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Blood Ties and Acts of Love

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As I look at my ever-growing and protruding belly, I find myself fascinated by the biological processes at play: sperm, egg, and a baby being made. I imagine that any woman experiencing this process for the first time would find it, as I do, an exciting but mystifying and often uncomfortable journey. In my own first three months I wondered, *Why does anyone go through this?*

As an adopted person my context for the way babies come into the world is through adoption, not birth. Of course I understand birth, but that is not the way I came into my family. I did not grow up knowing the people who gave birth to me. But I do not doubt the labor my adoptive parents went through to get me. It consisted of mounds of paperwork and home studies that stretched over two years. I thank God pregnancy is just 9 months.

In anticipating the birth of my child, I feel like an explorer getting ready to delve into a foreign land that is also somehow familiar. I did not grow up in the culture of blood; I grew up in the culture of adoption. The ties that bind me to my family are not based in biology. They are based in relationship.

But for the first time, I and my husband -- who happens to also be adopted from South Korea -- will, through our child, know what it is to be connected with someone who also shares our genes. And I must admit there is something delicious about finally being a part of the majority.

But it could get complicated. Like when we have to make a family tree. And have to explain how our little Korean child came from Irish, German, English and Italian ancestry. Although our child will look at our faces and will see familiar curves and lines, the extended family will not look as familiar. And so we will have to explain our adoption so our child can understand why grandma has blond hair and grandpa has blue eyes and we don't.

Part of the legacy we will also give our child is the loss of genetic ancestry. We will have to explain why mommy and daddy did not grow up with the parents who gave birth to them and why we got new families. And even though I have met my birth family, I do not know the family history. And knowing the history is not just knowing one's genes, it's knowing the stories going back generations.

Even though I hope to someday bring our child to Korea to meet extended biological kin, my husband and I cannot provide all of the skills needed to be effective in that culture. We don't speak Korean in the home; nor do we cook Korean food regularly. Although we have become very knowledgeable about Korean culture and have connections to the Korean-American community, I wonder about our ability to nurture our child's racial and cultural identity.

I am relieved, though, that my child will not have to answer the question "Why were you born?" the way I had to answer the question, "Why were you adopted?" I am glad that my child will not be told by well-meaning strangers he or she is "lucky" to have been born. And I certainly won't tell my child to be grateful because I brought them into the world. And if my child feels any gratitude toward me I hope it is because I earned it.

It will be important to remind ourselves that it is because of our own needs, not theirs, that we bring children into our lives to parent. Being able to have the gift of a child born to me allows me to reconnect to that which I had lost as a consequence of adoption. But I also know that to also have the gift of a child adopted by me would allow me to continue the culture I most understand — the culture of adoption.

I anticipate that generations and generations after me will slowly erase my history. They will most likely forget that their great-great-grandmother had to learn to be Korean. That she came to America at 3 and a half years old in a little red pant suit and vest, and white sweater trimmed in red. That she cried to return to her motherland. And that the mother she loved had blond hair and the father she loved was an Irishman. Ultimately I want generations after me to know this about the culture of blood and the culture of adoption: That blood is thicker than water, but love can be thicker than blood.