

# Putting the Pieces

## More Family Romancing

**How** could he ever begin to comprehend the extent of the poverty and perversity of the political system of his homeland when all he has ever known is the comfort of our home and the stability of our community, all safely tucked away in a Connecticut suburb? My son had opened up dialogue again about his Guatemalan origins and I was not going to let a teaching opportunity pass me by.

This second incident occurred shortly before his seventh birthday in late April on Holy Saturday. We had just attended our annual church Easter egg hunt that morning and were on our way to Walmart, just the two of us.

From the back seat I heard Adam's words inquisitively asking "Mom was I ever in your belly?" I thought to myself, so this must be about the pregnant woman at the church hall. And I was worried he was going to question why the Easter Bunny had on the same pink shoes as I had on and where did I go when the bunny appeared. It had been just about a year since his first inquisition on the topic of his birth parents (see AT June 2011 page 42).

"So what's this about Adam?" I asked.

"Daddy said that there was a baby in that lady's belly at the party," he stated with a look that I knew he was not telling me the whole truth.

"Daddy told you that?" I questioned knowing that my husband would have mentioned it to me.

"OK, Abbie's mom told us," he admitted.

I thought to myself what a perfect opportunity to explain both lessons to him, the baby

in the belly lesson and that another woman carried him during gestation. We had been up front with Adam from the start about his adoption, although being placed with us at birth, and arriving home at 7 months, he had no recollection of it at all. I continued with my explanation of where babies come from and that his first mother in Guatemala carried him inside her before he came with me.

And while I was looking for a parking spot I casually offered, "You know I have a picture of her at home, I will show it to you later if you want."

Adam had never seen the few photos that I had of his birth mother or his foster family. I was waiting for the right time and that moment was perfect for offering it. The Walmart trip was uneventful and we returned home with no further discussion. I assumed he would forget about it all by the time we got back, but as soon as we walked through the door, he blurted out, "Mom, where's that picture that you mentioned?"

That night after dinner we both went through all the photos from Guatemala that we had. He was interested in the story for about a week thereafter and asked a few more times to look through the pictures, but each time I could notice almost fear in his eyes when his birth mother's picture appeared, as if it hurt him too much to look at it. I asked if he wanted it up in his bedroom, but he declined, and I let him know that he was welcome to pull the photo album out to look at it any time he wanted to. But then the same question kept resurfacing during the following few weeks and then months.

"Mom, so my mother in Guatemala did not have the money to take care of me?" he would ask, which was what I told him.

But how do you attempt an explanation to a 7-year-old on the concept of poverty, a child who has never come close to that kind of experience. And who am I to judge another culture or try to define such a relative term to him.

I thought back to our trips to Guatemala and the books I had read of the civil strife and all the violence through the 80's. Carolina would have been coming of age during the height of the conflict, and from the birth certificate, I gathered she was from San Marcos in the Western highlands, one of the bloodiest areas of the civil war. And from her photo I suspected her as an indigenous Mayan woman. As if poverty wasn't difficult enough to define to him, I wasn't about to attempt an explanation of war, violence or ethnic persecution. I struggle as it is discussing those concepts with my adult college students, always walking a fine line trying not to offend anyone. The fact is, that lately I don't even know what I believe any more.

Yes, Guatemala is poor by American standards, but by whose values do we judge it — on a Western imperialist system of values? Two cultures but worlds apart, one striving for basic survival, physiological needs of clean water, food, medicine and housing. Basic needs of safety go unmet with a lack of state resources for ecological disasters, civil conflict, drug and human trafficking, offering little to no social services support for children and families, especially for the indigenous population in the rural areas.

But here in America we suffer from a different kind of survival, which one might consider a different form of poverty, one from alienation, excessive individualism, competitive consumerism, obesity, addictions and narcissistic self-centeredness. With each society so

# Together

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unique, both with its own challenges, who am I to say one is better. (Timimi, 2009)

Eight years ago I thought my husband and I had done something noble by taking in a marginalized child from a backward nation, with us in midlife and the resources to do so. Today I wonder about it.

Adam asked again, "Mom, so my mother in Guatemala had no money to take care of me? Do you think she remembers me? Do you think she misses me?"

"I am sure a day does not go by that she doesn't think of you, my baby," I answered him feeling her pain and trying desperately to hide the tears from my son. I don't want to let on to him that I can barely look at her picture myself without wondering under what conditions was she led to relinquish her son to me, and wonder if she had any other options at the time. (Bunkers et al., 2009)

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