

Metrowest Daily News

These are our children: Local residents contribute to anthology of adoption stories

By Kathy Uek / News Staff Writer
Tuesday, August 3, 2004

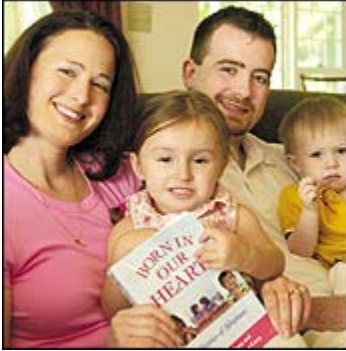


Photo Caption:

Kerriann Kimball of Mendon, with her family Brett, daughter Lillian 3, and son Vaughn, 1.

Article Text:

Kae Bowes of Newton waited almost six months to welcome her six-year-old grandchild and namesake. Katherine Lee Bowes Alves.

"We wondered what she was like," said Bowes. "In the picture they send, she looked shy. Oh, this poor darling, she's coming into a strange country from the orphanage in Bogotá, Colombia. How could we welcome her?"

Katherine's brothers, Liam and Pj, wrote letters describing their home. Liam was looking forward to asking his new sister about CRAN, the orphanage from which she was coming. It had been 10 years since he left the same orphanage at 4 months old.

"Although shorter than most adoptions, it seemed like it took forever, but the day finally arrived," said Bowes. "The doors flew open and Katherine came right in the house. Because of the letters, she knew where her room was and she went right upstairs. She is just incredible. She's very caring and full of life."

The story of Kae Bowes and her granddaughter, Katherine, is one of more than 60 stories told in the book, "Born in Our Hearts," published by Health Communications Inc. of Deerfield Beach, Fla.

Executive Director and Founder of the Alliance for Children Inc., Filis Casey, of Newton, wrote the anthology of stories relating to adoption with her daughter Marisa whom she adopted from Colombia at the age of 3.

The Alliance for Children, established in 1974, is a nonprofit, international and domestic adoption agency in Wellesley.

"These inspiring tales are representative of some of the stories that exist," said Casey, who has placed more than 5,000 children into permanent homes.

Not a how-to-book, "Born in Our Hearts," is about families sharing their experiences and revealing the challenges and joys of the lifelong adoption journey, the wonderment of meeting their child halfway around the world and the eventual bonding of the new family. The stories, presented from many perspectives, include birth mothers, adoptive couples, single parents and adoptees.

"Although the topics discussed all relate to adoption, the emotions conveyed are universal to those touched by the love, hope and joy of being blessed by a child who was 'born in our hearts,'" said Casey.

Adopted at almost 4 years of age from Quito, Ecuador, Monica Yerxa of Walpole remained an only child until she was 15 years old, when adoption laws changed. "We wanted to adopt more children, but were considered too old," said Monica's father, Lane Yerxa. "Once the laws changed, they considered the age of my wife, who is 12 years younger than I am."

Now Lane Yerxa, who took an early retirement from the former Boston Edison, stays home to care for Monica's three 10-year-old adopted sisters, while his wife, Sheila, continues to work.

"The best part of living with my family is the last six years after my parents adopted the other three," said Monica Yerxa, now 20 years old.

Each of her three sisters was adopted separately. Paola was adopted from Quito, Ecuador. In 2002, the Yexas adopted Alice from northwest China. Saddened that they left Alice's friend Olivia from the orphanage, they returned to China and adopted her in 2003, after the book was written.

"The girls watch everything I say," said Monica Yerxa. "They imitate things I do. I just want to be someone they look up to. God has given our family proof that older adoptions are successful and fulfilling. It takes work, but no more than any other adoption, or even learning to love a newborn. Families do take work, but they are the greatest gift."

With international adoptions, adoptive parents don't always have answers to questions their children may ask about their childhood.

But Mari and Joel Barrera of Natick may be able to answer some of the questions of their children, Milagros and James, who was adopted after the book was written.

Because of a unique arrangement, the couple spent two weeks in Quito, Ecuador, living in the nursery and getting to know the caretakers.

"When we went to Ecuador to adopt the children, we visited the nursery, met the caretakers and hear their (the children's) stories," said Joel Barrera. "It made a connection to their history and culture, being able to tell them what we learned and have photos of where they grew up."

"I feel blessed with these two bright wonderful healthy kids," said Barrera. "God blessed us to be their parents."

Keriann Kimball also feels blessed. Diagnosed with ovarian cancer at 6 and cardiomyopathy as an adult, a condition resulting from damage to the heart tissue, Kimball said she wouldn't change anything.

"It was part of the path to get to them," said Kimball, of Mendon. "It was all part of the greater plan."

Growing up playing with dolls, Kimball wondered if she would ever have children. "I always believed in my heart I would be a mother and I am. Even though I wondered if I would, when doctors said I couldn't because of the toxins from chemotherapy and because the pregnancy would be hard on my heart, I cried like anyone who deals with infertility."

Today Kimball can't imagine life without her 3-year-old Lillian and 18-month-old Vaughn adopted after the book was written.

Both domestic adoptions, Kimball tells of her gratitude. "I know when my children are adults they will not only be grateful to us for the life they've had, but they will also be grateful to the birth parents for choosing their life and for choosing us," said the Shrewsbury kindergarten teacher who has taken leave to raise her children.

"We have so much respect and gratitude for the birth parents, especially for a couple faced with an unplanned pregnancy," she said. "To make it all go away is so readily and quietly available. It's such an honor to be part of the book and give hope to other parents who have been told they couldn't have children."

All proceeds from the sale of the book will support the Foundation's projects. The Foundation, an international relief organization, established in 2000, helps children living in impoverished orphanages who are less likely to be adopted due to their age or special needs.

Kathy Uek can be reached at keuk@cnc.com