



AFFINITY



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ABRAZO

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Adoption Associates



Holiday

Edition



Straight from the

Heart



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Gifts come in all shapes and sizes. Some of them we've wanted for longer than we can remember. Some of them we accidentally deny ourselves until we appreciate their value.

Eight years ago, we placed a baby boy with a local adoptive couple who expressed no outward apprehensions about open adoption. They had done a private adoption previously and had little contact with that child's birthmom, but understood that a new placement might require more. They matched with a loving birthcouple who delivered within days of their first phone call. The birthmom, grieving, needed space, but the birthdad was very enthused about the relationship and met regularly with the family, relaying the good news of the baby's progress to the hurting birthmom.

After the first year, the birthfather and adoptive couple agreed to forego further visits until such time as the birthmom felt ready to participate. It took several years, but the day finally came when she said "yes." The adoptive parents said nothing. We waited for them to be ready to re-establish the relationship. They still said nothing. People change, we know, but who could've foreseen this? How can any part of the child we love be left behind? Why feel threatened by the only other people in the world who are as committed to our sons and daughters as we are, ourselves? We entrust our children, daily, to bus drivers and teachers and Scout leaders and babysitters and shopping mall Santas who are less invested in their welfare, yet we so easily exclude the birthparents who so generously entrusted us with that child in the first place.

Stymied, we brought in a renowned adoption reunion therapist to mediate. They told her "no, thank you," nicely but firmly. They weren't bad people. And they had nothing against the birthparents, they said. But their lives had grown in a direction that no longer allowed room for openness, where their adoptions were concerned. If at some point their daughter's birthmom initiates contact, then, they said, they might reconsider. But not just yet.

The birthcouple waited. Every year they came in anxiously for their annual photos, eagerly ripping open the envelope searching the attached report for some personal note, some word of comfort or encouragement. But aside from the typed summary of the child's growth and the family's travels, there was nothing. Nothing that said "you're not forgotten" or "we still care" or "you matter to us." The birthparents know where the adoptive family lives and have their phone numbers yet they maintain a respectful (although pained) distance. They trust their son is in good hands and they trust that anyone who loves their son so deeply would not intentionally inflict this pain on them.

This month, the birthparents brought in a carefully-wrapped gift for their son's seventh birthday, along with a present for his sister. They had gone to Build-A-Bear and put together a teddy with a special message of love they recorded themselves, so he could hear their voices once again. We sent the package across town by courier, then waited for a response. We called the adoptive family to confirm receipt. And still we waited.

And then, it came! A huge package of photos, a beautiful annual update, and best of all, handwritten thank-you notes from the birthparents' son and his doting big sister. We called to let the birthmom know we were forwarding the mailing to them, but she was so excited, she couldn't wait! So they came right over to pick them up that very day.

About half of Abrazo's adoptive families maintain actively-open adoption relationships with their child's birthparents, relationships in which the parties have some level of direct contact on a basis that fits their needs. Roughly twenty-five percent report that they've lost touch with their child's birthparents or lack the level of contact they now desire. It's easy to see how that happens; professionals are loathe to impress upon birthparents the importance of continued contact for fear that their adoptive families may not live up to the promises. We don't want to "set them up" for failure, yet it creates an expectation that the birthparents' continued interest in the child is nonessential and thus, too often, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

None of our adoptive families complain that their birthparents' contact is excessive. None of our birthparents complain that the adoptive parents' contact is invasive. And none of the children we've placed, most of whom are old enough to speak their own thoughts, report that knowing their birthparents is confusing or in any way stunts their growth.

There's an old saying that "the greatest gift parents can give their children is the knowledge that they love each other." At this season and all through the year, may we be reminded of that gift and generous in the giving of it—for our children's sake. Merry Christmas! Happy New Year!

Elizabeth



Nursery News

Hugs and kisses to the newest members of Abrazo's family!

The single mom of two young daughters made a loving choice for baby **AVA** that forever changed the lives of a Texas couple and in the nicest of ways... The arrival of baby **KATRINA** had such a huge impact on a family in Florida that they named a major hurricane after her... Baby **GABRIEL** made proud parents of a Fort Worth couple whose home was way too quiet before he came along... A North Carolina couple found their faith rewarded with the homecoming of baby **GABRIELLA**... Baby **BRENIMACIE** is surrounded by a circle of love that includes both birthparents, birthgrandparents, adoptive parents and one very proud big brother, himself an Abrazotot... Tennessee is the home of country music, great barbecue and one 'lil darling named **ASHLEY**... A multicultural miracle named **DANTE** brought spice and smiles to a previously-childless couple from the Valley... The 2023 Cotton Bowl Queen is sure to be a Texas-born beauty named **KATHARINE**... A Southeastern youth pastor and his wife found prayers answered with the arrival of girl baby **MADELYN**... An Illinois family discovered placement is twice as nice the second time around, when they returned to Abrazo on short notice for their daughter **SARAH**... Baby **JODIE** was the answer to her parents' questions why they could not possibly have become the mom and dad of any other baby before she came along... A Houston couple aboard the adoption rollercoaster found the loops and turns all had been worthwhile upon discovering beautiful baby **CAMILLE** the end of their ride... Newborn **KAYLEN** is living proof that it really is "not if? But when!"... Baby **HAYDEN** was welcomed home by a proud big sister and two very happy parents... A teen mom made a very grown-up choice on behalf of her newborn daughter **ISABEL**, and her daughter's new mom and dad truly adore them both... A Michigan family with much more than a mustard seed's worth of faith found hopes blossomed with the placement of long-awaited daughter **LEYNA**... His new mom may have just run the New York Marathon but she and her husband already felt they'd won the race of their lives when a loving birthmom entrusted them with her newborn son **TYLER**... Baby **KAITLIN** is soon to become a big sister at a very young age, since her adoptive parents have discovered they are unexpectedly expecting... Three loving parents joined hearts and hopes to ensure a beautiful future for newborn **TRINITY**... A preemie named **AIDAN** serves as proof that some of the best presents in life come in the very smallest packages... A birthmother's love, a birthgrandma's support, an adoptive couple's faith and twin brothers' excitement made all the difference for one handsome babe named **COLBY**... The Tennessee Volunteers gained a future linebacker with the arrival of baby **ELIJAH**... Baby **BAILEY** is a living, breathing answer to prayers, as her proud new parents can attest... **SALLY ELIZABETH** was welcomed into the world by her precious birthmom and a very thankful new Mommy and Daddy, as well... For one New Jersey couple, there just aren't enough words to describe the wonders of baby **HENDRICK** even being that they're both journalists!... **ISAAC**'s new parents got ready in record time, given that he came along just weeks after they'd completed orientation weekend, but ready they were!... Thanksgiving came early this year for the parents of **HANNAH GRACE**, thanks to her faithful birthfamily... An Iowa family found themselves on the way back to Texas just days after orientation, this time for a tiny bundle of boy they've named **MALIK**... Tiny **ROMAN** made a delighted dad of one Maryland man after earning his birthmom's blessing... Just when they thought their family was complete, a Florida family discovered God had another plan for them: a 3-year-old angel named **ELIZABETH MARIE**... A Minnesota couple whose niece is also an Abrazobabe added another Texas-born angel to the family when they took placement of newborn **MCKENNA**... Coming back to the state of their son's birth was twice as nice for the Midwestern againers who added baby **ANGELA** to their family in time for the holidays... And as we go to press, an excited Memphis couple is launching a brand new happily-ever-after love story with their tiny new son, **THATCHER**, who is truly the rainbow at the storm's end...

Congratulations, all!

HOLIDAY GREETINGS

In this season of giving, we encourage you to support your adoption community with a generous, tax-deductible contribution to Abrazo's Angel Account. The Angel Account is a charitable fund established to assist with special needs within and beyond our greater Abrazo family. To date, more than \$50,000 has been distributed, to help victims of the tsunami and hurricanes this year, offset legal costs in unanticipated challenges, provide respite to families of special needs children, facilitate birthparent-adoptive family reunions, subsidize expenses in the placement of disabled children, provide relief in cases of fetal demise, enable deserving families with limited resources to attend Camp Abrazo, fund medical services for poor children around the globe, offer extended loss therapy for grieving birthparents, offset financial losses suffered by adopting couples in failed adoptions, to pay for GED classes, to assist with catastrophic medical expenses, and to ship annual Christmas stockings to dozens of deserving birthsiblings of children placed through our agency.

Abrazo's Board of Directors has approved the 2006 activation of the Abrazo/Mitchard Birthparent Scholarship Fund. Seeded with a substantial donation from bestselling novelist and Abrazomom Jacquelyn Mitchard, the Fund will be administered through the San Antonio Area Foundation. Each year, the Foundation will award a one year scholarship to a deserving Abrazo birthmother to enable her to attend a Texas college or university of her choice; two one year tech school scholarships will also be available. (See additional application details in the spring issue of "Affinity.") Ongoing contributions to this fund are needed to ensure its success for many years to come.

The Board has also approved the development of a second scholarship fund, to be designated to help provide future college assistance for Abrazo's adoptees and their birthsiblings. The fund, which is being launched with a \$10K prior contribution from NBA basketball legend and Abrazodad Dominique Wilkins, is in need of your financial support, so that its value can accrue in time to possibly provide for the education of someone you love! The babies we placed in our first year of existence will be members of the graduating Class of 2012, which is not that far off! So help us grow their future with a tax-deductible, end of year gift to the Wilkins AbrazoScholars program.

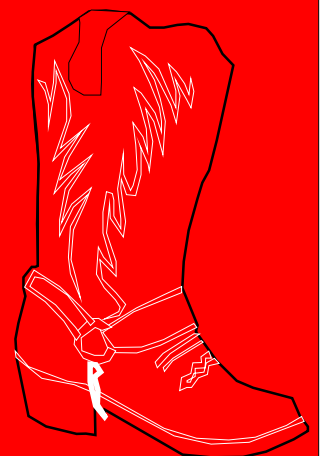
★CAMP ABRAZO★

Camp Abrazo 2005 was a sell-out, and a smashing success as over a hundred campers ranging from 2 weeks old to age 78 joined us for a weekend of fun and frolic at the Flying L Guest Ranch in beautiful Bandera, Texas. Folks came from as far away as West Virginia, Wisconsin, Tennessee, California, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Minnesota for the weekend, which was our eleventh annual reunion. Adoption expert Mary Martin Mason was our keynote speaker, while Abrazo kinfolk impressed all with their amazing talents in our opening night variety show and at the Cowboy Olympics on Saturday. Sunday's Golden Binkie Awards honored our new campers for excellence in adoption, and we salute them for their dedication and valor. The Flying L Guest Ranch & Resort is already taking reservations for Camp Abrazo 2006, so call today (1-800-292-5134) and be a part of the fun with us next summer!



WANTED:

**Your Hide & Kin at
CAMP ABRAZO 2006!
June 9-11, Flying L
Resort & Guest Ranch,
Bandera, Texas**



the GOLDEN BINKIES

Best Double Feature

Nothing good comes easy, they say, and this was surely true of this case. A destitute mother had struggled to care for her children, but found resources lacking and dreamt of a better life for her children. Enormously painful though it was, she decided to make an adoption plan, and found Abrazo, who then searched the nation for a family worthy of her gift. And found them we did, in a brilliant Midwestern doctor and his wife whose roots entwined perfectly with those of the twin angels entrusted to our care. They met, they fell in love, and the rest is family history, as we proudly award the Golden Binkie for Best Double Feature to Tunji and Cerise Ladipo, doubly awesome parents of Alexandria and Isabella.

Best Sequel

Referred to Abrazo by another family in attendance at Camp Abrazo, this then-childless couple was more than ready for the challenge of parenting, the thrill of late night feedings and the mystique of dirty diapers. They just didn't know how ready, until they were blessed to find the birthmom of their dreams—and their nearly 10 month old baby boy. He went home with them in December, 2004, only to be joined in February, 2005 by his newborn baby brother, who was welcomed into the world by his loving adoptive parents and his all-too-wonderful birthmom and her brilliant kids. Life after placement has been somewhat busy and full, made only moreso by the discovery of a miracle pregnancy that will provide the boys with a sister come winter! but this summer, we salute the folks who made "happily ever after" more than just a catch phrase: adoptive parents Mark & Stacey Goodson, their birthparents Tanya & Leonard and their children, the adoring family of Timothy & Winston.

Best Reality Show

If life is nothing more than a reality show, then these folks' story was truly Survivor, the Apprentice, Birth Stories and Extreme Makeover, all rolled up in one. From the rigors of fertility treatments to a failed adoption plan, a match with an open adoption-avoidant birthmom and a friendship made in heaven, this one has it all. And all's well that end well, because the reality is that everything turned out exactly as it should for one lucky little boy, and so it is that our Golden Binkie for Best Reality Show is realistically awarded to Marcelo and Claudia Paredes, oh-so-proud parents of Forumbaby Dante.

Best Soundtrack

What would life be without music? And how could we make music without children in our lives? One family knows

the answer to this query beats deep within their hearts, for their lives are composed of music, family and faith. They came to us via divine intervention, when a loving home was needed for an angel straight from heaven, and their lives since placement have been a holy lullabye. For the best soundtrack and a chorus of praise that will surely last a lifetime, our Golden Binkie for Best Soundtrack is awarded, to the sound of trumpets, to Michael and Wendy Jones, proud parents of Micah Grace.

Best Short Feature

Their first adoption plan seemed to go on forever but was ended in a matter of weeks and mercifully so, because how else could they possibly have been free to take placement of their firstborn son, when he needed a loving home within weeks of orientation? They rose to the challenge, got to Texas right quick, and were over and done before you could even find Rush Street on the map. They didn't let any grass grow between their first adoption and their second, either; they were back for Number Two lickety-split, skipping orientation and coming to Camp instead, to show off their brand new baby girl. For getting their act together in record time, our Golden Binkie for Best Short Feature is quickly presented to Paul and Beth Malik, prompt parents of Matthew and Sarah.

Best Makeup

Nothing is ever as it looks, and this couple found that out, the hard way. Bamboozled by a birthcouple who were better suited to a horror movie, they recovered from great disappointment, painted their faces with hopeful smiles and an optimism they didn't always feel inside, to continue to quest for the baby girl they were sure was out there waiting for them. Being Hollywood pretty didn't hurt, but it didn't always help either; after numerous calls with potential birthparents, they began to wonder if the tiny princess of their dreams was permanently hidden in a castle far away. But a good foundation, a dab of trust and a brush with destiny led them, within months, to a scared teen couple in need of a home for their weeks-old baby girl. They didn't just talk the talk, this family has truly walked the walk, as well, and so today we assign our Golden Binkie for Best Makeup to Gary and Sherrie Tennison and Dylan, picture-perfect family of Brenli Macie.

Best Cinematography

What is cinematography? It's what gives a story that golden glow, it's the way we see the picture we look at. And our next honorees have had that special perspective from start to finish. Their tale began with a phone call, sudden and urgent: a pregnant teen, due any day, needing shelter and a more secure

plan for her baby's future. She spoke with families, and settled on a doctor and his wife, who were childless, ready, but initially fearful of open adoption. Their learning curve was rounded quickly, however, as the baby came soon, and they've kept in touch just as they promised, not because Abrazo's watching, anymore, but because it's the right thing to do for the son they all love so. And thus, for talking the talk and walking the walk, our Golden Binkie for Best Cinematography is proudly given to Mark and Kitty Snyder, proud parents of Justin.

Best Wardrobe

Some say they come from the automobile capitol of the world, but in Abrazoland, it's haute couture for which we recognize their prowess. They're the folks who came to orientation perfectly attired, dressed the part, and oh, so ready to be decked out with spit-up on their shoulders! They were earnest, honest and cute to boot, and not even a devastating pregnancy loss could dim the fires of their enthusiasm for parenting. It didn't take long, either; a west Texas birthcouple spotted their profile right away, and found them a fitting choice of families for one baby girl who's dressed for success, and the daughter of their dreams. For being decked out and straight up, our Golden Binkie for Best Wardrobe is fitted "to a t" for Darren and Danielle Phillips, the fashionable mom and dad of stylesetter Elizabeth.

Best Comedy

What can we say about somebody who made us laugh from the very start? A little spit, a gold front tooth and one fun-loving couple ready to offer a joyful beginning to a child in need launched things, and the road to come was marked with chuckles and guffaws. Spirited and enthusiastic, they filled their orientation with Bronx cheers, and bounced back within a week to meet the little gigglebox they now call their son. Their inlaws being just as delightful to be around, they've joined us, too, this weekend, and so it's with a belly laugh and a "woolwoolwool" that we give the Golden Binkie for Best Comedy to Todd and Shellie Allen, happy home of baby Teagan.

Best Animated Feature

It's a tale as colorful as Barney, as miraculous as The Incredibles, as diverse as Madagascar and as fast-paced as Herbie!! Once upon a time, these superheroes were a couple without kids, who came to Abrazo and became a mom and dad faster than you can shout "Shazaam!!" It was because they were believers that a loving birthcouple believed in them, and sure enough, their firstborn son is an amazing kid of whom any parent could

be proud. But God had bigger plans for their family, and He blessed them, next, with a homegrown boy who's the best brother any guy could have. But hold onto your hats, folks, because the story didn't end there. A grandma who'd gone to heaven whispered in God's ear, and a tiny pink blessing floated gently into their home, in the form of a barely-dreamed-of but much-wanted baby girl, whose birthmom thinks the world of this family. Their lives are busy and chaotic and fuller than a cartoon, to be sure, but they wouldn't have it any other way, and so our Golden Binkie for Best Animated Feature goes home with Wayne and Mary Jo Terry, Joshua, Jacob, and Kylie.

Best Picture

Once upon a time there was a young couple who were expecting a baby and needing a miracle. They were awesome human beings but the timing was all wrong and as their due date drew closer, so grew their apprehension. How could they care for this baby? How would he fare? Meanwhile, across the state, another young couple in need of a miracle were waiting, but not on a due date; only for a dream. How could they share their love with a child, if their bodies couldn't grow one? In a Hollywood flick, this is the moment that the violins swell, because in a miracle that only Hollywood or heaven could pull off, the two couples found each other, and their happy ending is now one bouncing baby boy. For faith, fortitude and having formed a fabulous friendship, our Golden Binkie for Best Picture goes to Chris and Gabriela Farver, the creative team behind baby Austin.

Best Lighting

Lights, camera, action! In picture making, you can't have one without the other, and four gathered Texans in attendance can attest to this, because their lives came together when a loving birthmom wanted a specific type of family for her coming babe, and a loving set of againers came to our minds. The lights flickered, a couple of times, when the birthmom was swayed by private adoption offers, but in the end, the light of love prevailed and cast a golden glow over a east Texas hospital where, together, they joined hands and hearts in a loving promise to give one lucky baby girl a bright shining future. For illuminating perspective and undimmed hopes, our Best Lighting award goes to Scott and Laura Rattan, proud parents of Bianca, big brother Jacob, and birthmons Carolyn and Amanda.

Best Foreign Film

It sounds like the start of an old joke: put a Canadian, a Yankee and a Texan in a room, and whadaya get, eh? Three lifelong friends and the perfect family

for one precious baby girl. But let's start from the beginning. Canadian comes to the States and falls in love with PA girl. They get married and launch their lives together. Everything's perfect, but one thing is missing. They find the answer to their prayers in a titan-haired single mom in the Lone Star State. She works long hours, 'til the cows come home, and she's no chicken, but she longs for a better life for her daughter, so she can continue doing her best for her son. They join forces, and as a result, one little girl's life is the cat's meow, so as the curtain falls, our Golden Binkie for Best Foreign Film goes to birthmom Lolah, birthbrother Marcus, baby Emma Hope, and her proud mum and dad, Doug and Melissa Ross!

GB Best Stunts GB

We think all of our adoptive families are superheroes, of course, but only a few people can truly bound tall buildings with a single leap, throw a 500 lb. discus or hoist a Volkswagen over their heads. Our next honorees can do this and more, because not only is he a world-renowned strong man, she's a world-class mama, and they weathered the weight of the world when their first adoption plan fell through. It was a crushing blow, to be sure, but they had faith and strength and both saw them through until the darling girlbaby who was meant to be theirs could find her way home to them in California. Since then, they've nurtured extraordinary friendships with not just their daughter's birthmom, but the birthmom of the son that wasn't theirs, and for pulling off death-defying stunts with grace and perseverance, our Golden Binkie for Best Stunts goes to birthparents Julie and Erik and Jim and Heather Glassman, parents of superbaby Hayden.

GB Best Documentary GB

The documentary is something of a paradox: in the best of them, we watch for our own benefit but we learn something important in the process. Such was surely true in our next tale in which a fabulous family with a semi-closed adoption already done gingerly approached Abrazo about adopting again. They were forty years young, and found openness just scary enough to forfeit their dream, however, they got drafted and called into action when a college co-ed delivered unexpectedly and needed a family to would respect her privacy. They took home her precious baby girl, expecting that to be the happy ending, but in reality, happy-ever-after came six months later, when they met their daughter's birthmom for the first time, over dinner, and exchanged the first loving embrace in person. For being documentable proof that dreams do come true and that we have nothing to fear but fear itself, our Golden Binkie for Best Documentary goes to John and Diane Marzula, the very active parents of Johnny and Mary.

GB Best Scenery GB

Their first profile read like a travelogue, with scenes seen from all over the world in the years, before their living room became littered with toys. From exotic beaches to pyramids, they'd travelled the globe and seen it all, but still, they longed to see their lives filled with children. Supported in their quest by his grown sons, they made the trip to Texas, and not long after that, returned to claim their newborn son, making room in their lives for his birthfamily, as well. Shortly after their second orientation weekend (very shortly!!) they were called back again, this time for a baby girl in Houston, and the scene changed again, as they made the transition from a family of three to four. This weekend, the scene has expanded, as they came to Camp to meet their son's birthcousin, also an Abrazo babe, and we're so glad they're all on the scene! so we've seen fit to grant our Golden Binkie for Best Scenery to Homero and Linda De La Cruz, madre y padre to Desi and Fiona.

GB Best Direction GB

The best directors are those who know they don't know it all, and our next honorees surely seek guidance from their Producer because there's no other way they could have endured what they went through to be with us this weekend. Unsuccessful in their quest to birth a biobaby, they were led to Abrazo where, after a shattering failed adoption plan, they rose to become the grace-filled parents of an angel baby from El Paso. Being young and energetic, they were ready to start again before Abrazo was ready for them, so they went elsewhere and waited patiently through three failed adoption dreams. There was a reason for it, even if they didn't know it at the time, because elsewhere in San Antonio, a frightened teen was hiding a involuntary pregnancy, and her baby boy needed the perfect home, and a loving forever family who could raise him with pride, who relied on a higher power and understood the value of redemption. In them, she found the answer to her prayers, and they in her, and today, with thanks to God, we loving bestow the Golden Binkie for Best Direction to Paul and Michelle Dahlke, Chloe and Carter.

GB Best Action Film GB

Cops 'n robbers, intrigue, suspense: this flick had it all. Tejana princess braves the city, moves to the big leagues to face her fears and plot a safer future for her baby-in-waiting. Meanwhile, in the land of Elvis, father and stepmom of three grown daughters is willing to risk their all for a brand new baby boy. They meet, and shazaam!! It's a match! Birthmom goes into labor early; adoptive mom leaps into action to get here, stat! Birthmom wavers, but keeps the faith, and it's a new beginning for them all. A villain may lurk in the distance, but we trust the good guys

will prevail in the end, so we award this fast-paced, excitement-packed thriller with our Golden Binkie for Best Action to baby Gavin, birthmom Jessica, birthbrother Zoe, and adoptive parents Jim and Andrea Steadman.

GB Best Romantic Film GB

Theirs is a saga of faith, love and hope, but the greatest, of course, is love. And on Valentine's Day this year, in a romantic restaurant in San Antonio, occurred the most unique dinner date of all; 20-somethings and 40-somethings who fell in love and had a baby together. For just literally days before, Cupid's arrows had pointed a young woman due-any-day and her even younger boyfriend to a Tennessee couple who'd prayed with their son for years, asking God to grow their family. It took just one phone call, and zing! went their heartstrings, leading a birthcouple who'd planned for a closed adoption to build a new family relationship with a couple who valued openness, and their love story surrounds one very happy baby boy. Even Harlequin can't top this one! so our Golden Binkie for the Best Romance goes to Jay, Julie and Corbin Cothren, and birthparents Summer and Colby, loving family of baby Aidan.

GB Best Supporting Actors GB

They'd asked to say a few words at the close of their orientation weekend, and when they did, it was to offer affirmation and encouragement to the other couples in the room, because as the mother and stepdad of a teenage girl, already, they knew the joys of parenting and couldn't wait for their sojourners to experience the same. That same spirit of fellowship followed them through the adoption process, perfectly preparing them to be "all that" for the frightened birthmom of a girl B.O.G. who'd hidden her pregnancy and needed a loving home and experienced parents to raise her daughter. They rose to the call almost immediately, and have sought to "be there" for her ever since, so our Golden Binkie for Best Supporting Actors is gratefully given to Steve and Sophia Castaneda, baby Stevie Rae and big sister Veronica.

GB Best Dialog GB

When they shared their plight at orientation on Friday night, there wasn't a dry eye in the house, and since then, theirs is a story of love that just doesn't quit. They longed for their first birthmother call, while the rest of their group had already been there, done that, and instead, they got a B.O.G. whose birthmom never once opted to speak with them. There were so many things they would've liked to tell her, but she just wasn't ready to hear their voices. Their hearts were bursting with compassion and respect, however, so they got a second chance to say what they needed their birthmom to hear, when heaven matched them with another baby-on-the-ground, and a birthmother who needed the love and assurance they had to offer. They've kept in touch ever since, and they're here with us this weekend, so it is with pleasure that we announce our Golden Binkie for Best Dialogue is

given to Robert and Christina Barritt, Samuel and Abigail.

GB Best Western GB

They came from out West, a rootin'-tootin' family of three longing for a fourth, and they were looking for a special cowgirl, one who needed them as much as they needed her. They found her by way of a beautiful prairie princess, who was raising one child alone, had another on the way and needed a better option for her baby's future. Their homestudy arrived by Pony Express, but their baby girl was here in three shakes of a horse's tail, so they galloped in on time, and by golly, we're proud as cowpies to have 'em here with us today at the O.K. Corral! We don't know what life has in store for them, along the dusty trail, but if they circle their wagons around the dream of another child, we they'll ride for the brand and come back to Abrazo, because we goshdurnit, we like them, and therefore present our Golden Binkie for Best Western to Scott and Reggie Spaulding, Alex, baby Anisa, birthmom Barbara and her darling, Kahmbrya.

GB Best Choreography GB

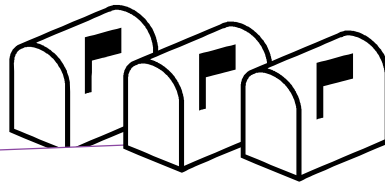
If adoption was a mulberry bush, these folks danced around it for awhile before they were sure it was the right plan for their lives. And who could blame them? As a young attractive couple with a lovely home and solid careers, they seemed to have it all; everything except the baby they'd always wanted. They waltzed through fertility treatments, shimmed through the disappointments, jitterbugged around the open adoption issues, and finally fox-trotted their way to Abrazo's orientation. Shortly afterwards, they plied into just the right adoption plan, tapdanced away the remaining months of the birthmom's pregnancy, and tangoed right out of the hospital with a beautiful baby boy who truly sets their hearts to dancing. For hipopping right on to Camp Abrazo with their darling little son this year, our Golden Binkie for Best Choreography goes to Darrin and Leeza Gannaway, mom and dad to baby Will and their beautiful birthmother, Christina.

GB Best Medical Drama GB

She delivered a tiny baby girl she hadn't felt ready for, and who stayed in the hospital a little while longer before heading home with her. Once there, however, her courageous birthmom heard a small, still voice in her heart which said "go find them." For even during her pregnancy, she'd known in her soul that her baby's destiny was greater than what just she could offer. It took time and prayers and alot of faith, but she found the home that felt right, and prescribed a brighter future for her daughter in the process, so our Golden Binkie for Best Medical Drama goes to Chenikqua, birthmom of healthy baby Mary Alice, beloved member of the Klassen family.



Letters



A Birthmom Explains Open Adoption

Honestly, I think the most important fact in open adoption that no one on either side should forget that by choosing open adoption you are willing to share your baby with the people who wanted to make the best decision for the baby.

By "sharing" I don't mean they get the baby on weekends or every other holiday, just that this isn't only your baby; that there is a whole other family that loves that baby just as much as you do but had to make a painful decision.

Once you adopt a child, imagine knowing that you couldn't take care of it and had to entrust someone else with your baby. How much you'd want to know is probably a starting point for how much the BP in your adoption will want to know. Sometimes, the birthparents might find contact too hard, but that doesn't mean they don't care for that baby just as much.

With open adoption you might have to see the birthparents and watch them hold your child and kiss and hug your child and tell your child how much they love it, but if that's not all alright with you, then a fully open adoption is probably not your best bet.

I placed my son Colby, his adoptive mom's name is Angie and she's like a sister to me. The way I see it, when Angie talks about Colby he is her baby. When I talk about Colby he is my baby. But both of us always know that he is OUR baby.

Loving Colby forever, Kristal

FOR MY SONS & THEIR ANGELS

By Sabrina Rohmiller, for Teyler and Tyson

I could not have imagined you... my precious little sons
From the first day I met you I knew you were the ones.

From God's hand to their arms and then into my life,
I knew for sure that the love they gave made this moment right.

I looked into your eyes and you looked into mine
We were made a family through an intervention divine.

God sends us angels... and your birthmothers are mine
Through their love for you, they gave us a new light to shine.

As I watch you grow, I can only think of love
For you, my precious sons, were sent from up above.

Know as I watch you soar, angels dwell within
For they gave you and me a new life to begin.

The angels were all around us the day when we first met
The Abrazo gals and your birthmoms I will not soon forget.

Remember that I love you and remember, so do they
They love you so much they gave us a special day.

So thank you to the angels, who gave us wings to fly.
The sons you gave to me are the apples of my eye.



Dear Elizabeth, Angela, Holly, Pamela, Estela and Renee,

Thank you all again for the wonderful adoption experience. You are all so good at what you do. You helped make our entire experience run so smoothly—from orientation to finalization, without a hitch! You educated us and calmed our fears about open adoption, and now we cannot imagine going through such a huge experience without our birthparents being a part of it. They are now an extension to our family. Aidan is the answer to many years of prayer. We feel that God's timing is perfect and He has blest us with His best. Please keep up the good work. We will continue to follow closely the awesome things happening in San Antonio through the Forum. May God bless each of you in a special way.

With love, Julie, Jay, Corbin and Aidan

Dear Elizabeth, Angela and the whole Abrazo Crew:

Nathan had an awesome third birthday celebration so I wanted to share the enclosed photo with all of you, showing the positive difference you make in people's lives, big and small. He's such a beautiful child, full of life and humor. The gratitude and appreciation that I feel for you, those who make up Abrazo and are its heart never fades. In fact, I think it grows stronger with time, as does my love for my child.

Just wanted to tell you thank you again for all that you do. (And I wanted you to see what a handsome young man my Nathan is!) My love, also, to Gloria and Hugo.

God Bless You,
Jean and Nathan Henry

ABRAZO'S ANGELS

Many thanks to our 2005 contributors for their support:

The Weir family
The Dooley family
The James family
Jill Welsh White
The Baugher family
Jean Henry
The Steadman family
The Brown family
Jose Ayala
The Malik family
The Tate family
Ralph & Faye Klasen
The Walker family
The Word family
The Law Office of Robert Estrada
The Knott-Brewer family
The Paredes family
The Terry family
Debra Rankin & David Reyes
The Cornish family
The Burns family
The Hollman family
The Phillips family
The Kacso family
Nancy Nash
Toys for Tots
Margaret Mattera

IN MEMORY OF MIKE

The Abrazo community lost a dear friend over Thanksgiving weekend this year. His name was Mike Delgado, and at the age of twenty-six, he was studying to become a pharmacy technician, when a drunk driver cut short his life in a tragic car accident in the Valley.

Mike was the father of two children, when he and his girlfriend found themselves facing an untimely pregnancy. Both had bigger dreams for their lives and that of their children.



They knew there wasn't enough to go around as it was, and they wanted much more for their precious baby, so they came to San Antonio to work with Abrazo on an open adoption plan to give her the world.

Mike was the life of the party at our weekly birthparent support group meetings. He attended regularly, and also came to orientation weekends to speak on the panel about what it was like to be a birthfather in an open adoption plan. Mike took on a variety of odd jobs locally in an effort to help support his girlfriend, and he participated enthusiastically in the selection of an adoptive family for their coming baby. Just before the birth, Mike and his very-pregnant girlfriend attended Camp Abrazo 2004 with their youngest daughter, and he was an enthusiastic competitor in the Cowboy Olympics. He was in the delivery room for the birth of the baby they named Leah Marie, and he, too, wiped away tears while relinquishing parental rights in order for her adoption to proceed. Mike kept in touch with their daughter's adoptive family, meeting with them when they came to finalize. He'd hoped to attend Camp Abrazo 2005, and registered, but felt too awkward to come alone when his girlfriend and the adoptive family could not make it.

He was a loving father and a hard worker, with a ready smile and a quick wit. He'd admittedly made some mistakes in life, but he'd worked hard to overcome his weaknesses and now had goals and dreams that he'd just begun to achieve. He'd posted his thoughts on Abrazo's Forum about his need to always know how his child was doing, wanting for her to always know how much he loved her. While she'll never now have the chance to meet him here on earth, she is being raised by parents who loved her birthdaddy, and will forever treasure every reminder of him that they see in her. Mike could never have foretold his own tragic end, but what a gift he gave his daughter, choosing an adoption plan that ensures he lives on in the memory of his child's adoptive family and always in their hearts.

Welcome to Abrazo

Meet Our Wonderful Staff



Elizabeth Jurenovich M.S.
Executive Director
Licensed Professional Counselor
Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist
Certified Open Adoption Practitioner



Angela Martinez, M.S.W.
Family Services Coordinator



Holly Yancy
Legal Services Coordinator



Pamela Zinsmeister, M.A., LPC-Intern
Maternity Services Coordinator



Renee Todd, B.A.
Maternity Services Coordinator

We're happy to be here to serve your needs and your child's throughout the adoption process. At Abrazo, we consider you family! Please help us know what we can do to meet your individual needs more effectively.

Abrazo . . . A Better Choice for a Brighter Future.

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THE INSIDE

Scoop



*Abrazo Staff with "The Family of Adoption"
author Dr. Joyce Pavao*

FORUM ANNIVERSARY #5:

Abrazo's online community, The Forum, recently celebrated its fifth anniversary, and we send out thankful salutations to our webmaster and all the Forum members who have made it the amazing gathering place that it is. If you've not yet registered, join up today, at www.abrazo.org/forum... **HOT, HOT, HOT:** Have you noticed? Forum members now qualify for a frequent posters recognition program that earns them chili peppers for increasing posting numbers and exclusive Abrazo gifts not available in stores...

BIENVENIDOS to the most recent graduates of our Parents of Tomorrow weekends; the Peabiscuits of 5/05, the Summer Strollers of 7/05, the 10-4 Good Buddies of 9/05 and Bobbing for

Squirrels of 10/05!... STORK STOP:

Congrats to Brent and Jackie on the birth of their newest son; to Paul & Kathy and sons on their adoption of a third baby boy; to Bruce & Stephanie on the birth of their homegrown daughter; to Melissa and husband on the birth of their son; to Sigmar & Clare on the placement of their daughter; to Chad & Bobbi whose surprise pregnancy resulted in the birth of a second daughter; to former staffers Angi and Barbra (and husbands) on their newborn angels; and to Mark & Stacey, whose miracle delivery of an unexpected baby girl means they now have three kids under the age of two!... **HAPPY HOUSE-WARMING** to our beloved foster family, Hugo & Gloria Burke, who have moved into a lovely new home with renewed commitment to their foster parenting ministry... **SHOW YOUR COLORS:** Abrazo has new cap sleeve Abrazo tees for ladies in light lavender, available for a tax-deductible Angel Account donation of \$25 or more... **FLAT STANLEY:** Speaking of tshirts, send us pictures of your loved ones modeling Abrazo sportswear across the globe, and we'll post them on Abrazo's Forum, under the new

Gallery feature... Let's get Abrazo seen in every corner of the continent—and beyond!.. **KUDOS** to staff member Holly Renee Todd, whose recent promotion makes her the agency's second Maternity Services Coordinator, along with veteran Pamela Zinsmeister, who is now an official LPC Intern... **NEWSWORTHY:** Hurrah for the Gillette family of Wisconsin, the Santos family of Texas, and the Dahlke family of Wisconsin, all of whom shared their Abrazo adoption stories with various media sources during this year... **PICNIC PALS:** Thanks to Abrazomoms Susan Word and Melissa Merritt, Abrazo's Memphis-area families gathered for an outdoor reunion potluck there in August, and a great time was had by all (see photos on Abrazo's Forum, under the new Gallery feature)... **WORLD PREMIERE:** The agency's hot new video, filmed at Camp Abrazo, was premiered before a distinguished audience in November at the Hearts for Adoption support group meeting in Memphis, TN. Copies are available for those who wish to use the video at their church or organizational gathering; call Abrazo for more information. **PRAYER LIST:** Please keep in your prayers two of Abrazo's little angels facing extraordinary medical challenges, Danny and Ivy, and their parents, as well as the Steadman, Knott-Brewer and Everding families, who hopefully await finalization day... **COMING SOON:** Our birthmother "Homecoming" event, in Spring 2006!!! Contact our Maternity Services coordinators for more info!

Check it out: Abrazo Forum @www.abrazo.org

Online exchanges between birthparents and adoptive families on a variety of important-to-you topics and issues! Log on today!



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