



# Summer 2009 Newsletter



## State of the Agency



I cannot believe it has been 9 months since I last wrote an article for the Newsletter. Initially, we wanted to have a quarterly Newsletter to keep up communications. However, twice yearly may be more realistic. Our goal will be to get this Newsletter out to you in September and another one in December.

The good news is that AWL continues to thrive. In the calendar year of 2008, we made 44 placements. Our in-state placements last year were 21 out of 44 which was incredible. This is more placements than we have had in any of the past 8 years since Nancy and I have taken over the helm at Adoptions With Love.

This year has also been busy. Thus far, we have had 28 placements; six of them have been with birthparents residing in Massachusetts. The referrals continue to come in on a daily basis from all over the country. One birthmother found us because she saw a man wearing one of the T-shirts from our 20<sup>th</sup> reunion. She approached him and asked about the agency. This young woman is now making an adoption plan through AWL. You are all part of our best referrals.

Even in these difficult economic times, AWL has remained financially stable. We have continued to see an increase in the need for financial assistance by birthparents. We have been able to meet this need with the generous contributions made through the funds raised by your donations. Our goal remains to find the best home for each child and we have continued to subsidize one-third of our adoptions each year. Therefore, we continue to ask for your generous contributions to one of our charitable funds. All Adoptions With Love families contribute to the ongoing stability of our organization.

This Newsletter includes articles from staff, birthparents and Interns. We welcome contributions from all members of the AWL family.

With warmest regards,

Amy S. Cohen, Executive Director



### **New members of the AWL family**

From left to right: Joshua, Emma, Luke, Carter, Or, Isabella, Max

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*Our mission is to provide prospective adoptive parents and birth parents with professional, sensitive and confidential services to facilitate successful placements that meet the individual needs of all members of the adoption triad.*

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## A letter from Nancy ... *By Nancy Rosenhaus, Associate Director*

**I** have had my master's degree in social work for 28 years. Over that time I have worked in a variety of settings and of course the longest setting has been where my heart is; right here at Adoptions With Love, Inc. With my graduate schooling far behind me I have learned that *I continue to learn*. Most recently, I have learned from my clients: parents who have or are hoping to adopt; birth mothers who place children for adoption as well as the children who grow up to become adolescents and young adults. I learn from my dear colleague, Amy Cohen, the rest of the staff at AWL, and the Board of Directors of AWL. I continue to learn from my own daughters, who have grown up into opinionated young adults and my husband (who is also opinionated). Most recently I have had some amazing experiences.

The other day I had lunch with a young woman who placed her baby for adoption 4 years ago. We speak from time to time and have lunch once in a while. What she has to tell me about her journey through this maze of feelings over the years makes me a better social worker. Her insight into her own path with her adoption experience is like a private course for me. She shared her feelings about the long bumpy road she journeys on to resolve her feelings about making the plan of adoption for her child. Although she has moved on successfully in her professional and personal life, she continues to work hard to resolve her grief. She says she would not change her decision, but it is still very hard. She teaches me.

Another beautiful 18 year old young woman came to see me with her parents. She felt she was ready to meet her birth mother. After speaking to this young woman and her parents I agreed, that, although she was young for this journey, she was ready. But the question remained: would her birth mother be ready or even willing? When I tracked the birth mother down and called her completely out of the blue, I had no idea how she would react. The answer was that she was thrilled and always hoped this day would come. We emailed back and forth and they finally met. They teach me and continue to do so. You can read more about this amazing reunion in the letter from Marianne, in this

newsletter.

Today I made another one of these calls to a woman, now in her mid 30's that made an adoption plan for a child 20 years ago. She was not at all happy that I tracked her down and contacted her. She was actually very upset that I had opened up a part of her life that SHE was not ready for. Maybe the young adult child was ready, but she was not. We all had to respect her point of view and personal preferences. This was very difficult for the young adult that sought the connection and very upsetting to me that I had thrown this woman completely off balance; a balance she had worked very hard to achieve.

This experience has definitely confirmed my belief: **do not try this at home**. In other words, it is important that the *professionals* make these delicate and tender calls. This negative reaction shook me and gave me pause, but I am a professional. I understand that this woman, twenty years later, had not done the work necessary to resolve her feelings about the adoption plan she made as a teenager. If the young adult had made this call, I firmly believe it would have been a complete and utter disaster.

I have learned that people's lives change. We track down families that have not kept in touch with us over the years to find that one parent has sadly passed away or another couple has divorced. I hear how much they have struggled through the ordeal but how wonderful and amazing their children are. I have learned that birthparents lives also change. Some go on to graduate college, high school, get a GED, have other children, get married, get divorced, leave an abusing partner, lift themselves out of poverty or drug abuse, etc. And yet, some do not.

This is the world of adoption. Nothing is stagnant. That is the beauty. I continually learn day to day. Learning is what keeps it interesting, fun and challenging. I love seeing the children who come in to visit us, now as elementary school or high school kids or young adults. It is a pleasure to say: I love what I do for my living. Thank you all. This is an awesome career.

# Moving On . . .

By Meghan De Santa

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It is hard to believe it has been almost 3 years since I came to Adoptions With Love. Amidst the twists and turns and happy chaos of the adoption process, I have hardly noticed the months go by. I am sure that all I have learned from working on well over 100 adoptions will take years to fully comprehend. My daily experiences at the agency have occupied dinner conversations and dreams, and the many incredible people I've worked with have immensely impacted my life and goals. I have felt truly blessed to work in an environment where we can see first-hand that the services we provide bring so many children into wonderful, loving families and homes.

After much consideration, I have decided to move on to pursue a degree in Medical Anthropology at Boston University to concentrate on women's health and public policy. The decision was of course largely inspired by my eye-opening work with birth mothers across the country, and by my long-term desire to serve the public interest in this arena. While I am excited for what is to come, the thought of leaving AWL is bittersweet and the memories I have made here will follow me wherever I go.

I am so thankful to the birthparents for putting your faith in us to help you through a most emotional and difficult time in your lives. After so many phone conversations and milestones, it is hard to believe that I have never met many of you in person. Your strength and courage have been an absolute inspiration, and you can be sure that I will be checking in with the agency to find out how you are all doing. It has been a pleasure to



work with you at the very beginning of your adoption story and I hope that you feel some peace knowing that the agency will be here for you in the years to come. I want to wish you health and happiness in your lives wherever they may lead, and do hope that you will stay connected.

I have also had the pleasure of getting to know many wonderful adoptive families and have learned much from your experiences as well. The decision to adopt and the process of waiting for a placement are more harrowing and exciting than I ever could have imagined before working in the field. It takes a special kind of strength and understanding to comprehend the unique experience of being entrusted with a child and feeling the immediate bond that connects your two families. For us, being part of a baby's homecoming makes the whirlwind of paperwork and phone calls more than worthwhile, and *nothing* beats the unforgettable experience of introducing a family to their new baby after a long and emotional wait. It has been an honor to be a part of such a tremendous time in all of your lives.

I want to express my immense gratitude to Amy, Nancy, and Karen for giving me the opportunity to do such rewarding work. I am so proud to be a part of an agency with integrity and a sincere desire to help families across the country. I have learned so much from all of you and I hate to say goodbye. I look forward to being in touch and hearing all the news of future adoptions!

## Returning for more . . .

By Deborah Bamel, Birth Parent Coordinator



**M**y name is Deborah Bamel and I am very excited to be joining the staff at Adoptions With Love as the Birth Parent Coordinator. I worked at AWL in the summer of 2006 as an intern and had a wonderful experience learning about the world of adoption. I am now thrilled to be back here in a new, more professional role. I am especially eager to work closely with our birthmothers and develop relationships with them. I recently graduated from Tufts University with a bachelor's degree in Child Development and Community Health. Before coming to AWL, I worked with young children and their families at the Grow Clinic for Children at Boston Medical Center, and served as a research assistant on a nation-wide study called Children's Health Watch. I hope to pursue a graduate degree in Public Health or Social Work at some point in the future. I am fluent in Spanish and spent a semester studying at the University of Seville in Seville, Spain. Outside of work, I love to travel, bake, swim, and read. I hope to get to know many of you in the coming months!

Summer 2009 Newsletter

## *Finding each other . . .* By: Marianne

Whenever I read a sentence like “It was a day like any other day” and I hear the keys click on my keyboard my mind flashes to Spiderman or Superman. Well, here a day in May did start like any other but in this case there are no superheroes and no freakish mutant powers, just an ordinary woman sitting quietly at her desk listening to music and doing paperwork. The phone rings in a not so unusual way and I answer it in a not so unusual way, a friendly hello the name of the company and my name. On the other end, “Is this Marianne, the Marianne?” I started to giggle because the nature of the industry I work in is based on referrals. In that industry I am liked by most but disliked by some. On some level I am accustomed to this kind of greeting. Often I try to be silly and make light of things so having someone seem playful is not so unusual. Quickly though the caller identifies themselves as a representative from Adoptions With Love, gently guiding me into the nature of the call. “Marianne 18 years ago you had a relationship with the agency that I work for in Newton, Massachusetts.” This simple little statement sucked the wind right out of my lungs. It is not the kind of windedness that you get from running up a mountain or from being punched in the gut, it is the kind that you get from having the air sucked out like when you accidentally get the dental sucking hose pointed toward your throat instead of your teeth. The fortunate sentence next from the caller was “Everyone is okay; no one died or is ill.” This gave me the hiccup of a breath that I needed. Next my favorite sentence, “She is beautiful, grounded and very bright.” Ahh...just like I planned. From this moment, after a series of “oh my gods” and “holy cows,” I was able to begin a conversation that had some banter.

I will not lie, huge teardrops jumped out of my eyes like a swimmer leaping from a bridge— up and out then splash on the ground. I have never seen any-

thing like it in my life, perfect round splashes of water, one after the other. It seemed like I kept chanting “Oh My God, Oh My God.” Nancy, from AWL, asked if it was a good “Oh My God” and I assured her that it was the best “Oh My God” of my entire life. It was the kind that blasted away the last eighteen years like the wind licks a dandelion puff— so much seemed completely irrelevant or seemed to no longer apply.

From this conversation I learned that my daughter wanted to meet me. First letters and pictures and then we would meet. My personality is such that I make sure when I sit to write that I am quiet inside. I make sure that all the chatter of fear and nervousness are quieted down. I also had to have a firm belief that I could write something meaningful and representational of myself. I had to cry my eyes out again a number of times and then I settled down to the letter. I described as much as I could think of without being a bore and I started the story of how she had been a part of my life during her physical absence. I was sure to mention that her birth remains an inspiration to me in every possible way and the strength and clarity that I gained in having her grow in my body and become an amazing human being was my beacon of strength to this day. After letter writing our meeting place, date and time was set. I was excited and I felt a kind of focus and completeness that I had not felt maybe in my whole life.

The morning of our meeting, getting ready and then driving, I would describe it as being a little kid waking on Christmas morning, knowing I was the first to wake up, but waiting for someone to come get me and tell me it was time to go down stairs. It felt like I had a joy bomb in my belly and it was going to explode and joy juice would leak out everywhere in the most delicious way. You have to understand it is that feeling when you know a surprise that will make someone happy and you have to bite back the words because the waiting for the right moment is more important than telling them. It was a great feeling.

There was a big water fountain in the park where we met. She was leaning against the wall. I stood for a second just looking at her before she noticed I was there. My tummy flipped like I was lying on the back seat of a car. Well, we walked right up to one another and hugged and cried and hugged and cried and hugged and cried. It was delightful. After we finished blubbering, I held her away by the shoulders and I asked her “Well, has it been good your life?” She smiled wide and deep, eyes sparkly and said “YES.” I replied “Excellent.” Inside I thought “just like I planned.”

There are so many details just from the first day to share. The conversations with my daughter, seeing her parents again, being invited to my daughter’s graduation and the sweet, quiet, contemplative ride home represent a beginning. What I can tell you of this experience is that I know with confidence that I am in her life now. We are engaged together, all four of us, in getting to know one another. We have a strong bond due to the nature of things and now we have the pleasure of knowing and loving one another more deeply. What I hoped to be true 18 years ago is true. My daughter is healthy. She grew up with two strong and loving parents who guided her to knowing herself. She has had an enormous number of experiences and introductions with cultures from all over the world. She is confident, clear, sassy and kind. . . . *Continued on page 5*





I've always known that I was adopted. In my mind there was never any issue with it. I've never had issues discussing it, never felt like it was something that

separated me from anyone else. As far back as I can remember, a book titled *The Day We Got You* was on my nightstand and occasionally my parents and I would read it before bedtime. Then they'd tell me the story of how they got the call and were so incredibly happy to find out they had a baby! It was the day before my father's birthday, and he'd tell me how exhausted they were from staying up all night with me, but how I was still the best birthday present he could have asked for.

I vividly remember jumping rope with a friend in my driveway one day when we were probably eight years old. Somehow, in the midst of a jump-roping session, I told her I was adopted. She said, "No, you're not." And I said, "Yes, I am! Go ask my parents." And so she did. She could not believe it. Adoption still has a reputation of being international or through foster care. People don't think I am adopted because I am so much like my parents. I look remarkably like my father and everyone in his family. The only time my adoption ever comes up is for things like medical history or genetics. People ask questions like "do you get your eyes from your mother or father?" expecting a simple answer. I still haven't found a tactful way to respond in situations like that and usually end up clamming up or sputtering something about

adoption.

As I've grown older, I've started to think about my adoption differently. One year, when I was probably 16 or 17, around the time of my birthday, I had a realization. It suddenly occurred to me that my birthmother probably still exists, she probably still thinks about me; it's not like I'm dead to her. I realized that she didn't just give me up because she couldn't provide for me, but also because she loved me and knew that I would be able to have a better life elsewhere with my parents. Now I end up thinking about her a lot more, especially when it gets closer to my birthday.

This summer I've decided to look at the adoption process from a different perspective. I've been working three days a week as an intern at Adoptions With Love – the very same agency my parents adopted me through twenty years ago. It's been a real pleasure getting to know Amy, Nancy (who was my parents' social worker!), Karen, Meghan and Deborah. I've had such a valuable learning experience here and have gotten to see what's on the other side and behind the scenes of the adoption process. We joke that there is certainly no stork that delivers babies, but more an insanely large amount of paperwork and phone calls to get these placements done. I've gotten to hear stories of joy and horror; women who cannot afford to purchase maternity clothes, let alone get to a doctor; and families who have been waiting for so long and finally get the call that there is a child waiting for loving parents. Just today, I saw the child from the first placement I was around for. It was so rewarding because the last time I saw the adoptive parents they were getting ready to get on a plane to Illinois and here they were with the most adorable

little baby in their arms.

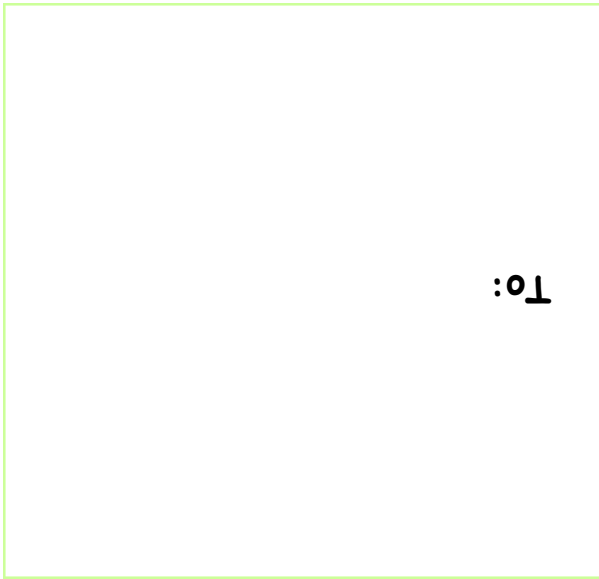
Another great thing is being able to talk with my parents about their experiences adopting 20 years ago and how the process has changed since then. One of the biggest differences is that back when my parents adopted birthmothers came to live with adoptive families after a child was placed with the family. After I was born my parents had two birthmothers living in our house and my mother even took one of them to the hospital when she was in labor and was in the delivery room when her baby was born. Also, AWL now fosters the relationship between the birthmother and the adoptive parents by providing a letter and photograph exchanging system. This is fun for us – we love seeing all of the babies – but many of our birthmothers really appreciate seeing their child grow in their new home. For the adoptive couple, we work hard to obtain family medical histories from both the birthmother and birthfather – something that I only wish had been done 20 years ago!

This is surely one of the most interesting and rewarding experiences I have ever had at a job. I can see little bits of my parents in every joyful adoptive couple I see. Working at AWL is a wonderful experience and has brought me one step closer to finding my own birthmother. I know that it is something I will do, eventually, when I feel the time is right. After all, she is part of the reason I've had the opportunities I've had, and she deserves thanks! I also want to thank everyone that I've had the opportunity to work with this summer for giving me an experience I won't forget and will impact the rest of my life.

### *Finding each other...* continued from page 4

What I can also tell you of the experience is that in many ways I feel like I have worked this whole time to prepare for meeting her and becoming a part of her life. Her birth set me on a journey of question and answer. I mended the hole that I felt inside after we were apart and I gently applied salve to it, patting it lovingly not really knowing if it would ever be full but feeling pretty sure that I would be. Now, having her in my life, I have to tell you that in order to take her in I have to pull back the skin to fill the hole. There are challenges and a little ache in all the joy at first, but not enough to stop me from any of it. These are the happiest

days for me and the ones that give me the overwhelming sense that I do indeed know when and how to do the right thing. She has helped me become all that I have evolved to be and believe that I drink deeper from the cup than if I had not had this experience in my life. I believe my life is a rich life. One that has given me a kind of sensitivity and alertness that helps me find the good in most things.



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