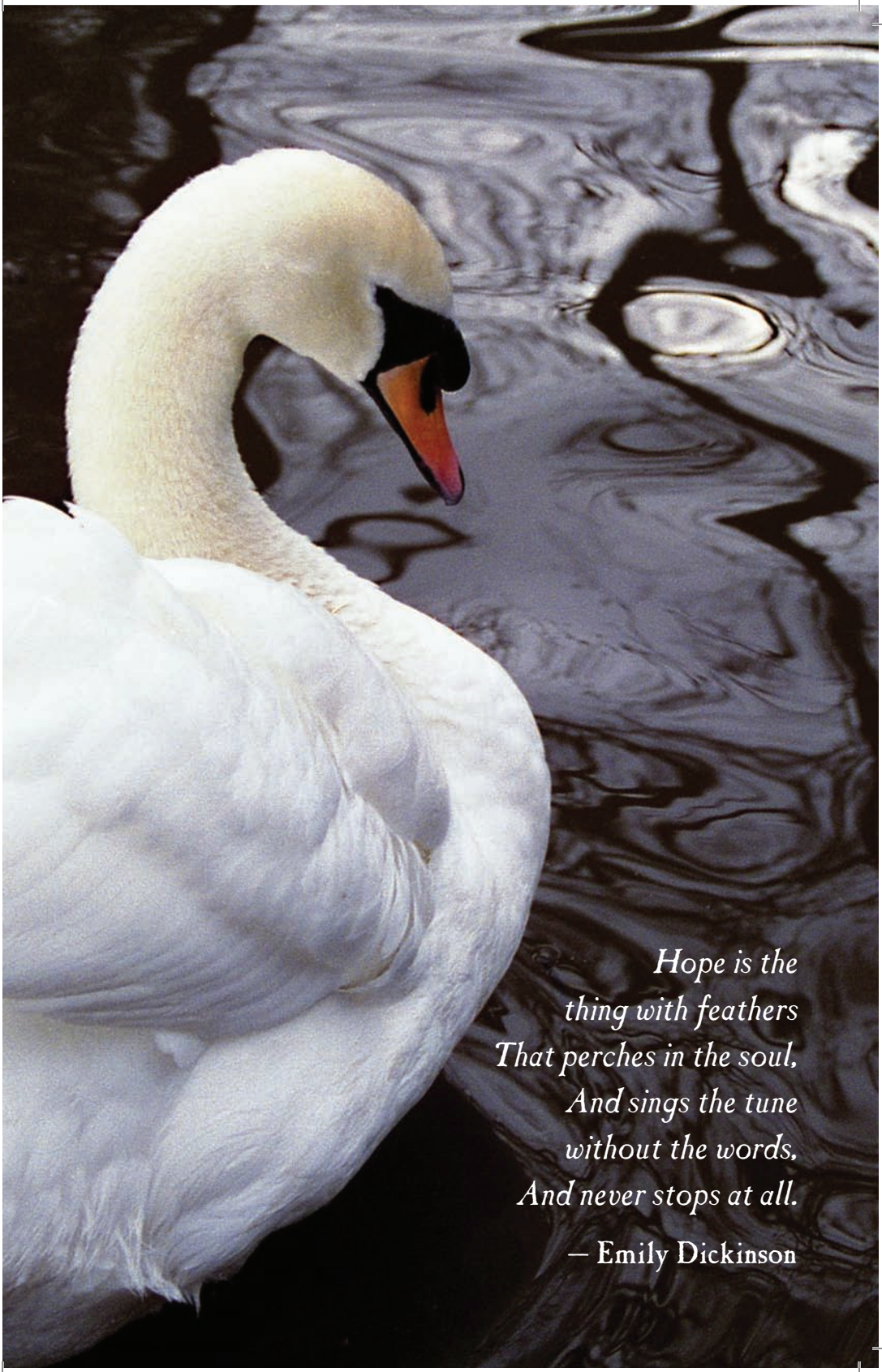

Hope is the
thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune
without the words,
And never stops at all.
— Emily Dickinson

Faith is the bird that sings
when the dawn is still dark.
—Rabindranath Tagore

Coping with loss. Renewing hope.

Hope is the single most powerful and positive strength you need when embarking on any journey, no matter how long and difficult that journey may seem.

You have received this booklet because we realize that you have experienced a tremendous loss. We have come to refer to this loss as an "adoption miscarriage." When you experience this devastating setback, you may go through a wide range of emotions. This booklet was created to help you understand that the emotions you are feeling are very natural and very real.

You will find some suggestions on how to cope with your loss and to also help remind yourself that it is normal to grieve. The stages of grief are briefly outlined, as they are important stages toward your eventual healing. We've also included some firsthand accounts of the emotions that others have experienced on their personal adoption journeys.

We know that this booklet won't take away your pain, but we hope that it will lessen the sting and help you talk about your loss with us when you are ready. We hope you discover the courage necessary to complete your journey on the road to a successful adoption.

What you may want to know, but are afraid to ask

Is this my fault?

Perhaps you are afraid that you did something to change the expectant parent's mind. This is a common fear. It is not your fault. Birth parents change their minds for many reasons. Most commonly, it is because they could not find the strength necessary to become a birth parent.

I am not meant to be a parent.

This is not the case. If you wish to become a parent, then the first step to parenthood is not giving up. Parenthood is filled with challenges. Your path to parenthood has led to this disappointment, but you will become a parent if you continue exploring your options.

I feel like giving up.

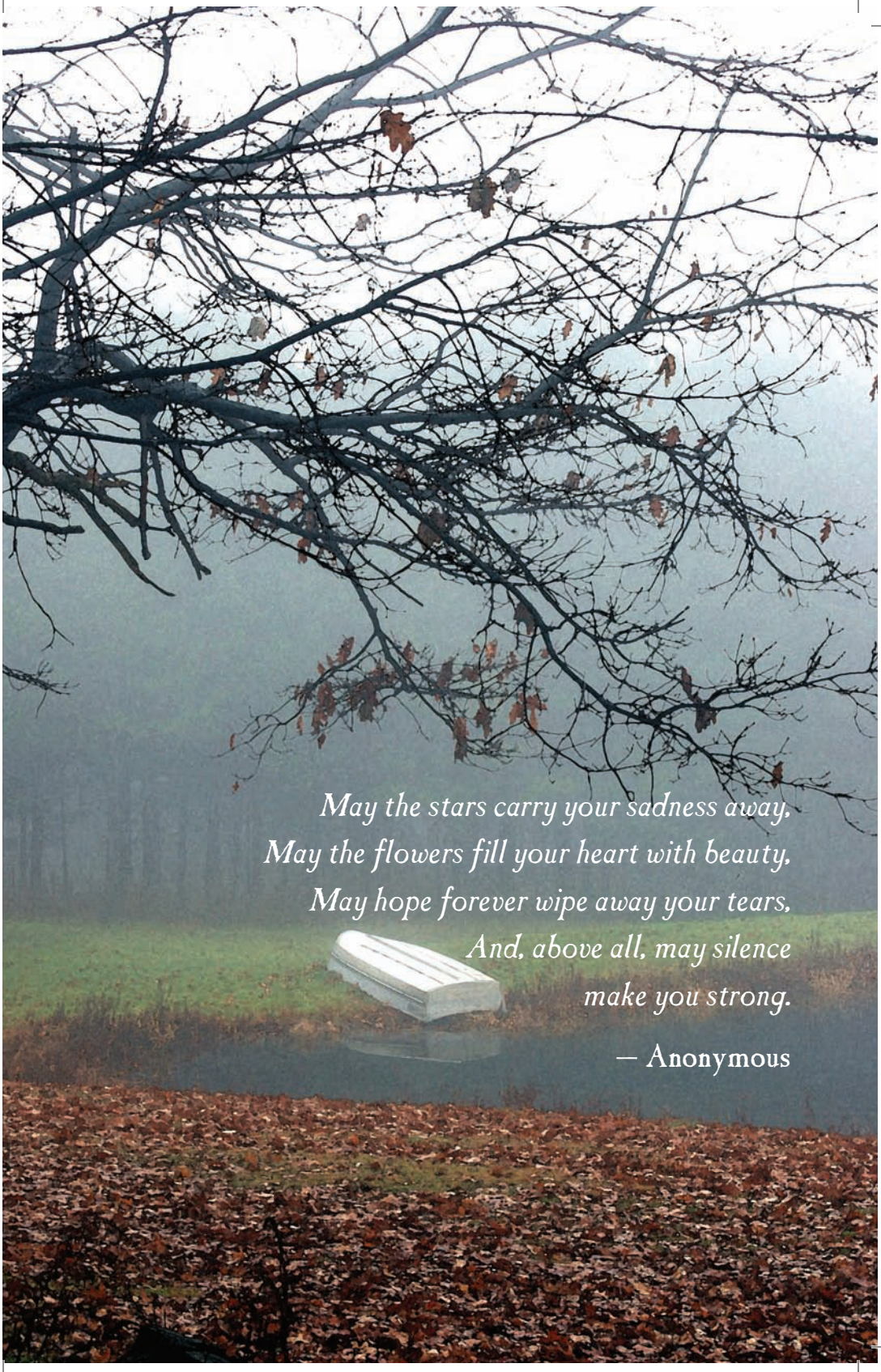
This is normal. You are emotionally exhausted. Give yourself time to heal. When you are ready, get back in the saddle, re-evaluate your options and continue with the journey.

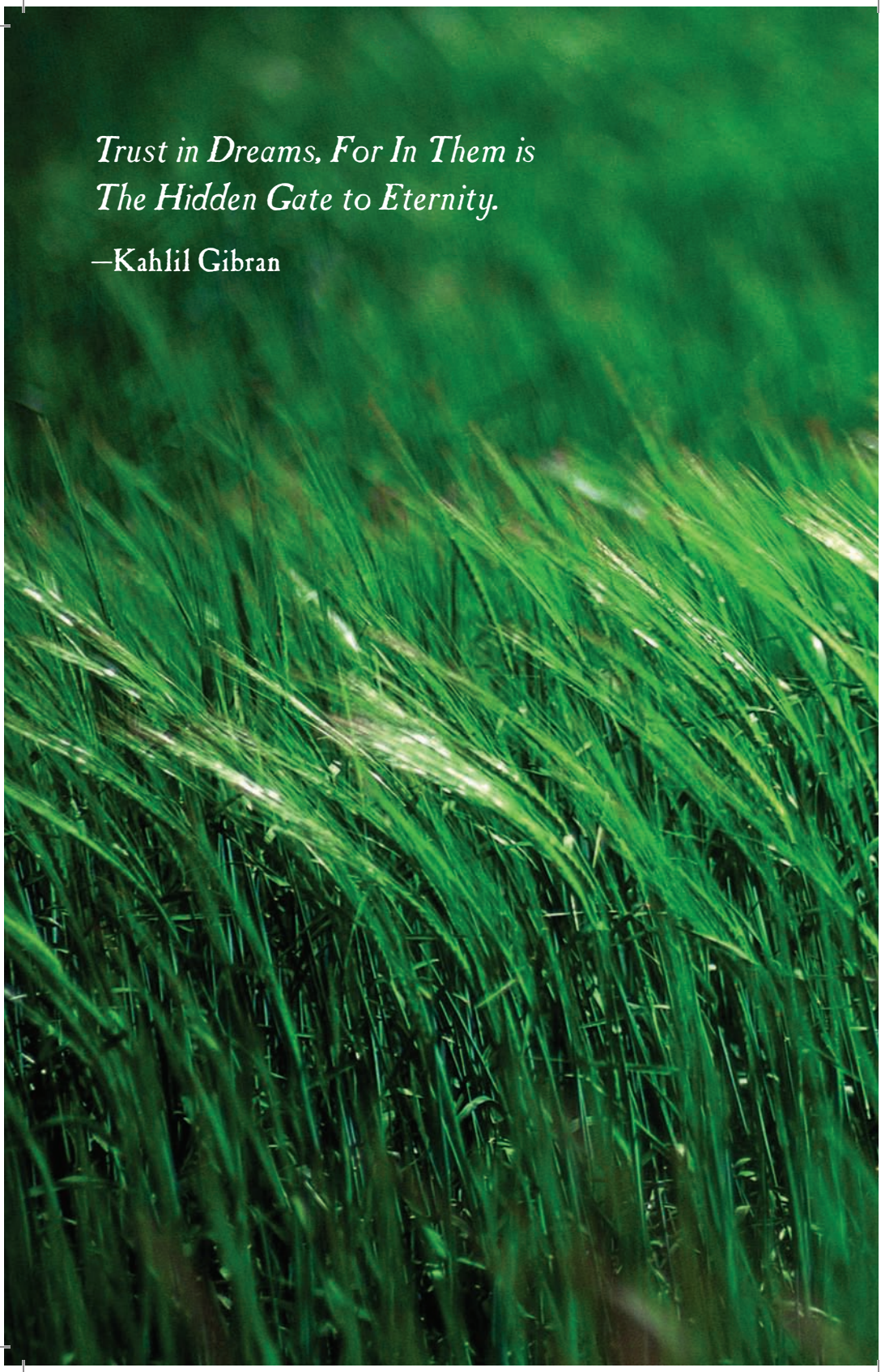
It will never happen.

The power of positive thinking is strong. If you believe it will happen, then you must continue on your adoption journey. Do not give up.

Isn't there something the agency can do?

Isn't there some way the agency can make the process less painful in order to prevent this kind of disappointment? You may feel compelled to ask Adoption STAR to profile and match you without disclosing these matches so as to avoid these disappointments. It is almost impossible to do this; no two adoption circumstances are alike. We need your full participation and input when considering referrals and matches. During the grieving process, we encourage you to call us, talk with us and let us know how we can be of help to you during this time. ❖


May the stars carry your sadness away,
May the flowers fill your heart with beauty,
May hope forever wipe away your tears,
And, above all, may silence
make you strong.
— Anonymous


Trust in Dreams, For In Them is
The Hidden Gate to Eternity.
—Kahlil Gibran

How to keep your adoption dream alive

Allow your friends and family to help you.

Most of us love to serve others in their time of need, but feel that we are "putting someone out" when the favor is returned. Do yourself and your family a tremendous favor—accept the help! Welcome the hugs, the tears, the prayers, the food, the work relief, the baby-sitting offers (if you already have children) and, if warranted, the monetary aid. As your friends and family begin to call and visit, think about your needs so your support group can put their love to work. It's hard to find the right words to say, so let them express their love and concern through actions.

Express yourself.

Your friends and family have the best intentions in their attempts to comfort you, but sometimes the words don't come out just right. Clarify what they meant to say instead of internalizing the hurt and letting misunderstandings bottle up. Perhaps it's best to tell your story once, instead of repeating it over and over. Ask a friend to make calls to your closest friends who can help spread the word for you and avoid the painful re-telling of your loss.

Change your routine. Allow yourself to grieve.

When first learning of your disappointment, rather than going home to an empty nursery or quiet house, it may ease the pain to stay in a hotel or do something other than what you had planned. Give yourself some time to realize that, while it might not be a death, it feels like one. You have the right to mourn this loss. At the same time, focus on your dream to adopt and don't give up until it becomes a reality.

Let your partner grieve in their own way.

Everyone grieves very differently, and not always like their counterparts. Some people want to talk about it; others prefer to be left alone. Some people need their parents, their clergy or their friends first; sometimes your partner may not want to talk until they have sorted out their feelings.

It may be helpful to seek out people who have been through miscarriages or infant deaths, or others who have suffered failed placements. Their wisdom will be invaluable to you as you try to imagine your future.

It's important for couples to respect their partner's natural boundaries and to understand that, what you need may not be what your partner needs. If this is the case, you both must communicate—up-front—what it is you need, go and get this support from the person who can best give it…and then promise each other to "circle back around" when ready.

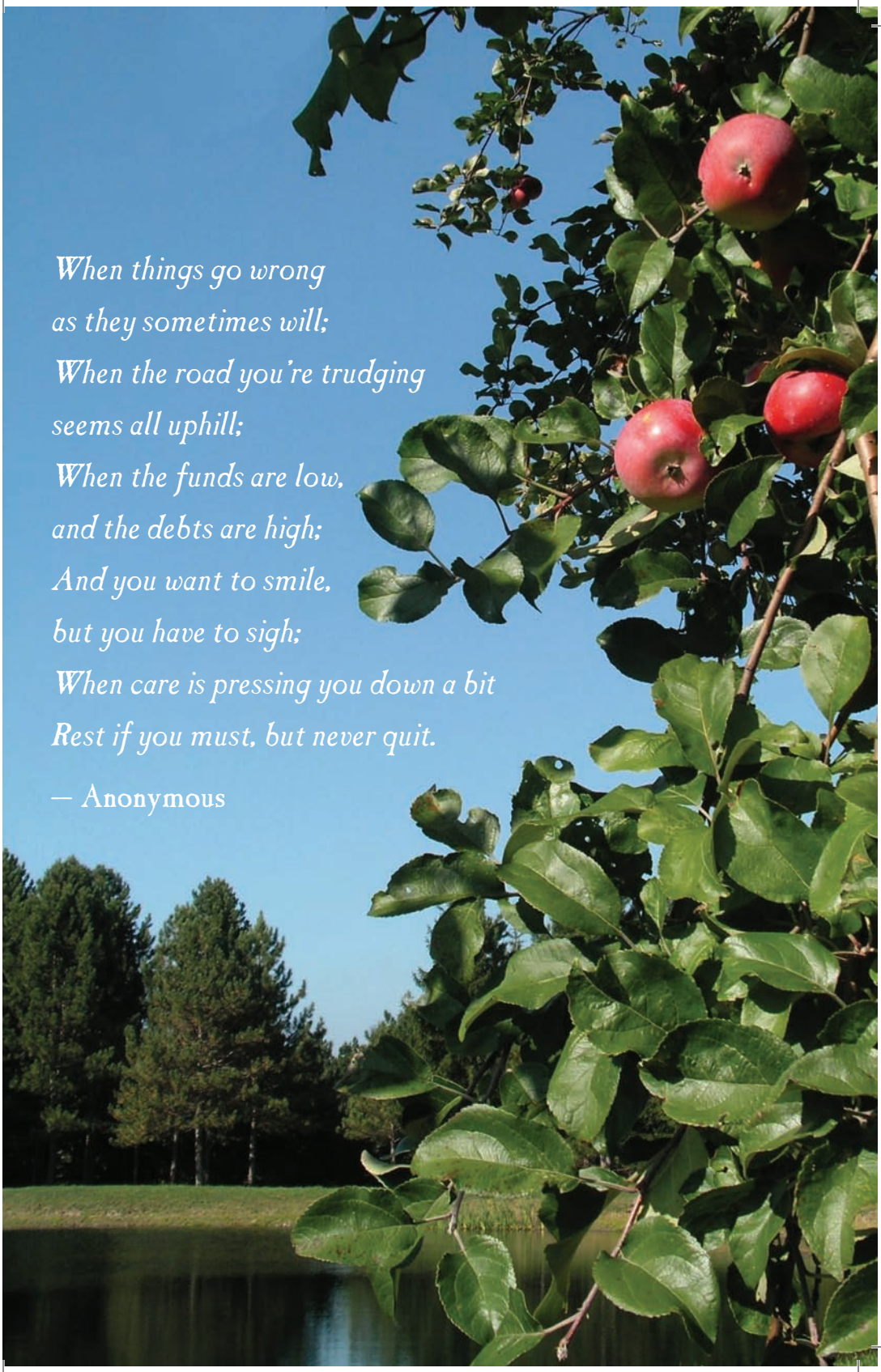
Consider taking some time off from adoption.

This may sound frightening, but you make the rules. Know yourself. Some people are fine jumping right back in and others need more time. It may be as little as a week, up to a month, or longer. Only you know when you are ready. Let the agency know when you wish to hear about referrals again.

Seek closure.

Examine what you have lost and what you still need to move forward. Some box up the toys, put away the stroller, and repaint the baby room immediately. Others make minor alterations and prepare for the next go around. There is no right or wrong answer, but impulsive, spur-of-the-moment reactions are not advised. Throwing the car seat in the river and the stuffed animals into the fireplace may release some pent-up anger and feel wickedly satisfying for the moment, but you will most likely regret it later.

Discuss your next steps with those important to you, and come up with a plan to move forward. Write a letter to the birth mother, God, or your agency. Let them sit, and if after a week the letters still seem appropriate, send them. Express yourself in your normal creative outlets: write music or poetry; make a symbolic craft or a video. Your emotions will often sneak themselves into the endeavor and bring spontaneous healing moments that may otherwise be missed. ❖


When things go wrong
as they sometimes will;
When the road you're trudging
seems all uphill;
When the funds are low,
and the debts are high;
And you want to smile,
but you have to sigh;
When care is pressing you down a bit
Rest if you must, but never quit.
— Anonymous

Understanding the stages of grief

(courtesy of www.grief.com)

The stages of grief were not meant to tuck messy emotions into neat packages. Grief is as individual as our lives. **Denial, anger, bargaining, depression** and **acceptance** are all part of the process of learning to live with the one we lost. They are words to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling, but are not stops on a linear timeline in grief. We may feel one, then another and back again to the first one. We all go through them in a different order with the common hope of accepting the stages of grief, and making us better equipped to cope with life and loss.

Denial

This first stage helps us to survive the loss. In this stage, the world becomes meaningless and overwhelming. Life makes no sense. We are in a state of shock and denial. We go numb. We wonder how we can go on, if we can go on, why we should go on. We try to find a way to simply get through each day. Denial and shock help us to cope and make survival possible. Denial helps us to pace our feelings of grief. There is a grace in denial. It is nature's way of letting in only as much as we can handle.

As you accept the reality of the loss and start to ask yourself questions, you are unknowingly beginning the healing process. You are becoming stronger, and the denial is beginning to fade. But as you proceed, all the feelings you were denying begin to surface.

Anger

Anger is a necessary stage of the healing process. Be willing to feel your anger, even though it may seem endless. The more you truly feel it, the more it will begin to dissipate and the more you will heal. There are many other emotions under the anger and you will get to them in time. The truth is that anger has no limits. It can extend not only to your friends, the doctors, your family, to yourself and also to God. You may ask, "Where is God in this?"

Underneath anger is where your pain "lives." It is natural to feel deserted and abandoned. Anger is strength and it can be an anchor, giving temporary structure to the nothingness of loss. At first grief feels like being lost at sea: no connection to anything. But when anger is attached to someone, or has a face, suddenly you have structure—your anger toward them. The anger becomes a bridge over the open sea, a connection from you to them. It is something to hold onto. This connection made from the strength of anger feels better than nothing at all. We usually know more about suppressing anger than feeling it. Anger is just another indication of the intensity of your love.

Bargaining

It seems like you will do anything if only your loved one would be spared. "Please God," you bargain, "I will never be angry at my partner again if you'll just let them live." After a loss, bargaining may take the form of a temporary truce. "What if I devote the rest of my life to helping others? Then can I wake up and realize this has all been a bad dream?"

We become lost in a maze of "If only…" or "What if…" statements. We want life returned to what is was; we want our loved one restored. We want to go back in time: know the birth parent will change their mind, stop the accident from happening… if only, if only, if only. Guilt is often bargaining's companion. The "if onlys" cause us to find fault in ourselves and what we "think" we could have done differently. We may even bargain with the pain. We will do anything not to feel the pain of this loss. We remain in the past, trying to negotiate our way out of the hurt.

Depression

Empty feelings present themselves, and grief enters our lives on a deeper level, deeper than we ever imagined. This depressive stage feels as though it will last forever. It's important to understand that this depression is not a sign of mental illness. It is the appropriate response to a great loss. We withdraw from life, left in a fog of intense sadness, wondering, perhaps, if there is any point in going on. Depression after a loss is too often seen as unnatural: a state to be fixed, something to snap out of. An adoption

miscarriage is a very depressing situation, and depression is a normal and appropriate response. The realization that the child is not joining your family is understandably depressing. If grief is a process of healing, then depression is one of the many necessary steps along the way.

Acceptance

Acceptance should not be confused with the notion of being "all right" or "OK" with what has happened. Most people don't ever feel OK or all right about a failed adoption. This stage is about accepting the reality that the child will not be with you and recognizing that this new reality is the permanent reality. We don't like it, but eventually we learn to live with it. We must try to live now in a world where our loved one is missing. At first, many people want to maintain life as it was before this situation but the past cannot remain intact. It has been forever changed and we must readjust. We must learn to reorganize roles, re-assign them to others or take them on ourselves.

As we begin to live again and enjoy our life, we know that we can never replace what has been lost. But we can make new connections, new meaningful relationships, and stay true to our adoption journey. We invest in our friendships and in our relationship with ourselves. We begin to live again, but we cannot do so until we have given grief its time. ❖

Firsthand accounts of the adoption journey

To close out our booklet, we are including some firsthand accounts from those who have been through and are currently experiencing the adoption journey. These stories are meant to give you a glimpse into the many emotional ups and downs that can occur throughout the adoption process: from experiencing the first great disappointment, to the eventual success and pure joy that can be found when the adoption journey is taken to its ultimate destination. We hope that these accounts will inspire you to continue your journey and to help you realize that you are not alone.

Now What?! A Shared Perspective

by Michelle Ashby & Matt Coleman

We were three states away in a hotel, waiting to find out when we could see him again. It had been two very long days. The birth mother was "having a rough time," according to the caseworker; she needed some time alone with the baby.

After six months of planning, a two minute conversation ended it all. The birth mother had changed her mind. Her sister had now offered to help raise the baby. That was it. Now what? The following are just a few of the many questions that went through our minds throughout our emotional ordeal. We still wish we had the answers to some of these questions, and hope that by sharing them with you, they will help you to cope with the sometimes uncertain road on the journey to adoption.

Should we call the birth mother?

We've spoken with her so many times over the past six months. We feel that we "know" her.

Can't we just talk this through?

She just said two days ago that she couldn't care for another child. Aren't we entitled to a conversation with… somebody?

Why isn't the agency or lawyer calling to check on us?

They know we are sitting in a hotel not knowing what to do. Shouldn't we get "updates?" We just paid a retainer and the birth mothers expenses for the last six months; now we don't hear from anyone?

Should we go back home?

Maybe we should wait. The agency said that some birth mothers change their minds again after they get home.

Why doesn't the agency check in with the birth mother after she changes her mind?

Shouldn't they remind her why she was going to adopt in the first place?

What if she needs help? What if she is confused?

What do we tell our son?

He held his baby brother at the hospital; he has looked forward so much to being a big brother.

What do we tell our family, co-workers, friends?

We can't bear repeating this story over and over and over.

Should we call her again?

She didn't return our first call. Now, we just want to know how she and the baby are doing in order to bring closure, stop the waiting and go home.

It's been a month since our failed adoption. We waited in Indiana for a week before returning home. The birth mother never called to let us know how she was doing or what she named the baby. Since we've been back in town, talking with close friends and family has helped us the most. Initially, we just wanted to be left alone. We asked our friends to share the news.

At first, we put our name right back in for potential matches, the old "pick yourself up, dust yourself off" approach to grieving. After a few potential matches, we decided that our emotions were still too raw and removed our name from the list. We intend to resume our search one day, but are taking the time to regroup and heal. ❖

The Roller Coaster

by Michele Fried

On November 17, 1987, I was sitting in a Friendly's Restaurant inside a lovely suburban hospital. It was too early for ice cream as it was morning, though if you knew me then, ice cream was acceptable for breakfast too. But not this day, I was too nervous to eat because this was the day we were to meet our son. We were told to wait until the agency social worker came to get us. We waited and waited and waited. I am told

Peace is found from within.
— Anonymous

that it wasn't as long as I remember the wait to be, but, to me, it was an eternity. Finally the social worer arrived, but she didn't report the news we were waiting to hear. Instead, she said that the birth mother couldn't get dressed due to her emotional state and did not arrive at the hospital to sign her papers. The social worker said this meant we needed to begin to prepare ourselves that this adoption was not going to happen.

Prepare? This was a joke, right? As a childless couple waiting to become parents, we have experienced more than our share of losses. From monthly disappointments (when pregnancy tests were negative), to calls from social workers that our profile wasn't selected, to being matched for months…only to find out that the birth father's mother was going to raise the baby. We had also been rejected from agencies because we were either too young, not married long enough, or not the right religion. Shouldn't all these experiences prepare us for this disappointment?

When I received the call that the baby we were waiting for (after a three month match) would not be ours, I cried for hours, maybe days. I could not be consoled. I didn't understand why it hurt so much. I had never even met the birth parents. In fact, they were in a state far away from ours.

No one told me it would be like this. Or did they? Did someone at the agency say this could happen? I didn't remember because it hurt too much. We were now waiting at a hospital being told that the baby waiting in the nursery upstairs may not be ours. So when the social worker stepped away after sharing this dreadful news, instead of crying, I said to my husband, "I am never doing this again." And I meant it—at that moment. I was never going to put myself through this again.

I told him we'd figure something ou—even if that meant never having a baby. Maybe we would adopt an older child—this kind of pain couldn't possibly be associated with adopting an older child, could it? (It was years later that I learned all types of adoptions come with intense emotions.)

Ultimately, November 17th ended happily for us. That emotional morning led to us meeting our son and taking him home. But we arrived at that day after a long roller coaster ride.

On the day that I became a mother, I finally realized that we were not alone on that roller coaster. I learned that adoption is a roller coaster for all involved, even for those you don't expect:

• Our son's birth mother hid her pregnancy for 8 months. She had one month to be subject to her immediate and extended family's reactions and opinions. Since she was a teenager, her mother was intimately involved in the process and coordinated the adoption plans while the entire time trying to manage her own feelings about placing her first grandchild.

• Our agency social worker was going back and forth dealing with our son's birth mother and her mother, the hospital social worker (who was no fan of the adoption plan), and my husband and I. In addition she was updating and getting advice from her agency director (all on a Saturday!)

• Our families who grieved every time we did. They said their own silent prayers. Some of them struggled to understand adoption and others just held our hands. Our families were doubly impacted dealing with their own disappointments of almost becoming grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins.

• Even our neighbors who lent us baby clothes and a car seat were effected. They waited with us during the "almosts and the maybes." They had been so supportive and listened to us throughout this journey.

It was that point that I embarked on my professional career and when I coined the adoption journey as "a roller coaster ride." It's not because I wished it to appear negative, but on the contrary, it was to point out the ups and downs that we may experience before we reach our dream.

We must not forget the others on the ride with us, and we must not forget that we all handle the ride differently. Some just go with the thrills and drama and can find the awe in the journey, knowing the ride will come to a positive end eventually. Others close their eyes tightly whispering or praying for it to be over soon, and then there are others who scream and cry and demand for it to end. Some actually get off the ride, choosing not to go further. That is their right.

We took this roller coaster ride four more times and, yes, while we were more "prepared" for the ups and downs, it didn't take away the pain

of disappointments. Our first adoption experience didn't prepare us for the next losses, because no matter how much you know about the risks beforehand, each loss still hurts.

After three successful adoptions, and working in the field of adoption for many years, my husband and I were matched again with a fourth birth couple. An unexpected call from the agency arrived, but it was nothing we'd personally experienced before. The social worker told us the baby died before birth. Did someone tell us this could happen? Did someone prepare us for this possibility? The loss was profound. We had named him and we had dreamed of him… But this time we cried because by now we knew it was important and natural to cry.

This time, the loss was more than just ours:

• We sent flowers to the birth parents in the hospital. The social worker arranged it for us and we wrote a note to go with it.

• We thanked the social worker for all her work on this emotional case because I will always know how very terrible I felt needing to share the news of a failed match or worse. (I remember having to tell a couple that the baby they planned to adopt was born that morning and died at birth. I remember the prospective mom's reaction so clearly. Through their immense grief and loss, they were able to visit the young birth parents, arrange and pay for the burial where the four of them alone attended. Time went on and this couple was matched again with a birth couple expecting twins. They decorated the nursery with "double everything" only to learn that the birth mother made other plans. I learned so much from this couple. I told them that, too. Because they never gave up... the child they were waiting for was just not born yet, they finally adopted a beautiful baby girl.)

"Acceptance" isn't saying that the loss doesn't hurt anymore, but rather that it was part of the journey. I still can't answer why some of our journeys are filled with more disappointments and losses than others. I don't think anyone can. What I do believe is that if you don't give up, dreams do come true. ❖

A Place In My Heart

by Sue Reardon

I look into his big, brown eyes and kiss his soft and chubby cheeks. My fingers run through his abundant dark curls. His toasted marshmallow skin is in stark contrast to my fair skin and blond hair. Yet he is mine in every way imaginable. I carried him in my heart, my head, and in my dreams for such a long time. I guess that's partly what made the path such a special one. The road to him was anything but ordinary. It was filled with twists and unexpected turns, mountainous peeks and deep valleys. But it was also one filled with hope and faith.

By nature, my husband and I are both go-getters. We set our minds on something, and barrel through to the finish line without looking back. We can also be very spontaneous. So it was likely a surprise to no one when, in the matter of one day, we decided to sell our house AND adopt a second child. That was November of 2006. By August of 2007 we were settled into a new home, approved as adoptive parents and awaiting "the call."

September came and went with no calls. Then, October and November. This was baffling to us, as the wait for our first daughter was relatively short. She came home after only three months of waiting and here we were, after 3 months, and not a single call. At times I questioned if we were on the right path. How could a family as blessed as ours, who'd already experienced so much good, ask for another child? Maybe we didn't have the right. But in the end, we always felt the desire to stay the course and that something extraordinary awaited us.

Around that time, we heard through a friend about a woman in Pennsylvania who was looking to make an adoption plan for her unborn child. Although we had been seeking to adopt a Caucasian child, we found that this woman, LeAnn, was pregnant with a biracial baby. It wasn't something we had ever seriously considered. Crazy as it sounds, we hadn't given it much thought all. We had always "pictured" our family with Caucasian children. So we talked to each other and our families. We did some personal soul searching and began to realize what a non-issue it really was for us.

So we were quickly put in touch with LeAnn. I loved LeAnn immediately. She was the sweetest little thing, and I always enjoyed our conversations. It's as if distance and circumstance hadn't been as they were, I am sure we would have been the greatest of friends. Already parenting two small children alone and being in the midst of a high-risk pregnancy, her strength and determination amazed me. But she was adamant that she did not have the means to raise a third child. We chatted on the phone with ease. After several conversations, we anxiously agreed to adopt her unborn baby girl. Over the following weeks we kept in touch and she sent paperwork into the agency we were working with.

LeAnn would often call to tell us about her most recent doctor's visits, and we were even planning a weekend trip to meet one another in person. With each conversation, my admiration and love for her grew. But although things were progressing well, in my heart I had reservations. It's as if I knew this baby wasn't meant to be ours. I could tell that deep down inside LeAnn wanted nothing more than to keep her baby. But her current circumstances seemed just too much to make that happen, which broke my heart.

Conversations continued and I tried to ignore what my heart was saying. My head told me that we needed to line things up. So after much internal resistance, I began to make plans. We began to plan our leaves from work. I packed a diaper bag. I picked out a name. I could even picture her tiny body all dressed in pink lying in her crib. But it still didn't feel right. And I would soon learn why.

I eventually shared some of my reservations will LeAnn. I encouraged her to think about it some more and that, although we would be over the moon with the chance to raise this baby, we would also understand if she had changed her mind. No one was going to blame her for wanting to keep her baby. In the end LeAnn decided to parent. And I knew then, like I know now, that it was the right decision for everyone. Yes my heart was broken, but I also had an overwhelming sense of peace.

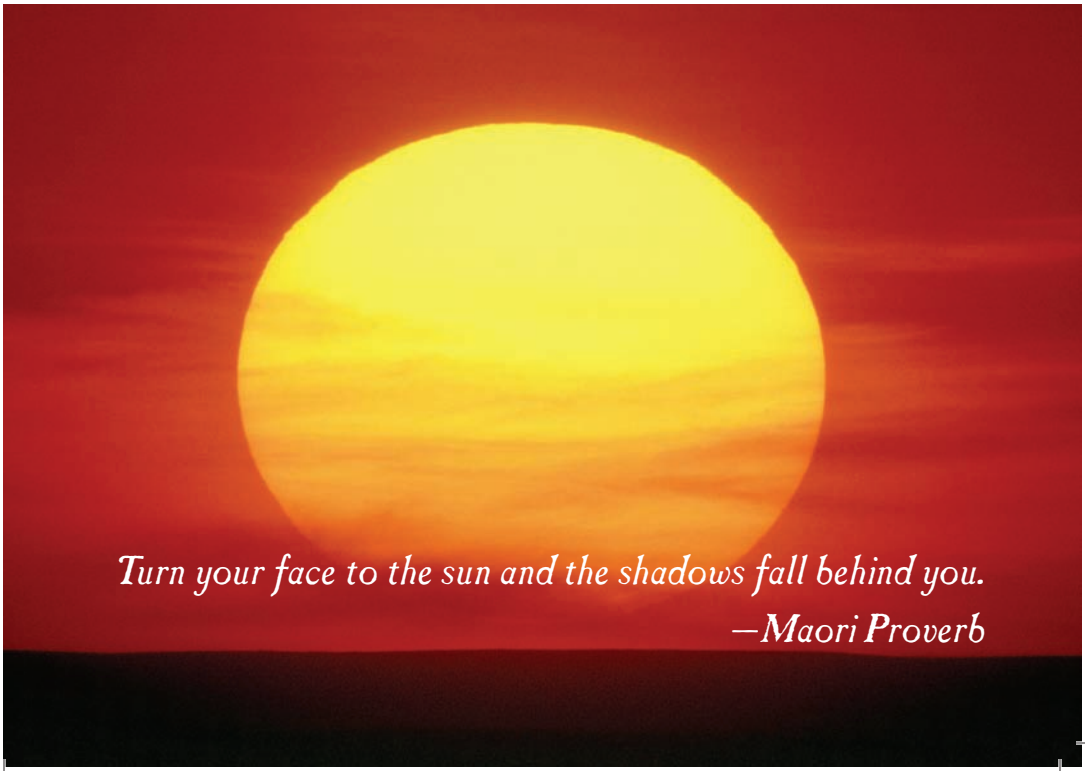
It was a weird feeling and still is actually. I know there was a reason for us meeting. It just wasn't the reason either of us first thought. I was there to support her emotionally during a difficult time; she, and her baby, served

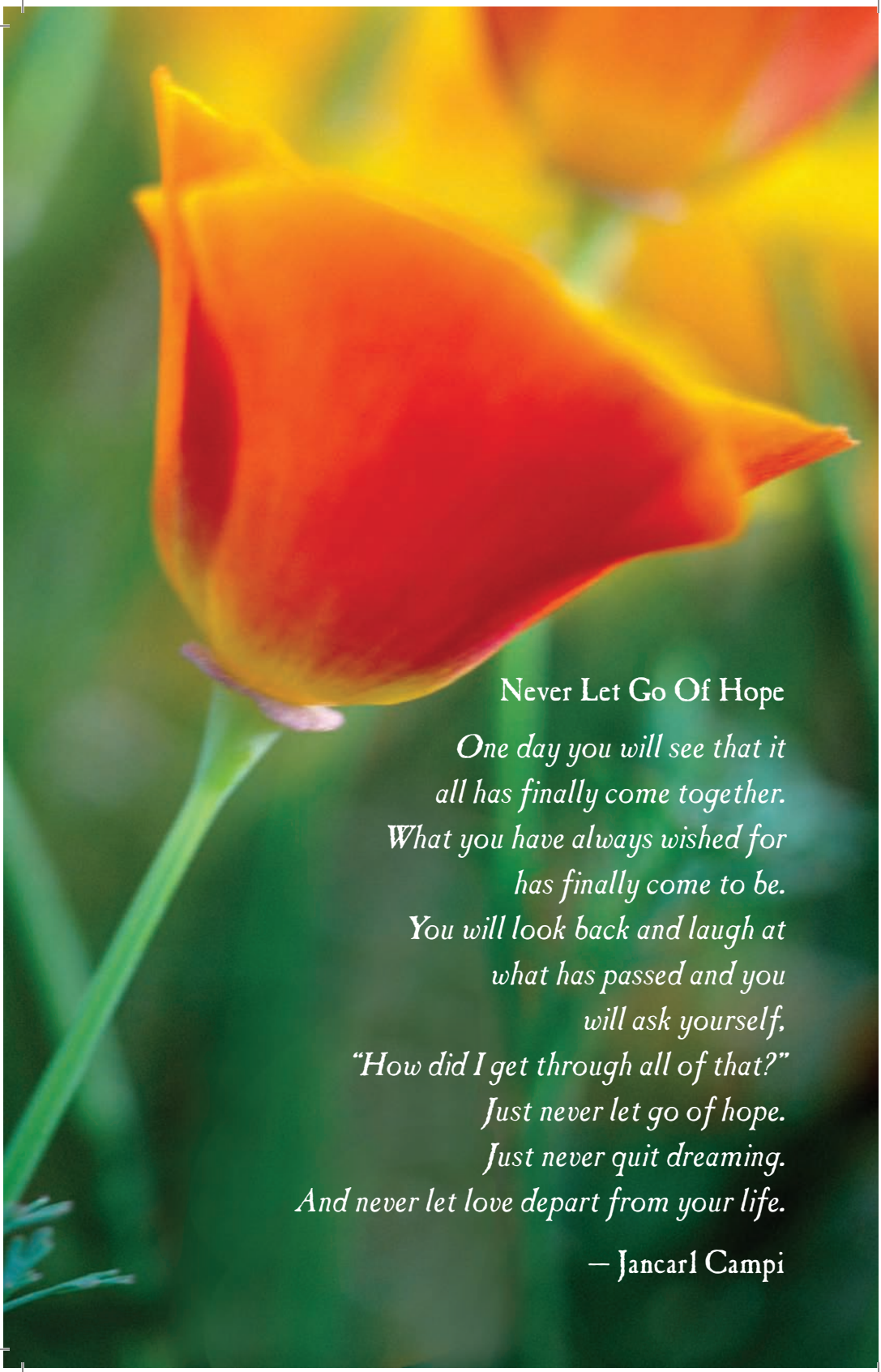
as a catalyst for our family opening ourselves to adopting trans racially.

Just three months later, we welcomed home our beautiful son Cullen... a baby who we likely would never considered had it not been for our experience with LeAnn.

I still think of her so very often (of the whole family actually). LeAnn was usually busy getting her son to bed or brushing out her daughter's hair during our phone chats. I could hear them in the background. And I loved them too. I worried for all of them. I still do. And I wonder how the baby is. What was she named? She would be one now. Is she healthy? Walking? Talking?

I do believe that neither of us happened upon each other by chance. God was very busy laying the ground work for what would lie ahead. And although I know LeAnn's daughter was never really ours, she and her family will always carry a special place in my heart. She opened our hearts to adopting trans racially and led us to the road that ultimately brought us to our son. And for that alone, we will be forever grateful. ❖




Never Let Go Of Hope
One day you will see that it
all has finally come together.
What you have always wished for
has finally come to be.
You will look back and laugh at
what has passed and you
will ask yourself,
"How did I get through all of that?"
Just never let go of hope.
Just never quit dreaming.
And never let love depart from your life.
— Jancarl Campi

My Notes or Thoughts

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