



A Journey to Parenthood

By Suzy Root
2008

This story is dedicated to
Sierra Adoption Services
for making it possible
for us to create our family,
to my husband for being the best father
3 girls could ever ask for and
to the powers that be, thank you
for blessing us with the best girls in the world!



We transform the lives of children in foster care by
building and nurturing permanent families.

**For local adoption information:
916-368-5114 or www.sierraadoption.org**

Introduction:

When we first began our journey with Sierra Adoption Services in 2001 I started writing a journal. I wondered then who it was I was writing it for or if I would even keep it up. I am so glad now that I did keep it up, all the way to adoption day. I thought that I had lost the file. We had been through so many computers and hard drives. But, my techno-husband was able to find it again and I couldn't be happier!

Now, after 6 years and reading back, I see the value in the journal has gone beyond us; our family. I feel that I can share my story with you and perhaps shed some light on the myriad of questions that must be pounding in your head – and heart – about how this is all going to work! I can only relate **our** story. I am sure there are many other versions and questions that will remain unanswered. The program we went through is called *fost-adopt*. This is where you can choose to foster or go straight to adoption. When we brought our kids home, they weren't legally removed from their birthmother's custody yet, although everyone knew that would happen eventually. Realistically, there was really no chance in reconciliation at that point. But, all situations are different. You can chose to be an emergency foster home (this is explained later) or, you can go the foster route where you choose to just foster the child, knowing that reunification is possible (or not, all situations are unique) or that you will not be choosing adoption. There is a lot to consider with fost-adopt.

We knew we wanted to build a permanent family from the onset.

We had and continue to have, a very positive experience with Sierra Adoption Services and I would like to share our story to help dispel the worry that adoption is a prospect to be feared.

(For the rest of the story, Sierra Adoption Services may be referred to as SAS.)

This is how I began writing our story:

May 21, 2001

It is the year 2001, the month of May and it is already pretty hot outside. I am awaiting your arrival. I am not pregnant, I am adopting. We are adopting. Unlike a "normal pregnancy", I don't know when you will arrive, how old you will be or what special challenges you will come with. We are trying to go day by day and be patient with the agency that is required to invade our private world and make sure that we can take care of you.

We have filled out a lot of forms, answered a lot of personal questions, been to "how to" classes and are now waiting for someone to come and peer into our cupboards and drawers to see if everything is safe for you. We have yet to ready a room for you. Somehow it doesn't feel right yet. We have begun to think about it and have done some changing of what goes where but it feels too soon to have an empty bed in an empty room. It is hard enough right now, knowing that we still have so far to go. It is really hard, all of this waiting, when we are ready now!

We decided to adopt a child for several reasons. I will not try to hide the fact from you that adoption was not our first choice of how to create our family. When you fall in love and marry, you will realize what a romantic thing it is to create life from your love. But, we have known since we got married that a biological child was not really a probability for us. So, we have always been open to the idea of adoption.

We did try to use the scientific methods of creating a biological child. But, for a lot of reasons, it didn't work out. In a way, I think I always knew it wouldn't. I feel I've been meant to adopt since I was a child myself. But, the main reason we decided to adopt was because we want to be parents. We have a lot of love and want to share it with a child. Who knows maybe 2 or 3!

You did not choose to be born; you did not choose to be born to parents who were unable to raise you.

We want to raise you, love you, nurture you and help you grow into a wonderful, happy adult. No matter where you came from. Please, never worry that you were a last choice for us. We had the option to try again and create a biological child and you should always try for what you want if you can. It seemed easier to have a biological child. I knew it would be a long hard road to adopt. I felt like, if I didn't try I would never know and always wonder. I feel now, that it is out of my system and I can move on to my destiny! You will be able to relate more if you are a girl and you have your own children. Infertility is not something you ever get over, but something you learn to live with. There are a lot of factors involved and some of them are chemical, like hormones, and you simply cannot deny those feelings. I want you to know that it doesn't make me love you any less because you did not grow inside of me. We will live together and grow together and mold into one. It simply will not matter where you came from when we love each other.

We will never deny you your past. We will do our best to answer as many questions as we can for you about your birth parents, your birth family and how you came to be with us. It is your right to know. We will never hold you back from trying to find and meet your birth parents, if that is what you want.

So, I will try to journalize this long strange trip so that you will feel welcome into this family. You belong in this family just as much as I do, or your dad does. Family is a group of people committed to unconditional love of each other given with respect and never abused. That is what we will be.”

That was the beginning of the rest of my life!

Now, back to the story.

When we began to consider adoption we started to discuss it with our friends. Our neighbors were pregnant and felt really sympathetic to our plight. They had been there through a failed in-vitro attempt, and a tubal pregnancy. One day, they told us a story about our mutual mailman that I did not know! He and his family were going to Sierra Adoption Services to try and adopt a child and that they were her foster parents now, she was *in their home* while they waited!

The best news being that it wasn't costing them much. Those were words that I welcomed! We had spent all our available funds on the in-vitro procedure. I had no idea how we were going to afford adoption. All I had ever known about was private adoption, through expensive lawyers and agencies!

So, I called Sierra Adoption Services and found out there was an introductory meeting the next week that we could attend.

We were nervous! Who wouldn't be. The nerves didn't last long, though. The facilities had paintings up and down the hallway, obviously done by children. How adorable and inviting. The room we were to meet in had tables shaped in a U for all to sit around. The room was full!

We grabbed some coffee and cookies, took a couple of seats and made small talk with the others around us.

We were soon introduced to Kathy, our instructor – and what a delight! She made everyone feel at home and eased our nerves with humor. We all went around the room and told the story of why we were there.

It seemed that most wanted to adopt just one child. Kathy made a joke that sticks with me today, in fact, I use it myself when I volunteer for SAS, it goes something like this: ***Come in for one and leave with three.*** At the time, we were so adamant, we just wanted one!!

We were also told that if, in the future, a sibling becomes available the adoptive parents would be notified first. All of this becomes very significant for us but we didn't realize it then!!

We decided to proceed and signed up for the training classes in May, 2001. We would go to a 3 hour class, once a week for 6 weeks. They were on Wednesday evenings, so it was convenient for us. We wanted our child as soon as possible. We wanted to get our family and go home!

That was the original plan!

The training classes are very informative. There is a lot to know about children who have been removed from their biological family. We knew nothing about being parents, let alone being parents to children who quite possibly had been living in traumatic situations. The camaraderie in the group made the meetings something we looked forward to.

I was not working outside the home at this time and had lots of nothing to do! So, I got to work on the miles of paperwork.

At the first meeting, we got the large intake packet. The intake paperwork is a “getting to know you”. The intake paperwork is like an application. There is a financial form, a lot of permission/release forms, employment verification and medical reports.

You will need to provide certified copies of your marriage decree (if applicable), divorce decree (if applicable), birth certificates, 1040's and references. You will need to take a complete CPR/First Aid course. This takes 2 days to complete and may need to be updated if you don't complete your adoption within a year. We did have to update once the first time, but the third time is another part of the story!

You will also have to go and get a complete FBI fingerprint and background check. We were overwhelmed with all of the things we had to do! But, we knew it was necessary, to insure the safety of the children.

Once the adoption is finalized, a Request For Refund of some of the expenses can be filled out and you can get a check for most of the upfront expenses. Keep all of your receipts! I had a folder for all of my receipts and am so glad that I did this because at the end, when it is all finalized, there will be a large build up of paperwork that you have received along the way!!

I got that bunch of paperwork done quickly. In fact, we were the first in our class! Like I said, I had lots of time and nothing to do! We were assigned a social worker right away. Her name was Melissa and she was a perfect fit for us. I don't know how they do it, but the experts at SAS know just how to pair people up.

So, it took us 6 weeks to complete the training class and then we began to write “The Story of Our Life” for the Home Study.

I am very private. It was difficult for me to put down in writing all of the mistakes I had made in my past! I think this could have been one of the most difficult parts of the process for me. I have learned something from each mistake of the past and feel that I have grown from them.

This was, in retrospect, a very enlightening experience.

Your social worker will come over with a type written version of your story and she will interview you and your significant other together and then separately about what you wrote. At this time, communication should be open.

This can be a very vulnerable time for you. What you need to remember is that the whole agency is on your side! Whatever comes up, can probably be worked out!

In July 2001 we got the house certified for safety. This is common procedure for foster homes. My house has never been so clean! I wanted the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval! I was so worried that I wouldn't do enough.

Really, what they want to see is that the house, garage, drawers and cabinets have chemicals and sharp objects all safely put away. Contrary to what I believed, no one will be coming over with a white glove! I was relieved!

All of the people, in all of the steps of the process, want you to succeed. They will give you a list of things that they will be checking for. They are very willing to work with you and answer all of your questions. If you don't pass the first time, fix it and they will come back.

In the meantime, I began to read a lot of books, everything I could get my hands on about parenting and adoption. I wanted to be ready! I was so nervous about becoming a parent!

We really had no experience with children before we got ours. All we knew about children were our memories from being children ourselves! We did not have a lot of friends with kids or family with kids that lived close at that time.

In an aside, I have donated most of my books to SAS's extensive library. I have also used their library to check out books, all at no cost!

With time to wait and a mind full of all things baby related, I started to miss the whole pregnancy, baby shower and all of the other things that go along with being pregnant. I believe that this part of the journey was about acceptance of my infertility. I had to find a way to work that through.

We were hoping for a baby, so I spent some time in Target and Goores making a registry! It turns out that doing this was a big help in trying to figure out what we would need, for a child of any age. Car seat, bed/crib, stroller, etc!

If you have never had a baby, searching for these things can be overwhelming! I just spent time in the stores and looked over everything trying to get a gauge on what was the best and why.

Turns out, I got an expensive stroller and it was awful for me! I liked the less costly one better! It had the features I wanted. So, I ended up selling the expensive stroller and getting 2 less expensive ones for the money! Now, I had one for the car and one for the house.

When shopping, think of who **you** are and what **you** need. It might not be the stuff that costs the most! I believe that parent consumers can be suckered into buying more costly things than they need because of the desire to "do the right thing"! A lot of what we needed and wanted could be found, in like new condition, at Once Upon A Child, for second hand prices!

We really had no idea what age of child/ren we would be bringing home but my desire for a baby was strong and doing these things made me feel like part of the “pregnant” crowd. It fulfilled a need for me. It helped to ease the loss.

On July 27th I wrote:

“Today I began a registry at Goores. It was fun and overwhelming! I didn’t get much in there yet. It’s hard to do, not knowing your size. And there is so much to research. What car seat is best, what stroller, what bed, etc. Do we need this and that, will you be walking? But it was a confirming experience. I was able to picture myself with you and what you may need and what I could do to make us more comfortable.”

After getting the homestudy approved and the house certified for safety, in August 2001 we officially became foster parents and our search for a child could begin! We were excited and nervous! We began in March 2001 and now 5 short months later, we were much closer to becoming parents! This is how fast it can all be done! Of course, it depends on you and your desire to get all of the necessities completed.

The hardest part about the search for a child/ren is having to say “no”. I didn’t think about this much until I was faced with it. After we were approved, I began getting phone calls from Melissa (our social worker). She would tell me about babies or sibling sets and their circumstances. I was terrified! I worried about how to make this very important decision. Do we take the first one/s that comes along? How do we decide which one is right? What if we say no to the “right” child and never find her/him again? These thoughts would keep me awake at night!

The first time I had to say that I didn't think that the child was right for us, I felt so guilty! I just knew in my heart that when it was right, we would know. We knew we wanted to start as young as we could. We *really* wanted a baby. I didn't think this was going to be possible in the foster-adopt system that we were in. I figured that the only way this would happen was with private adoption. I was wrong! We got quite a few calls about babies. Problem was we weren't the only ones getting called!

One time we heard a story on the news about a baby that was abandoned and some of our relatives couldn't figure out why that couldn't be **our** baby! We had to get past the fact that there were many parents out there who were "in line" ahead of us!

Some foster parents sign up for emergency placement; this is where you may get a call in the middle of the night to take in a child or children who are being removed from a dangerous situation by CPS and the police. These *can* turn into adoptions but there is a lot that has to be done first. The children can end up in reunification with their biological parents. There are a lot of factors to consider with this type of situation. And, it is why we chose not to be an emergency placement home.

You really have to do some soul searching when adopting through the foster program. You have to be able to consider and raise children of other cultures that may also be of another religion than your own. You have to be able to accept everything in their backgrounds.

This is no time to be a martyr. We learned through our training and hearing it from the children's own words that, in the long run, it may not work out. It is difficult but we had to make honest decisions about the vision we had for **our** family.

I have heard Dr Phil say that children come into *our* lives and have to adjust to *us*. But, it seems to me that these children may be a little bit off from that rule! I believe that we need to be very sensitive to what they may have gone through to get here and everyone involved must make adjustments!

By January 2002, I was getting a little impatient with waiting. It had been 10 months since we got on the road to adoption and still no child. Ordinarily, you wait 9 months for a pregnancy and I was not immune to that fact! I wanted to “give birth”!

The world was recoiling from 9/11, and there was a hushed pall that made our wait even more unbearable. It felt like we were running out of time before the sky would fall and our hopes of building a family were dashed.

Between January and April I had not written a thing in the journal. I had begun taking care of my friends’ little 3 month old baby boy for her while she went back to work. This was good experience and kept me busy during the wait!

Then, on April 23, 2002 (just 13 days after I turned 40 and 1 year and 1 month after we began this journey) I wrote:

This is a very important time for us! We have found you! We have yet to meet you but we have been chosen and have chosen Jasmine and Mikayla to join our family and make it complete! We are so excited! We should be meeting Jasmine next week and go from there. I don’t’ know yet how this will all play out, but we are keeping our minds and hearts open!”

On April 23rd, when Melissa called, she told me about 2 little girls, one just about to turn 3 and one who would be having her first birthday the very next day! The girls were siblings but living in two different foster homes. The social workers wanted them together again as soon as possible.

Melissa sent me a picture on the computer and I could hardly contain myself! Talk about nerves and emotions all over the place! I just knew these were “our girls”! I sent the picture to Dan and called everyone I knew who was waiting along with us.

We met Jasmine on May 1st. We were told that she was very shy, but she and Dan bonded on that very first visit. I spent about 3 hours a day at her foster parents’ home getting to know her and her me. Dan came too, when he was able to get away from work. It didn’t take long before we were going on our first outing alone with Jasmine and then bringing her home to meet our dog and see where she was going to live. The foster parents did a good job preparing Jasmine for us; they told her that we were going to be her new Mommy and Daddy.

Jasmine moved in with us the week of May 13th!

On May 8th I wrote:

Just a few thoughts.....I want you (Jasmine and Mikayla) to know how much emotion goes into this whole adoption process. I am feeling so many things that I am having trouble getting a really good night’s sleep. I am feeling guilt, doubt, anxiousness to get it all going, anxiety because we have so much to do, etc. Don’t get me wrong, I want this to happen, but I think I want it to happen now! I am ready to just jump in and get started. It is hard to live this way, just waiting all the time.”

So, the transitional phase, getting the child into your home, is a stressful time! You fall in love and want to start living as a family right away but the rules are the rules and they are there for a reason; so, you wait!

By May 23rd, after several more visitations with Mikayla, we had both children in the home and our family was complete.

They both seemed to adjust rather easily. Jasmine was said to be shy by nature and it took some time to get her to start opening up. But all in all, we adjusted pretty quickly.

Both sets of our relatives and all of our friends bonded quickly with the girls. How could they not, they were so precious?! The emotions ran the gamut! I was tired and nervous about what to do, just like any new mother.

We all had to adjust to living with each other. There were some long nights and some tears, but everyone who becomes a parent, goes through that!! You can prepare for 9 months or more, but you really don't know what it will be like, until you actually do it!

After a few months of waiting for the courts to discontinue the rights of the birthmother, we got to file the 'request for adoption' paperwork.

A short time after that, our court date was scheduled.

Adoption day was an enchanting day for us! We sat before a judge, in his office and signed papers. It could not have been easier! Afterward, we took pictures and went out for ice cream! Then, we went home and got down to the business of being a family!

On May 9, 2003 (1 year and 2 months after beginning our quest) I wrote:

“.....Jasmine and Mikayla are legally Roots! Congratulations, we made it! All in all, it hasn't been that bumpy a ride. I know it could have been a lot harder and I am grateful!”

Then, 2 years later, after returning from a family reunion in North Carolina, we got **the** phone call. In a word, we had just had another child! A girl, a baby, a sibling, 1 month old, did we want to adopt her? How could we say no!

On October 25, 2005 I wrote:

On Sept 16, 2005 we got a phone call from a social worker in Yolo County. She said that the girls' birth mother has had another baby and she has been removed from custody and is in foster care. Did we want to adopt? Well, it only took me seconds to say yes, but I would have to consult with Dan. The more we thought about it, we couldn't say no. We want this baby. The baby is named Lily. She was 9lbs at birth, pretty healthy despite being born methamphetamine positive. The doctors say she will probably not suffer long term effects of the drugs. She is healthy.

Our foster license lapsed, we were done with the system, or so we thought! It must have been the fastest renewal of a foster license ever! Within 40 days of hearing about “Lily”, we will bring her home. We have purchased what we think will be important to get us going, bed, clothes, diapers, bottles...etc. She will be 9 weeks tomorrow and that is when we will bring her home.

Jasmine and Mikayla are very excited! They can't wait to have a baby to play with! They are happy to have a sister, although, this has raised some questions that we were not ready to deal with right now.

These girls are way too young to understand what their birthmother is about. They do, however, understand the term “birth mother” as opposed to “Mom”, who is me!”

I wanted that baby in my home **tonight!** You can see by what I wrote, this is a really emotional journey. Sometimes, I think, I still have a feeling of loss about not being able to carry children of my own. What I have discovered now – what I really wish – is that I could have carried **these** children so that they wouldn't have had to go through what they have.

But we wouldn't be together otherwise. As parents, my husband and I have our own problems with the woman who is their birth mother, but we never let the children know our feelings about this. We are always respectful and all they know is that their birth mother has too many problems of her own to be able to take care of them. They will never know who their birth fathers are, there is no record available.

With “Lily”, we did have some visitation to deal with before parental rights were terminated. I took her to SAS once a month and left her for an hour with Carol, our social worker. We have never met the birthmother and did not want to. I didn't want her to know who we were. We chose not to have an open adoption. Birthmother came to a few visits but started not showing up.

She had lost 3 children before Lily and the courts were quick to get to the point. So, visitation was cancelled, the parental rights were terminated, and we were able to schedule our new adoption day! We chose to change this child's name to Amanda Elizabeth and she was adopted before her 1st birthday! It all went so quickly!

And then..... We went to Disneyland!!

It is hard for us not to get angry about all of the children being put in harms way because of the adults who can't take responsibility for them. But, thanks to the people who want to be their parents, many of these children get a second chance. I feel that **I** got a second chance, too. I got to have my baby. There are so many children who need homes and they all deserve to be in loving, safe families. It is hard for me not to feel guilt ridden about the fact that I can not be the home for every child in the world! We all have to know our limits and live by them. We are done! Our family is complete. We are quite comfortable being a family of 5!

Remember in the beginning when we were told that we may get a phone call for a sibling? We never expected it to really come! So, that little joke from the orientation meeting, "Come for one, leave with 3" really was an omen!!

We have some pictures and some items that the birthmother wanted them to have, we hold them in a safe place for the girls for when they are older. They have asked about her and they have seen her picture but they don't bring it up much at all. When they do, we listen and answer their questions. Should we need help with them dealing with their adoption in the future, I know that SAS has great programs waiting for us to take advantage of.

These girls were very young when they were removed from her custody and do not remember her at all. Luckily, there was no abuse or trauma to have to deal with. They do have some minor medical and dental issues because of poor prenatal care, drug and alcohol abuse while pregnant and we have yet to see if any effects come about from this exposure. We know that SAS is there if we need the help.

During the process we did have some hard times with Jasmine's foster parents. They had a very difficult time letting go of her. They had her in their life for almost 3 years! I can imagine the loss they felt when she moved out of their home. They wanted to adopt her but not Mikayla.

All of the social workers involved felt that these girls needed to stay together. I cannot imagine them not together. Through it all, we had the support of at least 3 social workers, most of the time, to take care of the problems that came up. We had to do some compromising and adjusting. All of life is that way, though, isn't it!? To this day, we see Jasmine's foster parents once in awhile and the relationship is fine now.

When my kids came home, they virtually came with a paper bag of clothes, a few toys and, with Jasmine, some pictures of her babyhood. I vowed to make sure that the rest of their lives were documented. I take **a lot** of pictures! I make photo/musical shows on DVD to share with the family that we don't see often and I go to their school and take pictures all year of them with their classmates to make DVD scrapbooks for *all* of the kids.

We continue to do what we can to support SAS in their quest to have all of the available children in this area adopted into loving homes. We volunteer when we can by speaking at fund raising events and training classes, telling our story. We also hold an annual cell phone drive to collect unused cell phones, recycle them and donate the money to SAS. This helps us to feel like we are still in the game! SAS needs this support to continue to place children in safe and loving homes with little cost to the families who adopt them.

If anyone would like to contact me and talk about **any** issues regarding adoption, I am available. I may be able to help with issues regarding Medi-cal, Denti-cal, AAP, Head Start, drug exposure and many others. I have found some wonderful doctors who accept their medical program and would be happy to refer! We had the most trouble finding good dental care, but I think we are being served by a good dental office now.

I would love to be able to help anyone who is trying to get through the process! To the foster-adopt family in need, I am a friend indeed! I will be there for anyone who wants to talk it out or ask questions that I may not have answered here.

The easiest way to reach me is: suzy@risingdestiny.com

Also, please visit our web site at www.risingdestiny.com to learn more about Sierra Adoption Services, photo shows on DVD, our Phoneraiser cell phone drive, and a host of other useful topics.

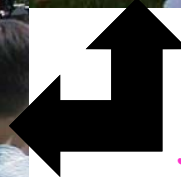
Lastly, people have called us heroes for adopting, but we just feel like parents!

Root Family
Adoption Journey
Scrap Book



Our first viewing of Jasmine and Mikayla.
This is the picture that was sent to me on
the day that Melissa called
to tell us that we had
been chosen for this sibling set!

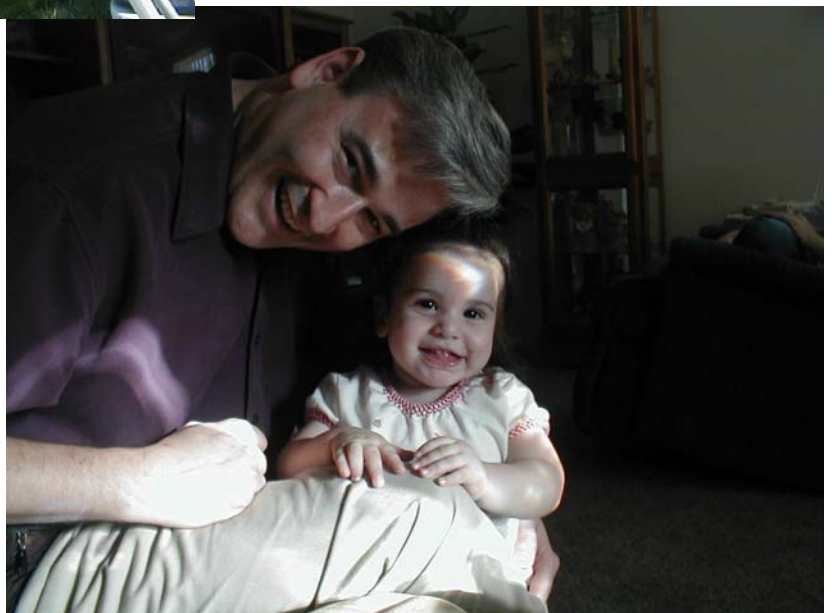
Love at first sight!!!



These are pictures of a party that
Jasmine's foster parents threw. It
was an early birthday party because Jas-
mine would be living with us when she
turned 3. It was a huge event! It was also
the first time we were able to spend a whole
day with her. This was just a few days after
we met. We bonded well on that day!



This is a picture of our first
meeting with Mikayla.
She was such a bright and
bubbly baby! She had just
turned one at the end of April.
She was walk/crawling when we
met her in May.



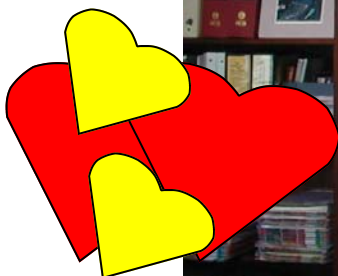


Signing papers in the judges office.



ADOPTION DAY!

The New and Improved Root Family!



Bringing Home Amanda



**Jasmine and
Mikayla were very
excited to become
sisters to Amanda!**

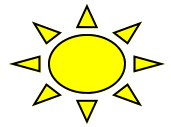
**Amanda was just
about 2 months old
when we brought
her home.**

**She was a very
happy baby!**



**The New Family Root,
Expanded!**

Adoption Notification Day 2009

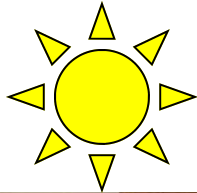


Waiting for the judge to come.

Dan's dad came with us to help with all of the kids!

Amanda was walking and very active at this time!

With our wonderful social worker, Carol. We remain friends, to this day!



Finalization Number 2!!



"So, Root Family, now that you have adopted your 3rd child, what are you going to do next?"

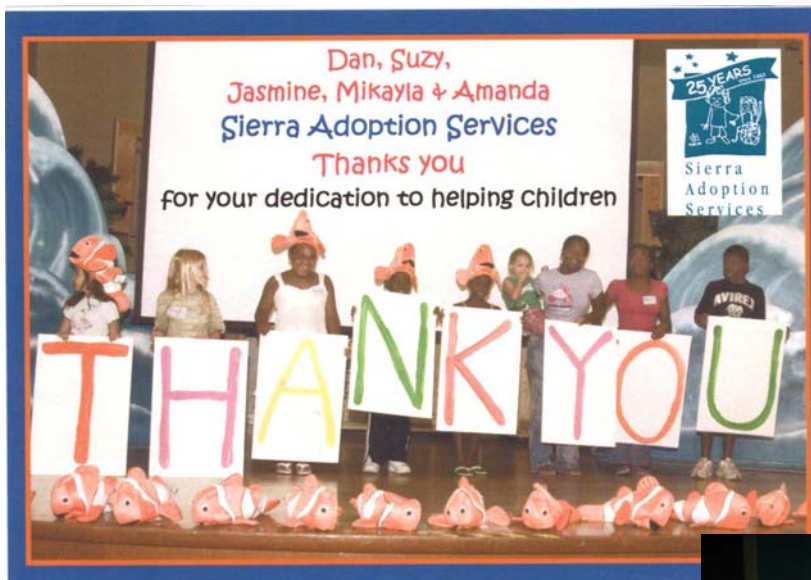
"We're going to Disneyland!"



**The Root Family,
Dan, Suzy, Amanda, Mikayla and Jasmine**

Disneyland, 2007

**The following pages
are some memories
of our fund raising
and volunteer efforts**



One of the events where we volunteered to speak, Jasmine and Mikayla also helped by being photographed to create this card. Another version was used to thank the donors from this event. Mikayla and Jasmine are the “T” and the “H”.

Presenting the check for \$1,218.00 to Bob Herne and Kim Rhineholder of SAS from our efforts in our first cell phoneraiser event.



Dan with Kitty O’Neal from KFBK, who also aided in our cell phone drive efforts. Commander Bill Eveland, formerly of KFBK and family friend also recorded a Public Service Announcement for the phone drive!

A memorial photo from the day we volunteered to do an interview with Donna Cordova and Fox 40 for their segment called A Place Called Home that airs the first Monday of each month. This Segment, produced and written by Donna Cordova, is a profile of children waiting to be adopted by loving families. We were brought in as a “success story”! It was quite an exciting day for us and we got to be on television!

