

She adopted a child — and then gave him up

Anita Tedaldi raised boy for 18 months before making heartbreaking choice

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No decision she ever made or ever expects to make was more agonizing or more controversial. After 18 months of pouring her love and efforts into bonding with her adoptive son, Anita Tedaldi realized it wasn't working and gave the child to another family.

"I loved him and I cared deeply for him," Tedaldi told TODAY's Matt Lauer Thursday in New York. "I tried to do the same exact thing I did with my biological children, but over time it became clear that our family maybe wasn't a good match for him, that we were unable to meet some of his needs."

Tedaldi inspired both praise and condemnation when she wrote in The New York Times' Motherlode blog about the orphan boy she and her husband adopted from South America, where, they learned, he had been found abandoned at the side of a road.

The child was somewhere around 1 year old — his exact age could not be determined. His legs were underdeveloped, and his head was flat in the back from being left in a crib unattended.

The controversy has spread to [the blog written by TODAY's Natalie Morales](#), who wrote about it after reporting Tedaldi's story. After reading Tedaldi's story in the Times, Morales observed: "It's a piece that will bring you to tears."

She did her homework

It also brought Tedaldi to wrenching tears. She and her husband, who is in the U.S. military and is frequently deployed overseas, had five natural daughters. They wanted to adopt to share their blessings with a child who otherwise would have had little hope.

"I had wanted to adopt for a long time, even before I met my husband or had my five biological daughters," she wrote in her blog entry. "I've always wanted a large family, like the one I grew up with in Italy, and I love the chaos and liveliness of many kids."

Tedaldi said she wasn't going into adoption blind or with false expectations. "I did lots of research on adoption, including attachment problems and other complications that older adopted children can have," she wrote. "I spoke to my therapist and went through a thorough screening process with social workers to figure out if I, and my family, could be a good match for a child who needed a home."

She was ecstatic when she picked up the boy, whom she identifies only as "D.," after months of waiting, Tedaldi recounted. But as much as she poured herself into the challenges of raising him along with her five daughters, she realized that she wasn't connecting with him, and that he wasn't bonding with her at that visceral level that only a parent understands.

As time went on, Tedaldi began to consider giving him up to another adoptive family, but first, she sought out a therapist to help her bond with D.

"Still, I struggled," Tedaldi wrote. "One day ... I was on the phone with Jennifer, our social worker, who merely asked 'what's up' when I blurted out that I couldn't parent D., that things were too hard.

"As soon as I said these words out loud, a flood of emotions washed over me, and I sobbed, clutching the phone with both hands."

An agonizing decision

Problems with D. were also affecting her marriage, and when her husband was home between deployments, they found themselves fighting nearly constantly. Finally, the family made the wrenching decision to go to an agency to find a new home for D.

Tedaldi and "Samantha," D.'s new mother, spent days meeting together with the boy to smooth the transition. Tedaldi wrote movingly of the last time she saw D.

"I kneeled down and pulled D. close to me, desperately wanting to impress an indelible memory of my son on me, and me on him, inhaling his scent, feeling his soft skin and touching his coarse hair. In our last moments together, I stared into his eyes and told him that I loved him and that I had tried to do my best," she wrote. "His new mom would love him so, so much; my little man would be OK. He didn't cry, he stared back at me, then looked to Samantha and asked for more juice."

Forthright opinions

Comments were quick to come, from those who said they admired Tedaldi's courage to those who said they despised her cowardice.

"I have heard our society called 'Throw Away', this woman, and I cannot call her a mom, just threw this little boy away, again. What message have we embedded in this little boy's mind? He has now been thrown away not once but twice. Have we created a future psychopath? Will he ever trust another person?" wrote one reader to Morales' blog.

On the other side of the debate was this comment: "I watched Anita tell her story with Matt this morning and, as a mom, it broke my heart. It is not anyone's place to judge her. She was

looking out for little "D's" best interest and it had to be a very hard decision for her and her family. Why are we as a society so quick to judge!!!!"

Tedaldi told Lauer she knew the criticism was coming. In fact, she had been critical of other mothers who had done the same thing.

"I did do the same thing two years ago," Tedaldi said. "I wrote a column where I criticized somebody who had done the same thing. I understand where the criticism comes from, because, of course, this is not the outcome that anyone would hope for. But ultimately, we had to do what was best for the child."

'Not a rental'

There are more than 130,000 adoptions in the United States every year. Adam Pertman, executive director of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute and author of "Adoption Nation," told Lauer such cases as Tedaldi's are rare.

"It happens, and the one message we shouldn't take away from this is that adoption is a rental where you try it out. It's not. It's permanent and it's loving, and it's like every other family, but that doesn't always work," Pertman told Lauer.

Lisa Belkin, columnist and editor of the Motherlode blog, told Lauer, "The point was not to say, 'Look, this happens all the time,' and to frighten people away. The point was to say, 'This happens sometimes and knowing about that going in — more information — is better.' "

Months later, Tedaldi said D. and his new family are doing well.

"I'm not sure that I failed him. I loved him and I tried my best — in that respect I didn't fail him," she said. "He deserves the best life that he can possibly have. I wish that I could have been the one to give him that life."

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