



# Family Newsletter



Left to right, Cory, Nevaeh, Jessica and Hayden Franks.

## Family’s move helps preserve their adopted children’s racial identity

A story Jessica Franks shares with humor underscores the thoughtfulness and care adoptive families need when considering transracial adoption.

“Every year, when I get all the African-American Santas out,” says the MARE adoption navigator while trying to hold her giggles, “my kids are like, ‘Yes! Black Santa!’ I know it sounds so silly, but they love it! Representation like that does matter.”

Decorating their home with black Santas and angels has become a Christmas tradition for Jessica, her husband, Cory, and their adopted children, Nevaeh, 9, and Hayden, 8 – and it serves as a lesson for other

families considering transracial adoption.

However, the importance of racial representation and identity came slowly to Cory and Jessica, who admits to going into transracial adoption a bit naïve. She thought it would be easy, that their African-American children would fit in well in the predominantly white community where the family resided.

“Then I realized that there’s more to transracial adoption than just parents who love their kids,” says Jessica. “I saw things like my kids being left out at school and in sporting activities. They were feeling left out. They were not feeling like they fit in.”

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Learn more about foster care adoption at [www.mare.org](http://www.mare.org).

Jessica and Cory did some soul-searching and concluded that for Nevaeh and Hayden to feel connected, the family needed to move to another community.

"After talking and realizing that our kids were the only African-American people anywhere – at the grocery store, at school, in the community, at sporting events – we were like this has to change. So we moved."

They settled in a predominantly African-American community with a large population of Arab-Americans as well, which essentially flipped them into the position that their kids were in.

"My husband and I are now the minority," Jessica says. "So it's different to go out and to be different, to be the minority and to see how that feels.

"It's happened a handful of times

that we've been out and we've run into a family who are black with white children or white families with black children," says Jessica. "And then my kids stop and stare, and the kids are all looking at each other in awe. It's like, 'Hey, you look like me. Your family is different.'

"Having that connection is great. One night we were out to dinner and a family sat right next to us, and it was two black boys and two white parents. And my kids and their kids couldn't stop staring at each other.

"We just went to parent/teacher conferences and a little child came up to my son and said, 'where's your mom?' My son said, 'she's right there,' and the other kid looked at me and went, 'You're ...' and Hayden goes, 'I know; she's white.'

"I do worry what it's going to look

like when they get older. Are they going to have insecurities? Are they going to be embarrassed?

"I think it's been a real eye-opener that race does exist, and it does matter. Because I was naively thinking, 'Yeah, it's going to be fine.' I didn't think much about it at first, but it is extremely important and especially in today's society with so much racial tension and things happening. We have to talk about it, and we have to take action to be inclusive."

And as unsettling as a move can be, it proved to be the best choice for the entire Franks family.

"I'm so happy we made the decision for our kids because the first thing that Nevaeh said to me after coming home from her new school was, 'There are all these kids who look like me and have their hair in braids!'"



## Important considerations for adoptive parents

Adoptive families thinking about transracial adoption have many considerations, so MARE Adoption Navigator Jessica Franks offers these tips, which can also apply to same-race adoptions.

- First would be understanding that race and culture do matter – especially to children who have

already lost so much entering the foster care system. It is important to maintain a connection to their culture.

- Take trainings, read books, challenge your own thoughts and beliefs.
- Is your family accepting? Are you

willing to not invite that family member over if they're not supportive?

- Do you live in a diverse area? Are you willing to drive to the next county if it is more diverse?

I would encourage families to consider how much they're willing

to change their routine. Are you willing to go to a different church? Would you drive to a more diverse area to have your kids play sports there?

I'd also encourage putting books, materials and things like that in the home. We go to the library and check out books on adoption. They have age-appropriate books about adoption and culture. There was one about bears – a black bear, a brown bear, a white bear.

Find a community that will support and share in your unique experience while offering a safe

space without judgment. Attending support groups is a great way to feel understood or to meet other people going through similar experiences who can offer ideas and resources.

Create an ongoing, open and honest conversation about race, culture and identity in the home so youth feel comfortable talking. Be open to challenging conversations happening in the world's news or media and find fun ways to explore race and culture such as music and movies.

The holidays are a wonderful

time to learn more about your child's culture; consider cooking traditional meals, reading books, watching movies, or attending festivals or events. It is also a great opportunity to create your own new traditions together as a family.

We create our own traditions about how we celebrate and what the holiday means to us, so when Black History Month comes around, I'll have them teach me about Rosa Parks. Hayden is into Black Panther, so we support how important it is to have a black superhero.

## Designing a great future

Sandy, as Sandra prefers, is a very creative girl who loves coloring and drawing and doing arts and crafts.



She says she's good at singing and dancing and wants to become a singer, artist or fashion designer when she gets older. In addition to her artistic endeavors, Sandy shows an interest in basketball.

Her favorite activities include swimming, shopping, listening to music, getting

her hair done, dressing up and spending time with friends. Sandy also enjoys playing Monopoly and card games such as Uno and Skip-Bo.

She loves cheese pizza, cheetahs and the colors purple, gray, black and blue. Sandy's favorite holiday is Christmas because she likes spending time with family and friends.

"She is very willing to share and loves to build new friendships," says one of the people who knows her well. Sandy would love celebrating holidays with a future forever family.

When she's asked about the things she wants to do with her new family, Sandy simply says, "spend time together."

## Hurray for the red, white, green, yellow and more!

Saying Kakashi likes flags is a bit akin to saying stars come out at night.



OK, so his "banner benevolence" isn't quite that obvious. But Kakashi does love his flags, all 50 or more of them from different countries throughout the world. "He has an extensive collection," says one the adults close to Kakashi. "He waves them throughout the house and enjoys watching the colorful flags on his outdoor flagpole."

Flags aren't Kakashi's only interest. He's active and enjoys being outdoors whether it's playing at the playground, having fun on the swings or jumping on the trampoline. Adds one of his close adults, "Kakashi loves anything related to water – kayaking, swimming, watching the fountain at the park, playing in the water table at the children's museum and playing in the rain, to name a few. Kakashi also loves music; he has an old phone with a music app, and he is constantly listening to his favorite songs."

This cool kid not only wants to meet a forever family, but he also might share hugs. After all, Kakashi is an affectionate and considerate guy.

## Kids' Corner



### This recipe really rocks. Literally!

Let's make Stone Soup, a good hearty recipe for winter!

You can add any vegetables and protein source, it is a great way to get kids to try different vegetables, and it is a nice lesson on sharing and making "something from nothing." And of course for younger kids, read the stone soup book! Check out these recipe resources:

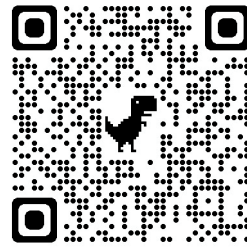
1. <https://thenourishinghome.com/2012/09/stone-soup-memories-in-the-making/>
2. Amazon link for book: <https://www.amazon.com/Stone-Soup-Aladdin-Picture-Books/dp/0689711034>
3. Free trial for audible link (you can listen to the audio book for free): <https://www.audible.com/pd/Stone-Soup-Audiobook/B002V8DFFQ>



1. Nourishinghome



2. Picture book



3. Audio book

## Sound the alarm – future firefighter needs a family!

If you hear a siren in the middle of the night sometime in the future, it could be Brayden, who wants to become a firefighter when he gets older.



He might even keep the fire station well kempt because he's had experience in mopping and washing windows.

Brayden will order his fellow firefighters pizza, his favorite food, and they'll rescue cats stuck in trees since they're his favorite animal.

After his day at the fire station, er, school, Brayden likes going to the beach. On the weekends, Brayden enjoys chilling with friends, making crafts and playing video games.

If he could travel anywhere, Brayden would go to a metropolis. "I like big cities," he says – probably so he can see the most fire trucks. Brayden says he wishes for a big mansion with an Olympic-sized swimming pool "and a lot of money to buy stuff."

Despite his firefighting desire, Brayden hopes he doesn't need to put out any fires in his future home. He just wants a nice family who likes "hanging out, going to the beach and playing video games."

## Calendar

**January 21**  
**Virtual MARE**  
**Meet & Greet**  
10:30 a.m.-1 p.m.

**February 18**  
**Virtual MARE**  
**Meet & Greet**  
10:30 a.m.-1 p.m.

For more information, contact [jessica\\_thompson@judsoncenter.org](mailto:jessica_thompson@judsoncenter.org) or call 734-528-2070.

**Take note:** Watch for notices of upcoming Meet & Greets on [www.mare.org](http://www.mare.org) and on Facebook and Twitter.

## Coming up

### May is National Foster Care Month

As [www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth](http://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth) states, "it's a time to acknowledge families and professionals who help children and youth in foster care find permanent homes." Look for more info as it nears at [Mare.org](http://Mare.org).

## MARE contact information

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