

Interracial Families: Four Families Talk About Interracial Adoption

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We would like to thank the four families who shared their stories in this article.

In this article from PPL Adoption Resources, we take a personal look at families built through interracial adoption. On the following pages, in their own words, are thoughts from four Christian families on their adoption decisions, efforts and successes.

The Carletons

We have three biological children--all girls, ages 14, 11 and 7. We have adopted two boys; our 2-1/2 year-old is biracial, and our 1 year-old is black. Both of our boys were adopted through Bethany Christian Services.

Adoption has always interested us as a way of adding to our family. The color of a child never mattered to us, and since there is a bigger need for homes for these children, we decided to adopt interracially.

First Attempts Thwarted by State Policy

Before we started the process, we perceived the home study to be a big hurdle. The homestudy turned out to be a minor concern in the course of our experience! Before contacting Bethany we tried to adopt through a state agency and there were problems with the state not wanting to place African American and biracial children in white homes. There was also a myriad of bureaucratic red tape to wade through with the state.

We then decided to apply with the local office of Bethany and have had very positive experiences with them. They are dedicated not only to the child but also to the birth mothers, which was very important to us.

We had the hardest time after our home studies were completed and we had to wait for a baby to be placed with us. We weren't sure if we'd have to wait two weeks or two years. For our first adoption we waited about a year and a half, and the second time we only waited about three months. Consistent prayer through the process is important!

Church, Family Key Supports

We have had a great deal of support from our local congregation and extended family. If anyone did have any misgivings about interracial adoption, they never said anything to us. We think people were more surprised by the fact that we wanted to raise five children than the children being any particular race.

Our children are still young so we have not run into many of the issues that we might face regarding interracial adoption. Several books by African-American authors were helpful to us: *I Ain't Comin' Back* by Dolphus Weary and *Let Justice Roll Down* by John Perkins. These authors have given us insight into what African-Americans

face in today's society. In this way we hope to be able to better prepare our sons for what to expect, and also show them ways they can be servants to others.

Consider God's Calling

We see our two adoptions as natural outgrowths of obedience to God's Word. As Christians, we are to care for the fatherless and orphans. If we have the resources and gifts we should consider God's calling to adopt.

Sometimes a family may wonder whether they would ever be able to love a child of another race as much as they love any of their biological children or other adopted children. We would say, not to worry! All of our children are unique and created in God's image, regardless of their birth history. Our hope is that we will show our sons and daughters the love of God as they grow, and that they will use all of the gifts given to them to serve God's kingdom.

The Arnolds

We have two biological children--our daughter is 12 and our son is 10. We adopted our second daughter at 2 months of age through a private Christian agency; she is now 16 months old.

We had been involved in pro-life activities for some time, by giving money and going to marches and other events. We began feeling unrest at our level of involvement--wanting to do more--and felt adoption was the next step for us.

We knew that we wanted to bring a special needs child into our family, particularly a biracial child who might not be as easily placed elsewhere. We also were involved in a church where there were other biracial children, both adopted and biological.

One More Child, Money Were Big Hurdles

A large hurdle for us was simply the decision to have a third child, and parenting a baby again. We are 39 and 44 and knew that this would mean having children at home for a long time! The financial cost of the adoption was also a concern. We moved into the process knowing that if God opened doors (i.e. providing a way to afford it) then we would do it.

As we prepared for a new baby and for the realities of an interracial adoption, we had a lot of support. The leadership of our agency was key. They were very helpful in directing us to resources and asking the right questions of ourselves. Our children were included in this entire process with the agency.

We also live in a racially integrated neighborhood, which served as a positive factor in our decision process. We had many conversations with our neighbors and read a lot of books on interracial adoption. John Perkins' writings have been helpful, and we regularly read *Urban Family* magazine.

One tremendous blessing was the offer of our church's deacon board to pay all of our placement fees. Our families were also very supportive of our decision to adopt. Our financial situation was their main concern. It seems that finances are the main obstacle in keeping Christians from pursuing interracial adoption. Also, many folks do not have a good support system and may not have a clear idea of how to go about this type of

adoption. We have been blessed by a supportive community of friends who encouraged (and still encourage) us in our decision.

Our daughter has opened many doors to conversation. We get various reactions, ranging from very positive to rather negative. There are obviously many unknowns for what our future will be like, but we deal with them day by day. We have seen God honor our desire to adopt, and have seen Him work through the process, in our lives, the life of our daughter, and in her birth mother's life.

The Wallaces

Our biracial daughter, Hannah, arrived three years ago when our other children were eight, six and three years old. Our pastor recommended an adoption attorney who handled our adoption, even though we did have contact with Holt International about their programs overseas.

God first brought an image of our daughter into my husband's mind and she looked Asian, so we continued to pursue an interracial adoption. It turned out that our baby looked like the image even though she's not Asian.

Three or four families in our circle of acquaintances have adopted interracially, and have been an encouragement to us. God has also given us connections to help remedy some of the segregation of our neighborhood: teachers, friends with mixed-race marriages, and African-American friends.

Love is Paramount to Skin Color

One hurdle for us was that we would not know how to provide a balanced cultural environment for her. We want her to be aware of all the cultural influences on her heritage and the blessing and the pain involved for those of African American descent, but only to the degree of her interest. We have friends who encouraged us that first and foremost she will have a loving family; that is paramount to whatever cultural experiences she will have.

Considering adoption after three biological children raised the typical question for us, would we be able to love this child as much as the others? We felt clearly that God has said to us, 'although another woman carried her and another man fathered her, this is your baby.'

Our church family has been a primary support. Our pastor helped us in understanding the general adoption process, and several other adoptive families in our church were very supportive, too. Our immediate families were very supportive and our child is greatly loved.

Many families in our opinion are fearful that looking different from the child will be painful for the child, or the family. Perhaps, there is fear, too, about being forced to defend a child in a society that is still riddled with prejudice. One book about interracial families that I read was very helpful in addressing these issues.

Adoption, in addition to the straightforward benefits of receiving our daughter, is also a wonder to us in that it presents such a tangible picture of God the Father adopting each of us into His body with all the rights and privileges of His heirs.

The Nelsons

We first saw our twin daughters in a photo of waiting children when they were 11 months old. We traveled to Brazil to adopt them and they were home at 14 months of age. We adopted through an agency (Limiar) based in Ohio, and had a very positive experience working with them. They deal exclusively in Brazilian adoption and were very helpful every step of the way.

Our adoption went fairly quickly because they were both in need of open-heart surgery, which took place in the States. Our daughters are black and both have Down syndrome. We did not necessarily set out to adopt a special needs child, but both of us had life experiences with special needs children that, in hindsight, helped to prepare us. We had also decided before we married that we would adopt after biological children had arrived. After several years of infertility, we found ourselves pursuing adoption. One adoption of a healthy biracial infant fell through and then, we saw our girls!

Unfortunately we have not received extensive support from friends and family. The "drawbacks" for those around us seemed to be multiple--two children at once, Down syndrome, serious heart problems, and of a different race. The agency which did our home study was also negative, essentially questioning our desire for these two girls when we could adopt a white child here in the States. We were even interviewed by a psychologist in Brazil to make sure we knew what we were doing!

Our desire all along was to adopt a child or children who may not be as likely to be adopted by other families. Another positive factor for us was our predominantly Dominican/Puerto Rican neighborhood. We also have several strong friendships with black families in our church. They have been very supportive as well as verbalizing some helpful cautions.

Prejudice Still Evident

We initially thought that the biggest problem we would encounter was our daughters' developmental delays. A close Christian friend who is black told us that our real trouble would be that they're black. We now think, unfortunately, that she was right. A close family member asked us why we didn't pursue a child with Down syndrome from Asia or China, suggesting that it has been our girls' race, not their disability, that has been difficult for her to accept. Understandably, family members want things in life to be easy for us.

Our girls are doing so well! They have healed remarkably from their heart surgery, and are in ongoing occupational therapy. They are communicating two and three-word sentences through sign language, and are full of smiles and giggles.

No Saints Here, Just Want to be Parents

Undoubtedly the "saint syndrome" keeps many Christians from adopting. We hear so often "what a wonderful thing you are doing!" when all we have really done is pursue our deep desire to parent, and followed God's leading to these particular children. The reticence to adopt a child of another race may also play more of a role than most Christians care to admit.

Whether we acknowledge it or not, most of us still operate under the "rule" that God builds families

biologically. It is adoption in general, not just interracial adoption, that is perceived as second best, even in the Christian community. We are not crusaders, just parents of two wonderful girls. We pray that this "second-best" perception of adoption can be righted for the sake of so many deserving children.
