

At adoption reunion, family are related by gift

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Children whoosh down an inflatable water slide in the Pompano Beach park squealing and squawking. Bright blue sky reached out behind them and lazy white clouds hung just low enough to capture their joy in fluffy white bundles.

It was that kind of day. Food cooking on a grill. Music booming and families soaking up the sun. A family reunion for families connected by one single act -- adoption.

Omega Psi Phi fraternity hosted their annual Adoption Appreciation picnic as a way to honor families that had opened their hearts and homes to children available through the state.



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Although I'd been invited many times over the years, this year's event was my first. An eclectic mix of races and ages, married and single families milled about carrying hot dog buns, kicking bouncing balls or pushing carriages. We nodded at one another and kept our eyes on our children as they ran wild. The whole thing -- being there with the kids, sharing with them once again the story of how we became family, and sharing it with others who'd built their families the same way -- felt special and right.

Melvin Davis of Fort Lauderdale has been a member of the traditionally black fraternity Omega Psi Phi for 22 years. He organized the picnic and says he's proud to be part of the event each year.

"We were looking for a program in the community that would benefit children. One of our frat brothers worked with an agency in the adoption community. He said why don't we come and take a look at the matching party," Davis says, speaking of the events that allow potential adoptive parents to interact with children.

Over the years, I've attended my share of adoption parties. Even before I knew I wanted to be an adoptive parent, I'd gone and felt the heartbreaking tug of children who just wanted to be loved. That's what made the recent "appreciation" picnic so special. It's the next chapter in the story. The "what-can-happen-when" part that comes after a family goes from "potentially" adopting to "congratulations!"

Davis says a few of his fraternity members have adopted children over the years. "We know the picnics are positive programs," he says. Omega Psi Phi does appreciation picnics as well as

matching parties. "We provide the music, the location, the entertainment, the food. Childnet invites the families and we take care of the rest," he says.

November is National Adoption Awareness Month. It was in November that I finalized the adoption for my second child in 2002. We were part of a huge mass adoption at the Broward Courthouse that year. There are numerous activities planned in Broward this month.

In Miami-Dade, 65 children were adopted on Nov. 9. At least 500 others await permanent homes. Vivianne Hall, associate development director for Children's Home Society Southeast says their event on Saturday in Palm Beach County is from 9 a.m. to noon at the courthouse and will include around 30 families.

It's a real feel-good sort of thing with a wide range of families," Hall says. Among the adoptions Hall plans to highlight for is "a woman in her late 40s with two or three grown children. She's adopting Guatemalan-born twins -- a boy and a girl. She's really amazing," Hall says.

What was really amazing was how normal the scene at the park felt. When your children are little, you don't worry too much about how they will react to "being adopted." But kids get bigger and social influences change, so you don't really know.

So while we ate hot dogs and turned cartwheels and made friends, I told the girls again about the first time I met them. And explained that when I say "the people helped me adopt you" I meant some of the people right there at the park.

In true kid fashion, they took it all in. Lauren hugged me and said, "I love you, Mom." Kenya said, "That's good, Mommy. Can I get back on the water slide now?"

What else was there to say?

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