

Family Resource Center

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You can find this edition of *small steps* in color
on the web at www.adoptillinois.org

small steps

spring 2004



FRC'S MISSION

To find permanent loving family homes
for children, here and around the world,
through adoption.

E-MAIL UPDATE

Please let us know if you have a new
e-mail address

Just give us a call or e-mail us at :
Adoption@f-r-c.org

Do you want to know about educational programs offered by FRC?

Call the Education Hotline
(773) 334-4258

FRC adoption program participants
can call this number to find out about
upcoming classes and events.
Classes offered can be used to satisfy
foster family home licensing requirements.

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FRC's birth mothers are in our hearts and minds year-round.

As Mother's Day approaches, we offer you one birth mother's true story.

A Birth Mother's Story



Suzy

It wasn't supposed to happen to me. I was a good girl. I was the salutatorian of my graduating class and had been to college. I was doing things with my life. I made every possible excuse to make myself believe that I was *not* twenty years old and pregnant. For a while I actually believed myself. By the time I was seven months pregnant, I couldn't hide from myself anymore. One cold afternoon in November, I sat my parents down and broke the news. I remember saying to them that I was still a child in so many ways and had no business raising a child. Even considering everything accomplished so far in my life, I was not ready.

My parents and I realized that adoption was the best option. I didn't know much about adoption, but wanted to educate myself to the fullest extent possible. It was in the phone book that I found Family Resource Center. Like a schoolgirl, I must have called FRC ten times and hung up before I actually said hello. After swallowing my pride and finally completing a call, I was put in touch with Laura. She was to be my birth parent counselor, and later became one of my closest friends. Laura and I talked for hours, and made plans for my move to Chicago. Subtly, my parents were pushing me to have a closed adoption. They figured it would be easier on me not to see the baby or the family that would receive him. Depressed and tired, I just assumed their stance was right. Towards the beginning of January, I made my way from St. Louis to Chicago, where I would live while having the baby.

As quickly as I fell in love with Chicago, I also fell in love with FRC. My greatest fear in moving to this big city was that I would be alone. Luckily, that never happened. Laura and I spoke daily. Our lunch and coffee dates were amazing. For the first time in my pregnancy, a person didn't make me feel ashamed to be in my predicament. I was proud to be able to give such a gift—the gift of my baby—to people I didn't even know yet. It actually became a mission for me to complete the adoption. With the help of a counselor, I worked my way out of depression and began to take hold of my own fate. Making a full turn from my parents' stance, I became very interested in an open adoption. Deep down, this is what I wanted all along. I decided that I deserved to be a part of my child's life, and that he also deserved to have one more person to love him more than anyone in the world. From then on everything became easier. In my eyes, it seemed common sense that an open adoption would be the healthier alternative for me.

At the beginning of February, I began to feel that there was no skin left to stretch! Laura suggested that now would be an ideal time to search for a family. I trudged into the office with my protruding belly and began to leaf through about a million albums. It was an overwhelming task. All these people just wanted a baby to love. I wanted to help them all. Hours later, as if I were conducting an NBA draft, I had narrowed my choices to four couples and carried their books home to study in depth. Honestly, I loved

A Birth Mother's Story

Continued from page 1

each couple in different ways. In the end, I had given each couple a nickname and decided on "the Greek Ones". I will call them Tim and Betty. They seemed to be amazing! I felt as though I had known them my whole life. I wanted to meet them immediately.

.....
I was proud to be able to give such a gift—the gift of my baby—to people I didn't even know yet."
.....

Laura and I walked into the restaurant where we were meeting Tim and Betty, who greeted us very warmly. Amazed by all of our similarities, Tim, Betty, and I felt that it was fate that had brought us together. There were no silences or awkward moments between us, just huge spurts of laughter and excited interruptions of "Oh yeah, me too!" With our food untouched three hours later, I excused myself to the washroom only to find that my water had broken (I like to say it was

from all the laughter). We met again later at the hospital where I was rambling incoherently due to the epidural. It was the most miraculous thing to have them there with me. As my labor progressed and the delivery was near, Tim excused himself to nervously pace the hallways, while Betty stayed with me.

One thing that sticks with me through the madness of that late night was Laura. As she promised, Laura never left my side. She fed me ice chips and wiped my forehead. Above all she was my saving grace when I needed an angel. Theo was born at 3:44 a.m. Even I couldn't believe it when his cobalt eyes, a carbon copy of my own, were looking up at me. Every part of him was wondrous and beautiful. Nurses and doctors rushed in and out but none of us noticed. We were all transfixed by this little miracle. Holding him, and watching Tim and Betty hold him, made everything so real.

It wouldn't be truthful to say there were no doubts about my relinquishing Theo, but the next day changed everything. Tim and Betty came to visit. Betty sat in my bed watching soap operas with me while I held the baby, and Tim slept in the chair. Then it all made sense. In that single moment, everything was clear. We were a family already.

It wasn't all smooth sailing for me after that. No matter how accepting you are with such a situation, it can still be intolerably hard. I had good days and bad days and, truthfully, still do. Tim and Betty faithfully sent pictures and letters so that I, too, could watch Theo grow. They have been so considerate about keeping in touch. While remaining in Chicago for several months, I continued to see a counselor to help deal with my emotions and feelings about the adoption. Other than my physical changes, I had lost and gained so much. The therapy helped me find my way through it all. This was one of FRC's most valuable perks for me.

Through it all, I have become a better person. Even people who don't know what I have been through have seen positive changes in me. I am proud to be a birth mother and to have such a beautiful child. It is an even bigger pleasure to know that Theo is with such a wonderful couple. Tim and Betty are so much like me that it feels as though I am raising him myself. Millions of times a day I think of the three of them, and realize how blessed I am to be a part of their lives. In the end, I grew up so much in such a short time. No matter what anyone says, I am the lucky one to live every day knowing the joy I have brought to such remarkable and loving people. ☀

It's Spring! It's Mother's Day!

By Sue Allen, Coordinator of Birth Parent Services

FRC's Second Annual Mother's Day Luncheon Sunday, May 16, 2004

FRC's Birth Parent Counselors are consistently touched and amazed by the courage of the Birth Mothers with whom we work. These women usually come to us during periods when they are facing difficult personal situations. When they make the decision to place their infants with adoptive families, it is a decision based primarily on love and concern for their babies.

FRC will again be honoring the Birth Mothers who have placed children through FRC at our Second Annual Mother's Day Luncheon on Sunday, May 16th. The luncheon will begin at 11:00 a.m. at the Fireside Restaurant, just a few blocks from our office. FRC's team of Birth Parent Counselors—Sue Allen, Kendra Brown, Pamela Brown, Angel Cole and Laura Zajkowski—will be there to welcome everyone. This now-annual luncheon offers the opportunity for Birth Mothers and involved Birth Fathers to share stories and support one another.

Following the lunch, we will introduce attendees to FRC's Adoption Learning Center. I believe that birthparents, adoptee and adoptive parents will find the Adoption Learning Center to be a valuable resource for personal growth and learning now and in the future. ☀



Kendra B., Danielle P. and
Christian F. celebrate the 1st Annual
Birth Parent Luncheon

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• CHINA JOURNAL •

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

by Jane B. Turner, Program Coordinator



WOW!

It's been almost ten years since the FRC China Program began. With amazement

I think about "our" first babies in the early groups, who are now third graders. I remember the first few sets of referrals — grainy postage-stamp-sized black-and-white photos with the sole medical information of: "Child is sound of body and mind". Take a leap of faith and head for China! Times have changed and improved. Our newest returning families received a color passport photo, two or three candid color photos, a two-page medical report, lab test results and a social/developmental history of their child. Now our families travel knowing what to expect.

Some things have *not* changed. The challenge of the waiting process with the endless wondering of "when, when, when". The pride of parents showing off their referral pictures and talking about the baby waiting for them. The excitement and nervousness on departure day, leaving O'Hare. It's suddenly so real, so palpable! The life-changing experience of a China trip. Meeting the children, completing the adoption. Children change and blossom before their parents' very eyes. Parents change and blossom before *my* very eyes. The happiness,



Marshall and Trisha in China with Group 37



Patty with daughter Sara Min and Lillian in China with Group 37



Philip with daughter Louise with Group 37

relief and weariness I see on the faces of parents as they return home. And months and years later seeing the families and their much-loved children. Although the children may not remember me, they should know that each and every one of them has made a difference in my life.

I have such wonderful memories. Snapshots in time that to this day bring tears to my eyes. Tears of tenderness, tears of laughter. Helping brand new parents calm their fears: "She doesn't like me!"; "She won't take a bottle!"; "No one is sleeping!". Crisis intervention: "I lost my passport!"; "My documents are wrong!"; "I want to go home!". Just plain fun: "Meet in the hall at 4:30, bring a beer for Tom and chocolate for Jane."; "We need to buy things for the orphanage, we have 40 minutes to spend 6000 RMB!"; "Don't worry, it tastes just like chicken!"; "Bowling party at 6:30. Babies love bowling!". Moments of sweetness: "She smiled for the first time!"; "She fell asleep in her Daddy's arms."; "I love her more than I ever dreamed."

Now we are coming up to the China Program's 10th year. I look forward to a delightful 10-year Anniversary Celebration in the spring of 2005. I have a few ideas in mind and am eager for your suggestions, your participation and your assistance.

My work is truly a privilege. ☺

SAVE THE DATE!

15th Annual Family Festival

Saturday, June 12, 2004

at the Forest Preserve in Palatine, Illinois

Invitations will be mailed in May. For more information call Angela at (773) 334-2300

- Petting Zoo
- Great Food
- Snow Cones
- Moon Walk
- Pony Rides
- Games
- Cotton Candy
- Velcro Obstacle Course



Domestic Adoption Program One Year Later

by Andi Yakovitz, LCSW, Domestic Program Coordinator

It was about this time last year that FRC underwent a reorganization that included the creation of the position of Coordinator of Domestic Adoption Programs. Prior to this point, families reported having close relationships with their Home Study Workers, but beyond that did not feel connected to the greater FRC Community.

To that end, as coordinator of the program, I now produce a monthly bulletin that gives a report on recent placements, the number of birth parents we are serving, and any other interesting news happening around the office. We also gather as a group several times per year

to discuss a topic relevant to domestic adoption, and to allow waiting families the opportunity to meet each other. I hope that in this past year communication between FRC and potential adoptive families has increased, and that this increase in communication has helped families feel supported, and led them to realize that FRC really is working on their behalf.

All of us here at FRC hope that the journey from home study to placement is quick and smooth, but the reality is that, for some, there are bumps in the road. While we cannot guarantee that any family will receive a placement through us, we do guarantee that FRC will focus on outreach

to connect with as many birth parents as possible. We guarantee that everyone in our program has our support.

2004 is shaping up to be a busy year. Our outreach efforts to hospitals and clinics are proving to be fertile ground, as the percentage of birth moms we have contacting us from these resources is on the rise. At the same time, our population of waiting families is very low. In fact, for a variety of reasons, now is a great time to apply to FRC for a domestic adoption.

I am very pleased about the improvements in service that we have made in the Domestic Adoption Program, and look forward to speaking with all of our present and future families. It is always a pleasure to hear from you!

Please stay tuned for exciting updates and changes to our web site at www.adoptillinois.org. Whatever you see today will look considerably different by the middle of July 2004. ☺

Grandparents for FRC Spring Coffee & Walkabout Takes Place

FRC's festive and informative Spring Coffee & Walkabout for adoptive grandparents (and interested others) took place on the morning of Wednesday, April 14th. Grandparents gathered in our conference room for coffee and bakery treats, while enjoying the opportunity to meet one another. Richard Pearlman, FRC's executive director, gave a "broad picture update" on the work of Family Resource Center. Andi Yakovitz, coordinator of the domestic adoption program, and Jane Turner, coordinator of the intercountry adoption program, spoke about their programs' progress and future expectations.

Sue Allen, birth parent coordinator, told about the birth parent counselors' move later in April to the new Adoption Learning Center. Angela Bartle, talked about day-to-day agency details as coordinator of administration and invited everyone to attend FRC's Family Festival in June. Richard escorted the grandparents' group upstairs to see the Adoption Learning Center and the third floor apartments available for birth mothers in need.

A worthwhile morning!

Nancy Kerr Carroll,
coordinator for Grandparents for FRC



FRC Garage & Rummage Sale

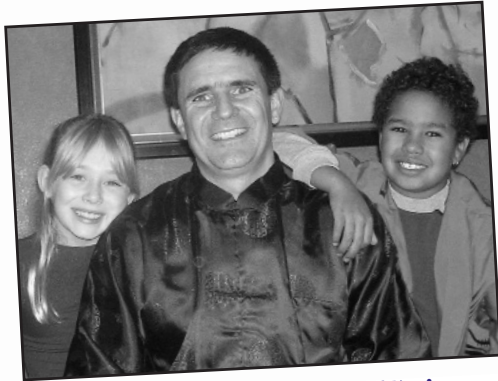
Family Resource is holding a Garage & Rummage Sale on Friday, May 16th & Saturday, May 17th. The sale will be located at FRC's office in the back of the building. The sale will begin at 10:00 a.m. and end at 4:00 p.m.

Do you have any items that you would like to donate? There is no item too large or small. If you would like to donate items, please call FRC to arrange for a time to drop off donated items at our office.

All donations will be acknowledged with a tax-exempt letter receipt. Large or heavy donations can be picked up on request.

Are you available to volunteer and help run the sale? Adults and mature young people are invited to help.

Please call Angela at FRC for more details:
(773) 334-2300.



Mark and his children Claire and Kevin



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April 2004

Dear Friends:

First of all, I would like to thank everyone who attended and/or supported our fund raising auction on March 13. This year's event was a great success financially for FRC and a fun evening for all who attended.

As spring approaches, the work of Family Resource Center is blossoming. Inquiries and applications are received almost daily for both our Domestic and Intercountry Adoption Programs. Our Educational Meetings continue to serve both current and future parents. These meetings are offered to the community without charge or obligation.

Placement activity is as busy as ever. Outreach efforts have positioned FRC as the "go to" agency for women and children in need of adoption assistance at many hospitals around the Chicago area. FRC compassionately supports these families, at no charge or obligation, whether the parents decide to place their child or not.

FRC remains on the forefront of all aspects of adoption and provides the best possible services to children, birth parents and adoptive parents. However, FRC must move forward if we are to remain effective as the FRC community matures and as the world changes.

For this reason, FRC has established our Adoption Learning Center on our building's second floor. Richard has told me that as our adoptee community reaches early adulthood "...the general topic of 'understanding adoption' will be the greatest challenge facing the Family Resource Center community in the years to come." The Adoption Learning Center is a major step toward meeting this challenge.

Another aspect of FRC's preparation for the future is our utilization of the Internet. Many adoptions now occur after birth parents and adoptive parents connect via the Internet, often through adoptive parent listings. FRC is actively evaluating how to best combine this new technology with our focus on compassionate support for all involved in adoption.

FRC appreciates your continued financial support so that we may successfully pursue these and other initiatives. We have included a donation envelope in this issue of *Small Steps* for your convenience.

Thank you for your generous support!

Gratefully,

Mark Mulert
Family Resource Center
President, Board of Directors
mamulert@comcast.net

Our Help. Your Decisions.

FRC, an Illinois Licensed, Non-profit Child Welfare Agency



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Spring Auction and Dinner Celebrates FRC's 15th Anniversary

by Angela Bartle, Coordinator for Spring Fundraisers

On March 13th the staff, board members and friends of FRC had a wonderful time at our Annual Spring Fundraising Gala. The event was held at the Renaissance Chicago North Shore Hotel in Northbrook. All had a good time and guests marveled at the array of wonderful auction items. Among the 220 attendees were two team members of the Chicago Bears.

This year several young people joined us to share in our celebration. Throughout the evening, it was fun to see the young people rushing around the auction tables as they bid against other guests. They wanted to be sure to win the items that had caught their interest. Guests of all ages had a great time throughout the evening.

As we all moved into the dining room, I took a moment to look around. Everywhere I looked there were friends, families and

co-workers enjoying themselves as they celebrated Family Resource Center's 15th Anniversary. I felt a swell of pride to be a part of this wonderful, caring organization.

Later, during the dinner presentation, Richard told a touching true story about how a birth mother and her teenage daughter — adopted by a family — communicated through letters for the first time. It was very moving and made me realize how fortunate I am to be part of an organization that brings children and families together!

Later this month, I'll begin planning for our "Sweet Sixteen" Fundraiser in the spring of 2005. Our date and place should be confirmed soon. Please give me a call at (773) 334-2300 or send an email to: abartle@f-r-c.org, if you would like to be a member of the 2005 Spring Auction Planning Committee. We welcome your ideas and creativity! 🌟



Kendra B and Angela B. celebrate at the 2004 Dinner and Auction



Susan and Greg B. enjoying the 2004 FRC Fundraiser