

## A note from the Executive Producer:

My inspiration in producing "Roots and Branches" was to hear- and accurately communicate- the voices of those directly touched by adoption describe in their own words, their feelings about having been adopted. As an adoptive parent and adoption attorney, I am an avid proponent of the positive/respectful adoption language movement and its purpose to educate society about adoption, in light of the common "misuse" of certain adoption terminology that is pervasive (and often offensive) in the media and entertainment industries. I have always emphasized the use of positive adoption language ("PAL") both on a personal level at home and importantly, in the day to day practice of adoption where I represent adoptive and birth parents.

Interestingly, despite the influence of PAL used in their homes, it became apparent during the production of "*I Have Roots and Branches...*" that the adoptees in the cast sometimes described themselves using language that was different than that recommended in the guidelines. Most telling was their deviation from the proposed positive "having been" adopted to their own more comfortable consideration of themselves as "being" adopted. They also referred to other adoptees as children who "are" adopted rather than children who "were" adopted. Some of the adult adoptees also made references to being taught by their parents that they were "special" or "chosen", a somewhat dated approach in adoptive homes today.

Although they had different levels of awareness of PAL, all members of the cast were comfortable with their responses. In fact, the "is" adopted (considered negative) vs. "was" adopted (considered positive) was more of a source of confusion for them than validation. All of the adoptees in the cast understood that they were adopted only once, that the adoption was an event that took place on a single occasion, and that the more positive way of describing themselves would be to say "I was adopted". Despite that understanding, they expressed pride in the fact that they had been adopted and pride to consider themselves to be adopted.

After completing filming, I made no effort to silence those voices and self-assessments. While the purpose of adoption reform is clearly to normalize adoption as perceived by society as a whole, we adoption advocates also support the concept that adoption is a lifelong journey. But such advocacy and strict adherence to PAL is sometimes unrealistic. By supporting the positive notion of the lifelong journey, the characterization of the present tense state of "being" adopted as *negative*, seeks to deny or conceal the adoptive background of a person. The effect of characterizing this definition as negative, censors one's ability to define himself or herself as he or she deems appropriate. I wholeheartedly agree with some leading adoption authorities on this subject that adoption "should not be seen as a definition of a person." However, to consider the present tense phrase "Adam is adopted" as an implication that adoption is a label or disability ends up creating a negative spin or innuendo. There is simply *no tangible negative innuendo* associated with one's reference to oneself as "being" adopted. I would emphatically agree that where adoptive status is irrelevant to a situation, it (like race) need not be cited. But in this movie about adoption, the children take pride in the fact that is part of who they are. While some of the words of these adoptees may offer a different point of view than that recommended by some leaders in the field, neither view is wrong. The purpose of the film is to expose others to these beautiful voices which provide an additional perspective to the equation and dialogue of "what is in the best interest of the children who have been adopted", and raises for consideration that maybe we all need to listen a little more carefully to what they have to say.



In deferring to the voices of children and adults who have experienced first hand what it feels like to have been adopted or to be adopted, we must not miss the forest for the trees. Let us not undermine their positive viewpoint by rigid adherence to semantics. Let us teach our children tolerance and flexibility in our well-intentioned efforts to influence them about respectful adoption language. Not all children who were adopted use a "universal" or "recommended" dialect of adoption. *Let us teach our children that it is okay for them to express their feelings about adoption in their own words- It is their legacy, and a legacy they are proud of.... their roots and branches. Let us listen to their voices and celebrate that legacy with them. I hope you enjoy this film's joyful and uplifting message.*

*Flory G. Herman*, Executive Producer "*I Have Roots and Branches*"... **Personal Reflections on Adoption**

Copyright 2004 Flory G. Herman