



Adoption Wrecks You and Transforms You: an Adoption story from the Puls family

The Only Way Out is Through

I was emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and physically exhausted when we stepped off the plane from Taiwan. My husband, who can always look at the big picture, was more generous with his love and joy. He could immediately see that we would be okay. I tend to get stuck in a moment, and all I could see was my possibly ruined life. When we were in the trenches during the first few weeks home, I would scour the internet for anything that put words onto how I felt. I read somewhere that adoption wrecks you, and then it transforms you. I very much felt wrecked but was encouraged and comforted by the idea of being changed. I figured that the only way out of the wreckage was to go through it.

The Wreck

People see the cute, happy photos of families uniting with their child for the first time and think it's rainbows and butterflies after that, but life after the airport is tough. It wrecked me. Overnight, we became parents to a six-year-old boy who knew five English words. All three of us were grieving, and for those first few weeks, at least one of us was in tears during every hour of the day. I remember cooking Thanksgiving dinner with a sobbing and screaming child following me around the kitchen for six hours. Friends were texting me, "Welcome home! You're so blessed!" as my husband and I sat on the floor with our grieving son as he cried in our arms. This lasted for weeks. I knew it would be challenging, but living it was very different. I would be horrified if anyone saw my Google searches from that first month.

Our son had five whole years before we knew him living a life that is much unknown to us, a story that is his own. When he became part of our family, he changed us, not with the apparent transition to parenthood, but with hard and heavy truths that exposed the cracks and faults in our own stories. Inviting someone else's brokenness into our home revealed all the brokenness in us. He turned our lives upside down, dismantling what we thought we knew and what we thought we were going to be. We could not witness the effects of deep fractures in his life without seeing the cracks in our own. One of the cracks in my own life was letting go of the shame associated with taking care of myself. Not the kind of self-care like bubble baths and manicures, but rest, pursuing my passions, and putting my own oxygen mask on first. I learned to listen to and trust myself.

We quickly learned that if we wanted to help our child heal from brokenness and hurt, we had to acknowledge and heal the brokenness and pain in our own lives. I've always had a good handle on my mental health, but I needed help.

The Transformation

Therapy played a significant role in gently guiding me to a better place. I learned to let every feeling have its moment so that I could have the capacity and tools to parent and love a child that endured real trauma. I couldn't teach my child to regulate his emotions and navigate the effects of trauma if I could not heal the parts of me that I didn't like. I learned how to sit in my uncomfortable feelings and let them lead me to understanding, truth, and ultimately a stronger sense of self. I teach my son to sit in his feelings too. As a family, we have learned that behavior comes from a feeling, which comes from a need. We sit in an uncomfortable place long enough to ask, "what does my body or heart need?" This practice has made our house a calm and safe space for everyone.

All that my child has lost and endured has become part of my story and my new normal. The world is a different place, a more prominent, scary, broken, and more beautiful place. Everything changed. Our world was too small before. Our dreams were too temporary, our lives too comfortable, our worries so finite, and our desires too selfish. Our son revealed a broken side of life that we never acknowledged. It's honest to us now. We are better because we get to love him. I feel like we got special glasses to see the brokenness in the people around us, and as we all heal, we have found so much love, grace, and compassion to give to others freely. One of the best gifts I can give my son is a happy, healthy mom who lives a whole life. I created an enriching life that I don't need to escape from to feel joy and freedom. I have goals, hobbies, and aspirations separate from my family, all of which fulfill me differently. Because of that, I can be fully present and joyful at home. He helped me become that woman. I look at my son, and my heart overflows with joy and love for him. I remember a time when I thought that feeling felt far away. I can't believe he is ours, and we get to love him every day. We could have missed this.

I often tell my husband that I'm thankful to be out of the small window of time when our child first came home. I would tell anyone deep in the weeds that the times when you feel all your comforts squeezing out and all the parts of your old life going out the window - there is so much joy and freedom on the other side of it if you push through. Let yourself feel it all and remember that the only way out is through.