

# Inspired Woman

ADOPTION



## HOMESTYLE

5 WAYS TO EDUCATE YOURSELF  
BEFORE BUILDING A NEW HOUSE

## GOTCHA FOREVER

ANGELS IN ADOPTION

## THE ADOPTED CHILD

SEARCHING FOR BIRTH PARENTS

OCTOBER 2018  
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Kari Wolff

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by Rachael

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has granted me what I asked of Him."  
1 Samuel 1:27

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# Editors' Notes



This issue could have been 200 pages long—there are so many inspiring adoption stories! We've barely scratched the surface! I am inspired by the stories we have included in this issue. Listening to our cover girl, Kari Wolff, talk about her daughters and hearing the pride in her voice brought tears to my eyes. She and her husband, Mike, have created a beautiful family, all because of adoption. Meeting 15-year-old Daria Schumeier and hearing her incredible adoption story that brought her from Russia to Bismarck was unbelievable. And when Patrick Atkinson submitted his column about the children he has adopted, I had to find a box of tissues. These are all people I've known for years and have known adoption was a part of their lives. But I had no idea the hoops they jumped through or the challenges they'd faced. I am grateful to have learned more of their stories, and I

am honored to share them with you on the pages of this magazine. And our team of writers contributed some amazing stories about adoption. Seriously, this issue is going to blow you away!

As we put this issue together, we were also recovering from our first-ever ELEVATE conference. I'm still on a high! The conference was more than I ever dreamed it would be. Thank you to those of you who trusted us with this crazy idea and helped us make it a reality. To those who attended the conference, thank you for taking that leap and spending some time with us. It was so great to meet so many new women and reconnect with others. As for the next ELEVATE conference, stay tuned!

*Jody*



"It will all work out."

Jody says that whenever we are working on a magazine project. And she's right; things do work out. Maybe because we always keep our mission in focus.

Take the ELEVATE Women's Conference, for example. We had a vision for an event that became something different than we first imagined. It required extra time and energy, but through the weariness of planning and organizing all the details, Jody kept saying, "It will all work out." The conference was amazing, but in ways beyond our hope and vision.

This issue, like many others, is also proof that things seem to work out. When we met with our advisory board members in August 2017 to discuss themes for the magazine, adoption was one suggestion. We chose October for this theme so we could shine an early light on adoption awareness this year. November 18 is National Adoption Day. What couldn't have been planned—but worked out—is the timing of this theme for me on a personal level. If adoption has been any part of your life, I hope you are encouraged by the article I share in this issue.

Get ready to experience every emotion. Adoption is a vast topic, and we couldn't possibly cover it all in just one issue. But we are confident that our mission is fulfilled on the pages that await you; it's what we use to guide us in our decisions. And it always seems to work out.

*Marci*

***The mission of Inspired Woman is to celebrate, encourage, empower, educate, and entertain women.***





### Photography: Rachael Neva Photo

The 2018 ELEVATE Women's Conference was a huge success! Seventy seven women from across North Dakota gathered in Medora on September 6 & 7 for an extra dose of inspiration and to be elevated in their purpose, influence, and skills.

We tip our hats to the women who helped raise \$1,755 for the Inspired Woman Scholarship Fund. They competed for high-value prizes, including a wine fridge, diamond necklace, and a 2019 Medora getaway

package and hot air balloon ride for two!

Most notably, the women left wanting more of what they came for—inspiring and meaningful messages from the high-energy speakers and the cover girls who had them laughing, crying, and standing on their feet cheering.

These are conference highlights and favorite moments the women shared:

***"The level of professional mixed with real, fun women. Very meaningful! Learned a lot!"***

*—Jeanie Vetsch, Bismarck*







**"Enjoyed everything and loved the location. Will definitely attend again!"**  
*—MaryAnne Bamberger, Minot*

**"Great overall, wonderful speakers."**  
*—Bonnie Kuehnemund, Rugby*

**"The Cover Girl panel discussion was excellent! Conference overall was awesome! I will come again!"**  
*—Tricia Schlosser, Bismarck*

**It was an uplifting and renewing experience!"**  
*—Laurel Weigelt, Minot*


**"Wow! So Much! I can shift the current way of doing or thinking and the tone of my home and workplace. Talk about power!"**  
*—Tracy Brandjord, Lake Metigoshe*

Thank you to all the women who attended the conference! We are happy you enjoyed it!  
 And thanks to our partners, sponsors, and supporters for helping make our first ELEVATE Women's Conference a success!

**ELEVATE! CELEBRATE!**

# MUST-READ BOOKS

Article and Photo by Pam Vukelic



*"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasm, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement and who at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly."*

—Theodore Roosevelt

In June, during a professional development class at NDSU, I spent two days studying the work of Brené Brown. Her book, "Daring Greatly: How the Courage to be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead" is predicated in part on that TR quote.

Recently, President Obama referenced the quote in his eulogy for Senator John McCain. He said,

*"Roosevelt's men in the arena seems tailored to John McCain. Roosevelt speaks of those who strive, who dare to do great things, who sometimes win and sometimes come up short but always relish a good fight. A contrast to those cold, timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat. Isn't that the spirit we celebrate this week? That striving to be better, to do better, worthy of the great inheritance our founders bestowed."*

TR looms large in Medora, where I recently spent a few days. He makes an appearance in the Medora Musical, his statue graces the front of the new theatre building, and his namesake hotel marks

the center of town. And I challenge you to resist the ubiquitous bespectacled Teddy bears.

A TR impersonator showed up at the retreat I was attending and recited the quote. Later that evening, the Cashman Auctioneers made reference to those words in their inspiring and hilarious scholarship fundraising activity. It was remarkable to me that a quote from a 1910 speech given at the Sorbonne in Paris has so much resonance in today's world.

The retreat was sponsored by Inspired Woman magazine. The theme was ELEVATE Your Purpose, Influence, and Skills. In the beauty of the Badlands and in the aura of Medora we met and were inspired.

Noreen Keesey encouraged us to elevate our success. There's a wonderful story (easily found online) titled "Let the Rabbits Run" that is a great reminder of the joys found in our differences. She encouraged us to read the works of Donald O. Clifton that deal with discovering our strengths.

Jeanne Masseth seemed to be echoing one of Brené Brown's practices. Ms. Brown carries a short list in her wallet of the names of people whose opinions matter to her. To make the list, you must love her for her strengths as well as her struggles. Jeanne had us reflect on the five people with whom we spend the most time. She pointed out that in many ways we are the average of those five people and encouraged us to remember it is more important to be interested than interesting. It's something to keep in mind if we can choose who these five people

are. The book "The ONE Thing" by Gary Keller is on her list of recommendations.

Melanie Carvell addressed three important topics: meditation, mindfulness, and kindness. Meditation can help relieve pain, reduce symptoms of depression, and ease anxiety. There are many apps available with meditation suggestions. She recommended "Unplug: A Simple Guide to Meditation" by Suze Schwartz and "Meditation for Fidgety Skeptics" by Dan Harris. Melanie left us with the question, "How do you leave others feeling when they cross your path?" and a list of 50 ideas for acts of kindness.

Dr. Cindra Kamphoff, presenter of Top 10 Practices of Female Game-Changers, used her experiences in training Minnesota Vikings team members to provide timely examples. She reminded us of Eleanor Roosevelt's quote, "You must do the thing you think you cannot do." Cindra's book, "Beyond Grit," is now on my list of books to read.

What a meaningful conference Jody and Marci orchestrated for us! Their attention to the tiniest of details was apparent. Being out on a hike in the Badlands or being entertained by the Cashman sisters as Auctioneers, there clearly was something for everyone. New friendships were formed, and old friends became closer friends. And, oh, there are so many elevating practices to be adopted. *W*



*Pam Vukelic recently retired from a long career as a FACS (Family and Consumer Science) instructor. Inspired to do lots more reading and adopt some speakers' recommendations, she is grateful to have more free time.*

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# THE STORIES WE TELL

by Noreen Keesey

"I'm not a leader," she told me. Then, almost immediately, she followed up with the comment, "Oh, that's literally my job!" Mary (not her real name) had been telling herself a story about her work and the role she played. It wasn't until she made that statement out loud that she recognized it.

We all tell ourselves stories.

“

"The stories we tell ourselves can be subtle. We might not notice them if we aren't paying attention. One way to start recognizing them is to listen for extreme language."

Sometimes, we do so to protect ourselves from a reality we aren't ready or able to face. It isn't necessarily bad that we tell stories. But if we are not careful, they can limit us or keep us stuck in an undesirable situation. They can stifle our dreams.

The stories we tell ourselves can be subtle. We might not notice them if we aren't paying attention. One way to start recognizing them is to listen for extreme language. Statements like, "Things never go my way anyway, so why bother trying?" or, "Things that look promising always fall apart!" are signs that stories might be at play.

You could also be limiting yourself by believing that something cannot happen until a particular condition exists. If getting that job or losing some weight or meeting that partner will make life perfect, that might be a story you are telling to prevent you from taking action that feels scary.

Since it is sometimes hard to notice our own stories, it can be helpful to talk things through with a friend or a peer group. Let them know that you want help in identifying unhelpful stories, and give them permission to gently challenge you if they hear one. Whether you choose to examine your stories alone or with support, ask the following questions and see what answers arise.

- 1. What story am I telling?** The story may seem obvious, but sometimes clearly stating what we think is going on sheds light on the fact that our thoughts might be getting the best of us. Once you have clearly stated what you believe to be true, make a case for it. Ask the next question.
- 2. Do I know for sure that this story is true?** With this question, you are looking for facts that support or disprove your story. Go beyond answering with a simple yes or no. You want to get beyond your beliefs and feelings about a situation and present evidence. Now that you have given the story a reality check, see if you can reframe the situation.
- 3. Is there a better story I can tell?** We have a choice about the stories we tell ourselves. Though we cannot just invent a story and have everything work out the way we desire, we can tell a story that is supportive and realistic. Our stories can affect our outlook, our behavior, and our well-being. Becoming aware of the unconscious stories we are telling gives us the power to choose better ones.

Neale Donald Walsch said, "Life begins at the end of your comfort zone." Now might be a good time to try getting a little uncomfortable. Challenge that story you've been telling yourself and see if another story will serve you better. You are the author of your life; pay attention to the story you are writing. *M*



*Noreen is leadership and team development coach and trainer based in Bismarck.*

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## AMY PIERCE AND LAURA RESSLER

Family-owned businesses are nothing new, but the chances of those family-owned businesses staying in the family for generation after generation aren't good. The Conway Center for Family Business says only three percent of family businesses survive into the fourth generation and beyond.

Laura Ressler and her daughter Amy Pierce are working to change that statistic. Their family-owned business, Roberts Floral, celebrated 60 years of business in September. Laura is the third generation, Amy the fourth.

Mother and daughter both say flowers are in their blood. Amy recalls racing to the flower shop after school, and sometimes even during the school day.

"I went to school across the street and was always trying to sneak over to see my family!" Amy says with a laugh. "But my real love for the flower shop didn't come until later. I actually moved away after high school and ended up working at a flower shop in South Dakota. My mom gently reminded me I could work at our family flower shop. I came back about 12 years ago and have been here ever since."

Besides Laura and Amy, Laura's mother, husband, and son-in-law also work at the flower shop, along with about 25 other employees. Laura and Amy say the best thing about their business is the customers.

"They are precious to us. They are the base of what we do," says Laura.

Roberts Floral is located at 210 North 8th Street in Bismarck.



## TABITHA URIBE

After moving 35 times in 10 years, Tabitha Uribe and her family have finally found roots in Bismarck, North Dakota.

"We left our small town in East Texas in 2008. We bought an RV, packed up the kids, and chased the oil," explains Tabitha. "This is our third time in Bismarck, and it feels like home. The second time we lived here, I discovered craft shows. Everyone kept asking me if I taught stained glass classes. Finally, at the last show I did, I took a sign up sheet. It was filled by the end of that day! So I figured, I'd better start doing some classes."

Tabitha held classes in her garage. Two women showed up for the first one. But then word got out, and more women started showing up. And then it was time to move again. Tabitha and her husband spent eight months in Williston.

In January, the couple moved back to Bismarck, and Tabitha rented a space to make her dreams come true.

"It is magical in here. I want women to feel like this is their village and to leave here feeling confident and empowered."

Tabitha sells crafts on consignment and has three classrooms, a stained glass and mosaics room, and a pottery space. She says the space is forever evolving as the vision grows. Tabitha teaches stained glass classes and is always looking for people to teach other craft classes and share their talents with others.

Learn more on Tabitha's website, [diyvillage.biz](http://diyvillage.biz).





## KAT SOCKS

Sometimes the best fictional stories come from real life experiences. That's exactly the case with Kat Socks' children's book, "Pickles the Dog." Pickles is a real dog, adopted by Kat's mother-in-law after the Minot flood in 2011.

"Pickles just has a beautiful story. The sad part of her story is she is a flood dog and kept coming back to the shelter time after time. Finally she ended up at the Central Dakota Humane Society in Mandan, and my mother-in-law adopted her," explains Kat. "She really is a good dog. She just needed the right home and the right person."

Kat adapted Pickles' story a little for her book. In the book, Pickles is adopted by a farm family. Pickles has never been on a farm before and gets into lots of trouble, but the little girl in the book helps her adjust with

redirection training.

"I really wanted to put a training element in the book. I have had such great feedback from that. People have told me they're using the redirection training technique from the book. I'm excited to hear that people are using the message in the book."

Kat says it took her about a year to complete the book. She worked with an illustrator and self-published. "Pickles the Dog" officially launched July 30 and is available in more than 20 stores, online at Amazon and Barnes and Noble, as well as on Kat's websites, [picklesthe dog.com](http://picklesthe dog.com) and [katssocks.com](http://katssocks.com) (use the code *inspired* for free shipping). Kat donates a portion of all her sales to animal shelters. Kat will be selling and signing her book at several events this fall. Find her list of events on her websites.



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## **BIRTH MOTHER: JEANNE CHURCH**

Jeanne Church was 17 years old when she had her first baby, a girl. She had been living at an unwed mothers home in the Seattle, Washington area, away from her loved ones.

Jeanne chose to place her baby girl for adoption. Little did she know, her decision would change so many lives. And little did she know, she would someday see her baby again.

## **LIFE MOM: MARGE FRENCH**

"I wish I'd had the privilege to carry a child, but I couldn't. This was my answer."

After suffering from fertility issues, Marge French and her husband, Jack, got their paperwork in order to adopt

Within three years, Marge and Jack adopted another baby girl named Melissa.

"They're ours, that's all there is to it. That's the way you feel."

## **DAVINA FRENCH**

"There has never been a time that I didn't know that I was adopted. I can remember as I grew up that I was told how special I was because they actually got to pick me out!"

Davina says the yearning to meet her birth parents increased over time.

She was in her 30s when she received a phone call that her birth mother would like to make contact.

"Hidden behind the mask of initial

# **BLOOM WHERE YOU'RE PLANTED:** *An Adoption Story*

by Amber (Schatz) Danks | Submitted Photos

a child. After around a year of waiting, they received word their baby had been born. They knew it was meant to be.

"Our caseworker called and said, 'Your baby is here.' She didn't say a girl or boy, just that our baby was born May 18. He (Jack) said, 'What is it?' I said, 'I don't know!' Of course, she was a little girl."

May 18 happens to be the couple's anniversary.

"I told Jack she was meant for us."

Marge chose the name Davina for her baby because it means, "the chosen child."

"We were so concentrated on her. We were both looking at her, cooing. Jack looked at the caseworker and said, 'How many people turn you down?' She said, 'None,'" Marge remembers with a laugh. "So we dressed her up, put her in blankets, and took her home. It felt so right. I had been waiting so long for that wonderful day."

optimism was a fear that meeting a birth mother who 'gave you up' for unknown circumstances; [it] had the possibilities of bringing negativity into my world that I loved and had very little life drama. I also felt very guarded for the parents that raised me. What would they think? How would they feel? Would they know that no matter the outcome of meeting my birth mother, that they were my parents?"

Because they were adults, Davina's mom, Marge, encouraged both of her daughters to meet their biological parents.

"We're in our 80s now, the biological mothers are in their 60s. I said, 'You need to spend some time with your other family, you need to connect with them. They're their biological families,'" says Marge.

"My excitement was undeniable and outweighed any skepticism, and so as

For more on  
this story visit  
[inspiredwomanonline.com](http://inspiredwomanonline.com)

the day for the official meeting grew closer, I started to write questions down, then rehearsing opening remarks and wondering what she really looked like," says Davina. "The first time we stood face to face I had this underwhelmed feeling at first. She had blue eyes; mine were brown. She had blonde hair; mine was brown. I was average height; she was really short. But all the anxiety disappeared as soon as we started talking. There was a familiarity in the rhythm of her voice as she excitedly chatted away. I may not have looked like her, but boy, oh boy, did I have her extraversion and some very specific physical mannerisms!"

### FULL CIRCLE

"My mother is who I was raised with and made me who I am, and Jeanne is a bonus mom who gave me life and the understanding of what I'm made of. It's about understanding the nurture and the nature of my life," says Davina.

"In my personal journey, I would make the same decision today that I made years ago," says Jeanne. "I will never be able to forget the smile on Davina's life mother's (Marge) face when we first met, and she held me so close and thanked me for giving her a beautiful daughter. This made the decision and the heartache and the lonely spots in between all worth it." *M*



Jeanne and Davina

“

"My mother is who I was raised with and made me who I am, and Jeanne is a bonus mom who gave me life and the understanding of what I'm made of. It's about understanding the nurture and the nature of my life." —Davina French



Jack, Davina, Marge



*Amber (Schatz) Danks spent nearly 12 years as a news reporter, producer, and anchor. She is currently tackling her toughest and most rewarding assignment yet: being a stay-at-home mom to her baby girl.*

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# Kari's Wolff

## THE FAMILY WE CHOSE

by Jody Kerzman

Photography: Photos by Jacy





Like many couples, Mike and Kari Wolff's road to adoption began with infertility.

"We were to the point where we were going to try in vitro," recalls Kari. "But it just didn't feel right. For whatever reason, it just didn't feel like how we were supposed to have kids. We had that dream of having our own biological kids, but we had also always kind of thought about adoption."

## CHOOSING ADOPTION

The Wolffs chose adoption and their experience was, in Kari's words, crazy.

"It was an unusually fast, easy process for us. We started the paperwork in August 2008, and by November we were matched with Layken. She was born in January and was ours the second she was born," Kari says. "Most people wait a long time, sometimes years, to adopt. We just got really, really lucky with Layken. Everything went so smoothly. Our caseworker even said it's not usually like this, it never happens this way."

Kari even met Layken's birth mom before she gave birth, went to a doctor's appointment with her, and heard Layken's heartbeat.

"I felt like I didn't miss out on those first time mom experiences. I was even in the delivery room for the birth."

From that moment, Mike and Kari became Layken's parents. Layken, now nine, has always known she's adopted.

"We've always been open with her," says Kari. "We don't have a relationship with her birth mom, but one day if she or Layken want one, we will be open to that."

After settling into their life as a family of three, the Wolffs decided to adopt again. In 2013, they were matched with an expectant mom from Michigan. The day before Mike and Kari were to fly out for their son's birth, the adoption fell through.

"So there's the heartache. I had none of that the first time," says Kari. "We were very, very heartbroken. I've talked to some friends who have had miscarriages; they say that feeling I had was similar to what a mom goes through when she has a miscarriage."

The couple decided to wait before

pursuing another adoption. They were building a new house, selling their old house, and didn't want to have the stress of another failed adoption. But just a few short months later, there was another baby. A young expectant mom in Alabama chose them to be her baby's parents. The baby was due in less than a month.

### BRINGING HOME LIBBY

"We felt good about it. We had quite a bit of information about the birth mom. She was pretty open and said she had not had any prenatal care," recalls Kari. "By the time she picked us, our paperwork had expired so we had to do all of that again super fast. We got it done in time and flew to Alabama in time for Libby's birth."

This time, Kari wasn't in the delivery room, but the bond was just as instant. Libby was six pounds, eight ounces and despite some breathing issues, seemed healthy. She was transferred to the NICU in Birmingham because the hospital where she was born didn't have a NICU. Still, Kari explains, it wasn't a big deal.

"They told us the breathing issues

could have been caused by many things, especially with the lack of prenatal care. We thought maybe she was born early."

Two weeks into her three week stay in the Birmingham NICU, Libby's heart rate skyrocketed to a dangerous level. Doctors gave her two doses of a drug that Kari explains basically stopped her heart and then restarted it. Finally, three weeks after she was born, Libby was released from the hospital. The family saw a pediatrician before heading back to North Dakota.

"I remember that doctor said Libby's head seemed a little small. He didn't think it was anything to be alarmed about, but recommended we follow up with our pediatrician when we got home," remembers Kari. "It wasn't a big deal. To us, she was just a little peanut that completed our family."

### UNEXPECTED NEWS

In July, the family followed up with a visit to Libby's pediatrician in Bismarck. She confirmed her head was smaller and ordered a CT scan. That scan showed some abnormal formations on Libby's brain. An MRI gave a better picture and

(BOTTOM LEFT)

Kari holding Layken for the first time after she was born



Submitted Photo





led to Libby's diagnosis of schizencephaly, a rare brain malformation.

"Basically, she suffered a stroke intrauterine, and at that point, her brain stopped developing. It actually affected both sides of Libby's brain. She is also missing her corpus callosum, the center of the brain that connects the right and the left, and that's how you get your coordination, communication. With this comes cerebral palsy, as well as high risk for seizures and epilepsy. She started having seizures at age two, and the CP is pretty dominant in all four extremities.

"At first I was angry," admits Kari. "But then I was given some really good advice—let her be the child that she is, and love Libby for who she is. From that point on, I realized she didn't deserve for me to be angry. None of this was her fault. So since then, we have embraced it and all the challenges."

## CHALLENGES AND EDUCATION

The challenges are plenty—Libby has seizures, gets sick easily, is nonverbal, and gets all her nutrition from a feeding tube. Challenges Kari

tackles head on every day.

"I sometimes find myself falling back into anger, but I don't stay there long, because I just can't. I need to be strong. I need to educate myself as much as I possibly can to give her the best life that she deserves."

That's meant educating herself and learning things outside her comfort zone.

"I'm an accountant!" Kari laughs. "But I have learned a lot. I know it's not the best form of education, but I've turned to Google a lot. It's led us to doctors and different information."

Kari has also learned to recognize seizures and pinpoint which part of the brain could cause them. She makes sure Libby attends physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy twice a week. Kari has gone to care coordination classes, served on the national schizencephaly awareness board, planned a national convention, and organized a local schizencephaly awareness day.

"We did our first awareness day on May 19, 2015, just three days before

(TOP RIGHT)  
The Wolffs after getting off the plane in Bismarck after Libby was born and their first moment of being a family of four



Submitted Photo



Libby's first birthday. We've done it every year since," says Kari. "We've had as many as 500 people at the event, which is great because it is a rare diagnosis, and not a lot of people know about it."

Kari has connected with people across North Dakota who do know about schizencephaly and are living with it.

"It's just brought so many great people to our lives."

Just as adoption brought Kari's daughters into her life.

### FOR A REASON

"I wouldn't change anything for the world. I look at it as Libby doesn't have the perfect life that we thought she would, but there's never a guarantee our children will be perfect. If I would have carried a child and the same thing would have happened, I will still need to charge forward and figure things out, just how I am now," explains Kari. "That was my thought process going into the whole adoption process; when you do the paperwork, you can

pick what you want, including a limb deformity, birthmarks, things you can't pick if you give birth to a baby."

And as it turns out, Layken and Libby were exactly what Kari and Mike needed. Their girls are their everything; Kari eyes fill with tears, the pride evident in her voice when she talks about her daughters.

"I felt connected to them the second they were born," she says. "Layken is an amazing sister and advocate for Libby. Last year her class did an amazing playground project to make their school's playground accessible for everyone. She helped inspire that. But it's hard to be the sibling of a child with special needs. So much attention is always on Libby."

But Kari knows there is a reason Libby came to their family. Perhaps it was to educate others about schizencephaly, to raise awareness about the disorder, or about adoption.

"Adoption is what makes us a family," Kari says matter-of-factly.

A family that will stick together, no matter what life throws at them. *W*





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# WOMEN OF MEDORA:

Sponsored by the Theodore Roosevelt Medora Foundation

## Kathy Solga

by Stephanie Fong | Photography: Rachael Neva Photography

*Women of Medora features inspiring women who have made an impact on the world through their time living and working in Medora.*

If you stop out at Medora's Bully Pulpit Golf Course on a September afternoon, you'll notice a few things.

First, the summer tourist season doesn't appear to be over in the least, with a full parking lot, bustling pro shop, and shiny, scoria-colored golf carts zipping around almost every breathtaking hole. (While the famed Medora Musical wraps up the second weekend of September, Bully Pulpit keeps hosting golfers until late October,

or until the snow flies—whichever comes first.)

Second, if you're looking for golf shop manager Kathy Solga, you may have to get in line, as it seems just about everyone on the course knows her and wants to give her a warm hello. But don't worry—not only will she be happy to take time to visit, she'll make you feel like you are the only person in the room.

When I arrived at the pro shop, Kathy was deep in conversation with two

girls—summer staff now back at college full time, who had simply wanted to check in and see how Kathy was doing and update her on their lives in the month since they left Medora. And Kathy was genuinely tuned into the girls, grateful they took the time to connect.

As we walked down to the golf course grill, longtime golf customers from Dickinson hollered their greetings to her. We even crossed paths with a cousin that Kathy hadn't seen in a while, creating a joyous mini-reunion in scenic surroundings.

So, how did Kathy become the smiling face of golf at this award-winning, nationally-acclaimed golf course?

If you haven't guessed by now, Kathy states it simply, "I love the people.

"It's the relationships—the golfers, the tournament organizers we work with year after year, our team of employees, and all the wonderful volunteers."

Kathy, a native of Dickinson, moved to Minnesota shortly after marrying her husband, Dave. Dave had a career in the golf industry, and Kathy was busy helping raise their two children while working in property management.

When Dave learned about the new golf course being built in Medora, he pursued the opportunity and became the director of golf, bringing the rest of the family along with him. Kathy has been at Bully Pulpit since the summer of 2003, helping lay sod and building the course alongside Dave before it opened in 2004.

Things have changed quite a bit since the first summer when Kathy and other pro shop staff worked out of a humble trailer, and the road leading up to the course was still gravel.

Roles have evolved, too. When Dave decided to pursue a career outside of golf a few years back, Kathy stayed, serving as an anchor of the golf course team and its history.

Kathy points out that when you have a great product like Bully Pulpit and really good customer service, the

numbers seem to just work themselves out. This simple equation has proven to be true, as the golf course continues to grow and enjoy positive revenue trends.

Any time Kathy talks about the success of the golf course, she includes the word "team" in the same breath, acknowledging the combination of year-round golf staff and the seasonal employees that help make the magic happen during prime golfing months.

While one of the more challenging parts of her job is the transition of workers in and out of the course's seasonal jobs—often requiring a great deal of retraining each and every new golf season—it's a challenge that she accepts and has learned to embrace.

Kathy explains that working with staff, especially young employees like the girls she was visiting with earlier that afternoon, is one of the things she most enjoys.

"There's no greater joy I have than to see young people become successful as an employee, then as a college student or in a career. In some small way, if I get to be a part of that and have a positive impact—that's why I do what I do."

Some recent leadership training inspired Kathy in her approach with staff, where she sees her role as that of "work coach" rather than just a boss.

"Yes, it's work, but it also should be fun. Have they enjoyed their day? That's what shows in our customer service."

And in 15 years of working in golf, Kathy has come to understand and love the game herself.

"Before I worked in Medora, I actually wasn't into golf—when your kids are little, four and a half hours [to play a round] is a long time!"

What she most enjoys about the game is, of course, playing golf with people she loves. *M*



*Stephanie (Tinjum) Fong worked in Medora during her college summer breaks and then had the privilege to work as the personnel manager for the Theodore Roosevelt Medora Foundation for seven years.*

# The Adopted Child

## Searching for Birth Parents

by Marci Narum | Submitted Photos

When you grow up knowing you're adopted, you can live with a sense of wondering; a feeling that something is missing or incomplete. *Who do I look like? Do I have siblings?*

My parents adopted me as an infant, and I've always known "I wasn't expected, I was selected," as the birth announcement states. I was never certain when or even if I would search for my birth parents, but I was inspired to do so a while back.

### THE RIGHTS TO SEARCH

Technology and DNA testing are popular resources now, but an adoption agency helped make me part of our family in 1971, so that's where I began. I was connected with Cindy Skauge, a licensed social worker with Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota (LSSND). She has worked in various roles for LSSND for 37 years, the past 27 years in pregnancy counseling and adoption placement, and helping adults search for and reunite with one or both birth parents or siblings.

"Almost every adopted adult I've worked with...hopes that I'll say, 'Oh, they're already searching for you,' or 'they've left a letter in your file for you,'" says Cindy. "But the majority of birth parents that I contact...don't know they have the right to search [for their child]."

Cindy says if birth parents are aware of their legal right to search when the child is 21, many of them fear their child resents them for their decision, so they don't take the risk. The adopted child can legally begin the search for birth parents at age 18, although Cindy says connections that happen at this age are not common nor very successful.

"At 18 we are all so immature; we don't

know who we are. So the majority of our [searches] are late 20s, 30s, 40s, and 50s. I've had some 60s search. It needs to be a time in your life when you feel like, 'This is the time, this feels right, and I'm open to whatever could happen.' And that could be a no; hearing that they're not open. Hearing tough history news that you may not have anticipated. But it also could be wonderful...a true blessing."

Simple paperwork begins the process. Within days, the adoption agency sends non-identifying information about the birth and birth parents, such as age, ethnicity, descriptive features, and their marital and family status. Their names are not revealed.

"That gives you the history or story of your background. Often times it comes with surprises, things you didn't expect from the birth mother's side or the birth father's side, or when reading the name you were given at birth by your birth mother."

Locating a birth parent can take as little as three months or up to a year or more. When Cindy locates one, she simply shares that the child they released has requested contact.

"And I always ask if it's a good time to talk, because sometimes I get a hold of birth mothers who have their husbands sitting with them, and they've never told them. They are then informed of their three rights under the North Dakota Disclosure Laws."

Those rights are: 1. To say yes or no to contact, 2. if they say yes, they have limited contact followed by 3. direct contact.

"They have the right to say no or decline contact," Cindy explains. "They don't even legally have to give medical information. If they do say no to contact, I always have a medical history form right there and try to verbally go through it so we can at least get



the medical information.”

Limited contact means corresponding by email or through the adoption agency, using only first names. Direct contact allows each person to share names, addresses, and telephone numbers. An agency social worker facilitates how they will move forward to build the relationship.

There are other relationships to consider, too: your parents, siblings, spouse, and children. Cindy prepared me for each conversation and shared insight I hadn't considered. She says sometimes family members can become fearful of losing their child. She explained how to share the news of my decision with my family, the common emotions a birth mother experiences when she is notified, and how to manage my own concerns and fears.

“There is that loyalty we have to family. If you don't have that—and it's very few—there were issues in that home. My goal is always to help that person searching know that this belongs to them. I look at it as something to celebrate; that you're starting this journey.”

Cindy says most searches result in positive connections and ongoing relationships.

“Every now and then I'll have people call me back and say, ‘You know, we just didn't connect.’

“Sometimes they will say, ‘I am so grateful who my parents were, because my birth family is so dysfunctional; great, loving people, but I was the lucky one.’ Sometimes their half-siblings will say to them, ‘You're the lucky one.’

“The hardest ones for me are when the birth mother says no. I need to help both sides understand where she's coming from and help that birth mother walk through her own feelings of guilt and shame; being okay with that and connecting with her in such a way that if she ever feels ready, she can call us. That's our hope, that people will be able to connect. Not everyone is open to that yet.”

### “COMPLETE” IS COMMON

Cindy says regardless the outcome of their search process, the adopted adult can experience a sense of completion.

“They'll say, ‘I know who I am now,’

I wasn't  
“EXPECTED”—  
I was  
SELECTED!



Neil and  
Mary Ann  
Narum with  
Marci

a sense of self that they didn't feel they had completely before. Many people will talk about having a hole and sometimes not even recognizing that until they start walking through this and start meeting birth family, and that can be no matter what the outcome. It's important to have that knowledge.”

A sense of completion is exactly what I described after reading my history from LSSND. But what I have gained since then stretches far beyond what I expected or imagined. I am deeply grateful for my birth mother's decision. I'm so happy my parents ‘selected’ me and raised me to be the woman I am. And through my search journey, I have connected with people who warmly welcome me, wrap me in love, and call me theirs. I am overjoyed to call them mine. As I get to know them, my heart cannot contain the love. It overflows; the only escape is through my eyes. They have been pouring love.

“It's amazing how freeing and healing it can be,” Cindy says. “And it affects people differently. There is no one way to do this or one way a person is supposed to feel. Everybody is on their own journey. If you're going to do a search, it needs to come from you wanting to do it.” *M*

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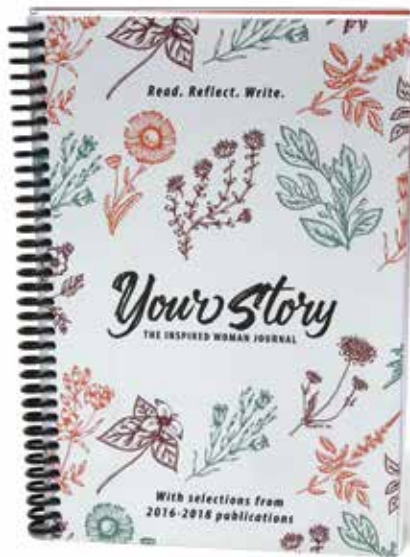
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# Homestyle

## 5 WAYS TO EDUCATE YOURSELF BEFORE BUILDING A NEW HOUSE

by Jody Kerzman | Photography: Rachael Neva Photo



Have you ever thought about building your dream home?

Most of us have, and a few of us will make the dream a reality. But if you're in the dreaming stage now, experts say there are some important steps to take before the walls go up. Heather Welle and her husband, Travis, are with E-Homes, a custom home builder in Bismarck, North Dakota. Heather says education is important for all potential clients. She shares five tips to educate yourself before the building begins:

- 1. Location.** Heather says location is key when building a home. Know where you want to build, and know what is and isn't allowed in that neighborhood. Some neighborhoods have covenants that require all homes to be a minimum size. So while you might be

able to afford the lot, can you afford the house too? Are outbuildings, fences, camper pads, or sheds important to you? Educate yourself on covenants prior to purchasing. Heather says it isn't uncommon for customers to start looking for a lot years before they're actually ready to build.

2. **Style.** What style of home do you want? Do you want a walk-out basement, a split level, or maybe a patio home? Your dream home's style might require more work to the lot. Heather says things like bringing in fill dirt, special excavations, and soil types can all play a part in the style of home that's built. Another example: basements are not allowed in homes built in low lying areas along the Missouri River. So if a basement is on your list of must-haves, you'll want to take this into consideration. Heather encourages her clients to share their Pinterest boards and dream house photos with their builders. That will give them a better idea of what all your dream home involves.
3. **Finances.** Heather explains this is about more than just how much money you can borrow to build your home. She says homeowners need to understand everything that is involved with construction financing. She encourages her clients to meet with a lender or even multiple lenders before purchasing a lot or deciding to build. It's important to understand what kind

of loan you qualify for and if there are additional costs associated with loans as they relate to a lot purchase, construction loan, and permanent financing.

4. **Builders.** Heather says before choosing a builder, educate yourself about builders in your area. Attend events such as the Parade of Homes to see the quality of work you can expect from each builder. Speak with others who have used the builder, and find out their experience. Ask builders about their process, their expected timeline from start to finish, and if they can build the style of home you want. Know what kind of customer service you expect, and find a builder that can provide it.
5. **Must-haves.** What things are must-haves in your home? What things are you willing to live without? If a tiled shower and gas fireplace are on your list of must-haves, find out how much they'll cost. Heather says those things add up quickly, and even people with million dollar budgets often end up trimming their list of must-haves. She suggests sitting down with your builder and going over every item, from flooring to siding, carpet and bathroom fixtures. Knowing how much your dream home costs might help you decide what's really important and what you can live without.

Bottom line: educate yourself. It might just lead you to your dream home. *M*



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# Gratitude & Guidance:

## ONE WOMAN'S STORY FROM COLUMBIA TO MINNESOTA

by Tracie Bettenhausen | Photos by Jade Neumann

When Terrie Rath met Jimmy Carter, she didn't know why he handed her a bag of peanuts. She didn't know what he said. She didn't realize he was President of the United States of America until years later.

She had just landed in the Minneapolis airport, 13 years old and 48 pounds. Her new parents, Marlowe and Ethel Beckman, had spent more than a month in Columbia, working through the ins-and-outs of adopting her to bring her home to Mora, Minnesota.

Terrie was overwhelmed by the United States.

"When I first saw my parents' home—and they weren't rich—but when I saw their home, I felt like the richest girl in the whole world," she says.

She had never seen so much food. Her parents took her to meet part of her extended family, treated to a Thanksgiving-like meal at her new grandparents' home.

"They were passing the dishes of food around, and I watched what everyone was doing," Terrie says. "When the bowl got to me, I (depicts taking scoop after

scoop of food onto her plate). My dad came over and started taking some of the food off my plate, and I cried."

She didn't know food was easy to come by here in her new home. It wouldn't be her last chance at so much abundance.

### EARLY MEMORIES

When Terrie was less than one month old, she was abandoned on the steps of a church in Columbia. An orphanage operated by Catholic nuns took her in; she was the youngest of about 45 other girls who were allowed to stay until they were 14 years old.

Terrie remembers getting up early before school, getting the donkeys ready, and heading out to pick the crops of coffee beans and marijuana. Their labor helped pay the orphanage's expenses, as she understood it. Some of the older girls smoked the marijuana, and forced her too as well, so she wouldn't tell on them. She was only four or five years old.

There were two lines for the showers before school.

"You'd stand in one line to get all wet

(TOP)

Terrie in the orphanage in Columbia. She is on the far left in glasses.

(BOTTOM)

Terrie's parents from Minnesota

(RIGHT)

Terrie, her daughter, and her husband



with the soap, and then you'd stand in the next line to rinse off. But by the time you were at the end of the second line, all the soap was dried on you," she says. "But I didn't know any different. It's just the way it was."

She also remembers having to stand in line to take spoonfuls of castor oil.

Still, Terrie says, "God had his hand on my shoulder my whole life. I'm not saying I didn't have no hardships, but everything has fallen into place."

She was abandoned by a mom for an unknown reason (she speculates maybe her mom was too poor, or her parents were caught up in the drug trade). She was brought to America, knowing no English, by parents who were already in their 40s (Who adopted kids who were Terrie's age, she wonders?), and who already had three other children. She was a teenager at the time of her adoption, when most people want babies.

"I won't sit here and say I wasn't abused. I was abused—by the priests; and the nuns were mean," she says.

She shows a scar on her arm, the result of a time she was burned with an iron by one of the nuns.

"I could not have screamed my brains out for someone to help me. I had no control of that situation," Terrie says. "There was nothing I could do, nowhere I could go.

"But I didn't let that define me. I didn't let my childhood hold me back. I didn't have control of that," she says. "You don't have control of what your life was like. But when you're an adult, you have control. Your present and your future, you can make what you want."

## THE MIRACLE

Terrie's parents tried for four years to bring her to America. They wrote letters back and forth, with translators helping them understand one another.

When she came to America, she didn't know English, but learned through a Spanish/English dictionary, special education classes, and flashcards.

Her dad was her closest attachment.

"He just took more time with me, more care. I spent so much more time with him than with my mom, and that was okay," she says. "We were always outside, tinkering around on vehicles and tractors, taking care of the animals, sheep, horses, cows, rabbits. We'd chop wood, and go hunting and fishing."

Terrie says she still has trouble forming close bonds to this day. She connects with people through teasing and laughing.

"Don't get me wrong, I love to see people smile and laugh, but I feel uncomfortable when people who don't know me want to give me a hug. There are times when my insides feel empty," she says. "There was always something missing. I had never known love. I was never with just one person to form an attachment when I was little."

The closest she's come has been through her daughter, Niomie. When Niomie was a baby, she tried to imagine how her own mother must have struggled to leave her on the church doorstep.

"When I had my daughter, I knew there was somebody else who had my blood," she says.

Today's Terrie's daughter is 21 years old.

"I have prospered, I have my own home, I have a wonderful husband," she says, coming back again to how her life could have been so different. "In Columbia, if you weren't adopted by 14 years old, they [would] sell you, to put you to work, or to be a prostitute.

"I believe in God 100 percent. If it wasn't for Him, I wouldn't be where I am. That's my look at life. It's a miracle...I remember what I came from. I remember what I did not have," Terrie says. "That's not to say I didn't work for what I have, but I thank God for guiding me through my life." *M*



*Tracie Bettenhausen is a senior staff writer/editor at Basin Electric. She has generously opened her home to two once-foster, now-adopted kitties, Basil and Sweet Pea.*

# OH MAN

**PATRICK ATKINSON**

by Patrick Atkinson | Submitted Photos

*Editors' Note: When planning the articles for this adoption issue, Patrick Atkinson of The GOD'S CHILD Project immediately came to mind for the Oh Man feature. He agreed to share his adoption story with us. Here it is, in Patrick's own words.*

Several years ago, the popular book, "Cheaper by The Dozen" told the true story of a New Jersey couple and their 12 children. When asked why they had so many kids, the parents would quickly respond with, "They're cheaper by the dozen, you know."

I get where they are coming from. Over the years I've adopted or taken permanent legal custody of 17.

I decided early on to spend my adulthood saving lives and building families. How? I had absolutely no idea.

College brought me to a pivotal crossroad when I volunteered with a regional crisis line for children and adults, particularly women. They were the runaways, throwaways, and despairing victims of family domestic abuse.

After college, my thoughts were on the crisis line's women and youth, so I turned down corporate job offers to take a job searching New York City's streets for runaways from North Dakota and the Upper Midwest.

Over the next three years, we returned home hundreds. It was time to dive in deeper.

The 80s were a decade of civil war and bloodshed across Central America, and El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua were burning. With camera views of children running scared in the streets and Mayan Indian women crawling out of massacre

sites etched into my mind, I left New York City for Central America. For the next seven years, I engaged in war-zone reconciliation and post-war reconstruction.

From this work grew the beginnings of The GOD'S CHILD Project; an international charity still headquartered in Bismarck. Founded in 1991, GCP has raised an estimated 80,000 children and cared for countless single mothers, widows, and abandoned women.

While I knew this was a good effort, God had even deeper plans; over the years I was also gifted with nine boys and eight girls with whom I formed a personal family.

Seventeen. Yes, it was a crazy thought, even back then amidst the gunfire, aerial bombings, and wholesale village massacres.

Yet they became my safe harbor when I took off my executive director's hat and put on my Daddy hat.

They didn't care that I had met that day with the President, a Nobel Prize winner, or a serial murderer. They wanted Dad to look at their drawings, talk about school, and start grilling dinner.

I didn't choose the boys and girls to adopt; through fate or circumstance, they chose me. I simply said 'yes.' They came from unique situations amidst the region's civil wars, or from the streets or child-jails where innocent orphans get thrown in with street-hardened gang members.

While most of the children we rescued fit in perfectly with one of our foster families, a select few didn't. As the months passed and I thought of myself more as their father and they as my children, I realized some children are born in their parents' bodies

while others are born in their heart.

We had wonderful times. We also had our moments of homework, house cleaning, and teenage-dating stress. Every parent does.

Yet I succeeded as a parent because I never tried to be my children's best friend. Children want us to be their mother or father; someone to tell them to brush their teeth and go back and try again if they didn't.

I never worried if my adopted children liked me; only that they respected me and knew that I loved them. I took for granted they might come out of adolescence thinking I was the worst dad in the world.

I also knew that in a few years they would realize how lucky we all had been.

My youngest, Kevin, is now married and living on his own, as are they all. Seven have gone to live with God—four by illness, three were murdered. The others are doing well and live in Guatemala, the United States, Canada, and Europe.

I see my now-grown kids frequently and am the proud grandfather to 11.

When the children were growing up, I gave them the choice of taking my last name or keeping their birth name. Different kids chose differently. Two hundred years from now some anthropologist will look at Guatemala, see names like Jose Cay Atkinson Xum, and wonder, "What the heck happened here?"

There are people in our world who open their homes and re-script their lives to care for a child in need of protection and love. We call them foster parents.

The children, however, call them heroes and saints. *M*



*After 25 years, it's time to say goodbye.*

MagiCandle Cakery will be closing this fall. We have been privileged to be a part of very special days in your lives. Cakes for bridal and baby showers, reveals, baptisms, first communions, confirmations, graduations, birthday, holidays, and "just because we want a cake" cakes. What a pleasure it has been to see the same faces for different occasions through the years. Thank you to our wonderful customers who have become dear friends through these past 25+ years.

*Stella and Weldee and MagiCandle staff, Carole, Cheryle, Dawn*

*\*Read more of Stella's farewell message on our website*





# A GIFT From God

by Jody Kerzman | Submitted Photos



Fifteen year old Daria Schumaier is a typical American teenager. She's on her school's volleyball, golf, and science olympiad teams. She plays chess and is learning to sew. And her favorite food is pepperoni pizza.

That's a fact that makes her parents, Barry and Paula, laugh and reminisce.

"When we first got her we tried to give her pizza, and she kept spitting it out!" laughs Paula.

That was in Moscow in 2006. The family was there to adopt Daria and bring her to North Dakota. Daria was nearly three years old then, but Schumaier's journey to adoption started long before she was even born.

"We went through miscarriage after miscarriage. We did have one daughter biologically, but after her birth, we just couldn't get pregnant again," explains Paula. "We prayed about it and felt like God was leading us to adoption."

They got on a waiting list for a domestic adoption. They waited and prayed for two long years.

"We just knew we were supposed to adopt," says Paula.

But it wasn't until a conversation with a stranger at a fast food restaurant that they started thinking about international adoption.

"I was visiting with some friends about the adoption process," remembers Barry. "A man came over and said, 'I don't mean to get personal, but I overheard you talking about adoption.' He proceeded to tell me about his family's international adoptions and even connected me with the agency, All God's Children. I still have his contact information in my phone."

A few weeks later, Paula's sister mentioned the same adoption agency.

"We figured that was a sign!" laughs Paula.

## FINDING THE RIGHT DOOR

Not wanting to waste anymore time, the Schumaier's signed up for an adoption from Bulgaria. Adoptions there were moving quickly. But shortly after signing up, Barry and Paula learned that adoptions from Bulgaria were closed.

"There was another door shut," says Barry.

Then another door opened. Their social worker suggested adopting a child from Russia. In a matter of months, they got a referral—a two-year-old girl named Daria.

Less than a month later, Barry and Paula were on their way to Russia to meet the girl they hoped would be their daughter. Russian adoption rules require couples to make two trips there before an adoption is finalized. Barry explains that the first trip is to meet the child and to see if the parents and child are compatible.

"It is very nerve-wracking," says Barry. "But we immediately felt attached to Daria."

Typically, it takes about three months at the most from that first visit to when a couple brings their child home. But the Schumaier's were given another hurdle. Their paperwork had been lost, so they had to redo it all, a costly and time-consuming task.

"We redid it all through a lot of tears," says Paula.

Finally, in April 2006, the family made their second trip to Russia, this time with their 10-year-old daughter Rachel along. This time they stayed for nearly three weeks.

"The court proceedings were in Russian. We had an interpreter but we had no idea what was happening. The judge could have said we couldn't adopt Daria for any reason and that would have been that," says Barry.

## BONDING BEGINS

But the judge determined the Schumaier's would be Daria's new parents, and the next day they picked up Daria. They spent the next few weeks in Russia getting to know each other.

"We had done a lot of reading, and our adoption agency really prepared us that it is not a fairy tale," admits Paula. "Daria was terrified when we left the baby house. I don't know if she had been in a car before. All she had even known was that baby house."

"She didn't understand a word we were saying; she was almost three years old and spoke fluent Russian while we spoke English," adds Barry.

Still, Daria started calling Paula "Mom" before they even left Russia. When they arrived home in Bismarck, the real adjusting began.

"We were told we needed to bond, so we spent that first summer pretty much at home," says Paula.

"She learned English incredibly fast, but she was slower to accept her sister Rachel," says Barry. "Rachel had been praying for this sister. I was sad and frustrated when Daria didn't really want anything to do with Rachel. I remember Rachel saying, 'Dad, you can't rush it.' Here was this 10-year-old giving me advice."

## THE PLAN & THE GIFT

Today, Rachel and Daria have a pretty typical sister relationship—they fight and binge watch Netflix together. And Rachel continues to protect her baby sister, the one she prayed for and waited for.

"God had it all worked out. There was a little girl that needed us, and we needed her. If everything would have worked out the way we wanted it to originally, that wasn't the right plan. It sounds weird to say, but I am thankful for infertility because without it, I wouldn't have Daria," says Paula.

Daria has always known she is adopted. She says sometimes she wonders if she looks like her birth parents, but she admits, she doesn't think about them very much.

"I've learned that parents are not only the ones who give birth to you, but they're the ones who raise you up most of your life," says Daria. "My life is an incredible story. Even though I was given up by my biological parents, I was chosen by these parents."

Daria's name is a gift from her birth parents; Barry and Paula chose to keep it. In Russia, Daria is a common name, and girls with that name are often called Dasha, which means "gift from God."

The Schumaier's couldn't agree more. *M*

# GOTCHA FOREVER: ANGELS IN ADOPTION

by Paula Redmann  
Photography: Photos by Jacy



Zoey, 12, was working on her homework at the kitchen table. Three-year-old whirlwind Ari wanted to run barefoot on the cool, lush grass in the front yard. Carlie, age nine, was doing cartwheels. Seven-year-old Ava was taking tiny bites out of the teeny apples that her dad gently shook from a tree.

Danielle Wyatt, matriarch, and who Zoey says, “is definitely the boss,” attends to each child’s needs as patiently as a stream; flowing to each one with a radiant smile, a word of praise, a kiss on the cheek, a tuck of hair behind an ear, and like all wise mothers, the occasional promise of reward. “Ari, come sit with me and we’ll go for ice cream!”

There’s never a dull day in the Wyatt home. And what a home it is. The love is nearly palpable.

Danielle and her husband, Cameron, recently adopted four of their five foster children. A simple sign on the fridge proclaims July 10, 2018 with “Gotcha Forever – Zoey, Carlie, Ava, and Ari.” It was a process to get to Gotcha Day. Ava and Carlie arrived first at Thanksgiving in 2015. Ari came a few weeks later.

“We had to fight hard for Zoey. We wanted her with her biological siblings and with us. She moved in on June 2, 2016,” says Danielle. “We are a unit. We are one family.”

A connection to the kids who need just a little more runs deep in Danielle. This

woman, wife, mother, foster mom, foster care advocate, North Dakota National Guard soldier, and daycare provider from Mandan just felt it in her bones.

Armed with associate degrees from Bismarck State College, Danielle worked at various daycare centers and preschools. Danielle’s parents were educators, so the classroom—a room full of children—was a natural place for Danielle. She became a paraprofessional in the Mandan and Bismarck Public School systems and found herself being naturally drawn to kids who needed extra help.

“I gravitated to the kids playing by themselves. These kids had extra emotions and they just didn’t know what to do with them. I loved working with children who needed me and it was so rewarding to see the growth that took place when I could teach them coping mechanisms.”

Danielle set out on a plan to lift children’s heads and their hearts. She became a daycare provider and loved—and still loves—caring for children in her home.

“All the snuggles are amazing, but I sent all the kids home at the end of the day. I didn’t want to give them up,” says Danielle. She and Cameron started their own fertility journey and started the process of being foster parents.

Cameron, a University of Mary nursing student, says they got their first foster placement in 2014 and have had 12





placements thus far.

"Our first placement was for two weeks. The next one was for six months, and we're still in touch with that family," says Danielle. "We want to stay in touch as best as we can and as much as we're allowed to. Foster parents know from the start that the goal is reunification; for the child to go back home and be able to stay."

In the interim, the Wyatts provide the oceans of love and the stable foundation for those in their care. They are registered through PATH, an agency that provides foster care, adoption, and treatment services to children and families.

"Some kids have additional needs for therapy, be it emotional, occupational, physical, or speech therapies, so we help with that. The therapists help you find strategies, but we're the ones in the trenches every day. I hold them while they are falling apart and get to help show them how to put themselves back together. We had a concurrent plan for these four children, meaning we had our foster plan for Zoey, Carlie, Ava, and Ari, and right beside that, an adoption plan," explains Danielle.

## MAKING IT OFFICIAL

There were two separate and very official dates that took place for the Wyatts in their adoption process. The first came early this spring, when all parental rights

were terminated.

"Terminated. That's just a sad word, isn't it?" asks Danielle. "That happens first, because it's the best thing for the child."

The next step in the process is the joyful piece, the actual adoption day.

"It was more like a wedding," says Cameron.

After the official court proceedings, the Wyatt's celebrated with relatives and friends, complete with family vows that Cameron and Danielle wrote for each other, and for their four new gotcha family members.

And then there was the party crasher. North Dakota Senator Heidi Heitkamp arrived at the celebration to present Cameron and Danielle with the 2018 Angels in Adoption award, an honor given to individuals, families, or organizations who have shown dedication to improving the lives of children in foster homes.

"We were so shocked, and so honored," says Danielle.

Helping repair children comes easily to Danielle. Loving them unconditionally flows from her.

"Ari, let's get ice cream!" *M*



*Paula Redmann is the Community Relations Manager for Bismark Parks and Recreation District. She married her high school sweetheart, Tom. They have two grown sons, Alex and Max.*

# COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTOR

**NORTH DAKOTA HEART GALLERY**  
Submitted Photos



## **TELL US A LITTLE HISTORY OF NORTH DAKOTA HEART GALLERY.**

The North Dakota Heart Gallery is a nonprofit organization that was started in 2008 with a mission to reach out to the public and encourage the adoption of North Dakota children in foster care waiting for forever homes. Since 2008, we have served over 230 children and placed over 100 children into their adoptive homes. Of those 230+ children we are still serving now, some have turned 18 and aged out of the system, and others had goals that changed.

We begin the experience by enlisting the help of professional photographers throughout North Dakota. Through artistic photography, we showcase the child's personality and spirit, showing potential families a glimpse inside a child's heart.

Every child deserves a family to call their own. The North Dakota Heart Gallery features children from throughout the state. The Heart Gallery will travel to events and exhibitions in communities across North Dakota to recruit forever families.

## **HOW ARE YOU DIFFERENT FROM OTHER ORGANIZATIONS LIKE YOURS?**

The North Dakota Heart Gallery is unique because we showcase the children through artistic photography. We believe this allows the child's personality to show through and give viewers a glimpse of who they are. You are able to get a glimpse of the child's spirit and personality! We are lucky that professional area photographers donate their time and talents to give these children a photoshoot where they can

really shine and feel their best.

### WHAT ARE YOUR NEEDS RIGHT NOW IF SOMEONE WOULD LIKE TO HELP?

Our organization is run completely on donations from our supporters through child sponsorships and donations to help us with costs of printing the gallery and travel costs of the gallery across North Dakota. Another way to support us would be to host the gallery at your workplace, church, or other places of gathering across the state. Lastly, we have our annual One Hope, Many Hearts Gala on November 8 and are in need of sponsors and donations. If you are able to help out with this need, please email us at [info@ndheartgallery.org](mailto:info@ndheartgallery.org).

### HOW CAN PEOPLE CONTACT YOU?

Visit our website at [www.NDHeartGallery.org](http://www.NDHeartGallery.org) to see the children who are waiting for their forever families or to send an inquiry. You can also email us at [info@ndheartgallery.org](mailto:info@ndheartgallery.org).

### HOW CAN PEOPLE DONATE OR GET INVOLVED?

The North Dakota Heart Gallery depends on the help of many people and organizations. Through your donations or volunteer efforts, you can be a part of this truly rewarding experience. We also need businesses, churches, malls, museums, YMCAs—or other places where people gather—to host a photo gallery so that even more people can see these brave children who are waiting for their forever family and light a spark for someone thinking about adoption. *M*



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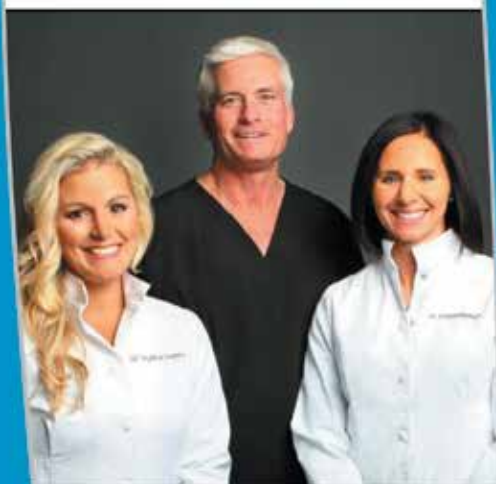
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# Do You Know WHO YOU ARE?

by Carole Hemingway

Questions about my birth used to haunt me when I was younger. Being older now and hopefully wiser, I'm no longer haunted. To set the record straight, I believe in 'knowing' who you are. For me, that didn't happen until I was 40 years old, and my mother was on her deathbed the end of July, 1981. I left home with one identity and returned home with a new one.

All genes aside, recent research shows that our behavior patterns are influenced and formed by the people who raised us into adulthood. Those patterns become part of our DNA. When you're adopted, the order of your life is going to be somewhat disconnected, especially not knowing who your biological parents are. It makes you wonder—where did you get your sense of humor or lack thereof? And yes, even the things and people you've come to love or not.

Does it make sense that we are able to control who we are by what we think and who influenced our thinking? We are capable of showing

a new side of ourselves to the world, once we know how the heck we got here.

Our mothers, like it or not, were our primary image of an adult woman, and our fathers were primary images of an adult man. As a result, we may lack spiritual stability; the truth of where we came from. We become more open to the truth of who we are, hopefully. If we don't know where we come from, how do we know what we truly need?

Knowing who your biological parents are is a mass awakening. If you resist this awakening you become numb, and you won't be as powerful as you would want to be, and nothing you do makes up for that separateness. Where did you get these patterns?

Birth is not a beginning but a continuation; I, for one, do believe that life goes on forever, just the soul occupies another body for the purpose of being visible so everyone can see us. Physical incarnation is a classroom experience, and some souls



come into class to learn. It's a lot like the channel selector on your remote.

There is brokenness and pain in finding your roots, because you have to try to heal that pain while finding yourself, but how can you do that until you heal your heritage? Confusion about heritage translates into confusion about ourselves. The internal tension cannot be denied.

Our messages from childhood were shaped early, and might you still be hungry to communicate with your adult self?

I'm a great believer in finding the right therapist, and I was blessed to have met some of the best over a 15-year period. No one else helped me connect my feelings and connect the dots to my loss and abandonment issues. Trying to connect the child-self to an adult body is no easy process. Today, I have a voice—at times loud—and speak in my new identity. I am thankful for the deepest truth my mother shared with me so very long

ago. Resolving the anger was a big one. Therapy cuts through the layers of confusion to honesty and relieves the pressure of conflicts, along with the intense pain involved.


The reality of adoption isn't and won't be easy to hear or read when you decide to dive into something like ancestry.com, and what will take place inside you can be like opening 'a can of worms.' But it's worth the pain to do the research, to dig; however deep it takes you to find the truth. I strongly support these methods of strong reality. Embrace the newness!

If you don't know your history, you are like a leaf blowing in the wind that grows up to be a tumbleweed and will never see or know that the leaf is part of a branch on a tree called family! *M*



*Carole Hemingway is an internationally regarded author, speaker, and historical writer. She recently moved to a horse farm in Kentucky (close to two Triple Crown Winners) and where she is writing three books about Gettysburg.*

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# Gather

## at the Table

### READERS' RECIPES

#### EGG BAKE

*Submitted by: Tina Frisinger, Karmin's Kitchen Table*

Here is a delicious and easy recipe that Karmin makes. It is the epitome of comfort food and can easily be adapted to your family's tastes.

2 one pound packages Jimmy Dean sausage (any flavor of your choice)  
1 onion, chopped  
1 cup uncooked Minute Rice  
4 ½ cups Rice Krispies cereal  
2 bags shredded cheese  
5 eggs  
2 cans cream of celery soup

Preheat oven to 350 F. Brown sausage and onion together. In a bowl, combine the eggs and cream of celery soup. In a 11x13 greased pan layer the following:

- 2 cups cereal
- ½ cup rice
- ½ of the sausage and onion mixture
- 1 bag cheese
- ¼ of the egg mixture

Repeat, but use remainder of the egg mixture on the last step. Top with remaining ½ cup of cereal. Bake at 350 F for 50-60 minutes. *W*



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