

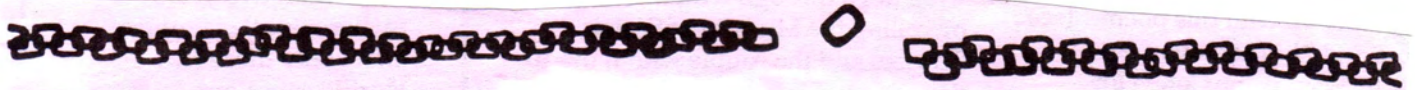
Chain of Life

ISSUES IN ADOPTION AND CHILD WELFARE

▲ SINCE 1989 ▲

P.O. BOX 8081 ▲ BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94707

ISSUE 30 · SPRING 1994 · JANINE BAER, EDITOR



REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY RACES AHEAD OF ETHICAL GUIDELINES

Fetal Eggs? Upon learning about fertilization of fetal eggs, in vitro fertilization, embryo cloning, sperm and ovum donation, womb renting, and post-menopausal embryo transplants, the Landlord in the Heavenly Real Estate Office in a newspaper editorial concludes in dismay, "When I told them to go forth and multiply, I should have included an operating manual" (Arthur Hoppe, "Brave New Babies," January 9, 1994, *S.F. Examiner and Chronicle*).

The previous day's *Chronicle* had reported that authorities in Great Britain had decided to "study the moral implications" of the use of eggs from aborted fetuses, and to "assess whether the public will accept the use of eggs from corpses and fetuses before further research should be allowed." This research was temporarily halted until the Human Fertilization and Embryology Authority makes a decision. The group's members are said to have been "impressed by the scientific advances" but they "remain worried about the implications," according to Colin Campbell, the group's chair. "[Q]uestions have been raised about the effect on children who might consider that their biological mother had never been born" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, January 9, 1994, p. A-12). Thank the Landlord this occurred to someone!

Feminists Too See Problems with High-Tech Reproduction

Feminist voices are among those questioning the wisdom in all this reproductive "choice." In her book *Women as Wombs: Reproductive Technologies and the Battle Over Women's Freedom*, feminist professor Janice G. Raymond of the University of Massachusetts argues that such reproductive forms often "rob women of control over their bodies and promote exploitation of low income women and women of color" (K. Kaufman, *San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle*, January 9, 1994). Raymond "calls for an analysis of reproductive technologies that puts women's health, safety and dignity first and does not substitute consumer-oriented concepts of 'choice' for true sexual 'self-determination.'" *Women as Wombs* is published by HarperSan Francisco.

Woman Coerced to Relinquish Wins Damages

Baby selling that passes for adoption has been around a long time. In 1938, the Child Welfare League of America cautioned against encouraging trafficking in babies in its recommendations regarding adoption. *Ms.* magazine's September/October 1993 issue reminds us that baby selling takes place today, in the magazine's article about anti-

abortion clinics that convince pregnant women not to have abortions (Lisa Petrillo, "Selling Babies Is a Big Business for Bogus Abortion Clinics," *Ms.*, September/October 1993, pages 92-93). Krista Stoner of San Diego County was a woman who "wanted help as a single parent, but she claims that the only thing the [San Diego Pregnancy Services] center did was push her to give up the baby for adoption" according to Petrillo. Stoner did not get her baby back, but she did win \$650,000. in damages in May 1993, for having been forced to choose adoptive parents and sign relinquishment papers while she was in labor. Her success in proving she was defrauded is a victory against such clinics.

According to the *Ms.* article, pro-choice groups claim there are 2,000 to 3,000 "largely unlicensed antiabortion 'counseling' centers nationwide. Most are disguised to look like medical clinics," but they use instruction manuals provided by religious fundamentalist groups. Women are promised pregnancy tests, then they are called "sinners" and "are hounded at home and work." Petrillo notes that adoption is a "big-bucks international industry." She also mentions that sealed adoption records make it even more difficult to track these "underground adoption networks." ▲

MEASURE IN WASHINGTON STATE TARGETS GAY AND LESBIAN PARENTS

On Monday, January 10, 1994, two anti-gay initiatives were filed in Washington state, setting off petition drives to get the measures on the November ballot. One of these measures, filed by the Citizens Alliance of Washington, targets lesbian and gay parents and their families with unprecedented vigor. It would prohibit gays and lesbians from becoming foster parents, adopting children, or gaining custody in a divorce. The measure also would bar "minority status based on homosexuality," prohibit schools from presenting homosexuality as positive behavior, and ban same-gender marriage.

Tim Fisher, Executive Director of the Gay and Lesbian Parents Coalition International points out that "The radical right has tried before to prevent lesbians and gays from becoming foster parents and adopting children who need good homes, but this is their first attempt to enact legislation that prohibits lesbians and gays from retaining custody of their own children in a divorce." Buried in the fine print, the initiative states that upon dissolution of a marriage where one of the parents is gay or lesbian, the other parent will receive custody of their children. Where both parents are gay, custody will be awarded to the nearest non-gay relative. If no such person exists, children will be taken from their parents and put in foster care or put up for adoption.

Children of lesbian and gay parents around the country are reacting to the news from Washington state with disbelief. "They say they're pro-family, then they force families apart," comments Stefan Lynch of COLAGE (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere).

"When my parents split up," says Lynch, a college student, "they both came out as gay and stayed friends and great parents. And I know a lot of kids in the same situation. If it were up to those people in Washington state, I would have been taken from my home and family and placed with strangers."

Kate Ranson-Walsh, a 13-year-old whose parents split up five years ago, says, "If I was ever taken away

that lesbians and gays are unfit to be parents, unfit to be near children. The truth is there are over three dozen reputable, scientific studies showing that our kids are no different from kids raised in non-gay households — except ours are a little more tolerant of human differences."

Psychologist April Martin explains, "The right needs a scapegoat to coalesce its power base — and we're it. We're the basis upon

upon dissolution of a marriage where one of the
parents is gay or lesbian, the other parent will
receive custody of their children

from my dad, I don't know what I would do. It's not fair. He didn't do anything to me or anyone else."

If this initiative passes, thousands of families in Washington state would be placed in jeopardy. "Parents are scared," says Gloria Stancich of the South Puget Sound Lesbian and Gay Parents Support Group in Tacoma, Washington, "particularly those dealing with custody issues. Washington is a state that's been very fair to its gay and lesbian citizens, but we cannot afford to be complacent."

Pat Justis of Olympia, Washington says, "Listening to the news on the radio, I was nauseated. I was expecting it, but I am still shell-shocked." Pat is the mother of a toddler and active in Out on a L.I.M.B. (Lesbians in Maternity and Beyond).

According to Tim Fisher, "The radical right perpetuates the myths

which they get people to fork over their money." Martin is author of *The Lesbian and Gay Parenting Handbook*.

As the radical right increasingly targets lesbians and gays in general, and parents in particular, those targeted have increased their activism. "Having a child puts a fire in your belly," says Pat Justis. "This is not a battle where I can sit back; there's too much at stake for my son. I'm writing a letter about this initiative and mailing it to every straight person in my address book." Public opinion polls show that coming out is the most effective and persuasive tactic for lesbians and gays. "The more out we are," agrees Stancich, "the more they know us as human beings — as normal, everyday working people and parents." ▲

— from *Gay and Lesbian Parents Coalition International*

SONG FOR NANCY

by Nancy Schimmel

You've been gone a long long while with your gift for col-or and
dance and song, With your mo - Ther's mouth and your fa - Ther's smile, You
know I'm sor-ry it's been so long. In
fif - ty five when you were born, I knew that marriage was
not for me, But a na - tu - ral child was a child of scorn, And they
said they'd find you a fam - i - ly

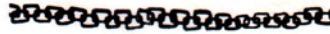
So someone else saw you laugh and grow
And someone else bought the birthday cake
I kept my secret and finished school
And told myself it was for your sake.
Your other parents loved you well
Your other family did their best
But till you knew about your birth
Your wond'ring mind wouldn't let you rest.

Which part of you was heredity?
Your mother's song and your father's smile,
And your mother's own curiosity
So we opened up the forbidden file.
The file is not Pandora's box
It isn't the room with the bloody key
It's full of some of who you are
And what you and I might grow to be.

Written for Nancy Beth Ibsen

©1993 by Nancy Schimmel
(510)843-0533

BOOKS BOOKS BOOKS



NEW BOOKS

AVAILABLE IN APRIL

The Journey of the Adopted Self: A Quest for Wholeness by Betty Jean Lifton. The publisher, Basic Books, describes Lifton's new book this way:

"Adoption, a subject long cloaked in silence, is coming out of the closet. An avalanche of books, magazine articles, and television programs bears witness to the end of the 'closed' adoption system, which cut adopted people off from their heritage, and to the beginning of an open system.

"In this timely new book, Betty Jean Lifton, herself an adoptee, whose *Lost and Found* helped launch the open system, breaks new ground by tracing the adopted child's lifelong struggle to form an authentic sense of self. She charts the psychological stages of that crucial healing journey. Lifton draws on a study of over a hundred people as well as her own counseling practice with adult adoptees to describe the concept of 'cumulative adoption trauma.'

"The book makes it poignantly clear that only by restoring connection to the past can adoptees envision a hopeful future."

Betty Jean Lifton is the author of *Twice Born* and *Lost and Found*, as well as a forthcoming children's book, *Tell Me a Real Adoption Story*.

Journey of the Adopted Self costs \$22. and is 352 pages long. To order it with a credit card, call BasicBooks at 1-800-331-3761.

AVAILABLE IN MAY

Kinship with Strangers: Adoption and Interpretations of Kinship in American Culture, by Judith S. Modell, Associate Professor of Anthropology.

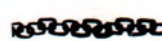

"Adoption challenges our understanding of the core symbols of kinship in American culture — birth, biology, and blood. Through the lens of anthropological theory, Judith Modell examines these symbols and the way they affect people who experience the 'fictive' kinship of adoption. Her findings are timely and profoundly moving and contribute valuable insights to the current debate about removing the veil of secrecy from adoption records and procedures.

"Modell draws on interviews with birthparents, adoptive parents, and adoptees, some of whom are involved in reforming the adoption process. That reform — opening of records, the acknowledgment of a biological and a legal parent, the blending of families that are related only through a child — spotlights the very meanings of mother and father, 'blood,' and identity in this country. Thus her book complements other recent anthropological literature that argues for a radical rethinking of the way we define, and use, those concepts.

"...Throughout, we hear the words of those involved in adoption, and we come to understand the ambiguities regarding love and responsibility, nurture and competence, well-being and wealth — concepts that underlie the 'transaction in parenthood' in American culture. Modell's findings should have important ramifications for policy, practice, and individual participation in the adoption experience." 230 pages, \$35. (+postage) from University of California Press. Call 1-800-777-4726 to order from the publisher.

Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890 to 1945, by Regina G. Kunzel is a history of out-of-wedlock pregnancy and how it was viewed by the evangelical reformers who founded maternity homes in the United States, by social workers who came after them, and by the unmarried mothers themselves. "Kunzel places shifting constructions of out-of-wedlock pregnancy within a broad history of gender, sexuality, class, and race..." Kunzel is assistant professor of history at Williams College. *Fallen Women, Problem Girls* is 272 pages and is published by Yale University Press. It retails for \$27.50. Try your local bookstore, or write to Yale University Press, 92A Yale Station, New Haven, CT 06520 (no phone orders).

Here's one I'd like to see, but at \$45. I'll have to try the library. Published in 1993, *Babies for Sale: The Tennessee Children's Home Adoption Scandal* is by Linda Tollett Austin, an attorney and historian. "In 1950, the Governor of Tennessee called for an investigation of the Tennessee Children's Home black market baby operations, said to have grossed \$1 million for Georgia Tann, the superintendent of the local branch of the home. Tann was accused of fraudulently persuading pregnant mothers to relinquish their children. A number of Hollywood celebrities adopted children through the home, namely Joan Crawford, June Allyson, and Dick Powell.... The story is dramatic and shows southern politics at its worst — congenial, respected public figures running shady deals in the back

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continued on next page...

room. Thousands of children were placed in adoptive homes during the agency's operation. Each case is a fascinating story involving the search and reunion of adopted children with their natural families." To order, contact Greenwood Publishing Group: 1-800-225-5800.

NOW IN PAPERBACK:

Lethal Secrets: The Psychology of Donor Insemination, Problems and Solutions, by Annette Baran and Reuben Pannor. This book includes a chapter on lesbian mothers; the authors encourage "open" donor conception. If it's not at your local women's bookstore, you can order it by phone from Tapestry Books, 1-800-765-2367 for \$11.95 plus postage.

Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race Before Roe v. Wade by Rickie Solinger. This wonderful book about the limited choices for single mothers from 1945 until 1965, choices that differed by race, is available for \$16.95 in paperback, plus shipping charges. 328 pages. Call Routledge, Inc. in New York at 212-224-6412, or ask your local bookstore. (Organizations like Concerned United Birthparents and American Adoption Congress also sell books such as this one as fundraisers.)

BOOK REVIEW

Where Are My Birthparents? A Guide for Teenage Adoptees by Karen Gravelle and Susan Fischer, (Walker & Co) 1993

At last, a non-fiction book from a mainstream press that talks to teenage adoptees about their need to know their origins. The book includes interviews with teens who are wondering and with adults who have searched and found. The authors discuss how and why people search and the possible psychological benefits and problems of reunion. They emphasize the need for a support group, for emotional preparation before the reunion, and for teenagers sharing the process with their adoptive parents. Includes resources and a bibliography.

The Berkeley Public Library has this book in the Young Adult section. Please ask your local library to get *Where Are My Birthparents?* so young adoptees in your community may find it.

— Nancy Schimmel

OPEN YOUR RECORDS BY COURT ORDER?

Attorney Brad Blauer Jones of Dallas, Texas, himself an adoptee, has provided guidelines for adoptees who want to try to get their records opened with a court order, something he has succeeded in doing for 40 clients. In an article published by AdoptNet in its Fall 1993 issue, Blauer Jones points out that even if the judge refuses your petition, your attempt will challenge the conclusions of

adoption reform opponents who "cite the infrequency of court petitions and applications to state voluntary reunion registries to prove that very few people care about unsealing adoption records."

If you are interested in the details, you can get Volume 5, Number 4 of AdoptNet in which this article appears for \$5.00 (subject to availability). Write to: *AdoptNet*, P.O. Box 50514, Palo Alto, CA 94303. ▲

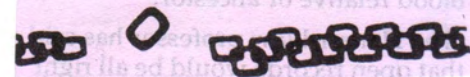
Chain of Life

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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.

The newsletter should not be confused with the anti-abortion group of a similar name!

SAN FRANCISCO FOSTER CARE CALLED WORST IN STATE

The following information is excerpted from a March 3, 1994 San Francisco Chronicle article by Robert B. Gunnison and Teresa Moore.

State authorities have determined that San Francisco has the worst foster care system in California and have ordered a special team of investigators to examine its more than 3,600 cases. The California Department of Social Services moved to find out why San Francisco has consistently failed to comply with state regulations for abused and neglected children who have been removed from their parents.

The problem is not usually that children are erroneously taken from their parents, according to Chief Judge Donna Hitchens of the San Francisco Juvenile Court. Hitchens said that every day she sees children who have been beaten, raped, abused and abandoned by their kin. Out of the thousands of cases that have come before her, only two or three times has she questioned whether the social worker should have taken the child. "More often I've gotten cases where I think, 'Why didn't they take this kid sooner?'" she said. The problem is that once children are placed in a foster home, San Francisco social workers often do not keep track of their cases.

According to the state Department of Social Services, social workers in San Francisco more than any other county in California have failed to make regularly scheduled visits with foster children, caretakers, and parents. Five state reviews since 1986 have flunked San Francisco for not making required visits. The purpose of the face-to-face visits is to insure that foster children are safe,

progressing toward reunification with their families or adoption, and receiving proper health and dental care.

For many foster children, the idea of actually seeing a social worker is a joke. Recently, when a roomful of teenagers in foster care were asked how often they see their social workers, they erupted in laughter.

One San Francisco teenager, who lives in a group home in Richmond, said she has "trained" her social worker. "I got him to call every other month," she said proudly.

The state investigation comes amid intense public criticism over the case of a 5-week-old baby who died after being removed from his parents. Although the city has not been found culpable in the February 5 death of Seing Saephan, an internal state report on deaths of San Francisco foster children from 1981 to 1987 found that social workers had failed to make required visits to at least four children who later died or were killed.

Brian Cahill, director of the city's Department of Social Services, which oversees the division, is quick to admit its failings and those of many of its 120 foster care social workers. Cahill, a former social worker, said the division has a history of insensitivity toward racial minorities, hostility toward state regulators and tension with its union. The challenge, he said, is to change what he called a "culture" of removing children from their parents.

By law, social workers may remove a child from parents if they determine that the youngster "has suffered, or there is substantial risk that the minor will suffer, serious

physical injury." To keep the child in foster care, a Juvenile Court judge must agree with the finding and declare the youngster a dependent child of the court.

Because foster children are minors, details of their cases are confidential under state law. It is nearly impossible for outsiders to learn the facts of a case and whether a child was removed for good reason.

The alternative to foster care is family preservation — an idea receiving considerable national attention. The goal is to provide services — parenting classes, drug and alcohol treatment, child care, or even such mundane things as helping clean house or wash dishes — to help keep a family together. Some counties, including Contra Costa (east of San Francisco), have moved aggressively into family preservation, but San Francisco has lagged. "It's slow, but that's what we're working toward," said Michelle Rutherford, director of longterm placement programs for the Division of Family and Children Services.

Watching the case closely is the Youth Law Center in San Francisco, whose 1988 lawsuit against Los Angeles forced swift reform of that county's troubled foster care system. The advocacy group is ready to file suit on behalf of San Francisco's 3,638 foster children unless quick progress is made.

"The social worker is usually the one stable anchor in a child's life once he or she enters foster care, the one person who knows the story of that child's family," said attorney Carole Shauffer of the Youth Law Center. ▲

Family Preservation Services That Prevent Abandonment

The following information is from Time magazine January 24, 1994, pages 58-59:

"Abandoned babies were far less painful to contemplate before the crack and AIDS epidemics, back when they came swaddled in baskets with heartbreaking notes, in the thousands rather than in the tens of thousands. Now they are a shared social nightmare, the blame for which may depend on the political philosophy of the beholder."

This report explains that women drug addicts may not want to abandon their babies at hospitals, but without help getting off drugs, they see little choice. "Boarder babies" is the name given to their abandoned infants who are boarded at hospitals; 22,000 were deserted by their mothers in the U.S. in 1991. Most were likely to enter the foster care system.

The high number of these abandoned infants has been greatly reduced through the work of early intervention programs offered by hospitals. These programs address the mothers' drug addictions, and some will house pregnant homeless women. The women are given parent training and attend lectures and discussions. Some programs provide services for up to three

years. At D.C. General Hospital, practical gifts are given to each of the mothers and their infants, while volunteer "godparents" help make sure the women stay off drugs and attend medical appointments. So far, all 200 women who have participated in the program at D.C. General have kept their children. ▲

MORE BOOKS

A Death in the Family: Orphans of the HIV Epidemic is a book published in 1993 by the United Hospital Fund. It describes the emerging population of youth surviving their parents' death from AIDS, pointing the way toward effective policies and programs. The book includes custody planning, and a directory of support services in New York City that can be replicated nationwide. 176 pages. Cost is \$10. plus \$3.50 postage from *United Hospital Fund, 55 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10003-4392.*

Books by Mail for Lesbian and Gay Families. *Joined by Love*, a 4-page catalog of books for lesbian and gay families, is available from Tapestry Books, which offers adoption-related books by mail. You can order the catalog for \$1. by calling the toll free line, 800-765-2367. *Joined by Love* includes books for children, teens, and parents. ▲

Chain of Life recently received this request:

"My adoptive mother is blind. Do you know of any source for tapes on issues dealing with adoptive mothers coming to understand search and reunion?"

If anyone is familiar with audiotape resources, please send information to Chain of Life and I will forward it to him. ▲

- **The Family Next Door** is a new publication for lesbian and gay parents "and their friends" and for people trying to become parents. It is a comprehensive 24-page newsletter with black and white photographs and drawings accompanying articles. Published bimonthly, cost is \$50 a year, or send \$6. for a back issue. Write to: *Next Door Publishing, Ltd., P.O. Box 21580, Oakland, CA 94620*, or call (510) 482-5778 during West Coast business hours. ▲

A RALLY IN ALBANY, NEW YORK FOR OPEN ADOPTION RECORDS WILL TAKE PLACE SATURDAY, APRIL 30, 1994 AT 12 NOON AT THE STATE CAPITOL. THE RALLY IS SPONSORED BY THE AMERICAN ADOPTION CONGRESS.

CHAIN OF LIFE currently has 92 subscribers. Public institutions among these are the New York City Public Library, Northwestern University Library in Evanston, Illinois, and the State Historical Society in Madison, Wisconsin. ▲

Summer 1994 Deadline is May 31

Submissions of articles, news items and events are always very welcome in the **Chain of Life** mailbox, although I cannot guarantee to include every submission. Announcements for events happening in July, August, or September 1994 should reach me by the May 31, 1994 deadline (that will be issue number 31). Deadline for the Fall 1994 issue will be August 31. If an item is received after the deadline, it may be held for the subsequent issue.

EVENTS IN APRIL/ MAY/JUNE

April 9: *Discussing Adoption with Your Child*, a workshop for adoptive parents presented by Jim Mehlfeld, LCSW, 1 to 4 pm, *Berkeley*. For more information, call Jim at 510-653-1057.

April 21-24: *American Adoption Congress conference, New Orleans*. All mailed preregistration must be postmarked by April 10. For more information, the AAC Conference Department can be reached at 714-434-7635.

April 30: *Search Workshop* by Martin Brandfon will take place in *San Mateo County, California*. \$25, 10 am to 1 pm. Proceeds to PACER

(Post Adoption Center for Education and Research). For more information about this event or about ongoing support groups, phone PACER at 510-935-6622.

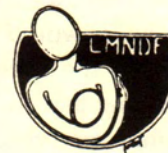
May 7: *Third Annual Art Show and Reading by Adoptees*, 7 pm, Center For Creative Work, 425 Bush St., Suite 425, *San Francisco* between Kearney and Grant. For more information, call Amy Jane Cheney at 415-647-1492, or call the Center at 415-989-9809. As is traditional, the reading and reception will be the night before Mother's Day. The show will be up for three weeks.

June 4: In *New York*, 59th St. & 5th Ave., 11:30 am. Opening Ceremony for 6th Annual *March on Washington for Civil Rights in Adoption and Family Preservation*, sponsored by Council for Equal Rights in Adoption, 212-988-0110.

(Follow the march to *Philadelphia* for a June 11 ceremony, and then a rally June 25 at Lincoln Memorial, *Washington DC*, at noon.)

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June 15: *Race and Your Child*, in *San Francisco* at Fort Mason Center, Room C205, 7:30 to 10 pm. A panel discussion with time for your questions, sponsored by Pact, an Adoption Alliance. \$10. for non-Pact members. Call Pact at 415-221-6957.

June 24 - 25: Gay and Lesbian Parents Coalition International conference. For more information, write GLPCI '94, P.O. Box 2553, Church Street Station, New York, NY 10008-2553.

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