Born from Love

Endearing Adoption Stories
Welcome to our e-book edition of **Born from Love**! We are proud to have compiled these beautiful stories of Legal Adoption in a single golden thread.

Adoption is a socio-legal process of providing a permanent family to a child whose parents have, voluntarily or involuntarily, relinquished parental authority over the child.

Adoption is the best form of alternative care for children who cannot be with their biological families. It provides a child with a permanent family and home, where he or she is loved as their own as if born to them.

Over the years, we have witnessed challenges and triumphs of adoption in the Philippines. From social stigma, society is gradually becoming more aware and open to adoption.

More families are coming out, applying to become adoptive families. Some of them now share their inspiring and heartwarming stories of how they found joy and happiness in caring for a child; and the other way around, where grown up adoptive children share how blessed they are to be in a loving family brought about by adoption.

“**Born from Love**” is a moving compilation of adoption stories rooted on the joy of having a permanent family. For after a long journey of waiting and hoping, here comes the greatest gift of all - a faithful family built on the firm foundation of love.
The process of going through the legal adoption in the Philippines is a long road to take, filled with daunting challenges that call for patience, perseverance, endurance, determination, and optimism. But it is worth all the efforts as a family blooms in this seemingly web of adversity.

Each narrative offers a spell of their own, enticing the readers to experience the beauty of adoption, from longing to fulfillment and onward to a complete cycle of family love.

NORFIL Foundation Inc., with the close engagement of the NORFIL Adoptive Parents (NAP) Team, aims to share these stories to capture the heart, mind and soul of the readers. Sometimes, a story is all we need to express the compassion that is nurtured within our being; to be reminded of our existence for others; and to deliver what we can in our big and small ways.

Little acts of kindness, gentleness and humility change a lifetime forever. We call upon your involvement as you join us in our advocacy on legal adoption.

We honor the Adoptive Parents who stood up and accepted God’s children into their homes and lives. And we invite our dear readers to be part in our Adoption journey. Thank you so much and God bless us all!

Ma. Teresa R. Nuqui
Executive Director, NORFIL

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(Handwritten signature)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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**Angela Maria L. Pangan**
President and Chair
Board of Trustees

**Ma. Teresa R. Nuqui**
Executive Director

**Ma. Robel V. Luna**
Program Manager

**Ma. Christina M. Llanto**
Domestic Adoption Social Worker
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worth the waiting time</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meant to be</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just the right fit</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazing grace</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembered by God</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The little angel at the crossroad of our lives</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love before the ‘first sight’</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God works in mysterious, overwhelming, thrilling, humorous, joyous, and very touching ways</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A special calling</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our little big joy</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angelum meum (my angel)</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then there was Jen!</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liebestraume, liebesleid, liebesfreud</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothers and sisters</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Worth the waiting time
Ian Paul and Maria Antonia Cabbab
Five years of busy careers, travelling and enjoying our married life together quickly passed by. We loved being with our nieces, nephews and kids of our friends; but we knew that becoming parents would be a different situation. We discussed, prayed and agreed that we will adopt a child to complete our family, after 5 years of married life, countless discussions and several attempts of fertility treatments.

We attended the Adoption Orientation seminar at NORFIL in February 2015; but tarried further just to be 100% sure of our decision. Finally, we submitted the complete documentation needed by NORFIL in October 2015.

At first we wanted a boy; but were convinced to open our hearts to a baby girl. After 8 long months of waiting, the matching committee finally matched us with a healthy baby girl. Our case worker sent us some pictures and were called in for a discussion. NORFIL Directress, Ms. Ma.Teresa Nuqui and assigned Social Worker informed us this baby girl has learned to walk and displays a happy disposition.

We met our baby girl 4 days before her first birthday at the receiving home, where her birth mother had surrendered her earlier on. The head nurse of the institution walked into the room carrying her. She looked at us with curiosity, as if asking who these strangers are in front of her. We carried her and she started to cry in our arms. The head nurse handed me a bottle of milk to feed her. “It is her naptime, she’s probably sleepy.” she said.

It was an emotional, electrically-charged moment for us. We had tears in our eyes as we gazed at this baby. It was definitely love at first sight.

We took off from work to spend time with our baby girl.

We introduced her to family members and friends.

At the onset, she was not smiling and responding to us but would simply sit quietly; play with toys; and sleep through the night without making a fuss. Around 3 days after coming home, she started to giggle and smile when we made funny sounds or when we tickle her. One memorable moment for us, is
when she started to embrace us when we carried her. She would raise her arms up asking to be carried and to this day, she enjoys sleeping next to us.

She is a happy child. She enjoys giving hugs and being tickled. We play peek-a-boo and read picture books. She loves to sing and dances in her own choreography. At 18 months she started saying words like: dog (doh), cat (tat), ball, Papa, Mama and typical of a toddler, her favorite is “no,no,no!”

At age 2 years and 10 months, she loves to ride in “Papa’s car” which she describes as “big” emoting with big eyes. She loves dogs and horses, inviting everyone to play with her.
Meant to be
Manoel Johann and Nilia Ces
We are Manoel Johann Ces and Nilia Ces. We got married on December 05, 2009 and planned to start a family right away. After a few years of trying with no success, Nilia went to several OB Gyne specialists for consultation and tests. She was diagnosed with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) and was asked to take medications and try to get pregnant. After a few cycles with no success, she was advised to try again without medications.

Few months passed and still not pregnant, we consulted an Infertility Specialist. Nilia went through a series of laboratory tests. Results were okay, while she still has PCOS. She was then advised again to do undergo infertility work-ups and lose weight for better chances of conceiving.

It was in early 2014 when the option of adoption came to our mind. While we are still working to have our own biological child, we wanted to open our home to someone whom we can care for as our own child. We researched online and saw an Adoption Helpdesk in SM Fairview that suggested 3 agencies accredited by DSWD; but did not contact any of them. The DSWD website provided a link to NORFIL and decided to visit their office on November 07, 2014, asked about adoption. We attended a Pre-adoption forum on November 15 as it was a prerequisite for our adoption application besides a list of required documents. We completed and submitted the requirements on February 05, 2015.

Months passed eagerly waiting to be matched to a child. Finally in November 2015, we were matched to a 1 year old boy! As we were excited with the news, we went to NORFIL immediately. They showed us pictures of the baby and reports on his background and medical history. We fell in love with him though we had yet to meet him. Happily, we signed the document stating that we are accepting the child.

Two weeks later we went to the Parenting Foundation in Sucat, Paranaque to get our child. We met the foster family who took care of this baby boy for almost a year. We met him at the office, running and playing around with his little toy car.

After signing documents, we brought our child home!
My wife and I decided that we rename him Neil Manuel. Neil as patterned after my wife’s nickname which is Nhil. And Manuel after the name of my father.

Our families warmly welcomed our child and shared our joy. Since it was holiday season, Neil was with us to a number of family gatherings.

This is our story of Love and Joy. We are happy to have considered adopting a child. ♥
Just the right fit
Ron and Maria Lourdes Elacio
“You complete me.” This famous statement from the movie Jerry Maguire seems to resonate deep within every couple who are madly, deeply, in love with each other, eager to take that next step, to commit to a future together. Those words are not always true. More than four years into our marriage, we know for certain that something is lacking. We take pride in that our relationship is strong enough to weather all storms; but sometimes in our silence, we know that there is a big void between us that needs to be filled in.

We were happily married on December of 2008. Having a baby has always been part of our plans. No rush, we just let life take its course. More than three years in and still no baby, suddenly there were perceived pressures from family and friends. We recognize our difficulty in having a baby so we consulted several doctors. We agreed to undergo a work-up.

We did as we were told; but month after month of religiously taking our prescriptions and all...no success. We were growing more frustrated. But still we pushed on.

Technology has rapidly advanced these days and there were several options available for assisted fertilization. Late in 2012, our doctor performed Intra-Uterine Insemination (IUI). This is a cheaper alternative over In-vitro Fertilization (IVF). Our hopes were high but were devastated with the unsuccessful procedure. We said we would try again next month; but seeing as how the chances were slim and how our doctor suggested that we try IVF, we decided to give up. Not only would IVF cost us a fortune; but a failed IVF procedure would probably leave us more devastated.

We were at our lowest point as a couple, yet realized that God has bigger plans for us. Upon the invitation of a friend, we attended the “Feast”. It is a weekly Catholic charismatic gathering led by Bro. Bo Sanchez. First time we attended we poured out our pain and offered it to God. Soon after, we joined a Caring Group. In one of our activities, we got to visit a nursery and a shelter for unwed women. This shelter aims to save babies from abortion by giving would-be mothers time to think things through or giving them the option to give their babies a chance for a better future through adoption.
After that encounter with mothers and babies, we just know that God is trying to tell us something. One time, we did an unscheduled visit to an orphanage somewhere in Cavite. We were so overwhelmed by the reaction of the kids surrounding us. One particular kid, a little deaf girl would not let go of us. We said to ourselves, “This is it. This is what God wants us to do. This is what we want do.”

Adoption was something that dwelled in our minds even before our visit to the shelter and the orphanage. This time though, we feel it is something that we wanted to do. There were offers from relatives and acquaintances for children, which we could adopt but going down this path, we know we have to do it the right way. Legally.

Sometime in March of 2013, we visited NORFIL Foundation to inquire about how we can adopt. This started our journey of having a child of our own. We were anxious yet excited at the prospect of finally having a child. We have never been down this road. There were a lot of questions and decisions surrounding and hounding us. Do we like a boy or a girl? What would the child look like? Do we want to know the child’s past? Are we really ready? All our questions, we lifted up to God. Thy will be done, Lord.

October 2013, NORFIL finally presented to us a candidate for adoption. They showed us a picture of a cute baby boy. They briefed us on the baby’s background and we were to decide on whether we want to adopt this baby or pass on him. One look to my wife and I knew what our response would be. YES! He is the one for us!
Finally on November 15, 2013 we got a glimpse of the 8 month-old baby Francis David. Our eyes swelled from the outpouring of different kinds of emotions. This is what we have been waiting for. This is what God wanted for us. The first time we carried him, he was crying his heart out. During our trip back home he was still crying. He cried so much, my wife just hugged him, wanting to assure him that all will be fine. When we got home he was past asleep. We put him on the bed and took a long hard look at him. It was like everything went dark and all we can see is this baby who was sound asleep. We finally have God’s gift and we are thankful for this blessing.

The morning after, he was eating, jumping and laughing. We were all so very happy! It was Sunday. We are meeting with the rest of my family to celebrate my mother’s birthday over lunch. Francis will get to meet the other members of our family. It was such a joyous moment in time. We have to bring him over the following day to meet the rest of the clan from my wife’s family. Seeing how our families were all supportive and happy for our decision and how lovingly they responded to Francis’ presence proved that Francis David has definitely and finally found home and a family.

Francis David is now 2 years old. We had our share of challenges in raising him, like other first time parents. He can now walk and run; talks a lot, sings and dances. We take him to the ‘Feast’ and see him raise his hands in worship. He is simply adorable.

Looking back, friends would say we are a blessing to any child we will adopt’ but I would rather say, it is the other way around. Francis David perfectly fits into our ‘void’ that was. He continuously blesses us in more ways we could ever imagine.

And so I add this little change to the ‘Jerry Maguire’ statement, which now holds true for us...

“He completes us!” ❤️
Amazing grace
Maricel and Angelito Jacela
We were at the right age when Angel and I got married, but our friends and relatives said that we were too old. I was 31 and he was 35, so we had to have a baby soon. Six months after being married, we immediately consulted an OB Gyne for work-ups. After a year of being non-receptive to the treatments, my friends and relatives recommended infertility specialists to us. I think I have tried all the treatments for infertility, from pills to artificial insemination. It was all unsuccessful. I was beginning to get depressed every time my monthly period came along.

One day, my husband raised the idea of adoption. Instead of pouring our money towards medication, we could instead turn it towards helping a child that needed a family. It was worth a try. It so happened that our relative had a friend who had applied for adoption at NORFIL. We started to inquire about the requirements for adoption. It was quite numerous, but still alright with us. We were determined to go through with our decision of adoption.

We waited for almost a year until we had a match—a 14 months old child named Mary Grace.

We were overjoyed because we were going to have a baby. We were excited when the time came to see her picture. God is truly amazing. Grace and I looked alike and she had the same birthday as my husband. We immediately signed the acceptance letter, come April 9, 2016. We finally got to take her home. She quickly warmed up to us and we really felt like we were her parents because she was so sweet to us. She is such a cheerful and energetic kid that loves dancing.

Today marks her 10th month with us and the legality of her adoption for the court is nearly granted. Nowadays, we don’t think about wherever Grace came from. What’s important is that we make her feel that she is our real daughter.
Remembered by God
Vallerie Anne and Jay Padua
Jay and I had been fantasizing about our future children since we were dating. We both wanted a boy first whom we would call “Zachary”, then a girl we would name “Bailey”. In our talks, the personality that “Zachary” had was playful, boisterous, and affectionate.

We were excited to start a family as soon as we got married. Like any newlyweds our age, it never occurred to us that anything was wrong. After 2 years of trying, my gynecologist suggested we get ourselves checked out. My doctor found nothing seriously wrong in the results, but advised us to go ahead and do an Intrauterine Insemination (IUI). After 2 failed IUI’s in 2010 and 2011, we were told that the next best step is In Vitro Fertilization (IVF). In August of 2013, we had another round of work ups at St. Luke BGC’s Center for Advanced Reproductive Medicine and Infertility and were told that my Anti-Müllerian Hormone (AMH) levels (which gives a good indication of ovarian reserves) were that of menopausal age. I was diagnosed with “inexplicable infertility” and was advised to have an IVF immediately. Although we were still in shock at this unexpected turn out, plus emotionally and financially unprepared for the procedure, we decided to go for it right away. I went through a month of fertility injections at maximum doses which as per ultrasound produced at least 3 viable eggs. All our hopes were pinned on those 3 viable eggs. But alas, on the day of the IVF, the doctor could not find any trace of an egg. We were absolutely devastated.

We were then directed to seek the help of a well-known Chinese acupuncturist who specializes in cases like ours. I went to her weekly and drank the teas that she prescribed for a period of 6 months, but still with no positive results.

Although adoption was always in the plans as the next option, it was only at this time that we began to seriously discuss it. We knew in our hearts that we wanted to be a family. The minute that Jay and I decided to take the adoption route, we were lead to people in our lives who were in the same boat.

As it happened, a friend who also lived in our building had just adopted a baby girl who looked exactly like them. We also discovered that Jay’s former
boss was at that time in the process of adopting a 3 year old girl she’d been fostering. Our talks with them led to our visits to CRIBS Foundation Inc. in Marikina, and Reception and Study Center for Children (RSCC) in Quezon City, to see the children and confirm our feelings about adoption. Then finally we had a long discussion with Jay’s aunt about her experience with the adoption of her two children and the whole process that it entailed. We then strongly felt that our Zachary was in an orphanage somewhere waiting for us.

The application for adoption was challenging in terms of documentation requirements- an undertaking very similar to applying for a US Visa or completing requirements for a new job. Being a housewife, I had the task of accomplishing that long list which included financials, character references, clearances, etc., majority of which had to be notarized. The first thing on the list was to attend the forum on Domestic Adoption in NORFIL Training and Research Center in Quezon City which we did in September 2014. Aside from forms and papers, the NORFIL social worker made a home visit, interviewed Jay and I together and separately, as well as our character references. We finally submitted our completed documents in April 2015.

Our case had already been presented twice in previous Matching Forums when we got the call about a possible match on September 14. Jay and I originally requested for a 6-8 month old baby boy, with Chinese features since we both had Chinese ancestry. The child, we were told, was everything we hoped for, except he was already 16 months old. Our social worker sent 1 photo of the child, and asked if we were willing to consider adopting him. All she was allowed to tell us was that he was clingy, and loves music and colors. The second we laid our eyes on that photo, we knew he was our Zachary.

On September 16, we went to NORFIL for the presentation of his case file, though the details didn’t matter anymore. Then the social worker told us that we could take Zachary home 6 days later. We were totally surprised since we had been advised that it was the norm for orphanages to require adoptive parents to visit initially for 4-6 weeks. We barely had a week to prepare, but we shopped and cleaned and made all the arrangements with happy, excited hearts.
September 22, 2015 is Zachary’s Gotcha Day. Though I’m glad we took a lot of videos, these will never quite depict the nervousness, the what-if-he-doesn’t-like-us jitters, the are-we-really-ready-for-this panic, and finally the overwhelming sensation that this baby BELONGS with us.

Zachary was a tiny bundle wearing an orange onesie and immediately wrapped his arms around Jay to be held. We cried, he laughed, and we laughed with him.

We took turns carrying him as we toured the orphanage and said grateful goodbyes to the people who nurtured him all through his young life. It made my heart overflow with love to see my husband with the Zachary we’d always had in our minds. Now, we were officially parents.

It took about 2 weeks for Zachary to respond to his new name, and another year before he called us “Daddy” and “Mommy”. He is as clingy now as he was when we first got him. He loves, even prefers to be carried. He can sing along to his favorite songs, especially Journey’s “Don’t Stop Believing”.

He loves monster trucks, is easily distracted by YouTube videos, devours anything chocolate, and knows exactly what kind of cuteness to project to get what he wants... like any toddler. And while Jay and I continue to learn how to become better parents, we are also
going through the legal process of adopting our little boy whose name means “remembered by God”. We feel that whenever we look at his angelic face.

The legal proceedings is another matter entirely. Though there is a standard as to regulations, procedures and policies may differ in certain areas/ city halls. Our lawyer filed our Petition for Adoption and Change of Name in November 2015. We

presented ourselves, including Zachary, in the first hearing in September of 2016, due to 2 previously canceled scheduled hearings. The second hearing was a presentation of exhibits or documentation, including a home study report conducted by a court appointed social worker who did pretty much exactly what the NORFIL social worker previously did, like interviewing family members, friends, neighbors, checking out the residence and such. After another cancellation, Jay and I were deposed at the third hearing, the NORFIL social worker testified at the fourth one and the court appointed social worker will be deposed on the next one. Aside from canceled hearings, the difficulties we deal with run from simple things like working elevators in the city hall, to the constricting 30- day validity of court clearances (which meant renewals plus additional leaves of absence for Jay every time we have a hearing), which also require NBI (1 year validity) and Police clearances (6 month validity). Thankfully, our lawyer is a friend who is experienced and has an assistant who is familiar with court proceedings as well.

Zachary is living up to the baby we dreamed of years ago: playful, boisterous, and affectionate. He displayed this to the court very well while I was being deposed on the stand and he decided to play around me, which amused the judge and prosecutor. Jay and I are very eager to get the new birth certificate which will then make Zachary officially, legally ours in name. We hope that that part will be easier. In the meantime, we’ll enjoy every single moment with our sweet Zachy. ❤️
The little angel at the crossroad of our lives

Roberto and Elvie Punsalan
Can you share with us a few moments of your precious time? If you can, we would like to share with you the story of our precious angel, Rhynn Paulet, who is now a young lady of almost fourteen years...

**The Beginning**

My wife of 18-years, Elvie and I are both raised from poor families. Our childhood were marked by the incessant battles of our parents in meeting the bills and providing the best that they could for us. Education was the primordial and most important gift that they could give, and they carried their crosses daily in meeting this objective. God’s first major reward and professional milestone came at differing points in our lives, Elvie and I completed our accountancy degrees and hurdled (she in the top twenty) our respective CPA exams. I got my certification on 1978, and she received hers on 1980.

We moved forward with our lives into the working world, eager to assist to our dear parents and younger siblings who at that time were in need of support. Enjoyment and appreciation of life came by way of field trips in our respective departments/companies, savoring of new experiences and friends, partaking of material benefits and focusing inward in the heady days when we were in our twenties and early thirties. However, at a secret corner of our hearts, we both longed to have a mate of our own and to cuddle a child (or more) that we knew would be ours, and give them the benefits of our sacrifices.

**Destiny Intervenes**

There is a saying that love and marriage comes like a thief in the night, it suddenly pops up when a person least expects it. Well-meaning friends and associates, eager to see us matched up, pulled through with a successful blind date in February 1992 that made us aware of each other, in a more intimate way. Previously, our lives were so wrapped up in our individual work/duties that life is almost passing us by. Thus, from a casual and almost work focused date, we moved on into a romantic relationship and finally, with the blessings of our parents, into sacred matrimony in September 1997. At last, we thought, now we shall realize our dreams of having little ones of our own...
The Spirit is willing, but the flesh cannot

There were clouds gathering in the distance that we knew could dampen our hopes. Our respective physical condition are not in the finest level, at least when the aim is to have your offspring. Physicians both locally and abroad tried to help us, using the powers of modern medicine, but to no avail. Tears of sadness and at times of envy of other couples blissfully savoring their little ones began to manifest in our lives, and we wondered why we should be denied this fundamental happiness of a child of ours.

A ray of hope

We both approached the idea of adoption with some timidity, bothered we are by the horror stories of adopted children growing into individuals who never appreciated the love, care and support of their adoptive families. Several individuals whom we conferred with gave varying views, but most seemed to be against the possibility of our loving a baby not of our own flesh and blood. Elvie and I went on, and we ended up phoning the NORFIL Foundation for an interview and counseling. The run of miracles have begun...

Tests, struggles, and more tests

Foster parenting, and eventually adoption are major decisions that a married but childless couple will make in their lives. It is akin to their decision to seal their lives together, and more so, as it will involve the responsibility of raising an individual to responsible adulthood. NORFIL thus held our hands tightly and led us onwards, helping us find the answers and enlightenment when called for, or solace and firm determination when such was what was needed. The foster parent license was granted in February 2002, somewhat delayed to our chagrin, as we wanted to care for an infant as early as November 2001. Nevertheless, God’s wise hand has started to create His heavenly pattern...

The baby comes into our lives, and hearts

Rhynn Paulet passed from NORFIL’s stewardship and into our trembling, unsure hands on February 23, 2002. We both have never raised a baby,
although we had some experience with infant nieces and nephews. However, fate and human evolution seemed to have programmed within us the instinctive reaction when a little, helpless infant is under our care and protection. Hitherto unknown steps like how to wean a just fed baby, how to replace soiled pampers, the proper mixture of milk formulas, cleaning of used bottles and nipples, etc. Suddenly seemed to be mere practical matters that we have been doing all our lives. All our waking moments and time at home were now riveted to our little angel, and we felt that a vacuum in our hearts was being filled at last.

**It is only temporary, you know**

Foster parenting and adoption are two distinct tasks, yet both results in the intertwining of a couple’s lives with the baby. The latter is characterized by the permanent stay of the infant in a couple’s home and life, the former a temporary and fleeting moment in the government and foundation’s quest for a permanent home for the child. The foster parenting offers the warmth and love of a family atmosphere to a needy angel, but the eventual separation drives deep thorns of anguish in a couple’s heart.

Rhynn Paulet was not surrendered for adoption at that time, and when her birth mother claimed her back on June 22, 2002, it seemed as if pain and loneliness combined, pounded their mallets into our consciousness. This day was the saddest in our lives...
God’s loving hand

In today’s modern, often hedonistic world, miracles are no longer taken at face value, indeed many scoff at it. How then could a middle-aged childless couple hope to see again their foster child who was returned to her birth mother and grandmother? Could we ever see her again? We thought not...

Yet, on the night of July 10, 2002, Paulet and her birth mother returned to NORFIL, and this turn of events culminated in the mother’s decision to give up her angel for adoption. It was not an easy one to make, and she anguished through the process, but wishing only the best for her baby, she relinquished her rights and responsibility for Paulet by signing the Deed of Voluntary Commitment.

NORFIL knew in its several counseling and spot-checking sessions with us that we have grown to love Paulet dearly. Yet it wanted to know if we would be willing to let the child back into our lives after this development. There was not a moment of hesitation in the family’s hearts...

Back into our arms and hearts

Rhynn Paulet returned through NORFIL into our home on July 10, 2002. She is happy there, and has celebrated her first two (2) birthdays joyously with our friends and families. We had her baptized on October 26, 2003, and with the full support of NORFIL and DSWD, worked on completing her adoption proceedings. The special proceeding was completed last January 16 in the Family Court of our city, and we happily received the Court’s favorable decision of our adoption request by the middle of 2004. She is now our legally adopted daughter, now in grade 8 at an all-girls school, and we look forward to her growing up as a fine young lady.

What next?

Where do we go from here, after the courts, DSWD and NORFIL has given us their blessings? We are and will always be a family of three, a mother-
father-daughter who will hold hands in our travel through the road of life together. We will raise Paulet and give her the best that we can offer, in terms of education, material comfort, love, discipline and principles to live by. We will see the country and other nations at various points in our lives, while Elvie and I are physically strong and can carry on. We will help her secure the education she desires; to follow the profession or calling she desires, escort her to the altar on the day when she seals her life with the man of her dreams, care for her children as loving grandparents, and watch her from a distance as she takes her place in the arena of life...such will be the blueprint of our family.

God bless us all!

Epilogue – She knows, at last

Rhynnn Paulet was told by us of her origin, on May 2, 2011 when we were in Hong Kong on vacation. She was already asking us, over the years, particularly when she already started schooling, of why we did not have pregnancy photos of her mom, just her baby pictures immediately. It was a very tense and taut moment, but we broke the news gently and lovingly, and after the initial shock, she took it all in a great measure of maturity, especially for a young girl of less than 10-years. Elvie and I are so proud of her mature outlook and calm demeanor, and of her acceptance and happiness of our unconditional love for her, which is growing stronger as the years go by. We told her everything about our attempt to have a child up to her adoption process, including showing her the pictures when she was newly born and with her birth mother, the data courtesy of the foundation. Nothing was held back to enable her to have a full understanding of her origin, at the same time we showed her that our love remains true and unconditional. And our child remains very loving to us.

To-date, our daughter remains the happy, at times carefree and active teenager that she now is. And Elvie and I remain very happy to have and nurture the angel that God and NORFIL has guided to our arms and hearts!! 💖
Love before the ‘first sight’
Kits and Obet Rubio
Obet and I became a couple ever since we were in 1st year medical school. We got married when we were in our 7th year of our relationship. Having no children didn’t bother us at first since we were very busy with our medical specialty training.

Fast forward five years later, when we were already done with our training, that is when we decided to undergo fertility workup. We went all the way. From natural conception only augmented by medications, to Intrauterine Insemination (IUI) to In Vitro fertilization (IVF). To put it bluntly, the physical stress combined with the dent in bank account was nothing compared to the shattered emotion when you see only a single line in a pregnancy test kit 2 weeks after each procedure. When our first in vitro fertilization attempt failed, I could say that it was one of the saddest moments of our lives. Thankfully because of our love for each other, and support from our families, it only took a short time for us to bounce back from the devastation.

We immediately researched about adoption after that 1st transplant of embryos (from the IVF) failed. We inquired at NORFIL and attended their scheduled seminar even though there are still remaining embryos from the IVF. We still pushed through with the transfer of the remaining embryos from the IVF. But for some reasons, deep in our hearts, we knew that the frozen embryos wouldn’t survive. So, when the dreaded negative pregnancy test came out, we did not waste any time being depressed. We fast tracked our requirements for NORFIL.

We specified that we wanted a baby girl when our application was already approved. At that time, it was very hard to be matched to a baby girl. Sometime in September 2014, while Cessna (social worker from Norfil) was in a matching conference, she called us up to ask us to open our hearts in having a baby boy. She told us that there is a baby boy perfect for us. But since we think it is a decision of a lifetime, we said that we needed more time to think. Our minds at that time were already set in having a baby girl. We let that opportunity pass. Obet and I agreed that if we will not be matched in the next conference, we would agree to have a baby boy. As expected we weren’t matched in the next conference. When we finally agreed to have a baby boy, we were immediately matched! It was October 8, 2014, Wednesday, at about
2:00 pm when Cessna delivered us the good news. Cessna told us the reason she was trying to convince us to open our heart to a baby boy because they feel that Tommy is a perfect match for us. We couldn’t agree more. I will be forever grateful, that Tommy was not matched to other couples for the times that we let the opportunity pass. Probably, I would advise other future first time adoptive parents-to-be to consider open sex adoption. You never knows who really the Heavens have matched for you. Just like being pregnant, it will be a surprise if you are going to have a son or daughter.

October 10, Friday, we went to NORFIL office to have Tommy’s case presented to us. When Tommy’s picture was shown, we cried tears of joy. We feel that we have an immediate connection with him. We begged the NORFIL people to let us see Tommy immediately. Thankfully, the orphanage where tommy was, allowed us to visit at once. The 15 minute drive to the orphanage seemed like forever. Oh how tears flowed when we held our little boy! The joy, happiness and overflowing love I felt the first time I hugged Tommy is indescribable. From then on, we visited Tommy everyday while waiting for the placement papers.

However during that week, an apparent measles broke out in the orphanage. At the same time, Tommy had severe asthma attack. They limited visitors, so we weren’t allowed to visit for about 3 days. At those times, we were very miserable because we can’t hold our baby. We, so badly want to soothe and comfort him knowing he has a hard time breathing because of his asthma.

I couldn’t function properly for not being able to see Tommy. Thinking to myself, “This must be what it feels like to be a parent.”

We were finally able to bring home Tommy 10 days after we saw him. It felt like heaven for me, the time he was riding with me at the back of our car. He is now really ours.

Looking back, if given the chance, I wouldn’t have changed anything what we have been through. Those experiences made us stronger. We don’t have what ifs in our mind. All that we have been through, helped us to be very prepared in having a son. Tommy is the really one for us. God, undoubtedly had his perfect plan for us in his own perfect timing.
As an Obstetrician and Gynecologist, a lot of patients come to me with infertility issues. Of course, being their doctor, I help them with the best of my abilities to help them conceive. If everything else fails, I gently tell my patients about adoption. I tell them the story of our little prince named Tommy. I would like to think that God has given us the opportunity to adopt so as we can inspire other people to bring a child to their family, whom may not be related to them by blood, but will be bound to them forever in heart and love.

I want to tell a thousand different things to all the people what it is like to have an adopted child. This can probably be summarized in one sentence: IT IS NO DIFFERENT TO HAVING A BIOLOGICAL ONE. We, the adoptive parents, love our children, with all our hearts. I guarantee that a biological parent’s prayer for his or her child is the same prayer as that of an adoptive parent. Everytime I see a hungry child in the street, or an abused child in the news, my heart gets very heavy. It could have been Tommy. Tommy changed us in more ways than one. We learned to be selfless.

We became stronger yet softer at the same time. We realized that we are capable of love that we never knew that we are capable of before. Every parent would understand these things.

As of writing, we are already preparing for court proceedings so that Tommy’s birth certificate will already be properly amended. He will be, in time, 120% legally ours. Sometimes, or should I say, a lot of times, we get impatient for these necessary steps and legal processes to be finished. But I know, at the end of the day, everything will be oh so worth the wait.

Someday this is what I am going to sing and tell Tommy: “I knew I loved you before I met you. I think I dreamed you into life”. (from the music of savage garden). ❤️
God works in mysterious, overwhelming, thrilling, humorous, joyous, and very touching ways

Alvi and Rina Siongco
Before Rina and I met, I was in a less than ideal situation in my life, going through a stressful marriage separation. Rina, on the other hand, was quite content with her single life. She had a great job, her family was as tight as always, and she had a nephew she adored. In other words, if “the one” didn’t come, she was okay with it.

Then, fate stepped in. While I was conversing with a common friend of ours, she happened to be reading an email from Rina. Our friend, then, thought it might be a great idea for us to meet. So, thinking that it was just a casual “blind date,” I told her, “Sure, why not?”

The day of our blind date came. What was supposed to be a simple conversation over coffee became a night of laughter and fun, and the start of a beautiful relationship.

Three years later, we were married. But even before we tied the knot, one of the many subjects we enjoyed talking about was kids. We were on the same page when it came to having kids of our own. We even listed down already the names we liked, but we also knew the risks of having children late in life (we were already near our 40s when we got married.) So, we told ourselves that we would try all possible methods to get pregnant, but if those didn’t work, we would then try adoption. See, unlike other people, Rina and I never had an issue with adopting. We both felt that there were just too many kids out there who needed good families to take care of them. And I, myself, have an adopted sister.

So, a few weeks after our last attempt at getting pregnant, we found ourselves going through an orientation on adoption at NORFIL Foundation (NORFIL is an NGO that takes care of bringing adoptive kids and parents together.) Then, after a few months and completing several documents, NORFIL told us we had a match. She was a baby girl, seven months old. And she was the most beautiful little girl we had ever seen. They told us that we could get her after a week and we said, “A week? Can’t we get her now?” We were that excited! But then, it also dawned on us that we had only one week to prepare everything we needed to be parents to this little girl. So, within that one week we had three baby
showers, we stocked up on diapers, baby food and clothes, and we started looking for a nanny.

Then, it came. The day we were to fetch her: GOTCHA DAY! I remember driving to NORFIL, both Rina and I were feeling very nervous and excited at the same time. We got there and waited at the lobby. Then, she arrived with her foster family. They walked towards us. Her foster sister was carrying her. She looked confused. Maybe because there were just too many unfamiliar faces. When we were about to leave with her, her foster family started crying, which I guess, made her start crying, too. It was very emotional.

We brought her to the car. Rina carried her in the back seat. The whole drive home felt like forever because she was crying the whole time and, to make matters worse, traffic was terrible the whole way home. My Mom was waiting for us when we got home. She excitedly approached our little girl with open arms, took her from Rina’s, and hugged her ever so tightly. I guess our openness to adoption runs in the blood. We named her Maria Lucia—Lucy, for short. Maria, because Rina’s first name has a Maria in it, and we wanted all our kids’ names to have Maria in them—whether girl or boy. Lucia, because to us, Lucy was the ‘light’ of our lives.

Lucy was still crying, which made us a bit stressed because we were so clueless as to why she wouldn’t stop. After trying to feed her and give her a toy, we figured out that all she was was sleepy. And apparently she was giving us signals that she was sleepy—she was scratching her ear and hair. The next day, we decided to take her for a stroll in the village. Again, she started crying. We only realized after a while that it was because she wasn’t the type who really liked being “strapped in.” She didn’t like strollers, nor did she like car seats. Basically anything that would restrict her movement, she consistently opposed...stubbornly. Lucy wasn’t afraid to show us what she felt or what she wanted. Right away, Rina and I saw what a strong and independent personality this child had. She wanted to explore, she was eager to learn, to experience things—to experience life. Carpe Diem! “Seize the day,” seemed to be her motto.

Then came the sleep-deprived nights! They never really tell you the little
amount of sleep you get when you become new parents. We were so not
prepared for it! Come bedtime, having such a larger than life personality
didn’t really go well with being a light sleeper when it came to Lucy. She
couldn’t go to sleep unless we rocked her to sleep, which at times, seemed
to go on forever. And when she was asleep already, we had to be extremely
careful placing her down on her bed because the slightest nudge would
wake her up and the cycle would repeat itself all over again. One of the
parenting books Rina read espoused the ‘Babywise’ method where you let
the child cry herself to sleep. You avoid soothing the child. This way, the
child would learn how to sleep on her own. One night, we decided to try
this method. She woke up in the middle of the night. We watched her in the
dark, but didn’t go to her. She then started crying. We still did nothing. Of
course, we didn’t last five minutes. It broke our hearts! We picked her up and
put her to sleep the way she wanted us to. And so our sleep-deprived nights
would continue for the next several months.

If there’s one facet Rina and I are truly grateful for when it comes to this whole
adoption experience, it’s the immediate unconditional love our daughter has
received from our families and friends. If there is a way her being adopted
influences the way our families treat her, it is that it makes her more endearing
to them. Her two sets of lolos and lolas are always eager to be with her. They
spoil her like crazy! Then again, she is a very lovable little girl. She always
has a ready smile and charming personality. She enjoys being with her
cousins, even though they’re all much older than her. She probably enjoys
all the attention. Who wouldn’t, right? At her baptism, Lucy had 10 pairs of
godparents. We knew it was a bit too much, but we didn’t really mind. Well,
the priest didn’t mind, too. They are all very caring and loving friends and
family, and they absolutely adore Lucy.

Days turned into weeks, weeks into months, and months into years. Life is
going by pretty fast in our household. Maybe it’s a good thing considering
Rina and I are in our 40s already. We blink, her teeth start showing; we blink
again, and she starts walking...correction, running. Pretty soon, we’re starting
to converse with her. Everyone keeps saying, “Enjoy this time while you can.”
We know and we do. Still, we can’t help but feel it’s all just happening so fast.
And every now and then, it hits me: she’s adopted. A fellow adoptive parent
told us before, “that’s when you know you’re truly a family.” When her being adopted is something that’s not even in your minds, anymore. It seems to move to the background. She’s your child, and that’s all that matters. How she came to be your child is just a matter of circumstance.

Rina reads a lot on parenting, adoption, and raising kids. And if there’s any advice we wholeheartedly would give to anyone who is wondering about the world of adoption, it’s this: to adopt is nothing, but a joyful experience. You help pull an unfortunate child out of the streets. You give a beautiful soul a chance to have a decent, happy life. And, it will definitely enrich your life. In fact, when people tell us Lucy is so lucky to have us, we tell them, no, it’s the other way around—we’re so lucky to have her. We are the ones who are blessed.

When someone asks us when we think is the best time to tell Lucy that she’s adopted, we tell them, “As soon as you can.” Even before Lucy turned two,
Rina would read children's books on adoption to her already. Lucy may not have understood them fully yet then, but what was important was to get her comfortable with hearing the term “adopted,” and later on slowly understand what it means. Also, it helped Rina and I feel more comfortable talking to her about it, as well.

Having adopted kids, I believe, is the same as having biological ones. Parents take care of them, nurture them, love them, scold them, make sure they don’t get hurt, and make sure they grow up as responsible and loving individuals. When we talk to friends about adoption, the fear that we usually hear from them is the uncertainty of the kind of people they’ll be when they grow up. There is that, we know, but isn’t that the case whether the child is yours biologically or not? Is there really any guarantee on how they’ll turn out when they grow up? The best we can do is be there for them and guide them.

So, after a couple of years of learning how to be good parents to Lucy, we thought it was time to adopt again. Rina and I thought it would be good for her to have a baby brother. We even talked to our families about it, to which of course, they got very excited. So, while preparing ourselves for this new chapter in our lives, we were caught off-guard with the most unexpected surprise—Rina got pregnant! 💖
A special calling for our time
Bonifacio and Alicia Belen
The Focus Should Be The Child

When the Child Placement Center of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) invited us to give a testimony on child adoption, I asked the coordinator what the activity was all about. The coordinator told me that the activity was going to be a congress on child adoption and other forms of caring for the displaced child. Furthermore, I learned that the theme of the congress was going to be: “A Family For Every Child.”

Our (meaning, my wife’s and my) immediate reaction to this information was that of gladness: we think the people behind DSWD are very much on the right track. In our opinion, it is of paramount importance that any form of caring for the displaced child should focus primarily “on providing a family for the child” and only, secondarily, “on providing a child for the adoptive parents.” These are not simply a play of words. We shall give substance to this statement of principle from our experience. Meanwhile, allow us to relate to you our story, and how we came about adopting a child.

Our Story

Our story is a very typical one. We were married three years and six months ago. As a couple, we are firm believers in the sanctity of marriage and the sacredness of human life. Thus, to us, having children is a great blessing and rearing them is a noble task. We do not believe in nor practice artificial contraception. In fact, the day before our wedding, my wife and I made a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Cebu, and told Our Lady how eager we were to have lots and lots of children, and to bring up the children she would entrust to us as true Christian men and women.

Month after month, however, we experienced the frustration of being unsuccessful in the effort of begetting a child. We went to the best doctors. There were no negative findings, just endless tests, and vitamins. We prayed constantly and insistently. But we could hardly hear God’s response.

The discernment process went on painfully. We felt some social pressures on our being childless, but we did not give them much significance. What was
important to us was to have a more basic question answered: If God had given us the capacity to be parents; surely He will give us “children to parent?” If in this increasingly unchristian world there are many parents who are abandoning their children, surely this blessing will not be denied a willing couple like us?

After a time of discernment, we decided to go to Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico and with filial piety abandoned to her all our concerns regarding the issue. We begged her to solve the problem for us in the manner she wanted to since we felt that we have already done everything humanly possible. That was in October 1995. The answer came swiftly in the person of a beautiful child whom we baptized on the Birthday of the Virgin Mary last September 8, 1996. Her name is Maria Guadalupe Atienza Belen.

**Insights On Adoption**

During the past three years, we have gained some insights on adoption. We would like to share these thoughts with you. These are thoughts that affect our being adoptive parents now and in the future. More importantly, they have helped us acquire a better attitude towards life, in general, and towards adoption, in particular. We hope that they will similarly influence your lives and that of those closest to you.

First Insight: How we think adoption ought to be understood?
Second Insight: How the Christian couple ought to proceed in discerning whether they are being called to adopt?
Third Insight: What are the possibilities inherent in adopting a child?

**Adoption Correctly Understood**

As adoptive parents, we immediately realized the importance of having clear ideas on adoption. We have encountered people who by their reactions to our having adopted a child show their lack of genuine understanding of the subject. This lack of understanding has, at times, its roots in a cultural bias that places a social stigma on adopting a child. This way of thinking naturally affects people’s attitude towards adoption. We now know, like many adoptive parents, that we shall have to continuously explain to others “how we think adoption ought
to be understood.” We owe this not only to our adopted child but also to other adoptive parents and adopted children as well.

As we have indicated in the beginning of our testimony, we believe that adoption should primarily be understood as the “decision to give a home, i.e., a family, to a child. The fulfillment of the desires of the adoptive parent (usually a childless couple) to have a child should only be a secondary motive. Reversing this order can be harmful. Allow us to explain why.

If the order of intentions were to be as proposed above, the main objective is to give a home to a child who otherwise would most probably not have one. The intention, in this case, is a pure, singularly noble concern for a displaced child. The satisfaction of fulfilling the longing to have a child becomes only a legitimate consequence of this primary motive.

On the hand, if the order is reversed and the main objective becomes the satisfaction of a longing or the “filling-in of the emptiness” resulting from the frustration of being childless, the intention is, frankly speaking, less pure and noble. This outlook is normally expressed in subtle and varied forms such as the following:

- We want to adopt because our neighbors, relatives, and friends all have children while we don’t. We experience daily the terrible peer pressure from being barren.
- We want to adopt so that someone would take care of us in our old age. It is lonely to be childless.
- We want to adopt so that we can show off a beautiful and bright child since someone is giving up her mestizo baby.

It is a basic Christian attitude that when our intention is pure and noble, frustrations will not deter us from loving. Thus, if we adopt for the right and noble purpose of “giving a home to a homeless child,” when disappointments come our way, our happiness and that of the child will not be jeopardized. We will not be frustrated if the child we adopted turns out to be “dull, slow, not pretty, not fair-complexioned, hard to love, bothersome or tiresome to take care of, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.” Our selfless attitude of giving unconditional love will guarantee our perseverance in rearing and loving our adopted child,
no different from how we would love him had he been our own. For this reason, when we visited an orphanage for the first time, we were told at the outset that adoptive parents could not choose a particular child to adopt (to take home), as if we were choosing a product in a mall or supermarket.

On the contrary, if our reason for adopting is selfish, when the “honeymoon period” is over and we begin to experience the difficulties inherent in bringing up a child, we may start regretting our having adopted. This can even turn out to be tragic. Tragic because parents may find it difficult to disown their natural children while the adopted children could more easily be rejected, emotionally, and sometimes, even physically. My wife and I know of many stories of adopted children being thrown out of their adoptive homes at the first sign of difficulty in raising them.

The above perspective is also critical because it points out who the giver is and who is the recipient. In the first perspective, the giver is the adoptive parent; the recipient is the adopted child. The joy and consolation that the adoptive parents receive from the child is only a consequence of their initial giving of themselves.

My wife and I are convinced that adoption is essentially “the giving of a family by someone who has (the adoptive parents) to someone who does not have (the adopted child).” Again, let us remind ourselves that in the Christian perspective, the giver always ends up genuinely happy.

**The Discernment of A Calling**

Our world is in chaos. No time in history has there been more abortions, child abuse, child neglect, and child abandonment than today. There are many silent screams of children being murdered in the womb. They need to be heard well. There are thousands upon thousands of children scrounging for food and sleeping in the filthiest streets of the earth. They are desperate for love.

On the other hand, there are intimate sighs, painful ones at times, coming from couples desiring the gift of having children.

In God’s providence, these situations need not be that hopeless. Mother Teresa
of Calcutta has been preaching the message the world over. She addresses them to would-be parents and would-be child murderers. In her acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize Award given her in December 1979, she tells the dignitaries in attendance:

“Let me tell you something that is truly frightening. We combat abortion with adoption and thus save thousands of lives. We spread the word in all clinics, hospitals, and police stations: We beg you not to kill the children; we will take them. At all hours of the day and of the night—among us there are many unmarried mothers—someone calls and we say: we will take care of you and your baby; we will give your baby a home.”

The Pope’s message is the same. In his encyclical Evangelium Vitae (March 25, 1995) or The Gospel of Life (Point Number 28), he tells us of the need to be aware of the worldwide, “enormous and dramatic clash between good and evil.” On the one side, he says, is the “culture of death” perpetuated by many first world countries, resulting to the desecration of life. He encourages us to counter this with the “culture of life” and thereby help bring back the respect for the sanctity of life from the time of conception. In few concise words, he thus speaks:

“We find ourselves not only ‘faced with but’ necessarily ‘in the midst of’ this conflict: we are all involved and all share in it, with the inescapable responsibility of choosing to be unconditionally pro-life.”

Adoption is, for us, part of the ordinary Christian’s mission for our time. Parents, in fact, not only childless ones, should consider the calling of giving a home to children who are abandoned or neglected by their natural parents. However, as in any calling, not everyone is chosen. A couple should together carefully discern whether they have this calling before adopting a child. Adopting a child is not merely a social work, a fad, much less a status symbol to display how charitable we are. One can help socially without being personally involved. This is what many philanthropists do. But one cannot adopt a child without being personally involved. Adopting, as in any parent-child relationship, is giving of oneself, body and soul.

In the book Conversations with Monsignor Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer (Point Number 96), a journalist commenting that “the frustration caused by not being able
to have children leads, at times, to discord and misunderstanding,” asks the opinion of the Founder of Opus Dei on “what meaning should Christian couples who are childless give to their married life?”

Part of St. Josemaria’s poignant response follows:

“... If in spite of everything God does not give them children, they should not regard themselves as being thwarted. They should be happy, discovering in this very fact God’s Will for them. Often God does not give children because He is asking more...”

“...If the married couple have interior life, they will understand that God is urging them to make their lives a generous Christian service, a different apostolate from the one they would have fulfilled with their children, but an equally marvelous one.”

“...There are, moreover, many apostolic tasks in which they can work. If they give themselves generously to others and forget themselves, if they put their hearts into their work, they will be wonderfully fruitful and will experience a spiritual parenthood that will fill their souls with true peace.”

Beyond spiritual parenthood through some form of apostolate with young people, adopting a child could be one blessed way that God may be “asking more” from a childless couple -- for a life of generous Christian service. Having been introduced to the message and spirituality of Opus Dei early on in our lives, my wife and I are convinced that -- adopting a child is a special calling for our time -- and, attuned to the spirit of the “saint of the ordinary life” (as St. John Paul II alluded to St. Josemaria in the decree of his canonization), adopting a child can truly be “a divine path” that leads to God.

For our part, for instance, my wife and I did not immediately consider adopting as the solution to our being childless. We initially felt that we were willing to financially help couples so that they can better take care of their children, rather than take their children away from the. We always believed that the rightful place of children is to be with their blood family. We were thus pleasantly surprised to learn that, the above cited encyclical (Point Number 93), the Pope had something to say regarding this manner of helping a would-be displaced child:
“Among the various forms of adoption, consideration should be given to adoption-at-a-distance, preferable in cases where the only reason for giving up the child is the extreme poverty of the child’s family. Through this type of adoption, parents are given the help needed to support and raise their children, without their being uprooted from their natural environment.”

Apart from our initial preference for “adoption-at-a-distance”, we were, at first, not sure that we were being called to adopt. We have friends who are likewise childless but who have discerned a different mission in life. The change in our thinking came only after a process of discernment.

My wife and I received the calling independent of each other and yet almost simultaneously. This is particularly significant when one considers that our story might have altogether been different had one of us not received the calling. We think that adopting a child specifically and fundamentally requires that both parents should receive the calling. Otherwise, conflicts and other problems can easily arise which could ultimately affect the child’s well-being.

A sincere process of discernment should precede a couple’s decision to adopt. This is our experience and we are sure that this is also the experience of others. Having exchanged notes with other adoptive parents, we realized that childless couples go through the same process of discernment.

We now look at adoption as consequent to the sad circumstance of the present-day world in which some parents give up their children while others yearn to have one. Divine providence plays a vital role in matching the couples that need children with the children who need a family. Whether we are being called to provide “a family for a child” will be relayed to us through God’s gentle promptings. Our role is to pose the question, to listen attentively, and to act with docility to the message we shall, without fail, receive.

**Responsibilities Of Adoptive Parents**

In caring for our newly adopted child, we realize that, like all parents, we have to uphold certain principles of child rearing to guide our everyday actions as parents. Our insight in this regard is simple: adoptive parents have the same
grave responsibilities as natural parents in the upbringing of their children. The responsibilities of parenting essentially include the following:

- **Providing for the Material Needs of the Child**
  Parents ought to provide for the material well-being of their adopted child: food, clothing, and shelter.

- **Providing for the Education of the Child**
  Parents ought to provide for the proper intellectual and volitional formation, psychological and emotional training, socio-civic, moral and spiritual development of their adopted child, realizing always that “the parents are the first and foremost educators of their children.”

The moral and spiritual formation of the child, we think, is the most important responsibilities of adoptive parents, and, for that matter, of natural parents as well.

To enrich the spiritual development of our children (adoptive or biological), we need to nurture in them the wonderful reality of divine filiation --- that we are all “adoptive children” of a loving and merciful heavenly Father. Like each one of us, the realization of their “true identity” as adoptive children gives them a secure foundation for their self-esteem and makes them resilient in weathering the storms of life’s journey. For this reason, the “adoptive parenthood” of God the Father was the main source of inspiration and motivation of our becoming adoptive parents.

As regards moral formation, parents have to give a home that will be the cradle of good values and Christian virtues for the child. As in any educational endeavor, the best way to teach is by setting the example. Otherwise, true learning can take place only with difficulty. When words are not matched by deeds, the child becomes confused. We think this is even more crucial for the adopted child since adoption, not being the natural way of begetting a child, brings with it a potential strain when known. Hence, when the time comes for the parents to reveal the child’s real situation within the family, the child brought up virtuously will, we think, have a stronger foundation to endure the emotional tempest that may come along with the revelation.
Having met several adoptive parents and hearing their story, we have formed the impression that -- with all due respect to many heroic natural parents -- in a certain sense adoptive parents at times tend to be “more nurturing” parents. Maybe this is because they take less for granted the fact that having a child is a divine gift since their adopted child normally would have come with more than ordinary difficulty.

In any case, we think our insight remains valid: adoptive parents or not, parents should equip themselves with a deep understanding of the inherent responsibilities of parenthood, together with the necessary parenting skills to live up to their sublime calling.

**A Family For Every Child Means Unconditional Love**

Let me end with some thoughts on unconditional love.

The theme of the congress, “A Family For Every Child,” may be stated differently as follows: the essence of adoption is the giving of an unconditional love to a child (in this case a displaced one).

This, by the way, is also the very essence of parenthood. In the final analysis, there is no difference between adoptive and biological parents. Both are called to give unconditional love.

The difference between natural and adoptive parenthood lies only from an unfortunate circumstance: for the child, because his biological parents, for one reason or another, is unable to give him that love without conditions; for the adoptive parents, because for one reason or another, they have been called to give that unconditional love in the place of the child’s biological parents.

Again, the Holy Father’s words and insights in Evangelium Vitae (Point Number 93) confirm this reality:

“True parental love is ready to go beyond the bonds of flesh and blood in order to accept children from other families, offering them whatever is necessary for their well-being and full development.”
Take note that the Pope speaks here of true parental love as a reality that need not be conditioned by “biological parenthood.” Subsequently, genuine parenthood can, should, and must be exercised by “couples towards their children”, whether biologically begotten or adopted.

A relative of ours once remarked that she found it admirable to see us “love someone who is not of our own blood.” When she told this to us, we simply smiled. In our heart and mind, we did not feel the need to justify our love. When we fetched Guada from her old house to bring her to her new and permanent home -- in our heart of hearts and in our will of wills -- we had already decided to love her, unconditionally.

Our decision, with the grace of God, will never change. She is our daughter, not by blood, but by the firm decision of our heart and will.

The above article is a revised version of the testimony we delivered before the participants of the Fourth National Congress on Adoption and Alternative Forms of Child Care, organized by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in collaboration with NGOs involved with the noble task of providing a home for our country’s displaced children. The congress was held last November 13-14, 1996 at the Asian Social Institute in Manila.
Our little big joy
Emmanuel Domingo and Michelle Aritao
We got married in May of 2006 in the town of Balete, province of Batangas. That was nearly 6 years after we first met at work. Back then, we were merely colleagues. Sometimes we got along fairly well. Other times, we tried to get ahead of each other for the chance to be the first to use the computer to send our respective emails (and by use, It meant get to hog the computer for the longest time possible). Back in year 2000, sending out emails entails first attempting to connect the internet via a dial-up-server. Secondly, pray not to get disconnected while your emails are being sent out.

From just being colleagues, friendship naturally ensued and quickly blossomed into something beyond just being friends. Our time together was an adventure of discovery and sharing. Our social circle mostly revolved around our service to our family, our parish, and our community.

Fast forward to 2006, we were, as most newlyweds commonly are, hopeful of an early start to a happy family-life. Three years passed and we came to a realization through medical confirmation that our dream of a happy family was not to be without difficulties. For a time, we had learned to accept some of the heartbreaking facts of life and we had no other resolve but to move on. Years went by until the void within us made it apparent that we needed to consider the best recourse – adoption. In 2014, with the help a dear friend, we were introduced to the concept of accepting a child whom we can love and rear as our own. Although as a couple, the idea was not wholeheartedly embraced right away. We first learned of a shelter facility in Pasig that we then visited just to have some idea of how to proceed with what was already the ostensible course for us. At Grace To Be Born, we were presented with a reality that we only got to appreciate and have some degree of understanding that not all who come to this world are blessed with biological parents who are capable of providing proper care for their own child. Having seen the innocent faces being cared for in that shelter was the final push that we needed as a couple to propel us on our own to really want to pursue the adoption alternative. From the Pasig-shelter, we were then introduced to the NORFIL Foundation, Inc. From there on, everything flowed rather smoothly. At NORFIL, we were educated via a Pre-Adoption Seminar conducted by a highly capable social worker who likewise handled our case carefully from start to the finish. Administratively, despite the tiresome process that required
many documentary necessities and a tedious Home Study Report that took months to accomplish, NORFIL only spent a little over a year to find a match for us. True enough, on April of 2015, we were blessed to have finally met our little joy – (her name is “Corinth” which came from the Bible – Corinthians). She had just turned a year old and she was just, for lack of a better word, perfect. From the granting of the pre-adoption placement authority in May of 2015 and through the six-month supervised trial custody, everything seemed to roll out without a problem.

The judicial process on the other hand, could have gone a lot smoother if not for the countless rescheduling of the court hearings. We were only fortunate to have a very competent legal counsel who was recommended for us by NORFIL. From the filing of the Petition for Adoption to the Regional Trial Court’s rendering of their Decree of Adoption, it only took us only a few months short of two years for everything to come to its much prayed for end.

As of this writing, our little Corinth is now just weeks away from turning 4 years old. She is now a happy, socially playful, smart, and loving nursery student, and we are now the grateful parents that we have always wanted to be. Not a day goes by without us being reminded of how blessed we are. From waking up to each new day with the sweet greeting of “Good morning, Mama. Good morning Papa.” To her unrelenting hugs and kisses that she so generously showers on us whenever she feels the irresistible urge to show her affection. All thanks to God and to the people who had supported us through and through - our family, friends, Grace To Be Born, NORFIL Foundation, Inc., and Atty. Filemon Nolasco. ❤
Angelum meum (my angel)
Rodolfo and Dahlia Lizardo
Our adoption story started sometime in 2012 when I asked my wife to undergo a fertility test to determine our chances of having our own baby as it’s been seven years then since we got married and we still don’t have a child. So in my next rotation leave (I was an OFW working in Nigeria), I underwent a sperm count and Dahlia also visited an OB-Gyne referred to us by our family doctor. Unfortunately, the result of our test showed that we will not be able to have a child of our own. I told her that as much as we want to have a baby, there are thing we don’t control and we just have to do what is best under our circumstances, so we decided to move forward. After that, I returned back to Nigeria to resume work and it came to my mind to try to adopt a child. As I don’t have any idea how to go about the process, searched the internet and found Norfil Foundation Inc., an agency involved in local adoption. I discussed this with my wife and she agreed that was the best option to have a baby. She then started contacting Norfil and was referred to Cessna Macula, who was the social worker handling local adoption. My wife was given all the requirements to start the process.

In May 2013, we finally started the process of local adoption when my wife attended the NORFIL Pre-Adoption Forum first as I was still in Nigeria then. In July 2013 I travelled to Philippines for my rotation leave, and in the same month attended the Pre-Adoption Forum together with my wife. We also submitted the partial documentary requirements to Cessna Macula. She also conducted her initial interview that month at our residence in Paranaque and submitted the remaining documentary requirements. In early August 2013, Cessna conducted another interview at the NORFIL office this time. The interview covered the husband and wife’s family background information, financial status, description of home and community, our experiences in child care and parenting experience, attitude and reaction of family members and relatives, among others. Afterwards, NORFIL Foundation completed its home study report including the recommendation to DSWD for the husband and wife to adopt a healthy ten (10) month old baby or below.

Finally, on January 2014 we received the pictures and video of the matched baby, named Ana Jannilyn Bautista. My wife and I readily agreed to adopt the baby and we issued the letter of acceptance as requested. The following month I took my rotation leave and on February 13, 2014, we finally meet
Ana Jannilyn Bautista at Hospicio de San Jose. Since my leave is only three weeks long, we requested Sister Evidente to allow us to get hold of Ana Jannilyn and will come back to Hospicio de San Jose on February 19, 2014 for the final signing of the Pre-Adoption Placement Authority (PAPA). Sister Evidente agreed and we took Ana Jannilyn with us from Hospicio de San Jose. My wife and I decided to bring the baby with us in Tagaytay and we stayed at One Tagaytay Place Hotel to see how we will bond together. The first day was really very special as it didn’t really take long for Ana Jannilyn to be comfortable with us and we easily feel we’re bonding together. She was a playful child and it was like we have known her for so long already. The first day was really an experience and we felt we did the right decision. On the lighter side, Ana Jannily gave her Papa another “experiences”, first she vomited at me and second was she excreted at me as well. So we had to clean and bath her but everything was okay afterwards and we were laughing at
the incident. The following day was Valentine’s Day and a memorable day to welcome our new member of the family. We left the hotel with a very vivid memory of our first day with Ana Jannilyn and now she’s ready to stay with us in her new home. On February 19, 2014 in a ceremony at Hospicio de San Jose, we finally signed the documents handling us the custody of baby Ana Jannilyn. We spend the remaining days of my leave bonding with Ana so she can still remember me when I go back to Nigeria. We went to malls, the baywalk in MOA and visited relatives to introduce to them our baby. They are quite receptive and happy with our decision to adopt the baby especially that they can see her playful side that makes her so lovable. On the day of my travel, Nicole (when we took her home, we change her name to Angeline Nicole from Ana Jannilyn) joined us at the airport for my send-off. My wife and I agreed that on every week end, we will do a chat via skype so Nicole will still remember “Papa” as she fondly calls me now. On the first chat we had, Nicole was not quite responsive as maybe she was wondering how come she can only see me in the video. But on the succeeding chats, she eventually got used to skype on the ipad so she was able to do small talk. This will continue for the next year and half seeing her only every seventy (70) days which is my rotation leave. In the meantime, our six (6) months trial custody started with Cessna doing the monthly visit to our home in Paranaque. In my absence, Dahlia is the one who attends to Cessna answering relevant questions on how the child is doing with us. I also met Cessna on two occasions during the six month trial custody when I have my rotation leave at home. By this time, Nicole is already very comfortable in his new home and calls me Papa, Dahlia as Mama and Dahlia’s mother as Mommy. Feeding her was not a problem as she has good appetite and even easier to give her vitamins and even medicine on occasion she got sick (usually fever and heavy colds). After the trial custody was completed, Cessna advised us that we did well and that the baby is growing and well adjusted.

Angeline Nicole has been busy with the usual growing up activities. At two and half years old, her Mama enrolled in the day care center for trial schooling (saling pusa) just to get her to experience interacting with other children. She enjoys going to school doing coloring, simple ABC, learning nursery songs, etc. When she reached three and half years old, we formally enrolled her to a private school as Nursery. As the school is a couple of
kilometers from our house, she had to be taken to and fetch from school daily. Her school activities were quite hectic given the quality standard of the school so parents had to be involved via a diary which the teacher and parents communicate to monitor the progress of the child. It was a very good experience as she learn a lot from academic point, to being able to perform (singing and dancing) in front of many people and also enjoying the company of her new friends and school mates. But on her Kinder 1, we transferred her to another private school which is walking distance from our house. It has quite similar set up in her former school and we can monitor her progress through the diary. Her new school also is active in sports activities which is good thing for Nicole so she can develop whatever skills she may have. At present, she is going to complete her Kinder 1 this March 2018. This summer vacation Nicole will be having a one on one swimming lesson as she is very fond of water activities. Next school year, she will enrolling as Kinder 2 to complete her pre-schooling and in preparation for her Grade schooling.

Nicole has also other activities apart from what she does in school. At home, if not playing with her toys, she does computer browsing the internet and watching educational programs. She is also fond of watching fairy tales like Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White among others. Another thing Nicole likes very much is going out with us like shopping to malls, swimming, travelling, etc. Although at the moment, we have not given specific chores to Nicole, she shows willingness to help in case we ask her to do something.

The next step then in the process is to file the “Petition to adopt Ana Jannilyn Bautista and for such minor to be named Angeline Nicole Castanos Lizardo” in court which we filed on December 29, 2014 at the Regional Trial Court in Paranaque. Our lawyer has already arrange the publication of our petition in a newspaper of general circulation. From the filing of our petition we have completed five hearings and finally submitted the final offer of evidence around June 2017 and we’re just waiting for the court decision and the issuance of the decree of adoption. Thereafter, the old birth certificate will have to be cancelled and a new one to be issued with name of the adoptive parents as father and mother. We are praying for the court decision to come soon. ♥
Then there was Jen!
Jess and Bobbie Laguitao
Many moons ago when I was still single, I dreamt of getting custody of a child under the Share-A-Home Christmas Program.

Getting married at 29 to a wonderful husband, we were blessed with 3 biological boys who are now all professionals. The plan to Share-A-Home somewhat ‘folded up.” But little did I know that after 3 decades will I realize that far-fetched but not an elusive dream.

I remember that one day when Jess popped up a bright idea! He asked if we can foster a baby girl, usually allowed for 6 months. He dreamt of having a daughter since. It was an afternoon that brought us delight since, unanimously with our 3 boys, we decided to go and foster a child!

We were referred to NORFIL Foundation, Inc. by a newfound friend, who is a Psychologist, who was then fostering multiple babies. Months went by from October passed December and no baby was for fostering. Jumpstart January went fleeting until Fantastic February came by when we were told that there is now a baby girl for fostering!

All together we went to NORFIL on that precious appointed moment to meet and greet this baby girl, who was cranky and cried at the top of her voice. Lolit and Aster were there to assist us. Later, Social Worker Marissa was at hand to assess and process our foster care requirements. We brought home this baby whom we pleasantly called Jennifer Joyce or Jen as nickname. Truly, she was the “apple of her brothers’ eyes” and the “center of the universe” of the Laguitao Family.

Six months was a quick sweep of time of a bustling life as NORFIL and DSWD forged alliances in matching babies with parents who signified to adopt. It was a queer yet defined feeling that we did not want to let go of baby Jen for Adoption by a matched family. Thence, we decided to write appeal letters and send care photos to concerned parties convincing them for us to keep Jen. Finally, we were deciding to adopt her. Odds were with us since that time, we cannot possibly adopt for reasons of “baby shopping” and age. Nonetheless, we continued on justifying why she is best to stay with us despite NORFIL and DSWD’s having identified a family matched for her.
It took a while before we got an unprecedented mobile phone call, while away from home in an HR Conference. It was the NCR Regional Director of DSWD herself, saying she has been waiting for my call; and that the Committee finally agreed that “it is best for Jen to stay with us!” That really made me “swoon and fly”, with my heart leaping in exhilarating joy!

With this go signal, we dedicated time to process the legal requirements, which was not easy to comply with and took some precious time. We were just focused on the goal: to legalize Jen’s adoption so she can use our surname and be our real daughter.

Eventually we got the “declaration” of legal adoption after 3 years in court procedure. We were so happy that we immediately sought her Catholic baptism and celebrated her Birthdays with relatives and friends. Then came school and varied hobbies and intermittent activities such as Kids’ Ballet, Voice Lesson, Violin, and Arts, Sketching, among others. Oh gee, suddenly I am back to motherhood!

Days, Weeks, Months, and Years went by and that little noisy baby grew to become a sweet little lady, now at 11 years old and a Middle Schooler at the Miriam College in Katipunan.

Jen shows her creative prominence more than being academic. She is slow-to-warm; but when she gets comfortable with someone, that person becomes one of her BFF or Best Friend Forever!

Is she aware of her adoption? Yes. Starting at tender age 4, we were telling her stories and eventually declaring that she is an adoptee. The beauty of
sharing and being open about the truth of adoption is transparency and fairness. Years quickly pass. Each day was embroidered by colorful moments. There were some thistles during her teen transition. These challenges though are patiently transformed to sweet nothings.

“Love a child you have not met.” They are blessed and chosen beyond the horizon; and a warm body during life’s journey. Adopt and be proud parents! Commitment to love this child is key towards a blooming relationship.

We were 5 in the family; THEN THERE WAS JEN! ♥
Liebestraume, liebesleid, liebesfreud
Gwen Antonette Besina Quin (12 years old)
What do you contemplate on, when you cannot fall into slumber?
Your origins? Your well being? Your life?
If you do, then, we are much alike.
Ever since I was much younger, I have always been forever grateful that I never had to worry about such things.
I may have thought about such, but never worried.
I always knew my parents were to stay by me along every step of the way.

Through our loves’ “liebestraumes, liebesleids, liebesfreuds.”

If you do not know the meaning, please do not fear.
For I, myself, am right here.
To explain to you my story, my steps along the way,
so you shall not be able to go astray.

November 2, 2006.

“That one crucial day.
The start of where my path would fail to ever go astray.
The love and warmth of my parents that day.”

I opened my eyes. I saw the two people who were to become the most essential people in my life.
Grasping my father’s silver glasses and wishing to wear them is indeed a memory so faint.
Thankfully through the valleys of my brain it traveled until the memory reached my comprehension once more.
It was a sunny day. The gentle sunlight had not failed to seep in from the numerous windows that were present in the area.

I WAS GOING HOME!!!

I remember spending my early childhood in a small apartment near a busy road. My home until I reached two years of age, was quite small.
Perfect for a newfound family.

“A window, a door,  
a ceiling, a floor,  
my own family, what more could I wish for?”

Nowadays, that apartment is closed for what I might say permanent terms.  
Looking back in the past, my home of two years was a “room” with a kitchen  
right as you entered,  
A window greeting you with the pleasant sunlight if you were to walk in during  
the day,  
and a hall leading to the two bedrooms.

“All was peaceful,  
all quiet.  
No threats or burdens yet to be sighted.”

Two years passed  
Chilling my toes on the pool on the top floor would soon be only a memory.  
We moved to the wondrous city of Paranaque, where I further grew up.

“Fun memories of childhood play,  
out in the sun all day.  
Until I found something else I wished to do.  
Being around three at the time,  
I cannot wait to narrate the start of my beautiful passion,  
in a rhyme.”

My mother sat with me at my toy keyboard, one of a piano.  
She had just taught me how to play ‘chopsticks’ but refused to teach me one  
part.  
Even if I asked her kindly to teach me, she declined and went off into the  
kitchen to cook.  
I sat dissapointed wishing to learn it.

“I shan’t wait for her.”
Due to the fact a wondrous idea to me has just occurred.
To learn it all on my own.
What could possibly go wrong?

Then, I played.
Perfectly.
“Not bad for a beginner.” My mother chimed
Little did she know this became the start of my musical life.

Years passed and I one day said,
“Mother, father, I want to play the violin.” Before they gave a reply, I found myself.
Standing in a mall before some music school. They said,
“I suggest she takes the piano first,
this will help in her musical thirst, to face harder pieces later in her life,
and within the notes her temper may not strife.”

So it was decided. We walked to a piano teacher in the village one fateful day, though I wanted the violin, I played piano anyway.

As I was turned down over and over,
my wish to play an instrument did NOT roll over.
I kept coming back, until she accepted,
and I was able to walk away with a beaming smile, brightening the day.

“I DON’T WISH TO PLAY ANYMORE.” My voiced echoed down the hall a year later.
Oh. How great, only when I invested to buy an actual piano,
That was the only time to the piano I said
“NO!”

Well, I was pushed.
Practice everyday, through the fits and the tantrums.
Practice everyday through tears.
until I had formed to become a pianist over the years.
I was the handicraft of perseverance, and persistence.
One of sadness, yet patience.

Until sadness won again.
“I joined a competition!”
“So did I!”
All I could do was look my friends right in the eye with a sigh.
Forcing a smile, I said,
“How splendid, how splendid, how splendid indeed,
Your knowledge through the study for this competition it shall feed.”

At that moment, something snapped, and I could only see the world in monochrome.
The wave of my feelings swaying unsteadily.

At that moment I decided.
“So with the piano, I will BECOME a showman.
To impress,
for people’s amazement, I shall assess.
To be a pianist I shall do my best?”

How it paid off.
My parent’s discipline,
not allowing me to quit,
I just needed the slightest push, that was it.

I found myself flipping the page, creating a symphony to fill one’s ears,
inspiring others to dedicate years,
to play the piano, all feelings in the piece, never
to be pushed aside,
to be a pianist, to play with pride.

Liebestraume, Love’s dream.
Liebesleid, Love’s sorrow.
Liebesfreud, Love’s joy.

I always know through ‘life’s Liebestraumes, liebesleids, liebesfreuds,’ they are there.
My parents and their pride and love for me resonating through the air. 💖
Brothers and sisters
Written by Olivia Hubilla-Tipon on the Tinio family
“Adoption” has never been an issue among the Tinio children. They’re just plain siblings, all seven of them.

Most Filipino families would rather keep it a secret, knowing how adoption carries with it a stigma that has to do with the child’s provenance. What kind of parents would give up their child for adoption? People are likely to ask.

Fortunately, the Tinios aren’t that like most people. “Adoption is not an issue in the family,” declares Bobby Tinio, whose brood of seven includes three adopted daughters. Confirms eldest daughter Monique: “The word ‘adopted’ doesn’t factor into the vocabulary the way it does with the rest of society. There is no difference in how we are loved, cared for, or scolded.”

Bobby and Melo Tinio didn’t plan on adopting. They were then in their forties, and already had four children. But an opportunity to foster a baby over the Christmas holidays changed everything.

Recounts eldest son Albert: “The deal was to take care of a baby, then return it after six months. But it was inevitable that the baby would grow on us. About four months into the fostering program, we were already talking of adoption.” The whole family wanted the baby, he says, and decided that with legal adoption, “nobody can take her away from us.”

So positive was their experience with Yani that the Tinios ended up fostering and eventually adopting two more girls, Chesca and Carla, despite s Social Welfare department policy at the time prohibiting foster parents from adopting their foster child.

Today, all seven children identify themselves simply as siblings, with no distinction on who are the biological offsprings and who are adopted.

There were adjustments made in the Tinio household, of course, but only because having seven children can strain limited resources. “Everything had to be divided by seven,” says Melo. “The children learned to share and become disciplined. It meant focusing more on needs than on wants.”
But having a big family also has a plus side, he adds. “It would be difficult if the older kids did not participate in the parenting of their younger siblings.” Older boys Albert and Barnie would take turns carrying their two asthmatic sisters whenever the girls found it difficult to breathe. Meanwhile, older girls Monique and Elise helped the younger girls with their homework.

Now that the children are grown up—with the youngest Carla in junior high school—the couple can afford to joke about the lean times. Recounts Melo with a laugh: “When we adopted Yani, Bob said, ‘It’s okay. I can retire at 65.’ When Carla came he said, ‘I’ll never be able to retire!’”

The Tinios are far from being typical adoption applicants, who are usually between 35 to 45 years old. Some are single while others have fertility issues and can’t have children. They were neither, says Melo. “Yani came to us when I was 42, Chesca at 45, and Carla at 48. Bob was 50 by then. We refer to them as my menopause babies. It was actually fun for us. Bob really enjoyed the girls because we had them when we were older and more mature to appreciate parenting better.”

Part of these parenting skills is knowing when and how to tell the kids that they’re adopted. The Tinios did it with a bedtime story, recounts Yani. “Through this story, my mother told me of how they were blessed with four children and yet were given another baby to love and share their life with. As I grew up, I was able to understand my bedtime story and found adoption as quite normal.”

This honestly and the loving acceptance by the whole family has created a positive attitude among the adopted children that radiated to their friends. Yani, now 22 and an events coordinator at the Bellevue Manila in Alabang, shares: “All my friends know that I am adopted. Most of them were shocked initially, but I think my positive attitude about it gave them a better insight. I am proud to say that not one of my friends thought less of me because I’m adopted. In fact, they’re amazed and look up to my parents.”

Admittedly, there were difficult moments, confides Melo. One of the girls once cried in class because she could not answer the seatwork question on
what traits she inherited from her mother. She knew the question referred to her birth mother, whom she never got to know since she was adopted as an infant. “We had to have a long talk after that, “Melo adds.

Some orphanages, like the Hospicio de San Jose, keep records of the child’s biological parents. Sr. Corrie Evidente, DC, the Hospicio’s administrator, reveals that they keep a “Life Book,” which records all the information about the child and parents. The records include a picture of the mother and father, if available, and letters from the mother and father, if available, and letters from the mother on why she had to give up her baby. This is given to the adoptive parents for them to show the child at the appropriate time.

When adopted children come of age, they are allowed by law to look for their biological parents under certain conditions. Says Melo: “I believe they are entitled to that and I would like to be there to help them find closure, in case they wish to locate their biological parents, if that’s possible.”
Fortunately, laws on adoption have become more accommodating to both adoptive parents and their adopted children. The Tinios, for one, were able to adopt Carla, whom they had initially fostered despite DSWD policy at the time that disallowed this. They did not give up, Melo reveals, explaining how they managed to skirt the policy. “It was like going through labor pains. You push and push until the baby is born.”

Monique recalls writing letters to the DSWD and to other Cabinet officials. “We wrote and talked and pushed anyone who would listen and who could help. Such perseverance and devotion could only end in success.”

Bobby, who now sits in the Inter-Country Adoption Board (ICAB) explains why the original policy was put in place: “Presumably, this is ‘baby shopping’ and unfair to applicants who have lined up for matching. Fortunately, this policy has been scrapped.”

He adds: “The Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Inter-Country Adoption, which the Philippines ratified in 1996, puts prime importance on the welfare of the child. Adoption policies must be implemented with the best interest of the child in mind. Thus, one who fosters a child is given first priority to adopt since it is expected that bonding has occurred naturally during the fostering period.”

The new friendlier laws also speed up the adoption process, notes Melo. “Every day that adoption is delayed means the child is deprived of loving care.”

Agrees Sr. Corrie: “We have more than 60 children up for adoption. Some are siblings of two or three. We give priority to ‘abandoned, surrendered, and orphaned children.’”

At the Hospicio, they have identified the choke points. The orphanage used to depend on Public Attorneys who, however, have their hands full handling other cases. Now with their own pro bono lawyers focusing on adoption, the process has been speeded up. Because they also handle the welfare cases of the elderly and the handicapped, the Hospicio also has three social workers assigned exclusively on adoption cases.
“We try to hasten the procedure, so the children don’t stay long in the institution and also because there are many adopting parents waiting in line, says Sr. Corrie, who also sits in the ICAB. “We meet weekly and approve at least 10 cases a week.”

Both the Tinios and Sr. Corrie laud DSWD Secretary Esperanza Cabral for her efforts in shortening the adoption process. Instead of matching the child on the local level first, the matching can be done for both local and inter-regional levels at the DSWD head office.

There are also support groups for adoptive families, reveal the Tinios, who are founding members of the 20-year old Adoptive Families Support Group which has since evolved into Adoptive Families Foundation (AFF). This network of adoptive families offers seminars on the legal aspects of adoption, organizes fun outings and parties, and other ways by which adopted children can bond with and help each other. “Our goal is to promote adoption as an option for building loving families forever.”

Yani, who considers herself the middle Melo child with two older brothers, two older sisters, sums up their family history well. “My parents say there are two ways of having children: through biological means and adoption. But certainly there is no difference—just that both create a family.” ♡