

Friends in Adoption journeys

Successfully creating families since 1982 through Compassionate Adoption Fall 2006



False starts and dashed hopes

Two families work through the bumps on their road to success

The story of Meredith



We had been busy seeing attorneys, checking out agencies, attending information sessions, choosing to work with FIA, preparing our profile, completing piles of paperwork, and getting ready for the home study. Could we even remember getting background checks, and trying to remember every last detail of our personal histories? We had scrubbed our house in anticipation of the home study, carefully chose references, and got fingerprinted.

Finally, we were “active” FIA clients and “live” on the website. I remember the date well – February 2nd – Ground Hog Day. This meant, we told our friends and family, that we could have a baby any day now or it could take a long time. Everyone was very excited for us early on. And then, after more than 6+

months of activity to start the adoption process, we waited. And waited...

We participated in the special advertising every month to improve our chances. We rushed to the mailbox every night after work seeking one of the magical postcards which could be our ticket to sleepless nights (for the

next 18 or so years). Yes, we got Melissa from Vermont, Rachel, Jamie and Rebecca from New York, Shannon from Tennessee, Ashley from Texas.

With every postcard came hope, but nothing more. And then, finally, numbness. In the end, we received well into the double-digits in postcards.

We attended every support group offered in our region by FIA, traveling over four hours round-trip just to hear what others in our shoes were doing to cope and to listen to the stories of new arrivals. Each time we felt motivated and hopeful. We called our assigned angel, Jo Ann, and got our long-distance hugs. FIA was always available to talk if we needed reassurance or a pep talk.

After a while friends and family just stopped asking

Continued on page 12

Peppermint pig brings us luck – and David!



Our adoption journey has been, like many others, a roller-coaster ride of sorts. We’ve had times of hope, promise, sadness, despair and, finally, fulfillment. Our families and friends have played an integral role in our journey as a remarkable support system. This past January, Anthony and I had dinner at our good friend Traci’s house. We were together to celebrate the New Year. We were surrounded by friends and family, yet we

Continued on page 13

dawn's desk

It has been a wonderfully hectic summer – we broke all records this year at our 24th Annual FIA Picnic with about 600 folks enjoying a day of sun and fun. We received a letter from an adoptive Mom in attendance that sums up the day.

She wrote:

Dear FIA Family,

It was so wonderful to see all of you at the picnic. The entire day felt like one big group hug. Annie has not stopped talking about it and as Dawn knows, Annie can talk! She keeps us on our toes constantly. God has blessed us with the gift of our daughter. We can never thank you enough for the work you do. We look forward to seeing you in October (see pages 8 and 9 for details on our exciting upcoming Capital Campaign Silent Auction). Please send the enclosed package to our daughter's birth parents.

All of our love,

Joe, Laura & Annie

This is why we have the picnic every year – we ARE a family... a growing family and already we are making plans for our 25th Annual Glorious, Gala Picnic to be held on JULY 13-15, 2007, the SECOND weekend in July! Please mark your calendars now. It is our hope that all of our waiting families will have a placement by then so that they will be able to join us. And continuing with that thought, the FIA staff has been busy educating the public about *Compassionate Adoption* all summer. I'm sitting at the *Devil's Bowl Speedway* as I write this letter. FIA and its clients are sponsoring three events – we are giving away FIA frisbees and pens and our literature is available. We were also at the *Open House* and the *Latina Woman's Health Fair* at the Saratoga Race Track. And we have lots more *Outreach Events* planned for the Fall. For more information on the exciting news about FIA, please visit our website at www.friendsinadoption.org and click onto **BUZZ BUZZ**.

One last note: Our *Get Acquainted Weekends* are booking quickly and we do not like to turn folks away. If you are interested in attending one, you must complete the short form on the back cover of this newsletter and send it to FIA. The form is also available on our website.

welcome home

our family

Penny, Warren, Angela & Spencer
Armando & John
Jay, Julie, Janae, Cassie, Jacob & Carly
Kory & Keri
Patrick, Dina & Madison
Brian & Ann Marie
Alan, Janice & Samantha
Phil & Lisa
Nat & Jason
Sean & Tricia
Keith & Megan
Greg & Keith
Rick & Tara
Glen, Terri & Jeremy
Anthony & Lisa
Michael & Calvin
Trish, Gina & Avery
Fletcher & Bobbijeane
Maureen & Dan

welcomes

Micah Joshua
Sara Elizabeth
Ella Grace
Ella Elizabeth
Ava Elizabeth
Meredith Grace
Emma Mari
Nathan William
Maxwell Elliot
Abigail
Kerrigan Rylee
Mira Grace
Brandon Jacob
James Thomas
David Michael
Vivien Stella
Fintan Collier
Jocelyn
Charles Nicholas

Journeys is published two times a year by Friends in Adoption. Send your letters, photos and comments to Mary Walsh Snyder, Friends in Adoption, 653 Plank Road, Suite 200, Clifton Park, NY 12065, mary@friendsinadoption.org. Letters may be edited for space.

fia kids

Dear Mom,

When I was 1, and could barely crawl, you were there to carry me every second.

When I was 2, and couldn't go up the stairs without getting hurt, you were there to carry me up.

When I was 3, and you were potty training me, sometimes I would miss and you would clean it up for me.

When I was 4, and had a lot of times when I was tired, you would nap with me.

When I was 5 and Matt was 8 and stronger, he would hurt me and you always had a shoulder for me to cry on.

When I was 6 and was a messy eater, you would scrub out the stains.

When I was 7 and was outside most of the time, I got a lot of cuts and you would be there to clean them and put a pretty band-aid on them.

When I was 8 and got dirty a lot I would have to change and you were always there to do the extra laundry.

When I was 9 and made the gymnastics team, you were there to always pay the fees.

Now...I am 10.

Happy Mother's Day!

Love Kara



kara

harrison

Dear Friends in Adoption,

I have known about my adoption ever since I was old enough to understand, about three-years-old. Last Spring I was in my mom's room and looking through her drawers and I found a letter to me from my birth mother. I got upset and did not understand why I did not know about it. My mother was living in Mississippi when Hurricane Katrina hit and was a victim. I got on the American Red Cross web site and then found that her family was looking for her. I begged my mom to get in touch with them and I have been in touch with my birth family for about a year now.

Thank You Friends in Adoption for helping kids like me find their family.

See page 7 for a letter from Harrison's mom.



Hi Dawn,

I think it's exciting to have a birth mother cause it's another member of the family other people don't have, and birth mothers can be really fun. I'm sad some parents are over-protective. Birth mothers work hard to make babies. They eat a lot of food and they have a lot of pain, and their kids should be happy to know them. It's more family and it's good. I know if kids are really young, parents want to be over-protective. But they can talk to me and I'll tell them how happy I am.

Matthew (almost 7)

matthew



Many adoptions are finalized without birth fathers participating in, or even being aware of, the mother's adoption plan. Adoptive families and women considering adoptive placements are uncertain whether a father can challenge an adoption of an infant. Further, a pregnant woman and a potential adoptive family may have different perspectives, expectations and goals regarding the father. The woman may wish to keep the father "out of the loop," while the adoptive family may wish to include him in the process for legal, medical and psycho-social reasons. Although legal challenges by fathers are thankfully rare, it may be helpful to remember the following general points:

1. The pregnant woman is not required to identify the father

In New York, the mother is normally not required to identify the father. In addition, she is not required to seek out the father and inform him of her pregnancy or her adoption plans. A pregnant woman considering adoption may therefore feel more comfortable keeping the father's name to herself, since she is under no legal obligation to reveal it.

2. The placement will proceed more smoothly if the father is known

If the father is known, he can hopefully be contacted to determine his position if the mother wishes. However, if he is unknown or unidentified, the adoptive family's attorney or agency is usually required to put a "John Doe" notice in a newspaper, necessitating additional cost and a slight delay in the finalization. Further, the adoptive family and the child

are placed in a less certain position until the adoption is finalized.

3. By not identifying the father, the mother could place her own rights at risk

If a mother signs a New York out-of-court surrender to an FIA adoption, the document will become final in 30 days. What if a father who has not been advised of the pregnancy/placement later appears to challenge the adoption? If the adoptive family decides not to proceed, the father may be able to argue that the mother has no rights to oppose him since her surrender is final and she has legally abandoned the child.

4. In New York, fathers fall into three legal categories depending on their actions after they learn of the mother's pregnancy/adoption plan

Fathers who have the right to withhold consent to adoption:

Under a 1990 ruling by New York's highest court, if a father promptly takes "every available avenue" to assert his parental rights and proves that he is ready, willing and able to actually take custody of the child, he may be able to veto the adoption. A father may assert parental rights by applying for paternity or custody, paying the mother's/child's expenses, holding himself out as the child's father, and offering to raise the child or marry the mother.

The father's position will be weakened if he is acting as a stand-in for a third party who will actually be taking custody in his place.

Fathers who have the limited right to argue that the adoption is

not in the child's "best interests":

A father can gain this limited status by signing an affidavit of paternity, being adjudicated the child's father by a court, being identified by the mother as the child's father in a sworn statement, being listed as the father on the child's birth certificate, or living with the child and holding himself out as the father. However, he cannot automatically veto the adoption. Instead, his ability to parent the child will be compared to that of the adoptive family in a "best interests" hearing. At such a hearing, the Court may not favor the father merely because of his biological relationship to the child. Rather, the Court must consider objective factors only (emotional/financial stability, education, ability to parent/nurture the child). As might be expected, adoptive families are usually successful at "best interests" hearings.

Fathers who have no rights:

Fathers who meet neither the "consent" test nor the "best interests" test have no rights under New York Law.

5. "Ignorant" fathers have limited rights

Since the mother is not required to let the father know of her pregnancy or adoption plan, a father who is unaware of the pregnancy and adoption plan will lose all rights after the adoption is finalized. An "ignorant" father who learns of the mother's pregnancy/adoption plan after birth but before finalization is still able to come into court to oppose the adoption. In addition to satisfying

the assertion-of-rights and fitness tests, he will be required to explain why he did not keep in close contact with the mother after the child's conception.

6. "Deceived" fathers have greater rights

A father who does not learn of the pregnancy or adoption plan as a result of the mother's active concealment or deception is not penalized if he comes forward late. Of course, he must still satisfy the assertion-of-rights and fitness tests.

7. Incarcerated fathers

Although theoretically an incarcerated father may apply to veto the adoption, a man whose remaining prison sentence is greater than 30 months will not be able to block the adoption as a matter of law.

8. Multi-state situations

If the father lives outside of New York, his rights may be governed by the adoption laws of his state, especially if he takes legal steps before the child's placement.

From a legal point of view, the mother considering adoption must be advised of her right not to identify the father. However, she should also be told that the adoption will proceed more smoothly if the father can be identified and that she could lose her rights if she signs a surrender without identifying the father, if he later enters the picture and asks for custody. If mothers are made aware of this information, it is hoped that more of them will consider identifying the child's father – which is invariably the preferred starting point for an adoptive placement.

Brendan O'Shea is an attorney with offices in Albany, New York. He may be reached at boshea@gdwo.net or (518) 432-7511.

Children waiting for parents.

You can change their lives.

Jonathan **Birthday: April 1994**

“Jon” is an engaging and articulate child who loves to smile! He likes all kinds of automobiles, from big trucks to race cars. He is a huge Nascar fan and can frequently be seen playing with his Hot Wheels out in the yard on a summer day. During the winter, he loves to watch hockey and build snow forts.

Jon is in 4th grade and is enrolled in special education classes due to behavioral concerns. He performs best in calm settings where he is not frequently distracted. Jon is diagnosed with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder and depression. Jon is reactive to his environment and may become easily frustrated if something is too difficult for him. However, when he feels comfortable and secure he handles stress well.

Jon would flourish in an environment that is sensitive and nurturing. A family that can provide consistency as well as kindness and gentle understanding would be ideal.

Niya **Birthday: July 1994**

Niya is a sweet girl with a wonderful sense of humor! She thrives on positive attention and loves to have fun! Niya enjoys reading, playing basketball and playing with dolls.

She is in 4th grade and is enrolled in special education classes. She is a hard-working student who enjoys learning and strives for success!

Niya has a medical condition that sometimes impairs her mobility. She has difficulty walking and occasionally needs assistance. Niya is ready to become part of a loving forever family.

She needs an energetic family who can provide her with a stable environment and who is committed to helping her with her medical needs. With proper encouragement and guidance, Niya will flourish into a wonderful young lady.



Antonio **Birthday: March 1994**

Antonio is an intelligent boy with a thirst for knowledge! He loves reading and will pick up most any book that's lying around. When he's not enthralled in a great book, he enjoys rough-and-tumble play outdoors, climbing trees and playing tag with other kids.

Antonio is in 5th grade and does well in school. His teacher says that he is intellectually gifted and is capable of working above his grade level.

Antonio is a caring and respectful boy who is looking forward to being adopted. He needs a family who can provide him with the support and encouragement that he needs to achieve his dreams. Antonio has a sibling with whom he hopes to maintain contact.

Marlene **Diamond**
Birthday: July 1992 **Birthday: June 1994**

Marlene is a talented young teen with a knack for writing. She has received numerous awards for her short stories! She has a lively personality and loves a good conversation.

Marlene is in 8th grade. She does well in school, typically receiving all A's and B's. She is active in extracurricular activities and enjoys being on the cheerleading team. Marlene has experienced much heartbreak in her young life, and does not always make the best choices. She is doing better understanding her emotions and maintaining appropriate behaviors.

Diamond is a friendly young man whose passion is drawing. No matter where he goes, his sketchpad is never far behind! He also likes to play basketball and video games. He loves animals and hopes to have a dog someday. Diamond is in 5th grade and is working at grade level. He sometimes needs help to stay focused and on task, but his teachers report that he is very pleasant and helpful.

Marlene and Diamond are siblings who belong together! They are ready for a fun and active family who can provide them with individualized attention, encouragement, boundaries and unconditional love.

family album



What do I tell my child about their birth mother?

Harrison's mom shares her story.

Hi Mary,

This is Harrison's mother (adoptive mother).

My son's adventures in life have been eventful. He came into the world a preemie and was hospitalized for two weeks after his birth. He was born with sleep apnea and developed RSV at 8 weeks of age, again being hospitalized. He required an apnea monitor for one year to alert us of any difficulty with his respirations.

My son has always been a very strong person in any situation. He has a wonderful personality, a smile that lights up the room, he is very smart, and kind to everyone.

We followed the advice of Dawn, FIA's Director, about letting Harrison know he was adopted from the very beginning. I also told him that a very special lady had him for me. I also told him what a wonderful woman she was and that she allowed me to raise him and love him for the rest of his life.

Throughout his preschool years, Harrison would make up stories about his birth mother and her family. He would tell stories about taking walks through the forest or that they played in the park. I became very concerned about these stories and again consulted with Dawn to see if this was normal. These stories would come and go. He continued to ask questions and I always answered

each one with the truth. The birth mother had sent a letter to my son and a picture to give to him when I felt he was ready to have them.

Last summer my son was going through my personal items (as most children do). He found the letter and the picture of his birth mother. He went to his room to read the letter and study the picture. Finally, he brought them to me and we discussed his treasures. He found these treasures when Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf. He asked if she still lived there and I told him as much as I knew. He immediately wanted to find her for fear she was injured or without a home. He worried about his biological sister as well.

We called Dawn and faxed the letter from his birth mother so she could read it. Then with my permission she talked to Harrison about his feelings and what he wanted. Dawn, Harrison's father and myself decided that he was mature enough to handle whatever the situation may bring. We posted with the Red Cross, called other agencies and nothing turned up. Then one day...he was online with the postings and found where his birth mother's grandparents were also looking for her. Of course we had to make the phone call...she accepted Harrison with open arms. He has already met his great-grandfather and continues weekly phone conversations

with his great-grandmother. We have spoken with his grandmother as well. Though he has not made contact with his birth mother, she knows he is doing well and is loved more than anything else in this world. We plan a family reunion in July at his great-grandmother's home on a lake in Michigan. Harrison cannot wait and neither can I. I want to meet our extended family...yes, it is my extended family too. His birth family has made me feel so comfortable and special as well.

You never know how anyone will feel when uniting the adoptive family and the birth family. I can only say from our experience it is a joyful time in our lives. Harrison is only 14 and very mature for his age. He has been able to manage his feelings with the help of both families.

My son has many talents and they have definitely come from his biological family. They are musicians, singers, and writers. Harrison is a Jr. Olympic Champion in Power Tumbling and Trampoline, he plays musical instruments, sings, dances (ballet, hip-hop, jazz, tap) and attends the creative and performing arts school in our area. Now he has a contract in New York for acting, singing and dancing. He will be auditioning for films, commercials, Broadway productions and commercial print. He just won four awards for singer, two-person scene,

Tributes

Michael & Sandra

Jerry & Margaret

Bob & Teri

Maya

Paul & Jo Ann

Richard & Ellen

Cliff & Conio

Spiros

ExxonMobil Foundation

New York Life Insurance

United Way

Barry & Brittany
in honor of
Birth Mother's Day

actor photography and model photography.

In writing this letter, I hope it lessens some of the fears of your adoptive families. I too have had ill feelings in my stomach over the "what ifs." But I decided I needed to share my wonderful son with his biological family, so they could enjoy him, love him and care about him as I do.

“There’s no place like home” Capital Campaign

Dawn’s Dream – A forever home for FIA!

Thanks to our wonderful donors, we have raised \$620,000 – halfway to our goal!

Last fall, FIA launched a **\$1.25 million capital campaign** to achieve Dawn’s dream – that FIA will be a “forever home” for the more than 1,000 families created to date and the thousands yet to come, and a secure and accessible repository for family files.

Through the campaign, we will:

- purchase and renovate our rented Vermont office
- build a Family History Center addition with a fireproofed file vault
- create private reading areas
- construct a great room for Get Acquainted Weekends.

Our goal is to break ground at the 2007 picnic – FIA’s 25th anniversary!

To date, many wonderful alumni families and friends have **pledged over \$620,000** toward the campaign, bringing us halfway there! We are hoping that all of our families and friends will make a pledge to the campaign to their best ability, and if you haven’t yet been asked to pledge, don’t worry – you will be!

We encourage you to check out the **Table of Gifts** and...

Help fill in the blanks!

Above and beyond pledges, the **Capital Campaign Cocktail Party and Silent Auction** will bring us significantly closer to realizing Dawn’s dream. Read on!

Help fill in the blanks!
3-year pledges welcome!

TABLE OF GIFTS GOAL \$1,250,000

■ RAISED □ NEEDED

\$100,000 and up



\$50,000 and up



\$25,000 and up



\$10,000 and up



\$5,000 and up



\$3,000 and up



And lots under \$3,000!



Capital Campaign. Let's celebrate!

Come one, come all!

Cocktail Party and Silent Auction

Saturday

October 21, 2006

7 – 10 pm

The Royalton Hotel

New York City

Special Hosts –
Famous FIA Alumni
Treat and Pam
Williams!

An extraordinary evening!

Featuring a delightful roving Hors d'oeuvres reception with a limited open bar at one of midtown's top boutique hotels, the Royalton, highlighted by sensational bidding opportunities in our Silent Auction.

We are hoping that all of our Alumni, their families and their friends, and all of our colleagues and supporters, will be able to attend!

Buy your tickets and make your reservations early!

Sensational bidding opportunities!

- One-week vacation on Martha's Vineyard in a 5-bedroom home. Ferry tickets too!
- 4 tickets to the extraordinary Broadway show *Wicked*. Meet the cast and tour backstage!
- Original Henri Matisse print!
- Tickets to the Jets...the Giants...the Rangers...!
- Two-night package at the W Union Square Hotel, New York!
- DVD player, complete with DVD's and popcorn!
- And lots more!

Join the party now!

- Become a Benefit Committee member by purchasing a special ticket package!
- Buy advance tickets!
- Donate silent auction items!
- Place an ad in the event program!
- Contribute cash to help offset costs!
- Get colleagues, acquaintances, friends, and family involved!
- See if your employer donates to their employees' charitable organizations.

Who to contact:

- For tickets to the event
Campaign Director Jacki Lappen – jacki@friendsinadoption.org
- For more information regarding how you can help
Event Chair Glenn Palmer – glenn@maynardpalmer.com

Don't miss this event of the century!



mail

Happy Family

To everyone at FIA,

We really appreciate everything you've done for our family. Thank you for coming into our lives. Talia's finalization is May 16th – Yahoo! What a day to celebrate! The kids decided that each year on May 16th we would have a special "Family Day" to commemorate the endless joy and wonderful blessings that Talia brings to our entire family. Thank you so much for everything.

P.S. The small donation is a token of our thanks and part of our "Family Day" celebration. We're honored to be part of the FIA family. Thank you!



Brittany, Barry and children

Happy Family

Dear Jody, Mary & all the FIA Staff,

We can't thank you enough for your guidance through the whole adoption process. It has been amazing for us. We can't believe how lucky we are to have this beautiful new baby be part of our family. Ava is doing fantastic; Madison couldn't love her anymore and has learned so much about adoption through Ava. And Pat and I count our blessings every night! Life is so good! You guys are all great. Thank you for celebrating with us. We know how emotional each placement is for you also. See you at the picnic and hopefully at the office before that.

P.S. Love the cute t-shirt!



Pat, Dina, Madison and Ava

Adoptive Parents

It only takes **one smile** to offer welcome...and *blessed be* the person who will share it.

It only takes **one moment** to be helpful...and *blessed be* the person who will spare it.

It only takes **one joy** to lift a spirit...and *blessed be* the person who will give it.

It only takes **one life** to make a difference...and *blessed be* the person who will live it. *(Amanda Bradley)*

God blesses those who give of themselves. May he reward you for being so kind.

Mary,

I intended to write you a letter telling you all the reasons why you will forever be loved by our family, but once I opened the card to write, all I could do was CRY! In the six weeks that we've had Ella home, the

very FIRST time I cried is when I opened the mailbox and received her FIA t-shirt! I think it allowed me the chance to feel that she was *really* mine, *forever*. Now while I want to thank you – I'm crying again! Mary, THANK YOU. There are simply not enough words to describe how awesome this has been for us. We love our little girl – she was meant to be here! *Love, Julie*

Mary,

My words can't match the heartfelt expressions of Julie (or her penmanship). On a broader scale, we will do our best, and have already started, to tell the world about FIA, its mission, its accomplishments, and its genuine caring for all involved. We are hopeful that you are able to continue your mission of educating the world about adoption and we'll try to help in some small way. Mary, thank you from the bottom of my heart! *Jay*



Julie and Jay

When you open your heart...

Hi Dawn,

Hope this email finds you well. I did indeed leave Barnes & Noble and am just now starting to aggressively network toward another job. It took a bit longer than I anticipated to decompress and reevaluate where I was and what I want to do. Now that the dust has settled I am happy to say that I still love being a communications strategist. I've mapped out a marketing plan for myself and believe it's just a matter of finding who needs me NOW. Hopefully it will be sooner rather than later.

Now for the main purpose of my email: On Mother's Day, we had my mom and her partner over for brunch. It was a delightful afternoon and we sat and schmoozed and laughed the hours away. Suddenly Matthew jumped up and said to me, "Mom! I could have made Heather a card! You know, she is my birth mother." I smiled and told him that he could call her to wish her a Happy Mother's Day. So he did.

Now at this point I must digress to tell you that this past year Matthew has come to a fuller understanding of what it means to have a birth mother and has found a great deal of comfort in the knowledge that Heather will have children and he will have half-siblings eventually. He looks forward to her visits with delight and we even had her brother and his children (Matthew's cousins) visit earlier this year.

When Matthew spoke with Heather, he was delighted and delightful. It was easy to see that it meant a great deal to him to make sure Heather knew that he thought of her that day. When he was done, I got on the phone and told her, "You know I always wondered how I would feel if or when Matthew chose to honor you on this day. I'm pleased to tell you it feels good. It feels right." Heather said she always wondered too, and she was glad it was okay. She also said this day was always a tough one, but each year it got easier because Matthew had such a great mom – really the best mom. I started to cry and told her that I was proud of us and also so happy that we were able to give Mother's Day back to her. Of course then Heather started crying. So Michael sat in the background and called us wusses and we were able to laugh. All in all an extraordinary day.

If someone had told me seven years ago that my son calling his birth mother to wish her a happy Mother's Day would be the best Mother's Day gift in the world to ME, I would have asked if they were smoking funny cigarettes. But it means we are making him happy and secure, and that he knows he can express his love without conditions.

It's amazing what happens when we open our hearts and take chances. Michael said I am special. But I think it's really about Matthew. He's so special he has always made me want to be a better person. When I met you all those years ago, I didn't want what you offered. I wanted to find a baby and run and hide. Now I cannot bear to think of my life any other way.

I have said it before, I will say it again – thank you so much my dear, dear Dawn for helping me to find my family.

Love, Robin

Meredith...continued from page 1

about the process. Our relatives would call periodically to tell us that they saw some show on TV or met somebody at the beauty salon who could get us a baby immediately from Timbuktu. What was the big hold up with us? Why weren't we going elsewhere? Ironically, the more we were pushed, the more we trusted where FIA was bringing us.

When a year approached, our stock of profiles started to run low. We would need to have them reprinted. We took this as an opportunity to reassess the original one and add some new photos as well as an updated look. This was a flurry of activity and gave us a renewed confidence in the process. Everyone at FIA seemed to share our excitement. We had also heard that as soon as you went to the time and trouble (and the money) of redoing the profile, it was only a matter of time...gosh, had we known that sooner, we would have redone it in the second month!

Our first real inquiry came after 14 months of no news from any of the postcards. It was a Wednesday and I received a call at work, late in the day. I was able to conference Brian in so we could both hear the details at the same time. There was a baby girl a few days old in the NICU just two hours from where we live waiting for a family to take her home. Her birth mother had moved on with her life secure with the knowledge that a family would be found. She had no interest in even meeting the family. The baby was tiny but there were no significant health issues even though she'd be hospitalized for two more weeks. But here was the kicker – we were the backup family; another family had first refusal. If we wanted to proceed, they would let us know the next day what the first family's decision was. YES, we were interested. They faxed us the health information which Brian rushed over to our pediatrician's office to

check for health issues. There were no red flags. That night we pulled out our short list of girl's names and hoped and prayed that this was really it. We planned our trip and game-planned how we would cover her two additional weeks in the hospital.

The next day at work, I was on pins and needles every time the phone rang. Finally, Kim called and gave us the news. The other family would go ahead with the adoption plan. Our hopes were dashed. Although we were disappointed, we both were just happy that this little baby alone in the hospital would soon have a family. One of the few friends I told said this was actually a good dress rehearsal for the real thing. Were we prepared? I don't know if you're ever really prepared for this, but, yes, we thought we were.

The next week seemed to go by so slowly. Brian and I both prayed that the baby girl was in the right place and that our little one would come to us in the right way (and soon!).

The following Friday afternoon we received another call. My hand shook as I conferenced in Brian. This was it – I just knew it. In the end, there were too many unknowns and issues for us to accept; we would have to say no. *Continued on page 14*



*Our caseworker
Barb and Meredith*

My Child, My Blessing

I held him when he was 5 hours old
changed his first meconium poop
panicked at his first real injury – a hand
caught in a treadmill (he was okay)
I have answered the call to every nightmare,
recital, practice, tear and need
I have napped with, been napped upon,
been up all night, been yelled at, and
bear hugged
I have been blessed, loved, inspired by
and fallen in love with this boy
my son
last night he said to me
as we were talking before bed
Are you my real mother?
a girl at school, who is also African American
told him I could not be – as I am white

and that his "real mother" could have kept
him – if she wanted to
I knew the day would come
we have been very honest and open
yet still I dreaded hearing those words
wishing I could have been there and
protected or moderated the moment
Yes baby – mommy and mama are your
real mothers
You also have a birth mother
but a mother does not need to be
called "real"
A mother loves you everyday, good or bad,
and is there for all – everyday – forever
I waited for the next question.
He looked like it was going to be a big one
one of the ones I have feared
Like why did she, or am I not good enough...
He looked at me so seriously and asked

what did the plane look like on your
trip to get me?
All my worries.
All he needed was one question answered.
I am sure many more will come in time
and I will answer them all honestly
Today at school he walked up to his friend
I stood next to him and smiled at her
she is only 6
and not adopted – I know it is confusing
"real moms aren't the ones who give
birth to you – they are ones that love
you everyday"
he told her and then said to me
"I feel better mama"
Can you get more real than that?
what a blessing I have been given.

Jessie & Stacie

we were quietly miserable. We had been in the waiting stage of the adoption process for 1½ years and getting frustrated and disappointed. Postcard after postcard from FIA and we were still childless. Everyone lovingly asked questions about the process and how we were feeling. We were honest with them, yet tried to convey that we were still hopeful that our child was out there somewhere. After dinner at Traci's house, she introduced us to the tradition of the Peppermint Pig. She put the Peppermint Pig into a red velvet bag. Everyone needed to make a silent wish and then take a whack at the pig with a little hammer. I don't think I have to tell you what we wished for! Boy, did we hit that pig with oomph!

Just a few days after our introduction to the Peppermint Pig, our phone rang. Kim from the Vermont office had wonderful news! We had been matched with a pregnant woman in Iowa. Shannon was due on January 27th and she wanted to talk to us! We thought our prayers had been answered. After all this time, our dream was finally about to come true. Anthony and I spoke on the phone with Shannon a few times and felt comfortable being matched with her. She was young and cheerful and seemed so confident about her decision to make an adoption plan. She claimed to have a strong support system in her family, but that later proved to be an untruth.

On February 6th, we got "the" call. Shannon was scheduled for induction the following morning. Anthony and I scrambled about and got on the first flight available. After a sleepless night, cancelled flights, broken airplanes, and tons of tears, we amazingly made it to the hospital in South Dakota in plenty of time to witness the birth of a healthy, beautiful boy on February 7th! She asked us to name the baby, so we named him Jacob. We spent the next two days living at the hospital with Shannon and Jacob. We all got along very well and we felt as if we were forming a wonderful, trusting bond with Shannon. We knew, without a doubt, that we were head-over-heals in love with Jacob. Throughout those two days, Shannon assured us of her decision to place Jacob in our home. Our families were back at home in Rhode Island and couldn't wait to smother this little baby with tons of hugs and kisses! She seemed so sure – we had no idea how unsure she really was.

On February 9th, Jacob and Shannon were set to be discharged from the hospital. We all had a comfortable conversation and we made plans to meet the next day so that we could take pictures with her one-year-old son. She wanted Jacob to know about his first family, and so did we. After a heart-wrenching good-bye scene, she left the hospital with a friend. A few hours later, we left the hospital with her son. A few hours after leaving the hospital, we made it from South Dakota to our hotel in Iowa. Literally, as we were opening the door to the hotel room, the cell phone rang. It was Mary and she had the worst news ever. My husband is the one who took the call, but I knew what was happening when I looked at his face. I had never seen such pain and sorrow in my husband's eyes. Shannon had called her attorney and was demanding that Jacob be returned to her immediately.

All we could do was to hold Jacob, cry, and pray that this was all a horrible nightmare. It couldn't be possible that we were going to lose him. For the next hour or so, I sat on the bed in the hotel room holding Jacob, staring at his chubby little face and trying to find a way to escape. By that time our family members were calling to cheerfully say goodnight to us and we had to break the news to them one by one. The distance between us in Iowa and our families in Rhode Island compounded our pain.

Thinking about this night still brings tears to my eyes. We eventually mustered up the strength to call Shannon's attorney to tell her where we were (though we did briefly consider high-tailing it to Canada under assumed names). A short while later, the attorney arrived at our hotel room to take Jacob from us. She stayed and talked with us while I fed Jacob one last time. It pained the attorney to have to take Jacob from



a loving couple and send him back into an unstable family situation. We'll never fully understand why this had to happen to us and to Jacob, but we have to believe that there is a reason. We certainly don't have to like it, but we do have to learn how to deal with it. For several weeks after losing Jacob, that fateful night played over and over again in my mind like an old video tape – over and over again.

The morning after losing Jacob, we spoke to Mary again. She asked us if we needed a break from the process or if she should start sending out our profiles again. We didn't even have to think about it! We told her that we needed to jump right back into the process. After all, what purpose would taking a break serve? The only thing that would heal the pain of losing Jacob would be to bring home our son or daughter. This decision proved to be fate at work; in our favor this time! Mary was meeting with a pregnant woman named Jessica that afternoon and she brought our profile along. It was comforting to know that our profile was getting out there and that Mary would continue to fight for us to the best of her ability. In the meantime, we went through a grieving process similar to what one goes through after a miscarriage or other death in the family. We sought counseling from our parish priest and family members. We accepted our grief, talked about it with anyone who was patient enough to listen, and worked our way through it.

Throughout the adoption process, patiently waiting (and waiting and waiting) is so difficult to do. People tell you that your baby is out there and will find his way home to you when it is meant to be...there is a baby for you, you just have to be patient...fate will determine when and how your baby comes home to you...it'll happen when you least expect it. When your home is silent, filling it with these words of advice did little to comfort us. As our lives slowly moved forward, we tried to be with our families and close friends as much as possible because they brought us immeasurable comfort.

In early March, I invited our immediate families over to our house to have a belated birthday dinner for Anthony. Our good friend Traci was with us that night and she brought another Peppermint Pig with her! In her very energetic and cheerful way, she told everybody about our first experience with the Peppermint Pig. We had apparently made a mistake with our wish and now needed to amend our wish. We couldn't just wish for a baby, we

Continued on page 15

2006/07 events

Sept. 14-15, 2006	FIA's Attorney, Agency & Social Worker in Partnership Semi-Annual Meeting	Middletown Springs, VT Call Dawn at 1-802-235-2373 or email to fia@friendsinadoption.org
Fall 2006	Monthly Pre-Adoptive Parents Support Group <i>Meetings and Special Events in the NYC and NJ area</i>	For more information, www.IACCcenter.com Sponsored by the Infertility and Adoption Counseling Center
Oct. 19-20, 2006	American Academy of Adoption Attorneys 2006 Mid-Year Conference – <i>Agency Adoptions and Foster Care: Emerging Legal Issues for Attorneys, Social Workers, Foster Parents and Other Adoption Professionals</i>	Denver, Colorado For more information, please call 1-202-832-2222
Nov. 4, 2006 8:00 am to 5:00 pm	15th Annual Conference <i>Sponsored by Adoption Resource Network (ARNI)</i>	<i>Believe in Possibilities</i> , Bay Trail Middle School, 1760 Scribner Road, Penfield, NY 14526. For more information, please call 1-716-586-9586
Nov. 6, 2006 6:30 pm	11th Annual AFCR Adoption Fair	Marriott Hotel For more information, please call 1-518-448-5295
Winter 2007	The American Fertility Association Adoption Seminar Series	For more information, please call 1-888-917-3777 or visit www.theafa.org
May 10-12, 2007	Adoption 2007: 18th Annual Statewide Adoption Training Conference – <i>Sponsored by the New York State Citizens' Coalition for Children</i>	Marriott Hotel, Albany, NY For more information, call 1-607-272-0034
July 13-15, 2007	Friends In Adoption's Annual Picnic Weekend	Haggood Pond, Peru, Vermont Call Dawn at 1-802-235-2373 or email Dawn@friendsinadoption.org

Meredith...continued from page 12

Saying no just broke our hearts. In less than two weeks, we had two situations that ended up at a dead-end. Would FIA think poorly of us because we said no to the second situation? Would they ever call again? It was a Friday and we drove home feeling numb that night. When would it happen for us?

When we arrived at home, the phone rang within five minutes. It was Barb – we assumed there were more details about the situation that was presented just hours ago. I let Brian take the call and headed upstairs to change. A second later, Brian called for me to come back downstairs. The call wasn't about the earlier situation.

Were we sitting down? Yes, but we dropped the phone and lost the call. Such grace. We called back immediately. Remember that baby from a week ago? Yes...well, a strange situation, but the original adoptive family had a personal situation come up and they could no longer parent this baby...would we be interested? There were no issues with the baby and she was ready to go home Sunday – the day after tomorrow (and a week earlier than we first learned about her a week ago)! There were some financial issues that we needed to weigh, but, in the end, the decision was really simple. Yes!

Oh my gosh – after calling a few night owl relatives (it was after 10 pm at this point) we raced into action. I felt this incredible need to clean the house before bringing home a newborn (friends tell me this was my “nesting” period) – so we cleaned. We packed for an overnight and pulled out our stash of newborn onesies and quickly realized that this baby, our daughter (our daughter!), was so tiny (she was just shy of four pounds at birth) that they'd be too big.

Combined, we got about three hours of sleep that night.

We were on the road by 7:30 the next morning making quick stops at our offices (since we knew that we wouldn't be returning Monday morning to the grind), the local baby superstore (where we bought a ton of stuff we thought a newborn would need), and chatted on our cell phones with family and friends the entire way. We had so much fun calling friends and family and casually mentioning that we were en route to meeting our daughter.

By noon, we were headed to the hospital. The situation was surreal. The guard just wanted to see ID before we went upstairs. Didn't the rest of the world care that we were meeting our baby in just moments?

The nurses in the NICU were so excited to see us.

They led us all the way to the back of the room where we found a beautiful baby girl with no name sleeping quietly in her bassinet. The nurses had clearly developed a fondness for this “orphan” baby and shared our tears as we held her for the first time.

The nurses gave us a crash course in baby care (feeding, diapering, bathing, swaddling, etc.) and before we knew it we were leaving the hospital with our bundle of joy. Less than 48 hours earlier, we were at work contemplating what movie we wanted to see that weekend; now we were talking about formula and diapers!

We were joyous, but very nervous, too. It was like a dream. Did we really know what we were doing? In the end we figured it out like any other new parent. While the wait was sometimes difficult to bear, in the end, our little Meredith seemed to find us when she was good and ready. And it seemed like we were good and ready too.

Anne Marie and Brian

Peppermint Pig...continued from page 13

needed to wish for a baby for keeps! We all giggled and appreciated Traci's optimism and cheerfulness. And then we whacked the crazy out of that pig and wished for a baby for keeps!

Then one Friday afternoon, a week after Pig #2, when we least expected it, fate (or the Peppermint Pig) brought Jessica to us. I was eating my lunch in the teacher's room listening to silly stories about students when my cell



phone rang. It was Mary's number, so my heart skipped a beat. When Mary calls, you just never know what is going to happen! In her ever cheerful voice, Mary told me that there was a pregnant woman named Jessica who wanted to meet us that weekend! I excitedly scribbled down notes about her due date, location and other items while I slowly started to cry. I was excited and scared all at the same time. My hands were

trembling and I felt short of breath. It was a bit strange at first, because we knew that we were not Jessica's first choice as the adoptive parents. She had previously chosen another couple with FIA, but that couple had been presented with two pregnant women and they chose the woman who was due sooner. That just proved to be fate at work again, this time in our favor.

Anthony and I traveled to New York that weekend to meet Jessica. As soon as we met Jessica and her mom, our nervousness quickly disappeared. We were there for a good three hours, chatting like old friends. We talked openly and honestly with each other right from the beginning which put all of us more at ease. When it was time to leave, we exchanged email addresses and hugged. When a match is right, you'll know it. We knew Jessica was right for us. The next day, Jessica sent us an email to tell us that she gave Mary the "green light" to move forward with making an adoption plan. Wow. It was happening again, but something was different this time. I can't put my finger on what made this feel different, but I'm sure that the change was in the level of openness and honesty between us.

Even though we were excited about our match with Jessica, we chose not to share the information with our families for a while. We eventually told our parents and siblings that we had been matched and that she was due in late April. The reality was that we were terrified about the 30 day waiting period in New York. Would we hold another beautiful baby only to go through the pain of loss again?

As the weeks passed by, we were nervously and impatiently excited about the impending arrival of this wonderful baby. After a rough week at school, I was very ready to enjoy my April vacation. Vacation started on Good Friday and I got up at my regular time and started to make a list of the many things that I needed to do during my vacation week. As I was sorting the laundry that needed to be done, the phone rang at 9:10 am. It was Mary. Jessica's water had broken and she was on her way to the hospital. She wasn't due for another week and a half! I was so surprised, excited and nervous I couldn't think clearly! I was so nervous that I asked Mary, "OK, what do we do now?". Her response was something to the tune of, "Uh, you get in the car and you come to New York. Now." Oh! Oh yeah!

Over the next few hours, our adoption story turned a new page. Jessica delivered a healthy baby boy at 4:12 pm that day. He was a tiny, 6 pound, 6 ounce little miracle. We were all in awe, in love and terrified! With Jessica's blessing, we named him David Michael. After David's birth, there were many tender moments, nervous times, questions, concerns, and celebratory moments. The details are part of David's adoption story. It's a wonderful story that we have chosen to share only with David. When David is ready, he can tell his story to whomever he wants, but it is his story to tell, not mine. We are hopeful that David will be proud of his adoption story because it truly is, and continues to be, a wonderful story! His birth and his adoption are just the beginning.

Now Anthony and I are Daddy and Mommy and it feels better than we ever imagined it would. All the clichés that made us cringe during our wait now ring true. David Michael was well worth the long wait. Everything does happen for a reason, no matter how painful and confusing it might be at the time. Our son did find his way home to us and is now with his forever family. Now that he is with us, everything seems to make more sense. When your adoption dream comes true, and the nervousness and uncertainty begin to fade away, you are left with an overwhelming feeling of love, pride, fulfillment and purpose. Now our thoughts drift away from the rollercoaster ride that we just experienced and now focus on our future as a family. We simply can't put into words the tremendous amount of love and pure joy that David and his birth mom Jessica have brought into our lives. We consider ourselves very blessed to be David's parents.

Anthony and Lisa

Friends in Adoption – General Info



Office Hours
9 am – 4 pm
Monday – Friday

During our office hours we will answer any questions and help solve adoption concerns. Please keep our office hours in mind and conduct your regular adoption business during this time.

Please note

On Fridays we try to catch up on paperwork. We can serve you best when calls to us on Fridays are limited to emergencies only. During office hours, we are also here to answer calls from pregnant women. After our working office hours, our trained answering service will be answering calls, with staff members serving as backup.

Email addresses

The staff may be reached via email by typing in the first name of the individual and @friendsinadoption.org.

Financial questions

Contact Tara during office hours.

Get Acquainted Weekend

Contact Kim or Lisa during office hours.

Capital Campaign

Contact Jacki at the Vermont office.

Status of clerical or checklist requirements

In order to activate your file, call the Vermont office during office hours.

Adoption questions

For advice on your profile, adoption ads, networking ideas and/or to check on potential calls, ask for Dawn, Mary, Barb, Lisa or Kim.

Begin with a Get Acquainted Weekend

Is FIA right for you?

Dear Mary, Dawn, Jo Ann, Lisa, Tara and Kim,

I still cannot stop thinking about the weekend. My favorite part was hearing Holly's story. The courage of that birth mom to tell what she went through and to share with all of us her personal information was so compelling.

I was glad to hear that not every adoption you do is an open one like Holly's. We are fine with exchanging letters and pictures through the agency. The openness piece is too much for us at this time (although we pray for a birth mom like Holly).

Thank you again for everything – I have never seen such a dedicated group of individuals who actually love their jobs. We have found the right agency and have hope again that we will have a child soon.

Love,

Sue and Barry

Before you make a decision about whether FIA is right for you, we feel it's important for you to understand who we are, how we work, what we expect from clients and how we view the adoption process. There's so much to tell, and we think there's no better atmosphere in which to accomplish this than here in Vermont.

So we ask you to start your journey at an FIA Get Acquainted Weekend. The weekend will give you a chance to meet our staff, ask questions and relax in a casual, rural

setting while exploring the adoption options offered by FIA.

Attendance at a Get Acquainted Weekend is mandatory for all clients. **It is a wonderful educational opportunity which does not obligate you to work with Friends in Adoption.**

The cost of the weekend is \$275 per couple or single. This fee covers all meetings and lunch on Saturday. Weekends fill up quickly and are booked on a first-come, first-serve basis.



Complete this Registration Form and return it to FIA. Pick your date carefully: FIA has a no refund policy. Your payment can only be applied to the workshop you register for.

Questions? Email Kim at kim@friendsinadoption.org.

Dawn, Barb, Kim, Jo Ann, Lisa, Mary and Tara,

Thanks for a truly inspiring weekend! We had already met with Mary in her office to hear about domestic adoption and FIA. We felt like there wasn't too much more to learn – we were so wrong! To hear the presentation of life-long issues of adoption and adopting transracially really helped us realize that we do want to adopt a child of color. We feel so badly that it has taken us this long to get our act together.

We were always worried about the money but it was nice to hear Tara say that money should not stop anyone from adopting and that FIA would work with us. It was funny how many of us, once we started exploring adoption, knew so many people that recommended your agency. I guess all roads do lead to FIA! We will call when we are ready to schedule a consult.

Maureen and John

Get Acquainted Weekend Registration Form

Name 1 _____

Name 2 _____

Street Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Home Phone _____

Work Phone 1 _____

Work Phone 2 _____

Email _____

May we call you at work (we identify ourselves as FIA)? Yes No

How long have you been in the adoption search process? _____

Special circumstances you would like us to know about. _____

How did you learn about FIA? _____

Would you consider adopting a child of race other than your own? Yes No

FIA offers a "reflections on race" segment in our workshops for families considering adopting outside of their own ethnic background.

If there is a cancellation for the weekend of your choice, would you be available on 24 hours notice? Yes No

Are there any children currently residing in your home? Yes No

Due to the nature of the weekend, we cannot accommodate children.

Please indicate your 1st, 2nd and 3rd choice for workshop to attend.

The following dates are set for FIA's 2006/07 Get Acquainted Weekends.

_____ October 27–29, 2006 _____ Aug. 24–26, 2007

_____ December 1–3, 2006 _____ Oct. 26–28, 2007

_____ March 2–4, 2007 _____ Nov. 30–Dec. 2, 2007

_____ May 18–20, 2007

Method of Payment

\$275 fee per couple/single includes meetings and lunch on Saturday.

Personal check payable to Friends in Adoption

VISA Mastercard

CC# _____

Signature _____ Exp. Date _____

Please return this form as soon as possible to reserve your space. Reservations may be made via email or fax with a credit card. A letter confirming space in the first available weekend will be sent to you upon receipt of this completed form. Fax to Kim at 1-802-235-2311.

Dates and rates subject to change without notice.

Mail this form to: Friends in Adoption

44 South Street, PO Box 1228

Middletown Springs, VT 05757-1228

Phone 1-802-235-2373, Fax 1-802-235-2311

www.friendsinadoption.org