

National Adoption Report

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Ruby Lee Piester, A Force to Be Reckoned With

By William L. Pierce

In Memoriam



Ruby Lee Piester
(1915 - 2003)
Founder, National Council For Adoption

Few people in life make a social impact that defies calculation, but Ruby Lee Piester was just such a person. During the time that “Ruby Lee,” as she was known to thousands of people, served as Executive Director of the Edna Gladney Home of Fort Worth, Texas, it was one of the largest maternity homes in America, with a capacity of 142 residents.

Serving pregnant girls and women was always the starting point for Ruby Lee. She deeply cared about young women and giving them a chance to reach their potential. It inspired her to see those she worked with and “mothered” overcome their challenges and become successful. Ruby Lee never gave up on women, never stopped believing that people could change, if they were given encouragement.

Ruby Lee knew from her conversations with young women that confidentiality is necessary for pregnant women to have real choices between abortion and adoption. She knew that although abortion was legalized there would still be many girls and women who would like other options. So she kept Gladney’s maternity home and adoption program alive and flourishing after many other agencies deserted the field.

Ruby Lee’s respect for the women she served, and for the promises of confidentiality made to them and women across America, led her to mount a major public education campaign about the dangerous Draft Model State Adoption Act (DMSAA). This Act was produced in 1979 by a “runaway” advisory committee appointed towards the end of the Carter Administration. Because of the “open records” provisions and other noxious elements in the Act, Ruby Lee correctly concluded that, if the DMSAA were to become law, domestic infant adoption would be snuffed out and tens of thousands of women who made adoption plans in previous decades would be betrayed. So she created a

continued on page 8

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Bill Pierce Honored with First Ruby Lee Piester Heart for Adoption Award

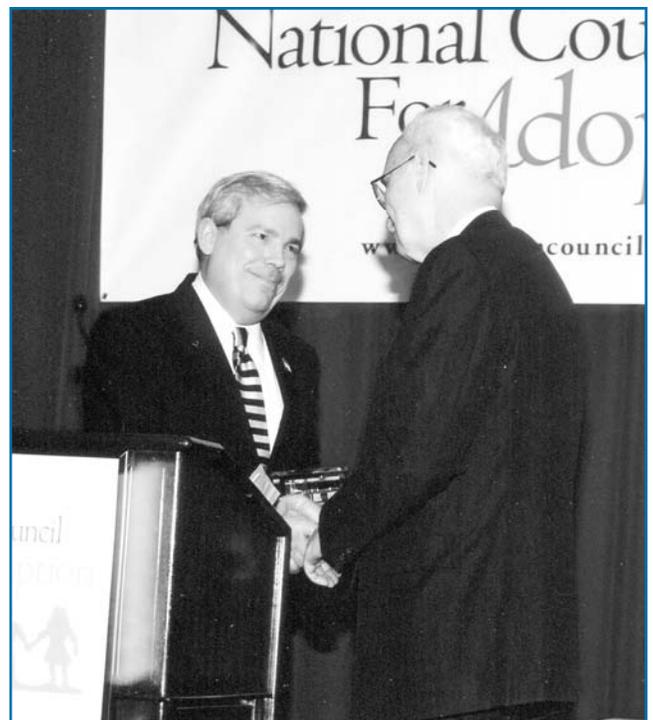


NCFAs Board shares the special moment with Bill Pierce.

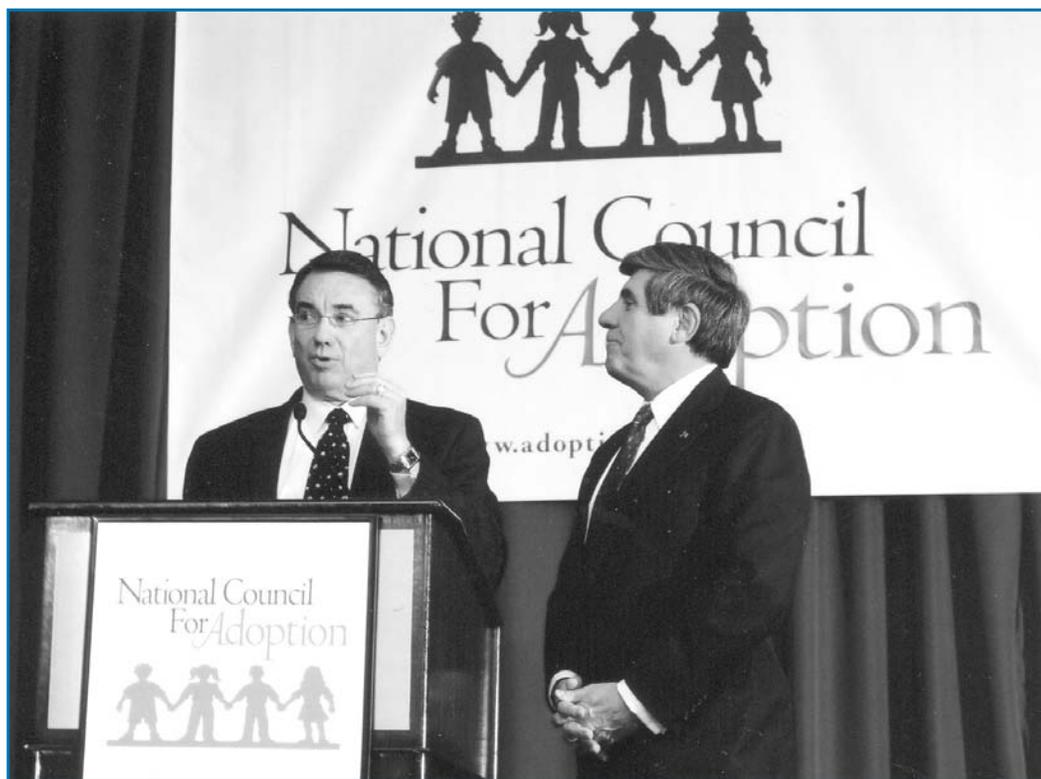
At the Adoption Hall of Fame 2003 Awards Banquet, the first Ruby Lee Piester Heart for Adoption Award was presented to NCFAs founding President William L. Pierce for “compassion, courage, and achievement, in improving the lives of children, birthparents, and families, through adoption,” as embossed on the crystal award. On behalf of the Board and Staff of the National Council For Adoption, Tom Atwood announced the creation of this new award in honor of NCFAs Founder.

As Atwood said in presenting the award, “The Ruby Lee Piester Heart for Adoption Award is a special honor. It will not be presented annually, but only when called for, to an extraordinary person who shares Ruby Lee Piester’s

passion for adoption. Ruby Lee said, ‘I have spent the better part of my adult life pressing the idea . . . that adoption is a positive experience.’ This award will go to that rare person who devotes his or her life, generously and effectively, to benefiting children, birthparents, and families through adoption. There is only one person who could receive the first such award, Bill Pierce.”



National Council For Adoption Inducts Members into Adoption Hall of Fame



Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy G. Thompson (left) speaks at the Adoption Hall of Fame 2003 Awards Banquet after receiving his Hall of Fame Award from Nebraska Senator Ben Nelson (right). Senator Nelson is an adoptive father of two. NCFA honored Secretary Thompson for his dedication to the Infant Adoption Awareness Training Program, and for his leadership in promoting adoption of children out of foster care.

The annual Adoption Hall of Fame 2003 Awards Banquet sponsored by the National Council For Adoption (NCFA) took place on Wednesday, March 26, at the Fairmont Hotel in Washington, D.C. The evening began with a festive Reception followed by the Banquet Dinner. Classical guitarist Michael Kolmstetter provided musical entertainment. All participants at the Banquet received his award-winning CD of children's lullabies.

NCFA celebrated its 23 years of serving children and families by bestowing its prestigious award, induction into the Adoption Hall of Fame, to outstanding Members of Congress and the Administration, and to exemplary "Goodwill Ambassadors" of adoption, who have proven their commitment to promoting sound and ethical adoption policies and practices.

This year NCFA recognized three champions of adoption who have led the way in advancing federal policies that present adoption as a positive option for women with unplanned pregnancies, make adoption more affordable, facilitate intercountry adoptions, and make it easier for children to be adopted out of foster care, through such federal legislation as the Adoption and Safe Families Act, the Infant Adoption Awareness Training Program, the Intercountry Adoption Act, and the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program. Through their leadership on adoption, Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy G. Thompson, Senator Larry E. Craig, and Representative Jim DeMint have brought untold benefits to children and families.

NCFA also honored D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams, who was adopted as a child himself, for the recent increases in adop-

tions in the nation's capital, and Pastor W.C. and Donna Martin, whose teaching and example have inspired over 40 families in their church to adopt 76 children out of foster care. Tony Blankley, Editorial Page Editor of the *Washington Times*, and Panelist on "The McLaughlin Group," served as the Master of Ceremonies at the Banquet.

The highlight of the evening was the presentation of the first Ruby Lee Piester Heart for Adoption Award to NCFA's founding President, William L. Pierce. This new award was created in recognition of Ruby Lee Piester's service and leadership that improved the lives of countless children, birthparents, and families, through adoption. Mrs. Piester and Bill Pierce co-founded NCFA in 1980. She passed away on February 2, 2003.

The event was hosted by a cross section of American adoption advocates and adoptive parents who personally value adoption and its important role in building happy families worldwide – including Marvin and Margaret Bush, Mary and David Bushnell, Janet and Peter Simon, Lou and Ralph Davidson, Mona Charen and Bob Parker, The Streep Family, and Hollywood producer Michael Jaffe and his wife Jann. In addition to Members of Congress and Administration officials, guests at the dinner included adoption agency directors, adoptive families, the media, and sponsoring organizations. Also in attendance were Embassy representatives from the countries of the Republic of Korea, the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Indonesia, the Slovak Republic, the Republic of Belarus, and Guatemala.

Adoption Hall of Fame Awards *(continued)*



Secretary Tommy Thompson greets Chris Atwood (son of NCFCA President Tom Atwood and his wife Eileen, by adoption) who led the Pledge of Allegiance at the Adoption Hall of Fame 2003 Awards Banquet. Chris is 13, an honor student, and has already achieved Star rank in Boy Scouts.



Hall of Fame Inductee Senator Larry Craig of Idaho (center) visits with NCFCA Board of Directors member, Mary Cunningham Agee (right), and her husband Bill at the Awards Banquet. Mary is a tireless advocate for family and children's issues. Bill Agee, who served as CEO of two Fortune 100 companies, presented Senator Craig with his award that evening. As Senate Co-Chair of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption, Senator Craig has led the way on all the vital pro-adoption legislation in recent years.



Kristen Day, Executive Director of Democrats for Life of America, presents the Hall of Fame Award to Representative Jim DeMint (SC-4). Rep. DeMint was the key leader in promoting adoption in the House through the Hope for Children Act and the Infant Adoption Awareness Training Program. This year, Congressman DeMint has already introduced legislation that would make the adoption tax credit permanent.



Ralph Davidson (whose wife Lou serves on the NCFCA Board of Directors) presents the Hall of Fame Award to D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams (right), who was himself adopted as a child. Lou and Ralph Davidson were previously inducted into NCFCA's Hall of Fame, and Ralph worked with *TIME-LIFE* for 37 years, where he was publisher of *TIME* and retired as Chairman of the company in 1988. Mayor Williams' commitment to children has borne fruit in a great increase in the number of children adopted out of foster care into forever families.





Master of Ceremonies, Tony Blankley (left), who serves as the Editorial Page Editor for the *Washington Times*, congratulates Hall of Fame Award inductee, Pastor W.C. Martin. By their preaching and example, Pastor W.C. and Donna Martin have inspired 40 families from their Bennett Chapel Baptist Church in Possum Trot, Texas, to adopt more than 70 children out of foster care. The Martins themselves have adopted four children.

**The National Council For Adoption
would like to express its
appreciation to the following
for their generous support.**

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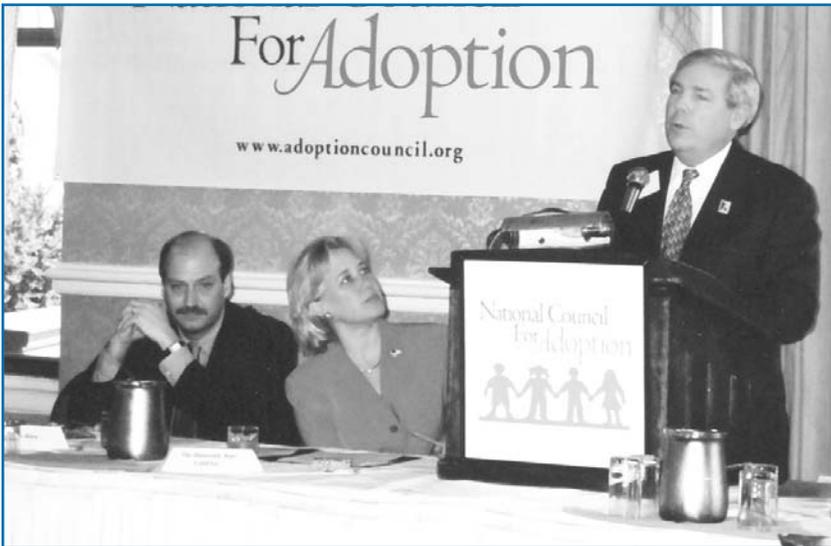
And to all the Volunteers and NCFA Staff
who helped make this event possible.

Photos by Jim Holmes



NCFA's three Presidents at the recent Adoption Hall of Fame Awards Banquet: current, Tom Atwood (left); Bill Pierce (center); and immediate past, Patrick Purtill (right).

Adoption Leaders Meet at NCFAs 2003 Annual Conference



NCFAs President Tom Atwood introduces the Honorable Mary Landrieu (center), U.S. Senator from Louisiana and Co-Chair of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption, and Dr. Wade Horn (left), Assistant Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, who were the featured Annual Conference keynote speakers.



Adoption agency directors and policy leaders from across America assembled for two days of informative speeches and panel discussions at the NCFAs Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. Top experts addressed the participants about timely domestic and international adoption issues, including dealing with putative father rights, promoting foster care adoptions, updates on the upcoming Hague regulations, and information on immigration statutes and regulations.

The National Council For Adoption (NCFAs) held its 2003 Annual Conference for adoption agencies, March 27 and 28, at the Hotel Washington in Washington, D.C. More than doubling last year's attendance, adoption leaders and agency directors from all across the country assembled to discuss timely domestic and international adoption issues with panels of experts. At the close of the conference, excited participants uniformly reported finding the sessions very informative, interesting, and useful.

Among the topics of the domestic adoption sessions were discussions of increasing referrals and growing the agency, securing certainty and finality in dealing with biological fathers' rights, and working with state agencies on foster care adoptions. Panelists on domestic issues included officials from the Children's Bureau of the Department of Health and Human Services and from agencies large and small, such as Bethany Christian Services and Sunny Ridge Family Center.

The international track included updates from officials of the Department of State and the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (formerly INS). The State and BCIS officials updated participants on the Hague regulations, advisories regarding various sending countries, and clarifications of immigration statutes and regulations. Most useful were the question and answer periods, when participants had the opportunity to express concerns and engage in discussions with policy makers at the highest levels of intercountry adoption practice. Additionally, NCFAs adoption agency members with extensive experience in intercountry adoption convened a roundtable to offer advice to agencies interested in launching international programs.

The Honorable Mary Landrieu, U.S. Senator from Louisiana and Co-Chair of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption, and Dr. Wade Horn, Assistant Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, were the featured conference keynote speakers. Both leaders in promoting the positive option of adoption, Senator Landrieu and Assistant Secretary Horn highlighted adoption concerns of the legislative and executive branches, giving conference attendees an inside look at federal adoption policy, past, present, and future.

The NCFAs Staff and Board extend sincere thanks to all who attended this year's conference. NCFAs is already gearing up for its 2004 annual conference and is planning to build upon this year's successes to offer an even better 2004 event. Stay tuned for a Save the Date announcement. We look forward to seeing you in Spring 2004, if not before!





Congress has taken up several adoption measures as part of its 108th session. Currently before the House Ways and Means Committee are two adoption-related bills. Rep. Jim DeMint of South Carolina is sponsoring H.R. 336, which would make permanent the adoption tax relief set to expire in 2010. Mr. DeMint has already over 100 cosponsors of this popular bill. In his press release,

DeMint quoted NCFAs comment that the permanent tax credit “will ensure that these benefits accrue for future generations of children in need.” Also before House Ways and Means is the Dave Thomas Act of 2003, H.R. 584. Introduced by Rep. Pete King of New York, this legislation would

allow penalty-free withdrawals from individual retirement accounts for adoption expenses.

The Senate passed the CARE Act of 2003, S. 272. This bill is well intended to provide incentives for charitable contributions. But it contains a provision that negatively impacts adoption. The CARE Act’s maternity group home provision funds the teaching of parenting to young mothers, but not adoption counseling. Adoption leaders in the Senate attempted to insert language to provide “pregnant women information regarding the option of placing for adoption through licensed adoption service providers,” but the bill passed without it. The House version contains language supporting adoption counseling. If the House passes its version, the difference will be reconciled in conference.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration increased efforts to promote adoptions out of foster care by proposing to provide

states additional financial incentives for placing children nine years and older. President Bush’s budget advocates a \$505-million increase for the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program, which encourages child safety, permanency, and well-being, including through adoption and post-adoption support services. The administration also proposed education or vocational training vouchers for older foster children and flexible child-welfare funding for states to help them find new and better ways to meet the needs of their foster care population.

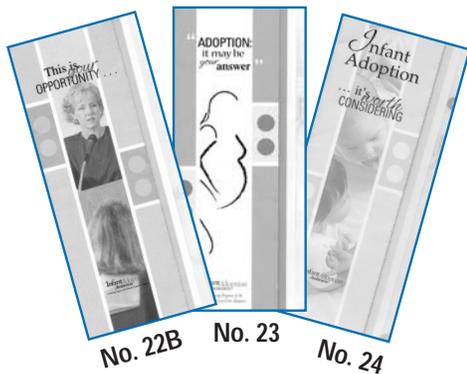
NCFAs has been busy defending the right to privacy in adoption across the country. We took two trips to Georgia to inform legislators regarding the injustice and harms that would result from eliminating the option of confidentiality in adoption. Even after the bill passed the Senate, the House stripped the offending provision, and the bill passed with the House amendment intact. Similar legislation was stopped in committee for this year, in Louisiana, Nevada, Connecticut, and Missouri. NCFAs also traveled to Louisiana to comment favorably on a paternity registry bill that would require that, in order to safeguard his paternal rights, an unmarried father must provide financial support during the pregnancy and register his paternity.

Despite an odd offensive against the extraordinarily popular Safe Haven laws earlier this year, Virginia, New Hampshire, Hawaii, and Wyoming enacted Safe Haven laws in 2003, bringing the total to 46 states. As I said in our press release regarding the arguments of opponents of Safe Havens, “Just how many babies do these laws have to rescue from death in a dumpster, in order for their opponents to consider them worthwhile? If one baby’s life is saved, the Safe Haven law is worth it, and there is no doubt that Safe Havens are saving lives.”

At the time of the submission of this article, NCFAs and its member international adoption agencies were awaiting the publication of the Hague regulations, and the final 60-day public comment period that will follow their release. These regulations will transform intercountry adoption practice, as we know it. NCFAs will team up with its member agencies to submit comments to the State Department. As you can see, 2003 has been a busy year on the legislative and executive fronts.

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executive fronts.

Infant Adoption Awareness Training Program



The project has developed a number of brochures that may be helpful to you. You can order copies by calling (866) 212-3678, or fax your request to (703) 535-1901. Number 23 and 24 will soon be available in Spanish.

A Public Information Campaign will soon be launched by the project. It will feature children and the theme, "THANKS FOR CONSIDERING ADOPTION."



During a break in the filming, several cast and crew members gather on a trampoline that was used in one of the scenes.



One cast member gets a look at the movie camera during filming of Infant Adoption Awareness public service announcements.

Ruby Lee Piester Tribute *(continued)*

firestorm of public comment calling for a return to Congress' original intent for DMSAA, which was to help find adoptive families for children in foster care.

Ruby Lee's activities upset many people, and calls started coming to me as Assistant Executive Director of the Child Welfare League of America, and head of the League's Washington Office. Because Gladney was a member agency of the League, I was asked if I had been "causing trouble" with "that woman from Texas." I was on sabbatical and didn't know about the DMSAA controversy, but when I looked into it, I agreed with Ruby Lee.

Ruby Lee's activities helped spur Congressional hearings. One day, at a Senate hearing, I heard a distinctive Texas twang in the row behind me. I turned around to find a dynamic woman holding forth to an enthralled circle of people. I asked, "Would you happen to be Ruby Lee Piester?" The answer was "yes." I suggested that, since some people thought we were "conspiring" together, we should at least talk.

So we stepped into the hallway and talked about public policy and public education. Over the next two days, we decided to ask the League to take the lead in

revising DMSAA. But the new leader of the League, along with the majority of the League's board, opted not to lead the battle.

So Ruby Lee and Gladney provided \$50,000 in "seed money" in 1980 to create a new voice for adoption, the National Committee For Adoption (NCFA), now the National Council For Adoption. Ruby Lee's dedication to the organization and the cause never wavered. She raised money and awareness, enlisted adoption agencies across America to get involved, and handpicked some of Gladney's best volunteers to serve on NCFA's board. She also asked me to head the NCFA staff. Within two years, DMSAA was returned to its original focus on children with special needs. And NCFA was launched, a strong advocate for adoption, despite shaky finances.

Ruby Lee had a strategy to ensure NCFA's survival. "Let's get a building in Washington for our headquarters," she told me. "That will send a signal that NCFA is permanent." With Ruby Lee's help, that building was obtained and when the mortgage was retired, it was named the Ruby Lee Center For Adoption.

After stepping down from Gladney, Ruby Lee never slowed down. She wrote

a book, ran a southwestern office for NCFA, and created an agency to find families for special needs children. She served on many panels, including a Blue Ribbon Commission appointed by Gov. George W. Bush. To the end of her life, Ruby Lee brightened whenever she spoke of young women's needs, children, and adoption.

At her side when she died in February 2003, as he had been throughout Ruby Lee's career, was her devoted husband, Jim Piester, serving, encouraging, and supporting. Jim was a father figure and positive male image for thousands of needy young women and a faithful partner with Ruby Lee in all she achieved.

Ruby Lee and James M. Piester had no biological children but they had thousands of other "children" and gave birth to NCFA, a 23-year-old force to be reckoned with in America and worldwide.

William L. Pierce is Founding President of National Council For Adoption and President and Executive Director of the U.S.A. Committee for IAVAAN.

