

# Ready for Adoption

Contributed by Shawn Krest

Our adoption gets finalized at the end of next week. The girls joke that the court date is on Friday the 13th, but I prefer to think of it as 48 hours before Father's Day. Our two newest daughters, teenage sisters, will officially join our family of wife, me, and three birth daughters, ages 3,5, and 7. We plan to give our five girls matching Journey Diamond necklaces with five stones (one for each of us) and scrapbooks. The girls have lived with us for eleven months, so in a lot of ways, it seems more like a marriage ceremony than a birth. With that in mind, we have written the following vows for next Friday.

We promise to love you completely, and faithfully and we promise that nothing you say, do, or become can ever change our love for you. We promise to laugh with you and cry with you. We promise to watch with pride when you dance, sing, run, or whatever else you choose to allow us to share. We promise to look at you and smile, to sing you songs and tell you jokes.

We promise that our hearts will swell when we see you smile and burst when we hear you laugh. We promise to adore you completely in a way you will only understand if you choose to have children someday. We promise never to hurt you, physically, mentally or emotionally. That doesn't mean we will never argue, and it doesn't mean you can do whatever you want without any consequences. It means we will punish the act, not the person.

We promise never to insult you, hit you, mock you in front of others, or anything else that you feel is an unacceptable way to be treated. We also promise not to let anyone else treat you that way either if we have anything to say about it. We promise to protect you from the big things and the little things. While we know that we can't shelter you from a world that can at times be difficult, we promise to move mountains to make sure that you are always happy, healthy, and safe.

We promise to look at you and see remarkable young women who will do great things someday. We will see strong, beautiful, intelligent people, even if you aren't feeling that way about yourself on a certain day. We promise to respect that you will have bad moods and bad days even though we will do what we can to improve them.

We promise that in all things we will treat you as if we gave birth to you, not because we want to take away the past that you have lived, but because we will treasure every moment we get to spend with you and wish we had more. Forever will never be long enough for us. We promise that you will be as important and precious to us as the three girls that live with us now. The fact that we brought them home from the hospital doesn't make them closer, more important, or special in any way.

We also promise not to tolerate anyone we know, friend, relative or stranger, who does not treat you the same way. We promise all of this even if you don't feel that way about us. We believe that if you see it, you will feel it eventually. We promise to ask you about your days, your grades, your friends, your weekends. We promise to listen to the music you listen to and watch the shows you watch, not because we don't trust your decisions, but because we want to know you and share in what you think is important. We also invite you to share in what we think is important—from television to holiday traditions.

We also promise not to push if you don't want to share in some of it. We don't want you to change who you are to match us. We want to know you as people and add you—every part of you—to the family we have, the traditions we have, the fun we have. We promise to respect the parts of your life that you bring with you and, if

you'll let us, add them to our life here.

We would promise to let you change us...but you already have. We promise to worry when you are not with us, not because we don't think you can make good decisions, but because we know bad things can happen to people without them getting to decide. We promise to hope for the best while fearing the worst because we are parents, and that is part of our job.

We promise to talk to you— even when you don't want to. We promise to listen, respect your opinion, respect your feelings, and respond to your concerns. The answer may not always be "yes" but we will explain the "no"s. We promise to be your rock. Always there, always supportive. We promise to fight for what is important to you, whether you know it's important or not.

We promise to accept you and let you be yourself, whatever that is now or becomes. We promise that no matter how hard you push, you will never succeed in pushing us away, no matter how hard you test, we will never fail you. We promise to support you in all things— whether it's an argument with a friend or a problem with a teacher. We may not agree with your decisions, but we will promise you that you will never be alone.

We promise that when you become our daughters, then wherever you go, whoever you become, you will always be our daughters. You will always be welcome here. When we don't hear from you, we will be waiting to move those mountains for you, to celebrate the good things and mourn the bad, to offer you a shoulder to cry on, advice if you want it (and sometimes when you don't). We offer you our home, our family, our love, our undying support, our respect, our hearts, our souls. They are the most precious things we have.

Use them well.