

Chain of Life

FEMINIST ADOPTION REFORM AND CHILD WELFARE

P.O. BOX 8081 ▲ BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94707

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The Price We Have Paid: In Memory of Mileva Maric

by Mary Anne Cohen

For many years I have been involved in the movement for adoption reform, which advocates open records, open adoption, and the reunion of separated family members. I am a mother who surrendered a child for adoption. As such, I always take an interest in stories involving adoption, and so was drawn to the following tragic tale:

When in July he learned that the birthmother was pregnant, he promised to forego all scientific and professional ambitions and accept the lowliest position if necessary, in order to marry her. At the time, his highest ambitions seemed thwarted not only by his fiancée's pregnancy, but also because he had just received a devastating reply to his criticism of Drude's Theory. But the birthmother's concern that he might throw away his talent to assume an unacceptable position just to make her happy was unnecessary: we note that the birthfather was able to draw on larger reserves of self-confidence and to continue his plans for a career in science.

By contrast, the birthmother never had the luxury of choosing between the conventional path of teacher or more lofty ambitions. Already three months pregnant, she failed to obtain her teaching certificate, and

concerns for her future family, and the ups and downs of the birthfather's search for a position now increasingly overshadowed her own professional desires. In the end, she apparently agreed to give up her illegitimate daughter, and resigned herself to having a second child after their marriage. The available evidence suggests that by the time her first child was born and surrendered, the birthmother had ceased to be the intellectually and emotionally formidable partner that the birthfather had begun courting five years earlier.¹

*the birthmother never
had the luxury of
choosing more lofty
ambitions*

This couple married and had another child, a son, within two years of the surrender. They later had another son, who was born normal, even gifted, but developed schizophrenia in late adolescence and never recovered. The marriage was troubled, and they divorced after sixteen years, bitterly, when he

continued on page 3...

Adoption from China

A version of the following letter was sent to the New York Times in April 1993:

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to your feature article, entitled "China's Market in Orphan Girls: How Li Sha, Abandoned in Wuhan, Became Hanna Porter, Embraced in Greenwich Village" by Bruce Porter.

I was born in Korea in 1960 and was adopted into a white u.s. family when I was five, in 1966, at a time when the international adoption industry was just beginning. I was given an Anglo name also when I was adopted, "Anne," and reclaimed my Korean name, "Mi Ok," which was also kept as my middle name. I am a published writer, poet, artist, activist, feminist, and clinical social worker. I have been averaging five national or international speaking engagements each year for the last ten years, writing about and presenting on the political, economic, racial, and cultural issues of international adoptions in the u.s.

Your article specifically reflects the issues I speak about to adoption conferences, adoptive parents' organizations, adoption agencies, and most recently, university and college Asian American students' groups. I have no answers, but only questions, when I speak to these various groups. Many of my audience members are adoptive parents

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ADOPTION FROM CHINA

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seeking solutions and my suggestions for dealing with the adoption-related problems that they hope to avoid — issues of societal and institutional racism, discrimination, cultural assimilation, stereotyping, and gender biases. I speak as an adopted person — one who has experienced the loss, anger, displacement, sadness, grief, mourning, confusion, bewilderment, and abandonment issues that most adopted individuals feel all our lives, despite the privileges, material enrichment, education, love, and nurturing that most of us have received from our adoptive families.

I hope that the author and the readers realize that China's misogynistic policies that follow from the one-child ruling, which has created a market supply of female infants, are misdirected. They result in female infanticide and now in the marketing of female infants for international adoption. The adoption policy is just another form of trafficking: first women in prostitution, and now children, through adoptions. Adoptive parents are the first to admit that they are adopting internationally because they have to wait for or pay an excess amount of cash for a white, healthy, "blue ribbon" baby. With international adoption, they can

"rescue" a child, fulfilling their rescue fantasies through cultural imperialism. Some have the racist belief that a white, u.s. adoptive parent could provide more than the child's birth mother of color. Many of these adoptive parents also have not resolved their infertility issues.

Adoption brings with it challenges that parents do not anticipate. For example, some adoptive parents tell 'their' children that their birth mothers must have loved them so much, they gave them up. I take issue with this approach. I was told the same by my adoptive parents and for years I feared that if my adoptive parents loved me so much, they would also give me up. This well-meaning, good-intentioned explanation only perpetuates and confuses the issues of love, guilt, abandonment, and insecurity, and does not validate that the policies of China, Korea, and other countries of origin have forced these birth mothers to relinquish their children. It isn't the birth mother who is "abandoning" her child, it is the country of origin and its policies, social intolerance, and cultural values that are abandoning these children. I attempt to warn adoptive parents not to perpetuate their rescue fantasies onto their adopted children through "why-you-were-adopted" stories and "explanations" that maintain the adoptive parents' comfort level.

PRO-
CHOICE,
PRO-
CHILD

As a clinician, I believe that these children from China, Korea, and other countries of origin will experience feelings of loss, displacement, anger, sadness, mourning, grief, cultural identity confusion, and resentment at different times in their lives, and to greater or lesser degrees, for which no amount of love, caring, "understanding," or nurturance will compensate. All I hope for for these children is that the adoptive parents will seek counseling and therapeutic interventions for both the child and for themselves. Although many adoptive parents wish to believe otherwise, the adoption process does not end when the child arrives. In my personal and clinical experience, it is only the beginning.

Most sincerely,

Mi Ok Song Bruining, M.S.W.
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MILEVA MARIC

...continued from page 1

left her for another woman. The birthmother never remarried. The fate of her surrendered only daughter was never known. The birthmother never resumed her studies or career.

Whose file, you may ask, is this? What sanctimonious social worker compiled these dry facts from the wreckage of three lives? Is this woman now one of the leaders in the adoption reform movement, or a new member just making the first timid steps to search; or is she still in the closet with her private pain, isolated and alone? Is the birthfather one of the few who join a search and support group, or is he one of the hidden birthfathers who opposes openness for fear of damage to his "professional reputation"? And what of the adoptee? Is she now an adult? Did she ever search? Did this story happen in 1945, or 1968, or 1976? Could the same story happen now? From the text quoted, there is no way to answer these questions with certainty.

In fact, the story happened in 1902, in Europe, and the name of the birthfather will be recognized by all — Albert Einstein, the great physicist and discoverer of the theory of relativity. Although the loss of his only daughter must have caused Einstein deep personal heartache, as he was an ethical and sensitive man, it did not in any way interfere with his career or accomplishments. While we all know the name Albert Einstein, how many of us have ever heard of his lover and first wife, Mileva Maric? How many of us have ever heard of his lost daughter Lieserl (Elizabeth)?

It might at first glance be supposed that Mileva was just a supporting character, the Dumb Blonde, the beautiful romantic ornament to the Great Man; tragic, but without any intrinsic merit of her own. She

might even be seen as the whining woman or pushy bitch who almost got in the way of the Great Man's important work — isn't that what birthmothers are supposed to be? Didn't we all take time out from being hairdressers or shop girls to give birth to that unfortunate "illegitimate" child? Don't women tempt saintly and scholarly men to "sin"?

In fact, Mileva Maric fit none of those stereotypes. She was a brilliant and promising young scientist in her own right, and from their letters, it is evident that she and Albert had a free, loving, tender, and equal relationship, at least until she got pregnant. In her early letters she comes across as bright, confident, and focused on a career in physics, as well as on her love for Albert. There are numerous playful references to how they will study together forever, and never become "philistines" like their parents. In Einstein's letters, he treats Mileva as his full intellectual equal, and among the endearments and gossip about mutual friends are discussions of Einstein's theories and studies, in which Mileva participates as an esteemed colleague.

Although I was unable to find much early background on Mileva, what little there is is impressive. She was a Serbian girl from what later became Yugoslavia, and she and Einstein met when both were students at the Swiss Federal Polytechnic Institute. While still a teenager, Mileva received a special dispensation to study mathematics and physics at an all-male secondary school, and she was the only female in her class at the School of Mathematics and Science at S.F.P.I. She must have been more brilliant than most of her male contemporaries to have achieved what she did in an age when women in science were scorned and discouraged.

Yet after the birth and surrender of her first child, and her marriage and birth of other children, Mileva evidently gave up her studies and

hopes of a career, and did not resume them even after her divorce. The girl who had once travelled fearlessly all over Europe, whom the young Einstein once described as "a creature who is my equal, and who is as strong and independent as I am" never again left Zurich, and became a sad and silent shadow.²

She was described this way:

Friends noticed a change in Mileva's attitude and thought the romance might be doomed. Something had happened between the two, but Mileva would only say it was 'intensely personal.' Whatever it was, she brooded about it and Albert seemed in some way responsible. Friends encouraged Mileva to talk about her problem and to get it out in the open. She insisted it was too personal and kept it a secret all her life — a vital detail in the story of Albert Einstein that still remains shrouded in mystery.³

This excerpt is from a book written in 1962. The "mystery" was not solved until recently, when the early letters of Albert and Mileva were discovered by a descendant.

Although "Mileva helped him solve certain mathematical problems" when Einstein was working on the theory of relativity, she remained very much anonymous and in the background. And it sounds as if there was little communication in the last years of their marriage, when friends "...worried because her dark moods were becoming more frequent. She was far too introverted and never talked about herself. Even alone with her family, she had little to say and her long periods of silence irritated Albert. If they ever discussed the root of the trouble, that pre-marital incident, nobody knew about it."⁴ This is a classic description of a depressed birthmother trying to live with her awful secret: someone I

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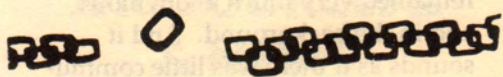
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Chain of Life



The title "Chain of Life" refers to the physical, genetic connection that all people have with other people, but that only adoptees in closed records adoptions are asked to ignore. Adoptees do not exist only to be living experiments in nature versus nurture studies. Like everyone, we are the product of our genes, our life experiences, and our own thoughts and actions. We have a right to know as much about ourselves as we need and want to know.

...continued from page 3

have known, and someone I have been.

In Mileva's depression and retreat from intellectual pursuits, the world lost the potential contributions of a brilliant intellect and great soul. We know what Albert gave the world — what more might Mileva have given us had her talent and spirit been nurtured rather than crushed? And what of her daughter, the adoptee, who probably lived and died in some small village in Eastern Europe, with no knowledge of her brilliant parents and famous father? What insurmountable obstacles stood in the path of Lieserl Einstein, growing up anonymous, female, and adopted, under some other name? What has the world lost that she might have given?

And what has the world lost in the stifling and crippling of the minds and souls of countless other birthmothers, those who began with great potential in science, in the arts, literature, politics, medicine and other fields, but who never achieved that potential due at least in part to the toxic effects of adoption loss? While just being female in our society is an obstacle to achievement, for how many of us has the added burden and secret stigma of surrendering a child been the last straw that kept us in depression and obscurity? I see my own life and the lives of many of my dearest friends reflected in the sad story of Mileva Maric. Such a waste, such a heavy punishment for the "crime" of loving and giving birth.

Part of the reason I surrendered my son was so that his brilliant scientist father should not have to interrupt his studies and take some lowly job — his brother-in-law had offered him a job as a carpenter — to support me and our child. Like Mileva, even if I could, I would not have forced that upon him, the Great Man and future doctor. I gave

no thought to my own brilliance or talent as an artist and poet, or to my needs or the needs of my child, but was willing to sacrifice everything so that a man who no longer even loved me would not be uncomfortable or inconvenienced.

The real tragedy is that in the end, nobody was better off: not I, not the birthfather, who is slowly drinking himself to death in spite of being a distinguished doctor and professor; and not our child, who has

Their divorce is typical of many birthparents who later married each other

not been happy in his adoptive home. Perhaps the same was true for the Einsteins and their daughter. Their divorce is typical of many birthparents who later married each other, often preceded by years of private recriminations over whose fault and choice the surrender was, with blame and bitterness on both sides. In spite of love, which did exist between Mileva and Albert on some level all their lives, such marriages are doomed.

When Albert left Mileva, he wrote her a letter in which he said, "You will see that I will always remain true to you, in my way."⁵ Mileva kept this letter and all of Albert's earlier letters all her life, until she died in 1948. It is sad to note that Albert must have discarded or lost many of her letters to him; but when he won the Nobel Prize, he gave all the money to Mileva rather than to his second wife, to whom he was still married at the time. But the story of their early passion and of the birth of Lieserl was such as awful "shame" that it was buried for over ninety years in the dust of old love letters, and came to light too late for any healing for those most intimately involved.

Those of us for whom the

adoption story is not yet dead history struggle to overcome the same shame and trauma, to regain what is left of our lives in spite of lost confidence, lost pride, lost years, lost love, and loss of the capacity to love without cynicism and fear. In spite of being no longer whole, we try, those of us not too wounded to try, to make some beauty in the world. It is no wonder that Mileva did not go back to science but instead devoted her life to caring for her mentally ill youngest son; the wonder is that she survived at all. The price she paid for being young and in love was too high for her, and it is too high for us as well.

What the world has lost in the stifling and crippling of women like Mileva for "sexual crimes" cannot be regained or counted. How many Einsteins and Shakespeares and Lincolns and Walt Whitmans have we lost, because they were first women, and then birthmothers, or incest survivors, or battered wives, or rape victims, or some other "unspeakable" victim of male domination? Has it been worth it to assuage the obsessive fears of the patriarchy concerning paternity and ownership of women and children? What are we losing today as somewhere a young woman of brilliant potential gives up her child and her life, and goes into a life of shame, submission, and silence? What if she refuses to go back to her studies for years, like I did, because she was told she was "too smart" to waste

We are wounded but no longer silent

her time raising a child, and sets out to prove that statement untrue, hurting herself more than anyone else in the end? This young woman could be the great-grandchild of Lieserl; this story has no end—it will go on as long as patriarchal values prevail.

I write this essay to celebrate Mileva Maric, a brilliant and tragic woman, and her unknown but never forgotten only daughter Lieserl Einstein — may their names be rescued from obscurity and their lives brought back to honor. Weep for Lieserl, for Mileva, for me, and for so many adoptees and birthmothers who will never be what they might have been had not surrender and shame blighted their lives. Weep for us, yes, but rejoice with us as well, as we come forward to tell our stories, and the stories of those who no longer have voices with which to speak. We are wounded but no longer silent, and our words may save our daughters from our grandmothers' fate. It is time for the silence to end — the price has been paid. ▲

NOTES

¹ Jurgen Renn and Robert Schulmann, *Albert Einstein and Mileva Maric: The Love Letters* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. xxvi, introduction. This quotation was taken verbatim, except I substituted the words "birthmother" and "birthfather" for the names "Albert" and "Mileva," and removed all references to time and place.

² Albert Einstein quoted in introduction to *The Love Letters*, p. xxvi.

³ Peter Michelmores, *Einstein: Profile of The Man* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1962), p. 42, from interviews with Hans Albert Einstein, Albert and Mileva's son, 1962.

⁴ Michelmores, p. 59.

⁵ Michelmores, p. 241, from a letter written by Albert to Mileva in 1919.

▲ CHAIN LETTERS ▲

June 16, 1993

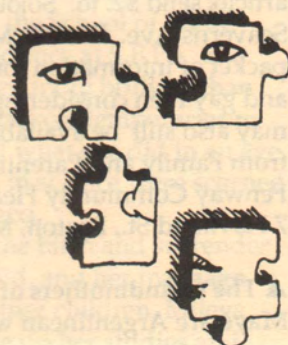
Dear Janine,

Judith S. Lewis is the author of *In the Family Way: Childbearing in the British Aristocracy 1760-1860*. This book was published in 1986 by Rutgers University Press, 109 Church St., New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901.

During that time period illegitimate children were raised by the father's family — by his parents or by him and his wife, with the same care as legitimate children. The man could develop strong affectional ties with these children. In contrast, the women rarely saw them. Patriarchal society had an enormous range of control, both formal and informal, of female sexual behavior. For example, divorced women were expected to atone for their sins by spending the rest of their lives in seclusion.

In 1839, Parliament passed the Infant Custody Act, which for the first time gave women the right to the custody of their children under the age of seven in event of a legal separation.

Joyce Bahr
New York, New York



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SEARCHER SANDY MUSSER INDICTED

Sandy Musser, whose Musser Foundation in Cape Coral, Florida reunites families separated by adoption, was indicted by a federal grand jury in March for "allegedly obtaining confidential information from the Social Security Administration." She was planning to plead not guilty at her pre-trial hearing June 10, according to a Musser Foundation representative.

A March article in the Cleveland newspaper *Plain Dealer* said Musser and Barbara Moskowitz, 53, were both charged with criminal conspiracy, wire fraud, and theft of government property. Moskowitz, an investigator in Ohio who assisted Musser, is also accused of having "posed as a court official or Social Security Administration employee to obtain confidential information from government files." The U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services Office of the Inspector General had been investigating the Musser Foundation since 1989. The conspiracy and fraud charges carry maximum sentences of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

In a mailing to supporters, Musser asked for donations to defray attorney fees, which were quoted as \$10,000 to \$15,000. Make your check payable to Musser Foundation Legal Defense Fund and mail it to The Musser Foundation, c/o James Zimmerman, Trustee, 303 Brookline Ave., Cherry Hill, NJ 08002. No contribution is too small; even one dollar or five dollars will help.

Musser stated that after the case is over, she plans to "take this issue to the Supreme Court. Sealed adoption records are immoral, illegal, and unconstitutional."

Sandy would also appreciate letters of support that she can bring to the trial. Those letters can be mailed to The Musser Foundation, P.O. Box 1860, Cape Coral, Florida 33910.

In part, the Musser Foundation Philosophy Statement says, "We believe that all family relationships should be inclusive, and not exclusive. Therefore, we believe in the concept of extending and expanding the family circle..." The foundation provides search workshops, a tracing service, open adoption education, search assistance, and private consultations. ▲

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▲ "Transracial Adoption: Facing the Issues" is an article by African American adoptee Adrianna Alty, who was raised by white parents. In the April 1993 issue of *Sojourner: The Women's Forum*, Alty reports on a conference for lesbians and gay men in Boston who wanted to adopt children. "These people were predominantly white, most were women, and many had already

adopted one or more children transracially." Panels addressed the politics and economics of adoption, including the political situation in countries where babies were available for adoption.

To obtain a copy of this excellent article, send \$2. to: Sojourner, 42 Seaverns Ave., Boston, MA 02130. A packet of information for lesbians and gay men considering adoption may also still be available for \$15. from Family and Parenting Services, Fenway Community Health Center, 7 Haviland St., Boston, MA 02119.

▲ The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo are Argentinean women

whose grandchildren were stolen by political opponents and "adopted" (illegally) during a period of dictatorship from 1976 to 1983. Largely at the urging of the Grandmothers, the United Nations included the right to one's identity in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 (the United States has not ratified this document). "Recovering Identity," an article that describes the work of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, was written by Rita Arditti and M. Brinton Lykes, and published in *Women's Studies International Forum*, Volume 15, Number 4, in 1992. According to the article, "How this right is interpreted

Film about Donor Offspring "Made in America"

Despite the title, this isn't a xenophobic film about cars, although it alludes to the production of children through sperm banks. It's the story of a seventeen-year-old African-American California high school student named Zora, played by Nia Long, who learns her mother Sarah, played by Whoopi Goldberg, used an anonymous donor from a sperm bank to conceive her. Zora is not amused, and goes to the sperm bank to look for her donor/father's identity.

Although it is a comedy, "Made in America" is the first feature film to depict a donor offspring at all. It shows Zora as someone who so badly wants to discover her donor/father's identity that she sneaks into the sperm bank's computer files. However, Zora is looking for a flesh and blood father in part because she was raised by a single mother, confounding the two separate circumstances of missing a father

and missing her genealogy.

Never mind that there is a turn of plot at the end that proves family is who we make it. Adoptees know that better than most people. To say that family ties are created by shared experience and caring does not contradict the strength of the desire to know one's genetic parents.

If anyone has reason to be offended by this film it is those few white Americans who have an insecure racial identity — and they probably won't bother seeing "Made In America" anyway. They might not like the film's comic stereotypes of white people, such as two pestering women who shop 'til they drop at Sarah's African Queen ethnic book shop. Now that I think about it, the worst white stereotypes are of women rather than men, since Hal (Ted Danson) becomes a real person by the end of the film.


Many critics thought this film was stupid, but one reporter took it

as an opportunity to write a serious article about the concerns of donor offspring for the *San Francisco Examiner*.

"Made in America" was filmed on location in Berkeley and Oakland.

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remains an open question."

▲ **The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child** by Nancy Newton Verrier is now available as a book. "In its application of information about pre-natal psychology, attachment, bonding, and loss, *The Primal Wound* clarifies the effects of separation from the birthmother on adopted children. ...it gives those children, whose pain has long been unacknowledged or misunderstood, validation for their feelings as explanations for their behavior.

The author is the mother of two daughters, one who is adopted and one who is not. Cost with postage is \$17.45 for the first book; \$15.45 for

the second book purchased at the same time. California residents add \$1.08 tax per book. Send check or money order in U.S. funds to: *Nancy Newton Verrier, 919 Village Center, Lafayette, CA 94549.*

▲ The May/June 1993 issue of *Utne Reader* ("The Best of the Alternative Press") focused on children, and included an article titled, "**Tempest in a Test Tube: New birth technologies spawn controversy about revealing identity of sperm and egg donors.**" Among many other sources cited, Chain of Life's editor was quoted in support of the right of donor offspring to know their genetic father's identity. For a single

issue of *Utne*, send \$4. to: *Utne Reader, 1624 Harmon Place, Suite 330, Minneapolis, MN 55403.*

▲ **Victories for Lesbian Mothers:** In May 1993, the donor who is the genetic father of an eleven-year-old girl lost his bid for parental rights and visitation rights. "Our kids feel triumphant and safe" said one of their mothers. Judge Edward M. Kaufmann said giving the donor paternity rights would not be in the children's best interest "under these circumstances, at this late time...". The two mothers, Sandra Russo and Robin Young, and their two daughters had made contact with the

turn the page...

FEEDBACK

FROM RENEWAL FORMS...

I would like Chain of Life to include more...

...articles on ongoing impact of reunion on lives of those affected by adoption

... of what it already includes — great articles, provocative, thoughtful, well-researched

I have liked...

...the political updates and literature info.

... most everything — quality of articles, reviews, poetry, information — all good

Other comments...

... just keep doing it, you provide a much-needed invaluable service
... just keep up the very good work
... I have liked *Chain of Life* very much. I am not renewing only because my interests have changed, so I don't make time to read it. Keep up the excellent work, and maybe one day I'll re-join. In any case your publication has definitely shaped and expanded my thinking in uncountable and wonderful ways.

I may be interested in writing an article for Chain of Life on the following topic...

...book reviews, death of birth parent

... maybe on "bisexuality and adoptees: multiple communities/identities/families and one identity/community/family"

Heterosexuals Only

France has written a new bioethics bill that provides guidelines for alternative reproduction methods. It bans surrogate motherhood, and it provides that fertility treatments are to be given only to heterosexual couples of reproductive age. Those couples can be married or unmarried. In addition, sperm and egg donors are to remain anonymous; "a child has no right to know the identity of a donor."

—from the April 20, 1993 edition of *The Washington Post*, sent to me by William Gage.

NEWS AND RESOURCES

...continued from previous page

biological fathers when the girls were 4 and 5 years old. The donor is planning an appeal. (*National NOW Times*, Allison Busch, June 1993.)

In another case, the Vermont Supreme Court ruled that a lesbian can adopt her lover's biological children. Deborah Lashman can now adopt her lover's sons. Associate Justice Denise Johnson wrote in the decision, "To deny legal protection to their relationship, as a matter of law, is inconsistent with the children's best interests and therefore with the public policy of this state." The two mothers now will share parental rights and responsibilities. (*from the San Francisco Chronicle*, June 21, 1993)

DEADLINES

The deadline for articles and news items for *Chain of Life* are:

July 31, 1993 — Issue #27
Sept. 30, 1993 — Issue #28

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