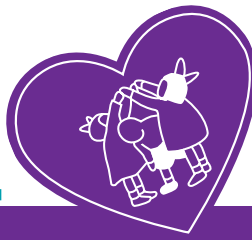


Adoption News



A Quarterly Newsletter from

Adoptions From The Heart

Winter 2010

Message from AFTH Founder and Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Despite the many changes and challenges that have faced the adoption community this past fiscal year, Adoptions From The Heart feels lucky to have remained financially strong and stable. The economic crisis in America and around the world has led many adoption agencies to close; also many families have been experiencing unemployment leading many to put their adoption plans on hold. We have had our share of changes and challenges but the future is looking bright.

The good news is that there are more organizations out there offering adoption grants, and the federal government continues to increase the adoption tax credit. We continue to update information on these organizations on our website and our new blog at afth.wordpress.com.

Our domestic adoption program continues to be very successful. We placed 155 domestic infants this past fiscal year and the number of disruptions families experienced has dropped. Our Heartbeats Assisted Reproduction Program formed an alliance with the well respected Nightlight Christian Adoption's Embryo Adoption Program: Snowflakes, and we look forward to helping families who want to consider this option.

To cut down on overhead, we have merged our Harrisburg and Lancaster offices forming the very successful Central PA office, and our Connecticut office has been very successfully promoting domestic adoption within the state and working with pregnant women to create adoption plans. Unfortunately, due to changes in adoption regulations in West Virginia and the lack of domestic adoptions that take place in this state, we found it necessary to not renew the agency license there.

Changing guidelines in Russia have led to ups and downs in our Russia networking program which we hope will be settled in the second half of this fiscal year.

The agency has also focused a lot of attention on outreach to the African American community hoping to recruit more families so that we can offer African American women more options when choosing a family.

continued on inside page...

* ❄️ In This Issue



- 2 Haiti Devastation
- 2 AFTH Humanitarian Aid
- 3 New AFTH Families!
- 4 Adoption Considerations in Estate Planning
- 5 Legislature
- 6 Book Reviews
- 7 Musings of an Adoptive Mama Column
- 8 Program Updates
- 9 Building Families One Heartbeat at a Time
- 10 Current State of International Adoptions
- 11 AFTH China Program

Insert:

Grace Chang's New Book
AFTH Event Recaps
Support Groups
2010 Spring Ed Series Classes:
Registration Now Open!



Devastation in Haiti

AFTH received hundreds of inquiries from those concerned about the plight of children in Haiti asking how they can start the adoption process and open their home to a child orphaned by the earthquake.

Excerpt from U.S. Department of State announcement:

It can be extremely difficult in such circumstances to determine whether children who appear to be orphans truly are eligible for adoption. Children may be temporarily separated from their parents or other family members during a natural disaster or conflict, and their parents may be looking for them. It is not uncommon in an emergency or unsettled situation for parents to send their children out of the area, or for families to become separated during an evacuation. Even when it can be demonstrated that children have indeed lost their parents or have been abandoned, they are often taken in by other relatives in the extended family. There are many ways in which U.S. citizens can help the children in areas of natural disaster or conflict. For example, individuals who wish to assist can make a financial contribution to a reputable relief or humanitarian organization working in that country. ([link on AFTH homepage for list of charities already working in Haiti](#))

AFTH's Board has established a fund specifically earmarked for the rebuilding of orphanages in Haiti. AFTH has set aside \$5,000 to begin the fund and welcomes additional contributions. To donate, visit www.afth.org and click on the "Donate" button in the lower left hand corner. Be sure to designate the contributions for the "AFTH Haiti Relief Fund." All donations, no matter the amount, will go directly to helping orphans in Haiti.

Visit www.state.gov/haitiquake or www.jcics.org for current updates on the status of conditions in Haiti.

AFTH Humanitarian Aid Efforts

Each year just before the holiday season, AFTH makes a donation of gift cards to birthmothers who have placed through the agency and have been identified by social workers as needing some extra financial assistance - many of whom are parenting other children. This year, AFTH donated a total of \$12,900 to 29 women who had placed children through AFTH's domestic program. The Walmart giftcards help the women purchase groceries, clothing and toys for their family during the holidays. After sending out the giftcards, AFTH often receives notes of thanks. This year, the recipients were truly thankful for the extra financial help as it allowed them to make the holiday special for their children.

AFTH Calendar Sales

Our 2010 AFTH calendars sales were a great success in raising money for our humanitarian aid. This year sales were just short of 600 calendars raising \$3,700 in profits for humanitarian aid.

Anyone interested in making a contribution to AFTH can visit our website www.afth.org and click on "donate." All donations are greatly appreciated. Donors can designate their contribution is to a specific project or to the general fund allotted to the area of greatest need.

Message Cont'd

AFTH is proud to have received the Human Rights Campaigns "All Children, All Families" seal of cultural competency and for supporting LGBT families.

We look forward to this coming fiscal year and to building more beautiful families.

Maxine Chalker

Maxine Chalker, MSW/LSW
Founder & Executive Director



Congratulations to Families Who Have Recently Adopted!



Sons from the USA

Amanda
David & Marcela
John & Athanasia
Scott & Teri
Kevin & Cathy
Francesca
Chad & Robert
Marc & Maria
Howard & Meryl
Robert & Heather
David & Gina
Michelle
Lawrence & Maria
John & Erin
Heather & Carol
William & Estera
Margaret & Malissa
Maureen
Elizabeth

Daughters from the USA

Phil & Michael
Marc & Bonnie
Chris & Steven
Josh & Philippe
David & Johanna
Scott & Kelly
Vincent & Kathy
Jeffrey & Shannon
Kevin & Tracy
David & Tanya
John & Carole
Michael & Amy
Tamara & Merle
Brian & Marybeth
Anthony & Kimberly

Children from Russia

Robert & Brenda (boy & girl)

Daughters from Kazakhstan

William & Melissa



Got E-mail? Stay Informed with AFTH!

A new update listserve has been created for families in our domestic program. Families in-process can subscribe to the listserve by sending a message with the word "SUBSCRIBE" in the subject line to:

DOMESTIC - AFTHDomesticUpdates-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

To connect and share with other AFTH families in the domestic program, we recommend joining the yahoo group created to foster discussion and support. To join, send an email with the word "SUBSCRIBE" in the subject line to the email address below:

DOMESTIC DISCUSSION GROUP- AFTHopenadoption-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Special Estate Planning for Adoptive Families

Posted with Permission By Cheryl N. Smith, Esq

My husband and I recently adopted a baby girl through domestic adoption. She is just the love of our lives and we have thoroughly enjoyed every minute of learning how to be her parents.

In addition to being a new adoptive mother, I am also an estate planning attorney, so after our daughter was born, I sat down to rewrite our Wills. I realized that the fact that we have an adopted child raised a whole host of questions which, even after nine years of practice, took on a whole new meaning to me. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that there are several issues and decisions that parents in adoptive families must be educated about that do not exist in families with only biological children.

Estate Planning in General

Every parent that has a minor child needs to have an estate plan in order to ensure that child is protected and cared for, both personally and financially. An estate plan typically consists of a set of documents that set forth your wishes with respect to your person (i.e., health care decisions), your estate (i.e., financial decisions) and your children (i.e., guardianship decisions).

The documents include a Will, a Trust, a Health Care Proxy, a Durable Power of Attorney, and a Parental Appointment of Guardian for Minors. While a good estate planning attorney can walk you through what each of these documents does, there are additional issues specific to adoption that an adoptive parent must consider when establishing an estate plan. Some of these issues are discussed below.

Choice of Guardian

Choosing a guardian to care for your children in the event you become incapacitated or die is never an easy decision for any parent. But when you are an adoptive parent, it is even more complicated. The person you select to fill this role must be sensitive to the unique circumstances of your family, and it may require some extra thought and direction on your part to make sure your wishes are carried out.

Things to consider include making sure your chosen

guardian has all the facts about your child's adoption so that as appropriate, they can share this information with your child. Also, if you are in an open adoption, will the person you chose as guardian follow through with helping to maintain that open relationship? In my own Will, I specifically state that if a nominated guardian is unwilling or unable to maintain a relationship with our daughter's birth parents, that they respectfully decline to serve as guardian, in which case the nominated alternates will step in.

I often recommend that adoptive parents prepare a letter, to be kept with their estate planning documents, spelling out the circumstances surrounding their child's adoption and giving directions regarding continued contact with the birth family and anything else they feel is important about their child's adoption.

Inheritance Rights

Before your adoption is finalized, your child has no legal rights to your estate. Depending on from where your child is adopted and the type of adoption you have, it can take anywhere from 6 months to a matter of years to finalize an adoption.

As soon as your child is placed with you, assuming it is intended to be a permanent placement, you should consider signing new Wills to include that child. Your Will can include language that treats a child placed for adoption the same as a biological child or a child whose adoption has been finalized.

Trusts

I always recommend that parents of young children leave their assets to a trust for the benefit of their child. It is never advisable to leave assets to a minor, first and foremost because legally they cannot take control of an inheritance, but also because leaving assets to a minor means continued court involvement and oversight until your child reaches the age of majority.

With adoption, and particularly open adoption, the need for a trust is magnified as there may be people other than your immediate family that have a direct interest in your child's life and well being. Keeping assets held for your

child in a Trust under the control of a Trustee that you have chosen (rather than being subject to judicial process) is the best way to protect your child's interests and preserve your assets for their benefit.

Because a Trust is usually not a public document (as opposed to a Will which gets filed with the Probate Court), it also serves as a mechanism to privately set forth special financial considerations for your child, as further discussed below.

Special Financial Considerations

There may be costs associated with raising an adopted child that go beyond making sure they are clothed, sheltered, fed and educated. If your plan for your child includes annual visits with the birth family, or a trip to the country from where they were adopted, this is something you should spell out. If they were adopted internationally, and you want them to have exposure to the culture of their homeland, you should incorporate

provisions in your Trust specifically directing your Trustee to pay for travel, cultural programs, or anything else that might be related.

Supplemental Needs Trusts

If your child has any disabilities or special needs, it will be even more important that you provide for him or her after you are gone. You should consider establishing a supplemental needs trust for your child to ensure that your child meets the financial eligibility rules for private or government assistance programs while preserving the assets you leave to him or her for needs not met by such programs.

Continued Planning

Finally, you should periodically review your estate plan with an experienced estate planning attorney. Changes in the law, your family structure or financial situation are all events that warrant a revisit of your plan as they can have a dramatic impact on your estate plan.

Cheryl N. Smith is an estate planning attorney at the law firm of Bass, Doherty and Finks, P.C. www.bassdoherty.com She is also mom to her beautiful daughter adopted at birth through domestic, open adoption. She can be reached via email at csmith@bassdoherty.com or via telephone at (617)787-8948. Copyright (c) 2009 Cheryl N. Smith



Legislation



DROP IN INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION: The number of children born in other countries and adopted into the United States dropped to a 13-year low in Fiscal 2009 (Oct. 1, 2008 through Sept. 30, 2009), according to data released by the State Department on Dec. 17. The total number of inter-country adoptions in FY09 fell to 12,753, the lowest level since 1996, and significantly down from a historic high of 22,990 in 2004.

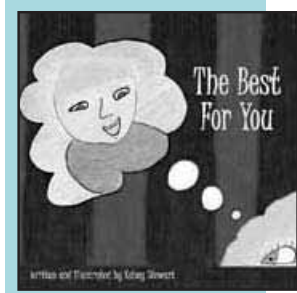
HIV TRAVEL BAN LIFTED: President Obama lifted the ban on travel into the U.S. by HIV positive individuals. This eliminates the need for families adopting HIV positive children internationally from having to file a waiver significantly reducing the time a child before a child can travel.

CDC RECOMMENDATIONS: The CDC recommends hepatitis A immunization to those expecting close contact with adoptees arriving from countries where hepatitis A is prevalent, including China, Russia and Ethiopia.

U.S. HOUSE BILL WOULD COERCE STATES TO ALLOW ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE BY SAME SEX PARENTS : October 15, 2009, the House introduced a bill proposing federal-level punishment for states that ban homosexual couples and non-married individuals from adopting children. The law would have an impact on Virginia, Utah, Florida, Arkansas, Nebraska and Mississippi, which either explicitly restrict adoption to heterosexual couples, or restrict it to married couples while not recognizing same-sex "marriage." The bill recommends that states allowing foster care placements only into married heterosexual households be deprived of federal child welfare funds. It also authorizes those who claim their bid for adoption was compromised by such factors to sue in a federal court. Major homosexual lobbies such as the Human Rights Commission have not commented on the bill.

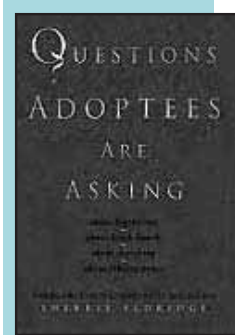
Book Reviews

THE BEST FOR YOU by Kelsey Stewart -



Written by a birth mother, this book offers a perspective that no other children's adoption book offers. The view of the birth mother. This heart warming book is aimed to help children and parents understand what one birth mother was thinking.

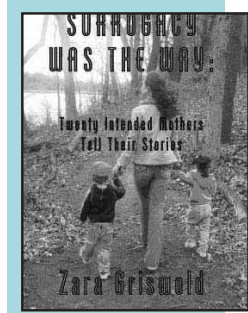
Written in her perspective, she tells her child the reasons why she chose adoption for her baby. A great conversation starter for parents, or companion book for adopted children to discuss with other children, this is a unique journey for any child of any age. **AFTH price \$12.00**



QUESTIONS ADOPTEES ARE ASKING...ABOUT BEGINNINGS...ABOUT SEARCHING...ABOUT FINDING PEACE by Sherrie Eldridge - This is an updated version of Ms. Eldridges book, *20 Life Transforming Choices Adoptees Need to Make*.

This book includes interviews with more than seventy adoptees to bring their questions to light, find the answers, and create connection among adult adoptees. An insightful book. **AFTH price \$13.00**

SURROGACY WAS THE WAY: TWENTY INTENDED MOTHERS TELL THEIR STORIES



This book takes a look at the intended parents perspective of surrogacy and is very helpful for both surrogates and intended parents going through surrogacy. It looks at the details that people do not

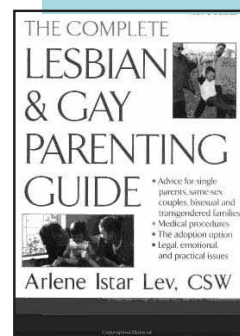
want to talk about. Surrogacy is a beautiful way to achieve pregnancy, but there is not a resource for intended parents on what to expect. Anyone who is

involved in gestational surrogacy, whether you are the intended parents, the surrogate, or family members, should read this book. **AFTH Price \$14.00**

THE COMPLETE LESBIAN AND GAY PARENTING GUIDE

by Arlene Istar Lev -

This book is one of the most inclusive LGBT parenting manuals out there, highly recommended for LGBT parents and anyone thinking about starting a family. It is an engaging read, full of funny stories and information. It is

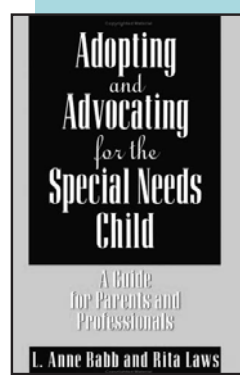


also one of the only books that is truly inclusive of bisexual, transgender and gender-variant families. **AFTH \$17.00**

ADOPTING AND ADVOCATING FOR THE SPECIAL NEEDS CHILD

by Rita Law and L. Anne Babb -

Although definitions vary special needs children include those with mental, physical, and emotional disabilities and those with problems due to their age, sibling status, race, and such risk factors as exposure to drugs in utero.

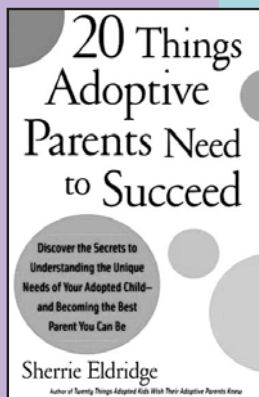


For parents interested in a special needs child and just beginning the adoption process, this book answers questions you may never have known to ask while clarifying the mysteries of the adoption system. Babb and Law clearly explain the most important information and most critical emotional issues which pre-adoptive parents need to consider. **AFTH price \$25.00**



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

20 THINGS ADOPTIVE PARENTS NEED TO SUCCEED by Sherry Eldridge - Speaking from



her own experience as an adoptee and an expert in the field of adoption, Eldridge shares proven strategies and the moving narratives of nearly one hundred adoptive families, helping parents gain a deeper understanding of what is normal, both for their children and themselves. By first strengthening yourself as a parent, you'll be able to truly listen to your child, and to connect with him or her on every level, by opening the channels of communication and keeping them open forever. Discover how to:

- o be confident that your role in your child's life is vital and irreplaceable
- o pass on the legacy of healthy self-care by assessing and regulating your stress
- o communicate unconditional love to your child
- o talk candidly with your child about her adoption and her birth family
- o teach your family how to respond positively to insensitive remarks about adoption
- o connect with other adoptive families-and build a support network

AFTH price \$12.00

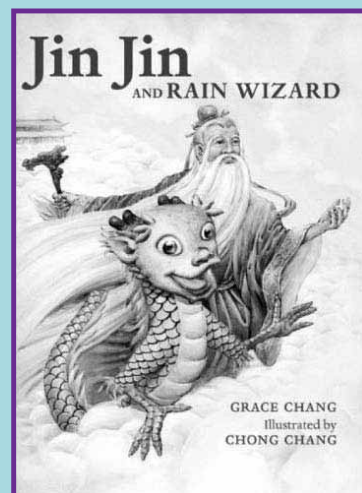


JIN JIN AND THE RAIN WIZARD by Grace Chang

AFTH is proud to announce our long time China Facilitator, Grace Chang, has published her second book about Jin Jin the Dragon. *Jin Jin and the Rain Wizard* introduces readers to yet another fascinating aspect of Chinese culture. At the end of the book, two additional pages describe the history of rice and the legend of Rain Wizard. A limited number of signed copies are available through our website. Select the Jin Jin book marked "Signed Copy" from our online book store. AFTH price \$14.00

Grace was born in Beijing into a family of famous entertainers. As a young girl, Grace learned magic from her grandfather in the courtyards of the Forbidden City. She also sat with her father as he wrote, while dreaming of becoming a writer herself one day. Today Grace is a multi-talented performer, illusionist, and storyteller and has helped hundreds of families adopt from China.

Chong Chang, Grace Chang's brother, has been drawing since the age of five. He graduated from Tiansen Art School and lives in China, where he works in graphic design. Because of the time difference between Brooklyn and China, Grace and Chong frequently exchange ideas in the middle of the night over the phone.



One morning, as Jin Jin leads his young friends in their early morning Tai Chi, he discovers that he has lost his magical water-breathing power.

Jin Jin consults his mentors, wise Old Turtle and Crane, who finally tease out the truth from him. While at the rice festival the day before - stuffing himself with his favorite rice delicacies – Jin Jin ended up throwing away his last dish of rice. And rice is more precious than gold! Old Turtle and Crane give Jin Jin a magic gourd, then lead him to an ancient archway, through which Jin Jin travels far back in time.

On a quest to find Rain Wizard, the only one who can help the starving farmers who live in a long-ago, drought-parched land, Jin Jin learns how important rice is. Will Jin Jin get back his water-breathing power?

Allentown Holiday Open House

The Allentown Office of Adoptions From The Heart held their holiday open house on December 1, 2009. It was a great evening with a year of conversation to catch up on, goodies to share, and lots of new friendships made. Kids of all ages played, colored, danced and ate plenty of cookies! It was a great time to meet the new faces of the Allentown Office. Helene, the new social worker at the Allentown Office, got to officially meet and greet families along with District Supervisor Marilyn Rich. A great time was had by all. Thank you to all who came out in the cold to celebrate adoption and the holidays.



Central PA Holiday Open House

Central PA held its annual cookie exchange and open house on December 16th with more than 25

adults and children in attendance. It was wonderful to see all the families from international and domestic programs and we hope to see everyone at the picnic.

Connecticut Holiday Party

A good time was had by all at our Annual Holiday Party on Saturday, December 5th! We had over 60 families in attendance. Santa paid us a visit and Cheryl Bisailon of Granite Valley Photography donated her time to take pictures with Santa. The Glastonbury High School Key Club provided us with talented Artists for Face Painting. We look forward to seeing everyone again next year!



Virginia Holiday Party

We had 99 in attendance in spite of threats of snow from the north and the usual downpours going on in Tidewater. We had several birthparents visiting with their children and adoptive families along with families who adopted internationally. Santa arrived with books and toys for the children. It was a success in all aspects!

AFTH Support Groups

CENTRAL PA

HARRISBURG - All Waiting Families support groups are held on the 3rd Thursday of each month at the Landis Building at the Polyclinic.

- Thursday, February 18 beginning at 7pm
- Thursday, March 18 beginning at 7pm
- Thursday, April 15 beginning at 7pm

LANCASTER - Domestic Family Support Group

- Monday, February 18 beginning at 7pm

Call (717) 399-7766 or (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 Club - series of monthly gatherings for birthmothers to come together in support.

Call (757) 361-0008 for 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.

Waiting family support groups are held for waiting families to come together in support.

- Wednesday, March 24 beginning at 7pm

Call (856) 665-5655 to RSVP by the Friday before. Pre-Registration Required for Meetings.

DELAWARE

Adoptive parent support groups are held to bring AFTH waiting families together.

- Tuesday, February 9 beginning at 6pm

Call (302) 658-8883 for information.

ALLENTOWN

Waiting Families Support Group

- Monday, April 19 beginning at 7pm

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



Adoption Education Spring 2010 Series

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



♥Cherry Hill, NJ

Post-Adoption Concerns

A panel of adoptive parents will discuss common post-placement issues including attachment and bonding, talking to family and friends about adoption, talking to your child about adoption and developing positive relationships with their birth parents.

Wednesday, April 21, 2010

7:00-9:00 PM

\$5/person

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

♥Allentown, PA

Healthy Snacks to Make with Your Kids

We will be learning how to make healthy, creative snacks that you can make with your children. What an easy and simple way to incorporate and disguise those fruits and veggies! Join us at 7:00 pm with your kids. Healthy eating and snacking too - the best part for kids!

Monday, May 17, 2010

7:00-9:00 PM

\$10 per family

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

♥Wilmington, DE

Q & A Panel of Adoptive Parents

Families with different birth parent situations discuss their placement, future contact, openness agreement and much more.

Saturday, May 22, 2010

11:00AM - 1:00 PM

\$5/person

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



Come GROW with us!

Reserve Your Space - Register Online Today!

www.afth.org/community

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!

www.afth.org/community

Classes are \$5/person unless noted.

# Attending	Cost	Topic/Location
		<u>Q & A Panel of Adoptive Parents</u> Wilmington, DE
♥		<u>Caring for Infants & Older Babies: What</u> <u>New Adoptive Parents Need to Know</u> Harrisburg, PA (Central PA Office)
♥		<u>Healthy Snacks</u> Allentown, PA
		<u>Post-Adoption Concerns</u> Cherry Hill, NJ
		<u>Talking About 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®

♥ 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 adjustment to parenthood, and more. This class is recommended for both domestic and international families. Bring your questions.

Wednesday, April 14, 2010

7:00-9:00PM

\$20/person or \$35/couple

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

♥ Chesapeake, VA

Talking to Your Child About Adoption: Panel of Adoptive Parents

The path to effective communication about adoption begins in infancy. Join a panel made up of adoptive parents and professionals to listen, share, and to learn effective communication with children about the varied facets of adoption including transracial and birth siblings to mention a few. This is a beneficial class for domestic and international adoptive parents alike.

Saturday, March 27, 2010

11:00AM-12:30 PM

\$5/person

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





Board Books to Bikes

By Gretchen Boger-O'Bryan

There's a lot going on in my household these days. In fact, as we prepare to close on the sale of our home, I'm realizing just how much has gone on in our household.

When Thom and I bought the house, it was an old place with good bones. Eyeing its potential, we reveled in its charm and old-house details, convinced it just needed some paint and spackle. A couple cases of spackle, myriad repairs and countless gallons of paint later, it did become a home.

With that start, the house already was loaded with sentiment. But then it became the first place in which I rocked my child to sleep, the spot where I began to learn the daunting ropes of motherhood.

Bittersweet is an understatement.

It's where my mom and sister came just hours after we received "the call" to help pack for the hospital. It's the crackle of the stone driveway I hear each time I remember bringing Maeve home, our extended families standing there waiting to meet her.

In our living room she toddled her first steps, right into my sister's welcoming arms.

For her first birthday, we celebrated in the backyard: our closest friends and family, countless balloons, food galore, bright tablecloths, a packed piñata, and multiple cakes.

We gather on the couch to read - first baby board books, now stacks of picture books - in front of a crackling fire.

Maeve chases cats Kate and Ella around and under and over and up and down the house, once a crawling baby

and now a young girl, determined to cement a friendship.

Sitting in the shadows of the tree each Christmas morning, we've watched Maeve's excitement and understanding grow. This year, a shiny new bike greeted her as she came downstairs.

We've hurried up those same stairs on movie night to pick the evening's entertainment.

She's moved from sweet nursery with mosquito netting and soft teddy bear to sassy big-girl room with play tent and carefully arranged dolls.

Maeve took her first bite of corn-on-the-cob - now her favorite vegetable - on the bright red bench in our breakfast nook. In that same spot, we now practice writing her name and numbers.

The screech of her bench dragging across bathroom tile to stop just in front of the sink - the required preface to tooth-paste-squeezing (not so much, Maeve!), tooth-brushing (a little longer, Maeve!) and vitamin-choosing (any one of them will do, Maeve!) - will soon be just a memory.

When we all cuddle in our bed, her foot jutting into my side or her head bumping into Thom's, we ask how she got so big. She giggles and as if she's revealing a secret, tells us she just can't help it, she has to grow into "a dult" like us. Then we tell her again how at just a few days old, she lay between us in this very bed and we stared with amazement, watching her every move.

Since the house went on the market, I've been stumbling around these and so many other memories, trying to make sense of leaving it all behind.

Then my mother, in an oh-so-motherly tone, set me straight: "Gretchen, when you get down to it, a house is just a bunch of wood and nails. It's you and your family that make up all those moments. That's what makes wood and nails a home."

Enough said. So I'll keep packing, shed a few more tears and then let go, knowing we're starting a new chapter in the book that is our family. There are new memories to create, dreams to make a reality - perhaps a sibling for Maeve - and family stories not yet written.

Deep breath, Gretchen, deep breath. Then off to the next pile of wood and nails.

Gretchen Boger-O'Bryan was placed with her daughter in July 2005 through Adoptions From The Heart. An editor and freelance writer, she has an adoption and first-time parenthood blog at www.mamagigi.wordpress.com. Reach her at mamagigi@comcast.net.



AFTH Program Updates



HEARTBEATS - Both of the Heartbeats Programs are seeing an increase in interest and AFTH is hoping to see some of the families enrolled in the programs home with their babies by the end of the year.

The Embryo Placement Program has been running successfully. The families in process are excited and eager to expand their family through embryo placement. We will share more about their progress in future updates. Webinars specific to the Embryo Placement Program will continue to be held monthly. To learn more, register for the webinar via the online event calendar at www.afth.org. An in-person information meeting about the Embryo Placement Program is being held on February 23rd at 7:00pm at the AFTH Wynnewood Office in Pennsylvania, for those of you who feel more comfortable talking with the program coordinator face to face. (see [page 9 for an article with more about this program](#))

The India Surrogacy Heartbeat Program has also seen growing interest. The first online webinar for this program was held in January with several interested families in attendance and we are expecting our first applications to this program very soon.

(see [page 9 for an article with more about this program](#))

To learn more information about either our Embryo Placement Program or the India Surrogacy Program, visit us at www.afth.org/heartbeats.



DOMESTIC - The African-American Domestic Program had a successful 2009. We placed 37 African-American infants and 1 toddler and 34 bi-racial infants, which is 7 more than we placed in 2008. We have had numerous intakes after the first of the year and have been talking to many new families on the phone about this program. Several families are in process of completing their home studies and hope to be in the profile book within the next few months. Advertising continues to stress the need we have for adoptive parent(s) open to adopting full African-American infants as the program is open to families living anywhere in the U.S.

The Caucasian Program was also very successful in 2009 with 91 children placed with adoptive families. For our waiting families, take heart in knowing that adoption does work and hopefully this will be your year.

The wait can be difficult and AFTH understands families want to maximize their opportunities to be shown to potential birthparents. AFTH is responding to feedback provided by birthparents by implementing some of their suggestions.

In addition to encouraging families to review their keys, AFTH is suggesting that families to create longer profiles. Social workers report that pregnant women looking to make an adoption plan for their child find that being presented with longer profiles has been very helpful to them when choosing a family. If you have not yet increased your profile to up to 5 pages, this might be the perfect time to do so with the winter weather keeping everyone inside.

AFTH has also seen an increase in women contacting us interested in a families shown on our website. AFTH has expanded the profiles on our website to include a photo gallery of the family (up to 5 photos), and now the family's full profile is also linked in. An immediate, positive response has been seen from those looking to make an adoption plan as a direct result of these changes and we encourage families to take full advantage of these new opportunities to possibly increase their exposure.

Building Families, One Heartbeat at a Time

Why an India Surrogacy Program?

In researching and developing the Heartbeats Embryo Placement Program, we found surrogacy was becoming a very popular family building option and that no home study is required of parents intending to use surrogacy to build their families. AFTH has seen the negative repercussions when education was not a required piece for adoptive parents and believes not requiring education for intended parents building a family through surrogacy is making the same mistake.

Intended families, while being biologically connected to the child, still experience aspects encountered by those adopting internationally: staying in another country and jumping through immigration hoops. The education course is designed to help prepare intended parents for the process and how to talk to friends and family about surrogacy, as well as, explain how to answer their child's questions about surrogacy. The education course helps families to combat the negative reactions and myths surrounding international surrogacy by empowering them with the resources, emotional support, and information needed when creating a family through international surrogacy.

Recently, many news stories have highlighted challenges and obstacles facing surrogacy in the U.S. causing more intended parents to look into international surrogacy programs. Interest in the Heartbeats India Surrogacy Program has increased because it is much less expensive than surrogacy in the U.S. and the Indian laws are more surrogacy friendly and clearly define the surrogate as having no legal rights to the child posing less risks for the intended parents.

Several inquiring intended parents already have embryos created through infertility treatments. These couples only need to make one trip to India for their child's birth, eliminating the initial trip to make a donation, thus decreasing the overall cost of the program. Additionally, LGBT families whose choices are limited and have had a harder time adopting see this program as a great option.

As is the case with all programs, Surrogacy in India is not ideal for everyone but by offering this program, AFTH is providing yet another opportunity for some intended parents to finally realize their life-long dream of becoming a family.

Embryo Placement Program Interest

AFTH has received a growing number of intended parents contacting AFTH to learn more about embryo placement. Program Coordinator Jeanne Heinemann reports many intended parents do not even know it may be a family building option for them until they hear about embryo placement in the news or review the Heartbeats section on the AFTH website.

Couples are pleasantly surprised to hear the current wait to be matched with an embryo donor is between 2-4 months, depending on the criteria the family is looking for, after completing the paperwork. Other common questions relate to the openness aspect between the donor and recipient families and choosing a clinic for the medical procedure whether is it the intended parents own clinic or being referral to one by AFTH.

Intended parents interested in a family building program that enables couples, in which the woman is able to carry a child to term, to experience pregnancy and prenatal bonding with their child at a cost much less than many other infertility procedures, are encouraged join us for a free educational opportunity to learn more about the program and ask Jeanne any questions they might have.



Heartbeats

ASSISTED REPRODUCTION PROGRAM

LEARN ABOUT AFTH'S HEARTBEATS PROGRAMS

- ♥ EMBRYO PLACEMENT PROGRAM
- ♥ SURROGACY IN INDIA

hosting in-person meeting & monthly webinars

**Embryo Placement Program
February 23rd at 7pm in Wynnewood, PA**

**Surrogacy in India Online Webinar
March 23rd at 7pm**

**Visit our online calendar of events to
register: www.afth.org**

The Current State of International Adoptions

Over the past few years international adoption has, sadly, become less of an option for families seeking to provide permanency for orphaned children. The number of children adopted from foreign countries by Americans decreased for the fifth consecutive year in 2009. In total, international adoptions by Americans have dropped from nearly 23,000 in 2005, to under 13,000 in 2009. Furthermore, the rate of decrease over the past twelve months was unprecedented, with numbers falling by nearly 30 percent. And, projections are for the total figure to potentially fall below 10,000 in 2010.

The causes of this decline are several. Some countries have independently taken steps to reduce the numbers of their children being adopted by foreigners. (Most notably, adoptions from China to the U.S. numbered nearly 8,000 in 2005, compared with 3,000 in 2009.) Surely, the economic recession has also impacted families' decisions to presently seek to grow their families, via adoption or otherwise. The most significant reason, however, for the drastic decrease in international adoptions over the past year would seem to be the Hague Convention, to which the United States became party on April 1, 2008.

The Hague Convention is an international treaty dating back to 1993. It seeks to set uniform inter-country procedures that protect the rights of children, birthparents, and adoptive parents, while preventing abuses. Recently, the Convention was in the news when its rules were invoked in helping a New Jersey resident to be allowed to bring his son back to the United States from Brazil.

Worldwide, there are approximately 75 member countries of the Convention, many of which have experienced a significant decrease in international adoptions as the Hague Treaty has gone into effect. So, the rapid decline of international adoption to the United States following the Convention going into effect here cannot be seen as surprising but, rather, as part of a global phenomenon.

The Hague Convention principally sets forth standards that increase protections for all members of the adoption triad. In practice, however, it also creates expectations for infrastructures that many third-world governments have been hard-pressed to meet. This has either directly or indirectly led to the United States no longer permitting its citizens to seek to adopt from countries including

Guatemala, Vietnam, and Cambodia. Additionally, the Hague Treaty has created a system in which adoption processes have become substantially more complicated, lengthy, and costly for prospective adoptive parents.

Unfortunately, the decline of international adoption bears little connection to the plight of millions of orphans globally in need of loving families. While none should argue with the goal of preventing abuse, the removal of the opportunity of adoption for so many children, without offering family-based permanency alternatives for them, seems to have created a tragic realization of the saying "throwing the baby out with the bathwater."

Naturally, adoption agencies in the U.S. (and abroad) have been impacted by the decrease in international adoptions. Limitations on work in foreign countries have curtailed agencies' abilities to continue providing humanitarian aid at former levels. Roughly 100 U.S. adoption agencies have closed in the past two years, while others have needed to restructure in order to continue their work. For Adoptions From The Heart, one result of the changing landscape of adoption has been a continued focus on domestic adoptions, with the number of such placements via AFTH having increased over the past two years.

AFTH's international adoption services now focus upon providing Home Studies, Post-Adoption/Placement Services, Parent Training, and International/Immigration Assistance. The agency has a wealth of experience in these areas, so families in need of such services are encouraged to apply. In this manner, AFTH continues to work with hundreds of families pursuing adoptions from countries such as China, Russia, Ethiopia, and elsewhere.

Having placed more than 3,000 children from abroad with loving adoptive families over the years, AFTH remains committed to the cause of international adoption. As such, the agency will continue to join in advocacy with the international adoption community, with hope of a future time when international adoption can once again become a more viable option for an increasing number of children in need of "forever families."

Questions regarding AFTH's international adoption services can be directed to Sam Wojnilower at SamW@afth.org or by phoning 610-642-7200.

China Program: Beginning and End

After its inception in 1985 as a domestic adoption agency focusing on open adoption, AFTH expanded its services to begin offering international adoption programs.

China Program Development

Grace Chang and her husband Stuart had facilitated a few Chinese adoptions with assistance from Grace's family in Beijing. At that time, adoptive parents were not required to use a licensed adoption agency to adopt from China. Grace and Stuart saw the demand for adoptive parents growing and began searching for an adoption agency with which to build a China Program. A social worker in New York had worked with AFTH and recommended us to Grace and Stuart. They visited the main office, which was in Ardmore, PA at the time, to meet and develop a program together. The plan was for Grace and Stuart, in conjunction with AFTH, to facilitate the program in the U.S. and Grace's family in Beijing would escort the families through the adoption process in China. And in 1993, the AFTH China Program was born paving the way for the many other AFTH international programs.

Program Beginning and Peak

For the first three years, Grace, Stuart and Roberta Evantash, AFTH's China Program Coordinator, traveled between AFTH branch offices to host free information meetings for those interested in learning more about the China Program. Families who had adopted through the AFTH China Program graciously traveled from office to office for these meetings to share their experiences until we had a family who had completed the China Program in each branch office. Roberta traveled to China in the early 90's and accompanied a family who was adopting. She went back seven years later and the country was

booming, she found it to be so different from her first visit. The China Program continued to grow and develop. Eventually Grace's brother Der and his wife Helen became our in-country facilitators escorting the families in China. AFTH families adored them and came home with stories about how wonderful and helpful they were. AFTH began sending larger travel groups, sometimes having 30 to 35 families traveling per month. This continued until late 2006 when news of a slowdown began to surface. Little did anyone imagine the scope of the slow down. In 2004, 230 families traveled to China and returned home with their children as compared to 2009 in which AFTH received only one month of referrals and only 13 families traveled to China. At the peak of the program, families were returning home with children in as little as 6 months upon completing the required paperwork. The wait for families has continued to increase and is now upwards of 7-8 years except for families open to adopting children with special needs.

Final Chapter

At the end of September 2009, the China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA) announced all non-Hague accredited agencies were required to transfer their cases to Hague accredited agencies by December 1, 2009. This marked the final chapter for the AFTH China Program. It was sad to see the program end after 17 years of operation. AFTH and Roberta, the Program Coordinator from beginning to end, look back proudly at being instrumental in helping to make such a positive change in the lives of adoptive couples and the more than 2,000 Chinese infants who were placed with their forever families through the AFTH China Program.





Adoptions From The Heart®

30-31 Hampstead Circle
Wynnewood, PA 19096

NON-PROFIT
ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT # 36
ARDMORE, PA



Adoption News is a publication of Adoptions From The Heart, a private, non-profit, licensed agency.

Upcoming AFTH Summer Picnics

Look for more details in the spring newsletter and online at www.afth.org.

22nd Annual Agency Picnic

June 6, 2010 from 11am-2pm
Flourtown Picnic Area
in Fort Washington, PA

Virginia Annual Picnic

June 12, 2010 from 2:30-5:30
Chesapeake City Park Fun Forest
in Chesapeake, VA

Connecticut Annual Adoption Picnic

June 27, 2010 from 11am-4pm,
Quassy Amusement Park
in Middlebury, CT

10th Annual Pittsburgh Picnic

August 6, 2010 beginning at 10am
Idlewild Park in Ligonier, PA

WYNNEWOOD OFFICE
30-31 Hampstead Circle
Wynnewood, PA 19096
610.642.7200

ALLENTOWN OFFICE
2212 Union Blvd
Allentown, PA 18109
610.432.2384

CENTRAL PA OFFICE
1525 Oregon Pike, Suite 402
Lancaster, PA 17601
717.399.7766
717.232.1787

PITTSBURGH OFFICE
1225 South Main St., Suite 207
Greensburg, PA 15601
724.853.6533

NEW JERSEY OFFICE
451 Woodland Avenue
Cherry Hill, NJ 08002
856.665.5655
732.335.8883

DELAWARE OFFICE
18-A Trolley Square
Wilmington, DE 19806
302.658.8883

VIRGINIA OFFICE
1407 Stephanie Way, Suite H
Chesapeake, VA 23320
757.361.0008
804.218.2569

NEW YORK
1.800-355-5500

CONNECTICUT OFFICE
2389 Main Street
Glastonbury, CT 06033
860.657.2626

TOLL FREE NUMBER
1.800.355.5500

VISIT OUR WEBSITE:
www.afth.org

Is Our Mailing List Current?

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.