

The Constellation

Spring 2009 Newsletter

“Like adoption, a mosaic is a picture created of bits and pieces. The spaces between remind us that each piece has a history of its own.”



Honoring our Histories

Celebrating our Lives

Letter From the President

Ally Burr-Harris

Dear Constellation Members,

I am honored to step into the role of Board President for Adoption Mosaic this year, and I am eternally grateful for the phenomenal job that Debbie Kaufman has done as Board President for the past 3 years. Debbie and Astrid have worked closely together and both deserve many kudos for helping Adoption Mosaic to grow from a "baby" organization to the strong, vibrant organization that we are today after just 4 years in existence.

For those of you who do not know me, I am a fairly new transplant to Portland. Our family moved here over two years ago from St. Louis, Missouri. In addition to being an adoptive parent, I work part-time as a child psychologist at Children's Program specializing in attachment, trauma, and adoption issues. My initial exposure to Adoption Mosaic was at a Transracial Parenting workshop. I thought I was attending as an adoption professional scoping out a fellow adoption professional (who was this Astrid person anyway?) in my new town. However, when I attended this workshop, I quickly took off my professional hat and put on my personal hat. I am a parent of three children, two of whom were adopted transracially. I felt tremendous guilt as a parent because my children had lost their African American village in St. Louis, and I had managed to relocate us to a particularly white part of Portland. Astrid helped me take a good look at ways that I needed to build up support for our family here in Portland. She stretched me to take a closer look at issues like white privilege. After this one workshop, I knew I would be more involved with Adoption Mosaic. (Little did I know I'd be President of the Board two years later). I saw something in Adoption Mosaic that was profoundly different from any other adoption support service that I had encountered. Adoption Mosaic involves all members of the constellation. This can be uncomfortable at times. It can stretch us and take us outside of our comfort zone. Yet, it provides a huge opportunity for growth and understanding. By sitting down at a table with birth parents, adult adoptees, and adoptive parents, we all learn from one another.

What's Inside

Why Adoption Mosaic?: pg 2+

Schedule At a Glance: pg 2

Program Overview: pg 3

Thank you: pg 3

Ask Astrid: pg 4

Movie Review: pg 5

Book Review: pg 5

Food For Thought:

Immigration: pg 6

Shanza: pg 6

Contributors: pg 7

Our Board of Directors has experienced some particularly exciting growth this year. This newsletter marks the introduction of six new board members: Doug Ricks, Saranna Weller-Filz, Lani Faith, Kelly Jeske, Liz Rogers, and Sandy Carter-Templeman. In addition to these new members, Michael McGrorty joined the Board in the middle of 2008. In expanding our Board of Directors, we bring many new talents, skills and life experiences to our table. Within our Board, we have domestic, international, and transracial adoptees, LGBTQ members, single adoptive parents, adoption professionals, educators, men and women, international, transracial, and domestic adoptive parents, marketing professionals, persons with expertise in fundraising and grant writing, and financial experts. As we expand our Board in the future, we hope to also better represent other constellation members such as birthparents, and professionals with important areas of expertise such as adoption-related law and medicine.

My vision as Board President is to empower our phenomenal staff to create and develop the organization of their dreams. I believe that we are well on our way.

Adoptive fathers your input is needed! Please take a moment to complete our new survey. We want to hear what is important to you!



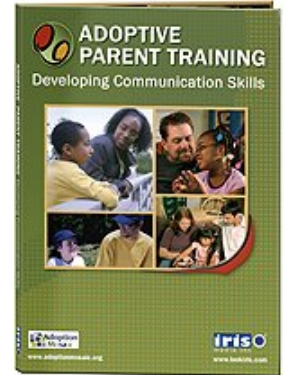
Did you know that Adoption Mosaic is working on a Youth's Movie Booklet? Suggestions? We want to hear them!

**Be heard on Adoption Mosaic's Blog or Email
info@adoptionmosaic.org**

Adoption Mosaic's Expanded Programming

Ally Burr-Harris

Most of you are familiar by now with the programs that Adoption Mosaic offers. Let me just highlight some of the ways in which our services have grown. We now have quarterly newsletters, a constantly expanding website and blog with tons of resources including interviews, book reviews, dialogues, articles, links and book and movie reviews. We offer programs for adoptive parents, waiting parents, adult adoptees, and youth adoptees. Due to the popularity of our activity groups for adopted youth, we now offer groups at least three times a year in Portland, and have even expanded this program to Eugene! We are in the process of developing programs specifically addressing the needs and interests of birth parents, LGBTQ parents, single parents, adoptive fathers, and school professionals. In addition to our well known programs such as trans-racial parenting workshops, adoption movie group, adoption readiness classes, life-story books, and discussing adoption with children, we have seen new programs come into the fold in this last year. We now offer attachment-focused workshops for parents of younger and older children.



For those who are unable to make it to our groups or workshops, we are constantly increasing our print and media resources. After two years of research and development in collaboration with Iris Media Inc., we are thrilled to offer our *Adoptive Parent Training: Developing Communication Skills* DVD. This DVD demonstrates how adoptive parents can communicate openly and honestly with their family members, friends, and especially their children. Following on the heels of our popular Movie Group Booklet we are also developing a Youth Movie Booklet.

Adoption Mosaic has also grown behind the scenes. Our finance, development, marketing, and program committees are well-organized, clear in their missions, growing in membership, and working together to meet the goals of our community. We are extraordinarily grateful to our dedicated base of volunteers that continues to grow. Come join us as we continue to stretch, grow, and reach all members of the adoption constellation through meaningful, educational, and supportive programming. Just wait and see what we pull off in 2009!

Thank you to the Ginocchio Family!



The Ginocchio Family

**Clockwise from left: Hudson (6yrs),
Chris, Lila (14Mo), & Rachel,**

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the Ginocchio Family for their generous contributions to Adoption Mosaic. It indeed has been an honor to be a part of their adoption journey.

Rachel writes:

"We've been attending Adoption Mosaic workshops, with the hope of

getting answers to our questions about trans-racial adoption. We stumbled through discussions and activities, and with Astrid's inspiring guidance, realized that adoption is a process of learning which questions to ask, opening our hearts, and finding answers within.

In October, we brought our daughter Lila home (at age 11 months) from Vietnam. In lieu of presents, we asked family and friends to welcome Lila by making a contribution to Adoption Mosaic. We wanted to thank those who did and thank Adoption Mosaic for continuing to be part of our adoption journey."

Why Adoption Mosaic? -MereAnn Reid

As a therapist with a background in youth advocacy and juvenile court, I believe strongly in the idea that healing can take place through counseling, expressive art, and shared group experiences. I came to Adoption Mosaic looking for a place where adoption, family history, and a sense of belonging can be approached without a diagnosis or pathologizing of these experiences, even when they are complex and tough to discuss. I have found Adoption Mosaic to be a welcoming and inclusive organization where discussion and debate are invited, perspectives on political and personal issues are shared, and the community can begin exploring the factors that shape adoption practice in the U.S. I have found brave men and women, from teens to grandparents, who are willing to practice talking about topics that shape family life, identity, and social policy. I have found challenges to my own ideas about international and domestic adoption and discovered nuances of my own beliefs, even as they develop in conversation with others. In Adoption Mosaic, I believe I have found an organization with heart and a passion for changing the way adoptions are practiced, a group of people dedicated to helping support healthy families, and a collective community willing to challenge each other to develop stronger supports for all members of the adoption constellation. I feel very fortunate to be included in this work and want to continue to make Adoption Mosaic more accessible, engaging, and dynamic.



Ask Astrid

Quarterly we feature your questions answered by Astrid Dabbeni, please submit your questions to tara@adoptionmosaic.org with "ask astrid" in the subject line

Dear Astrid,

My wife and I adopted our daughter from foster care when she was 18 months old. She is of Mexican decent and is now 5 years old. We are contemplating whether or not to try and get her into a full immersion Spanish program. How important do you think it is for our daughter to learn Spanish? -Jacob

Dear Jacob,

Less than a year ago I too was trying to decide what the best program/school would be for my then 5 year old daughter. Wow, what a lot of work! It truly consumed me! Like you, I was trying to decide on either a neighborhood school or a Spanish immersion program.

When my sister and I came to the United States we only spoke Spanish; however, it only took us about 6 months to lose our mother tongue which was soon replaced with English, our new mother tongue. Now, whenever I return to Colombia, about every two years, I struggle with the language as if I were 2 years old. Not being able to speak Spanish makes it challenging to learn about Colombia and to feel confident and proud of being Colombian. I believe cultural awareness and confidence in one's birth country/community is extremely important. However, the inability to communicate in a common language can make it difficult, if not impossible to develop such awareness and confidence. I, therefore, feel language acquisition is a step in setting the ground work for the commitment to your child's awareness and understanding of their birth culture. I know this involves so much more than sending them to a language immersion program in the hope that they will learn and love the language, but giving your child this opportunity to learn Spanish is a huge step in your commitment to your child's present and future awareness and understanding of their birth culture.

I am currently raising my daughter tri-lingual (Italian, Spanish and English). What do you think? Perhaps I'm trying to compensate for something. :)

**Why Adoption Mosaic?
-Michael McGrorty**

As an employee of the Oregon Post Adoption Resource Center (ORPARC), I worked professionally with Astrid Dabbeni, one of Adoption Mosaic's cofounders, and accompanied Astrid's journey in helping to form what is today Adoption Mosaic. Since Adoption Mosaic's inception I have been loosely involved, offering my volunteer services in some manner or another, and in July 2008 became an official member of the organization's Board of Directors. My participation in Adoption Mosaic arises out of my eagerness to educate myself, other families, and the community about the world of adoption. Something else that drew me to Adoption Mosaic is that the organization is sensitive and values all individuals who make up the greater adoption constellation, and all those who are touched by adoption in some manner. Adoption Mosaic continues to reach out to communities that might otherwise not feel included. As the new program committee chairperson, I am excited to help lead a group of qualified and sensitive people to implement and carry out Adoption Mosaic's many workshops and programs, with the goal of educating the community about adoption. Adoption Mosaic's founders have performed an exemplary job in making Mosaic what it is today. It is now part of my privilege to help Mosaic reach farther and touch the lives of more constellation members.

**Why Adoption Mosaic?
-Liz Rogers**

My piece of Mosaic is as a Korean-American adoptee interested in expanding the discussion around how adoption intersects politics, race and class, in the hope of moving forward toward better practices where human rights and equality take precedence over business and privilege.



**Why Adoption Mosaic?
-Saranna Weller-Filz**

I am thankful that there is an organization that respects and honors all parts of the adoption constellation, and helps to empower young adoptees to feel proud about being adopted. I am grateful I get to be apart of it.

Adoption Mosaic Movie Review

Then She Found Me (2008) Review by Livia Montana



April Epner is 39-year-old schoolteacher and adoptee who longs to have a biological child. But her life is turned upside down when her husband leaves her, her adoptive mother dies, and then her first mother, a flamboyant talk show host, finds her. Despite misgivings, April forms a relationship with her birthmother, falls in love with a single father, and discovers that she is pregnant. But just when April believes that her dreams of having a biological child and finding a loving relationship have come true, her life changes yet again.

“through the viewing of mainstream movies the adoption experience is shared and normalized”

Adoption Mosaic Movie Reviews are written with the intent of fostering conversation amongst movie viewers. Viewers are encouraged to use our “Points to Consider” to discuss the movie

-OR-

Come join us for a movie and facilitated discussion at Adoption Mosaic’s Movie night. Visit www.adoptionmosaic.org for more information, and be sure to drop by our blog to continue the discussion!

<http://blog.adoptionmosaic.org>

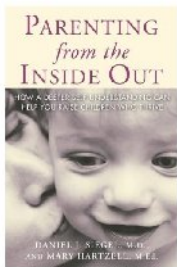
Points to Consider:

- 1) Throughout most of the movie, April objects to the statement that having a biological child is the same thing as adopting a child. Do you agree or disagree with her? How did watching April deal with her fertility issues make you feel? In what ways do you think fertility issues might differ for adoptees as opposed to those who grew up with their biological families?
- 2) What did you feel about April’s brother commenting that she doesn’t know what it feels like *not* to be adopted? What did you think of her brother’s explanation of what it felt like for him grow up with his biological parents?
- 3) How did you feel about April’s birthmother, Bernice, finding her? What did you think about the stories that Bernice tells April about how she became pregnant and why she relinquished her?

Adoption Mosaic Book Review

Parenting From the Inside Out: How a Deeper Self-Understanding Can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive

By Daniel Seigel and Mary Hartzell, Review by Ally Burr-Harris



If you pick up this book expecting another parenting guide, you are in for a surprise. The beauty of *Parenting from the Inside Out* is that parents are challenged to understand and connect with their children by first becoming more mindful of what is going on inside themselves. The authors are a surprising duo; a psychiatry professor with expertise in neurobiology and attachment and a child-development specialist and parent educator. Through this collaboration, they explain how relationships with others directly affect the development of the brain, and they offer parents a refreshing framework for raising resilient children. Rather than feeling overwhelmed with the parenting “to-do list” embedded in the book, parents are left feeling empowered by the opportunities to raise children who thrive. As parents, we are asked to look within and examine

our own emotional reactions to situations with our children. We are then asked to make sense of our reactions based on our own stories and our own attachment histories. The emphasis here is on self-reflection and resolution of experiences as a foundation for healing and connecting with others. First, parents are asked to utilize these skills on themselves, and then they are asked to apply these skills with their children.

I confess that I am a person who wants to understand *why* something is important, not just *what* to do. For this reason, I appreciate the emphasis that Seigel and Hartzell place on understanding the role of neurobiology. Readers will come away knowing the difference between terms like amygdala and orbital frontal cortex. They will also learn how brain development can be impacted by early trauma and loss. Even more, they will learn pivotal ways in which parents can impact their child’s brain development. This in turn can lead to a trajectory of change in multiple arenas: moral development, social development, emotional regulation, and cognitive development. The good news is that the book is structured in such a way that readers who are less inclined to want to understand brain terminology can simply skip

(Continued on page 7)



Food for Thought

Thoughts from the Adoption Constellation



Shanza

By An Adoptee (11 yrs)

I am from hard times
 From killing and bombs that would rain down from the sky
 I am from the rich lavish carpets that would cover the floors
 Soft beneath my feet
 From the sparkling water the sweet smelling gardens and the soft cushions
 to the dry clay like earth as I sit on the floor I remember
 I am from loss and death traveling to safety with explosions behind us like a
 cat pouncing on its prey a mouse which is us
 I am from my mother's tears and the terror stricken face of my sister as the
 bomb rockets down and kills my sisters
 I am from the blue mosque
 Which I love dearly
 From my father's prayers to the lord and I know I am safe as long as God
 protects me
 I am from my older life where I sewed for fun
 But now I see girls who must beg on the streets and sew rugs all day long
 sweltering under the heat of glistening sun
 I am from hours on the roof
 Praying
 Wishing
 I was somewhere else
 Away from the fears this place has brought me
 I still dream of my old life
 Where I could forget all of my worries
 But I know that it will never be
 The same

ourselves as immigrants. I was so grateful Liz was able to step in and explain. Polo had, what I interpreted as, a look of concern and confusion. After the initial shock Polo and I were experiencing (mine of "Wow, I have never thought of this" and his of "Wow, she has never thought of this"), we were able to engage in a rich conversation which included Polo explaining that immigrating here is such an important part of who we are and that by denying this we are denying an important part of our selves, since how we came to this country does play a role in defining who we are.

Since that coffee date in December, I have put a lot of thought into this and have begun to explore and dialogue with friends (both non-adopted and adopted) what it means to immigrate to this country. I took a small poll in the last couple of months with close friends and family, and there is no doubting it - everyone I have spoken to agrees that my sister and I did indeed immigrate to this country. However, there is not clarity around whether those same people consider us immigrants by definition. So, I find myself asking? What is it about the adoption process that seems to makes our immigrant status go away? And is that a good thing or bad?

As all of this is new territory for me I would love to hear your thoughts and ideas about this topic. Please join me in this conversation on our blog at <http://blog.adoptionmosaic.org/>

Immigrant

By Astrid Dabbeni

"I am sorry, what did you say?"

This last December I met with Polo, a writer for the Asian Reporter and author of a new book *Counter Culture, immigrant stories from Portland cafe counters*, who was born in Indonesia and immigrated to the United States some years later. I was meeting with him and Liz Rogers, an Adoption Mosaic board member and Korean adoptee, to discuss various issues of trans-racial adoption.

I was very much enjoying our conversation and learning more about Polo's amazing work in the immigrant community. At about the same time in our conversation that I found myself saying "Wow, he is doing so much for "that" community," Polo asked "So, how old were you and your sister when the two of you immigrated to this country?" Instead of just answering "4 and 5 years old," I paused because my head was racing with questions of "What does he mean, who is he referring to, what is he talking about?" In somewhat of a confused state I said "I'm sorry, what did you say?" Before Polo had a chance to repeat himself, Liz piped in and explained that she too had been taken back when she recently had been asked the exact same question. As I sat there speechless (and as many of you who know me well know, this does not happen often), Liz proceeded to explain to Polo that for many of us who were adopted internationally we don't see

