

As they explored adoption, Arlo Leach and Sally Giles quickly learned of the many families wanting to adopt young children, but the few considering older ones. This knowledge informed their decisions and led them to their delightful 15-year-old daughter Dezziray (“Dezzi,”) whom they adopted at age 12.

Several factors motivated Sally and Arlo to adopt: social consciousness, personal experience with adoption, the *AdoptUSKids* website, and the national PSA/campaign, “*You Don’t Have to Be Perfect to Be a Perfect Parent.*” The online listings of waiting children gave the couple “a better idea of the challenges these children were facing and the importance of stepping up to help them.” Sally explains, “We didn’t adopt because we felt a need to become parents. Our primary motivation has been to help a child. This has made it easier to set our expectations aside and focus on what our child needs at each developmental stage.”

Starting at age 4, Dezzi had been in foster care intermittently for eight years before coming to Sally and Arlo. Her new parents were well equipped to help her with the resulting trauma and grief. They had a stable nine-year marriage. They were comfortable using professional services, and they understood the need for each family member to have his or her own therapist. They also attended adoption parenting support groups, recognizing how much they could learn from others who had “been there.”

Due to her parents’ diligence and her own inner strength, Dezzi has emerged into an outgoing teen. She is often found happily dancing and singing, and occasionally making up silly faces or voices. A talented dancer, Dezzi has joined her high school cheerleading team. She is also skilled at drawing and painting. Animal welfare is high on her list of priorities. Her concern for animals led her to become a vegetarian at a young age. Dezzi is currently aiming for a career as an animal rights attorney.

Through their regular contact with Dezzi’s extended birth family, all three have learned to be more open-minded. Arlo and Sally have been learning to navigate different family cultures, and Dezzi has gained a lot of insight about herself and the experiences that have made her who she is today.

Sally and Arlo ask policymakers to assure that all adoptive families have access to the level of expertise that they experienced in working with “a helpful caseworker, an amazing adoption agency (*The Boys and Girls Aid Society*), and experienced counselors,” all resources they see as critical to the success of adoptive placements. They thank members of Congress for the Federal Adoption Tax Credit, stating, “Having some financial relief makes a big difference.”

Dezzi clearly recalls the first time she realized that she had a forever family. “It happened when we painted my bedroom. I got to pick out the color and help paint it.” Asked what adoption means to her, Dezzi writes, “You stay at home; you don’t have to move around. And also, you get to see the same doorknobs until you graduate from college.” She is also realistic – so when other youth say that adoption is “a special thing,” Dezzi points out, “It is hard too.”

