By Carolyn Lee
The Imperial Republican

Dec. 31 was a special day in the Charley and Carla Colton household. Foster child LaReina officially became LaReina Raphaelita Colton.

The adoption ceremony took place at the Chase County Courthouse.

The five-year old has actually been a part of the family for three and one-half years. She came to the Coltons as an 18-month old.

Sister Shakota, 6, who is also adopted, said, “She knocked me down when I was little.”

The story, as told by Carla, is that a call came from Health and Human Services that LaReina needed a foster family. Carla went to get her.

Meanwhile, Charley told Shakota, then two, that they were going to get a baby.

When Carla arrived home, with LaReina under one arm and a diaper bag and bottles under another, Shakota asked where the baby was (LaReina was a big 18-month old).

Charley said Shakota then said “Hi, baby, this is my mom and you have your own mom.” LaReina tackled her.

The two have been typical sisters ever since, fighting and making up.

Charley said LaReina is “one of the sweetest, lovingest, with the cutest smile you’ll ever see.” Carla added that she “says the funniest things at the funniest times.”

She makes the family more complete, the couple agreed.

The adoption process has been a long haul and a long wait, Carla commented. “Wednesday was a nice completeness,” she said.

The process has taken about three years. Charley explained the process.

If a child has already been placed with a foster parent and not reunited with the parents, then it comes to a point where the parental rights have been relinquished.

“If they’ve been in your care for six months and the family has not been located and the caseworker knows if you’re interested, the process can be started,” he said.

The six month adjustment period allows everyone to determine that the right decisions have been made.

What does Dec. 31, 2008 mean to LaReina?

“I’m going to be adopted to Mama.”

Charley laughed and asked her again. “I’m going to be happy because I’m going to be adopted to you.”

Shakota prodded, “You’re going to, like, stay here forever.”

The Coltons’ four grown children and three foster children will be part of the celebration. The Coltons plan to adopt 11-year old Dakota next spring.

LaReina was hoping for a pony ride and a magician on the courthouse lawn following the ceremony. She likely settled for a meal at a local restaurant.

As for her family, Charley said, “She’s been here so long she doesn’t know any different.”