

# CHAIN OF LIFE

## AN ADOPTION REFORM NEWSLETTER

Issue 2 • July/August 1989 ▲ P.O. Box 8081, Berkeley, CA 94707

### Chain of Life Goes to Gay Day in San Francisco

What an interesting stream of people came by the Chain of Life booth at the Lesbian/Gay Pride Celebration in San Francisco June 25th! I spent the day at a little table, handing out articles about adoption reform and the Chain of Life newsletter, and talking to people about their interests in adoption.

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People would ask me what Chain of Life was about; some assumed I was there to help lesbians and gays adopt children. One asked if I were a front for an anti-abortion group (I'm not!) I explained that my goal was to educate people about the lifelong nature of adoption, and the harm often done by closed records. This knowledge should be a prerequisite for anyone who is thinking of adopting.

Other people tuned in quickly to my perspective after looking at the article titles on the table (including "The Lingering Pain of the Birth Mother" and "Why Adoptees Search"). Some adoptees told me their stories of search and reunion. One man was trying to find his brother in Sweden and had a fantasy of taking a sauna with him. Another had found his birth family and had eventually come out to a brother, who was accepting of him.

One woman took one of each article and explained that her mother was adopted and she, the daughter, continued to experience the ripple effects of not knowing her own maternal heritage. A woman psychologist correctly noted that my focus seemed to be one of child welfare (I had included an article about the need for foster parents of "crack babies" on my table). A man carrying a little boy on his shoulders said that it had taken him many years to get over his experiences growing up in foster homes. And a gay man introduced himself as the son of one of the authors of material on my table!

There were also two separate women who thought that searching for one's birthparents was a sign of disloyalty to one's adoptive parents. One, an adoptee, had come up to the booth to investigate the possibility of becoming an adoptive parent herself, then bristled when I explained that my main motive there was to support openness in adoption. It was a fascinating group of people who wandered through the civic center plaza!

One lesbian told me she had heard that contracts stating men are donors and not fathers

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### RESOURCES FOR ADOPTION REFORM

CHAIN OF LIFE • P.O. BOX 8081 • LANDSCAPE STATION • BERKELEY, CA 94707

You are reading it! A progressive, feminist newsletter of adoption liberation educating about the ongoing concerns of adopted people and their birth and adoptive families. It supports the right of adoptees and birthfamily members to contact each other through the opening of adoption records. Chain of Life has a special focus on issues of interest to lesbian and gay triad members.

What topics are important to you? Your stories, letters, and ideas are welcome. \$6. for issues #1 through 4, or \$2. for single issues, payable to J. Baer.

AMERICAN ADOPTION CONGRESS  
• CHEROKEE STATION • P O BOX 20137 •  
NEW YORK, NY 10028 • 212-988-0110

An international educational network dedicated to promoting openness and honesty in adoption, established in 1978. Has a quarterly newsletter; excellent national and regional conferences. The April 1990 national conference will be held in Chicago. Membership \$40. a year.

PACER: POST ADOPTION CENTER FOR  
EDUCATION AND RESEARCH • 2255  
YGNACIO VALLEY ROAD, SUITE L •  
WALNUT CREEK, CA 94598 • 415-935-6622  
For San Francisco Bay Area residents  
PACER offers support groups and workshops for adopted adults, birth parents, and adoptive parents. For *everyone*, PACER sells books and a music tape about adoption by mail; write for free book list. \$25 for membership includes quarterly newsletter. Support groups are open to non-members at \$5. per meeting.

ALMA -- ADOPTEES' LIBERTY  
MOVEMENT ASSOCIATION •  
P.O. BOX 2341 • ALAMEDA, CA 94501 •  
(415) 523-4774  
(SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA NEWSLETTER)  
A chapter of the first national adoptee search organization, non-members are

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welcome at "rap sessions," but you must be a member to attend "search workshops." "Discuss in depth your feelings before, during or after the search" at rap sessions. ALMA's motto has bugged me for years because of its sexist language: "The truth of his origin is the birthright of every man." Why it can't be changed to "The truth of one's origin is the birthright of everyone" I do not know.

**ADOPTIVE PARENTS FOR OPEN RECORDS**  
• P.O. BOX 193 • LONG VALLEY, NJ 07853

A nationwide organization of adoptive families who seek humane adoption reforms. "APFOR families recognize that adopted persons must incorporate dual heritages of adoptive and birth families." They also "seek to remediate the grief and loss felt by each part of the adoptive triad." Educational materials are available; write for a brochure and order form, and for information on starting or joining a group in your area. I especially recommend the information packet with the article, "Every adoptee is a special needs child."

**CONCERNED UNITED BIRTHPARENTS •**  
2000 WALKER STREET, DES MOINES,  
IOWA 50317

"CUB" is a national network for relinquishing mothers (and fathers). They offer telephone peer counseling ("soft shoulders") and a newsletter, as well as brochures on topics of interest to adoptees, professionals, adoptive parents and others. Booklets include, "Why Won't My Birth mother Meet Me?" "The Social Worker's Role in Adoption," and "The Birthparents' Perspective in Adoption," for \$2. each. Membership is \$35. for the first year, \$25 after.

**INTERNATIONAL SOUNDEX REUNION  
REGISTRY • EMMA MAY VILARDI • P.O.  
BOX 2312 • CARSON CITY, NV 89702**

Computer match for adopted people over 18 and their birthparents. A free service (donations accepted). Send for a registration form, fill out as much as you can of it and mail back. If your missing relative has also registered, ISRR will phone you collect. "ISRR facilitates your freedom of choice and constitutional privacy through a confidential and voluntary identification system on a national and international scale."

**ALARM NETWORK • P.O. BOX 6581 •  
FORT MYERS, FLORIDA 33911 • (813) 549-  
9393 • NEWSLETTER \$18.**

ALARM is dedicated to changing adoption laws to open sealed records nationwide. It is an acronym for "Advocating Legislation for Adoption Reform Movement." A 2-year-old organization with 22 state or regional branches, their motto is "Free by '93."

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have not held up in court. I am not aware if this is correct, having last heard that lesbian lawyers recommend contracts with donors stating responsibilities and obligations (or lack thereof) of both sides to avoid custody disputes. Would any lawyers reading this article please send me a clarification on this question? It's also my understanding that the use of doctors or sperm banks are legally safe ways of ensuring women's custody. (And of course I recommend the use of known donors to give

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children the option to know their birth heritage on both sides -- see Issue #1).

My focus shifted from open records to other concerns of mine -- the rights of children and the rights of gay people -- when I heard the story of a gay man who, he explained, had been a foster father. Someone who didn't like him, reported his gay status to his county's social services department. As a result, his teenage foster son, who had lived with him for four years, was immediately taken from his custody against the boy's wishes, simply because the man was gay. The boy was not returned to his birth parents -- he knows his birth parents and does not want to live with them -- but to a group home, an institution. The man, after three years, is still trying to regain custody of the now 17-year-old. It was a touching story that also made me angry. How can we change that county's policy? It is in the best interests of no one.

Janine Baer

**DONOR'S OFFSPRING • P.O. BOX 33,  
SARCOXIE, MISSOURI 64862 • 417-548-3679**

I list this organization with hesitation. It is the only national group I know of that addresses the concerns of adults who were conceived by donor insemination, a practice that has taken place for 100 years in the U.S. They offer a newsletter (\$20. for 2 years) that includes personal experiences and feelings of adult donor offspring.

My reluctance to recommend Donor's Offspring to a gay or feminist reader stems from the founder's very conservative perspective. For example, founder Candace Turner recently wrote, "educators must teach that loving, biological families are the foundation of civilization." Several years ago, she wrote that she was against divorce and single-parenting.

Turner says that since 1983, she has received letters "full of pain" from donor offspring. Writing in April '89, she said, "I am still waiting for letters from the happy couples, heterosexual or lesbian, who are

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# Some Random Thoughts on Being Gay, Being Male and Being Adopted

by William L. Gage

## Having known I was adopted

for about as long as I can remember, and having discovered my homosexuality very early in my life, I spent most of my teenage years assuming that I was both the only gay and the only adopted person (besides my sister) I knew. I found it to be an interesting coincidence, then, when, in the late summer of 1978, I met another guy who was not only also gay and also adopted, but who was also *German-born!* I cannot recall this person's name (unfortunately), but I think the fact that it wasn't until another seven years or so had passed that I learned of the existence of yet another gay male adoptee says as much about the "invisibility" of gay men and women (specifically) as it does about adoptees (generally).

Three more years would pass before I would meet still more gay male adoptees, and then it was as if I'd stumbled upon a "nest" of them! I started subscribing to a gay computer bulletin board system here in New York City (The Backroom BBS) and, as time went on, several other subscribers became known to me as also being adoptees. I met one through a message I posted regarding a newsletter I publish (*Geborener Deutscher*); another became known to me in the course of a conversation we had over brunch one day not long after I'd begun subscribing to The Backroom; and I made the acquaintance of still another through exchanging public messages on the bulletin board.

For the most part, it seems as if most male adoptees, whether gay or not, do not have any great desire to search. The guy with whom I spoke over brunch seemed to become interested, however, when I suggested that I might be able to help him by giving him the names of some search-and-support groups in Florida, the state where he was born and where his birth mother might still live. (As it turned out, his birth mother did indeed still live in Florida; and had, in fact, been a member of one of the Florida search-and-support groups for eight years. He had a reunion with her and the experience was, from what he told me, extremely positive for both him and his birth mother -- who was made aware of his homosexuality. Ironically, his birth mother subsequently died of an AIDS-related illness -- a mere five months following their reunion.)

The guy who responded to my effort to publicize my newsletter was born in Puerto Rico, and has an apparent interest in searching, but feels that without some help or assistance, he is not up to tackling the task alone. (Although he and his brother -- who were both adopted by the same family -- were born in Puerto Rico, his best information indicates that his mother was Spanish and may have returned to her home in Barcelona.)

The other two gay male adoptees of my acquaintance are what are commonly characterized as "adamant non-searchers." The one, a friend of a former roommate of mine, is quietly happy not to search; he shows no ambivalence on the matter and takes an active interest in my stories of my efforts to locate my birth mother and to assist others through my newsletter (which I send to him) and my computer bulletin board system (The WOMB BBS). The other, in stark contrast to my former roommate's friend, seems strongly ambivalent about the question of search, expressing his negative opinion thereof in terms which suggest the old Shakespearean quote, "Me thinks he doest protest too much!" His ambivalence could also be towards me; but even if some measure is directed at me personally, there is sufficient question to suggest that most of it might have more to do with what I perceive to be an identity not as firmly rooted in his adoptive family as he might like to believe.

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## Review

### Sacred Bond

The Legacy of Baby M.,

by Phyllis Chesler. Times Books,  
New York. \$7.95. paper (1989)

This recent book from feminist scholar Phyllis Chesler contains a well-researched critique of contemporary adoption practices in the United States in its chapter titled "A Pound of Flesh." The chapter explores adoption to provide a context for understanding the surrogacy issue in the "Baby M" custody case, but this single chapter can stand alone as an essay about the socio-political meaning of adoption today.

According to Chesler, ours is a society in which wealthy white couples seeking newborn white infants to raise will pay between \$10,000. and \$50,000. to lawyers and other baby brokers to adopt independently, outside of adoption agencies. While acknowledging that adoption by strangers is still *sometimes* the best option for a neglected child, Chesler claims it is all too often a practice done for people more concerned about their own needs in having a family than about helping homeless children. Why else would so many black, non-infant, and/or disabled children in need of permanent families be kept waiting, while prospective adoptive parents travel to other countries? Some adopting parents even admit taking solace that transnational adoption will make it very difficult for the birthparents to find and reunite with their children.

Chesler ends the chapter suggesting a constitutional amendment that would give birth parents and relinquished children the right to know each other. Readers interested in a feminist view of adoption will find validation and a valuable resource in Chesler's *Sacred Bond* ▲

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male adoptees,  
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Individual speculation aside, of the five (gay) male adoptees of my acquaintance (including myself), only I seem to have mustered enough curiosity or interest to actively and self-motivatedly pursue a search to its conclusion. And it seems reasonable to surmise from my own experience that male adoptees, as a group and as a rule, simply are not moved to search without some form of external prodding or motivation. I would have thought, however, perhaps based on some (false?) perception of gay males as being more "sensitive," or more in touch with the feeling side of their natures, that they, as a subgroup of male adoptees, might be more likely to search on their own initiative. My personal sampling in this regard is hardly scientific, but could conceivably be representative. If so, this does not bode well for the birth mothers of male adoptees, whether gay or straight, since it is generally much easier to find someone who is also looking for you; and, in cases where a searching birth mother does find her son, he may not be emotionally or mentally prepared to deal with her reappearance in his life. ▲

• William L. Gage, 2300 Ocean Avenue,  
Brooklyn, NY 11229



# Adoption Liberation March July 19 to August 5, 1989

The American Adoption Congress is sponsoring an 18-day march on Washington in support of access to adoption records by adoptees and birth parents. At noon on August 5th there will be a speak-out by people whose lives have been changed by closed adoption records, to take place at the Lincoln Memorial.

Called the H.E.A.L. March (Honesty and Equality in Adoption Laws), it will start in New York at the Statue of Liberty on July 19th with groups of supporters from all over the country. For more information, call the A.A.C. office at (212) 988-0290, or write: American Adoption Congress, Cherokee Station, P.O. Box 20137, New York, NY 10028.

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joyful 'artificial families' just looking for contacts with other young families. . ."

Fortunately, lesbian parents have better places to meet other lesbian families, and given Turner's perspective, why would they want to contact this group? Perhaps, if at all, only to know that adult donor offspring do exist, and to read about their experiences and concerns.

## Donor/Father Support Groups?

*"Many groups for lesbians considering parenthood and for lesbian mothers needing support have already been established, mostly in metropolitan areas in which there is an active lesbian/gay community. There have been few such groups for men, gay or straight, who are considering being donors and/or involved fathers. Such groups could provide an essential place for open-ended discussion of the many emotional, ethical, and complex issues men certainly face when considering to be a donor. . .*

*"It may be an ideal situation for some men simply to be donors, with no paternal rights and responsibilities. For these men, the contribution of their sperm is a loving act that connects them to a generalized future. For other men, however, the donation of sperm with no parental involvement would be an unethical or perhaps unbearable loss; for some, it might be intolerable. It is time we encouraged men to look more closely at their feelings about being donors. We can no longer hope that they will donate semen and 'forget' about the potential offspring that could result from the donation."*

-- Francine Hornstein and Cherie Pies, "Baby M and the Gay Family," Spring '88 issue of *Out/Look*, P.O. Box 460430, San Francisco, CA 94146.

## Foster Homes Needed For 'Crack Babies'

*From the San Francisco Chronicle, March 29, 1989*

The number of "crack babies" -- many of them born prematurely, addicted and with terrible medical problems -- is soaring. At some Bay Area hospitals, an estimated 10 to 20 percent of babies delivered are born to mothers who use cocaine and crack cocaine.

A group called the Community Task Force on Homes for Children recruits foster parents. In the Bay Area, prospective foster parents who wish to help care for children are asked to telephone 772-HELP.

## Announcements

**OPEN ADOPTION BOOKLET AVAILABLE**  
"Opening Closed Adoptions: Six Reunion Stories" is a collection of 6 true stories about adoption reunions, some of them initiated by adoptive parents with children under age 18. These short but remarkable stories are available for \$7. by mail as a fundraiser for PACER, the Post Adoption Center for Education and Research. Make checks payable to Janine Baer, P.O. Box 8081, Berkeley, CA 94707.

## The WOMB BBS

*An Adoption- and Search-related  
Computer Bulletin Board System*

General Message Base; Electronic Mail;  
Dedicated Message Bases for Adoptees,  
Birth Parents and Adoptive Parents;  
Reprints of Adoption-Related Articles  
from Newspapers and Magazines;  
Users' Search & Reunion Stories;  
National Calendar of Events;  
*And Much, Much More!*

To Log Onto The WOMB BBS, Call  
(718) 998-6303

24 hours a day / 7 days a week / 8N1

## "A Name You Never Got" In Indianapolis October 7th

The excellent one-woman play by relinquishing mother Ronda Slater will take place October 7th at the American Adoption Congress regional conference in Indianapolis. Slater is a Bay Area resident whose on-target performance about the experience of being a birthmother and reuniting with her teenage daughter has traveled around the country for several years. Stay tuned to these pages for news of future performances in other locations.

## I STAND CORRECTED

In Issue #1 of CHAIN OF LIFE, I said only one person of the same gender can adopt a child. While that's generally true, there have been eleven gay or lesbian couples in the United States who have adopted jointly, according to a June 12, 1989 article in the *San Francisco Examiner*.

Other facts from the article: only two states, New Hampshire and Florida, legally forbid all gays from adopting, whether as single parents or jointly. Many states, including California, have policies that recommend against joint adoptions by "unmarried couples" of any gender. Six states still forbid gay parents from retaining custody of their children (adopted or otherwise) in custody disputes, while 13 others only "disfavor" the gay parent who is leaving a heterosexual marriage, "but stop short of forbidding custody."

Before President Reagan left office, he commissioned an adoption task force to explore the topic of adoption. While acknowledging the need for adoptive parents (especially for older children), and supporting single parent adoptions, their report included one sentence saying it did not recommend gays and lesbians as adoptive parents. No explanation or rationale for this position was even attempted. ▲