

Five Februaries and a fantastic calendar of love: An open adoption story.



by Rut Martinez-Alicea

Dylan came to our lives on the sweetest February 12th of all times. He was one week old when we took him home; he was so small, so perfect, so unreal! Here's one of the reasons: For Steve and I, February 12th seems to have fantastic powers.

We shared our 1st kiss on February 12th 2005, we got engaged February 12th of the following year, and we had our civil marriage ceremony on, February 12th 2007! I know you're counting and these are only three Februaries. For the 4th and 5th Februaries and the tale of the fantastic calendar I need to tell you more about our story.

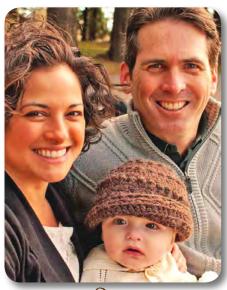
Once we were done with the homestudy, and the biographies, and the letter to birthparents, and the collage... and the video... and got ourselves in the pool of parents, we got ourselves as ready as we could to get through the wait to be chosen from the pool of parents. We got into the pool in late December of 2012 and 26 days later, on Wednesday, January 23, 2013, we got the call and Dylan

was due to be born in another 26 days! We met with the birthparents two days later and we fell in love with them. They were 16 and 17 years old, so candid, so funny – wonderful masters of what it means to be willingly vulnerable. We exchanged phone numbers and the long list of texts started almost right away.

We sure were not expecting things would move this fast and while this was a challenging timeline, it was a great and blessed challenge to have. But Dylan had different plans and he decided to arrive even sooner ... instead of 26 days we got 13. He was born on Tuesday, February 5, 2013. We had only met twice with the birthparents so we didn't have the expectation of being at the birth. Still, we hoped to meet Dylan soon after the birth. Communication with the birthmother, Kiri, suddenly stopped and signs of a disruption started to surface. Kiri struggled throughout her pregnancy with the choices of adoption and parenting. More than anything

she wanted what was best for Dylan but was unsure of what that was. She also wanted to make sure Dylan would never have doubts about her love for him.

We got to meet Dylan the day after his birth but Kiri wasn't able to be with us while we were at the hospital. She was in the midst of an experience I'll never be able to grasp, and while we were afraid for our own emotional vulnerabilities, we were clear that this was her right. She postponed the entrustment ceremony from Wednesday to Thursday and then to Saturday. When the time



Dylan Rut and Steve.

came to make a final decision she chose to not move forward with the adoption and to parent Dylan. Our hearts were broken in ways that are hard to express with words. Thanks to the advice of other parents and our OA&FS Counselor, we had devised a plan in case of disruption. We knew we needed to get out of town at least for a



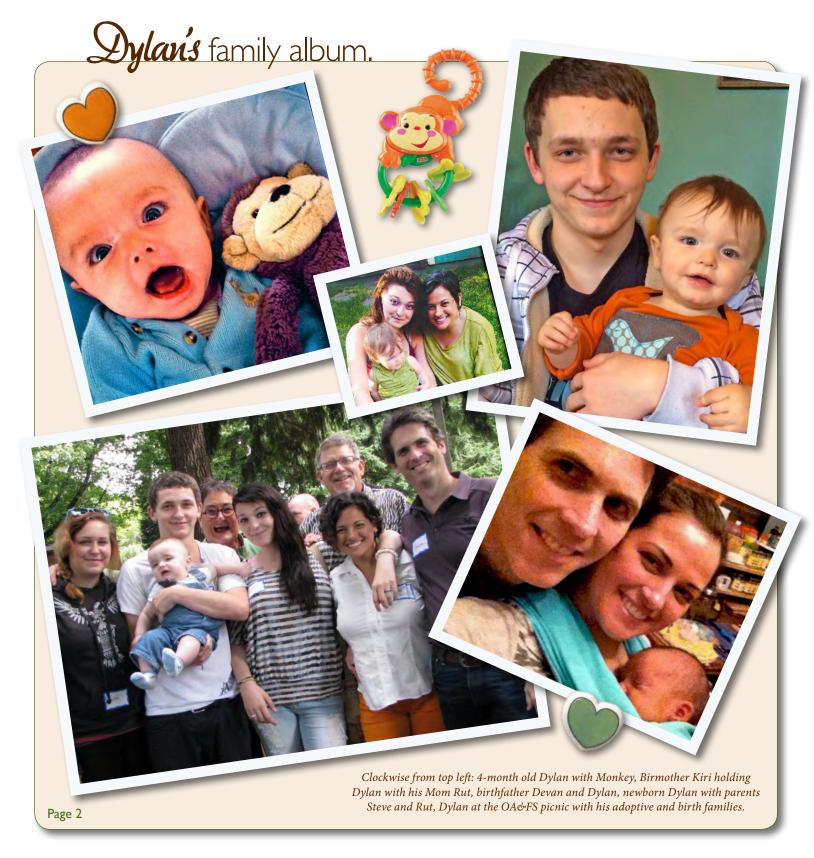
Rut, Kiri and Dylan.

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couple of days to hold one another and reevaluate our next steps. We came back to town, it was the 11th and almost at midnight, Kiri sent me a text that made me a mother and made Kiri, Mama Kiri! So this was how we ended up having our entrustment ceremony on February 12th, 2013. It just had to be the 12th. And finally, this last February 12th, Dylan made sure to honor the tradition by calling me mama for the first time! Now, every day

is part of a fantastic calendar filled with the most unimaginable, selfless, and perfect love for Dylan. And this is the brief story of five Februaries and fantastic calendar of love.

Rut-Martinez Alicea is an OA&FS Adoptive parents and Coordinator at the <u>Multicultural Center, Portland Community College</u>.



The year in review: OA&FS at the forefront of change.



Shari Levine

Some of my favorite moments this past year have come from watching our open adoption community members make connections with each other and with the agency.

It's deeply gratifying when open adoptees return to the agency wanting to volunteer and give back to the agency that marked the beginning of their journey; or when a birthmom speaks for the first time at our seminar and provides a heartfelt account of her adoption experience, which

has exceeded her expectations; or when a prospective adoptive parent begins our program because one of her students planned an adoption through our agency and spoke so highly of the respectful services she received. These special moments fill me with pride and inspire me to reflect on the reasons we do this work.

- At OA&FS we offer cutting edge <u>all-options pregnancy</u> <u>counseling</u> and <u>open adoption programs</u> that truly reflect the evolving needs of its participants. Expectant parents, adoptive parents, birthparents and adoptees want choices, access to information and healthy relationships.
- The foundation of our adoption program is all-options pregnancy counseling. This completely transparent, non-coercive, expectant parent-led process gives OA&FS the integrity credentials to attract clients from all over the nation: clients that share these same values.
- In our unique open adoption model, birth and adoptive parents create genuine friendships that are much like extended family relationships. Our process is increasingly in demand, as these aspects especially appeal to the Millennial generation of expectant parents and the progressive adoptive parents who are drawn to our agency.

<u>Current research</u> now confirms what we've known at this
agency since 1985. Openness in adoption has enormous
benefits for the child, the adoptive family, and the birth family.

We're strongly committed to supporting open adoption by channeling all our marketing efforts into awareness, education and advocacy. **The following programs were allocated significant resources in 2013-14.** And as adoption continues to change dramatically, OA&FS will be at the forefront of that change by providing a model that will guide the future of adoption.

Than sevine

Shari Levine Executive Director

Reaching Expectant Parents

Nationwide Presence. Our efforts to provide services to expectant parents across the U.S. have become increasingly effective in the second year of this initiative. By creating a national presence, we are not only bringing our pro-choice options counseling and progressive open adoption services to expectant parents nationwide, we are also broadening the adoption opportunities for our families entering and waiting in the pool. In this fiscal year, 42% of expectant parent intakes were from states other than Oregon or Washington.

Out of State Placements. This fiscal year, 19% of our adoption placements were with birthparents who live outside of Oregon and Washington. This is an increase of 167% from the previous year. The adoptions have gone smoothly and the expectant parents are so pleased to have access to a program that truly meets their needs.

Expectant Parent Packet. The information mailed to expectant parents was retooled to have even greater appeal for our core audience of women ages 16-30, with eye-catching graphics and copy that this demographic can easily relate to. Every expectant parent who contacts the agency now receives this packet.

Online Inquiry. An <u>interactive form</u> was integrated into the expectant and birth parent sections of the website. Those wanting to connect with the agency online can do so, and a counselor will then call them. This inquiry type is a strong contributor, representing 18% of intakes, (second only to phone calls).

Brochure Updates. Our flagship brochures anchor the <u>materials</u> we create for service providers to pass along to their clients and patients. These hard-working pieces were redesigned to reflect the look, feel and updated language that we use online. These include

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Birthmother, Spanish Language, Open Adoption for At-Risk Parents and Birthfather brochures. They all include <u>QR codes</u> that can be scanned with a smart phone to take readers to the associated landing page of our website.

OA&FS Website

New Pages. We added a Spanish language page to the "Pregnant?" section that works in conjunction with the new



<u>Spanish brochure</u>. Passcode protected pages were built into the Adoptive Parents section to make it easier for those going through our process to access forms and resources not distributed to the general public. This replaces the need to send individual emails with attached forms.

"Favorites" Tool. Prospective birthparents can now easily select and make lists of families they'd like to know more about. They simply go to a family's page, click on the "add to favorites" link, and when they're ready, they can <u>"view favorites"</u> which lists all of the families they've given this designation.

Online Inquiry. Prospective adoptive parents can now request information using a web form on the site. This includes a checkbox to ask for a call back from our Client Services Manager. After submitting this form, they're emailed the free packet.

New Hosting Service. We changed from GoDaddy to <u>WestHost</u> for web hosting services. WestHost is more suitable for our size of site and they have very responsive tech support. Importantly, with this new vendor our page load times are faster.

Online Marketing

Google Adwords. Our campaigns of paid text ads that appear next to the search results in Google have continued to evolve. We tested many variations of these ads using different headlines, body copy and landing pages to gauge effectiveness. Those that worked best continue to be used, and create consistent visitor traffic to our website. Plus, all text ads now have "mobile click to call" – one tap calling from a smart phone.

Google Organic Search. During a trial with Call Rail – a phone call tracking provider — we learned that most OA&FS phone calls are initiated via Google organic search, (which is free). So in the spring, we made calculated changes to the advertising mix to adjust the amount spent on paid ads, knowing that our organic presence was getting strong results. We continue to maintain focus on search engine optimization since that's what keeps us on the first page of these search results, which in turn provide the most engaged visitors to our website. A great majority of expectant parents – 60% – now

find OA&FS via Google. This search engine is the most popular way for those exploring pregnancy options to connect with our agency.

Social Media

<u>Facebook</u>. We finished the year at just over 11,000 likers – a 38% increase since June 2013. Content posts continue weekly, featuring a mix of adoption, parenting, reproductive justice and gay rights topics plus waiting families' promotion.

Promoted Posts. Since these did not bring in visitors that then contacted the agency, we discontinued the paid advertising in Facebook called "promoted posts".

Broadcast Media

BBC Documentary. OA&FS and select clients were featured in a television documentary on open adoption produced by BBC Three's "Stacey Dooley in the USA". Open adoption as we know



it doesn't exist in the UK, so they used this for a public education platform. In addition to following an OA&FS expectant couple choosing, meeting, forming a relationship with the prospective adoptive family, the BBC also interviewed an OA&FS adoptee and his extended open adoption family. This program aired in Great Britain in spring of 2014.

Reaching Prospective Adoptive Parents

Free Information Booklet. The packet mailed to prospective adoptive parents upon request was redesigned with a new focus on the beginning stages of the adoption journey. This is distributed as an interactive .pdf attached to personalized emails from Client Services Manager Lori Maas.

Events

Lori Holden Workshops. In October OA&FS hosted popular author and blogger Lori Holden to conduct a series of workshops in Seattle, Portland and Eugene. In each city, the learning began with a lunch in which Lori answered questions submitted by OA&FS staffers.

For the evening community gatherings, the heart of Lori's message was her <u>openness in</u> <u>adoption grid</u>. This illustrates that



Lori Holden

while we often have little influence over the level of contact in our adoptions, we are in charge of the spirit of openness we bring to the adoption. By embodying openness, we are encouraging our children to claim, and be claimed by both their entire birth and adoptive clans.

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"Quad A" Conference. The American Association of Adoption
Attorneys held their annual conference at New Orleans in May.
This was combined with the American Association of Assisted
Reproductive Attorneys and had 268 attendees. Jan Jamieson,
Eugene Counselor/Regional Supervisor and Sally Shuey, Marketing

& Development
Director
represented the
agency at a vendor
table. They found



it to be a wonderful opportunity to meet adoption attorneys from throughout the U.S. in order to build our network of adoption professionals for our national expansion. They were surprised to learn how unique our open adoption model is regarded by the attorneys and agencies that attended. After the conference a follow-up email was sent to attendees that highlighted our families and explained fully open adoptions in detail. In this we debuted a new

type of communication for the agency – <u>an infographic</u> that visually explains <u>open adoption using bold</u> <u>graphics</u>.

"Closure" Screening.

OA&FS' Seattle office hosted a screening of the film "Closure" in the spring. This popular documentary chronicles the journey of Angela Tucker, a transracial adoptee who seeks and finds her birth family. The film was followed by a live Q&A session with Angela.



Angela Tucker

This was also shown at a waiting family gathering in Portland.

Legislation

Open Adoption Records Law. Senate Bill 623 – Oregon's first in the nation bill providing adoptees access to their court adoption file – went into effect on January 1, 2014. This statute allows adoptees and their birthparents access to their previously sealed court record when the adoptee is 18. The adoptees will gain direct access and the birthparents will need to obtain a court order, but the presumption will be in their favor. The adoptive parents will have access without a court order throughout the adoptee's life.

Executive Director Shari Levine, OA&FS board member and adoptive mom, Michele Greco and OA&FS birthmother Sunny Moore assisted in writing this statute through their participation in the <u>Oregon Law Commission</u> (OLC) committee charged with reforming adoption records legislation.

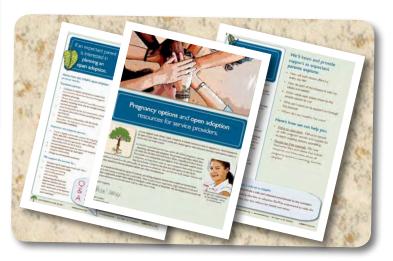
Counseling Program

Origins Therapy. As a result of the various paths to parenthood, there is an emerging need for a new type of emotional support for families. OA&FS is now filling this unmet need by offering counseling for individuals, couples and families whose lives have been touched by adoption, surrogacy and reproductive technology.

Communications Support. A new Origins Therapy section was built within the OA&FS website. To bring visitors to this site, and awareness to these services, we'll place listings for Counselors Katie Stallman and Kate Sturm in Psychology Today and Good Therapy online directories. Most people seeking therapy go to these sites to connect with a counseling professional. They're already well-optimized and show up in the first page of Google organic results. A print brochure was also produced for distribution to service providers who may refer clients to OA&FS.

Outreach Efforts

Outreach Packet. The various elements of the outreach packet were condensed and consolidated into a booklet. The goal of retooling was to increase effectiveness and decrease time needed to collate packets. Information is divided by categories so that each have their own section within the piece.



Outreach Mailing. The <u>new outreach booklet</u> was mailed, along with a sample of the updated birthmother brochure, to 993 outreach contacts in May.

Independent Homestudies Flier. A new flier and intro email was created to offer independent homestudies to Oregon attorneys. This was in response to the Oregon State Department of Human Services lifting the cap on home study fees. Our agency's expertise and turnaround time combined with a reasonable fee for services is a strong message for this audience.

Booth Panels. New panels were created for the tabletop displays used at events such as adoption fairs and conferences. There are different versions that speak to service providers who support expectant parents and prospective adoptive parents.

Chanks for your generous support of Open Adoption & Family Services!

Gifts of \$1,000 +

Microsoft Giving Campaign Matching Funds

Meagan O'Leary & Shannon Sedlecek

Snider Family Charitable Fund Wyss Foundation

Gifts of \$500-\$999

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Heather & Scott Allmain
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Pauline & Michael Delegeane, in celebration of the marriage of Dean Kralios & Scot Partlow

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Shawn Farrell

Barbara Fridell, in celebration of the marriage of Dean Kralios & Scot Partlow

Margaret Fuller

Gerald Gronert

Suzanne Haberland & Stasa Fritz

Jere & Becky Hall

Andrea Hardy

Richard Hausken & Ruth Warbington

Irie Hoffman

Lisa & Doug Klink

Linda Kostur

Karen Kralios, in celebration of the marriage of Dean Kralios & Scot Partlow

Jan Jamieson

Laura LaTosch, in celebration of the marriage of Dean Kralios & Scot Partlow

Angie & Nick Lunde

Sunny Moore

Spyridon & Lisa Nicon, in celebration of the marriage of Dean Kralios & Scot Partlow

Scobie Puchtler & Sarah Felstiner

Ronald Renchler & Christy McMannis

Michael & Wendy Russo

Patrick Sexton

Sally Shuey

Steve & Kathy Somnitz

Katie Stallman

Starbucks Foundation Partner Match

Sean Stitham & Jean Nahan

Kate Sturm

Stanley & Barbara Sugarman

Cindy Dahl & Charles Thierheimer

Alex Trotter

Thomas Valvano

Nicholas Veroske

Ross Whitehead & Jean Hicks

Suzie Williams

Cheryl & Michael Wiznerowicz

Gifts Up to \$99

Anonymous Anonymous

Anonymous

Robin Baker

Wright & Benny Burnett-Smith

Mary Ellen Bushnell

Andrea Castillo

Lee Catalano

Robert & Victoria Curtis

Jesse Dillon, in celebration of the marriage of Dean Kralios & Scot Partlow

Arthur Donnelly

Todd Ebersole & Isabel Wyss

Marilyn Flick, In honor of Jan speaking at her Human Sexuality class every year.

Robin Francisco

Riyaz Gayasaddin

Heather Goldy

Michele Greco & Mike Banker

Lois Heinlein & Thomas

Mathews

Scott Huber & Jeff Lee

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Maria Villegas

Ginny & Andy Woo

Katie Woodward

WHY DO YOU GIVE TO OA&FS?

As a family Benny, Wright and four-year-old Tristan love to play games, walk around the neighborhood as Tristen rides his bike and cook together. Tristen has become a little chef like his birthfather, and enjoys helping out. His current favorite activities are helping make green eggs and ham in the morning, creating Minion Masks (from Despicable Me) and playing with their dogs Josie and Caraloo.

They love traveling to visit family and especially look forward to the trips to see Tristen's birthfamily. Every year Benny and Wright take a picture of Tristen sitting on a little duck in the play area at Gateway Mall in Springfield. "It's become a tradition. We love seeing how much he has grown between each visit. It makes us laugh thinking of a 16-year-old Tristen sitting on a little plastic duck. We love how much we have bonded with Tristen's birthparents and love to hear what they are up to in their lives. They are incredibly kind-hearted people and we are so proud to call them family."

When did you first hear about OA&FS? What attracted you to the agency?

We first discovered the agency in 2005 during a Google search of adoption options. The main thing that attracted us to OA&FS was the validation we felt as a family. At the time, few agencies were working with same-sex couples. Some were willing to work with us provided we hide the fact we were gay. We felt parenting at its core is about honesty. How could we build a foundation for a family in any other way?

What do you appreciate about the OA&FS mission? What aspects of the agency's work are meaningful to you?

All options counseling is the aspect of the mission we appreciate the most. We are firm believers that everyone should have the choice to determine what is best for themselves and their families. On a personal level, we love that OA&FS will be there for us long after placement. We have never viewed them as a business: the agency is committed to creating and reinforcing families. We have been blessed to welcome Tristen and his birthfamily into our lives and have greatly benefited from the care of the



OA&FS adoptee Tristen with parents Wright, (left), and Benny.

Why do you choose to donate to OA&FS?

As a family we feel it is important to give in whatever way you can to support a cause close to your heart. There are so many great organizations out there but we really resonate with the work OA&FS is doing. Not only have they helped facilitate the placement of an awesome kid with us, but we believe strongly in the work they do with all their clients. We love donating to the Birthmothers' Retreat every year as a way to honor Tristen's birthmother. The community she has built with other birthmothers is an important part of her life and we are proud of our story. If we lived in Portland you better bet we would be volunteering all the time!

How has your open adoption experience changed your family's life?

Before starting the process, open adoption was not an idea that was familiar to us or our family. It's easy to try and control every aspect of your life. With having to take the passenger seat to start our family we grew as people tremendously. The benefits of Tristen's placement have completely changed how we approach things and we find ourselves more present in our day to day. Simple things like seeing Tristen play outside in the rain are the moments we treasure the most. Being trusted to care for an incredible kiddo is a very humbling experience and we are so honored to be included in the relationships Tristen was born with.

agency's work. In many ways,

the people of OA&FS (clients

our extended family as well.

and employees) are now part of

Service statistics: the numbers behind the mission.

July 2010 through June 2014

Open Adoption & Family Services (OA&FS) is a pro-choice, nonprofit adoption agency with offices in Oregon and Washington. We provide free, all-options pregnancy counseling for pregnant women and couples, plan open adoptions at no cost to birthparents and offer lifelong services for our clients. We've completed more than 1,350 open adoptions since the agency was founded in 1985.

Placements

- Average number of placements per year: 41.
- 26% of placements were with gay or lesbian families; 4% were with single parents.
- 23% of placements were "last minute"when adoption planning begins at birth.
- Adoptive parents waited an average of 14 months between entering the waiting families pool and placement.

Children Placed

- 93% of children placed were newborns; 5% were under three months, 2% were between three and six months.
- Most of the children had little to no prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol. 37% had no exposure; 26% had mild; 17% had moderate; and 20% had severe exposure.
- Of the children placed, 62% were full Caucasian; 19% had Hispanic heritage; 4% had Asian heritage; 6% had African American heritage; 1% had Native American heritage; 8% were of other ethnicities.

Expectant Parents

• In fiscal year 2013-14, 439 expectant parents contacted us to inquire about our services.

Birthparents

- Birthparents received an average of 8.5 weeks of counseling prior to placement.
 - 71% of placements had pregnancy-related expenses at an average of \$1,226.
 - Open Adoption Agreements had an average of three visits per year.
 - Birthfathers signed consents to adoption in 56% of placements.
 - The average age of birthmothers was 24 years old, 21 for consenting birthfathers and 40 for adoptive parents.

In FY 2013-14 OA&FS staff has ...

- Hosted events attended by 555 members of the open adoption community including a birthmothers' retreat and our first birthfathers' gathering.
- Delivered 88 presentations about open adoption to 766 service providers and 614 students, (high school and college).
- Fulfilled 473 organization requests for marketing materials. We also mailed materials to 993 service providers during our spring outreach campaign.

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Love our volunteers!

Thank you to the following individuals and organizations who contributed their time, talents and expertise to support the agency's mission last year. Thanks to all the OA&FS community members who donated their photographs in this year's annual report, the agency website and other publications.

If you would like to volunteer or donate photographs, please contact us at info@openadopt.org.

Kay Abramowitz
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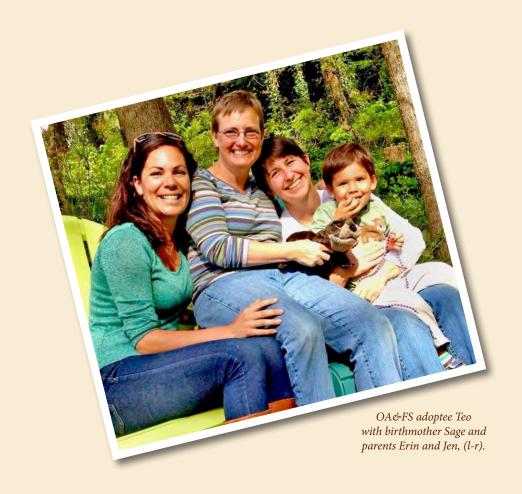
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