

Teens adapt to divorce

Students talk about parents living separately

By Kaylee Costello

On January 13, 2007, Zael Ellenhorn, '12, walked into his family's living room with his younger brother, where his parents waited to give them the news that would change their lives forever. "It was really cold and icy that day," Ellenhorn said.

"When they sat us down, they started off by saying that my brother and I might've noticed that they hadn't been spending as much time together, and that there's been this degree of tension between them," he said. "They said they were going to be living separately. Up until then, it was always something I assumed would happen to someone else. I remember thinking right then that I guess we're all 'someone else' to someone else."

Today, with over 50 percent of American couples divorced, it is not uncommon to see a child switching houses every other day. Compared to the 20 percent divorce rate of the 1980's, it's no wonder that divorced parents have become a social norm.

Nevertheless, Ellenhorn remembers that when he first learned of the separation, he tried to repress his feelings. He said, "The feelings are almost too immediate to feel right there, so you push them back for a while so you can kind of prepare yourself for feeling them. But when you do, you're never actually prepared, even if you think you are."

Elena Hayes, '12, whose parents divorced when she was 14, had a different reaction. She said, "I was happy, because they didn't seem happy to be together anymore."

The parents of Aaron Pillay, '12, divorced when he was three years old. "I didn't understand and was confused

and scared. Now that I'm older I know it's a common thing, and my parents continue to maintain a good relationship so I'm fine with it," he said. Pillay spends weekdays with his mom, who lives in Amherst, and goes to see his dad in Rhode Island every other weekend and for the majority of the summer.

Ellenhorn has been going back and forth between his mom's house and his dad's house for the past four years. He switches houses every other night, which he says is easier now that his dad has moved just minutes away from his mom. "In the beginning, my dad was living in Sunderland, which is like a 20 minute drive. So that kind of sucked," said Ellenhorn. He said, "Transition is the hardest part of going through a separation. You're used to living in one place and having all your stuff in one place, and then all of a sudden you're packing your stuff up every other day to switch houses."

Additionally, holidays can be difficult when dealing with divorced parents. Pillay spends Christmas day with his mom's side of the family, then a few days later goes to his dad's house for a second Christmas. "Since it's been a while it doesn't affect me as much," Pillay said. "It's cool because I get two Christmases, but it does bring attention to the fact that my parents are split."

Ellenhorn's Christmas morning is spent with both his mom and his dad. "I know they just do it for me and Django [Ellenhorn's brother], but I still wouldn't have it any other way," Ellenhorn said. "During the holidays most people reflect on how much they do have, but in these situations it's so easy to see what you don't have."

Adopted ARHS students reflect on lives

By Ana Sofia Semedo

Miguel Reda, '13, was adopted at nine months old from Guatemala and is grateful for the opportunities his adoptive parents have provided him in Amherst. Still, "I would like to meet my birth family and learn more about my family and their history," he said.

Anna Glazer, '12, was born in India, and doesn't know much about her backgrounds. Glazer said about her birth parents, "They did what was best for them

and it gave me a much better life." She believes that adoption is a way for parents to give their child a second chance and better future. Still, she added, "I get curious. I wonder who my biological parents are, what kind of people they are, what they are doing,"

In addition to these international adoptions, some ARHS students were adopted after months or even years in foster care. "I mean a lot of my friends don't know," "Jenny" [name withheld by request] said. "Jenny" was put into foster care by the state, which happens when biological parents fail to care for their children. In this process, children are placed with foster parents who can adopt if they want to. But during this process the child may change from family to family, which can be emotionally wrenching. In "Jenny's" case, she has moved from foster home to foster home for years.

Reda, on the other hand was very young when he was adopted, but he also faced a big health problem. "My mother already had many other children to care for so it would be very difficult for

her to care for another child. I would most likely not be alive or would have a hard life if I had not been adopted. When I was born I was very sick and my adoptive mother worked hard to find a doctor who could help me," he said. With the help from his adoptive parents and high quality hospitals in the US, today Reda is very healthy.

International adoptions, like Reda's, take time and require confirmation from

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cooperating governments. According to the Adoption Guide, "Intercountry adoptions are usually handled by private, nonprofit adoption agencies." Countries want to make sure they are making the best decision for every international adoption. "It was a little difficult to have all of the paperwork from Guatemala. The US government was shutting down adoption from Guatemala to the US at the time," said Reda.

Guatemala is still, however, one of the most popular countries for U.S families to adopt from. Yet in the past year "Guatemala has currently suspended the adoption process in order to create a Central Authority to process adoptions, which will make Guatemala Hague Compliant," according to adoption.com.

Glazer said, of her adoption, "It was difficult and expensive. There was lots of paperwork and many lawyers." Her adoption was closed, meaning she does not have

access to the identity of her birth parents.

Unlike the other students, "Jenny" knows her birthmother and has a tight relationship with her. "My process has been really complicated and isn't entirely over. I have been through a lot of families and lived in a lot of places," she said. After a long time "Jenny" is now lives with the foster parents who adopted her and her sister.

Though "Jenny" is from a different culture than her adoptive parents and sometimes they argue she doesn't let "the little details" get in the way. She appreciates the family that she has today and is glad to have been adopted.

Adoptees learn about their adoptions in different ways. "My mom told me when I was little. She let me know and be aware of future challenges," said Glazer, who also read books to help her understand adoption.

Reda learned early too. "My adoptive parents told me when I was little, and I grew up with an older brother who was also adopted from Peru. My adoptive parents told me that I came to them from Guatemala and that my birth mother was sad that she would not be able to live with me and take care of me. She was happy, though, that I would have a good family and that I would be living in America."

These students feel very appreciative to be where they are today. "Many people are accepting of adoption. It is a more common thing nowadays, so I feel more comfortable about it," Reda said.