Kids of ‘quiet migration’ come of age

Adoptees from other countries search for answers to sometimes painful questions

"Many of the psychological and emotional issues are the same for domestic and international adoptees: the loss of the biological family, the disconnect with where it all started, the lack of information on the birth family," said Lee Crawford, an art therapist in Richmond, B.C.

At a dinner, the reporter casually invited Jenna to visit her in Korea some time. "I felt that if I was perfect, I would be more loved."

"Kids of 'quiet migration' come of age" by Denise Bernardo, westcoast news

"I needed the freedom to feel my feelings without guilt, whatever they were," Jenna said. "I had to make alone."

"It's abandonment. It's identity. It's lack of love or good parenting. It's a new family that came out of a situation that was not designed, if not impossible," said Crawford, an art therapist and registered clinical counsellor. "It seems many adoptive families in her practice.

"She was around 10 or 11, she says, when she looked through the file of her adoption papers. 'There wasn't much information,' she remembers. 'It was her name. The names of her birth parents. What she liked, how much she slept.'"

"I cried and cried and cried," she said, as her adoptive family moved to a different city. "I just knew it was a journey of myself." In Seoul, she felt like she fit in. "To feel at home, to be part of the rite of passage where I came from.'"

"It was a demographic that is part of a global demographic that has been called the 'quiet migration.' Between 1971 and 2001 in the United States, more than 265,000 children were adopted from abroad, in Canada, numbers have hovered around 20,000 per decade since the 1980s.

"A demographic that is coming of age."

"Many of the children, like Jenna, face unique issues of racial and cultural identity, and coming of age."

"The truth about inter-country and trans-racial adoption, Crawford said, is 'It's complicated.'"

"My mother was a stranger when I first saw her. She was petite, and beautiful and laidback. Part of me said, 'There's my mom.' Another part of me said, 'What if she isn't?'"

"It wasn't just race. It was part of me felt a bit of guilt if I wasn't white.'"

"Yes, said Jenna, 'It was the strong feelings that moved her inside. She was in a xenophobic, loving, tight family, but she was different.'"

"I would let anyone take off my clothes. I slept with my underwear on."

"I wouldn't let anyone take off my clothes. I slept with my underwear on."

"A fourth child, a boy, from Hong Kong."

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Through a translator, she asked her adoptive parents of Romanian twins Mikaela and Zoe. "My mother was a stranger on all flights. New bookings only. 100% non-refundable. Flights may not operate on certain days. Offer combinable with other fares. Advance purchase required. All fares shown are one-way. See westjet.com for details."

Saturday, November 20, 2010  |  Breaking News: Vancouver Sun.com A7

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"I was adopted in the U.S. at a few days old," Anna said. "I found my birth mother at 39. She was petite, and beautiful. Many years of guilt were lifted off me when I saw her," she said. She wanted that connection for Jenna, and for her birth mother. With the help of the Ukrainian translator she had met while adopting Jenna, she was able to locate her. Jenna sends pictures, and hopes they will meet one day. Since then, she has facilitated more than 100 searches and reunions in Kazakhstan, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia, and Guatemala for adoptees and families in countries around the world including Ireland, Africa, Germany, and the United States.

"There was a shack with a big yard, and a pig. ... Zoe and I really look like our other mother, Mora, when the toes were just nine months," Anna said. The girls' birth mother had slipped a piece of paper into Jan's hand at the courthouse in Romania with her contact information.

"A few months after they were settled in Canada, and the babies, who had been near death, were nursed back to health, Jan sent a letter to Mora in Romania to let her know the girls were doing well. "I kept in touch with her," Jan said. Although the girls had been adopted at birth, "Mikaela struggled right from the beginning," Jan said.

"She used to play a game called 'little girl lost in the forest,' where she would find a baby and come and drop it at Linda's foot." The trip to Romania, and a reunion with their birth family, was a turning point for the girls. They had lunch and took photos, and met cousins and extended family.

"Mikaela seemed to be floating on clouds after that. She just kind of glowed," Jan said. Jenna felt more at ease with her birth mother, and then abusive to me. She was pregnant with my little brother, and had to leave my mother and then abusive to me. But a year into the marriage, my father became very abusive to my mother, and then abusive to me. She was very much in love, and very happy to have that connection."

Making connections

For Jenna, making the connection with her birth mother, Sunny Hall, meant making a connection with the birth father, and with the brother she has never met. "I let her, because she'd never have been my mother without her," Jenna said. Jenna told Jenna that she had heard, every day, that her daughter, a 14-year-old girl, had been taken in an auto accident, and that the brother she has never met was also put up for adoption. Jenna discovered that she and her mother had identical features; she saw herself in her mother. "I was very sick with grief that day," Jenna said. "She kept picking out the fish and making sure that there was no bones in it. I was still that little girl.

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