

Cherishing Family Ties

A STORY OF OPEN ADOPTION

When Anna first learned of her pregnancy she was overwhelmed with emotions and uncertainty. She already had a 1-year old son and was a single mother living at home with her parents. Mike, the father of her son and unborn child, was close by but facing his own struggles to make ends meet. She knew immediately that making an adoption plan would be best for everyone.

Through a recommendation from her pastor at church, Anna reached out to Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey's Adoption Options. She and Mike met with MaryAnn Sager, Director of Adoption Options, to learn more and discuss the process. "Mike did not agree with my decision at first," explains Anna. "It was tough to convince him that it was the right choice to make. But after meeting with MaryAnn and learning more about it, I think he finally realized adoption was the best thing."

Open Adoption

"I knew a little about the open adoption process when we first spoke to MaryAnn," Anna continued. "I thought it was a nice option." Like so many others involved in the adoption process, Anna was surprised to learn she had the right to decide if she wanted to be included in her baby's life. "It is a changing trend in adoption," describes MaryAnn. "Open adoptions enable everyone in the process to benefit from the exchange of important information. Sharing social background and family medical history offers essential information that will carry the child throughout his or her life. Open adoption also establishes an environment of trust and gives the child a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding the adoption."

At the time, MaryAnn presented Anna and Mike with several profiles of couples looking to adopt. The second profile they reviewed piqued Anna's interest. It was a couple from New Jersey that had been married ten years. Their profile immediately convinced Anna that this warm and loving couple, who come from a close-knit family, would provide the perfect home for her baby.

An Anxious Time

The couple, Adam and Robin Schiller, had



Robin, Adam and Addison Schiller

hopes of one day welcoming a child into the world. When infertility issues arose, they were faced with the realization that they may never conceive and deliver a birth child. As their yearning for a child progressed, they decided to consider adoption.

Armed with information they had received from various resources, Robin and Adam decided to make some calls to local adoption agencies. "We knew right away that the staff at Adoption Options was committed to making our dream of having a family a reality," explains Robin. "From the moment we began the process they made sure all our questions were answered. For us, the process moved rather quickly. We attended a new parent meeting and began completing the essential paperwork." The Schillers answered an extensive questionnaire; then created a profile about their family, how they met, and their interests. They also provided several pages of photos and wrote a personalized letter addressed to potential birth parents.

"During one of our counseling sessions, the social worker from Adoption Options introduced us to the idea of an open adoption. We were a little scared at first, but soon realized it was a great way for us to have important information about our baby's birth family and medical history," explained Robin.

Getting Acquainted

It was several months into the process when Robin and Adam learned of Anna and Mike, and the baby girl they were expecting. They had the chance to meet Anna at the agency and

get to know one another. They talked and laughed and shared family stories together. At a later meeting, they had an opportunity to get to know Mike as well.

Then, about three weeks before Anna was due to deliver, the Schillers received word that they had been chosen to adopt Anna and Mike's baby. "We were so excited," recalls Adam "but we were still aware of the fact that Anna and Mike could change their minds until the documents surrendering their parental rights were signed. It was a difficult three weeks."

Finally, the call came, as expected. Anna had delivered the baby -- but the news was a bit concerning. "Anna had second thoughts about her decision right after the baby was born," explains MaryAnn. "It is a common reaction for birth mothers after delivery. I reminded Anna to recall all of the factors that went into her decision and her adoptive plan." Anna soon realized that she should continue with the adoption and then personally called Robin and Adam to let them know.

And Baby Makes Three... Then Six?

Robin and Adam welcomed home baby Addison and began their life as a family. They quickly established a frequent line of communication with Anna, exchanging phone calls and emails often. Every few months and during holidays, such as Christmas and Easter,



Addison celebrating her 1st birthday

they get together so that Addison is able to see her brother and Anna. "Addison knows us as friends and I am fine with that -- I know she is in good hands," shares Anna. "But to me, the Schillers, are like my second family."

The Schillers recently invited Anna, Mike and their son to attend Addison's first birthday. The day was filled with love. "I was very nervous to meet Robin and Adam's families," explains Anna. "But I was so happy to be included."

Anna, who enjoys baking and decorating cakes, made Addison a very special first birthday cake. "The cake she made was beautiful. Anna is very talented," Robin added. "We were glad that we could all celebrate Addison's special day together."



*Anna, Robin, Mike and Addison
at her 1st birthday party*

The future looks very bright for Addison, the Schillers, Anna, Mike and their son. "We are fortunate to have such a unique relationship," includes Adam. "I know Addison will be grateful to have them be a part in her life."

Each Experience is a Different One

Not all open adoption relationships resemble that of Anna, Mike and the Schillers. Each open adoption is different. Levels of communication vary and both the birth and adoptive parents can determine what works best for them. Nonetheless, when it comes to open adoption whatever the level of relationship the result is always a win-win for the child, as it has been for Addison.

**For those
entering into
the Open
Adoption
Process,
Anna & Robin
offer the
following
advice:**

ANNA

"As a birth mother making an adoption plan, don't wait until the last minute to make important decisions. Start early and give yourself enough time to carefully weigh your options. If you decide to choose adoption for your child, take the time to find a good family and begin building a bond with them. I was lucky to find Robin and Adam so quickly. It gave Mike and I the time to get to know them and find comfort in our decision."

ROBIN

"As an adoptive parent, I would recommend that anyone interested in open adoption educate themselves, as well as their extended families. Adam and I found that although we were comfortable with the idea of open adoption and having direct contact with the birth parents, our family members had some concerns. It was different from what they were familiar with and therefore they had reservations. Adoption was always very secretive and it took some convincing for them to see the benefits of open adoption."

"My other advice would be to keep an open mind throughout the process. Talk to other people who might be going through the same issues -- establish a support system. We have found that joining a support group has not only helped us, but has also allowed us to help others."

ADOPTION *Program*

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