

NEIGHBORS OF ORION

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SEEN,
HEARD, LOVED

*Meet
Jen and Kenya Todd*

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Feature Story

SEEN, HEARD, LOVED

Meet Jen and Kenya Todd

By Brandon Still

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In an area that is made up primarily of traditional families and structures, Jen Todd is proud to be the single mother of an adopted daughter, striking out on her own path.

"We have a very non-typical family," said Jen. "Being a full-time single mama and multi-racial adoptive family brings a lot of curiosity and unique challenges. We are transparent about our experiences so others can learn, and we have a core family value to understand and honor differences, so everyone feels included, accepted and loved."

"We've been blessed to have a lot of training and support to embrace our diversity and navigate the unique aspects in our family," said Jen.

Jen's daughter, Kenya, just turned 11 years and loves singing, dancing and performing and has a natural talent for it all. She has been in several performances with Kaleo Kids locally and had the lead role in the winter show. She takes dance classes at Broadway Dance and singing lessons at the Red Piano in Oxford.

"I adopted my daughter on my own because I had a deep calling to be a mother while on a mission trip," said Jen. "I fostered my daughter when she was 8 days old right after she was born in Detroit."

"When I officially adopted her, it was the greatest joy of my life. She was one year old," continued Jen. "I named her Kenya because it was there that I felt God was calling me to this path to motherhood and I was deeply inspired by the strong single women in the Pokot, an indigenous area of Kenya where I was on mission."

Kenya was a new fifth grade student this year at Blanche Sims and she loved her experiences with both students and staff made sure she was integrated into the community.

"We have several signs in our house that say 'seen, heard, loved,' and the amazing staff at Kenya's school definitely made sure she was," said Jen. "She made instant friends and was included and accepted by her classmates."

Kenya and Jen are joined at home by two cats, Tabby and Boo. Tabby is an older cat they got from Jen's beloved mother when she passed away, and Boo is an all-black kitten that was adopted from the new Black Cat Beanery in Lake Orion right after Halloween last year.

Prior to moving to Lake Orion and adopting Kenya, Jen grew up in Warren and went to college at Michigan State University where she graduated with a bachelor's degree in psychology and continued



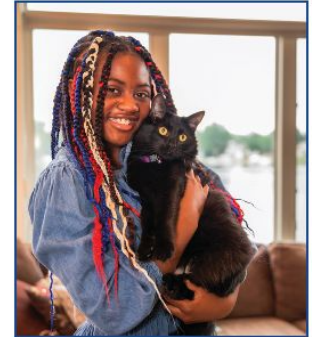
her studies at Pepperdine University where she earned a master's in organizational development.

"My master's program was a unique global executive program where we learned how to consult with organizations in different cultures," said Jen. "I did consulting projects with leaders in China, Mexico, and Canada."

After graduation, Jen got a sales job in Chicago where she fell in love with city life. In Chicago, Jen had many exciting jobs in Human Resources and Leadership/Organization Effectiveness with consulting firms and corporations such as Arthur Andersen, AON, and Allstate Insurance.

"After 15 years working hard, living the city life in Chicago and having a condo that overlooked Lake Michigan, I kept getting a nagging feeling that I needed to know my deeper purpose, start a family and live on a lake, not just look at it," said Jen. "I missed the trees, land and lakes in Michigan and my family back here. I always dreamed of having a cottage right on a lake."

"The Pure Michigan commercials had just started to be played everywhere and they spoke to my soul," continued Jen. "I started a search for a cottage on the west side of Michigan. After a year of many trips looking at cottages I still had not found the right fit. I was in Detroit working with clients and just for fun I thought I'd look at cottages in this area."



"When I drove through downtown Lake Orion it was exactly what I wanted. Then I walked through what is now my house on Long Lake. I instantly knew it was the house of my dreams! I immediately bought it and commuted back and forth from Chicago for a year before I finally realized it wasn't meant to be just a summer cottage, I wanted to live here full time."

In 2004, Jen took a leap and started her own consulting and coaching business called Breakthrough Partners Inc.

"We do Leadership and Transformational coaching for businesses, non-profits and individuals that want to take their mission, careers and lives to the next level," said Jen. "We work with ambitious leaders and entrepreneurs that have a vision for change and a heart for people that want to make a greater impact, have purpose, and well-being."

"My parents passed away in a short period of time, then COVID whammed us, we had the Oxford tragedy and there was so much loss everywhere" continued Jen. "I got trained in grief and trauma and many mind, body and soul healing modalities. I'm passionate about bringing holistic wellness into all the Leadership Coaching I do and to our community."

In addition to being the owner of a business that is happily celebrating 20 years of success this month, Jen is also a published author and speaker and has had the joy of sharing her wisdom to people around the world. Her book "Daily Nuggets of Truth: Wisdom for Centering Your Soul in Unsettling Times" was written during COVID as a daily guide of inspiration and mantras.

Jen was assisted in writing the children's book "For the Love of Jude" by Kenya who has passion for reading. The book tells the story of her cherished Grandma who passed away when Kenya was just five years old and teaches the A-B-C's on how to unconditionally love others. Kenya is an avid reader and can go through two books a day once she gets started! Her books can be found on Amazon or by visiting her website jentodd.com.

"I am very driven by my faith in God's plan and purpose for our lives, and that is core to everything," said Jen. "We love Kensington Community Church in Lake Orion and we are active as volunteers. Kenya and I are both greeters on Sundays and I have led small group studies for women, single moms, racial reconciliation and have been on many mission trips to Africa,"

"I founded a girls and women's empowerment mission in Kenya in partnership with the church that is near and dear to my heart. It is now part of the yearly ongoing education programs in the girls' children's ministry," continued Jen.

"When the Oxford tragedy hit, I volunteered to help bring in mental health support to the area. I believe strongly that everyone deserves to have access to the best trained support for mental and emotional well-being."

Jen and Kenya love hosting their friends, family, and neighbors at their house for boating, barbecues and bonfires and relishing the lake life in their backyard.

"Between the Bunny Run beach and boating life, summer in Lake Orion is total bliss," said Jen. "We try to make it to every downtown and community event all through the year. Our favorites include the Children's Park, Cookies and Cream, Wine Social and local shopping on Broadway."

Kenya and Jen are also football fans and love watching the Lions and Dragons, and especially the Spartan games. When they aren't enjoying lake life in Lake Orion, they cherish their annual trip to Grand Haven on Lake Michigan, visits to Florida and California and trips to warm beach places in the winter.

This summer, keep an eye out for Jen and Kenya around town. You'll find them volunteering at Kensington, taking in a concert at the Children's Park, or strolling the shops downtown. When you do see them, be sure to take a moment to stop and say hi. We know you'll love getting to know your Orion neighbors!