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A FEMINIST ADOPTION REFORM AND CHILD WELFARE NEWSLETTER

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donors are altruistic, and need cash

Ova: The Newest Reproductive Commodities

by Janine Baer

Women have been socialized to put the needs of others before their own. As mothers, as spouses, as teachers and as nurses, it has been women's traditional role to nurture others. Their work is inexpendable to society, but they are rarely compensated adequately for it.

Now some women can express their desire to help others in a new way, as donors of ovarian eggs, (ova; singular, ovum). True, they get paid for their eggs; like sperm "donors," these are not true donations, so the motivation may not be entirely altruistic. But unlike with sperm donation, eggs are extracted surgically. The procedure is complicated and painful. Before the surgery, the egg donor must inject herself with an ovulation suppressant every morning for a few weeks. She then must take an ovulation stimulant to produce a large quantity of eggs prior to their extraction. Home injections of another drug, more difficult to administer, are required. Extreme mood swings were noticed by a donor's husband as a result of the drugs she injected.

When the doctor ascertains by ultrasound that the eggs are present and ready to be removed, outpatient surgery is performed, using a long needle to extract the microscopic eggs, which are stored in a test tube. They are then fertilized with the

sperm of an infertile woman's husband, and implanted in the uterus of the infertile woman.

The donor is paid \$1,650. each time she goes through the process, while egg recipients "come from as far as Australia and the Philippines, paying \$11,000 for each attempted pregnancy," according to Kim Kowsky, staff writer for the *Los Angeles Times* in her article of January 3, 1993. Couples from Japan have purchased the ova of Asian American university students, according to a 1992 article in *Redbook*, a popular women's magazine.

As of 1990, the Center for Advanced Reproductive Care in Redondo Beach, California was one of 67 fertility clinics in the United States that perform impregnation using donor ova. This clinic is more successful than most, with about 50% of attempts resulting in births, as compared to a 22% success rate in clinics nationally.

Donor altruism is not the main problem with this form of conception. The real problems are secrecy about the donor's identity that affects the children conceived this way, and the increasing acceptance by U.S. society of the commodification of life. Ovum donors and recipient couples rarely meet. There is no provision for the offspring to learn the identity of their genetic

mother/donors at any point in the future. And low-income women are "motivated" to donate at least in part by the economic hardship.

And there is another controversy. Homophobia is built into the process in a new way. The Center for Advanced Reproductive Care does its best to guarantee to recipient couples that their children will not be lesbians by screening out lesbian ovum donors with the rationale that homosexuality may be hereditary. The doctors at the clinic also exclude vegetarians from being egg donors because they believe a non-meat diet "can affect the ovaries' ability to produce certain hormones."

While some bioethicists are concerned about possible exploitation of egg donors and recipients, the rights of a child/adult conceived this way to know his or her true genetic identity is ignored. In the *L.A. Times* article this issue is not addressed, though the donor says she "finds herself peeking into strollers, wondering if the child inside may be one of hers." In the article about ovum donors in *Redbook*, an infertile woman says she is not concerned about her future child's right to know his or her identity, because her own husband, an adoptee, has never wanted to know the identity of his birth parents.

In 1979, Joss Shawyer wrote in

Families with Two Moms, Two Dads

by David Tuller

San Francisco Chronicle Staff Writer

After four miscarriages, Adria Blum was ecstatic when her son was born. His father, Barry Chersky, comforted her in the delivery room during the many hours of labor. So did Adria's lover, Marilyn. So did Barry's lover, Michael Baiad.

Now the four Oakland residents, all in their 40s, share custody of Ari, a rambunctious 3-year-old conceived through artificial insemination. He feels sorry for other kids because they don't all have a Mommy, a Daddy, a Marilyn and a Michael.

"I used to feel bad that he didn't also call me Daddy . . . but then I realized that Michael is not just my name, but Ari's category for my role as a parent," Baiad said.

Welcome to the world of co-parenting, the latest plot twist in the unfolding tale of gay and lesbian family life in America. Gays with children are nothing new: Many gays and lesbians have children born in heterosexual marriages, and thousands of lesbians are rearing children conceived through sperm banks or anonymous donors.

But now a tiny yet growing number of gay men and lesbians are deciding to have children and rear them — together. Other lesbians, while retaining sole custodial and parental rights, are encouraging the fathers, or "known donors," to play an active role in the children's lives.

Liz Hendrickson, executive director of the San Francisco-based National Center for Lesbian Rights, estimates that the number of children growing up in such arrange-

ments is still in the hundreds, with most in San Francisco, New York and other urban centers. "But these families are more significant than their numbers suggest because they challenge the foundation of laws based on the heterosexual, nuclear-family model," she said.

Social and Legal Questions

Because the lovers of the biological mother and father frequently take an active role in rearing children, Hendrickson added, social and legal questions can arise.

Several factors are contributing to the trend. Some lesbians have been influenced by the discussions in recent years of the benefits of open adoption, in which parties agree that the adoptive parents will rear the child but will tell him or her about the biological parents.

Some lesbians have been influenced by the discussions in recent years of the benefits of open adoption

"I didn't want the biological father to be parenting with me, but I did want a known donor because I wanted the possibility of having contact with him in the future," said Ilene Chaya Gusfield, an Oakland lawyer whose 9-year-old daughter occasionally spends time with her biological father.

The phenomenon has also benefited from improved relations between gay men and lesbians, which stem largely from their joint efforts to fight the AIDS epidemic.

At the same time, said Oakland health care worker Leland Traiman, healthy gay men, weary of years of death and mourning, are starting to look to the future.

"We have experienced so much loss, and this is a wonderful response to that — an affirmation of life, of family, of community," said Traiman, who is planning to open a sperm bank for gay men that caters primarily to lesbians who want their children to have some contact with their fathers.

With a close lesbian friend, Traiman wants to raise a child conceived through artificial insemination. Although the woman is not yet pregnant, they both have put a house on the market. They plan to buy a duplex together to make it easier to share custody.

Traiman has already fathered a 4-month-old daughter, who is being reared by her mother and the mother's lover. Although he has relinquished all parental and financial responsibilities and the mother's lover hopes to adopt the child, Traiman plans to play "a godfather or uncle type of role" in her life. Moreover, his parents have decided to move from New Mexico to the Bay Area to be near their only grandchild.

Shirley Traiman, Leland's mother, said she is "delighted," not fazed, by the unusual arrangement. The two mothers, she said, "are beautiful women, and when they reassured my husband and I that they wanted us to participate in grandparenting, we jumped."

continued . . .

'Sperm-and-Egg Mixers'

A year ago, Traiman founded Prospective Queer Parents, which holds brunches that some participants have affectionately named "sperm-and-egg mixers." On the second Sunday of every month, about two dozen gay men and lesbians interested in finding co-parents gather to eat, chat . . . and scope out each other's genes.

Although no one in the group has yet gotten pregnant, several men and women are discussing how arrangements might work. At a recent gathering, over bagels, brownies and fruit salad, participants discussed the vicissitudes in their search for the perfect co-parent.

A lesbian couple and their prospective male co-parent fretted over the legal and emotional challenges of trying to construct a three-way parenting arrangement.

their biggest troubles come from a society and a legal system that fail to acknowledge the validity of their families

A gay man related happily that he and his lesbian co-parent had finally drawn up an agreement and now plan to start inseminating. And another lesbian expressed disappointment that a close gay friend, after much thought, had decided that she did not want to rear a child with her.

Adria Blum said the trend reflects the attempts of gays and lesbians to recreate the kind of extended family that thrives in older cultures but has all but disappeared in America's highly mobile society.

"Our family arrangement is in many ways radical and visionary,

since we're a bunch of four queers," she said. "But in other ways, we're a very traditional family — we value longevity, and struggling through for the long haul."

The logistics can be complicated. Ari, Blum's son, spends half the week at his mothers' house and half the week with his fathers, who live less than a mile away. Because of their schedules, Blum said that the five of them do not gather as often as they might like.

But co-parents generally say that their biggest troubles come from a society and a legal system that fail to acknowledge the validity of their families.

In California, as in many other states, the law presumes that if artificial insemination takes place in a doctor's office or through a sperm bank, the donor has no rights and the mother's lover can legally adopt the child. If the insemination takes place at home, the donor can assert full paternal rights and the lover of the lesbian mother has no legal standing.

Consequently, the nonbiological mothers in co-parenting arrangements often have deep concerns about their role and relationship to the child, said one San Francisco woman who, with her lover, is discussing having a child with a gay man. "If my lover is the biological mother, then I'd like it to be named after my late father so that I feel like I have a spiritual connection to the child," she said.

Hendrickson, the attorney, said the law should be flexible enough to recognize that some families have three parents who all have legitimate rights. She added that the rigidity of the legal system is one reason some co-parenting disputes end up in court, with lesbians and gay men

fighting fiercely over custody and other issues.

To avoid such fights, many co-parents draw up agreements outlining their responsibilities and expectations. Although these contracts are not legally binding, they provide judges as well as parents with an irrefutable record of their initial intent.

Co-parents argue that their children, far from being confused, actually benefit from having a wider range of adult influences.

Although most of these children are still under 5 years old, some are considerably older, such as the 13-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son of a gay man and a lesbian from Virginia. The parents and their respective lovers live in a duplex, and the daughter said she and her brother enjoy the freedom to run between the two flats.

And there is another advantage, she added: dinner options.

"If our mothers are having Hungarian sausage upstairs but downstairs they're having pizza, they'll eat downstairs — but if they're having breaded chicken upstairs, that's my favorite dish, so I'll go upstairs," she said. ▲

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LOVE
makes a family

▲ RESOURCES ▲ & NEWS

Chain of Life

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April 1924

from the BULLETIN OF THE CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE OF AMERICA, report by the INTER-CITY CONFERENCE ON ILLEGITIMACY:

"At the last meeting of the Inter-City Conference of Case Workers in Lansing, Michigan, the subject of the Ethics of Social Work was discussed. . .

The group tried to face the question of whether social workers, in cases of illegitimacy, are in the habit of asking their clients to follow a course of action which the social worker himself would not follow if the case affected his own family."

▲ A support group for adoptees and others who are interested in adoptee issues is currently held on Monday nights at San Francisco State University at the women's center from 7 pm to 9:30 pm. It is free of charge, and is led by adoptee Barbara Jean Allender Douglass, who can be reached at 415-885-6124 for more information.

▲ Adoptee Amy Jane Cheney will present the following events for adoptees in San Francisco:

- March 13: Network & Open House
- April 17: Breath and Movement Workshop
- May 8: Art Show and Reading
- May 22: Healing Ourselves Workshop
- June 12: Conscious Loving Workshop.

For more information, call Amy at 415-647-1492.

▲ A benefit for "Sealed Records, Sealed Lives," a documentary film in progress that examines the lifelong effects of adoption on the 30 million birth parents, adoptees, and adoptive parents in the United States today, will be held Thursday evening, March 25, at 8 pm at Old Wives' Tales Bookstore, 1009 Valencia St. at 21st St., San Francisco. Sheila Ganz, producer/director, will speak on the progress of the film, and the various experiences of surrender, separation, and adoption. She will show a 7-1/2 minute sample video, with questions and answers afterwards. Your feedback is welcome. Free admission. For more info, call 415-564-3691.

▲ Therapy groups and individual counseling for adoptees are offered by Sally Clark, M.A., in Oakland, California. She writes, "Being an adoptee can result in a lonely journey with different issues surfacing at each stage of life. You may feel that no one truly understands the impact of being adopted; frequently, family, lovers, friends and even therapists cannot empathize with our pain because of the myths about adoption that surround us in our culture. Group interaction can be an invaluable part of your healing. This group will provide a safe loving space to share your experiences. You will learn about the issues that face adoptees and begin to break through your feelings of isolation and pain. You will begin to understand the gifts you have because of our unique experience, along with the problems that may surface in intimate relationships. Join us. You are welcomed." For more information, call Sally at (510) 549-9401.

▲ I recently received a copy of a letter about changes in the provincial adoption records access law in British Columbia. It reads in part: "We in TRIAD have been lobbying for open records in British Columbia since our Victoria Chapter started in 1988. Many changes have taken place since then, and today British Columbia has the most progressive legislation in all of Canada, with an "active" registry for adult adoptees, birth parents, and siblings. It has taken a lot of letter writing, the presenting of briefs, meetings, telephone calls, and just plain blood, sweat, and tears. ". . . We were told yesterday that open adoption records are going to happen here in B.C. 'within the year.' We expect the announcement will be made in September when the new

Freedom of Information Act is initiated. We just wanted to share the good news with you."

▲ The Second Annual March and Rally for the Rights of Sexually Abused Children will be held on May 9, 1993 at 12 noon on the White House lawn (the back yard) in Washington, D.C. This march and rally is intended to bring to public attention that one out of three adults are survivors of child sexual abuse. All survivors and their supporters are encouraged to attend the march and rally, which will consist of presentations by survivors, protective parents of abused children, and legislators who are trying to effect laws to protect today's child victims, who cannot vote or lobby, and have no voice but ours. The rally will be followed by a march down Pennsylvania Avenue to the front of the White House.

Help end the conspiracy of silence so that we all may be free from sexual abuse. For additional information, please contact Amy at P.O. Box 267942, Chicago, IL 60626-7942. If you are unable to attend, please display a white ribbon on May 9 in memory of the thousands of survivors and child victims, and fly your flag at half-mast to honor those who remain prisoners in their own homes.

▲ A very interesting research article on the history of sealed adoption records was published in June 1992 by the *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*. Written by E. Wayne Carp of Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, Washington, the article is titled "The Sealed Adoption Records Controversy in Historical Perspective: The Case of the Children's Home Society of Washington, 1895 - 1988." Carp found that the Children's Home Society of Washington routinely released identifying information of birth parents to adoptees until the mid-1950s, despite

sealed records laws. Following a transition period during which the agency sometimes gave out names to adoptees, it was not until the early 1970s that the Society made the change to a strictly closed-records policy. Carp claims the adoption rights movement tends to be ahistorical and to make assumptions about the past that are not always accurate. You may find this journal in your local university library.

▲ The Rainbow Clinic is a new Medical Clinic for Children of Lesbians and Gay Men in San Francisco. It will have a grand opening March 1, 1993. In March, the clinic is open two evenings: March 1 and March 22, from 5 to 7:30 pm. Appointments can be made by calling 415-476-6410. The clinic is located at UCSF, Ambulatory Care Center Building, 400 Parnassus Ave., 2nd floor, in the Department of Pediatrics.

The medical staff writes: "Our goal is to provide high quality pediatric services in a gay and lesbian-sensitive environment. We are hoping also to provide a variety of resources including discussion seminars, guest speakers, and materials such as journals, books, and videos of interest to lesbian and gay parents and their children. We accept most private insurance plans, Healthnet and Medi-Cal.

"We are delighted to have this opportunity to provide a much-needed service to our community as well as to explore lesbian and gay parenting issues in greater depth."

The clinic will be staffed by Doctors Tamar Gershon, Nick Giardini, and Tina Gabby, and nurse practitioner Liz San Luis.

▲ The American Adoption Congress is interested in member input on topics that will be covered in the organization's position paper.

Topics under discussion include reproductive technologies (including record-keeping mechanisms for surrogate motherhood, artificial insemination, and in vitro fertilization), gay/lesbian adoptions, guardianship, open records (should birth families, siblings, and grandparents of an adoptee also have access?), the question of whether advertising for birth families is acceptable, and many other topics. Send your opinions and/or relevant articles or suggested book titles on the topics under discussion to Susan Miller-Havens, AAC Education Department, 1000 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 9, Washington, DC 20036.

Do you want to write an article or submit a news item for Chain of Life? I am always interested in your input. Deadlines for each issue are listed on the back page of this newsletter.

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SENATE BILL 1148: Safeguards for California Birth Parents Who Choose Independent Adoptions

by Christina R. Thanstrom

When Arleen signed the papers relinquishing her newborn daughter to the Department of Social Services, the agency did not inform her of any options. She was 19 years old, unmarried, and in her first year of nursing school. Pregnant young women such as Arleen simply did not keep their babies in 1966 and abortion was neither safe nor legal. Perhaps there really weren't any options for the Department of Social Services to inform Arleen about.

Arleen was asked to name the child but not allowed to see or hold her. She signed the relinquishment papers on the day she gave birth and was never told of the chance of changing her decision.

Were Arleen in the same situation in California in 1994, things would most certainly be different. Arleen would indeed have options, and because of landmark independent adoption reform law, Senate Bill 1148 (SB 1148), the Department of Social Services would be required to explain fully the options available to her, including that she may keep her child while receiving financial support from the government or private organizations.

SB 1148 was carried by California Senator Marian Bergeson (Republican, Orange County) and sponsored by the American Adoption Congress and Families for Adoption Reform and Children's Rights. Governor Pete Wilson signed the bill, making it law, in September

of 1992. The changes enumerated in SB 1148 will take effect in 1994.

The new law is a true landmark in the reform of birth parents' rights. Affecting only independent adoptions and not state adoptions, the law provides that much of the previous responsibility of interviewing and assessing prospective adoptive parents may now be delegated to a licensed private adoption agency or individual. These assessment tasks, which include home studies of the prospective parents chosen by the birth parents, were previously performed solely by the Department of Social Services. The development and regulation of uniform guidelines will continue to be handled by the Department of Social Services.

*no questions will be asked
and there will be no "best
interest" or suitability hear-
ings permitted*

The law also mandates that these licensees must fully explain the options available to birth parents. The law further mandates that the licensees must conduct four separate meetings in which birth parents are counseled on the possibilities of keeping their child. ~~Birth parents are also made aware of some of the more~~ The result of the law on the parties involved, however, is not as easily predictable. Viewed as a much-needed step forward in the fight for

birth parents' rights, the bill was created with the best interest of all parties in mind. But it appears that SB 1148 may result in fewer adoptions that are ever actually completed.

*The changes in SB 1148 will
take effect in 1994*

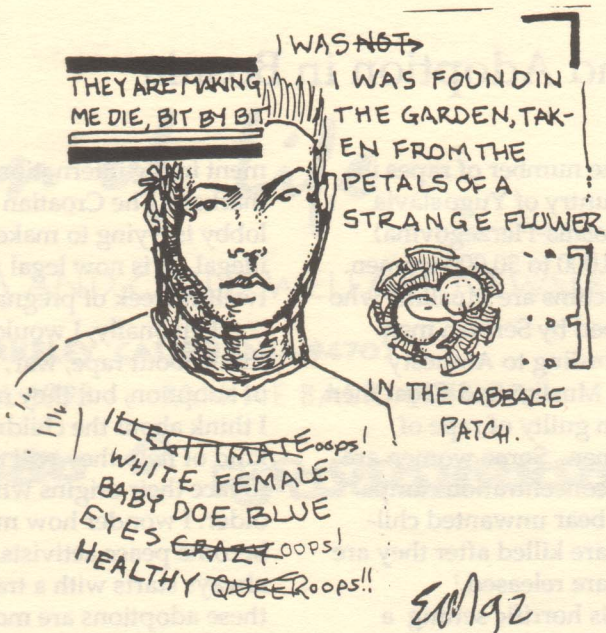
American Adoption Congress president Kate Burke describes SB 1148 as landmark because of its emphasis on the fundamental right of birth parents to be parents as well as to understand their options. The logic behind the four-month time period is that it will allow for a healthier child because a decision to remove a child from its prospective adoptive parents will happen sooner in some cases than the current law allows.

As an adoptee with strong beliefs in adoption reform, I have some difficulty with SB 1148. It seems no one is truly thinking of the child. Are we to believe that a baby who has been with nurturing adoptive parents for two months will not be affected by return to the birth parents as much as a child who has been with an adoptive family for six months? What is best for the child in these situations? Of course, no decision in the adoption realm is an easy one and SB 1148 is a step in the right direction toward adoptions that hurt less and benefit more. The only ones who can justly analyze SB 1148 and its effects are the indepen-

dently adopted children of tomorrow.

For a copy of SB 1148, contact California Senator Marian Bergeson's office in Newport Beach or Sacramento. ▲

Christina R. Thanstrom is a first-year law student in San Francisco interested in a career in adoption law. She is also an adoptee who has met both of her birthparents.



Erin McGuigan is a 22-year-old student at The Evergreen State College in Olympia. She is an aspiring artist, musician and writer, and a perspiring amateur.

... OVUM DONORS continued from page 1

her book *Death By Adoption*, "Anyone can live with truth, no one can live with lies, and only those who live a lie can appreciate the difference." Adoptees in closed records adoptions, and other people who have never met their missing parents, are the only ones in a position to appreciate and understand how it feels never to see a reflection of your own characteristics in others.

But why should a business that makes a lot of money bother to keep accessible records for future donor offspring? Almost no one seems to think it is important — except those of us who know the difference. ▲

Many thanks to the readers who sent information on ovum donors on which this article is based.



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History Repeats Itself

April 1925

As published in the *Bulletin of the Child Welfare League of America, Report of the Inter-City Conference on Illegitimacy, New York City*

"The joint meeting with the Child Welfare League of America is scheduled for Thursday afternoon, June 11th [1925]. The subject for discussion is, 'When is it to the Advantage of Mother and Child to be Kept Together and When Should They be Separated?'"

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Rape and Adoption in Bosnia

Estimates of the number of rapes in the former country of Yugoslavia (now called Bosnia-Herzegovina) range from 20,000 to 50,000 women. Most of the victims are Muslims who have been raped by Serbian men although, according to Amnesty International, Muslim and Croat men have also been guilty of rape of "enemy" women. Some women are being held in concentration camps and forced to bear unwanted children. Others are killed after they are raped. Some are released.¹

Within this horrific setting a Catholic adoption organization, Caritas, circulates in the Bosnian camps and takes babies for place-

ment in the international adoption market.² The Croatian Catholic lobby is trying to make abortion illegal. It is now legal until the twelfth week of pregnancy.

Personally, I would rather not think about rape, war, and the causes of adoption, but they must be faced. I think about the children, and what kind of help they will need to be able to face their origins when they are older. I wonder how many will become peace activists. Adoption always starts with a tragedy, and these adoptions are more tragic than most.

¹ *Time*, February 22, 1993

² *N.O.W. Times*, January 1993

— Janine Baer

Writing an Article for Chain of Life?

Here are the deadlines for 1993's newsletters:

<u>Issue Date</u>	<u>Last day for submissions</u>
May/June 1993	March 31, 1993
July/August 1993	May 31, 1993
September/October 1993	July 31, 1993
Nov./December 1993	Sept. 30, 1993

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Are you — an adoptee, a birth parent, an adoptive parent, a professional/other? _____