

Summer 2010

T H E L A W O F F I C E O F R A Y M O N D W . G O D W I N

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DID YOU KNOW?

Ray is available to speak about adoption to your church, adoption organization or other group.

Please contact our office for more information.

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AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY

Mike and Richelle's adoption journey has been a bumpy road with many surprises and an exciting, though unexpected, end: three babies who aren't triplets. When they began the adoption process, Mike and Richelle lived in Rhode Island. They knew they would soon be moving to South Carolina, but decided to begin their home study in Rhode Island.

After moving to South Carolina, they were matched with a birth mother named "Laura", (not her real name) through our office. Laura was pregnant with biracial twins, a boy and a girl. Mike and Richelle developed a relationship with Laura during her pregnancy and were

looking forward to the births of their babies in February 2009.

Laura went into labor in January, a month early, and after the twin's births decided to parent the babies. Mike and Richelle were dismayed but



Fletcher, Jessica, and Brandon

decided to pursue another adoption. That April, the agency who did their home study in Rhode Island called them about a Caucasian boy who was one week old and

available for adoption. They immediately flew to Rhode Island, and returned with their son, Fletcher.

During this time, Mike and Richelle also continued to stay in contact with Laura. Richelle recognizes that not all families could have continued contact in this situation, but they felt that it was the right thing for them to do. The first week in July, Laura called and told Mike and Richelle that she had decided she wanted to place the babies for adoption.

At this point the twins were 5½ months old, two months older than Fletcher. After a brief stay with a foster family, the birth parents signed the

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LIFESONG FOR ORPHANS

Our office has recently been introduced to the amazing organization, Lifesong for Orphans. Founded by Gary Ringger, Lifesong seeks to care for orphans in three specific areas:

Orphan care around the world: Lifesong provides staff and funding for many different

types of orphan care around the world. The ministry meets a variety of needs from food and clothing, education and job training to Bible studies and transportation to local churches. Currently Lifesong is working in Ethiopia, Honduras, India, Liberia, Ukraine, and Zambia.

Establishment and administration of church adoption funds: Lifesong helps local churches create an adoption fund and then even manage and administer the adoption fund—at no cost to the church!

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LITTLE BUNDLES OF JOY

It is a wonderful privilege to be able to place children in homes with their adoptive parents. We love when families stop by our office after placement to show off their child(ren) or send us pictures from home. If you have adopted through our office, we would love to see updated pictures of you and your child(ren).

Please enjoy these pictures of a few of the children who have recently been adopted through our office.



JOURNEY

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relinquishment documents, and Mike and Richelle finally brought their twin babies, Jessica and Brandon, home.

Having Fletcher, Jessica, and Brandon is like parenting triplets. They are at slightly different stages developmentally but are very close. They eat the same kind of food, drink the same kind of formula, and wear the same size diapers. The three siblings get along very well. Brandon and Fletcher share a room and are great friends. The three babies also love playing together.

Mike and Richelle get lots of funny comments when they are out as a

family. People ask whether the children are twins or triplets. One person even looked at the three babies and asked, "Which two are the twins?"

When talking about their adoption story, Richelle said that they don't have any regrets, but they have learned a lot. They wish they hadn't been matched so early with Laura. She was only twelve weeks pregnant, while most birth mothers are matched through our office much later in their pregnancy. They said that Fletcher's last-minute adoption was much easier.

Mike and Richelle also wish that when they began the process, they had

mentally prepared for the possibility of a disrupted adoption

Mike and Richelle are very glad that they built a relationship with Laura, and they stay in contact with her even now, speaking on the phone every few weeks and sending pictures once a month. Fletcher's adoption is closed, so it is an interesting situation to have one adoption that is very open and another that is closed.

When asked if they plan to adopt again, Richelle smiled and said, "Yes, but not this year." Apparently three infants in one year are enough for now!

LIFESONG

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Their services include managing the adoption fund and carrying the administrative load on behalf of the church, along with providing the screening and reviewing of adoptive couples, using mutually agreed upon criteria for those decisions. Lifesong is passionate about getting the local church involved with orphan care and adoption.

Adoption grants and loans: According to the Lifesong website, "Adoption is

our ultimate goal in caring for orphan children as it enables them to become a part of God's perfect plan: a family. While many Christian couples have the desire and resources to care for a child, initial costs keep many from following God's call to adopt."

The Lifesong Legacy Fund provides interest free loans to adoptive parents. The ministry also provides matching grants (ranging from \$2,000 to 4,000) designed to encourage the adoptive couple's church family to prayerfully and financially support the adoption.

Please visit Lifesongfororphans.org for more information about this organization and its desire to "bring joy and purpose to orphans."

"Lifesong is passionate about getting the local church involved with orphan care and adoption."



AN ADOPTEE'S STORY: THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Katie-Laken was adopted through our office as an infant and loves to speak about her passionate support for adoption.

Hi, my name is Katie-Laken Weeks, and I am very proud to say that I am adopted. I was adopted as an infant to a very loving and kind family. Being a fourteen-year-old with a wonderful and blessed life is something that would not have happened if not for the blessing of adoption. I am very grateful for the life that my family has given me. If not for their love and support, I would not be where I am today.

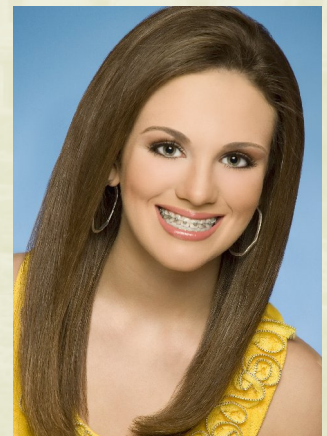
Currently, I am Miss Greater Mauldin

Teen and will compete for the title of Miss South Carolina Teen in July. My community service platform is Foster or Adopt: "There's No Place Like Home" I encourage families across the state of South Carolina to adopt. If you cannot adopt, then consider providing a foster home to a child or teen in need.

My sister, Kylie, is adopted as well. She joined our family at three years of age. She is very important to my family and me.

I encourage you to allow God to guide you in your adoption/foster choices. Some ways to donate to adoption and

foster care organizations are through Wendy's Restaurants (Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption), local adoption facilities and DSS centers. If you want to build your family, adoption is the way to go. Blood does not make a family, love does. Adoption is a loving option!



Katie-Laken Weeks

DSS ADOPTIONS – COMMON QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Julie Rau is a former Department of Social Services (DSS) attorney who now works for our office assisting with DSS adoptions.



Julie Rau

Adopting a child through DSS - is it right for us?

This is a question we hear often. The answer is "it depends."

DSS offers a wonderful opportunity to parent a child who needs love and stability. The following questions are commonly asked about DSS adoptions

How long does a DSS adoption take?

That is a very difficult question to answer because each case progresses at its own pace for a myriad of reasons. South Carolina has set forth a goal of "permanency for children within 24 months," meaning that the child should be either returned to his/her family or adopted or placed in some other permanent home within 24 months of the removal from his/her home. I can't say that South Carolina Department of Social Services always meets that goal, but it remains the goal for every child.

When in the process should an adop-

tive parent contact our office?

Certainly contact our office to complete the adoption of the child in your home once the Department has terminated the rights of the parents! However, there are a number of reasons to contact our office before that time. Feel free to contact our office at any step in the process if things are not moving in the direction you desire them to go.

Sometimes, DSS finds itself in a very difficult position: DSS knows that a particular child would be better off with the adoptive family but still must work toward reunification with the birth family. Our office has been able to terminate parental rights in situations where DSS was restricted by its own rules from doing so.

Why do you need an attorney outside of DSS itself?

The DSS attorney does not represent you! The Department has federal regulations, state law and mandates and various policies to follow, few of which have anything to do with helping foster parents. In any contested court scenario, you are better off having an attorney who represents only you and can advocate your position, as well as advocate for what you believe to be the child's best interest.

What kinds of children are available for adoption?

All sorts of children come into the DSS system. Some are placed into foster care as newborns, more are at least a little older. Some children have been neglected in the care they received from their parents but suffer little to no problems. Some were severely neglected or abused and need special services to assist their development. The children come from all races and cultures.

Would you recommend parents consider adopting through DSS?

Absolutely! From a Christian perspective, we are all charged with looking after "the least of these" (Matthew 25:40) and with the care of widows and orphans (James 1:27). Children in the foster care system need stable, loving homes and good examples of what a family is supposed to be. You can offer that to a child who may never have known it before.

How do I get started?

Contact DSS Adoptions (www.dss.sc.gov) for more information. Once a child has been placed in your home through DSS, contact our office so we can meet to discuss what happens next. And enjoy your new family member!

OFFICE NEWS – NEW ADDITIONS

Our office has recently welcomed two new employees.

Danielle Arnold recently joined our staff as the our Birth Mother Liaison. Danielle was married this past December and then graduated from Bob Jones University in May with a Master's degree in Counseling.

Jen Wetzel also recently joined our office. She graduated from Bob Jones this year with a degree in graphic design and works on our website and various print material. Jen is originally from Chicago.

Welcome Danielle and Jen!

ADOPTION TAX CREDIT EXTENDED

Good news! The adoption tax credit has been extended and increased!

The credit was originally set to expire December 2010, but the health care reform bill (H.R. 3590) includes a provision that extends the credit until December 2011. The bill also increases the credit from \$12,170 to \$13,170.

This means that an adoptive family could pay \$13,170 less in taxes if they adopt in 2010. Also, new for 2010, the tax credit is refundable if your family's tax bill is less than the credit amount.

Be sure to talk to your tax professional to see if your family qualifies for the tax credit.