

## Plenty To Be Thankful For

Loving Parents, Multi-Ethnic Extended Family Ready To Provide A Better Life For Adopted Baby  
By [Katie Warchut](#) Published on 11/22/2007

### New London

AT 12 WEEKS OLD, DARIUS LAWRENCE PFEIFFER IS sweet-tempered, settling comfortably into the arms of strangers. He's already pulled between being a Yankees fan, like his mother, and a Red Sox fan, like his father. And he's definitely a Whaler.

While coaching her girls at basketball practice, Linda Pfeiffer steals him for a moment from the arms of his father, David Pfeiffer, on the sidelines, clutching him to her chest.

"He loves me," she brags, with a smile.

When the Pfeiffers decided to become parents, they didn't need their first child to be related by blood, or even to look like them.

Darius, who is both Caucasian and African-American, has fine hair that is just starting to thicken and curl. His lips purse in a bow

between puffy cheeks. Perfectly formed eyebrows frame his huge dark eyes.

Linda, a teacher at New London High School, and David, a social worker at the Waterford Country School, work with a racial mix of kids who like to joke that Darius begins to look more like them every day.

Which is exactly why they see New London, with its many ethnicities, as the perfect place to raise their son. The Pfeiffers, who are white, are creating a larger family for Darius made up of fellow teachers, coaches, friends and students.

"If there are things he can't get from us, there's someone he can get it from," David said. "He won't be deprived culturally in any way, and he'll be a better-rounded person for that."

And so when Darius attends a New London football game — he hasn't missed one — he is surrounded by football players, asking their tiny "nephew": "Did you see my touchdown?"

Linda's girls take their turn crowding around him, arguing about who holds him next, and who is the favorite aunt.

"When I ask someone to be his aunt, I mean it truly, not just in name," Linda said.

•••••The Pfeiffers chose to adopt Darius not because of a biological inability to have children, but in a shared belief that they can offer a better life to a child born with fewer opportunities than some.

"I just think it's a part of us, to start a family off that way," David said.

Race was not an issue.

"There was no question in my mind that I'd love whatever I could get," Linda said.

They hope someday to have biological children, who could learn to help others by example, they said.

While international adoptions have surged in recent years, some adoption officials, like Sandra Couillard, executive director of the Child Adoption Resource Association of New London, say it is sometimes at the expense of minority children in the United States who need homes.

In 2006, C.A.R.A. placed 25 children in families. Half of the adoptions were domestic and half were international.

While statistics on private adoptions are not tracked by any one agency, Couillard said she observes the number of minority children available for adoption while collaborating with agencies around the country.

C.A.R.A. charges a standard fee to arrange an adoption, but some other agencies have lowered the fees for adopting minority children in an effort to find them homes, Couillard said. Families adopting Caucasian children, who are in higher demand, generally pay more.

Adoption of a minority child could cost around \$14,000, while a Caucasian child could cost a family \$25,000 to \$35,000, Couillard said.

The fees pay for the agencies to operate, evaluate potential adoptive families, and pay for legal expenses, advertising and sometimes for the birth mother's expenses, she said.

International adoptions, meanwhile, can range from \$20,000 for a child from China to \$32,000 for a European or Russian baby, Couillard said.

But prospective parents seem to think of international adoptions first.

"Families call, and they want to adopt from Ethiopia," Couillard said. "I think it's skewing the picture. We're not telling the rest of the story."

A state Department of Children and Families spokesman shared his concerns.

"Nationwide, children of color are overrepresented in the child welfare system," said Gary Kleeblatt. "So we have a special need ... to recruit families for children of color."

With domestic adoptions, parents get to skip the immigration process, and the medical histories of birth parents and the mother's prenatal care are available.

And, though C.A.R.A. also advocates for adoptions of foster children through DCF, the advantage of a private adoption is a very short legal risk period — the time when the birth parents' rights are not yet terminated.

That's not to say private adoptions don't have their own challenges.

•••••On Aug. 28, a Virginia adoption agency sent the Pfeiffers an e-mail about a woman in that state who had given birth to a boy weighing 8 pounds, 10 ounces, and measuring 20.5 inches long.

The mother had chosen Linda and David at the last minute, after arrangements for another family had fallen through. She had seen their “birth album” of pictures with all the kids they work with and their black toy poodle, Habib, whom they consider their “first child.”

The Pfeiffers were ecstatic when their social worker at C.A.R.A, Elaine Butler, told them they only had to go pick the baby up.

But just as they were making plans to leave, the day before school was starting, Butler had to deliver bad news: Another family was interested, and the birth mother liked the idea of her baby having siblings.

“I was totally devastated, and I never even had him,” Linda said.

“No one's ever gonna pick us,” she thought. “If it's a contest, we're gonna lose every single time.”

But the second family wasn't going to be able to get to Virginia soon enough, which would have placed the baby in temporary foster care. The birth mother rejected that idea.

Suddenly, Linda and David had to run to Wal-Mart to buy a car seat, and to a friend's house to borrow some baby clothes for a 10 p.m. car trip to Virginia.

They arrived at the hospital nervous. They had talked about how they would feel when they got him, but weren't sure what to expect.

Then the nurse said, “Wait here. I'm going to get your son.”

In that moment, Linda knew.

“I could've laid on the floor and cried like a baby myself,” she said. “I fell in love with him before I saw him.”

They met the mother, who they've decided can be a part of Darius' life if she chooses to. They invited her to send photos and gifts, and maybe have an occasional meeting.

“How could you tell her no?” Linda said. “You're giving me your child.”

Society has certain labels for “adopted kids,” the Pfeiffers know, but they keep meeting more and more people who are proud to be adopted. They plan to stay involved with C.A.R.A.

“He'll know what adoption means and that it's not a bad thing,” David said. “He'll respect us instead of blame us.”

“We'll love him enough that he won't have any doubt that he's our son,” Linda said.

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