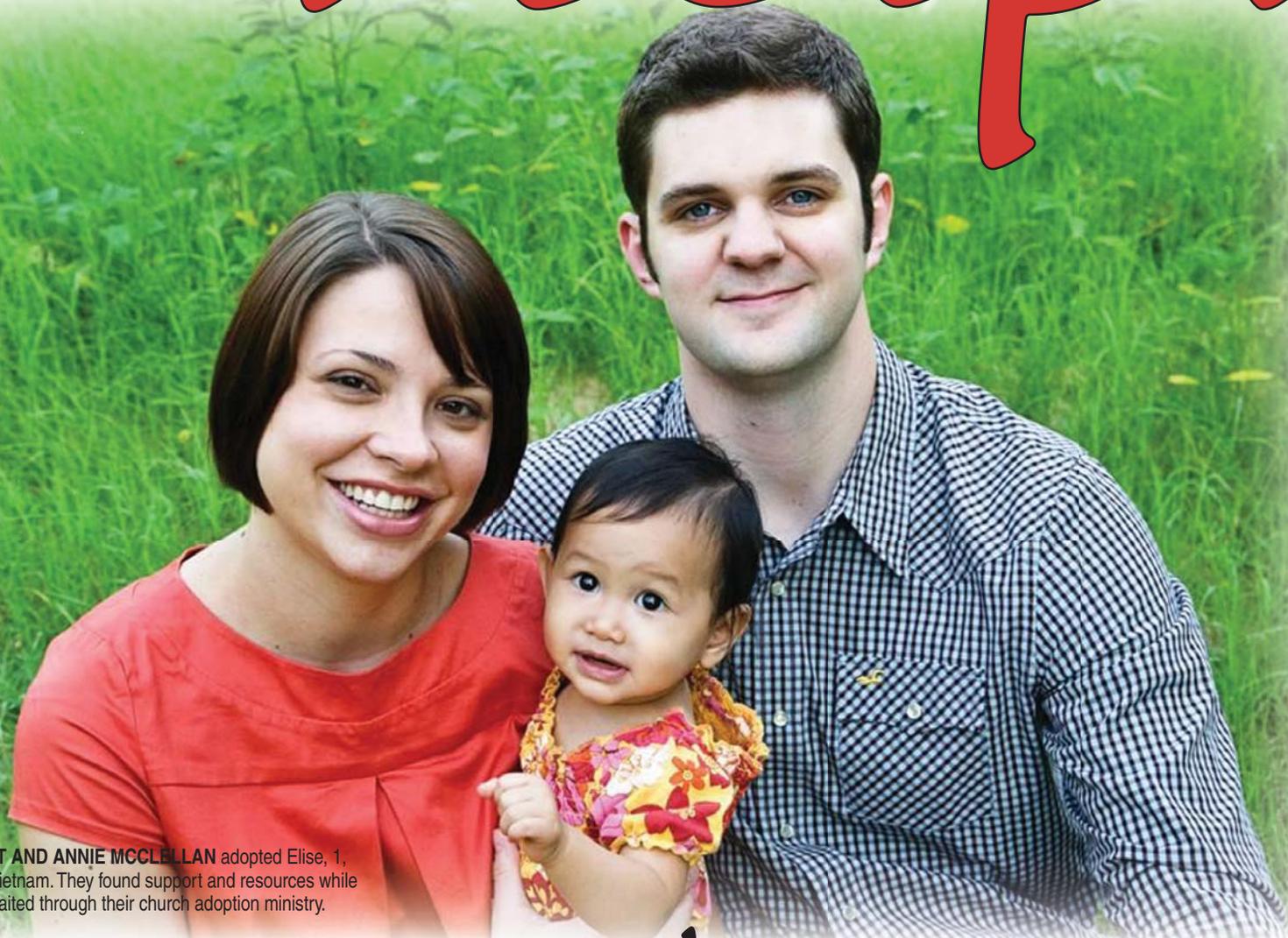


Help!



SCOTT AND ANNIE MCCLELLAN adopted Elise, 1, from Vietnam. They found support and resources while they waited through their church adoption ministry.

We're Adopting!

By Michael Monroe

Tips for helping families prepare to parent their new child, then surviving and thriving in the early stages of adoption.

I received an interesting e-mail recently from a mom who had just welcomed home a preschool aged boy from Russia. The subject line of the e-mail said it all — “Help, We’ve Adopted!” As I read the e-mail detailing the challenges this family was experiencing, I couldn’t help but think how many adoptive parents, including my wife and me have had that same exact thought at some point . . . and often on more than one occasion.

Many consider the first year of marriage to be one of the hardest and most challenging. Shortly after the honeymoon ends, and sometimes even before, the bliss of marriage may be rudely interrupted by the discovery of annoying habits, frustrating realities and unexpected challenges.

The same is often true of the adoption journey. Many parents who have adopted toddlers and older children have experienced a honeymoon of sorts with their new son or daughter — a time marked with warm and charming interaction and virtual total compliance. However, the ‘adoption honeymoon’ can end rather unceremoniously with the onset of tantrums, defiance and other inappropriate behaviors, as the child begins to test boundaries and begin what can be a difficult transition to a new environment and a new family. Equally, children adopted at all ages are likely, if not almost certain, to experience a range of emotions and thoughts such as grief, loss, questions about identity and confusion — all relating in some way or another to the impact of adoption in their lives.

The adoption honeymoon may be shorter for toddlers and may last a bit longer for older children. With children adopted as infants it may seem early on that the honeymoon will never end. Regardless, experience suggests that the adoption honeymoon will inevitably end, and once it does the challenges and issues can set in — sometimes creeping up only occasionally, sometimes crashing in. This can leave adoptive parents thinking (and at times ready to scream), “Help, We’ve Adopted!”

Finding Help Before You Need It

When thinking about adoption it is important

to keep in mind that the adoption process — that is, the steps starting with making decisions about whether and how to adopt all the way through to the joyful “welcome home” — is merely a part, and a relatively small part at that, of the life-long adoption journey. With that in mind, it’s best to use the adoption process to also begin preparing for the long-term journey ahead.

It is understood that adoption, and particularly intercountry adoption, generally comes with some amount of waiting. For some

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countries and some processes, the wait can seem like an eternity. In the face of this difficult reality, the challenge for those who are waiting is to figure out what it means for them to “wait well.” Part of that certainly includes becoming educated, as well as helping friends and family to become better educated, about the process and what the future may hold for you as an adoptive family. “Waiting well” also should include finding connections to resources and support. In this sense, the best connections are most often experienced adoptive parents who understand and can relate to you and your family and are willing to offer support, encouragement and wisdom.

Whatever “waiting well” means for you and your family, it is important to resist the temptation to “bunker down” and simply try to survive the wait. Instead, view the wait as an opportunity to actively and intentionally prepare yourself and those around you so that you are all well positioned for whatever challenges come your way once the adoption honeymoon ends.

Where Do I Go From Here?

No matter where you are in the adoption

process or journey, it is never too late to begin preparing for what may lay ahead. Here are several important things that adoptive parents, as well as those who are considering adoption or are currently waiting, can begin to do now to find answers and, more importantly, know where to turn when the adoption honeymoon is over:

Get Prepared — Generally speaking, adoption is not one of those things in life that just happens. Because of all that is involved in the process and the waiting that is frequently

required, it can hardly be said that adoption is likely to sneak up on you. Maybe that’s the reason you never see bumper stickers that read “Adoption Happens.”

With that in mind, it is important for adoptive parents to become educated about what to expect in terms of behaviors, emotions, questions and issues that can arise. More importantly, adoptive parents need to learn ways to effectively and compassionately respond in order to build a trusting and open relationship with their child. The issues and challenges that will arise will almost certainly change and evolve as your child gets older. In light of this, “getting prepared” should be understood not as a one-time thing, but rather a continual learning process that will span all of your child’s formative years.

Get Connected — One of greatest ways to improve your chances of successfully navigating the twists and turns of the adoption journey is to get connected early and stay connected after you welcome your child home. In our fast paced, high tech world connections can take many forms. However, the best connections are almost always of the person-to-

person variety. Whether through a community support group or a church ministry, seek out experienced adoptive families with whom you share common experiences as well as families

ing the wait will certainly help you to “wait well.” Equally, don’t let the fact that you may be currently experiencing tough times relating to adoption issues keep you from seeking out

the close bond and sense of togetherness they had as they navigated the adoption process itself. Dealing with post-placement challenges and issues should not be left to only one spouse. More to the point, dads must be sure not to leave it to the mothers to understand and respond to the adoption-related challenges on their own. The same principle also applies for single adoptive parents in regard to their extended family and others in their immediate support network.

Fully embracing a child through adoption requires all of those who have made the commitment to love and care for the child to take an interest in and be intentional about becoming educated about the challenges and issues as well as participating in the process of helping the child heal and become whole.

that may have traveled slightly different paths. If you can’t find such a group in your area, consider starting one. There are plenty of resources available to help you.

connections. We have seen that for many parents the connections and support that serve them best are the ones that were initiated and fostered well before their needs arose or their adoption process was complete.

Fully embracing a child through adoption requires all of those who have made the commitment to love and care for the child to take an interest in and be intentional about becoming educated about the challenges and issues as well as participating in the process of helping the child heal and become whole. For example, there is much to suggest that traditional discipline techniques should give way to a different approach for children who were adopted, such as the approach detailed by Drs. Purvis and Cross in their book, *The Connected Child*. In order to most effectively utilize this parenting approach with your

Whatever the case, don’t wait until you begin to encounter challenges or until you have completed your adoption process to get connected. Forging connections with others dur-

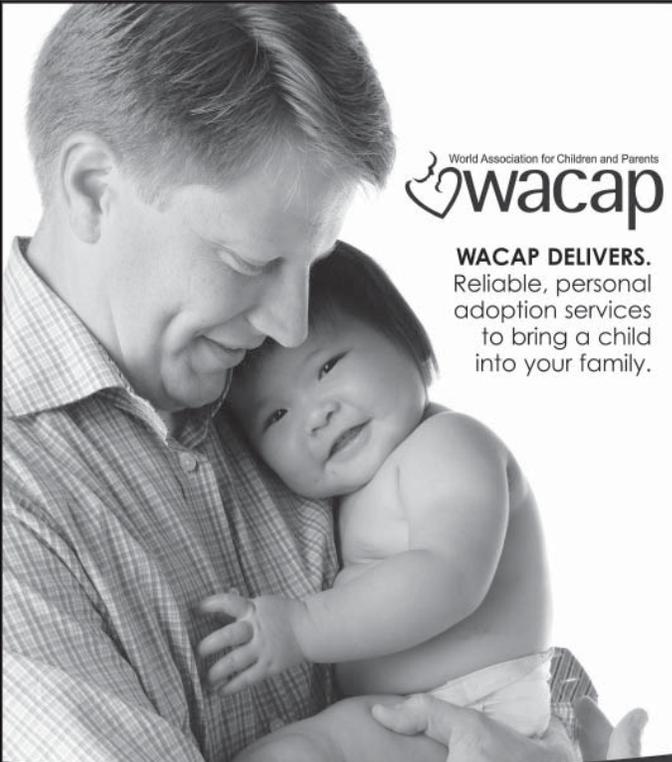
Stick Together — The stress of life coupled with the challenges of being newly adoptive parents can sometimes cause couples to lose



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newly adopted child it is important that both parents as well as grandparents, extended family and close friends all get on the same page about how to understand and respond to the child and his behaviors.

In addition, children (in particular older children) sometimes resort to manipulation and divide-and-conquer approaches to pit one parent against another. In response, it is essential that parents stay on the same page and maintain a healthy level of openness and communication as they stick together for the health of their relationship and the benefit of their child.

Don't Take it Personally — It's not all about you. This is a simple, yet difficult truth that every adoptive parent must accept and remember. This truth is one that we all too often forget. We, as adoptive parents, are certainly deeply involved with our whole selves — heart, mind and emotions — but most often we are not truly the object of the

emotions and even the behaviors our child may exhibit. Many of our children come with “junk” that is a byproduct of a past which can never fully be known or understood. Likewise, adopted children also deal, in varying degrees, with various emotions and questions relat-

purpose for their lives, even as we consistently offer them the love, grace, protection and discipline they need to help them grow and thrive.

Michael Monroe and his wife, Amy, lead

Many of our children come with “junk” that is a byproduct of a past which can never fully be known or understood . . . In the face of this it is important to remember, and to remind our children often, that there is a purpose for their lives, even as we consistently offer them the love, grace, protection and discipline they need to help them grow and thrive.

ing to the life-long impact of adoption. In the face of this it is important to remember, and to remind our children often, that there is a

Tapestry, the adoption and foster care ministry at Irving Bible Church. You can find out more about Tapestry at www.tapestry.irvingbible.org.



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