

# Chain of Life

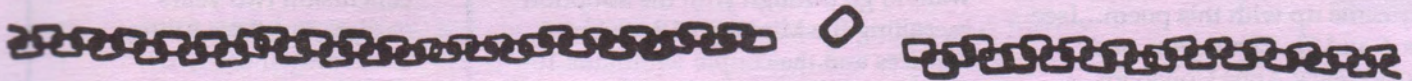
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## ISSUES IN ADOPTION AND CHILD WELFARE

▲ SINCE 1989 ▲

P.O. BOX 8081 · BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94707

ISSUE 28 · NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1993 · JANINE BAER, M.A., EDITOR



### DO KIDS HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW THEIR FATHERS?

San Francisco Bay Times, a biweekly newspaper of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual communities, published an interview with April Martin, author of *The Lesbian and Gay Parenting Handbook: Creating and Raising Our Families* in its September 23, 1993 issue. Interviewer Louise Rafkin is herself an author of one book about the children of lesbian mothers and another about lesbian daughters. An excerpt from the interview is reprinted here with permission of San Francisco Bay Times, 288 Seventh St., San Francisco, California 94103.

LOUISE RAFKIN: The book gives very thorough investigation to the hows and why of getting pregnant, different methods and donor do's and don'ts. You consider legal, financial and familial configurations. The book seems to point at a very fundamental question, which is how much control and ownership do we have over children? How much do kids have a right to information? Do kids have a right to know their fathers? We make very serious decisions for children and these decisions aren't easy.

APRIL MARTIN: I struggled with those questions through much of the book. The book forced me to consider my

own choices. My partner and I used anonymous donors who are not knowable, but I have recently written the physician who inseminated us and asked if there was any possibility that they could be knowable at some point. When we made that decision we thought, well, he's only giving sperm, who needs to know him anyway? At that point we thought genetic contribution didn't count. But I have come to realize that things are more complicated and that it is not only my decision who needs to know what. Whether my children need to know something is their need. Ideally, I would like every child to have the option to know who their genetic parents are, at whatever point it becomes a question for them.

I think parents have the determining right to form the constellation of the family while the child is growing up. During that time parents can decide who the adults in the family are going to be. But once the child is grown, he or she should have access to information about their biological parents. That holds true for children who are adopted, or children of AI or surrogacy. ▲

*The Lesbian and Gay Parenting Handbook* by April Martin, published by HarperCollins, \$15.

### Second Year

by Paula Friedman

This is the second autumn  
since the spring  
you found me

The yellow leaves the sky  
are neither more nor less  
bright than usual again

This is the second year  
I know you are here,  
and not in the  
nowhere  
I put you

"for his sake"  
your sake

not ever expected

here,  
This is the second year.

© 1992 by Paula Friedman

## ▲ CHAIN LETTERS ▲

September 1, 1993

Dear Janine,

Sally Brown wasn't the only person who was deeply moved by Mary Anne Cohen's article on Mileva Maric Einstein. I was so affected by this story that I thought about it incessantly for weeks, did some research on my own, and finally came up with this poem...[see pages 6 and 7]. Thank you, and thanks to Mary Anne Cohen for inspiring it.

*Sincerely,*  
Susan Ito  
Oakland, California ▲

September 3, 1993

Dear Janine,

I would like to thank you and Jean Paton of Orphan Voyage for the wonderful review of *Stories of Adoption: Loss and Reunion* that appeared in the [September-] October 1993 *Chain of Life* newsletter. We hope that the personal testimonies presented in this book help heal some wounds and promote better understanding of the adoption process.

*Sincerely,*  
Betty Brickson  
NewSage Press  
Portland, Oregon ▲

Editor:

On August 20, 1993, Teena Sawan, a 20-year-old Cree birth mother from Alberta, lost custody of her 20-month-old son to a non-native couple from Victoria, British Columbia. Her son, Jordan, was placed with the couple when he was two months old. Teena Sawan revoked her consent to the adoption and won in the B.C. Supreme court. The couple appealed. The appeal court ruled that bonding did not occur between Sawan and her son. It also ruled that the lower court was wrong to place emphasis on Sawan's part-Cree

PRO-  
CHOICE,  
PRO-  
CHILD

background. She is a status Cree; the birth father is non-native and not involved in the custody.

Sawan made it known she did not want to go through with the adoption by calling the Ministry of Social Services and the couple within the 10-day period allowed under Alberta law. Apparently her written notice was not received by the Ministry in Alberta. Jordan was not returned to her. The appeal court claimed the move back to his natural mother would be disruptive.

Sawan's case, as well as the U.S. adoption custody case for Baby Jessica, shows us there is something seriously wrong with adoption. Adoption's mandate was to provide a home for a child without a family. Instead, adoption is about separating a child from its mother or family, in order to fill a demand for babies. However, with fewer babies available for adoption, and the known hurt that birth mothers and adoptees suffer, we can no longer look to adoption as a cure to infertility.

The tragedy of infertility must be addressed as a separate but equally important issue as providing support to women who face an unplanned pregnancy.

Teena Sawan is appealing to the Supreme Court of Canada. No doubt the young woman will need support. She is currently engaged and pregnant with her second child. She will be returning to school and has made arrangements for

## CORRECTION!

The last issue of *Chain of Life* said "Florida Allows Gay Adoptions." This information was not entirely accurate. A second county in Florida, Sarasota County, ruled in March that the ban on gay and lesbian adopters is unconstitutional. A Monroe County (Key West) judge had come to the same conclusion two years earlier. But their rulings affect only those two Florida counties.

Thanks to Tim Fisher of the Gay and Lesbian Parents Coalition International for pointing out this error. He writes, "Florida's ban on adoptions is on the run, but still in effect." ▲

day care for both children.

I urge readers to send letters of support to Teena Sawan. Donations will also help cover travel costs to visit her son. Write to: c/o Jean Morgan, Henley & Walden, Attorneys, Suite 201 - 2377 Bevan Avenue, Sidney, British Columbia V8L 4M9, Canada.

*Millie Strom*  
Vancouver, British Columbia ▲



A national organization and referral network by and for lesbians choosing children. Bimonthly interactive newsletter, discussing lesbians' experiences and opinions about considering children, creating a family, blending families, and other diverse issues of significance to lesbian mothers and their families. \$15-\$20 membership, sliding scale, or \$3.00 for sample newsletter and membership information. Momazons, P.O. Box 02069, Columbus, Ohio 43202. (614)267-0193.

# Experience As Memory

by Amy Jane Cheney

When I began my search for my birthparents over a decade ago, I was living with a friend of mine. I was evicted by her shortly after I received my "non-identifying" information in the mail, and I was homeless for six months. I found out later that my friend was an adoptive mother.

I had a poetry teacher in college who took me under her wing, assuring me my poetry was fantastic and my person lovable. She told me a year later that she was a birthmother. I felt devastated and betrayed. Did she really like me, think my poetry was fantastic, or was she connecting with me as she wished she were connecting with her birth daughter whom she had not yet found?

The journey of my search has been a search for the truth. For origins, beginnings. For roots. Root causes and roots in terms of my heritage. A search for the missing box top to the jumble of puzzle pieces, many of which had fallen behind the couch and were covered with dust. It has been a search for memory and language. A search to find the words to place on the situations in my life that helped to clarify them: adoptive mother, fear of eviction, homelessness. Acceptance, birthmother, betrayal of established trust.

Many of my life situations have been a metaphor and confirmation of reality of my early experiences. What I have been experiencing in the last several years is how early my memory goes back; how my early experiences have deeply and profoundly affected me. I first became aware of this almost cellular memory through the great pain in the breakup of the first relationship I had after I found my birthparents.

This relationship was the first time in my life that I was able to

love deeply, openly, and fully. I had never "been in love" before, or experienced this wonderful feeling of unconditional love. I connect my being able to do so at this time directly with having contacted my birthparents. The relationship had lasted two years; I had been separated from my partner for nine months when I began to piece together that she had been having an affair.

I was devastated. We had separated since she "needed to be alone." This was the "best" separation I had ever had — I thought. With the uncovering of the affair, I was filled with deep shame. I felt there was something somehow terribly wrong with me. I had felt this before, but this absolutely confirmed it. I spent the nights in a fetal position wracked with sobs, trying to breathe. I was in agonizing pain and deep grief. I thought I was going to die.

Where did these feelings originate? Why was I in this specific position? What did this have to do with me? Pieces of the puzzle of my life came back to my conscious mind as I asked these healing questions. I realized that in every single one of my relationships, my partner had had an affair. I had not recognized this pattern before and was horrified — not only by the pattern, but by my own unconsciousness. As I began to inquire further as to where this feeling had begun for me, I was astonished at the answer that came to me: at my conception.

I had been conceived as the result of an affair. My father was engaged to marry someone else when he had a relationship with my mother. He did not tell my mother about his engagement. I had been acting out the scenario of my concep-

tion and subsequent abandonment my entire life — not only my own abandonment and betrayal, but that of my mother.

Ironically, when I contacted my birthmother, after an initial welcoming she told me that she had made a decision to "go her own way alone" twenty-six years before and that she still felt that way, wanting no contact with me.

When I speak about my memory from the time of conception, inevitably I am asked my views on abortion. It is not a contradiction that I support abortion. My life has been affected by abortion in deep and tangible ways.

*My mother wanted an abortion, and abortion was illegal in 1960.*

As a direct result of not having been aborted, I used to wish I were dead. After all, I *should* have been. I believe many people live with these feelings not knowing their origin or being able to clear those intense feelings from their bodies.

Having been actively conscious of what adoption means to me and having shared my own experiences with other adoptees, I am struck by how brutal our conception stories often are: rape, incest, affairs, Romeo and Juliet dramas, one night stands. And for those of us whose parents were sexually involved and yet not married, what feelings and social stigma were attached to our conceptions? How has this affected us?

Researchers believe that such conditions as addictions, illness, depression, suicide, co-dependency, anxiety, and fear of intimacy, among others, may have their roots in the pre- and perinatal periods

*continued on next page ...*

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### Chain of Life

is edited and published by Janine Baer.

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**Chain of Life** is a forum for exploring adoption issues and related topics. It is not responsible for actions taken by readers as a result of information presented here.

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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. Like everyone, adoptees 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.

In addition to advocating open adoption records, *Chain of Life* works toward developing an understanding of when adoption is appropriate for some children, and when other forms of support are preferable, both in our current society and in a more humane society of the future.

## ▲ RESOURCES ▲ & NEWS

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**November 9 in San Francisco:** SHARON KAPLAN ROSZIA, co-author (with Lois Melina) of *The Open Adoption Experience*, will lead a workshop for families and professionals about relationships, boundaries, and children's understanding of open adoption and will answer your questions. Sponsored by Pact, an Adoption Alliance, this event will take place at Fort Mason Center, Room C205, and cost \$12. To preregister or for more information about this and other Pact events, call 415-221-6957. ▲

**EAST BAY ADOPTION WRITING GROUP:** For adoptees, birthparents, adoptive parents, and others affected by adoption who are doing all forms of writing including fiction, poetry, or journals. The goal of the group is not only personal exploration and healing, but also possible dissemination/publication to increase awareness of the realities of adoption, reunion, etc. Group meets alternate Sundays in Berkeley. There is no fee. The facilitator has long experience leading writing groups and editing literary magazines/anthologies, and is a birthmother. If interested, phone Paula, (510) 527-3857 evenings (8 to 10 pm is best). ▲

**Wanted: Submissions for an anthology of WOMEN WRITING ON ADOPTION**, edited by Susan Wadia-Ells, to be published by Seal Press in 1994. The anthology will bring together many of women's silenced life stories and some of the most poignant adoption stories found in international literature. The collection will include both previously published and unpublished writing.

Because adoption is never a simple act, the anthology will look

at the economic, spiritual, psychological, cultural, political, racial, herstorical and social aspects of adoption from the birth mother's, adoptive mother's, daughter's, grandmother's, and other points of view. Fiction and non-fiction will be considered (no poetry, please).

Deadline is December 15, 1993. Contributors will get monetary payment plus two copies of the anthology. Send submissions to: Susan Wadia-Ells, P.O. Box 401, Putney, VT 05346, U.S.A. ▲

### ...CHENEY, CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

(see list of sources at end of article). I have personally experienced how my self worth and experiences of entitlement and prosperity are also rooted in this period.

My mother wanted an abortion, and abortion was illegal in 1960. She attempted to abort me. I knew this through written information I had found but was unaware of its effects until I began to acknowledge and honor the experiences and memory of my body. I have felt: I am a mistake, I'm too much trouble, I shouldn't be here. It would be easier if I were dead. Why don't I just kill myself? This group or cycle of feelings would come up for me over and over again in my life. The smallest thing would start it going. I didn't even recognize this as a pattern, it just was how life was. I thought everybody went through it.

I now know, through breath and movement work, that this cycle is directly tied to my mother's experience of wanting an abortion and going through a variation of these feelings herself. At this point in my life I rarely experience this cycle.

I have heard many birthmothers share their stories of the nine months that they carried us. Those months were filled with high anxiety and stress, intolerable loneliness, intense denial and secrecy, fear, anger, indecision, and often, deep connec-

tion, love, and caring. I have experienced myself and seen with others how all these states have affected us profoundly. Healing from these effects, on this level, can be deep and far reaching, profound and transformational.

Separating out my feelings and experiences from my mother's has been truly liberating and amazing to me, especially since I've only met her twice in my life. I've found that opening up to the pain and the memory has opened me up to much healing, meaning, and joy to be on this journey of life. ▲

## SOURCES

David Chamberlain, *Babies Remember Birth*, 1988 (Distributed by St. Martin's Press)

Barbara Findeisen, "Journey to Be Born" (video), Pocket Ranch Institute, P.O. Box 516, Geyserville, California 95441

Michael Gabriel, *Voices from the Womb*, 1992

Pre and Perinatal Association journal, available from Human Sciences Press, Inc., 233 Spring St., NY, NY 10013-1578 (\$45/4 issues)

Sondra Ray and Bob Mandel, *Birth and Relationships*, 1987

Thomas Verny, *Secret Life of the Unborn Child*, 1981

*Amy Jane Cheney is a Body-Centered Therapist, currently offering groups and workshops for adoptees. She organizes an art show and reading for adoptees every Mother's Day. A Breath and Movement workshop for adoptees is scheduled for November 13, and an Abundance and Prosperity workshop will take place January 8, 1994. If you are interested in any of the above, please call her at (415) 647-1492.*

HAPPY  
HOLIDAYS

## CHILDREN OF LESBIANS AND GAYS EVERYWHERE (COLAGE) RESPONDS TO VA CUSTODY DECISION

*On September 7, 1993, a Henrico County, Virginia judge ruled that a 2-year-old child's grandmother may retain custody of him and that his mother, Sharon Bottoms, 23, is "unfit" simply because she is a lesbian.*

COLAGE is the only national organization run by and for the daughters and sons of lesbians and gay men. Our 600-plus members represent only a tiny fraction of the six to eight million Americans with lesbian and gay parents.

We know first hand that the judgement in the Sharon Bottoms case was inaccurate, prejudiced, and does not reflect the reality of growing up with a lesbian mother. Scientific studies and our own experiences show there are no bad effects of growing up with lesbian and gay parents. However, the secrecy many of us must maintain

because of the threat of custody cases is a burden. The irony of this judgement — "in the best interests of the child" — is that decisions like these cause the most problems for us.

Our hearts go out to two-year-old Tyler. We all have experienced some type of negative reaction to our families; custody rulings based on the sexual orientation of our parents are simply an extreme form.

Fortunately, this case does not reflect the positive trend in courts and other institutions towards our families. We believe the positive trend will continue as more and more Americans realize that children aren't raised by their parents' sexual orientation; they are raised by their parents' love. ▲

*Further Information: COLAGE can be reached at 3023 North Clark, Box 121, Chicago, IL 60657; phone (202) 583-8029*

## SANDY MUSSER SENTENCED; WILL APPEAL

On October 1, birth mother Sandy Musser was sentenced for obtaining confidential information as part of her work as a search consultant for adoptees and birth parents. She was sentenced to four months in prison, two months under house arrest with an electronic device, and three years probation. Her attorney is appealing; Musser hopes the appellate court will overturn the conviction. If it doesn't, then the lower court may be asked to make modifications, or else she will be going to prison. This process could take three months. For more information, the Musser Foundation can be reached at P.O. Box 1860, Cape Coral, Florida 33910, (813) 542-1342. Materials related to her trial are now available for purchase; request a brochure. ▲

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# MILEVA

BY SUSAN ITO

Einstein: the world's wild-haired darling, the genius clown  
wobbling in the rain on his bicycle, his raincoat billowing, a charcoal sail.  
We all loved him, love him still, but not like you did;  
it was you who stroked that cloud of electric hair, strange and wild like a  
windblown tree; your eyes who held his own,  
heavy with memory, their creases holding sad secrets

Mileva, your mind, too, was strung with brilliant lights  
your footsteps light and confident  
the girl who threw down her embroidery  
and took up physics, the molecules spinning their own bright cloth

Oh Mileva those letters he wrote to you, *tell me what you think of this theory?*  
and amidst the scribbled numbers and equations, arrows arcing the page  
were circled endearments, the carbon smudged with his trembling finger —  
he loved you Leva, the scientist, the woman.

That day in 1902: a hot white morning when you told him of the child.  
The atoms stopped their spinning, leaned in to listen close  
to learn of their own folding away, how he promised to forsake even them  
for you, for the daughter quick inside your belly. You said no.  
*Albert, you said, don't throw away your talent.*

The girl, Lieserl, born in the new year, was taken by nuns to city parents  
who promised picture books and pony rides, hot chocolate in porcelain cups  
who braided her pale frizzled hair so tightly her ears ached.  
You and Albert married; there were sons. He rose, dazzling the world  
yet with a strange earthy sadness like Chaplin's little tramp  
while his theories exploded under shattering bits of chalk  
you grew quiet, your bowed head shadowing your lap.

He still brought you his papers, although not as often  
he explained the qualities of energy behind your back  
as you stirred pots of soup, buttoned the smallest one's sweater  
you said, *yes, yes* while you thought of her, eleven years old that month.  
In the fluorescent auditorium, Albert's soft voice fanned out through loudspeakers.  
*Relativity*, he said. The room thundered with the striking of hands  
as you whispered the word: Relativity.

You closed your eyes and saw her, standing between two strangers,  
she was moving her lips, saying "This is my mother. This is my father."  
The people were all on their feet then, Albert nodding and beaming,  
gesturing with his hands while you went to stand by him, tear streaked.  
You wept into his collar, "She's gone forever, Lieserl, our little star."

In the end you grew too dark Mileva, a storm raging around him  
the hole inside you echoing *mama*, her voice louder at times than even the boys'  
pulling at your skirt, their high voices sternly telling you  
*Smile mother, for the newspaper people.* You couldn't smile.  
Albert, tired of nudging the edges of your mouth upward,  
took his fingers away, slipped away from your home.

Photos from LIFE magazine, the New York Times, they loved his ragged form  
you clipped them out, laid them down tenderly with crumbs of paste  
Sat alone at the dusky kitchen table drinking pale green wine  
after several hours slipping down onto your knees and gently, gently unbraided  
the woven rug, smoothing its rippled skeins under your palms. ▲

© Susan Ito, 1993

*Susan Ito is an adoptee, a mother and a writer living in Oakland, California.  
She is in the process of co-editing an anthology of fiction and poetry on the topic  
of adoption entitled Ghost at Heart's Edge.*

**SALLY A. CLARK, M.A.**

*Individual, Couples, Family Counseling*

(510) 549-9401

## Next Deadline November 30

Submissions of articles and news items are always very welcome in my mailbox, although I cannot guarantee to include every submission in the newsletter. Announcements for events happening in January, February, or March 1994 should reach me by the NOVEMBER 30, 1993 deadline (that will be issue number 29). Deadline for the Spring 1994 issue will be February 28. ▲

713 Peralta  
Berkeley 94707

M FCC Registered Intern #IMF 22007  
Supervised by L. La Gov. MFC #20571

## FEEDBACK

### FROM RENEWAL FORMS...

Hi Janine,

I have truly enjoyed your newsletter for the last year or so.

I have been a group leader for the last nine years and have benefitted from all the feedback I receive from all our "Sister Groups," either from telephone contact or newsletters.

I commend your work and am enclosing our B.U.S. check to cover the next 6 issues of Chain of Life.

I am appalled at what is happening in our movement today. All of us have one main goal — TO REUNITE FAMILIES. Our support, prayers, and love go to Sandy Musser, a dear sister, who has also had our main goal in the forefront for the seventeen years she has helped REUNITE FAMILIES, and I should think our government should have much more important priorities — could spend OUR tax money more efficiently by cracking down on drug dealers, murderers, etc., and try to understand what we are all about, instead of trying to hurt us, as we REUNITE FAMILIES.

We (B.U.S. — Birthparents, Adoptees, Adoptive Parents United

in Support) will continue our fight as I am glad you are also doing — until there is only a need for support groups because we are all able to reunite with our children or our birthfamilies.

God Bless — we all need each other — and a special hug goes to Sandy for all she has done and will continue to do.

— A Grateful "Healing" Birth Mom

### MORE LETTERS...

September 26, 1993

Dear Friends and Adoptees,

I recently began a private practice internship in psychotherapy, specializing in adoption issues. I am working under the supervision of Jeanette Gurevitch, LCSW and our office is in Berkeley.

I am offering a therapy group with the intention of creating a safe place for adoptees to come together to express feelings and experiences unique to being adopted. As both a therapist and adult adoptee, I am experienced with the many issues confronting adoptees. I have a clear understanding of how painful some of these issues may be. My experience includes working with adoptees during and after searches and reunions.

I am committed to providing affordable, quality therapy to adoptees. My sliding scale is \$25-\$60 per session for individual counseling. Through the end of December, I am offering an initial consultation for \$20 to interested adoptees. If you, or someone you know, is looking for individual or group therapy that is sensitive to the experiences and needs of adoptees, please feel free to call me any time at (510) 549-1464.

Sincerely,

Holly Du Bois, MSW  
2955 Shattuck Avenue  
Berkeley, California 94705

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I am enclosing a check for \$10 for 4 issues or  \$15 for 6 issues  
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I am  an adoptee,  a birth parent,  an adoptive parent,  an adoption professional, or  \_\_\_\_\_