

## UNDER THE ARCH



November, 2006

Volume IV Issue I

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## NJ•ARCH Features:

- Chat Rooms
- Lending Library
- Warm Line
- Resource Directory
- Buddy Mentors
- Support Group Advocacy
- Upcoming Events
- Speakers Bureau

[www.cafsnj.org](http://www.cafsnj.org)*Answering the Call*

## November is National Adoption Awareness Month

*You don't have to be perfect to be a perfect parent. There are thousands of teens in foster care who would love to put up with you.*

Each year, November is recognized as National Adoption Awareness Month. While all adoption-related issues are important, the particular focus of this month is the adoption of children currently in foster care. During the month of November, states, communi-

ties, public and private organizations, businesses, families, and individuals celebrate adoption as a positive way to build families.

Promoting awareness can be done through planned events, gatherings and celebrations as well as simple everyday activities. These are all opportunities to educate ourselves and others about adoption, and about issues surrounding adoption. If one child finds

their "forever home", through this awareness, let's consider it a success.

The following are ideas in how your family and community can help celebrate this month:

Ask your local library to display adoption-related books. Write a letter to the editor about a positive adoption story.

Speak to your principle, teacher, counselor or social

*(Continued on page 6)*

## NATIONAL ADOPTION DAY: NOVEMBER 18TH



This year, National Adoption Day is November 18, 2006. National Adoption Day is a collective national effort to raise awareness of the 118,000 children in foster care waiting to find perma-

nant loving families. Now in its seventh year, National Adoption Day has made the dreams of thousands of children come true by working with courts, judges, attorneys, and advocates to finalize adoptions into permanent, loving families and to celebrate adoption. Each year, judges, attorneys, adoption

professionals, child welfare agencies and advocates assist in helping to celebrate this special day. In 2005, 277 events took place throughout the country with more than 3,300 children finalizing their adoptions. This year in New Jersey, over 130 DYFS children in foster care will have their adoptions finalized.

## SOME OF NJ's ANGELS:



**Karen Backiel**



**Brian and Carman Bovasso**

Pictures Courtesy of  
Pam Hasegawa

## ANGELS IN ADOPTION AWARDS: TEN NEW JERSEY "ANGELS" RECOGNIZED

Each year, the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI) recognizes ordinary people who do extraordinary things for the cause of adoption.

The "Angels in Adoption" Program is CCAI's signature public awareness program, which provides the opportunity for all members of the U.S. Congress to honor the good works of their constituents who have enriched the lives of foster children who need forever homes. This year's program took place in Washington DC on September 20<sup>th</sup>.

In addition, these "National Angels" were recognized for their adoption and foster care advocacy on a broader, nationwide scale. This year, more than 190 members of Congress participated, making it the year's single most significant Congressional event pertaining to child welfare in the United States. The following were our New Jersey's Angels:

**Karen Backiel**

**Rep: Bill Pascrell**

Ms. Bakiel is a master's level social worker who has devoted more than 30 years to adoption field services. Ms. Bakiel worked as the Adoption Case Work Supervisor in the NJ's DYFS, Paterson

Office (formally Northern Adoption Resource Center). For many years, she mentored scores of young caseworkers in the importance of permanency for children.

Ms. Backiel was uniquely able to translate policy and procedure to day-to-day practical steps. As a result, thousands of children in northern NJ have had the benefit of well-trained and caring caseworkers and successful adoption placements.

Ms. Bakiel also took the lead in developing and maintaining a staff library at the adoption center that later became the resource in the later development of the NJ Adoption Resource Clearing House (NJ ARCH).

**Brian and Carman Bovasso**

**Rep: Christopher Smith**

The Bovassos have been blessing the lives of children for years as active volunteers with Angel's Wings, a children's emergency shelter located at St. Francis Medical Center in Trenton.

They began volunteering at Angel's Wings four years ago, committing four hours each Sunday morning to feed, care for and play with children that had been separated from their families and placed in temporary

emergency shelter by DYFS. The Bovassos wished to offer these children a safe haven and decided to become foster parents. Two siblings from the shelter later became part of their family.

**Mary Anne Cohen**

**Rep: Rodney Frelinghuysen**

An adoption professional describes Ms. Cohen as "one of the half dozen most important contributors to the adoption field in the last 50 years". A gifted poet and prodigious writer, Ms. Cohen's poetry, essays and artwork have inspired the entire adoption community, including all members of the triad. She has presented in countless conference workshops, participated in Birthmother's Day celebrations, and read her poetry in many settings. Ms. Cohen helped to found the national organization, CUB (Concerned United Birthparents) as well as co-founded ORIGINS, a NJ based national organization for birthmothers of adopted children.

**Dr. Alla Gordina**

**Rep: Senator Frank Lautenberg**

Dr. Gordina is a pediatrician specializing in international adoption. For the past 10 years, she has worked to

## ANGELS IN ADOPTION AWARDS:

educate physicians in the U.S. about the special needs of this underserved and rarely understood group of patients. Her ability to bridge the gap between medical practices in other countries and the U.S has been invaluable to the families and their physicians.

Dr. Gordina has been a frequent volunteer speaker at many organizations as well as was responsible for creating a Pre-Adoption Vaccination CD, which is distributed by an organization called Project Katherine which she also assisted in launching. Her wisdom has influenced the practice of International Adoption doctors across our nation, and has enabled them to work more directly with the doctors in the former Soviet Union, improving access to information and outcomes of adoption.

### Kathleen Ward Niedt

#### **Rep: Jim Saxton**

Ms. Niedt was nominated as an Angel not only for her work as a field worker, unit supervisor and administrative supervisor in adoptions in NJ's DYFS, but also for her lifetime commitment to children awaiting adoption.

Developing a training program, which she presented to every protective service supervisor in the seven coun-

ties in Southern NJ, she addressed the need to focus on the child, the true meaning of adoption, and told her own story of being adopted and her search for her own biological family. As an adoptive mother of her nephew, Ms. Niedt has put into practice the lessons she has taught so successfully these many years.

### Renee Olson & Jim Russell

#### **Rep: Frank Pallone, Jr.**

Ms. Olsen and Mr. Russell adopted a seven year old boy from Ethiopia. Their son was an orphan, whose mother had died of unknown causes, possibly from AIDS. Many people are reluctant to adopt from a country that has such a high percentage of AIDS cases, but that same reason was one of the things that influenced Renee and Jim to adopt from Ethiopia. Their son, having known very few English words, is already able to read simple books.

### Anne Oros

#### **Rep: Steven R. Rothman**

Ms. Oros and her husband, John have been foster parents with Children's Aid and Family Services for the past seven years, and before that with Bethany Services. Ms. Oros has worked tirelessly on behalf of children with special needs, in particular

babies who are born to drug-addicted mothers and need special loving care. Caring for seven foster children, many with special needs, and in the process of adopting a special needs three-year old, Ms. Oros has been a wonderful advocate in the community.

### Kathleen E. Russo

#### **Rep: Mike Ferguson**

Ms. Russo is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and currently the Director of Children's Aid and Family Services Post Adoption Counseling Services. She has exhibited leadership on a local and statewide level to advocate for children and families touched by adoption. In this position, she supervises Master's Level clinicians, who provide clinical services to any adoptive family who seeks help. As she is an adoptive mom herself, she knows first hand the challenges and joy of raising an adoptive child. It was largely through Ms. Russo's efforts that Children's Aid and Family Services was awarded a federal and state grant, which enabled them to implement the NJ Adoption Resource Clearing House (NJ ARCH), where over 5,000 visitors visit the website each month.

## SOME OF NJ'S ANGELS:



Mary Anne Cohen



Dr. Alla Gordina



Kathleen E. Russo



Barbara A. Rall, LCSW

*Have a question  
that needs  
expert advice?*

*E-mail or  
call the warmline;  
we would be happy  
to assist you!*

*Frequently asked  
questions and responses  
from the staff will be  
published in future  
newsletters.*



## ASK OUR EXPERTS

E-MAIL US YOUR QUESTIONS AT [WARMLINE@NJARCH.ORG](mailto:WARMLINE@NJARCH.ORG)

*Our son, adopted from Russia, has been home seven months now. He is four and a half and has picked up on the English language incredibly well. However, he cannot seem to grasp the concept of letters. We have worked with him on the alphabet with flash cards, Sesame Street videos, blocks, puzzles, coloring books, you name it and he is still unable to identify the letters. Now when I say letters, I mean just A, B, and C. He seems genuinely interested and isn't hyperactive at all. He has quite an attention span for a four year old boy. He was with his bio mom for the first two years of his life, but severely malnourished and neglected. Then he was in an orphanage for almost two years till we got him in February this year.*

*He seems bright and pretty happy for the most part. He is delayed in many areas and is now in a preschool special education program three hours a day five days a week with occupational and speech therapy. He was evaluated this summer and had an IEP.*

I can see that you would be concerned about your son's development but you must bear in mind he has only been "home" for seven

months. The fact that he is learning English quickly is very positive, and, the extra care and stimulation he is receiving in his preschool program is very good.

One of the errors we make as parents is to focus on cognitive ability too early. We expect our preschool age children to master the alphabet, write their names, identify numbers and colors. While all of this has a place, what we fail to focus on is the most important part of preschool development which is socialization. The work of preschool kids is to be able to get along well with others. If children are well socialized, they will catch up with the academic requirements in kindergarten or first grade. If they know how to read, but cannot play cooperatively or follow simple directions, they will be at a disadvantage throughout their elementary school years.

In your son's situation, there is another very important factor at work here. He has only been in your home for seven months. During this time he has adjusted to a new language, new parents and new routines. This is a massive task for a four and a half year old child.

Making attachments and coming to an understanding of how he came to be with a new family on the other side of the world is very difficult. Your description of him as bright and very happy says a great deal. He has made a transition and is not visibly depressed about the loss of everything that was familiar to him in his country of origin.

I would suggest that you work closely with your school district to ensure he has an appropriate educational program and continue to work with him at home without exerting pressure to learn the alphabet. And, just enjoy him for who he is.



## NATALIE'S BOOK CORNER

### Hello, Readers! Welcome to Natalie's Library Corner!

As the NJ ARCH Lending Library continues to grow, more books are being ordered for birthparents. It is our collective feeling that this side of the adoption triad has had less visibility and support over the years. Much of the reason for this was that birthmothers were too ashamed to come forward.

Hot off the press and getting much publicity is a brand new read by Ann Fessler titled, *The Girls Who Went Away: The Hidden History of Women Who Surrendered Children for Adoption in the Decades Before Roe v. Wade*. Ann Fessler has been interviewed on several television talk shows including CN 8's **Real Life** with Mary Amoroso. That appearance aired on Sunday, the 20<sup>th</sup> of August at 7:00 P.M.

*The Girls Who Went Away* brings to light the untold stories of the 1.5 million women who surrendered their babies for adoption rather than raising them alone. The stigma and shame rendered by society was too great to bear for both mother and child in the post World War II era. Often it was the parents of these young, unmarried pregnant women who pressured them into giving up their babies. They were given no other options.

Society's punishment exacted a mighty toll on all of its victims, sparing no mercy.

Little if any attention was paid to the lifelong effects of forcing a mother to give up her child. No compassion was offered to these young women. Ann Fessler traveled throughout the United States and interviewed over 100 women who, for the first time, bared their souls in the telling of the shocking details of their experiences.

The inequality of the sexes was never more apparent. For young men who engaged in premarital sex, their status was often elevated. For young women, the opposite was true. Abortion was illegal in most states and was cost prohibitive as well as life threatening. Young women were expelled from school, shunned by family and friends and sent away to maternity homes to bear their children alone. The advice given by the medical community was, "Have your baby!" "Go home!" "Resume your life!" "Forget!"

It has since been realized that surrendering a child is not a thing that one can ever forget. It bears no resemblance to the natural order of things. This is a life-altering experience which leaves in its wake a haunting gnawing feeling

that does not go away. Some professionals feel that healing can only occur with the finding of the lost child.

An adoptee herself, the author begins and ends her book with her own personal account of search and reunion.

I found this book to be a timely addition to adoption literature. We, as a society, are trying to understand the human condition and to "right the wrongs" of years of injustice and cruelty. National debate continues about reproductive rights, unsealing of adoption records, search and reunion, and the right of adoptees to obtain their original birth certificates.

Other books on this subject include:

*Birthmothers* by Merry Bloch Jones

*Adoption Reunions* by Michelle Mc Colm

*Birth Bond* by J.S. Gediman and L.P. Brown

*Birthright* by Jean A. Strauss

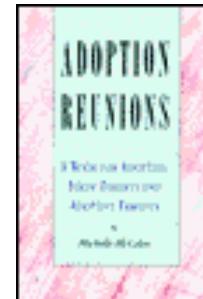
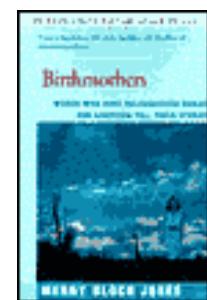
*Beneath A Tall Tree* by Jean A. Strauss

*Mom, Dad, I'm Pregnant* by Jayne E. Schooler

*Mother, Can You Hear Me?* by Elizabeth Cooper Allen

### DID YOU KNOW?

**The NJ ARCH Lending Library has a variety of birth parent books.**



## DID YOU KNOW?



Approximately 130 DYFS children will have their adoptions finalized in Newark and Camden on November 18th, National Adoption Day.

Each family will have a family portrait taken and be presented with a commemorative plaque.



To find out more about National Adoption Day log onto :  
[www.nationaladoptionday.org](http://www.nationaladoptionday.org)

## NOVEMBER IS NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH

*(Continued from Page 1)*

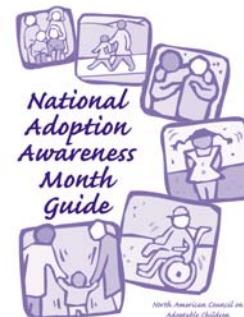
worker about adoption awareness. Ask to come into your child's room to read an adoption-related story and discuss with the kids how families are formed.

Read an adoption story as a family; work on a life book with your child or your own journal; light candles during dinner to remember the children who are waiting for forever families; light a candle to remember your child's birth parents; make a Christmas/Kwanzaa/Chanukah ornament or gift which reflects the ethnic heritage of your family members; take a family walk; play in the leaves with your

children. Discuss how a family tree can be as unique as leaves on a tree. Learn more about positive adoption language; attend an adoption conference; share a birth family tradition or recipe for your Thanksgiving meal. Give your child/children an extra hug today. Submit a story connected with your adoption experience to local, state, or national publications. Send a note of thanks to someone who helped make your adoption or search dreams a reality.

For more ideas, log onto  
<http://www.adopting.org/adoptions/november-is-national-adoption-awareness-month-2.html>

Want something more comprehensive? Download the *National Adoption Awareness Month Guide* at <http://www.nacac.org/AdMoGuide/intro.pdf>. Printed copies are available for \$10.00. To order, send a request with your name and mailing address to [info@nacac.org](mailto:info@nacac.org).



*National Adoption Awareness Month Guide*

North American Council on Adoptable Children

## DYFS FEATURED CHILD: LORRAINE



DOB: June 16, 1991

Lorraine, an outgoing girl, thrives on individual attention and positive reinforcement. She takes great pride and care

in maintaining a well-groomed appearance. Lorraine is happy wearing color-coordinated clothes in pink. Her favorite activities are dolls, arts and crafts, and cultural outings.

Although she may push or hit people when she is frustrated, she is progressing in her socialization skills. Lorraine received special services in school to assist with her emotional and perceptual challenges. She is an achiever and a perfection-

ist when completing homework. Medication and ongoing therapy help Lorraine minimize anxiety, as well as oppositional and aggressive behaviors.

The best match for Lorraine will be a patient, attentive and emotionally supportive family, preferably with older children or no other children in the home. For more information about Lorraine, please call 800-99-ADOPT.

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT: RAINBOW FAMILIES

In 1994, a handful of gay parents began to network to find support for themselves and their children. Out of these early social events Lambda Families of New Jersey was formed. The organization was loosely affiliated with the Family Pride Coalition.

The mission of the organization is to provide support for gay and lesbian individuals and couples who are planning families and to provide ongoing social events for them and their children.

The organization holds annual events including a Holiday party, Halloween party,



summer beach gathering and a picnic.

Over the years, a number of affinity groups have come into being including **Starting our Lambda Families** which meets monthly to assist members who are planning to become parents. They hear from experts in the field of adoption and assisted reproduction and share information about their family building journeys. There are a number of regional play groups and a

dads group for those already parents. The organization also sponsors the biennial Lambda Families of NJ parenting conference at Montclair State University.

In early 2006, the organization incorporated and obtained non-profit status. Its new name is Rainbow Families.

For more information, e-mail [info@lambdafamiliesofnj.org](mailto:info@lambdafamiliesofnj.org), or call 973-763-8511 and check out their website at [www.rainbowfamiliesnj.org/](http://www.rainbowfamiliesnj.org/).

## DID YOU KNOW?

Check out [Adopte1.org](http://Adopte1.org) to view Spanish Information on

National Adoption Awareness Month.



### History of National Adoption Day

*National Adoption Month roots can be traced back more than 25 years.*

*In 1976, the governor of Massachusetts first proclaimed Adoption Week and, later that year, President Gerald Ford made it official nationally. The number of States proclaiming the observance of Adoption Week in November grew, and in 1990, National Adoption Week became National Adoption Awareness Month.*

## A HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS TO AIR DECEMBER 22ND; 8PM ON CBS



Stay Tuned for the next "*A Home for the Holidays*" sponsored by Wendy's International and The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. This broadcast will be aired on Friday, December 22<sup>nd</sup> on CBS.

*"A Home for the Holidays"* is a nationally televised entertainment program, designed to raise awareness about foster care adoption and enhance recruitment efforts nationwide. Its key objective is to promote a positive image of foster care adoption and the children who wait. This program combines celebrity performances, along with compelling stories from American fami-

lies, who share the joys of adoption.

NJ ARCH will again be the NJ coordinators for this event. For more information about this broadcast, to receive The Dave Thomas Foundation "How To" booklet, or NJ ARCH's *How to Adopt in New Jersey* handbook, call the Warm Line at 877-4ARCHNJ or send an e-mail to the Warmline at Warmline@njarch.org.

# NEW JERSEY ADOPTION RESOURCE CLEARING HOUSE

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## DISCLAIMER

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*The one-stop  
resource  
for those  
touched  
by adoption.*

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## NJ-ARCH IS THREE YEARS OLD THIS MONTH

The NJ Adoption Resource Clearing House officially opened for business in November of 2003. Although the staff had been toiling for months, it was at that time the web site was launched and the first issue of *Under the Arch* was published. We've come a long way since then and lots of you have made use of our services.

Since the program started, 1,917 people have phoned the Warm Line, 145 of them with book requests.

At the same time, 625 people have mailed us with questions about adoption, 351 of them with book requests. Our library now has over 800 volumes and would-be borrowers have contacted us from as far away as the Netherlands and Brazil.

In 2004, 30,472 people visited the website. By 2005 that number had increased to 60,023 and we are on track to meet or exceed that again this year since 50,471 people have visited the site

age over 5,000 web site visitors per month, we believe we are providing a useful service. Thanks to all of you who have made use of our services. We look forward to being your *one stop resource for those touched by adoption*.

### Visit our Live Chat Rooms:

General : Sat. 11-12 / Tues. 7-8  
Spanish 1st Sat 10-11am  
Young Teen: Weds 4-5 pm  
Older Teen: Weds 7-8 pm  
Search and Reunion  
2nd and 4th Weds 8-9 pm  
Special Hosted 4th  
Weds. 9-10 pm