

# SUBURBAN LIFE

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BRIAN HERSCHFUS

## Race issue makes him see red

Today, living in the '90s, we're well aware that the law recognizes equality of rights for every individual no matter what the color of his or her skin. Skin color does not dictate ability, educational stature or the degree of love which a parent may have for a child, whether the child is a biological or merely a legal offspring.

Of course, the "law" recognizing equality of rights for people no matter what the color of their skin is wonderful in its practicalness, however, the law at least, in part, is dictated and influenced by the actions of society.

All too often, people preach equality but when it comes right down to it, many people in our society are frustrating the rights of equality and prohibiting equality from progressing from where it was 40-50 years ago.

Just three years ago, a Farmington Hills couple found out that although equality was preached by religious and community leaders, these leaders themselves did not practice what they preached.

Bob and Judy Turner, religiously devout in their faith, became emotionally attached to one of the many children they had been foster parents to. The Turners approached the agency, who placed foster children with them and asked the agency if they could apply and be considered as adoptive parent candidates for this little baby they had fostered since the day after his birth.

The agency, a Christian organization, told the Turners that this was not possible because the Turners were white and the baby was black. The agency said it was required to place the baby for adoption with a black family.

As time progressed, however, the agency was having no success whatsoever in placing this baby. The Turners intentionally respected the law but they also believed deeply and considered for the adoption of this baby, to whom they were emotionally tied. In fact, so emotional was their bond, that Mrs. Turner had desired to breast-feed this child. The Turners already had two healthy teenage daughters, had a successful business and were well-settled in their ways.

The Turners did not need this baby, but they needed them and they wanted to share their love with this child.

Just days before the law required the placement of this baby, after the biological parents' rights had been terminated, this religious agency utilized the services of yet another agency to find an adoptive black family who was not registered with the religious agency. This religious organization already had a family ready, willing and able to adopt this baby, and why was the agency working so assiduously to place this child with a family not even associated with this religious organization? Simple, the Turners were white and the baby was black.

The Turners' love was so strong that they went to court over this baby. The Turners' battle was emotionally draining, but the final results yielded in their greatest joy when they finally adopted this black baby boy.

Yet this issue of black and white, which ultimately led to joyous results, also had a big price tag. The Turners lost their business, spent the life savings and sold their big home with their big money, all in ways dreamed of. The Turners now live in a rented home and Bob Turner works at his new job for less income than what he made before. You may ask if the Turners are content with all they gave up, and the answer is no. They were not ready to settle for a black baby because their son needed a playmate. So they adopted another black child, this time a girl. Now the Turners are content.

The Turners paid a big price to prove their love for Jordan, but the law did not require them to do so.

You see, the law has well-settled criteria for interracial adoptions and the law has a system designed to protect people adequately, such as the Turners, and to protect the best interest of the particular child. However, sometimes it takes people like the Turners to help eliminate this interracial bias so that those empowered to insure the laws and regulations are upheld can be made aware of bias that exists in our society mirroring the social beliefs of 40-50 years ago.

My discussion with the Turners and others like them, and my reading of articles are cases on the subject of interracial adoptions has made it apparent that in the last three years this has become much easier to adopt interracially.

However, it is not that the law itself has changed so greatly, if at all. Rather in the past three years the laws and regulations are being more carefully adhered to so that the best interest of the particular child is considered, as opposed to the color of skin of the respective parties involved.

Clearly, there are many black children who could have been taken out of the system and placed with loving fathers and mothers that they can call their very own.

The system, which is not perfect, is moving in the right direction and those who will benefit the most are these children who want to be loved and for whom there are people that want to shower them with love.

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Family frolic: Loren Sohn holds Masha as Raya hams it up next to her mother, Sue, and sister, Dasha.

STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LEHMAN

## Sealed with love

### Family's bond transcends barriers



Three young girls leave a Russian orphanage, lifestyle and culture for a life in Farmington Hills. Their curiosity and quest for answers have speeded them toward a comfortable transition.

BY DIANE GALE  
SPECIAL WRITER

Six months after Sue and Loren Sohn decided to adopt one infant daughter, they had flown to Russia and become the parents of three precocious children.

"When they first came, it was like a tornado hit this house," Sue Sohn said. "They even picked up heat registers to see what they were."

Everything was new to Raya, 8, and her twin 7-year-old sisters, Masha and Dasha. They continue to explore their surroundings 17 months after they moved in with their Farmington Hills parents.

The sisters left their birth country, the orphanage and all the people who cared for them since they were infants and they got on a plane with virtual strangers.

Everything was new Not only would everyday life outside an orphanage be new, but they had to adapt to another country, language and culture.

"They had no concept of religion, mail, grocery stores or money," Loren Sohn said. "They had no concept of what grandparents, aunts and uncles were."

That day after Halloween last year,

for instance, the girls asked if they could go out again that night. They had never crossed a street before. And they had no idea what a kitchen was. Something "belonging" to someone was new, too.

"They would just walk into the house next door," Loren Sohn said. "They just didn't have the exposure to any of these concepts."

Strong spirit But nothing seemed to shake these little girls who only knew a few words of English when they arrived. A year and a half later, they seem to have mastered the language, and their curiosity about everything, including visitors from the paper, is endless.

"Why do you make your 'a's like that?" "Why are you writing things down?" "What are you going to do with it?" "Why do you write like that?"

The barrage of questions is commonplace and the Sohns try to give answers, which is only part of the tremendous adjustment they've made.

"We're a far cry from where we started," Sue Sohn said about deciding to adopt one child and bringing home three girls.

"We started investigating the options, and we wanted to do an inter-

national adoption," Sue Sohn said. "So many of the kids who are available for adoption here have been abused or have an emotional problem. There's long waits for infants."

Besides, she added, it's safer to have a birth mother from the other side of the world and not likely to show up on the front step one day.

Smooth process

They learned about the Maine Adoption Placement Service and were told about various children. When they heard about the three sisters, it just felt right for the Sohns.

"The Lord does funny things sometimes," Susan Sohn said. "Everything just seemed to work out. Every hurdle we thought would be a brick wall came tumbling down."

Loren Sohn added that there is a greater need for families to adopt older children.

"We weren't that hung up on having a baby," he said.

Going to Russia eliminated extensive red tape required by Michigan adoption laws. The trip in itself was an experience of a lifetime.

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SHARON LEHMAN STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Full of questions: Dasha, Raya and Masha want answers for everything.

## Oldest Farmington club embraces traditions

BY DIANE HANSON  
SPECIAL WRITER

That's nearly 70 years old, still going strong and dedicated to those good old-fashioned ideals of God, country and serving others with integrity, honesty and respect? The Farmington Exchange Club, the first and oldest service organization in Farmington, "It started clear back in 1924," explained Dr. John Richardson, veterinarian and owner of the Plaza Veterinary Clinic on Mooney Avenue.

The Exchange Club was founded in Detroit in 1911 by jeweler Charles A. Berkey. But the roots of the organization go back to in 1896 when a group of Detroit business and professional men informally gathered to have lunch, share ideas, advise one another and swap stories. Berkey was among those men who, at the time, formed the "Boosters Club" and was key in later developing and organizing it into the Exchange Club.

Meeting for noon luncheons at the original Penobscot Building in Detroit, the Exchange Club

sought members who "lived up to the old-fashioned idea of truth, integrity . . ."

The Farmington club formed 13 years later. The founder's son, Reid Berkey, now deceased, lived in Farmington and was a member. According to Jim Stevens, real estate broker and owner of Century 21 Hartford, the official charter meeting for the Exchange Club of Farmington was held on June 21, 1924.

"Those were the days where you kind of relaxed a little bit," said Stevens, club historian and member since 1970.

The businessmen would meet for lunch in the basement of the Methodist church, he said. Part of the social activities included golfing in the summer and playing cards in the winter Wednesday afternoons.

Indeed, winding the clock back 70 years revealed a much different, slower-paced Farmington. It was Farmington where businessmen closed up shop on Wednesday afternoon because they were open on Saturday to accommodate the farmers who came to

town to do their business.

Richardson, club secretary, moved from East Lansing to open his veterinary clinic in Farmington in 1961 and is still in his original building on Mooney Avenue. He has been a member of Exchange for 30 years and has seen many changes.

"There were orchards and the winery and there were grapes down here," he recounted. "Down at the end of my street, the winery was producing wine. Farmington Dairy made milk, cheese, ice cream and the whole nine yards. It's gone now. It burned down in 1963. It sat where Farmington Agency is today."

There have been many changes in the last 70 years. The club is now a national organization with more than 40,000 members in over 1,200 clubs in the United States and Puerto Rico. It is the largest and oldest, exclusively national service club in America.

Another significant change was the addition of women.

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