

## Adoption

For thousands of parents and children, becoming a complete family through adoption has resulted in great change and enriched lives.

A cold interpretation of adoption is that it 'provides the legal basis for the assumption of parental responsibilities in respect of a particular child by those who are not their natural parents.' But ask anyone who has adopted, wants to adopt, or has been adopted, and they'll tell you there's much more emotion to it than that!

There are many children in care who long to live in a permanent family and be loved by adoptive parents. There are many would-be parents who are infertile and long to

adopt. But fitting the two together is not the quickest process imaginable.

Around 50% of all adoptions are within step-families. When a previously single parent marries, the new partner often wishes to adopt the stepchild as his or her own. Other adoptions are by those wishing to help a child from another country. Whatever the reason, there are many parents and children whose lives are changed and enriched by being merged into one complete family.

### “They’ve Got a Baby For Us!”

“I’m afraid you’re not going to be able to have your own children.” Almost 25 years ago, those words were going to change our lives more than we could have ever realised.

After three years of marriage, we had decided it was time to begin our own family. The possibility of not having our own children had never been discussed and we assumed it would just happen at the appropriate time. Gill’s sisters and brother all had children and discovering we may have some problems was like a bolt out of the blue.

After a battery of the most undignified tests, the news that we could not have our own children was almost too much to comprehend. That day remains something of a blur even after all this time. I do remember many tears, and a feeling of incredulity and disbelief that this could be happening to us.

The next few weeks were spent in almost constant discussion as we wrestled with how to deal with this unwanted news. The thought of living without children was not something that either of us dwelled on for any length of time. We preferred to consider the options open to us. We now understand that for many in a similar situation, making the decision to move on and consider alternatives is an enormous one. For some, the idea of bringing up children that are not their own is just not an option and they choose to remain childless. For others, like Gill and myself, fostering and adoption is the way forward and we embarked on the process at the earliest opportunity.

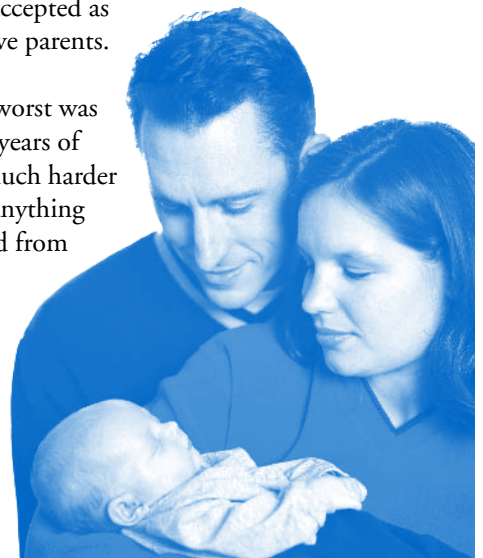
Although Gill and I were both social workers, I don’t think

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we had any real concept of the kind of intense scrutiny our lives would be put under during the next two years. We faced a whole series of interviews with a stream of social workers, asking what sometimes appeared to be the most personal and private information. Sex, church, discipline, punishment, teenagers - on any conceivable life situation we seemed to be required to have a considered opinion. I can well remember how we used to decide our ‘considered’ opinions in the moments before the social worker arrived at our home!

We must have said the right things, because at last our case was put before a panel for consideration. To much joy and celebration we finally heard the news that we had been accepted as prospective adoptive parents.

If we thought the worst was over, the next two years of nothingness was much harder to deal with than anything we had experienced from the social workers. Just sitting and waiting was not something we found easy, particularly Gill, whose whole personality was



## “They’ve Got a Baby For Us!” continued from page 1

bursting at the seams to pour out all this love she had.

One Monday afternoon when I was lecturing, there was a knock on the door and one of the secretaries told me there was an urgent telephone call for me. This had never happened to me before. When I picked up the phone, Gill was crying at the other end. She had crashed the car, but was safe and unhurt. The car was a little damaged, but nobody was injured. Like the kind, caring, concerned husband I am, I told her not to worry and I would see her later!

That evening, after saying all the right things, I suggested it would be best not to disturb me while I was lecturing unless it was an absolute emergency. So I was surprised when, on the very next Monday, the same secretary interrupted the same lecture to tell me my wife was on the phone again. I picked up the phone to hear tears once more. But this time Gill managed to splutter out the words that would bring us such joy: “They’ve got a baby for us!”

Five days later, Rhys Williams arrived in our lives. The five days between getting the news, and bringing him home, was one whirl of buying baby clothes and equipment that most people take nine months to do. It seemed never-ending, and probably the bank manager still remembers the period as a particularly challenging time for all those concerned.

Those early days were not easy for me. I didn’t immediately feel at ease with this six-month-old bundle of humanity. I was later to realise that this was nothing to do with me bonding with my new son, but more to do with me not particularly feeling comfortable with young babies.

The rest, as they say, is history. Rhys is now 23 years of age, and as a post-graduate student touring the world, he is currently e-mailing us from Cambodia. He has a brother called Owain who arrived in our lives five years later and who, like Rhys, brings us all the highs and lows that come from being a parent. They have brought us great joy, and we could not love them more, whatever the circumstances they came to us.

Being a parent is tough, and perhaps the most important job that we will ever be asked to do. Being an adoptive parent brings all the normal problems, plus one or two specific ones. We still have to face the issue of tracing birth parents, but we know that we will stand with them if they want to go through that process and whatever other issues their birth history might bring them. Like all families, our past and our future will be full of joys and sadness, but a family we will remain.

Being an adoptive parent has been a wonderful privilege. Gill and I have not regretted it for a single moment.

*Steve*

“Being an adoptive parent brings all the normal problems, plus one or two specific ones”

## A Positive View

Adoption conjures up a variety of images, some of which are fairly negative. Its portrayal in TV soaps, for example, is rarely accurate and often sensational. Admittedly my own story has had its fair share of ups and downs, but ultimately my adoption has been a positive thing and I am very grateful for my adoptive family.

I was adopted as a tiny baby, but even before my birth, important decisions were already being made. My natural mother, knowing she could not look after me, wanted to make sure that I was cared for in a good family. She also wanted it to be a Christian family. As a result the organisation that she used to put me up for adoption was a Christian one. Also, regardless of whether I was a boy or girl, my adoptive family had already been decided and they wanted me. I was two months old when I met my family.

My adoption has never been hidden from me and the honesty of my parents in telling me about it has been of great benefit to me. I have seen what happens when such information is kept a secret. It can tear families apart. Adoptive parents’ reasons for secrecy are understandable. They don’t know how to tell the child and dread what might happen when they do. I am grateful that I was told the whole story.

My parents kept a folder about my early life, health

documents and even a photo of my natural mother. As I grew up, school records were added. The folder was a huge help to me, because when I started asking questions about where I came from, the information was to hand. From an early age, whenever I asked to see this folder, my parents always said yes.

At other times I would just ask questions about how they felt and why. Their responses were honest, even when the questions were hard ones. I know this was not easy for them. My parents had to deal with the fact that, at some point, I might decide to find out about my natural mother and go looking for her. Their honesty has enriched my relationship with them. Now, as an adult, I am reaping the rewards of a very close relationship with them.

I think most people who are adopted go through a season when difficult issues come to a head and need to be dealt with. For me, these were issues of rejection, self-esteem, anger and hate. My time came when I was in my mid-teens.

I was 16 and having a hard time at a new school. We’d moved to a different area due to my father’s work. I was struggling with many of these issues on a daily basis and was having a very unhappy time. This lasted until I was in my late teens.

## A Positive View continued from page 2

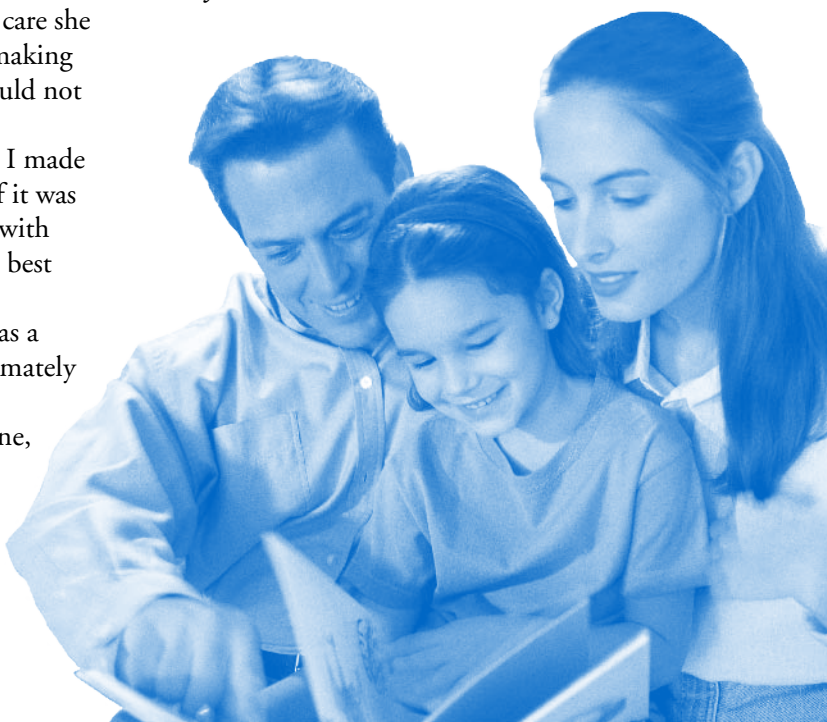
I faced the really big issue of rejection when I was 19, after another move, and I embarked on some counseling sessions. The sticking point for me was my biological father. Why had he done what he had done? I understood my mother's predicament and was grateful for the care she had taken, not only allowing me to live, but also making sure that I was in the best situation possible if I could not be with her.

Ultimately, after facing the anger and the hurt, I made the decision to forgive my biological father, even if it was without understanding. I did have ongoing issues with men and relationships but as a Christian I had the best possible basis for working this through.

I believe my faith, even the simple faith I had as a child, held me safe and brought me through. Ultimately my identity has come through what my heavenly Father thinks of me. Psalm 139, a favourite of mine, confirms that God cares for me and that I am precious to him. It talks about him seeing me as I was formed in my natural mother's womb.

As an adopted child, I feel very blessed. I was chosen by my adoptive parents, who have given me their care and love. My entry into the world is now of little consequence. As I said earlier, my

journey has had its ups and downs – but through it all I have learned that God is the only one who can give us our true identity and value no matter what start we had in life.  
*Mary*



## Making the Decision

We were distraught when we discovered that we couldn't have children. But our feelings and reactions were not the same. Matthew really wanted to be a daddy, but if it never happened he would still be happy because he had me. But for me it was a much bigger issue and we had to spend a lot of time talking about the fact that, although I love him more than anything, he still wasn't quite 'enough'. Of all the discussions we had, this was probably one of the hardest.

So when it came to making the decision to adopt I was constantly wondering if he was sure. I kept asking myself whether he really, really wanted to do this. I needed to be sure that he was doing it for himself as well, and not just for me. But I know he wants to be a daddy. It took some time for me to be truly convinced, but I am now!

It was hard to speak with the social workers at first. Some of the things they said really hurt. At the beginning I felt that the care system seemed to have little regard for me and my feelings, needs and rights. It was only after some time that I began to realise it wasn't that they had no regard for them - it's just that I wasn't their top priority. The children in their care, who have already been through so much, are their priority.

It's their responsibility to make sure that these children are placed with the right family and that the changeover is as seamless as possible. We already believed

we'd be good parents - the long assessment is to make sure that our belief is well-founded.

I just wanted a baby. A brand new baby with no family ties that we'd have to deal with. Romania is a country dear to our hearts and we'd thought that we would adopt from there. But the pre-assessment training had a huge effect on us.

Almost immediately I felt that we should not be rescuing a child from another country when there are so many children in care in the UK. It took longer for Matthew to be convinced, but now he thinks the same way too. It felt almost that we were being disloyal to Romania, but we are sure that this is the right thing to do. Now we are seeking official approval to adopt two siblings up to the age of six.

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We have gone through many phases and feelings about this but no feeling returns as often as this one! I have sat on the sofa on a Saturday evening after a nice Chinese meal and a glass of wine, looked around at my house and thought to myself: "Why are we doing this to ourselves? Toys, washing, computer games, parents' evenings..."

Wouldn't we be better off loving our nieces and nephews, enjoying nice holidays, and keeping the ironing to a minimum?" The answer is always - NO!

*Rachel*

## Facts and Figures

- Around 50% of all adoptions are by step parents. Many others are by infertile couples who have chosen adoption as a natural next step in their desire to be parents. Others wish to help a child from a different country, ethnic background or culture, sharing the good things in their lives with a child who is less fortunate.
- In the UK in 2000, around 5,000 children were adopted.
- Criteria for applicants are strict, but there is no typical or ideal adopter. Adoption Agencies look for people from a wide range of backgrounds and life experiences. High salaries, home ownership and good qualifications are irrelevant when it comes to adopting a child.
- A very small number of children adopted each year are under the age of 12 months. Prospective parents who wish to adopt a baby should expect a long wait.
- New adoption leave and pay entitlements were introduced by parliament in April 2003.



## Extra Help

### Support Groups

#### Adoption UK

Manor Farm  
Appletree Road  
Chipping Warden  
Banbury OX17 1LH  
Tel: 01295 660121  
Helpline: 0870 7700 450  
Email: [enquiries@adoptionuk.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@adoptionuk.org.uk)  
Web: [www.adoptionuk.com](http://www.adoptionuk.com)

Supports adoptive families before, during and after adoption. Training and a variety of publications are available.

#### BAAF

Skyline House  
200 Union Street  
London SE1 0LX  
Phone: 020 7593 2000  
Email: [mail@baaf.org.uk](mailto:mail@baaf.org.uk)  
Web: [www.baaf.org.uk](http://www.baaf.org.uk)  
Describing itself as 'The leading UK-wide membership organisation for those concerned with adoption, fostering and child care', BAAF also produces a monthly newsletter 'Be My Parent', a journal 'Adoption and Fostering' and a wide variety of other publications.

#### [www.adoption.org.uk](http://www.adoption.org.uk)

This popular adoption website offers relevant and up to date information on adoption issues, and has launched a new website for people throughout the UK who are

looking for online information about children that adoption agencies wish to place in their area ([www.UKkids.info](http://www.UKkids.info)).

#### After Adoption

Actionline: 0800 0 568 578  
Email: [information@afteradoption.org.uk](mailto:information@afteradoption.org.uk)  
Web: [www.afteradoption.org.uk](http://www.afteradoption.org.uk)

After Adoption's Actionline is a free, confidential helpline for anyone whose life has been affected by adoption - adopted people, birth relatives and adoptive families. It aims to give relevant information, support and the opportunity to discuss adoption openly. It also enables people to make appointments for After Adoption services including counseling and groups.

#### Talk Adoption

Helpline: 0808 808 1234  
Email: [helpline@talkadoption.org.uk](mailto:helpline@talkadoption.org.uk)  
TALKadoption is a helpline especially for young people under the age of 26.

#### Bookshelf

##### *Romanian Rescue*

Sue Smith, Hodder and Stoughton, 1997,  
ISBN 0340694084

Many publications available from BAAF  
(see 'Support Groups')