

Lori Hall: When I was young, I always thought that I would adopt a child. I can remember my mother reminding me of that whenever we did decide to adopt. She says, "Remember when you wanted to adopt a child?" China resonated with me. I'm not sure exactly why. My father, he was always in the military. He had spent some time, not in China, but in Japan and in Korea. I remember that being important. I thought a lot about it. Whenever Brad and I got married, we both were older and set in our ways and weren't sure when we would have children. I knew that if we were going to, it should be quick because I was not getting any younger. We tried. We thought about it a little bit.

It didn't work like we thought that it would or as quickly as it did. We began to really think about adoption. We researched it. He researched a lot. It wasn't a hard decision to go with China. We looked domestically and saw all the things that you had to do, which a lot of times involved what we considered a performance of putting things together and making it look great. China seemed real straightforward. That's how we came to that decision. We thought that it would be quick. That played in our mind too.

Jena Heath: What did you know about it? What did you know about China? Did it matter to you that the likelihood of birth parents emerging at any point was probably pretty slim? Did you think about any of that?

Lori: No. We didn't think a lot about it. I didn't really have strong feelings. Some many people think, "I don't want to do it domestically or have open adoptions. I don't want to have that extra burden to have to deal with." I didn't think about that. That didn't seem like a problem to me. My feeling was that if this is somebody's child, they should get to know about this child. The shared love and desire for this child should be an okay thing for everyone to participate in. That didn't seem as important to me.

It's almost in reverse in retrospect. Now, it sometimes makes me sad that the likelihood of my child knowing her biological parents is slim, is almost more heartbreaking to me than maybe the reverse is to some other people, knowing that they would have to keep someone involved. The likelihood that Audrey has a sibling out there is, I think, great. It would be strange to think that you could go through the rest of your life and never have a connection to an actual sibling. That sometimes burdens me. I don't know that it burdens her, at least not at this point. Someday it could.

Jena: Does she ask about it?

Lori: She'll talk about she would like to have a sibling. She would like to have a brother or sister. I don't think she imagines the concept or the possibility that she really probably has some. We'll talk vaguely about that there's laws, or there was, that prevented people from having lots of children. It was difficult and they often gave up girl children. That is heartbreaking to her. She'll cry about that sometimes, the thought of that. She doesn't get the politics of it. She's not really imagining, "Do I have a brother or sister out there?"

Jena: It's not something you feel strongly enough that you'd go marching off on a birth parent search necessarily, but that you are definitely open to the possibility that she would have more information?

Lori: Absolutely, yes. Exactly. I've thought about it. Obviously, I've not done anything about it. I'm not tempted to. My only fear is I'll wait too long whenever it becomes more and more difficult, or where there's no one at her SWI that even has a recollection of her, or where maybe records don't exist, if they even do exist right now. I worry that time is important. If I'm going to, for her, then I should do it now. She's at the point where it's not important to her today, but it will be when she's eighteen or twenty or twenty-five. Will she have wished that I had tried when there was time to still try? I think about that and if there is that possibility that I should do it on her behalf and then let her decide if she wants that information or not.

Jena: Is that something that you're starting? Are you actively --?

Lori: -- I'm not. I'm not doing enough. You allow everything else that you have going on to get in the way of you doing it because it's difficult. You look at it as being a difficulty. You're life's pretty good. You're happy. She's happy. It doesn't seem as important. Every once in a while, Brad and I will have a discussion. We'll talk about it. Should we have her DNA tested? Should we pursue something a little bit? I'll google things all the time. I'll look at things and think about it. Then I'll think, what could I do? It seems like a big undertaking. You wonder if you should do it. Where do you start?

I also get dubious about the whole thing. Are you going to get real information? I worry about that a little bit. You'll pursue all this stuff. Will you get some information, but is that information honest? Is it real? Is it not? Now, have you created this false sense of hope about something? I think you do. You see the stories. You read the few, little smatterings of stories out there. They seem like this, "Gosh. What a neat, wonderful, thing." Everyone was happy to meet each other and happy to see each other. Then you don't read about the thousands of others that don't exist or maybe were not as tied up in a bow. I'm sure there's some moments in which you get the information, and that's great, but it's not -- I think that'd be okay too. What I would hope is if the information was available, it's not about finding this parent and developing a relationship with them as being something beautiful and heartwarming. It's more of the knowledge becomes a part of you and a part of your identity. I would think, from my own perspective, it's nice to know something about your family.

Jena: How do you feel about the lack of transparency? How did you initially feel about it? Did you wonder to yourself, "Why isn't it more transparent? Why is it so difficult?" Or not? Did you just assume, "That's their system?"

Lori: I didn't question it a lot in the beginning. Part of it is the process is so consuming that that's all I was concerned about. That's all Brad and I really ever talked about. I didn't really think much beyond just this process of getting the child and the joy. You're surrounded by people who admire you. They relish the stories. They're sentimental about it. There are a lot

of things that maybe you're really not in a lot of ways because you're trying to make a family. It's not about doing something good. It's not about all the things people kind of want to characterize your adoption process to be. I didn't really question, "Gosh, I don't know about this." People would though. People would say, "Do you know anything about her family? Where are her parents?" Then they were shocked when you would tell them, at least for me, it wasn't with that much judgement, I would just say I don't know. People were shocked that you would accept that.

Jena: Have you ever wondered about whether Audrey was legitimately abandoned?

Lori: Absolutely. That's what makes you question things even more. You hear the stories about children being practically sold, I guess you could call it. Then you wonder if that is your child's origins. That's tough to think about. It's tough to process and to want to believe that it's still okay for you to be their parent. Maybe that parent that gave them up didn't want to give them up. That's tough too. In a weird kind of way, from an impartial perspective, if that was the case, that would be really hard for me. I would want that parent to have that child too. You can't both have the child. It would be hard for me because I know how much I love her. Someone else loves her too.

Jena: What would you do?

Lori: [emotional] I don't know. I would want her to know that. How would you not want someone else to have what I have? It would be really selfish not to want to share that child. It's tough. All you know is your own feelings, your own perspective. I can only imagine that if that were the case, that they would feel like I do. I don't know. I think I would want them to know her somehow.

Jena: To forge some kind of way in which --

Lori: -- Yeah. It's interesting. It's having an only child and having waited longer in life to have a child, I share my child with a lot of people. My parents help me a lot. I have a best friend who helps me all the time. I share this child because I can and because it does take a lot of people to raise your child right. It would be okay if you needed to share your child to allow someone else to help make this child what you really want, which is someone who can be independent someday and who can be resourceful and who can grow up in the right way. It's not really that's she's mine. I have a responsibility to help her be all that she can be. That's become more apparent in my life as she's grown. I'm responsible for her. I love her so much. It's not about her being mine. I've been given this responsibility. I love it.

We can't own who they are or own them in any way. I always am bothered a little bit by people who want to say how wonderful it is, what you've done, because I don't look at it as something that I've done. I'm just being a parent like everyone else is who is a parent. I don't want to be looked at as this is something special that you chose to do, to take on, "What a wonderful thing." That's an interesting thing. I don't know why people like to say that. I don't want to criticize people. People can say whatever they want. I don't want to sound like you're

not appreciative of other people's perspectives. It's interesting that people want to always say, "That's so wonderful that you did that." I think that also passes this judgement on other people in other countries. How is it that we are better to come in and raise a child than someone else? I don't think that's what any kind of adoption is about.