



FAMILY OF MISFITS

A mutual desire for children lead this couple to two adoptions. None of the four are biologically related and that makes for the perfect family.

Inside, the Bunkers' home smells like smoked salmon. Teri Bunker is canning some of the 100 pounds of fish she brought back from a family trip to Alaska. She's not freezing it like she usually does, not after the freezer at the clinic she owns lost power last year.

"There's nothing worse than fish that's spoiled," she says from her plump leather sofa.

Her partner Cindy, sitting in the armchair next to her, chimes in. "We've had several freezer accidents," she says.

Cindy, 53, and Teri, 48, look like a couple that has been together for 14 years. Both are dressed for comfort in tourist T-shirts, Teri's shirt from Alaska and Cindy's from New Orleans. They have short, no-nonsense haircuts that match their personalities. They sit in the living room of their Northeast Portland home, surrounded by Alaska Native art (despite their fondness for the state, neither is from there).

But the most important commonality for the couple is their mutual desire for children. The pair has two sons, both 18, whom they adopted from the state. Neither Cindy nor Teri imagined years ago that they would adopt, especially an older child, but now they have a family they wouldn't give up.

"I call us all the misfits," Teri says. "None of us are related biologically, but we all came together to make our family."

Cindy and Teri met through a personal ad in *Willamette Week*. Cindy wrote the ad – the only one she's written – in which she explained that whoever replied should be comfortable with her 3-year-old adopted son, Michael.

Cindy had recently adopted Michael. She was 35 and working as a juvenile lawyer. Though she had never seriously considered adoption, through her work she saw signs of abuse – babies who were neglected, burned or shaken – that compelled her to act.

"Something just sort of awoke in me," she says.

She adopted Michael, who was born to a 16-year-old mother. The teenager was living with him in a garage with no heat when someone reported her to the Department of Human Services. Michael was placed in foster care. He never met his father. Cindy thought she could help.

"I felt that I had a pretty good life and support system," she says, "and that it would be a good life for a child."

Teri, too, wanted children, but she was apprehensive about coming into a family with a child who was adopted.

"I didn't want to be a third parent," she said.

But Teri clicked with both Cindy and Michael, and a year after they met, Teri adopted Michael as well. Michael calls his two moms "Mom-Cindy" and "Mom-Teri."

Seven years passed before Cindy and Teri decided to adopt another child. Michael always wanted a younger brother, but when Cindy was ready to adopt, Teri wasn't, and vice versa.

"We needed to both be on the same page," Teri says, "and it took us seven years to both say 'yes.'"

This time, the couple adopted Isaac. At 10 years old, he was younger than Michael, but only by two months. And like most older children who are adopted, Isaac's history is especially difficult. He was born premature to a 15-year-old mother who used methamphetamine. He was raised by his father who abused him until he was moved to foster care at age 7. His chaotic childhood hindered his development – when Teri and Cindy met him, he was in third grade but couldn't read or eat with utensils.

"We weren't sure if, IQ wise, we were going to have to set our sights lower for him," Teri says.

But they didn't. When they took Isaac home, they had him read for an hour every night. Isaac remembers one of his first books was about the *Berenstain Bears*.