

MEDIA RELEASE

TOUCH Adoption Services celebrates 15th anniversary with book launch *Our Very Own 2 – Singapore’s very own collection of stories to celebrate adoptive families*

SINGAPORE, 14 January 2016 – In celebration of its 15th anniversary, TOUCH Adoption Services (TAS), a service of TOUCH Family Services, will be launching their newly published book titled ***Our Very Own 2***, on 16 January 2016. *Our Very Own 2* is a sequel to the first book, *Our Very Own* which was published in 2010.

Says Mr Eugene Seow, Executive Director of TOUCH Family Services, “15 years ago, TOUCH was invited by then Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports to do the very first home study assessment which paved the way for our adoption work. We have never looked back and have since seen more than 900¹ children adopted into families. This is certainly a milestone worth commemorating.”

To be unveiled by Guest-of-honour, Assoc Prof Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Education & Ministry of Social and Family Development, *Our Very Own 2* is a compilation of 22 real life stories contributed by adoptive families, adoptees, birth families and even adoption workers who have shared precious glimpses of their lives. Some of these stories are sequels to stories which were shared in the first book, mapping how these families have evolved since. And for the first time, the *Our Very Own* series will also feature heartfelt stories on fostering in Singapore.

The objectives of the book are to:

- Celebrate adoption as an act of love
- Encourage and provide an avenue for adoptive parents, adoptees and even birth parents to share their stories with a view to validation and empowerment
- Inspire prospective adoptive parents and offer insights into the experience of becoming an adoptive parent, including how some adoptive families have dealt with matters unique to adoption
- Raise the general level of awareness of adoption and promote more informed and sensitive behaviour among the public and professionals

This book offers practical insights on the journey of adoption for families. The compilation of inspiring stories also includes accounts of how adoptive parents fall in love with their adopted children, and how they struggle with issues of disclosure and reactions from the community.

¹*Through conducting home studies and facilitating child placements*

Says Mr Seow, "TAS believes that every child deserves a permanent home, and it's with that conviction that we started TAS in 2001. 15 years later, we are glad to share true stories of adoption with the public through *Our Very Own 2* and give a voice to Singapore's adoption community. We hope that this collection of stories will be an encouragement and inspiration to both adoptive and non-adoptive families in Singapore."

Members of the public may purchase *Our Very Own 2* from TAS at S\$20.00 or email adoption@touch.org.sg for more information.

Please refer to Annex A for excerpts from *Our Very Own 2*.

For more information, please contact:

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About TOUCH Family Services

TOUCH Family Services (TFS), an affiliate of TOUCH Community Services, is committed to building strong families, and promoting the well-being of individuals and families in need. TFS supports families through adoption services, counselling support and family life education including marriage preparation courses and family enrichment seminars. For more details on TFS, please visit www.touch.org.sg/family_service_group.

What If by Alice

*“As adoptive parents, we will do our best to prepare her for the future,
but we will not be able to prepare the future for her.”*

This is something I think about constantly, as do many adoptive parents.

What if my child’s birth parents want to meet her when she grows up?

What if she wants to meet them?

What if she doesn’t?

Initially I did not think about it much when our daughter first came home with us at less than a month old. The frustrations of trying to conceive a biological child quickly faded away as Mun Tarnng (whose name means “the family is complete” in Mandarin) captured our hearts in October 2007. My husband and I had travelled to Malaysia to meet her birthmother and promised we would take care of her baby as our forever family.

After many years of soul-searching and watching others interact with adopted children, we were finally ready to be adoptive parents. Fortunately, we have several adoptees in our network of family and friends, so it was natural for them to welcome our daughter.

Other adoptive parents shared that they had benefited from being able to keep in contact with the birthparents, as it provided an identity and a history for their adopted child. Friends and relatives who were adoptees also shared similar thoughts on how they finally connected with their birthparents and biological siblings.

Finding The Birth Parents

The search for birthparents is not always easy. In our daughter’s first year with us, we decided to search for her birthparents.

We went through several sources but were told it was not possible to locate them. After two years, we tried again – this time on our own – only to find out that the birthparents were actually still living at the same address listed on the copy of the identity cards that had been given to us!

We drove to their home in Malaysia and rang the bell at the gate, completely unannounced. Her birthfather came out to meet us. We recognised him right away from his photo in the adoption documents.

We explained the reason why we wanted to stay in touch with them. We showed him pictures of Mun Tarnng and thanked him for the lovely daughter who has brought so much joy to our family.

We asked if they would like to meet with Mun Tarnng. The birthfather said he would have to discuss it with his wife, who was not home at the time. We left our contact numbers, hoping they would get in touch with us. We waited and waited, but did not hear from them.

Trying Again

Another year passed by. With encouragement from my husband, we decided to make another attempt the following year. We drove to Malaysia again during the Chinese New Year period.

Like the last visit, we showed up unannounced. This time, we got to meet with her birthmother.

We were invited into the house, where we also met Mun Tarng's three biological siblings. We chatted for about 20 minutes and exchanged phone numbers and email addresses. I told the birth mother to just call me whenever she was ready to meet Mun Tarng.

It remains at the back of my mind that someday I may get "that call". I wonder if my daughter will be ready.

Knowing Her Story

I started telling Mun Tarng about her adoption story when she was a few months old. She knows she has birthparents who live in Malaysia and that she has siblings.

As it often happens, adoptive parents might think that their children are not thinking about it, as they seem so matter-of-fact or dismissive when told the facts. They do not yet express much emotion about it.

One day, out of the blue, while we were on a trip to Malaysia, Mun Tarng suddenly asked:

"Are we going to meet my tummy mummy?"

"No, not this time," we told her.

She accepted the answer without question, but she remembered.

When Mun Tarng was five years old, we were having dinner one day at a hawker centre with some friends and we were talking about siblings. Totally unprompted, Mun Tarng reported to the others that she has two brothers and one sister (even though she is an only child in our family!) in Malaysia.

She had definitely internalised what we had been sharing with her.

It Is Her Choice

I have thought through all this very carefully. I have started making a memory box for her and I am thinking about what I will say in the event that she asks "Why me?"

I have decided that if her birthparents say they want to meet and if Mun Tarng is ready, I will likely tell her more of the details about her adoption. If either her birthparents or Mun Tarng decide they are not ready, I may keep the story simple, so as to spare her some of the details.

I believe that it is the birthparents and the child who should decide when the time is right to meet, not the adoptive parents. But deep in my heart, I keep hoping that it will happen sometime in the near future.

The important thing is, *everyone* in the equation has to be ready. As adoptive parents, we will do our best to prepare her for the future, but we will not be able to prepare the future for her.

What if they want to?

What if they don't?

These questions will always be on my mind.

* *This is the sequel to the story "Our Child Finally Arrives" first published in Our Very Own (2010).*

I am Chang Hann By Chang Hann

*“Being adopted makes me feel wanted, knowing that I was chosen.
It is such a blessing and I will always be thankful to God and my parents.”*

I know who I am. I was adopted from an Indonesian family by my parents who are Chinese.

Sometimes I get asked why my complexion is so dark. Most of the time, we say it is because I do a lot of outdoor sports (which is true) as we do not always feel like sharing or think it is necessary to explain the whole adoption thing to others. I am not really bothered by it.

To me, being adopted makes me feel wanted, knowing that I was chosen. It is such a blessing and I will always be thankful to God and my parents.

Being adopted has not changed the way people think of me or the way I think of others. The community that I grew up in accepts me and does not judge me based on my adoption. This has strongly helped me to embrace the fact that I was adopted.

My family and friends have always been very supportive of what I do, and more importantly, who I am. This has helped me overcome thoughts of not being wanted and has helped me to accept it as a part of my identity.

A Family Who Sticks Together

My younger sister and I have always known about our adoption simply because my family has always been open and honest about it. I have pretty much known it all my life.

The fact that we are adopted has never been a problem for me or my sister. At this point in her life, she has not needed mentoring regarding adoption. I guess we are both secure about who we are – and that is a good thing.

To me, a family is a group of people who go through all aspects of life together, be it the good, the bad or the ugly – the works! Whether we share the same blood or not does not matter.

A family is one who sticks together. A family is always there for you. A family takes care of you and loves you like no one else does. A family stands with each other through thick or thin, come what may.

Two Sides Of A Story

I am currently not in touch with my birth family and do not know who they are. Since my adoption, I have been told I have met my birth mother once.

I used to think I would never search for my birth parents. But now, if I did find them, it would be to tell them I forgive them for everything. Because honestly, I feel my adoption has been nothing but a straight-up blessing.

To other adoptees, there are two things I want to say to you. The first is, there are always two sides to a story. It may seem like your birth parents left you because you were not good enough. Maybe it is true. Maybe it is not.

Maybe your birth parents could not afford to bring you up. Maybe they loved you so much they did not want you to grow up in an unhealthy environment.

There is a saying that goes, "If you love someone, set them free."

Your birth parents probably loved you. Do not hate them because they left you. First, find out why.

The second thing is, do not ever feel unwanted. Out of the 100 over children in the orphanage, your parents chose *you*. Your family loves *you*. God loves *you*. Your friends love *you*. Remember that.

To other adoptive parents, I would like to say that you have done a beautiful and courageous thing. Love your adoptive children unconditionally so that they will always love themselves and believe in who they are.

My parents did that for me. I will always be thankful to them.

The First Date

By Teo Seok Bee (Adoption Worker)

As the name was called out, a nanny walked into the room with a child in her arms. Mr and Mrs Tan got up quickly from their chairs, their eyes fixed on the child – the precious one they had been waiting for what seemed like years.

Mrs Tan could not hide her pent-up emotions any longer and tears flowed down her cheeks as she gently took the child from the nanny's arms.

Together with a colleague, we had accompanied eight families on the inaugural trip to Chongqing, China, in 2005, to meet their adopted children for the first time and to finalise the adoption proceedings.

It boasted a first in many areas – this was the first batch of adoptive parents being welcomed in China since the signing of the bilateral adoption agreement between Singapore and China.

For some of the families, it was their first visit to China. Naturally, it was the first time they all met their children.

The 10-day visit was a defining moment for those eight families. From the formal interview and signing procedures to the informal sightseeing tours, joy of the highest kind mixed with baby cries filled the air.

Whilst we were impressed with the attention to detail in arranging for baby strollers, cots and baby tubs in hotel rooms, we were elated with the progress some of the children made in just 10 days of individual care and attention given.

It was an honour and privilege to share such significant moments with the families. We saw our vision played out during the trip – the fulfillment of a dream – of couples wanting to parent a child and a child finding a permanent loving family.