



WHEN ADOPTees PUSH, PLEASE PULL

MICHELLE MADRID-BRANCH



WHY DO I WRITE SO TRANSPARENTLY ABOUT THE ADOPTEE EXPERIENCE?

Because I know that there are other adoptees in the world, right now, who feel isolated and are frustrated by this sense of isolation. That's not to say that these same adoptees are not loved and cherished by their adoptive families, it's just that adoption—for the adoptee—can feel lonely.

Who do you talk to? Where do you turn? How do you grab hold of emotions and questions that you've stuffed way down inside of you and bring them up to the light? Will you still be loved, included, if you do?

FEAR OF REJECTION IS REAL FOR THE ADOPTEE.

Often, our initial reaction to this fear is to push with all of our might away from the rawest parts of ourselves. Pushing is a protective mechanism for the person of adoption.

How do I know this? As an adoptee, I've done a good amount of pushing in my life. I've pushed people away for fear that they might leave me, first. I've pushed people away as a test to see if they'd come back. I've pushed the door closed to relationships because I didn't trust that those relationships would last. I've pushed my feelings down deep and hoped, in the doing, that the hurt would disappear. It doesn't.

I'VE PUSHED AND HUSTLED TO PROVE MY WORTH, YET I STILL FELT UNCERTAIN OF MY VALUE.

I've pushed to be seen as perfect because I believed that imperfect things—imperfect people—would be sent back. Exclusion is excruciating for the adoptee. I didn't understand that perfection doesn't exist. I didn't know that the quest for perfection, an impossible goal, only leaves a person feeling more and more disappointed in themselves.

I've pushed and punched at the holes in my birth history. I've blamed myself for the holes. I've pushed to go back and re-live the parts of my life that disappeared without my consent. I've pushed to make people proud that I didn't even know. I've pushed to run from the shame I felt inside. I've pushed to find the answers to, *why*, and *who*, and *how*. I've pushed to please others because the pleasing made me feel wanted, even if it also made me feel weak and sad. I've pushed myself to the point of exhaustion just trying to make sense of it all.

Adoption.

So often, I hear those who love adoptees say, "They keep pushing me away." I want you to understand that the pushing is not aimed to hurt you—it's not personal.

PUSHING, FOR THE ADOPTEE, IS OFTEN AN INVOLUNTARY ACT OF PROTECTION.

It's a survival technique that kicks in quickly and often without notice because a part of the adoptee feels so exposed and at risk.

Feeling the wound is frightening, and yes—risky—but it's necessary. For all of us, adopted or not, we must feel the things that have hurt us in order to face the wounds—begin healing them—and move forward. Pushing is an act of avoidance. We want to stay in control and ahead of the pain. Only, pushing and avoidance are short-term strategies that can only lead to long-term suffering.

So, what do we do with the adoptee who may be pushing right now? Pushing you away, avoiding what needs to be dealt with, hustling for their worth, pushing their feelings way down, pushing for perfection, pushing to belong....?

We pull.

We pull them in. We pull them closer. We pull them into love.

My dad once told me, on a day when my toddler boy was raging against the shifts that had occurred in his life from Russia to America—"Love the hurt out of him. Pull him to you, Michelle." My boy was pushing and I started pulling, and what happened next was nothing short of a miracle. He melted into me and, together, we cried and grieved for all he was feeling. I didn't leave. I didn't push back. This was not a tug-of-war over control. This was about love and healing and understanding and inclusion and compassion and empathy. This was about a commitment to stay and never, ever leave. And, my boy needed to feel that from the woman who was now his mom.

ADOPTees NEED TO FEEL YOUR COMMITMENT TO STAY EVEN WHEN WE PUSH BACK SO HARD THAT IT TAKES YOUR BREATH AWAY.

And, at the same time, adoptees need to be encouraged and supported so that they can stop pushing away their feelings, questions, emotions, and truths. It's time to face what needs to be faced—speak it out loud—so that every adoptee can begin thriving in all areas of their lives.

It's time for authenticity in adoption—on all levels.

It's time to understand the pain behind the push and to activate the power of the pull. It's time to see that the adoptee's push is just a trade, although not a sound one, but a trade being made to stay safe.

Brené Brown says this about trading authenticity for safety, "If you trade your authenticity for safety, you may experience the following: anxiety, depression, eating disorders, addiction, rage, blame, resentment, and inexplicable grief."

I once was a master at trading authenticity for safety. I once felt the weight of anxiety, depression, blame, resentment, and grief. When I stopped pushing and opened myself to the pull of authenticity, love, connection, community, and honesty—the weight left me. Not in a way where I felt abandoned or rejected, but in a way where I felt finally free.

Which is what I hope for every adoptee—freedom. Freedom from the things that keep them up at night, the things that make them want to push away from feeling what needs to be felt and asking what needs to be asked, freedom from the wounds, freedom from the fear, freedom from the fight. *Freedom from the push.*

THE NEXT TIME THE ADOPTEE IN YOUR LIFE PUSHES, RESPOND WITH A PULL.

Please, pull.

Pull them. Secure them. Assure them...back to love.

