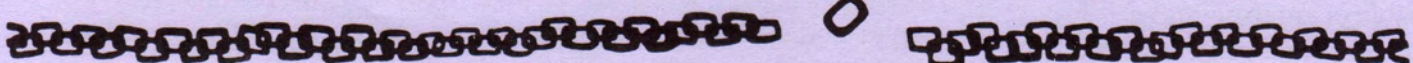


Chain of Life

A FEMINIST ADOPTION REFORM AND CHILD WELFARE NEWSLETTER

P.O. BOX 8081 ▲ BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94707

ISSUE 21 · SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1992 · JANINE BAER, EDITOR



Lesbians and Gay Men as Adoptive Parents: The Last Frontier of Human Discrimination

by Marcie A. Griffin, M.S.

The adoption industry has long been known to be one of the most slowly evolving social service industries in the country. It has taken over four decades for us to realize that closed adoptions are not the most successful for adoptees or birthparents. Single parent adoptions for the most part have been few and far between until approximately the last five years. Even the vice president of the country, Dan Quayle, believes that single parent families are not appropriate for children, so the prejudice marches on. What will it take to break through these barriers to parenthood so that those who wish to parent and have the skills to do so have the opportunity?

Breaking down secrecy seems to be the most valid approach. Open adoption expresses the philosophy that secrecy in adoption is harmful. If we are to focus on the "best interests of the child" we need to be open to all forms of adoption because we do not have "good" parents to waste. The best parent for a child

should be the primary concern of adoption professionals and birthparents.

Good parenting can come from many sources, including the lesbian and gay community. Lesbians and gays have lived with secrecy, because it seems to be the only avenue through which they can lead their lives with the same advantages granted those in traditional family units. As singles they can adopt, making sure not to reveal their sexual preference. *More secrecy.* It is not surprising that single lesbians and gays avoid sharing that information with adoption professionals because they would likely be denied. Should they come to an agency and apply as a couple, they are probably exercising an act of futility.

It is incumbent on lesbian and gay adoption professionals to break down this last barrier of secrecy and discrimination. Their role is to educate other adoption professionals to the reality of lesbian and gay couples as parents. There are numerous articles available which indicate that lesbian and gay couples function as well as or better than heterosexual couples.

Peplau and colleagues¹ reported their findings after a 1978 study that dealt with issues of attachment, balance of power, and satisfaction in relationships. The sample included 127 lesbians, 128 gay men, 65 heterosexual women, and 65 heterosexual men. The results indicated that regardless of sexual orientation, negotiating levels of intimacy and independence is a task for all couples. They also found that there were few indications of masculine/feminine role-playing in lesbian and gay male relationships. Role equality in their relationships was positively associated with satisfaction in relationships among lesbian couples. Both lesbian and heterosexual couples regarded their relationships as highly satisfactory.

Bell and Weinberg² also did a large scale study of gay and lesbian lifestyles. The monogamous lesbian and gay couples most closely resembled the cohesive heterosexual married couple. They were found to have superior adjustment to all other groups. It is likely that lesbian and gay couples may be more sensitive to adoptees'

issues and needs, as they are accustomed to the self-preserving act of secrecy but also understand how unfulfilling and burdensome it can become.

There may be fewer difficulties to encumber homosexual couples in approaching adoption openly in relation to the issue of infertility. A gay male couple, although quite capable of entering into a surrogacy arrangement with a woman, probably finds this option threatening legally. Many surrogate mothers, after carrying a child for nine months, have chosen to parent themselves, and the gay couple would have few if any legal options. Therefore, chances are they are unable to become parents in situations in which they would have full control except through adoption, or by bringing a child into the relationship who was produced from one or both men's previous heterosexual relationships.

For lesbian couples, because both are unlikely to be infertile, there are the options of selecting a man to be the biological father, or of using donor insemination. Both of these options have legal and identity ramifications. The biological father may establish paternity and seek custody of the child, which would interfere with the lesbian couple's desire to parent. With donor insemination, most clinics do not offer the option of knowing the biological father's identity. This leaves the child produced from the process unable to connect to the other biological parent. Obviously, adoption is the best solution to the above-mentioned difficulties. If completed through an agency, it allows for legal protection of the parents' rights and can allow for openness between the adopting and biological parents so the child can

have a complete identity.

Another study, conducted by Blumstein and Schwartz,³ was large scale and included 300 couples' responses on general areas of work, money, and sex. The sample consisted of 72 married heterosexual couples, 48 cohabiting heterosexual couples, 90 lesbian couples, and 90 gay male couples. The authors noted that lesbian couples tend to be more relationship-oriented and want more time with their partners. Lesbian couples ranked equality, independence, and an equitable distribution of household duties as important, whereas the heterosexual couples were more likely to choose the traditional role assignments in male/female relationships. These findings support the hypothesis of more balanced adaptability in lesbians couples than in heterosexual couples. It also stands to reason that gay and lesbian couples would also be more tolerant and celebrant of difference in their children.

Olson and his associates⁴ found in their study of lesbian and heterosexual couples that lesbian couples scored higher on family cohesiveness and family adaptability. This is a much needed characteristic of adopting families. In their twin and sibling studies of men, Michael Bailey and Richard Pillard⁵ support a biological basis for homosexuality. If homosexuality and heterosexuality both come from a biological base, then discrimination against lesbian and gay couples who wish to parent becomes ludicrous. Of course it is unacceptable to discriminate regardless of the origins of sexual orientation.

Possibly the only avenues currently available to educate those in the adoption community regarding this issue are to bring in

experts in the field of sexual orientation research, and for lesbian and gay adoption professionals to make their identities known to co-workers and adoption administrations to act as role models. Making sure they know someone who is lesbian or gay is the best possible way to educate those who continue to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation.

Marcie A. Griffin is a lesbian adoption professional in Texas who has worked in the field of adoption for four years and in mental health for thirteen years prior. She is a nationally published author in the field of adoption. ▲

NOTES

¹ Peplau, L.A.. "What homosexuals want in relationships," *Psychology Today* (March) 28-38, 1981

² Bell, A.P. and M. Weinberg, *Homosexualities: A study of diversity among men and women*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978

³ Blumstein, P. and P. Schwartz, *American Couples: Money, Work, Sex*, New York: Pocket Books, 1983

⁴ Olsen, Sprenkel, D.H., and C.S. Russell, "Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems: I. Cohesion and adaptability dimensions, family types, and clinical applications," *Family Process*, 18 3-28, 1979

⁵ Bailey, Michael and Richard Pillard, M.D., "Are Some People Born Gay?" *The New York Times Science*, December 1991. Also, Pillard, Richard, *The Harvard Mental Health Letter*, "Does Homosexuality Have a Biological Basis?" June 1992, Volume 8, Number 12

◆
For lesbians, gay men, or bisexuals who are willing to parent across gender lines, see the facing page, 'Dads in Ads.'

Finding Christa

by Joyce Bahr

The film "Finding Christa" was written, produced, and directed by birth-mother Camille Billops and her husband, James Hatch, a professor of theater at the City University of New York. This is their third film. It is a documentary of a mother-daughter reconciliation, but it denies adopted persons the right to their anger and tries to justify the relinquishment with feminism.

The major character in the film, Camille Billops, does not seek out her daughter Christa Victoria as one may

Dads from Ads

There are other alternatives besides adoption, surrogacy, and donor insemination for lesbians and gay men who want to have or raise children. The San Francisco newspaper for the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community, *Bay Times*, has an "Open Exchange" section of ads; in its July 30, 1992 issue the ads include several listed under "Parenting" in which individuals seek others for having and raising children.

One ad says simply "known donor seeks moms," with a name and phone number. A similar one says "Man, 38, would like to be known donor!" In another, a lesbian seeking a gay or bisexual man for co-parenting, asks, "Interested in Being a Daddy?" Still another ad is written by a gay man who wants to have a relationship and children with a lesbian.

Perhaps the most unique ad seeks individuals and couples who want to live in a group household and share co-parenting of one foster child.

The San Francisco Bay Times can be purchased by subscription, or picked up for free in the Bay Area.



think from the title. Given up at four years of age in 1962, Christa initiates the search along with the help of her adoptive mother, Margaret Liebig. Ms. Liebig, a singer and warm-hearted, understanding lady, recognizes Christa's need to know her birth family.

As was the norm for black women in 1964, Camille was not coerced to give up her daughter born out of wedlock. Family members gave her respect by having a baby shower for her. In 1962, unlike Camille, white women pregnant out of wedlock did not have baby showers, but were hidden away in maternity homes or at Aunt Sally's.

The film is composed of interviews with family members who are asked why they thought Camille gave up Christa. An aunt says that Camille gave up her daughter so she could run off with a man. And that is actually what Camille did. She brought four-year-old Christa to an adoption agency in order to seek a life of adventure and art in Egypt.

However sorry she may be if she has hurt anyone, Camille uses the film to focus on her career and feminism as justifiable reasons for relinquishment. Although feminism is mentioned, feelings of sisterhood for her daughter are not portrayed when Billops is contacted by her. A friend of Camille, a young man, appeals to the cool, chilly birthmother to go ahead and meet Christa.

As feminists know, sisterhood is powerful. Had this mother-daughter story shown sisterhood between the two women, it could have been powerful. Had this film explored Christa's feelings and especially the anger of children given up not as infants but at older ages, it could have had more impact and been more moving. This lack of exploration of Christa's feelings leaves the viewer with the terrible



Baby photo of Christa Victoria in "Finding Christa" (*New York Times*, March 24, 1992, p. C15)

thought that the filmmaker believes adopted children are to be seen but not heard.

Camille uses the film to focus on her career and feminism as justifiable reasons for relinquishment

The film also does not mention the outdated and discriminatory closed-record system, and it is not a strong force toward the liberation of adopted persons or birthmothers. ▲

Joyce Bahr is the birthmother of a twenty-six year old son. She is the founder of Manhattan Birthparents Group and a Regional Director for the American Adoption Congress.

The film "Finding Christa" can be ordered for \$39.95 from Hatch-Billops Collection, 491 Broadway, New York, NY 10012. Information about tapes of songs recorded by Christa Victoria can be obtained from: Christa Victoria, 242 Mott Street #4C, New York, NY 10012.

▲ CHAIN LETTERS ▲

July 22, 1992

Dear Janine,

A friend just gave me a copy of the July/August issue of Chain of Life. I have to say that I was extremely moved and affected by the Elizabeth Min interview, "Blended Identity." I am a half-Japanese (other half: unknown) adoptee and so much of what she said resonated with my own experience. I plan to write her as well and tell her how much her words meant to me.

Here is a check for a subscription, as well as some back orders and a small donation to support the continuation of this wonderful publication. I'm wondering if you would print the following announcement:



Writing Wanted for Adoption Anthology

Seeking quality manuscripts of short fiction, poetry, and personal essay on the theme of adoption. Will include writings about and/or by birth parents, adoptive parents, adoptees, adoption professionals, and others touched by adoption. Send complete manuscript with brief bio to: Tina Cervin & Susan Ito / Adoption Anthology; 206 Andover St., San Francisco, CA 94110. Include a SASE with sufficient postage if you want material returned. Deadline October 15, 1992.



Thank you very much for your important work.

Gratefully,
Susan Ito

July 22, 1992

Dear Janine,

I just received the latest issue of *Chain of Life*. Your usual excellent job; congratulations!

What prompts me to write is the item in column one on page four, regarding the state of New Hampshire's statutory proscription against gays becoming foster or adoptive parents. (Perhaps that is New Hampshire's way of saying that it believes that gay children become so because they were poorly raised?) It is, however one looks at it, an incredible implementation of such a statute.

In addition, it is my understanding that Florida also has such a law on its books. A judge in a county court there recently [1991] declared the Florida law to be "unconstitutional," but the effect of his ruling did not extend beyond the Florida county in which he presides. In any case, it is questionable what effect, if any, the judge's ruling has had, in that county or elsewhere.

You may also be interested to know that I have recently begun a "Parents FLAG" [Friends of Lesbians And Gays] echo within Fidonet. The echo is being carried on two dozen different BBSs [computer-accessed Bulletin Board Systems], including my own [KinQuest], and including systems in Canada, England, and Australia. (An "echo," for those who don't know what it is, is the Fidonet term for

a "national conference," which is where electronic messages are shared among many different computer bulletin board systems around the country — or around the world — thus enabling individuals to correspond with others in many different parts of the country simply by logging onto their local-area BBS.) I enclose, for your information, a list of all the BBSs currently carrying the echo (as of July 21, 1992). Please feel free to publicize this information in any way you may deem suitable.

Keep up the good work!

Yours in search,

Wilhelm
(William Gage)

Thanks for the information. Readers with computer access to these systems can write to me for the name and phone number of a BBS near you (send SASE). The two in California are "PCBL BBS" in San Mateo (415-572-9563) and "The Library" in Simi Valley (805-522-7795). In Brooklyn, New York, contact "KinQuest BBS" (718-998-6303).



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▲ RESOURCES & NEWS ▲

▲ The Southwest Regional **American Adoption Congress** conference will take place in Simi Valley October 23-25, 1992. Before October 10, fees for AAC members are \$85 (not including hotel and transportation costs of course) and go up from there.

Workshop topics include *California Open Records Legislation; Is There a Clinical Basis for Supporting the Adoption Reform Movement?; Adolescent Adoption Issues; Healing Adoption Wounds; The Unknown Birthfather; and Search, Support and Computers*. For more information, write to AAC, c/o Nancy Russell, P.O. Box 12161, La Crescenta, CA 91214-3524, or call (714) 434-7635.

▲ Does anyone have a copy of an article about the new **law against commercial surrogacy in New York**? I heard this on TV, but haven't seen it in print yet.

▲ With the Supreme Court upholding Pennsylvania's law requiring minor women to have **parental consent**, or consent of a judge, before being able to get an abortion, twenty-one states now require such consent. A reader points out that, in contrast, "forty-six states let young women put a baby up for adoption without consulting mom or dad. No state requires parental consent for pregnancy care and delivery services for minors." (Also see the article in this issue for an in-depth look at parental consent laws.)

- From an article by Tom Teepen in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

▲ **Self-determination for pre-teens?** "A juvenile court judge ruled [July 9, 1992] that an eleven-year-old boy can sue his parents for 'divorce' in what child advocates believe could be a precedent-setting case" says a newspaper story from Orlando, Florida. "The boy is living with foster parents, who want to adopt him. His natural father has given up his rights to the boy, but his natural mother is fighting to regain custody." The judge did not make a decision, but granted Gregory K. the right to pursue the case.

"Courts often make decisions involving parental rights. But cases are typically brought by a guardian or social agency. In this case, the boy himself is the plaintiff and the court had to decide whether an eleven-year-old had the right to initiate such a suit."

Said Karen Adams of the National Child Rights Alliance, "It opens the door a little bit wider for kids to have some control over their lives . . . especially abused kids."

▲ The *Los Angeles Times* reported that the House of Representatives approved a measure for new **federal spending on child welfare** and food programs that would be paid for by imposing a 10% surtax on millionaires. "The bill's Democratic sponsors said the additional funds are essential to keep families intact, prevent unnecessary foster care placements, and meet the special needs of children exposed to drugs or in high-risk homes." If passed by Congress, President Bush would veto it; keep this in mind when

voting in November.
- information from *S.F. Chronicle*, August 7, 1992

▲ Remember the article about the **Primal Wound** by Nancy Verrier in Issue 17 of *Chain of Life*? Her conclusions were questioned in the Summer 1992 issue of *Roots and Wings*, a magazine "for families and friends touched by adoption."

If you are interested in the dialogue, you can obtain that issue for \$5 (\$20 for a year's subscription) by writing to *Roots & Wings*, P.O. Box 638, Chester, NJ 07930.

▲ **GLASS — Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services** — offers suitable adults the opportunity to be foster parents to youngsters whose families have abandoned them or are unable to care for them. It also manages group homes for youth with HIV disease and AIDS and provides family reunification services for high risk youth ages 13 to 18. GLASS is located at 8901 Melrose Ave., Suite 202, West Hollywood, CA 90069-5613, 310/288-1757.

▲ Thanks to Pam Hemphill's very generous donation, **Chain of Life** not only can pay the printer for this issue, but will still have some money in its bank account toward publishing Issue #22.

It takes the cost of about seventeen subscriptions to pay for the printing, production, and postage of just one issue of **Chain of Life**. If you can't believe that a newsletter as unique, sensible, daring, intelligent, controversial, and paradoxical as **Chain of Life**

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... continued

has really existed for over three years and you want to see it continue (even though you may disagree with half of what it says), be sure to renew, donate, buy back issues, and/or tell your friends about it.

As of August 17, **Chain of Life** had 100 paid subscribers. Twenty-four of those will expire with this issue! Please renew to help **Chain** keep publishing into 1993 and beyond. If you don't want to risk the entire \$15 for 6 issues, you can send \$7.50 for 3 issues instead. ▲



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Teenage Abortion and Parental Consent Laws

by Mike Males

Punishment is both the motive and result of parental consent laws.

This article is used with permission of the editor of In These Times, a progressive weekly newspaper published in Chicago. It was originally in ITT's July 22, 1992 issue.

Laws requiring parental consent before a girl under age 18 can obtain an abortion have won endorsement by the U.S. Supreme Court, the U.S. Senate, both presidential candidates and Perot, 20 state legislatures, and 80 percent of the American public — and are even seen by many pro-abortion choice adults as a "reasonable compromise."

Yet reaffirmation of parental consent laws is by far the most disturbing and intrusive element of the Supreme Court's June 30 ruling allowing new curbs on abortion, one that demonstrates the mechanism by which abortion rights can be summarily removed from vulnerable populations.

Parental consent laws authorize an outside party — a parent, or

a judge if the girl goes to court to obtain an abortion without telling her parents — to force a teenage girl to bear a child against her will. Once another person can decide when a female must bear a child, the 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* decision guaranteeing access to abortion is abrogated. It becomes simply a matter of how many barriers can be raised to deny abortion to the only women who stand to lose the right in any case — the young and the poor.

Parental consent is already the most popular restriction enacted by states and Congress. In upholding such laws, justices again swept aside monumental realities regarding abortion patterns among teenagers, the family conditions of girls who cannot inform their parents, and the miserable experiences of states with such laws.

The court's ruling embodies diametrically opposing views of family life. In striking down spousal notice laws, justices recognized America's epidemic of domestic abuse and the plight of wives who cannot reveal abortion plans to their husbands for fear of violence and alienation. In upholding parental notice and consent, justices painted an idyllic portrait of loving family concern, ignoring that these same violent, disowning husbands can also be violent, disowning fathers.

it demonstrates how abortion rights can be removed from vulnerable populations

Thus seven wealthy justices, averaging well over age 60, ignored the day-to-day realities of millions of girls such as L.V., a 16-year-old Montanan with abusive, alcoholic, estranged parents; impoverished, a prior victim of incest, pregnant by a 24-year-old man she planned to

marry in an effort to escape harsh conditions but who had left town.

Montana has no parental consent law. Had such law been in effect, L.V. would have risked violent abuse by her parents when told of her pregnancy. The local judge, an anti-abortion fundamentalist, almost certainly would have refused any petition for her to obtain an abortion without parental consent. Thus her choices: self-abortion, obtain an illegal abortion, have the child, or leave school on a weekday to drive hours to seek an amenable judge.

The gasoline industry has been the chief beneficiary of parental consent laws.

The gasoline industry has been the chief beneficiary of parental consent laws. After Massachusetts passed such a law in 1981, Brandeis University researchers found 1,000 Massachusetts girls traveling to nearby states for abortions every year. Minnesota's similar law drove hundreds of girls to clinics in Fargo, North Dakota and Wisconsin.

Parental consent laws highlight the cruelty of anti-abortion regulation; the rich and mobile retain the ability to go to other states or countries; the young and the poor are forced into untenable positions. The effect of such laws is to demand a useless, stressful judicial runaround for girls already facing difficult situations.

Poverty, rape, abuse

Supporters of parental consent laws ignore the grim conditions of millions of youth. Six million children do not live with parents, according to the Casey Foundation. Four million children and adolescents were added to poverty rolls during the '80s. Three million children are physically abused, sexu-

ally abused, or neglected every year. The National Women's Study indicates 500,000 to 1 million children and adolescents were raped in 1990; offender profiles show 90 percent of all rapists are adults. A recent Washington study shows two-thirds of all pregnant teenagers were sexually abused during childhood or adolescence, many by parents.

Impoverished, abused girls are by far the most likely to become pregnant. Having ignored worsening childhood poverty, abuse, and health care which contribute to adolescent pregnancy and abortion, politicians now back harsh restrictive substitutes for genuine initiatives to help the young.

Surveys of Montana abortion clinics show that three-fourths of all minor girls voluntarily choose to include a parent in abortion decisions. Those who do not (nearly all of whom involve another trusted adults — an aunt, older sister, family friend) are overwhelmingly from homes where parents are violent or rigidly judgmental. Parental consent laws function to further traumatize that population of girls already subjected to childhood's worst abuses.

Parental involvement laws do not promote parental involvement. In Massachusetts and Minnesota, 40 to 45 percent of all girls (many after judge-shopping) obtain abortions without parental notice, a level higher than in Montana (24 percent), which has no law. "The law has, more than anything, disrupted and harmed families" and "can provoke violence," U.S. District Judge Donald Alsop wrote in a compelling opinion ignored by the Supreme Court.

In briefs filed in Judge Alsop's court reviewing parental consent and notification laws, Minnesota and Massachusetts judges re-

counted harassed, terrified, angry girls forced to reveal intimate details of their lives in intimidating court proceedings. "They find it a very nerve-racking experience," wrote one judge; another described "incredible amounts of stress" shown in "tone of voice, tenor of voice, shaking, wringing of hands," even physical illness. Judges, some personally opposed to abortion, unanimously agreed parental consent laws are useless and punitive.

politicians now back harsh restrictive substitutes for genuine initiatives to help the young

While the Supreme Court upheld parental and judicial "rights" to decide that a minor girl must have a baby, there is no mandate that parents or the court pay her pregnancy expenses and the 18-year, \$200,000 cost of raising a child she did not want to have — one an adult woman would have been allowed to abort. Bizarrely, a judge who finds a girl too immature for an abortion may force her to be a mother. *[editor's note: Isn't this where the adoption brokers step in?]*

Adult-teen sex

There is, further, no requirement that the male partner in "teenage" abortions face similar sanctions. The reason: It is adult men, not teenage boys, who cause or collaborate in the vast majority of all "teenage" pregnancies and abortions, including the 5 percent of all "teen" pregnancies that result from rape. Vital and health statistics records indicate 90 percent of all pregnancies among girls under age 18 are caused by adult men over age 18, and more than half by men over age 20. The "adult-teen" pregnancy

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and abortion reality is one lawmakers and justices refuse to face.

Thus the only ones left to punish are young girls. And yet, minor girls are hardly the cause of the prevalence of abortion that anti-abortion forces find so offensive. Only one out of 10 abortions is performed on a girl under age 18; less than 2 percent of all abortions in the country involve a pregnancy caused by a couple in which both partners are under age 18. The young, like the poor, are targeted for oppressive restrictions because they can't fight back.

Punishment appears, in the end, both the motive and result of parental consent laws. In a June 30 *Dateline* NBC report, the legislative sponsor of Ohio's parental notification law equated a pregnant teenage girl with a criminal who commits theft or vandalism. The laws' chief effects are delay, fear, stress, expense, hazard, forced motherhood and — now that the Supreme Court has invited states to experiment with harsher

restrictions against teenagers and other vulnerable women — a return to dangerous illicit and self-induced measures. ▲
Mike Males is a freelance writer living in Bozeman, Montana. Subscriptions to In These Times can be ordered by calling 1-800-827-0270. Ask for current rates.

the single woman who decides (her choice) to raise her child? How is our society helping her? And for the woman who may elect to relinquish her child, what is being done for the birth mother and child, towards more civilized laws and society's view of each?

I think your publication is superb.

FEEDBACK

FROM RENEWAL FORMS

I would like to see Chain of Life include less. . .

- gay rights issues -[include] only if applicable to adoption - other pubs. for that

I have liked . . .

- everything

Other comments . . .

- Looking at adoption from a feminist perspective, I would like to see articles dealing with the entire pro-choice issue. Many feminist organizations need to get their head out of their uterus and address other than abortion issues. What about programs for

• I hope you are finding financial and personal resources to continue - it looks like you are! I'm glad. I will write for you one day! (So busy!)

• Thank you for still doing the newsletter. I know it is very difficult — times are so hard — but I hope you can continue. You have brought so many such inspiration and faith. Keep on keeping on.

• I very much appreciate your newsletter - my partner and I are in the process of expanding our family thru adoption - I have especially learned from the issue focusing on trans-racial adoption - thank you for doing this important work

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