

The 2007 Summer MN ASAP Family Voices focuses on connecting children adopted transracially to their culture and ethnicity.

## Reflecting on Growing Up and Raising a Child in a Transracial Adoption

by Mary Martin Mason

**R**obert O'Connor, at the age of 4, and his brother, Adam, then six, were adopted in 1971 by Kathy Jefferson. Today, Robert, like his mother, works in child welfare: she in children's mental health and he as a counselor and professor who trains future social workers. In the following interview, the two share their views on the practice of adopting across racial lines and what that experience has meant to them, both individually and professionally.

**Kathy:** When we adopted, we didn't think in terms of race. In my family of origin, half of my cousins were adopted. Consequently, both adopted and birth children were the norm for me. It's just how it was. It just made sense to me that if there were kids needing parents and adults who wanted to be parents, the two should be put together. The "hard to place kids" were older and kids of color. I also didn't have a clue as to what I was doing as a parent. Maya Angelou says, "You do what you know. When you know more, you do more."

**Robert:** I remember going on outings with other families like ours with a group called The Open Door Society. It was good to see other adoptive families that looked like ours and to associate with other kids who looked like me. That community provided great support for parents and for kids, but it only went so far because in some areas it was like the blind leading the blind. The parents shared limitations although there was the help that comes from sharing an experience.

**Kathy:** I agree that it has to be bigger than gathering with similar families.

Parents of kids of color must realize that once you become a family you're no longer a white family. That doesn't mean you become black when you're white, but your family has to pay attention to (issues like) the reality of racism.

### Live a Multi-Cultural Life

**Robert:** Parents may protest as they frequently do, "My kid is rejecting that culture. They don't want it." This rejection has to do with the child wanting to fit into the family system. My mom found added value for herself personally in living a multi-cultural life. She would go to the Black Nativity without me. She would collect the black Santas without me. Mom had relationships with other African Americans before adopting us and still does.

**Kathy:** There was some deliberateness and intentionality to instilling what Robert calls a sense of community. We lived in Rush City for awhile, and I can remember driving to St. Paul to get birthday cards because the kids were not going to have white children on their cards. If I couldn't have an appropriate card, I'd pick one with an animal on it. Eventually we moved to an integrated neighborhood in St. Paul.

Some non-adopted kids who grow up in isolated pockets also struggle with adapting to another community to which they feel they don't belong. They need a framework with which they can move with ease. That comes from relationships and exposure and participating in arts and events; not like putting on a band-aid but making it a ritual. Like Robert said, there is a list of what families can do, but tasks have to

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move into the family life so exposure to the child's culture becomes more than a book on the coffee table.

I had three wishes for my children: that they would be able to care about themselves, care about others and have a close supportive relationship with each other. Anything outside of that was gravy. Within those parameters, you won't hurt others or let others abuse you, and although the rest of the world might not hang with you, you have each other. How you instill that, I don't know, but it must have happened because they now have that.

### Help the Child Develop a Racial Identity

**Robert:** I think Mom understood how important it was for parents to focus on child-launching, specifically launching children of color to be successful on their own. This means parenting not for today, but for tomorrow. Research shows that racial identity is tied to the parent's identification of the child. If the child asks, "What race am I?" and the parents say, "You are a member of the human race," the child is then less likely to develop a racial identity.

The additional significant component is for the child to have a group identity. This means recognizing membership with their racial group. Parents need to begin to advocate for a community they may not know much about.

### Talk about Race and Racism

**Robert:** If parents don't have conversations about race, diversity, culture and racism, then their children don't have permission to have those conversations. Children intuitively know what conversations to hold or not hold. The journey from cultural isolation and dislocation to cultural integration and appreciation is a long journey for a child to make alone. Too often communities are integrated on the backs of small

children who are on the frontlines and have the fewest resources emotionally, intellectually and psychologically to be able to make it.

**Kathy:** When Adam was six and was watching his dad shave, he asked him, "When I get big, will I be white like you?" That question broke my heart because he wasn't just noticing race as a fact. Already he had learned that one race was valued over another.

On the other hand, when my four-year-old granddaughter asked me, "You're white. How come?" she was noticing one aspect of physical appearance. You have to pick up the clues that kids use when they ask questions, but you can't ignore race.

**Robert:** A part of the challenge for transracially adopted persons is being culturally and racially dislocated from their cultures of origin. That creates a dual arduous task of trying to seamlessly fit into their family system and at the same time, develop a racial, cultural identity that is the opposite. This is a sophisticated, challenging task for a young person to do.

**Kathy:** A part of the parent's denial of racism is that with the realization of racism comes terrible fear for your children's safety. You realize they are targets for hostile ignorant people. When Robert was in college and took a road trip to Louisiana with a college friend, I was scared out of my mind. We taught our kids that their opinions mattered. Robert got that message, and I knew that he would not play "the game." I worried that I had set my son up to be hurt.

**Robert:** In Louisiana, we were followed by the police who turned on and off their radar. At a gas station I paid with cash, and the gas attendant refused to give me my change. As Mom said, I protested, and my friend, who had grown up there, said, "Just leave it." After the vacation, I realized that I had not interacted with a

single white person the entire 12 days of the trip.

**Kathy:** Racism is alive and well. When we're white and grow up with privilege, we don't see it because we've never experienced it. Our children will. We need to protect them and give them the skills. The parents need to be ready to deal with the terror that comes with racism.

**Robert:** Adopted persons who grow up isolated don't know how to be bi-cultural. This usually happens for the first time in college when they are faced with peers who want them to come aboard, and if they can't then they get "eyed up." Often times we refer to ourselves as adoptees versus adoptees because like chameleons, we must adapt to different environments.

I did a lot of individual work to "make it back" as my community would say, but it took years of therapy with an African American therapist well versed in transracial adoption. It was hard work even though I had the core messages that I had rights, that I mattered and that I could be anything I wanted to be. Mom told me that almost every day. Ultimately, when I had enough successes, I believed it. That internal message affirmed louder than a race-based society that said that my voice didn't matter. Too many kids are missing that.

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# Externalizing Racism: A Parenting Tool in Transracial Adoption

by Deb Reisner

When my husband and I adopted our first child 18 years ago, agency staff told us, “Take him home and love him. Everything will be fine.” Now we have five children and our family is a beautiful blend of African American, Native American, Latino, and European American races and cultures. Loving our children has been easy. As transracial adoptive parents, however, it has been much more difficult to develop strategies for dealing with individual and institutional racism.

Because my husband and I do not share our children’s racial or cultural backgrounds, we must work hard to help them develop skills and strategies to deal with the every day reality of racism. And, to live authentically in our racist society, each of our children must learn to externalize racism: to understand racism is NOT about them, but a reflection of other people’s ignorance.

The alternative...internalizing racism... leads children to believe the destructive messages of racism are true and directed specifically at them. When children externalize racism they can develop a strong racial identity, self esteem, and attachments. When children learn to internalize racism, their racial identities suffer, their self-esteem ends up in shambles, and their attachments are in peril. In our experience, the best lessons we can offer are those that teach our children to externalize racism and assure them we will always be there for them. (Externalizing racism does not mean dismissing racism or pretending it does not exist.)

Through the years, with help from many experts (especially adult transracial adoptees) we have identified a number of strategies for teaching our children to externalize racism. Some of those strategies are explained below.

## Cultural Membership

One of the most important ways our children learn to externalize racism is through cultural membership. From adult transracial adoptees I’ve learned that a central theme in their lives is the need to establish meaningful relationships with adults and youth who look like them and share their culture. Through these relationships, our children learn the subtle and not so subtle norms of their cultural community of how to dress, to talk, to be.

We parents must help our children engage with their cultural community in meaningful ways. By choosing where we live, where we worship, what schools our children attend, and the YMCA to which we belong, we can facilitate cultural membership. For us, these institutions have provided cultural membership, mentoring, friends, and community. Just as I need to find a tutor to teach my children physics, I need to find a tutor to teach my children how to be African American, Latino, or Native American in our society. When our children become members of their cultural community they learn to refute stereotypes, develop survival skills, and make positive connections with a broader range of people. Cultural membership offers a solid foundation for externalizing racism.

## Develop a Family Language about Racism

Within the family, we help teach our children to externalize racism through a shared language about racism. For instance, when we are out in public and someone says to my husband, “You are a

saint to adopt these kids,” he replies, “No, you don’t understand. I am the lucky one to be their dad.”

“You don’t understand” is our family language to redirect the ignorance behind the comment back to the stranger. The stranger’s ignorance is the issue, not the fact the members of our family don’t all look alike, or that only a saint would adopt our children. Inevitably, strangers will ask intrusive or inappropriate questions such as “Where did she come from?” or “How much did they cost?” or “Do you provide day care?” My typical response is, “Why would you ask?” Again, my response turns the question around, and puts responsibility back where it belongs: on the stranger.

As my children have gotten older, I hear them use this same strategy to address questions such as, “Why are your mom and dad white?” and “Why did your real mom give you away?” Their response is “Why would you ask?” Indeed, why would you ask?

## Honor Feelings about Racism

Recently I was in a grocery store with my 3-year old when I felt my neck tighten, my body’s usual response to the discomfort of racism. As I quickly put the items we needed in our basket, it became obvious a woman was following us. She got closer and closer to us with each turn down the aisles until she finally approached us at the check out. She abruptly asked, “Is that your son?”

“Why would you ask?” I replied. Then I scooped up my son and left the store. As we walked to the car, I held him close. He clung to my neck and said, “Mommy, I not like that lady.”

“Honey, where does your body not like that lady?” I asked him. He answered, “In my tummy.” We went on to talk, in developmentally appropriate language, about his body’s response to racism.

It is extremely important we honor our children’s feelings about racism so we can help them to externalize it. For example, if my child says a person does not like him because he is Native American, that is his reality. I don’t question or try to talk him out of his feelings.

Instead we talk about externalizing the experience, discuss options for handling the situation, and decide whether he needs my help in other ways. Teaching our children to honor their feelings about racism is teaching our children to be safe. They will often “feel” racism before they are cognitively aware they are vulnerable. By tuning in to their intuitive signals, our children can avoid or better prepare themselves for racially charged situations.

## Keep Life Real

Confronting racism is painful, and while it may be tempting to try to make things easier, it is essential we strive to make things real. An adult transracial adoptee told me her mother tried to make things “easy” by downplaying racism. When the adoptee’s white mother took her to an all-white church, she would express her discomfort at the stares and whispers. Her mother would then say, “Those people are staring and whispering to each other because you are so beautiful.”

Because it did not acknowledge her reality, this seemingly nice but dismissive response left my friend feeling very alone. Even

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as a young child she knew the attention she received from the church-goers was about race and culture.

Though they may not mean to, extended family members may ignore the reality of racism for their nieces, nephews, or grandchildren. These relatives often love and accept the transracially adopted child into their family, yet harbor prejudices about the child's race and culture. As illustrated by the church story, transracially adopted children will long remember the pain of having relatives deny what the child knows is real.

When it comes to racism in our extended family, we must have a "zero tolerance policy." If our child tells us someone we love and have known all our life has done or said something hurtful, we must not minimize it. If we say, "Auntie Marie didn't really mean that," or "Honey, you are just too sensitive," we are aligning ourselves with the person who hurt our child. Instead, our child needs us to make it clear we are on his or her side.

For our children to feel safe and at home, they must feel sure

that we try to understand their experience in the world as persons of color. Open conversations about difficult subjects like racism, sexism, current events, and family dynamics are great ways to lay the foundation for ongoing attachment and relationship.

To build our children's trust in us, we must also keep working to understand our own white privilege, stereotypes, and racism.

We must explore our country's history from the perspective of our child's cultural community and commit to fighting racism even when we pay a personal price. We need to be there with our children when they are mistreated, denied access, or struggling to comprehend the cruel injustice of racism.

Love is just the beginning of the transracial adoption journey. There is no end. My husband, our children, and I continue to learn and grow together. We are a family.

*Deb Reisner is a MN ASAP Parent Liaison. This article is adapted from the Summer 2007 issue of Adoptalk, published by the North American Council on Adoptable Children. Contact NACAC at 651-644-3036, info@nacac.org, or www.nacac.org.*

## The Cultural Bond: A Tie that Binds

by Mary Martin Mason



Sandra White Hawk knows firsthand the power of healing that comes from re-connecting a child to their culture and heritage. At the age of 18 months she was adopted by a white family that had moved to South Dakota to be missionaries. As a child, the face and body that looked back at her from a mirror was different from everyone she knew. She says, "I was never ashamed

that I was Indian, but I was ashamed because I didn't know what it meant. From the first time as an adult that I stepped foot on the reservation, I felt relaxed in my body as I never had before because finally everyone looked like me. There was comfort in the reflection of my image everywhere. I came from somewhere, so it gave me a sense of a true beginning."

For adoptive and foster parents of children who don't share their race, White Hawk advises, "It's really important that children know that they are not forgotten. If they don't have their image reflected back to them in their schools and neighborhoods, especially in adolescence there's no sense of self or any understanding of who they are."

White Hawk believes that parents as well as children benefit from relocating near or in a community that mirrors the child's race. Just as a family might move into a school district for the sake of their child's education, purposeful choices of school and neighborhoods can help the child thrive.

The Native community offers multiple ways to stay connected to one's tribe and customs:

- Newspapers such as The Circle, are devoted to community news and arts.
- Community centers, like the American Indian Family Center in St. Paul or the Minneapolis American Indian Center, offer language lessons, youth programs and activities.
- Cultural festivals such as the many powwows held around Minnesota provide music, arts and food.

Cultural connections help children learn the subtleties that distinguish one group from another. White Hawk says, "These include how to learn, how to sit and observe and listen, how to treat elders, how to know that you have a place in a community. Such nuances provide a sense of purpose."

Many children who lack an understanding of cultural subtleties often feel they need to fit into the dominant culture, explaining why some deny their ethnicity. For others, the dominant culture may be all they know. White Hawk says, "Cross culturally, we adoptees learn to act as if everything is fine. It's confusing. You sail through on a daily basis and then something will remind you that you don't know who you are. In many ways you will never be accepted inside the other culture. You can be reminded of that abruptly in the teen years when you start dating. Suddenly you find that the families that once accepted you as a child oppose inter-racial dating. You have no one to talk to about that. The parents may minimize racial incidents, saying, 'I don't see color when I see my child,' a statement that negates the child's reality. A powerful response to racism that parents can use is to enlist mentors from the child's ethnicity who can guide and direct."

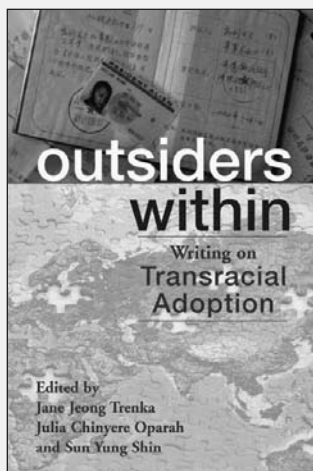
White Hawk explains, "Native people are still an invisible race. The child could be affected by a school mascot based on Indian symbols that the parent might not view as harmful, and yet the child feels degraded. Lately when the media reported the Virginia Tech shooting as the worse mass shooting in the history of the United States, there was no mention of Wounded Knee or the Sand Creek massacre. When the child's history is not taught or understood, the child is diminished. You need to know your history in order to know which direction you are going."

Another benefit of connecting to the child's culture is the healing

it can provide. For White Hawk, this healing was not possible until her adult years. She'd prefer that young children see the positives in their culture of origin to prevent future difficulties. She says, "I came from a strong people. I saw strength of my family, the beauty of the culture and all those that are parts of me. That was healing. The first time I heard the drum I don't have words yet to describe that."

"Ultimately the parents are enriched and nourished by being included in a community," says White Hawk. "They need not be afraid of the child's culture or threatened by the child's connection to the culture."

*Sandra White Hawk is a contributor to "Outsiders Within," writing on transracial adoption and the co-founder of the First Nations Orphans Association (FNOA), offering advocacy to adoptees and fostered individuals and their families. First Nations Orphans Association, www.geocities.com/fnoac. Native and non-native families raising native children, contact Mary Lyons, MN ASAP Statewide American Indian Community, for resources and support. 952-431-5045, 866-392-0270 (toll free), MNCOFAS@aol.com*



## Outsiders provide an Inside View Of the Transracial Adoption Experience

*A Review by Mary Martin Mason*

*Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption* begins with a declaration of independence: "For the past 50 years, white adoptive parents, academics, psychiatrists and social workers have dominated the literature on transracial adoption. These experts have been the ones to tell the public - including adoptees, what it's like and how we turn out." Affirming themselves as the experts and spokespersons for their unique life experience, the contributors realize the challenge in writing a book that they call a corrective action. The anthology that follows will intrigue, edify and yes, in some cases, anger some readers.

The book purposefully blends input from domestic and internationally adopted persons who are typically separated in the examination of adoption. Readers are brought into the common life experience shared by these two groups, being raised in white culture and yet having to graduate to live as people of color in a race-conscious society.

Many years after the influx of international adoption and an escalating over-representation of children of color

in foster care and in adoption, the writers attribute their silence until now to the isolation of their experience. And this is the essence of the book for parents: silence is a first line defense common among adoptees of color who "fear that expressing our opinions will estrange us from our white families, friends and colleagues." Getting beyond that silence can strengthen families and prevent possible estrangement with young adults who may distance themselves from parents that lack understanding of their children's reality.

In his essay "Lifelong Impact, Enduring Need," John Raible says, "I maintain that agencies and adoption professionals would serve their clients well by providing lifetime counseling, multicultural education opportunities and other forms of post adoption support to families long after the initial adoptive placement takes place." Raible says that adoptees are yearning to talk about race and adoption, and parents need to be prepared to hold conversations, even though they may be uncomfortable. Combining data, analysis and more subjective personal stories, *Outsiders Within* is divided into six distinct sections:

- Where are you really from?
- How did you get here?
- Colonial imaginations, global migrations
- Growing through the pain
- Journeys home
- Speaking for ourselves

"Where are you really from?" explores the

complexity of identity-seeking for those who don't see their faces reflected in family, neighbors or with peers. "How did you get here?" provides a searing look at the politics and economics of adoption. "Colonial Imaginations, Global Migrations," gives a historical perspective of the Indian Child Welfare Act and The Orphan Train, while "Growing through the pain" reveals how facing loss and grief can be transformative. Finally, "Journeys Home" and "Speaking for Ourselves" brings the reader full circle as the contributors in their young adult years re-connect with their heritage and ethnicity.

The emerging voices of angry, dissatisfied adopted persons upsets some within the adoption community. This anthology challenges those vested in adoption who are not themselves adopted to guard against dismissing hearing from the very persons most personally connected to adoption, and to rather heed the wisdom of contributors such as Jeni C. Wright. In her essay, "Love is Colorblind," Wright describes her mother's response to a racial incident. "My wish is that instead she had given me the gift of a simple acknowledgement: that our home may be colorblind but outside sometimes wasn't. And that was unfair. And it was OK to feel sad or mad about that. But that no matter what, she would always love me, and so would everyone else in our wonderful, multicolored family."

For those willing to put aside their discomfort, *Outsiders Within* will prove to be a valuable resource and reference. Even parents who are very experienced in adoption issues and multiculturalism can learn from the thoughtful essays, poetry and art.

*Outsiders Within:  
Writing on Transracial Adoption*  
Edited by Jane Jeong Trenka, Julia  
Chinyere Oparah and Sun Yung Shin

# MINNESOTA ADOPTIVE AND FOSTER PARENT *Support Groups*

## TWIN CITIES METRO AREA SUPPORT GROUPS

**African American Adoption Agency**  
651-659-0460

**Amigos de Colombia**  
Luann Zimmer 612-879-5251

**Anoka County**  
Nancy Le 763-422-7104

**Carver County**  
Shirley McCourt 952-442-2833

**Dakota County**  
Ann Dempsey 952-891-7415

**Downey Side**  
651-228-0117

**4 Keeps/Anoka County**  
Nancy Le 763-422-7104

**Families with Children from China**  
Diane Nathrop 651-488-6872

**Families for Russian and Ukrainian Adoption (FRUA)**  
Jennifer Mayotte 763-585-0884

**Grandparents and Others Raising Relative's Kids**  
Lutheran Social Service  
Linda Hammersten 612-879-5307

**Hennepin County - Southern**  
Ginny Blade 651-644-3036

**Hennepin County - Northern**  
Deb Reisner 763-545-0293

**Multiracial Single Parent Group**  
Jennifer Schnarr 651-603-0245

**Native American Community**  
Mary Lyons 952-892-5087

**Niños de Paraguay**  
Jane Nichols 952-829-0938

**North Suburban Ours for a United Response**  
Marge Newmaster 763-429-0357

**Open Adoption Resources (FLOAT) Families Linked by Open Adoption Ties**  
Heidi Manguson 507-356-4209

**Parent-Led Support for African American Adoptive, Foster and Kinship Families**  
Darlene Morgan 651-776-0505  
Mary Collins 651-735-9230

**Parents of Asian Indian American Children**  
Marilyn Christianson 952-944-7114

**Peruvian Adoptive Families**  
Vicki Gohl 651-639-8144

**Rainbow Families**  
Laura Smidzik 612-827-7731

**St. Paul East Side**  
Amy Ames 651-776-4301

**Tusen Takk Asia (Resources for Families with children from China)**  
Beth McInerney 651-494-2282

## GREATER MINNESOTA SUPPORT GROUPS - NORTHERN

**Duluth Area Support Group**  
Marilyn Gow 218-525-0664 or 866-302-2211

**Children of the Dragon (Duluth area)**  
Jill Dalbacka 218-525-4906

**FASD Support Group - Virginia**  
John Hays  
218-376-4650  
877-454-KIDS (toll free)

**Lancaster**  
Beth Pankratz 218-762-2161

**Native American Community**  
Mary Lyons 877-392-0270 - toll free

**North Homes - Grand Rapids**  
218-327-3000  
888-430-3055 - toll free

**Stevens County**  
Barb Fischer 320-763-3144  
800-728-1736 - toll free

**Thief River Falls**  
Sarah Coumbe-Guida  
800-726-0201 - toll free

**Polk County Foster Parents**  
Jackie Jeffrey 218-281-3127

## CENTRAL

**Chisago, Isanti and Pine Counties**  
Paula Dunham 320-746-3145  
877-699-5937 - toll free

**Crow Wing, Aitkin, Morrison Counties**  
Paula Dunham 320-746-3145  
877-699-5937 - toll free

**Douglas County**  
Barb Fischer 320-763-3144  
800-728-1736 - toll free

**Downey Side - St Cloud**  
Pat or Mike Schaefer 320-240-1433

**Kanabec, Mille Lacs Counties**  
Theresa Julkowski 320-679-2467

**Olmsted County/PATH Adoption Support Group**  
Jodi Gasner - 507-261-4684

**Ottertail County Foster/Adoptive Parents**  
Barb Fischer 320-763-3144  
800-728-1736 - toll free

**North Branch**  
Jean Storlie 651-271-2999  
micknys@aol.com

**Stearns County**  
Paula Dunham 320-746-3145  
877-699-5937 - toll free

**Wadena County**  
Barb Fischer 320-763-3144  
800-728-1736 - toll free

**Wright, Sherburne Counties**  
Paula Dunham 877-699-5937

**Families of Multiracial Adoptions - Mankato**  
Roxanne Johnson 507-345-1850

**Willmar**  
Joanna Schrupp  
willmaradoptiongroup@yahoo.com

**Love Has No Boundaries - Fairmont**  
Teresa Engeman 507-235-8748

**Mankato**  
Deb Wallace 507-436-5638  
888-662-9547 (toll free)

**Meeker/Stearns County Adoption/Foster/Kinship Care Support Group**  
Karrie Halbur-320-764-2917  
or Paula Dunham toll free  
877-699-5937

**Partners in Adoption - Marshall**  
Cindy Nelson 507-532-1260

**Olmsted County Children's Mental Health Collaborative**  
Debra Dalin 507-529-4539

**Renville, McLeod, Sibley Rock, Noble Counties**  
Deb Wallace 507-436-5638  
866-662-9547 toll free

**Rochester Grandparent Group**  
Jill Welsh 507-287-2020

## SOUTHWEST

**Nobles, Pipestone, Rock County Support Group**  
Contact: Lisa Rosin 507-669-2317,  
rlrosin@frontiernet.net or Jodi  
Vanden Bosch, 605-321-1329 or  
jlynnvbosch@iw.net

## SOUTHEAST

**Waseca Area**  
Barb Hertzog 507-835-7064  
barb.hertzog@co.waseca.mn.us

# Resources

## BOOKS

- Are Those Kids Yours? American Families with Children Adopted from Other Countries*, by Cheri Register, guides families inside the complex world of transnational adoption that includes all perspectives and raises ethical questions.
- Beyond Good Intentions A Mother Reflects on Raising Internationally Adopted Children*, by Cheri Register, calls attention to ten choices well-meaning parents make that turn out not to serve their children's needs as well as one might expect. She calls for a frank and intimate conversation about the distinct challenges of raising children adopted across national, cultural, and, often, racial boundaries.
- Birthmarks: Transracial Adoption in Contemporary America*, by Sandra Patton, explores the complexities of transracial adoption, revealing how multiracial families face perplexing questions about the social, biological and cultural meaning of identity.
- Black Baby White Hands: A View from the Crib*, by Jaiya John, is a autobiographical account by the first African American baby adopted by a white family in New Mexico. John's poetic, lyrical account of his childhood provides a roadmap for families undertaking the same journey.
- Dim Sum, Bagels and Grits: A Sourcebook for Multicultural Families*, by Myra Alpers, reveals personal and professional insights into such topics as combining cultures, confronting prejudice, developing role models and locating multicultural resources.
- Does Anybody Else Look Like Me? A Parent's Guide to Raising Multiracial Children*, by Donna Jackson Nakazawa, helps children develop an understanding of their individuality and build self-esteem. This resource includes professional commentary as well as scripts and stories to help transracial families rear children in an evolving world.
- In Their Own Voices: Transracial Adoptees Tell Their Stories*, by Rita J. Simon and Rhonda M. Roorda, explores the impact of being adopted transracially through a collection of interviews conducted with black and biracial young adults who were adopted as children by white parents.
- Inside Transracial Adoption*, by Beth Hall and Gail Steinberg, offers real solutions to real challenges, reinforcing the message that race matters, racism is alive, and transracial families can develop strong and binding ties. The authors blend academic research, social reality and personal experience to guide both veterans and prospective parents who are considering transracial adoption.
- Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption*, edited by Jane Jeong Trenka, Julia Chinyere Oparah and Sun Yung Shin, is an anthology compiled by transracially and transnationally adopted adults. The book makes a case for inclusion of their often missing voices in policy, practice, education and all aspects of adoption. This explosive and complex collection of personal narrative, critical essays, poetry, and art is "must reading" for parents and for professionals.
- Kimchi and Calamari*, by Rose Kent, is the fictional account of Joseph Calderaro who must write an essay about his ancestors for social studies. Joseph knows very little about his birth family, so he pretends that Olympic marathoner Sohn Kee Chung was his grandfather, creating an award-winning essay. Once his lie is unmasked, Joseph must redo the assignment, prompting him to begin a search for his birth family. (Ages 8-12)
- The Language of Blood*, by Jane Jeong Trenka, is a memoir of an adult adopted person from Korea whose search for identity takes her back to her country of origin. There, with the help of her birth family, she tries to resolve the dualities of never fully belonging to Korea or to America. Bold, poetic and unflinching, this book explores the complexities of being adopted internationally.
- Of Many Colors: Portraits of Multiracial Families*, by Peggy Gillespie, is based on an award-winning photo exhibit that documents the feelings and experiences of Americans who live in multiracial families. Included are stories of thirty-nine families who have bridged the racial divide through adoption or interracial marriage. Parents and children speak candidly about their lives, their relationships, and the ways in which they have dealt with issues of race.
- Transracial Adoption and Foster Care: Practice Issues for Professionals*, by Joseph Crumbley, provides professionals, agencies, and organizations with ways to provide services to transracial families including training preparation and case management. A variety of professional concerns such as staff attitudes and recruitment are addressed.
- What Are You? Voices of Mixed-Race Young People*, edited by Pearl Fuyo Gaskins, presents the voices of young people of racially mixed backgrounds discussing their feelings about family relationships, prejudice, personal identity, and other issues. Although not about adoptees, this book addresses similar topics such as dating, families, and the double prejudice and double insight that come from being "mixed, but not mixed-up."

## NACAC PUBLICATIONS ABOUT TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION INCLUDE:

- Parenting Resource Manual addresses issues such as cultivating positive self-esteem, dealing with race in a race-conscious society, caring for hair and grooming, finding community resources and more.
- Self Awareness Tool helps prospective foster and adoptive parents determine if transracial or transcultural foster care or adoption is the right decision for their family.
- Training Curriculum is designed to help agencies and parent groups train individuals about issues related to race and culture through seven different training modules.

## DVD

*A Conversation 10 Years Later* is the sequel to *Struggle for Identity: Issues in Transracial Adoption*, the definitive training video used in nationwide trainings to inform adoptive and foster parents about the needs of their children of a different race or ethnicity. John Raible and Michelle Johnson from the original cast return to explore issues of racism, the visible and public nature of transracial adoption, loyalty and attachment, transracialization and creating multicultural families, as seen through the lens of their personal experience and professional training. Produced and available through the New York State Citizens' Coalition for Children, Inc., and PhotoSynthesis Productions. <http://www.photosynthesisproductions.com/store.cfm>.

## BLOG AND WEBSITE

- Harlow's Monkey*, social worker and adult adoptee, is Jae Ran Kim's highly acclaimed blog on transracial adoption. The blog includes links on how to be an ally, adoption resources, adoptee organizations, and much, much more. <http://harlowmonkey.typepad.com>.
- Anti-Racist Parent* offers a website for parents committed to raising children with an anti-racist outlook. <http://www.antiracistparent.com>.

## PARENT LIAISONS CONNECT FAMILIES WITH RESOURCES

MN ASAP's parent support and respite network includes eleven regional parent liaisons to help adoptive parents locate support and resources. Contact your regional parent liaison if you need local resources (such as a respite care provider or therapist), would like to start or join a support group, or just need someone to listen. The liaisons are here to help!

### Metro Area African American Community

Mary Collins  
651-735-9230  
marycollins03@earthlink.net

### East Metro

Amy Ames  
651-779-8220  
normaldozen@comcast.net

### West Twin Cities Metro

Deb Reisner  
763-545-0293  
dreisner@comcast.net

### Northwest

Sarah Coumbe-Guida [cg.consulting@yahoo.com](mailto:cg.consulting@yahoo.com)

### North Central

John Hays  
218-376-4650 877-454-KIDS (toll free)  
[hayskids@frontiernet.net](mailto:hayskids@frontiernet.net)

### Northeast

Marilyn Gow  
218-525-0664 866-302-2211 (toll free)  
[marilyngow@hotmail.com](mailto:marilyngow@hotmail.com)

### Statewide American Indian Community

Mary Lyons  
952-431-5045 866-392-0270 (toll free)  
[MNCOFAS@aol.com](mailto:MNCOFAS@aol.com)

### West Central

Barb Fischer  
320-763-3144 800-728-1736 (toll free)  
[adopt@wisper-wireless.com](mailto:adopt@wisper-wireless.com)

### East Central

Paula Dunham  
320-746-3145 877-699-5937 (toll free)  
[paula@northofreality.com](mailto:paula@northofreality.com)

### Southwest

Deb Wallace  
507-436-5638 866-662-9547 (toll free)  
[mnsouth@earthlink.net](mailto:mnsouth@earthlink.net)

### Southeast

Sarah Schaller  
507-292-1151 888-292-1151 toll free  
[sarahschaller@yahoo.com](mailto:sarahschaller@yahoo.com)

### African American Outreach Liaison

Darlene Morgan  
651-776-0505 877-349-6353 (toll free)  
[darlenemorgan@nacac.org](mailto:darlenemorgan@nacac.org)

### Parent Support Group Coordinator

Julie Pribyl  
320-963-6055  
[djpribyl@lakedalelink.net](mailto:djpribyl@lakedalelink.net)

# Parenting Tips for White Parents With Adopted Children of Color

by Sun Yung Shin

**1** Live in or move to, if you have to, a multicultural, racially and ethnically diverse neighborhood. Make sure your child regularly interacts with people of color in a variety of ways.

**2** Study and learn about whiteness and white privilege. Don't waste time and energy feeling guilty. Guilt is a luxury of those with privilege. Embrace the opportunity to work for social justice. Study and learn how to be an active anti-racist, and then do it.

**3** Understand that even if your child is, for example, ethnically Chinese, she or he will be perceived as "Asian American" or even simply "Asian" (or worse, "Oriental"). Understand the complex and interrelated history of various groups of color in America. Don't overemphasize traditions from the culture of origin at the expense of dealing with race in America.

**4** Be prepared to teach your child how to directly respond to racist comments, questions, and incidents. (You'll have to learn this from adults of color.) Never make excuses for others. Never brush off these encounters as insignificant or isolated.

**5** Be prepared for friends and family to be confused or even offended by your anti-racist work. Be patient with them and let them know about your new priorities. Continue to make new friends of all races who are interested in making America a truly equitable nation.

**6** Avoid saying or thinking that, "I'm \_\_\_\_\_ too now that I have a child from \_\_\_\_\_." That's simply insulting and offensive to all the people who actually are \_\_\_\_\_ and don't get to "choose." Understand the differences between nationality, race, ethnicity, and culture—and how they overlap (or don't overlap) for your child and your family.

**7** Study and learn about your child's culture(s) of origin, not from North American and/or white writers but from writers and historians from within that (those) culture(s).

**8** Understand how gender and sexuality operate in your child's culture(s) of origin.

**9** Understand that even if your child is disinterested in her or his culture of origin, she or he will be impacted by how the American mainstream perceives that culture.

**10** Support the artistic expression and adoption-related professional work of adult adoptees—if only because your child will eventually be an adult adoptee.

**11** Study the history of inequalities in terms of reproductive rights (who gets to have a safe abortion, who gets to keep their children, who is considered a socially acceptable mother) in this country before criticizing the sexism or patriarchy in other countries (or communities). Consider how you can invest in your child's home community so that women and families...*people who look like your child*...will not "have to" send their children away.

*Sun Yung Shin is the author of the poetry collection "Skirt Full of Black" (Coffee House Press); co-editor of "Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption" (South End Press); and author of "Cooper's Lesson" (Children's Book Press), a bilingual (Korean/English) illustrated book for children. She is a 2007 Bush Artist Fellow for Literature and has received grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board and the Jerome Foundation. Shin teaches creative writing on an adjunct basis at the College of St. Catherine and is on a one-year leave from teaching full-time at the Perpich Center for Arts Education. [www.sunyungshin.com](http://www.sunyungshin.com) [sunyungshin@gmail.com](mailto:sunyungshin@gmail.com)*

# MINNESOTA WAITING YOUTH: MALCOLM(16)



**H**i. My name is Malcolm I'm 16 years old, and love to play basketball. I love to draw; I love artwork. I like to dress well. I like to look my best. Last, I'm very smart and capable if I put my mind to it.

What I want for my future is a good job, college, a car, someone to be there for me.

My most recent interest is in calligraphy. I'm learning to use the pens and working on Gothic and Italic scripts. It's exacting and time-consuming, but I really want to be good at it.

OK, I admit that I have some issues to work on, but they'd be a lot easier to work through if I had a permanent family to work with. Sometimes I think I'm too old, that no one will want an older kid like me. But if I give up on believing that someone's out there for me, then I'll have to give up on everything.

I want a family that will accept me, give me support, and provide the structure that I need to continue growing. I would definitely like to have siblings that are about my age, or at least have kids in the neighborhood that are my age. I'm not particular about younger siblings, but I would really like a big brother or sister. Dogs or cats in a future home would be a real plus.

What I want in a family is them for to be nice, active in sports, have kids I could play with, have a job, be successful, and understand me. And have pets.

*Malcolm participates in The Homecoming Project, an effort to increase adoption of Minnesota waiting teens. If you are interested in learning more about Malcolm, please contact Recruitment Specialist Willie Moos at 612-320-260-3968 or wmoos@mnadopt.org.*

## REQUEST FOR ADOPTION *Information*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

To save postage, send an email reminder of the next MN ASAP Family Voices that I can download from [www.mnasap.org](http://www.mnasap.org) My email address is \_\_\_\_\_

Please add me to the MN ASAP Family Voices mailing List. Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I'd like more information on:

Parent liaisons (Peer support from other adoptive parents)

Support

Adoption-related training opportunities

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Complete this form and fax it to 612-861-7112 or mail it to:

MN ASAP, c/o MARN, Loring Park Building, 430 Oak Grove Street, Suite 404, Minneapolis MN 55403 [www.mnasap.org](http://www.mnasap.org)

# Understanding Latino Adoption

According to the 2000 census, Minnesota's Latino population increased 166.1 percent in the past decade.

**M**aria L. Quintanilla, the Executive Director of the Latino Family Institute, illuminates what this demographic might mean for the local adoptive community. The Latino Family Institute is the only Southern California agency devoted to providing adoption and foster care services to the Latino population. Quintanilla has expertise in understanding the organizational and cultural barriers that keep Latino families from adopting and advises families who have adopted children from Latin countries how to connect them to their culture and heritage.

## Eliminating Barriers for Latino Families

As for the barriers to adoption for Latino adoptive families, Quintanilla says there is a general mistrust of government agencies. She says, "Corruption and political persecution are common in many Latin American countries and inspire fear in both immigrant families and acculturated Latinos. Social service agencies, often perceived as extensions of the government, are automatically mistrusted." Not only can the home study process be perceived as intrusive, but placing agencies and counties are often not viewed as community friendly.

Quintanilla says, "Staff members fail to reflect Latinos' community or speak their language, forms are not available in Spanish, and agency hours do not accommodate working people. Few traditional agencies are open to walk-in clients or those who prefer to drop off paperwork, common practices for Latinos and consistent with the cultural custom of *personalismo*...the preference for personal rather than impersonal or institutional contacts."

Added to these barriers is that many Latinos are not aware that they are eligible to adopt, since only the wealthy are able to adopt in their countries of origin. Believing that the income standards must be even higher in the United States, some Latinos are reluctant to pursue the adoption process.

As the number of waiting Latino children grows in Minnesota, recruitment of families is impacted about misconceptions about children with special needs. Quintanilla says, "Latino families may become discouraged about adopting a child who has an alarming diagnosis or label, such as prenatal drug exposure, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Since children of color are more likely to be labeled, many Latino children available for adoption will have one or more of these designations." Quintanilla suggests that prospective parents need an honest, careful explanation of who the children are and where they've come from.

## Raising Your Latino Child with Cultural Pride

For Minnesota families who have adopted children from Latin American countries, Quintanilla has advice on ways to preserve the integrity of the child's culture and race. "First of all it is important to recognize that there are twenty one Latin American countries each having their unique history and ethnic diversity."

"Latino Core Values include being family and child-centered, having a common language, strong work ethic, a strong sense of spirituality, respect for others, valuing personal connections, having prescribed patriarchal and

matriarchal role distinctions and celebrating life events. Each of these values is manifested based on the individual's level of acculturation."

Quintanilla notes that parents need to recognize the importance of maintaining a sense of connection to their child's ethnic background. She says, "The more receptive you are to your child's ethnic background, the more likely your child will be accepting of this part of their identity. Be prepared to identify people and organizations that are a direct link to that particular community. These associations will not only increase your cultural awareness, but you will garner mutual support from other parents sharing the same experience. Your child will also be able to see other families that reflect their life experience."

Families need to be aware of how mainstream society perceives the Latino's child's ethnic/cultural background and prepare themselves as well as their child on how to handle cultural stereotypes. "As their parents, you are their best role model for cultural acceptance by the friends you chose, your community affiliations, your interest in other cultures, the patrons you frequent, and neighborhoods you belong to or see as a resource for ethnic foods, music, art and cultural events."

"I would also encourage parents to learn Spanish words that have cultural endearing significance," says Quintanilla, "such as *mijo*, pronounced *meho*, meaning "dear son" and *mija* meaning "dear daughter" pronounced *meha*. What is important is that you feel comfortable and that you teach your children that mainstream middle class America is not the measurement for all others."

*Maria L. Quintanilla  
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(800) 294-9161 ext. 212  
latinofamilyinstituteinc@yahoo.com  
www.latinoadoptions.com*

## *A Transracially Adopted Child's Bill of Rights*

*Every child is entitled to love and full membership in her family.*

*Every child is entitled to have his culture embraced and valued.*

*Every child is entitled to parents who know that this is a race-conscious society.*

*Every child is entitled to parents who know that she will experience life differently than they do.*

*Every child is entitled to parents who are not looking to "save" him or to improve the world.*

*Every child is entitled to parents who know that being in a family doesn't depend on "matching."*

*Every child is entitled to parents who know that trans-racial adoption changes the family forever.*

*Every child is entitled to be accepted by extended family members.*

*Every child is entitled to parents who know if they are white, they benefit from racism.*

*Every child is entitled to parents who know that they can't transmit the child's birth culture if it is not their own.*

*Every child is entitled to have items at home that are made for and by people of his race.*

*Every child is entitled to opportunities to make friends with people of her race or ethnicity.*

*Every child is entitled to daily opportunities of positive experiences with his birth culture.*

*Every child is entitled to build racial pride within her own home, school and neighborhood.*

*Every child is entitled to have many opportunities to connect with adults of the child's race.*

*Every child is entitled to parents who accept, understand and empathize with her culture.*

*Every child is entitled to learn survival, problem-solving and coping skills in a context of racial pride.*

*Every child is entitled to take pride in the development of a dual identity and a*

*multicultural/multiracial perspective on life.*

*Every child is entitled to find his multiculturalism to be an asset and to conclude, "I've got the best of both worlds."*

*by Liza Steinberg Triggs, Liza Steinberg Triggs' material is reprinted by permission from PACT, An Adoption Alliance. PACT, An Adoption Alliance, 4179 Piedmont Avenue, Suite 330, Oakland, CA 94611 (510) 243-9460, [www.pactadopt.org](http://www.pactadopt.org), [info@pactadopt.org](mailto:info@pactadopt.org)*



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## MN ASAP Family Voices Switches to email Delivery

Due to budgetary cuts, the quarterly MN ASAP Family Voices newsletter will soon be delivered by:

- **Email for those who “opt in” on [www.mnasap.org](http://www.mnasap.org)**
- **In a downloadable PDF form on [www.mnasap.org](http://www.mnasap.org)**
- **By mail delivery to a limited number without email**

Enter your email address on [www.mnasap.org](http://www.mnasap.org) to assure ongoing delivery of MN ASAP FAMILY Voices via email.

Call 612-746-5127 if you do not have email and wish to have the newsletter mailed to you.