

## *ParentLife Magazine( September 2003)*

### **Mixed Feelings**

Every baby born into this world innately expects that her mother will provide care, nurture and love. That is the way we are wired in the womb, adopted or not. However, that privilege of being cared for by the one who gave us birth does not occur for adopted children.

Therefore, some adoptees have a foundational belief (often unconscious) that they do not have the right to choose their own course in life. This core belief may be expressed as “because my birth mother made a choice over which I had no control, I will forever be at the mercy of others.”

However, Rick Warren describes God’s point of view: “God decided how you would be born. Regardless of the circumstances of your birth or who your parents are, God had a plan in creating you. It does not matter whether your parents were good, bad, or indifferent. God knew that those two individuals possessed exactly the right genetic makeup to create the custom ‘you’ he had in mind.” (1)

Here are two choices adoptees need to make to take control of their feelings:

**The Choice:** Allow yourself to think about your birth parents. Many adoptees have been discouraged from thinking about their birth parents by others, as if it were a taboo subject. Children should be allowed to think about their birth parents. In fact, your adopted child will think about her birth mother because of the special connection between mother and child. Encourage and help your child to verbalize these thoughts. On birthdays you might say, “I wonder if your birth mother is thinking about you today.” Listen to her thoughts about her birth mother.

Psalm 139: 13 says, “*For it was You who created my inward parts; You knit me together in my mother’s womb.*” Our first home was our mother’s womb. Scientists have indicated that during the last two months of pregnancy, a baby “communicates” with her mother. A baby can even recognize her mother’s voice and smell.

One adoptee asked her mom prior to her third birthday party if her “lady” was coming. The mother asked, “What lady?”

Her daughter answered, “The lady I grew inside. It’s my BIRTHday, isn’t it?”

However, some children may need help to think about their birth mothers because of the pain of rejection they feel when they do so.

The Choice: Claim all emotions as valid and verbalize them.

Some researchers argue: “Can a baby less than one year old ‘remember’ this separation from his original parents? No, he probably will not remember events as a series of pictures that can be recalled. What is remembered, or preserved is anxiety, a primitive kind of terror, which returns in waves in later life.”

Some adoptees may experience anxiety even though they are a happy, well-adjusted member of their adoptive family. They may not associate anxiety with adoption loss. This loss frequently produces mixed feelings, “I am being held by someone who does not sound, smell, or look like my birth mommy.” Some adoptees feel an unexplainable sense that something is not quite right.

Help your child express his feelings. Say, “We want you to know that it is okay to have mixed feelings. We understand and want you to tell us about them anytime.”

Allow your child to verbalize his emotions. Claiming these emotions gives him more control and understanding of his emotions rather than feeling controlled by them.

(1) Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Zondervan) 2002.