

[00:00:01.290] - Lisa Qualls

Welcome to the Adoption Connection Podcast, where we share resources by and for adoptive and foster moms. I'm Lisa Qualls

[00:00:08.970] - Melissa Corkum

and this is Melissa Corkum. Don't worry, we get it, and we're here for you.

[00:00:15.400] - Melissa Corkum

Hey, friends. Welcome to episode 102 of the Adoption Connection Podcast. This week we're talking about siblings. And when we hear from you guys, siblings, all things siblings, are one of the most requested topics to train, to talk about. The questions about siblings are frequent, and there are so many things to talk about in this kind of broad siblings category. But today we wanted to talk specifically about whether or not we should keep biological siblings together when considering placements for foster care and adoption. And we brought to the podcast Sue Badeau, who is a good friend of ours and just brilliant on so many levels. She has also been on the podcast speaking about race and adoption.

[00:01:07.760] - Lisa Qualls

Yes, Sue is an expert on so many topics, but she's perfect for this interview because she and her husband Hecto, are the lifetime parents of 22 children, two by birth and 20 adopted. And they have also served as foster parents for more than 50 children in three states, and as a host family for refugee youth. So they have parented groups of siblings multiple times. Sue has a degree in early Child Development in Elementary Education from Smith College, and she's worked in child serving fields as a professional for 33 years, working in adoption, foster care, juvenile justice, children's mental health, and education. She's written curricula for parents and judges and attorneys. She's pretty much done everything. She's a very knowledgeable person, and I'm just so happy that we got to have the opportunity to talk with her about the topic of siblings.

[00:02:12.240] - Lisa Qualls

Hello, Sue. Welcome to the Adoption Connection podcast.

[00:02:15.040] - Sue Badeau

Hi, Lisa. I'm really excited to be sharing this time with you.

[00:02:18.450] - Lisa Qualls

Well, we got to spend a lot of time together when we were both speaking at the Refresh conference in Seattle that got canceled after we were there because of Coronavirus. And so that was just so wonderful for me to spend some time with you. I mean, you're an incredible expert on so many topics, and I came home and thought, wow, how many different things could I interview Sue about? But I'm really excited about the topic of siblings, which is what we're going to be talking about today. But before we do that, will you just share your very remarkable story of being an adoptive parent?

[00:02:56.660] - Sue Badeau

So I'm actually talking to you now from my small home in the Philadelphia area. You'll hear that my husband and I raised many, many children, but a couple of years ago, the last of them got into their own adult, independent life, and we moved out of our big house into a small two bedroom apartment. And then right after Seattle, he went to visit one of our sons, thinking he'd just be able to come home. And then everything got shut down. And so I'm literally alone, really, for the first time in my life. I don't think I've ever... I've been alone on a trip. I work, I travel for work, but I've never lived alone in my entire life. I grew up with my parents, I dated my high school sweetheart. So we both went to college, but got married immediately after college. And then we started having all these kids that I'll mention in a moment. So I've absolutely never lived alone. So these last three weeks have been very strange for me to really be completely alone. So it's nice to see your face and hear your voice.

[00:04:00.710] - Lisa Qualls

I did not know that happened. I can't believe it.

[00:04:04.760] - Sue Badeau

That's the most recent part of our story, but it's very different from the other part of our story where I never had a moment alone, never mind weeks alone. And it really is connected. I mean, our story is very deeply connected to our topic of siblings today. So this will lead in quite well, because our permanent lifetime family includes 22 children. That's all adults. But when people say, how did you end up with 22 children? First off, to say it wasn't the original plan, and I'll mention a moment about that in a second. But how it got to be 22 really was because of siblings. We did adopt sibling groups three separate times, big sibling groups, two of them at least were big. So our numbers come up kind of in one swoop. So the numbers in our family and the topic of siblings go hand in hand here. But yeah, high school sweethearts, like I said, and we always talked about wanting to do something with our adult lives that was going to involve children and helping children, and we weren't quite sure what that would look like. But soon after we got married, right out of college, we had a bunch of things happen in our life and our church and presentations that just got us into this idea of becoming adopted parents, possibly becoming foster parents.

[00:05:17.260] - Sue Badeau

We signed up at a local agency. I was still barely, not even 21, I don't think asked if we could be considered as foster parents. And they asked us would we take teenagers. We had been married less than a year, we were young, we didn't really hardly know anything, but we said sure. So our beginning of our foster care parent journey was with teenagers. And we ended up through a series of different agencies we worked with, and fostering 23 teenagers over the next few years, about five or six at a time, and they all stayed with us varying amounts of time, and so many of them were still even in touch with now. But during that period, we realized that so many of these.. In fact, I even totaled it up once... The teenagers that were coming to our home, they were spending time with us, but we were like their 11th, 12th, 13th foster care placement. They had been in foster care 11, 12, 13 years before coming to our home. And so we really started thinking about what is this idea? What do kids really need? And we came up with this concept that they really needed to be able to set down roots in a family. And of course that's the theme of what is known in the professional world now is permanency. But we were still young, we didn't even know the lingo, and in fact, even in the professional circles, that word wasn't yet being used.

[00:06:46.240] - Lisa Qualls

Tell us what year that was approximately when you started fostering.

[00:06:50.680] - Sue Badeau

Absolutely. So we got married in 1979 and we were foster parents by 1980. And so yeah, nobody was talking permanency. And in fact, back then, believe it or not, if you had a foster child in your home and you started to get attached to them or started them to you, that in itself was a reason to move them. It was considered inappropriate to attach, to let the child attach to you. So that's how far things have changed. But we saw that that's what children needed. So we decided to shift in the direction of adoption and/or helping children reconnect with their biological families, but having permanency one way or the other. So as we did that, we sort of weaned out of the foster care world for a while and we had our two birth children, we had adopted our first two, and our house felt empty after all those years of having all these teenagers. So we went to visit some friends in another state that we had only been corresponding with, who had a large family of twelve kids that included two sets of siblings they had adopted. And we said, wow, we never even really knew about that.

[00:07:57.810] - Sue Badeau

And we both have very close relationships with our own siblings. And we just started learning about all the siblings that get separated through the foster care system, or even internationally through orphanage and other situations. So we really became focused on siblings. We started looking and saying, God, show us what siblings need a family? And so it kind of went from there. We adopted one sibling group of four kids, then we adopted another sibling group of six, and all six of them were teenagers at the time they joined us. Literally from 13 up to 19 when they joined our family. And our last set of siblings was a set of two. So that was a smaller one. But three sets of siblings, six, four and two. That pretty much is how our family grew so big so quickly. So over the years, we adopted three children with terminal illnesses, and all three of them have now passed away. Blessing for us, they all

lived twice as long as what the medical prognosis was, so that life expectancy was that they wouldn't live to be more than 11, 12, 13. They all lived into their twenties, but they now passed away in their eternal home.

[00:09:17.580] - Sue Badeau

But we miss them very much all the time. So we have 19 still living children who all are adults and who all live in one way or another, independent from us. They don't live totally independently, most of them. We have many children with a lot of challenges, so we do everything from, you know, just check-ins and emotional support to managing and helping them with their rent and their money management. But all of them are doing amazingly better than what people thought they might do. So they're working, except for right now, most of them have lost their jobs, unfortunately, and they have their lives and their relationships. So square out this side of that story on our journey, we have grandchildren and even great grandchildren.

[00:10:02.220] - Lisa Qualls

Wow, great grandchildren. That's amazing. How many, so you have 19 living children, and how many of them have a spouse?

[00:10:11.890] - Sue Badeau

At Christmas time, when I make my list of just our children, their spouses or partners and their children, it comes to over 90 people.

[00:10:22.910] - Lisa Qualls

Wow, that's what I was wondering.

[00:10:25.390] - Sue Badeau

Not including any of our siblings or cousins or any other relationships, just that.

[00:10:31.050] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, right. Wow, okay. And how old are your grandchildren? From oldest to youngest?

[00:10:38.210] - Sue Badeau

Yes, our youngest grandchild is a baby, still just a year old, and our oldest is just about 30. She's turning 30 this year.

[00:10:48.390] - Lisa Qualls

Okay, so you became very passionate about keeping sibling groups together. Now, did all of your... Like, in the sibling groups, did they all come at once, or was it a situation where you started, you had some of them and then you became aware of others and they joined? How did that happen?

[00:11:07.170] - Sue Badeau

So interesting, we dropped siblings three times, and each time there was a little variation on that answer to that question. So the first time it was four siblings. They were together at that point in the same cluster home, and we adopted them all together. They all came at once when they joined their family. And they were school aged children, they were ranged from about five up to ten years old, two boys and two girls. The next time we adopted siblings, the older teenagers that I mentioned to you, there were six of them. They were all in separate placements to begin with. We were called by the agency about just one of them, the youngest. And it was as we began exploring why did they think we would be a good family for him, we started learning that he had all these other siblings. So then we started asking, well, what about them? And we got really interesting answers. Like, well, first of all, two of them technically had already aged out of the foster care system because they were 18 and 19. So they said, well, two of them, you know, they already aged out. They don't need a family. They're independent. And then they said, and then the next three, we're going to prepare them for that. We're not working to get them adopted. They don't need a family anymore. They need to learn skills so they'll be ready for independence. So we have them in those kinds of programs. So really the only one that still needs a family at this point is the 13 year old. Not only because he's the youngest, but he's deaf and he has other challenges, and so we know he's really going to need a family. So it took a lot of

advocacy, actually, to get them restored back together. First we really were advocating with the agency like, we think that siblings should have the chance to be together. Oh, no, you know, they're fine. They're all separate. They're used to it.

[00:12:51.660] - Sue Badeau

And when our initial efforts at advocacy didn't quite hit the mark, we tried another technique that I often teach people. It's kind of a tongue in cheek way that I phrase it, but it really is an advocacy strategy. Is that when someone who's in power says something or wants to do a course of action that you don't agree with, but you know you're not going to win the argument, then just go ahead and sort of pretend to agree with them. Basically, you don't have to say you agree with them, but just say, okay, I understand. You've made your decision, or you know best, or something along those lines. And then work your agenda, your advocacy agenda, sort of subversively on the side. And so that's what we had to do. And we said, well, okay, you've made your decision. But before we adopt him, the youngest one's name is David, we'd like to have at least a gathering, a party, if you want to call it that, a going away party, where you do bring all his siblings together so at least they can meet us and know, who are these people taking our brother. And so they did agree to that. And then once we had the siblings there, we said, we don't believe in splitting up families. And so if your brother's coming home with us, we consider all of your family now. And if you ever want to visit, you can visit. If you ever want to call, you can call. And, oh, if you ever should want to join the family in a more official way, just let us know. We'll figure it out.

[00:14:25.770] - Sue Badeau

So once the kids had that message, one by one, they started saying, I want to join that family. I want to be part of I want to be back with my siblings. And so they would talk to their worker, and their workers felt like, oh, you went behind her back. But at this point, the teen was saying, I want to do this, so then they were working with us. And so in that case, the six of them, the youngest one came first, and then the next two came, and then the oldest three each came one by one by one. And even the two that technically had already aged out of care, they chose to come on their own. They didn't have to have any agency approval. They just made up their mind, hey, I want to do this too. And even the oldest one, who by the time he really was fully kind of engaged and embedded with the family, he said, Can I be adopted too? And he was 20 at that point, but we went ahead and we did his legal adoption in court. That was 30 years ago, and he's a great friend.

[00:15:18.340] - Lisa Qualls

And did all of your kids... Did he change his last name? Do they all have your last name?

[00:15:27.710] - Sue Badeau

Most of them wanted to all have the same family last name. But we ended up hearing from our oldest son that he, and he kind of said it this way now. He said, I believe I'm you're meant to be my family. I'm happy to be your son. But in reality, I could have probably been adopted like six years earlier if the caseworkers would have ever told me I didn't have to change my name. He was a junior to his father. His father had been murdered. He wanted to keep his name, that was important to him. And no one had ever explained that to him. And so he had been fiercely resisting any efforts to get him a family or get him adopted. So we're all thankful that he's our family and our son, but it's unfortunate when kids lose their opportunity to have a family for a lifetime because of misinformation or myths, or just people not knowing things. So he didn't change his name. A couple of the others didn't change their last name. So few of them have different last names than us. A few of them wanted to use the opportunity of adoption to change their first name.

[00:16:37.500] - Sue Badeau

So we have a couple children who changed their first name. Several of them didn't have really a middle name, and many of them kept their birth last name as middle name. But in addition, some of them took on a new middle name when we did the final legal adoption. So we have a whole bunch of different naming circumstances that came up in our family.

[00:16:58.740] - Lisa Qualls

Wow. And then you had the sibling group of four, they came all at once. You have the sibling group of

six that kind of came little by little. And then your last sibling group, how did that one happen?

[00:17:10.960] - Sue Badeau

The last sibling group, which also happened to be two of the last members of the family, so we already had a very large family by the time they came. One of them was one of our children with terminal illness. He had a very significant terminal illness, and he was already six years old. And children with this illness aren't expected to live possibly past eight, somewhere eight to ten. So he also had had other challenges. He was born with fetal alcohol exposure, and had then been in some foster placements where he had been maltreated. So he, besides the terminal illness, he just had a lot going on. By this time, we already had a son, Wayne, with the same actual underlying disease, the same terminal disease. Wayne didn't have all those other factors, but he had the disease. It's a very challenging disease to manage in the home, and it's also very rare, so even doctors usually haven't heard of it. It's called Sanfilippo Syndrome. You probably haven't heard of it.

[00:18:10.270] - Lisa Qualls

Nope, not heard of it.

[00:18:12.940] - Sue Badeau

It involves children that need a lot of chronic, almost 24 hour supervision and care. There's a lot of things in a household that can make it challenging, except if you have a household like ours where you're already doing that. So the social worker, his social worker, Adam, somehow, through a network of social workers, heard that our family was already raising a child with this illness, and she contacted us about him. So we weren't really certain at that point that we were even adding any more children to our family. We sort of felt like it was complete, but after a lot of thought, prayer, discussion, family meetings, everything you do, we realized that we wanted him to join our family. And so we said yes. And that's when we learned he actually had two siblings. One of his siblings was already adopted into a relative family in kinship care, but the other sibling was in foster care, and younger than him and healthy. So we said, well, we'll take both of them. We have this passion about keeping siblings together and all of that. In this case, basically they said, no, you're kind of a second rate family because you're so big.

[00:19:24.560] - Sue Badeau

We are happy to place Adam with you because he has no other options. We just need anybody for him. But we would never place a healthy young child like his brother in a large family. There's so many other options for a healthy young child, that we don't need to resort to a large family like yours. That was one thing they said. Second thing they said was, besides, the brother doesn't have any special needs, and so he shouldn't be saddled with having to grow up in his family with not only his brother, but all your other children with all their special needs. Like, he shouldn't have to be saddled with that. He deserves a family where he doesn't have to be in that situation. So those were the two of the reasons that we were given why they didn't want to keep those siblings together. We really agonized over it, because we knew that Adam really didn't have much time left, that he was terminally ill, that he needed a family who understood his condition. But we strongly believed these brothers needed to be together as well. Anyway, we ended up saying yes about Adam and figuring, well, we'll try to at least do our best to keep your siblings in contact if there's nothing else we can do.

[00:20:39.400] - Sue Badeau

They placed the other sibling, whose name is Aaron. They placed him in a single parent family that wanted a healthy young child. They placed him and so we didn't really have the advocacy tools or strategies that we had with our other siblings. So we kind of felt like we had to let go and just hope that it would all be for the best. And then six months later... So Adam did come and join the family, and six months later, we got a call like, hey, you know what? That adoption is disrupting with his younger brother. He's changed. He's not this sweet little kid with no special needs. He's, like, got all these behaviors, and he's got all this stuff going on. This family just feels that they can't deal with it. Well, of course he had been traumatized, like, how many multiple times? And then being torn away from his brother, who he adored. They kind of said, okay, now that he's this problem child, now your family is okay. But we welcomed him, and he became at that point and continued to be because we didn't have anymore, our youngest child, and he'll be turning 30 this year, but we love him very much

too. And he did go through a lot of trauma in those early years that the workers weren't really aware of because they were so focused on his brother. He's had a lot of work to do and a lot of healing to do as well.

[00:22:07.260] - Lisa Qualls

Okay. There are so many different directions, so many different questions I could ask you. And I do want to focus on siblings, but I want to know, how did you manage all the medical needs of your children? Because I'm guessing that not just your terminally ill children had medical needs. You probably had kids with other unique special medical needs. On a practical way, how did you do all of that?

[00:22:32.890] - Sue Badeau

You know, it's really interesting. Well, for one thing, we definitely knew that one parent had to be full time at home all the time. And in our household, just because of the nature of the kinds of care the children needed and our personalities and everything else, it was best for my husband, Hector, actually, to be the full time at home parent. And I continued to work. I work in this field, so but always having someone full time at home was essential, that was one thing. The second thing is those three with terminal illnesses, and several of our others did have quite a wide range of lots of special needs and challenges, but on a day to day basis, they were healthy. We weren't really dealing with medical was the least of our worries. Medical was really not the biggest challenge, except occasionally we had a couple of times when one of our children was hospitalized and touching on something happening, but then they got better and come home. Most of the time it was the emotional healing, the behaviors that relate to trauma, the intellectual and cognitive challenges that many of our children have, other kinds of mental health challenges beyond just the trauma related ones, school issues.

[00:23:52.560] - Sue Badeau

Most of the time it was those kinds of things that was really challenging. Medical, you learn what you were able to do in home. So you learn for a child that needs medication or tube feeding or whatever, you learn how to do it, and then you do it, and it just becomes part of your routine. Just like learning to braid somebody's hair or something. Like you learn it, you do it. I don't mean to make that light of it, it's still a little bit challenging, but it's like a skill you learn and then you do. And it's pretty consistent from day to day. Whereas all the other kind of needs, the constant calls from the school, how the different trauma levels and behaviors of kids affect when they interact with each other, how it weighs on you, finances, appointments, all of those paperwork, all of those things with all the other challenges was much more difficult. Or as one time, my husband put it, our children with the most severe medical needs, they also were in diapers their whole life. Like, they never outgrew the need for diapers. And someone once asked me, oh, that must be so depressing to have kids that are like, never going to be out of diapers. You're going to be changing diapers for the rest of their lives. And my husband said, you know what? Physical diapers are easier to change than emotional ones.

[00:25:12.490] - Lisa Qualls

It's so true, right? That's good. It's really true. Okay, so you and Hector are passionate about keeping siblings together. Other than just the good idea of it, can you tell us why that is important for children?

[00:25:31.910] - Sue Badeau

One of the things... For anyone out there listening for you, if you have a sibling at all, even one, then what you can realize, especially as you get older in your life, your sibling relationship, for better, for worse, is the longest lasting relationship you will ever have in your entire life. Parents usually predecease your siblings. So usually your sibling relationship is going to last longer than the one you have with your parents. Most often you start having your siblings start being part of your life before you even get in school. So your siblings are with you before even your first best friend that you met in kindergarten. Certainly you have your siblings long before you meet your spouse, or have children of your own, or any of those other really long lasting relationships in your life. Your sibling relationship is the longest of all of them. And so there's something really unique about that sibling bond that I mean, when we talk about permanency and adoption, like that's the permanent relationship. And there's so much research about how much we learn from our siblings about social skills. Even when we have rocky relationships with our siblings, we learn negotiating, we learn a lot of social skills from siblings.

[00:26:47.590] - Sue Badeau

They're the only ones who really know and kind of have walked with us through certain parts of our life, even if we experienced it differently. One thing I sometimes said is no two siblings have the same two parents. I mean, even if you grow up in your biological home, you each experience your parents differently. But somehow your sibling at least knows that journey that you've walked through, they've been there with you for it. Sometimes they're your first protector or you're their first protector. So there's just this chord that is just so much different and deeper and longer than any other relationship that we have in our life. So to break that or to lose that, the trauma is really more than... Sometimes it gets taken too lightly. So that's one really important reason for any siblings to have an opportunity to stay together. But then when you talk about siblings who've also been through other kinds of trauma. They've been collectively neglected, abused, abandoned, whatever circumstances led them to be either in an orphanage or in foster care. Then wow, they've already had so many losses, to just inflict another loss on them can really be overwhelming and can create the depth of that wound that is so much harder to heal. So much harder to bounce back from.

[00:28:15.260] - Sue Badeau

And then another reason is that even if siblings were separated for reasons that seemed wise at the moment, like they were harming each other, even if they were doing things harmfully, hitting each other, beating each other, you know, things like this, if you just simply separate them, you haven't really addressed the root of the issue. And so they might now be going on through life in two separate circumstances, but without having addressed the root of that issue, they're going to continue to play out things in other relationships. They're going to have difficulty healing from that even that early relationship. So if at all possible, even in those situations, I like to try to keep siblings together and then work with the family and work with the siblings to keep everyone safe, of course, but to help address the underlying issues and help them heal together in safety, rather than separately. So those are some of the reasons.

[00:29:19.460] - Lisa Qualls

And you may have just answered this a little bit, but what would you say to people who say siblings have trauma bonds and so it's not good to keep them together? Well, you answered a little bit, but I'll put that out to you anyhow.

[00:29:32.590] - Sue Badeau

Yeah, I mean, I think that's right. It's another way of saying so they have to heal separately. And to me, it kind of relates to what I also hear a lot in social work, not related to siblings, just related to children trauma histories in general, that oh, this child needs to heal from their trauma before they're ready for a family. Like we have to get them into some treatment program before they're ready. And you hear, this child is not ready for a family. And when I look at all the research and when I look at my life experience, you heal in relationship. You don't heal over here and then come have a relationship. While you're healing in that relationship, there's going to be hard times. And the family that you're healing with needs a lot of support. But you're going to heal in that relationship and that family. And so similarly, siblings, I think they're going to heal best from their trauma, usually there's always exceptions, and I'll grant that there are some instances where siblings are better served if they're not together. I'm not saying this is 100% rule, but I think it's more the rule and the rare time would be an exception. And that they can heal from that trauma when given the right care, the right family settings, the parents get support, they can heal from that trauma better together than separately.

[00:30:57.190] - Lisa Qualls

So you brought up the topic of safety. With a lot of children and older children, I know many families deal with how do we keep our children safe because they have so many of them have been so traumatized and wounded, and they may have behaviors that aren't safe. So how did you do that in your home with so many kids?

[00:31:28.650] - Melissa Corkum

Hey friends, we want to pause the interview to make sure you know about our free Compassion Challenge for the discouraged adoptive parent. This is an OnDemand video training so you can rebuild

your compassion for your child and enjoy parenting again.

[00:31:39.090] - Lisa Qualls

In this free video training, we'll introduce you to Blocked Trust and Blocked Care. We'll help you understand why your child pushes you away, why you're not a bad parent, because you're losing patience and shed the feelings of shame and guilt. There is hope. You can regain compassion for yourself and your child. To grab this free training, head to theadoptionconnection.com/compassion. Now, let's hop back into our interview.

[00:32:09.110] - Lisa Qualls

So how did you do that in your home with so many kids?

[00:32:13.630] - Sue Badeau

Well, we did our best. And we had strategies and things that we tried and things that we learned maybe weren't working as well and we had to make changes or alterations. So I will say off the top to answer that question, we weren't perfect. We missed the mark sometimes. And I think part of that could be a factor having a lot of kids. But part of that is a factor just being a parent. You have one child, you can't 100 percent keep them safe all the time. I mean, it's just part of being a parent. And then it does get a little multiplied if you have more kids. But we were there, we were present. As I said, we had one parent home all the time. We made very thoughtful and careful decisions about who would have which rooms, bedrooms, where they would be spaced in the house, where we would be in relation to that. We did a lot of family meetings and other strategies where we just try to generate communication among everyone in the family. We gave a lot of encouragement. Luckily, we learned early on that children learn better, all of us humans, we learned better from encouragement than from correction.

[00:33:34.020] - Sue Badeau

So we need correction at times, but we learn better when someone can notice the good things that we're doing and reinforce those. So we even started when our kids were, when we had a lot of kids, including some that were younger at home, we had a thing called a prize jar. And we had a little award called Caught Being Good. Because kids are so used to being caught being bad. So we called it Caught Being Good. And we had a prize jar that hey, caught you doing something good, that's great. You shared or you didn't hit. You know, yesterday when that situation came up, you hit your brother. Today you didn't hit him, or whatever, and so you can pick a prize out of the prize jar. There were simple things. It might be a little snack/treat, it might be a little coupon that said you get to stay up an extra half hour tonight, or just different things like this. But they really enjoyed that. They loved that. And that helped a lot. But also because the siblings could give them to each other, and then if they gave one to someone else, then that was also something that was good.

[00:34:40.680] - Sue Badeau

They also got reward for doing that. And we called that the pat on the back. We even printed out little cards that said pat on the back. And the kids could point out when they saw one of their siblings doing something well, doing something good, they could give that sibling a pat on the back. So it became contagious. And after a while we had to phase it out a little. I mean, we'd be handing out prizes like 500 times a day, but when we phased it out a little, we said everyone can be doing pats on the back. We'll talk about them once a week at our Sunday family dinner and we'll talk about the good things or something. So we were still doing and encouraging it, but by then it had become more of a habit. So that was one thing.

[00:35:27.540] - Sue Badeau

Sometimes we have to do things, like find ways. Some of our kids that have these two with the Sanfilippo syndrome, they would get up in the night before... The syndrome actually causes you to lose functioning and eventually they were not able to walk and they were wheelchair bound. But before that, kids with this disease also don't sleep in long stretches, so they would just be up during the night and they could get out of their rooms and wander around. And we usually try to have someone up as much as possible or in and out checking on them. Of course we have listening devices. But sometimes we also had to have special kinds of gating so that they couldn't even get out

of their rooms during the night. So we had to do physical alterations to create safety, as well as the sort of parenting ideas. But it was always on our mind. And so we were always trying to figure out how we could do it better.

[00:36:22.910] - Lisa Qualls

You're human, so I guess you did. But did you ever have times when you thought we were in so far over our heads? Were you ever able to get help outside of just you and your husband doing it all?

[00:36:36.260] - Sue Badeau

Yes. The worst time that I have felt we're totally overhead happens to be right now.

[00:36:44.740] - Lisa Qualls

Okay!

[00:36:46.390] - Sue Badeau

Our kids are all adults now and they all live in different households. They don't live with us, as I told you at the beginning. And even with all those kids that we adopted over the years and our birth kids, and even with so many of them having all the challenges that they had, we never had everyone in crisis at once. Like all through the years, maybe we might have five in crisis, which was enough. But usually it was even less than that. We never had every single person in the whole family in crisis at once. And now they're all adults. They're on their own. Things seem good. And yet because of what's happening in the world right now, more than half of our kids have lost their jobs. And they have types of jobs in food service and restaurant work and they live, like literally paycheck to paycheck. So they're really struggling. Plus the loss of the job, the loss of the routine, loss of the schedule, that trauma triggers all of that. We all know that. And many of them have kids that are now with them. And then some of our kids who have really high functioning and have amazing jobs in healthcare, in internet service, in things that are very essential and in demand, and they have added stress right now in crisis, and maybe their kids are at home, but they're still having to work.

[00:38:04.990] - Sue Badeau

So literally every single person in our family is in crisis right now. And we said, wow. That's what we never really anticipated with such a large family is that they'd all be in crisis at once at any point in time, and not living under our roof, so feeling so powerless and not being able to do anything about it, or not being able to physically go out and do anything about it. This has really been a challenging time for me in regard to your question. But prior to that, yes, we had times over the years. And luckily, thankfully, the biggest blessing I think that we had in our entire parenting journey, was that I can only think of maybe one or two times when Hector and I both sort of had that feeling at the same time. So usually if one of us was totally overwhelmed, the other one wasn't. If one of us was feeling like, what are we doing? The other one was, we got this. And so we could give each other breaks. I could say he was the full time at home parent, but there were some few times when I'd say, go take a weekend, go visit your friends in another state, I got this.

[00:39:08.140] - Sue Badeau

That was hard on me because that wasn't my skill set, but I could handle it for a few days, and then the other way around. So we did have those moments, for sure. And we did have some real severe crises. I mean, grief when we had children die, but other... We had teen pregnancies, we had arrests, we had things that are hard. I wasn't arrested. Well, anyway, another story, I'm talking about kids.

[00:39:37.300] - Lisa Qualls

You weren't arrested, yeah.

[00:39:40.460] - Sue Badeau

We had a lot of really big challenges, but they didn't all come at once and we were able to kind of usually be there for each other as well. We have supports. We had supports through friends, through church, through neighbors. We didn't really have much professional. Our kids went to school and some of them had very good teachers and good aides and things like this. Our children who were terminally ill towards the end of their lives. We had some visiting nurses who came in and helped with

the overnight care in particular, so that we didn't have to stay up all night and be with everybody all day. But other than that, we didn't have in-home, other adults have professional services like that most of the time. But we did have support, we did have people we could turn to. We did have opportunities for our kids to get experiences, going to a summer camp, or different things that came up like that, that helped them and us. So you have to really work at it and it's often a patchwork quilt piecing together the support, but we were able to do that.

[00:40:53.290] - Lisa Qualls

Would you say that your faith has played a part in both the decisions you made about your family, but your ability to sustain and what you are doing, even now?

[00:41:06.900] - Sue Badeau

Yeah, so absolutely. I mean, right from the beginning, in fact, I told you we ended up with 22 kids, but it wasn't our plan. We dated in high school, we dated in college. We thought we were going to have some kind of life that involved working with children. And as we started to learn about kids needing homes and meeting families and thinking about maybe adoption or foster care, we came up with this plan. We said, you know, what, we're going to have two kids and adopt two kids. We told God that. We told everybody. In fact, we had adopted just our first one, one child, and we had our one birth daughter, and it was National Adoption Month in our little town in New England where we lived. And somehow we got picked to be like the family, to be interviewed for a newspaper article. So at that point, we still only had two children. One was born to us, one was adopted. And we made this quote in the newspaper, or our life plan is we're going to have two, adopt two. We're halfway there. My parents would pull that article out from time to time over the years, like, but it was our faith, and we really felt that as we looked.

[00:42:19.920] - Sue Badeau

You introduced me at the beginning of the segment saying that I'm an expert in many things. Well, the way I got to be an expert in many things is basically by saying we've never had experience with a child in a wheelchair, we've never had experience with a teen pregnancy, and boom, we got one. That sense of humor was always like, I'll give you one of those. So it got to a point where we'd hear about somebody dealing with something, and we didn't want to say, we've never dealt with that because we were worried that as soon as we said those words out loud, we would get a chance to deal with it. But really, it's totally with our faith. And that's why even though we have 22 that became a permanent family, believe it or not, we said no also over the years. People think we just like, we're addicted to it out there. We just said yeah, we couldn't say no. We said yes to every child, any caseworker called us about, and that's not true. We thought carefully, we prayed carefully. We considered, can we really parent this child? Can this child really fit well with the other kids we already have? Will everybody be safe? All of that. We actually said no quite a good number of times.

[00:43:31.170] - Lisa Qualls

And that's hard, that's hard to do, to say no. So we work with a lot of moms in particular, but parents who have really hard relationships with their young adult children that came to them through adoption, and they're very, very discouraged. Have you had that happen with any of your kids, where they're angry with you or they don't want a relationship with you and have any of them come through that? And how has your heart dealt with it?

[00:44:03.190] - Sue Badeau

That's one of the hardest things. So first answer is yes. We also dealt with that. We have had, and continue in a couple of instances, to have young adults, kids that we really struggle with, helping them find their way. We really struggle with decisions we have to make in regard to how we will or won't help them and whether we're helping or enabling or all of those kinds of things. And that are not in good places where we would want them to be, but yet we can't just step in and take over their life. Or we shouldn't, we don't think that's the right thing to do. And in most cases we can't anyway. But we've had in particular one child who really kind of said, I'm kind of done with the family at a certain point. And yes, came back through. It came around, but it was years later, many years. It wasn't next week, it wasn't next month. It was years. And then we had another child that it was kind of more like an experiment, for about nine months. She kind of took off and said, I'm doing my own thing. I'm going

back to my roots.

[00:45:11.590] - Sue Badeau

And then she is still very connected to her roots. So it wasn't about that. But she came back and became even more deeply grounded in our family. And so we've had all different versions of that. We have a child or two, and they're all adults now. So when I say a child, I'm speaking now adult kids who still to this day their way of dealing with stress is, I'm cutting everyone off. I'm not talking to anyone, or I'm only talking to the people I select. And that doesn't include you or something like that. So we trust. One of my mantras is that the end of the story isn't written yet. We don't know how this is all going to be when eternity comes. We don't have all the answers, but that's partly we wrote a book about our family. It's called *Are We There Yet?* It's like we're never really fully there. We don't know. But we always continue to love. We always continue to hold out opportunities. So the ones that have said, I don't want anything to do with you for a period of time, we always make sure we have back channel ways to at least get messages to them. Like, hey, you're still invited for Thanksgiving, or we're thinking about you and hope you're okay. I would love to hear from you, or something. And so that message is still there, even if it's not being reciprocated at that time. I think it's the absolute hardest thing to deal with as a parent, especially as a mom's heart. It feels broken. I've really gone into the lamentation mode. I've cried out. I've said things to God like, we trusted you, that bringing this child is the right thing to do. And now this is happening. How is this good? How is this right? What are you doing here? So it's been hard. Luckily, I have other people in my life who are also adoptive parents who've maybe struggled with some of those things and were able to support each other. That's been hard for me over the years, because I was a teacher and a trainer and a sort of leader in some of this way. So it's hard to take the same group that you're kind of the leader of. You can't say, okay, now let me tell you my stuff, because they look at you as you're supposed to be the leader. So it's a little harder when you're in that role to find your people, and to find who can be your support when you're there trying to support others.

[00:47:57.190] - Sue Badeau

So you have to take it seriously. You have to really look for those opportunities or create those opportunities, but you just really have to keep having that long view like, you know, the end of the story is not written yet. And I'm going to trust and believe that it's going to be the ending that's going to be good for everybody.

[00:48:18.790] - Lisa Qualls

Well, on that note, I think that's very encouraging for everybody. There's so much more we could talk about about sibling relationships, but this has been a wonderful conversation. I know it's going to be really helpful to our listeners. So thank you so much, Sue.

[00:48:34.500] - Sue Badeau

Absolutely. Thank you for having me.

[00:48:41.590] - Melissa Corkum

I so appreciate Sue, and what I appreciate about her is her experience, but also just her challenging even my thoughts on keeping siblings together, because, honestly, sometimes I feel like it's just easier to separate them out and deal with one child from a hard place in a family at a time, right? And I know that that's not always the ideal or even the easiest. There's all kinds of reasons why that, but I think even just Sue talking about this lifelong relationship and, you know, even going back to episode 100 where we had our kids on, even just PJ saying, right, like, they're our siblings, they're not going anywhere. So I really appreciated that. But we also wanted to just throw this out there in case you're at home or walking, listening and thinking, oh, gosh, we did split a sibling group up. Or, we are parenting one part of a sibling group and it was not possible to keep everyone together. And Sue did leave room for that. But there are certain situations where it's not possible for all those siblings to be together. But we want to just encourage you that we can still take the principles that Sue is talking about and this idea that the sibling bond matters, the sibling relationship matters, by when at all possible, helping our kids stay in contact with siblings who they might not be living with.

[00:50:06.720] - Lisa Qualls

Right. I mean, like, in one of my children's situations, his sibling was adopted into a different country, but we were able to find her and create a connection. So I think the sibling relationship is very important, and I appreciated what Sue had to say. So if you want to learn more from Sue, you can do that in a couple of different ways. You can go to her website, which is just Suebadeau.com. And her last name is a little tricky to spell, but this will be in the Show Notes. She also is the author of some books, including one about their family experience called *Are We There Yet? The Ultimate Road Trip: Adopting and Raising 22 Kids*. You can find all of that in our show Notes for this episode at theadoptionconnection.com/102. Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. You can find us on Facebook or Instagram as theAdoptioncconnection.

[00:51:00.450] - Melissa Corkum

Thanks so much for listening. We love having you. If you enjoyed this episode, please leave a quick review over on itunes. It will help us reach more moms who may be feeling alone.

[00:51:10.540] - Lisa Qualls

And remember, until next week, you're a good mom doing good work, and we're here for you.

[00:51:17.660] - Melissa Corkum

The music for the podcast is called New Day and was created by Lee Rosevere.