



Jean MacLeod and The Write Magic www.TheWriteMagic.com

Ready, Set... *Lifebook!*

By Jean MacLeod

What is a Lifebook?

A lifebook is about your child. It begins with her birth and tells her pre-adoption story. It talks about her birthparents, orphanage, birth country, reasons for adoption, and her daily life before she met you. A lifebook offers a parent and child an opportunity to work on the child's story together, with the parent supplying facts and photographs, and the child supplying her feelings, words or drawings. It is a treasury of information, and an important piece of your child's identity. A lifebook's synergy works to tie an adoptee's "before and after" together, and becomes a book-in-process as your child matures and adds more of her own thoughts to her early life narrative.

Real-Life Stories

Finding the positive spin on an abandonment or adoption story is not what is most important to our kids or to their self-esteem. What we can do to help them feel good is to give them the truth, and allow them to feel and process anger, loss and grief. We can help our kids understand the cultural context of their abandonment, or the harsh personal choices a birthparent may have felt forced to make, but the intellectual or factual approach will not banish the need for an adoptee to *feel* the personal pain of rejection.

We can use our children's stories as tools to help them understand their emotions, their lives and how they ended up half-way around the world. Talking about their reality shows our kids that we accept them and their feelings, that we can deal with hard truths, and that we will walk next to them and support them so they can learn to deal with the hard truths, too.

My daughter was never excited about my positive take on her early-life story. When I finally got 'real', and went to her feelings about her reality, was when she let herself truly love me. We all can spin happy endings to our children's adoption stories, but sometimes getting to happy means first going back to sad, and dealing with loss. I've learned that truth doesn't need to be sugar-coated; it needs to be acknowledged, felt, dealt with, processed and revisited. The miraculous by-product of honesty and empathy is a parent-child bond built on the firm foundation of trust, and a relationship that is stronger for weathering the difficult issues together.

Building Foundations...Building Identity

Without a foundation to build upon, a structure crumbles. Helping a child develop an identity that includes the past, the present and the future is integral for an adopted child to feel whole. Creating an honest life narrative helps provide a sense of history, or life structure, for adopted children. Our internationally adopted sons and daughters come to us encoded with information that we can backtrack, react to and connect with. Everyone



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has a story, but the facts of an internationally adopted child's babyhood are not as important as how she *feels* about her early life, how she interprets pre-adoptive events, and how she views her place in the world.

Resilience, a trait that allows a person to view and react to adversity as a challenge rather than as a trauma, plays a large part in how a child defines herself through 'past identity'. A child who suffered a harsh orphanage experience had a difficult start in life, but can be taught by a parent to be re-defined by her bravery and courageously strong survival skills. Lifebooks can provide a written and photographic testament to our children's faith, hope and strength!

Avoid Lifebook FREEZE

It's very easy to become immobilized by the importance of creating a lifebook for your child. This 'must-do' task on your project list can rapidly become a procrastinator's worst nightmare: an un-organized bin of adoption papers, mementoes and photos, heaped with parental fear and guilt!

There is HELP for those gripped in the paralysis of "where to begin". You don't have to be a writer or a scrapper or an artist; guidebooks and online listservs provide step-by-step support for parents who are beginning the narrative journey. These resources offer ordered lists of topics to include in a child's book and examples of sample wording for tough subjects. Some parents prefer to create digital lifebooks online, and use a printing service to 'publish' their final product. A lifebook can be a crafter's work of art or as simple as a three ring binder—the most important piece of the book is its *content*.

Digital Scrapbooking 101

<http://www.digitalscrapbookplace.com/university/Scrapping101/basics.shtml>

New to Digital Scrapbooking?

<http://www.scrapbook-bytes.com/new-to-digital-scrapbooking.php>

LifeBooks Creating a Treasure for the Adopted Child

By Beth O'Malley, MEd

Adoption Lifebook - A Bridge to Your Child's Beginnings A Workbook for International Adoptive Families

by Cindy Probst, MEd, MSW, LCSW

Include Your Kids!

Remember to include your children in the re-creation of their stories. Ask for their input, and insert pages of their thoughts, observations and feelings into the album. Use the



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realistic list of questions in *“The BIG Questions...What Your Adopted Child Wants to Know”* as a lifebook conversation starter. You may not have many answers for your child, but the ongoing process of questioning, examining and discussing aids children in dealing with difficult information or ambiguous life stories.

Young children may prefer to color pictures of the people and events of their pre-adoptive lives and dictate an explanation of their artwork. Some children may resist any discussion about their early lives and may not wish to be involved in their lifebook at all... and that’s okay, too. Simply, our job as adoptive parents is to provide our children with all of the information that we have, or that we can honestly surmise, about their early lives. A lifebook is a gift of the past; when our sons and daughters are ready they will understand the histories that we have helped capture...and they will be able to build their futures on the powerful basis of what is known, what is not, and the personal truths they derive from both.

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