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## Little Angel finds adoption heavenly

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Angel Melissa-Victoria Brown.

"Yeah, that's my name," proclaimed the little 8-year-old girl after she was officially adopted Thursday afternoon by her new mom, Tamara Brown.

Little Angel jumped up into her mother's arms, and they each held on tight.

"Yeah, the adoption is final. The adoption is final," Angel repeated over and over again.

The official act took only a few minutes, but afterward Angel got to sit with Superior Court Judge Terence Flynn and show him some photographs. Flynn listened as mother and daughter showed off their memories of the past 14 months.

"She has changed so much over the past year," Brown explained to Flynn, pointing to photos taken the day Angel arrived at Brown's home after state officials were forced to remove the little girl from an abusive home.

After viewing the photo album, Flynn posed for a photo with the new family — an addition for the album, he told them. Then the judge reached into his desk drawer and pulled out a heart-shaped pin that read: "I'm Special. I'm Adopted."

Angel pinned it right on her dress.

"The adoption is final. The adoption is final," Angel repeatedly chanted as she skipped out of the judge's chambers and through his courtroom.

Brown walked out of the courtroom and immediately did the "happy dance."

"I am over the moon," she said with a huge smile on her face. "We've talked about this day and talked about this day. And all that's required — having people question you and question your motives — and this is like winning the greatest race ever, and I've gotten the greatest prize ever."

Brown, 43, of Eatontown, and little Angel had worked toward the adoption for more than a year.

In April 3, 2007, Brown got a phone call at work from the state's Division of Youth and Family Services telling her that a 7-year-old girl was part of an emergency removal from an abusive home,

and asking if she would take in the young girl.

Brown said it took just a few seconds before she said yes. She told her boss at New Jersey Natural Gas she had to go "now."

That evening, Angel was brought to Brown's home, and the two just clicked right away.

"At first, she was a bit shy, but we kept saying, 'we haven't seen the real Angel yet,' but she came out of her shell," Brown said.

Brown's journey to become an adoptive parent began in 2005 after viewing an exhibit at New Jersey Natural Gas headquarters in Wall, where she works as an engineer.

The Heart Gallery of New Jersey had set up an exhibit of photographs featuring the 346 children deemed by DYFS as its "hardest to adopt." NJNG's parent company, New Jersey Resources, is one of the sponsors of the gallery, an online and traveling exhibit of photographs of New Jersey children who are seeking adoption and are typically in foster care.

"Those photos really hit home with me," Brown said.

In May 2006, she made the commitment to go through the process of getting licensed for adoption by DYFS. After 10 months, the process was complete, and she was told she would be active in the state system in about 30 days.

Four days later, she got the call asking if she would take in Angel, although Angel was not a part of the first round of Heart Gallery children.

As time went on, the two grew closer, and soon Angel was asking Brown if she could call her Mom. Then it happened — the two knew they were meant to be family.

One day in August 2007, Angel came to Brown with her idea about what she wanted for her new name: Angel Melissa-Victoria Brown. Melissa is her birth mother's name, and Victoria is her new grandmother's name. And she wanted her new mother's last name.

"She made that decision, and she hasn't budged or changed her mind," Brown said.

"Yeah," Angel chimed in, unable to contain her emotions. "Angel Melissa-Victoria Brown, that's my name."

Prior to going into the courtroom, Brown and Angel were greeted with flowers from friends Stephanie Thompson and Barbara Wright, both of Neptune, who attend St. Stephen AME Zion Church in Asbury Park with the Browns. Both women were overjoyed for the pair.

Inside the courtroom, as they waited to be called into the judge's chambers to make it all official and final, Angel snuggled up between mom Tamara and grandmom Victoria Brown.

Grandmom Victoria started to page through a photo album brought along to show anybody who would take a look. Soon Angel joined in looking at all the memories from the past year.

Each time grandmom Victoria would turn a page, Brown or Angel would provide a little commentary.

"That's me playing soccer," Angel said while pointing to one of the photographs.

"It's the greatest thing I've ever done," Brown said. "Now we can be just us. We can just be who we are together."

"Now I want a baby sister," Angel said, turning to her mom.

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