Building Text and Photo Pages for your Child's Lifebook

Regardless of the format you've chosen for the creation of your child's lifebook, the text and photos you include should be the same. And, even if you have not yet chosen the format, don't let that be a barrier to lifebook progress! Many people opt to write the text for the entire lifebook before assembling a single page. Despite pictures being able to say a thousand words, it is the text that will more fully tell the child's story – even if fewer than a thousand words are used!

That said, in the simplest concept of a lifebook, you want to make sure there are sections devoted to your child's birth and birthplace, his birthparents, the reason he was placed for adoption and how he now fits into your family. Those are the basics, and a true lifebook can be created in as little as a half dozen pages. From there, especially if you have decided to combine true "lifebook" topics with other memories of the adoption journey, the sky is the limit. Your child's adoption scrapbook could become as many as 50 pages or more! If it helps, there is a list compiled of possible page topics available at this link: http://www.scrapandtell.com/files/LifebookPages.htm *(NOTE: Please keep in mind that the page topics listed are not limited to those that are specific to a lifebook.)*

Here are some things to consider when drafting the text of a lifebook:

1. The lifebook is private and you should let your child, when (s)he is old enough, decide with whom it is shared. You wouldn't leave a lifebook out on the cocktail table for extended relatives and the babysitter to peruse.

2. A lifebook is the child's story, plain and simple, written for them, owned by them. As the author of the lifebook, it is easy for us to express our opinion or bias on a matter, but it is important to refrain from doing so.

3. The lifebook is the foundation (one tool anyway) for future adoption discussions. By introducing adoption language and concepts in the lifebook, it will be easier and more comfortable for your child to progress to more advanced understanding and conversation.

4. It should be written with age-appropriateness to your child. Sometimes lifebook content is difficult to explain, but we should remember to use words that will be understood at the time they are first heard or read.

5. It should be truthful, based on fact and not conjecture. Period.

Ok, now that you have an idea of how to write the text, what type or number of photos should you include? The answer to that question is a personal decision. If you have photos to supplement the story, it is a good idea to include them. Children, especially younger ones, need the visual stimulation to retain focus on the content. If you try to read a lifebook to a child and there is nothing visually stimulating on the page, it will not hold his interest. If you have no photos, use clipart or other scrapbooking embellishments to decorate the pages. However, if you have 50 photos that capture a particular event, it is not necessary to include all of them. Perhaps you can consider the two or three photos that you like best (or that help most to tell the story) and put the rest in a simple slip-in album.

If you have them, I would include pictures of the birthparents, foster mother or primary caregiver during the transition period (unless your child came home with you directly from the hospital) and, of course, photos from the first day you met. Other photos or documents that are nice to have are of the birth certificate, birthplace, and the judge that finalized the adoption, making it legal. These are all things that help tell the child's story.

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