

MidWeek

Kristine Altwies Nicholson

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By Matt Tuohy



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It's been nearly 17 years since Kristine Altwies Nicholson took over as executive director and CEO of Hawaii International Child (HIC), a non-profit adoption agency, and appeared on MidWeek 's cover in 1993. However, she appears impervious to time and stress while juggling her family life, professional life and her drive to help children all over the world find new homes in Hawaii. "There is not a day that goes by where I don't feel grateful," she says with a smile. "I really love my work."

HIC is a international adoption agency that has brought children from as far away as Kazakhstan to the Islands. The agency was founded in 1975, and since its inception has placed in permanent homes more that 3,000 children from several countries around the world.

People like Deborah Long-Yep and her husband sought the help of HIC and Nicholson to complete their family when they were unable to conceive. "My first child was Jennifer, and she arrived in 1980, and my second was born in '86. At that point we weren't going to have any more," says Long-Yep. However, since she and her family were considered a successful adoptive family, they were later contacted about adopting a third child, Bradley, who was one of the last coming out of Korea at the time. "We said we were very interested, no questions asked." Nicholson personally went to Korea, picked up Bradley (pictured with her above), flew him on her lap back to Hawaii and surrendered the screaming baby to his mother.

"She has unconditional love and acceptance of any child," Long-Yep says. "She wants to place every child. She wants to make sure that every child has a home, and because of that desire she never gives up."

Nicholson, an adoptive child herself, has a 2-year-old daughter of her own and is in the process of adopting a child from China. "I'd always planned to adopt," she says. "And in my advocacy and educating of prospective adoptive parents, one of the first things I always tell people is, 'If you're waiting for the right time to start a family, you're going to wait forever.'"

Feeling that she was not living up to her own philosophy, Nicholson took the plunge and began the process of adoption in January 2007. She says she is expecting to receive a child in another two years.

Based on the lengthy amount of time it will take Nicholson to get her new child, it's obvious that what was once a relatively quick process now takes a lot longer. "There are a lot more regulations now," Nicholson explains. "And many countries that previously offered their children for adoption are less and less inclined to place their children for adoption.

"If you think you want to be a parent, do it today," she urges. For more information on HIC or adoption, go to www.hic.org or call the agency at 586-2367.