

Open Adoption

Spring 2011

Marketing Force

Meet the IAC's Marketing Department

IAC's Texas Office Opens Its Doors

IAC Opens New Office in Texas

One Love

Shared Journey of a Birthmom
and an Adoptive Couple

Summer Events

Save the Date for IAC Picnics
and LGBT Pride



INDEPENDENT ADOPTION CENTER
www.adoptionhelp.org

From the **EDITOR**

Recent events in Japan have reminded me of the importance of staying connected with friends and family. Myself and a few other IAC staff members have special connections with people in Japan whose lives have been heavily affected by these occurrences. How fortunate we are to have resources like the Internet and social media networks to keep us connected and up-to-date on what is going on in our world and what is happening to the people who are so important to us.

Open adoption is about staying connected. Sometimes we don't even realize how important someone is to us, or how important someone will become, unless we keep a positive outlook and open mind. This means welcoming any opportunity to share your plans to adopt in a genuine and appropriate manner. Jennie Hurley addresses this in her networking success story on page 9, "Marketing Your Adoption Plan with an Open Heart."

This also means welcoming your child's birthmother as a unique extension of your family. Her existence to you is filled with every ounce of love that you have, or will have, for your child. And, she will always love him just as much. In the feature article, "...One Love" on page 5, readers will glimpse into the powerful connection between a birthfamily and adoptive family. The voices of the birthmom (Meryah Maddock) and adoptive mom (Wendy Crawford) are woven together in this surprising and heartwarming adventure.

Before we hear from IAC families, readers will get to see the "newest families" and IAC news and events. And, in "Marketing Force" on page 3, we'll reveal the faces behind the IAC Marketing Department and find out what makes them tick.

We've saved the best for last, so on page 10, hear from resident expert Kathleen Silber. She shares some incredibly valuable information about how to approach the hospital experience of your child's birth. There's no better time to reinforce your connection with your child's birthmother. As always, the final pages will supply updates on birthparent statistics, *Open Adoption* article submission information and the upcoming support group calendar. Enjoy!



ANN WRIXON
Executive Director

Open Adoption

Spring 2011

Ann Wrixon, MBA
Executive Director

Kathleen Silber, MSW, ACSW
Associate Executive Director

Ann Wrixon EDITOR

Sarah Bryson CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Erin Grimm ART DIRECTOR

EDITORIAL STAFF

Kathleen Silber

Sarah Bryson

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San Francisco, CA Office

391 Taylor Blvd., Suite 100
Pleasant Hill, CA 94523
T 925.827.2229

Los Angeles, CA Office

5777 W. Century Blvd., Suite 1450
Los Angeles, CA 90045
T 310.215.3180

Indianapolis, IN Office

5162 E Stop 11 Road, Suite 1
Indianapolis, IN 46237
T 317.887.2015

Atlanta, GA Office

3774 Lavista Road, Suite 100
Tucker, GA 30084
T 404.321.6900

Raleigh, NC Office

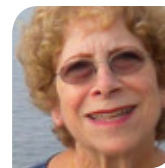
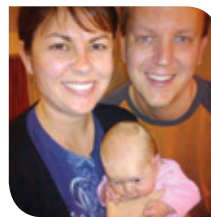
184 Raven Ridge Road, Suite 109
Raleigh, NC 27614
T 919.676.6288

Pearland, TX Office

2734 Sunrise Blvd, Suite 308
Pearland, TX 77584
T 404.321.6900

Learn more about IAC at

www.adoptionhelp.org
www.iheartadoption.org



IAC NEWS & EVENTS

- 1 The IAC's Newest Families
- 2 Upcoming Events
- 2 Texas Branch Opens
- 2 Meet IAC's Newest Staff
- 2 Making the Most of Facebook



STAFF PROFILE

- 3 IAC's Marketing Force
Interview with IAC's Marketing Department

FEATURE {PAGE 5}

- 5 Two Families, Two Children, One Love
Meryah Haddock & Wendy Crawford

OUR STORY

- 9 Marketing Your Adoption with an Open Heart
Jennie Hurley

ADVICE

- 10 Ask Kathleen, the IAC's Resident Expert
Kathleen Silber, MSW, ACSW

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 11 Birthparent Statistics & Adoption Keepsakes
- 12 Adoptive Parent Support Groups

Front: Meryah Haddock, Barron & Wendy Crawford, with sons Wyatt & Greysen



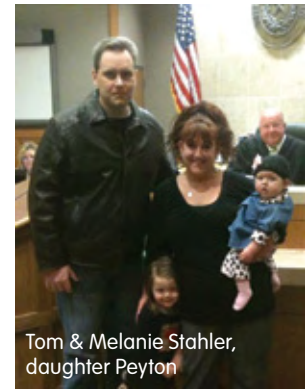
Daisy Campos & Chris Linser, son Lincoln



Brandon Barile & Brandon Swain, daughter Sophia



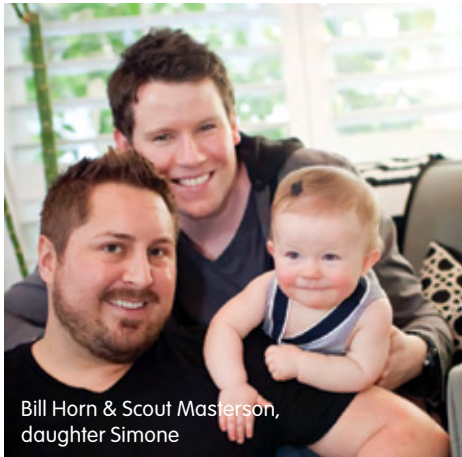
Ryan & Maria Donoghue, son Mason



Tom & Melanie Stahler, daughter Peyton



Jodienne & Bill Gresens, son Logan



Bill Horn & Scout Masterson, daughter Simone

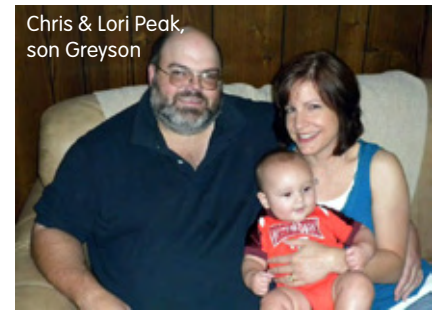


Corinne & Ken Versteeg, daughter Julia

Newest Families



Roberta & Wes Uyemura, son Robert



Chris & Lori Peak, son Greyson



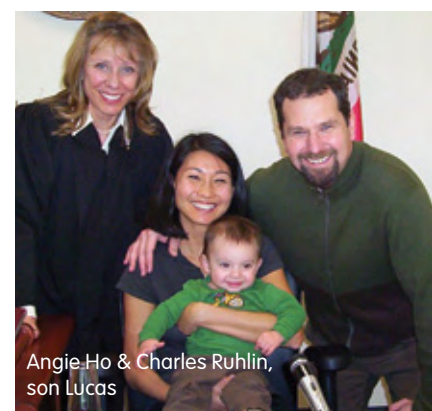
Nate & Sarah Green, son Tyler



Nicole & JP Lavallee, daughter Samantha



Alison Green-Barton & Brooks Barton, son Rohan



Angie-Ho & Charles Ruhlin, son Lucas

- Michael Abare & Doug Morse, son Henry
- Leslie Andelin & Barbara Iugano, daughter Eloise
- Marcus & Elisabeth Brown, daughter Camille
- David Brown & Wendy Kwan, daughter Malia
- Sunil Etha & Renu Chitturi, daughter Keya
- William & Jodienne Gresens, son Logan
- Joe Matessa & Billy Molasso, sons Enrique & Elias
- Garth & Jenny Miner, son Landon
- Jeff & Cindy Riebling, daughter Mackenzie
- Troy & Renee San Jose, daughter Sofia
- Jeff & Helena Tummers, son Jaxon

Congratulations!

IAC'S TEXAS OFFICE IS UP AND RUNNING

The IAC office in Pearland, TX (near Houston) is now open for business! After being awarded a license to operate in Texas in 2010, much work was to be done to get the office up and running. This was made possible largely due to the dedication and hard work of Texas Administrator Amber Burfeind, LMSW, who is also the Co-Branch Director of IAC Atlanta. Amber secured a new office location, hired two new full-time staff members and, with the help and support of the other branches, completed this transition in March of 2011. IAC Texas will be holding their first Adoption Information Session in April!

The IAC's expansion into Texas will allow us to better serve the large population of both adoptive and birthparents living in Texas.

ONLINE SUPPORT GROUP 4/27/11

IAC is pleased to announce that we will be holding an online support group for our families anywhere in the country who do not live within driving distance of an in-person IAC support group. This will be a web conference (video and audio), in which attendees will be able to see and hear all the participants through their personal computers and phones. We've completed a test group and are now ready for the real thing! We can accommodate up to 25 families per group. You must have a built-in camera or a web cam in order to participate. The first online group will be:

Wednesday, April 27
5:30PM – 7:00PM PT

RSVP to Lane Mashal, MSW at lmashal@adoptionhelp.org if you would like to attend. He is an Adoption Coordinator in the Los Angeles office and will be facilitating the group.

RECEIVE UP TO THE MINUTE INFORMATION ON OUR BLOGS AND SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES. CHECK THE BACK COVER FOR DETAILS.

IT'S ALMOST SUMMERTIME!

Get out your baskets and red-checked blankets, IAC's annual picnics are just around the corner. So mark your calendars!

PLEASANT HILL SATURDAY 6/18/11	LOS ANGELES SUNDAY 5/15/11	ATLANTA SATURDAY 5/14/11	RALEIGH SATURDAY 6/11/11	INDIANAPOLIS SATURDAY 7/16/11
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LGBT PRIDE PARADES

As usual we are taking part in San Francisco's Pride Parade and have added Houston Pride to our list of events. Come lend your support!

HOUSTON LGBT PRIDE » Saturday, June 25, 2011

SAN FRANCISCO LGBT PRIDE » Sunday, June 26, 2011

LEARN HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF FACEBOOK FOR YOUR ADOPTION

Many of IAC's waiting families have already created Facebook Pages but we want to make sure you are using it effectively. Visit our blog (adoptionhelp.org/blog) and read "Making the Most of Facebook for Your Adoption" which lists ways to increase your visibility and attract the right audience.

MEET IAC'S NEWEST STAFF!



SABA BLANDING
Texas



CINDY CARTER
Texas



AKI WALLACE
North Carolina

FROM TEXAS, we are pleased to welcome two new counselors: Saba Blanding, LMSW and Cindy Carter, LMSW. Saba and Cindy will be working with birthparents and adoptive families as Birthparent Intake and Open Adoption Counselors. They have also been working to foster outreach connections in the Texas region and will be representing the IAC at the Houston Pride Parade this June.

FROM NORTH CAROLINA, we're also happy to introduce Aki Wallace, MFA who is filling a new role at the IAC. Aki will be working with families in the northeast, mid-atlantic and southeast regions to provide advice and consultation on their Dear Birthparent Letters and online profiles. She will also be designing new letter templates and offering technical support for all IAC clients.

IAC's
Marketing
Force

MARKETING NINJA



SARAH BRYSON

Director of Marketing

JACK OF ALL TRADES



RYAN SCHWAB

Webmaster

DESIGN & SOCIAL MEDIA GURU



ERIN GRIMM

Marketing & Design Associate

Marketing BENCHMARKS

- ➔ Increased historical birthparent intake numbers by nearly 70%
- ➔ Increased last minute hospital placements by 700%
- ➔ Eliminated the need for adoptive families to create personal websites
- ➔ Went social! IAC has fantastic presence on Facebook, YouTube & Twitter
- ➔ Established two new websites providing the public with more resources on open adoption and giving birthparents a space all their own
- ➔ Ran a successful television campaign
- ➔ Revamped the Client Binder
- ➔ Upgraded IAC's marketing materials and information pamphlets
- ➔ Established blogs, one for adoptive families and one for birthparents
- ➔ Increased organic (FREE) traffic to adoptionhelp.org by over 100% through Search Engine Optimization efforts
- ➔ Developed the Online Client Resource Center
- ➔ Partnered with Greenerprinter to develop an online "Design Center" where clients can design and print their Dear Birthparent Letter from templates.
- ➔ Designed and engineered a private online social support network for birthparents to share updates, stories and photos (This website featured on the homepage of Drupal.org and received over 50 million impressions per day)
- ➔ Reformatted many of IAC's internal forms and documents and organized them in an online platform providing better version control, accessibility and collaboration.

Coming Up...

- ➔ Goal: 2000 birthparent contacts for this year
- ➔ More robust email marketing
- ➔ Further optimization of online ad targeting
- ➔ Increased focus on blogging
- ➔ Redesign of adoptionhelp.org
- ➔ New adoption tapestries video
- ➔ Increased focus on outreach programs
- ➔ A special surprise...stay tuned

Sarah has been with the IAC for over three years slicing through lead generation challenges and driving innovation in IAC's internal operations. When Sarah is not in stealth mode crunching numbers and stalking other marketers on the web, she is leading the IAC's Marketing efforts.

Q WHAT DO YOU ENJOY DOING OUTSIDE OF WORK?

I enjoy taking in inspiration from the world around me. I do yoga and martial arts. I explore art, poetry and philosophy in all their forms. I love watching movies, traveling, eating out, trying new things, nature, adventure and an occasional game of Rock Band!

Q HAS WORKING AT THE IAC AFFECTED THE WAY YOU SEE THE WORLD?

Well I feel lucky because I think if I had ended up in a different field, I would have been jaded at this point in my career. But, I still see the world as being a place full of people who really do care and want to help.

Q WHO HAS MADE THE MOST POSITIVE IMPACT ON YOUR LIFE?

My fiancé. He is the strongest, most peaceful and pure-hearted person I have ever met. I learn from him everyday and he makes my life awesome!

Ryan "technically" holds the marketing team together. He's logical, quick-witted and fearless. Ryan is always cracking the code on something, be it a file cabinet, a phone call, a phone system, a web host, a mailbox, a printer or a complex Drupal module. He is quite truly a "jack of all trades", webmaster of one.

Q WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE TASK AT THE IAC AND WHY? BE HONEST.

I enjoy the variety of tasks I'm presented with in my work. If I get stuck for too long on a tough programming problem, I can switch over and practice my ABC's with some filing. If I had to decide on one, my favorite task would be developing new online tools for our clients.

Q TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF OUTSIDE OF THE IAC.

I'm a bit of a homebody most of the time, spending evenings with a movie and a new recipe, or trying out a new coding tool or video game. I also have a great set of friends with whom I talk politics over homebrew or go out for a round of disc-golf or to check out the art galleries around Oakland.

Q WHO DO YOU THINK IS THE MOST INTERESTING HISTORICAL FIGURE?

I'm fond of the writings and philosophy of Voltaire because of his advocacy for human rights, religious freedom, and scientific exploration all delivered with a scathing wit before these ideas were fashionable. Really though, I find all philosophers fascinating, from Aristotle to Sartre and Derrida, they've all made valuable contributions.

Our guru of design and social media is a smart, soft-spoken and dedicated wiz at constructing beautiful and powerful designs that effectively deliver the IAC's message to the masses. Erin is supportive and patient with clients and IAC staff. And, she's a fireball in the social media marketing arena.

Q WHAT DO YOU FEEL MAKES AN EFFECTIVE DESIGN?

Effective design solves a problem, communicates a message, and elicits an emotional response from the intended audience.

Q WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO WHEN YOU'RE NOT BEING THE IAC'S GURU?

Design carries over into many aspects of my life unrelated to work. Interior design and bookmaking are both hobbies that bring me great joy when time allows. I am also very grateful to live in San Francisco. I take every opportunity to attend festivals, concerts, and restaurants that celebrate art in its many forms. I am also an avid swimmer. I swim almost every day from 6-7AM before heading to work. Most people call me crazy, but I've been doing this since I was nine years old, so I feel crazy if I don't get up early and swim!

Q IF YOU WERE A COLOR WHAT COLOR WOULD YOU BE AND WHY?

This is a tough question because color is such an inspiration to me. I will have to say blue, though, because it is so calming. I'm fascinated by the serenity of the ocean. When I was in high school I painted three walls of my room a light blue and covered the fourth in dark blue with all sorts of ocean life: a sea turtle, an octopus, sea kelp, and schools of tropical fish. I absolutely loved spending time in there.

Two Families, Two Children, ONE LOVE



Happy family of Open Adoption. Wendy and Barron Crawford with sons Wyatt and Graysen and their birthmother Meryah Haddock

A joint article by **Wendy Crawford** (Adoptive Mom) and **Meryah Haddock** (Birthmother)

What led us to open adoption is the same story as many adoptive couples. Not unlike many others, I was skeptical of openness. I recall my stomach churning at the weekend workshop when the counselor spoke about the birthfamily becoming “extended” family. She painted a picture of the birthmom on vacation with the family and spending holidays together. I thought, “Yeah...not so much.” I was ok with phone calls, emails and pictures, but that’s it. I look back now and smile.

In November of 2004, the call came. The birthmother was a “high-risk match” who had a couple potential matches fall through already. She was past her due date, so we had to decide quickly. Next thing we knew, we were in a plane on the way to California. A couple hours after the birth, we arrived at the hospital. For the next few days we got to know the birthmother, bonded with the baby and had our match meeting. Everything seemed to be going well, when suddenly the dreaded and abrupt end to this

story reared its ugly head. The birthmother had a change of heart. So, we had to say goodbye to her and the baby boy we had already named and so quickly fell in love with. As I cradled him in my arms, I looked to my husband Barron and said, “This really sucks”. “Could you be more specific?” he asked. I continued, “When you truly believe that everything happens for a reason—this sucks.”

After a cross-country move, we took 15 months off from our adoption plan while we built our new home in Montana. For the next round, we decided we wanted more time to get to know our future child’s birthmother before we matched. Little did we know what this would mean for our lives.

In September of 2006 we went “active” again and now on the front page of IAC’s website, we received numerous emails. Yet after what we had been through – maybe we were overly cautious—none of them felt “right”. The email that changed our lives came Thanksgiving weekend.

At sixteen years old, I had the world at my fingertips. I was set to graduate high school in three months and was already in my first semester of college. Then, in one moment my whole life came to a dramatic halt: I became pregnant. I panicked and, although I had always been against it, my thoughts went straight to abortion. My parents said that they would always love and support me, but would not pay for an abortion. My mother, in all of her wisdom, tried to get at why I wanted to do this. The only answer I could give her was “I’m scared.” I will always be grateful for that discussion—it jolted me out of panic-mode and ultimately saved my child and me.

Then reality hit: “What am I going to do?” I knew that I wasn’t in a position to provide my child with a fulfilling life. With abortion now out of the picture, in my mind there was only one other option. Adoption was a concept that I wasn’t completely comfortable with. I mean, how could I be ultimately happy not knowing my child, what he was doing, how he was? Coincidentally, I had watched a TV program a couple of weeks prior about open adoption. After researching that concept for a few days, I felt like it was the best option. When I presented the idea to my family, they offered their full support.

I found IAC's website and began looking at waiting family profiles. I focused on couples that lived in my state, California, so that I would be able to visit the family and my child. Eventually, I had narrowed the list of families I was interested in down to ten. Because I very much value my mom's opinion and insight, I asked her if she would mind looking at those ten families with me. She noticed that there was one adoptive couple, Barron and Wendy Crawford, who were on my list and lived in Montana. She inquired about why I had chosen to consider them, and I told her that I just kept going back to their page and something about them just seemed "right" to me.

“... the Montana couple was still there. I found myself reading their profile over and over again.”

After narrowing my list down to three families, the Montana couple was still there. I found myself reading their profile over and over again. I didn't want for my child to live so far away from me, but I also knew that I needed to find the best family to raise him. I turned to God, something I hadn't done for years, and prayed for guidance. I felt a huge weight lift off of my heart and I just knew that the Crawford's were the family that my child was meant to be with.

Upon reading Meryah's short email, I turned to Barron "Oh, my God, this is her, this is our birthmother!" Soon we were emailing daily, telling all about our lives, stories, trips, life philosophies – Meryah quickly knew more about us than most of our friends. Again, we found ourselves on the way to California to meet and hopefully "match."

In November, I proceeded to email them and ask questions about their lifestyle and beliefs. I also asked if they would consider a fully open adoption. After exchanging a couple of emails, IAC called so that they could get information about me. By the time I was officially a "birthmother" with their agency, the adoptive couple and I were emailing almost daily. We discussed all kinds of things: how they had met, their occupational histories, their marriage, and other life events pertaining to both them and me. We also talked about smaller details like favorite colors and foods.

After some time, we talked every once in a while on the phone in addition to pretty constant email exchanges. A couple of months went by, during which time I graduated from high school, completed my first semester in college, and began my second semester. Eventually, it was time for us to have our match meeting. Upon meeting them in person, I felt even more assured that they were the parents that I wanted for my child.

We traveled to California to meet Meryah for the match meeting. The day we arrived, we spent time at her family's house, ate pizza and watched the Super Bowl. The next day Meryah came to our hotel and she taught me how to knit. Then, along with her mother, we went to her ultrasound where we found out she was having a baby boy! Thank goodness she wanted to know the gender, it would have driven me crazy waiting. Like me, patience in not one of Meryah's strong suits – one of the many things we have in common.



Wyatt and Graysen pause for some brotherly love

The next day, the Crawford's and my mom and I carpooled to our match meeting at the IAC. I met Katie Chavira, who was the first counselor I spoke with at the IAC, and Jennifer Bliss, my Open Adoption Counselor. They both treated me with great dignity and respect, something that I will be forever grateful for. We all sat down together for the match meeting, which Jen facilitated.

In our emails we had already covered many of the topics discussed at the match meeting. I think the counselor was surprised how well we all knew each other. And, of course there were those "light bulb" moments: we discussed the failed adoption and the pain I felt giving the baby back and how I could not fathom what Meryah would be going through. Meryah teared up and her mom said that they had talked about it and they felt they were not losing a baby, but gaining us as their family—we all cried. Another "aha" moment for me came when the counselor was discussing our infertility and how it affected me. I replied that at times I did wonder what I had done that was so bad that God did not see fit for me to have a child. Barron turned to me and said "Don't you think God knew that Meryah would need us and that if we had children we would not be here for her. You are having a child, it's just that Meryah is giving birth to him." (More tears in the room).

The meeting went great and we went out to dinner with the rest of my family afterwards. I remember feeling a little more weight lifting off of my heart after those few days—I knew that I was making the right decision for my baby.

Of course we matched with Meryah and a couple days later flew back home. Meryah flew up to Montana a few weeks later for what would be the first of many visits. We continued to email daily in which time we picked out a name for the baby, "Graysen."

I created a journal for Graysen, which I wrote in frequently about the reasons surrounding my decision to do an open adoption, as well as how much I love him. In April, I traveled to Montana to spend some time at their house. I was able to build more upon my relationship with the Crawford's and see where my child would live. It was

a wonderful visit. Once I returned home, the emails continued until the end of June.

Along the way we had well-meaning friends and family question the process. After one particularly hard day I jumped in the shower so I could cry without Barron seeing me. I came out and told Barron,

We are having a baby boy, his name is Graysen, we will not let people make us doubt. We need to give Meryah our trust and faith, she deserves joy and excitement from us and if this falls through it will not be because we did not give it our all. Obviously, I hope that it does not fall through yet I know that we have made it through the worst and, if we have to, we will do it again. We are having a baby boy, his name is Graysen.

Unknowing of the turmoil I had been going through, Barron's response was a typically calm, "sounds good to me."

We drove to California at the end of June. We spent most of the days with Meryah and her family and we got to meet with Graysen's birthfather.

“ I told her that now it was her turn to tune out all of the negative things people were saying and to trust us. ”

One evening, the Crawford's and Wendy's parents, whom I was meeting for the first time, came to my family's house for dinner. About five minutes after their arrival, my water broke and the painful contractions began. My mom drove me to the hospital, where Wendy and Barron would meet us. We arrived at the hospital and the nurses proceeded to put us in the waiting area. I was in serious pain at this point and my water continued to flow. I remember several people in the waiting room staring at me in shock.

I particularly remember one man, presumably a husband, looking horrified and quickly running out to the nurses' station. Almost immediately following his action, a nurse came and instructed my mother and me to follow her to a room. My mom helped me change into a hospital gown and the nurse hooked me up to several different machines. Wendy and Barron arrived shortly afterwards and were in the room with us. My mom and the Crawford's noticed that Graysen's heartbeat kept dropping severely low and then spiking extremely high, something that didn't seem normal to us. Barron finally went to ask a nurse about the situation, which is when the big event really began.

My doctor and some nurses came into the room and tried to have me push a couple of times, but Graysen didn't move. My doctor wanted to perform an emergency C-section, but both anesthesiologists were in major surgeries and were unable to help. My doctor then left the room and my mom and the Crawford's were asked to leave as well. My doctor came back with a woman who turned me on my side and gave me an epidural. All I can remember is laying on my back and seeing at least six additional people standing around my bed, all of whom were specialists of something or another. My doctor told me that Graysen had the umbilical cord wrapped around his neck and she was

going to have to use a "vacuum" to help get him out. At this point, my mom and the Crawford's were back in the room, my mom and Wendy on either side of me and Barron politely standing behind a curtain toward the corner of the room. On the third push of mine and pull of my doctor's, Graysen finally came out. I remember seeing my doctor's hand unwrap the umbilical cord three times from around Graysen's neck, and then I heard him cry and I just smiled—he was ok!

Barron cut the umbilical cord and Wendy stayed with Graysen and me in the hospital until we were both discharged. Jen, my counselor, came down to my house to take care of the final paperwork. I signed my parental relinquishment and Graysen's birthfather, who wasn't present throughout the pregnancy, also came to sign his. We all took pictures together and spent time playing with Graysen. We even got to spend his first 4th of July together. Once the Crawford's received approval to leave the state and go back home, we were able to spend one last evening together. I said my temporary goodbye to Graysen and watched him drive away with his parents. While this tore me up inside and caused me a lot of grief, I still knew that I was doing the right and best thing for Graysen, and that is what mattered most.

Over the next couple of weeks, while waiting for approval to go home, we spent as much time as possible together. The night before we left was extremely emotional for all of us. For me this time was like a double-edged sword, I had a friend who was in pain both emotionally and physically and not only could I not do anything to help her, I also felt that I was the source of some of the pain. I knew Meryah was confident in her decision. She felt blessed to have found us and knew we loved Graysen and would nurture and support him always. At the same time, I think she had concerns about whether she would be able to see him again. When it was time for us to leave, she and I discussed all of this. I told her that now it was her turn to tune out all of the negative things people were saying and to trust us. I added that as soon as she was ready she would be welcome to come for a visit.

The relationship that I had already started to build with the Crawford's became even stronger. We talked on the phone and emailed almost daily. Little did I know that we were only half way through our adoption journey.

We talked on the phone daily and come September it was time for Meryah to visit. Sure enough, we found ourselves on vacation together at Yellowstone and Tetons National Parks. Then, we headed down to Denver where my family got to meet Meryah and Graysen for the first time.

In December, I found out that I was pregnant again. I was disappointed in myself and clueless as to what I was going to do. Abortion wasn't an option for me, I was still not in a position to raise a child, and I didn't want to do another open adoption unless the placement was with the Crawford's, which I didn't think they would be open to. Once again, I prayed for strength and guidance. Near the end of January after our call, I told Barron that something was not right. I remember saying "I hope it's kid stuff like staying out late partying, drinking and not



'I'm pregnant.'" The next day, after talking for a while, Meryah told me she was pregnant – I was stunned. That night I could not sleep. You can imagine all the thoughts running through my head. She had not mentioned adoption, so we didn't know really what she was thinking.

After a lot of soul searching and intense discussion Barron and I decided we would talk with Meryah. I told her we did not know what her plans were, but that if she decided on adoption we hoped she would consider us. She was relieved saying that would be the only way she would consider adoption and that she thought we did not want any more children. I told her we felt blessed to have Graysen and wanted to focus on him. We hadn't wanted to go through the whole adoption process again because we had already decided that if Meryah was not our birthmother, we did not want any other. So, we had just assumed that Graysen would be an only child. *I felt God in that moment and knew that he was answering my prayers. So, we set out to arrange a second open adoption.*

In April we drove to California to meet with the birthfather and the adoption agency. Meryah and I went to her ultrasound. *Once again—it was a boy! My family and the Crawford's discussed boy names and then decided upon Wyatt. As with Graysen, I created a journal for Wyatt discussing the reasons surrounding my decision to do an open adoption, as well as emphasizing how much I love him.*

“ I was also able to finish school and obtain a respectable job, one which I worked hard for in hopes of making my sons proud of me. ”

We drove to California the end of July and spent the next couple of weeks doing basically what we had done the summer before! Wyatt arrived five days after his due date. *My mom and Wendy went with me to the hospital for my appointment to be induced. It took all night before Wyatt decided that he was ready to be born. Wyatt's birth went a lot smoother than Graysen's had and he was born a beautiful, healthy baby boy. Once again, Wendy stayed in the hospital with Wyatt and me until we were discharged. Our families spent a lot of time together and took tons of pictures. I also created a scrapbook for Wyatt to keep his pictures in. Our adoption counselor came to*

do final paperwork and I signed my relinquishment. Once the Crawford's were permitted to leave the state, they let my mom, my younger sister and brother, and me babysit Graysen and Wyatt during their last night in California. I was able to say my temporary goodbyes. Once the Crawford's returned, I had to walk out of their hotel room, once again leaving my love behind.

Due to a job transfer of my dad's my family and I now live in Missouri. Conveniently, Barron recently accepted a position in Tennessee so we no live only a few hours away from each other.

We had the pleasure of more visits from Meryah and her family in the months to follow. Before we moved to Tennessee this past fall, Meryah had visited us seven times. She went to Barron's family's house with us for Thanksgiving this past year and she was our first houseguest in our new home. We had told the boys she was coming, so when she got here she was greeted with a chorus of "Myah's here", with both boys running at her and Wyatt launching himself into her arms. We are truly blessed to be in each other's lives.

We refer to each other as family and treat each other as such. I have always known how Graysen and Wyatt are doing and what new things they are learning. My experience with open adoption changed my aspirations; I went from considering a career in zoology to receiving my Bachelor of Social Work degree and am now working for an adoption agency where I am involved with adoptive parents, birthparents, and adoptive/adopted children. I will receive my Masters of Social Work a year from now.

While I will never claim that open adoption was an easy decision or process, I am undoubtedly certain that it was the right decision for my sons. I was able to provide them with parents who would enable them to thrive and provide them with a future full of possibilities. With continuing support from my immediate family, I was also able to finish school and obtain a respectable job, one which I worked hard for in hopes of making my sons proud of me one day. I continue to pray daily that Graysen and Wyatt know how much I love and care for them. I am so grateful that they have so many people who love them. We have two families, two children and one love.



MARKET YOUR ADOPTION WITH AN OPEN HEART

By Jennie Hurley

“Now let’s talk about marketing yourselves,” our IAC Counselor said. This was our first face-to-face meeting with her and we were reviewing the agency binder materials. As she said those words, I visualized my husband John and I wearing T-shirts imprinted with the words, Adopting Parents and our contact information, shortly followed by an image of us on billboards or perhaps handing out pens to people we met. As she continued reviewing recommendations of marketing and how adoptive parents can be a part of the process I began to understand.

At first I felt uncomfortable with the idea of us marketing ourselves. The brochure and website already seemed overwhelming at that stage. How do you share yourselves to birthmothers or birthfathers that you do not even know? How could we capture the essence of who we were for a website that explained how much we wanted to be parents? How could we stand out and be different yet be ourselves?

Now as I stand at the other side of the process, after a wonderful match and a beautiful month old daughter, I realize the value of our participation in the process. And, that our efforts plus the agency support yielded two birthmother contacts only 6 months after final agency approval and ultimately a match. I’d like to suggest three basic networking tactics that worked well for us as an adoptive couple.

MARKETING RESOURCES

Besides our I Heart profile, we did also have a personal website created and felt that it helped us stand out more. After going “live” and having our website linked to IAC’s website, my husband and I also began using Google Analytics. This is a free web application that enabled us to see who viewed our website, from where in the country, and for how long, among other details. This helped keep our spirits raised as we saw that people were looking at our website. We utilized Facebook as a social network, posting our website on our personal Facebook pages. We could see through Google Analytics that at least some additional people were finding and viewing our website through this avenue. Additionally we handed out our IAC brochure to family and friends and had a couple of possible leads from this.

SHARE YOUR STORY

Use your personal network, no matter how big or small. My husband and I made up a list of friends and family that we knew were interested in the adoption process and what we were going through. We began to send them a monthly e-mail almost from the very beginning of our process. The e-mails were often detailed with information about our Google Analytic statistics, where we were at in the process, sometimes how we were feeling, and what was coming next. We found multiple benefits from the e-mails. Friends were keeping us in their thoughts, as evidenced by quite a few “leads”. It was emotionally supportive to share the details and emotions we were experiencing and our friends and family felt included, engaged, and part of the process.

An unexpected benefit was that we did not have to repeat a full update of where we were at in the process at each family or friend gathering. With our networking e-mail, people were up to date on what we were doing and so the conversations were more informed and supportive. Also, one of the most effective means of “marketing” was simply talking about the fact we were adopting to other people. I began to tease my husband about it because I would hear him talking to people we met about it once he entered into a deeper conversation with them or we got the inevitable question from people, “Do you have kids?”

I admit, at first it was hard for me to share all the details with people since I am a pretty private person, but I began

to realize that it was therapeutic, people were genuinely interested and caring, and as ended up happening, could be a great resource for adoption. Our first birthmother contact actually came about from my husband sharing information and our website to a neighbor of his parents who was over for dinner one night. The neighbor mentioned it to his wife who happened to have a childhood friend that was pregnant and looking into open adoption. Though not ultimately “the” match, it was a wonderful experience with a terrific birthmother.

UTILIZE IAC’S SUPPORT RESOURCES

It turned out that one of the most valuable “marketing” resources ended up being the IAC support group that we attend almost every month. It surprises me that I did not think this group would become so instrumental in our adoption process. Now it seems obvious, these are all individuals that become part of your network and through each other we are all networking even further to match up parents with babies. Through our monthly visits, supportive friendships began to develop with other adoptive parents and our terrific birthmother Shay was actually referred to us from another adoptive parent couple that had just adopted their newborn. They felt that we would be a good fit for the birthmother and gave her our website link. We are so touched that they did that and they were right — it did end up being a terrific match!

I believe it is important that adoptive parents choose marketing that fits with their own personalities and their own means. You do not have to spend a lot of money to get your story out there! Perhaps it is the word marketing itself that makes us feel like we must sell ourselves like a car, but actually it is about telling your story, sharing your dreams, and most of all, being yourself. For us, we did not end up paying more to link our website with other available sites, we did not get matching shirts, or get business cards. But we did remain open and invite other people into our lives through e-mail, Facebook, IAC resources, and in person. Remember that you are not alone and that so many others are out there ready to support you in reaching your own match. Afterall, isn’t an open heart what open adoption is really all about?

Q. “We’re adopting a newborn. What do I need to know about our time at the hospital?”

The few hours or days the birthparents and adoptive parents spend together at the hospital are intense for everyone involved. The birthparents are saying hello to the baby, and, at the same time are preparing to say goodbye. The adoptive parents are joyful but anxious. They may worry about how they’ll be treated by the hospital staff, or that the birthmother will change her mind about adoption and delay their dreams of parenthood.

It helps to discuss the hospital experience with the birthparents and an adoption professional ahead of time, giving both families the opportunity to weigh in. Decide on as many details as possible, such as who will hold the baby first in the delivery room and what name the birthmother will put on the birth certificate form, and record them in a written hospital plan.

If these topics aren’t talked about in advance, there can be hurt feelings on both sides at a very emotional time. The discussion you have will not eliminate all of the problems and stress at the hospital, but it will reduce the number of potential stumbling blocks. Here are more tips on making the most of the time you’ll spend together following your child’s birth:

Advocate for the birthmother. If the nursing staff is giving her a hard time, speak up on her behalf. One birthmother I know described how much the adoptive mom’s support in the hospital meant to her: “It helped me realize that she cares about me, not just my baby.”

Be sensitive to the birthmother’s needs, and let her feel she is in control. It helps if you can view this as her hospital experience. Check in with her and ask how things are going. At the same time, offer her time alone with the baby while you take a break (go back to the hotel and take a nap, or shop for baby items). Some birthmothers have complained that the adopting couple was always in the room, and they never had any time alone with the baby. You will have plenty of time with the baby when you get home!

Bring a gift. A special token will show you are thinking about the birthmother. You might bring flowers or an album, with a couple of photos from the hospital already in it. Point out to her that there is plenty of space for the pictures you will send her in the coming months.

Keep an open mind. Remember that, in the hospital, the baby is still the birthmother’s, not yours! Be as flexible as possible, and take cues from her on how she wants to proceed. It’s OK if the hospital plan goes out the window once the baby has arrived. For example, the birthmother might have said in advance that she didn’t want to spend time alone with the baby in the hospital. Suddenly she is rooming in with him. Does that mean she is changing her mind about the adoption? Probably not. She simply changed her mind about wanting time with the baby.

Be prepared to witness the birthmother’s mixed feelings and pain. Placing a child for adoption is a difficult decision. Don’t ask her for reassurance that she isn’t changing her mind. Instead, encourage her to talk to her counselor about her feelings and decision.

Don’t involve friends and family. One problem I often see is that of the adoptive parents inviting friends and relatives to come to the hospital. Although you want everyone to see the baby, remember that this is the birthmother’s time with the baby. If she places him for adoption, this is the only time she gets to be the mom. The birthmother also needs to see you falling in love with the baby at the hospital. This is best without the intrusion of friends and family members.

Saying Goodbye. The hardest part of the hospital experience is the discharge. This is the time when the reality of the adoption decision hits the birthmother. She has had the baby with her for nine months, and now is leaving the hospital empty-handed. Be sensitive to her emotions. At the same time, you might find yourself struggling to balance your joy with her pain. Many families have told me they were surprised to feel guilty at the discharge time, knowing that their happiness came at the expense of the birthmother. (Guilt feelings might also initially affect your bonding with the baby.)

Keep in mind that the birthmother’s sadness is a normal part of grief. She wants you to be happy—and your joy will ease her pain. It will be important for her to hear from you in the coming months, to know how happy you are and how the baby is doing. Don’t be afraid to send photos of a beautiful, happy, smiling baby. That is what she wants to see!

ask Kathleen {the IAC'S RESIDENT EXPERT}



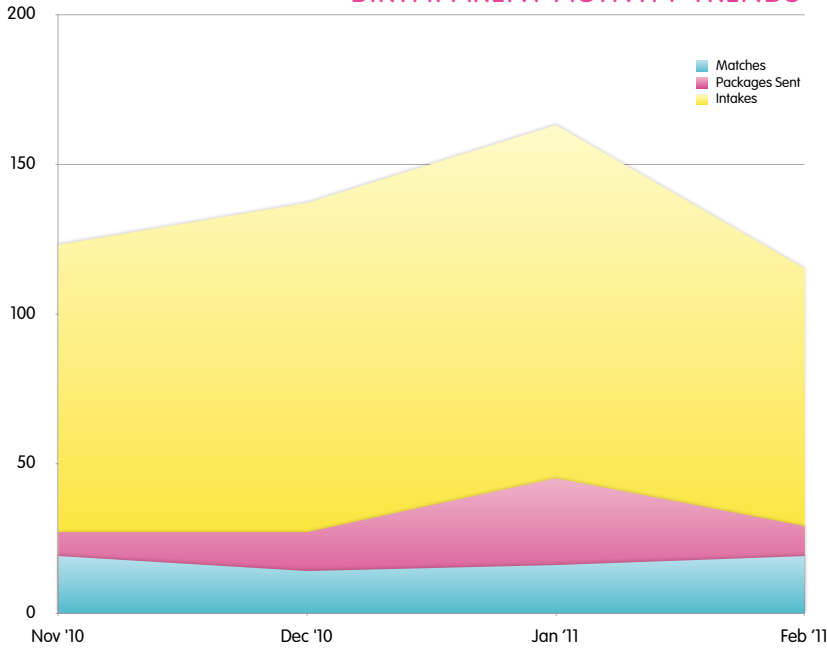
KATHLEEN SILBER, MSW, ACSW, is the IAC’s Associate Executive Director and Clinical Director. She is a nationally regarded expert, has written numerous groundbreaking books including “Dear Birthmother” and “Children of Open Adoption” and has advocated extensively for open adoption. Ms. Silber provides the IAC with clinical oversight and the IAC’s staff with clinical supervision.

This article was originally published in *Adoptive Families* Magazine. *Adoptive Families* can also be found online: www.AdoptiveFamilies.com

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BIRTHPARENT ACTIVITY TRENDS



BIRTHPARENT STATISTICS ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE

We post birthparent statistics on our website by the third week of every month. We offer detailed information on matches and "Dear Birthparent" Letter statistics. You can see them at:

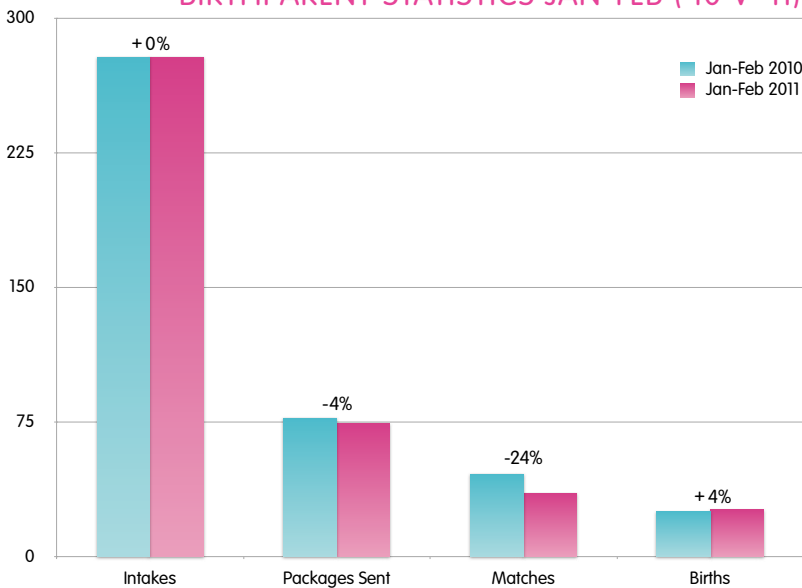
www.adoptionhelp.org/bpstats.html

A monthly reminder will be posted on our adoption forum located at:

www.adoptionforumsonline.com

➡ Registration for the IAC forums is FREE for all IAC clients. To sign up, email mldon@adoptionhelp.org

BIRTHPARENT STATISTICS JAN-FEB ('10 V '11)



GRAPHS EXPLAINED:

BIRTHPARENT ACTIVITY TRENDS

This graph shows the change over time since November 2010 in the number of monthly intakes, letter packages sent out and matches.

BIRTHPARENT STATISTICS JAN-FEB ('10 V '11)

This graph compares cumulative stats from January and February of 2010 versus 2011.

ADOPTION KEEPSAKES

Please feel free to email or call me if you are interested in writing an article for *Open Adoption*. If you're not up to writing an article, you can also share your success story with the IAC community by posting photos and/or updates on our Facebook pages and blogs. See the back cover for these links.



SEND SUBMISSIONS TO SARAH BRYSON
SBRYSON@ADOPTIONHELP.ORG

ADOPTIVE PARENT SUPPORT GROUPS

APRIL / MAY / JUNE 2011

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Pleasant Hill Support Group

Second Thursday of each month

April 14, May 12, June 9

7:00PM–8:30PM PST

Pleasant Hill Office

391 Taylor Blvd, Suite 100, Pleasant Hill

Kerrin Tomek, MSW

South Bay / Peninsula Support Group

Second Wednesday of each month

April 13, May 11, June 8

7:00PM–8:30PM PST

Christ the Good Shepherd Church

1550 Meridian Avenue, San Jose, CA 95125

Jennifer Lund, MSW

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles County Support Group

Third Tuesday of each month

April 19, May 17, June 21

7:00PM–8:30PM PST

Encino Hospital – 16237 Ventura Blvd.

(Between Haskell & Havenhurst, on the first floor in the Encino classroom)

Jennifer Bliss, PsyD, MSW, LCSW

Orange County Support Group

Second Monday of each month

April 11, May 9, June 13

7:00PM–8:30PM PST

First Presbyterian Church: 310 W. Broadway, Anaheim

One mile north of the I-5 Freeway and Disneyland off Harbor Blvd.

Kathleen Warschefsky, MSSW

San Diego County Support Group

Second Tuesday of each month

April 12, May 10, June 14

7:00PM–8:30PM PST

Private residence in El Cajon

Guyline Hubbard-Brosmer, PhD, MSW

WEST

Texas Support Group

Third Tuesday of each month

April 19, May 17, June 21

7:00PM–8:30PM PST

Texas Office

2734 Sunrise Blvd, Suite 308, Pearland, TX

Amber Burfeind, LMS, Saba Blanding, LMSW

and Cindy Carter, LMSW

MIDWEST

Indiana Support Group

Last Saturday of each month (except May)

April 30, May 21, June 25

1:00PM–2:30PM EST

Indiana Office

5162 E Stop 11 Rd., Suite 1, Indianapolis

Michelle Keyes, MSW, LSW

RSVP to (317) 887-2015 if you plan to attend

SOUTHEAST

North Carolina Support Group

Second Tuesday of each month

April 12, May 10, June 14

7:00PM–8:30PM EST

North Carolina Office

11030 Raven Ridge Road, Suite 109, Raleigh

RSVP to Lissette (919) 676-6288 if you plan to attend

Georgia Support Group

Second Tuesday of each month

April 12, May 10, June 14

7:00PM–8:30PM EST

Georgia Office

3774 Lavista Rd., Suite 100, Tucker

Amber Burfeind, LMSW, Hailey Andrews, LCSW and Ashley Garrison, MSW

RSVP to (404) 321-6900 if you plan to attend

Other Important Dates

May 30 {Memorial Day} All IAC offices closed

June 25 Houston LGBT Pride Parade

June 26 San Francisco LGBT Pride

2011 SUMMER PICNICS

Saturday, May 14 Atlanta, GA | **Sunday, May 15** Los Angeles, CA | **Saturday, June 11** Raleigh, NC

Saturday, June 18 Pleasant Hill, CA | **Saturday, July 16** Indianapolis, IN



INDEPENDENT ADOPTION CENTER

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