

HONORING, UNITING, AND CELEBRATING FAMILIES

OUR SHARED CHILDREN

An Adoptive Parent's Story

As we watched a video recounting the major moments of our four children's lives—laughing and playing, heading out for the first day of school, riding bikes, winter snowball fights—the four of us felt a common link. We shared a bond of motherhood and appreciation for the sacrifices, challenges, and love that had been forged on this difficult road of open adoption and shared parenting.

I will admit this bond hasn't come easily. Sharing our children with their biological relatives has been an emotionally demanding endeavor. It's been a balancing act of giving, supporting, nurturing, and growing for everyone. But the benefits far outweigh the challenges.



As adoptive parents, we had a heavy choice to make: should we include or dismiss the elements of our children's upbringing? Ultimately, we decided to maintain a positive relationship with their birth parents and family members, connect them with their culture of origin, and even acknowledge the circumstances of their difficult pasts in order to give them the lives they deserve.

Our journey of collaborative parenting began with finding and reuniting our oldest son, Jaikob, with his biological siblings. Soon after, we welcomed his mother and father to join our family for holidays and celebrations. Through phone calls, letters, and visits, this family, who had been separated for many years and become virtually lost to one another through the foster care system, began to heal.

Two years later, we adopted another son, Tristan, and we again embraced his young mother and her extended family. That pattern continued when Joshua and Isaiah joined our family, inviting one more mother into our extended family of choice. Again, we saw the benefits to both mother and child of maintaining connections and allowing time and interaction to heal old wounds. This bond gave each child a sense of where they came from, who they looked like, and what mannerisms, likes, and dislikes they inherited from their birth relatives.

Our four children have asked many questions over the years. When they have a question about where they used to live or recall a certain memory, when they can't see a familiar physical trait

in us, or wonder how their families are doing, we need only make a phone call, write a letter, or invite the family over to provide those longed-for answers. Those answers get to the heart of how our children perceive themselves and how they fit into this family and society at large. I know this gift is meant for them, but I can't help but be grateful that these birth families can provide my children with some things that I cannot.

That day, several years ago, when we sat together watching the loves of our lives blossoming and growing into four bright, healthy, vivacious young men, we four mothers came full circle with one another. The choices we made, the life-altering events that touched us all, and the healing power of collaborative parenting at work united us in a very deep and meaningful way. Each of those mothers took me aside that day (and many times since) to personally thank me for the love I had shown their children and for the opportunity to remain a part of their children's lives. And I thanked them for the gift borne through sacrifice that each of them had given me—our shared children.

To learn more about the importance of establishing and maintaining positive connections between resource parents and birth parents, read [Resource Parents Partnering With Birth Parents to Benefit Children](#), a guide offered by the Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association.



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