



BRIGHT THINGS

A Newsletter of Bright Futures Adoption Center,
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Our Hearts Are Full

by Jenna

When my husband and I first met in college, I remember us both saying we never wanted children. Of course, we were just too young and selfish to even wrap our heads around putting someone else's wants or needs before our own. Fast forward 7 years and we are married, expecting our first child, rushing to buy a house because our little apartment would in no way be suitable for a child, completely terrified but beyond excited. For many years, we were totally happy with our little family and there wasn't even a conversation about more children. But as our daughter got older, things changed.


In 2017, we moved to a new home in a new town and I remember saying to my husband, "I know now isn't the right time but once we get settled, I would like to look into adopting a child." Which I am almost certain was a comment he laughed at (lovingly, of course). Little did he know, for over a year I had been researching adoption, talking to a friend that had adopted and searching within my own heart over whether or not this would be a good idea for our family. Here's what I knew: I knew there were kids out there that needed a home. I knew we had a pretty wonderful home and so much love to give. I knew our daughter would be the absolute best big sister ever. I knew there were some risks with adoption but they were risks I was willing to take. Most of all, I knew that that there was a little person out there that needed us *almost* as much as we needed them.

After over a year of pestering, and I am quite persistent, my husband agreed to explore adoption. I know he did this because he loves me and quite frankly, taking the adoption journey with me was the truest act of love. I am forever grateful that I have someone who loves me that much. He was not sold on a second child and even more so, not sold on adoption, but was willing to meet with Bright Futures and just listen. So we did exactly that. In spring/summer of 2018 we went to Bright Futures to meet with Karen and listened. She showed us photos of some of the children who had been placed with Bright Futures' families and I remember seeing twin, African-American, baby boys; I was enchanted. We discussed the need for black and bi-racial adoptive families and it was one more check mark on my list of why we should move forward. There are many people who



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Thank You to All of Our Donors!
Family is Essential Campaign
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There is still time to help! Donations can be mailed to 2352 Main Street, Suite 206, Concord, MA 01742 or made at brightfuturesadoption.org, using the 'Donate' button

WELCOME TO NEW BRIGHT FUTURES STAFF!

Kim Bernstein, LICSW, has 25 years of experience working in adoption with a focus on finding families for older children and children with special needs. Her interest area is helping parents to understand their child's fear-based behaviors and support them in their role in their child's healing through connection. Kim grew up in a blended family and works in the Family Development Program.

Christine Trendell, LICSW, has over 25 years of experience working with children and their families in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. The focus of her clinical work has been on working with pregnant and parenting women around trauma and attachment, children 0-6, and with families brought together by adoption. She conducts child and family assessments.

Keavy Smith, LICSW, has worked with children and families in a variety of settings including DCF, Y.O.U. Inc Foster Care and as a Teen Parent Assessor. She is also a Therapist and Life Coach. She conducts child and family assessments.

Julie Belmont, LICSW, has been working with children and families for over 15 years in the medical field and more recently in private domestic adoption. She conducts child and family assessments.

WELCOME HOME – CONGRATS TO OUR NEW ADOPTIVE PARENTS!

Amalia, Brian & Joseph on the arrival of Gizelle
Amy, Jason, Grace & Chad on the arrival of Wyatt
Anne, Greg & David on the arrival of Kolbie
Beth & Bill on the arrival of Kylee and Elly
Betsy & Randy on the arrival of Olivia and Kaleb
Bridie & Tom on the arrival of Edward
Brittney, Matt, Logan & Gavin on the arrival of Mia
Carla & Diane on the arrival of Militza and Estrella
Cassandra & Ethan on the arrival of Brandon and Jordyn
Christina, Ky & Javier on the arrival of Travis
Cindy, David & Tucker on the arrival of Jonathan
Eric on the arrival of Keighan
Glenn, Armando & Isaiah on the arrival of Zy'aire
Jen & Joe on the arrival of Ritchie and Victor
Jennifer & Michael on the arrival of Olivia and Elijah
Jessica & John on the arrival of Jordany and Jiovanni
Kate & Mark on the arrival of James
Katie & Matt on the arrival of Sienna
Kelly & Matt on the arrival of Devin
Lisa & Ray on the arrival of Dwayne and Domonick
Maria & Michael on the arrival of Jameson and Ryder
Matt & Ryan on the arrival of Angel and Zayvion
Meghan, Adam, Ben & Lexi on the arrival of Dominick
and Maddox
Michelle & Sam on the arrival of Priscilla and Savior
Pam, Anthony & Cameron on the arrival of Benjamin
Puneeta, Priyank & Aarjav on the arrival of Anirudh
Sarah, Mark & Luna on the arrival of Ezra
Shannon & Nathan on the arrival of Bryelle and Alyana



Love 360: An Infant Adoption Story by Kate

Mark was only days away from celebrating his 40th birthday and I had recently turned 35 when we tied the knot in front of our family members and our closest friends. We both agreed we were destined to be parents, and we were eager to settle down and start building a family of our own. However, we soon found out it would not be as easy as we thought. Doctors gently explained our infertility condition, and then suggested that we explore alternative avenues if we still wanted a baby.

Together we decided to take a pause and soak in the devastating news; we prayed and reached deep into our souls for an answer to our predicament. During that time, I had been looking at adoption as an option online and came across Bright Futures. Seeing the agency tied to the Kennedy name hit home with my Massachusetts Irish Catholic upbringing; I quickly shared it with Mark and together we agreed that adoption could be the right path to making our dream a reality.



Our intake with the agency director revived our spirits and sparked excitement once more in the possibility of becoming parents. I jumped in head first researching online and reading every book on adoption I could find. Mark patiently listened as I regurgitated my latest adoption findings and dutifully recorded the dates in his phone for our upcoming home study and training schedule. But he confessed he couldn't shake one question looming over his head: *could he and a baby born to another set of parents be able to bond with one another?*

It wasn't even two whole months after we completed our adoption training with Bright Futures that we got the call. Another agency in Massachusetts had a birth family from Florida looking for a couple to adopt their two-month-old baby boy and they were looking for a potential match. Karen reviewed the birth family's request and quickly referred Mark and me over to the other agency. Our profile book was overnighted to the family, and a couple of days later we were on the phone with the birth parents. We discussed our families, our likes/dislikes, jobs, and why we were adopting. The birth mother even brought up naming the baby. We shared the name "James" with her, and she requested that they would like "Israel" to be his middle name. The conversation was effortless, and we ended up talking for over an hour! Karen called the next day to deliver the news that the birth parents wanted us to raise James Israel! Mark and I had just enough time to pack our bags, do a Target run, and tell our bosses that we were flying out and needed to file for parental leave.

All of the anxiety and nervousness instantly melted away when we stepped into the Florida attorney's office to meet the birth family face to face. It was like greeting old friends! The birth parents sat with their 4th child on their left side and our soon to be son, James Israel, in a car seat on their right. Everyone exchanged hugs, and the transfer was a very happy

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ignorantly think (through no fault of their own) that people adopt because they are “good people” when in reality, we adopt because we want a child and throughout the whole process find ways to justify why we are good enough for this child.

Moving forward in the process took some convincing for my husband but we agreed, one step at a time and we will see where this takes us. Luckily, there was a MAPP (Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting) class in fall of 2018 which we attended and met someone who is now a really good friend (so it was a total win-win) and completed our home study by January 2019. I was convinced that we would be matched with a child almost immediately because we just kept hearing that there were so many children and things can happen fast, so I was ready. What I didn't know was that the matching process is a process and you really do need to trust the process – it will lead you to exactly where you are meant to be. We thought we wanted a girl and knew we wanted young (0-3 years), and while I was willing to take on some risk, my husband was a little more hesitant. After a couple months of being presented with children - if I had to guess about 5-6 cases - Karen called with a little boy named Anthony. We had some reservations as he wasn't legally free but we assessed the risk and decided he was more than worth it.

After disclosure, a transition, a few sleepless nights, a trial to terminate parental rights, what felt like constant visits from DCF and 15 months of waiting to adopt, we finalized the adoption of Anthony in August 2020. From the minute he showed up, barely walking into our home, nothing has felt so right. We somehow struck the jackpot and found this child who blesses us every single day with his incredible smile, unconditional love, amazing sense of humor, hilarious dance moves and a laugh that could bring you out of the worst mood in an instant. Every time I see our children cuddling on the couch or can hear my husband and Anthony in his room playing superheroes, it almost brings me to tears. We are so blessed.

occasion. In that instant we all became one big family, and the cherry on top was when James' birth mother handed James to Mark for the first time and James instantly snuggled up to Mark's chest. The unconditional bond of love exuding from both sides was evident.

We stayed in Florida for two weeks waiting for approval from both states to allow us to fly home. We used that time to bond with James and visited again with his birth parents and James' older brothers who all signed notes in a picture book as a keepsake for James to read when he is older. We also created a private Facebook page to share his progress and milestones.

Back home now, James has settled in wonderfully. He's the apple of everyone's eye, and just turned one this past December (his birth parents gave him this bear!). We've shared many pictures, Facebook messages, text messages, and even had a few video calls with his birth family; we look forward to visiting once the pandemic is over. We value each other's space, but it's inevitable – we have become one awesome extended family, and connected in the center is James Israel, who is loved a full 360 degrees.



Alyssa's Search & Reunion Story

Jean A. S. Strauss poignantly wrote in her 1994 guide to search and reunion, *Birthright*, "Adoption doesn't end when papers are filed and documents are sealed. Adoption's influence...is lifelong. Ultimately, curiosity about the past, one's heritage and one's roots, can take over." From an early age, adoptee Alyssa often thought about her birth parents and wanted to meet them. Her parents understood her desire to know this information and were very encouraging and supportive. In first grade, she wrote a letter with her school photo enclosed to the Florence Crittenton League. It read: "Dear _____, I wish they changed the law so you could see your birth parents when you are 7 years old. This is what I look like. I like to read *The Box Car Children* and *Baby Sitters Little Sister*, from Alyssa."

This was the beginning of a search and reunion journey that Alyssa would revisit from time to time. Alyssa remembers going to the Lowell Probate Court at age 18 and requesting to view her record. She recalls that it was around Thanksgiving and the clerk appeared to be inexperienced and distracted. She was handed a paper with a name on it that she would later learn was the name given to her by her birth mother. Alyssa was also referred to a lawyer who might be able to assist in obtaining additional information. She paid a small fee, but following several unreturned phone calls, decided to take a break. "It was pretty discouraging," explained Alyssa. Even when her life got busy with college, graduate school and career opportunities, she never stopped thinking about finding her birth parents. In June 2019, she decided to Google the Florence Crittenton League and was immediately directed to the Bright Futures Adoption Center website where she learned that she could obtain a Non-Identifying Adoption Information Report and conduct a search. Without hesitation, she mailed in her paperwork and recommenced her search and reunion journey.

Often searching takes time and receiving a response even longer. Sometimes it doesn't go the way that the searcher hopes. However, in Alyssa's case, only a few months passed between Bright Futures contacting Alyssa's birthmother and her responding with eagerness to make contact directly with Alyssa. The first time Alyssa's birth mother reached out to her, she was completely caught off guard. "It was a Friday afternoon, and I was in the middle of making boutineers for a best friend's wedding, when I glanced at my phone and read the memo line of the email....I knew right away that it was her," Alyssa recalls. However, she held in her excitement as she hadn't yet shared with her closest friends that she had initiated a search. She didn't respond at that moment and focused on her friend's event. That Sunday, she reached out to her birth mother and they spoke by phone.

"The conversation was wonderful...she is a super nice person, easy to talk with," stated Alyssa. Thanksgiving was approaching and as Alyssa would be traveling home to Massachusetts to visit her family, she also made plans to meet her birthmother who lives only 20 minutes from her childhood home. They met for breakfast at a diner, just the two of them. "I was feeling nervous, mainly because I wanted everything to go well," Alyssa stated. She recalls that while they were eating, her birth mother soaked her pancakes with syrup and said, "I had such a sweet tooth

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Understanding Racism, Combating Racism and Talking to Children:

In May 2020, we watched yet another unarmed black man be murdered by the police and, as a part of our work to process these events and to support the children and families with whom we work, we committed to highlighting resources each month that we hoped would provoke thought, discussion, and learning for our families and children related to racism/antiracism, transracial parenting, and the impact of white supremacy in the U.S. We chose deliberately to focus not only on talking about race with children, but on understanding race and racism because we believe parents have a responsibility to make this world better and equitable for all of our children.

Every month since June 2020, we have continued in this commitment to seeing and recognizing the dignity, worth, and humanity of people of color and to our personal and professional work related to recognizing biases and racism and learning to do better. Below are some highlights of the last eight installments of our monthly resource list. If you have not been receiving these emails and would like to ensure that your address is on our list, please contact Carolina Menendez at cmenendez@rfkchildren.org.

Adult Understanding

- New York Times' 1619 Project Podcast Series: <https://nyti.ms/30DBICJ>
- Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University's *Scene on Radio* podcast, Season 2 series, "Seeing White": <http://www.sceneonradio.org/seeing-white/>

Combating Racism

- "My Role in a Social Change Ecosystem: A Mid-Year Check-in" by Deepa Iyer: <https://bit.ly/32aErEm>
- *On Being* podcast episode with Karen Murphy, Director of International Strategy at Facing History and Ourselves, on education and reconciliation: <https://bit.ly/3nL9zSA>

Helping Children

- "Five Ways to Raise Inclusive Kids Despite Living in Segregated Neighborhoods": <https://bit.ly/3bIqcd0>
- Singer-songwriter, activist, and founder of the Foundation for Child Honouring, Raffi has recently released a new song for children and their grown-ups, "Black Lives Matter to Me": <https://bit.ly/2Sx1ymN>

with you when I was pregnant." Alyssa was struck by how this was the first time she had ever heard a comment about her pre-birth self. Several days later, on the morning of Thanksgiving, Alyssa met two of her three half siblings and since then has met the third. She is enjoying these new relationships and the many funny similarities they share. When Covid is less of a threat, Alyssa looks forward to spending more time with them. Alyssa's parents continue to be very supportive and feel that it is wonderful that she is now connected to this previously missing piece of her story.

ADOPTION CALENDAR, EDUCATIONAL & SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES

Baby Care for First-Time Prospective Adopters

Learn the basics of baby care, including feeding, changing, dressing, and bathing in an adoption friendly environment. To register, call 978-440-0422 or email acone@rfkchildren.org

Adoptive Families Together offers monthly parent support groups in numerous communities in MA and NH, education sessions for those touched by adoption, and an online discussion group which provides a 24-hour support forum, focusing on children with challenging behaviors and complex needs. Visit mspcc.org/aft for more information or call 800-277-5387.

Adoption Learning Partners offers meaningful, timely, web-based educational adoption resources for professionals, parents, adopted individuals, and the families that love them. adoptionlearningpartners.org

Post Adoption Support Resources:

Center for Early Relationship Support offers twice monthly support groups for adoptive parents to share their unique experiences of parenting a child through adoption. For parents and babies up to age one year. Contact Adoption Resources at 617-332-2218 or mkahan@adoptionresources.org

Adoption Journeys: Adoption Journeys offers an array of post adoption services for adoptive families, Visit child-familyservices.org to learn more.

Boston Post Adoption Support: Offers individual and family therapy for all those touched by adoption, child and parent support groups, and search and reunion support. Visit bpar.org to learn more.

2021 Rudd Adoption Virtual Conference, The Future of Adoption: Adopted Adults-Connections Across Generations: will resume its 4th session, Spring 2021. This series will focus on navigating adulthood and constructing a sense of identity. <https://www.umass.edu/ruddchair/virtual-conference-2020-2021>

Bright Futures Adoption Center's Birth Mother's Day Brunch

Saturday, May 8, 2021

Come and join other birth mothers who placed their children through Bright Futures or the Florence Crittenton League to share, learn, give and get support, and celebrate your incredible journey of motherhood. Pre-registration required. Please call 978-263-5400 or email kcheyney@rfkchildren.org.

SAVE THE DATE!!!

**BRIGHT FUTURES'
ANNUAL SUMMER PICNIC**

AUGUST 7, 2021

Talk to your child's adoptive family or birth family now to arrange to spend time together that day.

Concerned United Birthparents(CUB)

Inc. Support Meetings from 2 to 5 pm, the third Sunday of the month, September to May, at Plymouth Congregational Church in Framingham, MA. For more information call 508-473-4066 and ask for Kathleen or visit <https://www.cubirthparents.org/boston.php>

Birthmom Buds Annual Birthmother's Day Retreat,

April 30 – May 2, 2021 in Charlotte, NC. This free retreat is a time for birthmothers to come together to celebrate and honor their motherhood and their children. For more information, email birthmombuds@gmail.com or visit birthmombuds.com. Birthmom Buds also offers mentorship programs for those who have placed a child for adoption and for those who are considering adoption.

PACT Family Camp East: August 9-14, 2021 in Pine Mountain, GA. Pact Family Camp East is a six-night/five-day event that brings together families with adopted children of color from across the country to share experiences, learn from experts, and build community. This camp has a profound effect on those families who attend and offers a community that these families have not found anywhere else. Visit www.pactadopt.org

You can contact Bright Futures by calling 978-263-5400 or visiting brightfuturesadoption.org

Friend us on Facebook and get updates about what's happening in the Bright Futures Family!