

Vonna Purtell: My name is Vonna Purtell.

Jena: Tell me a little bit about your decision to adopt. What led to it? How did you decide on China?

Vonna: My husband and I had been married for a few years, were unable to have children. We had went through the fertility process with treatments and IVF, had miscarried. For me, I thought that was it. I thought we weren't able to have kids, we weren't going to have kids. My husband was actually the one who said, "Why don't we look into adoption?" We looked into the Dave Thomas Foundation. My husband, for whatever reason, knew that Dave Thomas had been adopted. There was a Dave Thomas Wendy's Foundation with adoption and he had told me to look into that. I went ahead and got the information.

We went here locally in San Antonio to an information session and had went in with a mind-set of looking at domestic adoption, a private domestic adoption. We went through that process, getting some information. While we were there, they also touched on international adoption. We realized how, to us, scary domestic adoption would be. They had couples there who had actually went through the process several times. What we didn't realize was that a birth mother has so many days after she gives birth to change her mind. These people had actually had that happen to them several times. After everything we had been through, I knew that was something I couldn't go through.

We tuned in more to the international adoptions in the different counties. Once we heard about the little girls from China, that seemed to be the one that we wanted to look into. Before that, we had also looked at going through the foster system and had inquired about that. I made one phone call. That was as far as I went. I made one phone call, talked to what I'm going to guess was an overworked social worker who said, "You do realize that ninety percent of the kids in the Texas foster system are biracial?" He had no idea who I was on the other end of the phone. That didn't sit well with me. He also said that you could foster a child for several years. If it is determined that that child goes up for adoption, that child doesn't necessarily end up with you. They could end up with another family who's higher on the list. Based off of that one conversation, we didn't pursue it. It was Methodist Mission Home here in San Antonio that we had went to an information session at. We decided we wanted to look more into China and go that route. That's what we ended up doing.

Jena: Why didn't that social worker's comment about children being biracial sit well with you?

Vonna: I am half Filipino and half American, or Caucasian. To either one of us, it didn't really matter what the race of a child was. One of my children has special needs, or was considered special needs. Had we had a child through natural, traditional ways, I wouldn't have been able to guarantee a hundred percent that that child was going to be a healthy baby with no complications, which is the same reason why we didn't have a problem with special needs. As far as biracial went, it doesn't matter to us. It never did. I grew up in a military family. We travelled a lot. We were around different ethnicities. Whereas my husband, it was

a little bit different. Where he's from, everybody's Caucasian. They maybe had one black student in their school where he grew up at. When he went off to college, he had roommates that were from Africa and other places, other countries. It didn't bother him either.

Jena: It felt like the social worker was warning you about something you didn't feel the need to be warned about?

Vonna: Right. The social worker has probably encountered numerous times -- a social worker for the state, I guess they've seen all kinds of things. Probably one of their biggest battles may be someone who they're thinking in their mind -- again, he never met me, so he doesn't know who we are -- but probably thinking somebody who's coming along saying, "I want to adopt a child, but I want a healthy, white child. That's what I'm looking for." Maybe it's harder for them to place children that are biracial. In this country, everybody's something whether they want to admit it or not. [laughs] It probably sat poorly with me that that was a big deal to him to mention it to me.

Jena: You zeroed in on China. What was it about China as opposed to the other international options that appealed to you?

Vonna: We seemed to fit all of the criteria for China. They went through with the different countries, what some of the criteria was. China seemed to be the one that we fit the most. When we heard about how they treated -- we have may have been one of the only people who weren't aware of what the problem in China was with the one-child policy and the girls, and what they did. I was very naive to that until we started the process and started learning about it. Both of us thought, "Wow. That's where we want to go to." The only thing that kind of turned us off was that we were pretty much told it's going to be a girl. We didn't care either way if it was a boy or a girl. The whole idea that a girl was probably going to be the only option, we were kind of like, "I don't know." [laughs]

China also seemed to have the most streamlined process and the safest process. We had met people who had gone through Eastern Europe and adopted and had run into a lot of problems. We knew one family who actually had a child, went to go meet them once or twice. When they went back to finalize everything, had been told that they had to come up with some more cash. The whole adoption ended up falling through. We knew that China seemed to have the most stable program, which felt really safe to us.

Jena: When you started to find out about the one-child policy, did that make you want to adopt from China more? Did it make it more appealing or less appealing? How did it play into your thinking?

Vonna: For me, I don't think it mattered either way. I couldn't believe that they were still practicing the one-child policy. I didn't really have an understanding until we started looking into it deeper about the lengths that people would go through in order to keep that boy that they wanted. I couldn't believe that they would actually do something to a little girl or an

unborn child that they thought might be a girl. That part made us want even more to be able to go through with the process and hopefully come home with a child.

Jena: What year did you adopt the twins? When did you start the process? When did you come home with them?

Vonna: We started the process in 2005. I was probably a little over zealous. We started in May of 2005. Our dossier left for China in November of 2005. We came home in October 2007 with them. When we had started, first meeting with the social worker was, "Six months, nine at most, you'll have your baby in your hands." After our dossier left, the slowdown started occurring. What we thought was never going to happen, eventually did happen two years later. I'll never forget the phone call that we got in August. I can't remember the specifics. Our adoption agency is actually in Minnesota. They had had a bridge collapse or some sort in St. Paul. That had halted mail service.

Our referral package had landed. We couldn't get our referral package, but we knew it was in the United States. Our agency had said, "We have another office close by. They've received all our mail." We have it where our people were working on our stuff, whereas they hadn't received it yet. We had waiting so long. I was the person on the phone every couple hours, "Did somebody find it?" They finally found it. They called us forty-eight hours after everything had actually made it in that they were able to call us. They called us. I'll never forget. Our social worker here was the one who called us. She said, "Are you sitting down?" I said, "Wait a second. I got to get my husband." We were both at work because I was working for him at the time. She said, "You have been referred twins." We had no idea.

Jena: Had you said you were willing to take twins?

Vonna: We did. When we initially sent our dossier, our I-700 was approved for two children. We had only made the formal request in all our paperwork for one child to China. In May of 2007 we knew that our referral date was coming up, that our log-in date was coming up. We had reached out to our agency and said, "We would like to see if there's any possibility of sending a letter to China requesting specifically twins." They said, "We can do that for you. However, it's not going to happen. It's really rare. Don't get your hopes up. If you really want us to, we can do that. You have to do some things on your end." We had to reach out to my husband's employer, and have them write some letters, and get a couple of other things together for them. We submitted a whole new package together that they forwarded on. They said, "We've sent it. It's gone. We'll see what happens." In August, we got the phone and said we have twins.

Jena: It wasn't a whole new dossier, but it was an addendum to the dossier?

Vonna: Yes. We had to submit a bunch of new financial paperwork to them. Things had changed for us after that length of a wait. We had to show some new financial stuff to them. My husband's employer had to write another letter to them. The agency wrote a letter. They sent it off. We sat and we waited. We got the phone call. It was interesting phone call. We

got the phone call that, “You have twins, but...” There was a “but.” [laughs] “But one of them has a red marking on her hand. They thought it was a hemangioma, but they weren’t sure. It was very important to the doctors there and the officials in China that we understood what we were getting. My response to that was, “Was it hurting her? What do we need to do? Are there doctors who can see her? What needs to happen?” They said, “They want to make sure that you go through all the steps that you need to with your doctors there to review her file before you accept the referral that you want her.” I couldn’t imagine not taking her because she had a red hand. It was obviously a big thing to them. It was an even bigger thing when we went for our medical visit. It was a big thing to them.

Jena: A hemangioma is just basically a birthmark, isn't that right?

Vonna: It’s a birthmark. After coming home with Kai, our third one, we learned that it was just blood vessels that hadn’t broken up in utero. The plastic surgeon was like, “By the time she’s six or seven, it’s going to be gone. You won’t even know it was there.” She had a swollen thumb because of it. Surely by the time she was four, it was almost unnoticeable. For us, it was a way we could tell them apart because they’re identical.

Jena: Which daughter was it?

Vonna: Zoe.

Jena: It was Zoe. Has it eased? Is it still there? Is it gone?

Vonna: It’s gone.

Jena: Wow. You learned a little bit about Chinese culture and general approach to “a disability” or an abnormality.

Vonna: Right. The lengths that they went to stress what we needed to do to make sure that we were going to accept this referral was mind-blowing to me. It is a difference in culture. I will tell you now, we’ve had them home for seven years now. The moment the referral acceptance got to us in San Antonio, I met the paperwork at DHL and was ready to sign it.

Jena: Tell me about your decision to go back and adopt your son?

Vonna: That, again, is my husband. We were getting ready for the girls’ one-year post-placement visit. My husband said, “I want to go back.” I said, “You’re crazy.” We talked about it and said if we’re going to do it, we’re going to do it now. We didn’t want a huge age difference between them. What better way to start than with a one-year post-placement? Everything started to go again. We reached out to our social worker again and said this is what we’re interested in doing. She got all the information. Some things had changed with our government on how we filed paperwork and how they had to write up the home study. We sat down and met with her and said this is what we want to do.

We were going to go the normal process. We were ready to dive in for the normal process figuring two, three years is what we'd be looking at. She informed us that it was a five-year wait. We thought we don't think we could do that. She said, "This is another option." We were going to go through our agency in Minnesota. We had a really good experience with them. They said, "This is what we're doing with the special needs list if you're interested." A list would come up at midnight throughout the month. They would match families with who they thought based on the information sheet on what they could handle that they had checked off.

We said let's go for it. That's what we did. The girls, we had their post-placement done in October. The biggest thing that took was rewriting the home study numerous times. Our paperwork was actually getting ready to go to our agency. They called me and said, "We think we have a match for you. Do you have your paperwork done?" I said okay. They gave us twenty-four hours. I said, "Our paperwork's on the way. By the time we get back to you, you will have everything." That was in June. By December we had went to go pick him up.

Jena: What year was this?

Vonna: 2009.

Jena: You knew you were going to be doing cleft repair?

Vonna: Yes.

Jena: Was that daunting at all?

Vonna: No, not in choosing it. We were fortunate enough to get ahold of a doctor that we knew through someone who was practicing here in San Antonio. When we had considered cleft lip, cleft palate, I reached out to several different doctors. He was the only one who actually spent two hours on the phone with me one evening explaining to me what to expect about cleft lip, cleft palate. Sometimes cleft lip, cleft palate just isn't cleft lip, cleft palate. It could be a symptom of something else, of a bigger syndrome. We need to be aware of that. He said, "If it's just a classic case, it's just a matter of repairing. That's it." He laid everything out for us but made us feel very comfortable and was willing to do whatever we needed him to do when we got ready to bring that child home.

Jena: Kai said he's had twelve surgeries. Is he right about that?

Vonna: That's pretty close. It might be a little more.

Jena: Were any of those in China before he came home?

Vonna: No. They were all done here. He was unrepaired when we got him. You mentioned about the culture and the difference. When we went to pick him up, we ran into quite a number of people who stopped us and said, "You must be Americans if you're taking him.

We hear there's a really good cure." I tell everybody that story because it goes to show that they think it's a disease and that there's some magical cure. Everyone that we encountered I took as an opportunity to educate them and tell them that it's not a disease. It's a matter of going in and a couple of surgeries to repair it. He's had some complications here and there. He's probably had to have more than the average. On the whole, it's an easy fix.

Jena: Tell me about his ear.

Vonna: He has what they were referring to as slight microtia. Microtia is actually where you don't have an earhole. You have the form of the ear but not in your hole. He actually had the earholes where he could hear. His ears were slightly deformed. One of them flopped the whole way over. As he got bigger, it became more noticeable, the same with the other ear. It got to the point where two years ago it had bugged him so badly that we started talking to the plastic surgeon about it. They didn't want to do anything until he had gotten much older. He was getting teased. He was more aware of it. The doctor said, "His ears are fully grown. If this is what he wants to do." That was a decision that he made.

It was probably one of the roughest surgeries we've been through. There was a lot that he wasn't expecting. When we prepare, we watch videos on YouTube. He's well aware of exactly what the doctor's going to do, how they're going to do it, what's going to be used. We watched a couple of otoplasties. He understood how they were going to cut him. When we went through the pre-surgery appointments, he was told by one of the nurses that he would be completely bandaged. When we arrived for surgery the doctor said, "No, I think he's going to heal a lot better if we don't put any bandages on a lot quicker." We said okay. I didn't think anything of it. It was an in and out thing. My husband went to go get the car. I took him to the bathroom because he said he had to use the restroom. He saw himself in the mirror for the first time. The girls had to stay the night at a friend's house for two nights because he didn't want them to come home. We respected that. That was his thing. It was his one surgery that no one could come home to the house and see him. He wouldn't let any visitors until he was comfortable.

Jena: How old was he at this point?

Vonna: He was five.

Jena: Wow. He's an incredible kid.

Vonna: He is. He's probably one of the bravest kids that I know. He's so smart. We've had tons of discussions on why he has to have all these surgeries. As he gets older, it gets a little bit harder. When it was younger, you were more concentrating on him not touching things. He didn't understand what was happening. You were more concerned about keeping the stitches nice, him hurting himself. As he's gotten older, it's become more of a self-awareness thing. "Why am I having to miss school? How come I talk different? How come I look a little different?" I say he has an old soul. He accepts everything that you tell him. He thinks

about it. He has more compassion for other people than his sisters do. [laughs] He's a good kid.

Jena: How many of these surgeries were cleft? How many of them were ear?

Vonna: Only one's been ear.

Jena: He had about eleven surgeries for the cleft?

Vonna: He's had several lip repairs done only because after his first lip repair we noticed a fine line that started to appear. We were told that was a subcutaneous cleft, which meant it was a cleft through the muscle not necessarily through the skin. They had to go in and repair that. Then they had to go in and fine tune some things with his nose because the cleft went through his nose. He's had three surgeries. He had his palette repaired. He had to go in and have a pharyngeal flap surgery done. That's where his throat doesn't completely close off to make certain sounds. Two years ago he had to have a second repair of that done. Actually, it was last year he had to have that repair done because air was still escaping. He's had to have that done.

Cleft lip, cleft palate kids tend to have a little more things that happen with them. He had a branchial cleft fistula in his neck. That's his neck surgery that he was talking about. He had a hole in his neck. It was a microscopic hole. When he was a toddler we had noticed one day, we were giving him a bath and all of a sudden this stuff started coming out of his skin in his neck. We were told, "That happens. Don't worry about it." It was one of those things where he wanted to go to school -- it would start to drain if he had a sinus infection or something. It was almost like mucous that would come out of his neck. He wouldn't want to go to school. He'd want a Band-Aid put over it. We went to the doctor and we said, "We got to do something. It's affecting him socially. Kids are making fun of him." The doctors were very understanding. They went ahead and fixed that. He's had quite a bit.

Jena: It's more of a ride than you initially realized when you thought, "Cleft lip, cleft palate, by American standards, that's a fairly easy fix," as you initially thought. What's it been like to realize it's actually been quite complicated?

Vonna: We were well aware of what we were getting ourselves into, maybe not necessarily the number of surgeries that he's had so far. We totally were not expecting that. He's got a lot more to go. He has to have some bone grafting done and some other things done, which will be coming up. The important thing is getting a team of doctors behind you first and getting all the information, which is what we were fortunate enough to have had. That prepared us for the fact that it wasn't something that was going to be fixed in one surgery and be done. Sometimes it happens that way. Sometimes it doesn't. To have known that ahead of time has made things a lot easier.

The doctor that we had actually had put us in touch with a family who had given birth to a child who cleft lip and cleft palate. It caught them off guard, that this had happened to them.

I remember one conversation I had with her. She could not believe that we chose our son. This was their first child. They were devastated by what they were going to have to encounter and the struggles in the beginning. I explained to her if we had conceived naturally, I wouldn't have any guarantee that it couldn't happen to us. We didn't go out choosing him thinking, "Everybody's going to look at us and think of us as wonderful people, that we've saved this poor child." It was one of those things that you just don't know. It didn't matter to us.

Jena: Tell me about the dynamic among the three of them. The girls are twins. They have a twin thing. He's younger, but he seems like he can hold his own. What's that been like?

Vonna: He does. I'm surprised he didn't share with you how much he badly wants a little brother.

Jena: I'll ask him.

Vonna: He wants a brother so bad. He keeps telling me, "Why can't you just go to China and get one like you got me?" [laughs] We keep trying to explain to him that it doesn't work that way and that at this point our family is complete. We have the five of them. There are times where he sees that bond that is evident between the two girls. He wants that so badly, to share that. Grace, nothing really bothers her. She was very accepting of the fact that he was coming in. They were three at the time when we brought him home. Zoe, I'm surprised she didn't share with you that one of her earliest memories is how she pushed him down the steps and said, "Send him back. I don't want him." [laughs] She tends to share that with quite a few people at the most inopportune times.

We took them to China with us. They were very excited. At the same time, it rocked their world. They were the center of our universe for a little over a year. All of sudden, this new baby came in, this baby who wasn't just a baby. He was a baby who could take things from them and required a whole lot more attention than they needed, or a newborn would have required just because of the cleft lip and cleft palate. It did rock their world. Now, he fits in so well. He was meant to be here. He holds his own with the two of them. He dishes it out just as much as they dish it out.

Jena: He was two when he came home?

Vonna: He was fourteen months when we brought him home.

Jena: Do you get asked questions as many of our families do when we're out and about? If you do, what do you say?

Vonna: Not as much anymore now that they've gotten older. My husband has been referred to as the stepdad because he's the Caucasian one. [laughs]

Jena: That's interesting. Your husband's the odd man out?



Vonna: He is. He's had college friends who will see a family picture of us for the first time and say, "I didn't know you were the stepdad." He's like, "I'm not the stepdad. I am the dad." It's different for us only because I'm half Filipino. The kids do tend to resemble me a little bit more with the darker hair, darker skin, and eyes. Lately here we've been going through a bit of identity crisis. The kids will tell me occasionally that they're white like their dad and that they're not Asian. We went through that for a while. When they were younger, I would have people who would stop. The girls were much of a draw because they were identical twins. Then looking at them clearly you could tell that they were Asian. I got a lot of questions.

I would get people who would randomly stop me who weren't really sure but didn't know how to ask, and would say, "Their dad must be really Asian." One lady, I had said, "No. He's as white as you are." Another woman, I said one time, "No. I'm the Asian one." That stops them dead in their tracks. They just look at you like, "Oh, okay." [laughs] As they've gotten older, I haven't gotten it as much. Now that they're in school, all three of them, they have been in the same classes, the same classroom with the same group of kids. The girls, this will be their third year with the same group of kids. We don't openly go out and say, "We celebrate Chinese New Year." We send stuff into school. I go in and read books for Chinese New Year.

I don't know what exactly gets back to parents. Obviously not very much because I do have, still, a few parents who are shocked when they learn, if they come over to the house and they see pictures and they learn that the kids are adopted. It's easier for them to accept that Kai's adopted. When I say the girls are adopted too, "No!" Yes, they are. Kai seems -- I just asked him not too long ago, we were talking about a friend. He said, "Mom, I told Christian that I was adopted. He asked me about it." I said, "Did you explain it to him?" He said, "Yeah. I told him I'm from China. But I told him not to tell anybody." I said, "Why'd you tell him not to tell anybody?" He said, "I don't know. That's kind of personal." That was good enough for me. I don't get it as much now.

Jena: Is there anything that you would like people to know about the decision to adopt, about having a family that's multiracial, anything about this experience that you would want to share from the road you've been on?

Vonna: The most important thing is that we didn't start out as a couple who went into this looking to save someone else or save these children. We went into this looking to make a family. That's what we've done is we've made a family. It doesn't matter what race or ethnicity they are. They're ours. That's how we treat them. I have friends who have kids who are really struggling with the identity of being Asian and not being like everyone else. For mine -- it's all different personalities -- I don't think that it's as big of a thing to them because we've never made it a big thing to them. If they want to talk about it, we talk about it. If they don't want to talk about it, we don't talk about it. We give them all the information. When they're ready we know that they'll come back and want to discuss it with us. We've never

made it a big thing. This is the way we ended up making our family. That's what it's always been about.

Jena: I realize this is a broad statement. Shoot me down if you don't think it's a reasonable question. Do you think some adoptive families overemphasize the differences in an effort to help their kids? Maybe it is something that would be better for all of us to chill out about?

Vonna: For some, yes. Some people may struggle with the idea that they want to make up for that cultural awareness. It's constantly putting everything in their kid's face. "This is where you're from. We don't want you to forget." For some reason, some people may feel like they're not doing their child justice if they're not doing that, forcing them into all of these things. They may think that they're doing good by their child. Sometimes it's good to sit back and let them decide. If you give them all the information, let them decide when they're ready, if they're ever ready. My three, I think that Kai is going to be my one who's going to come back and say to me, "I want to know more." My girls, I don't think they will. I think that has more to do with the fact that they have each other. At the same time, some families need to, going back to your question, need to chill out a little bit.

Jena: Let it ride?

Vonna: Yeah.

Jena: Have any of the three of them asked about their origins very much or their biological families?

Vonna: Kai has. Kai started asking a few years ago where he came from. I think it's more of because he looks differently because of the cleft lip, cleft palate. He wants to more, wanting to know why he was given up, why they didn't want to take care of him. For him, that little piece is always going to be in the back of his mind. I really do think that he will be the one when he gets older who's going to come and say, "I want to know more. I want to hear why," maybe from that person if it's possible.

Jena: Do you think that on some level he -- this may be overthinking for him -- do you think because of the surgeries he wonders if that's a reason?

Vonna: Yes. He has asked that before.

Jena: Because there was something wrong with him?

Vonna: He's asked because there's something wrong with him, is that the reason why they didn't want him. We've tried to explain to him that because they loved him so much, they knew that they couldn't give him what he needed, to do all the repairs, and that that's the reason why he had to go live in the orphanage until we came along.

Jena: That's very touching.

Vonna: He's my kid. He's the one who gets that. There are times where he will, whether it's a night when you're reading a story to him, out of the blue he'll say, "Mommy, do you think a mommy and a daddy -- our friends, they told you that Ellie is a newborn. When my girlfriend was pregnant we heard a lot about, "Is she going to come out okay? Is she going to come out like me? What if something's wrong with her? Are they not going to want to take care of her?" We've had to try to give him bits and pieces of what it's like over there and what they're capable of doing, and still reassure him that his birth parents made a decision, that the woman who carried him made a decision that she wasn't going to be able to give him everything that he needed.

We'll never know for sure why or if that was the reason. We're going on the assumption that that's what it was. The girls came with a birth note. He came with a birth note, a note from the birth parents. His note was that they weren't able to take care of him and that they hoped that someone would be able to take him and give him what he needed. We're going on the assumption that that's all true. That's what we've shared with him.

Jena: What did the girls birth note say?

Vonna: It had their time of birth. It said that they were migrant workers and that they couldn't take care of them. Very different situations. Girls were left at an orphanage. Kai was left in the middle of the street, at least that's what all their paperwork says.

Jena: What province is Kai from?

Vonna: Yunnan. He tells you he's from Kunming because that's the big city that he remembers. He's actually from what's called Dehong Prefecture, which is along the border of Myanmar and China. It's a very different world down there.

Jena: Do you think you'll take the kids back?

Vonna: Yes. The girls have very vivid memories of when we went to go get Kai, even at three. They remember a lot. That was quite an experience, taking them back. We drew a lot of attention. They talk a lot about the travel over there and what we got to see. Kai wants to go back. They probably get the age of ten because we've always said to them, "Maybe when you're ten, that's when we'll go." We'll probably wait a little bit longer until Kai gets a little bit older. We want to take them back. We want them to tell us what they want to see. If it means that they want to go back to the orphanage, then that's where we'll go. If they just want to go back to the White Swan, it's the lap of luxury for two weeks.

Jena: Even more so now that they've renovated.

Vonna: I know. That's what I've heard.

Jena: Is there anything I haven't asked that you'd like to speak to?

Vonna: The other thing too is that this is a journey for everybody. It's just not a journey for you, your family too. My family is very diverse because my mom was Filipino. My dad's Italian and German. My husband, his family never left their little pocket of Pittsburg. They've always been there. This has been a new journey for them as well, to have these kids who've come from the other side of the world and everything that they've brought. It's not just your journey. It's your entire family's journey.

Jena: Is your husband's family into it?

Vonna: They are. I don't think they quite understood what we were doing in the beginning. They never had internet. When we got the referral, we called and said, "We have pictures. We want to share them with you." She's like, "Just tell me over the phone or mail them." [laughs] When we told her it was twins, she could not wait to track down a friend who had the internet so she could see these pictures. It has totally transformed their views. They came from a small area in Pittsburg and never really saw much ethnic diversity. These three have rocked their world. They're all open to it, excited about it.

Jena: Last question. How much do you think your military upbringing has informed your own sense of family and diversity? How fundamental is that in the way you see this?

Vonna: It's interesting that you say that. We're here in Texas. We don't have any immediate family. It's just the five of us. For me, it has made it easier because as a military family, you get up, you move all the time. You have to rely on those people, that group of you. There were six of us. That's what we had. That was our core. That's what we've held onto with the five of us. At the same time, that's the reason why I'm so color-blinded by race is because we moved around so much. My dad was stationed in Japan. We lived in Hawaii. We had friends and neighbors of all different ethnic backgrounds. The military's made up of multiracial people. You saw it all the time. It was never an issue for us. You saw it and you never thought twice about it. Experiencing different cultures, it gave us the ability to be able to experience those. I was able to go back to the Philippines and visit my mom's family at a young age to see how they lived. Cultural awareness, my mom still celebrated the way that they did in the Philippines, and the food. You grow up around that. Adopting kids from a different country isn't any different.

Jena: Was your dad in the army?

Vonna: Marines.

Jena: I want to thank you very much. This has been a wonderful conversation.

Vonna: You're welcome. Thank you.