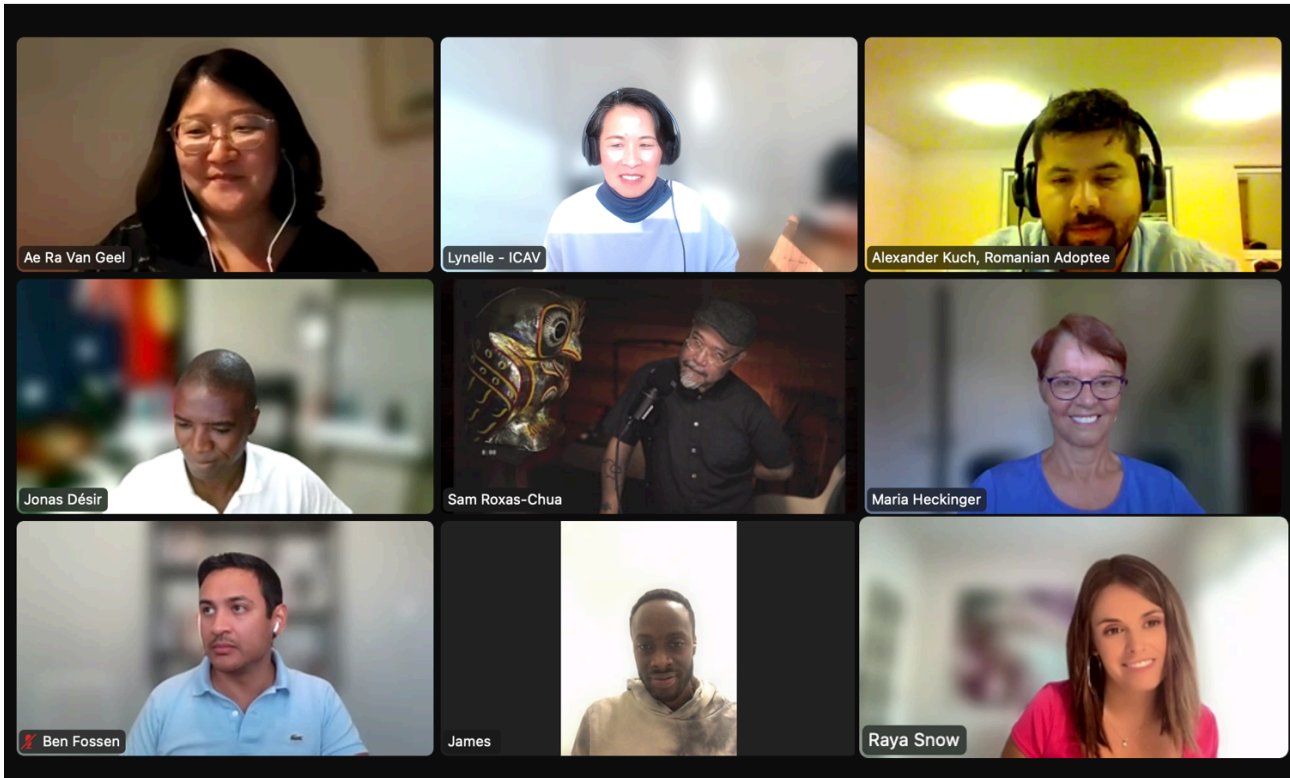


Reunion and Beyond in Intercountry Adoption



Summary of Key Messages

What do you recommend in preparation for a reunion?

Maria: if you want to have a positive relationship with adoptive family, talk honestly with them and don't be afraid to share your truth.

Ben: how I did it versus what I know now: be open (do what they do); make sure it's not your first visit back to birth country; take a photo album of your life growing up to show them; have supports / backups in place.

Raya: the value of professional support; be open to understand differences in expectations versus reality, be open to various scenarios happening in reunion, be prepared for memories that arise unexpectedly if you are adopted as an older child, it's important to listen to yourself first and then take a step back and listen to your biological family story - we often don't know what they've lived through.

What challenges have you experienced in reunion?

James: reunion gets more complicated as time goes on, adjusting after the reunion is difficult, my mental health needs extra space, it affects personal relationships; reunion requires we hold the beauty and discomforts hand in hand and find our peace with complications.

Jonas: terror of losing my mother again and reverting back to the age I was when I was separated; navigating the overwhelming aspects of the differences between us eg poverty; dealing with my expectations I perceived they might have of me.

Raya: adopted as an older age adoptee with memories; trying to sort out what the truth is when my adoption appears illegal, wondering what to do about it, how to hold the complicated feelings one has from those involved who did me wrong.

Ae Ra: regression in being triggered back into our earlier age as a baby/child feeling helpless; impact on our wider family and the rollercoaster ride of reunion; secondary rejection and the withdrawal of biological family if they are experiencing their own trauma.

Tips for a media organised reunion

Alex: remember they just want ratings; communicate your expectations; be well informed about the TV show before you agree; ask to have edit rights on what goes to air.

How to overcome / deal with differences in language and culture?

Ben: multiple visits and learn the language; be open and have many conversations to help them understand my boundaries or perspective; integrate my biological family into my every day life and when I'm there I live like they do.

James: learn the language; learn about my people (Afro heritage), the country and the situation my biological family faced; talk to my mother with respect for her situation and experience, we are bonded by the shared experiences we both face (eg racism); focus on the small wins.

What role do I want adoptive family to have in / after reunion?

Alex: my adoptive parents were always open and proactive in trying to find/keep information about my Romanian family and that held me in good stead in my reunion; transparency and honesty from adoptive parents is so important.

Jonas: I was estranged from adoptive family because I had a difficult adoption; from my experience with the tv show and with my adoptive parents, for my health, I don't allow my adoptive parents any contact with me now for the sake of my mental health.

Ae Ra (Era): adoptive parents passed away before reunion but this is what I would have wanted for her adoptive parents to do:

- Sort out your own issues on rejection, relinquishment, needs, before adopting - address your own possible issues in reunion with a therapist.
- Adapt to the pace and needs of adoptee, it doesn't really matter what you want or think.
- Provide financial support for trips back and forth and for psychological support needed by the adoptee.

How to support myself in reunion?

Jonas: setting strong boundaries in communications and with financial commitments, be consistent, this enables me to keep my balance; peer support was also essential.

Maria: importance of processing what has happened inter-generationally from both families through writing a book and going to therapy; keeping conversations, making notes, writing every time I visited helped me to remember.

Sam: I'm still in reunion and it's not just reunion with the "other" (mother), there's also reunion with the self; taking care of my self now in writing and art is reuniting with parts of my body that has something to say. Be curious to understand what our body wants us to know in the process of reunion.

Managing financial requests in reunion relationships

Sam: the need to create boundaries for myself and how to deal with the hurt this creates; understand everyone has their traumas; dealing with the guilt of saying no and being okay to not carry the burden.

Alex: choosing not to have a relationship with my Romanian mother, the relationship has to be built upon trust, saying no was easier because of the apparent lies and inconsistencies.

Ben: I've felt welcomed in my Guatemalan family, I give small and offer to help regularly and I feel it's important to contribute; important to manage expectations; paying for experiences is a good way to build a relationship rather than just leaving money; it's a relationship where I help out and I have a say, I am part of the family.

What's it been like for you finding answers to my questions?

James: finding out I was stolen from hospital and that my mother did not relinquish me, coming to terms with difficult information has been like shattering my truth and having to reframe it, but knowing the truth has helped me despite the suffering and pain it has involved. I have found more purpose for my life since knowing the truth.

Raya: it's difficult when my mother has passed or has mental illness that prevents me knowing the truth; dealing with trafficking requires bravery of the soul and has extra complications in reactions from adoptive and biological parents; ultimately, reunion has helped me think for myself and find my voice.

Sam: I've learnt to tell people "love me" and I matter to them; healing is not a goal for me, more important is to have a relationship with ones self; how to become a parent to myself and give the younger me a sense of togetherness in this life; I've learnt to be engaged in my observations and not react but find my compass.

What role should Governments and Adoption Agencies have in supporting adoptees and families in Reunion?

Ben: adoptees from Guatemala are citizens by birth i.e., you can't renounce your citizenship and given this, Guatemala has an obligation and responsibility to assist in birth family reunion; there are huge financial benefits to help adoptees return.

Maria: adoptees from Greece are fighting to be given rights - they want access to records, the ability to connect to their Greek-ness, citizenship rights; Greece needs to do the right thing,

provide acknowledgement of the past and provide support to assist families and adoptees to find one another.

Ae Ra (Era): my thoughts for Government and Agencies:

- Governments: your role starts before reunion occurs, responsibility to only work with countries that can guarantee full and correct information, provide funds for search and roots trips, provide adoption competent psychological support, take responsibility for everything that has gone wrong in the past.
- Agencies in birth countries: support birth families, educate on the impact of trauma and rejection, help families understand socially, culturally the differences in expectations and life experiences, help them understand the impact of language barriers.
- Agencies in adoptive countries: provide all the info you have, communicate clearly and with transparency, you need to build some trust for post reunion because some adoptees are wary that you have contributed to the lies and fabrications of their adoptions.
- Government and Agencies: Don't burden adoptees and families with expectations to pay, this adds to the levels of mistrust; provide a list of adoption competent therapists; educate on the impact of trauma; be available; provide information on social and cultural habits; accept that some adoptees don't want your help, it's not about you.