



Institute for Family & Child Well-Being

Our Story... Our Song

Biographical Reflections on African American Adoption

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Best Case Scenario: Dispelling the Myth that African American Couples Are Not Capable of Raising African American Siblings

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I have known for quite some time now what a blessing it is, that our parents decided to adopt my biological brother and me in 1972. There is no way they could have known then that their decision to adopt us would inspire both of us to educate and encourage other black families, social workers and legislators to have their voices heard and that they can make a difference when it comes to making decisions concerning black families adopting black children. My parents are one of many black couples that have proven that this myth about there not being any black families waiting to adopt black children or that somehow black families are not qualified to adopt black children is simply untrue. Unfortunately, there are many people in key positions that could recruit and approve more black families but they choose not to. I am grateful that an educated, heterosexual, black couple that has a strong belief in God adopted me.

Today I realize that there is a certain cultural competency that parents must have to raise black children. A lot of what I learned from my parents I learned simply by observing them and watching how they reacted in certain situations. There were some situations they found themselves having to deal with simply because they were a black couple

living in this country. Other lessons I learned simply by listening to the type of music my parents listen to or looking at the art work and sculptures that my parents had around the house. It has been necessary for me to draw on all of this knowledge and use those experiences as an adult. I can only imagine what the outcomes may have been in my life without having that knowledge and having had those experiences.

Another one of the reasons I am grateful to have been adopted by my parents is because they taught me what a healthy marriage looks like. My father loves my mom. I know how to treat a woman today

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because I have watched my mother and father interact with one another all of my life. I know that I have to respect women and treat them, as I would want my mother to be

treated. I know that there is a certain amount of compromise that is necessary in order to have a successful relationship. I also know that it is healthy for a husband to be physically attracted to his wife. I know most of this because of what I observed as a child growing up in a healthy heterosexual household. I believe that our children are taught certain behavior by watching television, listening to music and playing video games. I believe that children can learn certain behavior by simply observing the envi-

ronment they live in as well. I know most of what I learned as a child I learned because of what I observed, not by what I was being told.

When Oronde and I were placed for adoption by Homes for Black Children Adoption Agency in Detroit, Michigan, there was a commitment by the agency to place us together. I do not see that same commitment by other agencies today. It seems to be commonplace to separate siblings for the sake of the placement with little or no thought placed on the ramifications of that separation. The bond that siblings have with one another is so precious and in many cases it is the only bond that gives them the sense that they are not alone in this world.

Many of you may know that I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma on March 11, 2000. I had exhausted all of my treatment options after many cycles of chemotherapy and radiation and my doctors were getting ready to send me to a hospice. It turned out that Oronde matched all six markers needed to be my bone marrow donor and that I received his bone marrow via a stem cell transplant. The first transplant only lasted about six months so I had to do a second stem cell transplant. Today, ninety five percent of the bone marrow that my body produces is Oronde's.

I tell that story because it shows how important it was that I had been placed with my brother and given the chance to bond with him. Homes for Black Children had no way of knowing that they were saving my life by placing us together. Had they separated Oronde and I for the sake of the placement, and if I

were never able to find him as an adult, then I would not be living today. This is the reality and a possible outcome for thousands of sibling groups that are being separated today. Ensuring siblings are placed together whenever possible should be one of the highest priorities for a social worker and the adoption agency.

It is also my belief that we need to make social workers more accountable to the job they do gathering a child's family history. The social worker's obligation to all of their children is to be diligent when it comes to collecting family history. They should not only gather the mother's side of the family history, but they should gather the father's side of the family history as well. This is important because an adult adoptee may start researching the medical history of their biological family or they may try to find any siblings that they may have. If there was a thorough history done by the social worker then at least this information will be in the non-identifying information file that the adult adoptee is given when they initiate this search.

It has been a blessing for me to have been adopted by my mother and father and I am forever grateful. The fact that they adopted me and Oronde together dispels the myth that an educated, heterosexual, black couple that believes in God does not exist, and if they do, that they cannot successfully raise black children.

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