

Considering a Transracial Adoption?

by Terra Trevor

Before adopting a child of a different ethnicity it is important to consider all that a child will experience growing up in a transracial family . . .

You are waiting to adopt a child and your heart is soaring like an eagle. The moment you make the decision to adopt transracially, it's time to build a multiethnic family lifestyle.

While it's important to till a love of the people and land our children are born from, we don't always have local access, and a lot of living gets postponed. Any ethnic community that you feel drawn toward is the right place to begin.

Get off your beaten path. Become the minority. Locate the ethnic neighborhood you most want to absorb. Find the city library and go back week after week. Keep an eye on the bulletin boards. Attend community events in the area on a regular basis, and allow yourself to soak up images and impressions. Is there a barber or a market nearby you could begin to frequent? If the shopkeeper gives your child a special treat, return the kindness. If you are ignored, show kindness. Being ignored is sometimes what it feels like to be a person of color.

How then, do we go deeper? By participating regularly and steadily. The difference between embracing and exploiting a culture is when we are authentic and we feel ethnicity in our bones. It feels calm, safe and centering. It's the listening process, more about seeing and feeling, than it is about thinking. Let the changes take place inside of you. Don't look for success and don't quit. That's how a multiethnic lifestyle is built. Some of the best things in life take a long time to achieve.

You might begin attending a racially mixed church, or observe a Sunday intertribal powwow. Surround yourself with native families as they exchange news, ideas, song, dance and reflect on traditions. How do I know? My earliest memories encircle me; watching Grandma sew beads on Uncle Elmer's deer skin leggings, realizing that I'm white and Indian and what that meant. Listen to my mother and you'll hear stories about me in diapers moving to the heartbeat of the drum.

Talk to me and I'll tell you that fusing a multiracial way of feeling and being does not happen with a few social outings; it's a life process, a series of small steps gained over years. It is challenging at times, and requires us to use the same perseverance we needed in the adoption process that brought our children to us. We built friendships around a campfire, maintained them by hosting gatherings in our home. These relationships grew over late night bowls of naengmyon noodles and were strengthened when we let down our guard and allowed ourselves to be absorbed, and supported when our teenage son was diagnosed, then died, from a brain tumor. Anglers of every race, in every culture, will always find each other, thus my husband continues to find his connecting point on the ocean, fishing, grieving and making friends in the process.

We had three kids, two adopted transracially. Our children's childhood ran through our fingers like water as we lifted our hand to capture a moment with the camera. We turned around and they are adults, miles from us on their own. Will the foundation we built support them on their journey in an integrated world?

Our culture comes first from the family and community we are raised in. It is not our children's job to piece it together. We must begin the process. While those of us who are white cannot ever know what it feels like to be a person of color, we can choose to live diversely, give ourselves the freedom to ingest the beliefs that shape the perceptions of groups of people whose racial heritage is not the same as our own. But is ethnicity important only for people of color, or for those who have adopted transracially?

I believe all families benefit from a wide scope of ethnic diversity. Even those who have not adopted internationally or transracially. When we spend most of our time in wholly white enclaves with little or no access to mingle within ethnic communities, or are too threatened by its values to explore it further, we are coached to feel safest within the confines of a Caucasian boundary, then we develop silly notions that will keep us locked further away.

Life is not orderly. It's a bit scary at first to teach ourselves, or guide a child adopted at an older age, into unexplored racially diverse territory, but it's not impossible. Wherever we are, is a good place to begin, starting in this moment — stretch.

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