



#GIVING
TUESDAY

12.3.19

This Thanksgiving, We're Thankful for Your Support!

On December 3, PFSA is proud to participate in #GivingTuesday. This day of giving invites you to celebrate the holiday season by giving back and creating change in your community.

Together, we can continue to make a difference by keeping PA safe for all children!

Every dollar raised directly contributes to efforts to:

- ▶ Strengthen parenting
- ▶ Provide services and support to families in need
- ▶ Educate communities about awareness and advocacy

All of these initiatives help children and families reach their fullest potential.

We are grateful to you and for you! Your support on Giving Tuesday, and every day, allows us to fulfill our mission to #ProtectPAKids.

You can make donations by contacting Ann Moffitt, Development Director, at 717-238-0937 or through our website at pafsa.org.





A Word from Adam Smith, PFSA's Director of Prevention Programs

November is National Adoption Month, and instead of sitting here and writing tips and pointers, I decided to do something a little different: I asked my mom to write something for all of you. You see, both my sister and I are adopted, and my mother has a unique perspective on the process, the raw emotions, and the trials and tribulations for those families who have experienced this journey. So, please allow me to introduce you to my mom, Roxanne Smith.

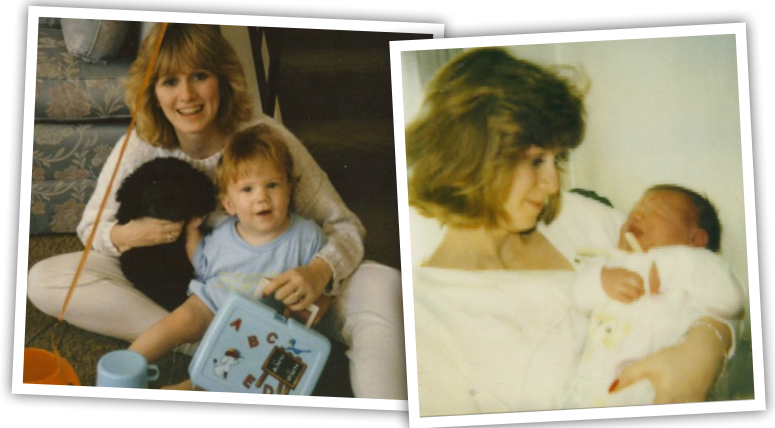
LOVE, ADJUSTMENT & BLESSINGS: A First-Person Account of Adoption

by Roxanne Smith

Almost every adoption is different because no two families are the same. There are some constants in the process, but feelings and circumstances are individual. The most important constant — adoption is a wonderful opportunity, and love is what matters most of all.

Our family came to private adoption through the infertility process. We were unable to conceive and were one of the early couples to try the IVF process in Baltimore, Maryland. Louise Brown, the first “test-tube baby,” had just been born in England, and an IVF program was starting at our local Greater Baltimore Medical Center. The odds were against us, with a 10% success rate. It was very expensive and uncomfortable, so, after a few months, we discontinued treatment. In addition to infertility, this was yet another loss in our quest to become parents.

We attempted the adoption process in domestic agencies and China, but due to age disparity, agency adoption wasn't in the cards for our family. We were discouraged, especially as the births of babies to our friends and family were increasing. It was heartbreaking for me to see everyone excited and happy about their pregnancies and new babies. I was happy for everyone but so sad. Luckily, private adoption



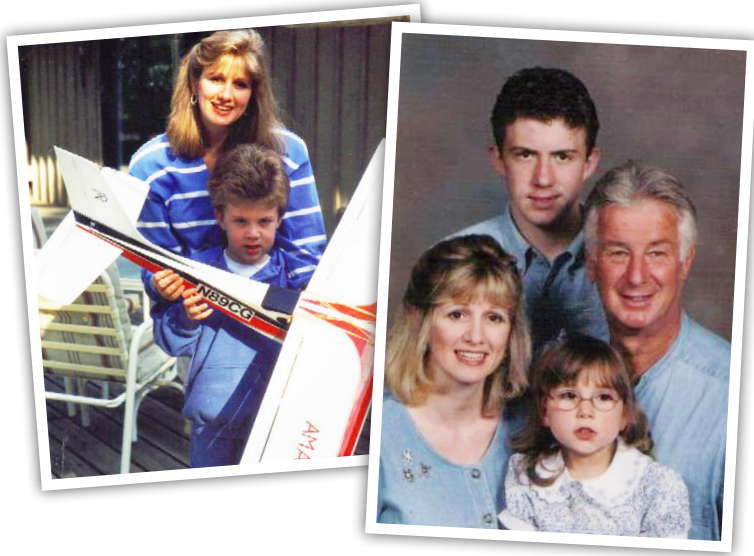
found us, and a baby was going to be available for us to adopt. It was a surprise, and we were hopeful but cautious.

We set up our nursery, told our family and friends, and waited for “our” baby to be born. It was a long five-month wait, worrying the birth mother would change her mind, that something would happen to the baby, that all sorts of things could go wrong that a parent in a personal pregnancy would not encounter. Adoption anxiety was constant.

Finally, the day came, and our baby arrived. Along with the joy, the tentativeness of the adoption was hanging over us as the birth mother had six months to change her mind.

Ours was an open adoption. The birth mother chose us, and we agreed to send letters to her every year and to allow her and her family

to visit our newborn. In the early days and for a long time, the role of parent didn't feel legitimate, especially with the birth mother dropping by at will. When you birth a baby, you have a sense of entitlement to that baby, something that we didn't feel right away. It took a while. We were successful only through setting limits on the visits of the birth parent and, finally, stopping visits all together. It was hard to feel like the parents when someone else kept pointing out that you were not.



To be fair, it wasn't just the birth mother who made us feel "less than" parents. We didn't have family close by, so we didn't enjoy the usual affirmations that cement you as parents in the minds of friends and family: no baby shower, no helpful relatives there when you brought the baby home to help you adjust to the usual fear and uncertainty of parenting a newborn. Circumstances weren't in our favor as our first child had horrific colic for months; the fact that it was difficult to comfort him also made us feel inadequate as parents. It was a long three months until our baby's system adjusted to the formula changes and life settled for our family.

Joining the early parenting groups was fraught as well. The new moms would be discussing their breastfeeding difficulties, their postpartum issues with pregnancy changes, weight,

hormones, and adjustment — a discussion I wasn't able to join, and I was often told "you wouldn't understand." It was hard to feel legitimate when you did not give birth to your baby and people kept pointing it out for you. You have to develop a thick skin to endure the reminders.

Of course, alone at home with our baby, we felt like the "real parents." We had all the experience "real parents" have and did all the things "real parents" do. Parents are born when the baby arrives. I had the best pediatrician in the early days who understood my "status" concerns and always stressed how I was "the real mom" to this baby, that my baby didn't know anyone else who cared for him the way I did and did so daily. We loved our baby so much, worried about him, and likely felt more than the usual anxiety about losing him, as that hung over our head for six months — something parents who came to a family through pregnancy didn't have to worry about at all. It was a difficult time coping with all the issues, but we never felt difficulty with loving our baby or feeling like his parents when we were parenting him.

Our second adoption was international and had different issues, as our baby girl was adopted through an orphanage. The birth parents were not in the picture, and after years of being a parent, I felt like a real parent no matter the circumstance. I was fiercely protective of my children and our family, especially when adoption and legitimacy was raised with questions about my kids' "real parents" and the like. I didn't put up with any of that and would shut it down immediately.

Both of our children were always aware they were adopted. Growing up, they expressed some of the usual issues. As small children, they verbalized how they wished they were in "mom's stomach." As teens, they sometimes expressed teenage anger that we were "not their real mom and dad," but we didn't take it

personally. We understood these challenges were going to come and go and were part of our children's rights as adoptees.

Early on, we decided not to address the difficulty in the process of becoming a family, only the love of family as the most important part of the journey. You really have to fight the message that "DNA makes a family" and emphasize that it's being there for your kids and love that makes you a family. That is all that matters.

There are many ways those in the adoption circle can make the process easy for a prospective parent. The biological parents should go into the process fully committed to eliminating additional heartbreak and pain for all parties; it's important to trust your plan for the child and find the most professional agency you can to ensure the baby has the best placement and future.

I would caution the family and friends of adopting parents to accept that there are many ways to build a family and not to spend time talking about the birth parents because biology isn't parenting, and it can be hurtful to the adoptive parents, especially in the beginning of the process.

Take your cues from the adoptive parents — they'll bring up any topic they want to discuss. Unlike biological parents, they've had to endure many intrusive interviews and evaluations to test their "suitability" to parent. Their family is, essentially, certified, and making them feel "less than" the biological parents is not only insensitive, it's insulting. Have the baby shower, celebrate the event, and realize that your entire family is enriched by the addition of a child. Adoption professionals are usually well-versed in making the adoption process easier on all parties involved. Understand that background checks, social worker's visits, and the legal procedures are necessary to ensure the safety of the children, but the process is hard on parents.

Agencies could spend more time addressing and allaying parents' fears surrounding the process and offering advice for the inevitable early bumps in the road, as well as advising adoptive parents on the questions they will get about the "real parents," talking to their kids about being adopted, and resources for future questions as children age.

Adoption is a blessing and can only be enriched by everyone involved being helpful, kind, and considerate.

PFSA's MRT Trainer Spotlight: Corynne Rutz

We are excited to introduce Corynne as a new PFSA-contracted trainer!

Hi! I'm Corynne Rutz. I am happily married to my husband, Aaron, and am a mama to the most amazing little boy, Jack. Outside of being a mom and wife, I like to exercise. I've run five marathons at this point and just completed my first triathlon this past summer. My professional background includes experience working with juvenile delinquents as a counselor, on a psychiatric unit as a mental health technician, in a prison as a treatment specialist, and in a domestic violence counseling center as a counselor and advocate for victims. I am currently still volunteering at the domestic violence counseling center in my spare time. Thank you for allowing me to introduce myself, and I look forward to getting to know you all hopefully sometime in the future!



PFSA Provides Training for Round #2 of Families in Recovery Statewide Pilot Program

On Oct. 21 and 22, PA Family Support Alliance conducted a two-day training workshop for representatives from over 20 Pennsylvania-based family-serving organizations. This is the second year PFSA offered *Families in Recovery* facilitator education, delivered with support from the Department of Human Services Office of Child Development and Early Learning at PaTTAN in Harrisburg, PA. The workshop was the official kickoff for a second year of this comprehensive statewide pilot program.



The workshop welcomed back the founding cohort, first trained in November 2018. These passionate facilitators served as a stakeholder sounding board and coaches for newly trained facilitators in the program. The workshop:

- ▶ Brought to life stories from parent participants
- ▶ Included a parent panel of two individuals living in long-term recovery from substance use disorder
- ▶ Included interactive break-out activities, dialogue, and learning models

All increased cultural sensitivity and promoted inclusion, parental resilience, and professional development and awareness.

The next seven-week series of *Families in Recovery* will begin in January 2020 throughout PA in community-based organizations. We look forward to sharing more about this exciting project. Congratulations, and thank you to all who continue to participate in our statewide effort to support and strengthen parents!

UPCOMING TRAINING

Families in Recovery Train-the-Trainer (TTT) Program

PFSA is conducting a final *Families in Recovery* TTT session in 2019, and all are welcome!

DETAILS

Dates: Dec. 16 & 17

Time: 9 a.m.–4 p.m.

Location: PFSA offices in Harrisburg

Organizational trainers will be fully prepared to provide training after attending a two-day comprehensive training consisting of content education and application instruction of the curriculum. These trainers then provide PFSA's *Families in Recovery* curriculum training to colleagues within their organization. TTT contracts include ongoing technical assistance, development and coaching webinars, and assistance with outcomes-driven data collection. TTT cohorts remain in contact with each other to share program implementation experience, ideas, and insights following initial training.

Please be sure to visit our website for training details and registration at www.pafsa.org.