

# Tree of Life Adoption Center

October 2007

## News from Executive Director, Daniel Stinea;

Daniel is completing documentation specific to The Hague which is due at the end of September. Please excuse his absence from this month's newsletter.

## News from International Program Director, Bianca Marcu;

We are still in search for adoptive families for our newest program, Ethiopia. The children in Ethiopia are generally healthy and well cared for. If you think you may have an interest in Ethiopia, please visit our website for program details or contact our office.

The Haitian program is also a point of interest for many prospective adoptive parents. The Haitian children are of various ages and they come from orphanages mostly maintained by missions or churches. The families currently in the process of adopting from Haiti are visiting often with their children. The adoption process can be slow but the need for families is high.

## News from International Program Coordinator, Kay Montes;

The focus of this month's newsletter is our Bulgarian program; it is one that has long been dear to our hearts. This summer, TOL was instrumental in collecting humanitarian funding to replace the boiler at one of the orphanages, allowing the 60 plus children living there to have hot water this winter. Several of you realize that when I disappeared in August, it was to deliver that donation. I am allowing that several days of our trip to be shared with you in this month's newsletter.....it was also a return trip for our youngest son, Josiah, to revisit his country of birth.

I will be spending much of October in the Portland office, working there from Oct. 3 through Oct. 13th. Thank you for checking my "working time zone" before calling. Reminder; even when I am at my home base in the mid-west, I work Portland hours (Pacific Time) Monday through Friday (9-5). 503-702-3108 as needed.

## News from Client Care Coordinator, Kay J;

This month we are focusing our newsletter on Bulgaria. This is a program near to my heart as Bulgaria is the birth country of my two wonderful daughters. Below you will see pictures of "typical" waiting children in Bulgaria. While the Bulgarian process will not allow us to post pictures of children currently available for adoption, hopefully these pictures will give you insight into the heart of Bulgaria, its children. As I can attest, the Bulgarian children are beautiful, loving, and so in need of homes. On page 2, we provide a general overview of Bulgaria and the adoption process. Page 3 & 4 are very special, as they are part one of Kay Montes' journey to Bulgaria with her husband and two of her children, one having been adopted from Bulgaria several years earlier. Look for further excerpts of Kay's journal in upcoming newsletters.

CONTENTS:	
NEWS BULLETINS	1
FACES OF BULGARIA	1
BULGARIAN OVERVIEW	2
DEAR FRIENDS & FAMILY; JOURNAL ENTRY #1	3

## Faces of Bulgaria

Here are pictures of some of the precious Bulgarian children shortly after coming home. While potential adoptive parents are not allowed to choose a child from a photo listing, we hope these pictures give you a sense of the children waiting in Bulgaria for their forever family.



## Focus on Bulgaria Program

We have been attempting to provide a monthly focus on one of our programs; this month we have chosen Bulgaria.

This is a program that has long been a favorite with Tree of Life. Many of you may not be aware of the geographic location of this small Eastern European country. It is situated on the Balkan peninsula and borders Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Romania. Bulgaria is comprised of 110,912 square kilometers and a population of 8,427,418 citizens. The capital is Sofia, a city of long history. Other major cities are Plovdiv, Varna, Rousse, and Bourgas. The currency is lev (although under transition to Euro); the official language is Bulgarian. The population is homogeneous from an ethnic point of view with 90% Bulgarians. From the minorities the largest group is the Turkish (around 8%), followed by the Gypsies (Roma). According to the Bulgarian government all persons born in Bulgaria are Bulgarian. Despite the communist period of Atheism, the population currently professes Christianity and Muslim religion (within the Turkish population). The modern economy of the country has been influenced by three significant historic events. The first, the liberation of Turkish rule when the country accepted the capitalist model based on the institution of personally owned property. This model changed during the reign of communism when a series of reforms were made to transform the economy of the country. The nationalization of all economic activities and the lack of private property affected all sectors. The third significant event is connected with the abolishment of the communist regime in Eastern Europe. After its abolishment, Bulgaria faced the difficult problem of entering the market economy and dealing with privatization being instituted again. The transition into a market economy required a series of reforms for the privatization of most state enterprises. The difficulties Bulgaria is still facing are connected to bringing the economy to healthy reform. As of January 1, 2007, Bulgaria was recognized as part of the European Union.

As related to adoptions and the current situation in Bulgaria; it has changed tremendously in the past years. Many of the changes are due to the implementation of the Hague Convention at the end of 2003; the law changed the system under which the children were matched to a family; before that time, we as agencies were allowed information about the children in need of family's and as such, we could offer those specific children to families. Following the law change at the end of 2003, the process switched over to what we call a "referral by request". The children are no longer allowed to be viewed by potential families until that family receives a referral; the process now allows us to present the potential family by compiling their dossier and providing the parameters of the child they would consider as one they would adopt. This most often includes; 1) age of child desired 2) gender of child desired 3) ethnicity of child willing to accept and 4) health status of desired child (if a family specifically desires to add a child with a medical need, we are allowed some initial non identifying information on children with medical needs for the consideration by the prospective parents before referral). Following the acceptance and registration of the dossier, a referral is made by the Ministry of Justice (currently an average of six to eight months following dossier submission). After receiving the referral, the process moves quickly; you visit the child, if you accept the referral, final documents are submitted, and court is held generally within eight weeks. The decree is final on the day of the judges ruling and arrangements are then made to come for your embassy interview. Our children have been coming home 10-12 weeks following the visitation trip.

The BIG NEWS is that due to a "cleansing of the Ministry" and isolation of several persons who have now have been removed and charged with "failure to complete their duties" the adoptions of Bulgaria are due to be increased many times over. This is the official news release that we received several weeks ago;

..... The new Minister of Justice Mrs. Miglena Tacheva gave an exclusive interview for the biggest TV in Bulgaria (BTV) on August 30th. She stated that she dismissed Mrs. Antoaneta Kalauzka, Director of "International Legal Child Protection and Intercountry Adoptions" Directorate for non-execution of her duties.

One of the main reasons for her dismissal is the artificial hold of the adoption procedures. Mrs. Tacheva officially stated there is no such requirement from the European Commission or a political reason for the decreased number of adoption procedures and it is intolerable that the adoptions are limited in numbers to far fewer than the number of waiting children.....

As a result of this development and the efforts of many to bring about these changes, we are accepting and encouraging families that feel their child may be waiting in Bulgaria to start the process soon! Who are these children in need?

There are 360 orphanages in Bulgaria and the official number of children in the orphanages is around 24,000. Of this number, approximately 6000 are under the age of six. Lack of cultural embracer in birth control and the resultant family size which then creates overwhelming poverty are the most common reasons for abandonment of the children. Most children are ethnic "Roma" or Gypsy; beautiful creamy skinned children of Turkish decent. Often, "true" Bulgarian children are also available for adoption; blue eyed, creamy skinned and dark haired children. Due to the slowness of the program as a result of the identified corrupt Ministry officials limiting the number of referrals in the past three years, there are an abundance of healthy waiting toddlers up to the age of three. We are prioritizing finding families for these wonderful children.

Our 'featured' writer of the month is Kay Montes, International Program Coordinator for TOL who spent ten days working in the country during the month of August. Many of you are aware that Kay's youngest three children are adopted from Bulgaria and as a result, this country is her "heart program". She, along with her husband Brad and her two sons, Joel, 7, and Josiah, 6 delivered a humanitarian check to the orphanage in Turgovishte where Josiah lived for the first two years of his life. The orphanage had been without a boiler/heater system for the past year and through the generous donations of the church the Montes family attends, the community where they live and many past adoptive families of Bulgarian children through TOL, \$5000.00 was hand delivered. Following are several days of Kay's journal from the trip across Bulgaria....these will also be posted eventually on the TOL web site so that all of the photos can be accessed.

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. What we are sharing this month is the first entry in Kay's journal that was sent home to family members. More entries will follow in the coming months. We hope you enjoy taking a trip into the heart of Bulgaria and its orphanages.

**Our day today; Bulgaria**

Dear friends and family, today is our second day in Bulgaria .....the boys are amazing little ones; they have charmed most of those they have met with quick grins and a soft "Dobra Den" which means "good day/hello" and then , Kak si? Which means "how are you?" .....

Josiah lost his hat(go figure) on the first flight; we walked the streets of Sofia tonight to find a new one.....I love it here...."fast food" is chicken shish kabobs on a grill and grilled peppers; beer comes in two liter bottles.....hot almonds and ice cream for desert.....



Kay, Brad, Josiah and Joel at the Rila Monastery

Today we visited the Rila (pronounced "REELA" monastery.....40 monks still live and worship here.....amazingly devoted men .....(yes Thomas and Andrew; I bought you new rosaries; my gift for your hearts that are full of faith)

We have breathed the lives of many who have been the very heart of Bulgaria.....I can not share the deep feelings of admiration and wonder at the lives they have lived.....

The boys are exhausted but doing beautifully (wish you were here to carry them Micah; you have done it before and I have no doubt that you could walk these streets again with your brothers on your shoulders).....I shared a middle of the night picture of them totally exhausted.....we have gained our time difference and are doing well now.....a seven hour difference is a leap.....



Mosque at the Rila Monastery

Our team here is simply incredible and gracious.....the boys have a relationship with them already and run to their arms when they see them each time.....the brought the boys books on Bulgaria last night (Anne, more amazing books for our libraries! I am looking for one about goats but they seem to be taken for granted here.....they are beautiful and run the roads with abandon)

Tomorrow we will go to Turgovishte; this is where the orphanage is that Josiah was cared for during the first 22 months of his life.....at times he is very stressed; I expect that tomorrow may trigger some really big memories....he freaked out when the airport demanded his shoes (a left over memory of when he was a baby and the staff at the orphanage told him "your new mommy will come and bring you new shoes" .....in his mind "new shoes" + "mommy" = HOME AND FAMILY..... it was amazing to watch him calm as we explained that we all had to take off our shoes..... it was not just him.....and we would get them back.....but every security stop (one in Indianapolis, one in Chicago, one in Vienna, one in Sofia)....he had to ask again "will they give my shoes back?". I am learning much as a mommy.....and we think that house payments and school schedules are stressful.....this poor guy is afraid if he takes his shoes off he will loose his family.....this trip will teach him that we are here for him for ever.....



Living quarters at the Rila Monastery; 40 monks reside here

Tomorrow we will see the woman that Josiah says "loved me first" (the Director of the orphanage); we are teaching that the "first" woman that loved him was his birth mother.....she could have killed him early instead of giving him life by carrying him to birth.....we want him to love her also for the gift of life that allowed him to become our son.....Dr. Penkova is the Director of the Children's Home for Children in Turgovishte.....and she was the second woman who loved him.....she truly cared for our son while he waited for us to come and bring him home.....not many others would have given a thought for caring for a baby that was 1) boy 2) Roma or Gypsy in ethnicity (and yes, we have had many many people really look us over this week; the fair mommy with the dark child), and 3) a child with a medical need.....but she kept our son well during the wait to be allowed to bring our precious boy home.....we are anxious to see her; she insisted that we come tomorrow as we had planned to see her on Tuesday or Wednesday but this was simply not fast enough for her.....it will be hard; there are over a 100 children in care at this time...we will see these children.....and we know that Josiah and Joel will have to stretch to understand why they don't have mommies and daddies like they do.....how do you explain .....



Dr. Penkova, the Director of the Turgovishte with Josiah & Joel

Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3

Our team here was overwhelmed by the amount of donation we have brought to the orphanage.....it seemed a reasonable amount to us.....but within this place.....it is a fortune.....we will meet with the Director of the orphanage to decide what is most pressing for the children; the boiler has been paid for.....now, do we fix the windows? Or do we build a playground.....

Those of you that know my heart well know that this is wrenching for me.....

Tomorrow night we will stay in rooms that in times past pregnant woman who had been rejected by their families were allowed to live in before they delivered.....at the orphanage where our baby girls lived until they came home to us...again.....the Director is an amazing woman and she is asking us to come to her.....I pray that we can be an encouragement to her as she is opening a very vulnerable part of the orphanage to care for us in this way...we will let the boys play in the Black Sea on Monday and Tuesday.....

More tomorrow; seven hour drive.....

Tremendous love for you all...

Kay, Brad, Joel and Josiah.



Play room and bedrooms at Turgovishte Orphanage where Josiah lived for the first 22 months of his life



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