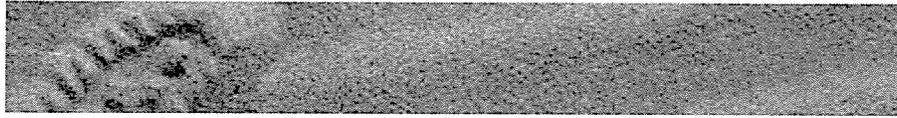


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What Matter Most



karen amster-young :: The Beach Chair Chronicles

...weekly observations & discoveries from manhattan to the east end...

As I look around my home office and stare at my never-ending to-do list I can't help thinking about a dear friend of mine who is going through a heart-wrenching time trying to successfully complete an adoption of a beautiful little Vietnamese girl who already considers my friend her mother.

I am staring at the Bloomies bag on my floor; it has been sitting here for a month, waiting for me to haul my ass to 60th Street to return some semi-horrific dresses that I bought in a state of panic before a recent family wedding in Pittsburgh (don't get me started – that's another column). Meanwhile, I can't stop thinking about this great friend who has already been back and forth to Vietnam two or three times this year as I try to find the time to get to do my errands. Nothing would or could stop her on her quest to adopt this little girl from Vietnam. Her situation is on my mind; it is making me think. It is making me extraordinarily pensive and mad.

I came home last Sunday relaxed from a weekend in the Hamptons and was jarred back to reality as I tried to cross town to drop my daughter at summer camp. I watched, incredulously as traffic cops ignored double-parked trucks of questionable origin block side streets for countless minutes while they aggressively ticket SUV's dropping little ones at summer programs and camps in front of various upper east and west side schools. What is wrong with our government and law enforcement on a local, state and national level? Sirens, traffic and clogged streets made my serene state from the weekend quickly fade.

It started for me with the recount in the now infamous 2000 Presidential election. Then of course life-altering 9/11 and too many unanswered questions; then the "bad" information that led to the Iraq War. I thought about our government again during the ridiculous primary season that just concluded a few weeks ago. Count a vote as half a

vote? Give me a break. Ticket an innocuous SUV not blocking any traffic for a few moments to drop off a kid at school or camp while ignoring the huge, unmarked trucks that languish forever and block entire city streets day after day? The energy our government and law enforcement officials spend on the wrong things is beginning to leave me speechless and disillusioned. Which brings me back to my friend.

I can't detail the specifics of her political and bureaucratic nightmare because she is about to embark on a legal battle to ensure this little girl eventually comes to the United States. I do not want to write anything that could even remotely be found by aggressive googling and would in any way, shape or form impact anything. But I will share with you that I have been flabbergasted by the situation: why is it so difficult for wonderful families to complete an adoption in Vietnam despite lip service to the contrary by President Bush and Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung?

The beautiful little girl my friend is trying to bring home is 5 1/2 years-old. She has never known her true birth mother and her father voluntarily gave her up for adoption because he lives in unimaginable poverty and can't care for her. This is not a little infant but a little girl who already knows my friend who has visited with her and talks to her weekly on the phone with a translator. This is a little girl who would likely languish in an orphanage (especially because of her age) and is now receiving new clothes and toys weekly via a care package that my friend sends religiously. Two brothers are also waiting for this little girl here in NYC. Her room is ready – filled with new furniture that likely costs more money than she would see in her entire lifetime should she have to stay in Vietnam. But all of these comforts are not what is making the light shine in this little girl's eyes for the first time (I've seen her photos). It's the love and connection she feels with my friend; a growing trust and love that she has never experienced in her lifetime.

And governmental bureaucracy is standing in the way.

I know my friend has the fight of her life ahead of her. She is determined. She and her husband have already written countless letters to politicians and others. They've researched and researched and researched. They've traveled. They've cried. They have gone to Washington D.C. to hire the best lawyers they could find. I know they won't stop until they bring her home.

I am feeling my friend's sadness over this situation. I am feeling frustrated. The big truck blocking the side streets is symbolic of the frustrating and unnecessary hurdle she faces in this fight for her little girl. The local authorities doing zilcho about daily unfair crap in NYC is representative of the wasted time and energy spent on blocking an adoption of a girl from Vietnam for the wrong reasons. Are my friends being used as a political example? Is her case being used as a data point to support policy change? Is our government full of shit sometimes? Yes, absolutely. And too often it's the good guys that have to fight the fight.

I can't wait to meet this little girl from Vietnam. She has no idea what is going on and how lucky she is to have a family like this fighting for her to come here to be a part of a loving home. But the look in her eyes is unmistakably one of a little girl already coming to life. I know she will be here one day. And I know one day my friend will tell her the remarkable story about her life and her eventual journey to America. I know when she is old enough to understand, Jodi will tell her how she fought with everything she had to be her mother. I just hope this little girl only experiences the best of what America has to offer. It's a great country; the opportunities here for her far surpass any she would have living in an orphanage in Vietnam her whole life. Hopefully, once here, she won't face any hurdles that are unfair, unjust and ridiculous. Unfortunately, she probably will. But it's still better here. She's going to love her new room. She already loves her new Mom.

Karen Amster-Young, formerly principal of Amster-Young Public Relations, Inc., is a freelance writer living in New York City. She lives with her husband, Ben and 6 year-old daughter, Alison. She continues to work as a public relations & marketing consultant and is currently working on a non-fiction book. Her work has appeared in a number of publications, including magazines on the East End. She can be reached at atkaren@thehamptons.com

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