

JOURNEYS

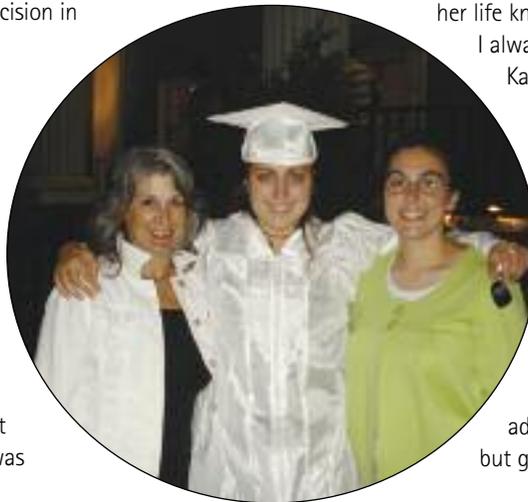
SUCCESSFULLY CREATING FAMILIES SINCE 1982 THROUGH COMPASSIONATE ADOPTION

Fall 2008

A reunion that was better than anyone could have hoped for

It all started at my home at Christmas, when my daughter Kamilah mentioned that she wanted to invite her birth mother to her high school graduation in June. Doug (her dad), and I had always told her that when she was 18 she could decide if she wanted to meet her birth mother, and we would support her decision in any way she desired.

Over the years we often asked if she wanted to meet her birth mom and she always seemed pretty casual about it and somewhat uncommitted. So you can imagine how surprised we were to have this request come out so suddenly. My first thought was, great – no problem – I'll write Faith a letter and ask how she feels about coming to the graduation. Then I called her Dad (we are divorced and living in different states now) and asked what he thought we should do – after all, Kamilah was not 18 and Faith was probably not expecting this at this time either. His concern was



more related to how she would handle the answer if it was no, or what her expectations were of her birth mother.

We wondered what Faith's life was like now – was she happy, well-adjusted, married, did she have more children, did the people in her life know about Kamilah – the thoughts were endless.

I always believed Faith would be willing to meet Kamilah, because she promised to be there for her when she was 18. It was an agreement we made during the adoption. Over the past 17 years, all my notes to Faith had been delivered by FIA, so I knew she was keeping her whereabouts well known.

Just to be sure we were doing the right thing for Kamilah, I called Dawn. I wanted to know how other families did these reunions – Thank God for FIA and Dawn – they were always there for us with kindness and good advice. Dawn pretty much said – be cautious, but go ahead and write a letter to Faith and be sure

Continued on page 12

Birth Mom Faith

I was sixteen years old when I chose to have an open adoption. I am so glad that I chose this kind of adoption. I truly believe that it is a very loving choice for a birth mother. The photos and info that Diane sent to me over the years have been a great blessing to me.

For years I had prayed that Kamilah would want to meet me someday. When I received the invitation to Kamilah's graduation, I was overwhelmed with emotions. I shared it with my family, and then I quickly called FIA. We were all very excited and very nervous waiting for Diane's call.

I remember getting their picture from FIA and thinking that Diane was so beautiful. The description of Doug and Diane's life was exactly what I had wanted for my baby. Another big reason that I had chosen them was that they already had a five year old daughter, Morgan. I wanted my daughter to have a sibling. I enjoyed the time that we spent together before Kamilah was born.

Talking to Doug and Diane again was great. I was a little nervous,

Continued on page 15

Daughter Kamilah

It was raining the night I met my birth mother. All my life I had dreamed of meeting her, what it would be like and what it would mean to me. Never in all my dreams did I imagine that she would be as beautiful in real life as she was in her pictures. Or that she would bring into my life five wonderful brothers and sisters. Pictures were the only things I ever had that let me see into the part of me that was missing; that let me see her.

Believe me when I say that even if you love your parents that raised you like they were the ones that had you, they still weren't the ones that gave you life – they just chose to love you like they did. I always knew I'd never be whole unless I met my birth parents. To know myself, I felt I had to know who made me.

So six months ago when my mom and I sat down to talk about my graduation, I told her that I wanted Faith to be there. She had told me before that I could invite her, and I had made up my mind, I wanted her

Continued on page 13



dawn's desk



A Tale of Pictures

How many of you noticed our family pictures in this issue? Did anything stand out to you?

Imagine being a birth parent anticipating the arrival of annual pictures from the adoptive family. With eager anticipation, they open the envelope and beam with pride as they look at the beautiful pictures of the child. But then they wonder.....where are the parent/s? We chose them; the baby is beautiful but are the parent/s okay?

Although I love receiving all of the pictures that are sent in for our offices to share (individual or group), I have begun to wonder why this occurs. Is it because as adults we are vain about our appearances and think that maybe because we don't look as young as we did in the original profile, we don't want the birth family to think that we are getting older? Is it because one of you is taking the picture while the other is in it and you don't want the birth family to think that you might have separated? If you are a single parent or a gay or lesbian family is it your fear that if someone other than the birth family sees the pictures, they will think poorly of either you or the birth family? Is it because you are fearful that you will hurt the birth family's feelings if you show them how happy you are to be parent/s or that they will wish they had parented the baby?

Pictures speak a thousand words – if you send pictures of your child "in action", whether it be reading a bedtime story together or a day at the park or a family get together, the birth family gets to see a glimpse of how the child has integrated into your family. For birth families this may be their peace of mind knowing that the child they placed is so loved and cared for.

And from our children:

As our kids get older they often become more interested in knowing more about their birth families. I recall one adoptive mom who called saying that her son would like to have a picture of his birth mom. I wrote a letter to his birth mom who proudly and promptly sent a picture to the agency to forward to the adoptive family. A few days after I passed the picture along, I received a call from the adoptive mom letting me know that they had received the picture and her son had framed and placed the picture of his birth mom over his bed. The adoptive mom commented that while she was proud of her son for doing this, she was a little jealous because the birth mom was so beautiful. I suggested that she tell her son how she felt and ask him if he would mind putting the picture on his bedside table. According to his mom, he gave her a big hug, assured her that he felt she was the best mom ever and went fast to sleep. (He did put the picture in a less conspicuous location.)

Many of our birth families have children they are parenting – some born prior to the adoption placement and some after. Our children are curious – many of them asking their adoptive families if they have any brothers or sisters. If you have pictures of the birth family and feel that it is age appropriate, this might be the time to share these pictures with your son or daughter. We encourage birth families to stay in touch with the agency updating not only their medical history but their family history as well.

When Kim, our Newsletter editor, asked me for my opinion on our family picture layout, my first reaction was to suggest that she mix and match the baby/child only pictures with the family pictures but then I thought that if we left them separated that this would be a good spring board for my *Dawn's Desk*. (Since writing this piece we've received/added more family pictures), my question remains, did it work? I would love to hear your thoughts and comments, dawn@friendsinadoption.org.

Enjoy a peaceful Fall.

Dawn





welcome home

our family

welcomes

Sean & Celeste	Teagan
Edwin & Michael	Sean Michael
Jill & Marion	Isabella
Peter & Jolene	Lucas
Chad & Linda	Aiden
Bob & Jill	Kyle
Retha & Jen	Isa
Steve, Barbara & Sarah	Jacob
Lauren & Caroline	Abigail
Jeremy & Christine	Angela
Jennifer, Denise & Noah	Eliana
Carl & Tom	Luke
Casey & Nicole	Aidan
Scott, Arna & Cody	Trevor
Rick & Cindy	Bethany
Mark & Susan	Alexander
Eric, Lori & Kristopher	Keira



October 5, 2008

The American Fertility Conference
www.afafamilymatters.com

September 19, 2008 (Friday)

FIA Annual Fall Partnership Meeting
Dorset, Vermont

November 1, 2008

CPFA "Let's Talk Adoption" Conference
www.cpfanj.org

November 3, 2008

AFCR 13th Annual Adoption Fair
Marriott Hotel, Albany, NY
1-518-448-5295

November 8, 2008

ARNI 17th Annual Adoption Conference
Penfield, NY
1-585-256-7500

November 23, 2008 – Save the date!

28th Annual Adoption Conference
Presented by the Adoptive Parents Committee
Weill Cornell Medical College
70th St. and York Ave., Manhattan
www.adoptiveparents.org/conference.htm



Family Creations Counseling

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Major changes urged in transracial adoption

NEW YORK (AP) - Several leading child welfare groups Tuesday urged an overhaul of federal laws dealing with transracial adoption, arguing that black children in foster care are ill-served by a "colorblind" approach meant to encourage their adoption by white families.

Recommendations for major changes in the much-debated policy were outlined in a report by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute.

"Color consciousness – not 'color blindness' – should help to shape policy development," the report said.

Groups endorsing its proposals included the North American Council on Adoptable Children, the Child Welfare League of America, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and the National Association of Black Social Workers.

At issue is the 1994 Multi-Ethnic Placement Act - and revisions made to it in 1996 - governing the adoption of children from foster care.

One part of the law directs state agencies to recruit more adoptive parents of the same race as the children. The new report says this provision hasn't been adequately enforced and calls for better funded efforts to recruit minority parents.

The more contentious part of the legislation prohibits race from being taken into consideration in most decisions about adoption from foster care. For example, white parents seeking to adopt a black child cannot be required to undergo race-oriented training that differs in any way from training that all prospective adoptive parents receive.

A key recommendation in the new report calls for amending the law so race could be considered as a factor in selecting parents for children from foster care. The change also would allow race-oriented pre-adoption training, "We tried to assess what was working and what wasn't, and came to the conclusion that preparing parents who adopt transracially benefits everyone, especially the children," said Adam Pertman, the Donaldson Institute's executive director.

"The view that we can be colorblind is a wonderful, idealistic perspective, but we don't live there," Pertman said. "If we want to do the best for the kids, we have to look at their realities."

At the heart of the debate is the fact that the foster care system has a disproportionately high number of black children, and on average they languish there nine months longer than white children before moving to permanent homes. The latest federal figures showed 32 percent of the 510,000 children in foster care were black in 2006, compared to 15 percent of all U.S. children.

Of the black children adopted out of foster care, about 20 percent are adopted by white families. The Donaldson report said current federal law, by stressing color blindness, deters child welfare agencies from assessing families' readiness to adopt transracially or preparing them for the distinctive challenges they might face.

"There is a higher rate of problems in minority foster children adopted transracially than in-race," said the report. "All children deserve to be raised in families that respect their cultural heritage."

Pertman stressed that his institute and its allies were not opposed to transracial adoption.

"We want to see more kids in foster care get permanent homes, and we want to see the parents who raise those children be prepared to do so," he said.

Professor Elizabeth Bartholet, who directs the Child Advocacy Program at Harvard Law School, believes the concept of striving for color blindness is sound. She foresees problems if race once again becomes a key determinant.

"Giving social workers the chance to do that produced very rigid race matching," she said, referring to pre-1994 policies. "That's one of the reasons to say race can't be used at all – there's no other way to be sure it doesn't become the overwhelming factor."

Current policy allows standardized pre-adoption training, but wisely prohibits specific screening for parents seeking to adopt transracially, Bartholet said.

"What cannot be done is to have a pass/fail test that turns on whether you give the politically correct answers," she said. "If social workers are allowed to use training to determine who can adopt, there's lots of experience showing they abuse that power."

She also questioned whether attempts to boost minority recruitment would succeed.

"Black people are significantly poorer than white people and less likely to be in a position to come forward," Bartholet said. "Recruitment efforts bump up against that fact."

The Donaldson recommendations were embraced as "long overdue" by Michelle Johnson, a black woman raised by white adoptive parents near Minneapolis. Johnson now works on child-welfare matters for the court system there.

Her parents "were not the norm," she said. "They were exceptional in what they did for me... They were very humble in what they didn't know. There was lots of communication."

Too many white adoptive parents, she said, underestimate the enduring presence of racism in America and don't get training that would help them raise a black child.

"As a social worker who used to place children, I know very few families are ready to do this," Johnson said. "When families fail to realize they need assistance, it's dangerous."

Regarding recruitment, Johnson said child welfare agencies should strive to find permanent homes for black children among their extended families before placing them in foster care.

John Mould and Margaret Geiger, an Ambler, PA couple, have two white biological children and five black adopted children, now aged 15 to 23. Mould said transracial adoption is unquestionably challenging, but he worries about any changes that might make training and screening requirements too rigid.

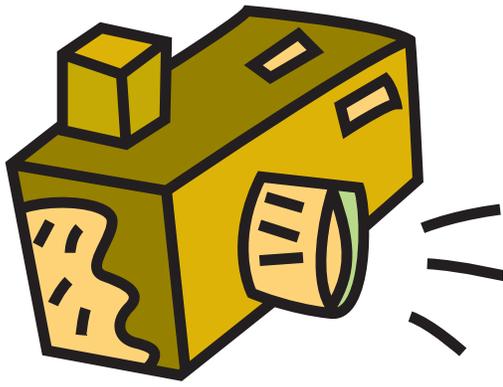
"There are so many kids who need homes," Mould said. "The idea of trying to find the perfect matches – you're not going to find them."

His adopted children have encountered some difficulties over the years, Mould said, but he believes they've developed resiliency and maturity as a result.

His youngest son, Eric Jones, 15, said the family's makeup sometimes complicates his life, but he's convinced that transracial adoption can succeed.

"White or black doesn't matter," he said. "What counts is whether the parents are ready to take responsibility."

www.adoptioninstitute.org



family album



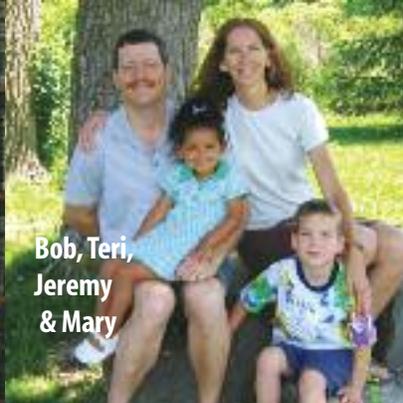
Mitch, Arlene
& Robert



Robert & Tyler



Tracy, Sue
& Clara



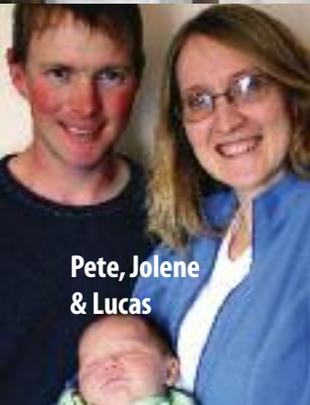
Bob, Teri,
Jeremy
& Mary



Casey, Nicole & Aidan



Patrick, Robin
& Annalei



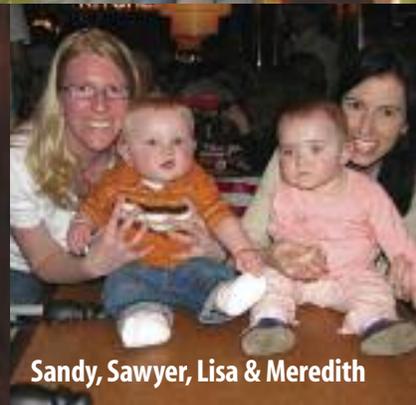
Pete, Jolene
& Lucas



Mark, Steven
& Derek



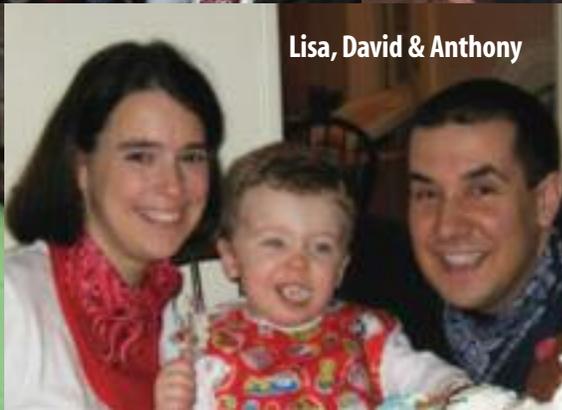
Kevin, Melissa &
Isabella



Sandy, Sawyer, Lisa & Meredith



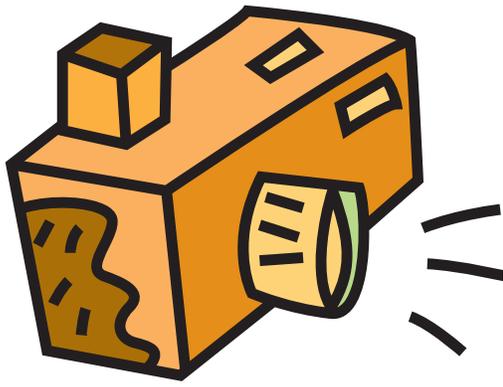
John, Kate
& John



Lisa, David & Anthony



Mike, Kelly &
Katelyn Isabella



family album



Sawyer



Lily & Laura



Nathan



Kayleigh & Abby



Carter



Ben



Dave, Sandy & Sawyer



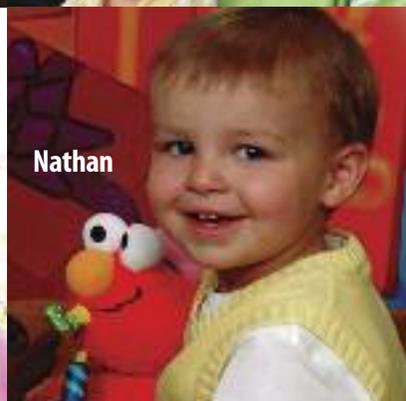
Jim, Mary, Kathryn & Jonathan



David



Jeff, Ben & Patty



Nathan



Lily & Grandma



Spencer



Keith, Kerrigan & Megan

Senators Bernie Sanders and Patrick Leahy and Congressman Peter Welch Honor Dawn Smith-Pliner as an Angel in Adoption™

To Be Recognized at National Event in Washington, DC



*Middletown Springs,
Vermont August 18,
2008* – Senators
Bernie Sanders
and Patrick Leahy
and Congressman
Peter Welch have

nominated Dawn Smith-Pliner as a 2008

Angel in Adoption™ for her outstanding advocacy of adoption issues. The Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI), which orchestrates the Angels in Adoption™ program, will honor Dawn Smith-Pliner, along with more than 180 Angels, at an awards ceremony and gala event in Washington, DC, September 16, 2008.

Dawn Smith-Pliner is being honored for her work in the field of Compassionate Adoption for the past quarter century.

The Angels in Adoption™ program is CCAI's signature public awareness campaign and provides an opportunity for all members of the U.S. Congress to honor the good work of their constituents who have enriched the lives of foster children and orphans in the United States and abroad.

This year, CCAI is celebrating their 10th Anniversary of honoring ordinary people doing extraordinary things! Over the last 10 years, CCAI has highlighted the work of over 1,300 people making a lasting difference in the life of a child.

"The Angels in Adoption program is unlike any other program in the Nation's Capitol. Because of it, over 1300 "Angels" have come to share with Washington their adoption experience and left with a renewed excitement of all that adoption makes possible," said Kathleen Strotzman. "I learned one simple lesson from my time on the hill, knowledge is power. Angels in Adoption is meant to give members of Congress the knowledge they need to use the power they have toward making the dream of a family a reality for every child."

In addition to the more than 180 local angels from around the country, several National Angels will also be recognized at the ceremony and gala for their dedication and commitment nationally and internationally to child welfare on a grand scale. Former "National Angels" include First Lady Laura Bush, Patti LaBelle, Jane Seymour, Muhammad Ali, the late Dave Thomas, Steven Curtis Chapman, Bruce Willis, Alonzo Mourning, and Marcus Samuelsson.

The Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI) is a 501(c)3 nonpartisan organization dedicated to raising awareness about the tens of thousands of orphans and foster children in the United States and the millions of orphans around the world in need of permanent, safe, and loving homes through adoption. CCAI's goal is the elimination of the barriers that hinder these children from realizing their basic right of a family.

CCAI was created in 2001 by the active co-chairs of the bicameral, bipartisan Congressional Coalition on Adoption (CCA) to more effectively raise Congressional and public awareness about the issue of adoption.

The Angels in Adoption™ program was established in 1999 as a Congressional press conference to honor outstanding individuals. Since then, the program has developed into a yearlong public awareness campaign culminating in an extraordinary awards Gala and celebration in Washington, DC.

The Angels in Adoption™ program is made possible through the generous support of Diamond and Founding Sponsor, the Freddie Mac Foundation, and Platinum Sponsor, SuperValu, Inc.

CCAI does not receive any government funding and they rely on the generous support of foundations, corporations, and individuals to accomplish their mission.

For more information visit www.ccaainstitute.org.





mail

Dear Patty, Brendan & Kate

We want you to know how much we appreciate the work you do. We are still in awe of your professionalism and dedication. Additionally, we believe you each played a key and vital role in getting us connected with Kendall. Never in our wildest dreams did we think things would happen in the manner they did. Thank you!

We are having a small get together to officially introduce Kendall to our friends. We have booked The Corner Well 4-13-08. We would be honored if you were able to stop by. They are serving lunch and it runs from 2 – 6 pm. Please don't feel obligated as we do understand that you each work with many families and also have other things going on in you lives. If you are able to attend, please feel free to bring your spouses/families. We believe the more the merrier. Please RSVP by 4/7/08 so we can give the restaurant the final count.

Thanks again!
Matthew, Brian & Kendall

Our dream come true

Please share in our dream come true as we announce our Final Adoption of our beautiful daughter Lilah Lucille!

Born July 21, 2007
Arrived Home
August 31, 2007
Finalized Adoption
March 5, 2008
Rich & Beth



Letter from birth mom Lisa

Dawn,

Thank you so much for the card and kind words two days before Mother's Day, it was great timing.

I talked to Tom and Carl and got to hear Luke use those lungs of his (better than me). We are as close as ever, I've missed them so much. I wanted to thank you for listening to me yell, scream and carry on. Most of all thank you for making it possible for me to say goodbye to my son. I will always treasure you for always fighting for me; you will always hold a special place in my heart.

Much love and appreciation,
Lisa

Hi Dawn

Hope this note finds you well. I am sure very busy as usual but hopefully you are enjoying the beautiful spring weather. Here are a couple of pictures of Ryan. He is busy himself experiencing all the new activities he is now able to do – hitting baseballs, golf balls, riding his tricycle, swinging and sliding! We love every minute of it and cannot believe how blessed we have been. It's amazing he is now a little over 2½ with his third birthday fast approaching. Please forward the enclosed envelope with letter and pictures to Melissa. Hope you enjoy the summer season upon us!



All the best,
Karen & Rich



mail

Huge THANK YOU!

Dear Dawn, Dawn C., Kim B., Kim, Mary, Barb & Tara,

Here is a picture of our beautiful Nathan, 1 week old! Thank you!

Although it doesn't seem enough for all that you have done to date. We know the journey continues but wanted to take this moment to say a huge THANK YOU! Especially to Kim Bellavia for taking such good care of our birth mother. Your love, understanding and "efficiency" in making it all happen is miraculous, thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Dianne, Euclid & Nathan



Dear Dawn

Deb, Caleigh and I hope all is well with you and the rest of the FIA staff. Enclosed please find a check for the second installment of our pledge for the capital campaign.

It is hard for Deb and I to believe that Caleigh is now a very active 2½ year old; it seems like only yesterday we were bringing her "home" to the hotel room (in the state she was born) just in time for Christmas. That tiny little baby has grown into a running, laughing and very talkative little girl. Deb and I still say all the time how fortunate we are that this little person is a part of our lives. Watching her grow and develop is truly very special. We are sure that you hear it a lot, but getting that goodnight kiss and hug each night is something that we would not get to experience if not for Caleigh's birth mom, Lorrie, and the help of FIA.

A few months ago we were putting Caleigh to bed for the night and we said "Caleigh, you know we love you very much" and she said "Yeah" for the first time. That was a moment that we will always remember and cherish.

We will not be able to make the picnic this year as we will be moving into a new home, so we have also enclosed a picture.

All the best,
Dave & Deb



Mary

Attached are some pictures from today. Thank you SOOOOO much for everything! Meredith is such a joy and has brought so much happiness to our lives.

Without you, we wouldn't be where we are today and we sincerely appreciate all the wonderful things you have done for us.

Lisa



Hello Dawn

Look at my handsome ham! Can you please forward letter and pictures to Erika? Thank you so much!

See you real soon!

Love,

Steph, Simon & Giovanni





mail

Dear FIA Staff

We wanted to give a long overdue thank you to all of you that have made our dream of having a child come true. We continue to be amazed and thankful that Emma Rose has come to us and made our family complete. We have almost forgotten what life was without her in our lives. She has brightened up our world and she is changing every day. These last 8 weeks have been wonderful and she is indeed our little miracle.



As you warned us early on, the adoption process is surely a bit of a roller coaster ride, but we have never regreted buying that ticket and hopping on.

Emma has not only touched our lives, but the lives of our friends and family. She is greatly loved and cherished.

Marc & Joe

Most wonderful

The last two years have been the most wonderful of our lives; we look forward to what the future will bring. Mira is as smart as they come, she surprises me every day with what she is learning; also with her depth of feeling and understanding. She is truly a gift from heaven. Thank you all for your continued support. Hope to see you in the not to distant future. We received a message from LaShanda; it has been a long while since her last correspondence. We were happy to hear from her!



All our best to all of you
Greg, Keith, & Mira Grace

Dear Friends at FIA

Well, it has been a whirlwind five and a half weeks since we first got the call about a little boy that was born in Vermont...since we rushed home, packed our bags and began this new journey. It seems like every moment has been packed!

As we have passed the "risk" phase, it is time for us to inundate you all with a few photos of our little boy, Jacob Louis. He has been a wonderful little boy... very attentive and a good eater. He is warm and cozy, does his best to not fuss (but hey, he is a baby...he's allowed sometimes!), and is a joy!



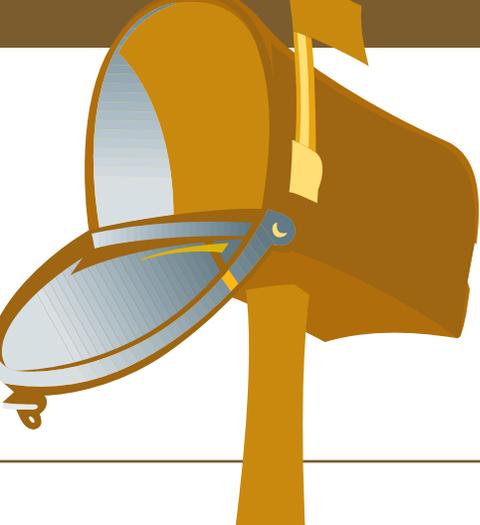
While we have introduced him to Barbara's family (some of whom live locally), he is about to meet the other family clan on the weekend of June 14 (as well as some close out of town friends who are also coming to town).

We want to thank you all for the roles you each played in our situation and for the ways that you helped to get us to this point. We are quite happy. Sarah is adjusting well to being a big sister. When she is riding in the back seat with Jacob next to her, she calms him with soothing words when he starts to fuss, "It's okay Jacob, we are almost home and Mommy and Daddy will take care of you. Yes, we are getting there soon".

So thank you once again, we hope you enjoy the photos.

Love,

Steve, Barbara, Sarah & Jacob



mail

Dear Dawn

I hope this note finds you doing well. 2008 seems pretty significant. It was 10 years ago this summer that Matthew was born. Sometimes I just can't believe it, because it feels like just last summer that we brought home a beautiful baby boy. Sometimes I just can't remember what life was like before he was a part of our family, because it feels like it has always been this way. I know that sounds strange, but it's really true.



We are enclosing our bi-annual packets to Matthew's birth parents. Thanks for continuing to facilitate our communication. I did remember to put in a couple of photos for you!

Matt just finished 4th grade, and he had a great year. He is very busy this summer with baseball, summer music lessons and band, and of course some vacations. Matt is switching from the oboe to the alto sax. He did really well with oboe, but decided he'd rather play something "jazzier". I am hoping maybe someday he'll want to play both, since he had a great start at the oboe this year. It's up to him, and I'm happy he is involved with music.

Our plan is to be at the FIA picnic. The only possible complication will be if Matt's travel baseball team has a championship game that Saturday (it was a big deal to be invited to try out for the travel team, and then he made it!). So I do hope we'll see you in just a couple of weeks.

Thanks again for doing the mail thing! I think we have enough postage on each letter. Hello to the great crew at FIA and see you soon.

Love,
Nan (& Tom & Matt)

Deanne

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!
You were and continue to be wonderful. Keep doing what you're doing, you have found your calling, making families. God blessed us with a beautiful baby. He is doing wonderful. Thanks again for all your kindness.



Love,
Bob, Jill & Kyle
July 6, 2008

Barb

I got the little package you sent!! Thank you soooooo much! I love it! I can't wait to get home and use everything! You're great! Thanks again!! You're so wonderful to work with!

Maureen K.

Dear Dawn C., Patty, Tara & Mary

A belated thanks for having us over to Mary's for dinner with the other FIA families. We really enjoyed spending time with each of you, and found it especially healing to meet with other waiting families. We continue to be inspired by the work that you all do.

Best Wishes,
Bill & Chris

Kamilah was prepared for the unknown. Dawn was upbeat, as was I, and we both tended to feel it would probably all be okay. Doug and I agreed that I would write a letter to Faith and we would hope for a good outcome.

So in January, I wrote the letter – now I had been writing to Faith (via the agency) as was our agreement, but always just giving information – in the early years it was all about Kamilah's doctor visits, how she was developing, her school work, her art work, our vacation and holiday pictures, a card on Mother's Day, a card on Faith's birthday, news to Faith about how Kamilah's life was progressing in the hopes that this would comfort her.

But now, I was asking for a reply – how should I word this request from our daughter? I only knew Faith as a teenager and our relationship was close, but more like friends – now she might be a mother and I didn't want to offend her or upset her nor treat her as a kid (even though I am old enough to be her mother).

I decided I would just do my best to offer the invite and to help in any way to make it possible for her to come, while at the same time assuring her that it was okay if this was not the best time – as long as we could get together at some point in the future when Kamilah was 18 (which would be in August). Over the next month or so, we waited for a reply. Kamilah was living in VT with her Dad and we talked every week and there was often a comment like "Have you heard from anybody?" This meant did I hear from Faith.

Finally it was getting to be the middle of April and graduation was getting close. I called FIA to be sure the letter had not been returned – they said it hadn't. Now, I was getting worried – was this a bad sign? Was Faith okay? Why would she wait to reply? Had my letter upset her life? I still trusted that in her heart she would want to meet Kamilah's request, but something must be wrong somewhere.

So I told Kamilah I would write another letter. I could sense Kamilah's disappointment and I was feeling so badly for her – I told her that if Faith didn't reply within two weeks I would call FIA and see if we could get her phone number and call her. Well, it wasn't even a week after that when I received an email from Kim at FIA. Apparently, my first letter had been lost at Faith's mother's house and Faith had just received the second letter. She called the agency and asked them to give me her number so I could call her right away.

It was 1:00 pm on Thursday, May 1st when I got the email and decided to call. I was so nervous – I had wanted to talk to Faith so many times, but we had agreed to not have communication both ways until Kamilah was 18 – we didn't want to co-parent – it was just too hard to share raising a child. I didn't know what to say – how do I relate to this now mature woman? I was used to talking with a 16 year old – and how do I tell her how grateful I am for her sharing such a gift with me – her daughter and my daughter – who now wanted to meet her.

When I dialed the number a man answered and I wasn't sure who it was or what to say – did he know about Kamilah? About Doug and I? I ended up just saying my name and asking to speak to Faith. Within what seemed to be minutes, but was actually seconds, the sweet voice I remembered from 17 years ago was being spoken by a woman and she actually seemed happy to be receiving my call. My first words were – how are you – are you okay – are you happy? She immediately said I am fine and I am very happy.

I was so overwhelmed at hearing her voice – I started to cry – it was a flood of emotions. I could barely control the joy at hearing the mother of my child (our child), a woman who I thought of every time I looked in my daughter's face – a woman who shared the greatest of all gifts with

me – I loved her as much as I love my daughter – and finally I was able to thank her for her gift.

I instinctively knew that she would not disappoint Kamilah – she was quiet and appeared to be completely calm and well collected just as she was as a teenager. I, on the other hand, was blubbering on about Kamilah and how much she wanted to meet her. She told me that she had not gotten my first letter, but was very happy to be invited to the graduation and would definitely come to Vermont. I thanked her for wanting to do this and told her what a wonderful person Kamilah is and how much joy she brought to our lives – and that she would be proud of her – little did I know at that moment just how much Kamilah and Faith were alike...

The conversation continued with my asking about her life and her family. Then she said she would like to bring her children with her if that was okay – and that her husband might not be able to come as they were moving to Virginia in the next week. When I asked about her children, she gave me the names and ages of five children – WOW, was I impressed. I could hear children in the background and found out she was home schooling them. I thought what a great Mom she was.

Then I asked about her husband and when she told me about him, I remembered that he had been her date to her prom (she had given us the picture for Kamilah's adoption album). He also came with Faith to our hotel when Kamilah was born and they took the baby back to her mother's house to spend the night with her parents. She and Keith were married for 15 years and very happy. I was so relieved – that meant he knew about Kamilah – it was not a secret.

Then she told me her children very much wanted to meet their sister – they also had known about her – Hannah, her 4 year old, wanted to touch her because she wasn't sure she was real. Well, I lost it again – how wonderful it was to know that Faith and her family were waiting to embrace Kamilah and that she already was a part of their family – they loved her even without ever meeting her.

I was so excited at the thought of the reunion – and couldn't wait to tell Kamilah the good news. After Faith and I got somewhat caught up with our lives (it would take more than an afternoon conversation to catch up on 17 years), we shared emails and phone numbers. I offered that Doug would be able to help them with arrangements for their stay in Vermont and we would be in touch again before the graduation in June.

I immediately called Doug to tell him the good news. I gave him Faith's phone number and told him Faith was planning on him calling soon. It just so happened that as we were talking, Kamilah was just walking up to his office. I asked him if he would be able to be with her after I spoke with her, as I didn't know how she'd feel when I told her about Faith. He said they would go home together and he'd let me know how she was after she had a chance to digest the news.

When Kamilah got on the phone, I asked her to sit down – I had great news. Now you need to understand that Kamilah is a lot like Faith – she's quiet, reserved and calm most of the time, but I wasn't sure how calm she'd be after our conversation. I remember telling her that Faith didn't get my first letter, but got the second and wanted me to call her right away – and yes she would love to come to the graduation and she wants to bring her FIVE children. There was a brief pause on the phone and then Kamilah said – "FIVE CHILDREN? You mean I have five siblings? That is GREAT!"

It was a typical Kamilah reaction – she is so loving and so open – and she just loves kids. I asked if she was okay with all this new information and she said yes. I asked if Faith wanted to talk with her was it

okay for her to call or would she prefer to call Faith. She decided she would rather call her. So I gave her Faith's number and said goodbye.

A few days later I found out that the text messages began....the kids (her 13 year old brother and 12 year old sister) began texting her. They were getting acquainted the 2008 way.

Now the rest of us just needed to wait until graduation to all meet.

Faith and her family arrived in Vermont the day before I arrived with my family. The graduation was to be attended by everyone in all the families and step families.

Doug and Cindy (his wife) took Kamilah to a town nearby where Faith and her family were staying for the five day visit. Cindy brought Kamilah to the hotel door to meet Faith and all her siblings were lined up outside on the porch. The kids were so excited that they were jumping up and down. It was quite a sight to see – and the story has it that Faith and Kamilah looked so much alike that they could've been looking in a mirror, or mistaken for sisters.

The next morning Doug and Cindy had a reunion brunch at their house and everyone was already there when I arrived with my family. My older daughter Morgan came out to meet us (Kamilah was attached at the hip with her little sisters and had a hard time getting to the door). When I entered the kitchen I saw all the familiar faces first and made my hellos. I then caught sight of Faith and it was amazing – 17 years came flying back to me – she looked almost the same as when I last saw her. She smiled that same sweet smile and said hello in that soft voice. Kamilah was next to her and it was so incredible – their faces were even more alike that I had imagined they would be.

I reached out to hug Faith and was again overwhelmed by emotion. I was so happy to be seeing her again and meeting her wonderful family. The tears started and once again she was cool, calm and in control. Over the next 4 days as I talked with everyone, I always seemed to be the one crying – but every tear drop was one of joy. It was an amazing four days for everyone.

All of us, who shared Kamilah in our lives, were moved by the time we spent together. We realized that we all had special ties to each other and were just at the beginning of a new chapter in our lives. We shared stories, took pictures, made memories and were thankful that we all

did the right thing – we put love of a baby at the center of everything we did for almost 18 years and now we were reaping the rewards. We vowed to stay in touch and made plans to have more reunions in the future – a future that is bright with the promise of more people to love and be loved by.

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there. I was ready to have her be part of my life.

So my mom wrote her, but the first letter never made it. Looking back I don't know how I managed to be patient for as long as I was, while waiting for her reply. After months had gone by my mother sent a second letter. This one made it. Not too long after that, my mother talked to my birth mother for the first time in 18 years.

It was the beginning of May and it was a beautiful day in Vermont. I walked into my parent's office on Main Street with a light heart and left a different person. I should have known when my mom was on the phone that something was going on, something that would affect me. I'll never forget how I felt hearing that my birth mother was happy and married with five children that were my brothers and sisters. And she wanted to meet me.

Soon after, I had my first conversation with my siblings, who I didn't know existed until days before. There was slight confusion when they first text messaged me, because I didn't know it was them. After I finally realized who was texting me I was in shock, but by the end of the day I knew their names and had begun my text messaging relationship with them.

The only thing I had left to do before I met the new members of my family was call Faith, my birth mother. Well I have a hard enough time calling my friends up for a casual chat, so this was going to be a challenge. It was so difficult for me to do, that I waited until the night before they came to Vermont to call. That phone call was everything I thought it would be, from awkward to heart stopping. Hearing her voice was mind blowing and it was then that it really hit me; I was meeting my birth mom.

The next night as I got out of the car at the hotel my family was staying at, my emotions just turned off. It was so overwhelming seeing those beautiful kids out on the porch I just knew I would cry if I didn't shut part of me down. Then when Faith came out I just about did let loose, but somehow I kept it together.

That whole weekend was an emotional one. My mothers bawled in each others arms and at the time I only saw two emotional women, but now that I'm letting myself look back and go over how I felt, I realize that it was one of the hugest moments of that weekend, in some ways bigger then even me meeting her. They were my mothers reuniting after years on their daughter's graduation weekend. Someday I'll understand that bond that is made when a woman gives birth to a daughter, and when I do I'll understand how I brought them together.

I spent Sunday, Monday and Tuesday with Faith and my family. We had the reunion on Sunday, my graduation party on Monday and then on Tuesday I brought them to some of my favorite places in town and we had a great day. The first thing I did on Tuesday was have brunch with Faith at a bagel depot, which she just thought was a hoot. Well our brunch lasted about two hours, and during it we talked about everything. She answered a lot of questions I had and we got to know each other over bagels.

The next day my mom and I went to say goodbye. I gave them little gifts I thought they'd like, we took pictures and said goodbye. Again I didn't cry. It was hard saying goodbye so soon after I had met them, but I did it. It was a wonderful weekend and it'll be one I remember forever, the weekend I met my birth mom and another part of my family.

Surveys for adoptive parents

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and Jockey Being Families are both conducting brief online surveys for adoptive parents regarding the need, use, and availability of post adoption services. For more information please visit www.surveymonkey.com.

We are very glad that these two foundations are interested in post adoption services and that they are committed to improving adoption services. To be sure they understand the parent's point of view, it is very important that they hear directly from parents themselves.

Please take the very few minutes needed to complete the two surveys, and pass the information along to all of the adoptive parents in your networks. Thanks for your help!

As you well know, the lack of effective, adoption competent services for children and families after adoption is a huge problem in adoption today. With all the efforts expended to put families together through adoption, we must do a better job of keeping them together!

NYSCCC's position is that adoption competent services must be available at no cost to any adoptive family wherever they live in NYS at any time the services are needed. Further, any agency that places children for adoption must provide, at a minimum, the following post adoption services:

- 1) Excellent information and referral services
- 2) Adoptive parent support groups
- 3) Ongoing education and training opportunities
- 4) Adoption competent counseling services

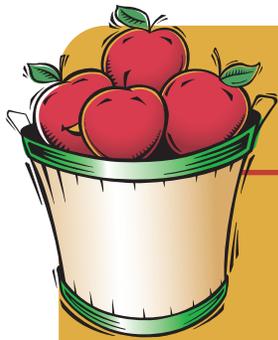
For more information regarding post adoption services, go to NYSCCC's webpage, www.nysccc.org.

The National Adoption Day Coalition announces date change for 2008 National Adoption Day

Washington, DC – National Adoption Day 2008 will be Saturday, November 15, 2008. Traditionally, National Adoption Day is celebrated the Saturday before Thanksgiving – which would have been November 22. Out of respect for the nation's remembrance of the 45th anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22, the National Adoption Day Coalition elected to move the celebration of National Adoption Day this year only to the Saturday prior.

Entering its ninth year, National Adoption Day includes courtroom hearings to finalize a projected 4,300 foster children's adoptions and other celebrations of adoptive families in communities in all 50 states across the United States. This collective national effort raises awareness of the 129,000 children in foster care waiting to find permanent, loving families and involves hundreds of judges, attorneys, adoption agencies, adoption professionals and child advocates volunteering their time to finalize adoptions of children from foster care and celebrating all families who adopt.

In addition to adding to the more than 20,000 foster care adoptions that have occurred as part of National Adoption Day since its inception, this day also builds collaboration among local adoption agencies, courts and advocacy organizations and communicates the availability and need for post-adoptive services.



donations

Hilda
Raymond & Theresa
Charles & JR
George & Deborah
Exxonmobil Foundation
Joe & Laura
Shari
Jeffrey & Kathy
Roger & Terry
Shannon
United Way

In honor of Ellie's birthday:

Deanna & Stuart	Anne
Michael & Ann Marie	Scot & Lynn
Rick & Pam	Frances & Robert
Willard & Stephanie	Tammy & Ray
Craig & Marty	Michael & Faye
David & Tanya	Patricia & Michael
Albert	Robin
Paul & Joan	Gary & Lori
Brendan	Joseph & Sara
Richard	Paul & Pamela
Karen	Timothy & Theresa
Daniel & Azalea	Anita



To all of the wonderful people at FIA

Not only do we thank you for all you did in helping us adopt Ellie, so do our family and friends!

Thank you!
Love Sue, Rich & Ellie

More American companies providing adoption benefits to employees

Of the approximately 1,000 major companies in the U.S., 47 percent provided employees with adoption benefits in 2007 compared to 12 percent in 1990, according to a June 20 CNN article, "More U.S. Firms Help Workers Adopt." The article reported on the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption's ranking of the most adoption-friendly companies for 2008, with the best companies offering benefits that include financial aid, paid time off, consulting or referral services, and free workshops. Despite the growing popularity of such benefits, fewer than half of one percent of employees takes advantage of adoption benefits and employers reportedly remain naïve about the issues adoptive parents may face. To read the article, go to: www.cnn.com.

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Major study links adoption openness to better outcomes for parents

Based on data from 323 adoption triads sampled from 33 agencies in 10 states, greater openness in adoptions is linked with more satisfaction with the adoption process for both adoptive parents and birthparents and with more positive post-adoption adjustment for birthmothers and birthfathers. "Bridging the Divide: Openness in Adoption and Postadoption Psychosocial Adjustment among Birth and Adoptive Parents," by Xiaojia Ge, Misaki Natsuaki, David Martin, Jenae Neiderhiser, Georgette Villareal, John Reid, Leslie Leve, Daniel Shaw, Laura Scaramella and David Reiss, was published in the August issue of the *Journal of Family Psychology* (Volume 22, Issue 4). This is the first major study on openness to include birthfathers ($n=112$) and reports on the first wave of data collection six to nine months post-placement. For more information go to www.psychnet.apa.org.

Birthmom...continued from page 1

especially when I asked Diane if it was okay for me to bring my five children. I was so relieved when she later told me that Kamilah was happy to find out about her siblings. Our children have always loved Kamilah and wanted her to be a part of their lives. The little ones had a hard time understanding why their big sister didn't come live with them. I was especially worried about how this brief reunion would affect them. Everything went better than I had ever hoped it would.

When I finally talked to Kamilah on the phone, I was so nervous that I had a hard time thinking. However, my children had no trouble talking to their sister through text messages. They were determined to have a relationship with their sister and didn't want to wait until graduation to get things started. Thankfully Kamilah seemed happy to start a relationship with them as well.

During our first night in Vermont, Kamilah came to meet us. The kids were waiting excitedly outside the hotel door. I was so anxious when I walked out the door. When I saw Kamilah, I thought that she was even more beautiful in person than in her pictures. Finally my prayers had been answered, and I was able to see my daughter for the first time since she was a baby.

The following day, we met the family. Everyone got along great! I was so happy to see that Kamilah had a loving, supportive family. When Diane hugged me, I completely lost it. Years of emotion came flooding over me. I had really bonded with her before the adoption, and those feelings were still there.

Abby (6) and Hannah (4) didn't want to let go of Kamilah the whole time that we were there. It was as if they wanted to give her a lifetime of love in a few days. I know how they felt. It was so hard to say goodbye.

This was a wonderful reunion. I will cherish it in my heart forever.

contacting Friends in Adoption

OFFICE HOURS

9 am – 4 pm, Monday – Thursday.

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.

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 your incoming pregnant woman calls. 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 e-mail by typing in the **first name** of the individual and @friendsinadoption.org.

JOURNEYS

...is published three times a year by FIA.

Send your letters, photos and comments to:

Kim Denis, Friends in Adoption
P.O. Box 1228
Middletown Springs, VT 05757
kim@friendsinadoption.org

Letters may be edited for space.

Begin with a Get Acquainted Workshop Is FIA right for you?

Dear FIA Staff,

Thank you, again, for organizing such a terrific GAW. We were extremely impressed with all of you and are grateful for the information you provided as well as the issues you raised for discussion and consideration. We're really glad we attended the workshop and expect to be in touch with you soon with a few questions and to hopefully schedule a consultation.

Warmest Regards,
Alan & Laura

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 Workshop. The workshop 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 Workshop 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 \$295 per couple. This fee covers all meetings and lunch. Workshops fill up quickly and are booked on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Complete this Registration Form; you can mail it to FIA **or** register online at www.friendsinadoption.org. 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.

Dear Friends in Adoption,

Today is a very exciting day for both Jeff and myself as we just officially signed on with FIA.

We cannot thank your staff enough for the GAW in Vermont. The information you shared and the knowledge of your staff was just incredible! You all truly made finalizing our decision a very easy process.

There is a lot to be said about an organization that can truly convey their passion about what they do, and that came through to us.

Thanks for a great weekend!
Jenn & Jeff

Get Acquainted Workshop 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? _____

If there is a cancellation for the workshop 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 workshop, we cannot accommodate children.

Please indicate your 1st and 2nd choice for a workshop to attend. The following dates are set for FIA's 2008 Get Acquainted Workshops.

_____ October 24-26, 2008 (Fri/Sat)

_____ December 4-6, 2008 (Thurs/Fri)

METHOD OF PAYMENT

\$295 fee per couple includes all meetings and lunch.

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 workshop 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