



When my daughter who was born to me was very young (two, and talking), we would take naps together, always lying together like nested spoons. On three of these occasions of deep, relaxed afternoon sleep, of easy, trusting physical connection, my toddler daughter and I dreamed the same dreams. At the time, the realization was so other-worldly, and my life was so hectic, that I simply shelved the eerie 'coincidences' in the very back of my mind. It wasn't until several years later that I really thought about what had occurred; a stay-at-home dad said something that triggered the memories, and I suddenly, rapidly, told him about the three shared dream experiences. It surprised both of us! He looked at me like he was seeing someone from the X-Files for the first time, but as a hands-on dad he also knew about the intimate currents that course between parent and child when daily life flows intensely between the two, and he nodded his head in acknowledgment.

I am not psychic in the usual sense, and my daughter and I had a normal, pragmatic mother-toddler relationship. But this daughter of mine had been physically connected to me for nine months while inside my body. Her dad and I had created her; she was literally part of me--I had grown her and I would willingly give my life for her. Why *wouldn't* there be lingering connections between us on some subterranean level? How strange that the 'unspoken' mother-child psychical frisson doesn't occur more frequently, and, reflecting on my own immediate reaction to push it back down when it did occur, how strange that our culture doesn't even have words to describe these other-worldly flashes of symbiotic, post-birth connection.

My two year old is now sixteen—she rolls her eyes when an outsider points out similarities between the two of us, but she is secretly interested and sometimes even pleased! She and I recently had a conversation about family genetics (I was teasing her about her traits from her dad's side of the family, and she was blaming me for some of her others), while my ten year old from China sat next to me on my bed, listening carefully.

"You and Molly are very connected", she observed seriously, after her big sister left the room. I turned and looked into her face and read what I needed to answer.

“You think that Molly and I are more connected because she grew inside me, don’t you?” It was a gentle statement more than a question, and it caused her eyes, bravely direct, to fill with tears. She nodded.

“Listen to me”, I told her. “Molly and I have a bond because she grew inside me. You and I have a bond that WE created. It is different than growing a baby, but it is every bit as precious. I cherish what we have because you and I worked hard to make our connection grow, and that is very, very special to me—just as special as my biological connection to your sister, and just as permanent.” She laid her head on my chest, and between sobs of pain and relief, told me fiercely that she loved me.

Pre-birth, a baby is used to being filled up, physically and emotionally, by the mother who carries her. As a birth parent I was given a glimpse of the mystery and power of biology, and an inkling of the invisible ties between mother and child. As an adoptive parent, I don’t try to eradicate my adopted child’s first, great mother-loss, her ‘primal wound’; I see my job as filling up an empathic ‘primal connection’ by building reciprocal bonds through honesty, vulnerability, compassion and effort.

When a baby is born she doesn’t understand she is ‘other’, she sees herself reflected in her mom and believes herself to be part. By helping our adopted children understand they are ‘other’ and are loved and cherished for who they are--for their gifts and losses and how they joined the family--we open the door to the symbiotic flashes that celebrate and confirm how completely a part of us they have become.

Our sons and daughters from other mothers (mothers who may wander fitfully in our children’s dreams) are followed by ghosts of their first parents and their other lives. These children wait for us to understand the adoption-parenting paradox:

We must recognize our children’s history and reach toward what walks unguarded through their minds at night; we must build a dream tower big enough for two sets of parents to inhabit; and in tandem, we must fiercely *claim* these children and *share* them, in order to make them truly our own.

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'Creating a Connection' Resources for Adoptive Parents

I Love You Rituals by Becky A. Bailey

The Heart of a Family by Meg Cox

The Five Love Languages of Children by Gary Chapman & Ross Campbell

Why I Chose You by Gregory E. Lang

The Twelve Gifts of Birth by Charlene Costanzo

Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew
by Sherrie Eldridge

Creating Ceremonies: Innovative Ways to Meet Adoption Challenges
by Cheryl A. Lieberman, Ph.D. and Rhea K. Bufferd, LICSW