

[00:00:00.000] - Lisa C. 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.

[00:00:09.990] - Melissa Corkum

And this is Melissa Corkum. Don't worry, we get it, and we're here for you. Please note that this episode contains topics that may be harder to listen to if you have a trauma history or young children listening.

[00:00:27.570] - Melissa Corkum

Stephanie Fast, I am so glad you're finally joining us on the podcast. I've had the privilege of meeting you in person, of hearing you speak on the stage. I think our audience would really enjoy hearing from you, not just your story as an adoptee, but also just your heart. So welcome.

[00:00:46.110] - Stephanie Fast

Thank you. It's an honor for me to be here with you. Yeah.

[00:00:50.650] - Melissa Corkum

So let's just start. Will you just introduce yourself to our audience? I'm sure some people have heard your story or know you, but I'm sure there's still some who don't. So just give us a quick introduction of who you are and what you're doing these days.

[00:01:08.280] - Stephanie Fast

Okay. Yeah. My name is Stephanie Fast, and I am a wife, a mother of six children, grandparent of 21 children. That keeps me pretty busy. But I also am a public speaker and an encourager and just an advocate for children that have come from hard places. I do deal mostly with adults that have come from hard places, just mainly because as we know, our brains really can't formulate a lot of what we experience as a child until the frontal part of our brain starts working. So I do a lot of mentoring and speaking at conferences and other functions.

[00:01:56.180] - Melissa Corkum

And you've lived a lot of life and so you have a lot of wisdom. I want to be like you when I grow up.

[00:02:02.190] - Stephanie Fast

Oh, wow.

[00:02:06.230] - Melissa Corkum

Can you tell us a little bit about your early growing up? What's the first thing you remember about your life in Korea?

[00:02:15.230] - Stephanie Fast

I think I remember quite young. I remember being with my biological mom, but I remember even understanding there was trauma in our home. Even as a young child, my spirit just sensed it and there was just the atmosphere around it. There's a lot of yelling and a lot of crying. But my memory really begins with my mom putting me on a train with the promise that an uncle was going to care for me. But when I got to where I was thought I was supposed to get to, there was no uncle. And this was in the '50s where Korea had just gotten over the Korean War. There were no such thing. I think nonprofit organizations were just starting out in South Korea at that time. So wherever I ended up, and I can't even remember the name of the town, there was no help for me. So I basically took care of myself, really for the first, maybe, well, I think at least two years and maybe even three years because, again, when I was young, I remember seasons of being on the streets, but I can't tell you the years that I was on the streets.

[00:03:27.510] - Stephanie Fast

And just went through things that no child should ever go through. Physical abuse, definitely mental abuse because I'm biracial, which means, again, in South Korea, you are a non person. So just the abuse from everybody, the mental abuse, the physical abuse. And I think probably somewhere along

my journey, I shut down even my spiritual, my soul and my spirit and my body. I was just in a survival mode, if I can describe it as that. But Miraculous of Miracles, I was actually found on a garbage heap when I was seven by a Swedish nurse. In my book, I tell the story that she told me of finding me and really just going to leave me there to die. And that sounds really horrible. But again, when you're in a third world country and you're specializing in who you're there to help, and it was the summer and there was a cholera epidemic going around, and she just knew that that's probably what I was dying from on this garbage heap. So she's going to actually leave me there to die. And she said two things happened that changed her mind. One was her body just became paralyzed, like she's glued to the garbage heap.

[00:04:54.700] - Stephanie Fast

And then she's trying to figure out what is going on. This quiet Lutheran missionary said she heard an audible voice and it said three words, she is mine. So she listened to that voice and I'm so thankful that she did. She rescued me, brought me back to life, placed me in a World Vision Orphanage. I was in there for two years. So by now I'm about nine years of age. And then a missionary couple that had a dream to adopt a very healthy baby boy saw me from the corner of their eye. And I was a basket case. I had a lazy eye. I had lice in my hair. I had tape worms in my stomach that they would actually come out of my mouth sometimes. I had still scabs on my body, boils on my body. Definitely not a child that when you go to an orphanage to pick out, you would say, Oh, I want this one. But again, they are spiritual people, and they felt really compelled of God that I was supposed to be the one that they were supposed to take home. I think they questioned that many times in the years that I lived with them. But they were gracious and loving and I am who I am, not only because of God, but largely due to my mom and my dad.

[00:06:17.860] - Melissa Corkum

Just an incredible story. I know you wrote a lot about it in your book, and so we'll help you share that at the end as well. You talk about having these snippets of memories from seasons in Korea. I'm just curious, do you remember feeling a sense of wanting... What happened when you got to the end of the train tracks and there was no uncle? Do you remember being angry or hurt? Do you remember any of your feelings or thoughts from that time?

[00:06:56.560] - Stephanie Fast

No, I think I was just bewildered. I know because you trust the adult in your life. My mom had said an uncle would be there to meet me, so I waited as long as I can remember until it got dark the first day. It was really the station master that basically told me that no one was coming for me. At that point, I was, I think, just bewildered. Where fear set in is when I left the train track and I found an oxen cart leaning up against the wall of this train station and crawling underneath it. And that was really the first time it really dawned on me. Yeah, I'm by myself. I have no one to care for me. And I remember crying really hard at that point. But to say I was angry or anything like that, I think I was just like, I need my mom.

[00:07:52.060] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, in shock, probably. You said at some point you're probably sure your parents may have regretted listening to that little voice that said, bring her home. So many of the parents listening to us are dealing with really big behaviors in their homes right now. And so are you willing to share some of the things that maybe made it hard for you to parent and your perspective now when you look back?

[00:08:26.140] - Stephanie Fast

Right. Well, my perspective now is I want to say I'm so sorry. And I did say that to them many times once I became an adult. I think for me, my story is a little different because my parents were missionaries in Korea, so I actually lived with them the first three years after I left the orphanage. I call that my honeymoon years, because I was taken out of the orphanage, brought into a missionary community, which is a really tight knit community. I went to a little missionary school. It was like I blocked the Korean side off of me. I never spoke Korean again. I didn't even want to go to churches with my dad. Although I lived in Korea, I lived in this little bubble called the missionary community. Really for the first three years, not only did I have my mom and dad that were so attentive to me, but I had all these other missionary moms and dads that just was so affirming to what I needed at that

point. So I thought it was wonderful. And really, during those three years, my mom and dad said the only behavioral issue they saw in me is that I would lie a lot.

[00:09:46.660] - Stephanie Fast

And lying was basically I wanted to create a fantasy for myself. So if someone had something that I envied, I had double that or triple that. It's just because I had so lack in the world, everything I wanted, I wanted more than what was provided for me. But they said that was really the only behavioral thing that they saw. But they were gentle about it. They didn't say, You're lying, you've got to change your ways. I remember my dad a couple of times saying, Do you really like the story that you're creating for yourself? And he gave me permission either to correct it or to just stay in that story. And if I stayed in that story, I think my parents just prayed and prayed and prayed, and eventually I did confess, right?

[00:10:39.960] - Stephanie Fast

But it really wasn't until I came to the States at the age of 12 that anger actually started. And it seems funny, but I think when I came to the States, I thought I would just blend in to the white community that I was adopted into, and I didn't. My parents pastored the church in the south. Again, in the 60s, there just weren't a lot of Asians. I don't remember any Asian until I started college, really. And so the whole identity issue and just that sense of being thankful, but being angry at the same time because there would be comments like, Oh, you're so lucky to be adopted. But inside I was saying, You don't know what I went through to come to this place. But you can't tell that to anybody. I can't even tell that to my parents. And when I went to school, they would call me Chinese because they didn't even know there was such a country as Korea. They only knew China. Just that sense of who am I? Where do I belong? When I was in Korea, they told me I was a foreign devil, and now I'm in America, and they're calling me this Asian devil, almost like. So yes, a lot of anger began to just build slowly. By the time I was probably 14 or 15, I became pretty uncontrollable, just not out in society so much because, again, I was afraid of rejection. In school, I did well. I had what I would call surface friends. It was really hard for me to keep a really strong friend because it was easier for me to say, I don't want you in my life than for them to reject me. Friends came and went a lot in my life. But I knew my parents were consistent. I knew that they loved me. I just showed a lot of behavior behind closed doors. I was ungrateful, yelled a lot, stole things, lied. And to a little degree, pretty disruptive. I would slam doors and cuss at them and things like that. Yeah, not too pleasant.

[00:13:07.800] - Melissa Corkum

I was a door slammer, too.

[00:13:09.850] - Stephanie Fast

Yeah.

[00:13:11.400] - Melissa Corkum

As it turns out, what would you tell parents? Or is there anything that your parents could have done that would... Every parent that we work with just wants to stop the behaviors, right? And some of them understand the deeper needs, and so they're trying to show love and patience and acceptance and give our kids a sense of felt safety. But ultimately, because they want those behaviors to resolve, right? They want their kids to have more meaningful relationships and friendships. They want them not to lie. They're fearful about what will happen if they're adults and they go out into the world and are untruthful or irresponsible or have anger issues. I just wonder now that you've lived so much of your story and you can look back and you've been a parent and you're a grandparent, what would you tell parents? Or was there anything that your parents could have done that might have helped? Or is it just something that had to work itself out?

[00:14:13.290] - Stephanie Fast

Well, I think as an adult, I had to work things out. But as a teenager, I just existed. And I was suicidal. I had depression issues and suicidal issues. And at those points, my parents would go for help. But again, just the history that I grew up in is a little different than the history of children that come that are adopted now. I think their internal issues are the same, but the circumstances are a little different. For me, my behavior was just all created in my own brain. I had no mental health, I don't think. The mental health I had is I created the scenario in my brain, and so I had to fight my own demons. That's

how I describe it. I think a lot of the young children or young adults that adoptive parents deal with now, they do come with generational sins, and they do come with chemical imbalances. Many of them come with just mental issues that is hard as parents to deal with. I'm so thankful that there are professional helps out there that help them. But on the other hand, I think talking to parents, we run to professional help almost too quick without assessing our children's needs on our own.

[00:15:48.190] - Stephanie Fast

We feel helpless. My parents feel helpless. They see a child lying and they think, I don't know what to do to help them. Then they take them to a professional and they hope that the professional can help them, which they need that. But I think parents have way more power than we give ourselves. The two or three things that my parents did really well was, they were really good listeners. I think sometimes we want to solve our children's problem so quick, we don't take the time to listen. And it's even listening to the painful things is really, really important. My parents were really great listeners. Dad, especially my dad, never amplified more than what he saw. He didn't seem to be afraid when he saw me behaving that way. Now, my mom would get a little afraid, but my dad would step in and he just would let me run the course. Then once I ran the course with my emotions, he had an amazing way of just tapping into what he saw in me the way God saw me. So instead of addressing the behavior, he often would tell me the opposite of it. If I was angry, he would say, Stephanie, you're such a gentle person and you're such a caring person and you have such a servant's heart. He would just stop at that and I would be bewildered because I had just finished yelling and screaming and saying, and all these things. So the reinforcements, the opposite reinforcements of my behavior took place in my brain. And I think without them even realizing and without me realizing it, I was retracing my brain just by what I heard from them.

[00:17:49.000] - Stephanie Fast

So I would say to parents, third thing is I would say to parents, they are not rejecting you because it's really painful because you're attacking the parents. I was attacking my mom and my dad, and my parents were really good in letting me know that I wasn't rejecting them. They would say gentle things like, Stephanie, we hear you, but we're here. Stephanie, we hear you, it hurts. They didn't go into great explanations of why they were hurt. They just said they were hurt. For me, being who I am, just hearing the word, I hurt my parents, even though I couldn't regulate my emotions at that point, as during the night or next day, I would just hear that, oh, I hurt my parents. And then I would try in my behavior to change. But of course, when you have anger and bitterness and the spirit of rejection just running off through you, it takes a long time.

[00:18:56.060] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. It sounds like even in the midst of all of that anger and hurt, their relationship... You were thinking about your relationship to them. We've talked a little bit about the Enneagram, and I hear from a lot of twos that they often are framing their life, like thinking about relationships. Have you seen that pattern in your life? And how were they able... Were there other ways that they were able to communicate to you the message that 2s say they want to hear, which is you are wanted and loved. Which again, sounds so obvious. Of course, we all want to be wanted and loved. But there are eight other messages that other personality types and people find even more important in some ways. Mine is, your needs will be taken care of. I'm just curious if you can talk a little bit more about this relationship orientation of thinking about you in relationship to other people.

[00:20:11.960] - Stephanie Fast

I think for me, when I did the test, it was such an eye opener for me because I thought even my adult behaviors had a lot to do with my childhood. But I realized it was pretty much just ingrained in me, and my childhood reinforced it, made it so much larger. Because I remember even as a child, having this sense that I was responsible to take care of others, which I had no way to even take care of myself, but I had this innate need. If I stole something, most kids wouldn't share it with other children. But for me, it was like, Oh, you need it, so I'm going to give it to you. I'll take care of you before I take care of myself. And so I always thought that was... But looking back on my childhood, I realized it had to do a lot with my number. The sense of feeling needed, being seen. Just by studying my number and my negatives and the positives has made me even more aware and actually thankful in a lot of ways.

[00:21:36.540] - Melissa Corkum

I've talked with a lot of adoptees because I think this is so fascinating. And we get the question a lot, does trauma or adoption create your number? Are there more adoptees who are one number than another because a certain abandonment or change in primary caregiver would create a number? More and more, I meet adoptees who are all the numbers and even have similar stories. And yet it's so interesting how that core motivation that I think we're born with plays through that even when there was no logical reason for you to think that you could meet the needs of other people, that you were still motivated to reach out and create relationship in that way, even if you had nothing.

[00:22:29.150] - Stephanie Fast

That's right.

[00:22:29.840] - Melissa Corkum

Just so fascinating. For me in my adoption story, I got angry around really silly things, mostly chores and other things, but I never remember thinking about how it was impacting my relationship with them. I was just so focused on what I was stuck in, the stuckness of having to do a chore before the fun and all of that, that it didn't really matter, all those other things. I have a great relationship with my parents and love them, but that underlying need to make sure that our relationship was okay was not really a common theme, especially my big behaviors.

[00:23:18.080] - Stephanie Fast

Yeah. Isn't that interesting? Whereas for me, my behavior didn't change. But inwardly, I was so ashamed that I was thinking I was breaking that relationship. And so then I would try in my own effort to change it. But my parents were really good in constantly reinforcing that no matter what I did, they still loved me. I never felt that rejection. My mom would get hurt. I don't even think my dad got hurt. It was like he knew. When I was an adult, we would have these conversations. I said, Dad, you were always so patient. How were you not wounded? He said, No, because God told me that we were supposed to bring you into our family. He said, I knew there was something more than what I saw. I thought, Wow, that's pretty amazing.

[00:24:17.090] - Melissa Corkum

That's big faith. Such big faith. You have big faith. I feel it when I'm with you and I hear it in your story. Was it because of your parents' influence? When did that become something that was yours and not just theirs?

[00:24:37.590] - Stephanie Fast

I think it became mine out of desperation because my parents were pastors. So as a pastor's kid, it seemed like you lived in church. And as a pastor's kid, they always picked you for the memory verse.

[00:24:56.520] - Melissa Corkum

A lot of expectations. I was a youth pastor's kid.

[00:24:58.760] - Stephanie Fast

Again, on the surface, people in church really didn't know I had all the issues that I... My parents really didn't share it with too many people. I think there was one aunt that really knew what was going on. And so but when I was about, probably the summer before my 17th birthday, an event happened at a summer camp that just devastated me. I probably at that point decided I just can't live anymore. It was so painful. And it brought back a lot of childhood memories. I was pretty much just going to end my life. I even wrote a letter and it. I went into my dad's study and I put it in one of his Bibles because I thought, okay, once I'm gone, my dad will open up the Bible. I just wanted to say I was sorry, like thing. So I came home from camp and I went back to school, but I just wasn't doing well that year, just stumbling in my grades and in my relationship with friends. My parents saw that and they would try to talk to me, but I would just, Nothing's wrong, nothing's wrong, nothing's wrong. But one day, my dad sat down with me and just really explained the human side of Jesus. I mean, we know that Jesus was a human, but we don't really stop to think about his life. He had a pretty traumatic life when you really think about it. He just explained where Jesus was born and really explained the scenario of it and the journey that Jesus had going from Bethlehem to wherever they ended up in Egypt. It was like three or

400 mile journey back in that day. Wherever they settled, that he was a refugee, that he lived in the margins. He explained that maybe he was taunted and ridiculed. Then, of course, all the things about his abuse and rejection and all that. It was really the first time in all the years that I had sat under preaching that I just saw, Wow, Jesus was a human just like me. He went through everything that I went through. He went through fear. He went through probably anger. I mean, the Bible says he went through everything, but he sinned not. But I think our sin is when we dwell on it and we act on it. But the emotions and the feelings, he felt it all.

[00:27:45.330] - Stephanie Fast

When my dad finished that night, I remember laying in bed just really because I came to that, I was going to commit suicide. But Dad's talk made sense to me. And then I remember getting out of bed, kneeling by the bed, but not saying the sweet sinner's prayer. I just said, Okay, God, if you're who mom and dad say you are, I want you to do something because I need something right now. Now, my thing is somewhere in my childhood, I had stopped crying. Because I learned as a little girl, the more you cry, the more you get abused. So I had just stopped crying. I knew how to be angry. I knew how to do all the negatives, but to actually cry, I didn't know how to cry. That night when I said, God, do something, he did do something. He touched my tear ducts and I began to cry for the first time that I could remember in a long, long time. As you know, tears is a good healing factor, right? And I was crying, crying, crying, and my parents heard me. And they came into the room and they didn't say anything. They just sat there and prayed and prayed and prayed. And then after all these tears, my dad said, Are you ready now to really receive Jesus into your life? I said, yes. And I made a commitment to God at that point that no matter what, I would go on this journey with him. When we talk about my faith base, I truly believe at that point. Now, the healing took a lot longer. There's a difference between being saved and believing, but the healing takes so much longer. But definitely, my mind or my heart changed. I realized that, okay, I'm going to connect to him and I'm going to study his word. I'm going to listen to his spirit because I am not going to stay who I am. I made a choice at that point to change.

[00:29:50.940] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, what a beautiful legacy that your parents have left. My next question is selfishly for me because I lost my dad in April of last year.

[00:30:03.030] - Stephanie Fast

I'm so sorry.

[00:30:04.510] - Melissa Corkum

And I know that you've walked through the journey of losing both of your parents. Just curious, how your story has impacted the grief of losing another loss. And what does healthy grieving look like for you?

[00:30:24.180] - Stephanie Fast

I think healthy grieving is honesty. And sometimes as believers, we're not honest because we think we got to put in the scriptures. And we mask the grief because we want to walk by faith. But for me, it was like God said, you'd be honest with your grief, really go into that loss. And I did. I grieved so deeply. And I'm still grieving. I just lost my mom in the February, so it would be a year to end this next month. Just that sense because I lost my dad about 25 years ago, and it was really, really difficult because between the two of them, I was probably closer emotionally to my dad than to my mom. But I think having my mom there, walking through that grief with me helped. Losing my mom, it was like I lost that one person that knew my story, truly knew my story, had been there through all the behaviors, had been faithful through all that, had rejoiced with me, had seen the losses that I had, even as an adult, being there with me, loving me through it. But also the one that I knew that prayed for me every day of my life. That was my mom. She would call on a daily basis. Hi, honey. What can I pray for you today? And just that anticipation of that phone call every day was such a connection. And to know that was gone and to know that although I had people, certainly that prayed for you, but I knew she faithfully prayed for me. So I still feel that sense of loss. I want to pick up the phone sometimes and call her, and I realize that I can't. I brought home a couple of her Bibles because she wrote a lot in the margins of the Bibles and just trying to hear her talk to me, even though she's gone. I have a chime in my backyard that sometimes it's... Again, now some people might say, Maybe not. But for me, I feel

like it's my mom talking to me. Because sometimes I'll talk to her and I'll stand under the chime and the wind's not even blowing and the chime will just chime for me. I don't know how long that grief thing process. My dad, the pain is gone, but with my mom, the pain is still there.

[00:33:10.190] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. Well, it hasn't even been a year yet.

[00:33:12.520] - Stephanie Fast

Yeah.

[00:33:14.270] - Melissa Corkum

Well, thanks for sharing. Is there anything as we wrap up that you would want to share with our community that's really on your heart tonight?

[00:33:23.320] - Stephanie Fast

I think what I would want to share with the community is don't give up hope. I think there are a lot of parents that just are on the edge and they're just saying, Okay, I'm going to live with my daughter and my son till they get out of the house.

[00:33:40.850] - Melissa Corkum

I've been there. Yes.

[00:33:44.200] - Stephanie Fast

And that day will come. But even then, and we know as parents, I have children that are in their late 40s and I'm still parenting them. We're going to be parents to the day we die. But don't give up hope. And I always say to parents, what was the reason why you adopted? Because I think sometimes we forget why we adopted because we're so involved in the trauma of what's going on in our family. But it's important to remember because my mom and dad said that to me, we remember why we adopted you. I want to say that to the parents. Go back to the reason why you even applied for the paper, when you first saw your child. What did God say to you about this child? Hold on to that.

[00:34:38.040] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. And sometimes there's grief there, that ambiguous loss, the disenfranchised grief of realizing what our expectations of what this journey of parenthood might have been is different than the reality.

[00:34:54.110] - Stephanie Fast

Even as parents, we hear the subtle message from society that says, We're the rescuers, we're the saviors, we're the good people. We don't feel that way. Just to die to that, too, that we didn't rescue the children. We didn't do any of that. We brought them into our family because we wanted a family. That's very, very important for adopted parents to remember. Even when their friends say, Oh, yeah, why is your daughter acting that way? She should feel so lucky for, as a parent, not to hear that, but to hear the Spirit of God saying to them, I brought her into your family for this reason. I think every adoptive parent, and God does speak to us, whether it's through the Word or through the Spirit, just say, God, what do you have to say about this? And hold on to that.

[00:35:58.980] - Melissa Corkum

I think it reminds me of some wise words I've heard along the journey as I've lived that, too, which is like, what is our job as parents? I started off in this parenting journey thinking it was my job to make my kids turn out a certain way or to make them behave a certain way. I hear you saying our job is to be faithful, to loving well, and holding on to hope and being obedient to whatever the next right thing is.

[00:36:35.470] - Stephanie Fast

And it's really hard because some parents listening and some people listening, they're just saying, I hear you, but I'm just in the thick of it. But for them to realize that there are other people in the thick of it, and they're cheering for them. And the end does come, really. Even if an adult adoptee still is struggling, which I do a lot of mentoring with adult adoptees, when they look back on their childhood,

they'll highlight the things that their parents did for them that was right. It's those things that makes them come back to say, I want to be what they believe me to be. Yeah.

[00:37:20.110] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. We're planting seeds for the future. Well, Stephanie, I am so grateful for the years of your wisdom and your willingness to share with everyone. I'm deeply thankful for the parts of your story that you're willing to share in order to make a difference and to encourage other families and other parents. Thank you again for being here.

[00:37:47.930] - Stephanie Fast

It's such an honor and I love being on this journey with you.

[00:37:50.770] - 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 the adoptionconnection.com/facebook.

[00:38:06.680] - Lisa C. Qualls

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

[00:38:15.050] - Melissa Corkum

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