

## **Adoptive Parent Profile**

We respect your need to know as much as possible about the adoptive families, so we give you more information than you are likely to find elsewhere. You will receive a detailed packet of information about the adoptive families you're interested in.

When birthparents call Open Adoption & Family Services, we send them a Dear Birthparent Booklet, which includes letters like this one from adoptive parents Joan and David. Every adoptive family is carefully screened by our counselor/mediators and a homestudy is written for birthparents to read. Adoptive families also write their autobiographies and create a photo collage. We've included photos from Joan and David's photo collage throughout this section.

Once you chose the adoptive family, you will meet them and begin your open adoption relationship.

---

### **Dear Birthparents Letter...**



Dear Birthparent,

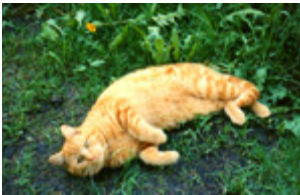
Greetings from Joan and David. Welcome to a sneak preview of our world.

Our idea of a good time is playing homemade music, cooking heaps of fresh food, building huts and lofts, coloring with paint and fabric, concocting costumes from found materials for our samba band, assembling flowers and feasts for friends' weddings and birthdays. "Create your own fun" is our motto. Simple pleasures refresh us: reading to each other, sharing the day, time with close friends. Folk dancing, volunteer projects, and bicycling to the farmer's market keep us active in the community. Hiking, mushroom hunting, and seeking out swimming holes connect us with nature.



David is an elementary music teacher and choir director. His classes and performances are full of spark and energy; a tapestry of rhythm, song and story. Trumpet playing and yoga balance his day. Joan is a landscape designer and contractor. Her gardens invite one to sit and spend time amidst the flowers, foliage and delights of the season. She also expresses herself through dance, writing and creative cooking. David has participated in Joan's garden projects doing construction and lending his artistic sensibility. During a break from David's teaching we enjoyed working together every day for two years.

Our house is a rambling cottage, a labor of love and imagination surrounded by an abundant garden and large trees. We have many neighborhood friendships including families with new babies. From our house it is a short walk to the river path and park. Leo is our shy outdoor cat. Six friendly chickens provide us with fresh organic eggs and amusing antics. The vegetable garden, berries, and fruit trees keep the table and freezer full.



For seven years we have grown to know and love each other. By creating together, spending time in nature, sharing our dreams, and exploring the world we have become a family. We would like our little family to grow. A wise fertility doctor advised us that adoption was the only sure route to parenthood. It didn't take much to win us over to the idea of open adoption. Family, friends and neighbors are awaiting a child with us, and have offered their active support. Joan's work schedule is flexible and will allow her to devote herself to mothering.

At our wedding we made vows to each other. For the child who joins our family, we make this vow: "With open hearts, we offer you a place to learn and grow. We commit to guide you, and to introduce you to all that lovingly guides us, to encourage your explorations (wearing a helmet of course), to help you know where you came from and where you are going."

Thank you for considering us. David and Joan

---

# Joan and David's Home Study...

April 2005



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Joan and David are a creative, spiritual, fun-loving couple who have been married since August 2002. David is an elementary performing arts teacher and Joan owns her own landscaping business. Their relationship is based on deep respect and honest communication, and they greatly enjoy working together on musical endeavors and projects around the house. Joan and David have a wonderful community of family and friends nearby, including many children. They have an enthusiastic approach to life and both are very excited to share their home and their adventures with a child.



## 2. HOME AND NEIGHBORHOOD

Joan and David live in a charming, one "plus" story home in a medium-sized Northwest city. It has approximately 1000 square feet of finished living space and sits on a very large wooded lot. Their neighborhood consists of a short street that dead-ends into a local park. Joan and David know most of their neighbors very well and appreciate the sheltered atmosphere of their tucked-away neighborhood. They feel very safe on their tree-lined street and appreciate having a diversity of families nearby. Joan bought the house fifteen years ago with her first husband and has been working on it ever since. She and David love the simplicity of their home and feel it is important to utilize their space rather than have rooms that stand empty or are just for show. They may add an additional room when their child is older so that he or she will have space for toys, art supplies, musical instruments or whatever hobbies they may develop.



There are warm wood accents throughout Joan and David's home, including beautiful hardwood floors in the living and dining areas. Joan reupholstered the furniture in the living room, and two black and white prints from the time they spent in Hawaii grace the walls. Much of the décor has a story; the dining table is a family heirloom and much of the art-work on display was done by friends. Joan's parents spend the winter in Guatemala every year, and they have many South American items in their home brought back from these trips. The kitchen is a good-sized rectangular space that juts off the living room/dining room area. Joan grew up visiting her grandmother in a one-room cabin and wanted to replicate the feel of an open living space when she remodeled the house. She likes the fact that she can stand in the kitchen and visit with guests in the living room. The kitchen is also accented in natural wood and is obviously a functional and well-used space. Much of the food is purchased in bulk and stored in reusable containers. David admits that before he met Joan, he didn't always realize how important it was to eat real meals. They both cook, but Joan tends to be the one who gets more elaborate.



Down the hall from the living room is a small bedroom that will be the nursery. Joan and David have collected a few handmade antique toys and needlepoint wall hangings that give this room a cozy, well-loved feel. The walls are painted a light pink-peach color and they are waiting until they adopt to add more décor. Also on this floor is a laundry area that opens into the bathroom and the backyard. Joan and David recycled antique bathroom fixtures and designed the tile in the shower, touches that make their bathroom truly unique. Their bedroom and office are on the opposite end of the house from the living room. The office floor is a beautiful, multi-colored stone that heats the room from below. An upright piano sits against one wall, and a computer work area faces another that is filled with huge windows. There are multiple built-ins in this room, all of which are trimmed in the same warm wood that is found throughout the home. A tiny staircase leads to a loft area that Joan and David use as their bedroom. A colorful quilt covers their bed, an item that is of special significance to Joan and David. Joan did a landscape work-trade with the woman who made the quilt and worked with her to incorporate colors and symbols that are significant to her and David and their love of dance.



The outside of the home is shingled in cedar and has a large front yard with many trees. The back yard is also green and tree-filled and has several outbuildings; a storage area for Joan's landscaping supplies, a small studio, and a chicken coop. One third of the yard is partitioned off for garden space. Joan and David grow an amazing variety of vegetables including broccoli, beans, lettuce, kale, tomatoes, garlic, leeks, peas, squash, cucumbers as well as blueberries, grapes, and plums. They like to cultivate flowers in among the veggies for color, and in the winter the chickens get the run of the garden as well as their insulated coop area. Joan and David also share communal garden space with their next door neighbor whose yard gets a different level of sun and is better for certain vegetables. The backyard studio area is a little hut that has been an office, a guest room, a practice space, and currently houses their food dehydrator. It has built-in shelves and a desk, and Joan and David can see insulating it and using it for a teenager's room many years in the future.

Joan and David's home very conducive for raising a family. They prioritize using their space in a way that is efficient and attractive, and have made their home a place they can truly live comfortably. Housekeeping standards are excellent and no health or safety hazards were observed.

### **3. FAMILY LIFESTYLE**

David is a performing arts teacher at a local elementary school, and Joan runs her own one-woman landscaping business. On weekdays, both rise between six and seven in the morning. Joan writes in her journal while David makes them breakfast of miso soup, Ezekiel toast and eggs. David works at the elementary school three days a week and directs a boys' choir one day a week. He also does workshops for music teachers, folk dance events for adults, and a variety of other community activities focused around music and dance. Tuesday through Friday he leaves early in the day to prepare activities for his classes and workshops. Joan's day looks different depending on what kind of job she's working on and what time of year it is. In the spring and summer, she too is often out the door early, working on whatever gardening or landscaping project she has been hired to complete. Winter tends to be her slow time and she can do more catch up on book-keeping, running errands, making adjustments to the structure of her business, and generally retooling.

In the evenings, Joan takes on the dinner plans while David practices instruments, works on class preparations, or reads. They both really enjoy food and find a lot of value in cooking wholesome, nourishing meals. They like eating with friends and with Joan's sister who lives just outside their town. Joan and David also like the division of labor they have achieved when it comes to food. David takes on breakfast, while Joan likes to

flex her culinary muscles on dinner. David admits that before he met Joan, he didn't put too much effort into eating a "real" dinner, and he appreciates the care she puts in to their evening meal. After dinner, they might read or watch a movie, but rarely do they watch television. Neither of them like violent movies, and prefer the classics that make them think rather than over-stimulating them with lots of explosions and drama.



Mondays and weekends tend to be days that David and Joan spend together. They try to keep Saturday as a day to relax and not do any work, but both have a hard time not finding something to do around the house and garden. Joan and David are both close to their families, and they visit family several times a year. Joan's sister and her family are an especially big part of their social life. Either alone or with friends, Joan and David will often take a hike or a drive to the coast to get out of town for a day. Both find that they need to spend time in nature to help them relax and adjust their perspectives on life. They both like to attend festivals and fairs, as well as weekend workshops (they met at a weekend dance camp). Having creative outlets is important to Joan and David, and they feel having a child opens up a whole new realm of opportunity for nurturing their creative spirits.

When David and Joan adopt, David can take family leave up to a year. Joan is in the process of deciding which pieces of her business to focus on as she adjusts her work-life to accommodate parenting a baby. Neither wants to use formal day-care, and they will instead rely on child-care swaps with friends so their child can grow up with a community of other trusted adults and children. While certain pieces of their day-to-day lives will require adjustment, Joan and David lead a lifestyle that will easily accommodate having a child. Music, being outdoors, and spending time with friends are all experiences they feel will enrich a child's world, and they can't wait to see what interests their child will have that will change and enrich their world.

#### **4. VALUES AND RELIGION**

Joan was raised in a Catholic household, and her parents still attend mass on a regular basis. While she really appreciated the community that the Catholic Church provided, Joan began having serious doubts about her religion at the age of fourteen. She felt a real sense of spirituality and connectedness with the world around her and the unseen world, but couldn't find a way to incorporate this emerging truth with the very traditional church her parents attended. As an older teen, Joan began meditating seriously. She fell in love with her Transcendental Meditation teacher, and her first "real" relationship was very intertwined with her spiritual development. She has experimented with a variety of "New

Age" religions, although she dislikes that word and finds that there are many people who claim to be open and spiritual who are actually not very healthy. Now Joan's goal is to infuse spirituality into her everyday life rather than depend on one particular practice. She feels very aware that there are unseen worlds that humans are not always aware of, and she wants to be open to the lessons that being quiet and reflective can teach her. Being in nature is a big part of her current practice, as is spending time with other women who have similar beliefs about the benefits of channeling and being open to spiritual guides. Joan does not force her beliefs on anyone and feels spirituality is a personal thing that should help a person enhance their life, not make them feel guilty or ashamed.

David's father was very schooled in theology and his family attended a Black Baptist church for the first several years of his life. While Christianity was important in their household for many years, his father had a rather abrupt shift in his thinking when David was around six years old. They had moved to California from the Midwest, times were politically tumultuous and David's father felt that in order to keep up with this "new era" that they should abandon their belief in God and look to science as an explanation for everything. David's mother continued to incorporate the basic tenets of Christianity into her parenting, but his father "threw the baby out with the bathwater," as David puts it. David's family attended a variety of Unitarian churches as a way to connect with the community they had lost when they left their Christian church. He realized what a wide variety of beliefs exist within the Unitarian church, some of which felt right to him and some of which did not. David believes that God is in everything and tries to be very conscious of the interconnectedness of all beings. He constantly asks himself where the sacred places in his life are, and makes an effort to cultivate a sense of reverence and respect for the world around him. He is profoundly grateful for his life and feels it is very important to always remind himself of how blessed he is to have the gifts of music and his wonderful relationship with Joan. David feels that meditating and having quiet time on a regular basis are very important for him to function well as a partner and a teacher, but he also understands that he doesn't have to be cross-legged under a tree to meditate. He believes that life is meditation, that you can celebrate a quiet moment by taking a deep breath and feeling at peace. David can imagine holding a sleeping baby as a meditation moment.

Joan and David do not plan to attend any specific church or religious services, but they do plan to talk to their child about the existence of a higher power and the importance of taking time to develop their own sense of what it means to be spiritual. They are both very respectful people and good listeners who value individuality and the uniqueness of every person. They both work very hard and feel that doing a good job at whatever you do it important. Joan and David believe in the importance of good communication and in putting effort into their relationship with each other, friends, family, and themselves. They are very conscientious people who do not float through life, but really make an effort to live with integrity and seek out the things that help them be the best people they can be.

## **5. PARENTING ATTITUDES / PHILOSOPHIES**

David grew up in a very lively home, and his family members are all quite gregarious and funny. As a young child, he looked up to his father and considered him to be a hero. His father taught David about carpentry and other useful handy-skills and they enjoyed idyllic father-son relationship. By the time David entered adolescence, his father had become very caught up in the free-spirited cultural atmosphere of California in the late 1960's. He had several affairs, some of which the family knew about and some of which they didn't. These affairs hurt David's mother very much and eventually the family had to move because of his father's indiscretions. His father really "fell off the pedestal" for David and he felt like he had lost his hero.

David's father never acknowledged the pain his affairs had caused their family, and David found this very difficult to deal with. As a result, he is conscious of taking responsibility for his own actions and discussing issues openly rather than suppressing them because they are uncomfortable. His parents eventually divorced, and David has remained much closer to his mother than his father. He feels he has found a place of forgiveness with his father, but it has taken a long time and it is something he still struggles with on an ongoing basis.

David appreciates the fact that his parents' form of discipline was removing privileges and talking rather than being overly physical or yelling. They spanked him some as a child, but as he grew older, he found that they made their expectations clear, and he usually didn't have any trouble following them. His parents had a lot of faith in the intelligence of their children, and they had compassion for how hard it is to grow up and learn how to follow the rules. David feels they were very reasonable parents when it came to discipline, but also admits that he was the youngest and his older siblings claim he "got off easy."

Joan's father was an entrepreneurial businessman and the adventurer in the family. Her mother was a very active, social woman who worked as a public health nurse after Joan was going to school full-time. Joan has fond memories of her childhood for the most part, but she and her sisters did have to work at her father's businesses a great deal growing up. This was hard on her because she had little free time and because she was the "boss' daughter." However, she appreciates the work ethic her parents instilled in her, as well as the value that it is important to be active and participate in your community.

Joan's middle sister was very feisty and outspoken and was often reprimanded or grounded for breaking the rules or being rude. Joan witnessed the struggles her parents and sister went through, so she generally obeyed and did what she was asked to do. Her parents did not believe in spanking out of impatience or frustration, which Joan appreciates, but she wishes she had been a bit more open and communicative with her parents rather than doing whatever it took to keep the peace.

Both Joan and David feel that the communication in their homes growing up was limited and did not delve below the surface very often. They both had fathers who projected a very "my way or the highway" attitude, and while have they reconciled their feeling about this element of their upbringings, it is something they wish to do differently with their own children. They both feel it is crucial to be emotionally present as parents and to create communication patterns that make it natural for their family to discuss the things that are really important to them. Joan and David feel that children deserve to be honored as unique individuals and realize that what works for some children may not work for others. They have delighted in observing the children in their families and their friendship circle and witnessing how they grow and change and assert themselves at different stages. David and Joan would not use physical punishment with their child, but would certainly intervene physically if their child were in harm's way (running into the street or reaching for a hot stove, for example). They feel it is very important to provide their children with a loving community of stable adults and children who will all support them as they grow up. They also feel it is important to provide many opportunities for creative expression so their children can try lots of different things and explore their skills and interests. They want to give their children a balance of physical, intellectual, and spiritual outlets and will encourage them in whatever healthy interests they pursue. David and Joan recognize that first-time parenting can be a real challenge, and are open to seeking outside resources if necessary, such as reading, workshops and counseling.

## **6. PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE MOTHER**

Joan is a 46-year-old Caucasian woman of French-Canadian, Irish, Norwegian, and Belgian descent. She has reddish light-brown hair, blue eyes, stands 5' 4" tall, and has a medium build. Joan is in good physical and emotional health as verified by her doctor on 8/19/04. Criminal history and Child Protective Services checks through Oregon's Department of Human Services (12/27/04) revealed no criminal history or incidents of abuse or neglect. Joan was asked whether she had a criminal history (including DUI's) or a history of child abuse, sexual abuse, or domestic violence, whether or not it resulted in arrest or conviction. She said she did not. Joan was asked whether she had a history of mental illness and/or any hospitalizations related to mental illness or drug or alcohol dependency. She said she did not have a history of mental illness or hospitalization for drug dependency. Joan did check herself into an alcohol rehabilitation program at the same time her father quit drinking when Joan was 22. She found herself binge-drinking to cope with father's alcoholism and after attending some groups designed to help the family with their father's disease, she realized that she herself could benefit from some time at the clinic. She stayed for a month, and continued to be involved with a variety of out-patient support groups for many years after that. She did not drink at all for 13 years, and since then has found that she is able to have wine with dinner occasionally without falling into old bad habits. Joan never drinks more than one or two drinks and never becomes intoxicated. Joan states that she has not been the subject of an unfavorable homestudy.

Joan is a warm and friendly person who has a quietly focused manner about her. She has a wonderful way with words and expresses herself very colorfully. She works hard at her

job and takes pride in creating beautiful outdoors spaces for people using her natural talents and the skills she has taught herself over the years. She is a very hands-on individual and would always prefer to be in the thick of a project rather than learning about something abstractly. Family is important to Joan and she spends a lot of time with her sister who lives nearby. She enjoys good relationships with the rest of her family and sees them when she can. She makes an effort to focus on the positive things she loves about her family instead of dwelling on ways she wishes they were different. Joan feels deep connections with people and thrives on good company and good food. She lives her life with purpose and integrity and finds peace and reflection in little moments throughout the day. Joan also has a wonderful sense of humor and loves to laugh. She is an engaging and witty person and knows when not to take herself or anything else too seriously.

Growing up with two older sisters, Joan was definitely the baby of the family. This role was accentuated by the fact that her mother lost another baby when Joan was two, and she has always felt that her parents needed her to play the role of a young child far after she was too mature to still be treated in such a way. The three children in their family were all quite different; Joan's oldest sister always had her head in the clouds, while her middle sister was feisty and stubborn. Joan was the "easy one" and feels she had a little of both her sisters in her. Her parents were very hard working and expected all three girls to work in their father's business from a young age. Her mother worked in a drapery shop when Joan was young, then returned to nursing as a public health nurse once Joan was old enough to be in school. Joan definitely feels she inherited a strong work ethic from her parents, although at times having so much demanded of her as a young person was very stressful. She was expected to work, but also to be the baby. In addition, her mother was often sick and hospitalized when Joan was young. This, combined with losing her sister, fueled a fear of illness in Joan that stayed with her throughout her childhood. She has since looked carefully at all these issues with the help of a counselor and feels very resolved about the difficulties of her young life.

Being outdoors was important in Joan's family and she cherishes her memories of being out on a boat and in the woods backpacking (before it was a "cool" thing to do). She was in the Girl Scouts and her parents were very involved with her scouting activities as well as with their community in general. Participation and volunteering were important values to Joan's mother and father, and she feels it helped her become involved in her own community as an adult. Her father moved the family a couple of times during her childhood. When she was in high school they ended up in an extremely small town in Washington, which Joan describes as "going back 20 years in time." Coming from a relatively progressive high school to a place where most of the girls were married before 12th grade graduation was a huge shock for Joan, and she was relieved to go away to college.

Joan first discovered her love for studying plants while in undergraduate school. She took courses in plant ecology and Japanese environmental design, both of which really

stimulated her and got her thinking about working with plants for a living. Joan left school and traveled to South America with her sister for a few months, and when she came back decided to pursue gardening and landscaping. She basically dove in and taught herself everything she knows through reading books and "faking it" until she made it. In 1988, Joan married a man she had met years before in one of her college classes. They bought a house and settled into their respective careers. Joan was relatively happy in her relationship at first, but it began to bother her that her husband often accused her of being an "emotional" person and refused to talk about their relationship in the long term. Joan considers herself a pretty stable person and someone who is comfortable expressing emotion, and she didn't like feeling she was doing anything wrong when she talked about her feelings. She also realized that her husband came from a family that didn't necessarily view marriage as permanent, while there was almost no divorce in her own family. Their problems escalated and, while they tried many different varieties of counseling, ultimately their marriage ended in divorce in 1995.

After her first marriage ended, Joan stayed in her home and continued growing her business. She was lonely, but liked that she was independent and branched out through friends and new hobbies. That is how she ultimately met David, through a weekend dance workshop. Joan is a survivor who can make the most out of any circumstance offered her. She doesn't do things the easy way, but instead likes to take the time to treat each relationship and endeavor with deliberate care. She feels incredibly lucky to have found a partner who suits her as well as David does, and likes feeling appreciated for her open, emotional side. Joan is able to reflect on the varied experiences of her life and speak of each one as an opportunity and a gift. She has a lighthearted tenderness and a sense of humor that serve her well as a business woman, sister, wife, and friend and will certainly benefit her as a mother.

## **7. PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE FATHER**

David is a 43-year-old Caucasian man of French, Scottish, English, and German descent. He has dark brown hair, hazel eyes, stands 5' 11" tall, and has a slender build. David is in very good physical and emotional health as verified by his medical clinic on (1/10/05). Criminal history and Child Protective Services checks through Oregon's Department of Human Services (12/27/04) revealed no criminal history or incidents of abuse or neglect. David was asked whether he had a history of mental illness and/or any hospitalizations related to mental illness or drug or alcohol dependency. He said he did not. David was asked whether he had a criminal history (including DUI's) or a history of child abuse, sexual abuse, or domestic violence, whether or not it resulted in arrest or conviction. He said he did not. David states that he has not been the subject of an unfavorable homestudy.

David has a vibrant energy about him and communicates in a very thoughtful, engaging way. Before he was a teacher, David was as a professional musician and entertainer, and he has a profound gift for working with groups. While he is able to take things seriously when they need attention and care, David has a great love for laughter and silliness. He

enjoys helping people push their own limits and let go of their inhibitions. David comes from a family of extroverts and looks forward to the jokes and fun times when they all get together. He has great respect for other cultures and enjoys learning about other parts of the world through music, dance and language. He recognizes that fact that his "on-the-go" personality can take a lot out of him, and makes a concerted effort to care for his body and his emotional side by spending a little time each day being quiet and peaceful. David is an empathetic person and has a gift for seeing the positive in people. Rather than criticizing other people if they make a mistake or behave badly, he describes them as "not having the skills" to know what to do in that situation. His enthusiasm and varied talents have filled his life with many adventures, and he is always ready to take on more.

Like Joan, David is the youngest in his family. He played the role of peacekeeper and disliked the sibling rivalry he witnessed in his two older sisters and older brother. David was a shy child in a household of extroverts until he found drama and music in middle school. He realized he had a talent to entertain and adopted a "funny guy" persona. David reflects that in his family, everyone was always striving to be the funniest and as a result, no one was really heard and their communication did not go below the surface very often. Over time he has been able to take his individual relationships with family members to deeper levels and can talk about anything he needed to with some effort.

Looking back on his childhood, David realizes now that while his family looked happy from the outside, there were serious issues within. The family moved from Kansas to Southern California in the early sixties, and David describes his father as "going a little bit nuts." Where he had been morally conservative before, David's father was very taken with current ideas of sexual liberation that were prevalent in their new community. He decided that he and David's mother should have an open marriage and proceeded to have a series of affairs. This hurt David's mother very much, and while she tried to continue to raise her family as if everything were fine, things grew more and more tense. Eventually, one of his affairs got David's father into trouble, and the family moved north to Medford, Oregon. David was very angry with his father at this point. He felt betrayed by a man who had been his hero, and he couldn't understand why his father wouldn't take responsibility for the pain he had caused his family. David's parents eventually divorced and he went through a period of time where he did not have contact with his father. He now sees him yearly, and while some of the old issues still come up, David is very glad to have a relationship with his father again after many years of work and communication to make the relationship as healthy as it can be.



David threw himself into music as his way of coping with the emotional distress he felt as a result of his father's decision-making. He became a skilled French horn player and continued to practice and improve during the four years he spent at college in Colorado. David traveled to Mexico after graduating, and ultimately ended up in San Francisco where he began to build a professional music career. At the age of 25, David married a woman who was a fellow musician. She was very dedicated to her career, which he respected, but while David was gigging and playing in studio bands, she wanted to be playing with a symphony and making her own records. In addition to their different goals, David found his wife was not a very compassionate person. He struggled with feelings of worthiness, and over time he felt like he was retreating into himself more and could not find the confidence to come to his own conclusions about what was right and good rather than always submitting to her opinion. The two eventually divorced after four years of marriage.

David had poured many years into a successful French horn career, but after his divorce he realized that he had been ignoring his talent for working more intensely with people, especially children. He trained to teach English as a second language and went to Brazil where he taught and learned martial arts and samba drumming. This was a life-changing time for David. He remembers taking a hike one day and experiencing his life flashing before his eyes when he looked over a cliff. He felt overwhelmed with regret that he had not spent more time with friends and family and that he had never become a teacher. Upon his return to the United States, David moved to Seattle and took every opportunity he could to work with young people, especially teen groups. After several years of doing after school groups, he returned to college in Oregon to get teaching credentials. David liked the variety that elementary education would provide, especially since he was interested in teaching music and drama and dance. He became a performing arts teacher and threw himself into his new career.

It was during this time that David met Joan. He felt very inspired by her from the very beginning and loved how supportive and positive she was. David took some time off to work with Joan in her business. The two traveled to Hawaii to do a big project for one of his sisters and loved spending their days being creative together. David feels incredibly lucky to have found such an amazing partner and to be returning to teaching with the love, stability, and support of a happy home life to bolster his creative energy. He is always searching for ways to be his best and to help others do the same. David has a real spark to his personality and can bring excitement to any gathering of people. Although he loves groups, he is very committed to his individual relationships as well and puts a great deal of effort into his communication with others. David is very ready to be a father and can't wait to bring a child into their lively, adventurous household.

## **8. MARITAL STATUS**

David and Joan met in 1998 when they were both attending a dance camp. They waltzed and ate meals together during the weekend, and began dating when it was over. They were amazed at how easy it was to spend time together, and also respected each other's

honesty, integrity, and commitment to truly being themselves. Both David and Joan had been married before and knew how difficult it was to maintain a relationship with someone who did not share fundamental values. They quickly realized they had found this match in each other, and their partnership grew strong very quickly. Joan says she kept expecting that she would tire of David's boundless silliness or that he would get annoyed with her more cautious approach to life, but that never happened. After several months of dating, they went on a long road trip together and had a wonderful time. When they returned, David moved into the home Joan had been living in and working on for years.

David jokes that he and Joan have a "mutual admiration society" because they are so fond of each other and love to talk about each other's qualities. He loves that Joan has taught him the beauty of how to just "be" in the world without having to run around doing things all the time. David also says that Joan brings the sweetness into his life, and he appreciates her warmth and her ability to bring out the best in people just by being herself. He thinks she is immensely talented at landscaping and loves working with her to create beauty in their home. Joan respects David's skills when it comes to talking about emotional issues. He has an ability to diffuse difficult or tense social situations and sort out group dynamics in a way she has never seen anyone do. Joan has enormous admiration for David's creativity and feels she benefits greatly from having such a talented person in her life, always encouraging her to try new things.

Being married is a joy for David and Joan. They spend a tremendous amount of time together, even working together on Joan's business for two years, and are able to keep their sense of humor in almost any situation. They both worked hard to address their individual issues and grow as people in their first marriages, and now are able to bring their healthiest, most respectful selves to the relationship. They both feel lucky to have found a partner who finds the same joy in making their home a beautiful, functional environment. The ease of Joan and David's relationship helps them both cope with stress and they have so much fun socializing, dancing, talking, cooking, making music, or just being in the same room together.

Since they've been married, David and Joan both say that their individual pace of life has required some adjustment; David is high energy and quick, while Joan is more measured and contemplative about things. However, this is rarely a problem for them as they have been able to find balance within these differences. The same is true of the areas that have caused conflict in their marriage. When they got together, David had been living the life of a musician, not saving much money or planning for the future, just doing what he needed to do to play music. Joan was much more of a planner, and David had to work on adjusting his mindset to include another person, especially since they wanted to start a family. As they began working together on their home and garden, David discovered that Joan had some difficulty overcoming her mental blocks about certain projects and he worked with her to get better about just tackling the things that seem the hardest and getting them out of the way rather than brooding and stressing about them. By sharing

their own skills in an area where the other might be weaker, Joan and David have been able to overcome their differences and learn to approach their own shortcomings with confidence.

Joan and David appear extremely happy in their relationship. They communicate well, are very kind to each other, and share the same vision for their future as a couple and as parents. This is the second marriage for both of them. They have never contemplated separation or divorce.

## **9. FINANCIAL INFORMATION**

Joan and David have adequate financial resources to raise a child. They own their home. They maintain savings and checking accounts as well as retirement funds. The family is medically insured. Neither Joan nor David has ever declared bankruptcy.

## **10. PREPARATION FOR ADOPTION**

Joan and David met when they were in their thirties. Joan had always known she wanted to be a mother, but David had spent so much of his life focusing solely on his professional music career that he hadn't really thought about having children. After getting married, they were both enthusiastic about becoming parents and stopped using birth control. When they didn't become pregnant, Joan and David sought the advice of a fertility doctor. The doctor told them that there were physical reasons limiting their fertility, and that the likelihood of them becoming pregnant without significant medical intervention was very small. Joan and David began researching adoption at this time, and decided that open adoption was the right path for them. They felt that openness was such a part of their personalities and their relationships already that they wouldn't want any other kind of adoption. They both have tremendous respect for children as individuals, and feel that children deserve information about their backgrounds and their histories. They know people who have open adoptions and love the idea of including birthparents in their lives as a new kind of extended family.

About the time Joan and David attended a seminar on open adoption and decided to pursue it, Joan got pregnant. They were thrilled after thinking that this was impossible, but unfortunately the pregnancy ended in miscarriage after two months. Joan and David were devastated by this experience and spent a year healing from the loss. When they felt they were ready, they returned to the adoption process and experienced a renewed sense of enthusiasm and joy at the thought of becoming parents. They are emotionally and spiritually prepared to care for a child and feel confident they can rely on the strength of their remarkable relationship to see them through the joys and challenges of raising a child.

## **11. REFERENCES**

Five letters of reference were submitted for Joan and David. All of the references highly recommended them as prospective adoptive parents. Below are excerpts from some of these letters.

- "Both Joan and David are very generous, shining-souled people. I think it was Lewis Carroll who was once asked how he was able to write so well for children when he didn't have any. His answer was, "You see, I was a child. And I have never forgotten." Together they seem to welcome life freshly and directly. They share a true open-heartedness that children themselves possess, and so many of us have lost touch with. They can easily tap into the childhood essence, and children naturally and positively respond to their energy. I cannot imagine more ideal parents than Joan and David, or a more ideal environment than the home they have made together. Because they value family and embrace life realistically with its ups and downs, their home is an optimum home for a child to be raised in. They recognize and appreciate the preciousness of each soul, and take very seriously the role of guiding and parenting a dependent child from infancy on. Joan is one of the wisest, most insightful people I've ever known. She is very attuned to emotion. David emanates light. Together they have an uncommon wealth of love to share. You can look the world over, but will find no bigger hearts than theirs."

--Lisa, friend

- "I have always been impressed with the caliber and quality of this couple's lifestyle. They are exceedingly conscientious workers, both in their places of employment and in the community. They are stewards of the Earth and have concerns about issues that affect our world. They love each other deeply, and this love overflows into the circle of community that surrounds them. Joan and David are an ideal couple. They work as a team and share interests from home improvement to contra dancing. The two of them have excellent problem solving skills; if any trouble does arise, they work cooperatively to solve it. Children have always been welcome in Joan and David's home. My children visited often, as well as the nieces and nephews of the couple. Joan's patient and sensitive manner compliments David's fun loving an gregarious side, so the children always feel comfortable in their presence."

--Leonora, friend and neighbor

- "David and Joan get along famously and nurture each other in loving ways. I feel confident that they are ripe and ready to raise children. They interact in kind and considerate ways with each other as well as with others beyond their home life. They have several friends who share their joy for living and have a wholesome support group that will help them in their quest of child rearing. From having seen children joyfully interact on numerous occasions with David, I think that an adopted child would relish living in a home where David's happy spirit and Joan's tender nurturing would stimulate growth and happiness. It is a privilege to recommend David and Joan as prospective parents; they are both mature and sensitive human beings with much to share."

--Randall, friend

- "David and Joan are great with children. David is without a doubt the most gifted and generous person I have known in terms of transforming social gatherings into fun, creative, and interactive times with children and adults. Games, music and singing jams, meals, work parties, you name it. He knows a lot about how to draw people out, get them engaged, and help them succeed. Joan is right with David in many of these creative ventures, but is herself something of a quiet, calm-center type-great at anticipating all aspects of a situation and preparing. She is very respectful of children. She views them as persons of ability and resourcefulness who have much to contribute, with proper care, encouragement and structure. She gives them choices to make and expects them to be responsible members of the family and the community."

--Mark, friend

### **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Joan and David are loving, vibrant couple who lead a very creative, conscientious lifestyle. They were married in August of 2000 and have a relationship based on open communication and tremendous mutual respect. Joan owns her own one-woman landscaping business, and David is an elementary school performing arts teacher. They have a lovely, very personalized home and garden in a small Northwest city. They have no children, but are greatly looking forward for adopting for the first time. Open Adoption and Family Services highly recommends Joan and David as prospective adoptive parents.

---

## **David's Autobiography...**



My name is David. I am 43 and I work as an elementary music teacher and choir director. This work brings me great fulfillment and a sense of purpose. I am married to a wise and wonderful woman named Joan, who happens to be the best thing that ever happened to

me. Every day when I count my blessings she is at the top of the list. Actually she's more like the first five blessings on my list.

My life with Joan is a journey of the heart, a journey together down a sometimes rugged path to authenticity. She cares deeply about who we really are. I met Joan in 1997 and we were married in the summer of 2000. We live in a little cedar shingle house, a labor of love for many years. It's cozy and comfortable and surrounded by beautiful trees and a loose rambling garden that delights us with the seasonal interest of leaf and bloom that comes from Joan's gifts as a garden designer and my ability to take orders.

Joan and I just plain like being around each other. We derive great pleasure from being in the same room. We like reading, singing, dancing, playing games, fixing meals, inventing recipes for fictitious foreign foods, working in the vegetable garden. Out my window I see six happy chickens basking in the sun. Before meeting Joan I had never given a single thought to raising chickens. She sort of talked me into it and now that we have them I wouldn't have it otherwise. This is the way it has always been with us. We broaden each other's horizons.

Long before Joan, my first horizon on this Earth was the grassy golden hill behind our house in Vallejo, California where I was born in the summer of 1961. Family folklore has it that I arrived on Earth ready to build things. Before too long my father figured this out and set me up with an old hammer, a bucket of used nails, and an endless supply of scrap lumber. With these things I constructed a rambling raft-like monstrosity that crept half way up our back hill. I called it "David's ark" because I had a kid's Bible with a picture in it of Noah's ark after the flood with a beautiful rainbow behind it. This same Bible had a sad picture of Adam and Eve being driven from the Garden of Eden. I didn't like that picture. One day I ripped it out and tore it to bits! My mom was upset but understanding. She didn't care for that picture either.

For the next few years I built one fort-like thing after another. My dad was letting me use the hand saw so I no longer had to use all boards "as is" and I could make some pretty neat stuff. I built one fort with a trap door and a secret tunnel, inspired by something I'd seen on "Hogan's Heroes", my favorite television show.

During this same period I wrote several little storybooks with pictures. One was called "The Never Seen Duck." It was about a little duck that inadvertently caused all sorts of small disasters to happen. My dad thought it was really good and wanted to get it published as a children's book just as I had written it with no corrections. That didn't quite pan out but I still appreciate his encouragement.

My family is a clan of talkative and good-natured extroverts. I appear outgoing and animated to my friends but I consider myself the quiet one of my family. I prefer conversations that take people to a new place rather than those that loudly tromp over familiar territory.

My parents, Grover and Eileen, grew up together in the town of Wells, Kansas (population 127). My father's side of the family is mostly of French and Scottish ancestry and my mother's side is mostly of German and English ancestry. Grover and Eileen met in a one room school house in first grade; my dad the shy farm boy and my mother the out-going town girl whose father owned the local grocery store. On the first day of school my father hesitated when asked to tell the class his name so little Eileen blurted out: "I think his name is Romeo!" It took a dozen years or so but he did eventually become her Romeo after they went off to college.

As a child my family made regular trips to Kansas to visit grandparents and relatives. We'd take a train in the winter and a big station-wagon or our converted bread-van/camper in the summer. I have fond memories of our visits to the tiny town where my parents grew up. Deep snow drifts and sledding in the winter. Hot sun, soda-pop and bicycles in the summer. And always plenty of cousins to play with.

My mother Eileen is the eldest of three children. A few years after she was born my uncle Dave came along, and then about 20 years later my uncle Brad was born. I never knew my grandpa Ward very well as he died when I was very young. Grandma Avis remarried many years later and died in 1997 having survived two husbands, cancer and all manner of wintertime ice-related accidents.

My mother has been the glue that holds us all together. As keeper of the morals, she practices what she preaches (and she does preach). As keeper of the finances, she is frugal yet generous. She is positive, joyful, full of mirth and fun to be around. She taught high school English for many years and among other things was able to indulge her lifelong enthusiasm for the works of Shakespeare and other classic literature. We had the good fortune of living in Medford near the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland. I cherish my high school years of going to plays in Ashland.

My father is the ninth child of nine. He grew up milking cows, planting and harvesting wheat, catching catfish in the creek, walking long distances to school in rain, snow, sleet and mud. Life was hard for little Grover, but he rose to the occasion and developed a work ethic that I inherited and from which am still recovering. His family made-do with very little, but somehow he managed to go to college as did a few of his eight siblings.

My father, like myself, becomes easily obsessed with an idea. His big ideas are usually in the realms of science, health, and saving the world. When I was young, he taught high school science. For the last 30 years he has operated his own landscaping business, and at one time or another everyone in our family has worked for him. He and my mother divorced in 1988. He is in his third marriage and is no longer at the center of our family life, but I do see him a few times a year.

My family has always been more extended than nuclear and growing up it seemed the door was always open to whoever needed it: neighbors, camp counselors, college kids,

exchange students, a cousin, a foster child, someone escaping their parents. It is still this way today at my mother's house. The door is always open.

In 1977 my family more or less merged with another family. It was sort of a mutual adoption. The Gonzalez family was just getting itself started as I (the youngest in our family) was finishing high school. So when the three Gonzalez girls came along a year or two apart they became like grandchildren to my mom and young cousins to me. The extended family is still going strong after 25 years, built on a foundation of unconditional love.

I am the youngest of four children. My sister Alice (six years older) is a family practice physician in Hawaii. She has twin sons (13). One excels in sports and music, the other in reading and writing. They were born with completely different personalities and have stayed that way. In spite of this or because of it, they have always been inseparable buddies.

Joan and I spent two months in Hawaii in 2002 and 2003 working for Alice. We built her a pool with walkway, deck and pavilion; designed and installed landscaping. It was lots of hard work in the pouring rain and the beating sun, but we loved it.

Carol (four years older) lives in the San Francisco Bay area with her husband Mark, their son Zephyr (15) and daughter Kirra (6). Carol is a professional flautist and music teacher. Everyone in her family is super musical.

My brother Ben is two years older than me. As kids we liked anything with wheels: bicycles, model cars, slot cars. We liked to mess around with stuff and our dad provided us space, tools, encouragement and demonstrations. Ben lives in Medford with his wife, Angie, and their toddler, Michael. Ben still works on his own cars a bit. He is a self-employed builder and contractor.

When I was ten I started playing trumpet and guitar. I took up the trumpet because my elementary school didn't start kids on French horn, my first choice. I took up guitar because my sister Alice's boyfriend played it and it seemed like guitar was part of everything I listened to whether it was the Beatles, Joni Mitchell or Santana.

I didn't practice my instruments very much until I was twelve and my family moved to Oregon. I switched from trumpet to French horn. At that moment some dormant musical ability was awakened. I fell in love with the sound of the thing and I played it every day.

In 8<sup>th</sup> grade some other dormant talents began to surface in choir and theater. At the same time, my fading interest in competitive sports was dealt its final blow by one humiliating season on the middle school wrestling team. My track coach said it was supposed to get me in shape for the track season. The plan backfired and I abandoned school sports entirely in favor of band, orchestra, choir, theater, bicycling and frisbee. My

musical aspirations were fueled by my sister Carol, who at the age of 17, was busy winning honors and attention as a flautist. I wanted to be like her so I took horn lessons, practiced hard and played with every school and community group I could cram into my schedule. In 10<sup>th</sup> grade I declared myself a music major and set out to make a career of it.

Music was my ticket to adventure for 20 years or so. My horn playing took me all over the U.S., Europe, and Mexico and was my living for 10 years in the San Francisco Bay area. After two years in the Bay Area I met and fell in love with a virtuoso jazz violinist. We were married in 1987. We struggled along together financially and emotionally. But many times, especially while touring, I felt that playing music was the best job in the world.



In 1991 that marriage fell apart and I began to question the horn and everything else. I wanted a break from the San Francisco area, I wanted a break from the professional symphony world and I felt compelled to try my hand at teaching. I took a crash course in how to teach English as a Second Language and went to Bahia, Brazil. I landed a good job teaching English but found I was vastly more interested in learning Brazilian culture than in teaching them mine. I immersed myself in Brazilian Portuguese, music, samba drumming and Capoeira. Capoeira is a blend of martial art, gymnastics, dance, and created in Brazil 400 years ago by African slaves. It is now practiced around the world by anyone who can find the patience, discipline and teacher to make it happen. The study and teaching of Capoeira and samba drumming became recurring themes in my life for the next 10 years.

I lived in Brazil for six months and might have stayed much longer if it weren't for a revelation I had one day while peering over the edge of an enormous cliff in a place called Chapada Diamantina. My life flashed before my eyes as a list of regrets. Why didn't I spend more time with my family? Why didn't I live in the Northwest? Why didn't I become a high school drama teacher?



Not being one to question revelations, I packed my bags and moved to Seattle to study improv theater and work with youth in whatever capacity I could as a freelance teacher. A few years of this and a few more moves (to Portland, then Medford) brought me to Eugene to get my teaching credential at UO and to find a regular position. Meanwhile the focus of my teaching had shifted from high school theater to elementary general music. I currently teach K-5 general music at a fabulous little neighborhood public school of 200 students in Eugene.

Over the course of 10 years I went from being a French horn specialist to being a performing arts and teaching generalist. I used to strive to be perfect at one thing. Now I strive to be adequate at many: singing, dancing, acting, composing, playing a variety of instruments: guitar, ukulele, piano, xylophone, trumpet, accordian, and all manner of percussion. I try to be good enough to stay one step ahead of the kids. Working with children is fulfilling and exhausting. It's the closest thing I've found to a calling so I try not to question it when I wake up at three AM with new songs in my head waiting to be written down. Or when I'm up to my ears in the details of producing an all-school musical play for 200 students.

Like most of my friends, my life has been guided to some degree by the pursuit of answers to life's persistent questions: Why are we here? What does it all mean? When I was little, the answers to these questions came mostly from the Bible. Then, when I was about 6, my parents began questioning certain aspects of their mostly Methodist upbringing, and I began questioning right along with them. They faded out of mainstream Christianity and began to look like atheist Unitarians. My mother maintained her own notion of god but my father felt the need to abandon Christianity and its vocabulary. As a result I was raised atheist Unitarian.

In my early twenties and out of the nest, I became conscious of a spiritual yearning in my soul. I now have my own sense of god. Over the years my spiritual path has led me again and again to the practice of yoga and meditation and to a kind of spiritual Unitarianism that I find I share with many others. I believe that all the sweetness, love and compassion we'll ever need is right here within our .

My parenting philosophy hinges on three things: firm boundaries, unconditional love, and play. As a 43 year old I have had a long time to develop my parenting philosophy with the children of friends and family and the children at my school. I believe in being a strong, clear, firm, loving parent who does not need to apologize for having the final word. I believe in setting very clear boundaries for children within which they have great freedom to create and explore. The children I work with thrive in this environment.

Children need unconditional love. They need to know that even when I don't love their behavior I still love them. I aim to cultivate respect through on-going acts of loving kindness towards self and others. The more I develop my consciousness the more I can genuinely pass it on to my child.

Children at all stages of their development need safe places to play. I try to make learning fun and to use a game or a song in the learning of everyday things. When people see how much fun I have playing with their kids they tell me that I should have some of my own. I hadn't given much serious thought to the idea of having kids until Joan had brought it up about 13 million times. Now I'm fully warmed up to the idea, have a strong desire to parent and a well-developed parenting philosophy that I'm ready to put to the test.

---

## Joan's Autobiography



My name is Joan. I'm grateful for the many blessings in my life. I live with my adoring and funny husband, David, in a sweet little house surrounded by garden and big trees, squirrels and chickadees, and geese flying low overhead to the nearby river.

I work as a landscape designer and gardener in my own business. I get a great deal of satisfaction from learning the beautiful essence of a place and finding ways to let it flourish. I thrive on watching things grow. I relish the sensation of making things: drawings, sweaters, meals, flower arrangements, and gardens. I enjoy moving my body: dancing, hiking and traveling. I really like being out in nature, walking in the woods, drippy wet or pine scented, the smell of tide flats, inlets and bays, big peaks, alpine meadows. I love laughing and not remembering what was funny in the first place.

I was born in 1958 in a small northwest logging town, the third daughter of Jack and Lucille. According to my mom, I just popped right out. My mother was a nurse who also worked as a seamstress in a drapery shop when my sisters and I were young. My father had a meat business with his brother. He had worked since age fourteen in the meat business and prided himself on his hard work and his ability to provide and to feed people. He lost his father when he was seven years old and he became the guy who was perpetually doing whatever needed to be done. He is still always building things and doing house projects.

My mother had aspirations for us--piano lessons, presentable appearances, good grades. She was also frugal and valued hard work and expected us to do our share of the work with her: cooking, cleaning, hauling firewood. We made pickles and canned cherries. She

sewed dresses and baked bread, just like my grandmother did. Jack and Lucille had lots of friends and many relatives and liked to have get-togethers and help with community events: Children's Orthopedic Hospital fundraisers, apple cider making, church bazaars. Participation was a big deal in our house. We were asked to notice what needed to be done before being told.

Since we lived near the woods and mountains and waters of Puget Sound, most weekends we went hiking, swam in Hood Canal, or took a picnic to the end of a logging road. My sisters and I picked berries, splashed in the creeks and made fairy houses around the trunks of big trees. I loved those outings. Except for the inevitable part in which my father had to turn the large station wagon around on the narrow logging road which terrified my mother. I was always torn between getting out of the car with mom or staying in the car with dad, displaying confidence in his ability to not go over the cliff. However, I survived to tell the tale and I'm grateful for the confident driving skills I've inherited.

Jack and Lucille met in the third grade. Lucille's family had moved to Washington state from South Dakota. Her mother, excellent with her hands in baking and crochet, worked in nursing homes and a cannery to put Lucille into a private boarding high school. Her father, a quiet gardener, carefully built their house. I have many happy memories of staying with them.

Lucille worked as a public health nurse for the Seattle Health Department. Her work doing home visits brought her in close contact with many people, where she is happiest. Her favorite part of the job was leading mother-baby groups for first time mothers. She still keeps in contact with many of those moms.

Jack is the third in a family of four, not counting stepbrothers and sisters. His mother was a dignified, competent woman with an amazing laugh, who saw her children and stepchildren through many a trying time without appearing to suffer.

I'm the youngest of three sisters. Debbie is the oldest. She and I loved to imagine our adult lives, with many of its details borrowed from the pages of the Sears catalog. She is kind and optimistic, never forgets a birthday and keeps in touch. Before she married, she worked as a dental educator. She now lives in Woodinville with her husband Mike and two girls, Danica (16), and Marissa (14). Danica thrives on school and gymnastics. Marissa has a great imagination, a way with words and a unique sense of humor.

My sister, Nancy, embraces the outdoors, embarks on bold adventures and graces all she does with her special brand of beauty. She freely shares her perspectives and watches out for me. Nancy lives on a farm with her husband Joey and their daughter Ruby. They operate a nursery and over the years have created an idyllic life complete with donkeys and fishponds. They always have something cooking, literally, and many people around to share it with. Ruby, 16, rides horses, plays piano, adores her cat and just joined the

debate team. She often visits for the weekend, playing music with David, doing projects with me or just curled up on the couch reading.

When I was two, I almost had a younger sister but my mother lost the baby at birth. It was very sad, especially since my mother then couldn't have any more children. I grew up with the story of our invisible little sister, a loss and a longing that was never quite resolved.

However, years later, we did find another sister. When I was fourteen, and learning Spanish in junior high school, I urged my family to take in an exchange student for the summer. A few months later, Mely arrived from Guadalajara, youngest girl of a large family. At fifteen years of age, she had spent little time away from home. We shared my room, grew in understanding each other and she returned the next summer. My sister Nancy lived with her family for a year. We spent many vacations driving to Mexico, always visiting her family. I love having her as another sister.

I kept finding sisters. My close women friends are a big part of my life. I met Tracie in fourth grade and became buddies in the college years, hiking and hacking our ways through our early twenties. One of my favorite roles in life is being auntie to her magical daughter, Genevieve. Lisa, a sweet and wise poet, was born twelve days after I was on the other side of the country. Twenty-seven years later, she moved in next door. We have walked and talked and pondered life's big questions ever since. Melissa worked for me and I taught her everything I knew about plants and gardening. She taught me much about design and new ways to see things. Now she has her own business in Portland and we regularly spark ideas off of each other and help each other on projects.

Making friends is easy for me, but I have occasionally felt myself to be the odd one out, like when I wore a clunky and very visible back brace for scoliosis in ninth and tenth grades, or when I was singled out as "smarter" than others in my classes. I have felt separated by being too good at things and intimidating to others, and by being really bad at things like throwing a ball and singing.



Since high school had its usual pestilence of challenges, I wanted college to be as different as possible. I studied environmental design, ecology and Native American spirituality at the Evergreen State College. I took some time off to work and travel and to figure out what I really wanted to do. I've since taken many courses and workshops in landscape and design. I'm largely self taught in my work. Since my own education was at times patched together with a few noticeable gaps, I'm aware of how it could have been otherwise with some good counseling and encouragement. I am committed to keeping the conversation open in our family about our child's education, always seeking balance between free exploration and employment goals. I believe the essence of learning combines the willingness to explore new things and the discipline to choose something to practice and refine.

This spirit of exploration has led me to some interesting places. I spent a few months in Chile in my early twenties, taking a long river trip and living in various villages and cities. For the past ten years my parents have spent the winters in Guatemala. I have visited several times, marveling in the mix of beauty and poverty, and finding riches where you'd least expect them. Three years ago I went to Ireland and France, the lands of my father's ancestors. I found a heart connection in each place and I long to explore them further. Much of the time I am content with shorter trips to the coast or mountains, but I appreciate how longer trips wake me up and inspire me.

Before carving out my niche in the world of gardening I did a wide variety of things to make ends meet. I made crumpets, cleaned fish, taught Peace Corps volunteers. My first job, at age five, was picking up pins from the drapery sewing room floor. I earned a nickel for every hundred pins, and I had to count them too. From age ten on, I worked in my father's industrial plumbing fixture factory, doing assembly work, painting, running errands and setting a good example. In high school, I served meals to the elderly in a retirement center.

In my early 20's I began what has become my career as a landscape designer and gardener. I started out being fascinated with plants and I'm always curious to see what I can do with any given space. I love physical work as well as planning and plotting. At times landscaping has expanded into larger community service. I volunteered for several years on a neighborhood park project, planting and promoting the vision of a wild open park. I'm happy when I pass through the park aware that I helped create and preserve its beauty.

I come from a family of committed Catholics. At age fourteen I started exploring my own beliefs. At sixteen I began practicing Transcendental Meditation, spent a month at the TM center in Iowa and felt like I was on the path to enlightenment. Since that time, my spiritual adventure has led me through the realms of yoga, spirit guides, and healing rituals. Currently, my practice is to write and let inner wisdom speak in words, to dance and find the oneness in music and movement, and to open up with close friends. I have

found that if I sit still (or walk) and pay attention, all the loving guidance I need is close at hand.

In the spring of 1998, David and I met at a dance camp. We stumbled over each other at a waltz workshop, ate some meals together and went on a long walk before the camp was over. I loved talking with him and our easy heart connection. He is the most playful human I know. He is a conscious and spiritual person. We spent time together over the next few months and by August decided to go on a road trip together. We just packed the car and followed our noses. Guided by some friends' suggestions we went to the grand open spaces of eastern Oregon: Hart Mountain, Steens Mountain, and to the eerie canyons of Succor Creek. By the end of the trip it was hard to imagine spending my days without him. When the trip was over he moved into my little house. Together we expanded it, and it is now definitely "ours".



For our wedding we invited friends and family to the woods for a weeklong campout. The entire week was part of the ritual but the ceremony itself was on the fourth day. We gathered people around us who were creative participants and together we cooked, decorated the space and each other, swam, played ball, danced, sang, feasted. The families became well acquainted. My mother made the cake and the kids wrote our names on it with wild huckleberries. I decorated the tables while David set up speakers and instruments in the meadow and chapel. My dad constructed an outdoor shower, got up early to make coffee and breakfast. David's mom made sure the chores were done.



The day of the wedding was cool and overcast for August. We wrote our vows in the morning and exchanged them that afternoon as the sun began to stream through the firs and the vine maple, bestowing blessings of bright beams into all corners of our hearts. We sang and danced into the night.

David and I enjoy a spiritual compatibility. We witness with friends and family the benefits of raising children in a spiritual community. We embrace parenthood as an opportunity to deepen our spiritual involvement with our community.

I have wanted children for most of my adult life. I always thought I would be a mother. My first marriage was at age thirty. When it came time to plan a family, it was not something my first husband could handle. After a great deal of soul-searching, counseling, and hard won acceptance, we mutually agreed to divorce. In my late thirties, I found it painful to watch my sisters and friends with children, feeling like I was outside the family life I had envisioned for myself. I longed for a true partner and that wish did come true. After David and I felt solid in our hearts, we stopped birth control and nothing happened. We visited a fertility specialist who suggested, given our ages and test results, adoption as the only sure route to parenthood. After a little mental adjustment, we both found the idea immensely appealing. And then I got pregnant. For two sweet months the world was brand new. On a snowy New Years Day, I had a miscarriage. I have spent the last year healing and rebuilding. Now I truly feel ready for this adventure.

Before meeting David, I went through a period of taking risks and trying new things and as I look back I see how my life was preparing me for being with him. I think about how my experiences today are preparing me for the next chapter. I long to know the child we are to raise and the people who will bring him or her into this world.

My imagination was no match for the wonderful reality of being with David. In this same way, my imagination can be no match for the reality of being with this child. I long to get to know our child - his interests and dreams, her words and looks, what he likes, what she knows, what is easy and what is work. It doesn't have to be a certain way. I am curious and willing to let this story unfold.