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ADOPTIONINSIGHTS

Emotional Tales Bring Mother and Daughter Closer Together

By Sarah MacDonald

For the Casey family, adoption is a way of life.

“People join their families in different ways,” said Filis Casey, 60, who recently published a new book of adoption stories with her daughter, Marisa. “We just want to let people know that adoption is a valid option.”

Which is why the mother and daughter team added their own tales to “Born in Our Hearts,” a compilation of emotional testimonials on the experience of adoption.

Marisa Catalina Casey was born in Colombia in 1979 and adopted by Filis and Bob Casey, when she was 3.

“I knew exactly what was happening,” Marisa remembered. “It was a normal way of life for us but it’s not that way for everyone. We understood it from so many different perspectives but what about other people?”

Filis Casey knew that adopted families sometimes need guidance, having founded the Alliance for Children Foundation (AFC) in 1974. AFC was Massachusetts’ first international adoption agency and has linked more than 5,000 Russian, Asian, and Latin American orphans with American parents.

The Wellesley-based agency is staffed by social workers, who conduct home visits and interviews before adoption and life-long training and support. Filis Casey is executive director and primary fundraiser for the agency.

A few years ago, AFC’s clients were invited to share their stories on the agency’s Web site and a lot of people jumped at the chance. That’s when the Caseys began talking about a book.

While she had the experience, both work and personal, to write a how-to-adopt book, Filis said she wouldn’t have felt fulfilled doing so.

“I wanted a more realistic portrayal of the ups and downs, the good and the bad that comes with it,” she said.

The Caseys aimed to gather stories from “the adoption triad” of birth parents, adoptive parents, and adopted kids. Finding stories was easy, Filis said.

“Every family has a story. Sometimes it was just a matter of asking people to start talking and, after about 20 minutes, they remembered something they hadn’t thought of. Many times people would say, ‘I never thought anyone felt like I did,’ she said.

In all, the Caseys spoke with 250 people and only a handful didn’t share something.

The book, published by Health Communications, the same company behind the Chicken Soup for the Soul series – contains 65 first-person stories, about 60 of which are from clients of the AFC.

Filis shared her story in the introductions and Marisa wrote a piece called “Roots and Wings.” There are stories from grandparents, siblings, and even an essay called “Not For Me,” about one woman’s decision not to adopt.

The Caseys expect the book will be well received by the adoption community. For adopted children, sharing stories helps with a sense of belonging, Marisa said.

“Being adopted, I’m always looking for communities to join, communities to add to enhance my experience and help me define my life story, my identity,” said Marisa, who now works as a grant writer at the Hearst Foundation in New York.

For parents, adoptive or not, the stories may help with some unexpected trials and tribulations, Filis said.

“It is a different parenting situation than having a biological child,” she said. “It’s comforting and helpful to get advice.”

Filis speaks with years of experience, having raised Marisa and two biological children, Matthew and Sarah.

“Going through the teenage years with kids isn’t smooth sailing for anyone,” she said.

The 2 ½ years compiling and publishing the book has brought the mother and daughter closer together.

“Working together, being able to work on a project together, has been great. An added benefit,” Filis said.

They have worked on every step of the process and in an interview the two play off each other, often asking one another who should answer the question first. Filis admits Marisa is the more outgoing of the pair.

“We spoke almost daily about one thing or another. We really respect each other as individuals,” said Marisa, who plans to follow in her mother’s footsteps in working with nonprofits. She is looking to get her Master’s degree in arts education and arts administration. They have already begun talking about a second book.

“Something more focused, maybe,” Marisa said.

The women are also concentrating energy on the Alliance for Children Foundation, which pays for food, shelter, clothing, medical care and education for children in orphanages overseas.

Proceeds from “Born in Our Hearts” will go to the foundation.

We’ve always tried to put back into the countries the children come from and there are so many needs,” Filis said.

In the end, both the Caseys hope their work will get people thinking about adoption.

“While it’s not all warm and fuzzy, the stories show that in the end, it is always worth it,” Marisa said.

For more information on the book or the Alliance for Children Foundation, call 781-431-7148 or visit www.afcfoundation.org.

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