

# FAMILY

## CONNECTIONS

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The  
Journey  
to our  
Daughter



Crossing the  
Border  
International  
Adoption

A Birth Mother  
a Very Special  
Person



Attorney Kevin P. Harrigan

Birth parents most  
common legal questions



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Syracuse attorney Kevin Harrigan specializes in the legally and emotionally complex process of creating families through adoption. In the past 30 years, he has developed a nationwide reputation for his expertise in New York State, interstate and international adoption law - - as well as widespread respect for his compassion, accessibility and integrity.

Kevin has helped thousands of prospective adoptive parents successfully navigate the adoption process. He has guided many birth parents through the challenging decision to make a permanent placement plan for their unborn child. Kevin also has extensive experience in international readoption, as well as co-parent, step-parent and grandparent adoptions.

Kevin is a member of the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys and recipient of the Angels in Adoption Award from the United States Senate.





# FAMILY

CONNECTIONS

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# How Can I Make An Adoption Plan for My Unborn Child?

## Adoption: A Loving Option

*By: Renee Hettich, MA, LMSW*

Are you experiencing an unexpected pregnancy? If so, you may be feeling anxious, confused, indecisive, and overwhelmed. You want what is best for you and your child but you may be unsure what to do.

Should I parent the child or make an adoption plan for the child with an adoptive family? The decisions are yours to make. Your choices will be influenced by your personal beliefs, your age, your relationship to the father of the child, your social situation, your support from family and friends, your future goals and aspirations, and other personal interests.

So how do I sort through my jumble of emotions, the intricacy of my situation, and the complexity of my options? Reaching out to family and friends for support and guidance will help. Seeking counsel and assistance from a social worker with expertise in the field of parenting and adoption will be vital. A professional social worker can help you explore your feelings surrounding your pregnancy and plan for your child. The social worker can help you secure resources you may need to help you make your decision regarding parenting or adoption. The social worker can help you explore your parenting or adoption options. The social worker will support you as you make positive and loving choices for

you and your child. Qualified social workers can be found at counseling centers, community clinics, and adoption agencies. Please understand that you have the right to make your own decisions regarding the parenting or adoption of your child. No one should influence or coerce your decision-making – not your parents, siblings, friends, social worker, attorney, doctor, counselor, etc. Social workers at Family Connections, Inc., a not-for-profit, authorized adoption agency, are available to assist you and will support and respect your choices.

If I decide to make an adoption plan for my child, what are my options? You are in the “driver’s seat” and will make the decisions regarding your plan to place your child with an adoptive family. You have many adoption options and can design your own adoption plan. Family Connections, Inc. can help you choose an adoption plan that is right for you and your child. You may choose a confidential adoption, where your identity and that of the adoptive parents is held in confidence. The adoptive family will not know you and you will not meet the adoptive parents. Or you may choose an open adoption, where you may choose to have contact with your child’s adoptive parents. The degree of openness with the adoptive family would depend upon your choices. For example you may wish to meet two or three families before you chose a family for your child. You may or may not wish to have contact with the adoptive family prior to the child’s birth. You may wish to receive pictures and letters from your child’s adoptive parents as the child grows. You may wish to have limited on-going visitation with the adoptive family. The possibilities are many and the choices are yours.



**If I wish to make an adoption plan for my child, what do I do now?** There are a number of steps you will take in planning for you and your child.

- Your first step is to consult with a qualified adoption agency like Family Connections, Inc. The agency will assist you as you design and implement your adoption plan.
- Second, you will speak with an attorney who will explain your legal rights and answer your questions. An adoption agency can refer you to an attorney who is specialized in adoption.
- Next, you will consider qualified adoptive parents. The agency will provide you with profiles of adoptive families; profiles are booklets and/or web pages and/or videos that feature information about and pictures of the family. All adoptive parents are fully investigated and approved as qualified adoptive parents by an adoption agency or by Family Court. You may choose a family from these profiles or you may wish to meet with two or three of the families over lunch to get to know them better before making your decision. You will then decide which adoptive family you wish to make an adoption plan with.
- Now that you have identified a family for your child, the adoption agency will support you as you continue in your pregnancy and adoption planning. If you choose to build a relationship with the adoptive family prior to the child's birth, the agency will help you work out additional contact with the adoptive family.
- When the baby arrives, you will make your decision regarding the adoptive placement of your child. Up until the child's birth, your adoption plan is just that a plan. Once the baby is born, you decide whether or not to surrender the custody of your child to the adoption agency for placement with the adoptive family you have chosen.
- After you place your child for adoption, your plan for post adoption contact (if any) will be honored.

**What about ... I have other questions?** You must have a zillion questions running through your mind. Hopefully we can answer a few ...

- Will my child know that I made a loving choice? Yes! Adoptive parents have tremendous respect and admiration for you and your decision to entrust your child (a precious gift) to them. They will honor you and speak of you with great reverence and love to their child.
- Will my privacy be respected? Yes. Your privacy will be ensured. Confidentiality is maintained at all times.
- Will the adoption cost me anything? No. You will have no costs. All expenses are supported by the adoption agency and adoptive parents. If you need resources to support your pregnancy and adoption plan, the adoption agency will help you secure the needed resources (e.g. maternity cloths, housing, food, transportation, medical services).
- Will I receive counseling services? Yes, if you choose. Family Connections, Inc. provides adoption options counseling and offers private therapeutic counseling services to you prior to and after the adoption.
- Will my right to post adoption contact be protected? Yes, if you wish for post adoption contact with the adoptive family (e.g. exchange of pictures and letter, annual visitation with child). You and the adoptive family will sign a legal document that obligates the family to comply. This agreement is enforceable by the court only if you place your baby using agency services.

Facing an unplanned pregnancy and making decisions regarding the care and parenting of your child is challenging. Family Connections, Inc. can help you make positive choices for you and your unborn baby. Please learn more about the agency at [www.adoptfamilyconnections.org](http://www.adoptfamilyconnections.org). We look forward to supporting you as you make loving decisions regarding the care of your baby. Please call us at 1-800-535-5556 or (607) 756-6574 or e-mail us at [info@adoptfamilyconnections.org](mailto:info@adoptfamilyconnections.org) for assistance. Every call and e-mail is confidential!



# Crossing the Border: International Adoption

*By Tami and Tim Scott*

My mom used to tell me the story of my childhood friend who was adopted domestically at just 3 1/2 years old. She remembers her friend, Brenda, taking her new daughter for her first walk around the neighborhood. Cathie, dressed in a little red coat and wearing thick-rimmed glasses, toddled along hand-in-hand with her new - forever - Mom. It's a memory that is etched in my own mother's mind; one that she describes as an eternally heartwarming experience, witnessing the love and bond between an adoptive mother and her beautiful, new child.

In 2003, my sister and her husband welcomed a baby boy from Korea into our family. We had all been eagerly following the “pregnancy” and were delighted to be part of the “delivery” when their sleeping 6-month old son was placed in their arms after his long flight around the globe. We had been worried how he would react, waking up to strange faces in a foreign environment. Our worries were completely unfounded because when he awoke, he greeted us all with a trusting, contagious smile. Today, he's a secure and loving 10-year-old, thriving in school and destined for a bright future.

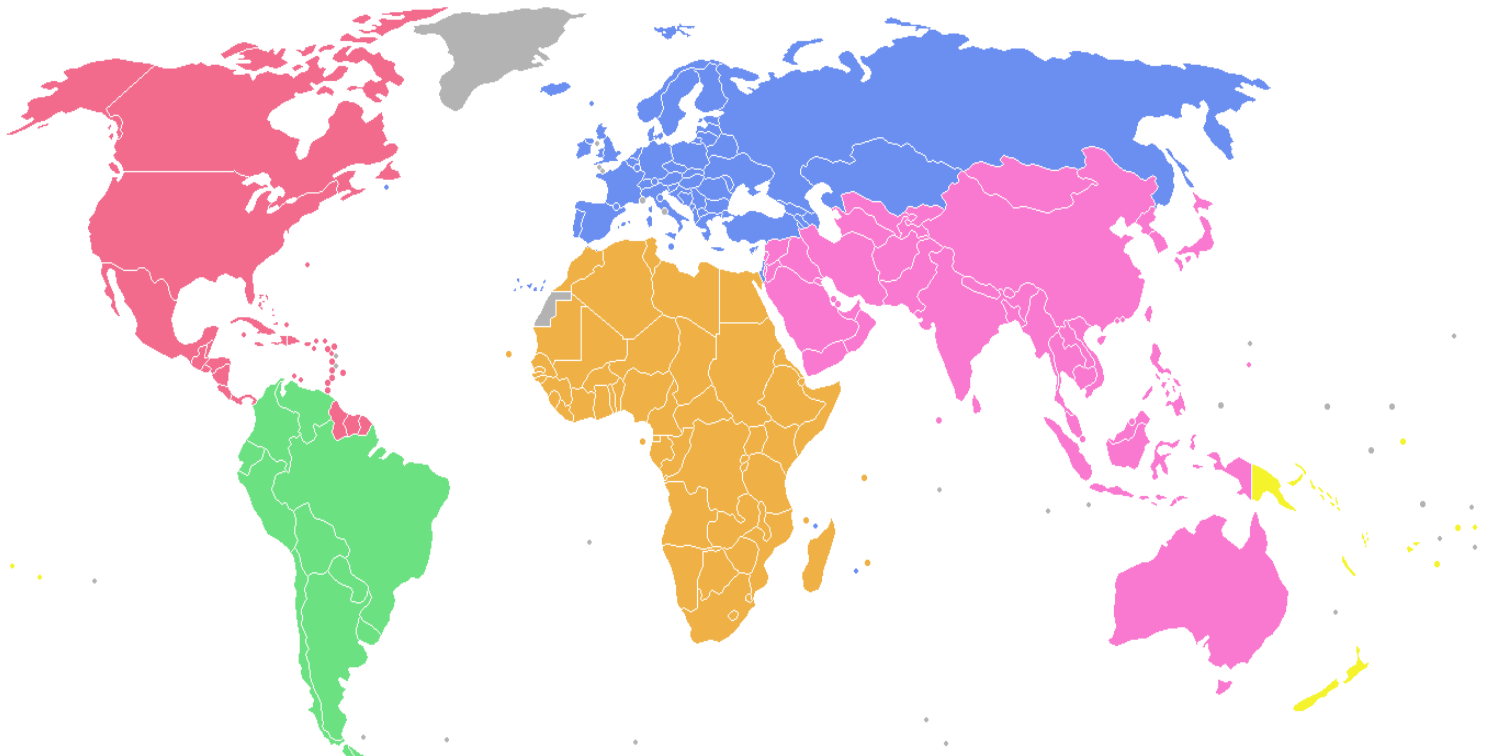
Years later, close friends of mine who already had

two biological children, adopted a boy and a girl from Ethiopia, then three more – a sibling group – a few years after that. All the kids they adopted were between the ages of 6 and 17.

In the meanwhile, I had begun dating my husband, Tim. We took our time getting to know each other prior to getting married and spent a lot of time discussing our future together: what he wanted, what I wanted, our goals, ambitions, desires. Of course, the topic of children came up. We both agreed that if we wanted to have kids, adoption would be our first choice. We were open to the idea of having biological children, but having been exposed to the joy adoption brought to our friends and family, we felt this was a way we could bless and be blessed.

Tim and I were married in 2010, got the last of the travel bug out of our system with a five month trip to Europe, bought a house and got serious about settling down and starting a family.

We didn't really know what we were doing, so we started by calling a local agency, specializing in the placement of domestic newborns, and scheduled ourselves for an introductory seminar. The agency





impressed us with its caring philosophy and competency, but we were a little discouraged to learn that we would have to wait at least six months to even apply. It wasn't a great fit for a second reason. Being a little older and hoping for more than one child, we decided an older sibling set was really what we were looking for. We continued to research other agencies, including those specializing in international adoptions. Because of our travels, Tim's international upbringing, and the experiences of family and friends, the idea of adopting from abroad particularly appealed to us.

As it turns out, every country has different requirements, some of them quite complex. Some we had to eliminate due to our age and relatively recent marriage. We also had to consider factors such as adoption fees, travel costs and how long we could afford to be away from our jobs for in-country stay requirements.

In the end, Colombia stood out to us. Tim teaches Spanish and had previously traveled there. It's close by, Hague-certified, and we met the adoption requirements. As I searched online, I came across an agency (Grace International) whose website featured a beautiful butterfly (our wedding theme!) on its homepage. I was thrilled with this little sign from God that we were on the right track.

About a month after we first contacted the agency, they sent us a picture of three beautiful siblings who were waiting for a home. Of course we said yes! This happened last August (2012) and since then we have been busily preparing/soliciting family histories, financial statements, criminal background clearances, psych evals, etc. etc. It's been a lot of work, and our fingers are raw from fingerprinting, but we have been making steady progress. We are now nine months into the adoption process and eagerly awaiting approval from the Colombian government.

So what lessons have we learned along the way? With a competent agency, the process is not as daunting as it first appears.

Tim, who does the finances, was very intimidated by the price tag of an adoption. In the end though, we found out that we do have a number of assets

that we can borrow against at a very reasonable rate and that we are likely to get back the majority of what we put out through tax credits.

Particularly helpful to us was our home study agency, Family Connections. We were expecting a white glove inspection of us, our background and our home and found this quite intimidating. Instead it was a much more collaborative process. Our social worker, Renee, sat down with us, answered our many questions, recommended reading material, and gave us great tips on how to be great adoptive parents. She really knew what had to be done and guided us through the entire home study process. She also made us aware of resources available in our area including an international doctor, our school district and the services they provide, what to expect when the children get here, and who to contact about adjustment issues.

So here we are waiting for the green light. We know in our hearts that this is the right step for us at this time in our lives. We are continuing to prepare a loving, complete home for the children we hope to welcome soon. Then the real adventure begins!







# *The Journey to Our Child Never Give Up Hope*

*by Heather & Bob,  
Adoptive Parents*

I suppose our adoption journey began the same way as many others. Heather and I had been married for almost ten years, we both had stable jobs, and we were living in a town where we could imagine raising children. Unable to get pregnant on our own, we had spent five years on infertility treatments, each procedure more invasive than the last. At one of our appointments, the physician showed us a list of options for becoming parents and the success rate of each option. At the time, I didn't even hear the different term he used, "becoming parents," not "getting pregnant." At the bottom of the list (and well beyond his purview), the method with the highest rate of success was adoption. Somewhere in the process, I think we both realized what we were doing, why we were so determined. It wasn't about "getting pregnant"; it was about becoming parents, sharing our lives with a child, passing on this love that had grown in our marriage. Defiance towards infertility gave way to a dull ache, a longing to be parents.

To learn more about adoption, we attended a conference in November 2009, and met an adoption social worker, Lorraine. We were considering international adoption, and Lorraine was presenting

on multicultural families. We talked with her after the presentation and felt a real bond right away. In the next few days, we decided to learn more about the agency and about domestic adoption. Before we knew it, we were starting the paperwork. It seemed so easy compared to infertility treatments: fill out this form, write this essay, apply for these background checks. It felt good to be doing something productive. In that first year of the process, we had a couple opportunities that we either weren't chosen for or that didn't feel right to us.

In December 2010, nearly a year after we started the adoption process, we had a chance to meet a birth mother who had already given birth to a little girl the day before. She chose a different couple to adopt her baby, and despite all the emotions, we knew we'd be parents through adoption one day. After this first disappointment, we decided to finally take a vacation. We'd been staying close to home in case we got a call from the agency. A week at the beach would be good medicine; we even traveled by train so we could ease into our vacation. How ironic that Lorraine called within minutes of checking into our hotel room. A birth mother, five months pregnant, and wanting to meet some potential adoptive parents.



We agreed to have the agency share our profile with the birth mother, and we were in disbelief that she chose to meet us. This opportunity was so different from our first. The baby was still three months away, so we really had a chance to get to know both birth parents. We arranged to meet the birth mother right after returning from vacation.

The birth mother, Rachael, arrived early for our first meeting. Nervous and excited, Heather and I were also early. Rachael recognized us from our pictures and approached us outside the restaurant. All three of us were a little cautious, but I think we immediately made a connection. I remember being struck by Rachael's calm, even gentle, nature. Anne and Lorraine arrived and we talked for two hours, learning a little about each other and sharing some laughs. A few weeks later, Lorraine told us that Rachael chose us to adopt her child. She chose us! Now it was time to get down to work and really get to know each other. The birth father, Luke, was traveling out of state, but we met with Rachael a few times and really started to form a relationship. After several weeks of meeting with Rachael, we finally got to meet Luke. We were nervous to be meeting the birth father, and he didn't put our minds at ease when we arrived. Aloof, even distant, we attributed his mood to nervousness. The meeting was awkward, but we agreed to meet a few more times when he was in town and available. This baby girl was only five weeks from arriving!

We met with Rachael and Luke a few more times, and each meeting seemed more and more difficult. Luke seemed contrary to anything we said and avoided answers to questions about our role at the hospital, post-adoption contact, and even the name of this child. The closer we got to the delivery date, it seemed the more vague he became. Difficult telephone calls and emails, and conflicting details from Luke and Rachael's attorney, finally escalated into a mediated meeting between the four of us just days before the baby's delivery date. Anne shared some background on post-adoption contact and helped frame the conversation in terms of a long term relationship between birth parents, adoptive parents, and this adopted child. Heather and I were uneasy after the meeting but eager for this child to arrive.

Rachael's daughter was born the following Wednesday

morning. Luke asked that we wait to come to the hospital until later that day, which turned into the next day. We were so anxious to meet this child, but there was nothing we could do. When we arrived at the hospital, things were awkward again. I don't think we were surprised by the mood in the room; we knew that only a birth parent could fully appreciate how difficult this decision is and we respected that. We didn't stay long on Thursday, but came back Friday to visit some more. We fed the baby from a tiny little bottle and even changed her poopy diaper. We whispered the name we'd chosen for her. Luke returned Friday evening and they shared the name they chose for the child. Rachael would be discharged the next day, which meant Heather and I would be taking this baby girl home, too.

We were woken Saturday morning by the phone. Lorraine and Anne were in the parking lot at the hotel and wanted to come up to our room. Heather and I panicked, unable to imagine why they had come to see us at the hotel. Had they just arrived in town early and didn't want to go to the hospital? Maybe there was some paperwork for us to sign? Was something wrong? We scrambled around the room to get dressed, trying to calm each other down. When Lorraine and Anne walked in the room, we knew from their expressions that the worst was happening. Luke had called Anne in the middle of the night to say that no one was taking his baby. The whole conversation was surreal, as though we were watching it on the television. I don't remember how long we talked, cried, yelled, and just sat there dumbfounded. It was over, we were not adopting this baby girl, there was nothing that could change it. It was just over.

At home, we couldn't bear being in the house, seeing the brightly painted nursery and the baby clothes, so we left town for a few days to nurse our wounds. This loss didn't just affect us, it affected our friends, coworkers, families, even Lorraine and Anne, who had put a lot of time and effort into this adoption. Our parents took it especially hard, unable to do anything but just be there for us. We busied ourselves with gardening and crafts like basketmaking and woodworking. We didn't talk about adoption much for the next few months. That winter, Lorraine called to let us know that another birth mother was expecting in March and wanted to meet us. Hesitant and hopeful at the same time, we started the process



again. For several weeks, we traveled to meet this young woman, got to know her, and shared our thoughts on parenting. We probably should have seen the signs earlier when she talked about specific ways she would parent, but I think we were a little blinded by the prospect of becoming parents ourselves. A few days before her baby was due, the birth mother called to tell us she wanted to parent her child. A little part of us must have seen it coming, but it hurt all the same.

This last disappointment got us thinking that domestic adoption might not be right for us. We had invested months of time and emotion into two failed adoptions and we weren't sure we could do it again. Russia's adoption program was still open at the time. It appealed to Heather for its relatively short process. I, on the other hand, had actually started imagining a life with just the two of us. Our marriage was stronger than ever, and we had a nice little routine together. Still, Heather convinced me to consider an adoption from Russia. We agreed that we'd start the paperwork when we returned from vacation in May.

And then came that beautiful Tuesday in May, just a couple days before we were leaving for vacation. Lorraine called me mid-morning: a baby girl was born a few hours earlier at the same hospital where

we met our first birth mother at. Not sure if she'd be interested, I called Heather at work. I was a little surprised when she said yes, so I called Lorraine and tried to get back to a normal work day. When Heather called mid-afternoon to say that Lorraine needed to speak with both of us, I had nearly forgotten about that morning's call. We called Lorraine from the parking lot at my office, answered a few questions, and then heard those words we'd waited so long to hear: "Congratulations, you're parents!" It was only seven hours since we'd first heard of this little girl, and now we were chosen to be her parents! We met our daughter, Amy, the next day at the hospital.

Every day since, she's greeted us with her eager smile and curious nature.

When we began the adoption process, Heather and I never could have imagined that we'd feel the pain of a failed adoption not once, but twice. We certainly knew the risk was there, but the promise of becoming parents outweighed the risk. Even after the second failed adoption, we wanted to share our lives with a child. And when we thought we had abandoned the idea of domestic adoption, we still jumped right back in and found ourselves with this unexpected little girl who changed everything.

## **Deborah Steincolor**

**Attorney at Law**



Your adoption experience is shaped by emotions and laws. As an attorney, with my masters in social work, I provide individualized and compassionate services to prospective adoptive parents through

all steps of adoption, birth parents planning adoptions, adoptive parents finalizing agency adoptions, re-adoptions, second parent, and stepparent adoptions. I am an active member of the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys.

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# Becoming an Adoptive Parent

## The Home Study Investigation and Preparatory Process

By: Renee Hettich, MA, LMSW

Congratulations on deciding to build your family through adoption. You are embarking on a wonderful journey that will begin with a home study investigation and end with the joy of a child. To be eligible to adopt a child domestically or internationally, you must successfully complete a home study investigation conducted by an authorized adoption agency or licensed social worker in your state of residence.

The purpose of the home study investigation/preparatory process is:

1. To ensure that an adopted child would be safe and nurtured in your home.
2. To prepare you for the addition of a child to your family through adoption. Your social worker will discuss with you such things as a child's medical and developmental needs, attachment, life-long adoption family development, trans-racial and trans-cultural adoption issues, separation and loss, the importance of honoring the birth family, etc.
3. To understand your adoption plan and the essence of who you and your family are so that your adoption results in a good "fit" for your child.

To qualify as an adoptive family in New York State, a family must complete a home study investigation that includes the following.

- ✓ A meeting with a qualified social worker face-to-face. The social worker must speak with each prospective adoptive parent and their minor children. The number of meetings will depend upon the requirements of the country from which you are adopting and your family's needs. At least one social worker meeting must occur in your home to ensure that there is space in the home for a child and that the home environment is safe for a child.
- ✓ Child abuse and neglect history reviews from any state or country in which you have lived as an adult.

- ✓ State and federal criminal history review conducted by the Department of Justice Services and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
- ✓ Medical examinations for all members of the household
- ✓ Autobiographies of the prospective adoptive parents
- ✓ Verification of income, assets and liabilities
- ✓ References from friends, clergy, co-workers, childcare providers, etc.
- ✓ Proof of birth and marriage
- ✓ Adoptive parent questionnaires and surveys
- ✓ Adoption preparatory training (requirements vary depending upon agency and country of adoption)

Please know that typically, the home study process takes two to four months to complete. At the successful conclusion of the home study investigation, you will be approved as prospective adoptive parents and begin your journey into parenthood.

Family Connections, Inc., is a not-for-profit, authorized adoption agency, who provides home study investigation services for families planning to adopt a child domestically or internationally. We would be pleased to support your home study needs. You can learn more about Family Connections, Inc. at [www.adoptfamilyconnections.org](http://www.adoptfamilyconnections.org).

Please call us at  
1-800-535-5556 or 607-756-6574  
or email us at [info@adoptfamilyconnections.org](mailto:info@adoptfamilyconnections.org)  
for assistance.

Renee Hettich, MA, LMSW is an adoptive parent of three children and has successfully completed home study investigations for each of her adoptions. She is now a social worker in the field of adoption and supports families as they progress through the home study investigation process.



# A BIRTH MOTHER A VERY SPECIAL PERSON

Every birth mother is a special individual who chooses to give life to her child and then give life to a new family through adoption. She gives her most precious life (her baby) to a loving couple who will forever rejoice in the miracle of the child and who will be forever grateful to her for entrusting them with her child. Every birth mother and every child is a precious gift. So, who is a birth mother? She is any woman who is faced with an unplanned pregnancy and who may not be ready or able to parent the child. She may be a teenager, young adult or mature woman. She may be single or involved in a committed relationship. She may be economically secure or financially unstable. She may be from any ethnic heritage. She may be a victim of assault or abuse. She may be well educated or a student of life. She may be supported by loving family or experience difficult or abusive relationships. She may be healthy or experience physical health, mental health and/or addiction concerns. Every birth mother is unique, but they all have common traits. Every birth mother makes a loving and selfless choice to give life to her child. Every birth mother loves their baby. Each birth mother has the ability to look beyond themselves and consider

the best interests of their child above their own needs. Every birth mother has the forethought to plan for their child in the making of an adoption plan with adoptive parents. Birth mothers are willing to experience the emotional loss of their child in exchange for the peaceful feeling of knowing their birth child is treasured in their adoptive home. Many birth mothers also stand up against family members, friends, and society pressures that question or negatively judge their decision to make an adoption plan for their child. Every birth mother is loving, courageous, sacrificial, thoughtful, proactive, selfless, ...

Each birth mother faces choices. The first choice a birth mother makes is to give life to her child. She then must decide what is in the best interests of her child and herself – should she parent the child or make an adoption plan for the child. There will be many factors that influence her decision about parenting. For example, does she have the financial resources needed to raise a child, does she have the support of the birth father or other family members in parenting, can she provide a safe environment for the child (e.g. free from abuse and drugs), is she physically and mentally healthy, and is she mature enough to parent a child.

If the birth mother decides that adoption is the right choice for her child and herself, she will have many options to consider. She may wish to have a closed (confidential) adoption in which she and the adoptive family do not know each other and have no contact before or after the adoption. She may want to have a semi-open adoption where she chooses the adoptive family for her child. She then may decide to get to know the family prior to the adoption. After the adoption, she would then receive pictures and updates regarding the child throughout the child's life. The birth mother may also wish to have an open adoption with the adoptive family. She would pick the family for her child, spend time getting to know the family before the adoption and then have an on-going relationship with the child and adoptive family after the adoption. The birth mother and adoptive family would periodically exchange pictures and letters and have face-to-face visitations. There are many options within adoption. The birth mother designs her child's adoption and makes choices that are in the best interests of her child and herself.

Every birth mother is an exceptional woman who makes life-changing decisions. It is with tremendous respect and admiration that we say “thank you” to every birth mother who makes the decision to give their child life and their child a family through adoption.

Written by, Anita F. Stevens, Executive Director of Family Connections, Inc. , a New York State authorized adoption agency and by Renee Hettich, MA, LMSW. Adoption Social Worker. For over twenty-two years, Anita has had the honor of supporting birth mothers as they make adoption plans for the children. Renee parents three children whom she adopted. She honors her children's birth parents everyday as she rejoices in each of her children's lives.



# Families Wanting & Waiting to Adopt

If you are considering placing your child for adoption, there are many families who are waiting to share their love with a child. Each family has been investigated and prepared by Family Connections, an adoption agency, to ensure that your child would be nurtured in a loving and safe home. Each family would be honored for you to consider them as parents for your child. You can learn a little about each family in the following pages. The families understand the importance of your decision and respect your adoption planning. To learn about these families, please contact Family Connections at 800-535-5556 or [info@adoptfamilyconnections.org](mailto:info@adoptfamilyconnections.org).

***Rob & Jillain***



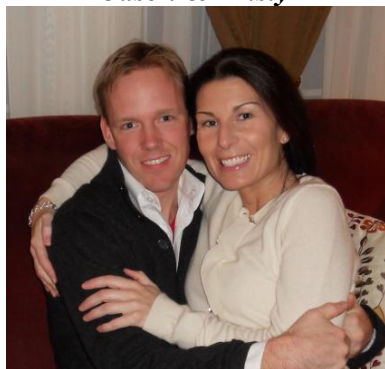
***Matt & Susan***



***Mark & Erin***



***Jason & Kristy***



***Geoff & Valeda***



***Eric & Betsy***



***Carl & Yvonne***



***Jerri & Laura***



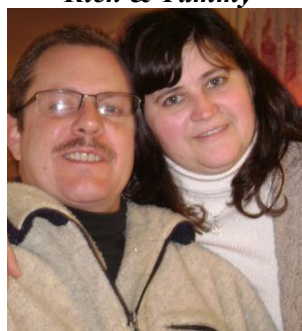
***Tony & Micki***



***Laurin***



***Rick & Tammy***



***Joel & Mia***



# Rob & Jillain



Thank you for taking the time to read about us. Wherever your journey leads you, we hope you find comfort and peace. We are very excited to start the journey of adoption. We both come from huge Italian families and can't wait to add another child to our family!

**Parenting Philosophy:** We are an active, adventurous and loving couple. We spend as much time together as possible. The love is so great among our families. We want to teach our child the meaning of being a good person. We want to teach them manners, respect and the ability to chase their dreams.

**Our Family:** Our family is huge! Jillain is the oldest of 8 children and Rob is the youngest of 3. We get together every week with both of our families. We have 7 nieces and nephews. We have many strong family traditions. We have Thanksgiving at our house every year. On Christmas Eve, we go to Rob's parents to celebrate the "feast of the seven fishes." Christmas morning, we go to Jillain's mothers and stay in our PJ's all day. We can't wait to share our traditions with a new little one.

**Our Home:** Our house is filled with love and 2 kitties. We have a cozy arts and crafts home with 3 bedrooms. Our yard is fully fenced with beautiful flower and herb gardens. We live by a lot of parks and have other young families in our area.



**Our Professions:** Rob is an inside sales rep and a JV boys basketball coach. Jillain is a hairstylist and make-up artist. Both of us are around kids on a regular basis. Whether it's on the basketball court, around our nieces & nephews or calming down the crying kids that hate to get their haircut, we have patience. Jillain is also a volunteer on the St. Jude's children's hospital committee.

**Our Activities:** We have a huge love of sports. We go to Mets, Giants, Knicks, and Syracuse games every year. Camping, nature hikes/exploring, picnicking and visits to amusement parks are some of the things we like to do in the summer.



**In Closing:** Thank you for taking the time to read our story and learn about us as potential adoptive parents. We deeply admire your decision to turn to adoption for your child. If you choose us as adoptive parents for your baby, we will give this child all the love that we have. The baby will be cherished, nurtured and guided.



# Matt & Susan

Hello from Susan and Matt. Thanks for taking time to read a little about us. Married for six years, we are very much in love and also best friends! We truly have a wonderful life, but it won't be complete without children to share it with.



**Parenting Philosophy:** We believe children need consistency to learn how to make good decisions. Children grow to be people of integrity when they see the adults around them sticking true to their word. We would strive to allow our children to be creative, free-spirited, and to make mistakes, but have enough structure and discipline for them to learn from those mistakes. Also, we feel it's important to teach respect for others through empathy and kindness, and respect for self by fostering talents and building confidence.

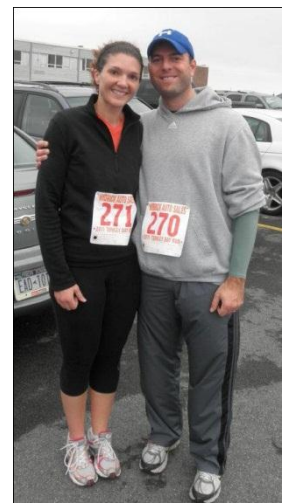
**Our Family:** Both of us have close knit immediate families that we spend time with regularly. Susan's parents and Matt's mom and step-dad all live close by. We each have one brother. Matt's is a twin, and they have always been very close. Matt's brother is engaged to be married, soon to bring a wonderful young woman into the family! Susan's brother is older, married, and has two daughters, 11 and 14. We love being "Aunt Susan and Uncle Matt. Both of our families are all anxious to have a baby to adore!



**Our Home:** We own a two story, traditional home in a quiet, family-friendly neighborhood. Our house was built in the 1920s, and has been renovated inside and out. There is plenty of space to play both inside and out, with a private, fenced back yard. We are one block away from an elementary school with a bright, new playground, and also two blocks from the hospital. It is truly an ideal place to raise a family.

**Our Professions:** Matt is proud to work in law enforcement, and has been at his current job for a decade. It is important work, and allows him to be the main breadwinner. Susan currently works as a Customer Service Representative and a group fitness instructor for a local fitness center. She absolutely loves the job, the people and the flexible schedule.

**Our Activities:** We enjoy exercising together, particularly in our favorite martial arts style fitness class (which Susan often teaches). We still love to curl up together for a good TV show or movie. If we are on the couch, our 12 year old cat Columbus is likely on one of our laps. We live close to both the Thousand Islands (where Matt's extended family has a cottage on the St. Lawrence River) and also the Adirondacks (where Susan's family has a camp with lots of land). We're sports fans, too.



# Mark & Erin



Hi, we're Mark and Erin! We are excited to add to our family through adoption. Our goal is to provide a child with the same type of loving homes that we grew up in - with evenings spent together enjoying family dinners, working on homework at the kitchen table, and frequent weekend adventures in the great outdoors. Know that any child that joins our family will be met with as much love and kindness as possible every day and will have every opportunity to follow their dreams.

**Parenting Philosophy:** We are committed to providing a loving and nurturing home for our children. We believe that parents must be caring, loving, and playful. We believe in teaching our

children the values of helping others, kindness, hard work, and the importance of family and a good education. We will encourage and challenge our children to try new things and to develop their unique individual skills and abilities.

**Our Family:** Family is the key to everything. We are blessed to have loving and close-knit families. Mark grew up the oldest of three children with two devoted parents. Mark is very close with his siblings, parents, and grandmother. Erin has one older brother and two compassionate and caring parents that she is very close to as well. We have three young nephews. Two of our nephews are adopted and all three are under the age of two. Family is especially important to us and we make special effort to stay connected with our family.

**Our Home:** We live in a quiet neighborhood and our home is spacious and with plenty of natural light. Just beyond our patio is a large green space where children can play. We live in one of the top rated school districts in New York and are near a wonderful park and a wooded area with walking trails and waterfalls. On the weekends we enjoy the state parks near our home. The center of town is close enough for us to ride our bikes or walk to the store, local movie theater, and church.



**Our Professions:** We are both extremely lucky to have jobs that we love. Mark works as a renewable energy Project Developer for a company specializing in wind and solar energy. Previously, Mark was a high school science teacher and high school cross country coach. Erin works as an Inclusion Director for a non-profit. She makes sure that children with special needs are included in activities and programs and enjoys working with the children on a daily basis.



**Our Activities:** The first thing that comes to mind about us is that we LOVE to be outside! We always try to plan an adventure for the weekend that will have us hiking, biking, or skiing. We also enjoy the Finger Lakes and we go to the local farmers markets. We spend our evenings cooking and trying new recipes from all around the world.



## *Jason & Kristy*

Hello. We are Kristy and Jason and live in the Central New York. We have been together for seventeen years and married for twelve years. We are incredibly honored that you've chosen to consider us as parents.

**Parenting Philosophy:** We recognize how important it is to be patient, supportive and encouraging for our child. We want to support our child's self-esteem and unique potential. We plan to raise our child with values that reflect respect and caring for others and responsibility. We value education and will support and promote our child's learning potential. We will raise our child with a healthy sense of his or her adoptive identity.



**Our Family:** Jason and I are close with both of our families and get together often for family dinners and to celebrate all holidays and special events. Our families would be honored to love, support, and care for any child that was placed in our lives. We are so blessed to have our “little angel”. Elle has brought us so much joy and unconditional love. Elle makes every day more special than the last. She is a happy, social, active and loving toddler who we love beyond measure. All of our moments with Elle are cherished and we are amazed by how much she has grown and developed. We love being parents and are looking forward to having another child!



**Our Home:** We live in a friendly suburban neighborhood filled with several young families and children. Our two story colonial style home has lots of room for children and has a wonderful yard. Our neighborhood is filled with the noise and laughter of children playing. The area is rich with

children's playgrounds, nature parks, museums, sports teams, and excellent educational institutions and colleges.

**Our Professions:** Kristy works in higher education as a Career Counselor. Jason works in Pharmaceutical Sales and specializes in cardiovascular health.



**Our Activities:** Kristy enjoys exercising, hiking, dance, music, going to the beach, and spending quality time with our daughter Elle, family and friends. Jason also enjoys exercising, playing soccer, running in local races, biking, swimming, hiking, going to the beach, and spending quality time with our daughter Elle, family and friends. Elle loves to play with dolls, cook, run, dance, listen to music, read books, play with friends, go to the beach, and participate in all outdoor activities.

We hope for you the strength and grace to guide you in making the best decision for yourself and your child. Thank you for considering us.

# Geoff & Valeda



Greetings! We are Geoff and Valeda, and we live in New York City, in the diverse borough of Queens. We want you to know that we respect the difficulty of your decision. We truly want to share our home with a child; it's something we have been waiting for and trying for almost four years. One thing family and friends will tell you about us – we are both still kids at heart. We've traveled all over the world, and laughter is the one universal language that can always bring people together.

**Parenting philosophy:** Children are by nature curious and love to experiment. We will encourage and support this sense of adventure. At the same time, we understand that children need to find their place in a family. We will help our child understand his or her adoptive history as they grow. We want our child to be unafraid to explore, make mistakes, and ask lots of questions about any and everything.

**Our family:** We have a huge, loving, and sometimes boisterous family! Valeda's parents have been married for more than 44 years, live in New York City, and are enjoying being grandparents. Geoff's mom lives not too far away in Williamsport, PA (his father passed away in 1991), and loves her four grandchildren dearly. Geoff has a brother and a sister, who both live on the East Coast, and Valeda has a brother and a sister; one in Georgia and one in Texas. We try to bring our two families together as often as we can. Altogether, our child will have seven first cousins, with three of those being under the age of five. Both our families have been preparing for the arrival of our child.

**Our home:** Our home is in a quiet but dynamic suburban community of Forest Hills, which is in the borough of Queens in New York City. Forest Hills is a child-friendly and very diverse area, with people from many different parts of the world calling it their home. The area is very safe, and there are lots of trees, shops, amenities and very good schools within walking distance. There are many parks – two very large ones (Forest Park and Flushing Meadows Park) and lots of recreational activities such as bike riding in the summer.



**Our professions:** We both are blessed to have jobs that we love, with a great deal of flexibility. Geoff is a child clinical psychologist and professor of Clinical Psychology. Valeda is a librarian and library administrator at a university.



**Our activities:** Geoff loves to surprise Valeda with short road trips to places she has never been to before. We also love going to concerts, the movies, and just hanging out with friends and family. We love to travel. Each year, we go to Uganda (a poor country in East Africa) where we help the people learn to read. Lastly, we are both marathon runners! We have both run the New York City Marathon.



# Eric & Betsy

Hi! We know you have a big decision before you and are praying for you as you journey through pregnancy and think about your options. Thank you for getting to know us and considering us as adoptive parents for your child.

**Parenting Philosophy:** We want our home be a place where our kids know that they are loved and accepted, are supported to develop their unique strengths, are helped to become men and women of strong character, and have fun! We use everyday opportunities to teach our son Ethan how to think on his own, know that it is ok to fail and try again, to love learning, and to value serving others.



**Our Family:** We have loving relationships with both of our families. They are supportive of our decision to adopt and are excited about loving a new child. Both of our families live out of state, but we see each other 4-5 times a year. Family squirt gun fights, boat rides, fishing, shared meals and walks to the local park or town festival are typical family time.



**Our Home:** The lovely tree-lined streets with people walking dogs or babies drew us to our neighborhood. We know all of our neighbors and host an annual block party on our street. We live in a 2-story home. Our yard has plenty of grass for playing games, along with a swing set and sand box. We enjoy working outside together and have a large vegetable garden and several flower gardens. We can easily walk to the grocery, an ice cream shop and restaurants, and the local library for children's story hour.

**Our Professions:** Eric is an engineer who develops software to control big machines, such as aircraft engines or wind turbines. Betsy worked full-time as an Occupational Therapist in a rehabilitation hospital for 12 years. After having Ethan in 2009, she willingly chose to become a stay-at-home mom, except for working a day or two each month.

**Our Activities:** Our family enjoys gardening, making s'mores in the firepit in our yard, helping in our church, and exploring the outdoors together. Sunday afternoons often involve a bicycle trip for ice cream or a hike at a nearby park. Eric likes riding his road bike and photography, while Betsy enjoys cooking and sharing coffee (or ice cream!) with a friend.

**In Closing:** Thank you for considering us as adoptive parents for your child. We are excited to welcome a child into our family through adoption.



# Carl & Yvonne



Hi! We are Carl and Yvonne. Thank you so much for getting to know us. Together for ten years, married for seven, we are a loving and committed couple eager to welcome a child into our laughter-filled home. We admire you for your decision, and want to assure you that our adopted child will be embraced with love and caring.

**Parenting Philosophy:** We believe that every child should feel safe, secure, and loved. We will raise our child to be a good person - kind and compassionate toward others. We also strongly believe in

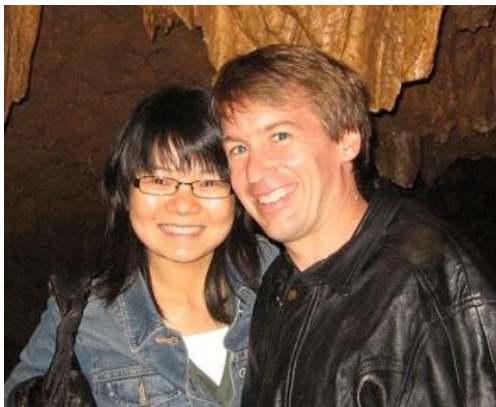
education and hard work – both of us grew up in families where our parents encouraged us to study and pursue our own interests, and we want to pass that on to our child.

**Our Family:** We are very close with our family – our parents, two brothers, sister, and their children. Yvonne reads to her three nephews over Skype every week and loves making them laugh by pretending to be different types of animals. In the winters, Carl's extended family gets together in Florida for games and long walks, where the children chase the family dogs up and down the beach. In the summers, we visit Yvonne's family in China, for excellent food and games, where the children chase Carl up and down the parks.

**Our Home:** We live in a two-bedroom apartment in a quiet, tree-lined street in New York City . It is right around the corner from a public library and park. Excellent schools, museums, and children's theaters are all nearby. We have many friends nearby with small children, so our child will grow up with plenty of playmates of very diverse backgrounds.



**Our Professions:** We are both professors and love teaching. (Carl was a kindergarten teacher right after college). Opening a young person's mind to new experiences and ideas is one of the most rewarding jobs in the world. Working in universities, we are fortunate to have schedules that allow us flexibility to raise our child and share our experiences with them.



**Our Activities:** We love travelling in the United States and around the world. When we travel, we like hiking and biking in beautiful landscapes. At home, Yvonne likes cooking and doing yoga. Carl enjoys playing chess, cards, and watching old 1980s movies.

**In Closing:** We know that this is a difficult decision for you. We admire you for your decision to consider adoption. We wish all the best for you and your child.



# Jerry & Laura

Hi! We are Jerry and Laura. We have been married for nine years and have two wonderful sons. Our boys were both adopted from South Korea and they have brought so much joy! We love being parents and always imagined having a big, loving family. We are so thankful for our children's birthparents and we speak openly with our children about adoption. If you chose us, please know that your child will be loved, you will have a place in our hearts, and we will be sure to share the story of how we all came to be a family.



**Parenting Philosophy:** Above all, we want to instill the love and importance of family. We are teaching our boys to be joyful, kind, respectful, loving, thankful, generous, and responsible. We try to foster their natural curiosity and hope to instill a love of learning. We know that life is not always perfect, but we hope to teach our children that with hard work and big dreams they can do anything.

**Our Family:** Our family of four is Jerry, Laura, and our sons – Evan and Dillon. We are both from large, loving families. Laura and Jerry are both one of four children. We are very close with our families and we are lucky to have grandparents nearby – they love spending time with their grandchildren!



**Our Home:** We live in a wonderful, suburban neighborhood in upstate New York. Our home sits just on the edge of a cul-de-sac – making it ideal for children. We are close with our neighbors and spend lots of time outside. Our backyard is fenced in, has several big trees, a sandbox, a playhouse, and tons of room for the kids to play. Our town has excellent schools, beautiful parks, and a real sense of community.

**Our Professions:** Jerry and Laura both value education and each earned advanced degrees. Jerry has a successful career as a portfolio manager at a local financial firm. Laura is a full time mommy who works only ten hours per week as a self-employed financial consultant.

**Our Activities:** Jerry loves to golf, cycle, ski, and tackle home improvement projects. Laura enjoys yoga, cooking, cycling, skiing, and quilting. Most of all, our activities now revolve around our kids! Days can be as simple as a trip to the library for story hour, or to a local park to meet friends – little trips are big adventures when small children are involved! We also love to get outside and be active as a family. Going for walks are always an adventure – we especially love the nature trails that weave through the woods behind our street. We enjoy traveling as a family – whether it be to a nearby lake or down south to a beach, seeing the world through the eyes of our children has been amazing.



# Tony & Micki



Hello and thank you so much for considering us as a possible family for your baby. We understand the decision you're facing and admire your courage and selfless sacrifice of love. We're a happily married couple from New York City who do just about everything together, including sharing a birthday on the same day. Family is everything to us – to have one of our own would be a dream-come-true. We are ready to welcome a baby into our lives.

**Parenting Philosophy:** We're a devoted couple who are always there for each other. We both come from strong, loving families. We believe in raising a child with love, support and guidance through positive reinforcement. We'd instill the values that make a person a good human being, offer life-enriching experiences and encourage him or her to reach for the stars!

**Our Family:** We both come from tight, close-knit Italian families and have lots of relatives. Extravagant Sunday dinners and big holiday feasts are common in our household. Micki has one brother and one sister. Tony has one brother. Together, we have ten nieces and nephews who are all looking forward to having a new cousin. Our latest addition is our little rescue dog named Blue (he has one blue eye). He loves children and is part of the family.

**Our Home:** We live in New York City, an amazing place that offers so much from museums to great schools and countless conveniences. Our guests say they feel the warmth the minute they step into our home, a two-bedroom apartment near the park. Our neighborhood is safe and quiet, family-friendly, away from the hubbub. It's a special little corner of Manhattan surrounded by trees, the river, playgrounds, baseball fields, ducks and summertime concerts. It's a perfect spot to raise a family, with lots to do and lots of opportunities for rich experiences.



**Our Professions:** We work together in a small creative arts business we co-founded. Tony has an MBA in marketing and has worked for major corporations. Believing that being able to laugh is one of the most important things a person can do, he has also preformed stand-up comedy in clubs throughout the city. Micki comes from an artistic family and went to art school, which led her to a successful career as an advertising creative director, a writer and filmmaker.



**Our activities:** We love to bike, hike and go out to eat. We live right near a bike path that winds through cherry and mulberry trees. Tony loves sports and is a huge football fan. Micki loves the art of cooking and enjoys entertaining friends and family with homemade delights. We also love to travel.



# Laurin

Hello, my name is Laurin. I appreciate you taking the time to consider me as a potential adoptive parent of your baby. I think you are courageous. My friends and family describe me as tenacious, hardworking, honest, reliable, loyal, fun, loving, and my own person. I love life and want to explore more with my child.

**Family:** I will assure that my child has a full life, happy; loved; safe; educated; and healthy. My family and friends are supportive. I come from a large loving family. I have five amazing sisters, who are great role models as mothers. I have 7 nieces and seven nephews, with whom I have very special relationships. I also have three brothers-in-law, who are good to my sisters; love my parents and adore their children. My parents have been married for 54 years and continue to be loyal to their family. I love them all.



**Parenting Philosophy:** I believe a child has a voice that should be heard. I also believe that structure and discipline is important for a child. I believe that speaking to a child and teaching them by example and leadership will guide them to make the right choice. I also believe that exposing my child to different cultures, ethnic groups and places is important. I will encourage my child to love who they are and where they came from.



**My home:** I have a three bedroom house in a medium city in Upstate New York with a large backyard waiting for a swing set, bikes and maybe even a pool. My neighborhood has museums, parks, plays, concerts, bike paths, shopping, eating, sporting events, ethnic and cultural celebrations, and much more. My child will be lucky to also experience the joy of country living. My sister lives on the water where we skate, cross country ski, boat, and fish. My parents live on a 250 acre farm where it is peaceful and serene with rolling hills and beautiful trees.

**My profession:** I am an attorney, and have my own office. I will be able to provide well for my child. I am also able to work at home while my child sleeps and plays.

**My Activities:** I love exploring life and have been lucky to visit many countries. I can't wait to travel with my child. I live in an area where skiing, museums, boating, and shopping are fun weekend events. I enjoy taking my sweet dogs for hikes. I look forward to reading with my child; or maybe watching a movie while cuddling on the couch with popcorn. I can't wait to be giggling with my child as we chase each other around the swing set in the back yard.



# Rick & Tammy



Hi our names are Rick and Tami. We are so excited at the thought of adopting a child! We look forward to providing a supportive and loving home for a child that we will love with all of our hearts. Your child would get a stable home, great education, and be surrounded by family, joy, and lots of laughter. We understand that adoption is an extraordinary gift and we would be honored to be able to complete our family in this way.

**Parenting Philosophy:** We look forward to raising our child with love and attention. Teaching them to be respectful and considerate of others and to give them the kind of attention they require to grow up healthy, happy, confident and able to make good choices when they are an adult. We will help them find their strengths and ultimately become a success in whatever they were born to do.

**Our Family:** We have been married for fifteen years. Spending time celebrating special occasions, birthdays, and holidays with our extended family of siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews is very important to us. We are a very close family and love this time together. We are grateful that our child will be loved and welcomed by so many special people in our lives. Our families are extremely supportive of our adoption and our child will have lots of cousins to play with.

**Our Home:** We live in a safe, kid-friendly suburban neighborhood with plenty of parks and playgrounds nearby. We are also close to several lakes and bike trails. Our home is a cozy cape cod style home with 3 bedrooms and a large yard with plenty of room to play. We have a number of families with young children in our neighborhood.



**Our Professions:** Rick has a certification in HVAC (Heating Ventilation Air Conditioning & Refrigeration) and is currently working as a Maintenance Technician and driver for a national real estate company. Tami has a Bachelor's degree in Accounting and is currently working as a computer programmer for a state agency.

**Our Activities:** We love the great outdoors. Taking our dog for a walk is one of our daily activities. Camping, fishing, and hiking are some of the things we like to do in the summer. Taking our kayaks out on the lake is one of our favorite things we do together. We love to explore and travel. Skiing and ice skating with our nieces and nephews are a given in the winter. We look forward to summer vacations every year. One of Tami's hobbies is scrapbooking all of our memories.



# Joel & Mia

Hi, we're Joel and Mia. We haven't met you yet, but we might have some important things in common. We wish for your baby the warmest, most loving, supportive childhood imaginable. Learning and creativity are what have shaped our lives the most, and they will shape the life of our family. We really hope to share with you the hopes that have brought us all to this moment.

**Parenting Philosophy:** We will always be there to nurture our child's capacity for self-respect, kindness, compassion, and generosity of spirit. We'll give them the combination of space and structure to pursue their dreams, whatever they may be. We understand that parenthood is a great joy and a tremendous challenge, and we are ready for both.

**Our Family:** Our loving families, in California and in New York City, are thrilled to join us in welcoming our child. Just as important to us is our circle of close friends, whose children are every age from newborn to high school. Adoption is a deep and cherished part of our lives: two of Joel's close relatives were adopted, and recently four of our best friends have grown their families through adoption.

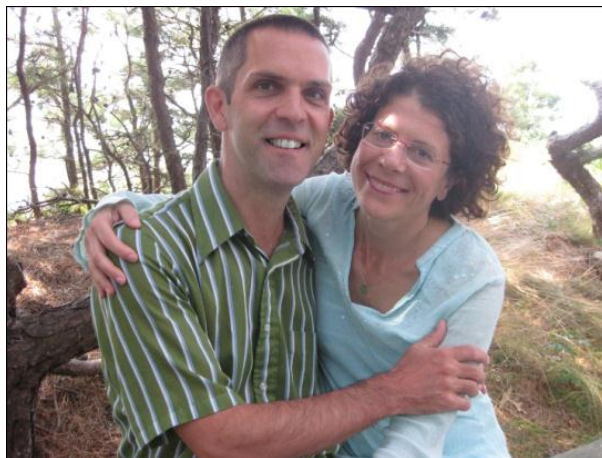
**Our Home:** We share a sunny house in New York City with a sweet cat, a lot of books and art, and the delicious smell of Mia's cooking. Mia grew up in New York, so she knows what a great place it is for a child. A short walk from our door, there's a fantastic playground, the year-round beauty of Central Park, and people from everywhere.

**Our Professions:** We both work in museums, creating exhibitions and writing books about art. Our daily lives are devoted to creativity and helping kids and adults discover new art and ideas for themselves.



**Our Activities:** Our favorite thing is having friends over to enjoy great food and games that involve play-acting or creating stories. Every summer we rent a house at the beach, where we swim and ride bikes with lots of guests. A big bond between us is our love of animals of every kind, whether out in the wild or fluttering into our garden.

**In Closing:** Our child will always know how their family came to be, and that the love of their birth mother brought us all together. Your needs are important to us. We would be happy to keep in touch through letters, emails, pictures, and phone calls. What's most important is getting to know and trust each other.





# How Adoption Changed My Life

*By Sue N., an adoptive mother*

Where do I start? How do I tell a story so close to my heart? When I reflect on the last decade and all the changes that have occurred in our family it amazes me. I am overwhelmed with joy each time I sit back and watch my children together, caring for each other, looking out for one another.

My husband and I had been married four years when our first child arrived. We were so proud and filled with excitement, this baby boy was a part of each of us and was the beginning of our life as a family, as parents. We always thought there would be more children, after all isn't that the way it was supposed to happen. After several years of trying we decided maybe it was time to look at adding to our family in another way. As a child I had always thought about adoption and how wonderful it would be to adopt a child, to bring people who needed each other together. As we explored our options, we knew that this was not going to be something that happened overnight. We shared our desire to adopt with anyone that would listen. We were open with our hearts and minds, willing to put our toe in the proverbial pond and make a ripple that could carry for miles. Looking back, I think this is what ultimately worked for us.

**We always thought there  
would be more children,  
after all isn't that the way it  
was supposed to happen?**

After a couple of years of waiting and praying, we finally would have hope. While taking my son to his regular Saturday morning sports event a family friend came up and very nonchalantly told me that she knew of a young woman looking for a family to adopt her baby. I remember the flushed feeling I had, my heart racing with excitement and my stomach churning with nerves. I remember my hands trembling when I went to write the young woman's phone number down. I could not wait to get home and talk to my husband, could this be the child we had been praying for, and what should I do next, it seemed like the five minute car ride home took hours. Everything within me wanted to run through the door and blurt out the information as fast as I could, but I knew that I needed to keep calm and not let our son know what was going on for fear he could be hurt if things did not work out. After a few minutes our son went off to play and I had a chance to tell my husband the news. He was filled with questions, and I could only answer a few, I had been so excited and nervous, I didn't think to even ask when the baby was due. We spent a day making phone calls to friends who could advise us on what to do next and what questions to ask the birth mother. As much as we thought we were prepared, we needed moral support and guidance, someone with an unbiased opinion. After gathering all the information, the next day we made the call, the one that changed our lives forever.

It was a Sunday night, we had just had family over for dinner and we shared the news with the adults, they were skeptical but supportive. We knew that this may not work out, and we were prepared. As our family entertained our son and the



other children in the next room, we stole away to the spare bedroom and made the call. I was shaking as I dialed the number, my husband stood by me, rubbing my back to soothe my nerves. The voice at the other end of the phone sent a wave all the way to my heart. My heart broke for this young woman she was so definite in her choice and so open and willing to meet with us. It was as if something much larger than any of us had brought us together, we both wanted the same thing. A couple of days later, we went to meet her, the car ride there was torture. Would she like us? Would this be the right fit? Will I remember everything I am supposed to ask? My husband held my hand the whole way, squeezing it gently as if to say, it will be okay. This quiet young woman met us at the door and was so warm and welcoming. We exchanged information, showed her pictures of our son and our home. We talked about life in general, asking even the hard questions. My husband was better at those than I was. I wanted to help her, to take care of her needs, not because I wanted to adopt her child, but because I was a mom, I had deep compassion for what she was going through. I wanted to help her even if she chose to keep this child. She was struggling and needed someone, we seemed to connect easily. After what seemed like hours we parted ways and agreed to call each other as soon as we knew what we wanted. We had barely arrived home when the phone rang, it was her, she wanted us to be her baby's family. Knowing her due date was close we quickly got to work, completing necessary paperwork and readying our home for this exciting new arrival. I specifically remember calling my in-laws who where away at the time. My mother-in-law answered and when we explained that we were adopting a baby she started to cry. We filled her in on all the pertinent information and she was overjoyed for us. About five minutes later she called back, she was so emotional at our initial call she could not remember anything we had told her. What an effect this baby had on our family and it was not even born yet.

The next few weeks were filled with paperwork, meeting with social workers, making plans. There were daily phone calls between the birthmother and I, sometimes several a day. We shared likes and dislikes, hopes and dreams. She told me that she wanted me to be there when the baby was to be born. I was overwhelmed with emotion when she told me this, she was sharing something so personal and intimate with me, what a strong and giving young woman. She made an adoption plan, decided how she wanted everything to take place, who would name the baby and who would be present. She was so willing to give us every opportunity to participate and wanted us to go through this process with her. The phone rang in the early hours of the morning and it was finally time for this baby to be born.

We hurried around and got on the road to the hospital. Little did I know what I would experience this cool spring day. I went in to meet her in the hospital room and was instantly drawn into the excitement and the process of childbirth. The nurses had a lot of questions, I stood by and observed, every now and then the birth mother would turn to me for answers but all I could say is that this has to be the way you want it to be, this is up to you. We shared many very intimate and beautiful moments, too personal to write about. These moments will be forever locked within my heart, only to be opened by one person, my daughter. Before we knew it tears were flowing, our little baby girl was born, strong and beautiful just like her birth mother. The

nurse whisked her away to be checked and I was told to follow. I remember them placing her in my arms and crying at the sight of this amazing child. My heart was filled with love, the same love I felt for my son, it did not matter that she did not grow inside of my body, she had grown in my heart and soul. My heart also felt sad, because out of this beautiful gift we had been given, another heart would ache for the loss this birthmother would feel, although by choice, this is never the less a loss.

We spent many hours together in the hospital sharing the joy of this beautiful baby girl. The next day it came time to part ways. There were many tears, both tears of joy and sorrow, we knew that we would be forever connected through this miracle she had created and shared with us. How can you thank someone for giving you the ultimate gift, the gift of a child. This beautiful little girl has changed our life so much. I can't imagine my life without her in it, she is so wonderful, loving, strong and dedicated to her family. When I look at her I sometimes see her birth mother and my heart longs to know that she is ok. My wish is that she knows what a wonderful and incredible thing she did for us, she made our family more complete, she will always have a very special place in my heart.



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# The Miracle of Family:

## Risks & Resiliency of Children Adopted Internationally

By: Renee Hettich, MA, LMSW

"Our daughters are here" we all whispered as we heard our children being escorted into the adjoining room in the provincial office in China. We excitedly, nervously and quickly finished our required adoption documents; wanting more than anything to hold our daughters. Finally, my daughter appeared bundled in three layers of clothes wearing bright yellow socks held by a petit, older Chinese woman who looked at me with a sorrowful smile. My daughter turned 9 months old that day. She had spent her first 9 months in a Social Welfare Institute and now will spend the rest of her life in our home and loving family.

My daughter came to me gladly without a tear or struggle. She gulped down a bottle and fell asleep. It seemed all too easy. When she awoke, we both woke up to the reality of the situation. I began to realize the challenges that lay ahead. At 9 months of age, my daughter was unable to roll-over, sit-up, reach for or play with a toy, or appropriately socially interact with others. Within the first 24 hours and after hours of massage and baby exercises, my daughter rolled-over for the first time and the following day looked at herself in an infant mirror. Four days later my daughter reached for toys and blew raspberries. By the time we got on the plane to come home ten days later, my daughter was sitting up unassisted for a few moments, giggling, and "talking" with me. Five weeks after arriving home, my daughter was crawling and babbling; three weeks later she was pulling herself up to a stand; and at age 12 months she was walking. It was like watching development in fast forward. Today, my daughter is 8 years old and is a bright and active child who lives life with enthusiasm and vigor.

Hundreds of thousands of other children, like my daughter, are waiting in orphanages around the world. They are faced with unthinkable challenges as they strive to survive without a loving family. I will never forget the blank faces of the children lined-up on my daughter's orphanage patio strapped into bouncy seats and walkers staring at gray walls with no toys, music, books, pictures, or people to engage their developing minds. Imagine an infant or young child laying in a bed hungry, bored, and crying to get the attention of one of the few busy caregivers; wanted to be fed, played with and held. It is easy to understand how institutionalized children are at risk for developmental challenges. Children waiting in orphanages are too often surrounded by a sterile, unresponsive and uninteresting environment. It is estimated that for every three to five months in an institution, a child loses approximately one month of overall development. Institutionalized children are at risk for delays in their language, motor, sensory, cognitive, and social/emotional skills. However, they are incredibly resilient.

Institutionalized children have a great capacity to recover from the effects of institutional care once in the care of a lov-

ing and nurturing family. Again and Again I have witnessed the amazingly quick development of skills within days and months of a child joining a family. Developmental delays usually improve rapidly after adoption into a loving home with many institutionalized children making developmental gains faster than the normal maturation curve. Parents and researchers both report rapid growth in cognitive, language, motor, social, emotional, and attachment development during the first year home. It is estimated that for the majority of children institutional variables no longer influence development three years after adoption. The best predictor of positive outcomes for the child is the "fit" with the family and the health of the parent-child relationship.

It is truly miraculous to see a child's development flourish under the care of a loving family. Every day as I watch my children play, learn and love, I am awed by their daily growth and development. Every institutionalized child deserves a family who can nurture their resilient spirit.

*Renee Hettich, MA, LMSW, is the mother of two daughters adopted from China and a son adopted from Guatemala. After her first daughter arrived home, she dedicated her life to bringing children and families together. She is an adoption social worker with Family Connections, Inc. and a speaker on adoption ethics and international adoption.*





# Choosing An Adoption Agency - Birth Parents

One of the first decisions a birth mother will need to make is to choose an adoption agency to support her adoption plan. Finding an adoption agency can be daunting and frustrating with so many agencies trying to get the attention of birth parents via print advertising, social media, and internet sites. It is important that a birth parent work with an agency where they feel comfortable and confident. As birth parents research adoption agencies they should consider the following. An adoption agency should:

- Guarantee the birth parents that they have the right to make their own decisions regarding the placement of their child without influence.
- Educate the birth family regarding all their adoption options and parenting options.
- Allow and encourage the birth family to choose the adoptive family for their child (via meetings with prospective adoptive families or family profiles).
- Support the birth family and prospective adoptive family as they build a relationship (if wanted).
- Never influence or pressure the birth parent(s) into a decision.

- Help the birth family get a lawyer.
- Assist the birth family to get needed services (e.g. housing, maternity clothing, prenatal medical care, etc).
- Support the birth family's emotional needs and provide counseling services (if wanted).
- Be available to provide emotional support to the birth parent's extended family (if needed).
- Make sure that any agreed upon post-adoption contact is honored.
- Be available 24/7 to provide support to the birth family.

The right adoption agency is key to ensuring a positive and successful outcome for the birth mother, birth father (if involved), adoptive family and baby. Family Connections, Inc., an authorized New York State adoption agency, provides all the services needed to support birth parent(s) as they make an adoption plan for their child.

Written by Renee Hettich, MA, LMSW Adoption Social Worker with Family Connections, Inc.

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# Choosing An Adoption Agency - Adoptive Parents

By Renee Hettich, MA, LMSW, Adoption Social Worker

One of the first decisions a prospective adoptive family will need to make is to choose an adoption agency to support their adoption plan. Finding an adoption agency can be daunting and frustrating with so many agencies trying to get the attention of adoptive parents via print advertising, social media, and internet sites. It is important that a prospective adoptive family work with an agency where they feel comfortable and confident. As adoptive parents research adoption agencies they should consider the following.

An adoption agency should:

- Guarantee the adoptive parents that they have the right to make their own decisions regarding their plan of adoption without influence.
- Educate the adoptive family regarding all their adoption options.
- Have the expertise in the type of adoption the prospective adoptive parents wish to pursue (e.g. domestic, international, older child, children with special needs).
- Provide training specific to the needs of the family and their adoption plan (e.g. attachment, adopting an older child, trans-racial adoption, parenting a child with special needs, family transitions, open adoption relationships, etc).
- Complete home study investigations in a thorough and timely manner.
- Refer the adoptive family to attorneys specializing in adoption (if needed).

In domestic adoption:

- Outreach to potential birth parents
- Assist with the matching of adoptive parents and birth parent(s)
- Support the prospective adoptive family and birth family as they build and maintain a relationship (if wanted)
- Place a child into their home
- Ensure any post adoption contact agreement is honored
- Provide post adoption support and supervision services

In international adoption:

- Refer to international adoption placement agencies (if needed)
- Provide education and technical assistance regarding the international adoption process (e.g. dossier, immigration, citizenship, etc)
- Provide post adoption support and supervision services
- Support the adoptive family's emotional needs as they proceed with their adoption plan.

The right adoption agency is key to ensuring a positive and successful outcome for the child and adoptive family. Family Connections, Inc., an authorized New York State adoption agency, provides all the services needed to support prospective adoptive families.

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# Birthparents Most Common Legal Questions

Written By: Kevin P. Harrigan, Esq.

A birthparent's choice to place a child for adoption may be the most difficult decision of his or her life. There are emotional, soul-searching questions that can test the strongest resolve and challenge lifelong beliefs.

Knowing the answers to some of the most fundamental questions can bring some relief to birthparents who are considering adoption as an option. I have spent thousands of hours talking with birthparents about the process, and implications of adoption. Looking back, I realize that there are three questions that seem to arise with every birthparent. These same questions also appear to cause them the most emotional distress.

## **Question: Do I have to go to court?**

No, not necessarily. For birthparents who are considering adoption as an alternative to parenting, the legal process begins with the voluntary termination of parental rights, and many times, this is done without the birthparents going to court.

In New York State, adoption may be private (with custody of the child transferred directly from the birthparents to the adoptive parents) or through an authorized adoption agency (with the custody and guardianship of the child transferred from the birthparent to the agency and then from the agency to the adoptive parents). In both types of adoption, the child is placed into the adoptive family's home shortly after the birth parents' consent.

In either case, birthparents are not permitted to sign documents that terminate their parental rights until after the child has been born. Following the birth, however, the birthparents may choose to sign either a Judicial Consent or Surrender document (in the court) or an Extra-Judicial Consent or Surrender document (outside of court).

The vast majority of consents or surrenders are executed outside the courtroom, in most cases before the birthmother leaves the hospital, or shortly thereafter. These consents and surrenders are signed in the presence of the birthparent's attorney and, in an agency adoption, with the addition of the adoption agency caseworker.

If the surrender is signed outside of court in an agency case, the birthparent may file a revocation within 30 days that will revoke their surrender of the child and return the child to their custody. If the child is in foster care at the time that the surrender is executed, the birthparent has 45 days to file a revocation. In a private adoption, the Extra-Judicial Consent may always be revoked within 45 days.

When the birthparent chooses to execute a Judicial Consent or Judicial Surrender in the Family Court or Surrogate Court in New York State, the same 30-day revocation period applies unless the child to be adopted is in foster care, in which case there is no revocation period, and birthparents' parental rights are immediately and irrevocably terminated.

Whether these documents are signed in court or out of court, the consents or surrenders must be explained to the birthparents in their principal language (e.g. English, Spanish, etc), and the birthparents must be allowed to ask any questions they might have. Finally the birthparents must be given a copy of the consent or surrender that they have signed.

## **Question: Do I need to involve the birth father?**

Ideally, the goal of every adoption is to have both the birthmother and the birthfather be part of the adoption plan with the adoptive parents and the adoption agency.

In reality, the birth father is often not an active participant in adoption planning. Sections 111 and 111-a of the Domestic Relations Law establish which birth fathers must consent to an adoption as well as those who must receive notice of the adoption proceeding. For example, a birthfather who is currently married to the birthmother must always consent to the adoption. In general, the Courts look to the six-month period immediately preceding the placement of the child for adoption and ask if the unwed birthfather has sufficiently shown his intention to accept parental responsibility.

Section 111-a of the Domestic Relations Law sets out a “laundry list” of birth fathers who must receive notice of the adoption proceeding.

Among these are birthfathers who are named on the birth certificate by the birthmother or whom the birthmother has named in a written sworn statement; birthfathers who have initiated paternity proceedings or filed with the putative father registry; birthfathers who have connected themselves to the child during pregnancy by supporting the birth mother both financially and emotionally; or birthfathers who have paid hospital, medical, or nursing expenses for the birthmother while holding themselves out to be the child’s father.

For many years in New York State, the birthmother was considered responsible for telling the birthfather about the pregnancy. More recently, the New York Court of Appeals has rejected the contention that an unwed mother is under any obligation to advise the unwed father of her pregnancy. At the same time, the birthmother cannot lie or deceive the birthfather if he asks her about this pregnancy.

A birthfather’s acknowledgement of paternity does not automatically entitle him to notice or consent status in the adoption proceeding. The birthfather can no longer stand back and not participate. In order to be recognized as a consent or notice father, he must take responsibility by acknowledging his role in the pregnancy and connect himself to the unborn child in some way, for example by financially supporting the mother or being involved in medical care.

Under Section 111-a of the Domestic Relations Law, a birthfather who meets these criteria is entitled to receive notice when an adoptive proceeding

is initiated. He is then given an opportunity, if desired, to appear before the court to challenge the adoption plan and assert his rights as a parent. He can claim the child and present an alternative plan in which he is the chief caretaker of the child. At this point, the birthfather must demonstrate to the court that he is personally capable of parenting and supporting the child.

In some situations, a man is automatically considered to have parental rights – and must consent to the adoption plan – in order for the adoption to proceed. This would include anyone who is married to the birth mother. Even if he is not the biological father, this man is considered the legal father and therefore must consent to the adoption or deny paternity.

Birthfathers who have lived with the birthmother and child for at least six months after the child is born can also be considered consent fathers.

Whenever appropriate, the adoption attorney or agency working with the birth mother should encourage the birthmother to include the birthfather in the planning and execution of the consent or surrender process. Usually a simple review of the birthfather’s history with an agency caseworker or experienced adoption attorney can help the birthmother determine if the birthfather should play a role.

### **Question: Am I permitted to have contact with my child after the adoption is finalized?**

Often the most important part of the adoption plan is the Post Adoption Contact Agreement (PACA) because it embodies the special spirit of love and cooperation between the adoptive parents and birthparents.

The PACA is a relatively new development in the overall adoption plan. Typically a PACA will include arrangements for the adoptive parents to update the birthparents on the child’s progress and development by sending them periodic letters and pictures.

A PACA may also provide for scheduled visits between the birthparent(s), the adoptive parents, and the child. The frequency of these contacts



depends completely on the wishes and consensus of the involved parties. Often the number of contacts agreed upon in the PACA is considered only a baseline and may be increased over the years, as the relationship develops.

The PACA may include not only the birthparents but also their extended families, such as the child's grandparents, siblings, and the birthparents' close friends. Family Connections, Inc. provides relaxing and supportive meetings for adoptive parents, birthparents, and their families.

Typically, as children grow older, the PACA arrangements may change with the consent of the parties. These agreements can continue until the child reaches the age of 18. At this point, adopted children are adults and are free to make their own contact arrangement with birthparents.

Unfortunately, in New York State, PACAs are enforceable in agency adoptions but not in private adoptions. In an agency adoption, the birthparents have legal recourse if the PACA terms are not met. These agreements are legally binding and become enforceable when the courts make them part of the surrender, either at the time of the Sur-

render Approval Hearing or at the Adoption Finalization proceeding.

If contact-related problems arise between the birthparents and adoptive families, the adoption agency may first seek to intervene and to act as a mediator. But ultimately, these agreements are enforceable by the Family Court or Surrogate Court in New York State. It should be noted that a breach of the Post Adoption Contact Agreement will not invalidate the adoption. A judge might at his/her discretion, fine adoptive parents and order them to comply with the contract. There are no known cases to give us an example.

Even under the best of circumstances, the adoption process can be emotional and complex. In the end, there is no substitute for having good information. Take every opportunity to meet with your adoption agency and your adoption attorney.

*Written by - Kevin Harrigan is an attorney in the Central New York area whose practice specializes in the field of adoption and adoption related issues. He has devoted over twenty years to guiding prospective adoptive parents as they embark on the start of the lifelong journey of parenthood, as well as the compassionate representation of birth parents in their commitment to making an adoption plan for their child.*

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# Adoption Options - Birth Parent Choices

*By: Renee Hettich, MA, LMSW, Adoption Social Worker*

When a woman finds herself pregnant and the pregnancy is unplanned, she has several options and choices. The decision she makes and the options she chooses are usually influenced by her personal moral beliefs, religious philosophies, age, social situation, relationship with the father of the child, support from family and friends, future goals and aspirations, and other personal circumstances. If a birth parent chooses to place their child into a loving adoptive home ...

Adoption is truly a choice. Birth parents make the decision whether to place their child for adoption or to parent the child. Sometimes birth parents are afraid to explore adoption as a choice for an unplanned pregnancy. Many fear that somehow they will be persuaded against their will to surrender their parental rights. Please know that NO person (family member, friend, lawyer, judge, social worker, doctor, employer, etc) can force or coerce a birth parent into implementing an adoption plan and placing their child with an adoptive family. If anyone attempted to pressure or coerce a birth parent to place their child for adoption, it would be certainly unethical and in New York State illegal. New York State adoption law has many protections in place to prevent a forced adoption. The core belief and practice philosophy of Family Connections, Inc. (adoption agency) is that every person has the right to self-determine – to make their own choices without influence or pressure. Any plan for adoption is made solely by the birth parent and is a voluntary act. It can't be stressed enough that no person can force a birth parent to place their baby in an adoptive family. Adoption is a voluntary choice.

Birth parents have an array of choices when making an adoption plan and can design a plan that best meets their and their baby's needs. Birth parents are in the “driver's

seat” - they have the power of choice. Birth parents have many choices and options - they may choose a confidential adoption, a semi-open adoption or an open adoption. They also have the right to choose the adoptive family they wish to place their child with. An adoption agency like Family Connections, Inc. can help birth parents explore their choices and make informed decisions regarding their adoption plans.

Birth parents have many options regarding adoption. Birth parents can explore their choices and then develop an individualized adoption plan that is most comfortable for them. There is a continuum of options and each adoption will be unique and special to the birth parents and adoptive family. Most adoption relationships can be characterized as open, semi-open, or confidential (aka closed).

**Open Adoption:** A birth parent may choose an open adoption. Open adoption relationships are unique to each adoption triad (birth parent – adoptive parent – child) and vary greatly. The level of openness with the adoptive family depends upon the choices of the birth family. Most open adoptions are characterized by:

- The birth parent(s) meeting and choosing the family for their child
- The sharing of identifying information between the birth and adoptive family
- The development of a relationship between the birth family and adoptive parents prior to the child's birth (if possible), and
- The maintenance of a relationship between the birth parent, adoptive parents, and adopted child throughout the child's childhood through pictures, letters and face-to-face visits.





adoption agency would know all of the identifying information for the birth parent and adoptive family, but would hold that information in confidence. The birth parent may choose to pick a family for their child from family profiles or meetings with prospective adoptive parents. The birth parent(s) and adoptive family may or may not develop a relationship with each other prior to and/or after the birth of the child (based upon the wishes of the birth parent). The birth parent may or may not request post adoption contact (e.g. pictures/letters regarding the child's growth). Any post adoption contact requested by the birth parent would be maintained through a third party such as an adoption agency. The wishes of the birth parent determine the degree of openness.

**Confidential Adoption:** A birth parent may choose a confidential adoption (aka closed adoption). In a confidential adoption the identity of the birth parent(s) and the adoptive parents is held in strict confidence. The adoptive family will not know the identity of the birth parent(s) and the birth parent(s) will not be told the adoptive family's identifying information. The birth parent may specify the characteristics of the adoptive family they wish for their child. The birth parent may choose the adoptive family from profiles and/or meet the adoptive family; it is up to them! If the birth parent decides not to choose the adoptive family, the adoption agency will choose an adoptive family who meets the birth parent's criteria. A confidential adoption guards the identity of the birth mother, birth father, child, and adoptive parents.

The possibilities are many and the decisions belong to the birth family.

Most birth parent(s) choose the adoptive family for their child (the agency will choose a family only if the birth

parent(s) do not wish to make the decision). The birth family can specify the characteristics that are important to her/ them in an adoptive family. The birth family may designate:

- The religion of the adoptive parents
- Type of family (two-parent family, traditional stay-at-home mom, two career couple, same sex couple, single parent, childless couple, multi-child family)
- Racial composition of the family
- Education level of adoptive parents
- Age of adoptive parents
- Financial status of family
- Place of residence (city, suburban, rural)
- Any other characteristic important to the birth parent

Once the adoption agency understands the birth parent(s) preferences for adoptive families, the agency will canvas their waiting families who meet the birth parent's criteria and then present the birth parent(s) with families who wish to be considered for the adoption of their child. The birth parent will typically receive family profiles from the agency for their review. From these profiles, the birth mother and/or birth father may choose a family or may request to meet two or three of the families before making their decision. After reviewing the family profiles and/or meeting with prospective adoptive families, the birth parent(s) will make their choice. Again, like all other aspects of adoption, the birth parent's choice of a family will not be influenced by her/their adoption agency, counselor, lawyer, judge, doctor, etc. The decision belongs to the birth parent.

Again, adoption is a choice and within adoption a birth parent has many choices. An adoption agency, like Family Connections, Inc., can provide birth families guidance and support as they consider all of their options.



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