

Becker Consulting Services

May 11, 2003

A NEW FAMILY



MARIKO CROWE/FOR THE HERALD

'If you love a kid, that's all that matters,' says Edith Houlihan with 18-month-old daughter Lili, who she adopted from China with her husband Richard at left. Adop-

tion was a long process for the Houlihans, who participate in a support group for parents to deal with some of the issues. **Story, 4.**

Becker Consulting Services

May 11, 2003

Families face a long, loving road in adoptions

Group helps parents cope

BY KIM GRATTAN
Herald Writer

Couples who choose to adopt a child face a tough road that can be as long as it is bumpy.

From the endless paperwork to the rigors of starting a family or adding to one, the adoption decision brings stresses that biological parenthood doesn't.

MIAMI-DADE

That's where Cherish Adoptive Families of Miami comes in.

It's a support group for parents who have adopted, and for adults who are thinking about it.

The group meets once a month to cover issues particular to parents and families. It's led by Jeanne Becker, 46, president of Becker Consulting and single mom to 6-year-old Ethan, whom she adopted from Russia.

Becker has been there, done that — and she enjoys sharing her experience and knowledge with other parents in the group.

Many of them have also opted for out-of-country adoptions, which can be especially trying.

Being around people who are sharing the same trials is comforting, say those who come to meetings regularly —



MARIKO CROWE/FOR THE HERALD

AT PLAY: Adriana Bielenstein, 4, Fatima Bielenstein, 8, and Richard Schreiber, 5, study a turtle in a tank.

TO KNOW MORE

Cherish Adoptive Families of Miami meets once a month at the Coral Gables Police Station, 2801 Salzedo St. For more information, call Cherish President Jeanne Becker at 305-444-2181 or e-mail: jbecker@beckerconsulting.com. The website is www.geocities.com/adoptionsmiami.

like Edith Houlihan.

She and her husband Richard are criminal defense attorneys who say they have seen the devastation caused by chaotic childhoods and poor parenting.

The couple decided to adopt because Richard's two

teenage children from a previous marriage were living with their mother.

Edith was 48 at the time and Richard 45, and they had no kids of their own.

So, after 15 months, and a whole lot of paperwork, the Houlihans went to China to

pick up their daughter Taylor on Father's Day 1998.

The experience was so good the Houlihans decided to adopt again. They went back to China and this time they brought Lili home with them.

Lili is now 18 months old and Taylor is 7, and the bond between the girls and their parents is unmistakable.

Cherish helps couples like the Houlihans answer some key questions — like how to teach children from different countries about their background and culture and when is a good time to tell kids they are adopted.

The Houlihans now have

'Trust that if you go looking for your child, your child will be there for you.'

— MARY BIELENSTEIN, parent

enough experience to offer some advice to prospective parents: look into the reasons for wanting a child and consider the choice carefully.

But, Edith says the bottom line is more simple than that: "If you love a kid, that's all that matters."

Group members Mary and Carlos Bielenstein, both 44, went searching for their perfect child in Brazil, where Carlos is from — but they wound up adopting two "perfect" girls from Hungary.

"It was like an instant family," Carlos Bielenstein said.

The Bielensteins spent five weeks in a hotel in Budapest when they went to get their daughters, Fatima and Adriana.

But they had a lot of support and love from their families and it was worth it when the girls got to meet their aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins.

Fatima and Adriana, now 8 and 5 years old, came as a pair and although Carlos and Mary were only looking for one child, they said they knew these two were meant for

▶ PLEASE SEE ADOPTIONS, 57

Parents finally find the loves of their lives

ADOPTIONS, FROM 4
them.

It's been three years since they adopted the girls — and the couple are regular visitors to Cherish meetings.

Mary Bielenstein says the adoption has taught her faith.

"Trust that if you go looking for your child, your child will be there for you," she said.

Lourdes and John Schreiber have both been blind for much of their adult lives, but they say they don't need to see to know that they have a beautiful family.

Lourdes' diabetes prevented her from having more children after their first daughter, Amanda, was born, so they decided to take in foster kids with the intention of adopting.

But on the day before their wedding anniversary, a representative from the Department of Children & Families called them about a baby name Andrew.

"It's the perfect baby for you guys," she told the Schreibers.

She was right. Andrew was

5 days old when the Schreibers took him home and now, four years later, they're adopting his half-brother Richard.

Amanda, now 14, helps her parents with the boys.

Lourdes, 40, wants to give her kids all the things they would miss out on in a foster home, stuff that only a mother can do, like waking them up for school and dressing them and tickling them until they howl with laughter.

The Schreibers, and everyone else in Cherish, know that there are so many children out there — waiting for homes.

Like other group members, Lourdes has some advice for those considering adoption:

"Don't be afraid to adopt," she said. "If it's in your mind and in your heart, do it."

For her part, Becker wouldn't have done it any other way. Although she's a successful businesswoman, she sees her biggest victories in Ethan.

One of the most poignant moments came recently. Becker and her son write notes



MARIKO GROWE/FOR THE HERALD

ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY: Parents involved in Cherish Adoptive Families gather at leader Jeanne Becker's home. From left: Carlos and Mary Bielenstein with their children Adriana and Fatima; Edith and Tom Houlihan with Taylor and Lili on their mother's lap; Jeanne Becker with son Ethan on her lap; and John and Lourdes Schreiber with their kids Andrew, Richard and Amanda.

to each other, so he can practice his writing.

Becker came home and found this note on the refrigerator:

"Mom, you are the best. I am so glad you picked me."