

Beauty for Ashes



Each and every day our home is filled with small moments of joy:

When I hear my daughter's deep belly laughs erupting because her brother has done something silly.
When my son falls asleep in the car and I get to carry him inside with his head on my shoulder while he snuggles in closer to me.

When my daughter hears the door open and begins jumping and squealing because her "Da Da" is home and she cannot contain her excitement. When she puckers up her sweet little lips because she needs to kiss us all goodnight (even the dog!) each night before she can go to bed.

When my son masters a new task and a proud smile creeps across his face, showing off his gorgeous dimples. When he lifts his small voice to sing in the car to comfort his baby sister as she rebels against her car seat, taking his role as the older brother so very seriously.

I notice and appreciate these everyday moments a little more because we spent nearly a decade hoping, wishing and praying for the chance to experience them. Infertility, a life-threatening cancer diagnosis, and a failed adoption with a family member made us believe that our dream of becoming parents might just be beyond our reach. We felt lost and hopeless, but still tried to keep our faith as the years passed by.

With time, it became clear what (or who) we had been waiting for. Adoption changed our lives forever. Being chosen to be parents not once, but twice, is the greatest honor we have ever received. We strive to live up to that privilege daily.

I hold the women who found us worthy of raising their children in such high esteem because of the immense strength it took to make such an incredibly difficult decision and their unwavering conviction to do what they each believed was the very best for their children. In challenging circumstances, they



prioritized the welfare of their children above all else—even themselves. The love that my babies' first moms exhibit for the children we share moves me to tears each time we get together, as it is overwhelmingly evident in each interaction between them.

Our son's adoption was fairly short and straightforward, but we were new to the process and everything seemed formidable and complicated. We met our son's first mom on a Thursday evening. She selected us on a Saturday morning and by Wednesday, he was HOME! In less than a week, we had gone from longing for a family to Mommy and Daddy.



From time to time, Jill, our social worker at Hands Across The Water (HATW), lead us through the joyful whirlwind and took the time to explain the required legal steps. More importantly she taught us about the ethics involved with this complex and beautiful method of creating a family. Jill supported and guided us through developing a relationship with our kid's first families, which is not always easy, can be awkward at times, but is so important and necessary for our babies to grow with the security of knowing exactly where they come from.

Both of our adoptions are transracial, as we are white, our son is African American, and our daughter is biracial. Our social worker helped us navigate this new experience of living as a multiracial family and helped to educate us on what our children of color would need as they grow. Even now, years after placement, Jill is a resource for us in our continuing journey of lifelong learning about our children's cultures and communities. We have remained close and she is always available to answer a question or offer her perspective and from time to time, sends over thoughtful articles or lets us know when a helpful class or speaker is nearby.

When we decided to adopt for the second time, we were much more confident and familiar with adoption and mistakenly thought we knew what to expect. While our son's adoption had been somewhat predictable, our daughter's was not. We ended up relying heavily again on the expertise and personal devotion of Jill at HATW. She remained committed to each member of our adoption triad (the adoptee, adoptive family, and the first family) and helped us to balance the needs of everyone involved as we struggled through extremely strong emotions and pored over the law to determine what was best for our daughter. Jill was by our side for nearly a year for each court appearance, supporting us through some dark and frightening days and celebrating with us when the judge declared us a forever family.



Now that both of our children's adoptions are finalized, we look back at those uncertain periods in our lives and are so thankful we found a reliable and ethical agency like Hands Across The Water. If we ever decided to add to our family, Jill would be our first call. I wouldn't dream of venturing into the adoption world without her invaluable guidance. One thing Jill assured us throughout it all is that "we parent the children who are meant to be ours," and I believe she is right.

Although adoption is built from loss, I will be forever grateful that we were able to take all of the rough and broken pieces and create a magnificent mosaic: a large blended family surrounding our children, filled with more love and joy than I could have ever imagined. It is truly a beautiful thing