



# Tree of Life Adoption Center

March 2008

## News from Executive Director, Daniel Stinea

Many of you are aware that TOL prioritizes being very 'personal' with our in-country teams and frequently as Executive Director I travel to each country to meet with the attorney's, coordinator's, government officials and orphanage directors that are vital to working with TOL. During the month of February I traveled to meet with the new Deputy Minister of Justice in Bulgaria, Mrs. Raichinova. Our intention has always been to meet the needs of the children who wait for families; during the slow acclimation to Hague law in Bulgaria at the end of 2003 and the following years, we are one of few agencies that patiently worked in this country and continued to bring children home while changes came to reality. As a result, our agency relationship with the officials in this country is one of deep gratitude and they in turn are very welcoming when we have the opportunity to pay them a visit. My meeting with Mrs. Raichinova was very positive and I believe that again, the children will benefit greatly under the new leadership. There are many children waiting and I want to personally congratulate the families who have stepped forward to allow us to present them in the country; this takes great commitment and faith on your part as this is what in turn will allow the MOJ to show their desire and ability to work efficiently. If they have no dossiers to process, they can not show the numbers of children being referred and therefore demonstrate their new level of functionality. We anticipate our first referrals very soon.

As I was "in the neighborhood", I traveled next to Kiev, Ukraine. Many of you have visited our web site and read the announcement of the re-opening of this program. My trip to the country was vital in that we are working with a new government and a new set of laws that again are more beneficial to the children who wait. Our team is also a new set of attorney's than those with whom we worked with in the past and my time with them was important to securing the high level of communication that has become the solid foundation of working with TOL in any program. As we know and recognize that the process of adding a child to your family through international adoption can be one of the greatest and most challenging journey's your family will ever undertake, having a positive and high set of standards for all of our programs is vital to supporting you along the path to bring your child home. I was pleased and very assured that the abilities of the team in Ukraine are and will be of a level that is consistent with our expectations. We are prepared to work with new families that believe their children wait in this country. We look forward to bringing children home from the Ukraine in the months ahead.

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Hague accreditation: many of you have asked "why is TOL not on the released list of accredited agencies": we were informed and congratulated for our excellent presentation of information to the COA in November. At that time, we were notified that our file was complete and no further documents were needed. (Further verified by the "documents completed on time" list of agencies that the COA posted mid February where we were not "asterisked" as not having completed requirements) On February 28<sup>th</sup>, we were notified that an additional document was needed: on February 29<sup>th</sup>, the 'first round' of accredited agencies was announced and posted to the public at large. We will provide the necessary information to the COA officials this week. Please note that Hague is not "official" until April 1<sup>st</sup> and many worthy agencies are still awaiting their accreditation notification: the DOS provides teaching to the public on their site specific to this and agencies will be added over the next month as any documents that are requested are provided. Thank you for all of you that have educated yourselves to the amazing amount of work that has gone into this accreditation process; it has been an educational experience of a lifetime for all agencies and the COA as to how to accomplish this goal.

I thank you for taking time to visit not only our web site, but to keep in touch.

## News from International Program Director, Bianca Marcu;

We are pleased to report that we are working with a new orphanage in Haiti. Our team in Haiti is happy to be working with the Tree of Life Family, and look forward to placing many waiting children into forever families. Our first family preparing to adopt from this orphanage is preparing their dossier. The Haitian program tends to run more slowly than we would like as a result of the government process within the country. We are hopeful that with new staff and others in the country that clients will start to bring their children home sooner than later. There are certainly many beautiful children that await loving families and we are eager to see that they find their way home.

## News from Client Care Coordinator: Kay J.

We are pleased to welcome home our first child from Ethiopia! Many of you may remember seeing her smiling face in past editions of our newsletter under the "waiting children" section. Now you can see her on page 3 under our "Welcome Home" section! Next month we will provide a focus on Ethiopia and some of our waiting children there. If you are not on the distribution list to receive this newsletter electronically, please send me an e-mail at [clientcarecoordinator@toladopt.org](mailto:clientcarecoordinator@toladopt.org). I will add you to our distribution. Also, please remember to add my e-mail to your contact list so that the newsletter is not sent to your junk mail file.

## News from International Program Coordinator, Kay Montes

Our congratulations to all families in process in Guatemala.....for your patience, your wisdom to balance 'the truth', to manage your stress, to visit your children in the country, to hold them close and dig your heals in while we work every day to inch our way closer to the ever sought after "PINK" slip, to take time to communicate in a positive and supportive way not only to your team at TOL but your team in Guatemala. Get those nurseries ready for home comings! It has, and continues to be an amazing journey to fight to bring home each and every child in process from Guatemala. The country is officially closed to international adoption; will it open again? If experience is worth any point of reference and other countries efforts are a mirror.....not for a very long time. To have voted into being a law that required children to be placed in non existent orphanages is amazing in and of itself.....to watch the reality of children being born in a country where there is no 'safe place' for mothers in need to go for help.....is heart breaking. TOL will bring each of our family's children home and we will not walk away.....our efforts will stay the course to do all that we can to provide hope for the children that are being born now.

As we 'tick off' each child home to their family from Guatemala, please remember that you can not "compare" adoptions; all children have different municipalities that must issue their birth certificates, all have birth mothers that must sign off on documents, all have files that have to be checked, rechecked and checked again so as to avoid a "previa" from our own US Embassy when the final presentation is handed in. They are coming home.....one at a time. Our congratulations to Kozil family in January and to Anne, Teresa, and Dale and Dianne as we hope to have all three of your little ones home before we go to press again.

**Bulgaria:** we are pleased to share that we have four new dossiers in country; our attorney has received nine referrals for Italian families since the beginning of the year. We have 14 families working on dossiers and we can't wait to see 'who' will be referred to each of these families. We are very proud to have the highest number of new clients in country of any other agency and as a direct result of Daniel's trip to the country in February, we know that the MOJ is equally pleased with the efforts of TOL and the families willing to step up to parent a child from this wonderful country! Congratulations to all of those who are part of this exciting program!

Personally, my thanks to all of you for your kindness over the holidays to share photos and updates that allow me to be reminded of who we work for.....some amazingly beautiful wonderful little children who are safely home in their new families! I appreciate you more than I can share.....Kay

My "quote of the month" goes to a small friend of mine;

*When called a "looser" by a "shake her head and hips" kind of attitude girl, "I just turned and walked away. That is how I be polite to bad people!"*

Anna Jarboe, age five, adopted from Bulgaria, home three years

## 2007-2008 Primary Project: Help for Andrey

Over the past few months we shared with you Andrey. This young boy turned 14 on January 31st, 2008. He has been living in an orphanage in Eastern Europe and was relinquished at birth due to his facial deformities. He is now here in the United States staying with a host family as he undergoes several surgeries to repair is cleft lip and pallet.

We have wonderful news to share, as Andrey's first surgery has been completed! He continues to thrive in his sponsor family's home and is learning many things quickly; things that we take for granted are simple and deep pleasures to Andrey. He has called the Director of his orphanage several times and tells him "I am being a good boy" and indeed he is! He is so sweet about all that is happening: he toured the hospital the week before the surgery and smiled his way through the entire experience; including giving blood! The goal of the first surgery was to close the palate and lip. The surgery took five hours; they were successful in closing the palate completed and used a bone graft from the top of his hip to fill the large gap in his palate. Only the palate is closed right now with the goal being to make the palate strong before any work will be done on his nose and lips. He went home from the hospital one day later! Thank you all for you support and encouragement for Andrey! If any one is interested in sending a card to Andrey please let us know and we can provide the address! As Andrey heals and grows stronger we will share photos.



## Waiting for Their Forever Family

This beautiful little girl waits in Eastern Europe; she is five and the top of her pre-school class; she is bright, affectionate and would do beautifully in a family. She has a medical condition called “arthrogryposis” which affects the tendon’s and muscles in her ankles and wrists. The Senator of Oregon adopted a similarly affected child several years ago through TOL and she is thriving. No doubt that she would do the same; one of our staff along with several of our families have met this wonderful little girl and can talk to you about adopting her. She will qualify for reduced fees and granting. Please spread the word on this little lady; a family who is motivated to work hard and fast on documentation could be in the country within six months: one trip adoption and she would come home with you. Please help us find her a family; she’s “special” and surely someone “needs” her.



This is Elmira; a tiny little lady with Cerebral Palsy; she has recently been moved from the baby house to an orphanage where there is little distinction between a “mental need” and a “medical need”; you can see that she is bright and attentive. She will need a family with experience in finding medical help for a child with her condition; she does not talk at this time which is why she was moved.....she can’t tell them how much she wants to learn and do what other five year old little girls do! One of our staff members spent a day with her; she has a limited range of motion in her legs which would be so much better with physical therapy and perhaps a tendon release. She loved the attention and responded with giggles and smiles. We do not want her future to be bleak and are actively searching for a family with a heart for a child with Cerebral Palsy. Could this be you? Can you share her information with others that might be interested in a daughter who needs a loving family? She is eligible for reduced fees and grant assistance; if a family is motivated to complete documents quickly, they could be in the country within six months: one trip adoption and she comes home with her family. PLEASE help us bring this child to the United States where she has a future.



## Welcome Home!

Andrea, home with daughter Quila from Guatemala



Lisa, home with daughter Bethlehem from Ethiopia

Following is the final installment of Kay Montes travel journal from Bulgaria. Past entries can be found in previous newsletters, starting with October 2007. In this edition, I included my favorite entry, number 5. This had also been a part of last month's newsletter, but I find it so stirring that I felt the need to include it again, with our final installment of Kay's trip. And as Kay mentions below, the pictures we are sharing are a picture journey as the world changes from one side of the country to the other and the contrast between a Bulgarian farm house and a Roma dwelling.

Enjoy. Kay J.

## Kay Montes Bulgarian Journal

### Entry 5

Dear All, sorry to have disappeared on you; we had a car breakdown and a part that had to be ordered.....we spent a second night sleeping at the orphanage where the girls were raised for two years.....our visit there was emotional to say the least.....the staff and the Director were amazed at the pictures of the girls.....they passed the pictures back and forth many many times.....they took us to the nursery and showed us the beds where the girls slept.....

The range of emotion for us was extreme.....the Director was surprised that Mattea was still alive.....she shared details with us that we had no idea about.....it is wonderful to know more of our daughters history.....

Petko left us to swim at the Black Sea.....the boys played hard and loved every moment.....we filled them with ice cream and did some "before school" shopping for them; the shoes are very well made here and both boys loved going shopping. They both are sporting new shoes and were in a rush to show them to Petko.....I think that he is amazed that something so "basic" as shoes brings such smiles.....

Another night in the orphanage.....As we left this morning a darling little three year old ran to me and grabbed my hand while pounding her chest and saying "me? me? me?".....the children know what it means when an American couple comes.....some one has a mommy and daddy.....I was reminded why I work as hard as I do.....

Back to have coffee and breakfast in the city this morning; more ice-cream (all fresh ingredients; we watched them deliver this morning to the venders.....bucket after bucket of fresh fruit and ice-cream.....

Then a two hour drive to Turgovishte; a short visit with the Director and then to the hotel (we had rented an apartment but as we were delayed in arriving they rented it out); the hotel is the same one in which I stayed four years ago on my first visit to Bulgaria.....we are going out now to find dinner.....working the next three days at the orphanage painting and repairing the play equipment.....

Much love to you all..... Will talk as we can.....

### Entry 6

Friday morning involved riding four hours on a bus.....we didn't need to wake the boys twice! They were excited enough to roll out at the "first call". The picture journey as the world changes from one side of the country to the other.....

We arrived to a lovely apartment that had been rented for us.....I went to the office and worked for a few hours with our team there.....boys and dad managed to find yet another place to indulge their need for ice-cream during my time away.....

### Entry 7

One more post as we share the "final leg" home.....

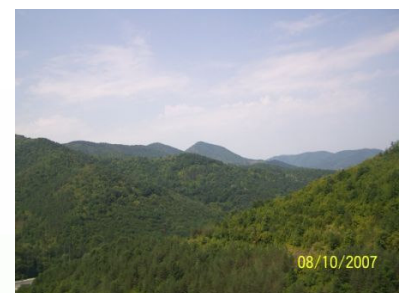
A final "sharing" with all of you.....the boys were tickled to find that they each had their own bed at our last stop.....they claimed they were not tired but these pictures were taken between Brad telling them to "climb in" and Mom arriving to give kisses and say prayers.....about three minutes...

Most of you know how I love morning.....only if it is one or two am.....so needless to say I was a ray of sunshine when six am arrived and Petko rang the doorbell; my "morning joyfulness" is only to be outdone by Petko's so we were a good match.....

I attached pictures from our apartment to the airport.....such a contrast of lives .....and proof that I really did go along on this trip.....

A final view of Bulgaria .....the mountains as we passed over and headed to Vienna .....

*Continued on page 5*



*Continued from page 4*

Where we learned that our flight to Chicago had been cancelled.....our 24 hour trip home ended up much longer and our luggage is somewhere between Vienna and London Heathrow.....(if I ever visit there again it will be too soon!). The boys however managed to talk their way into the cockpit on each leg home; just ask them to tell you about the difference in planes that have steering wheels and those that have levers.....

But we are safely home and hearts are full.....thanks to all who cared for our children, supported our efforts to make this great journey, allowed us the time and who waited at the airport until the wee hours of the morning.

Blagodarya ti mnogo za vskichko! Thank you so much for everything!



## The Winding Path to International Adoption

*This month we are including an article written by one of the Tree of Life Family. It provides an interesting perspective on the lessons that international adoption often has to teach us. If you have a story you would like to share with the Tree of Life Family, please send it to me at [clientcarecoordinator@toladopt.org](mailto:clientcarecoordinator@toladopt.org).*

My husband and I began our adventures with International Adoption in 2002. We were excited beyond words and just couldn't "wait" to put our sweet child into our arms. However, we had no idea what was ahead; so much to learn about cultures, the adoption process in and of itself, personalities, and ourselves among other things.

Adopting internationally has been an amazing experience...one in which my husband and I have now done with Tree of Life for three times. However, it is not an easy process and it gives a person a new insight to life. International adoption is a winding path sometimes with a few bumps along the way....If you go into the process knowing that; you will be much more at peace during the process.

Our first lesson learned was that "time" in every culture is different. Americans are busy and on schedule for all events and happenings; time is prompt. Americans want things to be done yesterday and being late is rude. This is not necessarily true for other countries. "In the morning" may mean morning of tomorrow, or "swiftly" may mean two months from now...So what do you take from that? Don't set yourself up for heartache. Whatever you are waiting for will happen; just not necessarily in your time. Patience, we have learned is a necessity.

Second lesson learned was to trust those that you have put your faith in to bring your child home. There is so much out there for you to connect to; blogs, chat lines, adoption forums... information which may not be accurate. Stay away from those "outside" sources. NOT every case is alike. Ask your questions to your coordinator...he or she will be honest and give you the latest data they have. They have no reason to "hide" anything from you...they are there for YOU.

Third lesson; there may be bumps in the path. As I said earlier, all adoptions are different. One case may need an extra form; another may be sitting on a desk while judge is out for some reason; another may take longer to get to a far off region, all creating delays. Unfortunately, these are things that you can't control and your coordinator can't control. Stressing about things will not help; take deep breaths, begin working on something special for your child, drink a margarita, punch a pillow....whatever helps you to pass time (there's that word again).

Okay with all that said, you will have down days. To be expected. Believe me, I have taken my share of walks, had my cries ..... The outcome of that winding path is the most marvelous loves of your lives. We have two wonderful girls from Russia; Kate age 6, adopted from Moscow City in 2003 and Madison age 3, adopted from Magadan in 2005. We are currently in process from Guatemala for two of the most precious boys. Was it all smooth? No. Was it worth it? Yes. Would I do it again? Absolutely....

Good luck to all those in process.

Brenda



Madison and Kate, and their little brothers on their way home from Guatemala.



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