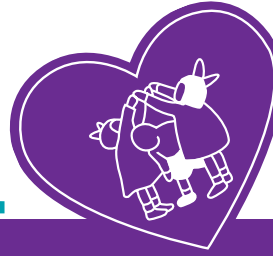


Adoption News



A Quarterly Newsletter from

Adoptions From The Heart

Winter 2009

AFTH Donations Helped More Than 40 Birthmothers Over the Holiday Season

Imagine not being able to give your children anything for the holiday season. No decorations, no grand meal and not even a little extra to be able to exchange a small gift.

For many of the women who place children through AFTH, this is a reality they face each holiday season. And it breaks their hearts to see their children go without.

AFTH understands birthmother's hardships often do not end with placing a child in a loving home. Sometimes women are parenting other children and are just trying to make ends meet each month. Many women struggle during the holiday season to be able to give their children a little something special.

This year, AFTH donated over \$14,000 to 42 birthmothers in need this past holiday season. Each woman received gift cards for food, toys and clothing to help brighten the holiday season for their family.

Social workers identify women who have children in the home who need some extra help during the holidays.

The gift cards are then distributed to these women before the holidays so they can use them to make the holidays special for their family.

hardships often do not end with placing a child in a loving home...

Each year we receive letters of appreciation from women who have received the gift cards explaining what it meant to their family.

We are deeply moved by the thank you letters and want to share them with you (*see page 2*).

With the current economy, we predict a rise in the number of birthmothers in need of financial assistance throughout the year in addition to the holiday season. We will continue to do what we can as an agency and hope with the assistance of donors we will be able to offer help to even more women in need. We invite anyone interested in making a contribution to visit our website www.afth.org and click on "donate." Donors may designate where the money is to be used. We appreciate donations of any amount as it enables us to be able to continue our work of giving back to birthmothers in need.

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Thank You From Birthmothers

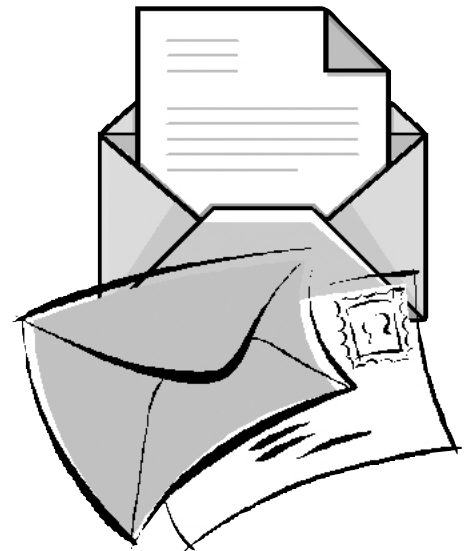
I usually start preparing for Christmas right after Halloween so I have enough time and money to provide my 3 children with a pretty decent Christmas. With the economy the way it is, I wasn't sure how I was going to do it this year and even worse, how I was going to break the news to my children.

Thank you! The gift cards came right before I lost all hope that my children would have any Christmas at all. The kids used the Walmart and Toys R Us gift cards to buy gifts for each other and exchange on Christmas Eve, something they are really looking forward to. I am looking forward to Christmas dinner, courtesy of Acme, and of course the looks on their faces come Christmas morning.

I was able to do a lot more than I hoped for thanks to all of you guys. I thank you and my children do as well. Happy Holidays and God Bless.

Sincerely,
Ebony

“The gift cards came right before I lost all hope...”



First thing, I would like to say thank you to my adoption counselor and Adoptions From The Heart for the gift cards and all the help they give me. To be honest, they did a lot for me when I chose adoption for my son two years ago.

The gift cards mean a lot to me because I am a divorced mother of a five-year old daughter and working barely above minimum wage. I am barely keeping ends met all year round. When I receive the gift cards, I know my daughter will have a good Christmas. I use them for her for nice toys, a nice Christmas dinner, and I also get some clothes for myself which I need.

“I am barely keeping ends met all year round...”

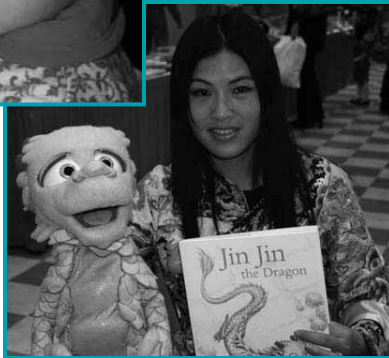
There are no words to describe how it makes me feel. All I have to say is thank you from the bottom of my heart. Adoptions From The Heart is a great adoption agency; they care about adoptive parents and the birth parents. Thank you again. I really appreciate the help.

Christy

13th Annual Asian New Year Party Recap



Over 400 AFTH families and friends gathered on blustery cold January 10th to celebrate the year of the ox at AFTH's 13th annual Asian New Year Party. Traditional Asian music filled the air, Asian food filled bellies and Asian décor canvassed the room at the Valley Forge Convention Center. Children were entertained with face painting and balloons by Freckles the Clown, the Guang Hua Chinese School performed traditional Asian dance routines, and Grace Chang did a magic show and a book signing. For the first time, AFTH invited adoptive families from all other programs, including domestic, to the Asian New Year Party to join us in celebrating different cultures. Fun was had by all!



Unique Ways to Celebrate Adoption

Unique T-shirts Celebrating Adoption

T-shirt designs which celebrate the joy of adoption are beginning to pop up everywhere. You can find over 29,000 designs at www.shop.cafepress.com/adoption.

They have t-shirts, sweatshirts, bibs, bags, baby outfits and much more.

Looking for humor: *"Don't tell my parents but I don't look a thing like them."*

Serious: *"Adoption - a gift of love."*

Inspirational: *"We don't have to look alike to be a family."*

Country specific: *"Special Delivery from China 2008."*

You can find it all at CafePress!

Adoption Related Greeting Cards

Trying to find that special adoption related card? Take a look at the selection of unique cards at www.AdoptionCardShop.com. Patricia Bubb, an adoptive parent, designed this special line of cards to celebrate the events surrounding the process of adoption. Cards are available for adoptive parents, birth family members, and adoption professionals.

Adoption Related Life Book & Scrapbooking Materials

Many adoptive parents have expressed a disappointment at the lack of selection of adoption related scrapbooking materials. One AFTH mother decided to make a change by designing her own line of affordable, high quality papers and titles which celebrate the joy of adoption. To see the selection of materials unique to her store contact the customer service at www.memoriesgalore.com and request a PDF of her original adoption related designs.

Message from the Executive Director

Greetings,

The 2008 year has surely been a roller coaster with many changes and challenges facing all of us, but we are optimistic about 2009. In June of 2008, we launched our new Heartbeats: Assisted Reproductive Program as an option for families. Along with the implementation of this new program and with the decline in international adoptions, we have more heavily focused our efforts on our domestic programs and have increased our placements by 27%!

International adoption has seen major changes in 2008 with the implementation of Hague, and the closing of many international countries, leaving many orphans without the hope of finding homes within the U.S. We have encountered the heartbreak of Guatemala closing their doors to adoption, China changing their regulations making it much longer for adoptive families to receive a match, and the end of the MOU between the US and Vietnam closing adoptions in this country to US families until a new agreement can be reached.

Our country has also seen the beginnings of a financial recession with more people being laid off and companies closing. These difficult economic times have hit the adoption community as well. Donations for humanitarian aid have dropped, more birth parents are in need of help with expenses and families have had to drop out of programs due to loss of income. AFTH has taken pro-active steps to maintain financial stability in order to continue to provide services to birth and adoptive families. Some decisions were difficult but financially necessary and some require a change in how we communicate.

We have closed our office in Hazlet, NJ and are now relying on regional consultants, for outreach and supervision in Northern NJ. We have also merged our Harrisburg and Lancaster offices, since their coverage areas often overlapped, to create a Central PA office. In an effort to reduce mailing costs we are using e-mail, e-mail lists and mass e-mails more often in our communication with clients. We are also holding webinars, instead of holding as many in person information meetings.

There have been exciting changes in 2008. Our merge with ARC of Connecticut allowed us to become a full service agency in Connecticut. We kept their wonderful Founder, Penny Rearick to oversee the office and they have been busy expanding their services into domestic adoption. Heidi Gonzalez has been promoted to Assistant Director. Heidi has worked for the agency for 22 years. Heidi will be focusing on technology advancement and helping to move the agency forward. In March 2008, we held our first adoption conference at Delaware County Community College. This was a great success, we received a lot of positive feedback and we are hoping to hold another conference in 2010.

As we head into 2009, we are optimistic about the future. We know this past year has been difficult for families with all the changes in adoption regulations and changes within our agency. Our staff is working hard to keep up with all the challenges these changes have brought. We look forward to a better 2009 for all of us.

Mafine Chalke



Legislation



ARGUMENTS OVER OPEN RECORDS HAVE "NO BASIS IN REALITY"

- In a Dec. 16 article by Anna Clark published on the website RH Reality Check, "Adoption Consensus," Adoption Institute Executive Director Adam Pertman comments that one of the most heated debates in adoption is about the right for adopted adults to obtain their original birth certificates. Citing findings from an Institute report on the topic, Pertman said that permitting access to these records would help make adoption a more compassionate and sensible system - while not negatively impacting adoption placements. He also said that research and experience show that there is "no basis in reality" to assertions - made by opponents of allowing adoptee access to original birth certificates - that doing so would cause more pregnant women to choose abortion over adoption.

RUSSIAN LAWMAKERS VOW TO MAKE ADOPTIONS HARDER FOR U.S. COUPLES -

Lawmakers in Russia reportedly are in the process of working out new, tougher regulations for Americans seeking to adopt children from their country after a court acquitted a father in Virginia of involuntary manslaughter in the death of the 21-month-old son he adopted from Russia. According to a Dec. 19 article in the Moscow Times by Svetlana Osadchuk, "Tough New Rules for Adoptive U.S. Parents," Russian legislators were outraged by the verdict and had prepared an official demand to the U.S. State Department regarding adoptions of Russian children; some legislators also promised to make domestic adoption by Russian families more attractive.

ARKANSAS - The American Civil Liberties Union has filed a lawsuit to challenge a new Arkansas law that prevents unmarried couples who live together from being adoptive or foster parents. Act 1 -- approved by Arkansas voters in November -- limits adoptions to married couples, effectively barring singles, unmarried heterosexual partners, and homosexuals from adopting children.

LOUISIANA - A same-sex couple whose son was born in Louisiana and adopted in New York won their lawsuit on Dec. 22 against the state of Louisiana after it refused to issue a new birth certificate identifying both fathers as the child's parents. The state argued it did not recognize adoptions by unmarried parents, but the U.S. District Court judge in Louisiana ruled in favor of the couple. The judge ruled that the Louisiana Office of Vital Records was violating the Full Faith and Credit Clause of the U.S. Constitution by refusing to recognize the New York adoption and ordered a new birth certificate to be issued that includes the name of both parents.

MAINE - Adoptees are now allowed access to their original birth certificates. Dozens of people showed up at the vital records office in August on January 2, 2009, when the law went into effect.

NEW YORK - A bill signed by Governor Paterson in August 5, 2008, states that children born in NY and adopted on or after Nov. 3, 2008, will be able to access identifying information about their birth parents when they reach age 18 provided their birth parents file a consent form with the adoption information registry. Birth parents can withdraw their consent to be contacted in the future but can also supply more non-identifying details through the adoption medical information sub-registry. Birth Parents can register at Vital Records Section; New York State Dept. of Health, Empire State Plaza, POB 2602, Albany, NY 12220, (518) 474-3077

OHIO - The Ohio House of Representatives gave final approval to a bill (SB 304) on Dec. 9 that will expand the timeframe during which a baby can be legally abandoned at designated "safe haven" sites from 72 hours to 30 days after birth. The bill, which amends the state's original infant abandonment legislation enacted in 2001, also stipulates the development of a plan to educate "at-risk populations who are most likely to voluntarily deliver a child" about the law. The bill, which was approved by the state Senate in May, is awaiting signature by the governor.



Congratulations to Families Who Have Recently Adopted!

Daughters from China

Drew & Melinda
William & Heidi
Rosemary
Gordon & Nancy
Jeannine
Jamie & Angela
Stephen & Maryann
Jamie & Anita
Shannon
Jennifer
Joseph & Lori
Michael & Denise
Patrick & Eleanor
Thomas & Rosemary
Jason & Andrea
Susan
Kay

Daughters from Guatemala

Edward & Rachel
Robert & Jennifer
Bim & Tracy
Tawnya
Derek & Kimberly
Vicki

Sons from Guatemala

Christopher & Michele
Brian & Maryann
Melinda
Chad & Caryl

Daughters from Russia

Dennis & Cathleen
Kenneth & Patricia
Gilles & Lori

Sons from Russia

Carl & Christy
Elena

Daughters from the USA

Joycelyn & Patricia
Leon & Caroline
Shawn & Kerry
Kenneth & Janet
Kim
Reginald & Rocky (twins)
Andrew & Susan
Tom & Leanna
Craig & Karen
Arnel & Dawne
Perry & Erin
Robert & Karen
Justin & Corina
Lou & Lori
Nathaniel & Janelle
Matthew & Catherine

Sons from the USA

Darren & Lynn
Louis & Elizabeth
Christopher & Carol
Keith & Katrina
Michael & Julianne
Craig & Jill
Lee & Heather

Paul & Jennifer
Ian & Charissa
David & Eric
Christopher & Amy
Sean & Danielle
John
Robert & Mallorie
Marita
Kevin & Susan
Anthony & Jennifer
Jeremy & Shannon
Larry & Jill

Daughters from Vietnam

Dennis & Marcia

Sons from Vietnam

Peter
Todd & Katherine
Lisa
Justin & Pamela





Adoption Education Spring 2009 Series

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



♥Chesapeake, VA

The Effects of Drug and Alcohol Use During Pregnancy

An instructor from the Tidewater Center for Life Support of Eastern Virginia Medical School will present crucial and helpful information on the effects of drug and substance abuse during pregnancy. The information should prove useful in making educated decisions for the profile key for waiting families, as well as provide insight for those with children who are placed. This is an opportunity to get the facts. Come and join us with your questions.

Saturday, March 28, 2009

11:00AM-12:30 PM

\$15/person or \$25/couple

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

♥Wilmington, DE

Birthmother Panel

A panel of birthmothers will be present to share and discuss their various experiences with placing their children for adoption. This class is a great opportunity and we encourage all domestic families (waiting and placed) to take part in this unique class. Questions are welcome and encouraged!

Tuesday, March 31, 2009

6:30-8:00 PM

\$5/person

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 and comfort and a video on car seat safety and installation. Bring your questions.

Friday, March 20, 2009

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 \$5/person unless noted.

# Attending	Cost	Topic/Location
		<u>Birthmother Panel</u> Wilmington, DE
	♥	<u>Caring for Infants & Older Babies: What New Adoptive Parents Need to Know</u> Harrisburg, PA (Central PA Office)
	♥	<u>Infant Care Class</u> Allentown, PA
		<u>Meeting Your Child's Birthmother</u> Cherry Hill, NJ
	♥	<u>The Effects of Drug & Alcohol Use During Pregnancy</u> Chesapeake, VA

Names: _____

Address: _____

Phone: () _____ - _____

Email: _____

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



Adoptions From The Heart®

♥ Central 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.

Wednesday, March 25, 2009

7:00-9:00PM

\$20/person or \$35/couple

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

♥ Cherry Hill

Meeting Your Child's Birth Mother

Everyone is nervous at their first pre-placement meeting. This workshop will provide a guideline for what to ask and what to share at that important first meeting to help set the foundation for a positive relationship with your child's birthmother.

Wednesday, March 11, 2009

7:00-9:00 PM

\$5/person

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



AFTH Event Recaps

National Adoption Day

Each year in honor of National Adoption Day in November, the Camden County Surrogate's Office hosts a special luncheon for families finalizing their child's adoption that Friday. The judges make a special effort to schedule as many finalizations as they can on that day as a way of honoring National Adoption Day.

This year, we had 12 AFTH families whose finalization proceedings were a part of this special event. It was a special day for everyone!



Fall Festival at Kerber's Dairy

Each year the Pittsburgh Office holds a fall festival at Kerber's Dairy where families can enjoy pumpkin picking, hayrides, a corn stalk maze, and of course ice cream. This year more than 100 people attended. Children fed the llamas and goats



and laughter could be heard as children ran around the playground area.

Pittsburgh Holiday Party

Over 200 people joined the Pittsburgh staff at their holiday party which was held on December 7th. Santa came to visit with the children and a wonderful puppet show was enjoyed by everyone. It was great to come together with all the families and we look forward to seeing everyone again next year.

Virginia Holiday Party

This year the holiday party was full of joy and laughter as over 100 people joined the AFTH staff in celebrating the holiday season. We were especially excited to have 7 birthmothers join us for a time to celebrate the holidays together with their children and their families. Children enjoyed games and story



telling and Santa also dropped in for a visit with AFTH families.



Allentown Annual Cookie Party



The Allentown Office held its 5th annual cookie party on December 11th at the home of Gretchen VanVelsor and Sandy Evans. It was a wet and foggy night outside, but warm and friendly inside for the



families in attendance. Santa visited and old friends had a chance to catch up and new friendships were formed. It is such a treat to see everyone. We look forward to next year and invite more of you to join us.

Connecticut Holiday Party

AFTH in Connecticut held it's annual Holiday Party on December 6th from 1-4 PM at the Gallery Restaurant in Glastonbury, CT. Over 250 guests came to the party representing 58 families! Children enjoyed face



painting, games, and our extra special guest: Santa Claus. Cheryl Bissailon from GVP Studio was on hand to take beautiful photos of the children as they told Santa their wishes for Christmas. We wish to send a special thank you to our young artist friend Noah Perry for helping us paint beautiful winter images on the children's faces. Our families had a great time and are already talking about the upcoming summer picnic.

Delaware Fall Open House

The fall open house was a great opportunity to families to socialize with other adoptive families as well as their social workers. While attendance was light, families that came enjoyed Halloween-inspired crafts as well as holiday candies and other seasonal goodies. The Delaware staff and all of the children who attended, proudly showed off their Halloween spirit by coming in costume. It was a fun night for all who attended.

Upcoming AFTH Events & Activities

Annual AFTH Picnics

WATCH FOR DETAILS IN THE NEXT NEWSLETTER

THE ANNUAL AGENCY PICNIC

Mark your calendars and save the date for this year's picnic be held at the Fort. Washington National Park.

Sunday, June 7th from 11am-2:00pm

VIRGINIA ANNUAL PICNIC

This year the picnic will be held at the Chesapeake City Park Fun Forest. We hope to see you there.

Saturday, June 13th from 2:30pm-6:00pm

RSVP to Iris at IrisL@afth.org or 757-361-0008

Connecticut Knitting Group

Come meet other knitters and adoptive parents as we knit much needed items for children in various orphanages. We have the yarn, needles, and the know-how! Don't know how to knit - we'll teach you. Our group meets each month in our office for an evening of socializing and of course knitting!

Wednesday, March 18th from 7:00pm-9:00pm

Wednesday, April 15th from 7:00pm-9:00pm

Wednesday, May 20th from 7:00pm-9:00pm

Contact Penny at 860-657-2626 for more info.

Life Book Class (Connecticut Office)

Do you know what a life book is? Have you not even started to write it yet? Unsure of where to begin? This is the class for you! In this class we will go over the steps it takes to complete your child's life book. The class covers everything including birth parents, open adoption, foster families, foreign adoption and everything in between. We will also discuss the different ways to assemble the life book. When the classes are finished, you will have your child's life book completely written. Our leader, Sarah Coffey, is an adoptive parent so she knows how difficult creating a life book can be. Join us and we can get it done together.

5 Week Program: Wed, Feb 5th - March 5th, 7-8pm

\$100 includes instruction book & all materials

Contact Brenda at 860-657-2626 to register.

AFTH Support Groups

HARRISBURG

Our Central PA Office holds support groups for all waiting families on the 3rd Thursday of each month. Meetings are held at the Landis Building at the Polyclinic. Join us for our next meeting.

- Thursday, Feb. 19 beginning at 7pm
- Thursday, March 19 beginning at 7pm
- Thursday, April. 16 beginning at 7pm

Call (717) 232-1787 for more information

VIRGINIA

Adoptive parent support groups are held to bring AFTH waiting families together. **Check the calendar of events at www.afth.org for upcoming dates.**

Birthmother support groups are also held to connect women who have or are making an adoption plan for their child.

Call (757) 361-0008 for more information

CHERRY HILL

Birthmother support groups are held to help connect women who have or are making an adoption plan for their child. Call 856-665-5655 or email JenniferB@afth.org if you are interested in attending.

Adoptive parent support groups are also being held to bring waiting families together for support on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at the Cherry Hill Office.

- Wednesday, Feb. 18 beginning at 7pm
- Wednesday, March 18 beginning at 7pm
- Wednesday, April. 15 beginning at 7pm

Call (856) 665-5655 to RSVP by the Friday before.

DELAWARE

Adoptive parent support groups are held to bring AFTH waiting families together. **Check the calendar of events at www.afth.org for upcoming dates or call (302) 658-8883 for more information**

ALLENTOWN

International Families Support Group

- Tuesday, Feb. 10 beginning at 7pm

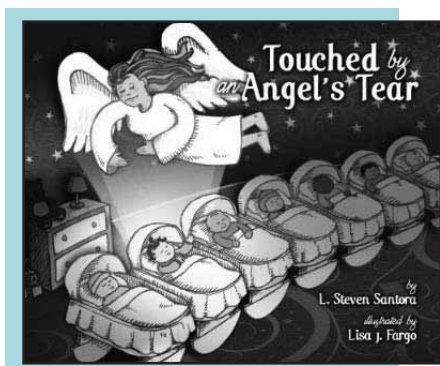
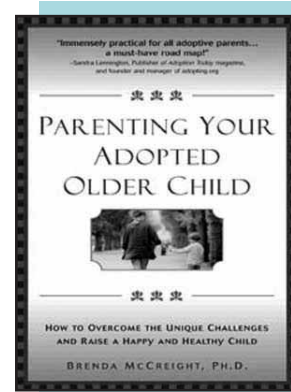
Domestic Families Support Group

Check the calendar of events at www.afth.org for upcoming dates or call (610) 432-2384 for more information

Book Reviews

Parenting Your Adopted Older Child: How to Overcome the Unique Challenges and Raise a Happy and Healthy Child *by Brenda, Ph.D. McCreight*

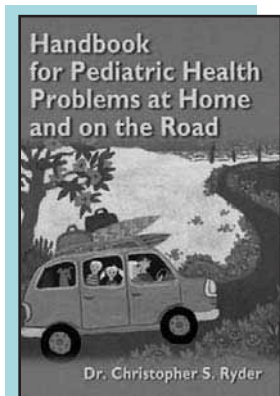
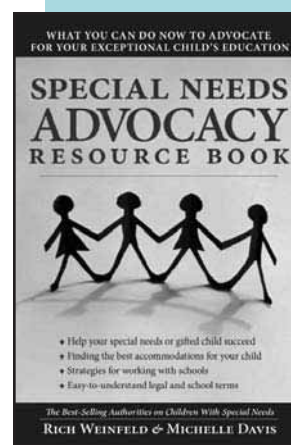
McCreight is both a child therapist and an adoptive parent of seven. She has written this book specifically for the growing number of people who adopt children over two years old. Parents learn to identify their child's needs, meet such challenges as aggressive behavior and attention deficit disorder, and create a sense of belonging. This book recognizes the challenges adopting older children presents and is valuable in helping identify challenges that might otherwise go unnoticed. It also provides suggestions and solutions regarding how to deal with certain behaviors. **List Price- \$19.95 - AFTH price \$15.00**



Touched by An Angel's Tear *by L. Steven Santora* - This book transforms what is typically understood as a bureaucratic matching process, into one driven by human kindness and a bit of magic. Hanna, the angel hovers close and whispers in the nannies ears directing them to match certain babies with certain families, facilitating perfect adoption matches. A very beautifully illustrated and written story by one of AFTH's very own adoptive parents! **List Price \$15.95 AFTH price \$14.00**

Special Needs Advocacy Resource Book: What You Can Do Now to Advocate for Your Exceptional Child's Education *by Rich Weinfeld & Michelle Davis*

This is a unique handbook that teaches parents how to work with schools to achieve optimal learning situations and accommodations for their child's needs. From IEPs and 504 Plans to IDEA and NCLB, navigating today's school system can be difficult. Topics covered in this handy guide include how to gather accurate information about a child's education, navigating school meetings, understanding education law, best practices in the classroom, working effectively with parents and school systems, educational options beyond the standard, and more. **List Price \$19.95 AFTH price \$ 14.00**



Handbook for Pediatric Health Problems at Home and on the Road *by Dr. Christopher S. Ryder*

This comprehensive guide will be invaluable to both new parents and those with experience. The advice covers common childhood symptoms and illnesses encountered both at home and while traveling. Dr. Christopher Ryder is a pediatrician with over 25 years experience caring for children. He has studied and practiced medicine in the USA, England, and South Africa. He has traveled extensively with his wife and son and brings firsthand knowledge about the trials and joys of traveling with children. **List Price \$15.00 AFTH price \$ 10.00**

All reviewed books are available in our branch offices, online, or by calling (610) 642-7200.

AFTH Program Updates

This section has been revised to now provide updates on all of our programs including Domestic and Heartbeats. As we no longer have families in-process for our international programs, those updates will be removed from this section. We encourage families in-process to join the listserves for more regular updates on their program.

HEARTBEATS - For more information on our new Embryo Placement Program call 1-888-330-3362 or visit www.afth.org/heartbeats.

DOMESTIC - We are proud to announce that our domestic placements are at an all time high! As we look at the stats from 2008, you can see our social workers hard work paid off as we finished up the year with 35 more domestic placements than in 2007. With a total of 166 domestic placements in 2008, it is our highest placement number since AFTH was founded in 1985. As we begin a new year, we are hopeful that 2009 will follow suit.

AFTH continues to do outreach and advertising to reach birthmothers. We sent out postcards to all local hospitals reminding them we are available and have waiting families for emergency placements - even during the holidays.

Webinars focusing on the African-American Domestic Program are held each month and we are continuing to seek families for this program.

RUSSIA - AFTH's Russia Partnering Program continues to run well. During the fall, four families brought children home from Moscow, and two families brought children home from St. Petersburg. Eight other families are awaiting invitations to travel to Russia, either to meet the child each hopes to adopt, or to adopt their child in Court. Families continue to receive referrals within a few months of completion of paperwork. Referrals are of boys and girls, as young as 12-36 months and up to 5 years of age.

In December, AFTH enjoyed a visit from our Russia "Partners," Justin and Phyllis Hercovici of Children of the World Adoption Agency (CWAA). Twelve families

in the Program that have not yet traveled to Russia had the opportunity to meet Justin and Phyllis at AFTH's Wynnewood Office, and they were able to learn more about the process of traveling to Russia to adopt a child. Thanks to Justin and Phyllis for coming!

UKRAINE - Our Ukraine program is open for married couples who are open to older or special needs children. AFTH currently has a family in process for third adoption. Questions regarding this program can be directed to Terry Petrone at TerryP@afth.org.

CHINA - Our families with the log in date of 2/16/06 received their China referrals in 10/08. The children referred were from the Jiangxi and Guangxi provinces. Eight families traveled to Jiangxi to pick up their daughters on 12/12/08 and the Guangxi families traveled on 12/15/08. AFTH has no other families with a 2/06 log in date. As of this writing families with Log In Dates through 2/23/06 have received their referrals and the CCAA has reviewed dossiers with Log In Dates through 2/28/07.

It is important that all waiting families are aware of the fact that as of 1/1/09 ALL Chinese orphanage donations will be \$5,100 which is an increase of \$2,100 from the current amount of \$3,000.

GUATEMALA - Only 5 more cases to finish up!! In November, 5 families brought their children home.

KAZAKHSTAN - As of September 2008, the government of Kazakhstan will only accept dossiers through Hague accredited agencies. As a result of this new regulation, AFTH has transferred our program to WACAP. Families who submitted dossiers prior to July



Program Updates Cont'd

2008, will continue to be processed through AFTH. Seven families traveled to Kazakhstan in the last 3 months of 2008, and it is anticipated that the remaining families on the waiting list will travel within the first six months of 2009. Questions regarding Kazakhstan program can be directed to Terry Petrone at TerryP@afth.org.

VIETNAM - Adoptions From The Heart is pleased to announce that 8 families have traveled to Vietnam to finalize their adoptions!!!! All of the families had a wonderful time in Vietnam learning about the culture and bonding with their children. Congratulations to Dennis and Marcy, Justin and Pamela, Todd and Katie, Peter, Lisa, and Richard and Kristi on the completion of your adoptions. Our thoughts are with you as you are experiencing the joys of parenthood and getting to know your children. There is one more family left to travel and we are hopeful that travel is eminent.

The dossiers have been returned by the Department of International Adoption. Adoptive families who would like to have their dossiers returned should contact their social worker to make arrangements. While Adoptions From The Heart and the rest of the adoption community was hopeful that talks for a new Memorandum of

Understanding would begin, to date there has been no negotiations for a Memorandum of Understanding. JCICS continues to advocate on behalf of the children and adoptive families involved in this suspension of intercountry adoptions and continue to hope for a positive outcome.

Email Communication: Keeping You Informed

Adoptions From The Heart is moving towards an increase in email communication as a way of keeping AFTH families in the loop of upcoming activities and events. We are sending families our newsletter and invitations to holiday parties and reminders about picnics all by means of email and we don't want you to miss out because we can't reach you.

If you have had a change in your email address or have never provided us with one as a means of contacting you, we encourage you to send us your email address(es) so we can include you on our list of families who want to stay informed about activities and events happening in their area. Send an email with your full name and your email address to adoption@afth.org or contact your local office.

Got E-mail?

To sign-up for monthly adoption program updates, 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

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 and receive updates information about the program, send an email with the word "subscribe" in the subject line to the email address below:

DOMESTIC - AFTHopenadoption-subscribe@yahoogroups.com



Arms Wide Open, Squeezing Tightly

By Gretchen Boger-O'Bryan

During one evening just before the holidays, I detoured from my To-Do List for some "me-time" to browse some of my favorite adoption blogs. While it was meant to be a carefree diversion, I soon could taste the salt of my tears.

I was reading a post from a birthmother who placed her daughter for adoption five years ago but remains active with visits, letters, emails and phone calls. It was the eve of her daughter's fifth birthday and she wrote about that night five years earlier. The baby inside her tossed and turned, having "a party" in her belly: "I did not know, however, that it was her going away party." She continued, "It was the last day that I was ever her only mother. It was the last day that she was truly mine."



Her words touched me in a way I wasn't prepared for. I cried for her pain, for her loss. And, I soon realized, for my daughter, too.

I think of Maeve's first mother, B., every day. It's impossible not to, even in the seemingly mundane moments of my family life: At 4 a.m., when Maeve's cool little hand touches my warm leg as she hoists herself high into our bed, having just pitter-patted into our bedroom. She tucks her legs under the tangle of blankets, nestles in alongside me and begins a conversation, pulling me from my sleep: *Can I ride my tricycle now? Is the sun still in its nest? Is the moon tired from the night? Do girls have mustaches ... can I have a pink one?*



Despite this burst of inquisitive imagination, the rhythm of her breathing soon finds a pattern I know as if it were my own. As she drifts back to sleep, I smile, a reflex gushing with thankfulness for this sunshine in my life. Still, I soon feel a cloud roll in and I am pulled awake again, thinking of her other mother. A mother whose arms are empty, a mother not enjoying this pre-dawn cuddle.

The depth of my joy in being Maeve's mom is matched only by a unique sadness. Motherhood's myriad emotions and experiences create a love so raw that it alone powers the fierce instinct to protect and nurture, to ensure our children are whole and happy. Yet as Maeve's mom I must contend with the fact that my presence in her life is because someone else, a part of her, is missing.

My tears from that blogger's post, I realized, were not just for her pain on the eve of her daughter's birthday, but for the role she continues to play in her daughter's life, and the hope we continue to hold out for our own arrangement. Three years of contact with Maeve's first mother have seen an ebb and flow. When it flows, I drink it in for the daughter that connects us; during the quiet, I grieve the loss for them both all over again.

But then I must remind myself that the foundation to this relationship is built through small steps and simple moments. It's not something I can hurry along. So I will wait, arms outstretched. Except, of course, during those early morning cuddles.

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



Drastic Decline in International Adoptions

The decline in international adoption has been taking a toll on waiting families and the children waiting for their forever homes.

On November 17, 2008, the State Department published its intercountry adoption statistics which reveals the number of international adoption is at its lowest since 1999. During the last fiscal year (Oct. 2007 through Sept. 2008), international adoptions totaling 17,438 (down by 2,175) is a drop of over 12% from the previous year. Unfortunately, there seems to be no change in sight for the trend in decreasing of international adoptions for the coming year.

China has lost its place as the number one country for international adoptions which it has held since 2000. The decrease in adoptions from China accounted for the biggest decline over the past fiscal year. To be exact, 1,544 less children placed in forever homes in just the last year.

Guatemala replaced China in the number one spot for international adoptions last year but because the country is now closed to intercountry adoption it is not expected to hold the number one position in 2009.

Other countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and India are also seeing a decline in adoptions.

Ethiopia had the largest increase in adoptions last year. And although African countries are not known for numbers of intercountry adoptions, it is one of the few regions viewed as having growth potential for international adoptions. In addition, there are many African-American children available right here in the U.S. and we encourage families to look into this option as a way of expanding their families.

So what does this mean for families wanting to adopt?

Many of those interested in building their family through adoption who were once interested in an international adoption program are now looking more closely at the need for families for children here in the U.S.

What can we suggest?

Because AFTH is one of the largest placing agencies of domestic infants on the east coast, we encourage families now discouraged with the time frames of international adoption to contact us to learn more about our domestic programs. We encourage you to ask questions and dive into a deeper understanding of the domestic process.

Adoption Clubhouse: Fantastic Website for Children Touched by Adoption

The Adoption Clubhouse is an educational website hosted by the National Adoption Center that serves as a virtual gathering place for school-aged children whose lives have been touched by adoption. The Clubhouse provides information and post-adoption support specifically for children, as well as a place to communicate and express themselves amongst peers.

The site targets the needs of children ages 8-13. Through the activities on this site, your child can experience a sense of belonging to an adoption community of peers.

Some of the site features include:

Speak Out - invites children to express and share their creativity, opinions and feelings by posting essays, poetry, and art.

Homework Help - gives the history of adoption and family-related school projects such as "family trees".

Hey Rachel - column written by Rachel, a 15 year old high school student in Pennsylvania who is also deeply connected with adoption. Rachel posts stories of her own experiences with adoption, as well as responds to emails she receives from the website readers directly.

Kids Message Board- your child can communicate with other kids who were adopted.

Visit the Clubhouse at www.adoptionclubhouse.org and introduce your children to this valuable and supportive online community specifically designed for them to be able to connect with other children their age who have been touched by adoption.

We hope your family had a wonderful holiday season and we wish you lots of happiness as we begin a new year!

AFTH Staff

ADOPTION EXPO 2009

Presented by:
Monmouth/Ocean County Adoptive Families
Support Group, LLC

Saturday, March 21, 2009
Noon-6:00pm

St. Mary's Church Spiritual Center
Colts Neck, NJ

For More Information and to Register:

Visit: www.freewebs.com/mocafsg
or

Contact Email at 848-203-2791 or escali@aol.com

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Do you wish to be removed from future mailings? Are you receiving more than one copy? Are your name and address incorrect? Please let us know by e-mailing adoption@afth.org.



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