

[00:00:01.390] - 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.

[00:00:10.290] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:18.690] - Lisa Qualls

Well, hey, friends, welcome to our episode today. Here at the Adoption Connection, you know, we value the voices of all members of the adoption triad. We also believe in the power of story to allow us to enter into a deeper understanding of another person's experience. So today I have Jennifer Hildebeitel with me. She is both an adoptee and an adoptive mom. She is part of the village, which is our membership community, and she also co facilitates our Enneagram book group with Melissa and me. So I'm just delighted to have my friend here. Jennifer, will you just introduce yourself to our listeners?

[00:00:56.190] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

Sure. I think, Lisa, it's an honor to be here at the Adoption Connection. Yes, my name is Jennifer. I live outside of Philadelphia. I have two children, one through birth and one through adoption. My oldest is a sophomore in College and my youngest is a sophomore in high school. Eric and I have been married 23 and a half years. I like to say I'm a retired teacher. I taught fourth grade with a master's in multicultural education prior to Skylar's birth. And now I'm actively involved in my Church. I work in several ministries, including a support group for foster and adoptive moms, which is a lot of 1v1 encouragement at this point with very busy moms with young kids. And I mentor teen girls. So I work with middle school and high school girls, and those are some of my passions.

[00:01:49.050] - Lisa Qualls

The first time I heard a little bit of your story, I thought, wow, I want to know more. And honestly, I still only know little bits of it. So this is as much of a new learning story for me as it is for our listeners. So can we go all the way back and will you share your story of being an adoptee?

[00:02:12.150] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

I will try my best. It's a long story. There are a lot of details, and I feel like I want to start by saying this story is through the eyes of a little girl who went through a lot of trauma. So the details of this story may not match everybody else's view of the story or remembrance of the story, so I want to say that. But my earliest memory actually is as an almost around a three year old when I arrived at my parents house, they would eventually become my adoptive parents. And I remember arriving with a brown grocery bag that had all of my belongings in it. And I remember systematically lining them up on the linoleum, you know, that 1970s Orange Brown linoleum. It's kind of burned in my memory, and that's the first memory I have. My biological brother was a baby, and he was already living with my mom and dad. And after he had been in their home for a little while, they didn't have any other children. They wanted to adopt him. And their social worker said, well, he has an older sister and they have a biological grandmother who really wants them to stay together, so if you want to adopt David, you'll have to take Jennifer. And I don't remember when I first was told that story, but it's something I've carried into adulthood with me that I wasn't the one that was wanted, it was my baby brother. But I teased my mom and she got a two for one deal because I'm the one taking care of her now.

[00:03:47.170] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah. Just that simple little bit of story, like it goes deep into your soul. Yeah, I can imagine that. So tell me a little bit about your family as you were growing up. So were you two their only children?

[00:04:03.370] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

We were, initially. My parents desperately wanted to have biological children and weren't able to conceive. And in that era, you didn't talk about it, you didn't get counseling, it was comfort in shame. And I didn't learn that until I was probably a teenager or young adult. That might explain some of my father's ways of communicating with my mom and all of that. My mom and dad came from very conservative, meta night families. There was a lot of legalism in their own upbringings, and so they

believed in that it was important to spare the Rod, not spare the Rod so you wouldn't spoil the child. However that phrase goes, and that a child should be seen and not heard. And I had pretty big feelings and a pretty big voice from an early age. And I remember feeling that in addition to not be wanted or not being loved, I never heard the phrase I love you. And my mom now says it every time I see her and we talk about the fact that she never used those words, but she had never heard those words from her parents either, until she was much older in life. It was also an error where you didn't talk about positive discipline or positive communication or how to nurture a family environment. There wasn't a desire there, they were surviving. They weren't prepared to become parents. They went from zero children to two. And they would describe me as feisty. I was always accused of or labeled as someone with a strong temper. I was just trying to express issues of justice, I can remember. And it was always blamed on my red hair. She has red hair, they are short tempered those red heads. And so that was also part of my identity growing up was I was too much, too loud, too verbal. By the time I got to be a teenager, my parents' marriage had really deteriorated. And I spent a lot of time caring for my mom in those years, trying to make sure that she was taken care of. So I became a parent, really, at a very young age in that relationship. But when I went to school was when I thrived. So school was my escape. I went to a small Mennonite high school with my high school friends might disagree, but for me, it was an escape from my home. I had teachers who invested in me, poured into me spiritually. They saw my gifts and celebrated them. There was no recognition at home. I was student Council President, I got really good grades, I had lots of friends. And then I got home and felt there wasn't a place for me there. And again, I think it's because my parents were fighting their own battles, right, figuratively and literally, but I learned to be seen and not heard and actually to not be seen. I hid a lot, so sort of the environment in which I grew up.

[00:07:27.250] - Lisa Qualls

How did your brother's temperament and things fit into that family culture, unless you don't want to really talk? That's his story, I know.

[00:07:37.840] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

Yeah, that is his story. He, we'll eventually talk about how I met members of my biological family and how those pieces helped me sort of put together the whole picture for David and I as littles. But what I learned later on in meeting my biological family is that I had a pretty stable beginning in the first two years before I entered foster care where David as a baby, I think our parents were already struggling with their drug addictions at that point. And so I think that impacted his brain in big ways, even though he had a full head of big red curls and just was adorable. It was evident at an early age that he was struggling with a mental health issue. But we didn't talk about that in the 70s and the 80s even. And he just always looked as if he was getting into trouble, and I was always embarrassed. We were a year apart in school, a year and a half in age. And so my parents, all of their attention was on managing the fallout from his choices at school and at Church and in the community without any guidance. He didn't have any guidance on how to raise a child who had ADHD or eventually he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. And I don't know when that would have been diagnosed now, when that would have developed in him. By the time I went to College, he was a senior in high school, and he went into juvenile delinquent home, and I was humiliated. That was a lot about again feeling like my home life wasn't a safe place. And my parents, like I said, were very busy trying to pay restitution to people that he stole from. And so there was no help for me to go to College. And there was just a lot of resentment building up in me at the attention he was taking the money he was taking. My parents didn't have very little financial resources, and then I was constantly there to care for my mom at the fallout of all of his decisions over the decades. So he would really like for us to be in close communication now. And for me, there's a lot of trust over many years that has been broken and has been very difficult. I have compassion for him when I think about our biological beginning, knowing that as an adult, he's made a lot of choices that have harmed me and my mom. But he was a child in a situation where he didn't get the care that he needed.

[00:10:22.450] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, wow. It's so sad. Children need safe adults to meet their needs. It's just so impactful when children are neglected or abused. Yeah, so throughout the years, did you think about your first family? Did you fantasize, imagine? What was that like as a child?

[00:10:47.710] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

I can't remember a lot prior to high school, as far as my thought life goes. I do remember some of the things that I've shared about you being kind of squelched or told to be less than or to go be quiet, but it was in high school that I just began to wrestle. It was so obvious. People used to say, oh, when did you first find out that you were adopted? Because again, in the 70s and 80s, people were discovering they were adopted because they just hadn't been told. And people wanted to know. And I'd say, have you met my family? Because there wasn't any way to hide that. Not only my appearance, my parents both had very dark hair and olive skin. And Dave and I were very fair skin, red hair. So it wasn't only our physical appearance, it was my personality. Here was this conservative environment where women were expected to be a certain way and I wasn't a certain way. And so I was really wrestling. And in high school, I was meeting families that didn't look and sound like the families that I grew up in. And I was staying over at people's houses and discovering I had more in common with some of my friends parents than I did with my own parents. And I did begin to fantasize about what must my biological family be like. But what supplanted that thought was, well, if they had really wanted or loved me, they would have kept me. So the fact that they abandoned me means that I started out not being wanted and loved. So why on Earth would finding them now or looking for them? What good could that do? What value could that be? I wanted to know who I looked like. I wanted to know if I was Irish. I was tired of people asking me if I was Irish and not knowing. It turns out I'm not. And I wanted to know where my gifts came from. I had a passion for photography. I knew from a really young age, I was really good with people. Like I said, if I could just have a job doing people, that's what I want to do. I want to do people. And that wasn't in my family, my adoptive family. And so somewhere between my junior and senior year, I started hanging out in my guidance counselor's office. He was an amazing person, a man before his time, I would say. And I was debriefing a lot about David because he would ask me for information, because he was trying to figure out what was happening and trying to help David. But then I also was having these reoccurring dreams in high school. One was myself as a baby in a high chair at the table and the table in the room I could probably draw for you right now. And the people were always the same in the dream. And I would have this dream on a regular basis. And then the other dream was David and I as small, small children in a rose garden, smelling roses. And so I shared this with him. And he said that he thought that maybe those dreams were from a life prior to me coming to my mom and dad. And had I ever thought about looking for my biological parents? And I was like, I would love to see what they look like. I would love to know what jobs they have. But no, they didn't want me in the first place. Why would I want to look for them? And he said, well, would you be okay if I looked for them? And I said, well, go ahead. But Mr. Clement, that's a waste of your time. I mean, remember, this was 1984, 1985. And we didn't have computers or smartphones or databases or 23 and me. And so I couldn't imagine, and I thought, well, someone was taking an interest in me. Someone thought I was valuable. And he had a friend who was a social worker in the county where I was adopted. And so I said, I'm going to reach out to her and just see if she can help me. And Lisa, a month later. I was about two or three months from graduation. He called me into his office, and he said, I want you to know that my friend actually was able to pull up your adoption record, which I had never seen. I was 17 at the time. And he said on that adoption record were two addresses. One was the address of my paternal grandmother, and the other address was my maternal grandparents. So the social worker wanted to write a letter to both of these people, all sets of grandparents, and introduced me and asked if there was any interest in meeting me. So she was asking Mr. Clements to ask me if I was okay with that. And I was like, sure, they're going to say no. I mean, they didn't want me to begin with. Why would they want to meet me now? And Mr. Clement said, well, there's just one challenge, because you're not 18, your records are closed to you. But if one of your parents will agree to open the record, then the social worker has permission to send a letter. And I was like, well, that's never going to happen. I hadn't even told my parents because I didn't think anything was going to come of it. I didn't have a meaningful relationship with my father, and neither did I with my mother. But remember, I was parenting her. So I went home very worried about what this is going to do for them. And so I remember that night really vividly where I told them about the letter that Mr. Clements and the social worker wanted to send. And I was marveling that there were grandparents involved. And I was asking 100 questions, like, Where was my biological mother? Where was my biological father? Why are your grandparents signing these records? And my mom said, well, your father wanted to keep you, but he couldn't. And that's why we kept you together, because it was his mother, your grandmother, who wanted to keep you together. I was like, what? I couldn't believe it. She knew a piece of my story, and she hadn't shared it with me. And then she pulled out a piece of paper from the

firebox that had his name on it. So suddenly, at 17, something she could have told me years ago when I was asking my million questions. And it wasn't like she deliberately hid it. I think it was more that she didn't think it was important because we didn't talk about adoption. Adoption was a taboo subject, and she was in her own trauma and her own grief for many years. But my mom broke down. She's not a woman who ever cries, and she broke down and cried and said she knew that she wasn't a good mom, that their marriage was really hard for me. And if I met my biological parents, I would leave her and I would go live with them. I remember thinking, remember, they didn't want me to begin with. So it's not like there's going to be a welcome place for me to go. But I remember saying, Mom, I'm never going to leave you. I will always take care of you. And I just want to know who I look like and where I came from, and then I'm going to College. I'm not going to be staying here, but I'll make sure you're taken care of. And if I have to move you into an apartment, I will. And I said, you will always be my mom. It's not that my biological mother is going to replace you if I even meet her. My mom said with those words, she was confident about signing the permission form to send the letter to my biological.

[00:18:27.350] - Lisa Qualls

Okay, now I just have to know. So the letter was sent. You're about to graduate from high school, and what happened?

[00:18:37.490] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

I received two letters back. One was from a biological, very quickly, like again, within another month. At this point, I think I was about to graduate in a month. It was May, and I was graduating in June. One was a letter from a biological sister who was five years older than me, and she lived 15 minutes away and had been looking for me her whole life. She wanted to know if we could get together, and we did. I have to remember again. I didn't have a therapist.

[00:19:18.830] - Lisa Qualls

I understand.

[00:19:22.290] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

I didn't have a counselor, my parents were inept, I had zero support. I was a 17 year old with an underdeveloped brain, right, who was still healing and would be for years from my own trauma. And here I meet this person who had been looking for me for my whole life.

[00:19:39.810] - Lisa Qualls

Wait, let me pause for 1 second. Did you go by yourself to meet her?

[00:19:46.050] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

Yes.

[00:19:46.050] - Lisa Qualls

Oh, that's a lot.

[00:19:47.230] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

Okay, it gets better. Again, remember 17 year old without much support. I mean, my guidance helped was cheering me on, but he didn't have any TBRI training, any trauma training whatsoever. And we thought it would be a good idea to invite my biological grandmother to my high school graduation. And so on a high school graduation night when all emotions are at an all time high, I meet my biological mother. It was not my best decision, but I was 17.

[00:20:23.150] - Lisa Qualls

Wait, your biological mother or your biological grandmother?

[00:20:26.490] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

My biological mother. So the letter that went to my maternal grandparents was forwarded to my biological mother, and she wrote a letter to me. So I told you there were two letters that came back. And she notified my half sister. The letter came from her parents to her. And then she wasn't in contact with my half sister, but knew where she lived and told her and knew that Erin had been

looking for me my whole life. So in the letter from my biological mother, she told me my biological father's name and address. He lived out of state, and she wanted me to know about a certain kind of cancer she had just been diagnosed with and described that and her phone number. I still have the letter. And so I called her and invited her to my high school graduation. Without any framework, without any scaffolding to process any of that.

[00:21:33.550] - Lisa Qualls

This episode is sponsored by The Village, our online membership community. The Village is for you if you feel like no one gets your life, you crave authentic and supportive community, you want a one stop shop for training and resources, and if being an adoptive parent feels harder than you ever imagined.

[00:21:53.470] - Melissa Corkum

Inside The Village, we offer things like mom and dad only gatherings, workshops with guest experts, behavior Q and A's, Enneagram conversations, and continuing support for overcoming block care. As a valued podcast listener, we want to offer you a special code to get 50% off your first month. So go to [theadoptionconnection.com/village](http://theadoptionconnection.com/village) and use the code PODCAST. You're pouring your heart out for your family, and we want to pour into you.

[00:22:30.290] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

And so I called her and invited her to my high school graduation without any framework, without any scaffolding to process any of that.

[00:22:41.380] - Lisa Qualls

Okay. Did you tell your parents that you had invited her?

[00:22:45.370] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

Oh, yes. So that was fun.

[00:22:47.770] - Lisa Qualls

You told them after the fact?

[00:22:50.090] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

After I had invited her, yeah.

[00:22:52.500] - Lisa Qualls

Wow, okay. I can only imagine the drama surrounding this. Wow, okay.

[00:22:58.570] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

With nobody talking about any of the feelings or emotions at all except for me. Me thinking, well, this is pretty amazing. I'm finally going to see if I look like her or not, which I do not. I take after my biological father's side.

[00:23:13.190] - Lisa Qualls

Okay. Let me ask you another question, though.

[00:23:15.720] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

Yeah.

[00:23:16.040] - Lisa Qualls

This is also your brother, David's birth mom, and he was not part of this whole decision to seek them out. Wow. Okay.

[00:23:29.870] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

And wanted zero to do with them.

[00:23:33.530] - Lisa Qualls

How did that turn out at your high school graduation?

[00:23:36.370] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

Well, we took a picture with David and myself and Aaron and Georgia. He was involved in them meeting my biological father's side four years later, almost three years later, when I was 21, which is another story. But yes, he to this day doesn't understand why I would want to do that and doesn't have any interest, doesn't ask me any questions. They ask about him all the time when I see them. But it's a reminder that even two biological siblings in the same adoptive family approach their beginning stories very differently.

[00:24:17.750] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah. So true. It's like when we try to categorize, well, all adoptees feel this or all birth moms feel this. It is not true. We are all uniquely ourselves, walking through our own very difficult stories of loss and everything. Okay, so that was the initial meeting. How did the relationship continue to develop or not? And then I want to know, how did it impact you just in your own growth and development and understanding of yourself? So I guess those are two pretty big questions. Let's start with what happened with this relationship after this big meeting.

[00:25:02.430] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

I went off to College and my biological mother, Georgia, and I exchanged letters throughout the year, a couple, you know. It was such a monumental time in my life, leaving the home where I had suffered a lot of hurt and a lot of hurt. And finally I was free from that, but I was also then trying to process. I remember my roommate in College just being wowed by the story. We would talk at night for hours and hours. I had another 18 year old helping me through that season in my life, which is comical to me now. But yes, that was my support system. So when I came back from College because of finances. I wasn't able to return to that school. And I was here in the area. And our biological mother invited Erin and I to come to a party at her house.

[00:26:00.410] - Lisa Qualls

And Erin's, your sister, the one who you met first.

[00:26:03.670] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

The one who I met first. And she had a son, Joseph, whom I adored. And at the time he was maybe four or so. And so she invited the three of us to come to this party that she had at her house. And we went to the party. And she is an artist, and most of the people there were fellow artists and had come out of the 60s and 70s together. And I had come out of the conservative midnight upbringing. So I was experiencing some things for the first time that I had it in a walk ever. And when we arrived, Georgia was busy. She was remarried, and they were busy with the party. And they had two young children who were my half siblings. And so I was just really enamored with these two little ones. And we were playing with my nephew with these two little ones. And I was trying to take pictures, and I'm so glad I did because I never saw them after that night. But people would ask us who we were, how we knew Georgia. And we had to explain that we were her biological daughters and her friends only knew her as a mom with two little ones. And the looks on their faces the first time when we were asked and we answered, we were shocked. And I felt like I had read that book *Flowers in the Attic*, and it's a very different scenario. But I felt a little bit like that where the children in that book were, I believe, kept up in the attic and the biological mom had a whole different life downstairs. And I felt a little bit like that, that we had been brought in to be shown off or to be I don't know what, but I was devastated. Erin and I left without talking to Georgia about it. We were so hurt and so upset that there wasn't an introduction meet or her friends weren't told ahead of time. And I was so mad and so hurt. And so I wrote her a letter in the way that I communicate honestly and directly and just said how hurtful that has been. And she wrote a letter back very scathing about how privileged I was that I had just walked back into her life. And of course, at this stage in my life and through a lot of transformation and a lot more experience with first moms and life, I would say, I now have such compassion for her. I can't imagine what that was like for me to just walk back into her life. But I knew at that time that I was still the child, even though I was 18, and I was distraught that she was blaming the hurt on me. And so that was our last letter. When I was 24, I was backpacking through Europe, and I was sure I might not come back. And so I felt like I had to have closure with a lot of things. And so I wrote her a letter at that time telling her that I would always be grateful to her for

giving me life, for agreeing to see me, for coming to my high school graduation when that couldn't have been easy for her. I was so much wiser five years later, and I never heard back from her. But I felt like it was closure for me and what I was realizing that as I met my biological father at 21 as well, they both had a lot of issues from abandoning me. I don't think my father has ever forgiven himself and remains in a lot of it has really struggled for many years because I don't believe he's ever forgiven himself for walking away from us. What I wasn't prepared for was a whole bunch of adult issues that a 17 or 18 year old without a therapist or counselor to guide her could have. I didn't know anything about drug addiction. I didn't know anything about a lot of adult issues at that point. Led a pretty sheltered life. If I could go back, I would do things differently. But I think your second question might have had something to do with how it impacted me.

[00:30:11.480] - Lisa Qualls

Before we go to that, there's a piece missing in the story that maybe you already said, but who did Erin grow up with? Who was her family? Because if she was, like, dropping, I assume she grew up with your birth mom. No?

[00:30:25.500] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

No, she did not. So our biological mother had a drug addiction and decided to move to California to go into rehab. And when she did that, the story goes. How it has been told to me is that, and Erin remembers this, she was that her biological father came to the house. So it was Erin at seven and I was two and David was a baby. And her biological father found out that Georgia had left us with my biological father. So he came she would visit him on the weekend. So he came and took her, and she wanted to take me with her. And he was like, no, only you can come. So she grew up with her biological father.

[00:31:15.370] - Lisa Qualls

Okay. All right. I needed that piece of the puzzle to understand that. Okay, now go on to I think we were going to talk about, so how did this meeting them, how did that change your experience of who you were, your story, things like that.

[00:31:33.330] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

A big piece of my story that we probably don't have time to talk about, but is one of the most impactful parts of my story is that I was somehow logically, as logical as a 17 year old can rationally, I was prepared for the rejection again. I was prepared to be abandoned again. I was prepared to be unwanted and unloved. But I wasn't prepared for my biological father's mom, my grandmother, her sisters, their kids and their kids all wanting to know me and my biological grandmother had looked for me on the streets of Philadelphia for years, hoping we would pass one another. And I had 20 or so very amazing years getting to know my biological grandmother and her sisters being spoiled, being showered upon, and then my children when they were very little girls, being showered upon. And so I don't have relationship with my biological father other than a card or two a year. But he lives near my uncle, who cares for him. And my uncle and I are very close, and we visit every year. He became an adopted dad. He and his wife adopted two children. And so I was part of this amazing circle of them watching he and his wife adopt two amazing guys. And so I would go back and do it again, but with therapist.

[00:33:01.600] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah.

[00:33:02.260] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

Now that I know a lot about therapy and the Enneagram, I would go in with a support team. But because just knowing who I look like and just knowing where I came from and some of the pieces to my story have brought me a peace that I didn't have prior to that. And it has brought me an appreciation for my adoption. I resented being adopted for many, many years. I was very bitter. Oh, my God, this is your best for me? And now, knowing how I might have grown up, I am very grateful. I still think that it could have been done better, but I do believe my parents did the best they could with the little resources that they had. I feel so blessed. I feel so fortunate in my 50s to have had to have known the love of my biological family, the extended family, and to know who I look like and some of

our history. It's been key to my peace, to watch my biological grandmother and her sisters love my children was one of the biggest gifts I was ever given in life.

[00:34:23.150] - Lisa Qualls

I mean, we could spend hours I want to know so much more of the story, but let's transition to here you are, you're an adoptee. You get married and you decide to become an adoptive mom. How did that happen?

[00:34:38.510] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

So I decided when I was in third grade that I was going to adopt a little girl. I met my first nonwhite person when I was in third grade, and she was a little girl. Rebecca, a local family in the Mennonite community, had adopted from Korea. She and her biological brother into a very large family of both biological and adopted children. And there was no ESL back then. And I watched this black haired girl with intensity on the playground and thought, who's helping her? I remember feeling this is a nine year old who's going to help her communicate. How is she going to know how to get lunch? And so I befriended her. And as we grew up together, her family life was also very difficult. And she had memories. She was nine. She was actually ten, I believe, because she was a year older, because back then you just put a kid down a grade and hope the English caught up and then you fast forward to them a year and added more trauma to them. But she and I can remember behind whispered doors in her bedroom talking about how we were going to adopt one day. And I said, I can remember it's a teenager saying, I want to give a little girl the unconditional love that I know can be given. I want to adopt a little girl and show the world how it can be done right, how you can help a little girl feel wanted and loved every day of her life. But when I met my husband much later in life, I said, hey, on our second date, I think, how do you feel about adoption? He wants to know how I felt about the death penalty. And I went to know how he felt about adoption, and he had never considered it. I also had some health issues and didn't believe that I could have a child biologically and didn't care. I had planned to adopt if I hadn't met Eric. My plan, my very arrogant, know it all plan was that I was going to adopt by the age of 30 if I didn't find someone to share life with and got me better and quickly gave me Eric right before I turned 30. And so Eric said, well, I would love to have a biological child and try, and if we can't, I would be happy to adopt. I just have never thought about it. Yeah, there's more to the details of that story, but I, of course, in my perfect plan, wanted two biological children and two children through adoption because I was passionate about going to Korea because of my friend Rebecca. And we had many foster children in our home growing up after David and I were adopted. And it was a very traumatic childhood of saying goodbye. And I felt that I couldn't do that as an adult. And as it turns out, we have one biological child and one child through adoption. And she was born in China and not Korea because Korea shut down their international program right as Eric and I were beginning the adoption process. So it was something I always wanted to do. And I've made it clear to Cameron, whom we adopted, that it was never second best because that's the message I needed to hear when I was growing up. It was a first choice. It was just that Skylar came first.

[00:37:44.390] - Lisa Qualls

So how do you think being an adoptee impacts you as an adoptive mom? You brought a lot to that. We all bring everything to our relationships, but you brought a history and understanding of adoption to being an adoptive mom that most of us don't have.

[00:38:06.030] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

I brought a lot of extra baggage, didn't I?

[00:38:08.260] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, I did the same.

[00:38:12.270] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

I was a much healthier version of myself at 40 when we were bringing Cameron home. We had started years prior, but I was 40 when we were bringing her home. But I thought that all of my experience with adoption, my story was going to be this huge blessing to my daughter that I would be able to help her wrestle with her identity. I would not be scared of, like, from an early age on. I mean, she was immersed in all books adoption. I was reading all books about adoption, parenting and

attachment long before she came home. And it just turns out that Cameron is not me.

[00:39:01.870] - Lisa Qualls  
Yes, isn't that a surprise.

[00:39:03.970] - Jennifer Hildebeitel  
She doesn't want to talk about adoption 24/7. And as I've done some work with the Enneagram, her personality also discovering what I think might be her Enneagram type from a parent's perspective, she's obviously too young to have done, and that has no interest in doing any of the work on her own. I realize now that I brought a lot of expectations to that parent. In addition, my relationship with Skyler is one dynamic having someone born from me that looked like me. But my parenting style and plan with Cameron shifted when I began to realize, oh, I was parenting, for both girls, I was parenting them the way that I wish I would have been parented. And now through the lens of the Enneagram, that wasn't working very well. Maybe I need to parent them individually the way that they need to be parented, and they can't possibly, as children and teenagers, fill my need to be wanted and loved. So it's been a journey.

[00:40:24.030] - Lisa Qualls  
Yeah, such a beautiful journey, though. I would love to hear so much more about all of that. Can you speak a little bit more about how you first learned about the Enneagram? You know, here at The Adoption Connection we think it's a very powerful tool for helping us to understand ourselves, understand other people, as well as grow and heal in the ways that we need to do. So. Can you share just a little bit about that?

[00:40:56.250] - Jennifer Hildebeitel  
Sure. I think it was somewhere around 2017 when I started listening to podcasts, and I felt like every Christian podcast I was listening to was talking about something called the Enneagram. And because I pride myself in being unique, I have never enjoyed a personality test ever, because I don't feel like it gets to the nuance of who I am. So I resisted it. I don't like to jump on bandwagon. I like to kind of go a different path sometimes. I think it was Annie F. Downs. Her first series, I think, may have been 2015, it might have been 2018, but she had been talking about it on her show in a way in which it was described as a tool. And I thought, well, I'm in a season of needing more healing. Let me just look at this tool. And so 2018, one of my goals was to explore the Enneagram. What is it? I remember writing it down in 2018 in January. What is The Enneagram? How might this help me grow? And I bought The Road Back to you. And I remember being in our bedroom. Eric was getting ready for bed, and I was just reading the beginnings of each chapter, and I got to the one on the twos, and I was like, oh, my word.

[00:42:13.710] - Jennifer Hildebeitel  
I said, hey, Eric, just listen to this list of 20 things and tell me what you think about it. He didn't know what book I was reading. He didn't know what it was. So I'm listing out the statements from the two. There were about four that I could not relate to, but 16 I had checked off as being something that described me. When I got to the end of the list, even before that, he kind of looked, stopped what he was doing and just kept focusing on me and said, well, I don't know what book you're reading, but who wrote a book about you? Wow. And we had a good laugh about that. And I became, I had never felt so understood and didn't like the fact that there were maybe hundreds of thousands, if not millions of other twos. But I had never felt so seen or known or understood. And then just so that's been four years of me just reading everything I can get my hands on, listening to all the podcasts, because it has changed the way that I parent. It's changed the way it's grown my relationship with Eric. It's grown my relationships outside of our home. It's given me compassion where I may not have had it before. Right.

[00:43:27.010] - Lisa Qualls  
I think that's been one of the greatest gifts for me, is just really realizing that different people see the world differently from me. And it's still good. We don't all see the world the same. We don't all relate in the same way. And that's obvious. But I think The Enneagram gives us just different eyes to see and understand people. So, yeah, it's a wonderful tool. And as I mentioned before, we are reading together

in the Village, The Journey Toward Wholeness by Suzanne Stabile. It's her new book, and you're helping facilitate that, which we're really excited about. So we're going to be learning about The Enneagram both as a community and together with you. And I'm really excited about that.

[00:44:13.490] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

Yeah, I am as well. I feel like I'm a perpetual student. That's why I became a teacher. So I would never at this point say I have the depth of knowledge needed to teach others but it's so much fun to learn alongside of one another.

[00:44:28.970] - Lisa Qualls

Yes, it really is. Well, if anybody listening would like to contact you, ask you questions, whatever it is, how can people find you?

[00:44:39.060] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

I think the best way to reach me would be through email so it's my first initial and my last @outlook.com but I think you'll put that in the show note. Spelling Hildebeitel will be tricky.

[00:44:50.370] - Lisa Qualls

Yes, I would say go ahead and say it but nobody's going to be able to remember. Someone's going to be driving and trying to pull over on the side of the road to write it down. So yes, we will put your email address in the show notes as well as a link to Suzanne's new book and to The Road Back to You since we referred to that one as well. And if you're listening and you are interested in these conversations we're having in the village, you are always welcome to join us. We're actually going to spend the entire year of 2022 on this book. Just slowly, one conversation a month about each number slowly going through this book and really learning from each other. So it's going to be a wonderful, wonderful year. Well, Jennifer, thank you. I could spend hours and hours with you and I hope we'll get to do that in person one time soon.

[00:45:39.230] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

Me too.

[00:45:39.230] - Lisa Qualls

But thank you for sharing your story with our listeners. I know it's just incredibly valuable to all of us to hear from one another and understand each other.

[00:45:48.830] - Jennifer Hildebeitel

Thank you for inviting me.

[00:45:52.010] - Melissa Corkum

Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. Our new Instagram handle is @postadoptionresources or better yet, join our free Facebook community [theadoptionconnection.com/facebook](https://theadoptionconnection.com/facebook).

[00:46:07.010] - Lisa Qualls

Thanks so much for listening. We love having you and remember you're a good parent doing good work.

[00:46:15.290] - Melissa Corkum

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