

Open Adoption Roundtable #41

There's a website, [Open Adoption Bloggers](#), that has gone a long way towards educating me on open adoption. The Roundtable is a periodic writing prompt designed to get people thinking about adoption. I don't always participate, mostly because we are so new to open adoption, but I thought I would take a stab at this one.

The prompt this time is "Are you approaching openness differently in 2013? What experiences from in the past year influenced you most?"

We're still feeling our way through what, exactly, open adoption means to our family. Katja isn't big enough to provide an opinion about how much contact she wants to have. We live a few hours away from her biological family, so just dropping in is really not an option. We're going to see them this weekend, though, and we are going to make sure we see them at least once a year as long as it is logistically possible for everyone concerned.

A long time ago I wrote a post about little-f family and big-F Family. Little-f family is made up of the family you are born with, the ones you don't choose. Big-F Family is made up of the people you choose, the ones you absolutely know will always support you, and the ones you call first when something happens. Sometimes you are lucky and they overlap. I learned this definition from friends in San Francisco when I was in college. They were two gay men who had little-f family who walked away from them when they needed them most. They had a huge a loving big-F Family, though, and I was lucky enough to be part of that.

B and E are Katja's family. They are our family, too. I'm not sure if they will end up being Family, since it's hard to get really close to them with the distance involved. We stay in

touch through the internet and phones, though. I send pictures, Katja's website has pictures and information, and we are in contact through social media. I don't feel like I need to shove Katja at them, but I want the option to be there. They are good people. We're not likely to end up living really close by just because of what our life is like, but we don't live near other people we are related to, either. They will keep being part of our lives.

What will be different in 2013? I don't know. This year will be busy and full of change. There are several interesting things on the horizon, all of which are tenuous and mostly undefined right now. We'll see B and E soon, though, and we'll get pictures of Katja with them. We'll hopefully get to see them in June, too, when I run my half marathon. We don't see them in the winter because of driving the passes; we don't drive in snow unless we absolutely have to for safety reasons. I think, though, that we will come a little closer to defining what this open adoption means for us, how we will continue to interact, and a little more of what to expect over the next few years.

There isn't a road map for this. Open adoption is created by each group of people, be they family or Family. We're figuring out where we fit in their lives and vice versa, what kinds of contact we will continue to have, and what we want to see. Katja will define this for herself as she gets older. In the meantime, we are responsible for doing what we promised and staying in touch.

How many is enough?

We were asked recently if we wanted to adopt another child. The answer was "No."

When we first started thinking about children, Xander only ever wanted one. I went back and forth between one and two. I didn't want an only child to be lonely, I was worried about socialization, and I wasn't sure I would be good enough, in some way, to provide everything to make sure an only child had a full and enriching life.

It's not that my childhood with my siblings was wonderful. We fought a lot, in many creative ways, and I wasn't really close with anyone except my youngest brother until I became an adult. Even now there is sometimes some discomfort when I say the wrong thing. It has gotten better, but I haven't ever had the "My sibling is my best friend ever!" kind of relationship, and I am not sure I could raise two children differently enough from how my parents raised us to avoid that kind of rivalry. I'm not sure why I was considering more than one, but there were moments when I felt rather strongly about it.

Since Katja came home, though, I have been almost imperceptibly migrating towards Xander's position. When the question came up again recently, my response was "No." I was sure that was the right answer.

Katja has a habit of picking up a book, bringing it over to me or Xander, and holding it up. Whoever she hands it to takes the book, sits down, and reads it to her. While we're at home, as long as we aren't in the middle of cooking, we have worked our schedules out so we have time for each other. That matters to me. I like being able to sit down and read anytime she wants me to. I couldn't do that as easily with a second child in the house. This coming year would be much more challenging if we were to try to adopt again; the process is very time

consuming, and I'd like to spend that time with the daughter we have, not chasing some idea that may or may not work out. I don't want to have to focus as much on making sure another family is okay. I drove down to California at least a couple of times a month and sometimes more often than to visit, bring food, and provide transportation. It took a lot of energy. I want to be home with my family now.

Sometimes being a good parent means I have to be selfish. On an airplane, they always say "If you are traveling with a child and the oxygen masks drop, make sure your mask is secure before putting a mask on your child." I have to take care of myself first to make sure that I can take care of Katja to the best of my ability. I've changed my exercise and eating habits since she was born. I'm running more and enjoying it. I'm not eating as much as I used to and we're paying more attention to what we eat because we need to make sure she gets proper nutrition, too. I keep housework on a schedule so we don't get behind, since there is less time to catch up on it.

I feel a little bit like not wanting another child is selfish. I don't want to put forth the time, effort, and emotional energy required to make an adoption work. I don't want to fill out all of the paperwork again. I don't want months of home visits. I don't want to deal with it anymore. We have a wonderful daughter and we are happy. Why mess with that? Maybe Katja would be better off with a sibling. I don't know. She's a remarkably outgoing little person, though. She gets lots of interaction with other people at her daycare and she clearly enjoys her time there. She enjoys her time at home, too, and likes being able to come over for a snuggle or a book whenever she feels like it.

I don't want to change this. Life is good. We're doing well. I'm being selfish, perhaps, but I can live with that. I like what we have and I love our little family.

Adoption thoughts

Adoption is a process which is fraught with the possibility of manipulation, coercion, and bribery. Faced with an unexpected or unwanted pregnancy, it must be difficult to decide that your child will be better off with another family, and money can often complicate the decision making process. The desires of adoptive families leave them vulnerable to exploitation, but also give incentive to exploit biological families. Third parties, such as lawyers and social workers, have their own agendas. With all of the competing interests and high emotions involved, it is not hard for one party to take advantage of another.

In some ways, we were quite lucky. We got to know Katja's biological family before she was born. We were able to visit them several times a month—we shared meals with them, introduced them to our dog Nyx, attended medical visits, and talked about a wide range of subjects. Moreover, they had made the decision to adopt before talking to an adoption facilitator, so we were not concerned that they were being forced into anything. They knew what they wanted and they chose us to adopt their daughter.

We were unlucky in other ways. Our adoption facilitator behaved in a way that we feel, in retrospect, was unethical. He billed us at lawyer rates for tasks that could (and should) have been done by an assistant for far less, such as delivering documents and transporting the biological family to appointments. At one point, he informed us that "Birth parents are just not that bright." This set off red flags for us, but we had already spent most of our resources, and had to make the decision to either continue working with him or give up on the idea of adoption altogether.

It frustrated us that he referred to all of the people we met as possible matches as "birth mothers." We knew the term was widely used, but until the final documents are signed, the mother is a pregnant woman considering adoption. The term "birth mother" sets up the assumption that the adoption will happen; it is no longer as much of a choice. The terminology is probably comforting to most adoptive parents, but it was not comforting to us. It gave us the feeling that biological families were not treated well by the facilitator, that their calls and requests were not respected unless the potential adoptive parents pushed, and that the facilitator was setting everything up to profit as much as possible from the process.

After the facilitator blew through nearly all of the trust account we established for the adoption in a month and a half, we tried to work with him to limit the cost of the adoption. We were told, point blank, that if we couldn't continue to pay, the match would be cancelled and he would find another adoptive family. Happily, we had established a strong enough bond with Katja's biological family that we were able to work with them directly, and were able to cut out the middle man. Still, it was incredibly upsetting to feel like we were being blackmailed.

We have been working through a lot of thoughts about adoption as Katja gets bigger. We want her to know her biological family, and we are trying to stay in touch. We want her to know that she was not abandoned and that her biological parents love her very much. We want Katja to know that she was "picked out special," and that she is dearly loved by both biological and adoptive families. She is being raised in a family where two of her grandparents were adopted, as was her great aunt, so there is no question about whether adoptive family is good enough. We are Family, and she is part of it. She may not look exactly like anyone else in the family, but we're an odd group anyway, so that should be all right. We will make sure that she is raised in an environment with as

many cultural influences as much as possible. We are hoping to do some traveling so she experiences more than just one place and group of people.

Our daughter is a funny, smart, beautiful, strong, loving, and brave little person. She eats almost anything we put in front of her, including spicy foods, and she enjoys experimenting with combining different tastes. Unless she's tired, she doesn't cry when she falls down because there are too many other interesting things going on. She loves music and loves to dance, getting her whole body involved and clearly enjoying herself. She likes making noise with the piano. She's starting to learn to talk and she is definitely communicating nonverbally; if she doesn't like something, we have no doubt about it! We are incredibly lucky that she is part of our family.

Adoption can be good. We know that her biological family still feels this was the right choice. Obviously, we do, too. At the same time, I wish that our society had enough support in a wide variety of ways to make adoption unnecessary, to allow every family to make choices about parenting and raise their biological children in a safe, supportive way. I am glad that Katja is our daughter, though.

I will be writing about the adoption process, the ethics, and various other subjects as they come up. This particular post was inspired by a post at Peter's Cross Station, here: <http://peterscrossstation.wordpress.com/2012/10/02/by-special-request-10-red-flags-that-your-adoption-agency-might-be-coercive/> I have not addressed everything in that post, but it's a beginning.

Just writing

I skipped Tuesday Tidbits this week because I was exhausted.

Two weeks ago we took Nyx into the vet to have a lump removed. The lump was cancerous. They got it all out, so, with any luck, she'll still be around for a good while longer, but it was hard for me. My last dog died two weeks after being diagnosed, and some part of me still thinks of cancer that way, as a quick and painful death sentence. Nyx came through the surgery fine. She'll have her stitches out at the end of the week, and as far as she's concerned, life is good.

Last Thursday, I totaled our car. We had a Toyota Corolla. We had been talking about getting a second car at the end of the summer, a little car that would just be for commuting. Now we're going to end up with a bigger car so we can go on road trips with Nyx and Katja and everyone will actually be comfortable. The accident wasn't bad, as accidents go, but I ended up bruised and a bit freaked out about turning left. I'll get over it. The insurance company, Country Insurance, was great. Very helpful, kind, and got everything done fast, as evidenced by the fact that we'll be buying a car on Saturday, just over a week after the accident. This may sound silly, but my ego was bruised, too. I think of myself as a good driver, but in that moment, I missed something that I should have seen. No one else was in the car and the driver of the other car was fine, so the only damage was to the cars. People are more important than things, I know, but I wish I could have avoided breaking this thing.

It's allergy season. I'm allergic to everything that grows in Nevada. This is not my best time of year.

What do you write about when most of what you're thinking isn't meant for public consumption? There are things about the adoption process that I'd love to discuss, but I won't touch

them until the adoption is finalized. I don't talk about work here. It's not professional. Katja has her own space, so I write there, about her and to her. There are a lot of things that I'd love to write, but at this particular moment I can't, for various reasons.

I found it interesting that one of the witnesses to the accident said "Thank god you are all right!" and I immediately thought "Nah, thank the seat belt." Once upon a time, a very long time ago, I would have felt thankful to some higher being. Now I am glad of the ingenuity of humans who figure out how to make us all safer. I am glad that we have a daughter who has the Elephant's Child problem: she is insatiably curious. I hope she always is, because out of curiosity can come amazing things.

As one more somewhat random tangent, we have been talking about how to handle the winter holiday now that we have a child. We have decided to base our holiday on Hanukkah, at least to the extent that it will be a multiple day event. I suppose it could be based on the twelve days of Christmas, too, though I don't think we'd do twelve days. In any case, each family member will get to open presents one night, so we each get a special night, almost like an extra birthday. One night, perhaps the last night, we'll volunteer to help somewhere where there are people much more in need than we are. That will depend on where we end up, but it's an important piece to offset the greed that I see more and more when Christmas rolls around. Have you noticed the commercials that try to make you feel like you are just not a good parent if you don't get the latest and greatest toy? That does not work for me. It makes me angry. I want gifts to be carefully selected to reflect the recipient, not to just be whatever is cool that year. There are a few days unaccounted for, but I'm sure we will figure them out as time goes on. We've been making a goose every year and inviting people we care about to share it with us; perhaps that will be a night in this

celebration, too. There will be no god of any sort, just an appreciation of loved ones and an awareness of the need to not only do good things for people we love but also for people we don't know who need help.

I will write Tuesday Tidbits next week after the bruises have healed and I am somewhat more coherent. I felt the need to write tonight, but this is much more stream of consciousness than my usual approach. I hope it has at least not been boring.

[A good place to be](#)

Once in a while I hit a point in time in which everything is just good. I'm in one of those times right now, and it is very nice. We have been stressed over infertility and adoption over the past six years; now we have a daughter, and she's quite wonderful. Our sleep schedule has become predictable enough that I can start running again. I'm at work full-time now, after a couple of months of part time work, so I am catching up there. I do miss getting to be home with Katja in the afternoons, but we have weekends and evenings together as well as that odd, half-asleep time for her middle of the night feeding, so I feel like I'm still involved enough. For the moment, Xander is taking good care of her. Once he goes back to school, she will be with a very dear friend, her honorary grandma, half time for childcare. I think Katja will be very happy in that environment.

I took Nyx running yesterday morning. We only did a mile and I walked a bit of it, but it was very pleasant. She has a harness specifically for when she's working. She is not allowed to mess around while wearing it. I use it when we're

running or going for walks with Katja. When we run, she just settles into her funny gait that adapts to my short legs and doesn't pull or try to check out much of anything. I'm not sure how true that would be during the day with all the neighborhood dogs out, but at 5:30 in the morning she does beautifully.

The endorphins help me a lot, too. If I can't exercise for whatever reason, it is difficult for me to not end up feeling a little unhappy. When I have the time and energy to exercise, the world seems like a much better place. After two and a half months of not running, getting back to that steady push is good for me both physically and mentally.

There are still things to worry about, mostly money, and things we need to figure out how to do. It isn't that life has suddenly become perfect. I am just being constantly reminded that there are good things that considerably outweigh the worrisome bits of life, and I am trying to enjoy everything as much as possible.

I wouldn't go so far as to say I am content, as I doubt I will ever manage that. I have several projects going, including learning Russian, working on a somewhat serious piece of writing, and reading a challenging (well, challenging for me, anyway) book about mathematics. I am enjoying re-learning Raffi songs and folk songs my mother used to sing to me so I can sing them to Katja. I don't, however, feel unhappily driven. I don't feel like there is any constant irritation in my life. I like what we have and I am happy.

It's a good place to be.

Unplanned

For once, my IndieInk writing challenge will be nonfiction.

“We must let go of the life we have planned, so as to accept the one that is waiting for us.” – Joseph Campbell

Six years ago, we planned to have a baby. Just one.

We knew we were in trouble when a fertility specialist said, with barely concealed glee, “You two are impressively infertile!”

Second opinion: the only kind of treatment we were willing to use (due to hormonal issues and money limitations – the other option was \$16,000 per cycle for a 60% chance of success, and those were not odds we were willing to play) had a 5% chance over three cycles. The doctor said, if he were in our place, he would not do it.

We didn't. We worked on accepting that we would not have a child.

Several months later, I watched my husband interact with a child we've known for years, and I realized that I wanted to see him with his own child. I mentioned adoption and he said he'd been thinking about it but did not want to push me.

We were rejected, with no explanation, by the first agency. We found another. We weren't completely comfortable, but they seemed eager and had good reviews.

We went to several match meetings that did not feel right or work out for one reason or another.

We became increasingly uncomfortable with the lawyer and agency, but were already in pretty deep, so we decided to play out this hand and see where it took us.

We met a family we liked. They liked us, too. We figured out what worked. I made food for them every time I went to visit; we became friends, of sorts. It is an odd relationship and not well defined, but we knew enough to trust each other.

A baby was born, emergency C-section, time spent in the NICU. Paperwork and confusion followed. Two weeks later we could finally come home.

We planned to do what so many people do so easily, just have a baby. It seemed like such a simple task, something natural in the deepest sense of the word. We have a beautiful baby girl from a life we had not planned, and six years after we started this journey, an entirely new life has opened up. We have more people involved than we expected and we have a lot to learn, but we love this little person completely.

This is not the life we had planned, the timing we expected, or the place we thought we'd be, but I find myself deliriously happy when I am holding our daughter. Sleep deprivation has something to do with it, but not as much as you might think.

Accepting this path was not easy, but it was a very good thing in the long run.

For the [IndieInk Writing Challenge](#) this week, [Britania](#) challenged me with “‘We must let go of the life we have planned, so as to accept the one that is waiting for us.’ – Joseph Campbell” and I challenged [iampisspot](#) with “‘Achievement brings its own anticlimax.’ – Maya Angelou”

[Our new family member](#)

On October 21, 2011, our daughter, Katja, was born. She had a bit of a hard time for the first five days, since she needed time in the NICU, but she's fine and healthy now. I am deeply happy that our adoption journey is almost at an end and that we have such an amazing, beautiful little girl in our lives.

Here she is:



This is a picture of her while she was still hooked up to the machines and such; she looks much more like a baby and less like a cyborg now.

We'll be setting up a private, password protected blog to write about her. If you'd like the link and password, please email me.

[An odd state of being](#)

Another step in the adoption process was completed last week.

I am starting to believe more that this could actually happen.

Infertility and everything we went through during that process made me very leery of getting excited about things that might not happen. Every month, I hoped that I was pregnant. Every month, I wasn't. Every time it ended up hurting, even though on some level I came to expect it. We went through the testing and the appointments and, eventually, the IUI, hoping again every month that something would go right this time. It never did, and we ended up being told that we are "impressively infertile" and that the doctor could not ethically do another intra-uterine insemination (IUI). He suggested in vitro fertilization, despite the fact that we had said we did not want that and, as we found out later, that we were not good candidates.

Another doctor, more tests, and we were told we had next to no chance with IUIs. The doctor was willing to do it, but he gave us the numbers and said that if it were a choice he had to make, he would not do it.

We spent years hoping every month. We spent years having that shown to be a ridiculous hope every month. I stopped believing much, and getting excited about something that was not definite became something that I could not do.

I am afraid of getting hurt that much again.

Adoption is not definite. I know that this has a high likelihood of going well. I know that we are doing everything we can to make it work, and it looks promising. I, however, am still afraid to hope too much. I remember how much the failed hope hurt. I want to be excited, but I am holding myself back.

This step helps a little bit. I am beginning to hope. We are starting to put together a registry, which, for me, is quite difficult. It means that I can see this adoption as a real enough possibility to actually plan for it, at least on some level. We are moving furniture and figuring out where things

will need to go to if another person ends up living with us. We are talking about looking for another car to accommodate both the dog and the child at the same time; our current car is fine, but Nyx takes up the entire back seat.

I do not think I will completely believe it until all of the paperwork has been signed and all we have to do is get through the six months before the adoption is finalized. Until then, it would be very easy for this to fall apart, and I am afraid. I should not be – in Magic 8 Ball parlance, all signs point to yes – but infertility taught me not to hope, not to let myself open up that far. I am in the situation of planning for something I do not quite believe in but desperately want to have happen.

It is a very odd state of being.

Open adoption

We have been talking a lot about openness about and in adoption. I have been somewhat surprised at people I know who think that it is all right to not tell a child that he or she is adopted. That is the basic part of openness about adoption. We believe that lying to a child is wrong, especially about something this basic. We each have an adopted parent, and both of them knew from the very beginning that they were adopted. It was not a big deal. It was part of life. It certainly was not anything to be embarrassed or upset about.

Some of our friends have been somewhat surprised about our approach to telling the child that he or she is adopted as early as we are planning (baby books, for instance, so the concept is there from the beginning). I do not want their story to be a surprise to them at any point in their lives.

If everything goes smoothly, we will be adopting a child who does not look like us. That will raise questions; that is not something that is easily ignored. I have heard about an adoptee who was a light-skinned African American adopted into an Italian family who was convinced until he was a teenager that he was just a slightly darker-skinned Italian. He was quite upset to discover he was adopted.

I do not want to raise a child without opening up the discussion and letting them ask. In the second King Fu Panda movie, the panda asks his father (a duck) why he never told the panda that he was adopted. The father's response was, "You never asked!" Communication has to be open. It has to be all right for the child to ask anything and not feel uncomfortable, and it is our job to make sure that the the openings are there. Adoption will not be a taboo subject; it will be discussed as easily as food, work, school, and any other common subject.

In terms of meeting with the biological family, there are pros and cons. If we make that agreement, we will hold by it, of course. It can cause some emotional challenges, probably more for me than for the child (I cannot speak for Xander), but I think it is important. If a child knows that there is another family out there related to him or her, it is quite possible that the other family will be romanticized. I know when I was little, if I got angry with my parents, I would wish I had another family. How much stronger could that wish be if you actually knew there were people out there related to you? If the child has the opportunity to meet their biological relatives somewhat regularly, that romanticization could be limited. Also, seeing biological relatives may help with self-identification; it is good to see people who look like you. My older brother and younger sister are both built differently than I am, but I am clearly a combination of my mother and my father. I liked knowing I have my dad's shoulders, for instance, and my mom's hips. I think it might help the child

grow up with a more comfortable sense of self if he or she knows that they look like someone.

I want adoption, the concept of more than one family, to be comfortable. I do not want the child to feel ashamed or unhappy. I have a lot to learn about a different culture so I can understand how everything fits together for the child, but at the same time, the child will be raised as our child, as part of our culture. I would like the child to feel comfortable with both cultures and to be able to find a path that suits them. I do not expect that path to be easy, necessarily, but I want the child be completely sure of our love and support.

This is going to be an interesting road we wander down...

To write or not to write?

I'm feeling selfish.

If/when we end up with a child, I will want to write about that experience. I don't, however, want to write about it here. This is my space.

I am not a mommy blogger. I don't have any issues with mommy bloggers; I think they fill an important niche, and in a lot of ways help people feel like what they are going through is a little less lonely. That particular niche can create a very important community.

I don't want this little corner of the internet to be part of it. This blog was created because I needed to sort through a lot of things that were going on in my life at the time. I had left an incredibly toxic seven-year-long relationship. I was

redefining myself. I was house hunting, working, trying to find my balance again, and learning that a lot of people I thought were friends had decided that I was not an acceptable human being because of what the other person had been saying. I used words then, as I do now, to help me find my way through life and to understand it better. I suppose it is also useful for understanding myself better. I still need this space to make sense of a very strange world. I will have a place to write about being a parent, but it will be private, not associated with this.

I do not expect many people to read my rambles. I'm sure that if I became part of the mommy blogging community I could have more readers and make more connections, but that isn't what I'm doing here. I don't particularly care how many people read this. I certainly enjoy seeing hits on my statistics, but I'm not shattered if they don't come. This is the space I use to figure things out.

I have been limiting what I say here lately. Adoption is a frustrating process, and much of what goes on, I can't talk about, either because of privacy issues or because it would not be sensible for one reason or another. I have, therefore, been ignoring the blog for the most part. I simply can't sort anything out here. Despite having very few regular readers, it is a very public place and I am very easy to find.

One thing I have been thinking about, though, is the question of privacy in adoption. I have read several bloggers who say that they haven't told anyone about the biological family of their child because it isn't their story to tell. I completely understand not telling perfect strangers, but not telling family seems odd. We are going to make sure that the child (if this works) knows from the very beginning that he or she is adopted and was picked out special. The "how you came to be" story will include the biological family. There won't be any surprises. If there were information that we wanted to keep from the child, I could understand it; for instance, if you

didn't want your mother in law to tell your child that their biological parent was in prison, then perhaps you would hold that piece of information back so you can broach the subject at the appropriate time. We are lucky enough to not have that issue. It would also depend on your relationship with your family, I'm sure. I'm not very worried about it. We're not giving anyone else information that will surprise or upset the child, because the child will have all of the available information from very early on.

I have also been wrestling with other things, like the possibility of raising a child of a different race. Raising a child to be strong, independent, and curious, and how that would be different depending on whether you are talking about a boy or a girl. Reading about the impressively insensitive questions people get from strangers and trying to figure out how to answer them. Thinking about nature versus nurture and wondering what will come of that.

This is the first time in the five years that we have been trying to have a child, one way or another, that I have felt like it might actually be possible. We might actually be parents sometime soon.

Oh, and I've discovered that nesting is most definitely not hormonal. I have been cleaning and organizing and painting and trying to make the house perfect. It won't end up being perfect, of course, but at least it will not be quite as cluttered. I was not expecting that, but it is rather amusing and good for the house.

Now that the blog hosting has been shifted, I'll be taking part in the [Indie Ink Writing Challenge](#) again. I do enjoy that, and, if you are interested, please stop by!