

Issues of the Heart Journal, Summer 1999

Adoption through the Eyes of a Child

If you could know the thoughts of an infant that had just been adopted, what do you think they would be?

Journey with me imaginatively into the world of the adopted child. Leave behind your adult views and refocus for a moment on adoption through the eyes of a child.

Come with me as I combine my own experience-based insights with the expertise of adoption professionals. Be aware that every adoptee's experience is unique, but also that there are many common threads that unite us.

Each adoptee's perception of adoption begins not at birth. Not on adoption day. But instead, during the first nine months of life in the womb. It is here, in the secret place, as the Psalmist calls it (Psalm 139) that God mysteriously weaves together the core being of the adoptee.

Thomas Verny, M.D., speaks of the importance of these nine months in utero in his book *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child* (Summit Books, 1981). He says, "These many studies concur that the baby in the womb hears, tastes, feels and learns, and that what he thus experiences begins to shape his attitudes and expectations about himself. He can sense and react not only to large undifferentiated emotions in the mother like love and hate, but also to shaded emotions such as ambivalence and ambiguity."

John and Paula Sanford say in *Healing the Wounded Spirit* (Bridge Publishing, 1985), "Before he sees the light of this earth he may be confused already about his identity, his right to live, his belonging."

Thus, the prenatal experiences, both positive and negative, form a lens through which the adoptee interprets life events. Add to this, the trauma of losing the birth mother and all that was intimate and familiar.

The perceptions and emotions that form during those pre-adoptive days are what this writer believes to be the adoptee's emotional perception of the dual identity. This is a reality that can't be expressed in words—a reality that can only be felt.

What do I mean by “dual identity?” The adoptee's heritage encompasses two families—biological and adoptive. Integration is the harmonious weaving together of nature and nurture into one marvelous human being, called “adoptee.”

The concept of the dual identity has been an avoided topic for many. Understandably! How do you explain to a child that he has two sets of parents?

However, even though talking about the adoptee's birth and birth family may feel uncomfortable to adoptive parents, it is one of the most loving gifts they can give to their child.

In order to do this, they must first grieve prior losses so that they are emotionally available to hear the child's unspoken need for integration. In doing so, they must remember that they, in addition to the birth family, have a distinctive role to play in the child's life.

While the biological family is God's channel for transmitting physical life, the adoptive family is the channel for spiritual life. What an awesome privilege to teach the adoptee that her life narrative began in eternity, in the very heart of God.

If adult adoptees could have verbalized their thoughts as infants, they may have said, “My cry may be loud at times because the first world I lived in prior to birth was filled with confusion and stress. Even though my birth mother courageously carried me for those nine months and gave me the gift of life, the stormy upheaval within her imprinted the core of my

being. Even though my time within her was stormy, I loved her nonetheless, for I am bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh. As I listened to her heartbeat, I felt close to her. But then, all of a sudden, she was gone—and I miss her. My wound is real, even though you can't see it. My heart is broken, even though I can't verbalize it. I need to talk about all my feelings—the angry ones, the sad ones, the glad ones, and the afraid ones. I need to be told that all my feelings are okay. Please hold me close.