

BY HOLLY PERDUE

Neither my partner nor I have ever wanted to give birth. We see adoption as a great way to grow a family.

Our first child came from a friend who was unable to deal with her son behaviorally. He came to live with us as a short-term fix and ended up staying. He was a very needy child emotionally, behaviorally and intellectually. He has a good heart and kindness through and through. He was the first of our eight adopted kids, some from here in Vermont, some from states far away.

There are thousands of children already waiting for their forever families. They are waiting in foster care for someone to call and ask to adopt them. They are all colors, all ages, all levels of need – their only commonality is that the parents who birthed them were unable to care for them.

Adoption is a great option for us as members of the LGBTQ communities because neither partner has

little seven-year-old boy – would you consider him?" I said "Sure, but can he climb trees?"

They sent us his paper work. This child was born at 27 weeks gestation, weighing one pound, eight ounces, and was diagnosed as a "failure to thrive" baby. He had had every preemie operation that was possible. He did not yet communicate, he was not toilet trained and did not feed himself. BUT, boy oh boy, did he have a spark in his eye! We said, "Sure we would like him to be part of our family." And the paper exchange began.

The first thing to realize about adoption is that while lots of children need loving and caring parents, the process isn't necessarily easy or smooth. It can be even more complicated when a couple is looking into adopting a child from a foreign country. Many countries forbid adoption by lesbians and gay men and require an affidavit to be signed by the adopting parent swearing that he or she isn't gay or lesbian. Each prospective parent needs to decide how closeted they will be in order to

Every reputable agency dealing with adoptions will require a homestudy, an examination of your circumstances and family life. You must choose a social worker or agency within the state of Vermont to do your homestudy, to assist in finding a child, to do the post-placement visits, and to finalize the adoption in court. Make a list of questions to ask the agency when you call to find out which agency would be best for your situation. You might want to ask if they have placed children in a lesbian or gay household before. Other questions to ask: How long will it take to receive a placement? What are the fees and are there any additional costs? How many placements and finalizations do they do in a year?

The homestudy produces a document that introduces you to the placing social worker and to the court that finalizes the adoption and assists in clearing interstate adoption regulations. Each agency is different in the amount of time it takes to complete a homestudy, but generally the required information is similar.

An established agency

I called a lawyer in the area and asked her to initiate contact. The birthmother was real and understood what she wanted for her baby. The lawyer was wonderful for both the birthmother and us. The birthmother did not take drugs or alcohol, but had not had any prenatal care. She birthed a beautiful baby girl and kept her the four days to relinquishment plus the two days until I arrived. She is one of the bravest women I know.

If a child is in the state's custody and available for adoption, generally the parental rights have been terminated. There is a program called Foster-adoption in which the adopting parents take the risk that the first parent's rights will be terminated at some time in the future. This is a common situation in Social Service infant and toddler adoptions or private adoptions in states with a long relinquishment period.

Waiting for a child to be placed in your family can be an emotional roller coaster. For infants, birth mothers can change their minds. For older children you must get their social worker's approval. Often if you

you interacting with the child. An adoption can be finalized in the state of Vermont after the child has been in your home for six months.

After finalization the child is yours – all yours! A member of your family, as if he/she were born to you, yours. The child and you have a real relationship in the eyes of the law. You are really that child's parent and he or she is really your child. You must advocate and protect the child as he or she grows. You must love the child unconditionally and be in it for the long haul. The child is treated legally the same as a child by birth for custody, inheritance, and financial support.

We are out as lesbians to all of our in-state social workers. It was one of the criteria for choosing a particular agency with which to work. After one southern agency figured out we were good parents – overcoming their initial misgivings about us as lesbians – we became a poster family for them when they gave talks about who can adopt.

Anyone in good health who is willing to love a child uncondition-

After finalization the child is yours – all yours! A member of your family, as if he/she were born to you, yours. You are really that child's parent and he or she is really your child.

CHOOSING CHILDREN



A Roller Coaster Ride Through The Adoption Process.

These eight children are now part of Holly Perdue's family thanks to patience and persistence.

"more ownership" of the child, as in the circumstance of birth (and, yes, I understand that second-parent adoption can help alleviate that situation for couples who give birth), provided all of the paper work is completed correctly. Here in Vermont it is especially so with the availability of second/two parent adoption and friendly social workers. Single parent adoption is also an option.

Many infant adoptions are through private agencies. Birthmothers contact an agency or lawyer in their area and make an adoption plan. For a birth mother and a biological father to relinquish a child for adoption is an act of love.

When our first son had been with us a while and it was clear he was not going to return to his first mother, I looked into adopting another child. I was in contact with a social service agency in the south about a two-year-old black girl. The agency put me off for a year because they wanted a black family for her. But in March of that year the same agency said, "We have an adorable

pass this test.

There are also three states in the United States that forbid by law adoption by members of our community: Utah, Mississippi, and Florida. In other states, such as Kentucky and Oklahoma, social workers just refuse to deal with us. If you find a child whom you adore, ask if the agency will deal with lesbians or gay men, since policies of the past may have changed.

To begin the adoption process be sure that you want a child and are willing to change your lifestyle to accommodate his or her needs. Then think about whom you are willing to accept. Is an infant your strongest desire, or would an adorable four-year-old suit? Teenagers are wonderful in their own right and need a place to belong. Explore all of the options. Are you willing to accept a child with learning differences? Physical challenges? Health issues? A boy or a girl or a sibling set? A child of a different race or culture from yours? Or is a healthy infant your only choice?

deals with other organizations on a regular basis to find the right child for you. There is information about hard-to-place kids on the internet – AdoptUSKids.org is one such site. The government has a site called the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse. It provides a lot of good information on the different types of adoption, different state laws, agencies in each state, and "relinquishment times" (the number of hours or days a birth parent has legal custody of the child – and no contact is allowed with the adopting family).

We lost out on the chance to adopt a baby girl when the birthmother called the social worker two hours after leaving the hospital and said, "Take me to my baby." The relinquishment period in Illinois is 48 hours after birth, so she had not yet signed a termination of parental rights.

A while later the same adoption facilitator called and said there was a birthmother in Louisiana, but she had only sketchy information.

send off a homestudy to an agency in a different state you never hear if they even received it. Sometimes it takes several months for them to make a decision. My best advice is to be persistent, polite and patient in dealing with an agency. Call and ask. Send out your homestudy to someone else. Spread your information around. If you have paid for the homestudy it is yours to approve and to have a copy. Agencies differ in how much initiative each wants a potential adoptive parent to take.

Interstate Compact is a state agency in each state that makes sure all of the paper work for a child to cross state lines is correct. You cannot legally cross state lines with a child who is placed with you without going through Interstate Compact. The state of Vermont is very good about processing the information in a timely manner. Other states can take a week to several months.

After you have the child placed in your home you must have a minimum of three-post placement visits. The social worker must see

ally and provide a good home may adopt. Older couples are encouraged to inquire because they often have the patience and skills necessary to raise a child who may have trust issues due to nasty circumstances in that child's earlier life. Don't bother looking if you have a felony conviction. If you lie on your homestudy or are not completely truthful you will probably not receive a child. If you are into pedophilia adoption is not for you. Adoption is about caring for the child's needs, not about the child meeting the needs of the parent.

The state of Vermont has many children available for adoption. Sometimes there are infants available through the foster-adopt program. But, waiting now in Vermont foster care are over a hundred children ready and waiting for their forever families. Maybe one of them is yours! ▼

Holly Perdue, her partner, and their children live in Worcester.