

June / July 2008

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THE PHILADELPHIA WOMEN'S JOURNAL™

A Bi-Monthly Resource For Women of the DELAWARE VALLEY



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Maxine Chalker

For nearly three decades, Maxine Chalker, MSW, LSW, has been dedicated to helping thousands of women through adoption, whether enabling them to become adoptive parents, or empowering pregnant women to create an open adoption plan that is right for them.

While a single parent on welfare, Maxine earned a degree in social work (and later a Master's degree) from Temple University. She then became an adoption social worker at a public child welfare agency, where she increasingly believed the adoption system did not always serve the needs of the "adoption triangle" – birth mothers, adoptive parents and children. And, as an adoptee herself, who

experienced a difficult search for her birth family, Maxine was uniquely aware of the issues adopted children face growing up. This personal insight fueled her determination to improve the overall adoption process.

In 1985, from the basement of her suburban Philadelphia home, Maxine established Adoptions From The Heart (AFTH) on the premise of open adoption, pioneering the concept in Pa., N.J., and Del. (Open adoption allows birth and adoptive parents to select each other, meet and have on-going relationships.) Then a rare and controversial concept, today it is standard practice. It was the first of numerous efforts that established Maxine as a pioneer in the adoption field, and an advocate for understanding and unity among all members of the adoption community.

Fervently committed to raising awareness of adoption-related issues, Maxine spearheaded the development of an educational program for local elementary and middle school personnel on family diversity and the different ways families form and thrive.

Over the years, Maxine grew AFTH's services and its footprint, significantly changing the face of adoption with its trendsetting programs. Today, the non-profit is the largest placing agency for domestic adoption on the East Coast. More than a decade ago, the agency was among the first in the area to offer international adoption services, well ahead of the growing trend. Under Maxine's leadership, AFTH has placed nearly 5,000 infants and toddlers from the U.S. and abroad in loving homes. Her message to all prospective adoptive parents: You will be successful.

When planning to adopt, there are many variables that determine which option is best for your family. Is it domestic adoption, which offers the opportunity to know the child's medical background, meet the birth family and parent the child from infancy? Or, international adoption, which provides more predictable time frames, no chance of disruption, the opportunity to learn a different culture, and a home for an orphan? Whatever you decide, it's important to recognize that every adoption journey is an individual one – what

worked for friends or relatives may not be right for you.

To help navigate the process, consider the following tips:

Do Your Homework

Learn as much as you can from reliable sources- not just the Internet. There are few decisions in your life as important as this one, so turn to the experts for help. Attend free adoption information meetings or webinars, meet agency staff, read books, ask lots of questions.

Separate Fact From Fiction

Myths surrounding adoption are plentiful. Don't rely on preconceived notions, hearsay or sensational stories. Internet support listserves are wonderful sources of information, but can also spread rumors and panic. Be open-minded and get the facts.

All Agencies Are Not Created Equal

If you plan to adopt through an agency, be aware that all programs and requirements are not created equal. Important considerations are number of years in business, number of yearly placements,

assistance preparing documents and availability of escorts in foreign countries. Be sure the agency is state licensed and non-profit, and that it is Hague accredited should you choose international adoption with a Hague country.

Don't Fear the Home Study

A home study is a written evaluation regarding your suitability to become adoptive parents. This may sound scary, but in reality it is an education process to help you understand the type of adoption

Build a Support Team

In the beginning of the adoption process there's lots to do – paperwork to complete, meetings to attend and documents to gather. After this, you wait – the most stressful part for many families. During this emotional time, join a support group, either local or online, surround yourself with family and friends, and don't hesitate to call your social worker for support throughout this process. Remember you are not alone!

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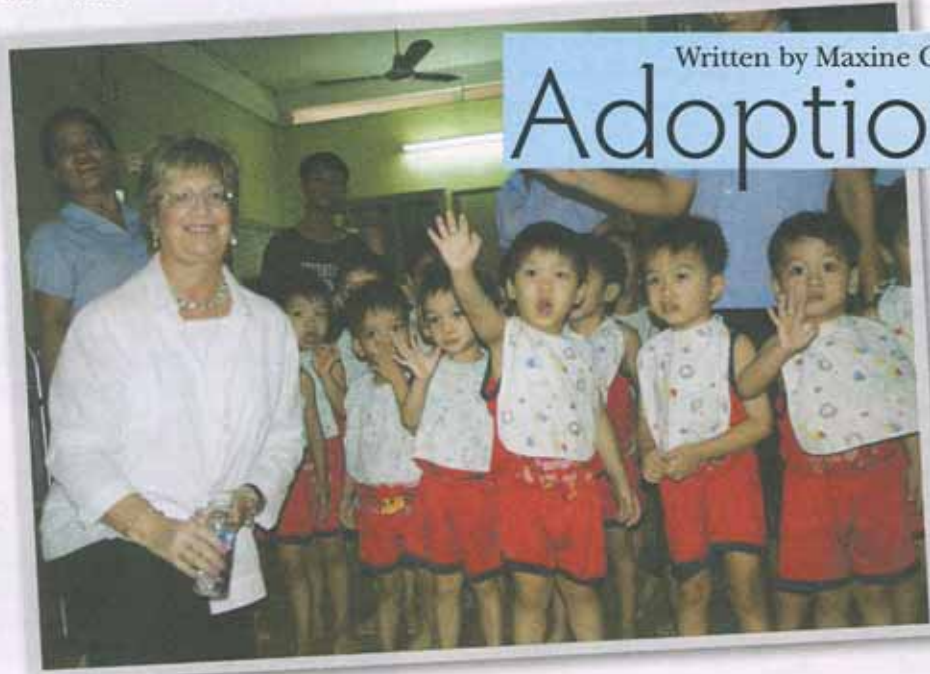
Fervently committed to raising awareness of adoption-related issues, Maxine spearheaded the development of an educational program for local elementary and middle school personnel on family diversity and the different ways families form and thrive.

She has worked to influence adoption legislation, including campaigning and policy writing for better adoption laws, and serving on a committee to revamp Pa. state regulations for adoption agencies, and testifying at legislative hearings to change adoption laws in Pa. and Del.

Over the years, Maxine grew AFTH's services and its footprint, significantly changing the face of adoption with its trendsetting programs. Today, the non-profit is the largest placing agency for domestic adoption on the East Coast. More than a decade ago, the agency was among the first in the area to offer international adoption services, well ahead of the growing trend. AFTH now works with orphanages in countries throughout Europe, Asia and South America. Under Maxine's leadership, AFTH has placed nearly 5,000 infants and toddlers from the U.S. and abroad in loving homes. Her message to all prospective adoptive parents: You will be successful.

Based in Wynnewood, PA, AFTH is a licensed, non-profit agency with nine offices in Pa., N.J., Del., Va., W.Va. and N.Y., and is approved to place children with families in Conn.

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Written by Maxine Chalker
Adoption 101

Above all, be patient and persistent. It may take time, but, rest assured, you will complete a successful adoption.

Adoptions From The Heart, founded in 1985, is a licensed, non-profit agency offering domestic and international adoptions. Based in Wynnewood, PA, AFTH has nine

offices in seven states, including three in the Delaware Valley.

Maxine Chalker,

MSW, LSW, Founder and Executive Director Adoptions From The Heart

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you've chosen, the differences between adopted and biological children, and to make sure your home is safe for a child. Don't worry, you don't have to be perfect, earn a million dollar salary, or even own your own house, to qualify.

Know the Numbers

Understand the fee schedule and learn all the costs up front to avoid any surprises. Steer clear of adoption professionals who aren't forthcoming about fees. Agencies that list costs on their Web site score extra points. Don't let fear of expenses keep you from adopting – get the facts, check out tax credits, employer reimbursements, grants, low interest loans, military subsidies and creative financing.