



Shattered Dreams--Lonely Choices: Birthparents of Babies with Disabilities Talk About Adoption

Joanne Finnegan

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Dreams of pregnancy include the expectation that nine months of waiting will end with a joyous event. But, each year, a shattered dream occurs for thousands of couples who receive the news that their child will have a disabling condition severe enough that they may question if they are the best parents for their child. Societal expectation is that parents will raise their child or, if the condition of the child is detected prenatally, abortion is offered as an alternative. Parents who explore other options face scrutiny and, sometimes, condemnation--lonely choices.

Joanne Finnegan shares her personal experience and that of several families she interviewed who, like herself, explored options other than raising their child with a disability. Parents express with candor the overwhelming pain they felt when receiving the news, the frustration when searching for options, the no-win feeling of decision making, the resolve with a final decision, and finally, life after the decision. Parent quotes also address issues such as spiritual dilemmas and interactions with friends, family, their other children, and medical professionals. Words of advice for new parents include how to build support systems and gather information, how to search for an adoptive family, and arranging the details of communication between adoptive and birth parents. Interviews with adoptive parents, poetry, and extensive resource lists complete the book. Written as a gift for other parents to help them cope with the pain and loneliness of decision making, this book will also be a valuable resource for medical professionals, adoption and social workers, counselors and spiritual advisors, and friends and family of the parents. It is a helpful as well as a deeply therapeutic book, providing a strong lesson in how to manage during this stressful time, from receiving the news about the baby's condition and prognosis, to weighing the factors involved in the various decisions. Should one take the baby home from the hospital? If not home, then where? Foster care, respite care, guardianship, and other forms of substitute care are mentioned. The author also examines decisions about finances and support services, family issues, finalizing an adoption plan, living with the decision, regrets, and future pregnancies.

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