

CHAIN OF LIFE

A FEMINIST ADOPTION REFORM AND CHILD WELFARE NEWSLETTER

EDITOR: JANINE BAER

Issue 11 • January/February 1991 ▲ P.O. Box 8081 • Berkeley, CA 94707



Raising Second Generation Adoptees

by Penny Callan Partridge

How has being an adoptee affected what I am like as an adoptive parent? When I've been asked this before, I've simply answered off the top of my head. Now that I've been asked it by the editor of this newsletter, I will try to come up with an answer the question deserves.

I know that being adopted has made me positive that adoptive parenting is real parenting. For better or worse, I have both of my adoptive parents in me. You couldn't remove their contributions to who I am any more than you could remove my genetic heritage. So I know I have an IMPORTANT ENOUGH place in my children's lives, even though they do each have another set of parents who are important too. My absolute sureness about this is, in fact, a direct result of a successful search for my birthparents. What I've gotten from my adoptive parents is much easier to pick out after learning how I am like, and unlike, each of my birthparents. I know it is in my children's best interests to be able to appreciate what each of their parents has given them.

being adopted myself has made me more relaxed as an adoptive parent

Then there is the issue of openness versus the withholding or concealing of information. Having lived with a fair amount of mystery, I do have a tendency to be extremely open with my children. The adoption of my daughter, now twenty, was a stepparent adoption. Her first mother's suicide when Abby was a baby is sad and "heavy" enough without the additional drama and tension that surrounds a secret (anxiously held and then anxiously revealed). My son Nathan is four and sees his birthmother two or three times a year. Ironically, she is currently concealing from her older son that he is part African-American, which Nathan is also. I don't know how this is going to get worked out among all of us. For myself, however, I seem to have three guiding principles concerning openness: I don't want to lie to my children. I want to try to match what I tell them to their level of understanding. And I want to ensure space for THEIR feelings about their own histories.

Of course, the fact that my children and I share being adopted gives us one way of identifying with each other. I wouldn't have this in common with my biological children if I had any. And this sameness about us -- or the familiarity I have with the adoptee experience -- is probably what makes me less concerned than some adoptive parents about a supposed proneness among adopted people to getting into trouble. I do not worry about my children being permanently damaged by the adoptee experience per se, because everyone I know is challenged by some difficult aspect of their own reality. I expect my children to meet whatever challenges their lives bring them, and I will try to help them do so. I think a lot of "the adoptee syndrome" comes from adoptive parents who don't want to acknowledge and respect the particular challenges of the adoptee's situation. This may come from their not wanting their children to face ANY hardships, but it may also come from

leftover sadness or resentment about their infertility. They try to avoid anything that would make their adoptive family feel different from a biological family, and that is what can make the adoptee want to burn down the house.

Conclusions? I see that what I have written is largely in a reassuring vein. I feel self-conscious about this, because adoptees have collectively started to gag on being the reassurers of adoptive parents (which can mean denying our own needs, our own reality).

However, I do believe that being adopted myself has made me more relaxed as an adoptive parent, and I wish I could somehow pass that on to other adoptive parents, for their children's sake as well as for theirs. So let me drop "reassuring" and hope that my thoughts here ENCOURAGE adoptive parents. If they can have the courage to appreciate the differentness of the adoptee's experience, I would hope they would then just relax and enjoy their children as individuals. I know that is what their children would like. ▲

-- Penny Callan Partridge, MSW, is a founder of Adoption Forum in Philadelphia. She is now living at Stanford and writing a book, BEING ADOPTED.

Lesbians, Gays and Parenting: A Contemporary Jewish View

by Rabbi Yoel Kahn

This article was a sermon, "All Shall Be Blessed By the Harvest: Children, Parenting and Our Community," delivered by Rabbi Yoel H. Kahn on Rosh HaShanah 5751--September 19, 1990. It is included here by permission of the author. Requests to republish this article, or for more information, should be addressed to Congregation Sha'ar Zahav, 220 Danvers St., San Francisco, CA 94114.

On the steps of a small sanctuary in the town of Shilo in the Land of Israel, three thousand years ago, stands a woman named Hannah, weeping bitterly. So overcome by emotion, she sways wildly from side to side and, unconsciously, her lips silently move as she utters an inner prayer. The priest on duty misunderstands her anguish and tries to chase her away: "How long will you be drunk, woman!" he says. "Throw your wine away!" She looks up at him through her tears and says: "I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have had no wine -- I have come to pour out my soul before God." She returns to her prayer, asking God to help her have a child.

As a modern, liberated Jew I rebel against this identification of self-fulfillment exclusively with parenthood

On these holy days, we gather to express our deepest yearnings and our innermost prayers. More and more, children are in our prayers -- our own children, those we dream of as Hannah did, the children of our friends and families. Tonight, I would like to share with you some of my reflections, yearnings, and prayers about parenting and children in our community.

Hearing Hannah's story, which will be chanted tomorrow morning as the Rosh Hashanah Haphtorah, I feel her pain. Hannah reminds me of all the women from her day until our own whose deepest needs have been misun-

... continued on next page

The copyrights to all work in Chain of Life are retained by their authors. Unsigned articles or letters are copyright Chain of Life. Please write for permission to re-publish any part of Chain of Life.



derstood by the men who are the gatekeepers of the Temple. But Hannah as a model of Jewish womanhood and personhood is troubling for me. For she is not primarily known as the woman who stood up to the men who controlled the door to the Temple, nor is she honored as the author of poems and prayers. Hannah is remembered as the woman whose life had no meaning because she could not bear a child. As a modern, liberated Jew I rebel against this identification of self-fulfillment exclusively with parenthood. Why, Hannah, must you have a child? Hannah, get an MBA!

As gay and lesbian people, our lives, our loves, our relationships and families, have been declared second class, empty or meaningless over and over again, if not simply ignored, because we "can't have children." The fact that homosexual sex is not procreative is intimately intertwined with many people's homophobia. As Anita Bryant once succinctly explained: "They can't reproduce, so they must recruit." And it is not only societal prejudice we face; we have been ostracized and rejected by other Jews because of the presumption that we do not have children. Many of us have struggled to make peace between the apparently irreconcilable equations "to be Jew, I must have children," and "as a lesbian or gay person, I cannot." Neither one of these axioms is as simplistically true as I -- and, I suspect, most of you -- once thought them to be.

we need to affirm and support families with children without buying into an oppressive system

In this, our synagogue's bar/bat mitzvah year, we have begun planning b'nai mitzvah ceremonies for the children of the first pioneering, openly lesbian families. Our school continues to grow, the only one in the world whose charter is to reach out to the children of gay and lesbian families. More and more of us who thought that becoming a parent was forever closed to us have now begun to consider what might be possible. But we must be careful, lest we internalize the messages and methods of the wider society around us. Our affirmation that gay and lesbian people can and should be parents cannot be interpreted as our acceptance of the proposition that only families with children are "real" families. The presence of children in our homes need not mean that we will become gay and lesbian copies of the dysfunctional or patriarchal family systems in which we may have grown up and are surrounded by today. While it is surely necessary to move away from a self-definition which pitted us against so-called "breeders," we need to affirm and support families with children without buying into an oppressive system which only considers those who are "married with children" to be legitimate Jews or mature adults.

... I am also conscious that listening to my words is no doubt painful to many of you, because you have lost a child or are at a place where you know that you will never be a parent or grandparent. Even as options are increasing for many, for others age or disability, HIV, Epstein Barr or DES precludes your consideration of becoming a biological parent, or may have lowered your health or life expectancy such that raising a child is not a responsible choice. I hear your pain and your loss; our compassion goes out to you.

Now, although I have initially framed my topic as a clash between the virtually unanimous teaching of the Jewish tradition and the reality of our lives as lesbian and gay people, it is in fact a more basic conflict between Jewish tradition and the organizing premises of our modern world. Because unless we are going to turn back the clock to a time when a woman's primary social role was wombkeeper, we cannot create a hierarchy of values in which giving birth is at the top. Even those who do not self-identify as feminists take for granted that women and men should have control over their own bodies and destinies; we believe that for many people, for a great variety of reasons, not having children is a valid, wise and responsible choice -- a choice hardly acknowledged in the Jewish tradition. For large numbers of us, having children has simply never been a realistic option.

For Judaism, there can be no underestimating the importance placed on the responsibility to have and raise

children. Many commentators consider the *mitzvah* "to be fruitful and multiply" the first, and therefore the most important, instruction in the Torah. This responsibility is codified in the *legal* tradition in which a *man* is required to have two children -- ideally a boy and a girl, thereby imitating God's action at creation. This legal requirement only hints at the cultural and social significance placed upon procreation and family in the Jewish tradition. We hear echoes of it everywhere we turn, from the biblical blessing: "May you live to see children of your children and peace upon Israel!" to the Yiddish, "*du zolst habn naches fun kinder* -- You should have *naches** from your children!"

Having children is seen as an act of faith in the future, a messianic hope -- even in the face of death. The urgency of continuing the covenant only increases when its future appears endangered. On an individual level, children are seen as the key to our own immortality, carrying some part of ourselves on into the future. Those who have no children supposedly have no one to say Kaddish [prayer for the dead] for them--and symbolically and actually, no one to carry on their own name or the Jewish future.

Since the Holocaust, some Jewish leaders have urged Jews to have lots of children in order to help replenish the diminished ranks of our people. In this way, the traditional obligation has taken on new meaning and importance for some, and our apparent disregard of the traditional expectation is that much more insulting. Some rabbis refuse to officiate at a marriage for a couple who state that they do not intend to have children; you can imagine these rabbis' response to openly gay people.

It is against this background that we have struggled to claim our rightful place as Jews. Let me make my apparent dissent from historical Jewish teaching perfectly clear: people who are not themselves parents are not in any manner inferior Jews. Many people who were not good candidates to be parents have had children because they felt that this was "the right thing to do." Each of us surely knows unhappy parents and children who grew up in a household lacking a minimum of emotional or spiritual warmth. But not only this; I support people's right to make a conscious, deliberate decision not to have children.

But I must tell you, if the essence of our modern freedom is choice, and I therefore reject a values-system which precludes choice, the essence of Judaism is covenant, and covenant means being in relationship, and every relationship demands responsibility. The importance of children and ensuring the future is too central and too fundamental a part of the Jewish tradition to turn away from it so quickly. The *mitzvot* of bringing new life into the world, of raising children and providing for the future are, I believe, binding upon us as Jews no less than upon our ancestors. What must change -- and in this way we are not deviants from the wider Jewish community, but teachers and role-models for our generation -- is our understanding of the ways in which this *mitzvah* can be fulfilled. What we have created out of necessity and in the face of adversity will become, I believe, a model for the entire community. The *mitzvot* of parenting and raising children, of teaching the next generation and ensuring the future of the covenant are *mitzvot* for *all* Jews -- including lesbian and gay Jews, those who are parents and those who are not, single or in relationship, young and old -- but we cannot legislate a single "correct" way to fulfill them; we need to be able to choose among many different paths to fulfillment of this fundamental Jewish obligation.

There are, then, two essential tasks: we need to name fully what we are doing now, recognizing that we are already fulfilling these *mitzvot* in new and creative expressions; and we have to break out of the narrow categories which have been offered us in order to expand the possibilities.

For example, who is a parent? There are biological parents -- essential for life. But parenting a child is a task and responsibility that extends far past the date of birth, a fact often overlooked by elements in our society whose interest in the health and future of children apparently concludes at the time of birth. One need not be a birth-parent to be a real parent -- and if we move away from the

* [may your children make you proud of them; *naches* doesn't translate easily -- JB]

limited categories of biology, we will see that a child can indeed have two Moms -- or three. Foster parents, godparents and honorary grandparents are essential roles in extended family and should be recognized as equally valid ways to fulfill the *mitzvah* of parenting.

Now not everyone can be a parent. But most of us are part of a family. In the gay and lesbian community, we have recovered and renewed an ancient institution which the mobility and fragility of modern society has largely lost -- the extended family. If family can be defined as the people "who take you in when no one else will," then our families are the strongest and most enduring ever known. From the earliest days of the [AIDS] epidemic it has been our families -- the non-biological, non-legally-recognized relationships and friendship groups, composed of roommates, former lovers and friends -- who took in the ones who are sick and sat by their bedsides, feeding and bathing and caring, when the rest of the world was still afraid to walk in the door -- and you have been there ever since. How dare anyone say that "queers can't have families"! We don't need to add children in order to establish the legitimacy of our families. But what we have learned, that caring and nurturing need not be a heroic task shouldered alone, ought to be a model for our families on how we raise our children. Every child needs trusting relationships with other adults, and your role can be the regular care provider, the godparent or aunt or uncle, or emergency relief. While we organize towards a time when parents are given time off to care for ill children, can't we share the responsibility among ourselves? The truth is that lots of us won't ever have children of our own -- so let us bless the lives of other children and enrich our own by becoming active, ongoing figures in their lives.

if the gay and lesbian educators and childcare workers were to disappear for a day, the entire system would grind to a halt.

Another route to the fulfillment of these *mitzvot* is as educators and healthcare and childcare workers and other providers of services to children. The Talmud teaches that a teacher is more important in a child's life than a parent, for the biological parent brings the child into the world and the teacher gives the child a future in the world. Our member Eric Rofes recently reminded me that if the gay and lesbian educators and childcare workers were to disappear for a day, the entire system would grind to a halt. Many of these people who devote themselves to nurturing and caring for the future generation are deeply closeted for their own safety and survival; we need to recognize them here for their contributions to the future as we support them in their struggle against the homophobia which requires so many of them to remain professionally in hiding...

If we are going to support the children around us, I think that we must also grieve for the children we don't have or were denied. While we have fought to affirm that having children is not a requirement for full Jewish citizenship, many of us would dearly love to have children. Being a parent is an immeasurable blessing. For most gay people until today, it never seemed possible unless we denied who we are. Having grown up with the expectation that we would be parents some day, coming out meant accepting the reality that we would not. I do not believe discussion of the magnitude of this loss for so many has ever been an open topic in the gay community. Parenting has never been easy for gay and lesbian people, and even today when technology and society have both made progress, it is still not easy. For some parents, coming out threatens to end access to the children they already have. For many people -- gay and not gay -- the absence of a committed partner to share the burdens precludes serious consideration. Just as options appear to be proliferating for many, for others of you these opportunities have arrived too late, as increasing age or eroding health mean that parenting is not a realistic goal. The loss, the disappointment, the pain are real and we need to allow ourselves to express them and hear them.

Further, I wonder about the possibility that, to some degree, we have internalized society's homophobia.

Cautioned against getting too close to children, many of us have been cut off by "family members" from the children of our extended family of origin. The continuing linkage of homosexuality with child abuse is part of the societal cover up of the truth that the great majority of sexual abusers are male, heterosexual and part of the immediate family. Is it not possible that part of our defense mechanisms is a social convention that gay men aren't supposed to like children? Is the discomfort some of us experience around children a result of not being used to having them around -- and thus a shameful consequence of the homophobia which pervades our civilization?

Now there are those among you who have no desire to be a parent, who don't especially enjoy young people's company, who do not include children in your lives, and are just fine with this state of affairs. Perhaps you have been sitting for the last fifteen minutes with your arms folded, convinced that this sermon has nothing to do with you.

But it does. The covenant is made with all of us and with each one of us. I do not insist that you change your social relationships or that you become a parent. But the Jewish tradition teaches -- and upon this I must insist -- that you care and act. Your caring is expressed, of course, through your support of the synagogue and its programs. Our Children's Chavurah would greatly benefit from the regular participation of adults -- especially men -- who are not parents. One child in our synagogue is looking for a Jewish big brother -- might that be you?

... [But] if we are to speak of the next generation, we've only discussed half our children. We have another set of children, ones who have grown up elsewhere, often feeling alone or cut off. They are no less important and equally in need of attention and nurturance. Right now, the next generation of gay and lesbian Jews is growing up. And some day, they are going to arrive at our door. We don't need to recruit -- creation's order sees that our numbers are naturally replenished. As I said from this pulpit at our anniversary service and repeat tonight, the next generation of gay and lesbian Jews are *our* children, they look to *us* for guidance and inspiration, and when they arrive we will be here to welcome them home. This is a *mitzvah* only we can fulfill.

In the Talmud, we read an oft-told story of an old Jew who is planting an olive tree in an orchard. A Roman soldier comes by and asks, "Why are you bothering to plant that tree? You will surely not live the many years it will take until it bears fruit." The Jewish elder looked up, pointed at the other trees in the orchard, and said, "My ancestors planted these trees that I might enjoy their fruit. I am planting this tree so that my grandchildren may enjoy its fruit." In our orchard, some of us will plant the trees; others of us will take the seedlings under our care. Some will water and feed the saplings, others will shape and guide their growth. Some will stand at the gates always watching over, others will visit at special seasons of the year. All who have tended this orchard -- whether we live to see the day when our trees come into flower or not -- shall be blessed by the harvest. ▲

▲ ANNOUNCEMENTS ▲

▲ **American Adoption Congress**, which works for truth in adoption, will be holding its international conference near Disneyland from April 10 through 14, 1991. Seventy workshops will be offered, including one about adoption and feminism; one about gay and lesbian adoptive parents; and one about adoption, donor insemination, and lesbian-feminism (by the editor of this newsletter). For conference information, phone 714-434-7635, or write to AAC, 1000 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 9, Washington, DC 20036. 1-800-274-OPEN.

▲ For information on searching for family members, call 1-900-7SEARCH. Over 500 resources are listed. You will be charged \$2. per minute.

▲ **Bastards are Beautiful** -- so says the famous button distributed by Orphan Voyage over the years. There are a very few left. You can have one, or more, as long as they last, for one dollar each plus 25 cents for a stamp. Send to Orphan Voyage, Cedaredge, CO 81413.

▲ CHAIN LETTERS ▲

October 4, 1990

IS CHAIN OF LIFE PRO-LIFE?

Thanks for your letter . . . I logged onto WOMB which was interesting but I still haven't figured out the ins and outs of modems; it will take a while.

I would like to mention the monthly CUB meeting, 7:30 to 9:30 pm, Noe Valley Ministry, 1021 Sanchez, San Francisco. Anyone who wants current dates or further information may call (415) 824-2346.

Pat Hemphill
San Francisco ▲

P.S. Why are you called Chain of Life? It sounds very pro-life while your letter seems pro-choice.

JB's response: L'Chaim! (To Life! -- a Jewish toast.) I am for Life, as well as pro-choice regarding abortion. As a bumper sticker says, I am "Pro-Child and Pro-Choice." Here is the explanation, originally in issue 4, of the name "Chain of Life":

The name 'Chain of Life' was taken from a 1973 hippie travel book, Vagabonding in America. In his acknowledgments, author Ed Buryin thanked his parents and his children, by name, 'for linking me into the chain of life.'

When I read that line, not yet having found my birth family and having no children, I felt a sense of cosmic isolation and sadness. I was unlinked in the chain of life. This is the image I drew and pasted all over this newsletter sixteen years later -- the unattached link, the adoptee in closed records, stranger adoption. It is this isolation that Chain of Life addresses and seeks to end. ▲

October 12, 1990

MENDING BROKEN FAMILY TIES

I recently received my first copy of Chain of Life. I was especially engaged by your interest in multicultural views on adoption, as mentioned in issue #8 . . .

At 37, African American, and a birth parent, I have a strong interest in the plight of children displaced through adoption. Specifically my personal concern is in the continued development of a much needed healing process which will aid in the mending of broken family ties.

My own child, adopted 14 years ago, is now 17. My physical search for him has just begun. The injustice of the adoption system often tires my heart but my faith stays strong. I know I will find my son Johann.

With regard to things I have mentioned, please feel free to pass my name and number on for information or resources relating to support groups, organizations, individuals, etc. of similar interest. As part of my own self healing, I welcome opportunities to extend love, support, and comfort to other birth parents or workers in the struggle to redefine, reclaim, and rebuild family and extended family community.

Sereta Freeman
(415) 653-9357 ▲

▲ *The following letter was sent to California Assembly-member Tom Bates (Berkeley) in response to his vote against the bill that would have provided access to identifying information for triad members. The bill passed the state Assembly despite Mr. Bates' vote, but was voted down in a Senate subcommittee in August.*

October 8, 1990

Dear Mr. Bates,

Regarding AB 3907 which would have provided access to sealed adoption records, I wish you would reconsider your feelings regarding confidentiality of old adoption records.

People may have entered into the adoption process believing information would remain confidential, but that confidentiality was imposed by the social service practices, and not by the request of the persons directly affected by adoption. People enter into marriage believing it will last forever, but we all know the divorce statistics! It simply is not right nor fair to establish and maintain a legal relation-

ship between adoptive parents and adopted child that is based on deception and lies, and tries to erase birth parents. An adopted child's birth certificate is falsified; adoptive parents are advised to pretend this child is just like one of their own. Neither is true. Every adopted child has birth parents. An adopted child is not the same as one's own birth child.

Birth mothers and fathers are the only parents in our society whose parental rights are totally terminated, for no crime, to the extent of not being allowed to know who is rearing their children, if they are all right, and how they are developing. This is cruel and unusual punishment. Even people who are in prison for murdering their spouse often retain custody and visitation rights to their children!

Birth parents are not criminals; they are just people who are unprepared to parent at a certain time in their lives. Why should they be punished forever by being denied knowledge of the welfare of their relinquished children? Why should adopted children be denied access to their personal heritage?

As an adoptive parent, I cannot imagine my adopted daughter not knowing who her birth relatives are: that would be to deny a significant core of her being. Dara looks very like her birth mom, Tricia. We know her, we visit her, we communicate with her. Dara is not confused about who this person is; she is her relative, her birth mother. Many children live in step-families; they are not expected to deny one of their natural parents, nor to forgo contact with that parent. Children quickly learn who are the various relatives in their family, including step-parents, half-siblings, cousins, grandparents; surely they can comprehend a birth parent.

As a birth mother myself, I know the intense grief of not knowing anything about my son for 17 long years. Finding him six years ago laid many ghosts to rest and relieved my mind. We are both respectful of each other's privacy and separate lives now.

People who search and find each other do so for deep emotional reasons, and they do not want to disrupt someone else's life. It rarely happens, and should not be used as an excuse for denying re-connection to adoptees and their birth families.

Please reconsider your stance on a bill to open adoption records. I note your support for a bill granting financial support to relatives caring for crack babies. This allows disrupted families to stay somewhat more intact. Don't you see that adopted children come from disrupted families, and that birth parents are relatives, too?

Thank you,

Colleen Houlihan
Berkeley, California ▲

October the 22nd of 1990

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE HARDER TO OBTAIN THAN GAY RIGHTS IN QUEBEC

I have received your newsletter, Issue 8. I thank you very much . . . I ask you to excuse my bad English and this untyped draft. I am very short in my time. Sometimes, I would like very much for days to have more than 24 hours. I have so much work to do to obtain adoption records disclosure. I hope we will be given positive answers to our requests by next December (in Québec)....Very important newspapers of Québec, TV networks, and things like these were talking about big scandals which occurred in Québec about strange adoption practices, past and present. Some people decided to use this method, even though this is not a very fair one; when we have to deal with criminals, kindness does not always succeed.

We had been trying kind methods for more than seven years, and it did not work at all. So we have been changing our methods during the past year, since the last general electoral campaign in Québec. As I told Madam Judith Kizell-Brans from Parent Finders, Ottawa, the "baseball bat method" has to be used at the same time with juridical, sociological, psychological and humane arguments when it is necessary to convince mules (I mean politicians). Here in Québec, the whole public opinion is on our side; adoptive parents (the normal ones) are with us. Why does the law

. . . continued on next page

stay the same? Because many birth fathers are not interested in having big positions put in danger because they did not take responsibility towards birth children and their mothers many years ago.

This fight for adoption disclosure is rougher and tougher than gay people's fight has been. Why? I have been asking the question many, many times. I think I found the answer. Society and families accept the "phenomenon" of homosexuality because people do not feel touched personally by the question when they are heterosexual. But, for conditions created for birth mothers and their children, everybody in society knows they are partly responsible for this unacceptable situation. A father has not chosen to have a gay child, but he has sometimes chosen to abandon a birth child and mother.

I know what I am talking about when I say that adoption records disclosure is much rougher than gay people's rights recognition has been because I am a gay woman who has been very involved in this battle. I was 21 years old in 1974, the year when a group of gay friends had enough of seeing suicides in the gay community because of bigoted law and blind society that refused to see during the day what they did during the night in dark corners. Finally, the law changed in Québec in 1977. It was time for Government.

I have noted that there are many gay people who search for parents or children in our group for adoption record disclosure. I remember a certain year when we were three gay people out of six persons in a lobbying group here in Québec. The reason why may be that gay people are very involved in human rights fights. We are used to it by the circumstances of our lives. We have known so much the feeling to be unable to express and to live our love openly that we can understand how birth mothers feel, these poor ladies who had not been allowed to love because church and society decided the moment they had chosen was not the right one. I have never accepted the verdict of society, because the birth mothers and children have been judged, when they should not have been. . . . Why should birth mothers not be given the right to know about their child when parents who abuse their children are given them back after a few appointments with a psychologist or someone like this? This is a question I asked our deputies last January and September at Québec Parliament. Nobody was able to answer. I saw Ministers cry because they merely did not believe we were still living under the govern of the stupid act they had voted for. They can cry as long as they can and want, they will not cry as much as we did and still do. Personally, I am a very bad christian. The rule of "eye for eye" is very appropriate with people who demonstrate bad will towards us. Presently, I think that Government is realizing we become stronger day after day. . . .

I will send you copies of our two reports by Parliamentary Committee, if I can remember where I put them. I have many boxes in my office. These reports are inside one of these. But which one?

Thank you very much, dear Madam, for your patient reading. I know I am not easy to understand into English. I am French and I have never been living in an English milieu. . . .

**An Adoptee and Activist
Charlesbourg, Québec ▲**

November 26, 1990

NEGATIVE OLD JOBS SEPARATING FAMILIES

... As always, I enjoyed the latest issue -- lots to think about. I would like to comment on two articles -- Jean Paton's comments on adoption as a feminist issue, and Marcia Levin's letter and the comments this article engendered.

I agree with Jean that adoption has not been a feminist issue until now, but I think I disagree in saying that it should be. Those hurt most grievously by adoption are mostly women -- birthmothers, and the many female adoptees who search in a much larger proportion than male adoptees. As to adoption being a lesbian issue, I feel a deep kinship as a birthmother with lesbians, because we both

belong to groups that are outcast, misrepresented, hated, and feared by patriarchal society. Among feminists, I have found lesbians generally to be more sympathetic to adoption reform than straight feminists, although there are exceptions, like Ms. Levin.

Middle class and upper class feminists tend to see through the eyes of adoptive parents, and to disregard the life experiences of birthmothers and "ungrateful" adoptees. They may also denigrate the whole concept of biological motherhood, if their concept of the ideal feminist is the woman most like the stereotypical man, who puts money and career ahead of family values. Birthmothers have been ignored or patronized by much of the feminist establishment for many years, but that should change.

Feminists who say they are for "Choice" must realize that many pregnant women want neither abortion nor adoption, but want the resources to raise their own child. In an ideal world, there would be very little adoption, possibly none, because adoption almost always rises out of conditions that exploit women. I cannot imagine a healthy woman -- emotionally and spiritually healthy -- choosing to carry to term a child she did not want to raise, or even know. In an ideal world, unwanted children would not be conceived.

In our real, imperfect world, the reasons that most birthmothers surrendered in years past, and surrender today, can be traced directly to patriarchal oppression of women, not to free choice. Most women who carry a baby to term love and want that child, but are convinced by patriarchal values that their very love is a reason to surrender. If single mothers were given the respect and resources that they need and deserve, very few would surrender. Most of us surrendered because we were made to compare ourselves with the mythical perfect adoptive couple, not only financially, but in every other way -- and they always came out first in every way but love, which we were assured did not matter. I agree fully with the comments of Millie Strom and Anne Mi Ok Bruining, that adoption is not the solution to infertility or to unplanned pregnancy.

Nobody I know in adoption reform, including myself, would want to force a mother to keep a truly unwanted child. In these very rare cases, adoption has a place, as well as in cases of abuse or neglect. However, I feel that adoption does permanent harm to the child and to the mother, and should be used only as a last resort. Choices have consequences. The choice of adoption moves a child from one "at risk" situation to another, possibly more permanent, situation of risk. It solves nothing.

Our "perfect world" would have no need for adoption agencies, and social workers would be so busy providing services to keep extended families together, and to provide contraceptives to prevent unwanted pregnancies, that they would not even miss their negative old jobs separating families.

I hope Ms. Levin takes a hard look at what she believes, and what she is doing. Adoption destroys families. It is a permanent solution to what is often a temporary problem, and women and children are the victims.

**Mary Anne Cohen
New Jersey ▲**

Comments from JB: I like this discussion. I personally don't know whether the generalization about lesbian versus heterosexual feminists is true. And I think male adoptees may be equally affected by adoption, but they may repress their feelings more than women and so search less often, or later in life. Let's keep exploring this. ▲

November 16, 1990

WHY I'M SO INTERESTED IN CHAIN OF LIFE

I wanted to write and tell you a little about myself and why I am so interested in "Chain of Life."

I am the adoptive mother of a pre-school age son, and the adoptive sister of an adult brother, who came to our family when he was 6 and I was 7 years old in an open adoption. I am married to a feminist man who is in every way a co-parent for our son. I am also a social worker, the director of a Women's Center that primarily serves battered women and children and is a rape crisis center. I am active in the movements for civil rights, including gay rights, and adoption reform.

... continued on next page

The WOMB BBS

An Adoption- and Search-Related
Computer Bulletin Board System

A Member of the
"FidoNet" BBS Network

Featuring:
the "Adoptees' Echo", etc. (718)
998-6303

3/12/2400 baud - 8/N/1 24 hours/day - 7 days/week



... continued from previous page

My views of adoption mirror very closely those expressed in Marcia N. Levin's letter in your last issue. I believe that open adoption is the way to go in nearly all situations.

My son's birth mother and I are close friends. We shared her pregnancy and our son's birth. She sees him whenever she wants, and her parents are typical grandparents, showering him with love and attention, just as his other two sets of grandparents do. He will always know that he is loved by all the people who comprise his family. I share "Chain of Life" with her, and she and I are discussing ways to get the message out to other people how well this can work for some people. She has herself become an activist for open adoption, and has shared with many of her college-age friends what a positive experience this has been for her. However, I realize that my speaking for her is suspect, and she has indicated she will likely subscribe and write to tell you this herself. If we can ever find the time, we may write something up on our experience and send it in to you. If you are ever contacted by anyone who you feel may gain helpful information from what he have worked out together, please feel free to give them my address.

Although I don't agree with all of the viewpoints expressed in "Chain," that's what makes it interesting. Diversity of opinion is a positive. I'm just glad that the forum for exchanging views and information is there.

Sincerely,

Jull Claussen
Carbondale, Illinois ▲

November 13, 1990

IMPROVEMENTS IN HAWAII DISCLOSURE LAW

I received the copy of Chain of Life. I have read some of Claudia's and have enjoyed them. . .

It is true that we will have limited access (to adoption records) in Hawaii after the first of the year. But it is not to be considered as "open." We are still a closed state.

This year Adoption Circle of Hawaii, along with the support of AAC and the local CUB [Concerned United Birthparents] branch, presented legislation that would help adoptees, birth parents and adoptive parents obtain the original birth certificate or amended one. The bill passed and will go into effect on January 1, 1991. I am enclosing a copy of the new law.

In a nutshell -- if it is possible -- the new law allows all triad members the right to request a copy of their original birth certificate. The adoptee must be 18; or the birth parent must wait until their child is 18; or the adoptive parent of a minor -- all can request the certificate that fits their need. Upon the receipt of the request to the Family Court, the Court will send a request to the last known address of the person being sought. If the letter is not returned with "no forwarding address," then after 60 days the document will be given to the person requesting it.

If the letter comes back with no forwarding address, then the court has 120 days to search for and find the person. If after 120 days the person cannot be found, then the document will be released. If the letter comes back with a request from the person being sought to maintain their confidentiality, then the records remain sealed for another 10 years. After 10 years, another request may be made. If the same answer comes back to maintain confidentiality, then they are sealed for life.

It is really an intermediary system, like the California waiver, but it only needs to be signed by two people. [In California, if all three sides of a triad make separate requests to the state, confidentiality will be waived.] They also have the part about getting it if they cannot locate the person. It really is not a perfect law. I personally foresee many problems, and I feel that many people will not receive the document. I have offered to do the search part for the court but I will continue to do my own search business. I feel that we will have more vetoes than we think and I think from the looks of things that the court is going to make it difficult. The forms necessary for the request are in the process of being formed. So far, they are very, very negative. Lots of legal jargon, very intimidating forms which stress your right to confidentiality. They make it look like it is more important to maintain your confidentiality than your right to the information. Adoption Circle has refused to agree to the forms in their present state. I have no idea what will happen in the next few weeks. Time will tell. I am telling people to hold off on their requests until something is resolved. . . .

I should tell you a little about myself. I am a birthmother who surrendered a daughter in 1964 in Illinois. I have found Donna and we have an ongoing relationship by phone and letters. . . I made contact through the agency. I am the CUB Branch coordinator of the Honolulu group. We have members on Oahu, Maui, and the Big Island. I am also an ISC [Independent Search Consultant] certified nationally for California, Hawaii, and Florida. I operate a search business -- Hawaiian Connection -- and have a registry for Hawaii. . . You may refer anyone to me and I will look over the info and tell them if I can help. . .

... Now, if I can ever help you -- please let me know. Hawaii was a hiding out place for many birthmothers who came from California to surrender. Perhaps some of your readers will be interested in contacting me for help.

Again, I will send you the final info on the new law. We are all waiting for some kind of final word. Let me hear from you some time, take care and. . .

Aloha,

Mary Gallano
Hawaiian Connection
P.O. Box 37838
Honolulu, Hawaii 96837

CHAIN

OF LIFE

for a 6-issue subscription
send \$10 to \$15 (sliding scale)

HELPING OFFSPRING PURSUE ETHICS

From newsletter #1 of H.O.P.E.

H.O.P.E. is an organization whose focus is on changing the system of "Closed adoptions" and "surrogate fatherhood," also known as Closed Donor Insemination or Artificial Insemination. We are not opposed to the practice. We are opposed to the deceptive way in which it's being utilized in the medical and social fields. Only those who have been involved in adoption and D.I. know of the pain and heartache associated with genealogical bewilderment. Let's work together!! A FEW OF US CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE!!!

- Read "Lethal Secrets" by Annette Baran and Reuben Pannor. Warner Books, 1989.
- H.O.P.E. is currently compiling information concerning case histories of those involved in our issues. The social changes we are pursuing are justified by your own personal experiences, your feelings, your hopes.
- From our most recent studies only 3% to 5% of all offspring know of their secret conception.
- Over 30,000 offspring were conceived through Donor Insemination last year.
- Watch for our next newsletter, January 1, 1991.

H.O.P.E. offers free counseling by mail or phone. If you have any questions or comments, do not hesitate to contact us.

H.O.P.E. • 888 LOGAN STREET #7F
DENVER, CO • 80203 • 303-839-8661