

[00:00:00.650] - Lisa Qualls

Welcome to the Adoption Connection Podcast, where we offer resources to equip you and stories to inspire you on your adoption journey. I'm Lisa Qualls

[00:00:10.390] - Melissa Corkum

And this is Melissa Corkum. Don't worry, we get it, and we're here for you.

[00:00:18.720] - Melissa Corkum

Hi, friends. Welcome to episode 147 of The Adoption Connection Podcast. This week, we are introducing you to a friend we actually got to meet in real life this past spring at an in person event, and he has just an incredible story and one that I think is going to help infuse some hope when you think into the future about what could possibly happen with your kids who came to you through adoption or foster care.

[00:00:48.660] - Lisa Qualls

Trent traveled a really difficult and horrific journey through the foster care system until he was adopted at the age of nine. So after healing a lot from his traumatic past, Trent, who is now 20, shares his inspiring story of triumph in order to provide hope and healing for others. He is involved in foster care reform at the national level, and he also serves as cofounder and CEO for Watch Me Rise, which is a Ministry devoted to working on behalf of children who've experienced trauma like he once did. He is currently completing his undergrad degree in family and human development at Arizona State and plans to pursue a Masters in clinical counseling. But probably the most delightful thing, is on the day that we met him, he had literally just completed his training to become a TBRI practitioner. So we're just delighted to have Trent on our podcast today. I hope you enjoyed the conversation.

[00:01:52.760] - Lisa Qualls

Well, hello, Trent. Welcome to the Adoption Connection Podcast.

[00:01:56.820] - Trent Taylor

Thank you so much, good morning. How are you?

[00:01:59.470] - Lisa Qualls

I'm doing really well, thanks. You know, one of the things we value really highly here at the Adoption Connection is really representing the voices of all parts of the triad and different experiences. Melissa and I together represent the Triad. She's an adoptee, I'm a birth mom, and we're both adoptive moms, so it's always really special for us to get other voices here. So I'm really delighted to have you joined.

[00:02:29.390] - Trent Taylor

Yeah,

[00:02:31.500] - Lisa Qualls

Would you just start by introducing yourself and then what I really think our listeners are going to want to hear is your story because it's really, really remarkable. So first, just tell us about who you are, what your life is like right now.

[00:02:45.600] - Trent Taylor

Yeah, of course. My name is Trent Taylor. I am currently 20 years old. I am on track to get my bachelors in family and human development. I also run a support Ministry alongside my adoptive mom called Watch Me Rise. And right now, that's where all my focus is going through the summer and just seeing wherever God takes us.

[00:03:09.490] - Lisa Qualls

Now, you did just accomplish something really significant, right? At the very day I met you, you had just finished your training to become a TBRI practitioner.

[00:03:19.620] - Trent Taylor

Yes, I did.

[00:03:20.760] - Lisa Qualls
How was that experience?

[00:03:22.800] - Trent Taylor
It was incredible. To be honest, I didn't quite feel real in the moment, but it was really remarkable to say how far I've come from the person who needed TBRI to now being able to give to right to others. It's really just a full circle moment.

[00:03:40.500] - Lisa Qualls
I love it. Well, I'm sure that your parents are very proud of you. So tell us how you came into this world of adoption, foster care. Why is it important to you?

[00:03:53.960] - Trent Taylor
Of course. So at the age of four, I was taken into the foster care system due to extreme neglect, domestic violence, and sexual abuse. And after that, me and my siblings were removed and I entered the foster care system that way, and I traveled to five different homes, five different schools. I remained with my older brother and my younger brother. Unfortunately, even though we were removed, the abuse did not stop as my older brother continued to abuse us through most of our foster homes. It wasn't up until the one before our adopted placement that the social workers found out and finally removed him. But Thankfully, I was able to remain with my younger brother the entire time. And my time to foster care, it was full of uncertainty, chaos, fear. I remember so many nights just crying myself to sleep, longing for a family and just someone to love me and keep me safe. But after that five year journey in foster care, my younger brother and I were at a match event. And that's where we met our adoptive parents and it is so hard to describe the feelings I had that day, but I just knew in my heart that these were the people who were going to adopt us. God just had something on my heart that day and I just had this gut feeling. And that same day we were given a dog tag with Jeremiah 29:11 engraved on the front. And after receiving that, that's really what helped me get through the rest of my time in foster care, just knowing that he had a plan for me. I was just able to cling on to that and that's what gave me hope. And so shortly after the match event, it was probably a couple of months, maybe closer to a year, we got to move in with our adoptive parents. And then about a year through the courts, we were finally adopted. And, you know, being in a place where I felt loved, I felt like I could trust people for the first time. It's really what it opened me up to, the possibility of being able to start healing and that trust and that security did not come easy. It was several years before I felt like I could really trust my adoptive parents. But the whole time they just walked my journey by my side, they cried with me as I mourned the loss of my childhood and my siblings. And every time they would always point me back to the ultimate healing that was found in God. And that is really what got me through all of my past pain and my trauma and that's why I was able to come to dramatic levels of healing. And so when I was roughly ten years old and after being adopted at the age of nine, that's when I started public speaking, that's when I started to share my story because, you know, working through all of my past trauma, it really opened my eyes up that my pain has a purpose and God was going to use what I had been through for his glory. And that's exactly what I wanted to do. And since then, I have been sharing my story to anyone who will listen. You know, I have done podcasts and books, and like I said, we're running a support Ministry, and my goal is to be a clinical counselor and a trauma informed consultant as well and just really help children find the same healing that I have found in God and help them come to the same place that I have been so gratefully given and have come to.

[00:07:57.740] - Lisa Qualls
That's wonderful. Okay, so let's back up. We've got foster parents listening today, kinship providers, adoptive parents, so it's not that common that we get to hear from a former foster youth about that experience, so what, you can share any part of your story you want, but what I think parents are going to want to know is, what do you wish your foster parents had known? How could they have helped you and cared for you during those years? Now you said you have five placements. So if you want to share a little bit about that, that would be great. And then just what you really want foster parents to know for sure.

[00:08:44.210] - Trent Taylor

You know, looking back, the one thing I wish the foster parents I had knew was how to handle a child who's experienced trauma or how to approach that type of parenting and to come at it with a sense of compassion and really just walking my journey by my side like my adopted parents did, you know? And when I think back to the different placements, I don't think any of them had any idea how trauma affects the brain and how that affects behaviors as well, you know, and I had some pretty rough placements, which isn't always uncommon. But the biggest thing, compassion, patients, trauma informed knowledge, just knowing how to parent differently and approach that differently and really just helping me feel like I'm not alone and that I've got someone to be there by my side.

[00:10:02.860] - Lisa Qualls

You were fairly young when you went into care. Do you remember each of the five families? Were you with some of them super short, some longer? What do you remember about just being moved around?

[00:10:15.200] - Trent Taylor

Yeah, so I definitely remember most of my places pretty well. I know my first one was kinship, and that was with my paternal grandparents at the time. I believe that lasted probably under a year. And then we were moved to a regular foster replacement. And it's hard to tell exactly how long I was in most of these placements, probably six months to a year, roughly. And then it was can kinship again and then foster. And then it was our adoptive placement. Like I said, during those times, the abuse didn't stop. It was kinship, foster, kinship. And then after that one, my older brother was removed, and then the last one before our adopted placement, that's when it was just me and my younger brother.

[00:11:05.620] - Lisa Qualls

Is there anything that a foster parent did for you that was helpful?

[00:11:16.360] - Lisa Qualls

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[00:11:23.480] - Melissa Corkum

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[00:11:48.680] - Lisa Qualls

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[00:12:09.660] - Melissa Corkum

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[00:12:24.260] - Lisa Qualls

Is there anything that a foster parent did for you that was helpful?

[00:12:30.460] - Trent Taylor

You know, I did have some foster parents who would occasionally help me with school and things like that because I did have a lot of academic holes from moving so many times.

[00:12:42.880] - Lisa Qualls

Did anybody do something that helped you feel safe?

[00:12:51.270] - Trent Taylor

Well, I do remember I had one foster placement where the foster dad was a state trooper and knowing that that did provide some safety, but also in that same placement, the biological daughter did not care for us being there too much. So she kind of took out her frustrations on us. Really, the only place that I really felt safe was my foster to adopt placement. A lot of, you know, most of my foster placements were filled with just continued abuse and uncertainty, and I never quite felt safe anywhere because I was always afraid that I have to move. So I never really allowed myself, I just couldn't let myself feel safe or get too comfortable.

[00:13:44.320] - Lisa Qualls

So we know that when children are living in that state of fear and that state of stress that they're not going to come and tell us, "Gee, I feel really afraid." They're going to tell us, but they're not probably going to use words. Did you have any behaviors that were challenging for your foster parents, or were you just amazingly calm and easy?

[00:14:09.080] - Trent Taylor

No, I most certainly had some behavior challenges because with everything that I had been through, I had a lot of anger, I had a lot of different emotions, and I didn't know how to express them appropriately. And I never really had anybody to sit down and help me learn how to do that because I guess they just assumed that when you're six and eight years old you just know how to. But yeah, so I'm just thinking back to some behavior that I had a lot of anger outbursts, some moments where I would freeze, my body would just shut down on me, and I just couldn't comply, which then looks like defiance which then would end up with me getting in trouble.

[00:14:57.640] - Lisa Qualls

Ok, that is really important. Tell me about that, go through that cycle again. So you would have this, you'd have all this fear that looks like anger, and then what happened?

[00:15:12.360] - Trent Taylor

And then over time, depending on the situation, my body would just shut down on me, and I would freeze. And I remember so vividly wanting to comply and wanting to do what was asked of me, but my body literally could not physically be moved at the time.

[00:15:30.230] - Lisa Qualls

Okay. That is so important to hear that you can give words to that because, you know, as a parent, our children are sometimes it's taking so much mental space trying to figure out why is my child doing this and what do I do in response? You know, the parents brain is always trying to process. And when I think of you as a little guy in this freeze mode, but the parent is saying, I want you to do this. I wasn't a, "I won't do it," I was, "I can't."

[00:16:00.800] - Trent Taylor

Exactly.

[00:16:02.000] - Lisa Qualls

And did anybody understand that?

[00:16:04.300] - Trent Taylor

My adoptive parents did, actually. I remember my mom telling me that when she first got us, that she went out to, like, the Barns and Noble and got everything she could on trauma and things like that. And my dad, who also had a rough upbringing, he was honestly the one who was able to help bring me out of that state of freeze and that state of shut down. And all he did, he didn't say a single word, but all he did was he simply came up to me and just gave me a gentle hug and just held me. And then I literally remember, I felt my body just all attention just loosening. And that was what brought me out of that state of freeze. And then I was able to start talking about things as my brain came back online.

[00:16:54.000] - Lisa Qualls

Well, I love that you mentioned that hug, because what we know is that a calm, regulated parent can help a child come into regulation. We can coregulate together. You know, I was just hugging one of my kids not long ago who was dysregulated. And I said, okay, let's just hug each other and feel each other's heartbeats for a minute, you know, and I actually said we can coregulate together, you know? But your dad's instincts to do that were really good because that hug helped you. Like you said, calm and bring your brain back online, because when a child is dysregulated, like you were, they're functioning in the lower part of their brain, which is not that thinking brain. It's not the brain that can think, "Oh, my mom's asking me to do this, and I really do want to do it because I want to make her happy." And you can't think that way when you're in that lower dysregulated part of your brain where fear is. Okay, I love that. Tell us more about what your parents did right. When I had a chance to meet you, I interviewed you on a panel at a conference, and I just remember listening, of course your mom was in the audience, I think your dad was there, too, yes? Well, for sure your mom and I just remember you spoke about so many ways that your parents helped you heal and be safe. So tell us more.

[00:18:23.320] - Trent Taylor

Yeah, of course. So the biggest thing that my adoptive mom did for me was she, almost every day, she would let me know how much she loved me and remind me that no matter what I do, no matter what happens, that she will never love me any less, she'll never think of me less and that she would never judge me and that I was safe. And just hearing that continuously, you know, over time, it started to click with me, like, wow, what she's saying is really true. So that on top of just being able to just talk, because I remember when I first disclosed my sexual abuse, I would say something as the memory would come to my mind and she was just, you know, she didn't act shocked, she didn't freak out. She just very calmly talk to me about it and we worked through it. And another big thing is that she walked my journey by my side, both my parents did. They came alongside me, and they really were basically detectives trying to figure out what my triggers were, what I needed to feel, what I needed, what I needed to feel safe, whether it made sense to them or not. They did it, they did whatever it took. And just seeing that they cared so much for the first time in my life, I was like, wow, they really have my back and they're not going to let me go or let anything bad happen to me. And just the open communication that we had and that trust that we had built over time. That was that was really that was some of the biggest things that they did, I think, were just spot on, just a judgment free zone, compassion, allowing me to feel whatever I felt, regardless of what they thought. Whatever I felt, they acknowledged it, and they helped me work through it. So they really just came alongside me and really just work through this with me.

[00:20:30.300] - Lisa Qualls

Did they have other children before you and your brother joined the family?

[00:20:34.880] - Trent Taylor

So they were foster parents for several years before they had us. But no, we were their first adoptive and any children actually.

[00:20:42.800] - Lisa Qualls

Okay. So it sounds like they devoted a lot of time and energy to you, too.

[00:20:49.960] - Trent Taylor

Yeah.

[00:20:50.680] - Lisa Qualls

Like, they poured themselves into you, which is really, really beautiful. What kind of practical things did they do that helped you maybe related to food or feeling safe at night or supporting you and advocating for you in school. Those kinds of things?

[00:21:11.600] - Trent Taylor

Yeah, of course. So my mom was actually a special Ed teacher student. She knew how all of those things work for school. So for school, she went into those meetings that were for me and went there and advocated on my behalf because I did have some academic holes. And she got me some tutoring and she got me some special things that I needed for school to help catch me back up. And for food

issues, she would always like, every time she got groceries, she would open the fridge and say, there's always food here. And sometimes she would put some snacks in a little bin for us and we knew that if we ever hungry, we would always have our little snack bin. And, you know, also, she worked a lot with me at home and homework and talking through how to express my emotions appropriately. And she also do the same for my younger brother. My younger brother, he had a lot of pre verbal trauma, so he doesn't quite remember a whole lot, which has been very difficult for him. But I remember, she stayed up for hours one night creating basically this book that describes different emotions. This is what this emotion feels like. This is how we can work through it together. This is some practical ways to know what to do when you feel these ways. And just the amount of time she invested in different things. And she'd pack just inspirational notes in our lunches to know that we were loved and just the amount of time she poured into us and the time she took to make sure that we knew we were loved and that we were safe. You know, and she would also, even though it kind of irritated them a little bit, they would let us lock the doors on their way in and out of the house, and sometimes we accidentally locked ourselves out, so they had to hide keys in the yard in case that happened, because we were so fearful of losing what we had and being taken away. But they never once got frustrated with us, they never scolded us for it. And they just did what they needed to do and just whatever we needed to feel safe, they did.

[00:23:28.300] - Lisa Qualls

So food issues are super, super common with children who've had so much food insecurity in their early lives. Even though your mom put out a bid for you, did you ever still feel like you needed to keep food in your pockets, or did you ever hide it in your room or anything like that?

[00:23:46.140] - Trent Taylor

So for me, personally, I did not. My younger brother did, but I did not. I don't really know why, but I didn't. I did worry that food wouldn't always be there because that had happened to me before, but I never quite really hoarded food or kept it in my pockets. Mostly, I probably just over at a lot of the time. Just ate until I was, like, really, really full and couldn't eat anymore. Yeah., So for me, personally, I didn't deal with that particular thing.

[00:24:18.260] - Lisa Qualls

So that overeating was also rooted in fear that fear that food would not be there tomorrow or did that resolve on its own? Or is that something you had to work on?

[00:24:30.890] - Trent Taylor

Well, it was kind of a mix of both. So over time, we kind of worked on it, and I feel like, as you know, some of my walls were coming down, and I was starting to trust and feel safe, some of those feelings of needing to eat as much as I can because I might not have it again, it kind of just went away as the safety and the trust rose. Those kind of just went by the wayside and eventually just went completely away.

[00:24:55.720] - Lisa Qualls

That's great. What about feeling safe at night? What practical things did your parents do for you for you because, of course, especially children who experienced abuse, sexual abuse, any kind of abuse, nighttime can be really scary.

[00:25:09.460] - Trent Taylor

Yeah, it can and it was for me. And so what they did was, they would come to my room, they would read me a book before bed time, and they put a little night light in my room because at the time, I was afraid of the dark and they would always ask me, do you want the door shut or do you want to crack? How much do you want to open? They gave me a voice and they gave me a choice during our night time schedule. And just reassuring me that if you need something, we will meet that need and your voice matters.

[00:25:46.480] - Lisa Qualls

That's really good. One of my kids slept inside a little tent on top of the bed for a long time, just because nighttime felt too scary, you know, like, even the room just felt too open, you know? And so

being in a small and closed space just give a sense of safety. And yeah, I think a little creativity can go a long way, but you're right. The most important thing is to really let the child have a voice. And I think sometimes as parents, it can be a little frustrating, like, well, last night you wanted the door shut, now today you're upset because I'm shutting the door and you want something different. But we just have to be so flexible. I think flexibility is one of the most important characteristics that adoptive and foster parents have to have, because if we're too rigid, that just tears down connection.

[00:26:42.660] - Trent Taylor
Definitely.

[00:26:44.810] - Lisa Qualls
So what else would you want our listeners to know to help us all be the best foster and adoptive parents we can be?

[00:26:54.400] - Trent Taylor
Yeah, for sure. I definitely think, as we've talked about before, giving the child voice, that's so key, because like you said, sometimes they might want the door shut, sometimes they might want it open and the parents kind of confused as to why. But here's the thing, that night that they wanted to close, they may have had a memory surface that they could not have verbalize. And then maybe the memory kind of went by the wayside, so they were okay with the door open. That's another one of those things. You got to just really, just like I said before, be a detective and really learn what your child needs and just straight up, ask them, what do you need? What do you need to feel safe? And if they are not certain, give them a couple of choices. Do you want to open? Do you want to close? And just even if it doesn't make sense to you, it makes sense to the child and that's all you need to know. And if it makes a child feel safe, then just don't do it. If it's something that's not a big deal and it's not going to impede your ability to function, just let it happen because that's what it builds, attachment, trust and a sense of safety. And it lets them know for the first time in their life that my voice matters and that I will be safe and that there are people who truly care about me and what I have to say.

[00:28:20.500] - Lisa Qualls
So your faith has been a big part of your healing journey as well. Do you want to share a little bit about that?

[00:28:26.780] - Trent Taylor
Of course. So Thankfully, I have always been close to God. My whole journey through foster care and basically my whole life because most of my foster placements were religious and that, knowing that and knowing that God had a plan for me and that because he was the one consistent thing in my life. You know, he was the one thing I knew would never leave, never hurt me. And he was the thing that I could cling on to hope and that's what I did throughout my whole journey through foster care. I just would pray and pray that some day, some day I would have a family of my own. And you know what? My prayers were answered at the age of nine, my younger brother and I were adopted. And like I said before, once I had that dog tag with that verse that really, really reassured me that God does have a plan for me and that God can take things that have been broken and damaged and turn them into something so beautiful. And we are all made new in Christ. We are all made perfectly in His image. And honestly, I would not have been able to heal. I would not be where I am today without him, you know, he is what got me this far in my life. He has helped me overcome so much. And lately, even years before, at a young age, I would just call out and say, God, whatever your will is for my life, whatever you want me to do, I will do it. My yes is on the table. Help make it clear, and I will obey to the best of my ability because you have gotten me this far and all I want to do is glorify you and share, you know, my story to give you glory, because this is his story, it's not mine. I'm just along for the ride that he has allowed me to be on.

[00:30:36.240] - Lisa Qualls
That's wonderful. Well, I thank you so much. Do you want to tell us just a little bit more about your organization?

[00:30:43.420] - Trent Taylor

Of course. Watch Me Rise is a support Ministry, and what we do is we have support groups lately it's been virtual because of the pandemic, but we're working towards going back in person. And we also offer specialized trainings from food issues, sexual abuse, to TBRI trainings and a bunch of other things, we have a podcast called Watch Me Rise podcast, I public speak, we have a couple of books that we sell, and basically we just try to create a sense of community and give foster and adoptive parents all the support that we know is needed and try to support them in every way we can.

[00:31:26.000] - Lisa Qualls

So is your organization more focused on serving the parents or serving the youth or all of that?

[00:31:33.420] - Trent Taylor

Both.

[00:31:34.120] - Lisa Qualls

Okay.

[00:31:34.720] - Trent Taylor

Yeah. Because while the parents are meeting, we also have basically a small support group for the children as well. So the parents come they can just relax because we have volunteers to come help with the children and make them check with them and work with the children as well along certain topics that are age appropriate for them to help them kind of realize why they do some of the things they do and help them better understand it.

[00:31:59.720] - Lisa Qualls

So you're doing that locally. Has that been replicated yet in other areas?

[00:32:10.580] - Trent Taylor

Not that I know of. I mean, there are other support groups done by DSS Agencies, but I don't know of any other local organizations that are doing what we do.

[00:32:22.380] - Lisa Qualls

Okay. Okay. But your podcast reaches everybody.

[00:32:26.180] - Trent Taylor

Yes.

[00:32:26.660] - Lisa Qualls

So people can find you. Well, we will have links to everything that you've talked about in the show notes, so that those of you who are listening, if you are driving your car, washing your dishes, you don't have to remember all of this. We will have it all there for you in the show notes. And, Trent, thank you so much for being on the podcast.

[00:32:48.040] - Trent Taylor

Thank you so much. This has been a true honor. And honestly, I love every opportunity I can to share my story because it gives hope and it provides hope. And it shows people what God can do if you put your yes on the table and let him take over. And I just love this opportunity because it gives me one more opportunity to glorify him and to give back. So thank you for letting me be here today.

[00:33:13.340] - Lisa Qualls

Well, our pleasure.

[00:33:21.070] - Melissa Corkum

Well, Lisa, I am so glad we invited Trent to be on the podcast. As we say so often here, that we really value stories from lived experience. And specifically, when Trent talked about that feeling of being frozen and he said I wanted to comply, but my body was just frozen. His body was having kind of a subconscious response to something that had triggered him from something from his past. And I just think it's so compelling to hear stories of kids who remember what it's like to be a child from early

adversity and can give us, can voice that inner experience. I remember as a child just being so out of my mind around silly things like chores even and having these big rages, but there's still this little tiny part of me who just wanted someone to give me a hug. And of course, I was shut up in my room to figure it out until I could be normal and respectful and come down and all of those things and there were no tools really to help parents understand that. But I do, I remember those experiences of kind of feeling misunderstood in my behavior. So I really appreciate Trent's voice and hearing him share his experience. I think it just helps grow our compassion as parents as we parent kids with challenging behaviors.

[00:34:59.920] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, I really enjoyed visiting with Trent. It was great talking with him in person and great doing this interview as well. He has a lot to offer to our community. So for those of you who are interested in learning more about Trent, you can find him on his website, which is watchmerise919.org. He's also the author of two books, *Shattered No More* and *Battling the Invisible Enemy*. So you can find information about those as well and I think he mentioned in the interview that he and his mom do a podcast called *Watch Me Rise*, so there are lots of places to engage with Trent. You can find all of this information, of course, in today's show notes, which you'll find at theadoptionconnection.com/147.

[00:35:50.260] - Melissa Corkum

Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. You can find us on Instagram as the Adoption Connection or better yet, join our free Facebook community at theadoptionconnection.com/facebook.

[00:36:03.350] - Lisa Qualls

Thanks so much for listening, we love having you. And remember, you're a good parent, doing good work.

[00:36:11.320] - Melissa Corkum

The music for the podcast is called *New Day* and was created by Lee Rosevere.