

# Our Thoughts for Professionals

## **KIMBERLEY ADOPTED FROM SOUTH KOREA AT 4 MONTHS OLD**

Kimberley: Because of the complexity of being adopted, professionals need to know, or people who work in health care, education, mental health, need to be aware that adoptees need a little more, or a little different, maybe not more, but different kinds of support to non adoptees because of everything that's happened because our trauma is our adoption.

## **MICHELLE ADOPTED FROM SOUTH KOREA AT 4 MONTHS OLD**

Michelle: You realize that it's not just a loss of your birth parents. It's a loss of an entire world and an entire life, your natural life. It's your parents, your family, your brothers, sisters, culture, country, language, it's tradition.

## **MESERET ADOPTED FROM ETHIOPIA AT 14 YEARS OLD**

Meseret: I think it's a very important part of the process for an adoptee to really grieve what they've left behind. It is not undermining what they have now, but it's just part of it.

Michelle: It is like just having a loved one go missing and never having the answers, never knowing what happened to them but even worse because we don't know what they look like. We don't know, you know, where our reflection comes from or anything like that. And just to look in the mirror is a very confronting thing and a very hard thing to do.

## **BENJAMIN ADOPTED FROM BRAZIL AT 13 MONTHS**

Benjamin: Enlisting in the army at 22, that was very heavily based upon my lack of self-worth and emotional detachment. And for me, that was the perfect place. I was gonna get paid to continue to be emotionally detached. And my self worth was not gonna come to the equation because you're just, you're a soldier, you do as you're told. They tell you to do this, you're going to do it.

Meseret: I didn't know how to express it, but I remember feeling uncomfortable around certain people or certain conversations, so I just shut down.

## **CHAMILA ADOPTED FROM SRI LANKA AT 4 YEARS OLD**

Chamila: There's the mental trauma. There's the developmental trauma. There's so much that goes on through our little brains when we're first out here, and you don't have that ability to articulate what you're going through. And people are under this misconception that being adopted is a wonderful thing. It's not necessarily always that. So make sure you take the time to actually get to know that person and understand what their truth is and where they're coming from.

## **JAMES ADOPTED FROM COLOMBIA AT 1 YEAR OLD**

James: Never project what you think adoption is onto that adoptee because we all have our different experiences. And for a lot of us, that process is very traumatic and has come with a lot of injuries and a lot of wounds. Specifically, if I could refer to an example, it would be a lot of people say, when I tell them I'm adopted, they say, "Oh, you're so lucky to have this life, you're so blessed." And as an adoptee, when you you get fed that narrative through your whole life, any trauma or any feelings of discomfort that you may have, you never feel you can raise with anyone because people just say to you, "Oh, don't raise that, that's ungrateful," or "You've had so many opportunities here."

Meseret: Really listen to the kid carefully, and also watch out like signs like why is the kid not opening up? Why are they feeling irritated or quiet?

Chamila: One thing that all teachers, doctors and psychological people, professionals, need to be aware of is abuse is something that's very prevalent in adopted children. I've experienced it myself from the ages of six to 16. And we may not display it in ways that seem normal, but you need to watch out for behavioral changes.

Benjamin: Becoming a parent is, that's when I started to delve into where my story started. And doing things like ancestry.com meant that I could fully understand where I was coming from to hopefully break those cycles and those patterns that weren't conducive to a healthy lifestyle and mental health that would affect my children 'cause at the end of the day then, it's the next generation that also get impacted by our stuff that we're carrying through the adoption story.

Kimberley: For professionals working with adoptees, be respectfully curious, be gentle in your inquiry, enquire. Don't kind of go, "do you have family history?" "Oh no, I'm adopted." "Okay, next question". Understand that there is physical and emotional, psychological impact that we may not even be aware of. So if you're aware of it, and you can bring it into the room in a safe way where we feel seen, held, heard, that will help us process, understand and feel accepted and not rejected.

James: If you talk to us, obviously our experience is gonna be different from the child, but it will at least give you an overview of what we went through.

Benjamin: It's very important that people understand that these things will carry on through life, depending on people's situations and depending on the help that they can get.

James: First resource I would recommend is a book called "The Primal Wound." This is quite a raw, honest look at adoption and its impacts. I'd also recommend any number of the articles and stories posted on the ICAV website. And these are especially pertinent because they're adoptee stories. They're not stories written by an academic or published in an academic paper. These are real-life, on-the-ground stories of adoptees.

#### **AIMEE ADOPTED FROM TAIWAN AT 4 MONTHS OLD**

Aimee: Thank you for listening because one of the ways that we are validated is when we are heard. So thank you very much.

(Music)

#### **KEY MESSAGES**

**ADOPTEES NEED TRAUMA INFORMED SUPPORT**

**WE FACE LIFELONG CORE ISSUES OF GRIEF AND LOSS**

**WE NEED A SAFE SPACE TO PROCESS THESE LOSSES**

**STAGES IN LIFE CAN TRIGGER THE ORIGINAL TRAUMAS**

**RARELY WILL WE IDENTIFY RELINQUISHMENT / ADOPTION AS OUR PROBLEM**

**DO NOT IGNORE SIGNS OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT  
IT HAPPENS WITHIN ADOPTIVE FAMILIES TOO**

**REFER TO ADOPTION AND TRAUMA RELATED RESOURCES, ESPECIALLY THOSE CREATED BY  
ADOPTEES**

**THANK YOU TO ADOPTEES:**

**AIMEE, BENJAMIN, CHAMILA, JAMES, KIMBERLEY, MESERET & MICHELLE**

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