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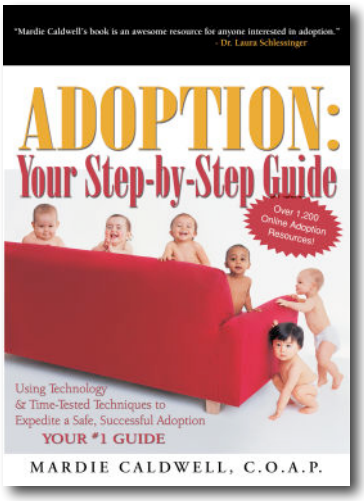


## Adoption, 21st Century Style:
## The Art of Finding and Bringing Home the Child Who's Right for You

*An authoritative new book explains how adoption has changed in the Internet Age—*
*and how playing by the new rules can help you finally complete your family.*

**Nevada City, CA** (May 2005)—Adoption has changed. The process that once seemed cold, secretive, and formal has been transformed. Sure, adoptive parents must still deal with waiting lists, reams of legal paperwork, visits from social workers. But the heartening truth is, the entire process has become faster, less costly, more open, more *human*. And while there are many reasons for this friendlier new face of adoption, one of the biggest may surprise you. The Internet. That's right. The world of hard drives, URLs, and bandwidth can yield a decidedly *un*technical result: a deeply cherished bundle of joy.

Successful adoptions are all about information, communication, and resources, and that makes the Web a natural tool for bringing families together, says adoption professional Mardie Caldwell, C.O.A.P. In her exciting new book, *Adoption: Your Step-by-Step Guide* (American Carriage House Publishing, 2005, ISBN: 0-9705734-2-1, $34.95), Caldwell offers practical, easy-to-follow guidelines for anyone who is thinking of adopting a child.

"In the past several years I have seen the adoption community develop a substantial presence on the Internet," she writes. "It has connected adoptive parents to agencies and facilitators, lawyers and social workers. It has created a thriving online community of adoption professionals and enthusiasts. Without the Internet, many thousands of families would not have found the children who have made each of their lives wonderfully complete."

Caldwell's book presents a comprehensive list of more than 1,200 "hotlinks"—online adoption resources that range from private and public agencies, to chat rooms, to birth mother profiles, to attorneys. But the other part of the book may be even more useful: it's packed with simple techniques and how-to advice that greatly improve readers' odds of finding and bringing home the child who's right for them.

Here are just a few examples to illustrate the breadth and depth of the tips found in *Adoption: Your Step-by-Step Guide*:

• **Don't let "reclaim" fears hold you back.** It's a common belief, reinforced by media sensationalizing, that a birth mother can come back during the child's life and reclaim him or her. But if the adoption is legal (no fraud and no duress), then it is irrevocable. However, for a period of time after the birth, as set by state law, the biological mother may decline to sign papers relinquishing parental rights to her child, an act known as *reclaim*. In Washington State she has forty-eight hours, in California, thirty days, and in some states, six months. The bottom line? Do your research, choose a good adoption professional (who knows the red flags), and make certain that the adoption is legal and aboveboard.

• **If at all possible, consider open adoption.** Open adoption—in which the birth parents may select the adoptive family and sometimes have contact with the child afterward—is healthier for everyone involved. The birth parents will be satisfied that they made the correct choice, and the adoptive parents will have access to the medical information necessary to raise their child. The level of contact the birth parents have with the child can vary. It may be the exchanging of photos, emails, and/or letters, or having more direct contact, such as telephone calls, or in some cases, getting together on occasion. For more information, see www.openadoption.com.

• **In writing your *Dear Birth Mother* letter, speak from the heart.** Your adoptive parent profile has to sketch an intriguing and truthful portrait of who you are and the kind of parent you'll be. Caldwell offers a trove of tips on writing and posting a letter that will stand out from the pack and capture the attention of a prospective birth mother. "When you tell about your childhood, she wants to know what you learned that made you into the person you are, the parent you will be: the morning you saved the life of a sparrow fallen from its nest, or the time you broke your mother's favorite cookie jar and she responded not with anger, but with love and a kiss," she writes. "You will want to cover the essential topics: life in your home, the people in your family, the fun things you do, and your ideas about parenting. Share yourself with your birth mother. She will appreciate it." (*NOTE: See tipsheet entitled* "Dear Birth Mother: Twenty Tips for Writing a Winning Profile.")

• **Little things can mean a lot to a birth mother.** Something that you might consider trivial could be the deciding factor for a birth mother. Caldwell tells of one couple she worked with whose profile had not gotten a nibble from even one of some fifty birth mothers. The reason? The husband, Larry, had a full, bushy beard that made him look—in the words of one of the birth mothers—like "an ax murderer." Once he shaved his beard and submitted a new photo, the couple was soon matched with a birth mother. "When they finally met in person, Larry had grown his beard back and that was okay," writes Caldwell. "By then the birth mother had gotten to know the person inside."

• **When adopting a child with special needs, consider these tips:**
✓Observe and talk with parents raising a child who is similar to the one you might adopt.
✓Visit Internet forums to read about adoptive parents whose lives are filled with purpose and joy, and also to hear about those who are struggling.
✓Search the Net for information about your child's condition, new treatment methods, and advice in the writing of experts. See www.webmd.com.
✓If your agency requires counseling for your family to adopt a special needs child, accept it graciously and don't be offended, because it will help you.

• **Take care to avoid adoption fraud.** Caldwell suggests you follow these safety tips:
✓Be wary of any organization promising to find you a birth mother within a short amount of time. Most adoptions take between six and eighteen months.
✓Protect your privacy: in online profiles, don't mention your employer, salary, home, or work phone numbers. Use your adoption professional's toll-free telephone number for birth mothers to call. Be cautious about revealing personal information in chat rooms.
✓If any party to your adoption asks for a quick decision or quick payment, consider it a red flag.
✓As a general reference, more than $15,000 paid to any one adoption professional should be questioned.

• **Know the difference between acceptable and unacceptable birth mother expenses.** Caldwell estimates that about half of all birth mothers do ask for help with expenses. The way it's usually handled is that you, the adoptive parent, places a budgeted amount into a trust fund and an attorney disperses the checks. Acceptable expenses can range from maternity clothes to rent to insurance co-payments to phone bills. Caldwell says that during her career she's been asked about a number of unacceptable expenses, including (believe it or not), vet bills, new carpet, a limo to the prom, highlights in hair, and a Hawaiian vacation!

• **Always treat birth mothers with respect.** Caldwell writes about a match her adoption center made: "After a very strenuous labor, [the birth mother] chose not to consent to the adoption. The couple was extremely upset with her, even to the point of using foul language. A few days later, this birth mother decided to place the child after all. Of course, she chose another family. I don't think that first couple ever did adopt. They needed only to have compassion and empathy for the birth mother and they would have had their baby." (*NOTE: See tipsheet entitled* "10 'Talking Tips' for Speaking with a Birth Mother.")

Of course, this is only a sampling of the information and advice contained in *Adoption: Your Step-by-Step Guide*. It's also filled with heartwarming true stories that fill readers with hope and anticipation. In fact, if there is one overarching message that presents itself throughout the book, it is simply this: don't give up.

"Even today, with so many resources at your fingertips, adoption takes time," asserts Caldwell. "There may be false starts and disappointments. You may feel like you're riding an emotional roller coaster—elation one day, tears the next. That's normal. But armed with information, you can keep the twists and turns of your journey in perspective. That's why I wrote this book. It's meant to give you all the resources you need and to let you know that you are not alone. Your child is waiting—just keep looking and one day, you'll be holding him or her in your arms."

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**About the Author:**

**Mardie Caldwell**, C.O.A.P., is the founder of Lifetime Adoption and host of the radio talk show *Let's Talk Adoption*. Caldwell has been an adoption professional since 1986 and assists in over 130 adoptions per year. She has been quoted in and consulted for *Parenting* and *Adoptive Families* magazines and has appeared on CNN, CBS, ABC, NBC, and Fox. Caldwell is married with four children and lives in Northern California.

**About the Book:**

*Adoption: Your Step-by-Step Guide* (American Carriage House Publishing, 2005, ISBN: 0-9705734-2-1, $34.95) is a Benjamin Franklin Award nominee for 2005 and is available at bookstores nationwide, online booksellers, and www.AdoptionStepByStep.com.