

CHAIN OF LIFE

A FEMINIST ADOPTION REFORM AND CHILD WELFARE NEWSLETTER

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EDITOR: JANINE BAER



African American Children Need Black Families

Most of the information in this article was derived from a 1987-88 article by law professor James S. Bowen in the *Journal of Family Law*, which is published by the University of Louisville School of Law. His article is titled, "Cultural Convergences and Divergences: the Nexus Between Putative Afro-American Family Values and the Best Interests of the Child." Mr. Bowen is an Associate Professor of Law at New York Law School.

▲ It was a situation comedy, but it could have been real. An 8-year-old boy named Alex on "A Different World" (October 4th) lived at an adoption agency and wanted to live with a family. At an adoption fair, prospective parents came to find children to adopt, but none of them even looked at Alex.

According to James S. Bowen, many children, both Black and White, are living in temporary homes or institutions and need permanent homes -- whether by extended family members or other adoptive parents. Children over the age of 8 have the hardest time finding homes; of that group, Black teenage boys have the least success. Infants, and then toddlers, are preferred by prospective parents of all races, while sibling groups and the mentally or physically handicapped are the least likely ever to live with a permanent family. In 1978, 40 percent of all children in foster care in the United States were Black; over 50 percent were members of a minority group.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY CHANGE

Drawing on information from a variety of scholars and disciplines on the topic of transracial versus same race (inracial) placement of Black children, Bowen arrived at 3 basic proposals for Black children who are no longer in the custody of their "bloodline" relatives: (1) "that a co-ordinated recruitment effort be mounted to find Black homes for Black children; (2) that when Black homes are not found and White homes are available, friendship groups, school, and religious institutions in the child's new environment should be integrated racially in order to provide "worthy models" for the child; and (3) that a national Afro-American Child Welfare Act be proposed in Congress to address the needs "of displaced Black children and disrupted Black families." As with the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act, such an act would give preferred placement within the child's extended family, and, if that were not possible, with other parents of the child's race. When placement alternatives are being considered for indigent families, those families would be provided legal counsel.

HISTORY OF TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION

According to Robert Hill in his book *Informal Adoption Among Black Families* (1977), 90 percent of Black children born out of wedlock are raised by the Black extended family. This was a historical necessity, since Blacks were not permitted to participate in formal (stranger) adoption until the 1960s. This informal adoption served the function of providing child care, allowing the child's parents to work.

Transracial placement of minority children began in the early 1960s. According to Margaret Howard, the primary reason for this change was the needs of White adoptive parents, for whom fewer White babies were

available ("Transracial Adoption: Analysis of the Best Interest of the Child Standard," *Notre Dame Law Review*, 1984). This need of White parents was compounded by agency practices. According to Hill, there have not been adequate attempts made to keep children with their extended families. He writes, "Although lip service is often given to the belief that the first priority should be on maintaining children in their own homes or with relatives and that foster care should only be a last resort, actual agency practice is the reverse." For a variety of reasons including the disproportionate number of minority children needing new homes and income requirements that kept many Blacks and Native Americans from qualifying as adoptive parents, there have not always been enough minority individuals to become adoptive parents for minority children. However, a higher percentage of Black than White families, in proportion to their overall numbers in society, have come forward to be adoptive parents.

WHY SAME RACE ADOPTION IS IMPORTANT

Although more research needs to be done, especially about adolescent adjustment of minority children raised transracially, there are good reasons why inracial adoption for Black children is preferable. The National Association of Black Social Workers reiterated this position in 1978. Black parents, said the NABSW, impart to their children "survival techniques and coping devices that serve as defensive mechanisms for the mental and physical onslaught which Blacks typically face in America." Bowen adds, "To suggest that the skills of survival, coping and defense can be taught by those who have never themselves learned them is at best mystifying" (p. 510). Inracial placement helps children learn to "ignore racial insults, to decipher the appropriateness of fighting back or submission, to emphasize Black strength, beauty and worth . . ."

Studies of Black children raised in White homes suggest they have low scores in social adjustment, and possible ethnic identity confusion. Many transracial adoptions are disrupted. A 1977 study by J. Ladner (*Mixed Families: Adopting Across Racial Boundaries*) uncovered more "ambivalence, resentment and hostility than earlier studies suggest" by adoptees ages 10 to 36 raised transracially. Researcher Ruth McRoy studied 30 children adopted transracially and 30 inracially, and concluded, "It seems plausible that transracially adopted children are more conscious of their racial group and adoptive status because their physical dissimilarity from their family and peers is a constant reminder . . . The child may be more likely to be called on to explain his or her racial background and adoptive status to others" ("Self-Esteem and Racial Identity in Transracial and Inracial Adoptees," *Social Work*, Nov. 1982).

SUGGESTIONS FOR TRANSRACIAL ADOPTIONS

However, no one thinks Black children should remain in foster homes or institutions rather than be placed with White adoptive families. "The NABSW has never asserted, nor do they now, that Black children needing adoption should languish in institutions or foster care arrangements" said this organization in its 1978 statement. When transracial adoption is chosen for a child, Ruth McRoy suggests that the family should move to an integrated neighborhood and school where Black role models will be available. "The entire racial milieu . . . should be investigated before transracial placement is allowed" and "post-adoption consultation [must] be made available to aid the development of a 'positive and unambiguous' Black identity in the Black child" (Bowen).

continued on next page . . .



HOW TO FIND MORE BLACK ADOPTIVE HOMES

Bowen refers to an ABC broadcast of the news show "20/20" that aired August 13, 1987. It showed the work of Father George Clements, a Roman Catholic priest, who started the One Church, One Child Program. This program asked at least one family in each Black church in Illinois to adopt at least one Black child. This program has been highly successful in eliminating the Black adoption crisis in Illinois. Expanded criteria to allow adoption by people over the age of 40, single people, and those without high incomes, helped this program succeed.

The fictional television show "A Different World" mentioned above portrayed the problem and solution for one child. The character Alex had originally been abandoned by his mother, and his father had died. The eight-year-old was shown running away from the adoption agency to the local Black college, where he knew Fredi, a woman student who worked with him as a volunteer. Alex asked Fredi to adopt him, but she explained that she couldn't. Fredi then asked her male professor to adopt Alex, accusing the professor of hypocrisy when he said he would prefer to have a biological child rather than adopt. Does he support the Black community in theory only, she challenged?

While I'm not sure that adoption out of political guilt will create a happy family, "A Different World" ended happily. Four Black men at the college, including two professors and a cook, talked about Alex's need for a home while playing cards. The older cook lamented that in his youth, the extended family would take in needy children. The next day, all four of the card players applied to the adoption agency for custody of Alex. In this TV ending, the originally reluctant professor and his wife were awarded custody.

POVERTY AND ADOPTION

As a society we are slow to address the causes of poverty and family breakup that result in the need for adoption. Billingsley and Giovannoni's Children of the Storm II (1972) says, "If individual inadequacy is [believed to be] the cause of poverty... then, a poor family is an inadequate family, and there is little value in maintaining it as a unit. As a result, child welfare has not made a heavy investment in maintaining families, but in maintaining children away from their families."

Bowen concludes with the importance of a permanent family for all children. If a Black family cannot be found, a non-Black family is desirable. For hard-to-place Black children, adoption by White families should be encouraged. He says, "[T]he long-run analysis is that the trauma and lack of family affection is more devastating than the denial of a home altogether, Black or white. . . . In any case, the child should be placed with some loving family who wants to care for him." ▲ *Janine Baer*

Thank you to Joyce E. Everett, Ph.D., of Smith College School for Social Work for referring me to this article, and to Anne Mi Ok Bruining for referring me to Dr. Everett.



Adoptions to be Insured By Lloyd's of London

"Lloyd's of London, the English brokerage firm famous for insuring athletes' arms, dancers' legs and Hollywood movie props is entering the adoption business. The 400-year-old company is test-marketing insurance policies in California that protect couples from losing their savings on adoptions that fail because the birth mother changes her mind. They feel there is a need for insurance because California law allows couples to spend thousands of dollars on an adoption but offers no protection if the child's birth mother backs out of the deal."

Information from Parent Finders newsletter, Ottawa 9/90

The WOMB BBS

An Adoption- and Search-related
Computer Bulletin Board System

General Message Base; Electronic Mail;
Dedicated Message Bases for Adoptees,
Birth Parents and Adoptive Parents;
Reprints of Adoption-Related Articles
from Newspapers and Magazines;
Users' Search & Reunion Stories;
National Calendar of Events;
And Much, Much More!

To Log Onto The WOMB BBS, Call
(718) 998-6303

24 hours a day / 7 days a week / 8N1

But Votes Against Open Records

Assemblymember Bates Sponsors Bill To Keep Families Together; Governor Deukmejian Vetoes It

California state assemblymember Tom Bates (Oakland/Berkeley/El Cerrito) sponsored Assembly Bill 3357 in August that would have allowed grandmothers caring for "crack babies" to get the same amount of financial support from the state as is given to unrelated foster parents. Not only would the child's ties to her or his family be strengthened by placement with a relative, the cost of institutional placement, which averages \$2500 monthly, could be avoided, thereby resulting in savings.

The grandmothers are only eligible for AFDC payments, which average \$101-341 per month, while foster parents receive an average of \$564 per month. Because the children are usually placed with a relative voluntarily instead of by court order, they are not eligible for the higher payment.

"The state talks a lot about helping families stay together," said Bates, "but when it comes to doing something about it, we don't put our money where our mouths are. This bill strengthens family ties." The legislation was drafted in response to interim hearings held by the Assembly Human Services Committee in San Francisco last fall. Grandmothers and social service providers cited the emotional and financial stress placed on relatives who care for these children, many of whom require special care because of their emotional or physical handicaps. The bill was sponsored by the City and County of San Francisco. It passed the Assembly 47 to 23, but was vetoed by Governor Deukmejian.

At the same time, I was surprised to learn that Mr. Bates had voted against opening adoption records in California. He believes the findings of an analysis of AB 3907 that says birthmothers and adoptees have a right to privacy (from each other) and open records might be unconstitutional. Local adoption reform activists are trying to educate him on this issue, while the American Adoption Congress plans to obtain a legal analysis of the constitutionality of state laws that would allow for retroactive access to identifying information in closed adoptions. I assume A.A.C. will also address whether adoptees are denied constitutional rights as a result of closed records.



• A television program called **Reunions**, which dramatizes various kinds of reunions, airs on Channel 2, Saturday evenings from 5:30 to 6 p.m. in the S.F. Bay Area.

▲ ANNOUNCEMENTS ▲

- **Concerned United Birthparents** will be having a meeting in San Francisco November 8 at 7:30 at Noe Valley Ministry, 1021 Sanchez. For further information, phone (415) 824-2346.
- An excellent trio of articles about the politics of international adoption was published way back in May 1989 by the feminist monthly paper, **Sojourner**. Send \$2. to Sojourner, 42 Seaverns Ave., Jamaica Plain, MA 02130, for this back issue.
- Creative pieces and theoretical essays by women of color, including at least 2 by adoptees, are in the book **Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras**. It is available by mail from: Aunt Lute Foundation, P.O. Box 410687, San Francisco, CA 94141. Cost is \$14.95 paper or \$24.95 hard cover, plus \$1.50 postage per book. Phone orders can be made by VISA or MasterCard to (415) 558-9655.
- **Over 1,000 workshops and seminars about adoption** and related topics are available on audio cassette. Send \$10. to obtain 2 catalogs to: Von Ende Communications, 3211 Saint Margaret Drive, Golden Valley, MN 55422; (612) 529-4493.
- **"Learning from Our Kids: Teenage and Adult Children of Lesbian and Gay Parents Speak Out,"** will take place Saturday, November 17, 1990, 9:30 am to 1:30 pm. It will include a panel of speakers, followed by small group discussion (bring a bag lunch). \$15. donation requested, First Presbyterian Church of Oakland, 2619 Broadway (27th and Broadway), Oakland, CA. Sponsored by Lyon-Martin Women's Health Services, 641-0220.
- **Workshop for adoptees and significant others** (friends of, children of, partners of, birth/adoptive parents of, birth/adoptive aunts, uncles, cousins of, etc.). How has adoption affected you? How can these relationships be healing? A supportive place to air and begin to resolve conflicts, misunderstandings and questions. San Francisco. 3-1/2 hours on a weekend day in November. Amy Jane Cheney 923-1454; Tori Bogart 750-0946.
- "There is a clear argument for an ethical dimension that birth parent identification may be an adoptee's constitutional right as well as personal need." This encouraging statement can be found in *Pediatric Annals*, April 1989, in the article **"Adopted Adolescents and the Birth Parent Quest"** written by adoptee Annie Gardiner and her adoptive mother Adele D. Hofmann. Address reprint requests to: Adele D. Hofmann, MD, Children's Hospital of Orange County, 455 South Main St., Orange, CA 92668.



World Summit for Children

The leaders of more than 70 nations embarked on a global campaign to erase hunger, illness, and poverty for millions of the world's children at the conclusion of the first World Summit for Children September 30th. "Resources always seem to be scarce" for children, said Canada's Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, co-chair of the conference.

President Bush was among the leaders who spoke, saying he would send a delegation to Africa on a fact-finding mission, to see whether the U.S. can contribute more to the world's fight against AIDS in Africa. Michael H.L. Merson, director of the World Health Organization's Global Program on AIDS, said he is delighted.

But the United States is one of the only industrialized countries to refrain from signing the United Nations convention on the rights of children. Why? Because conservatives in the U.S. oppose provisions in the charter that would prohibit execution of criminals whose crimes were committed when they were under the age of 18, AND because the charter does not oppose abortion. *Information excerpted from an article by Michael Specter, Washington Post, via S.F. Chronicle, Oct. 1, 1990* ▲

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Publishing a newsletter takes time, and time is money. To keep Chain of Life going, please subscribe, renew your subscription, and/or send a donation to place an ad or announcement in a given issue. (Suggested donation for a small ad is \$10. per issue, but that's negotiable. Send your ad and phone number, if in the Bay Area, or your address if not, and we can discuss donation amounts.) Your response to this request will help Chain of Life continue its analysis of current adoption practices and child welfare needs from a feminist, pro-child perspective.

Make your check payable to: J. Baer and send it to P.O. Box 8081, Berkeley, CA 94707. \$10. to \$15. is the regular subscription range, \$7. for low income individuals. I have no other funding. Thank you for your support. ▲

• A new book entitled Homosexuality and Family Relations includes the 35-page article **"Adoption and Foster Parenting for Lesbians and Gay Men: Creating New Traditions in Family"** by writer Wendell Ricketts and attorney Roberta Achtenberg, who heads the National Center for Lesbian Rights. The book was published this year by The Haworth Press, Inc. It includes case studies of gay teenagers living with gay and lesbian foster parents, a bibliography, and suggestions for educating social workers about gay and lesbian families.

• Ongoing activities of the **Lesbian and Gay Parenting Program** in San Francisco include Considering Parenthood Groups for Lesbians in SF and the East Bay, Considering Parenthood Groups for Gay Men in San Francisco (\$80-95 per person), and Childbirth Education Classes in SF and the East Bay (\$70-80). All groups are held throughout the year. Phone the Lyon-Martin Women's Health Service (415) 641-0220 for info.

• Adoptee Sammi Whytecap has released "One of a Kind," the 4th cassette tape of her music. It features songs about support groups, healing the child within, self-esteem, and a song for Sammi's brother who has AIDS. The lively title song was originally recorded on the Adoption Adventure tape to encourage the adoption of special needs children. "One of a Kind" is available for \$11 payable to Jasmine Journey Records, P.O. Box 26505, Tempe, Arizona 85285.

Peace on Earth

Kwanzaa

ברכותנו ליל חנוכה
Happy Chanukah

Muchas felicidades en estas fiestas

May the Season Be Merry and Gay

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Solstice Greetings

Dear Readers: Receiving mail from you is one of the most enjoyable and challenging parts of producing this newsletter. This issue has quite a few. . .

Sept. 15, 1990

OFFENSIVE LEFTIE POLITICS

Thanks for the copies of Chain of Life. While I find parts of it to be rather offensive leftie politics, I was intrigued by some of the material. I'm enclosing a check for a subscription.

A reader from Northern California

August 28, 1990

RESENTMENT OVER BEING ADOPTED

I sent off for a sample issue of your newsletter earlier this year. January to be exact. When I received it in the mail, I barely glanced at it. Why did it take me so long to read a newsletter on adoption? Procrastination, fear, resentment and I may just see something I can identify with.

Thank you! for starting the Chain of Life newsletter. Issue 4 was very interesting. The article on Amy and Cindy's workshop at the A.A.C. was definitely an eye opener for me. I was able to identify with the feeling of not being connected to the adoptive family, feeling "displaced," and the blank stares you get when you tell someone you are adopted. Until I read this article, I didn't realize that my being adopted has affected me a great deal over the past thirty-four years.

There is a lot of resentment in me because of the way I was raised. And due to the fact that I was lied to for twenty years about my background. I do feel fortunate that I did get the opportunity to meet my biological father. So I do know some of the facts of why I was adopted. I don't think I want to know the rest.

It really annoys me when people say -- so, you were a wanted child. To some extent, yes. But that doesn't mean I felt or received the love and attention every child deserves. Just because two people have the money and the profile that's needed doesn't mean anything, except that they can buy a human being.

Enclosed is a check for \$15. for my subscription. I see this as a step in the right direction for me. Maybe I'm getting closer to dealing with what really matters. Myself.

Thanks for listening.

Definitely for Open Records,

Phyllis Linton
Texas

September 3, 1990

ADOPTION NOT A FEMINIST ISSUE?

Thank you, as always, for sending the newsletter. It is getting better all the time, I think. You have a wide coverage, along with giving space to the people you are especially interested in. This takes some doing. I have just stated in Mary Anne Cohen's newsletter [Origins] that adoption is not a feminist issue. Perhaps it is not a lesbian issue either, though it is a subject of controversy there, I am told.

I appreciate your mentioning that I have the Australian reports, as so far the request has been small. It cost me over \$100 to get them from Australia, and though I did not want to make money on getting them around, I don't want

to be stuck with them. And they do blow a fresh breath of common sense through us all.

I certainly like the fact that you give addresses and all that when you refer to people. Most newsletters don't bother, it is all so anonymous.

Best wishes,

Jean [Paton]
Colorado

Note: The Australian report Jean mentions is the same report that Mary Iwanek suggests (see p. 6) in the fight for legislative reform. Titled "Accessing Adoption Information," it is available for \$6. from Jean Paton, Orphan Voyage, 2141 Road 2300, Cedaredge, CO 81413. (Checks to Orphan Voyage.) It is over one hundred pages long and consists of two reports: one about the adoption laws in New South Wales, Australia; the other by Mary Iwanek about the history of adoption and sealed records, and the New Zealand law that has been giving identifying information to adoptees and birthparents since 1986. This information is valuable to anyone interested in adoption or adoption reform.

I asked Jean what she meant by "adoption is not a feminist issue" and received the following explanation. . .

Sept. 14, 1990

THE ISSUE OF ADOPTION IS LEFT IN THE AIR

Yes, adoption is an issue of interest to lesbians, gays and also to birthparents, the question is how it is stated. What keeps coming in to me is that feminists say women have a right to decide what to do with the fruit of their body, either keep, abort or adopt. And then they pause, and the issue of adoption is left in the air. I think that is what I meant, it is an issue which feminists do not resolve, complete, or solve, whatever. This is widespread; even in little Delta County the pro-choice group "supports all choices for women with the view that the choice should be made by the people involved, not by the government." And this same pro-choice group has their name on one of the Adopt a Highway signs, pick up litter.

I have never found satisfaction in emphasis on "rights," even though I do believe in rights. I think an adopted person has a right to the records of his birth and adoption, simply because we all do, that is part of social living. The adopted person is utterly innocent as to his birth and separation. In this he is distinguished from other parties to an adoption. This has to be remembered when we discuss rights. Also a couple of quotes from Simone Weil, "The idea of rights is at the very center of social conflict and makes every nuance of charity impossible." and "Rights have no direct connection with love."

My own activities locally may bear mentioning. I have visited the head of the Woman's Clinic (abortion possible) in Grand Junction. I have tried with less success to talk with the Pregnancy Resource Center in Delta (pro-life). I have written letters to the editor on the subject of a child allowed to die while her parents prayed for a cure, and refused medical attention. I keep at all these facets of the problems that beset children, which may account for some of my attitudes. I think children need and want genetic families. I think adopted people should not have to wait until they are 18 or 21 to have real knowledge of whom they came from. Everything I say can be connected with these convictions. I am aware of current lesbian court action in California as to what constitutes a lesbian family. I think our culture is much confused about what children need. When I worked with them, so many years ago, forty or more, I always gave them such pieces of their families as I could find. Children have always been a limitation on the freedom of their parents, male or female; in my case, childless in one sense, but in another sense not at all, with far too many. But without children our freedom is not much of a blessing. Freedom without love, rights without love, I think that this is sometimes what I see about me, and I feel some distress about it all.

Jean

ADOPTION WOULD EXIST IN PERFECT SOCIETY

I am a radical lesbian feminist social worker working in the field of adoption. I have read several issues of "Chain of Life" with interest as few publications have the courage to identify as feminist, much less print lesbian content. I must, however, respond to several articles in Issue 9 (Sept./Oct. '90) that seem to exemplify the narrow focus and generalizations that have been the theme through other issues as well.

Upon entering the field of adoption, I too was dismayed by the class issues surrounding adoption. I asked myself why I was not working to help women to afford to parent their children. I came to realize that both short-term and long-term goals must be accomplished to make our society one where every parent feels she has the ability to provide for her children. The short term services are bandaids, the real problems can only be solved by major changes in the structure and attitudes of our society (which I work for through radical political activities in my "spare time").

While finances are certainly one of the most common reasons I am given by birthmothers choosing adoption, it is far from the only one. In my experience I have come in contact with women who have chosen adoption in spite of full emotional and financial security. To deny the experiences of these women is to discount their choices not to be parents. As a feminist who struggles daily for women's right to choose, I find this attitude as appalling as the lack of choices faced by the women whose articles appear in "Chain of Life." While no woman should be forced to place a child for adoption, it is also true that no woman should be forced to be a parent. The arguments put forth in "Chain of Life" sound very much like the old antifeminist standby "biology equals destiny." Being pregnant is not equal to wanting to be a parent.

I am also bothered by the generalizations that "Social workers identify more with the prospective parents...than with the pregnant women" ("The Forgotten Mother" by Millie Strom). This statement discounts my experience as a social worker and makes sweeping accusations of classism and ageism. Again, such generalizations are detrimental to positive feminist dialogue.

My experience has confirmed for me that even in a "perfect" society the need for adoption would still exist because freedom of choice means freedom to choose one's path in life, which may or may not include being a parent. All women's choices and experiences must be respected and learned from. There is much value in the sharing of negative experiences as a result of adoption. For this reason, I find value in "Chain of Life." However, the answer to negative experiences is not to eliminate a valid choice for women but to provide the option of adoption in a feminist, ethical way.

Once again, Reproductive Health Services (RHS) is leading the way for making all choices, parenthood, adoption, and abortion, accessible to all women. With the formation of Adoption Associates, an inhouse, licensed adoption agency, RHS has become a leader in providing ethical, woman centered adoption services in addition to their outstanding work for reproductive freedom. Women who identify finances as the only reason they are choosing adoption are supported in finding other alternatives. Many continue with an adoption plan in spite of finding resources for their financial needs. Increased access to quality prenatal care, women's health issues and support services for women and children are also high on the agenda at RHS.

Anne Mi Ok Bruining's statement ("Reflections on the Adoption and New Birth Technologies Conference, Sept./Oct. 1990") that "... adoption itself is child abuse, neglect and misogyny. . ." with the implication that adoption should be abolished is a narrow view that discounts the quality services and positive experiences that are as much a part of adoption as the negative. I also grieve for

the women who were told that they would forget their children and were not given the opportunity to grieve their loss but let us learn from the past. Eliminating choices and invalidating women's experiences that are different from our own are not part of a feminist analysis. Working to make all options, parenthood, adoption and abortion accessible and affordable for all women, is.

Sincerely,

Marcia N. Levin, MSW
7553 Ahern
St. Louis, MO 63130

Response from Millie Strom: The statement in question, "social workers identify more with the prospective parents than with the pregnant woman" was qualified in the article by two accounts: by the adoption expert team who authored *The Adoption Triangle* (1978) and by a filmmaker in the Vancouver area, who this year interviewed social workers for a documentary and said she felt that the attitude still exists today (I was as surprised as your reader Levin was). My sentence should have read, "Some social workers. . ." to avoid generalizations.

Does Levin's "adoption planning" with pregnant women include exposure to adoption-reform literature? exposure to statistics of the over-representation of adoptees in therapy, group homes and crime? exposure to support group meetings such as CUB -- to hear firsthand from birth mothers? or exposure to adoptees such as my son who was sexually abused by his alcoholic adoptive father? I hardly think these women would elect adoption after this kind of exposure if they were not lacking "full emotional and financial security."

I agree with Bruining's statement, "adoption is child abuse and misogyny." However, I have learned that to "educate" people on adoption issues is not through radical statements that attack an institution -- adoption -- which has been revered by the public and professionals for decades. Social workers and adoptive parents become particularly defensive.

But on the other hand, it was women like Anne Mi Ok Bruining, Carole Anderson (editor of the CUB Communicator), Phyllis Chesler, and Marsha Riben, who assertively and consistently challenged my beliefs on the issue of adoption. I applaud their courage.

Levin's reasoning that we should not discount women's choices is where the weakness lies. Feminist and psychologist Phyllis Chesler questions that line of reasoning in her analysis of the surrogate contract: "Are we entitled to control our bodies only by treating them as marketable commodities?"

Furthermore, Levin contradicts herself by saying we should not invalidate women's experiences that are different than our own. Yet, that is what she does by labeling some of the contributors to Chain of Life as "narrow views, classist, detrimental" etc.

Besides, a responsible professional would know better than to attack birth mothers and adoptees who are still grieving. An insightful professional would know it's a healthy expression of years and years of denial, loss, anger and unresolved grief. Levin, no doubt, has triggered some of my anger, but what is her issue that she responds so terribly defensively?

Reproductive rights divide women. This is precisely what is intended, because we are weakened by it. What are we doing about our differences? Trashing each other in "letters to the editors"?

Adoption does not solve a woman's unplanned pregnancy. Nor does it solve infertility, but rather turns children into commodities. There is no such thing as adoption in a feminist, ethical way. I hope in time, through exposure to birth mothers and adoptees in publications like Chain of Life, that Levin will come to see the contradiction of terms. ▲

Response from Anne Mi Ok Bruining: I wish to respond to Ms. Levin's letter in which she responds to both Ms. Strom's and my articles. It seems that Ms. Levin has taken one particular statement in my article out of context, inaccurately reflecting my perspective on adoption.

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Ms. Levin believes that I am against adoption. To be against all adoption, I agree, is a narrow view. Historically, adoption has been a social system that has failed to address the emotional, racial and class issues of birthmothers and the children who are adopted. I am pleased that Ms. Levin is committed to working at an adoption agency which is attempting to address feminist issues. I am not against adoption, but am working toward abolishing the misogynist attitudes of the women (and men) who consider adoption with the belief that parenthood is an entitlement and a right, particularly when these women (and men) don't have any trouble taking these children away from birthmothers.

I do believe that adoption is neglect and child abuse when children's rights are being denied through sealed records, closed adoption and anonymous donor insemination. Adoption can be an emotionally and socially humanistic decision if and when the birthmother's and adopted child's legal and emotional rights are the priority of all social workers, adoptive parents and the adoption industry.

Sincerely,

**Anne Mi Ok Bruining
MSW Student**

Response from Janine Baer: I appreciated receiving the letter from Marcia Levin, though I think she misunderstood some of our views. Sometimes there is no perfect answer for a family and people must choose among the least harmful. I don't think any adoption activists think women who really do not want to parent should be forced to. This would be a disaster -- most of all, for the child.

There is, however, a strong voice in the adoption reform movement to replace adoption, when it is the last and best resort, with some form of Permanent Guardianship. While adoption involves permanent severing of legal ties between parents and child, permanent guardianship allows the birthparents to keep a legal tie to their child; adoptive parents become permanent guardians. This could help enforce openness in open adoptions, and could avoid the pain of sealed records and closed adoption. In speaking of ideal societies, this is a concept that concerned people should explore further. I first heard of permanent guardianship from the publicized adoption of a Navajo girl in 1988. Native tribes have special laws that allow them to protest an adoption; the so-called "Baby K" case ended in a decision for permanent guardianship for the couple who wanted to adopt her. If adoption were generally replaced by guardianship, perhaps we could then abandon the word "adoption" to those who have perverted it with "adopt-a-highway" or "adopt-a-pet" slogans, saving guardianship for relationships between people.

I am truly pleased that Ms. Levin's adoption agency finds alternatives to adoption for women whose primary obstacle to keeping their child is financial. All agencies should do this; it's only humane. However, advocates for pregnant women's choices may not understand the problems created for adoptees by closed records. While I realize that we can't all take on all of society's problems in our limited "spare time" (and do the laundry too), closed records should be of concern to compassionate adoption workers. Chain of Life's issue 9 mentioned a campaign for open records taking place in Missouri. I hope Marcia and her colleagues will obtain information on how they can help this effort by writing to: Susan Foglesong, P.O. Box 18142, Raytown, MO 64133.▲

August 22, 1990

QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA OPENS RECORDS

I would first like to congratulate you on the excellent newsletters you provide to your members. I find them very informative and have learned a lot.

I would like to take this opportunity to advise you of the progress made in adult adoption law reform in the state of Queensland, Australia. They passed amendments to their Adoption of Children Act which will come into force on 1st September 1990 and 1st March 1991. I am enclosing a copy for your information.

The Government of Queensland has followed all the recommendations made in the report published by the Government of New South Wales. They are the first Government in the world to accept the right for adult adopted persons (18 years), birthparents and other family members to have access to adoption information without compulsory counselling, mediation or veto provisions. They do give people the opportunity to place a wish for no contact on a register which has to give an explanation.

I understand that the Government of California is currently considering legislation. This information might therefore be useful in your campaign. I also suggest that a copy of the report might be helpful if you have one. [I have one and it has been very helpful. See Jean Paton's letter, page 4, for ordering information -- JB.]

I personally feel very thrilled about the legislation as it is all one could hope for and is something I have hoped and worked for over many years. I hope the Government of New South Wales will follow the same path later this year.

Yours Sincerely,

**Mary Iwanek
Department of Sociology and Social Work
Victoria University of Wellington
P.O. Box 600, Wellington, New Zealand**

P.S. I noticed in your newsletter [Issue 6] the experience of a person who came to New Zealand and used "Jigsaw" as a contact. There is no reason whatsoever to pay for a mediator. The Department of Social Welfare's Adult Adoption Information Services provides this service free of charge, as do many independent counsellors and support group members.

October 1, 1990

**LESBIANS OF COLOR
LOSE CUSTODY MORE OFTEN**

I've read issues 4 through 9 of your newsletter with great interest, and I'd like to thank you and congratulate you for your excellent effort. Lambda is publishing a small booklet on the legal issues of adoption by lesbians and gay men, and I had asked a friend, Mi Ok Bruining, for some information. She showed me your publication.

Also, I lost custody of my son to his father and his wife when my son was two years old. I've spoken and written about this issue, which I think affects lesbians of color to a greater extent when we come out, since more of us seem to have children, and a lot of us were quite young when we had to confront the "system." After reading some of these articles, I understand much more clearly why I identified so strongly with birth mothers and adoptees -- it's a formidable social services and legal system colluding to devalue "less desirable mothers."

We'd like to subscribe, so I've enclosed a \$15. check for Lambda. My best wishes for your continued publication of Chain of Life.

Sincerely,

**Mariana Romo-Carmona
Coordinator of Public Education
Lambda Legal Defense & Education Fund, Inc.
666 Broadway, New York, NY 10012**

("Through test-case litigation and public education, Lambda works nationally to defend and extend the rights of lesbians and gay men. Lambda is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization founded in 1973.") ▲