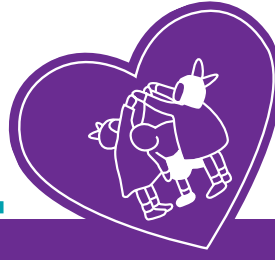


Adoption News



A Quarterly Newsletter from

Adoptions From The Heart

Winter 2008

It's All About Offering Choices: *Domestic African-American Program in Need of Families*

Adoptions From The Heart prides itself on being able to offer choices. By doing this, we allow adoptive parents and birth parents to make a plan of adoption that best fits their needs instead of trying to force them into a predetermined mold.

Choices allow the adoptive parents to select which program is best for their family. In addition, domestic families are able to choose the level of openness they are most comfortable with. They are also able to record their preferences regarding the birth parents' backgrounds so an appropriate match can be made.

AFTH also values being able provide choices for birth parents who are making a plan of adoption for their child. Within our domestic program it is the birth parents who view the profiles and select the adoptive parents for their child.

AFTH's goal is to be able to have a variety of potential adoptive parent profiles for each birth parent to view. Having multiple profiles allows the birth parents to see diversity among the families and to select a family that stands out to them. Birth parents select families for a wide variety of reasons. Each situation is unique. Your family may be just what they are looking for.

With this said, AFTH is eagerly seeking families for our African-American & African-American Biracial Domestic Program so we can provide diverse profiles for birth parents to select from. Applicants for this program can live anywhere in the U.S.

**"Your family
may be just
what they
are looking
for."**

Adoption finances can be a concern for some and so AFTH has created a flyer "Help with Adoption Expenses" which includes information about employee benefits, grants, tax credits, and adoption loans among other things. The flyer can be found on the Adoptive Parent Learning Center at www.afth.org. In addition, for families adopting through AFTH again, AFTH has reduced the fee for this program by \$2,000. We encourage all AFTH international families who are considering adopting again but are discouraged by the new time frames and restrictions of some of the international programs, to consider our African-American & African-American Biracial Domestic Program which is in need of families.

AFTH hosts monthly Webinars so families living out of our office service area can learn more about this program. To register for the Feb. 25th Webinar, email KristyG@afth.org. Or to learn more call us at 1-800-355-5500 to speak with an AFTH social worker.

In This Issue



- 2 Advocate Award
- 2 AFTH's 1st Adoption Conference
- 3 Upcoming Event
- 4 Legislature
- 5 Russian Adoptions
- 6 Book Reviews
- 7 New AFTH Families!
- 8-9 Program Updates
- 9 Letter from Maxine about Guatemala
- 10 Musings of an Adoptive Mama Column
- 11 Tax Credit, Upcoming Events, AFTH Calendars

Insert:
Spring Ed Series
Holiday Event Recaps
Charitable Works

Adoption Advocate Award



Each November in celebration of National Adoption Month, Adoptions From The Heart honors a member of the adoption community by awarding them the Adoption Advocate Award. The award recognizes someone who has demonstrated significant commitment to promoting awareness about adoption.

This year the award was presented to Tim and Carla Ansell of Connellsville, PA in recognition of their dedication as strong adoption advocates who work diligently to improve the adoption process for other families.

Pennsylvania State Senator Bob Regola (far left) presented the award along with AFTH's Roberta Evantash. Joining Tim and Carla (left to right) are their children Alivia, 12, Aubrianna, 11, Alyiah, 12, Avonlea, 4, Autumn, 5, and Aelijah, 18 months.

AFTH Hosting 1st Adoption Conference in March 2008

Adoptions From the Heart is proud to announce we are holding an adoption conference, "Strengthening Bonds: Adoptive Families and the Community," on March 15, 2008.

Join social workers, adoption professionals, teachers, nurses, other adoptive families and the AFTH staff to learn how we can strengthen the bond between adoptive families and our community. The objective of this conference is to raise awareness and educate families and

professionals regarding issues surrounding adoption, as well as promote unity and enlightenment among all members of the adoption community.

We've designed 17 innovative workshops lead by adoption professionals, lawyers, social workers, medical professionals and adoptive parents. There will also be a panel of adopted teenagers and a psychodrama workshop, which is a dramatization of key moments in the lives of different adoption triad members.

We're very pleased to announce our keynote speaker for the day will be Jeff Gammage, writer for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, author of newly released, "China Ghosts: My Daughter's Journey to America, My Passage to Fatherhood" and adoptive father. Our hostess for the day will be Loraine Ballard Morrill, Clear Channel Radio's news director, community affairs director and adoptive mother.

Other conference perks include a charity auction with very desirable prizes, continental breakfast, networking opportunities and a chance to mingle with AFTH staff. Pennsylvania Act 48 credits are available to teachers and PA & NJ CEU's are available to social workers.

Please join us for this important opportunity to continue your own education and to discuss adoption within the context of the community at large. And bring a friend!

Space is Limited.
Reserve Your Seat Today!

To see a detailed description of the workshops, directions, and register, go to:
www.afth.org/conference08

U.S. Baby Boomlet

Boomlet? What's that?

The sound a baby firecracker makes?

A boomlet is defined as a small and brief baby boom.

In 2006, there were nearly 4.3 million births in the United States which is a 3% jump from 2005. This is reportedly the largest number of children born in one year in the United States for over 45 years. It has not been since the tail end of the baby boom in 1961 that birthrates have climbed to these numbers. With this recent baby boomlet, the U.S. has finally reached a 2.1 fertility rate - the number of children a woman is expected to have in her lifetime. 2.1 is the "magic number" the U.S. requires for the population to replace itself.



It was surprising for demographers to discover this baby boomlet happening in the U.S. because declining fertility rates is a trend in many other wealthy industrialized nations. Despite this trend, the U.S. baby boomlet shows that fertility rates are up among all ethnic groups in their 20s, 30s, and early 40s.

It's still too soon to know if this boomlet is the beginning of a trend leading into a real baby boom, but Brady Hamilton, a statistician with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says, "we have to wait and see. For now, I would call it a noticeable blip."

Upcoming Agency Events



ANNUAL PICNICS

Agency-Wide Annual Picnic

Adoptions From The Heart will be hosting it's 20th annual picnic at the Flourtown Pavilion in the Fort Washington State Park on June 1st. Watch for updates on the website and email blast for more information.

Virginia Spring Picnic

Our Virginia Office will be hosting it's Spring Picnic on May 31st from 2:00-6:00. The picnic will be held at the Sandy Bottom Nature Center again this year. More information coming soon!

Pittsburgh Idlewild Picnic

Save the Date. The Pittsburgh Office will be hosting it's annual picnic at Idlewild Park on August 1st.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Adoptions From The Heart proudly offers support groups for waiting families. The groups are a great way for AFTH families to come together in support and share in a discussion.

Harrisburg

Our Harrisburg Office hosts support groups for all waiting families on the 3rd Thursday of each month. Mark the date and join us for our next meeting.

Virginia

Our Virginia Office holds support group meetings in Richmond and Chesapeake areas to bring AFTH waiting families together. Watch your email for more information about upcoming support groups.

Hazlet

Wednesday, Feb. 27 from 6:30-8pm
Domestic Waiting Families Group

Wednesday, April 30 from 6:30-8pm
Domestic Waiting Families Group

RSVP at (732) 355-8883

Greensburg

Tuesday, Feb. 12 from 7-9pm
International Waiting Families Group

Tuesday, Feb. 26 from 7-9pm
Domestic Waiting Families Group

RSVP at (724) 853-6533



Legislation



NEW JERSEY - New Jersey Bill A-2557 & S-1087 to reinstate equal rights of adopted citizens to obtain their original birth records has again stalled. Since 1940, adoptees in some states have been issued amended birth certificates that change the date and place of birth, as well as changing the names of the birth parents to list the adoptive parents. The original birth certificate is then sealed away. No matter how old an adoptee is, and regardless of whether his birth or adoptive parents are alive, access to this original birth certificate is denied. Opposition to these bills to open access to these original documents comes from organizations claiming that birth parents are promised anonymity during the adoption process, although repeated surveys and statistics show that 90% of birth mothers are happy to be found or initiate contact with their adopted children.

'CONFIDENTIAL INTERMEDIARY' SYSTEM ESTABLISHED IN NORTH CAROLINA - A new law in North Carolina (SL2007-262) will permit licensed adoption agencies and county departments of social services to act as "confidential intermediaries" - that is, they will be allowed to provide non-identifying family health information to adopted adults 21 years or older (or their descendants) and to birthparents; if written consent of all parties is provided, they will also be allowed to facilitate contact or provide identifying information. Previously,

such information could only be provided if a court order was obtained. The law goes into effect January 1, 2008

CALIFORNIA STATUTE PUTS EMPHASIS ON PLACEMENT WITH EXTENDED FAMILY - Gov.

Arnold Schwarzenegger has signed the Relative Caregiver Bill (AB298) into law, allowing foster children greater access to permanent placement with extended family members. The statute allows for extended family members to be given legal guardianship as a preference over adoption by non-family members. In addition, the law - enacted in October - requires relative caregivers to be given information regarding the options of legal guardianship and adoption, including the long-term benefits and consequences of each option.

DAVE THOMAS SURVEY: MANY WANT TO ADOPT BUT MANY HAVE MISCONCEPTIONS -

The Dave Thomas Foundation released the findings of an online survey conducted by Harris Interactive in November, reporting that 3 in 10 Americans have considered adopting, and that adoption from foster care is considered by 71 percent of those interested in the process. However, mistaken perceptions about adoptions from foster care were found to be widespread. For example, 45 percent

erroneously believed that children enter foster care because of juvenile delinquency; two-thirds believed that a biological parent could reclaim the child after adoption; and 46 percent believed adopting from foster care was expensive. Unfortunately, all of these are still current misconceptions about the foster care program.

BUSH SIGNS BILL CUTTING FUNDS FOR ADOPTION, CHILD WELFARE SERVICES -

President Bush signed legislation on Dec. 26 approving the 2008 federal budget (HR2764), which reduces federal spending in the Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) program - which funds services for families including reunification from foster care, adoption services, children at risk of being placed in foster care and at risk of abuse and neglect - was cut for the third time in the last four years, by \$25 million. Other programs were cut by 1.7 percent below 2007 spending (and have not received any increases in the past decade); they include Child Welfare Services, Child Welfare Training, Abandoned Infants, and Adoption Awareness and Adoption Opportunities grants.



Russian Adoption Program: Open and Running

Shortly after the Iron Curtain came down in 1991 Russia opened its doors to inter-country adoptions. Since 1993, Russia has remained among the top three most popular countries from which U.S. citizens choose to adopt.



Did You Know?

In 2007, there were 19,292 children adopted abroad by U.S. parents. This is a 15% decline in international adoptions over the last two years.

The drops may be caused by the tighter restrictions that some countries have been requiring of adoptive parents.

The good news is that more and more countries are opening up for inter-country adoptions.

There are over 40,000 Russian adoptees currently living in the United States. In the last two years alone, approximately 6,000 Russian orphans were adopted by U.S. citizens. Despite this number, Russia's federal database still lists over 172,000 children eligible for adoption, with an additional 130,000 children becoming eligible each year. As such, there remains a need for adoptive homes and families for Russian orphans.

In 2005, Russia initiated a review of its international adoption procedures, and began requiring that adoption agencies be approved by five separate Russian ministries in order to receive accreditation, rather than solely being approved by Russia's Ministry of Education. This change in process caused adoptions from Russia to the United States to slow for a period of time. But, by the end of 2007, more than two dozen U.S. adoption agencies had received accreditation in Russia and, as a result, Adoptions From The Heart has seen an increase in both applicants and adoptions in its Russia Partnering Program.

If you would like more information on our Russia Partnering Program, please visit our website www.afth.org or call us at 1-800-355-5500 to speak with one of our dedicated social workers.

Got E-mail?

To have monthly adoption program updates sent to you, send an e-mail with the word "subscribe" in the subject line to the appropriate email address:

CHINA - AFTHChinaUpdates-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

GUATEMALA - AFTHGuatUpdates-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

INDIA - AFTHIndiaUpdates-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

KAZAKHSTAN - AFTHKazakUpdates-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

NEW **RUSSIA** - AFTHRussiaUpdates-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

UKRAINE - AFTHUkraineUpdates-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

VIETNAM - AFTHVietnamUpdates-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

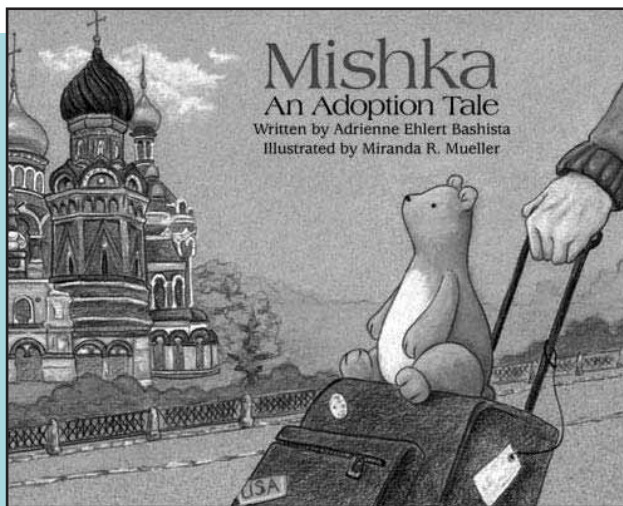
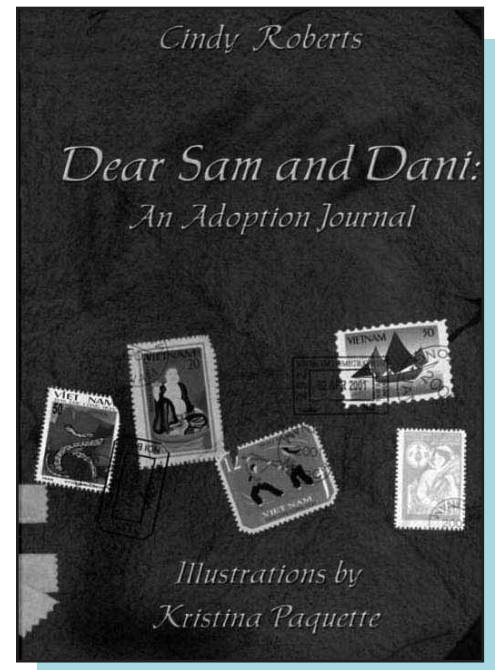
To become a member of our Domestic online discussion group where you can connect with other AFTH families, send an email with the word "subscribe" in the subject line to the email address below:

DOMESTIC - AFTHopenadoption-subscribe@yahoogroups.com



Book Reviews

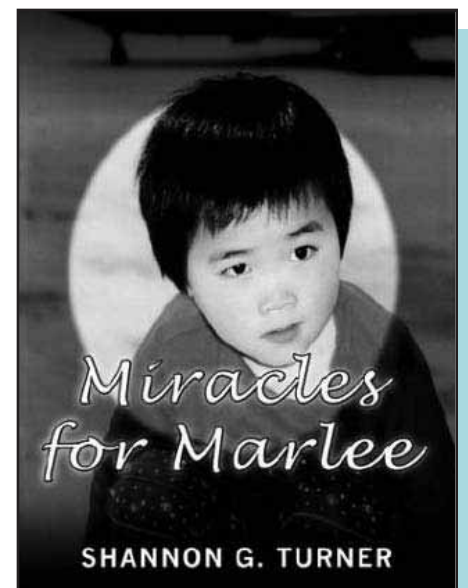
DEAR SAM AND DANI : AN ADOPTION JOURNAL by **Cindy Roberts** - This book is a set of letters the author wrote when she took her four sons -- two born to her and two adopted from Vietnam -- to visit the homeland and the birth family of her adopted sons. Cindy gives the reader a very real, fascinating, and honest portrayal of the reactions of all five of them -- the exciting, the strange, and the poignant. Enjoy many adventures with the boys as they chase chickens in the Mekong Delta, crawl through the Cu Chi Tunnels, visit many orphanages, and rediscover their own past. This playful book is written for children eight to twelve years old. AFTH price \$19.00



MISHKA: AN ADOPTION TALE (hardcover) by **Adrienne Ehler Bashista** - A charming adoption tale about a little boy and his stuffed bear, Misha, who waits for the day they'll go home with a family. The story is told from the point of view of the stuffed bear who keeps the little boy company while he waits for his new American family to adopt him from Russia. AFTH price \$17.00



MIRACLES FOR MARLEE by **Shannon Turner** -- Ms. Turner does an excellent job of pulling the reader into her experiences, taking us from her infertility struggles to her decision to adopt from China. She deals with emotions ranging from utter despair to total elation. With a sense of being a traveling companion along on the journey to China, readers share Ms. Turner and Marlee's intimate first days as mother and daughter. AFTH price \$20



All reviewed books are available in our branch offices, online, or you can order by calling Karen in the Wynnewood office (610) 642-7200.



Adoption Education Spring 2008 Series

We not only Build Beautiful Families,
We Help Strengthen Them!



♥Wilmington, DE

What Your Commitment Means to Me (Birthmother Panel)

The amount of openness that you have decided on in your adoption is a very important and personal decision -- only you can decide what is best for your family. In this session, hear from a birthmother about the importance of following through with the promises that you have made. Hear both sides of the story. Hear how promises broken affect a birthparent. In addition, hear from a birthparent about the impact it has when a child's adoptive parents remain committed to their plan.

Tuesday, May 20, 2008

6:30-8:00 PM

\$10/person or \$15/couple

Call (302) 658-8883 if you have any questions.

♥Allentown, PA

Infant Care Class: A Must for First Time Parents

Come join us for this workshop focused on the care of newborns and infants, including instructions on feeding, diapering, safety & comfort and a video on car seat safety and installation. Bring your questions.

Friday, April 4, 2008

7:00-9:00 PM

\$35 per family

Call (610) 432-2384 if you have any questions.



**Come
GROW
with us!**



Reserve Your Seat - Register Online Today!

<http://www.afth.org/community/courses.html>

Class Registration

Please fill out the registration form below
and return with payment to:

Adoptions From The Heart
30-31 Hampstead Circle
Wynnewood, PA 19096

Online Registration Available!

<http://www.afth.org/community/courses.html>

Classes are \$10/person or \$15/couple
♥ unless otherwise noted

# Attending	Cost	Topic/Location
		<u>What Your Commitment Means To Me</u> <i>(Birthmother Panel)</i> Wilmington, DE
♥		<u>Caring for Infants and Older Babies: What</u> <u>New Adoptive Parents Need to Know</u> Harrisburg, PA
♥		<u>Infant Care Class</u> Allentown, PA
		<u>Communicating With Your Child's</u> <u>Birthparents</u> Cherry Hill, NJ
		<u>Financing Adoption</u> Chesapeake, VA

Names: _____

Address: _____

Phone: () _____ - _____

Email: _____

For Information or Questions
610-642-7200 or contact your local AFTH office



Adoptions From The Heart®

♥ Chesapeake, VA

Financing Adoption

Financial Advisor Christianna Flynn from Merrill Lynch will provide valuable financial information and ideas on how to finance adoption as well as how to provide for the post adoption expenses of child rearing. Ms. Flynn will address the adoption tax credit and other important financial considerations when choosing adoption as a way to build your family.

Wednesday, April 16, 2008

6:30-8:00 PM

\$10/person or \$15/couple

Call (757) 361-0008 if you have any questions.

♥ Harrisburg, PA

Caring for Infants and Older Babies: What New Adoptive Parents Need to Know

Learn the basics of infant and child care in a comfortable setting with other adoptive parents and pre-adoptive parents. This class will include newborn care, feeding and changing your baby, choosing a pediatrician, making the adjustment to parenthood, and more. This class is recommended for both domestic and international families. Bring your questions.

Monday, May 5, 2008

7:00-9:00PM

\$20/person or \$35/couple

Call (717) 232-1787 if you have any questions.

♥ Cherry Hill

Communicating With Your Child's Birthparents

This session will discuss communicating with birth parents and will include guidelines for writing letters and selecting pictures to send.

Wednesday, April 9, 2008

7:00-8:30 PM

\$10/person or \$15/couple

Call (856) 665-5655 if you have any questions.

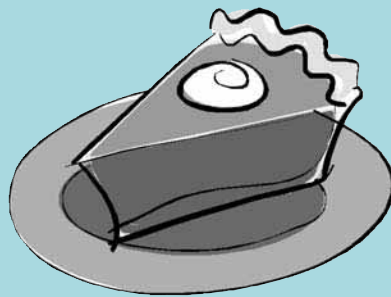
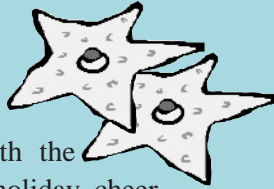
AFTH Holiday Festivities

Allentown Cookie Exchange - Our Allentown Office held its 4th Annual Cookie Exchange this past holiday season. Twelve families and the Allentown staff enjoyed cookies, socializing, and of course, storytime with Santa who brought gifts for the children. A thank you to Gretchen and Sandy for opening their lovely home to us.

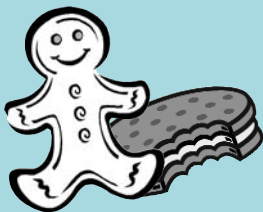


Delaware Cookie Party - AFTH families joined together with the Delaware Staff for an evening of holiday cheer.

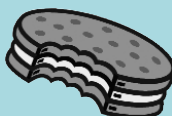
Each family brought a dozen of their favorite cookies to share. There were cookies, and cake, and pie galore. Fun was had by all who attended.



Harrisburg Holiday Party - Our Harrisburg Office hosted a holiday open house again this year. AFTH families and children connected with one another and with our staff. Over 25 people attended the open house and families enjoyed light refreshments and homemade goodies. Each child received a goodie bag with treats before going home.



Lancaster Cookie Party - Despite winter weather preventing most people from attending, some families braved the weather to join the Lancaster staff in a holiday celebration. If you were not able to make the party this year due to the storm, don't worry as the Lancaster Staff already has plans to host another Cookie Party next year.



Hazlet's Dessert Exchange - Hazlet hosted its first (hopefully first annual) dessert party. Families were asked to share their favorite desserts. The goodies were AMAZING and ranged from Bouche De Noel to Portuguese pastries. Five families (both pre-adopt and post-adopt) attended the party this year. The Hazlet Office hopes that more families join in the celebration next year so the AFTH recipe book can continue to grow



Pittsburgh Holiday Party- Our Pittsburgh Office had another successful holiday party with over 200 people in attendance this year. The children who attended enjoyed a puppet show and a special visit from Santa again this year.

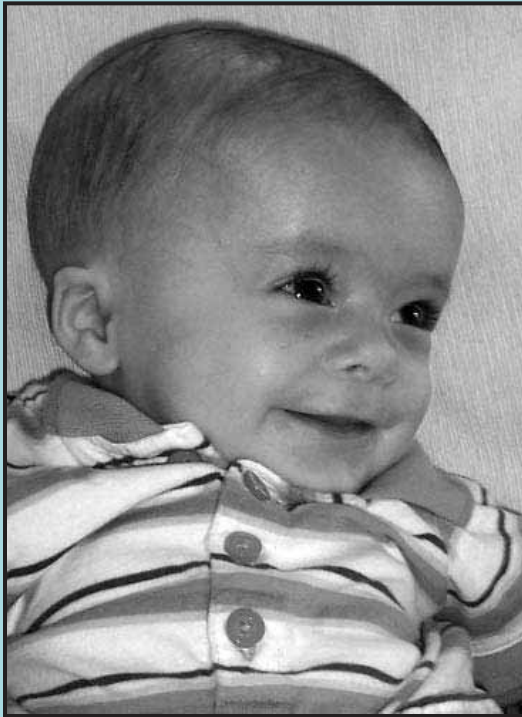
In addition to the party's regular holiday festivities, AFTH presented the 2008 AFTH "Advocacy in Adoption" award to the Ansell family in recognition for their diligent work to improve the adoption process for other families (*more information on page 2*).



Virginia Holiday Party - Our Virginia Office celebrated the holiday season with their annual holiday party. Over 50 adults and 33 children attended. Each family brought a dish to share and in honor of the holiday spirit each family donated a canned good to the church's pantry for those in need. Children enjoyed holiday worksheets and felt crafts and were especially excited for a special visit with Santa.

Charitable Works

Holiday Miracles Can be as Simple as a Chair!



Meet Dylan. He was placed with Cliff and Noreen at birth through AFTH's domestic program. Last May at only 5 months old, Dylan was diagnosed with Canavan Disease.

Canavan disease (CD) is a relatively rare, but always fatal, inherited, degenerative brain disorder that primarily affects children of eastern and central European Jewish (Ashkenazi) descent.

As a result of Dylan's condition, his adoptive parents have many hospital bills that are not covered by their insurance. Because children with CD cannot crawl, walk, sit, or talk,

Dylan is in need of a special chair costing in the thousands so that he is able to see his surroundings, participate in family life, and be more comfortable in his home. The chair will also allow Cliff and Noreen to have more freedom in the home rather than carrying Dylan at all times.

AFTH has created the Dylan Fund for anyone wishing to contribute a donation toward Dylan's family to help with the medical expenses and care of Dylan. With the help of many AFTH supporters and adoptive families, over \$3,200 has already been donated to the Dylan Fund.

AFTH is still accepting donations for the Dylan Fund online:
<http://www.afth.org/charity/donate.html>

Tori Update

As some of you may remember, last winter, we introduced you to a little girl named Tori. At only 8 months, when most babies are beginning to crawl, Tori began fighting for her life after being diagnosed with a rare and aggressive brain tumor.

AFTH created the Tori Fund and began accepting donations to help the family.

The family would like to share their appreciation for all the donations as it helped to ease the financial burdens caused by Tori's illness.

The family was blessed to have Tori home for Christmas but Tori's struggle continues as a recent MRI showed signs of tumor regrowth. On January 2, doctors were able to remove what they could see of the regrown tumor.

Doctors are now determining what the new course of treatment will be.

A Thank You Note From a Birthmother

'Tis the season for giving and in preparation for the 2007 holiday season, AFTH donated over \$10,900 to over 32 birthparents. Each year AFTH gives donations of gift certificates and giftcards to birth parents with children in the home to help ease the financial strain they face during the holiday season.

AFTH families may contribute to this fund by making a donation online or by sending a check to the Wynnewood Office - noting the birthmother fund as the designated fund

Dear AFTH,

Thank you sooo much for the gift cards. I want to thank you and everyone else at AFTH from the bottom of my heart, it means so much to us as it couldn't have come at a better time. I am so appreciative, it brings tears to my eyes. Words cannot express how I feel and thank you so much for thinking of us at this time of the year.

Bea

Congratulations to Families Who Have Recently Adopted!



Daughters from the USA

Catherine
Kymberly & Shaun
Theodore & Rebecca
Christopher & Cynthia
Judith
Alfred & Constance
Vic & Dana
Ted & Meg
Denis & Maureen
Daniel & Gretchen

Sons from the USA

David & Lori
Peter & Kate
Mark & Alicia
Brett & Joie
Brian & Paul
Christopher & Carey
Joseph & Ann
Thomas & Alane
Brian & Joanne
Joseph & Dina
Ken & Lesli
John & Erika
Robert & Michelle
John & Amy
Moses & Carla
John & Kelley
Carson & Jaca

Richard & Terrance
Joseph & Lori
Wesley & Michelle
Matthew & Natalie
Michael & Jennifer
Sarge
Brian & Albina

Daughters from Guatemala

Camille
Robert & Jennifer
Vincent & Marie
Thomas & Danielle
Robert & Beth Ann
Stacy & Patricia
Philip & Michelle
Deborah

Sons from Guatemala

Andrew & Elizabeth
Hesham & Susan
Theodore & Maryann
John & Lee Anne
Nathan & Jill
Theresa
Frank & Amy
Ronald & Joanne
Jennifer
Greg & Tammy

Daughters from Kazakhstan

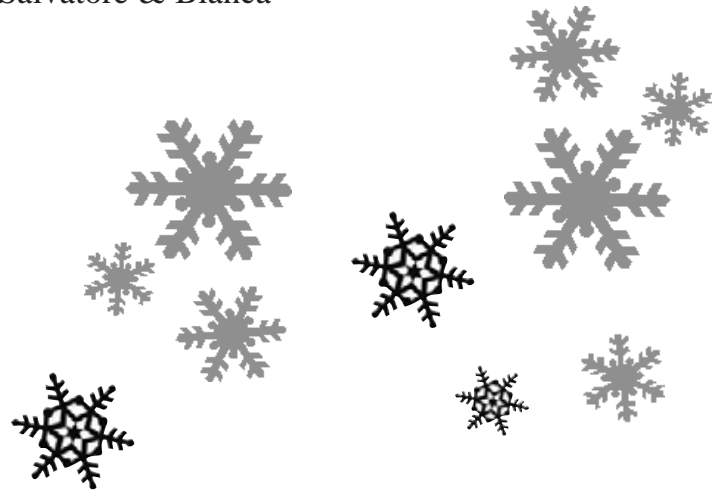
Lawrence & Christy

Daughters from India

Raj & Sujata

Sons from Russia

Salvatore & Blanca



International Adoption Program Updates

CHINA - This month (Jan. 11th and 12th) 25 families will be traveling to China. The program continues to run smoothly when we get assignments. We are also trying to get some special needs children and will keep you all updated as to our progress. We hope to see many of you at our annual Asian New Year Party on January 26th.

KAZAKHSTAN - Three AFTH families had the experience of spending Christmas in Kazakhstan and several other families will be traveling in the next few months. Things have been running smoothly and there have been no major changes or issues in the past few months. We have received a number of positive comments about the services provided by the in-country teams in both Astana and Kostanai and their efforts on behalf of our families. The adoption process in Kazakhstan is very complicated and AFTH is fortunate to have experienced and very competent teams in both regions. We continue to ask families who have completed adoptions to complete their post-placement and annual reports at least one month before the due date to avoid negatively impacting families in process. These reports should be sent to Terry Petrone at the Cherry Hill office. Any questions regarding post-placement reports or the Kazakhstan program can be directed to Terry Petrone via e-mail at TerryP@afth.org or by phone at the Cherry Hill office.

UKRAINE - The reorganization of the adoption process in Ukraine has been completed and the new State Department for Adoption and Protection of Children's Rights under the Ministry of Family, Youth and Sports of Ukraine began accepting new dossiers on December 19, 2006. The officials are currently working to review and update dossiers for families who were registered prior to that date and they expect that all of those families will travel by June. The new officials are being very strict about the paperwork and waiting families can expect to be contacted to re-do or update forms as their dossiers are being considered for appointments. The officials are saying that families who submit new dossiers will be invited to travel within 6 months of dossier registration. Families who have adopted are reminded to file their annual reports with the Ukrainian Consulate. These are due on the 1st of the month of the anniversary of the adoption. If you have questions regarding post-placement requirements or the adoption process in Ukraine, contact Terry Petrone, the Ukraine Adoption

Coordinator via e-mail at TerryP@afth.org or by phone at the Cherry Hill office.

RUSSIA - AFTH is excited to announce that its Russia Partner, Children of the World Adoption Agency, Inc. (CWAA) received its re-accreditation from Russia in December of 2007! Therefore, CWAA has resumed referring children, as young as 12-36 months of age, to AFTH families, so that there will be AFTH families traveling to Russia in January and February of 2008 to meet the children referred to them. At this time, the AFTH Russia waiting list is short, so that families are receiving referrals within a few months of completion of their paperwork.

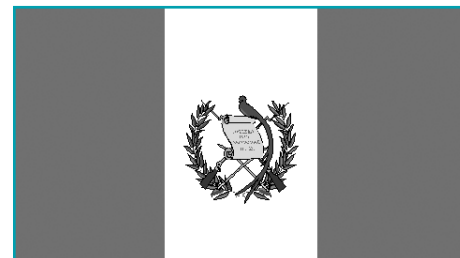
In looking back at the 1st full year of placements via the Russia Networking Program, AFTH is pleased to report that 17 Russian children arrived in the homes of AFTH families between December of 2006 and November of 2007. And, all families and children are doing wonderfully! Finally, AFTH extends its best "Welcome Home" wishes to Daniele, age 4, who came home from Moscow with Sal and Blanca in November, just in time for Thanksgiving.

INDIA - We are still working with two orphanages Mahila Mandal, which is the city of Latur in Maharashtra and Matruchhaya which is in Gujarat. We have received two referrals and are expecting more in the near future. Applications are coming in steadily. Families can specify with which orphanage they would like to work.

VIETNAM - Our Vietnam program is slowly moving ahead. We have become licensed to work in a second province and are working with 3 orphanages there. Referrals from orphanages in Ho Chi Minh City have been taking approximately 6 months to clear before they are eligible for international adoption. We are hoping that expanding into a 2nd province will help move the referral process along quicker for families.

Program Updates Cont'd

GUATEMALA - The Guatemala 5000 effort appears to have had a positive effect on the situation in Guatemala as the Grandfather clause for cases in processes is looking very positive. The Central Adoption Authority will be created after December 30th and cases have to be registered there, but the process is still very sketchy. Many families traveled in October, November and December and brought their children home. Many families have been going to visit their children, and this has been very positive.



Maxine Chalker's Message About Guatemala

While the ink is still fresh, child "advocates" around the world and our U.S. government are busy congratulating themselves that the United States has ratified the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption. This treaty was signed in 1993 with the goal of protecting children around the world from the prospect of child trafficking and exploitation -- certainly a goal that all child advocates support without reservation.

Sorry, but I need to rain on this parade. As the founder of Adoptions From The Heart who has served the needs of children who need families for over 22 years, and as an adult adoptee myself, I feel compelled to weigh in and share my belief that congratulations are premature and possibly, just plain wrong.

It has taken 14 years for the United States to honor its commitment to children from foreign countries who need families. Meanwhile, other countries around the world who struggle with enormous populations of orphaned and abandoned children implemented Hague during the 1990's. One by one, year after year, these countries became Hague compliant and virtually closed their doors to inter-country adoption entirely - ironically, all in the name of child protection under Hague. I, for one, cannot point to a single Hague success story in any foreign country that actually serves the needs of children.

I forgot to mention that perhaps each country processes a handful of inter-country adoptions per year. So what if they took 2 years to complete and adoptive families spent countless hours and dollars along the way? The cases were ethical and no private individual in the foreign country made a dime. Everyone was happy except the hundreds of thousands of children who remain in that country living without parents,

possibly on a trash dump somewhere. I question - what about them? These children have been rendered invisible by Hague.

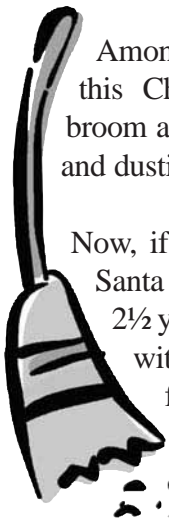
The U.S. has and is pressuring other countries like Guatemala and Vietnam into becoming Hague-compliant overnight - imposing impossible timetables and impossible hurdles for children needing families. The Department of State has forced Guatemala to set up a Central Authority within a month's time while the same process took the U.S. at least 9 years. There is no funding on the radar for the new system and now the Guatemalan children will suffer the same fate as others around the world by becoming invisible. The lucky ones will wind up in under-funded orphanages sharing caretakers with dozens of other children. Others may wind up living on the streets and victimized in unthinkable ways. When thousands of American families are willing to parent these children, why has the U.S. forced Guatemala to make the process impossibly difficult? And I wonder, why does our government seem to be forcing Vietnam to head down the same road?

With our newly-validated power as a Hague country, we need to actively encourage foreign adoption policy that will enable international countries to provide permanency for children according to their culture and values and will place children as young as possible. American citizens should know that the Hague process in the U.S. has demanded that agencies spend thousands upon thousands of dollars to become accredited under the new Hague rules. This cost will be passed onto prospective adoptive parents by higher agency fees. Of course, that assumes that there will still be children who are deemed eligible for adoption.



Home-Visit Hysteria Hullabaloo

By Gretchen Boger-O'Bryan



Among the gifts awaiting Maeve under the tree this Christmas was a child-sized cleaning set: broom and dustpan, Swiffer-style mop, spray bottle and dusting cloths.

Now, if such a practical gift had my name on it, Santa would need a serious talking to. But for my 2½ year old, it hit the spot. (Spot, what spot? Not with my little cleaner around!) She moves from room to room, mopping floors and "spraying" surfaces in delight, never returning to wipe them "dry."

If, when turning a tight corner with her mop, she knocks into a chair or startles the cat from its comfortable curl, she coos "Sorry" - whether feline or furniture - then asks, "You okay?" This continues until her favorite Laurie Berkner song plays or another distraction catches her fancy.

I watch all this happy commotion and smile, recalling that our floors have been the object of such obsessive attention before. And although we hadn't yet met Maeve, she was the reason then, too.

When preparing three years ago for our home visit, my husband and I were assured this was no white-glove inspection. But as prospective adoptive parents anxious about passing muster, we didn't dare depend on that.

So in addition to cleaning, and dutifully dotting the I's and crossing the T's of smoke alarms and fire

extinguishers, one could say I took preparations a wee bit too seriously. Lest you doubt, I'll share a few embarrassing examples.

When our social worker called to report she hadn't yet left the office and would be late, I decided to use the extra time to get a better shine on the wood floors near the entry foyer. Because, of course, everyone knows that glistening floors are the key to unlocking the doors to parenthood.

I'm soon mopping and sweating with abandon when my attention is drawn to a nearby window. Our social worker has arrived - and just four minutes after the appointed time. As if I wasn't already in panic mode, the floor is wet, cleaner and mop are still in hand, and I'm now in desperate need of makeup since it's just melted off my clammy face.

After inviting her in and beginning to chat, I realize how potent the chemical smell is from the last-minute cleaning. As she toured the house, all I could think was that she would either determine we didn't care enough and waited until the eleventh-hour to prepare - or that our home is usually so dirty we only just finished bringing it up to par. Either way, I knew it didn't bode well.

My prep for the visit also included plans to bake cookies. No, not kind hospitality for our visitor; rather, the cookies would simply be piled high on a plate in the kitchen, evoking a sense of organization and tender dedication to the household. Besides, doesn't turning flour and sugar into cookie goodness directly reflect on one's mothering capability?



Oh, dear readers, my irrational thinking continues: I never actually had time to bake, so the cookies placed lovingly under a glass dome in the kitchen were actually store-bought. I'm just relieved I didn't dab flour on my face, too.

These admissions make me cringe because there was no basis for such an emotional tizzy. Frankly, the most difficult part of the home visit was me. I chalk it up to wanting everything perfect for a visit that, if successful, played a part in me becoming a mom and changing life as I knew it.

Musings Cont'd

And change it did, in the most wonderful of ways. Parenthood also brought a welcome reality check. Are my floors as shiny as they could be? I haven't a clue. When there are cookies in the house do we actually get to eat them? You betcha.

Best of all, you can bet it was Maeve's helpful little hands that placed the dough onto the baking sheet in the first place. Wonderful changes, indeed.

Gretchen Boger-O'Bryan was placed with her infant daughter in July 2005 through Adoptions From The Heart. An editor in legal publishing, she also is a freelance writer and currently writes about adoption and first-time parenthood on her blog, musings: mamahood&more, at www.mamagigi.wordpress.com. You can reach Gretchen by emailing mamagigi@comcast.net.



Tax Time

April 15th is getting closer and it is time to start thinking about taxes.

It is important for adoptive parents to take advantage of the adoption tax credit which is \$11,390 for this filing season. Adoptive parents can use the tax credit on any qualifying adoption expenses incurred throughout the year. Such expenses may include adoption fees, attorney fees, travel expenses, and court costs.

The credit is applicable for both international and domestic adoptions. The adopted child must be under 18 years old or incapable of caring for him or herself.

For additional information on using the adoption tax credit when filing your taxes this year, be sure to speak with a local accountant or tax preparation professional about your specific adoption expenses and how you could benefit from the adoption tax credit.

Be In-The-Know

Does your family want to be in-the-know about the special event that AFTH is hosting to bring adoptive families together?

Would you like it to be as easy as hitting a button to RSVP?

AFTH is beginning to use email blasts as a way of staying in touch with adoptive families. We update families on events happening in their area (holiday parties, support groups, etc.) in addition to agency-wide events (Annual Picnic, Asian New Year Party, upcoming adoption conference, etc.).

It is important for us as an agency to have current contact information so that we can reach you. In order to begin receiving email blasts we need to have your current email address as well.

If you have recently changed email addresses or have never provided us with one, please be sure to contact your local office so we can update our information.

Prevent our messages from being lost in your junk mail by adding info@afth.org as one of your contacts.

Celebrate Adoption All Year Long

If you haven't already ordered your copy of the 2008 AFTH "Building Beautiful Families" Calendar, don't worry you still have time.

Calendars are still available online and at your local AFTH office. All proceeds to benefit AFTH's humanitarian aid efforts.

AFTH CONFERENCE

"Strengthening Bonds: Adoptive Families and the Community"

March 15, 2008
8:30am-4:00pm

Delaware County Community College in Media, PA

For More Information and to Register:

www.afth.org/conference08

CEUs Available for PA & NJ Social Workers
ACT 48 Credits Available for PA Teachers

JCICS 2008 CONFERENCE

"Creating Permanency Through Families:
Inter-country Adoption Role in Child Welfare"

April 9 - April 12

Holiday Inn on the Hill
Washington, DC

For More Information Go To:

www.jcics.org

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