

CHAIN OF LIFE

A FEMINIST ADOPTION REFORM AND CHILD WELFARE NEWSLETTER

EDITOR: JANINE BAER

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Nice Woman

(c) 1988 by Barbara U. Dudrear

Someone says, We need a woman who is passive, pliable, dependent; someone who won't ask questions. Get Nice Woman.

She says, You can count on me.

Someone says, We're looking for a Nice Woman willing to donate her cerebral cortex so a Very Important Person can continue to live.

She says, Here, take mine.

Someone says, We're casting for the Wizard of Oz, the roles of nonthinking scarecrow. . . timid, full of fear lion. . . tinman disconnected from feelings. . . little girl who is lost. Put out a call for Nice Woman.

She says, I know the parts by heart.

Someone says, Burt and Loni want a healthy, white, baby boy. Run an ad for Nice Woman.

She says, Gosh, I hope I get the job.

Someone says, We need somebody blind to our abuse of the young and the old. A Nice Woman will do nicely.

She says, I don't see a thing.

Someone says, We need somebody to blame for things gone wrong. Find Nice Woman.

She says, You're right. I'm sure I'm wrong.

Someone says, We need somebody to work in the kitchen during the party. Look for Nice Woman.

She says, I really came to dance, but I'll wash dishes.

Someone says, It's just not fair that life is so unfair. Why pick on me to be infertile? It's just not fair that life is so unfair. I insist that life be fair. A healthy, white newborn will make up for this unfairness. Find Nice Woman. Tell her this is her chance to be important, that it's a noble deed she does.

She says, I feel so important. It's a noble deed I do.

Someone says, We need a woman for sexual dalliance, someone to use and then discard. She's got to be a Nice Woman.

She says, I do hope he finds me attractive.

Someone says, We need somebody to do twice the work for half the pay. Find Nice Woman.

She says, When do I start?

Someone says, We need somebody on whom to hone our skills of bullying and cruelty. Is there a Nice Woman in the house?

She says, I'm over here.

Someone says, It's time for subtle coercion -- unwed mothers are starting to keep their children. Hunt out Nice Woman, young, pregnant, vulnerable, and start calling her Birthmother instead of Barbara, Catherine, Sally or Anne.

She says, I just love my new name.

You know her at a glance:

Someone steps on her foot,

She says, Excuse me.

Someone says, I didn't see you,

She says, Oh, I'm not really here.

Someone says, I want a baby,

She says, I'll give you mine.

A woman is beaten in this country every eighteen seconds. Women are raped at the rate of one every three minutes.

National Organization for Women Newsletter, Fall 1990

Deadline for contributions to the May/June issue is April 1, 1991

Recovering Adoptees

by Robert L. Wheeler

This article was originally published in October 1990 in The Adoption Birth Connection, the voice of adoption reform in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. It is included here by permission of publisher Jo Anne Swanson.

I am a recovering adoptee. I'm aware of the negative effects of adoption and I'm trying to do something to counteract those effects. I spent four years in the prison system. I had a failed marriage. I thought I was crazy. I thought I was a drug addict. I thought I was an alcoholic. I could have been any and all of these but in my case I had Adoption Syndrome.

Adoption Syndrome is a set of problems common to adoptees, each of us to a different degree. I grew up in a system where I was not allowed to acknowledge the pain that I went through. If there was an elephant in the living room, we had to pretend it wasn't there.

This is the same sort of system that we find in alcoholic homes or other types of dysfunctional, abusive homes. We live a lie.

The adoption system takes advantage of infertile couples, making them believe that they are not whole human beings; making them believe they have to live a life of pretend; making them believe that to be full human beings and to experience parenthood and love, they have to have the perfect white baby¹. In reality, there are many options for infertile people. One of the prerequisites, however, is that they band together and share their pain and share their common strength and hope together. They can openly grieve and deal with the pain that they suffer and not feel ashamed. It is not a moral issue to be infertile, it is a medical one. It does not require secrecy and false dramas to be played out in order to have an adjusted and happy life. The prospective parents are promised a package that is never delivered. They are promised that adopting a perfect white baby cures infertility pain.

The entire adoption system is set up from the standpoint of having the needs met of the social workers and agencies and individuals that work within those agencies, making money from the system, making a living from the system and having power and control over other people. The net result of this is that the baby's welfare is always the last consideration. It is the infant that never has legal protection or counsel.

Adoptees have to band together, just like war veterans need to gather together; just like alcoholics need to gather together for their recovery; just like individuals of all different faiths need to join together; just like birth mothers need to join together. Human beings need to know that other human beings understand their pain and their hurt. Human beings need to be fully loved and understood. In our work with recovering adoptees, we seek to love and to forgive all individuals involved in every aspect of adoption.

There are acts that are unforgivable, done to human beings, but there are no human beings who are unforgivable.

Adoptees who are in recovery break the silence. We no longer have to suffer alone. We no longer have to pretend to live a life that is a mask. We no longer have to protect the system that oppresses us and made victims of us, our birth parents, and our adoptive parents. It's a common phenomenon when children are abused by parents or primary caregivers that those children protect their abusers. The adoptive parent, the birth parent, and the adoptee are all persuaded by our culture -- by our churches, by our schools, by our institutions -- that we owe a debt of gratitude to the closed adoption system. This is a myth; this is false; this is a lie.

Although we live in an era of modern democracy politically, socially and in many cases spiritually, our culture is still living in the days of kings and slavery. Closed adoption is unenlightened soul slavery. It is spiritual abuse of the highest order and ranks on the same level as physical abuse to children.²

Adoptees who are in recovery break the silence.

The first step toward recovery or rehabilitation or just getting on with your life for anyone that suffers from an oppressive system or an oppressor is to admit that the oppression is being done. I grew up in a system where it was taboo to talk about my adoption. The few times that I tried to share it with anyone, like in first grade, I learned right away that people are going to treat me as if there is something wrong with me; that I'm different; that I'm outside the other group of kids. That means that I became ashamed of who I was. I became a shame-based person. Adoptees run away, commit suicide, vandalize, lose their marriages, go to prison, go to nut houses. Adoptees are misdiagnosed, mistreated, and abused.

Today in almost all psychiatric institutions, it is still not a standard form of intake to screen for adoption. Adoption is not yet recognized as a syndrome or disease or harmful characteristic and yet the statistics are obvious and overwhelming. While highbrow intellectuals argue back and forth about the detrimental effects of adoption, adoptees are out there dying.

All adoptees share a common brotherhood and sisterhood. Adoptees are one tribe, the lost tribe. Whenever one adoptee is in trouble, it is the business of all adoptees.

¹ Mr. Wheeler seems to be referring in this article only to certain white adoptive parents. Non-white as well as many white adoptive parents today often adopt non-white children.

² Opinions of the author do not necessarily reflect those of *Chain of Life*. Some forms of abuse are worse than others and I would not want to trivialize the experiences of all abuse survivors by saying their experiences are the same as that of all adoptees in closed adoptions.

The same as the alcoholic. The same as the war veteran. Adoptees and Triad members are now gathering together to form a circle, an alliance. Together, we declare that our experience has been painful and detrimental to our well-being. Together, we are not asking for scientific evidence for the fact that we hurt. We are a self-help, healing tribe, just like AA or ACOA or ALANON.

As we members learn to live by our Bill of Rights, and as we as individuals become stronger and healthier spiritually and physically, the closed adoption oppressive system will crumble.

The Recovering Adoptee's Bill of Rights

1. We have the right to dignity and respect.
2. We have the right to know we are adopted.
3. We have the right to possess our original birth certificate.
4. We have the right to possess all of our adoption records.
5. We have the right to full knowledge of our origins, ethnic and religious backgrounds, or original name, and any pertinent medical and social details.
6. We have the right to updated medical and social history of our birthparents.
7. We have the right to personal contacts with each of our birth families, as all other humans.
8. We have the right to live without guilt toward any set of parents.
9. We have the right to treat and love both sets of parents as one family.
10. We have the right and obligation to show our feelings.
11. We have the right to become whole and complete people.
12. We have a right and obligation not to violate the dignity of all people involved in the adoption Triad and to carry our message to all adult adopted children who still suffer.

This article has been included in several adoption reform newsletters since its original publication. It was sent to me by Jean Paton, who has worked for many decades to improve the lives of adoptees. ▲

I was perturbed to learn that an anti-abortion group has been using the phrase "chain of life" to describe their protest demonstrations against abortion. This newsletter is in no way affiliated with them! I am interested in furthering the quality of children's lives, not the quantity of babies born. --JB

**"Sharpening the Focus
on Adoption"**

**American Adoption Congress
13th International Conference
April 10-14, 1991
Hyatt Regency Alicante
Garden Grove, California**

American Adoption Congress Conference in California April 10-14

True adoption reform maniacs can immerse themselves in four days of workshops and networking in the shadow of Disneyland from April 10 through April 14. The price of admission is \$160. for American Adoption Congress members or \$205. for non-members (one-day fees are less) if you register by March 15, 1991. Disneyland admission is only \$27, but will provide fantasies rather than truth.

I always say I can't afford to attend A.A.C.'s conferences, but since this one is relatively close by (500 miles away) I'm going to go. Besides, I'm scheduled to give a workshop about *Chain of Life* and some of the philosophical controversies it addresses.

What is frustrating about this conference (besides the cost) is that ten workshops meet in each time slot, making choices difficult.

The following workshops may be of particular interest to *Chain of Life* readers: *Adoption and Feminism* by Martha Smith, Friday April 12 at 8:30 am; *Gay and Lesbian Adoptive Parents* by Connie Hornyak, April 12, 10:45 am; *The Social Implications of International Adoption* by Anne Mi Ok Bruining and Medoree Feldman, April 13 at 1:30 pm; and *Chain of Life: Adoption Reform from a Lesbian-Feminist Perspective* by Janine Baer, April 13 at 3:45 pm.

Meeting at the same time as some of the above workshops are: *Adoptee Empowerment* by Amy Jane Cheney; *Being Adopted/Being Bicultural* by Penny Callan Partridge; *Sealed Records, Sealed Lives*, by Sheila Ganz and Toni Maines; and *Oedipus Revisited: Why Men Don't Search* by Randolph Severson. I picture us all walking between workshops trying to catch some of each.

For your own brochure listing all 70 workshops along with registration information, phone the AAC Conference Department at 714-434-7635. The conference will take place at the Hyatt Regency Alicante, Garden Grove, Calif., where single or double accommodations are \$72 per night, a special conference price. Bring your credit card! It could be another decade before AAC meets in California again. ▲

Neglected Romanian Children Adopted by Foreigners

Is adoption the right solution for the orphans of Romania? The disastrous treatment of children in prison-like orphanages in Romania and the subsequent adoption of many of them by U.S., Canadian, Irish, and other foreign parents raises this question. How long should children have to wait under those conditions before their country's economy improves? Are there alternatives for helping them?

The situation of these children was exposed on television shows like *20/20* since Ceausescu was overthrown and executed. The former dictator of Romania literally forced women to bear children by outlawing abortion and birth control and requiring them to be checked at government-run clinics to make sure they were pregnant. Many of the children born to poor parents ended up in orphanages without adequate food, human affection, or surgery for correctable physical deformities.

The Swedish government and the Red Cross and Red Crescent donated money and supplies to improve the children's conditions, and many organizations are still doing this (see below). But adoption by foreigners seems to have been quite popular. Even blind and disabled Romanian teenagers have been rescued, looking rather happy about it on *20/20*'s December 22, 1990 update.

Earlier in 1990, that program mentioned that HIV-infected children could not be adopted into the U.S., even when prospective parents were willing to take on this burden, because of our government's ban against the immigration of people with HIV infection. A recent change in U.S. immigration law no longer banishes the HIV-infected, which could allow children in Romania infected by unclean needles used in supposed medical treatments to move to the U.S.

A *San Francisco Examiner* article (Dec. 23, 1990) quoted U.C. Berkeley political scientist Ken Jowitt that some of the Romanian birth parents *want* their relinquished children to be able to have a better life in America -- a dream they would also like for themselves. And in a country as poor as Romania, consent to adopt sometimes goes to the highest bidder, with prospective foreign parents paying Romanian birthparents "under the table" in order to obtain permission to adopt their child. Both a birth mother and birth father in Romania must agree to an adoption by foreigners. I suspect we'll hear of reunions with these children and their birthparents in future years.

While these adoptions, like all adoptions, will create feelings of loss for adoptees and their birthparents who suffered under forced childbearing conditions, adoption in these cases looks better than those orphanages. My hope is that the adoptive parents don't require eternal thanks from their children for having saved them. All children deserve decent upbringings and loving families; none deserve rejection or horrific living conditions.

The following comments by anthropologist and Romanian specialist Gail Kligman summarize the adoption situation in Romania: "There is something very disturbing about the commodification of children," she said in the *Examiner*. "Last year Romanian babies weren't a business, this year they're part of the international baby trade. They're

preferable. They're European. They're white. Certainly no one paid this kind of attention to the AIDS babies and orphans in Africa where it's on a far more massive scale.

"On the other hand, these kids are doomed and it is unquestionably a good thing that foreigners are taking them out."

In their Winter 1991 issue, the adoption magazine *Roots and Wings* provides the following addresses of organizations that will donate money to orphans who are still in Romania: UNICEF, 3 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017 (212) 346-7000 • American Red Cross Romanian Relief, P.O. Box 37243, Washington, DC 20013 • American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 711 Third Ave., New York, NY 10017.

(For more information on "Romania's Waiting Children" or to subscribe to *Roots and Wings*, write: *Roots and Wings*, 15 Nancy Terrace, Hackettstown, NJ 07840. Subscriptions are \$20. for 4 issues. Their Winter '91 issue also includes many short articles on adopting and raising special needs children.) ▲

The WOMB BBS

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Reunions Do Not Disrupt Lives

"Contrary to expectation, reunions do not seem to disrupt the lives of the participants. Even birthmothers who did not search and who still would not do so were pleased to be found. At least from the point of view of the birth parents, the reunion, even if unsuccessful, seems to enhance their lives.

"There is an assumption in some segments of society that it is possible to produce a child and dismiss any connection to that child after giving birth. . . The findings from this study support the need to reevaluate this assumption."

From "Reunions between Adoptees and Birth Parents: The Birth Parents' Experience" by Phyllis R. Silverman, Lee Campbell, Patricia Patti, and Carolyn Briggs Style. Reprinted from Social Work, Volume 33, Number 6, November-December 1988

▲ Chain Letters ▲

December 5, 1990

BIRTHMOTHER'S POEM ABOUT WAKING UP

I have only become aware of your newsletter through an article that was reprinted in the Fall 1990 issue of ORIGINS, an organization for women who have lost children to adoption.

Enclosed is a copy of a poem I wrote about women: passivity, loss, sacrifice -- but mostly about waking up.

I am a birthmother now reunited with a lost daughter. I saw her for the first time -- since birth -- when she was 30 years old, and it was then I heard her speak her first words and take her first steps!

The rights to the poem remain with me. I offer it for consideration in your newsletter [see "Nice Woman" on page . . .]

May we continue to successfully work toward adoption reform.

Sincerely,
Barbara U. Dudrear
Southern California ▲

December 17, 1990-A day of celebration for me!

THERE WAS NO ROOM AT THE INN

In two hours I will be flying to Colorado to celebrate the holidays with my daughter, Debbie. The last time we had Christmas together was 31 years ago when I was eight months pregnant and there was no room "at the inn." That was a sad Christmas for me and this one will be most joyous for we will be together. I am excited!

Yes, you may print what you like of my December 5 letter... I appreciate your ethics. I have written letters before to accompany my poem and found my personal comments published without permission. That kind of editorial behavior appals me. . . Thank you for asking.

... I am pleased to support your contribution to community [with a subscription]. That your newsletter gives voice to all women and men who are working for adoption reform is supported by me. I have little or no interest most of the time in people's sexual preference. I have experienced community prejudice toward me for being sexually active outside of marriage. Gosh knows it is a mean spirited approach to getting along with one another. I care about ethics and about trying to understand one another so that we can work in bettering our society -- its people and its laws. I no longer keep quiet to please people or because I fear rejection. "Nice Woman" is my emancipation proclamation.

Keep writing and working to educate where education is needed, Janine. I support your work. Your name is familiar to me so I am sure in my boxes of adoption-related material I have articles written by you. I am in the process of completing my doctoral dissertation about birthmothers who have searched and found -- I will be relating our experiences to the mythological hero's journey. Ordinary women (since my study has been narrowed to women) are stepping out of the closet to claim their hero status. "Heroine" will once again become a title of respect.

Your subscription expires with the issue number on your mailing label. Subscriptions cost \$10. to \$15., a sliding scale based on your income. (That's only \$1.66 to \$2.50 per issue.) Please help Chain of Life continue publishing. You can also get 3 issues for \$7.50.

... May this Christmas, however and in whatever way you celebrate the return of the light to the earth, be a joyous and wonder-filled one for you and those dear to you.

Sincerely,
Barbara [Dudrear] ▲

P.S. I agree with your view about couples "adopting" mother and child. We must stop destroying families; we must allow two to be a family.

I relinquished my daughter in January 1960. My pregnancy occurred in the climate of the '50s -- quite a change was to take place in the '60s, but I cannot say, had I been pregnant during our social revolution, that I would have been awake enough to even know it was going on. The social (outer) times have not a lot to do with relinquishment as much as the inner climate does. That is where self-esteem lives and does its work of valuing or devaluing.

Why is it, Janine, that white females continue to relinquish? Why do white grandparents let go of a grandchild so easily? Black grandmothers hang on with their teeth; Hispanic families expand to take in one more. ▲

December 19, 1990

WE SHOULD VALIDATE WOMEN WHO CHOOSE FREELY NOT TO BE MOTHERS

Thank you for your reply to my likes/dislikes about *Chain of Life*. I feel that you're providing a great service to people on all sides of the adoption process to exchange views and learn from each other.

I'm an adoptee interested in finding my birth mother and searching (sporadically). But I'm also a feminist who doesn't believe that all women feel fulfilled by pregnancy and/or motherhood. It seems that most of the letters I read in *Chain of Life* assume that all birthmothers would choose to keep their children if society provided them enough material and social support. These supports, sadly lacking in the U.S. patriarchal/capitalist society, obviously need to be fought for for women to have a really free choice over their bodies and lives.

But as feminists we must also validate the choices of women who choose freely not to be mothers. I'm disturbed by feminists declaring that maternal/child bonds are "natural" and assuming that all women who relinquish children to adoption would really prefer to keep them.

As a feminist who has no particular interest in children, I've felt oppressed by women who automatically expect me to do childcare at feminist events and to feel a "natural" interest in their children. Babies don't interest me at all, and older children interest me in about the same proportion as

adults do -- I like some and not others, as opposed to treating children as a category. No, if I got pregnant I'd have an abortion with no qualms. But suppose, for health/ legal/ other reasons, abortion was unavailable as my choice. Then I would definitely have my baby adopted at birth. This choice would give me more qualms than abortion, since I wouldn't want to labor nine months to produce a baby for an upper-middle class couple, whom I would see as my class enemy, or for people who would raise her/him with values antithetical to mine. For these reasons, I would probably give a lot of thought to choosing my baby's parents. But that's a different concern than wishing to have support to keep the baby. Even with all the support in the world, I have no interest personally in raising a child.

I just think that, as feminists, we need to celebrate the great diversity of women's lives and interests. We need to fight for the resources women need to make all the various choices about our lifestyles possible.

In sisterhood,
Jan Cannavan
Brooklyn, New York ▲

December 16, 1990

CHAIN OF LIFE IS ONLY FORUM FOR FEMINIST VIEWS ON ADOPTION

I'm finally subscribing. I very much appreciated the complimentary copy you sent me in September. So, enclosed is \$10. . . for a one year subscription.

I fervently support your newsletter as it's the only forum I've found so far for any feminist views on adoption and also for lesbian/gay issues. As a lesbian adoptee, this is important to me. (Through your newsletter, I contacted Amy Jane Cheney -- a great connection.)

Carry on the good work,
Seattle, Washington ▲

December 19, 1990

MOTHER OF SPERM DONOR SEEKS CHILDREN

I was referred to you by Lori Carangelo, Executive Director of Americans for Open Records, Palm Desert.

I am the mother of a sperm donor who has passed away. I would love to locate my biological grandchildren. Lori thought you might be of some help with a registry or whatever. . .

Encino, California ▲

Response: Unfortunately, I am not aware of any registry for reuniting children of donor insemination with their biological fathers and extended families. The Sperm Bank of California in Oakland allows children conceived by "identity release donors" (a choice mothers can make at the time of conception) to be given their donor/father's name when the children become eighteen years old. But it's my understanding that most children of donor insemination -- especially those whose parents are heterosexual and married -- don't even know they are donor offspring. And most sperm banks will not release the names of donors for any reason.

SHOULD I FIND MY CHILD'S BIRTH MOTHER?

I didn't have any extra money to renew my subscription until now. I'm not sure how to fill in your form [*I sent a form requesting feedback to people whose subscription had lapsed -- JB*]. My feelings about *Chain of Life* have more to do with my own confusion and guilt than the actual content and quality of the newsletter.

My daughter Anna is African-American. I adopted her when she was 11-days old. I wanted an open adoption, but the agency told me Anna's mother wasn't interested in doing that.

In the 4-1/2 years since Anna came into my life, I've gained a lot of awareness about the difficulties and ethical problems of cross-racial adoption. I've also become less naive about the workings of the agency. Through the search for my birth family, I've learned more about the feelings of birth mothers.

Now I'm filled with horror that Anna's mother might be going through the agonies that many birth mothers experience. I wonder if the agency told me the truth about open adoption. I worry that her feelings may have changed with time and that she is suffering -- not knowing if her child is okay.

Those feelings of empathy with Anna's birth mother are combined with my own fear that if I contact her, she will be really angry and disappointed to learn her baby was adopted by a white lesbian.

I have this woman's address. I write to her every so often but so far I haven't had the courage to mail the letter. My friends and my ex-lover (Anna's co-parent) think I'm crazy for wanting to contact her. I know I need to overcome my fear and do it but it's really hard.

So, Janine, since *Chain of Life* has done such a good job of talking about birth mothers and cross-racial adoption and related topics, you can see how it pushes my buttons. When the last two issues arrived, they sat around for a few weeks before I could read them. You're doing a fine job. All these things need to be talked about. That *Chain of Life* is bringing my fears and guilt to the surface is hard but necessary.

Take care,
Lynn Margaret Cole
Red Rock, Texas ▲

Editor's Response: What a dilemma. If any reader wants to respond directly to the author of a letter in *Chain of Life*, you can always send your letter to me (with an extra stamp) and I will forward it to the writer. I consider the names and addresses of *Chain of Life* subscribers to be confidential and will not exchange them with other groups or individuals. Some writers (such as Lynn) use pseudonyms when publishing their letters in *Chain of Life* so it would be impossible to find them in phone books.

AIDS will cause more than 10 million African children to be orphaned this decade, the World Health Organization predicted.

San Francisco Chronicle, Nov. 30, 1990

January 7, 1991

DONOR OFFSPRING CONTACTS SISTER

Hi. Just wanted to thank you for the mention of H.O.P.E. (Helping Offspring Pursue Ethics) in your newsletter. I applaud your work and dedication.

I have contacted one of my D.I. [donor insemination] sisters that was "sold" by the donor. Historically I think this is a first. Her dad and my dad were friends in Lincoln in the '30s - '40s and were both institutionalized and sterilized (involuntarily) by the state of Nebraska.

Each, married in 1949, had of course the same problem. Went to the same doctor. Both [wives] were inseminated in the same week, September 1954. Both got the same donor and now, 35 years later, we will meet for the first time. We've talked for hours on the phone, having much in common.

This has me mystified, happy, and eternally grateful.

Keep in touch,
Greg Wiatt
Offspring 1955 ▲

December 27, 1990

CONCERN FOR GAY AND LESBIAN ADOPTEEES

Since I've put off taking the psych licensing exam until October instead of this April, I've had more time to read and study. I've read 7 or 8 books the last couple of weeks -- personal psychology, multiple personality disorder, dependencies, abuse/s, etc. . . . As before only two (Kluft and Black) had a couple of lines of reference to adoptees.

I was again especially drawn to this awareness of omission of adoption/adoptees by Claudia Black's new book *Double Duty*. Her premise, as that of others, is that most families are dysfunctional and that when children are brought up in these families and also have to deal with being "food addicted, physically disabled, an only child, chemically dependent, a person of color, physically abused, gay or lesbian, or the child of two chemically dependent parents," these children are doing Double Duty.

True. And many children are doing triple and quadruple duty or more. And so, I think, are adoptees; and what about gay adoptees? Why don't any of the contemporary "hot" psych persons address adoption and adoptees? (At least Black included gay and lesbian!) I think that adoption at its base is dysfunctional, not having the usual family ties, history, etc. The adoptee has to deal with separation, surrender, displacement and accommodating to the adoptive; several "mis-functions" to start with. Then if the person is gay???

It is difficult for many parents when they find that the children born to them are gay and difficult for the kids! I feel that in adoption there is more of a conscious and determined act of deciding to parent. How is it then when an adoptee is gay, when there may be different bonding, different reasons for caring, and perhaps, not caring?

Last year I mentioned to you that about 50% of the clients with whom I was working were gay and adoptees. I have an ongoing relationship with two of these persons;

"his" family knows he is gay, "hers" doesn't. All the gay adoptees I know have had terribly difficult lives. In addition, their searches are fraught with even more uncertainty as they do not know what kind of response or acceptance they will find when they find their birthfamilies.

I would like to get some information together and out for gay adoptees. I would like to know how they feel their childhoods were for them; what different or special issues they feel may have come up for them; what their relationships were and are like with their families and/or their birthfamilies, if they have found them; how they feel that their lives have gone; factors they felt important in their lives; their questions; joys and gripes. You might be able to add questions and comments that I am not aware of on this, Janine.

I wonder if any of your readers would share their experiences on being gay and adopted with me. Perhaps their information would enable me to make up a questionnaire to further our knowledge and put out some thought and help for gay adoptees. Perhaps they, you, and I could put out some papers or a book on our own. . . .

[Note: If any reader wants to send a response to this woman's request to me with an extra 29c stamp, I will forward it to her. -- JB.]

A birth mother and therapist
Southern California ▲

▲ Announcements ▲

▲ **Sealed Records, Sealed Lives.** Birth mother Sheila Ganz is producing a film that will examine the impact of surrender, separation, and adoption on birth parents, adoptees, and adoptive parents in the context of closed adoption. For more information or to support the film, contact **Sheila Ganz**, c/o Film Arts Foundation, 346 - 9th St., San Francisco, CA 94103, or call (415) 522-8760.

▲ **Off Our Backs**, the feminist monthly, includes a detailed interview of Sheila's views on adoption in its January 1991 issue. People who say the feminist movement ignores adoption reform issues will be pleased to know about this article. Try writing to: Off Our Backs, 2423 18th St., NW, Washington, DC 20009. (Subscriptions are \$17. a year for 11 issues.)

▲ **Just For Us** is a newsletter by, for, and about children of gay and lesbian parents. If you fall in this category (or know someone who does) and would like to receive Just For Us, send your name and address to: Just For Us, c/o Ali Dubin, 8830 Noble Ave., Sepulveda, CA 91343. Its Dec. 1990 issue includes contact people for support throughout the United States "so that if you, as a child of a gay or lesbian, need to reach someone for support, you do not have to be alone." It is geared toward teenagers and young adults. Next year's conference will include workshops on *AIDS, Telling/Not Telling My Friends, My Gay Dad, My Lesbian Mom, Our Sexuality, and Religion*. For more information on the conference (which includes segments for adults as well as children), write to: Just For Us, Box 50360, Washington, DC 20091.

▲ **Cry Not, My Baby. Cry.** Audiotaped program of birth mothers "coming out." In this radio documentary from the mid-1980s, birth mothers from all walks of life discuss their experiences and feelings. Childbirth, relinquishment and reunion are addressed from the perspectives of twelve relinquishing mothers. The audiotape includes a post documentary rap. To obtain this 1-1/2 hour audiotape, send \$10. to Celeste Newbrough, Producer, 3046 College Ave., Berkeley, CA 94705. (Tell Celeste that you read about it in *Chain of Life*.)

▲ **Adoption Therapist** is published to provide new vision and innovative techniques for treating adoptive families in crisis. They welcome manuscripts to be considered for publication. Submit to: Aileen Edgington, Ph.D., "The Adoption Therapist," c/o Hope Cottage Adoption Center, 4209 McKinney Ave., Suite 200, Dallas, TX 75205. Subscriptions are \$20. a year for 2 issues.

▲ **The Purple Crayon.** Children's books about non-traditional families, including adoptive families, gay families, and multicultural families, are available by mail order from The Purple Crayon, 4110 Opal St., Oakland, CA 94609. Send \$2. for a catalog.

▲ **Lesbian Mothers Resource Network** produces a quarterly newsletter available for \$15. a year. Originally the Lesbian Mothers' National Defense Fund, the organization started in 1974 to protect lesbian mothers whose custody of their children was challenged by ex-husbands; it has expanded to include other parenting issues. Their address is: LMRN, P.O. Box 21567, Seattle, WA 98111.

▲ **Death By Adoption** by Joss Shawyer, the 1979 feminist adoption reform book from New Zealand, is still available from Concerned United Birthparents (and nowhere else in the world as far as I can tell). This is a book about the abuses of adoption and closed records, written by a woman who chose not to relinquish her child. In 1985 New Zealand passed a law that greatly liberalized access to the names of relatives missing through adoption. Send \$10. to: CUB, 2000 Walker Street, Des Moines, IA 50317.



Parents of Gays Can't "Adopt" Highway

"Not only are lesbians and gay men unworthy to adopt children, it seems, but their parents are unworthy even to adopt highways.

"When St. Louis County began its 'Adopt-a-Highway' plan, local members of P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) decided to pitch in on the beautification campaign. Initially, they were accepted; but when county officials realized that the words 'lesbian' and 'gay' might appear on public signs giving credit for the highway adoption, they changed their minds. Parents who love and acknowledge their gay kids are 'too controversial' the county decided."

info from gaypaper 8/3/90 via Off Our Backs October 1990

Commodification of Human Beings?

"... The more I thought about treating my sperm as a commodity, the more uncomfortable I became with the notion. . . . I don't have any problem with donating blood or with other people selling it. But I began to wonder if sperm weren't a different sort of thing. When combined with ova under the right conditions, they turn into human beings. The commodification of human beings is not something I could accept. Would I be selling a body fluid, or would I be selling some of my (for now unborn) children?"

Gordy Slack, writer, *East Bay Express*, Oakland, California, January 13, 1989

Study of Effects of Adoption on Teen Behavior

The following information was excerpted from an article by Jean Hopfensperger, from the *Union Leader*, Manchester, New Hampshire, July 21, 1990. Thanks to *Today Reunites Yesterday (TRY)*, in Northampton, MA, for sending it.

In the summer of 1990 a study was

begun that will examine the effects of adoption on the emotional and social behavior of adolescents. A grant from the National Institute of Mental Health to the Search Institute in Minneapolis will fund the study. It will compare problems in interracial and intercultural adoption to same race adoptions, explore the relative importance of heredity and environment on behavior, and examine the effect of adoption on a teenager's search for identity. Over 1600 adoptive families in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Colorado will participate in the study. Minnesota ranks high in adoptions per capita and rates second nationwide in placing foreign-born children.

There has never been a large-scale study exploring the effect of adoption on the turbulent teen years in spite of the fact that adopted children are showing up in disproportionate numbers in the social service, mental health, and criminal justice systems.

The nearly 4-year study will examine the extent that emotional and behavioral problems are related to adoption, what services are being offered to help adopted adolescents and their families, and whether there are predictable ways in which adoptive parents relate to their adoptive children differently than they relate to their other children.