

An International Fight



Dr. Jenn

DR. JENN BERMAN

Ever since I can remember my cousin Tina wanted to be a mother. She longed for a son. But it wasn't until two years ago, on a visit to Eastern Europe, that she decided it was time. Standing at Auschwitz, she realized that she wanted to perform "Tikkun olam" (an act which helps to heal the world) and adopt a child who needed a parent and offer him a Jewish home. She decided that she wanted to adopt from an eastern European country and chose the former Soviet Republic of Georgia because they were receptive to single mother adoptions and the orphanages there are particularly horrific. She knew that in the process of becoming a mother through adoption, she also would be performing a "mitzvah" by taking a child out of those conditions and offering him a loving home.

Becoming a mother is never easy, even

under the best of circumstances. For some, the struggle lies in the difficulties of getting pregnant, for others the pregnancy itself is extremely difficult. Then there are those who attempt domestic or international adoptions, for whom the wait to be approved by an agency and assigned a child can take years. Unbeknownst to Tina, when she made her choice at that concentration camp where so many children had lost their fight for life, she chose a journey toward motherhood that would become a battle over the life of a child. This fight would take her thousands of miles away from her home in the United States to a beautiful but developing nation to pursue the adoption of her son.

Tina's baby boy was born in Tbilisi, Georgia on July 27th of 2003. She received a video of him from the adoption agency that August. She was moved to tears at first sight. She was touched by his sweetness, vulnerability and personality. In the way that

for Motherhood

a mother knows her child, she knew in her heart and the deepest depths of her soul that this was her son. She named him Joshua Adam Rubin.

International adoptions are often difficult as a result of the changing political climate of a country at any given moment. In September of 2003, Tina was told that the Georgian Parliament and the Georgian President were trying to change the current adoption laws that would put a stop to all international adoptions. This was due, in part, to a widespread rumor that international adoptions are really a front for selling babies for body parts.

The agency was apologetic and told Tina that they would put her at the top of the list for the next available baby in Russia. But in her heart Joshua was already her son and she couldn't give up her struggle. She had to fight for him. If she gave up he would end up

in an orphanage or even worse.

Tina felt that her actions were of limited effect from so far away. With growing frustration, she left her job, and in the first week of January she boarded a plane to Tbilisi to fight for the right to take her son home. As I write this article in April, she is still there in Georgia. She has endured freezing weather, a minor revolution, bombings, and a certain lawlessness that prevails in the countryside and, of course, homesickness as a result of leaving everything and everyone she knows to go to a country with a completely different language and culture. Tina has been on a rollercoaster few people can truly understand.

But through it all she has managed to stay strong and continue to fight for her child.

There have been many moments over the past few months when Tina thought she was close to bringing Joshua home. It seems that for every three steps forward, the Georgian red tape and changing political climate has forced her to take two steps back.



She has used this time to bond with Joshua and help him get stronger. She has been working with a massage therapist who does baby massage. She teaches him baby sign language to help him communicate with her. She has been there for many firsts: the first time he sat up, his first tooth, the first time he stood up with help (thanks to the strength he has developed as a result of the massage).

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work), and his first signs. Throughout it all she has kept a journal of her experiences to share with Joshua when he is old enough. She writes:

"I have just begun to fight! They won't know what hit them, and they certainly don't know how tenacious I can be. I am hoping they get so sick of me that they just say 'take your baby and go!'"

"My baby... My baby is incredible. He is growing every day and we are really great together. My arms are the only arms he has ever fallen asleep in and all I can say is...heaven! All my troubles disappear when I am with him. He and I have our own little special world in this two-room flat with nine people. We find a way to have time alone for music, playing, talking... and he talks. We talk about everything! He loves my voice and I was told when I was gone he liked hearing English spoken. When he cries and I am not with him, he stops when he hears my voice coming towards him. He loves when I sing to him, and if anyone has ever heard me sing you will agree that it must be true love!"

"... Joshua is so strong now it blows me away. He has two bottom teeth, lots of hair, eyes as wide as the ocean and a smile that will knock your socks off. Since I was gone he picked up a little bit of a scream... Joshua screams when he is happy and having fun. He has the cutest pout when he is unhappy but it never lasts long and I have ways of making him smile!"

I believe in my heart that Tina is a mother. It is too easy to take motherhood for granted, especially during difficult times. Watching Tina's determination, courage, and battle for her son has taught me more about what it means to be a mother than anything I have witnessed before. As I write this, Tina and Joshua's fate is still undecided. I hope they will have the chance to celebrate their first of many Mother's Days in the United States where they belong.

If you would like to send words of encouragement or help in any way, contact Tina via email at TinaRubin@earthlink.net.

Dr. Jenn Berman is a psychotherapist and sports psychology consultant. She regularly appears on television and radio as an expert on psychological issues. For questions, comments or advice to be used in one of her columns, she can be reached through her website at www.DoctorJenn.com.

Resources:

- *How to Adopt Internationally: A Guide for Agency Directed and Independent Adoptions*, by Jean Nelson and Heino R. Erichsen (\$18.00)
- *Becoming a Family: Promoting Healthy Attachments with your Adopted Child* by Lark Eshleman, Ph.D. (\$22.95)
- *Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew*, by Sherrie Eldridge (\$11.15)