



Upcoming Events



Adoption Connection Workshops



Increase Your Family, not Your Debt!



What's New!



Recent Arrivals



# Connections



## Creating Matches Through Your Monitor



De and Steve connected with both their children's birthmothers through the use of the Internet.



lot has changed since De Stewart-Otto decided to post her "Dear Birthmother" letter on the Internet back in 1997. She and husband Steve were six months into their adoption

process and had received only a few contacts from prospective birthmothers when she says they decided to "put our fears of unknown and unexpected birth mother calls aside and put our

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We help you make the right connection.



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CONNECTION  
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Adoption Connection is a full-service, licensed adoption agency and non-sectarian program affiliated with Jewish Family and Children's Services of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties.

**Recent Arrival**



■ **Joseph Kristopher Lepansky.**  
*Born 5/27/02.*

letter online.” Because De and Steve’s professions already revolved around Internet technology they easily created their own “Dear Birthmother” website and began running it from their home at a low cost.

Five years and two successful adoptions later De is a staunch supporter of open adoption and using the Internet as a tool to connect adoption triad members. She runs her own non-profit Web site called [www.dearbirthmother.com](http://www.dearbirthmother.com) to help prospective birth parents and adoptive parents find each other and get the information they need.

**Empowering  
Prospective  
Birthmothers**

Using the Internet has given prospective birthmothers the opportunity to research adoption laws in their state and look for an agency to work with, as well as find adoptive parents. De says, “Birthparents today have a tremendous benefit because they can look at hundreds of profiles.” By finding adoptive families who they have a strong connection with, birthparents will be more satisfied with the adoptive parents they choose.

The Internet can also be a good place for birthparents to start their search for information. They may feel apprehensive about calling an agency because they could be unsure of the adoption process or are worried about confidentiality at home. Birthmothers can learn more about agencies through their

websites. Adoption Connection even has “Dear Birthmother” letters posted on our website. We have completed several adoptions with birthmothers who emailed a family directly after they saw their “Dear Birthmother” letters online. Lynne Fingerman, co-director of Adoption Connection, is pleased to see that families of all kinds have gotten a lot of interest in their online profiles. She says, “I feel really good that as an agency we can provide this service to same-sex families as well as heterosexual couples and singles.”

Email can also be a great tool for a prospective birthmother who may have specific questions for a family but is not quite ready to take the next step. Keeping a distance through the use of email can be less overwhelming and intimidating as a first level of communication. De and her husband actually matched with a birthmother even before

# Upcoming Events

## Adoption Symposium

For adoptive parents and birth parents, as well as professionals who work with adoption triad members. Come join us for a day focused on how to develop and negotiate the relationship between birth and adoptive parents before and after the adoption. Speaker Leslie Foge, MA, MFCC is a Bay Area counselor who has worked with over 500 birthmothers and is the author of *"The Third Choice: A Woman's Guide to Placing a Child for Adoption."* CEU credits will be offered for professionals and sessions will be targeted toward both professionals and adoptive parents. Date: November 1, 9:30-3:00 pm at Jewish Family and Children's Services, 2150 Post Street, San Francisco. Cost: \$60 per person. Sponsored by Adoption Connection.

## Adoptive Family Picnic

Adoption Connection's annual family will be taking place this year on Sunday, September 21 from 12:00-3:00 pm. Please join us for an afternoon of fun, games and food! Location to be announced.



talking to her on the phone but she says this is very unusual. Randie Bencanann, co-director of Adoption Connection, says birthmothers also can get written information easily through email. More and more, Adoption Connection sends literature to prospective birthmothers who are considering adoption but aren't ready to speak with a professional on the phone.

Birth parents can also find support from others going through the process through the use of mailing lists and online forums. Sites like [www.adoptionforums.com](http://www.adoptionforums.com) and [www.adoption.about.com](http://www.adoption.about.com) helps birthparents make connections with one another. Bencanann says, "It is important that a birthparent gets the support she needs throughout the adoption process and after the baby is placed with the adoptive family.

## Recent Arrival



■ **Connor Wayne Starr.**  
Born 9/25/02.

Often a birthmother will find great support via the Internet from others who have experienced the many powerful emotions that occur during the adoption process." Bencanann also stresses that this form of support still doesn't take the place of professional counseling by an agency or adoption professional.

## Adoptive Parents Link Up to the Web

By using the Internet prospective adoptive parents can benefit in the same ways the birthparents do. De Stewart-Otto says, "By having email be the first communication with a birthmother you can compose a response in the comfort of your home. You don't have to feel instant

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“Whether it’s for the Internet or printed on paper, writing a generic birth-mother letter is a thing of the past.”

pressure or nervousness on the phone.” The Internet is also low in cost compared to placing advertisements in national publications or sending out a mass mailing. De says that many Web server providers will create your Web page for you. Adoption Connection gives clients the opportunity to post your “Dear Birth mother” letter on our Web site. It is included among the other services for clients enrolled in our outreach program.

Posting such a letter on the Internet isn’t for everyone. Making the leap may suddenly seem like the entire world knows about your adoption plans. If you feel as

though you are not sure how to proceed with a birthmother who has contacted you remember that Adoption Connection can offer you advice and guidance. Bencanann says, “Because any contact, even email contact, with a birthparent can be emotionally challenging for adoptive parents. They should seek out the agency’s advice when they are trying to develop an email relationship with a birthmom.”

### Tips for Getting Started Online

**Get Real.** Whether it’s for the Internet or printed on paper, writing a generic birthmother letter is a thing of the past, says De. Both birthmothers of her children liked her online letter because it was descriptive and included little details about her family’s life together. Says De, “Adoptive parents have to find a way to stand out from the crowd and you’ve got to be real.” Find a birthmother who likes you because of your similarities and it will create a stronger match.

**Keep It Simple.** You don’t have to be a computer genius to put together a clear and interesting letter online. Stay away from any files that are big and time-consuming to download, including needless graphics and big picture files. “Don’t use music,” says De, “What if she is at her community library and is worried about confidentiality?”

**Link-Up.** By working with a few

### Recent Arrival



■ **Marielle Elzada Lappin.** (Guatemala) Arrived home on 9/06/02.

# Workshops

*You do not have to be a client of Adoption Connection to take advantage of our great workshops! Here are just a few:*

different search engines and Web sites your letter will get more exposure. Go over your budget and see how many sites you want to invest in. Look into becoming a featured site for a month and staggering your enrollment with Web sites so that you'll be at the top of the list some of the time.

**Know Your Limits.** Prospective adoptive parents should not take on the role of a therapist or counselor. As in any relationship with a birthmother, if she needs a lot of emotional support, always refer her to Adoption Connection to get counseling and speak with an adoption professional. Fingerman says, "If a birthmother continually delays getting in contact with an agency, it makes me wonder if the situation is real." Be cautious when responding to online situations that would require you to make an immediate financial or emotional commitment. This may be a red flag. Always ask Adoption Connection for advice and support. De says, "Stay away from chat rooms; they are not very productive. Instead join forums where everyone who is contributing messages must give information, sign in and register. This way you know who you're talking to."

Whether you decide to use the Internet for information, referrals, research or to locate a good adoption situation, it is only one tool among many. Find your comfort level and use it when you feel it is appropriate.

## **Adoption Connection Orientation**

A one-night workshop introducing prospective adoptive parents to the adoption process and our services. Free of charge. Held twice per month in San Francisco. (Also held in Sacramento and Palo Alto.)

## **Preparing for Adoption**

A five-session series for prospective adoptive parents. Topics include understanding open adoption, birthmother relationships and raising an adopted child. Guest speakers include adoptees, adoptive parents and birthparents. Fee: \$95 per person.

## **Finding the Words**

Held in hospitals, clinics and social service centers, an in-service for professionals whose clients are facing unplanned pregnancies. Topics include a discussion on open adoption and how to approach clients about the adoption option, and an overview of current adoption policy. Free of charge.

## **Adoptive Parents Group**

A support and discussion group for parents of adopted children ages two to five years old. Get the support you need and meet other adoptive parents. Fee: \$25 per session

## **Transracial Adoption**

A single-session workshop for families considering adopting a child of a different ethnicity than their own. Special issues discussed include understanding racial and cultural identity. Fee: \$30 per session. Held quarterly.

## **Talking to Your Child About Adoption**

Learn how to talk to your child in an age-appropriate way. Learn appropriate language to feel comfortable and confident answering your child's questions. Fee: \$25 per session.

## **Relationship with Birth Families**

Learn about negotiating a lifelong relationship and how to handle challenging situations. Fee: \$25 per session.

## **Creating a Lifebook**

Learn how to create a special book for your child that illustrates and celebrates how she/he came into your family. Fee: \$25 per person.

## **LGBT Parenting Issues**

Geared toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender couples or individuals who are in the process of adopting or considering adoption or who have adopted. Participants will explore special issues involving adopting and parenting in a lesbian or gay family. Fee: \$35 per person.

Call us for dates and times. Our calendar can be found at: [www.adoptionconnection.org](http://www.adoptionconnection.org).



# Increase Your Family, Not Your Debt

**G**rowing your family through adoption doesn't mean breaking the bank. With updated tax credits and better employee benefits adoption has become more and more affordable. Unfortunately, many adoptive parents don't know what types of financial help they are entitled to. Whether you are thinking about a domestic or an international adoption there are ways to defray the costs of agency and attorney fees, transportation costs and birthmother expenses.

## Employee Benefits and Assistance Programs

Many companies offer their employees help with their adoption costs through Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). EAPs were created to help employees with dramatic and/or life-changing situations or problems. Employers pay EAP providers to help their employees with referrals, appropriate expenses, and support. If you are a full time employee with a company offering an EAP, you could be directly reimbursed for adoption expenses ranging from \$2,000-\$10,000. Paid or unpaid leave when your child comes home, medical expenses for birthmothers and adoption educational workshops may also be included benefits of your employee package.

Talk to your Human Resources Department and ask your company

if they offer any adoption-related benefits. (If they offer an EAP, you may want to call directly.) Your company doesn't offer these benefits? Make it known that they are needed and wanted by their employees!

## Tax Credits

The Hope for Children Act (H.R. 622), passed in 2002, allows qualifying families to claim up to \$10,000 in tax credits for adoption expenses, beginning with expenses that occurred in that year. This credit is more valuable than a deductible because adoption expenses are subtracted dollar for dollar against your tax liability. You also carry over the claim and take the credit for up to five years or whenever you reach the \$10,000 cap (whichever comes first.) For a domestic adoption the tax credit must be taken after you have legal custody. For an international adoption the tax credit can be taken only after finalization.

For details call the IRS at 1-800-829-1040 or go to their Web site: [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov). Ask a tax attorney about specific requirements. Take an online course called "Understanding the Adoption Tax Credit" for free at [www.adoptionlearningpartners.org](http://www.adoptionlearningpartners.org).

## Loans and Grants

Borrowing money to fund an adoption is never ideal and should

### Recent Arrival



■ **Julia Elizabeth Kushner.** 11/09/02.

## Recent Arrival



■ **William Edward Lane Pedigo.**  
Born 7/6/02.

be done with caution. The National Adoption Foundation has established a \$9 million loan bank for loans to adoptive families. They are usually small (about \$2,500). You can call for an application at (203) 791-3811 or go to their Web site at [www.nafadopt.org](http://www.nafadopt.org). Unfortunately there aren't many grants available to adoptive parents. The National Adoption Foundation does offer grants ranging from \$500 to \$4000. You can download a grant application from their site (see above).

Just remember to create a budget and stay within it, no matter how promising a situation with a prospective birthmother looks. Randie Bencanann, Adoption Connection co-director says, "Some adoptive parents feel like if they don't go for one situation then another will never come along. This is not true!" Remember, no matter what your adoption budget is you can be successful.

- **Website Overhaul** – This year our Web site, [www.adoptionconnection.org](http://www.adoptionconnection.org), will be updated! Don't worry; it will still be just as easy to navigate but with a new look, more adoptive and birth parent content, and an updated "Dear Birthmother" letter page. Do you want to tell the story of how you became a family? Let us know!
- **Adoption Connection and Parents Place Team Up** Parents Place, located in the same building as Adoption Connection at 1710 Scott Street in San Francisco, shares a common goal of building strong, effective families. The program (also affiliated with Jewish Family and Children's Services) has a 20-year history in the Bay Area of supporting parents and helping families avoid crises before they develop. Now at four locations throughout the Bay Area, Parents Place offers a wide variety of groups and workshops for parents and children, expert consultation and counseling, and a comprehensive library of multi-media parenting resources. Sign up for their Calendar to find out what workshops are right for your family. San Francisco 415/359-2454 Marin 415/491-7959 Peninsula 650/688-3040 Sonoma 707/571-2048 [www.ParentsPlaceOnline.org](http://www.ParentsPlaceOnline.org)
- **Tell Your Open Adoption Story** – Do you have an adopted child over the age of five? Micky Duxbury, MFT, wants to hear from birth and adoptive families practicing fully in an open adoption. What have the benefits and challenges been of openness in your family? How have you negotiated changes in contact? Your answers will be used for a new book: *Into the Heart of Open Adoption*. To receive a questionnaire or to set up a phone interview call Micky at (510) 848-0240 or email her at [mickydux@earthlink.net](mailto:mickydux@earthlink.net).



# International Adoption Program

**W**hen Adoption Connection hired Debbie Parelskin to run our new International Program she had her sights set to complete ten homestudies in the first year. With nearly 31 homestudies approved and eight children already placed in their new adoptive homes Debbie is still amazed at the success – and need – for the service. “Adoption Connection is serving a niche in the community that has been lacking,” says Parelskin.

By giving clients the opportunity to complete the homestudy with a local agency, adoptive parents are free to find the right international agency *outside* of the Bay Area to facilitate the adoption. Adoption Connection can also update a domestic homestudy into an

international one. “We have worked with agencies that work with Kazakhstan, Russia, China, Guatemala and Mexico, just to name a few,” says Parelskin, “and you don’t have to have a country or agency picked out to begin the homestudy process. Adoption Connection can help you connect to the right agency.”

Debbie does warn that the international homestudy process can be more complicated and time-intensive than the domestic process and that homestudies can take up to three months to complete. Her advice? “Don’t get matched with a child until you are through with the homestudy and have completed the INS forms. We don’t want children overseas to wait needlessly.”



Debbie Parelskin (left) enjoys a visit from Jane Lavine and son Alex, who arrived from Kazakhstan on December 17, 2002.

We believe that in an adoption, everyone gains when given a chance to learn about one another. **Committed to education, counseling and support**, our goal is to empower both birth and adoptive parents before and after the birth to create the adoption that works best for everyone involved. **Adoption Connection** welcomes couples and individuals of all ages, religions, and ethnic background or sexual orientation.

**Adoption Connection**



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