

“We love all our children the same—whether biological or adopted.”



Meet the Johnson Family Representative Bonamici

Melanie and Vern Johnson are the proud parents of a delightful five-some. Daughters Anna and Emily, ages 31 and 28, were born to the couple. Daughter Macie, age 22, and sons Tony and Mickey, ages 15 and 14, all came through adoption. An early challenge the couple faced was overcoming the misconception that adoption is “the easy way” to grow a family. Melanie observes, “In many ways, adoption is much more difficult than birth -- but it is worth every bit of the pain. We love all our children the same—whether biological or adopted.”

A church presentation by *Christian Family Adoptions* inspired Melanie and Vern to look into adoption. Anna and Emily, then middle and high school aged, were excited to welcome younger siblings. Tony was 1 year old and Mickey was 4 months old when placed with the Johnsons. Each had been in foster care since birth due to his birthmother’s drug use. Macie joined the family later—just shy of her twelfth birthday.

Due to prenatal drug exposure, the boys have faced developmental challenges. On this note, the Johnsons wish to respectfully inform policy makers that better insurance coverage is needed to help “at risk” children reach their full potential. In their area, very few speech or occupational therapists accept the Oregon Health Plan. The yearly limit of sessions adds further hardship, as does the limit of just 30 minutes for evaluations. (Other insurances allow two hours for comparable evaluations.) They also cite a need for more mental health professionals to receive training in the challenges of older child adoptions, particularly attachment issues.

Despite difficult starts in life, Tony and Mickey are progressing and thriving. Both boys are athletic and compete in football, wrestling and track. Tony is a contemplative youngster who loves to learn, especially anything related to World War II history. Friendly and outgoing, Mickey enjoys playing at the park and performing stunts. Adoption has provided these boys not only with parents and older sisters, but also with a close-in-age brother and “best bud.” The two get along fabulously, spending much of their free time together improving their sports skills or creating music videos that parody popular songs. Recently when asked who his “hero” is, Mickey named his older brother.

Melanie and Vern are thankful for the support of their faith community. “Several other families adopted around the time we did. We were able to encourage each other throughout the process.” Their pastor, an adoptive father with a degree in social and behavioral studies, helped the Johnsons “to normalize some of the issues we have faced, particularly with our 22-year-old daughter.” Macie, a talented artist and photographer, has found it difficult to shake off the influence of her early years.

The Johnsons thank members of Congress for the Federal Adoption Tax Credit, which helped them financially as they grew from having two to having five children within a four-year period.

Asked what being adopted means to him, Tony replied, “Adoption means you have family—the people you come home to that always have your back no matter what.”