In February 18 of this year (2011) there was a large fire in the Varna orphanage in Bulgaria. The Varna orphanage, under the Directorship of Dr. Dzhanakova (pronounced Dr. Jenkova) typically cares for 150 children between the ages of 0-3. Thankfully, Dr. Dzhanakova, the staff and all children are safe and while not in the ‘regular’ living quarters, are able to stay in a part of the orphanage. The fire destroyed the furnace department and the storage area; they have been without heat up until this past week. Due to the generosity of one of the Bulgarian adoption agencies, a diesel burner was installed as a ‘bandage’ until funding can be brought together to assist in the complete renovation.

The loss of the storage area is tragic: in this area all new beds/bedding/blankets/sheets, diapers, wet wipes, shoes, clothes, pajamas, socks, undershirts, sleepers, walkers, Exersaucer’s, some food (non perishables), water….essentially everything needed to care for children birth to three years of age was stored in that room and nothing is salvageable. In the past eleven years many many Tree of Life families have been blessed by a child coming home from Varna. The care is stellar; many of the medically needy children stay here as Dr. Dzhanakova level of medical knowledge is excellent along with this being a large orphanage with a large staff. Tree of Life’s staff member, Kay Montes and her family were blessed by their twin daughters having lived at the Varna orphanage until they came home in 2004. This orphanage is very dear to us and we will be actively working to see that all needs are met to have the orphanage at its best once again. Along with repairs the children are in urgent need of shoes, clothes, walkers for the kids, diapers, wet wipes, etc. The total damage to the orphanage is estimated at 100,000 leva which is about $70,600 in US dollars.

We feel that this is a very attainable goal from Tree of Life and our extended family of clients, neighbors, past adoptive families, our respective church affiliations, school fund raising and the children home from Varna themselves. We have attached some very dark photos that are all that we have available at this time. However, as of next week, we will have video and more details. In the mean time, if you feel that you would like to assist, please visit Tree of Life’s website for more pictures and information on donating. All funds should be indicated specific to Varna Fire.
of a little boy with special needs (upper limb difference) who was thought to be 4, we soon learned he was 7 and I spooked, but not for his special needs but for his age. I worried about the 5 year age difference for my son who was only 2, would there be the sibling closeness that I sought for my little boy? As many who walk the adoption journey can share, you watch the little ones you once had considered (even if for a brief moment) until they are safe in a family. I can proudly say that this little man found his family. He opened my heart to considering a child with special needs, specifically limb difference.

This bring us to the adoption process. I began my homestudy in late February 2009. I stared at the paperwork that would represent the vision of my child. I sat night after night watching my little boy play and reading about the plight of orphans especially that of little boys. I decided I would request a boy. I then decided (after being told several horror stories of adopting children out of birth order) to request a child younger than my son. I researched every special need listed and discovered several were considerations though I would request a healthy child. When I filled in the check boxes, I felt a child with upper limb difference would fit our family but lower limb difference would probably not due to our active lifestyle. Just a week after forming that healthy, boy, under 2 years old vision of my adoptive child, my sweet Elina’s profile arrived. There she was a little girl, 4.5 years old with dual lower limb difference. So much for seeking out a vision, my child found me from the other side of the world.

Making the decision to adopt Elina was not as difficult as I thought it would be. It took me less than a week to think it thru and the next eight months to convince family and friends that I could handle Elina’s needs. I do have to admit that the process had rocky moments, like the fact that when I took several days to consider Elina, I nearly lost her because of another families’ request was received by Bulgaria. Initially I wasn’t chosen and thus mourned her loss. A few weeks later, I sent Kay a note that though I saw Elina as “my child” I was willing to begin again. Whatever your beliefs, my faith was renewed because later that week Bulgaria requested additional families to consider for her placement before making a decision and I threw my hat back into the ring. At the next meeting I was chosen to be Elina’s mom. Maybe it was how I said she would just be my little girl with or without legs, that she would be part of a grand life adventure and that I would ensure she would have the best legs and medical plan. Whatever the reason, she has been in my arms for nearly a year.

It took one year, nearly the date, for me to request Elina until I left the US to pick her up in Bulgaria. As most will tell you, adoption is not for the faint of heart. I realized it isn’t just the paperwork that can be difficult, it is the wait. My homestudy agency was slow to write their report, thus our USCIS approval was delayed until July 1st, and by the time it was received by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) it was summer break. Before going back into session, Bulgaria implemented new adoption laws effective October 1, 2009 which allowed children not previously eligible for adoption to be placed into international adoption register. My wait continued until I received Elina’s official referral mid-October and visited Elina mid-November. We I traveled to Bulgaria, with my sister, I found a love of the Bulgarian people and culture that will forever keep them dear to my heart.

At my first visit to the Ruse Baby Home, Elina came into the room like a firecracker. She walked to and fro so that I
could see that she was a “normal” little girl with “normal” legs. It was a wonderful but very emotional week. I held strong until the last moment, when my tears fell because I would leave my daughter and wait to bring her home.

I prayed for our pick-up dates to be issued quickly. In my heart I felt that Elina’s court date would be on my birthday in early February and it was (see picture celebrating my birthday and Elina’s adoption day). The in-country team asked me if I would consider participating in the Ministry of Justice Conference which would advocate for international adoptions. Therefore, my pick up trip was scheduled for the last week of March, and I began preparing to speak at the conference. What a whirlwind pick up week, though I didn’t spend much time away from Elina I was able to advocate on the BTV Morning News Show, an evening tele-a-thon (via an interview from our apartment) and the MOJ Conference. We felt like celebrities walking the streets of Sofia because so many people recognized us. Vendors gave Elina trinkets, a special stone, a pair of ear-rings, a necklace, chocolate and juice. Bulgaria poured its love in front of Elina as she embarked on her journey to America. There were so many kind words from strangers, understanding glances and even kisses on our cheeks. Elina’s excitement was contagious; she shared her tale of America with the men at the little coffee shop and the ladies at the bric-a-brac market. She giggled and laughed, and as we boarded our flight from Amsterdam that would bring us home to the USA, Elina exclaimed, “Chao Bulgaria, Hell-ooo A-mer-ee-ka!!”

Elina has been in my arms for nearly a year, we have ridden the roller coaster ride of grief, mourning, and finding her identity in a new country, and speaking a new language as an older sister and a daughter. Elina has become confident and is becoming very attached. Do I think we are at the end of attachment? No, I believe we are a year into our attachment, I believe we still are on our attachment journey, I believe she feels secure in our relationship, and I believe she doesn’t want to be anywhere else in the world but in my arms. Tonight, as we do every night, we said our prayers at dinner. I have never encouraged my children to pray but not with what should be said during prayer only that their prayers should come from their heart. My now 4 year old son always starts with, “Thank you God for my toys.” Tonight when Elina took her turn to give thanks, she closed her eyes tight and said, “Thank you God for my family, thank you God so much that my mommy found me in Bulgaria, thank you God for my mommy and for my brother. Amen.”
Garage Sale Season!

What better time to spring clean and make some money off those unwanted items in your house, less is more especially in this case!

Friends and family are usually most willing to contribute to yard sales and spring being just around the corner they are most likely doing a bit of spring cleaning themselves. Items can also be collected from freecycle.org, or even found free on Craigs List. Price your items at a good sales price, place an ad in the local paper or online at Craig’s List. Sell bottled water on hot days and coffee in cold mornings. Save what is left from one sale and make it a weekend event, make sure to check with local city regulations on this. For more details and more fundraising events visit our fundraising page at:

Fundraising Idea >>>

“Holding Time”
A Book Review

By: CeAnne Kosel

“Holding Time”, by Dr. Martha G. Whelch is one of those adoption attachment “musts”. Even parents with biological children will find this book helpful in helping their children handle their emotions and release that build up of tension they are holding inside. This title was recommended to us by our social worker when we brought our first son home from Russia. Our oldest would bang his head continuously, scream, kick, bite and put up a huge fight for everything including not feeding him fast enough, to not wanting to be held.

Holding Time gave him what he needed. Essentially the idea of holding time is to cradle your child like an infant and let them “get their angeries out”. This takes the child back to what they missed as an infant when typically infants are rocked to sleep and held constantly. It gives the child a safe release then they take it out on siblings, strangers, other relatives, animals and even mom and dad.

After hours of holding time (this is not an instant fix), my oldest son finally calmed down. His eye contact is much improved, he loves to snuggle and be held, he gives and receives affection and his head banging is now gone. He is a very affectionate little boy and often tells me how some day he is going to buy me a pink dress and take me out in his ‘cool car’. This book did wonders for our attachment and it is well worth the read. It can be found used at www.bookfinder.com
Adoption Quote...

Not flesh of my flesh, Nor bone of my bone, 
But still miraculously my own. 
Never forget for a single minute, 
You didn't grow under my heart - but in it

Grandmother of the Heart Program

Every child should have at least one Grammy

The mission of The Grandmother Project is to strengthen and improve the development and well-being of children living in orphanages throughout Bulgaria. The goal is accomplished by arranging for "grandmothers" (or women from the community who are available to nurture and spend one-on-one time with the children). The women spend 4 hours every day with two children placed in the local orphanage. Each child receives individual care and is given a chance to build a close relationship with their caregivers. This individual care can help the emotional development of the child, stimulates the gross motor development and fosters fine motor skills and speech development.

The emotional contact that can be built between the "Nanny" and give the child the warmth and love of having a Grandma. Many of the children build confidence and self-respect due in part to the opportunity provided by a relationship outside of that which they know from their caretakers. This time may strengthen their physiological health and allow them to be open to trusting and growing closer to their future adoptive parents as well as form meaningful relationships throughout their adult life.

The officials of Bulgaria are seeing the increased level of emotional development in the children blessed with the opportunity to have a Nanny. Many more women are stepping forward to assist; the gain appears to be positive for both the Nanny and the children for whom they care. Most certainly the feeling of being needed benefits the woman who are hired and the children receive so many opportunities to learn about the world outside of the orphanage that the gain appears to be many fold.

How to Help

Tree of Life is accepting donations, please mail monetary donations to the attention: "Grandmother of the Heart Program", or visit our website to make a direct donation. www.toladopt.org

Also visit our website for current updates on the Grandmother of the Heart Program as well as more detailed information about the program.

Exciting News >>>

Our Website Has Been Updated!

To better serve our clients, current, past, and future, we have updated our website which of information. New to our website is a wonderful before/after slide show of children that have arrived home, many links and articles for adoptive parents and we are also now on Facebook! We are still in the process of adding links, resources, photos and the like so continue to check back.

Also Find us on Facebook!
Visit our New Site: www.toladopt.org