



Adoptions Together

Celebrating 16 years of service to children

Fall 2006

conversation

An update from Adoptions Together

Adoption...Self Reflections how adoption changed my life by Rita McEleny

Unlike most people, I can honestly say I remember the exact moment that I was born: the moment my social worker turned off her car and we ran up the walk to my new home and family. Adopted at 7 years old with my two younger siblings, there is little I can recall about my years in foster care. Whether that is because the memories are not there, or because I have chosen to suppress them, I cannot honestly say. I do not remember my biological mother or any real time that I spent with her and there is little I know about her. What I do know is that she was very young when I was born. I know that her name was Rosa and that she had a very hard life. I have no recollection of my biological father.



There have been times in my life when I have had memories and dreams about my days in foster care, but I don't know if these are real or imagined. I do remember that my siblings and I were separated when we were first removed from my biological mother but I do not remember being taken away. Later we were all put together into our final foster home before we were adopted. I remember not wanting to sleep next to windows because I was afraid my biological mother would come and take me away. I remember wanting to sleep on the top bunk of the bed with lots of clothes on. I also remember being teased and shunned by my foster parent's biological children.

From the second I ran up the walk into the arms of my new parents I knew these were special people and I was going to be okay. My family is interracial; my siblings and I are Puerto Rican and my adopted family is white. In being adopted, I also gained an older sister who over the years has become more than a sister and has become one of my very best friends.

I have had good and hard moments being adopted. Recently I had a close moment with my father while we were cleaning the hot tub. Something he said prompted me to remind him, "but Dad, I was adopted." He turned to me with a smile and a gleam in his eye and replied "Oh yeah, I forgot we had adopted you." It was that moment in my life that I realized that my parents loved me and my siblings as if we had been born to them. This is a moment and a realization I hope all children who are adopted get the opportunity to experience.

Being "adopted" had never made me question who I was and where I came from until the 5th grade when one of our family study assignments was to bring in a picture of

ourselves when we were babies. I remember crying while I explained to my teacher that I didn't have a picture of myself when I was a baby and that I didn't even know what I looked like before the age of 6. That memory hurts me still to this day.

The other time I felt different was when my nephew Ethan was born. Although I love my nephew very much, his birth stirred some things inside of me. Seeing my mother sewing blankets and seeing the excitement in my sister's face whenever they talked about the baby reminded me that I was unwanted as a baby. I also felt like I didn't belong because I was not anyone's daughter or sister or aunt biologically. The most recent hard time where I faced an identity crisis was when I tried to join the Latina sorority in college. I realized I knew nothing of my culture and heritage and that I might never fit in with my Hispanic people. This is a concept I am struggling with today. Still, adoption has changed my life for the better and it is my hope to one day help change the life of another child who needs a family. ♥

Rita McEleny is 22 years old and a senior at the University of Maryland in College Park. She is interning at Adoptions Together during Fall, 2006. Rita and her siblings were the first children adopted from state foster care by an Adoptions Together family.

Studio Theatre Features AT Family

This summer, AT parent Marc Blumenstein's 10 year old son Zachary starred in the critically acclaimed play "Caroline, or Change." The story is set in Louisiana just prior to President Kennedy's assassination and revolves around the lives of an African American woman and the southern Jewish family that employs her. While any parent would be proud to have their child



Janice Goldwater
Executive Director

Founder's Column

by Janice Goldwater
Founder and Executive Director

Transitions

As Adoptions Together completes its 16th year, my baby boy, who once sat in his infant seat by my side as I wrote the application for our child placement license, now towers over me. Tim drives a car, takes on computer and technical issues like a wizard and can talk to other adults about complicated child welfare issues. This year I feel particularly sensitive to the passage of time since I am turning 50 on the last day of October. It feels Very Big. And, at the same time, I feel extremely lucky to have been blessed with the opportunity to impact the lives of so many children and families. Hearing from you, seeing how your children are growing is a gift. Receiving calls from parents who are celebrating successes with their children, being challenged with parenting issues and seeking tools to raise healthy children keeps our community vibrant. Within the organization this fall, some staff are moving on. New programs are being established and plans to meet community child welfare issues are being implemented. We recognize that our work begins when a family is built and is done when your family no longer needs our services. Raising children has been described as not for the faint of heart! We were here for you when you built your family and are here for you as your children mature and face the challenges of growing up in this world with its joys and tragedies. In this issue, two families who began their adoption journey with us have come full circle to support our work and programs.

So, as summer turns to fall and we celebrate the passage of another year, I remind you to appreciate life itself. As for me, I am grateful for my own family, my four beautiful children and husband, our Adoptions Together staff and the chance to serve all of you and your children as together we move through life seeking meaning and the chance to leave the world a better place. ♥

Have you been to www.adoptionstogether.org recently?

We've had a makeover with a new look and ease of navigation. Let us know what you think! Also, if you have a new or changed email address, please email us at info@adoptionstogether.org



www.adoptionstogether.org

Adoptions Together is committed to building healthy permanent families for all children in need, without regard to race, religion or disability, by providing the highest quality child placement services, lifelong guidance to children and their families and advocacy for best practices in child welfare systems.

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Conversation is the newsletter of Adoptions Together and its programs, including AdoptionWorks, Center for Adoptive Families, the Domestic and International Adoption Programs.

Adoptions Together Staff and Agency News

Executive Director, Janice Goldwater, joined the ATTACH Board of Directors and participated in a three-day board retreat.

As a member of the **Adoption Exchange Association (AEA)** Board of Directors, Janice attended a strategic planning session in San Antonio, Texas.

Janice and CAF Director, Louise Fleischman presented at the JCICS annual conference: *Adult Attachment Styles & Implication for Parenting*.

Janice and International Program Director, Sandy Rappeport presented at a “Lunch and Learn” for the employees of AOL in Virginia.

Janice Goldwater was interviewed on the need for children in US foster care to be adopted on Studio 501C3, Montgomery County Cable, which aired on August 16.

Adoptions Together was presented an “Outstanding Achievement in Recycling” by Montgomery County.

Janice and AdoptionWorks Director, Carol Edelstein presented at the 2006 NACAC in Long Beach, CA: Their presentation was titled *Hanging in for the Long Haul: Preparing and Supporting Parents*.

The Center for Adoptive Families was in the community offering seminars about special adoption topics:

Louise Fleischman presented—Attachment and International Adoption training to Infant & Toddler Program professionals; “Behavior Management” to One-Church-One-Child members; Mental health issues common among children in foster care for the benefit of foster parents to Foster and Adoptive Parent Advocacy.

Jennifer Klotz, with Carol Edelstein, Director of AdoptionWorks, guest lectured at Towson University—Family Resource Management course provides students with information related to individual and family decision making with emphasis on the development

and allocation of resources. The focus is working with and understanding needs of at-risk individuals and families and adopting children from the public foster care system. Jennifer is a member of the Department of Family Studies and Community Development Advisory Committee for Human Service Education

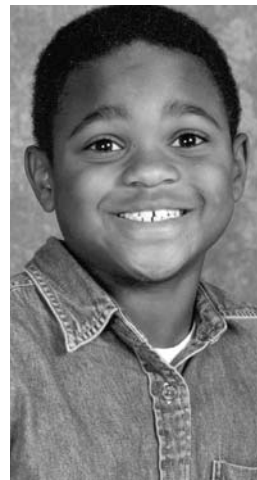
Domestic Director, Susan Ogden, presented Adoption Trends to social workers at Civita Medical Center, University of Maryland Medical Center, and Greater Southeast Hospital. Susan also wrote an article, “Learning More About Birth Mothers,” for Resolve Mid Atlantic Region Newsletter, Spring, 2006 issue.

Domestic Family Advocate, Adrienne Jubilee, co-Chairs Building Black Adoptive Families (BBAF) The council meets regularly (next meeting is Monday, October 2 at the Silver Spring office) to promote initiatives to guide families through the sometimes confusing task of adopting infants and school-aged children of African descent through Adoptions Together. Contact ajubilee@adoptions-together.org.

Did you see Adoptions Together featured on WB? On August 23 at 9 pm, a WB special aired with Adoptions Together staff and families.

Studio Theatre, continued from page 1

on the stage at Washington, DC’s Studio Theatre, Marc is particularly pleased for Zach—who is African American and being



raised by a white father in a Jewish home—to be cast in this play.

Marc says the show highlighted his own gratitude for all the people who struggled for changes during the civil rights era. “Zach is standing on the shoulders of those who lived before him, with all their strengths and

fortitude throughout our country’s history. Without their contributions and sacrifices, Zach wouldn’t be on stage today.”

The young actor echoed this appreciation himself during a Question & Answer Session held after one of the many performances. While explaining how he and the other young actors prepared for a play about civil rights in the 1960’s, Zach added, “As a result of studying Martin Luther King and other leaders of the civil rights movement, I understand the progress that African Americans have made. I was able to be adopted by a white dad, and I am really happy about that.”

Janice Goldwater and others spoke about transracial adoption at a reception for friends and supporters of Adoptions Together along with cast members. Marc, an Adoptions Together Board Member, also co-leads workshops on transracial adoption for the Center for Adoptive Families. ♥

Kwanzaa Party for Adoptions Together families in December

To celebrate African American heritage and the Seven Principles, Building Black Adoptive Families Council will host a party for AT families. Unity, Self-Determination, Collective Work and Responsibility, Cooperative Economics, Purpose of Traditions, Creativity and Faith are Kwanzaa principles which apply to all families with African American children. Stay tuned for date and place!

Virginia Revises Adoption Laws

By Stanton Phillips, Esquire

Virginia has enacted a major overhaul of its adoption laws for the first time since 1995. The new statutes took effect on July 1, 2006. The purpose of the changes was to establish a smooth and clear legal path, speed up the adoption process and focus on the best interests of the child.

Most adoptions will speed through the courts 51 days faster. If a birth parent does not visit or contact the child for six months without just cause prior to the filing of the petition, no consent shall be required.

Another major change is that it is now allowable for the birth father to execute his consent prior to birth of the child.

Agency Placements

In an agency entrustment, a birth parent will be able to revoke consent for 7 days from signing, until the child is 10 days old, or until the child is placed in the adoptive home, whichever is longer.

Parental Placements

The new law provides that the birth mother can consent in court on the child's third calendar day of life instead of waiting until the child is 10 days old. A birth parent may revoke their consent for 10 days but once a child is 10 days old, no consent can be withdrawn.

Since the parental statutes were enacted in 1989, adopters and birth parents, who have been matched through their private (non-agency) efforts, were required to exchange name, address and background information in a simultaneous meeting with a social worker. While the meeting is still required to exchange background information, they now can waive the exchange of names and addresses.

The parental placement procedures still require the adopters to proceed through juvenile and domestic relations court to deal with parental rights and custody. ♥

Stanton Phillips practices law in Virginia and can be reached at Adoptlawr@aol.com

Fall Courses at the Center for Adoptive Families include:

Teen Education and Support Group

As children enter adolescence, they frequently turn to their peers for activities and advice, making it difficult to maintain open communication with their parents. Teen adoptees also may struggle with an extra layer of challenges related to their adoption. This 6-week group will introduce teens to various aspects of adoption, helping them feel more comfortable thinking and discussing it within a group of adoptees only.

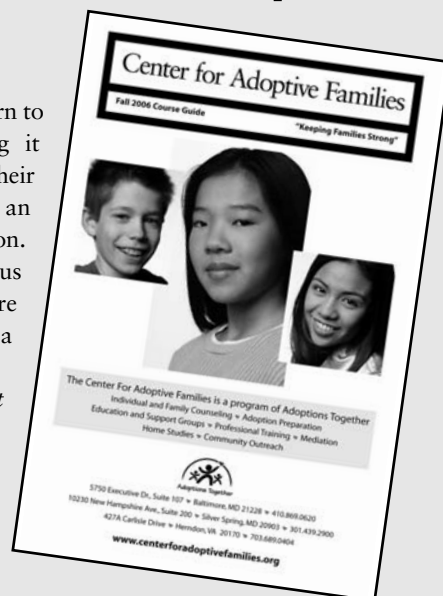
Facilitator: Cindy Talbot, LCSW-C, CAF therapist and expert in teen issues and adoption

Day: Wednesdays, October 4–November 15, 2006

Place: Baltimore Office

Time: 6:45–8:00 pm

Fee: \$150/child, \$115 each add'l child



New Seminars and Old Favorites

- *Second parent adoption*
- *Teen issues in adoption*
- *Openness in adoption*
- *Single parent adoption: From Soup to Nuts*
- *Talking to your child about adoption*
- *Adoption preparation*

Advance registration is required for all programs. For details, go to www.centerforadoptivefamilies.org.

CAF workshops and seminars for adoptive parents, adopted persons, prospective parents, educators and health professionals are made possible by donations to Adoptions Together.

Save the Date: Adoptions Together Gala January 23, 2007!

Adoptions Together has been selected as one of the region's charities to benefit from the Washington Area New Auto Dealer Association's 2007 Gala to be held at the Washington Convention Center January 23, 2007.

Mark your Calendars! If interested in group tickets and sponsorships—or have suggestions for companies that would like to sponsor—contact Scott Perkins at sperkins@adoptionstogether.org or (301) 439-2900.

Maryland Revises Adoption Laws

Dawn Musgrave, Associate Director and General Counsel at Adoptions Together, represented the interests of private child placement agencies throughout the process of overhauling the laws pertaining to guardianship and adoption completed during the 2006 legislative session.

“There are many improvements in the new law,” said Musgrave, “Among the most important is a simpler and better organized statutory framework with one section covering guardianships and adoptions through Departments of Social Service; another section that applies to guardianships and adoptions

through licensed private adoption agencies; and a final section that covers independent adoption.”

Other significant improvements include:

- ♥ **Open Adoption Agreements:** Under the new law, the court may specifically enforce agreements between birth parents and adoptive parents to remain in contact with each other after the adoption.
- ♥ **Paternity:** A court that is considering an adoption or guardianship may now resolve contested paternity issues without requiring a separate legal case to be filed.

- ♥ **Consent Procedure:** The new law continues the current thirty day revocation period for a birth parent’s initial consent to guardianship or adoption, but also sets up a process through which a birth parent who has revoked a prior consent to give consent a second time without a second revocation period. ♥

Questions about the changes in the Maryland laws can be directed to Adoptions Together’s domestic staff or dmusgrave@adoptionstogether.org

Macy's Shop for a Cause

Please support Adoptions Together by participating in a fundraiser on Saturday, September 16, 2006. This unique one-day only shopping event was created to support local non-profit organizations.

For each \$5.00 shopping pass we sell, we keep the entire \$5.00!! You can enjoy a day of spectacular discounts, entertainment, special events and thousands of dollars worth of fabulous prizes.



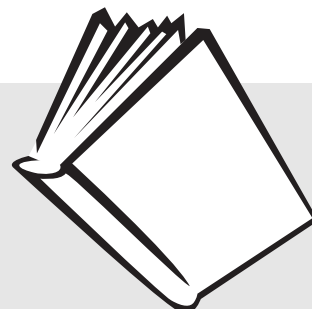
You may use your shopping pass at any Macy's store.

Contact Mary Bergman at 301-439-2900 or mbergman@adoptionstogether.org to purchase your tickets!



Adoptions Together and Amazon.com Partnership

Come to adoptionstogether.org and visit our new store featuring books for children, families and professionals about adoption. Partial proceeds from ANY Amazon purchase you make through our website will benefit Adoptions Together.



Foster Care—Coming Full Circle



The McEwen children present their birthday foster care donation to Janice Goldwater.

Gina and Glen McEwen adopted three children from Adoptions Together. Recently, to celebrate their children's birthdays, they asked their friends to consider making a donation to Adoptions Together to support the foster program that cares for infants before they are placed with adoptive parents. They presented the donations to Adoptions Together and Gina wrote the following in thanks:

If it weren't for the foster care program at Adoptions Together, and the love and dedication that these foster parents provide, Glen and I would not have such strong and healthy children today. Lindsay and Laurie were born premature at just 27 weeks gestation. Laurie weighed only 1.5 pounds and Lindsay weighed only 2.2 pounds. Laurie was not breathing, so she needed to be resuscitated and then put on a ventilator, which she remained

on for 32 days. Lindsay was breathing at first and then stopped; so she, too, was put on a ventilator for 12 days.

Both Lindsay and Laurie had other issues that could have prevented them from seeing and hearing normally. They remained in the hospital for 103 days. Through all of this, the staff of Adoptions Together was there for them. When Laurie and Lindsay were finally well enough to be released from the hospital, Adoptions Together brought them into one of their loving foster homes until there was an adoption plan made for them.

Laurie and Lindsay lived with their foster family, the Morgans, for a total of 6 weeks until Glen and I were able to bring them home. During that time, their Foster Mom, Laurie Morgan, and her amazing family cared for their

every need; day and night they gave Laurie and Lindsay the care, love, and support they needed to get healthy. When Laurie and Lindsay came home to us, it was obvious that they had been tremendously loved and nurtured, which allowed them to gain strength and health. Our pediatrician said it was a miracle that these baby girls were doing so well, and they credited it to the care and nurturing of their foster family.

The Morgan family was up every 2 hours, every single night for 6 weeks, caring for our Laurie and Lindsay. They made sure Laurie and Lindsay were eating well and getting the proper medicines that they needed in order to grow strong and get well. The Morgan family spent many days running Laurie and Lindsay to doctor appointments, which were crucial with their fragile state of being. It was important to them that Laurie and Lindsay had a good start and, therefore, a promising healthy future. It didn't matter to the Morgan family that they were sleep deprived or their daily schedules rearranged to accommodate the needs of our Laurie and Lindsay. This family worked together as a team and caring for babies was what their life was about. The Morgan family is by far the most selfless family I have ever met in my entire life.

This is just one example of what the foster families at Adoptions Together do. There are hundreds of babies, including some very sick infants, which the foster families at Adoptions Together have taken in, cared for, nurtured, and loved until they were able to be adopted into a permanent home. I'm sharing this story with you because I want you to know how very much it means to Glen and I that you were willing to contribute to this cause which is so close to our hearts. When we returned from our kids' birthday party and started opening your gift envelopes, the joy that came over Laurie, Lindsay, and Danny's faces was priceless! You see, they share our joy and appreciation for your gifts because they really do understand how special it is to be able to help care for a child waiting to be adopted. ♥

The **Laurie Morgan Fund** was established to support our interim care program in honor of Laurie who passed away in January, 2006. www.adoptionstogether.org/userfile/file/Laurie_Morgan_MemorialFund

Homecomings

January–June, 2006

Adoptive Parents	Welcomed into their home	Adoptive Parents	Welcomed into their home	From	Adoptive Parents	Welcomed into their home	From
DOMESTIC							
Paul & Barbara	Aniya & Azaria	Sherry & Rick	Anastasia		Kevin & Cheryl	Hannah	China
Tim & Amy	Matthew	Cathy & Brad	Connie		Julian & Cheryl	Audrey	China
Matthew & David	Lynn	Darla	Marisa & Zanaya		Richard & Suzanne	Natalie	China
Linda & Curtis	Tyler	Velicia & Ed	Moneisha & Latrice		James & Diane	Christopher	China
Donna & David	Jacob	Tami & Imran	Carlos, Armando, Antonio, Christina & Leonella		Tracey	Lalide	China
Pat & Ron	Natalie				Geoffrey & Rebecca	Emma	China
Andrea & Patrick	Dillon				Thomas & Laura	Lila	China
Bernadine & Alvin	Grant				Theresa	Teresa	Guatemala
Kim & Karen	Thomas				Cathy	Joelle	Guatemala
Anna & Joseph	Christopher				Kenneth & Susan	Anakela	Guatemala
Gregory & Rebecca	Lua	INTERNATIONAL			Kevin & Sonja	Alex	Guatemala
Wanda	Hagan	Joseph & Patricia	Ryan	Russia	David & Judith	Maya	Guatemala
Carolyn & Doralee	Daniel	Reid & Christine	Eva	Russia	James & Holly	Geovany	Guatemala
Keisha & Gregory	Skyler	Pat & Donna	Delaney	Russia	Robert & Cathleen	Logan	Guatemala
Mark & David	Matthew	Nadim & Margaret	Max	Russia	Jeffrey & Rebecca	Kaiden	Guatemala
Rosie & Ryan	Connor	Laura	Arina	Russia	Brian & Mary Ellen	Samuel	Guatemala
Wanda & Dave	Nathan & Kayla	Catherine	Luke	Russia	Mark & Anna	Joshua	Guatemala
Alyson	Clayton	David & Joanna	Nikolas	Russia	Brenda	Corinne	Guatemala
Jeff & William	Ella	John & Nancie Marie	Victoria	Russia	Judy	Sarah	Guatemala
Michael	Yusef	Troy & Christine	Emmalee & Alexis	Russia	Louis & Stephanie	Abigail	Guatemala
Rolonda & Philander	Shareef	Charles & Shawna	Kate & William	Russia	Christopher & Margaret	William	Guatemala
Yolanda	Trayvon	Karen	William	Russia	Robert & Martha	Joseph & Marisol	Guatemala
		Peter & Michelle	Violetta & Daniil	Russia			
		Christopher & Ann	Gabriel	Azerbaijan			
		Lisa	Samantha	China			

Change, challenging but inevitable...

After 8 years of leadership as Director of Adoption Together's Center for Adoptive Families, Louise Fleischman is stepping down in order to accommodate her children's busy high-school years. She will continue as a vital part of Adoptions Together, providing counseling to families and professional training. Hundreds of families and social services workers have benefitted enormously from Louise's expertise over the years. Through Louise's leadership, CAF has become nationally known for quality services to the adoption and foster care community. While we will miss having her in the office on a daily basis, we're comforted to know that Louise will still be active in our Adoptions Together community.

Mary Chamberlain joined the Adoptions Together team in the fall of 2003 in order to expand our services into Virginia. In addition to leading the effort to be licensed in Virginia, Mary successfully set up the new office, developed the infrastructure, and built a professional and caring team of staff and contractors. With this accomplished, Mary has decided it is time to cut back her hours and will no longer serve as our Virginia Director. Fortunately for us, Mary will still continue to have an active role in the Adoptions Together community. She will be completing home studies and post-placement reports and conducting professional trainings along with other activities in support of Adoptions Together's families.

Next Issue: Welcome New Staff! ♥

HELP WANTED! For Fall Family Day on Sunday, October 8

- In-kind donations of food and paper goods as well as cash sponsorships to underwrite this exciting day are welcome. Does your company have a Community Relations or Corporate Giving program that you think might be interested in supporting this year's Fall Family Day? If so, please contact Scott Perkins at sperkins@adoptionstogether.org. All sponsors and contributors will receive prominent recognition at Fall Family Day as well as in the following AT newsletter.
- Volunteers are also needed—if you have time to help before the event or at the event, please call Mary Bergman at 301-439-2900.



FALL FAMILY DAY PROMISES FUN FOR EVERYONE!!

Round up your family, bring a covered dish and join the Adoptions Together family for
our annual

FALL FAMILY DAY PICNIC AND REUNION

**Sunday, October 8
1-5 pm**

Centennial Park, Pavilion H, 10000 Route 108 Ellicott City
(same location as last year)



There will be fun for everyone—food, games, prizes. AND this year we are making scarecrows!!
Volunteers are needed—if you have time to help before the event or at the event, please call Mary Bergman at 301-439-2900.

SAVE THE DATE. JOIN THE FUN.
Watch for your invitation and be sure to RSVP!



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Adoptions Together

conversation

An update from Adoptions Together

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