



La'Zaya, who will formally join her forever family Saturday, was featured in the Nebraska Families Collaborative 2013 calendar.

### National Adoption Day Saturday

## These Parents Make Adoption Look Easy

By Lorraine Boyd  
The Daily Record

"When Marty at CSI [Child Saving Institute] called me, she said, 'I have to tell you about this young lady,'" Angela Washington recalled. "'She's reserved, shy. She doesn't like touching much. Will you meet her?' I said sure."

When 15-year-old La'Zaya met Angela, she was sure.

The first thing they did was hug each other. The first words La'Zaya said to Angela were, "I want to be adopted."

"I asked, 'Are you sure?' 'Yes,' she said. Then we started talking," Angela said.

That was almost six months ago. This Saturday at 10 a.m. in Judge Christopher Kelly's courtroom, Zaya, as they call her, will officially become part of the Washington family.

#### Zaya and Adoption Day

Saturday is National Adoption Day. See ADOPTION DAY, page 2

## Adoption Day

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Day across the country and it will be observed at the Omaha City/County Building beginning at 8:30 a.m.

Zaya will join 41 other children who are joining their new families that day.

“This is down from last year for the day but as of November 30<sup>th</sup> we will have completed 237 adoptions, with another 15 to 20 to hopefully occur in December. We did a total of 192 for the year in 2012, so this is a big increase!” Stephanie Clark, permanency & family finding supervisor at Nebraska Families Collaborative, said. CSI helps NFC find forever homes for children.

This is the 14<sup>th</sup> consecutive year that the Douglas County Juvenile Court has participated in the event. Once again, the celebration will include balloon and face painting artists, a magician, gifts for the adoptees, flowers for the parents, family photos, and refreshments.

Juvenile Court Judge Wadie Thomas Jr. said, “We were fortunate to receive a grant from the Gilbert M. and Martha H. Hitchcock Foundation, which will help our celebration tremendously.”

Zaya will become big sister to her two little sisters – 11-year-old Amyia and 4-year-old Loyren, the biological daughters of Angela, who is a single working mom. “They’re very excited about having a new sister,” Angela said.

Angela was sure about Zaya from the very first day too. “It’s like she’s been in the family before. We’re like peanut butter and jelly.”

She also noted that her new daughter, who spent the last eight years in foster care, is an “old

soul.” Continuing her description, she said, “She’s awesome. Very family-oriented and upbeat ... a precious girl. And, she’s ours!”

Zaya, a sophomore at Northwest High School who is on the honor roll, wants to be a chef, keeps her word and is very good to her new grandparents. And her smile, her mom said, is mesmerizing ... “just gorgeous.”

Sounds like a love affair all around.

### Skye Blue

In another courtroom, at 10:15 a.m., 14-year-old Skye Blue Alonzo will become the daughter of Lillias and Terry Freeman-Hogan.

The couple raised four biological children – three girls and a boy. Two of the girls were very close in age and shared many of the same friends. When the family was living in Kansas City, they asked their mom if a friend could spend a few days or weeks with them, because his time was just about up at the shelter where he was staying. By coincidence, Terry had done some volunteer work there. Jason was 17, a “big, husky boy with two years of high school left to complete,” Lillias recalled.

His story was sad, but not uncommon. Abused by his mother and her boyfriends until he was four, he was then shuttled from relative to relative after that.

They said yes. Then they hurried to become his legal guardians. “He needed to feel secure and stable,” Lillias said. “He was in survival mode. The older kids need a safety net, something those without a family don’t have.”

Jason is 32 now, and has just returned to the nest to stay while looking for a new place to live. There’s that safety net she was

talking about.

The Freeman-Hogans also adopted Katie, another teen.

“We sort of specialize in teenagers,” Lillias said. “We have a better rapport with teens than little ones. We like to listen to them.” Besides that, she said, statistics show that by the time a kid in foster care hits 13, there is a 97 percent chance they will never have a permanent home.

When asked about the challenges of adopting teens, Lillias downplayed her actions, saying, “Every parent can rise to the occasion.” And she may be passing down that belief. She said one of her daughters has had great difficulty having a child and is considering adoption.

The newest member of the family, Skye had been in foster care since kindergarten. She is one of five siblings. Her older sister ran away from foster care to be with her mom, but her two little brothers were adopted by a couple and her little sister was adopted by a single mom. Along with her Skye’s grandmothers, they’ve all been invited to attend the ceremony Saturday.

“It’s going to be an Alonzo family reunion!” Lillias said. Skye has elected to keep her last name, mostly because of her Hispanic heritage with which she identifies. But she changed her middle name from Marie to Blue, because the kids call her Skye Blue anyway.

In June, Lillias and Terry took most of their family, including Skye, on vacation to the boundary waters of Minnesota where they rented cabins and “were canoeing and fishing the quiet rivers and lakes for a week,” Lillias said.

Sounds like they don’t have to leave town to enjoy each other’s company. It just comes naturally

to this generous, caring couple.

And come Saturday, their family and dozens of others will get a little bigger and little brighter ... just in time for Thanksgiving.

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Meet "most" of the Freeman-Hogan family on vacation, from left: Skye Alonzo, Lillias and Terry Freeman-Hogan, Michelle Nunnelley, Jason Shields, Katie Freeman-Hogan, Alan and Micky Woodward.