

Making Room in My Filled-Up Calendar for More Adoptive Parents Was the Best Thing I Did for My Family

This overwhelmed mom thought her capacity to care for more people was full. Then an unexpected support system showed up—and wouldn't take no for an answer.

WORKING MOTHER

By [Joy Jordan-Lake](#) October 1, 2019

It indeed takes a village to raise a child—or at least, that's the richest, most beautiful way to do it. But I had to learn this all over again with my third child, when everything in my life seemed to argue for circling the wagons and defaulting to what my family threatens they will have etched someday on my tombstone: I can do this all by myself.

With two biological children and two busy careers, my husband and I were in the midst of a harried midwinter move from Waco, Texas, to Nashville, Tennessee—and we would soon find ourselves stuck with two houses after buyers pulled out of the sale last minute in Texas. But far more important than real estate woes just then was our flying to China to bring home our third child, a precious adopted daughter. Back in the U.S., my father was suffering from early Alzheimer's Disease and my mother needed help not only with care but with knowing what to do, where to move, how to proceed. My husband's mother was in L.A., and we needed to get out to see her and help more often than we had.

In the midst of the move two weeks after returning from China, the two older children and I fell ill with mono. I had a deadline looming for a book that would become *Working Families*. In addition, I took a part-time teaching job in our new town and my husband worked long hours, both of us struggling to pay the two mortgages. Life had spun beyond busy into the realms of a blur.

Let's just say that the last thing I was looking for was more extended family to keep track of and care for. When the eight other families who adopted at the same time from the same orphanage in rural China began planning annual and then more frequent reunions and formed a Facebook group and texting thread and began referring to our group as an extended family, I was exhausted — and, quite honestly, resistant. I liked them all immensely, and I understood that our daughters, in the orphanage together for the first 11 months of their lives, shared an unusual bond we needed to honor. But my care-for capacity was already overloaded. My calendar was already over-full.

In the friendliest, most loving and understanding way, they would simply not let us go.

I am teary as I write that. Because despite our living hundreds of miles from each other, they became a village for our family.

Raising kids, and raising them well, is tough enough, as we all know. But helping adopted kids navigate the extra questions they have to face adds a whole extra layer of wisdom required. As our families gathered, we discovered the strength and connection our girls seemed to find in each other's company — and that we found with each other. We adults held broadly different jobs, from realtors to writers to bankers and teachers and accountants. Our girls, who as toddlers looked so much alike from behind with their nine heads of long, glossy black hair and our dressing them to match, grew into vibrant teenagers with vastly different styles and interests and talents. Yet even the differences seemed to make the village-bond stronger.

We adults found we could be vulnerable with each other. We could share parenting ideas and challenges. We could ask each other the hard questions of how you answer your daughter when she wants to talk about adoption — or for that matter, matters of faith or culture, what college might be a good fit or what future career.

I write books for a living these days, a profession that is typically fairly lonely — lots of long nights meeting deadlines and silent stretches of days and months staring at a laptop screen. As a mom, I've always felt like moving from that silence and intense concentration to the boisterous high-energy demands of picking up kids from preschool or teens from track practice was like burning rubber at the starting line every day, going from zero to 60 in nanoseconds. I knew what community felt like—and all of it loud—in my household with people from Italian and Scottish and Chinese extraction. But to my utter surprise, our adoption group has brought community even into my writing life.

Inspired by my adopted daughter and by our group of girls from the same orphanage, all adored and all thriving, I recently published my first children's picture book, *A Crazy-Much Love*. Coming from all over the country, seven of the 10 girls showed up with their families for the book launch party.

From Texas, from Chicago, from Cincinnati, they gathered to fill our house and laugh together and marvel over old pictures of the 10 girls as toddlers together in blue butterfly dresses one of the grandmothers had made, the girls as gangly children learning to swim at the summer camp one family hosted annually in Kentucky, the girls as young teenagers with matching Old Navy scarves and hanging artfully from a brass hotel baggage cart as if they were rolling through a Broadway musical dance scene.

What had started out a book I'd written alone inspired by my younger daughter had grown, just as it should have, into our book as a village of families. Our journey. Our over-the-top love for our kids, adopted and biological. And also, go figure, our gratitude for each other. For being able to be authentic and messy and baffled and grieving and grateful with each other over the past 15 years. Being able to celebrate together. The gift of adoption. The gift of together. The gift of family.

Maybe I'm clumsier at parenting than most, but quite honestly, I find it the most gut-wrenchingly hard as well as the most spectacularly beautiful thing I've ever done. So now as the veteran working mother of three kids, two of whom have launched to

college and grad school with only one left at home, I offer this advice to younger moms: I know you're busy. I bet you're exhausted, your calendar and your care-for capacity way past full.

But don't let the crazy-much of your schedule make you shut out the village that is all around you, that is ready to help you raise your child. That can become a storehouse of wisdom for you. That can become a cherished even-more-extended, not-letting-you-go kind of family.

Here's to you, fellow *Working Mom*. And here's to the villages that won't let us go.



Joy Jordan-Lake's daughter and three of the other girls who became a part of their "village."

Joy Jordan-Lake has been a college professor, waitress, journalist, director of a program for homeless families, university chaplain, and—the job title that remains her personal favorite: head sailing instructor. She is the author of several books including *A Tangled Mercy*, and *Blue Hole Back Home*. *A Crazy-Much Love* is her debut picture book. She lives outside Nashville with her husband and their three children. www.joyjordanlake.com

