After a 10-year journey through infertility, acclaimed actress Nia Vardalos and her husband, Ian Gomez, received 14 hours notice that they might become parents.

The call that changed their lives came from a foster family agency (FFA). A three-year-old girl had been relinquished to foster care by a young couple whose relationship did not last the birth. That little girl was waiting for a home.

An Academy Award-nominated actress, screenwriter, and author of “Instant Mom,” Nia treasures her new role as mom, and advocate for adoption and foster care. A private person, Nia has faith that her public voice can help others on the journey to become adoptive parents.

While Nia may tell you that her daughter, Ilaria, is her destiny, she will not tell you that she enjoyed every moment of getting there. “After banging my head against the brick wall of infertility, I accepted the fact that there would have to be another plan for me,” she says.

She was stunned to find out the U.S. has 500,000 kids in foster care, and 129,000 of them are legally available for adoption, and waiting for a family.

Moving past the misconceptions

Nia and Ian came slowly to the foster adoption program, due to misconceptions about how the process worked. “I thought in foster adoption, the children came to live with you for a while, then went back home, or might go back home,” Nia says. “I wasn’t aware of all the children who are already legally emancipated from their families.”

Nia hopes to share information on how to adopt children, whether via international means, domestically, or through foster care.

“There seems to be the impression that it’s difficult to adopt in the U.S.,” she says. “Having been through the process, I want to tell people how to do it: Just find an FFA to help you navigate the system, walk you through the paperwork, the necessary and thorough background screening process, and the procedure of adopting from foster care in the U.S.”

Nia acknowledges that adoption through foster care is hampered by negative misconceptions.

Before the adoption, Nia heard from friends who advised against adopting from foster care, because of myths that the children are damaged. “To be honest, I don’t disparage anyone for worrying, because the media has done a good job of only picking up those rare, scary stories,” Nia says. “Most people in Hollywood are more damaged than any child living in foster care!”

Ridiculously happy

For people unsure of adoption, Nia understands—and has advice. “If fear of the unknown is stopping someone from taking this step, I do what I can to provide information. When I was worried about adopting, I fought back the irrational thoughts by asking myself questions, such as: ‘What’s the alternative? If I don’t do this, will I live a life of regret?’”

Nia and Ian are very private people, and to go public with their story in the book went against her nature. “But I felt if I did it, it might get more kids adopted,” she says. “When we were matched with our daughter, and I became a ridiculously, gushingly happy mom, it dawned on me—I think I’m supposed to be using my big mouth to talk about adoption.”

Parents who adopt children, Nia says, all share a secret. “If the standard route of creating a family had worked for me, I wouldn’t have met this child,” Nia says. “I needed to know her. I needed to be her mother. We got invited to a club we didn’t think we could ever get into.”

An Evening with Nia Vardalos

Join us for an evening with Nia Vardalos. Nia shares her adoption journey as chronicled in her book, “Instant Mom.”

APRIL 30, 2014

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