

[00:00:01.160] - Lisa Qualls

Welcome to the Adoption Connection podcast, where we offer resources to equip you and stories to inspire you on your adoption journey. I'm Lisa Qualls.

[00:00:09.980] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:19.030] - Lisa Qualls

Each month, we host a workshop where we invite a guest expert to share their knowledge and expertise. This week, we're bringing you a recording from a recent workshop. We hope you enjoy it.

[00:00:34.520] - Melissa Corkum

Well, hello, everyone, and welcome to Successful Vacation Planning for Adoptive Families. This month, we have invited two adoptive moms who have a lot of vacation planning experience and then also are doing work in that area in some capacity or another. They'll get to tell you a little bit more about that. Without further ado, I am going to let Rachel and Kristen introduce themselves. Kristen, will you start us off?

[00:01:12.690] - Kristen Perso

Sure. I'm Kristen Perso. Melissa and I know each other as adoptive moms. I am a mom to four kids. We have two girls who are teenagers, who are biological. And we have two boys who are 12 and nine, who are adopted. Our son, Samson, who's 12, is adopted from Uganda, and our son, Aden, is adopted from China. They've been with us for about 10 and six years or so. So we've had them for quite a while in our family. We love to travel. I grew up traveling, did a lot of road trips with my family growing up, and we have continued traveling between my husband and I as we've had kids just because we live we love to do it. And we pretty much always... I'm actually trying to think, I don't think my husband and I have ever done more than a night or two very short trip because we've never really had a good situation of, oh, we can leave our kids with grandparents or anything like that. So we've always done travel as a family. So whether it's been one, two, three, or now four kids, it's pretty much all of us going together.

[00:02:25.480] - Kristen Perso

So some of the things that are great about that are that we have a lot of great memories. We've traveled a lot of different places. When I was looking at the list, we've done international travel because we took our girls with us when we adopted Samson and Aiden. So they've been to Uganda and China. We've done road trips. We live in Pennsylvania, so we've been up to Maine. We go back to see family in Michigan and Minnesota. Last summer, we decided to do a big trip and got to Hawaii and actually did a big fun trip. So we've done a lot of different things. So we have some great memories, but we've learned a lot along the way of how to do it without coming home and going, That was awful. I wish that we hadn't gone because you do have those days. So yeah, I'm happy to share some more of those tips and things that we've learned throughout the time that we have together.

[00:03:15.240] - Melissa Corkum

Thanks, Kristen. All right, Rachel, go ahead.

[00:03:18.840] - Rachel Bell

All right. I'm Rachel Bell. I know Melissa from, I was the director of a retreat for foster and adoptive moms for seven years. And Melissa was our last speaker at our last retreat. So we've been friends ever since then. I live in Arkansas with my husband, Evan, and we have four children. All four of our children joined our family through adoption, and they are 13, 11, 7, and 1. Travel has... It's something that was important to my family growing up, just like you said, Kristen, and it's something that has really been important to our family. We just really feel like the shared experiences and the connection that we have on travel when we travel, just focus on your family has really allowed our family to have stronger bonds. Now, of course, we have things that make travel more difficult. And so we've had some really terrible trips and we've had some really great trips. And I like to say there's no bad vacation because either, which is my personality, because if we have a bad one, then we just know all the things we don't do next time, right? Or how we change it for next time. Even a bad vacation can

have some fun memories. There are two vacations in particular that I took with my family growing up that were terrible experiences, but we laugh about them all the time now. We joke about those terrible experiences. Even the bad vacations can have bonding experiences and things that connect your family years later. Don't be discouraged by those. But in my family, we have autism, OCD, anxiety, traumatic brain injury, a longer list of things, it would take me five minutes maybe to list all the things. But I myself have an autoimmune disease and I have several severe food allergies. So all of those things complicate travel and have shaped my experiences.

[00:05:23.270] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. So I am so excited to hear from you guys because you're obviously super qualified to tell us things that we should be thinking about as we plan vacations with our families. So let's start with the planning part. Rachel, what are your best tips for thinking ahead in terms of planning? You already mentioned some food things, so what are the other things that you take into account when you're planning?

[00:05:46.990] - Rachel Bell

Well, I have a list here. I just want to reiterate, there's no bad vacation. When you're planning, you want to set yourself up for success. You want to have realistic expectations, all of those things. But also, if it doesn't go well, you can monitor and adjust. We'll talk about those things. But some tips that are really important to me when planning a vacation are to prep my kids, prep, prep, prep, prep my kids. Surprise vacations, they are not for families like mine. We have tried that. We've tried to surprise our kids with Disney World or different things like that. First of all, the reaction is not Instagram worthy. They're not excited. They're like, Wait, what is happening to me? It doesn't go well. Then the other thing is they feel anxious about what's about to happen to them. So prepping them so they know exactly what's going to happen and even involving them in the planning process. I find that that really helps our family have a successful vacation. If we're all doing the research about the location together and there are some choices and we allow our children to make some of those choices.

[00:06:57.870] - Rachel Bell

If they take some ownership on the vacation, it really helps their attitudes and their willingness to do the things that we plan to do, when they feel like it was their idea or they were involved in the planning process. So those things we always do. And we also do things as far as prepping our kids, we do things like watch YouTube videos about the location where we're going to. So nothing is shocking to them. Nothing is a surprise. They know what to expect. That's a strong way to set your family up for success. Another thing I have on here is... Let's hold on just a second. Okay, so if you're new to traveling with your family and you're not sure how it's going to go, I would encourage you to take risks, like to do things that you think that your family can handle, but you're not 100% sure, but also have a backup plan. Always have a backup plan, always have an exit strategy. This is what we want to do on this day, but if that doesn't go well, this is what we're going to do instead. Those have also been really helpful to us.

[00:08:05.660] - Melissa Corkum

Love it. Thank you. Kristen, what has worked well for your family?

[00:08:10.640] - Kristen Perso

Yeah, I was just going to say a lot of that same stuff of not surprising your kids, that the times that we don't tell our kids as much, it doesn't go as well. I am a planner, so I usually just take literally a spiral notebook or something. I've tried it with a piece of paper and it usually gets lost. So I try to take a spiral notebook and I write down the things we're going to do every day or put it on your phone or something like that and say, this day we're planning to do this, this day is planning to do this, plan the days in there for downtime. I was going to say when we travel, we definitely don't plan a full full schedule because it doesn't seem to go very well for us when we don't do that. Either it's like everybody's together too much, and that gets hard. So just planning, even if you just have the afternoon where we're only going to be at the hotel or the condo or wherever we're at, that's really been helpful for us. But yeah, I write everything down. I say this day, the plan is for this. I plan ahead. I try to get as much of the stuff ahead of time when we're at home, like tickets for things. I try to find out how can we get the ticket? Is there a cheaper way to get the ticket? Would it help if we get a

membership to somewhere? All of that stuff.

[00:09:33.820] - Kristen Perso

When you're looking for a place to stay, we've pretty much stopped doing hotels with our family unless absolutely necessary because with a family of six or larger or even sometimes five, four is okay, but I guess. But it's really hard. And we have some of the same stuff going on that Rachel was mentioning with one of our kids has autism and some trauma stuff. And hotels with everybody in one room together are just not really setting us up for success. So we definitely either look for a hotel like Homewoods Suites are great because they have two bedrooms and you get a living room and you don't pay that much more. If we do need to do hotels, we also look at Embassy Suites or Drury Inns are great because not only do you get a suite, but you often get food a lot of the time. And it's right there at the hotel. Food is a big one for us. I try to plan our activities, but I also try to plan out our food. And the most helpful thing for that is usually when we're traveling somewhere, if we're in the car, we're on the plane, I try to do a grocery pickup order as we're going there so that it's ready and we can literally pick it up on the way to wherever we're staying so that you don't get there and go, shoot, everybody's hungry, everybody's tired, we have no food. It's all there. You don't have to go rush out the next morning. It's there. And if you have it available, I also, we did stay at a hotel for a conference with just myself and two of our kids last summer, and we were able to do Walmart grocery delivery where the person delivered it directly to our hotel. Which was also great because we were able to order some things that we could just keep. We only had a minifridge and a microwave, but we were able to keep in the mini fridge and a microwave. It saved us money. It saved me time of having to figure out, Okay, where are we going to go to eat? So just trying to plan ahead for all those logistics, and not have to do that when you're actually there trying to relax has been really helpful for our family.

[00:11:32.430] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I think those are all really good forward thinking. I always think it's like the secret service. There's a secret service that goes ahead of the President and thinks about all the things that could go wrong and then makes their plan or sets them up for success. That's how we have to think ahead for our families. Think about all the things that might, could go wrong and how can you scaffold supports around yourselves. With that, for folks that hang around the podcast or The Adoption Connection, the Reclaim Compassion coaching program, I'm always talking about definition of success, and how we define success for things, and how we have to define success by things that we can control. And recently, one mom was like, Yeah, whenever I think about success now, I always think about it in statements that start with I will because they're always active and they're things that we can do. So all that to say, I think a flawless vacation where everyone has fun is a great... we call them icing on the cake wins or goals. But I think realistically that if we defined our vacations by that, then they wouldn't all feel successful. And Rachel, to your point, you've said they can all be successful. It's just all about how we think about it or what we've learned from it. So Kristen, what are some ways that you've managed your expectations when you're traveling with your family?

[00:13:04.570] - Kristen Perso

I think exactly what you just said, using our family's definition of success, and not the normal definition of what a vacation is going to be, because what success looks like for us is, did we get there in one piece? Yeah. That's the first step. And overall, are most of us enjoying the vacation? Yes. We have one kid who we know is probably going to be a little disgruntled on the whole trip, no matter what. Because one little thing was just not the way that they wanted. And just being okay with that and kind of saying, That's probably how it's going to be, and not letting it ruin the whole trip. And just really saying, This is what it looks like for our family. I recently talked to someone. So our youngest son is a power wheelchair user, and I was talking to someone who is a dad and has the same disability and uses crutches to walk. He said, When I go on vacation, it's pretty much a given that I'm going to fall down. He's like, We joke around. It's not really a vacation if dad doesn't trip and fall at some point on the trip. It's like, Okay. They have gotten to the point where they're like, Okay, it is what it is. And just being okay with that and trying to just keep the perspective of, it is what it is for our family and we need to be okay with that. And really trying to just not... And even when you're at a place, if you're at the beach or something, and you see the other perfect family, that is a struggle for my husband and I sometimes because we'll be out and we'll be like, look at those people with their one or two kids, and it looks so easy for them. And just reminding yourself, everybody has hard stuff.

Our hard stuff is different than their hard stuff. Just trying to keep all of that perspective, trying to look at my list of tangible stuff.

[00:15:08.950] - Kristen Perso

Some of the actual tangible things we do, like I said, we don't schedule stuff in every single day because it doesn't work well for our family. When we do Florida to do Disney or something, we do one park and another activity, and then we just hang out at the pool because that works well for us and that's okay. And just being like, no, we're not going to Florida and we're not doing every single park that there is and being okay with that. Because that's what works for our family. I think those are probably some of the biggest things of just reminding yourself what your definition of success looks like for your family, probably.

[00:15:46.160] - Melissa Corkum

What about you, Rachel? What are some expectation management tips that you would have?

[00:15:53.290] - Rachel Bell

Well, we've all said the same thing, but just to reiterate, you can have a successful vacation and never take one that looks like your friends or other people that you see. You can make great memories with your family. You can go all over the world and do all kinds of things, and there may be certain things that you never do. But that doesn't mean you're not also doing great things and you're not making memories and building bonds in your family and strengthening your family and having a great time. So much of our lives, if you're here in this conversation, look different than people around you, and vacations are just like that. It doesn't mean that they're worse, they're just different. And like Kristen said, I totally lost my train of thought after I said, like Kristen said. What I was going to say, like you said, oh, gosh. But anyway, it's just like you set low expectations, set realistic expectations based on your family. Nobody knows your family like you know your family. Even though Kristen and I have these experiences with our family, we probably have different experiences from one another. And we probably have different... Our family dynamics, we may have some similarities from the people listening, but nobody's family is exactly the same. You're the only one who knows your exact family. You're the only one who can set the expectations for your exact family.

[00:17:18.780] - Rachel Bell

But I do think it's helpful to do things like to join a Facebook group for families like yours. There are going to be people in there that are discussing travel for your specific thing, whatever it is, food allergies or a certain diagnosis or whatever. And asking questions, to people like you, that's a good way to manage your expectations by learning from other people with similar things before you go. I think it's also important, I've already said this, but just to constantly reevaluate your vacation while you're in it, monitor and adjust what's going on, what's going right, what do we want to change, what have we planned that maybe isn't a good idea, and just don't give up. I've been on vacations where some of our best memories as a family and some of our worst memories came from the same vacation. We went on an RV road trip in 2020. And when we think about it now, we talk about it like it was the greatest time ever, and we do have some great memories from it. There was also a day where I tried to take my children on a hike to see the arch at Arches National Park. That is a very strenuous hike and it was July and they were literally scream crying on the trail. It was a disaster. We made it three fourths of the way up and then came down without seeing the arches at all. I cried on the way down because we didn't make it to the arches. Then we drove to another point where we could see them with binoculars, basically. We took a picture there. One of my son is crying and he looks like he hates it. I mean, it's the worst picture ever. It's really funny now to look at. But that same day we came back to our RV and I made dinner and I was sitting at a picnic table outside the RV. One of my children went inside the RV. A few minutes later, water... We had rented this RV, by the way. It wasn't ours. It's important to note it was not ours. Water just came pouring out of all of every crack in the whole RV, water was just pouring out. I ran and opened the door and water rushed out the door and that child had flooded the bathroom, flooded the whole RV. It was the thing. I hope the person we rented it from doesn't ever hear this, but we cleaned it up. Everything was fine. That was just one day. We had some other great experiences, but that was the same trip. I think just never feel like this is a disaster. We're done. We're never traveling again. It's just how things are. There's great moments and there are not great moments.

[00:20:13.360] - Melissa Corkum

Well, I think that's so important. I think it's so much harder to accept those moments if you go in hoping for this picture perfect vacation and then you have all the grief and all the things when it doesn't quite go. But if you go with that, and you think could happen. It's all going to be an adventure mindset. Then some of those things, hopefully, you can look back at and laugh later. Okay. So, Rachel, what other tried and true tips did we miss? What other things are saving your life right now when it comes to vacations in your family?

[00:20:52.380] - Rachel Bell

Okay. So when Melissa first talked to Kristen and I about doing this podcast, I was actually on a vacation. So my my husband and I were writing things down while we were on it because there's nothing like the feeling of actually being there, and helping yourself remember what your tips are. But something... So I have seven. The first one is leave while it's going well. That is a joke between my husband and I. If we are ever at some activity, a Museum, a theme park, a dinner, whatever, we are somewhere and we look at each other or we just think in our own heads, Wow, this is really going well. It's time to leave. Because when something is going well, we stay too long because we're really enjoying it and we keep staying and then it doesn't go well and it ends badly. And you would rather leave that experience with a smile on your face than drag four crying people to the car. So we always joke, leave when it's going well. And if either of us ever says, this is going really well, we're like, oh, we got to go. That's the joke between us. But it's serious. It really does make a difference.

[00:22:04.500] - Rachel Bell

Another tip I have is ask for what you need. You would be really surprised, I think, how much other people want to help you, whether you're in a restaurant, in an airport, any type of public transportation. If something is not going well and there's an actual need that the staff around you could meet, if you would just ask somebody, a lot of times they will help you. We so many times in an airport, we have had an issue where we either needed to board early and we had not paid to do that, or we needed to board last. There are different things that we have needed depending on what meltdown was happening. And if we just express that to someone, we've received so much help from people around us just by asking for what we need. The worst that can happen is they say no, or they say they're not able to help. So ask for what you need.

[00:22:54.870] - Rachel Bell

Number three, think outside the box. As we've said, travel can be so successful for us, but it may look different than other people you know. Two things that I have on the list for that is we do Disney World a lot as a family, and we're able to do that successfully. I haven't seen the fireworks at Magic Kingdom in years. We go to Disney World regularly, we cannot do the fireworks. But we have a tradition in our family of riding rides when the fireworks are going on because there's nobody at the rides. That's just something that's fun for us. Then nobody's worried about... I do have children that could handle the fireworks and would like to go to them. But because we really focus on what our thing is in our family, it's fine that we don't. I'm not sad that we miss the fireworks. My kids that would tolerate the fireworks are not sad because that's what we do. And then just recently, we went to the beach and we tried something that we called a backwards beach day. And we went out to lunch instead of out to dinner. And then we had a very slow day and we rolled up on the beach at 4 PM when everyone else was leaving, basically had the beach to ourselves. And it was so much better for us than walking out on the beach at 10 AM when all of Florida is out there and that has not been as successful for us. So just try some things that, really brainstorming with your family or with the Internet, whatever is helpful to you to just maybe view things in a different way, maybe try something unexpected. That's a good way to find success for your family.

[00:24:34.280] - Rachel Bell

Okay, Four, pre talk pressure points. Pictures are a real pressure point for our family. They're very important to me because I feel like my kids are going to want to know the places that they've been, but some of them don't love to take pictures. So if we're like, Hey, tonight we're going to go to this place and I would really love to have a picture there. Pre talking it, how many pictures do you think are realistic? Kind of making a deal with whichever kid has an issue with that, that has been a good way.

My particular child that causes issues during pictures, if I'll just be like, What would make it work out for you? I really need this picture. It's really important to me. What would make it not stressful for you? And let that child have some feedback. Just anyway, pre talking that has really taken some of the stress off of it for us. And that includes me listening to my child and not taking 40 pictures whenever they agreed to 2, or whatever.

[00:25:37.260] - Rachel Bell

Okay, another one is quality over quantity. That goes back to leave while it's going well. Having a couple of quality moments on your trip is so much more important than doing all the things you want to do. And maybe there's a trip where you had 10 things you wanted to do and you already got to five. But if those five went well, that's successful.

[00:25:57.000] - Rachel Bell

I'm going to pick up the pace here. And then I've said this a million times, but even a bad vacation can become a funny family memory. So don't be discouraged in those moments. Obviously, it's fine to be upset whenever things go poorly, but you're going to laugh about a lot of it. You're going to laugh about it later, or it's still going to be a family memory. You're still going to reference it. It's still something that connects your people. Even if it's just between you and your spouse. Or you guys are like, Wow, we survived that. Trauma bond, whatever. There are benefits of traveling even in the moments where it doesn't go well.

[00:26:37.720] - Lisa Qualls

Then something that we like to do is have a meeting at the end of a trip and talk about what went right, what went wrong, and use that while it's fresh in your mind to make notes of how you want to travel and not travel on your next vacation.

[00:26:53.460] - Melissa Corkum

Okay. I feel like that was worth the price of admission right there. Those seven tips, Rachel. I'm going to remember the leave whenever you feel like it's going well. All right, Kristen, what do you have to add?

[00:27:09.120] - Kristen Perso

I have some more specific things. I was just going to say I like to think outside the box because we also have done the rides during the fireworks at Magic Kingdom and nobody complained about it. We did the... I can't even... The lamest one, like the people mover, we run all by ourselves and it was so cool. And you could see the fireworks. And those I just googled stuff before of tips for Magic Kingdom. Because I remember even when our girls were little, so when we had it easy still with just two kids, thinking, okay, I know that my daughter needs a nap and we're doing one day of the park and reading someone's tip of sit on the carousel of progress, it is air conditioned, it is dark and your child will fall asleep because it's boring and you can give them a nap and you can sit there for half an hour and no one cares because no one really wants to go on that ride that much. So they won't care if you just sit there and you actually don't get up. You can just say to the person, My kid might fall asleep. Can I just keep riding it? And they usually let you. So definitely, I agree with you thinking outside the box of what works for your family.

[00:28:18.960] - Kristen Perso

And then yes, also being assertive. So I mentioned that our youngest son is a power wheelchair user, so flying with him with his wheelchair is very, very difficult. Wheelchairs often get broken. So if there's any other families who have that on here, I'm happy to share more specific tips later. But we really just had to be so specific and ask for help and be assertive, which is not something my husband and I are always super great at, but we're getting better. And I think, Rachel, you're really right. You need to be willing to ask for what your family needs. And the worst thing that people need to do is say no. But the best thing is they can go out of their way to help you and make your day a lot easier and go a lot smoother. And your kids then are learning how to ask for their own, what they need and what you need as a family, too.

[00:29:08.370] - Kristen Perso

So some of my other specific tips, I was going to say the best thing that we do on road trips is... We do a lot of road trips because we have family back in Michigan, so it's like a 10 hour drive. So we pretty much have just figured out where the Subway restaurants are, and we bring chips and we bring drinks and we bring some other snacks and we know we're going to drive to the Subway. I'm going to go in. I know what everybody's sandwich order is. I'm just going to get the same thing we always get. We put them in a cooler and we drive a little bit further and then everybody has their sandwich and their chips and their drink. And then when it's time to get out, we don't have to get out to go find fast food. We can get out, everybody can actually walk around. Our stops are shorter, so it gets us places faster. For us, sometimes when we do fast food, fast food when we're on the road. Everybody's like, I feel bad now. I had a bunch of fast food. I'm sitting in the car. So Subway has worked really well for us. It's lower cost, everybody feels better, and it saves our stops when we're driving to be able to get out and actually do something.

[00:30:16.230] - Kristen Perso

I also wanted to share, I recently met another adoptive mom who runs a blog called the Wonders Within Reach, and she basically shares all of their travel tips. And one of the things she was saying is they travel a lot between Pennsylvania and Florida for medical stuff. And she's like, there's this great playground that we know of that's right off from 95 in Richmond, Virginia. And she's like, that's our go to spot. We know we eat lunch right before that or whatever, right after that, and we get out and the kids get to run around at the playground. So trying to plan ahead for some of those things, give your kids an incentive. Our kids don't really get vending machine stuff very often. So when we are doing the drives, we're like, Hey, you get to go get the vending machine. And it's the fun of a couple of dollars and they get to watch it fall down and pick their own snacks and stuff. So even just little stuff like that, I feel like really helps us on the road trips that are super boring when you're doing stuff that's maybe you're not going somewhere new.

[00:31:18.060] - Kristen Perso

Yeah, I was going to share. We try to do a beach day. We haven't intentionally done the beach in the evening, but I was thinking when you said it, we did one time just end up at the beach in the evening. And it was so nice because there was no one there. We've tried to do different beaches and it has gone very badly. We've had where we've tried a new beach just because it's like, hey, everybody's talking about this beach. We should give it a try. And most of us don't love to be in the sun for the whole day. So we bring the beach tent and we get to the beach to find out, oh, you can't bring that beach tent here. You have to use this particular kind. And then we're like, we already have... And logistically, you just don't know that stuff until you get there. And then it happens to be the same day where it actually starts raining, like sleeting rain on the beach and just that stuff that you just have to say, okay, this is just, it is what it is. It's not the only beach day we've ever had. It really stinks while we're here. But just accepting it and going, it is what it is.

[00:32:29.110] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, we do a lot of road trips. And I know we have a wide age range, probably not as wide as some families, but 10 years. And we have done a lot of listening to either radio dramas or books in the car because it keeps people from talking, which keeps people from arguing. So we've used that for ,any, many years.

[00:32:54.240] - Kristen Perso

Yeah. And I didn't really say, but we don't necessarily let our kids do a ton of electronic time. We try to keep a handle on that at home. But in the car, we just go, it is what it is, just watch the screen. And if it keeps everybody happy until we get there, I mean, and just being okay with that, again and not making yourself feel guilty about, oh, my kids are watching the screens for five hours in the car. And just having that conversation, it's part of travel, it's a privilege, that thing and just being okay with it and not feeling bad, I think has been really helpful, too. .

[00:33:30.070] - Rachel Bell

We do the same thing. We have very few electronic rules in the car.

[00:33:36.580] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. All right. Well, before we jump into Q&A, so if you do have questions saved up, you can start popping those into the chat. I wanted to give both Kristen and Rachel a chance to tell us a little bit about what they do in terms of the work that they do with adoptive families and other families and how it intersects with vacationing. Kristen, you want to share about Cherry Blossom first?

[00:34:01.180] - Kristen Perso

Sure. So we originally are from Michigan. I mentioned we live in Pennsylvania now. And the main reason for our move was because our two youngest kids have medical needs. And so we ended up moving to be closer to the children's hospital that specializes in the needs that they have. So for a while, we were traveling back and forth just for medical appointments. And those were really our vacations. And so that wasn't really our long term goal was to have all of our family vacations just be for doctor's appointments. And so in those drives, we started having the conversations of like, man, this really stinks that we have to do this for our vacations. And we were fortunate to be able to move. And so as we, though, have been here, we meet so many families like ours who are flying across the country for medical appointments, all of those things that it really limits your actual vacation time. So over the course of all of that and experiencing that and meeting families like ours who are not getting to vacation because they're doing medical stuff, or adoptive families who also, as probably I assume everyone on here knows, adoption is expensive and cuts into most of our normal budgets and sometimes doesn't leave a lot left for vacation.

[00:35:15.980] - Kristen Perso

So we decided to start a nonprofit two and a half years ago called Cherry Blossom Vacations. Our mission is to give adoptive families, foster families, and families who have special needs a no cost vacation stay. So we are currently in the fundraising stage. Our long term goal is to buy a house that we as the nonprofit will own. And then we will use that house just to give vacation stays to families like ours who are not vacationing because as we know, there's so many different reasons. There's financial reasons. There's just logistical reasons of it's just too hard, too overwhelming. I have to bring too many things. My kids might lose it while we're there, and I don't even want to risk that. So we're hoping that by giving families a stay that's number one, no cost and number two, in a place that can be set up to help families like ours have less things to bring, have less things to think about, things like some families need to travel with a safety bed. Some families, including ours, we have one kid who has to be in his own bedroom. He cannot share a bedroom with other people. And so knowing that there is a room that if a child needs to be in their own room, they can be in it. If you need to put a little doorbell thing on it to know when they come in and out of the room, you can do that and not have to think about all of those things.

[00:36:37.530] - Kristen Perso

So along with fundraising, we're also partnering with... We have about five vacation homes at the moment that their homeowners are donating time for us to match families with. So we do have a rather long waiting list, unfortunately. The need is obviously there. So that is what we're doing. We're matching a few families as we can at a time. We just have had our first two family's vacation, and we have two more vacationing coming up in May. So we would love to have families apply. I'm trying to be realistic with people and say it is a rather long waiting list, but our hope is that we will continue to fundraise and get to a point where we have our own house and then we'll be able to help lots of families be able to vacation.

[00:37:20.920] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. So more importantly, if you know someone who would like to sponsor or donate towards our families being able to have vacations, that would also help as well. Or if you have connections in the vacation world. Rachel, what about you?

[00:37:34.390] - Rachel Bell

I started a travel planning company in August. For the last 10 years before that, I worked in support for foster and adoptive families. I transitioned to this in August. It really has a lot of similarities as far as a lot of the families I work with. But my company specializes in travel for families for families in general and then for individuals with disabilities, invisible or visible disabilities, and food allergies. As I said, those are things that my family has experienced personally, and we are passionate about

vacations. I not only have we seen the benefits of vacations in our family, but in the years that I was working in support for foster and adoptive families, some of our biggest events were like, we had a family camp that we did yearly, and that meant so much to families because it was a vacation for them and a connection opportunity. And it was really more than they bargained for. They went looking for something to do, a low cost vacation. It was over spring break, and they left just really feeling like it was such an important experience for their family. Something where it feels like sometimes vacations are just something extra, something not necessary.

[00:38:56.600] - Rachel Bell

There are situations where that's true. Vacations have to be extra depending on the budget, which I love your organization, Kristen, that's awesome. But also, vacations for my family are a priority because they really can be an investment in your family. Anyway, my husband and I talked for a year before I started this company, just about what was next for me. And this feels like it felt like at the time, just the right meeting of all of my experiences and things that were important to our family. Anyway, I help families plan travel to currently booking all Disney destinations, which is in Disney World, Disney Land. Disney has a resort in Hawaii called Aulani, Disney Cruise Line. Disney also does abroad travel with Adventures by Disney. And then most major cruise lines in Atlanta and the Bahamas are the things I'm booking right now. All of my services are free to the traveler. The companies that I work with actually pay me, so you guys do not have to. So that is what I'm doing with Bell Travel Co.

[00:40:12.890] - Melissa Corkum

Awesome. Real quick, Rachel, what's the best place for folks to find Bell Travel Co? Do you have a website, socials?

[00:40:22.310] - Rachel Bell

I do. I have... On Instagram, it's @belltravelco, and then my website is belltravel.co.

[00:40:31.920] - Melissa Corkum

Perfect. Kristen, where can folks find Cherry Blossom?

[00:40:34.210] - Kristen Perso

CherryBlossomVacations.Org.

[00:40:36.210] - Melissa Corkum

All right. So thank you both for sharing all of your wisdom and tips. I know we're going to continue to do that in the Q&A, but thanks for taking time to think through some of those things with me here on the podcast and for the workshop.

[00:40:55.240] - Melissa Corkum

We are so thankful for the amazing guests who share their wisdom and expertise with us. Adoptive Parenting gives us both the challenge and the opportunity to keep learning new tools and perspectives.

[00:41:07.000] - Lisa Qualls

If you'd like to hear more from our guests and get support on this topic, all of our workshops, including the Q&A's, are available to folks inside our group coaching program called Reclaim Compassion. To learn more, go to reclaimcompassion.com.

[00:41:24.180] - Melissa Corkum

Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. Our new Instagram handle is @postadoptionresources. Or better yet, join our free Facebook community at theadoptionconnection.com/Facebook.

[00:41:39.110] - Lisa Qualls

Thanks so much for listening. We love having you. Remember, you're a good parent doing good work.

[00:41:47.300] - Melissa Corkum

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