

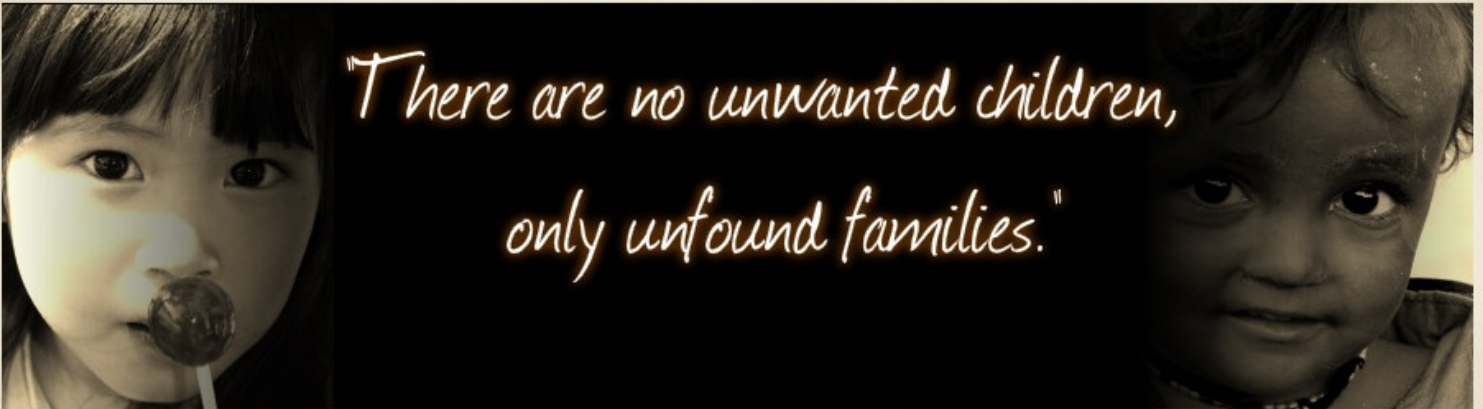
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*Tree of Life Adoption Center*

*Keeping our adoptive families connected and Informed*



*"There are no unwanted children,  
only unfound families."*

**Varna Fire Relief**



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. Dzhnakova (pronounced Dr. Jenkova) typically cares for 150 children between the ages of 0-3. Thankfully, Dr. Dzhnakova, 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

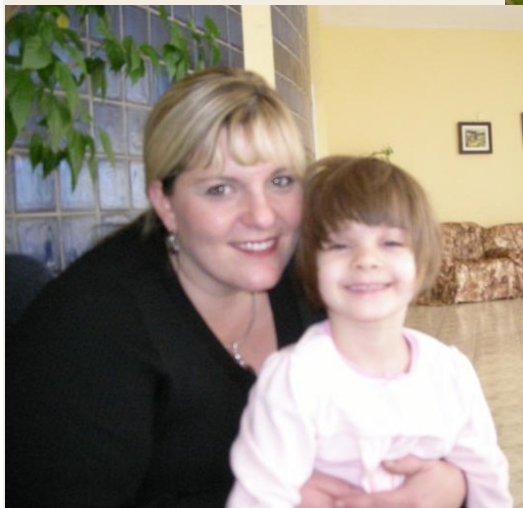
together to assist in the complete renovation. The loss of the storage area is tragic: in this area all new beds/bedding/blankets/sheets, diapers, wet wipes, shoes, clothes, pajamas, socks, undershirts, sleepers, walkers, Exersaucer's, some food (non perishables) , water.....essentially everything needed 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. Dzhankova 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, walk-

ers 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](http://www.treeoflife.org) for

more pictures and information on donating. All funds should be indicated specific to Varna Fire.





**By: Yvonne Villemure**

I made the decision to adopt a child just after Christmas 2008, when I had been divorced for nearly two years. I had pondered the idea to adopt a child several years prior when I was married and infertility issues plagued my mind, spirit and body. I wanted to adopt a child and my then husband asked that we try one last fertility treatment prior to moving forward with an adoption from China. At that point, I was 28 and China would not accept paperwork until I turned 30. We had a medical miracle and my son was born in December 2006. So there I was 31, my son was 2 years old and I was a divorced, single mother who had just made the decision to adopt. I walked a difficult road, many people had an opinion of why I shouldn't adopt. I was too young, I needed time for myself, I needed to find someone new, I needed to find someone with children. Very few people were supportive of my decision and only one or two actually encouraged my endeavor to adopt a child.

The vision of my adoptive child was elusive. My vision of my child was only that I felt their heart and did not include specific features. Maybe my child would have Asian eyes of a Chinese child, sleek black hair of an Indian child, olive complexion of a Roma child, the dark skin and liquid eyes of an African child or the Caucasian features of a Russian child. From mid-summer 2008 until February 2009, I had researched adoption and it was overwhelming. It was not until I spoke with Kay Montes the adoption spiral stopped and I felt my feet plant. I had found my program, I had found Bulgaria. I felt the roots grow, my back bone grow stiff and I felt anchored into Tree of Life's Bulgaria program. Kay shortly thereafter spoke to me

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 brings 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 discov-



ered 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 life style. 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 street 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.”



## Nutrition is Key...

### In Helping Adopted Children to Thrive

The SPOON Foundation was started by two Portland adoptive moms, Cindy Kaplan and Michelle Rudzinski. Both moms adopted from

Kazakhstan in 2006 and were immediately confronted with malnutrition issues in their children. Cindy’s infant son, who was underweight, struggled with bottle-feeding and getting enough nutrition. Michelle’s five year old daughter’s growth was stunted and she had rickets so severe that she could barely walk. Transitioning her to an American diet proved difficult. As the two moms got together for play dates, they began to wonder if their children were alone in their struggles with the fallout from their early poor nutrition. They began to talk to other parents and professionals, and before they knew it they had founded SPOON Foundation, which stands for Support and Provide Overseas Orphan Nutrition. The mission of SPOON is twofold: to improve nutrition practices for institutionalized children over-

seas through tested, sustainable programs; and, to educate parents and professionals about the unique nutritional needs of their adopted children.

SPOON’s current overseas program is being conducted in ten baby houses in Kazakhstan where children are being supplied with an improved menu and multivitamins to determine the best way to quickly improve their nutritional status. SPOON’s international reach will soon expand to other countries as well. Stateside, SPOON’s biggest project is the Adoption Nutrition website (<http://adoptionnutrition.org>) where parents and professionals can find information and advice specific to adopted children. Sections of the website include “Nutrition by Country,” “Diet Tips and Tricks,” “Pre-Adoption Prep,” and “Feeding Challenges.” A popular section of the site is “Nutrition Profiles” where families can tell their own stories about adoption and nutrition or feeding. If you have a story to tell, please contact [mishelle@spoonfoundation.org](mailto:mishelle@spoonfoundation.org) or visit the Spoon Foundation’s website at: [www.SpoonFoundation.org](http://www.SpoonFoundation.org)

# Essential Tips for the Trip Coming Home

One of our clients shares her tip on helping to span the language barrier when adopting children who speak their native language.

**By: Adrienne Parks**

Mom to Kaitlyn, 6 years old

Before my husband and I left on our second trip, I created a small picture communication book to help us communicate with our new daughter, Kaitlyn. I am a special education teacher, and I have experience working with individuals who communicate through various methods other than speech.

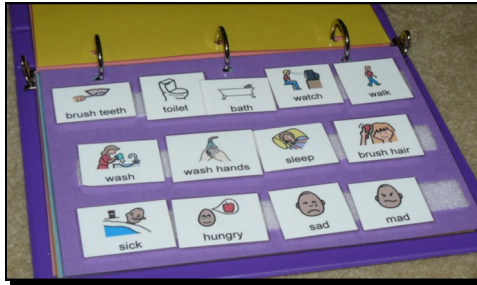
Some individuals use pictures to communicate needs and wants. Many individuals benefit from picture schedules to help them know what to expect from the day. I decided that similar strategies would help Kaitlyn bridge the gap between Bulgarian and English, while also reducing frustration during our first days as a family.

I purchased a memo-size three-ring binder at an office store. Then I cut seven pieces of construction paper to fit inside the binder and punched holes in each piece. I laminated each piece to add durability. Using a software program for special educators, I created picture cards with the word written under each picture. This could easily be done using clip art if you do not have access to software designed for this purpose. Each card is about an inch by an inch. I also laminated each card to add to durability. Then I placed a piece of Velcro on the back of each card.

On the first page of the binder, I placed small pieces of Velcro and numbered each piece. This is to list the order of events for a period of time. For example, in the evening the routine might be take a bath, brush hair, eat a snack, brush teeth, go to the potty, and then go to sleep. Each picture represents one of those events. After each event is completed, the card can be moved to the second page to show

that the event is over. We used the words “all done” and the sign language sign to reinforce that a particular event was finished. The remaining pages of the book are for storing the extra picture cards when they were not needed. Each page has three strips of Velcro for storing the cards.

The pictures we used the most often during our week in Bulgaria, which is when we used the communication book the most included: eat, drink, sleep, toys, watch TV, bath, brush hair, brush teeth, clothes, car, toilet, and apartment. We also used airplane (we had three of these picture cards since we had three flights), American flag, and home to help our daughter understand the trip home. I included lots of



other cards for types of foods we might eat or activities we might do together. Emotion cards, such as hungry, happy, sad, and sick were also included in the communication book.

We found that the book helped Kaitlyn immensely during our first days together. Even now after being home almost a month and with much more English in her vocabulary, she enjoys looking at the book and asking me the names of each picture in English.



## “Holding Time” A Book Review

By: CeAnne Kosel

“Holding Time”, by Dr. Martha G. Welch 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 place to let all of his/her anger out and also teaches them that mom (or dad) is a safe place to share these things with. If the child doesn’t have 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](http://www.bookfinder.com)

### Fundraising Idea >>>

## 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](http://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:



# 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 through out 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 the child 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](http://www.toladopt.org)

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



## Tree of Life Adoption Center

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[info@toladopt.org](mailto:info@toladopt.org)

### 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](http://www.toladopt.org)