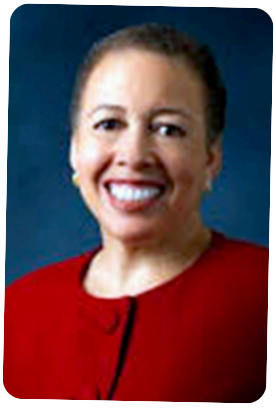
Activism in Adoption

adoption education for the 21st century







Most adoption education is aimed at only at potential adoptive parents as they start their adoption journey, and addresses the transition of bringing a new baby into the home. Where most training ends, Activism in Adoption starts, by covering the entire parenting journey, from the experiences of an expectant mother considering adoption to how to help adult adoptees successfully navigate a reunion relationship with their birth family. It's education for a lifetime, for every member of the adoption constellation, because adoption is a lifetime commitment.

Viewing Activism in Adoption video content is simple: purchase a 30-day pass, and gain access to our entire catalog. Learn from the people most impacted by adoption - birthparents and adoptees - who share their experiences with nuance and vulnerability so that we can improve outcomes for every member of the adoption constellation.

ON YOUR FEET FOUNDATION

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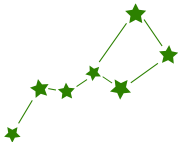
Activism in Adoption is designed to allow *you* to create bespoke educational programming based on *your* unique experiences and needs, giving you the ability to identify and build the tools you need to improve adoption outcomes in your own adoption constellation and continue your journey of becoming an advocate for ethical adoption.



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> On Your Feet Foundation has been an incredible resource for having honest conversations about adoption from those that personally live a daily adoption reality. Whether hearing from all members of the adoption triad or adoption professionals, I always feel encouraged when I participate in their trainings. There's a lot of work we can do to continue growing in openness and support of birth families, adoptive families, and adoptees. OYFF is laying the groundwork for growth, asking the hard questions, and providing a space for people to learn how we can help these populations thrive.
>
> *-KG, Adoption Professional, LMSW*

WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT

On Your Feet is the gold-standard for post-placement care. With 20+ years of experience caring for birthparents, we see the damage caused when members of the adoption constellation hasn't received the education they need, so we launched **Activism in Adoption** in 2020.

Our **AiA** sessions, recorded live on Zoom, are a safe space for *everyone* in the adoption community — including extended family and adoption professionals — to explore preconceived notions, stigmas and stereotypes, sit in vulnerability, and ask hard questions. **When we do this as a community, we become the change-makers in adoption and we improve outcomes for everyone in the constellation.** We do this by...

- **Centering birthparent and adoptee voices**, ***when others do not***, because these voices are critical in changing the adoption landscape for the better, and too often, they are left out of adoption education entirely.
- **Covering the entire parenting journey**, ***when others do not,*** because adoption is more than just bringing a new baby home; you need to hear first-hand experiences about topics like an expectant mother considering adoption, and how to help your adult adoptee navigate a reunion relationship with their birth family.
- **Focusing on three key topics: Race, Relationships, and Resilience,** ***when others do not***, because these stories bring nuance and detail that can only come from lived experience.

Most adoption education ends before an adoption is finalized, but where other adoption education programs stop, Activism in Adoption is just getting started.

Activism in Adoption

CATEGORY OVERVIEWS



RELATIONSHIPS

We all know that a healthy open adoption is the best way to improve adoptee outcomes, and we all want that! But there is no roadmap for how adoptive parents are supposed to build these healthy relationships, which is why we bring birthparents in to help.

If you are looking for an unvarnished and deeply nuanced look at the real experiences of birthmothers, start by learning about adoption from birthparents. **Marcia Lane-McGee**, **Muthoni Gaciku Kittredge**, and **Sarah Schmidth's** birthmother panel on relinquishment, grief & healing is the perfect place to start. For a more in-depth discussion of birthmother grief, **Candace Cahill's** talk on the types of grief in relinquishment and birthmother paths to healing is a must-watch.

Curious about how birthparents feel, watching their child grow up in another family? Birthmother **Cathy Crossno** discusses how she learned to havigate a strong, healthy open adoption.

Need to see how these roadmaps get built by hearing from both sides of the same adoption triad? Birthmother **Maryellen Kandu** is joined by **Pauline Pearce,** her son's adoptive mother, for a vulnerable, honest conversation about how the built their relationship over the years. They started out strangers and now are the best of friends, but they didn't get to where they are today without putting a lot of effort into learning how to trust each other and communicate well, and their example can teach you how to do the same. ***You know who is often left out of conversations about adoption? Adoptive fathers***. **Shanyce Henley**, a birthmother, and **Ron Lundeen**, the adoptive father in Shanyce's adoption triad, talk candidly about the importance of relationship between birthmothers and adoptive fathers and how they managed to forge a strong friendship.

Most adoption education overlooks the fact that adopted children grow up, and as they do, their relationships within their adoption triad change. ***Wondering how to foster these relationships as adopted children grow up?*** Join birthmothers **Vicki Twomey** and **Jessica Figlio** as they discuss what happens when adoptees become adults, and how triad relationships shift and grow over time.



RESILIENCE

In order to improve outcomes in adoption, every member of the constellation needs to develop the resilience necessary to grow through the challenges adoption presents. Adoptive parenting is a form of therapeutic parenting, and the skills and mindset necessary to be successful at it aren't always intuitive. ***Looking for a primer on therapeutic parenting through an adoption lens and how to better meet your child's needs through developing your own resilience?*** Hear from **Billy Kaplan, LCSW**, an adoption parenting expert, as he discusses how to master therapeutic parenting through difficult times.

Resilience is a critical tool for transracially adopted people, but how can we help them nurture it within themselves? Transracially adopted person **Cordan James** walks us through how to learn the skills necessary to navigate and overcome traumatic experiences, and Dr. Liz DeBetta walks us through the 7-step trauma-healing framework she developed.

Developing resilience is critical for birthparents, too, but how can they find the resilience they need to show up for the children they placed? Join birthmother **Hope O Helder**, author of the birthmother memoir, *Finding Hope: A Birthmother's Journey into the Light,* in a candid discussion about the experience of adoption from a birthmother perspective, and how she developed the tools to grow and find her way.

Want to learn how to develop the two tools most critical for building resilience in yourself and your entire adoption constellation? Birthmother **Clemencia DeLeon** walks us through the importance of developing radical honesty and how to grow our emotional intelligence.

Activism in Adoption

CATEGORY OVERVIEWS

RACE & INTERSECTIONALITY

According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, approximately 38% of all domestic infant adoptions are transracial, and the Department of State reports that 284,088 adoptions of foreign-born children have occured in the United States, more than 80% of which are considered transracial. If you are a white family raising a child of the global majority, you need an up-to-date toolkit for every stage of their life, and we can help.

Where should you start? **Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum**, president emerita of Spelman College and author of the best-selling book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations about Race* has a master class on race in America, and how race impacts both birthfamilies and adoptive families. **After that, the best experts on transracial adoption are transracially adopted people:** **Kevin Hofmann** and **Isaac Etter** both provide insight on growing up Black in a white family, including how their parents learned to best support their racial identity, and what they needed to feel seen and supported, a theme continued in T**orie DiMartile's** talk regarding racial identity and mental health in adopted people of color.

What about children adopted into families of the same race? **Dr. Maxine Bryant** provides an important and rarely highlighted perspective as a domestic Black adoptee adopted by Black parents during a time when formal adoption in the Black community was rare.

How do transracially adopted people make sense of their adoption? Asian-American adopted person **Patrick Armstrong** walks us through the *Adoptee Consciousness Model*, which provides adopted people a framework on which to better understand their own adoption experience. ***What can I do to best support my transracially adopted child if they want to know more about where they came from?*** We are joined by **Nam Holtz, LMSW**, a transracially adopted person born in Korea whose documentary film, *Found in Korea*, takes us on her journey to learn more about her roots.

What is intersectionality, and why does it matter so much in adoption? **Joe Toolan,** a transracially adopted person born in Guatamala, walks us through intersectionality in the adoption community, and how adopted people navigate their own identities as they intersect race, culture, class, and queerness.



> *We all have a sphere of influence. Each of us needs to find our own sources of courage so that we can begin to speak. There are many problems to address, and we cannot avoid them indefinitely. We cannot continue to be silent. We must begin to speak, knowing that words alone are insufficient. But I have seen that meaningful dialogue can lead to effective action. Change is possible.*
>
> *-Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum*

Activism in Adoption

CATEGORY OVERVIEWS

ETHICS & ADVOCACY

When we listen to the individuals whose lives are most impacted by adoption, when we allow ourselves to sit in uncomfortable spaces, we learn and we grow, we begin to understand the ethics, and sometimes the lack of ethics in adoption, and we become the change-makers - improving outcomes in adoption for our children, for ourselves as adoptive parents and adoption professionals, and for the birthparents who chose to place their children for adoption. ***Learning about the ethics of adoption is a daunting task: where do we start?*** We'd recommend **Dr. Gretchen Sisson's** talk about her groundbreaking new book *Relinquished: The Politics of Adoption and the Privilege of American Motherhood,* which lays bare the birthmother experience in America. **This talk is a perfect pairing with the talk given by the authors of *Adoption Unfiltered***, adopted person **Sarah Easterly**, birthmother **Kelsey Vander Vliet Ranyard**, and adoptive mother **Lori Holden** — along with their panelists, birthmother **Muthoni Gaciku-Kittredge**, birthmother **Erika Gonzales**, adopted person **Kayla Zheng**, and adoptive mother **Leslie Molloy**.

Something nobody ever talks about is the experience of going from expectant parent to birthparent, and often those terms are used interchangeably, which is coercive. **What can we do to improve the experiences and outcomes of expectant mothers who may be considering adoption?** Birthmother **Hope O Helder** and **Nam Holtz, LMSW**, a transracially adopted person born in Korea team up to discuss the critical importance of ethical independent counseling and care for expectant mothers.

Now that you have a baseline of information on which to act, how do you get started in ethical adoption advocacy? Start in your own adoption constellation. Therapist and transracially adopted person born in Columbia, **Marcella Moslow, LCSW, RPT** joins us to teach us the importance of advocating for quality care for adoptees, providing practical information for how to get started, followed by transracially adopted person **Rachel Boyer, MSW, LMSW** discussing the importance of sharing knowledge and stories as a way of centering adopted people's voices and changing dominant adoption narratives, bringing our advocacy skills out of our immediate adoption constellation and out into the world.

Consumer DNA testing is creating a seismic shift in the way we understand modern adoption, because it uncovers secrets and information that formerly, adopted people have never been able to access. How do make sense of how DNA tests are shifting modern adoption and how that affects both birthparents and adopted people? When adopted person **Bethany Fraser** took one, in her 40s, she not only unlocked a past she didn't know existed, but received information about her race and ethnicity that was radically different from the story she had always been told. Join Bethany as she unpacks how DNA testing impacted her life, and what it means for everyone in the adoption landscape.

What responsibility do we collectively hold for keeping all adopted children safe from harm? Noted ethical adoption advocate and adopted person **Kirsta Bowman** discusses the unregulated business of re-homing adopted children, including how these children are bein advertised on social media, and how there is limited oversight over these transactions.

What role can adoptive mothers play in building ethical adoption practices? Adoptive mother **Katy Finn** joins us to discuss the power adoptive mothers have to shift the adoption narrative as we all understand it by de-emphasizing the voices of adoptive parents, and instead encouring them to use their power in the adoption landscape to elevate the voices of birthparents and adopted people.

Activism in Adoption

RELATIONSHIPS

Relinquishment, Grief & Healing: A Birthparent Panel Discussion



Marcia Lane-McGee



Sarah Schmidth



Muthoni Gaciku Kittredge

In this panel discussion, we are joined by three birthmothers: **Marcia Lane-McGee**, author and co-host of the podcast *Plaid Skirts and Basic Black*, **Sarah Schmidth**, adoption education advocate, and **Muthoni Gaciku Kittredge**, co-host of the podcast *Birth Mothers Amplified,* discussing birthparent experiences with relinquishment, navigating adoption agencies, and adoptive relationships through grief and healing.

> *Continued education about first/birth parent experiences is important for the adoption community because it is easy to make judgments about what you don't understand. The narrative around adoption is inaccurate and irresponsible and having knowledge of the first/birth parent experience will help correct the issue and steer towards truth: that adoption starts with trauma.*
>
> *-Marcia Lane-McGee*

Types of Grief in Relinquishment and Adoption and Paths to Healing: A Birthmother Perspective

Adoption is widely assumed in our culture to be a win for everyone involved. However, there is a growing community of adult adopted people, first parents, and adoptive families speaking up about the trauma of relinquishment and the associated lifelong mental health issues. In this session, **Candace Cahill**, a first mother and author of the critically aclaimed memoir, *Goodbye Again*, uses her personal story of relinquishment, reunion, and the subsequent death of her son to explore types of grief and loss in adoption. With contributions from adult adopted people and adoptive families, Candace shines a light on the need for comprehensive pre-and-post-placement mental health resources and provides tools and tips for healing.





ON YOUR FEET FOUNDATION

RELATIONSHIPS

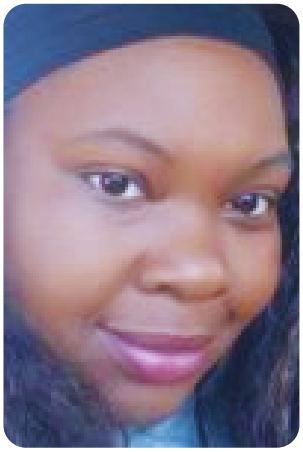
Trust, Communication & Friendship: Building Better Open Adoption Relationships



Everybody knows that a critical component of open adoption is centering the adopted child's needs and that creating a healthy open adoption relationships is something that birthparents and adoptive parents need to do together to create more positive adoption outcomes, not just for adopted people but also for themselves. But nobody talks about *how* to do it. Until now. Join **Maryellen Kandu** (birthmother) & **Pauline Pearce** (her son's adoptive mother) as they candidly share the challenges they faced, building the kind of deep trust and friendship necessary to help the adoptee in their triad thrive. Educators like Maryellen and Pauline are critical for anyone whose adoption constellation includes open adoption, because not only are both experts in adoption, but they are in the same adoption triad, so when they give advice, it comes from their lived experiences with each other, as a birthmother and her son's adoptive mother, as they built what is ultimately the roadmap you need to make your own open adoption productive, happy, and adoptee-centered.

> *"I would totally recommend this session to anyone considering adoption, especially those with trepidation about what openness looks like. This is the most positive example I have ever seen. "*
>
> *-MD, Adoption Professional & Social Worker*

Birthmothers & Adoptive Fathers: Building Healthy Open Adoption Relationships



In the adoption community, the phrase 'adoptive parents' is often code for 'adoptive moms,' and it's rare to hear from fathers at all, either birthfathers or adoptive dads, but a healthy open adoption requires the work to create and maintain it be done by *both* adoptive parents. Communication and understanding between birth mothers and adoptive fathers are critical components in a healthy open adoption relationship. **Shanyce H.** is a birth mother and **Ron Lundeen,** her childrens' adoptive father, talk candidly about their experiences in building an adoption triad based in friendship, mutual respect, and trust.



Activism in Adoption

RELATIONSHIPS

Beyond The Early Years: Growing With The Children We Placed



Nearly all adoption education focuses on adopting a baby, but does not address what happens as they baby grows into a teen, and then an adult. The tools and information you may need to bring an adopted child into your home aren't the same tools you may need as they grow into adulthood. We hear a lot about preparing for openness in the early years of the adoptees life. But what does the relationship look as the adoptee grows up? How do we prepare for a healthy open relationship through those years? Join two seasoned birthmothers, **Vicki Twomey** and **Jessica Figlio**, who have each experienced over 20 years of openness in adoption, as they share their stories.



> *We don't have a model for what it means for a birth mother to be continually involved in their child's life in the adoptive family in a way that is meaningful and productive for all parties involved. We don't have models for what open adoption is, both for the people who have to live it, but also for people outside it. Even though openness is the norm in adoption, it remains an oddity in our broader cultural idea of adoption, and people who live in an open adoption are constantly having to figure out this relationship on their own in a world that doesn't understand what that looks like.*
>
> *-Dr. Gretchen Sisson*

Navigating Adoption Relationships from a Birthmom Perspective



Birthmom **Cathy Crossno** tells the story of how she came to place her daughter for adoption, and how she was able to build a strong relationship with both her daughter and her daughter's adoptive parents. Cathy acknowledges the complexities of relationships within the adoption triad, while highlighting ways to honor birthparents in closed adoption and finding positive ways to navigate open adoption relationships. The discussion includes information for birthparents on how they can advocate for their wants and wishes and will give the audience the tools to help adopted children build a strong sense of self-identity.

ON YOUR FEET FOUNDATION

Activism in Adoption

RESILIENCE

Parenting in SPACE™: Therapeutic Parenting in Difficult Times



TreeHouse Health's President & Clinical Director **Billy Kaplan, LCSW**, discusses the critical importance of providing adopted children therapeutic parenting through an attachment-focused, trauma-informed lens. but with a reminder to parents that nobody benefits when parents don't also take care of themselves and their needs. Parents raising adopted kids know that a trauma-informed parenting approach, one that fosters feelings of safety and connectedness, is vitally important for children who have experienced the trauma of adoption, but the advice given on how to do so often encourages parents to disregard or neglect their own needs as well, leading to burnout. But you can be a trauma-informed parent without burning out. Parenting in SPACE™ is a new framework, developed by the therapists at TreeHouse health's psychotherapists, that gives parents a new set of tools for making sure they are meeting their own needs while effectively parenting adopted children.

> *Put on your oxygen mask first. Really. Because to help our kids, we have to help ourselves first. Then take care of our primary partner relationship. Then take care of the kids. If the focus is on the kids the kids won't be better won't get better, they won't feel better, because if you're anxious, your anxiety is going to spread to them.*
>
> *- Billy Kaplan, LCSW*

Making a Comback: Learning Skills to Navigate and Overcome Traumatic Experiences

Cordan James, Executive Director of Fathering Together and a transracially adopted person, is a social entrepreneur whose work focuses on education and empowerment. He rose from adversity to become a leading motivational speaker and youth/family mentor, guiding children and adults through exercises designed to build self-esteem, self-reliance, and emotional resilience. His unique insight, a product of being a child that came up through the foster care system, gives him tools built with evidence-based knowledge, along with the empathy necessary to help adoptive and foster families through their unique struggles. Cordan's talk is a judgment-free zone, aimed at providing real insight into the experiences of adopted and foster children, and his life's work is rooted in mentoring, advocacy, and leaving the world a little better than he found it.



> *I think probably the first step is to realize you don't know what you're doing. We're all trying to figure this out. So just lend yourself some mercy and some grace.*
>
> *-Cordan James, adopted person*

ON YOUR FEET FOUNDATION

Activism in Adoption

RESILIENCE

Finding Hope and Light

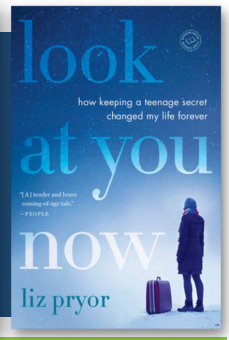


Speaker, birthmother, and author of birthmother memoir, *Finding Hope: A Birthmother's Journey into the Light*, **Hope O Helder** talks about building resilience and learning to thrive despite the circumstances life throws you. In conversation with moderator, advice columnist, and birthmother **Liz Pryor**, author of birthmother memoir *Look at You Now: How Keeping a Teenage Secret Changed My Life,* this session gives an unvarnished and nuanced look at adoption from a birthmother perspective, giving adoptive parents, adoptees, and adoption professionals the opportunity to better understand what birthparents need in order to build resilience and thrive.



> *I feel like all of us have our own unique stories of challenge, and pain, and difficulty, and no matter how often we wonder, "why do things happen in my life the way they do," it's really important to remember that it's not so much what happens to us in our lives as how we choose to get through it.*
>
> *- Liz Prior, birthmother*





Developing Radical Honesty and Emotional Intelligence



Clemencia Deleon, a birthmother who placed her child in a kinship adoption, unpacks the complexity of kinship adoption, and the importance of honesty and emotional intelligence in navigating this form of adoption. There are a lot of obvious benefits built in to kinship adoption: the adoptee has racial and cultural mirrors, are already a member of their adoptive parents' family, and and one or both of their birthparents are likely known to them as part of their extended family. But the more difficult aspects of kinship adoption are often glossed over, or ignored entirely. Kinship adoption creates complex family dynamics, emotional stress, potential for role confusion within the family, and the added pressure of managing family relationships. Families are complicated and full of history, and Clemencia addresses how that history can impact the adoption dynamic in unexpected and difficult ways, and how to best navigate complicated adoption relationships by practicing radical honesty and building emotional intelligence.

> *In order for there to be any real, authentic openness, there has to be radical honesty — honesty with yourself and honesty with the child — honesty about who you are, and why you chose adoption.*
>
> *-Clemencia Deleon, birthmother*

ON YOUR FEET FOUNDATION

Activism in Adoption

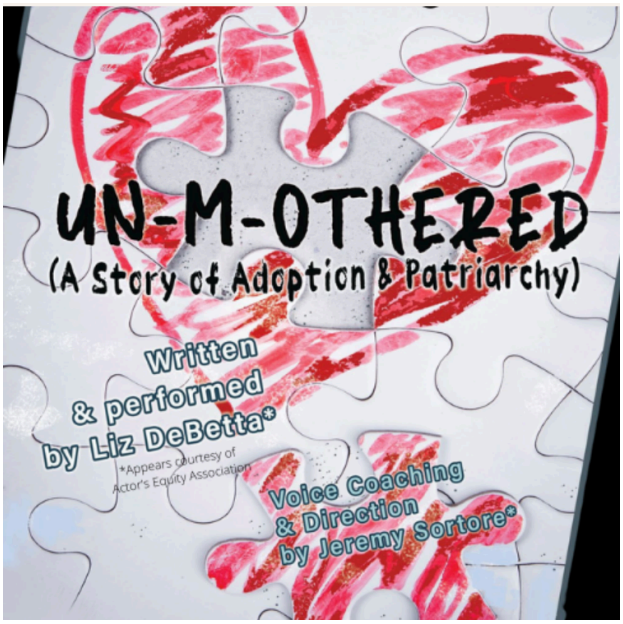
RESILIENCE

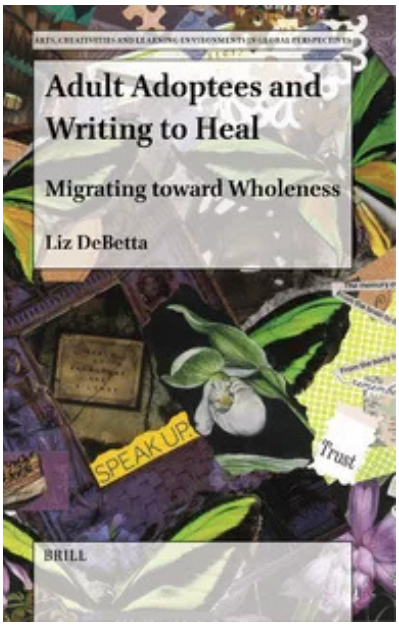
Reclaiming the Narrative: A 7-Step Approach to Trauma Healing and Adoptee Wholeness



Dr.Liz DeBetta is an adopted person and the author of *Migrating Toward Wholeness: Adult Adoptees and Writing to Heal* & Performer of the award-winning solo show *Un-M-Othered: A Story of Adoption & Patriarchy*. She is an interdisciplinary scholar-artist-activist who is committed to changing systems and helping people navigate trauma through creative processes, offering trauma-informed coaching for adoptees (adults & teens), adoptive families, and women using the methodology developed from her 2021 pilot of Migrating Toward Wholeness© with the Rudd Adoption Research Program at UMass-Amherst. She is a proud member of Actor's Equity Association, SAG-AFTRA, Affiliate Faculty at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender and part of the Diversity Scholars Network at the National Center for Institutional Diversity at the University of Michigan. She holds a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Studies (Humanities & Culture) with certificates in Women's & Gender Studies and Creative Writing.

Being able to question, reject, and rewrite the dominant narratives that make adoptees the object rather than the subject of their stories is essential to finding healing and wholeness. Using Howard Bath's 3-pillars of Trauma-informed Care (2008) and the 7-step trauma-healing framework embedded in the Migrating Toward Wholeness© method of expressive writing to heal, attendees will learn how the process of re-narrativizing for adoptees can be used to find clarity, understand the effects of trauma, and promote personal growth, to help to shift internal narratives and create healthy dialogue among families.





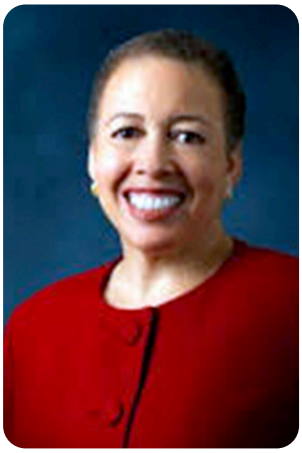
> *Liz DeBetta has created an incredibly poignant, important performance piece providing unique insight into the trauma of adoption from the inside out, beautifully told through words and movement.*
>
> *-Catherine Gigante-Brown, novelist*

ON YOUR FEET FOUNDATION

Activism in Adoption

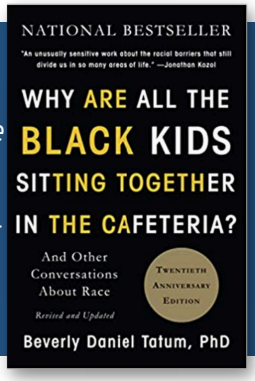
RACE & INTERSECTIONALITY

A Conversation about Race and Adoption

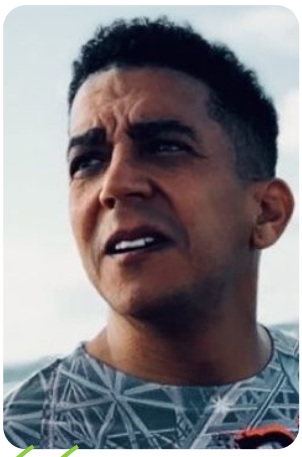


Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum, President Emerita of Spelman College and author of the best-selling and critically acclaimed book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations about Race*, guides us in a discussion that explores what it really means to be a parent of a transracially adopted person, how Black children experience racism, and how white adoptive parents and adults can learn to understand that experience. Joined by panelists **Shanyce Henley**, a birthmom, and **Kevin Hofmann**, author and transracially adopted person, walks us through critical knowledge necessary for understanding race in America, including acknowledging that birthparents often have fears when placing their child in a family of a different race or culture and that many white parents aren't provided the education they need to unpack the impact of race on their children and what concrete action they can take to navigate a transracial adoption successfully.

> *As we know, racism is a huge issue for the children, for the parents, for the family, and sometimes not talked about. For young people growing up in white families, sometimes there is a real sense of distress when the topic of racism has not been easily approached in the family. If the parents are hesitant to even acknowledge racial difference, or talk about it, that puts the child in a very challenging position.*
>
> *- Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum*



Lessons From The Life: Growing up Black in White



Author and transracially adopted person **Kevin Hofmann** was born into the racially-charged Detroit of 1967 to a white mother and a Black father, placed into foster care, and then adopted by a white minister and his wife, who were also the parents of three biological children. Hofmann's talk is based on his best-selling memoir, *Growing up Black in White,* which tells his story through the lens of hope and promise, and in his session he shares the choices his family made in order to connect him to the Black community, which included moving the family from a white neighborhood to one that was predominantly Black, providing adoptive parents a roadmap to help their children build strong racial identities based on self-respect instead of outside judgment.

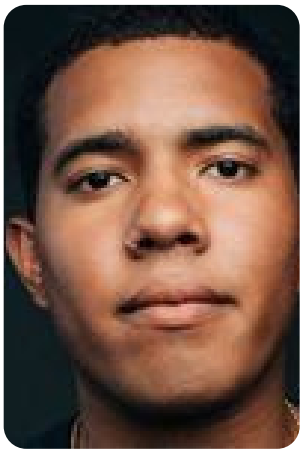
> *People do not understand the burden of being 'the only one.' It is your job as parents to help your children and those around them manage the diversity. It should be painfully obvious by now but I will state it again: your children shouldn't be the diversity in every circle they are a part of.*
>
> *- Kevin Hofmann, transracially adopted person*



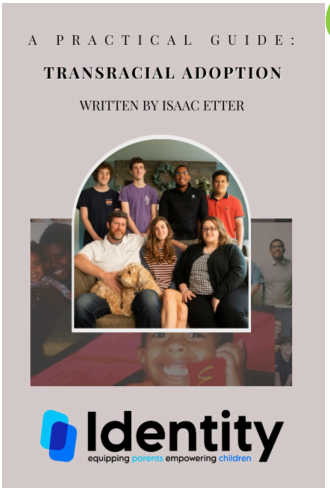
ON YOUR FEET FOUNDATION

RACE & INTERSECTIONALITY

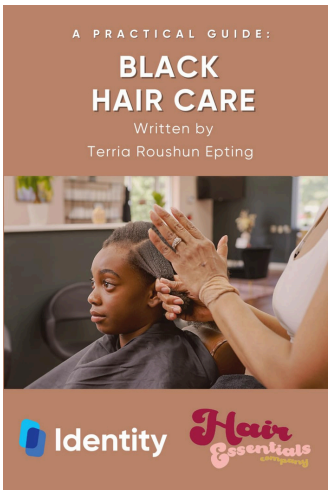
When Your Family Doesn't Look Like You



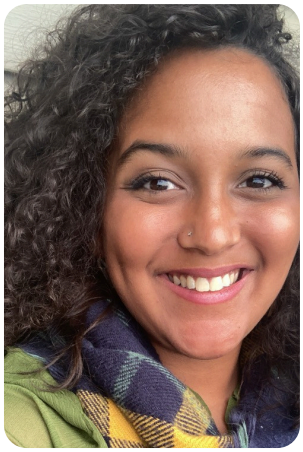
Transracially adopted person **Isaac Etter** is an activist, racial bias consultant, and social entrepreneur, and the founder of *Identity*, where the focus is on re-imaging post-placement support for adoptive and foster families. He is also the founder of the podcast *Inside Transracial Adoption*, which he co-hosts with his white adoptive mother, where they unpack the complexity of transracial adoption together, and the author of *A Practical Guide to Transracial Adoption*. Joined by moderator and birthmother **Shanyce H.** and adult adoptee **Nam Holtz, LMSW,** Isaac take a deep-dive into the intersection of race and adoption, providing an audience of adult adoptees, adoptive parents, and adoption professionals an unvarnished look at some of the challenges inherent in building a multi-racial family.



> *Your children should understand the reality of racism in America, from police brutality to what they may experience at school – all of these things – and you should be creating the opportunity for your child to come to you when they experience those things.*
>
> *-Isaac Etter, transracially adopted person*



Torie DiMartile: Racial Identity and Mental Health: Insights from Adoptees of Color



This session explores transracially adopted person **Torie DiMartile**'s dissertation research on how racial identity and family belonging is created and understood by Black adult transracial adopted people. Drawing from interviews with dozens of adult adopted people, along with her own experiences in adoption, she discusses the challenges many adopted people of color face when being raised in white homes, such as intra-familial racism, racial gaslighting, and colorblindness, and the impact that has on their connections with their adoptive family, their racial identity development, and their mental health.

Activism in Adoption

RACE & INTERSECTIONALITY

Finding My People: Joys and Challenges in Adoption and Reunion



Dr. Maxine Bryant provides an important and rarely highlighted perspective as a domestic Black adoptee adopted by Black parents during a time when formal adoption in the Black community was rare. Alongside her personal story, Maxine also brings crucial insight into the history of the practice of adoption within Black families, providing perspective regarding how Black communities 'take care of their own'. Part of the ups and downs of her story includes initiating reunion through Ancestry.com and meeting, building, and sustaining relationships with her biological siblings.

Often overlooked in adoption education, research and practice, Dr. Bryant also discusses the adult adoptee experience. Maxine offers meaningful insight into what it looks like to process and explore identity over many years and discusses how she has reached a place of healing and resilience despite her hardships. Maxine is the Director of the Center for Africana Studies and the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Center, Georgia Southern University.

Rejection, Reclamation, and Self-Acceptance: Adoptee Consciousness Model



Patrick Armstrong, a transracially adopted person born in Korea, uses the *Adoptee Consciousness Model* to share about his experience navigating rejection, reclaiming his identity, and finding self-acceptance. This process of becoming critically reflective of adoption may bring up feelings of anger, denial, and confusion as an adopted person struggles to meaningfully process and accept the impact and implications of their adoption. *How can adoptive parents support their child if their feelings and views about adoption change? How can adoption professionals prepare families to more honestly engage with the difficult and uncomfortable parts of adoption? How can fellow adoptees find self-acceptance, reclaim their racial/cultural identity and transform their loss into purpose and healing?* Patrick takes the audience through the phases of the Adoptee Consciousness Model by sharing examples and stories from his own experience and offering practical guidance on supporting adoptee well-being long-term.

THE ADOPTEE CONSCIOUSNESS MODEL

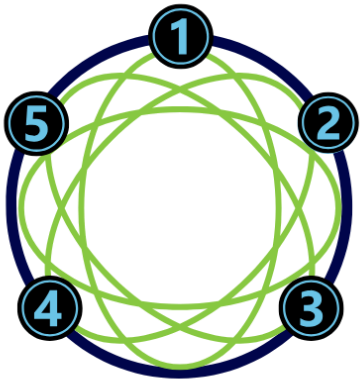
1 - Status Quo

2 - Rupture

3 - Dissonance

4 - Expansiveness

5 - Forgiveness & Activism



Susan F. Branco, JaeRan Kim, Grace Newton, Stephanie Kripa Cooper-Lewter, and Paula O'Laughlin

The Adoptee Consciousness Model, developed by **Susan F. Branco, JaeRan Kim, Grace Newton, Stephanie Kripa Cooper-Lewter**, and **Paula O'Laughlin**, describes how adopted people become aware of the larger social issues (racism, poverty, unethical agency practices etc.) which shape adoption and begin to question the mainstream narrative of adoption as an exclusively happy and positive outcome for all involved. *The model, developed by adopted people for adopted people* considers intersecting racial, ethnic, and cultural identities while also promoting empathy for adopted people wherever they are on the spiral of adoptee consciousness

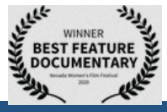
Activism in Adoption

RACE & INTERSECTIONALITY

Found in Korea: A Conversation with Documentary Filmmaker Nam Holtz, LMSW



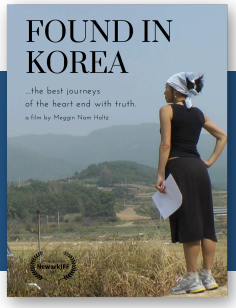
Meggin (Nam) Holtz, LMSW, a transacially adopted person born in Korea, has been involved in adoption advocacy, awareness, and support for a decade. Her award-winning documentary film, *Found In Korea* 한국에서 발견된 , about birth search, identity, and adoption was created to serve as a point of entry for meaningful conversations about adoption and the impact of adoption, and is aimed at both youth and adults. Her film serves as the catalyst for this talk, in which she discusses what it is like when transracially adopted people go back to their country of origin, in search of their family and their roots. It's a must-watch for anyone whose family was built via international adoption, but the resonance of not knowing anything about your origins and searching for where you truly come from is just as applicable for families built via domestic adoption.







> Educate yourself about adoption, period. You know, adoption from all voices: adoptive parent voices, adoptee voices, birthparent voices. I think that acknowledging the paradox of adoption is crucial.
>
> *- Nam Holtz, LMSW, transracially adopted person*



Adoption & Intersectionality: Navigating Race, Culture, Class, and Queerness as an Adoptee

Adopted people often find themselves caught in a web of different identities, systems, and predicaments, all of which intersect in complex ways and can be very difficult to navigate. **Joe Toolan,** a transacially adopted person born in Guatemala discusses what those intersectional roots meant for his experiences growing up in a white family. Transracially adopted people often find themselves in situation where they do not feel like they fit in, and can struggle with identity and self, and at the same time are attempting to navigate challenging conversations with their adopted parents around race, class, and identity formation. As a queer person, Joe talks about navigating coming out as an adopted person, being authentic, and living a truthful life, both with his adoptive parents and in reunion with his birthfamily. Joe also discusses working as an advocate for the community, as a leader in the non-profit and advocacy world, and how education and relationships can make a better world for adoptees.



> Adoptees often struggle with feelings of not being enough because we've experienced the loss and potential rejection associated with our adoption.
>
> *-Joe Toolan, transracially adopted person*

Activism in Adoption

ETHICS & ADVOCACY

Relinquished: The Politics of Adoption and the Privilege of American Motherhood



Sociologist **Gretchen Sisson** discusses her new book *Relinquished: The Politics of Adoption and the Privilege of American Motherhood*, and her ten years of research on adoption in the United States. How do relinquishing mothers feel about the support and counseling they received (or didn't) during their pregnancies? How is openness explained to expecting mothers, and does the marketing of open adoption align with their reality of open adoption? How do birthmothers feel about their adoptions over time, and how can their longer-term needs and traumas inform how we support mothers moving forward? Where does our society fail birth mothers, and what do they wish more people understood about their experiences? Through her multiple interviews over the years with numerous birthmothers, she uncovers the answers to these questions and more, providing adoptive parents the information necessary to better understand their child's first mother, and her experience as part of an adoption triad.

> Herein lies the cultural contradiction of how we portray adoption. We view certain parents as fundamentally incapable of and inadequate to the task of raising their children, but relinquishment demonstrates their worthiness. They are better parents because they do not parent their child; the permanent separation rendered by adoption redeems them of their deviations and deficiencies. Birthmothers are perfect mothers —the embodiment of love and self-sacrifice— until they express any desire to raise or know their child.
>
> *-Dr. Gretchen Sisson*

Advocating for Quality Care for Adoptees



Marcella Moslow, LCSW, RPT, is a trauma therapist and a transacially adopted person born in Columbia. Adoptee activism doesn't always have to be through large scale practices or platforms, it can take the form of becoming educated and advocating for adoptees who face disparities when it comes to receiving care whether it be from schools, clinics, medical providers, therapists and more. Historically, there has been a lack of quality care available for adoptees and those impacted by the experience of adoption. In this session, Marcella discusses the role of activism in bridging the gaps in understanding about the unique needs of adopted people. Marcella will share insight on ways adoptees, birth/first families, adoptive families, professionals and those wishing to be allies can work toward/advocate for quality/more informed care that will promote more comprehensive healing.

> For me, activism within the realm of adoption allows me to speak out on the realities of the adoptee experience that go unaddressed in the mainstream adoption narrative. It provides a way to advocate for quality and attuned care for this community that has so often been overlooked and provided subpar care. It allows me to create space to promote communal healing, advocate for societal change and empower fellow adoptees to share their truths.
>
> *-Marcella Moslow, LCSW, RPT*

ON YOUR FEET FOUNDATION

Activism in Adoption

ETHICS & ADVOCACY

Adoption Unfiltered Book Tour (Filmed Live at The Book Stall, Winnetka, Ill)

Sara Easterly



adoptee

Kelsey Vander Vliet Ranyard

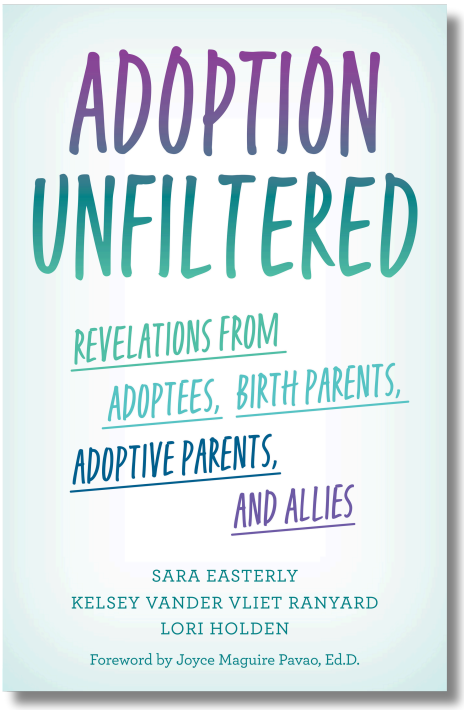


birthmother

Lori Holden



adoptive mother



Along with Panelists Muthoni Gaciku-Kittredge, *birthmother*, Erika Gonzales, *birthmother*, Kayla Zheng, *adoptee*, and Leslie Molloy, *adoptive mother*.

We were honored to be able to host the Chicagoland stop on the Adoption Unfiltered Book Tour. This AiA session was filmed live at that event, and features the authors — adoptee Sara Easterly, birthmother Kelsey Vander Vliet Ranyard, and adoptive mother Lori Holden — along with their panelists, Muthoni Gaciku-Kittredge (birthmother), Erika Gonzales (birthmother), Kayla Zheng (adoptee), and Leslie Molloy (adoptive mother). Learn more about what the authors discovered during their research into adoption from each side of the adoption triad — they interviewed dozens of adoptees, birth parents, adoptive parents, social workers, therapists, and other allies — all of whom shared candidly about their challenges in adoption. While finding common ground in the sometimes-contentious space of adoption may seem like a lofty goal, it reveals the authors' optimistic aim: working together with truth and transparency to move toward healing.

> We wanted to 'work across the aisles' in adoption, and show what it's like when adults who have lived this experience are willing to come together and work together to create true, meaningful change.
>
> *-Kelsey Vander Vliet Ranyard, birthmother*

THE BOOK STALL

Our thanks to The Book Stall for hosting this event.

811 Elm Street, Winnetka, Illinois 60093 - 847-446-8880

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Activism in Adoption

ETHICS & ADVOCACY

IMPROVING EXPERIENCES FOR EXPECTANT MOMS CONSIDERING ADOPTION

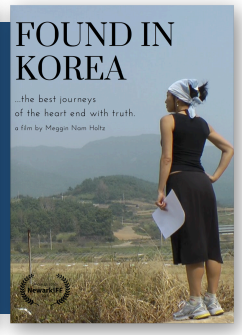


Hope O Helder, birthmom and author of critically acclaimed memoir, *Finding Hope: A Birthmother's Journey into the Light* and **Nam Holtz, LMSW**, a therapist, transacially adopted person born in Korea, and award-winning documentary filmmaker, *Found in Korea*, discuss how we can improve outcomes for expectant moms considering adoption, including insuring access to more resources and unbiased options counseling aimed at giving her the support she needs to make an informed decision. When we improve the hospital experience for expectant mothers, we mitigate their trauma, and *if* they place, the trauma for their child, giving them, and the adoptive parents, a better chance at improving outcomes and creating a healthy open adoption triad.



> Someday, you are going to have to tell your child the circumstances surrounding their adoption. Are you going to be able to tell them that you did everything you could to make sure their adoption was ethical? That you made sure that their birth mother had access to the resources she needed to heal?
>
> *- Hope O Helder, birthmother*





Raising the Level of Adoption Competence

The importance of sharing knowledge and stories to help shape a new narrative and create a world where adopted people are seen and supported.



Rachel Boyer, MSW, LMSW, a social worker and transracially adopted person provides her expertise and insight as a transracial adoptee and social worker passionate about trauma-informed and adoption competent social work practice. She discusses how our society views adoption, where the gaps are in adoption storytelling (and why those gaps have persisted), who those gaps are serving, and how we can learn to engage in adoption advocacy at the local, state, and federal level, providing concrete examples and suggestions for how to do so, encouraging everyone to make their voice heard, both to provide diverse perspectives on adoption to our media and lawmakers, but also so that we can all work alongside adult adopted people, who are currently shouldering the bulk of the burden of advocacy.

> I am so excited that birth moms are finally getting a strong voice. We are so much more than a stereotype or a statistic.
>
> *-LF, birthmom*

ON YOUR FEET FOUNDATION

Activism in Adoption

ETHICS & ADVOCACY

UNVEILING THE UNKNOWN: HOW DNA TESTING IS CHANGING THE ADOPTION NARRATIVE



Bethany Fraser is a transacially adopted person and host of the podcast, The Adoptee Diaries: Truth, Trust, and Transparency. Bethany always knew she was adopted, but it wasn't until she did a home DNA kit did she learn some stunning secrets about her origins, including the discovery that she was multiracial, something that had been kept hidden from her, and which ultimately led her to connect with her birth family. Bethany is leading the conversation on the intersection of ancestry and adoption, the lifelong search for identity and belonging, and the unique challenges of being mixed in America. Drawing from her own emotional journey of discovery, Bethany sheds light on the complex issues surrounding adoptee identity and family relationship, and how the power of DNA testing is reshaping the adoption narrative, especially in closed adoptions.

> I know now that a piece of my personality comes directly from what I experienced. It's the lies, not having context, that feeling of not being good enough. It's only now that I finally feel like I am able to trust my gut; finally I'm able to say no. Now I trust my judgment about people. Now I make my own decisions and get to embrace life unapologetically.
>
> *-Bethany Fraser, transracially adopted person*

Shifting the Adoption Narrative: The Role and Power of Adoptive Mothers



While reflecting on her theater piece, *Placing Home*, which centers birthmother stories, adoptive mother **Katy Finn** unpacks the powerful role adoptive mothers can play in shifting the pervasive adoption narrative.Katy's talk centers around three questions: *what role does the adoptive mother play in shifting the narrative? Where can these shifts happen?* And finally, *why does it matter?* Katy uses examples from her own journey in adoption to demonstrate why this shift in thinking is so necessary, and addresses how both prospective adoptive parents and adoptive parents can take clear action towards empowering birthparents and adoptees to bring their stories to the forefront of the adoption landscape.

> For a child to grow up happy and healthy, they have to be secure in their identity, and we know that adoption brings a whole slew of complexities to a child's identity. Identity involves traits from the birthfamily. We are very quick in our family to say, "It's not nature OR nurture; it's nature AND nurture.
>
> *-Katy Finn, Adoptive Mother*

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Activism in Adoption

ETHICS &ADVOCACY

Kirsta Bowman | Advertising Children on Social Media: Ethical Concerns in Rehoming Practices

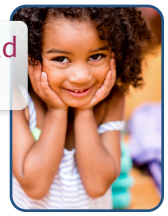


Kirsta Bowman, an adopted person well-known on social media for her thoughtful and nuanced videos discussing the adoption landscape, joins us to discuss her research into unethical rehoming practices on social media. Unregulated custody transfer, often referred to as 'rehoming', is the practice of adoptive parents transferring legal custody of their child to another individual or family without the involvement of the child welfare, oversight, or other appropriate systems. Photos and biographies of minor children whose adoptive parents want to rehome them can be found in numerous places on social media, advertising them to potential new parents without concern of who they might be.

After Kirsta's talk, we received the following:

"I'm writing to thank you for the excellent webinar your organization put on a few weeks ago. A contact of mine at the U.S. Department of State shared the invitation with me because the Uniform Law Commission (ULC) recently finalized a model law on this topic called the Uniform Unregulated Child Custody Transfer Act (UUCCTA). The UUCCTA provides states with a uniform regulatory framework to deal with two issues: (1) the unregulated custody transfer of children; and (2) provision of better information and guidance to prospective adoptive parents of children in certain adoptions.

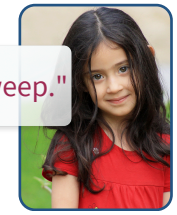
"Anna is an organized and clean child who keeps her room neat."





"David is stronger than he looks, and loves to do yardwork."

"Cayleigh loves to clean and sweep."



* The comments above are real and taken from a rehoming Facebook group; the photos are stock photos and the names are changed, to protect the children's privacy.

The UUCCTA has already been enacted in Utah and Washington and will likely be enacted in more states in the future. I wanted to write to share some information about this model law with the folks at your organization and any attendees of the Advertising Children on Social Media: Ethical Concerns in Rehoming Practices webinar who may be interested in working to enact this model law in their states."

> My jaw was on the floor throughout this entire talk. How is there no oversight for these kids? Who is keeping them safe?
>
> *-Activism in Adoption attendee, adoptive father*

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AFFILIATE PROGRAM

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