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Author to highlight adoption trends event at Bellefaire

BY SUE HOFFMAN

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Adoption has brought Jennifer Woda and Brian Thornton everything they could dream of in a family. Woda, who teaches an early childhood music program through her company Sing and Swing, and Thornton, a cellist with the Cleveland Orchestra, adopted two biracial girls as infants.

Maya, 9, and Madelyn, 4 1/2, are both Caucasian and African-American, and Madelyn is also part Cherokee.

“We adopted both girls through Bellefaire,” said Woda. “Being a multiracial family has enriched our lives.”

The Cleveland Heights couple’s decision to adopt followed more than four years of infertility treatment. When they picked Maya up at the hospital just days after her birth in December 2003, they were thrilled, Woda said. “We didn’t care if our baby was black or white; we just wanted a healthy infant. Everything felt like it was a biological child except I didn’t have to go through pregnancy,” Woda said. Woda and Thornton adopted Madelyn in 2009.

“We were already a blend of cultures,” said Woda. She is Jewish and her husband was raised Methodist. Both share their family traditions with the girls.

The family is active at Anshe Chesed Fairmount Temple in Beachwood, where Woda sings in the choir and provides her “Music Together” program. Thornton, whose teacher, the late Lev Aronson, was a Holocaust survivor, plays the cello for Kol Nidre services. Madelyn attends preschool at Fairmount Temple and Maya participates in the Mandel JCC’s Playmakers Youth Theatre.

The family also honors the girls’ biological culture. “I’m teaching them Jewish traditions, but we talk about Martin Luther King Jr. and Trayvon Martin,” Woda said. “As a transracial adoptive parent, you have a responsibility to understand what it means to be a person of color in our society. You need to prepare them for racism and prejudice and to give them appropriate responses.”

The Woda-Thornton family configuration apparently reflects a trend.

“At Bellefaire JCB, we are seeing a rise in transracial adoptions like the Woda-Thornton household,” said Deborah Arnold, director of marketing and communications.

Bellefaire JCB, a child welfare agency in Shaker Heights, will present a free seminar, “The New Face of Adoption,” from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Thursday Nov. 14.

Keynote speaker Kevin Hofmann, author of “Growing Up Black in White,” will share his experiences with transracial adoptions. Born to a white mother and a black father in racially charged Detroit in 1967, Hofmann was adopted by a white minister and his wife who had three biological children.

The seminar includes breakout sessions on adoption cost, the effect of the Internet on “closed” (confidential) adoptions, and the impact of the Hague Convention on international adoptions.

“In Cleveland, there’s a need for adoptive parents,” said Andy Dobrin, Bellefaire JCB foster care and adoption division director. “Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Family Services reports that today there are over 600 ‘waiting’ children available for adoption.”



Jen Woda and Brian Thornton out for dinner with their children Madelyn, 4 1/2, and Maya, 9, who wore a wig as a “fashion statement.”