

Tree of Life Adoption Center

News from Executive Director, Daniel Stinea;

December 2007

We are very happy to share that every month we have children from multiple countries coming home to their families! We love to see the results of our efforts as there is no greater joy than when we see the files that have previously been only "documents" and "dossiers" and "Power of Attorney's", "Fed Ex accounts" and "emails" and "court dates" finally become marked "HOME WITH FAMILY" and have a child's face associated with that memo! One of our greatest rewards is to be allowed to share in the "final hour" when your child comes home! Thank you to those that have kept in touch and shared pictures as your children find their place in your families. We hope to have the "before and after" page up on the web site soon; thank you to all that have sent pictures to be included.

News from International Program Coordinator, Kay Montes;

What is going on in Guatemala? Wow.....what a question! For those of you that have either adopted from, are in process from or are considering adding a child from Guatemala.....this is a 'loaded question' that could literally take years to address.....we have been trying very hard to teach and address the rash or rumors, Department of State postings, UNICEF, JOINT COUNCIL, online chat groups, TV Documentaries and all other forms of "information" specific to Guatemala that are out there. It is an overwhelming amount of information that literally peaks and lulls throughout not only the course of a week but virtually every day.....I could write a book on this and still the subject would be difficult to embrace as a lay person.....If you would like to "touch" the subject; I am providing you with several articles that are, to the best of our knowledge, some of the most relevant, written and presented by the resources we respect most, are most vested in being honest and forthright in their communication, and certainly the most knowledgeable without being reactionary.

The very best of web sites to monitor; ADA (written by the Guatemalan attorneys) <http://www.adaguatemala.org/English/news/> Focus on Adoption <http://www.focusonadoption.com/> and Families Without Borders: <http://www.familieswithoutborders.com/> . With some balance, Joint Council may also have some pertinent information; however, please keep in mind that following the reactive and inaccurate posting of the DOS on Sept. 27th, the Joint Council jumped to support DOS.....and now that the outcry has been so vocal, they have "altered" their position. JCICS Guatemala 5000: <http://www.jcics.org/Guatemala5000.htm>

At this time; (could change before this goes to print); this is the "last round of information"; According to the newspapers, the Guatemalan Congress held a seminar on November 6, and agreed to postpone the effect of the Hague Convention approval until April 1st, to pass an adoption law that would allow singles to adopt, and to appoint as Central Authority an autonomous entity, which is great, because neither Bienestar Social, nor the PGN would be able to do it efficiently. This not the law, but a big step in the right direction.

However, the next line of the above announcement reads: The US consul expressed that such change was unnecessary. That means that the crushing pressure of the US diplomats will be used to get back to the table the UNICEF proposal, Bill 3217 and to keep January 1st, 2008 as it was originally planned.

Long story short; we continue to work every day to bring our families with children in process THROUGH the process in a timely manner and to care for all parts of the process that are in our control; as Daniel mentioned above, children are indeed coming home.....we remain committed to working every day with our parent's, our coordinators, our attorney's, the US Embassy, the DOS and advocate for the doors to Guatemala to remain open; not just for these children in process but for those that will most certainly be "left behind" if adoptions are closed. It is stressful every day; we are all very appreciative of your positive communication and support of our efforts.

We have several children that we are still hoping to place with families; documents are a must to starting an adoption from Guatemala . Home study and I 171(even if to another country) would get your foot in the door.....

News from Client Care Coordinator, Kay J;

Due to heavy travel schedules in October, the November issue of the Tree of Life newsletter did not make it to print. I apologize to our faithful readers. Also, in the next few months, we will be transitioning away from the printed newsletters. Instead, we will send them out by e-mail, and continue to post them on our website. We are in process of creating the e-mail distribution list. To ensure our distribution list is complete, it would be helpful if you could send me an e-mail at clietcarecoordinator@toladopt.org. I will then ensure your e-mail address is part of our distribution list.

A Child in Need;

This child is currently in an orphanage in Kazakhstan. Kay M. was able to meet him on her last visit and reports that he has a wonderful personality and is a great kid. Tree of Life has managed to get permission from the Kazak officials to bring him to Michigan for surgery. He will come before Christmas and stay for six months. The surgery is provided free, but we are in need of funds to help with his airfare. We will also be looking for a family to adopt him. If you are able to provide a donation for his airfare, please mark all tax deductible donations as "Medical Flight/Kazakhstan" and mail to our Portland office. You will receive a receipt by mail.



Slamming the Door on Adoption Depriving Children Abroad of Loving Homes

By Elizabeth Bartholet
Sunday, November 4, 2007

Last month, Guatemala was effectively shut down as a country from which children can be adopted into the United States. While the shutdown is officially temporary, it is likely that even when new laws are in place, Guatemala will follow the path taken by many South American countries in recent years: eliminating the private agencies and intermediaries that facilitate the placement of children who need homes and substituting government monopoly over adoption, which will reduce to a trickle the number of children escaping life in institutions or on the streets.

In recent years, Guatemala has been a model for those who believe in adoption as a vehicle for providing homeless children with permanent, nurturing parents. It has released significant numbers of children to international adoption, many at young ages, before they suffered the kind of damage that results in attachment disorders and other life-altering limitations. Ironically, these policies are why Guatemala attracted the attention of UNICEF and other human rights organizations that, along with our State Department, have been pushing for adoption "reform." These official "friends of children" have created pressure that has led to the cessation of international adoption in half the countries that in recent decades had been sending the largest number of homeless children abroad. Until recent years, the number of international adoptions into the United States had been steadily increasing, but the numbers are dramatically down.

Why close down international adoption? The real-world alternatives for the children at issue are life -- or death -- on the streets or in the types of institutions that a half-century of research has proved systematically destroy children's ability to grow up capable of functioning normally in society. By contrast, we know that adoption works incredibly well to provide children with nurturing homes and that it works best for those placed early in life.

Critics of international adoption argue that children have heritage rights and "belong" in their countries of birth. But children enjoy little in the way of heritage or other rights in institutions. The critics argue that we should develop foster-care alternatives for children in the countries they are from, and UNICEF's official position favors in-country foster care over out-of-country adoption. But foster care does not exist as a real option in most countries that allow children to be adopted abroad, and the generally dire economic circumstances in these nations make it extremely unlikely that comprehensive foster care programs will soon be developed. Nor is there any reason to think that children would do as well in foster care as in adoptive homes. Indeed, for decades the research in countries that use foster care, such as the United States, has shown that such care does not work nearly as well for children as adoption does.

Critics also condemn adoption abuses such as baby-buying. But there is no hard evidence that payments are systematically used in any country to induce birth parents to surrender their children. In any event, the right response to such abuses is stepped-up enforcement of the overlapping laws prohibiting such payments, which would rightly result in the lawbreakers being penalized. Closing down international adoption, however, wrongly penalizes all those homeless children who could otherwise find nurturing adoptive homes, condemning them to institutions or to the streets.

Policies restricting international adoption replicate the same-race matching policies that used to exist in the United States. In the mid-1990s, Congress passed the Multiethnic Placement Act, rejecting the notion that children should be seen as belonging only within the racial group into which they were born. Our lawmakers recognized the harm children suffered by virtue of being held in foster care rather than being adopted transracially.

Congress, the State Department and the human rights organizations that purport to care for children should similarly reject the notion that children in other countries must at all costs be kept in their communities of birth. Children's most fundamental human rights include the right to be nurtured in their formative years by permanent parents in real families.

Elizabeth Bartholet is a law professor and faculty director of the Child Advocacy Program at Harvard Law School. She is the author of the books "Family Bonds" and "Nobody's Children."

Waiting in Guatemala

These children are available for adoption Guatemala. To apply for one of these children, you must be paper ready (I-171 in hand)



Jose Armando; five months old.
Video available



Rebeca, 12, waiting along with her baby brother to be born shortly. Would like to place together. Must have I 171 approved for two children.



Andres; born June 2007
Video available

As you may remember, Kay Montes recently took a journey with her husband and 2 of her sons to visit Bulgaria; some of their trip was work related, some was time for their son Josiah to revisit the orphanage where he lived for the first 22 months of his life. While on their journey, they spent most of their time in orphanages, delivering a humanitarian donation, and working to paint the play ground at the Turgovishte orphanage. Last month we shared with you the first installment of Kay's journey. Today is part 2. If you missed October's newsletter, you can find it on our website (www.toladopt.org) under the News section.

Our trip across Bulgaria.....day three.....

We left our apartment this morning after a breakfast of cheese, eggs, fresh bread.....and that amazing Bulgarian coffee.....forget about drinking a quart of Starbucks every day; two inches of this coffee "qualifies" by my measure; if you toss an horse shoe in it, it would float.....

Off with the boys asking a million questions of our friend Petko; "why do you have to buy a stamp to drive on the roads?" (because this is how the road use tax is paid; it is less expensive than a ticket if you get stopped). Why is gas \$6.00 a gallon?.....(I won't share Petko's answer with you on that one! Just leave it to say that our \$3.00 a gallon did not elicit much sympathy). Why do you smoke? (for those of you that know Petko, you know he gave them the story about it "being a bad habit and I choose that bad habit again every day), are we there yet? (where?) we don't know.....where are we going? Can we play in the rain? (sure, you guys won't get sick but you can bet all of the adults will!).....



We traveled to Velinka Tarnova (check the map at the top); amazing fortress.....how anybody thought they could win by attacking such a place was hard to understand.....Petko taught that it took a year but they wore them down eventually.....and the doors were opened from the inside.....and a story "true love" followed how the queen of the fortress fell in love with a Greek man.....and when he wanted to leave Bulgaria and return to his country.....she shot him in the leg and had him imprisoned in the tower that hung over the side of the mountain.....for ten years she "kept him" and visited him at night.....I was afraid to ask what happened at the end of the tenth year and no one seemed to want to tell me.....lesson; do not fall in love with woman who has gun. Run away fast.....run, run, run.....

The boys ran up the wet rocks like little goats and had a wonderful time imagining living in such a place.....the bells were amazing.....beyond words.....

Bells of Velinka Tamova Fortress

We had lunch and boys napped on the road to Turgovishte.....Bulgaria has an incredible death rate on the roads due to wild driving, narrow roads and fast speeds.....we were delayed by an accident that CLEARLY was fatal.....we were glad the boys slept.....the road was then detoured by road work.....we eventually arrived in Turgovishte and traveled to the home of Dr. Penkova (the Director of the orphanage where Josiah lived as a baby). She was waiting and watching out the window and I am pretty sure she cracked a couple of his ribs when she held him tight.....very very amazing to see this lady again after four years.....she was so pleased to see "Rumina" (pet form of Rumen) and she just kept reaching to touch him while she served us coffee and fresh fruit.....



Velinka Tamova Fortress

She was gracious and overwhelmed by the gift of money to assist in repairing the orphanage; the boiler system is covered and between us we agreed that the next most important step would be to replace some windows and doors so that the new heat system could best be utilized.....and the four of us are being armed with paint brushes and we will repair and re-paint the current play equipment outside the orphanage. IF there is any funding left, we will purchase some new play equipment and swings.



Views of the Velinka Tarnova fortress

We left her and traveled quickly to Varna.....to the orphanage where our little girls lived for 29 months of their lives.....following a complete inspection of our passports by the security guard (who shared that his son is working in Wyoming on a college student exchangesuch a small world!) we were delivered up four flights of stairs to a small room with two beds and two fold outs.....clean and sparse.....and perfect for us.....tonight is hard for me; there are 300 children in care here.....and occasionally a small one will cry.....my heart says "go" but I can not.....tomorrow we will meet with Dr. Jancova and see her again for the first time in two and a half years....

Funny story on Brad; many of you know we have seven cats(I have pictures to prove there are only seven!); they are a bit of an annoyance to Brad at times (well, most times).....and tonight we went out to eat at a restaurant that Petko knew ofdeep in a wooded part of a park in Varna.....and we sit down outside; Petko and I are determined to help the staff evaluate the beer they stock.....purely an act of kindness on our parts.....we order our meals and the boys suddenly say "look Daddy, just like at home!" and there sat seven cats.....all waiting for us with great cat grins in place to hopefully drop a morsel of food for them....poor guy, he can't get away from them!

Good night all.....Petko taught the boys a new word tonight "leka nosh" or "Good night" in Bulgarian.....not sure who is having more fun; the teacher or the students.....



Varna Orphanage: Main Entrance



Indoor play room



View of the Black Sea and grounds of the orphanage



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