

Jena Heath: The first question is what do you know? How do you know it?

Meilan Stuy: About my birth parents? I know that she gave me to her sister to help. Except for my grandma, my birth grandma, she helped the most. Then I went to my uncle. There was a deal with whoever takes care of the orphanage. He's like, "Better education, somebody else wants to care of your daughter." I think he lied about. He said that she'll come back when she's eighteen and help with the family. She'll learn English. Since I lived in a poor area, I think it was really important to have a good education. Somehow it took a very long time. He agreed. That's how my parents adopted me.

Jena: How do you know this story? How old were you when you learned it?

Meilan: I learned little bits of information over the five years. I learned a little from my sister. My mom gave some hints. My dad sat down and talked with us sometimes.

Jena: As you learned this, what sort of feelings did you have?

Meilan: I felt confused. I felt like I was passed down through my birth mom's sister's whole family.

Jena: When you were younger, was it hard to even understand where were you at different points?

Meilan: I really thought my real mom right now, I thought she was my birth mom.

Jena: Lan?

Meilan: Yeah. I really thought she was my birth mom. I felt closer to her. I wasn't scared at that point.

Jena: How old were you when you knew that she was not your birth mom?

Meilan: One time I started getting really mad at my sisters because they called her mom. I told them that's not their mom. My dad told me, he's like, "She's your mom, but she's not your birth mom."

Jena: In your mind, did you feel less close to her when you learned that? Did you go through some adjustment in your mind about how you thought about your connection to her?

Meilan: I felt more open to know all this information. It was really confusing.

Jena: When you confronted your sisters and you said, "She's my mom. She's not your mom," and your dad said, "Actually, she's not anyone's birth mom," how did that work? Did you say to yourself, "Well, none of us is her birth mom. We're all her daughter in the same way?" Did that start to come into focus?

Meilan: A little bit. I was really curious about my birth mom. After a while, I didn't really care because she's my real mom.

Jena: And that's it?

Meilan: Yeah.

Jena: Did you ever want to meet your birth mom? Did you ever have a feeling of --

Meilan: -- If I'm over there, I don't know how I would ask her anything because I don't know what her response would be.

Jena: When you do give her any thought or think about her, what questions do you have?

Meilan: I want to know why she couldn't take care of me or why she gave me up for adoption.

Jena: Are you glad you know all of this? Would you rather not know all of this?

Meilan: I'd rather be informed about all this.

Jena: Even though it's been a struggle at times, why would you rather know?

Meilan: When I'm with my dad, when I'm around, people question. They're like, "How's that possible?" I look nothing like him. I don't want to just say, "I have no clue." I want to explain to them. You should enlighten people about it.

Jena: It's better to have the information? You have the most complicated story of your sisters. You had to wrestle the most with understanding all the stages. What would you tell younger adoptees about learning about their background? What advice would you give them and their parents?

Meilan: I'd tell their parents to tell them everything they know about their birth parents. Kids are curious. They want to know.

Jena: Do you think that adoptive parents should search, for instance, for birth parents when their children are young and cannot consent? Do you think that birth parents should wait and do it when their children are old enough to be able to consent to the search?

Meilan: I think they should search for it. If they do find their birth parents, they should talk to their kid and ask what they would like to do.

Jena: Once they get the information, stop and consult with your child? What's your overall feeling now about your family, your sisters, your mom, what you were talking about, your connection? Do you give any of this much thought? Is it pretty much resolved for you?

Meilan: I give it a lot of thought sometimes. Even though we're not biologically related, we're still a family.

Jena: When you do think about it and you're giving it a lot of thought, what are you thinking? What goes through your head?

Meilan: I question mostly everything about my adoption and what would happen if I wasn't adopted by this family.

Jena: What do you...

Meilan: I think that this is the best environment for me.

Jena: Do you ever get fed up with people asking questions?

Meilan: Yes, I do. A girl in our school, she asked if I was adopted. That's the first question people ask if they see Asians. They're like, "Are you adopted?" because the one-child policy. She was also adopted. She kept going into my personal business. She's like, "Wait. How do you get along with your family?" I was like, "I don't think that's any of your concern." I don't know how that helps her. I gave her everything she wanted to know.

Jena: Even though it was intrusive, you answered her questions?

Meilan: Mm-hmm.

Jena: I can feel with my daughter sometimes when people ask, she gets this look on her face like, "I wish you people would stop asking me these intrusive questions." My last question is what advice would you give everybody else when they encounter families like ours?

Meilan: People are afraid of being different. What I usually tell them is that even though we're not biologically related, we're still a family. That's all that matters.