

## A life full of love

*Local family opens up about adoption experience*

By Jennifer Blake  
Progress Staff

A family is whatever you make it. That is the message a local family is sending across the country.

Pierceland resident Juanita Mapstone and her family are one of 20 families who contributed to the book *Labours of Love: Canadians Talk About Adoption* by Ontario author Deborah Brennan. The book was released last week in time for Adoption Awareness Month.

*Labours of Love* is a collection of stories from families across Canada about adoption, which Brennan said she knows from experience is something that is hard to come by. “I wanted to write the book I was looking for when I adopted my daughter,” she explained.

“One in five Canadians are affected by adoption - either they were adopted, they are adoptive parents or they are birth parents. Yet it’s something people don’t talk about. There is a stigma attached to it and misconceptions. I think the media often makes it sound scary, like these children are thrown away.”

Brennan said the families she met on the journey to write her book proved that those things are not true. Mapstone came to her near the beginning of the process, and showed the positive side of adoption.

“She was always enthusiastic in talking about her story,” said Brennan.

“She is a big supporter of openness in adoption.”

Both of Mapstone’s children, Mason, 8, and Mya, 4, were adopted at birth. Mapstone said today she is close with Mya’s birth family and is also in touch with Mason’s.

“I knew I couldn’t have kids as a teenager,” she explained.

“I spent 18 months on a wait list for Mason. It went very smooth, there was very little contact with the birth family. He met his birth family last year. We aren’t that close, but I can call them whenever I need to.”

She said adopting Mya happened quickly and led her and her husband at the time to get to know the parents.

“I think the whole thing was rushed; even though they made the decision they spent two weeks with Mya and then these strangers came along with no warning,” said Mapstone.

“So we got to know them. Mya’s birth mother, Terri-Lynn was young and her mother Brenda and I have become very good friends. Mya doesn’t fully comprehend the situation, she just knows she has a big family.”

Mapstone said she firmly believes openness with the birth parents is the best thing for her children.

“My kids know where they came from,” she said.

“When it comes to medical history, all I have to do is pick up the phone if I have a question. I don’t see how anyone could lose in this entire situation.”

She added she is constantly surprised by the comments she gets from people.

“The biggest question I was asked after I got Mason, and still am, is ‘aren’t you scared of the birth mother coming back?’” she said.

“I’m not. She sees everything, she doesn’t have to wonder what she’s doing and how she is. What kid wouldn’t want too much love?”

Brennan said her purpose for writing her book was to open the eyes of people who know little about adoption, and also to help people who are affected by it.

“There are 22,000 kids available for adoption in Canada,” she said.

“Why is that? That shouldn’t be. It took me five years since the initial step to write my book because I couldn’t find a publisher. No one wanted to touch the topic. I had a tough time getting stories because it’s one thing to confide in your friends, but to have it in a book is harder.”

She said once she got people talking, the stories were incredible.

“It was a process and an adventure,” she said.

“It was amazing to spend time with these families; they are all different. I spoke with Jeff Healey for two hours. I traveled all over to meet these people.”

Mapstone said she hopes the book can reach people who need it.

“It is my hope that teenagers in a tough situation and don’t know what to do can be given an option they have never seen,” she said.

“Terri-Lynn was never told about adoption, she researched it herself. She made the most difficult decision of her life and people are knocking her for that. So many people are not able to have children. They have to know this is an option.”

Brennan said Mapstone is a positive example for people everywhere.

“She is smart,” she said.

“She sees both sides - it’s not a one-way street. She can empathize with the birth parents’ decisions.”

Brennan said she hopes her book can help make positive changes in the area of adoption. Her book tells the story of 20 families, but it represents so much more.

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