

## Adoption Mythbuster: Martha (Pinet) Henry '96

By Laurie Morrissey

**M**ARTHA HENRY HAS DISCUSSED ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE in many settings, including National Public Radio, *Cosmopolitan* Magazine and the Today Show. Now the psychology graduate is the author of a reference book for families, professionals and students. Published by Lyceum Books in May, it focuses on the behavioral and medical needs of children who are adopted or living in foster care.

Henry earned a doctorate in developmental psychology at Clark University, and began working at the Office for Foster Care and Adoption Education Policy at UMass Medical School eight years ago. Her book, *Adoption in the United States: A Reference Book for Families, Professionals and Students*, is written for the whole team involved in adoption and foster care, including family members and people in the legal, social, health, and education professions.

One of Henry's main interests is the use of language. "Most of the time when people talk about adoption, they use language that is stigmatizing," she says. "Expressions like 'put up for adoption,' or 'give up,' can unintentionally hurt feelings by conveying values and beliefs that have a whole loaded history behind them." The phrase "put up for adoption" comes from the orphan trains of the 1850s-1920s when abandoned or orphaned children from eastern cities were sent to the Midwest and put on display for people to choose, Henry explains. Many ended up being used as farm and domestic labor.

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Henry is particularly concerned about the number of children in the foster care system—at least 500,000—many of whom have special health care needs. "Surprisingly, there is not a lot of research on this," says Henry. "Most of what there is has a pathological bent, focusing on the deficits as opposed to the strengths of families."

Henry and her staff evaluate training programs and develop adoption and foster care curricula, including courses and seminars for medical students.

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