



*“Marissa was born in our hearts.”*

## Meet the Depner Family Representative Shrader

“Being adopted means that my parents are committed to me. I don't have to worry about leaving the next day. I get to make and keep the same friends.” Thirteen-year-old Marissa composed this statement when asked what adoption means to her. This young woman greatly appreciates having a safe and stable family after having lived for six years - almost half her life—in *thirteen* different foster homes.

Her new parents, Dawn and Mark, were not fazed by the challenges of adopting an older child because they had already raised four children, one with developmental disabilities. Their youngest son had just left for college when the couple started the adoption application process.

All the Depner young adults have been supportive of their parents' decision to adopt. It was their younger daughter who brought Marissa to the family's attention after seeing her featured on the TV spot “Wednesday's Child.” Mom explains, “She showed us the video, and at that time Marissa was born in our hearts. When we saw this girl speak about wanting her ‘forever family’ we knew we were that family.”

The Depners are providing their new daughter the kind of life every child deserves. Marissa enjoys bicycling with the family, playing softball, and exploring other sports. She is also honing her musical and artistic abilities. Marissa especially loves having friends spend the night because she has not had that opportunity in the past. Marissa relates well to younger children and likes to help others.

Post adoption supports, specifically mental health counseling, have been helping Marissa to understand her past and to adjust to her new life. Counseling has also helped Dawn and Mark learn how best to communicate with a child from a traumatic background.

Factors that influenced this family's adoption decision-making were “faith, community, and family.” They state, “We knew that God placed Marissa with us, and what a gift she was!” The Depners credit *A Family for Every Child* with assisting them through their adoption process.

One area the Depners feel needs improvement is the Adoption Committee process. They suggest clearer protocol for communications and better training for the decision-makers. Dawn explains, “We were not initially selected for Marissa. The family she was placed with ‘changed their minds’ a year later. This leads me to believe that the committee needs some additional training so kids like Marissa don't have to experience rejection to the extent that she did.”

Marissa says a family trip to Hawaii and just spending time together helped her to realize she had finally found her forever home. She writes, “After about a year, I realized that my parents weren't going to change their minds. I remember thanking my mom for not being a flake and leaving me like everyone else did.” Marissa encourages all capable adults to consider adopting. “I was once in the same position as every foster child—scared, alone, and feeling forgotten and un-loved. When I met my forever family, those doubts vanished. If you ever get the chance to adopt, it will change not only the child's life, but yours too.”