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# Insite

BRAZOS VALLEY

## HEART & HOME



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*Real Estate Forecast*  
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*When True Love Means Adoption*  
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**EVERY MARCH INSITE** examines the local real estate market. A series of excellent stories in this issue will tell you what you need to know about buying and selling in the current climate, how to approach investing in these uncertain times, and how to protect your assets. That's the "home" part of the cover headline Heart and Home.

Titus Schulz, in all his blue-eyed wonder, posed for this month's cover on the same day his adoption by Charla and Michael Schulz was finalized at the Brazos County Courthouse. The Schulz agreed to add the photo shoot to an already monumental day in the life of their family because, in their words, "We would do anything for Aggieland Pregnancy Outreach," the agency that facilitated the adoption. That's the heart part.

In another excellent series this month, a young woman tells how she came to make the loving choice to place her child with caring parents through open adoption. A companion article highlights three area agencies, including Aggieland Pregnancy Outreach, that provide support to women facing an unplanned pregnancy. All three organizations rely on local individuals and charitable groups for the financial and volunteer contributions that make possible their important work.

Some readers will disagree with the decision to profile Planned Parenthood in the unplanned pregnancy story, even though 94 percent of their offered services support reproductive health: family planning, birth control, well woman services and STD testing and treatment. Planned Parenthood is part of that story because more than 25 years ago, a young couple with no health insurance wanted to delay the start of their family until they were financially and emotionally prepared to be parents. Actually, the woman swore she would never have children; her more moderate husband said, "Maybe someday." Planned Parenthood, then located in Downtown Bryan, provided the woman with her first well-woman visits and contraception on an affordable, sliding-scale fee basis. Six years later when the couple decided to start a family, much had changed, including having health insurance. What hadn't changed was the woman's reproductive health thanks in part to the caring professionals at Planned Parenthood.

The Gammon children, and their parents, are grateful to all the area organizations whose mission it is to ensure that every child has a healthy start in life and is raised by caring parents. For me, that's really the heart of the matter. — **Angelique Gammon**

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see her, I just have to call," Gilbert says. "We've grown so attached to each other."

When she was pregnant, Gilbert found Aggieland Pregnancy Outreach, Inc. (APO), an open adoption agency in College Station. Open adoption agencies allow the mother to pick her baby's adoptive parents, and also

the baby and give her to someone else. She had feelings of annoyance when people got excited about the baby and asked her questions. "I didn't like all the questions," says Gilbert. "It was embarrassing." Refusing to let her pregnancy interfere with her life, she continued her usual routine of waking

*Open adoption agencies allow the mother to pick her baby's adoptive parents, and also allows for the mother to remain in contact with her child after the adoption placement.*

allows for the mother to remain in contact with her child after the adoption placement. "APO made it easier. It was nice to know my counselor was always there for me. She made sure that I looked at all my options before I committed to adoption," says Gilbert.

APO provides the mothers with "Life Books," scrapbooks of the parents looking to adopt a baby. This is the first step in the process of selecting an adoptive family. Gilbert says she initially had only two requirements: she wanted a family that lived in Texas and one with Christian values. "I wanted my daughter to be a Texas girl," she says. However, the further along in the process she went, the harder the choice became. Gilbert says at first she did not care about which family adopted her daughter, wishing to detach herself from the baby and the pregnancy. "After a while it got harder because I started to care about my baby and who would raise her."

Gilbert says the most difficult part didn't start until after she delivered Rianna. During the pregnancy she tried to view her baby as a nuisance. She couldn't wait to deliver

up early to exercise, attending classes, and working. Gilbert says she even worked the day she went into labor. In her mind, she was going to have the baby and that would be the end of it. But something changed after she held her for the first time. "I didn't plan on falling in love with my daughter," Gilbert says.

Gilbert was in the hospital with her daughter for three days. She held her during those days and the baby slept on her. Rianna seemed to become more of a part of her than she ever had been during the pregnancy. After those three days, the staff of Aggieland Pregnancy Outreach conducted a ceremony at the hospital called an entrustment ceremony. This was a time to honor the baby and Gilbert's commitment to entrust her daughter to the care of Paul and Lois. It also honored the commitment of Paul and Lois to little Rianna to be her parents and their commitment to Amber. "I had to physically place my baby in Lois' arms," Gilbert says. "Hardest part, absolutely."

For Gilbert, the pain of losing her baby did not stop that day. Over the next

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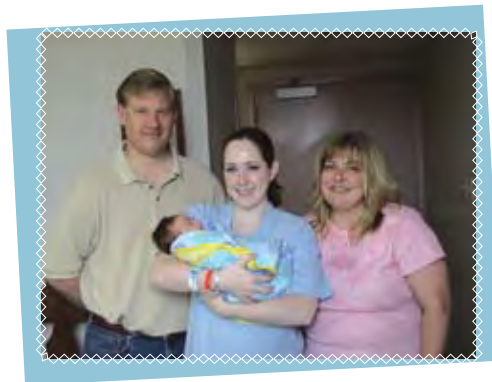
## True Love

Amber loved her baby so much she placed her with adoptive parents. This is her story.

Amber Gilbert was a senior at Sam Houston State University when she found out the unimaginable – she was pregnant. Once she got over the shock, she became realistic. As a 22-year-old student with no money and no intentions of staying with her boyfriend at the time, she knew she had only one choice. "I never considered anything other than adoption," Gilbert says. "It was just the right thing to do."

Gilbert's daughter was adopted by a married couple in the Woodlands. Gilbert loves to visit them whenever she can, and says that she and her little daughter, Rianna, have become best friends. "When I want to

Birth mother Amber Gilbert (center) with newborn Rianna and adoptive parents Paul and Lois Decker. The adoption was arranged by the staff of Aggieland Pregnancy Outreach (l-r) Shannon Harris, Victoria Buckwalter, Don Campbell and Kim Schams.



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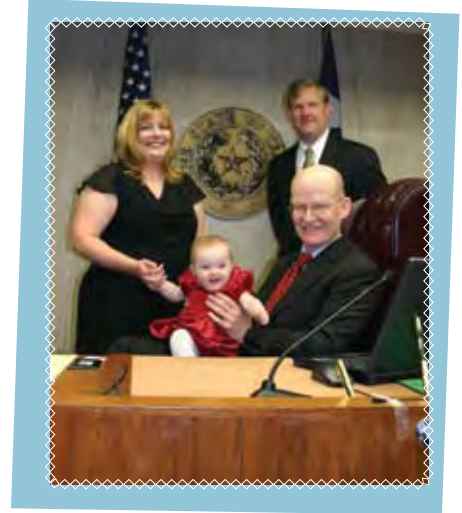
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Paul and Lois pose with Judge Jim Locke at the hearing where Rianna's adoption was finalized.

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three months, she went through the worst depression of her life. "Giving her up for adoption was like someone ripped my heart out piece by piece," Gilbert says. "Something was gone that couldn't be replaced...something I needed." She felt so alone and empty that she had thoughts of suicide, and says she could not have gotten past her depression without her faith and the support from her parents and her best friend. "I would be curled up crying on the bathroom floor and my mom would come and just hold me," Gilbert says.

During the first few months, Gilbert says she irrationally focused feelings of anger and hatred toward the adoptive couple. Over time, that the pain began to lessen. Lois, the adoptive mom, would periodically call her to tell her about Rianna. At first, Gilbert felt like shouting at her, "You took my baby away," even though she knew this was not the case at all. Eventually however, the phone calls helped Gilbert open up to Lois. "It helped me to know how happy they were, how lucky she (Rianna) was," Gilbert says. "I couldn't give all of that to my baby. I had to go on Medicaid just to have her and she wouldn't have a daddy in her life if I had kept her." She started visiting Rianna once a month. Although she didn't plan it to be this way, the adoption became incredibly open. "I visit at least once a month now, sometimes every other week," Gilbert says.

Rianna is now 2 ½ years old. Gilbert says it is no longer painful. "I think about

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how overjoyed Paul and Lois are, and how lucky Rianna is that Lois doesn't work, and that Paul is a doctor in The Woodlands," she says. Gilbert says Rianna's adoptive parents are wonderful. "There's nothing they do that I don't agree with," she says. "Just watching them gives me a lot of tips." Rianna realizes that Gilbert is like a family member, but at this age, she doesn't fully understand adoption. Gilbert says that Paul and Lois have explained to her that she grew in Amber's tummy and when she came out, they adopted her and they became her

*Yes, adoption was painful, but it was so worth it.  
- Amber Gilbert*

mommy and daddy. Gilbert hopes that in the future they will continue to be really good friends, and she will someday serve as a mentor figure to Rianna. "I hope she can come to talk to me with stuff she can't talk about with her mom and dad," she says.

After experiencing the pain that comes with giving up her baby for adoption, Gilbert says that she thinks the experience matured her, and she now feels older than most 24-year-olds because she had a child at age 22. "I would like to consider myself less selfish," she says. She said it also grew in her the desire to someday have her own family. Before she had Rianna she wasn't fond of the idea of being a mother. "I will be a better parent because of this."

For women facing an unplanned pregnancy, Gilbert offers words of encouragement. "It's not the end of the world," she says. "There are options. You're not going to die even though you think you will." Gilbert says she refused to let her pregnancy stop her from achieving her goals of graduating from college and getting a job. After experiencing open adoption, Gilbert says she would highly encourage any mother facing an unplanned pregnancy to consider it.

"Yes, adoption was painful, but it was so worth it," says Gilbert. *i*

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