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Newsletter

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News From Americans Adopting Orphans—Seattle Main Office

Special Opportunity for Sichuan Families

On several occasions, the China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA) has selected **Americans Adopting Orphans'** families to be assigned children from orphanages that have had no previous international adoption experience. We believe this privilege bestowed upon our agency is because of the experience and reliability of our staff in China, and the excellent reputation our agency has established.

In February and April, we helped the Fuling, Sichuan orphanage in this way. Our families were the first Americans to ever adopt from this orphanage. The CCAA told us that this orphanage has very limited resources, and could use our help in the care of the children there. The orphanage had expressed a specific need for washing machines.

The benefit to the children of having this simple appliance available to them is obvious. Simply being able to have clean clothes, which we normally take for granted, was something we could make possible for the children in this orphanage.

While our agency has expressed concern over donations to orphanages when they are not done under the auspices of the CCAA or the local ministry of Civil Affairs, this was an opportunity to give to the children in a way that we knew would directly and only benefit the children in the orphanage.

We know that families are constantly asked to give money to this cause or that. All too often it is hard to know if the money you are giving will really go for the purpose you have intended. This was a chance for families to give a contribution to an agency that they personally know, to directly help children that they have or were to meet.

The cost of a heavy-duty washing machine in China is about \$150. It was our hope that each family adopting from Sichuan in February and April groups would open their hearts and their wallets and donate enough to help buy at least half of a washer. While this was not a requirement or a fee, we received over \$1,000 in donation--enough for several washing machines *and* a refrigerator, which were presented to the orphanage in May. **Americans Adopting Orphans** thanks our Fuling families for their generosity and support!

These contributions should be tax deductible for our families, as we have applied to the federal Government to become a charity. Our final approval should come through by the next newsletter.

Annual Pig-Nic Just Around the Corner

Client families, your invitation to our 5th Annual Summer BBQ is included with this newsletter. You will also find an announcement regarding a very special guest in town just for the Pig-Nic. We know he's looking forward to seeing each and every one of you again. Can you guess who this mystery person might be? See the next article.

Dr. Chen Coming for a Visit!

Just in time for our Summer BBQ, Dr. Chen will make his first trip to the US. Not only will families get to reconnect with their baby buddies but they will also be able to reunite with the man who helped make it all happen! Rally around with your kids and cameras, he's on his way!

There will be a presentation of a special gift from **Americans Adopting Orphans'** families to Dr. Chen at the Pig-Nic. See enclosed instructions to contribute.

Unethical Adoption Program Alert

We know that some of our families are pursuing adoptions from different sources, and that many of our readers are not clients of our agency, and are still considering their options. For that reason we wanted to warn our readers about something that may sound tempting, but that we think is pretty disreputable.

Last week we got a call from a woman who stated she was looking for someone who could do a “partial” home study for her. She went on to say that she is in this program where children from Kazakhstan are being brought over to spend time with American families so that the families can decide whether or not they want to adopt the children. This gave families an opportunity to “try out” the children to see if the relationships worked. Since she never took legal *custody* of the child, she didn’t need a full home study. Just a partial one and a form that she needed to fill out.

After further discussion, we learned that these were 7 and 8 year old orphanage children who were not being told the truth about their visit to the US. After a month or so, the children would return to Kazakhstan after which time, the host family could apply to adopt them if the child had met with their standards.

This woman seemed gleeful about the prospects of auditioning a kid to adopt. If a child did *not* get adopted by the host family, after the visit, that family could continue to advocate for that child by spreading the word that the child was still available.

We think that this is all a very bad idea for a number of reasons. First and foremost, something like this can be very damaging to the children involved. The idea that you can hide something like this from 7 and 8 year olds is ludicrous. These children are being set up for massive disappointment should they not be permanently accepted in to the "auditioning" family. This kind of personal rejection is devastating. Plus, it is a terrible idea to start your relationship with a new child by lying to them about why they are in your family.

Second, this builds unrealistic expectations in the adopting family. Older children from orphanages are typically very charming for the first few months they are with a family. This is typically referred to as “the honeymoon period.” Then comes the anger, and the testing. By placing these children in the families for such a short period of time, the "agency" that is doing this, is implying that they will truly understand the personality of the child they are adopting. That is simply not the case.

Third, by asking for a "partial" home study, the "agency" and the family are not even coming close to meeting their obligations of preparing their family for the reality of adopting an older child from a former Soviet republic. It is also quite possible that this rather casual placing of children in people's homes is a violation of both US Immigration and state foster care laws.

Finally, these families are setting themselves up to be abused financially. Once a family has bonded to a child, they are more very much subject to being held up for surprise fees.

We could go on, but this is simply not the way international adoption should be practiced.

News From Americans Adopting Orphans—Missouri Branch Office

St. Louis Information Meetings

On the first Thursday of every month, Susan will be conducting information meetings for those interested in adoption from China and Vietnam. The meetings will begin at 7 pm and will be held at 8045 Big Bend Boulevard, Suite 109, St. Louis. Call 314-963-7100 for details or driving instructions.

News from the Net

Hope for Children Act Passes!

The Federal Adoption Tax Credit is all but a reality. It has passed both the House and Senate. The House version and the Senate version are being reconciled against each other before the final version is sent to President Bush to sign into law.

What this means for adoptive parents is that starting with adoptions completed after December 31st, 2001, those with incomes of \$150,000 or less are eligible for a \$10,000 tax credit from Uncle Sam. For the average China adoption through **Americans Adopting Orphans**, adoptive families usually spend about \$14,000. When you include the tax credit with adoption expense reimbursement from many employers, this can make the adoption nearly free. In any case, adoptions are now much less expensive for almost all of our clients.

Your Child's Chinese Passport and Subsequent Travel to China

For most families, once you and your child come home from China, in fact, the second your child's feet hit the ground at your point of entry in the United States, your child becomes a US citizen. After you have passed through immigration and customs with your child on your return flight, you should retire your child's Chinese passport. It has served its purpose as giving the child official permission to leave China and to enter the US.

In order to travel outside the US, your child needs a US passport, particularly if you later return to China. According to the Adopted Children's Immigrant Visa Unit, "We have received inquiries from parents who have previously adopted in China and who plan to return to adopt another child. The parents asked if the children who had been adopted earlier would be able to travel to China on their Chinese passports at the US Consulate in Guangzhou. With the passage of the Child Citizenship Act 2000 (and if any necessary re-adoption was completed -- in the case when only one parent of a married couple traveled to China to adopt and file the I-600) all of these children are now U.S. citizens and entitled to U.S. consular protection overseas. We do not recommend that these children travel to China using their Chinese passports as a travel document as they would be considered by China to be Chinese citizens and subject to Chinese law."

In other words, it is not worth the risk to your child and family to attempt travel on your child's Chinese passport. Let this be one of your first acts as a parent. Take the time to protect your child—obtain a US passport for your child as temporary proof of their American citizenship! You should still get a formal Certificate of Citizenship from the INS as soon as they clarify their rules in this matter. Note – The US Consulate in Guangzhou and other US Immigration offices have stated that children with IR-4 visas (adopted children of married couples where only one spouse traveled) must go through readoption in the US in order to obtain full citizenship for their children, before their child can be issued a passport. It is our understanding, however, that the State Department, which issues passports, is actually giving passports to children with IR-4 visas, anyway. So it may not hurt to try.

It is very important to remember that it is extremely important that you readopt your children in the United States. Readoption is completely separate from citizenship. It is important that you legally protect your child by getting that US adoption decree. While we have heard some advice to parents that this is not necessary, we consider that to be foolishly shortsighted and dangerous.

Processing Times--China

The rest of the May 2000 referrals were released at the end of this May, along with assignments for families whose dossiers were sent to China in June of 2000. That's right, we got two months worth of assignments all at once! We had suspected that's what might happen and were happy to have our suspicions confirmed, but not as happy, and relieved, as those folks who caught the first glimpses of their daughters. It has been a long wait for many parents-to-be, but we're hoping that this is an indication that the floodgates are about to open for referrals.

The children in our last couple of groups have all been girls in the 10 to 13 months range, except for one 3-year-old boy (as requested by that family). We expect ages of children to decrease as waiting time decreases. Trips continue to be about 10 or 11 days long.

Processing Times--Vietnam

The wait for referrals from Vietnam is about 7 months from submission of dossier to assignment. International Mission of Hope (IMH) reports receiving twice their average amount of dossiers/applications in October of last year and cites this as the reason that referrals have slowed. In the last month, IMH has made over 30 referrals. They are hoping to catch up in the next few months. Families applying to adopt children over 1 year of age may have a longer wait than families requesting younger infants. Typically, families are adopting boys between 5 and 9 months of age from Vietnam. For the present time, IMH is not accepting requests from families wanting to adopt two unrelated infants at the same time.

For our Vietnam program, single moms with or without children may specify a preferred gender. However, childless couples must be open to either gender.

Join Americans Adopting Orphans' E-Group

Clients of **Americans Adopting Orphans** are welcome to join our agency's official e-mail group, where the only members are fellow **Americans Adopting Orphans** families. This group is a nice break from apc where clients can share their support and enthusiasm with other pre- and post-adoptive families. Send your subscription message to: [Americans Adopting Orphans-
subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:Americans_Adopting_Orphans_subscribe@yahoo.com) or just send as an e-mail at our regular address, aao@orphans.com and we will sign you up. You will be asked to identify yourself by name as a client of **Americans Adopting Orphans** to read and post messages on this site.

News from the East

Keeping the Red Tape Unraveled with INS

On a trip to Asia in April, Director Dave Ptasnik stopped by the US Consulate in Guangzhou. There he met with the new head of the ACIVU (orphan visa unit), Jim Herman. During their conversation, Dave spoke of ways Americans Adopting Orphans helps client families with their INS pre-adoption processing in the US.

Dave explained to Mr. Herman how our agency strongly discourages families from involving elected representatives in the routine processing of INS I-600A approvals because we understand it oftentimes delays approvals rather than speeding them along. Mr. Herman replied that this was also a concern for his office, and described how, when a Congress person becomes involved at the request of a family, even if the family were about to be approved, the case must be carefully reviewed and investigated, which could slow the approval process tremendously.

Great caution is urged for families getting antsy for their INS approval. For most pre-adoptive parents, your 171-H will come without any extra pressure or intervention from you,

your adoption agency, or your elected representatives. It often just takes time and waiting your turn. Most families receive their 171-H within 2 to 4 weeks of the INS receiving the fingerprint clearance and approved home study. The INS, as a bureaucratic institution, must process cases in order to be as fair as possible to everyone. Expedited approval is very rare and reserved for grave humanitarian circumstances. Your being in a hurry, although painful for you, is not considered to be a grave humanitarian circumstance by the INS.

“Going to the top” by contacting a government official is not an appropriate first step in the successful and *timely* resolution of your INS approval. If your patience is wearing thin, confer with your adoption agency. Adoption agencies are in daily contact with the INS over one matter or another for their clients. Your adoption agency is far more familiar with INS regulations, your family, and your adoption processing than your Congressman. We’re here to help.

Parents’ Zone

Amy’s Chinese Culture Class for Kids a BIG Hit!

There were shrieks, there were ooohs and aaaahs, there were even a few tears...and that was from the parents who accompanied their children to our Chinese Culture Class for Preschoolers. Everybody had a ball when Amy and Dave teamed up to teach a class full of eager young ladies about the songs and games of children in China. They even had their very own Lion Dance complete with hand made masks! Be sure to sign your child up for this class the next time it is offered. They will have a great time learning about the culture and customs of their birth country, and you will too!

The Lights Are On

Driving through rush hour traffic one spring afternoon, our family was passing the time, as we often do, discussing adoption. Our kids, ages 7 and 8, were breaking new ground with some of their questions. My husband and I appreciate these little windows into the minds of our children whenever they are presented.

Our goal with Kate and Joe is to raise them to be caring and confident people. Adults with high self-esteem and self-worth who think about and take responsibility for their actions. Strong enough to realize that *they* control their destinies. All too often we see adult adoptees blaming their misfortunes on being adopted. Although adoption will always be part of who they are, it is not all they are.

This was the point of our discussion on this particular day. We were talking about how some people developed attitudes that the world “was out to get them” or that the world “owed them” and how that could color a person’s perception of events. To think that someone could allow themselves to be controlled by events rather than the event being controlled by the person was a new concept for our twosome. After a few quiet moments of reflection, our son Joe proved to be filled with insight. “But that would be like giving up,” he said. “I could never do that!”

Jaws dropping open, we glanced at each other. With our looks, we silently gave ourselves a “mommy and daddy point” each for getting that idea across. I was the first to recover. “Joe, a lot of bigger people haven’t figured that out yet.” My husband seconded this with, “That’s a good way to put it. You said that very well!”

I suppose we could’ve gone on and on congratulating ourselves, but conversations move quickly in our clan. The kids had already gone on to, for them, more interesting palaver. Who was more famous, Nsync or Backstreet Boys? There are some questions for which parents just don’t have the answers. As long as I get a few right now and then, that’s OK with me.

Second Chances

By Cindy Ptasnik

Ever had your back is against the wall? Maybe you chose the wrong path or things just didn't go your way. Whether of your own making or not, you're in deep and you'd give anything for a second chance. An opportunity to make a change for the better, to begin anew.

Not everyone is presented with a second chance when it is needed. And it is very rare for a single action to be the answer for a group of people with vastly different problems. However, there is a phenomenon that brings solutions to people from all walks of life. It crosses generations and cultures, and connects hearts. While not a panacea, adoption gives a second chance to birth parents, children, and adoptive parents. Particularly with foreign adoption, second chances can be life-changing for all involved.

The birth parents

For single birth parents surprised and overwhelmed by an unexpected pregnancy, adoption can mean a chance to protect their future. Stakes can be very high, particularly in developing countries like Vietnam and China where it may be difficult for a woman with a child to find a man willing to marry her.

In Vietnam, where family size is not restricted by the government, in addition to out of wedlock births, it is poverty and illness that often prevent children from being raised by their birth parents. When a fourth child is born to a family that can barely feed three children, often that baby is surrendered to the care of a feeding center or orphanage. Thus adoption is a pressure valve that allows a way to preserve the lives of every family member.

China's "one child" policy, while curbing the population and easing pressure on the food supply, coupled with a cultural preference for male offspring, has created a burgeoning orphanage system full of little girls in need of parents and homes. Married couples risk fines and penalties, loss of social privileges, and future security by exceeding population regulations.

The children

Children are born every second of every day. Most are welcomed into their families with great rejoicing. Unfortunately, some are not. They enter the world and are greeted with adversity. Sometimes the difficulties are so great that the family cannot remain intact and hard choices must be made.

Orphaned or abandoned by their families of origin, babies often enter orphanages without names or known histories. Almost all may spend their entire childhoods in an institution never to know the love of a family of their own. Caregivers in these places, while compassionate, are no substitute for a mom and dad.

Though their physical needs may be met, many children do not thrive in orphanage settings because they cannot endure the stress and emotional deprivation. The mortality rate in some orphanages can exceed 50%. Children are in desperate need of families to help them escape this all too real threat and be able to reach their full potential.

Life without a family is usually pretty bleak. Being an orphan still bears a stigma in Asian cultures. With little education and no family connections to help them, once orphaned children reach their teens and leave the orphanage, the only home they've ever known, their chances at anything but a menial job are pretty slim. Girls are sometimes forced into prostitution to survive.

Adoption offers these children not only a chance to live but to have a life. A life filled with love, security, and self-esteem. A sense of belonging to a forever family.

The adoptive parents

For those fearing that they might be forever childless, adoption is a second chance to have a family. Fortunately, infertility has taught many people that there is a difference between the desire to be pregnant and the desire to parent. However, this revelation comes to some only after they have spent tens of thousands of dollars on unsuccessful medical intervention.

Adoption presents a true alternative, and is often the best solution for singles to parent without pregnancy or a partner. Being a single adoptive parent is becoming more commonplace in the US. Some single men and women aren't stopping with just one adoption. While life missing the role model of one parent may add challenges to a child's life, gaining just one parent eliminates far more challenges than it creates compared to growing up in an orphanage.

More and more, experienced parents are turning to adoption after their birth children are grown and out of the house. Adoption gives still vital and active mature parents another chance to raise children based on the successes they had with their other children. Often these parents are much more relaxed and playful with their parenting than first timers.

Three groups of people, joined in a solution that benefits all involved. Adoption brings us all together, giving us second chances at life, love, and happiness.

Summer Calendar of Events in Seattle

Through August 12 th	Seattle Asian Art Museum Treasures from a Lost Civilization: Ancient Chinese Art from Sichuan (SAM downtown)
June 9 th	Digging to China! Sichuan Family Festival Music and dance, artist demonstrations, hands-on activities, and a virtual reality archeological dig Seattle Art Museum
June 24 th	BAT 2*, 2 PM to 3 PM General Adoption Support Group Meeting, 3 PM to 5 PM
July 7 th & 8 th	Chinatown/International District Summer Festival, Seattle Main stage Hing Hay Park—martial arts and dance performances, arts & crafts, food venders, lots of fun
July 22 nd	BAT 1*, 2 PM to 3 PM General Adoption Support Group Meeting, 3 PM to 5 PM
July 29 th	Americans Adopting Orphans 6th Annual Clients Only Summer BBQ with Special Guest Dr. Chen
August 26 th	BAT 2*, 2 PM to 3 PM General Adoption Support Group Meeting, Cancelled
Sept 23	BAT 1*, 2 PM to 3 PM General Adoption Support Group Meeting, 3 PM to 5 PM

*Basic Adoption Training Classes (BAT) are a series of 2 classes that provide adoption education to home study clients and helps families meet the new requirements for additional social work visits for those undergoing a home study for China. BAT classes are held once each month on the 4th Sunday. You must be a client of **Americans Adopting Orphans** to attend. Call 206-524-5437 for details.