

# Open Page

Winter 2008

Open Adoption & Family Services, Inc.

Vol. 17, No. 2



## Dialogue With David

**Adopted in 1985, David is one of the oldest children of OA&FS. David is pictured here with Skylar Olivia born on November 20th, 2007, one of the youngest children of OA&FS.**

**Although currently on hiatus off-line, David works as a computer programmer. He is a passionate and talented photographer, as can be seen in his pictures of the Portland Holiday Party on page 7. In addition to having an adventurous spirit and love of the outdoors, David has an uncanny ability to manifest opportunities in his life. This interview was conducted on January 3, 2008.**

**How old are you?** 22

**What is your parents' relationship like with your birthparents?**

My birthparents and adoptive parents have gotten along quite well. I've seen that it is very important to all of them to maintain a relationship with each other. I think it's been a lot of work for everybody. Parenting seems intense and everyone has strong opinions about it. I imagine issues would come up, that's my assumption.

**Describe the kind of relationship you have with your birthparents?**

I am very close to my birthmother, Liane. We've been close my entire life. She lives in Portland and we do lots of outdoor activities together. My birthfather lives in Eugene and I see him less frequently. I think he was more involved when I was younger.

**Has knowing your birthparents helped you to know yourself better?**

Probably. This raises questions about nature versus nurture. I think nurture is more a factor than nature

when it comes to personality. I think I see more of my adoptive parents in me than my birthparents. I've not had any specific epiphanies about myself through talking with my birthparents.

**What have your parents done that has helped you maintain and build a relationship with your birthparents?**

We have a birthday tradition. On my birthday all of the parents come together in one place. From my first birthday to my fifteenth all four of my parents were present. It's now dropping off since I moved from Eugene to Portland. Now I think it's kind of exhausting to be the center of that much attention.

**What is special about your open adoption?**

That's like asking what was special about having parents. There is nothing special about it. I can't imagine not knowing my birthparents or not knowing I was adopted. That would be terrible.

**What is the most common question people ask you about adoption?**

People are often surprised and say to me, "You know your birthparents!?"

**If you could, would you change anything about your open adoption?**

Maybe it would have been better if I had more encouragement to have a relationship with my birthfather. However, it's possible my lack of closeness with him was less a function of adoption and more a function of our particular relationship.

**DIALOGUE WITH DAVID** continues on page 6

## Contact OA&FS

Shari Levine Executive Director  
sharil@openadopt.org

### PORTLAND:

Amy DeGennaro Counselor/Mediator  
amy@openadopt.org

Kim Heavener Development Director  
kimh@openadopt.org

Cindy A. Lee Fiscal Manager  
cindy@openadopt.org

Lori Maas Office Manager  
lori@openadopt.org

Sari Prevost Counselor/Mediator  
sari@openadopt.org

Kelly Sullivan Counselor/Mediator  
kelly@openadopt.org

Suzie Williams Program Manager  
suzie@openadopt.org

5200 SW Macadam Avenue, Suite 250  
Portland, Oregon 97239  
Phone: (503)226-4870 • Fax: (503)226-4891

### EASTERN OREGON:

Angie Lunde Counselor/Mediator  
angie@openadopt.org

Joseph, Oregon

### EUGENE:

Jan Jamieson Counselor/Mediator  
jan@openadopt.org

Jen Walsh Administrative Assistant  
jen@openadopt.org

Satya Maness Counselor/Mediator  
satya@openadopt.org

315 West 10th Avenue  
Eugene, Oregon 97401  
Phone: (541)343-4825 • Fax: (541)431-1241

### MEDFORD:

Susan Holmes-Freeman  
Counselor/Mediator  
susan@openadopt.org

7 Vancouver Avenue  
Medford, Oregon 97504  
Phone: (541)608-6134 • Fax: (541)282-8564

### SEATTLE:

Lisa Koblenz  
Office Manager/Outreach Coordinator  
lisa@openadopt.org

Katie R. Stallman  
Counselor/Mediator  
katie@openadopt.org

Courtney Gray  
Counselor/Mediator  
courtney@openadopt.org

Laurel Stitzhal  
Regional Manager & Counselor/Mediator  
laurel@openadopt.org

Maria Villegas  
Counselor/Mediator  
maria@openadopt.org

200 West Mercer Street, Suite E-508  
Seattle, Washington 98119  
Phone: (206)782-0442 • Fax: (206)782-0578

WWW.OPENADOPT.ORG

## Agency Happenings

### Goodbye Gillian



Sadly, we will be saying good-bye to Counselor/Mediator Gillian Freney this January. Gillian is pursuing a new career path at Oregon Health Sciences University (OHSU). She will be working as a Community Consultant at the Oregon Center for Children with Special Needs. Gillian has been a dedicated member of the OA&FS' community for the past ten years: three years as a Board member and seven years as a staff member. During that time, Gillian brought extensive knowledge and insight to her work, and has served as an excellent resource for her clients and co-workers. Through her keen observations, she has made valuable contributions to the agency. We wish Gillian well in her life pursuits. She will be sorely missed!

*"Thank you from the bottom of my heart to my clients and colleagues. Working with you was such a profound privilege. I am humbled and enriched to have been a part of so many wonderful adoptions. I am forever grateful to you all, and wish you the very best now and in the future."*

~Gillian J. Freney, Portland Counselor/Mediator

### Welcome Jen

We would like to welcome our new administrative assistant in the Eugene office, Jen Walsh. Jen most recently worked with Healthy Start of Lane County and brings a wealth of knowledge regarding resources in our community to this position. Jan and Satya, the counselors in the Eugene office, appreciate her warmth, humor, and organizational skills. Thanks for all your help so far, Jen, and welcome!

### OA&FS CHILDREN'S BOOK NOW AVAILABLE!

RAIN OR SHINE, was written by adoptive mom Hilary Horder Hippely and illustrated by former OA&FS counselor Margaret Godfrey.

Order Now! at: [www.openadopt.org/latest-news-events](http://www.openadopt.org/latest-news-events)

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# KIDS' CORNER



Ashleigh and Lela

## “This I Believe”

**Written by Ashleigh, birth sister of Lela, at the age of 15 on September 13, 2007.**

“Lela, go find your sister.”

This is how almost every Thursday evening starts. Lela runs to the door, hugs my legs, and wants up. I usually give in and pick her up, and she gives me one of her cute baby hugs or kisses in return. Lela Claire Boerner is two and a half years old, and she’s my half sister. I believe that family ties cannot be severed by the hardest situations.

I found out about Lela, and the fact that she was going to be adopted, the day after she was born. I was shocked, angry, and frozen with not knowing what to do. I didn’t know anything about the family, nor did I know anything about “open adoption” in the first place. My first thought was something along the lines of “am I going to be able to have a relationship with some kid who shares half of my gene pool?” I didn’t care that she wasn’t near me or that I hadn’t even seen her. I just knew that I needed to form some sort of bond with her.

The first time I met Dan and Beth, Lela’s adoptive parents, I knew automatically that their love and compassion was something that no one else could give to Lela. No one can forget their son Sammy, either. He was around three years old at the time, and was bursting with love for his little sister. Now, Sammy is almost six and I love him like a little brother. Dan, Beth, Sammy, and Lela are a second family to me. Anytime I need help with anything, or just a little cheering up, I can go to them and instantly be okay. Lela and I will have a bond in the future that I have never shared with anyone. This is the meaning of open adoption. The sense of family and love that I feel with them is indescribable. I am so happy that my mom found the people that she did to take care of my baby sister. I can’t wait to stand on the sidelines and watch her grow up.

I believe that the bond my little sister and I share will never be severed. I believe that she will grow up with the love and guidance of her parents, her big brother, and me, her big sister.

**To read more about Ashleigh and Lela see the article “Honoring Sibling Connections” in the Spring 2007 Open Page.**

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## Please Support OA&FS

Like all nonprofit organizations, Open Adoption & Family Services depends on donors to expand and fulfill its mission. There are many ways to support OA&FS with gifts of all sizes.

- Donations by cash, check or credit card—always welcome and always needed.
- Automatic Deduction - Make a pledge to OA&FS, in the increments and timing of your choice, payable by automatic deductions from your bank account or credit card.
- Endowment Fund - OA&FS accepts gifts of cash, stock, property or other appreciated assets. OA&FS has established a \$25,000 endowment fund with Oregon Community Foundation. Assets are invested by OCF, and OA&FS receives distributions from the interest generated by the fund twice a year.
- Planned gifts - Make a bequest to the agency through your will or other estate-planning method, and we’ll welcome you into OA&FS’ Family Legacy program.

*For more information please contact Development Director Kim Heavener at (503) 226-4870. Thank you for your support!*

**OA&FS is a charitable organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.  
Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.**

# OA&FS Connects With Community

## ADOPTION DIALOGUE

The Adoption Dialogue was attended by over 60 pro-choice health-care professionals, political activists, counselors, abortion providers, and adoption professionals from six states on November 15th, 2007. OA&FS Board Member Grayson Dempsey, our facilitator, did a masterful job! The morning began with exercises that encouraged the group to express their feelings about adoption which provided tremendous insight into the root of the groups' adoption fears and misconceptions. For example many participants equated adoption with a pro-life agenda or believed adoption was a purely disempowering experience for birthmothers. "We felt it was our responsibility as counselors and activists committed to true Reproductive Justice that we invite a conversation exploring these fears, assumptions, and questions with our colleagues working in the abortion, adoption and parenting worlds," stated Grayson. Dan Savage was remarkably effective at lunch with his legendary humor as he offered participants a vision of open adoption they could believe in. In the afternoon, Grayson skillfully helped the audience reexamine their perceptions of adoption and create broader, more accepting frameworks. The "dialogue" format was highly effective, allowing for much more discussion and deep thought than a presentation on open adoption would have. We made a lasting impact on the way the participants of the Adoption Dialogue will think and talk about adoption in the future!



*"We shared our own personal experiences with adoption and talked about how those experiences have affected our lives and our work. And, most importantly, we explored the effects of stigma and how we are each silenced in different ways – how women who have had abortions and women who have placed for adoption are both manipulated and often ignored in a world in which pregnancy choices are so highly politicized. Participants were given the chance to envision a different world, and by the end of the day we had set goals and built coalitions for moving toward this vision."*

**~Grayson Dempsey,  
OA&FS Board Member**



## DAN SAVAGE

On November 15th OA&FS hosted a book reading and signing at In Other Words Bookstore with OA&FS adoptive father Dan Savage. Over 60 people came together to hear Dan read from his book THE KID. The event was warm and cozy as people enjoyed treats made by OA&FS prospective adoptive mother Sarah Bradshay of Simply Sated Catering and sat on the floor to listen to Dan read. The event attracted an equal number of OA&FS community members and members of the public new to open adoption.

"Just Out" staff writer Julie Sabatier attended and wrote this wonderful review: "I headed over to In Other Words last night to hear sex advice columnist Dan Savage speak about something other than sex- how he and his boyfriend, Terry, adopted their son, DJ, through Open Adoption & Family Services. It was a well-attended event and many people (including me) got teary right along with Savage when he read a heart-wrenching chapter from his book THE KID about what it was like to take a newborn DJ from his mother in the hospital. "Excuse me. I'm just a weepy bag of slop," said Savage, pausing to look up from the text. I'll admit I didn't know a whole lot about open adoption before attending this event, but Savage made a strong argument for it. He pointed out that however painful it may have been for him and his boyfriend to actually be present when DJ was separated from his mother, they know it was better this way because they don't have to guess when DJ asks questions about her. "We know she loved him. We saw it," he explained. And, with open adoption, the birthmother is still a part of the extended family. DJ can call her and ask her questions if he wants. ...Savage made it seem effortless to bring an audience from the brink of tears to belly-clenching laughter."

# Star Supporters Shine!

There are many ways to support OA&FS: share your story with friends and family, speak at an Adoption Information Meeting or Seminar, donate a service, host an event, write an inspirational story for waiting families, share your child's poem, drawing, or comments about open adoption, or send pictures of your family!

**THE FOLLOWING OA&FS COMMUNITY MEMBERS DESERVE A SPECIAL THANK YOU FOR THEIR SUPPORT!**

**Heather Allmain OA&FS Adoptive Mother** ~ for sharing her expertise as an event planner and helping the November 15th fundraising event with Dan Savage run smooth as silk. Thank you Heather!

**Sarah and Melissa Bradshay OA&FS Prospective Adoptive Mothers** ~ for volunteering their catering services at the November 15th fundraising event and filling us up with warmth and beautiful, tasty food! Thank you Sarah and Melissa!

**Sarah Bradshay OA&FS Prospective Adoptive Mother** ~ for advocating for OA&FS to be the recipient of her workplace committee annual award. The GLOBE committee, (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Employees of Verizon), has a nationwide member base and its purpose is to provide support and resources to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender employees of Verizon. OA&FS has received a very generous donation of numerous, beautiful, brand-new, GLBT friendly children's books due to Sarah's support. Thank you Sarah!

**John Chally OA&FS Co-Founder** ~ for ongoing consultation and heartfelt commitment to OA&FS. Thank you John!

**Grayson Dempsey OA&FS Board Member** ~ for advocating for OA&FS and encouraging support from attendees at our November 15th fundraising event with Dan Savage. Thank you Grayson!

**Margaret Godfrey Former OA&FS Staff Member** ~ for the contribution of the beautiful illustrations in the new OA&FS children's book, RAIN OR SHINE. Thank you Margaret!

**Hilary Horder Hippely Author and Adoptive Mother** ~ for creating and writing the heartwarming story of RAIN OR SHINE, in which the birthmother plays an active role. Thank you Hilary!

**Sunny Moore and Megan Zimmerman OA&FS Birthmothers** ~ for sharing their stories with prospective adoptive parents at the seminar. Thank you Sunny and Megan!

**Scobie Puchtler OA&FS Adoptive Father** ~ for volunteering endless hours in the making and production of the "Opening Adoption" DVDs. Thank you Scobie!

**Dan Savage OA&FS Adoptive Father** ~ for educating and inspiring participants by sharing his adoption story at the Adoption Dialogue. And for reading from his book THE KID and touching the hearts of everyone at our fundraising event that same evening. Thank you Dan!

**David Tilchen OA&FS Adoptee** ~ for sharing his story in this issue of the Open Page and for being the volunteer photographer at the Portland Holiday Party. Thank you David!

**Melissa Valencia-Manerini OA&FS Board Member** ~ for her tireless, attentive and invaluable assistance on the 17 hour day of November 15th. And for sharing her story as a birthmother with prospective adoptive parents at our seminars. Thank you Melissa!

 **Thank you!**

**Is there anything about your open adoption that has been confusing?**

I don't think so. Everything was always open. I would have been confused if I was told on my fifth birthday that I was adopted. I've never felt confused or conflicted about the role of everyone involved.

**What advice would you give to other children of open adoption?**

Don't think your birthparents don't love you.

**What advice would you give to adoptive parents?**

Encourage your child to build and maintain a relationship with their birthparents on their own. It's important a child can share in maintaining the relationship so it won't disintegrate over time. The relationship should not be one sided and should not be the sole responsibility of the birthparents.

**What advice would you give to prospective adoptive parents?**

Think about the child and imagine what it would be like for them to grow up. Imagine them finding out they were adopted well into their childhood. Imagine them not having any chance of knowing who they are. Closed adoption is terrible. Not being able to learn about your hereditary background is practically unethical.

**What advice would you give to birthparents?**

At some point you should really explain your side of the story to the child. Explain why you chose not to raise them. Without this knowledge the child will feel uncertain, insecure and perhaps even mistrust the birthparents. I wondered but didn't ask for a long time. I only heard my full story a few years ago. It felt really good to hear the entire story.

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# Making Room in Our Hearts:

## Keeping Family Ties through Open Adoption by: Micky Duxbury



**Condensed Book Review by Kathleen Silber**

As one of the pioneers of open adoption, I am frequently asked what has been the impact of open adoption and how has it effected the lives of all parties, especially the children. Making Room in Our Hearts successfully answers these questions. Duxbury, a licensed marriage and family therapist who specializes in pre and post-adoption counseling, is also an adoptive parent. Her book opens with her family's adoption story, and this story reflects the empathy and insight that she shows throughout the book.

The book is a reasoned discussion of the various issues that open adoption raises, and it is illuminated by the stories of adoptive parents, birthparents, and children (many of whom are now adults) who have lived the topics under discussion.

Duxbury, an advocate of open adoption, does not spare either the joy or pain of open adoption and examines open adoption with older children adopted through the public system and the issues involved in opening closed adoptions.

Her message is that open adoption is best not only for the child but for every member of the triad. This theme is built convincingly through the perspectives of the stories of the families and is strengthened in a no-holds-barred approach to looking at open adoption. By far the most convincing advocates for open adoption in this book are the adopted teens and adults who share their stories. For example, Josh, age 21, comments about the question people invariably ask "Are you confused about who is your real mother?" Josh states "Kid's aren't stupid. I think I would be confused if my birthmother was not in my life. My birthmother is not another parent. The word parent doesn't even come into mind... Your parents are your parents. My birthmother is really important to me—she is like a special aunt, but she is not my parent."

This book is important reading for all individuals considering adoption—prospective adopting parents and birthparents—as well as those already in open adoptions. It will help all parties focus on the needs of the child and on healthier adoptions for all parties.

# Great OA&FS Gatherings!



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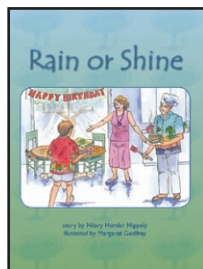
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Pictured here: 1. Emily; 2. Evie, Ken, Isaac, Ashley & Ashley's Mom; 3. Dakorah; 4. Allison & Cameron; 5. Donna & Brennan; 6. Rose; 7. Arley, Hoyt, Mary & McKinnon; 8. Riley; 9. Bruce, Russ & Spencer; 10. Gillian, Autumn, Sari, Kelly & Skylar; 11. Eugene Families; 12. John & Cooper; 13. Seattle Families; 14. Lily & Denise; & 15. Hanni.

December marks the time when OA&FS community members come together for celebration and support. This tradition occurs in Portland, Eugene and Seattle each year! Portland had a record turn out for the warmly hosted event at the home of Denise Jarrett-Weeks, Stephen Weeks and their daughter Lily. Seattle families were cheerfully welcomed for the second year in a row at the home of Diann and Michael Smith and their three children. The close knit Eugene community celebrated at the home of Sue Mathisen, Lori Lund and their daughter Honora. THANK YOU so much to our gracious hosts and to all of the OA&FS community members who joined us in good cheer!

Photo Credits: 1,2,5,7,9,12,13 & 15 Katie Stallman; 3,4,6,8,10 & 14 David Tilchen; 11 Steve Shapiro.

## OA&FS CHILDREN'S BOOK NOW AVAILABLE!



**RAIN OR SHINE**, was written by adoptive mom Hilary Horder Hippely and illustrated by former OA&FS counselor Margaret Godfrey.

Finn has a happy life with his mother and father. Every summer he looks forward to the birthday celebration that will reunite him with his rich extended family, particularly his birthmother, Lisa. But when clouds threaten, Finn wonders how his much-loved birthday traditions can continue. With warmth and honesty, RAIN OR SHINE celebrates the possibilities of life, love, and family.

## OA&FS DVDS NOW AVAILABLE!

**These two heartfelt DVDs, produced and directed by OA&FS adoptive father Scobie Puchtler, are a great way to introduce open adoption to friends and family.**

### **Opening Adoption: A Birth Mother's Story**

In this 30 minute documentary, Melissa Busch, 23, tells the story of the open adoption she created for her daughter when she found her-self pregnant at age 15. Additional comments from John Chally, co-founder of OA&FS.

### **Opening Adoption: Teens of Open Adoption**

In this 15 minute documentary created from the Teen Panel at the 20th Anniversary celebration of OA&FS, teenagers of open adoption share their unique experiences, stories, and perspectives.

**ORDER NOW! at: [www.openadopt.org/latest-news-events](http://www.openadopt.org/latest-news-events)**

*Open Adoption & Family Services, Inc.*

5200 SW Macadam Avenue, Suite 250  
Portland, Oregon 97239-3800

Address Service Requested

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