

# Chain of Life

## ISSUES IN ADOPTION AND CHILD WELFARE

▲ SINCE 1989 ▲

P.O. BOX 8081 • BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94707

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### Two Views of Adoptees

▲ Betty Jean Lifton, *Journey of the Adopted Self, A Quest for Wholeness* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 328 pages. \$22. hard cover. Order from 1-800-331-3761.

▲ Peter L. Benson, Anu Sharma, and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *Growing Up Adopted: A Portrait of Adolescents and Their Families* (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1994), 128 pages. \$19.95 + postage, paperback. 1-800-888-7828 (weekdays)

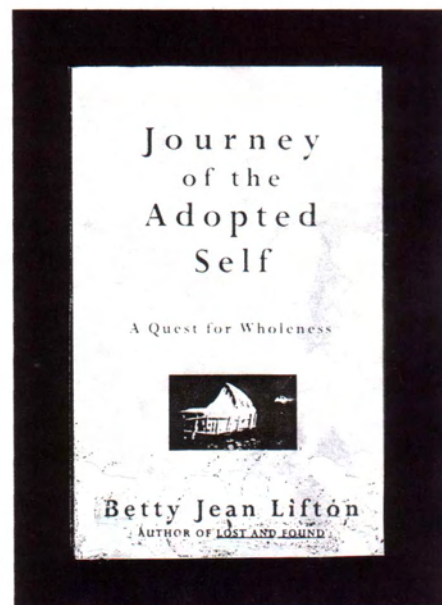
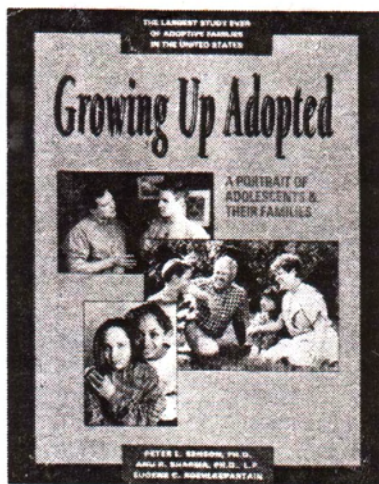
These books offer what may seem to be contradictory news about the mental health of adoptees. A new study of over 700 adoptive families — published in book form as *Growing Up Adopted* — found that adopted teens are no more vulnerable to problems of identity than are adolescents in general. Also published this year, Betty Jean Lifton's book, *Journey of the Adopted Self, A Quest for Wholeness*, describes the additional psychological challenges adoptees must work through to integrate their birth identities with their adopted identities. The books offer two different faces of adoption, but both describe real people. Both books agree that search for birth parents, or the desire to search, is an important question for adoptees. Lifton describes the positive psychological outcomes of search, while *Growing Up Adopted* found that a majority of teenage adoptees in their sample would like to meet both of their birthparents if they could.

Among many thought-provoking topics in *Journey of the Adopted Self*, Lifton describes extreme violent behaviors that, while rare among adoptees, seem to be exhibited by adopted men more often than their numbers in society would predict. These behaviors include murder of their adoptive parents, suicide, and possibly (the statistical evidence is confusing) mass murder of strangers, especially of

women. Lifton has developed a construct she calls the "adopted child syndrome" to explain why some adoptees seem to be at greater psychological risk for these violent behaviors, and she has testified about it in court when adoptees have been sentenced. In noting the possible relationship between adoptive status and extreme behaviors, Lifton wants to educate adoptive families and psychotherapists about the feelings of adoptees to prevent this kind of behavior and the rage and desperation that lead to it.

Lifton has interviewed many adult adoptees, some who were therapy clients and others with whom

*continued on page 6...*





## ALL RECENT INCOME INCLUDING DONATIONS

• State • Triad? • \$Amount

JUNE TOTAL .....\$ 23.

### JULY ▲

CA ..... unknown .....\$ 65.  
IL ..... Adoptee .....\$ 15.  
NJ ..... Birth Mother .....\$ 30.  
HI ..... Adoptee .....\$ 25.  
CA ..... non triad .....\$ 15.  
MA ..... Adoptee .....\$ 10.  
NY ..... unknown .....\$ 10.  
CA ..... Birth Mother .....\$ 5.  
CA ..... Adoptive Mother .....\$ 60.  
CA ..... Adoptee .....\$100.  
NJ ..... Adoptee .....\$ 10.  
MA ..... unknown .....\$ 15.  
NY ..... Adoptive Mother .....\$200.  
CA ..... Birth Mother .....\$ 40.  
CO ..... non-triad .....\$ 15.  
Canada ... Birth Mother .....\$ 5.  
IL ..... Adoptee .....\$ 15.  
CA ..... Birth Mother .....\$ 15.

JULY SUBTOTAL .....\$650.00

### AUGUST ▲

FL ..... Birth Mother .....\$ 35.  
NY ..... Birth Mother .....\$ 20.  
NJ ..... Adoptee .....\$ 15.  
OR ..... Adoptive Mother .....\$ 10.  
CA ..... Adoptee .....\$ 25.  
CA ..... Adoptee .....\$25.  
MD ..... Adoptee .....\$25.  
CA ..... Adoptee .....\$25.  
IA ..... want to adopt .....\$20.  
WI ..... Birth Mother .....\$13.  
CA ..... Adoptee .....\$10.  
MA ..... unknown .....\$5.  
IL ..... Birth Mother .....\$79.  
Canada .. non-triad .....\$50.  
CA ..... Adoptee .....\$10.  
CA ..... Birth Mother .....\$15.  
NY ..... Birth Mother .....\$100.  
IL ..... Birth Mother .....\$15.  
MI ..... Adoptee .....\$5.

AUGUST SUBTOTAL .....\$522.

### early SEPTEMBER ▲

OR ..... Adoptive Mother .....\$ 15.  
MA ..... non-triad .....\$ 33.  
IA ..... Adoptive Mother .....\$ 10.

SEPTEMBER SUBTOTAL .....\$58.

GRAND TOTAL .....\$1,230. !!

# THANK YOU



...to everyone who donated to Chain of Life. Since the last newsletter, Chain of Life's bank account has gone from below zero to over a thousand dollars — this really helps put the newsletter on solid footing!

The bad news, though not unexpected, is that the Uniform Adoption Act was approved by the group that wrote it. The fight for fair

adoption policies that respect the children in whose best interests adoption supposedly takes place will move to state legislatures.

I intend to take the advice of Marge Booker (letter below) and send copies of Chain of Life to more organizations and individuals. Thanks again to all of you for helping to get the word out. ▲

July 22, 1994

I am enclosing this contribution to *Chain of Life* because I think the work you are doing is very important and must be continued. As an adoptive parent, it has certainly been important to me to hear the perspectives of adoptees and birth parents, voices so often silenced in our culture. I would very much like to see your publication receive the attention it deserves; it should be widely distributed to support groups, social service agencies, public libraries, and other educational venues. If you send me 3-4 copies of the most recent issue, if they are available, I will see that they get circulated in my community. Please don't give up.

I hope that *Chain of Life* will remain healthy and strong for a long time to come — my daughter is almost two, and it will be a few more years until she can get her own subscription and read it herself! For myself, my daughter, her birth mom, and all of us out there living one leg of the adoption triangle, I thank you.

with love,  
Marge Booker  
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK ▲

August 31, 1994

I enclose a check...for a subscription to Chain of Life + 10 back issues. I greatly appreciate the work that you are doing — a voice of sanity in the middle of so much confusion.

I am writing a book about the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, and the topic of adoption is very important vis-a-vis their work. Do you know that in Argentina now there is a "right to identity"; there is a law, #23849, about children's rights, to protect stolen children and illegal adoptions. A lawyer that works with the Grandmothers told me that adoptees could use that law to gain knowledge of their origins, but I don't know if it has been tested or not.

I am going back to Argentina in December to get more info for the book and I will inquire.

In any case, I will keep you posted. Thanks again for your important and *unique* work.

Best,  
Rita Arditti  
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS ▲





## NATIONAL GROUPS OPPOSE PROVISIONS OF DRAFT UNIFORM ADOPTION ACT

A number of national organizations have gone on record as opposing the newly drafted Uniform Adoption Act, because it fails to recognize adoption as a service for children and it fails to adequately protect the interests of children.

The organizations — Child Welfare League of America, Catholic Charities, the National Association of Social Workers, the American Adoption Congress, Concerned United Birthparents, the National Adoption Center, the Adoption Exchange Association, Children Awaiting Parents, and the Joint Council on International Children's Services — stated their objections to the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws, which drafted the act and which will meet during the week of July 29 - August 5, 1994 to consider final approval of the proposed act. The group identified the following as their major concerns:

- The child's best interests should govern decision-making in all adoption proceedings. The draft act focuses on rights of adults to adopt children, rather than on adoption as a service for children.

- The draft act focuses on expediting the permanent separation of infants from their birthparents without providing the parents adequate counseling, exploration of alternatives, and procedural safeguards.

- The act would terminate a

biological parent's visitation rights and communication with his or her child upon completion of the adoption. Despite the fact that open adoptions are increasingly viewed as being in the best interests of children, the act does not allow flexibility in negotiating any level of openness.

- The act does not address the needs of the large numbers of children who have special needs (those who are school age; are part of a sibling group; are children of color; and who have special physical, emotional or developmental needs) but rather focuses on healthy infants.

- The act supports sealed adoption records and is unclear about rights of adopted persons to information.

The group concluded with this request to commissioners: "We urge you to consider the content of the act in light of well-established, quality adoption practice and to withhold your approval of the act. A final uniform adoption act based on this draft simply would not promote and strengthen adoption as a service for children." ▲

### Birth Mother Profiles Wanted for Book

Millie Strom, a Canadian reunited mother, was recently awarded a Canada Council grant to write a non-fiction book from the birth mother perspective. She is interested in obtaining copies of profiles of birth mothers prepared by social workers or counsellors, particularly those that contain mistruths. Usually this is prepared for adoptees when they request background information or register for a reunion.

Please indicate if the name on the profile may be used or if you prefer a pseudonym.

Send to:

**Millie Strom**  
**Suite 102, 2045 Franklin St.**  
**Vancouver, B.C.**  
**CANADA V5L 1R4**

PHONE: (604) 255-0255

### GINNY PIZZARDI, M.F.C.C. PSYCHOTHERAPY

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# Raggedy Ladies vs. Men in Blue Suits: A Trip to Trenton

© by Mary Anne Manning Cohen

We went to Trenton on a bright midsummer's day, the raggedy ladies of New Jersey Coalition for Openness in Adoption, dragging along books, signs, cameras, and bags filled with papers and notebooks. As is usual in adoption reform, we were all women except for our "token male," adoptee Mike Cordasco. The occasion was a hearing of Senate Bill 560/Assembly Bill 1273, which would permit adoptees to obtain their original birth certificates at age eighteen, unless a birthmother chose to have her name deleted. We did not know quite what to expect that day but were worn out and discouraged by all the political chicanery and disappointment that had gone before — there had already been two previous committee hearings where few people had even gotten to speak, and Trenton is a long, hot way from where most of us live.

Our little group straggled into the meeting room only to be confronted by a formidable array of unsmiling Men in Blue Suits. Our first thought was that they were a battery of high-powered lawyers from the New Jersey Catholic Conference who had come out against our bill at the previous hearing, or that perhaps they were "experts" gathered by the National Council for Adoption, the group that works to keep records sealed. It was instant stomach ache time! It turned out that these men were just some adoptive fathers of young children, men who were scared of dealing with birth families, with a Vice President of the National Council who had gotten them riled up, but we did not know

that until they began to give their testimony. I feel that it was not accidental that they were all men dressed to be intimidating, and that when they saw our varied collection of adoptees, birthmothers, and adoptive mother Jane Nast, they thought they would have an easy victory. Their demeanor was arrogant and snide.

The testimony began with a woman from Junior League who was on our side; she was later cornered in the hall by the guy from the National Council, who tried to get her to change her mind and rescind what she had said! After Mike Cordasco spoke, refuting much of what Catholic Conference had said previously, it was my turn. I was relieved to get to speak so early, especially as that meant I did not have to stay in the room and get upset by our opposition. I was also glad when one of them objected that we were getting to testify first, rather than alternating pro and con — it really worked in our favor that they did not get the last word.

The major theme of our opponents was those POOR birthmothers in the closet, and how meeting their kids would ruin their lives. They waxed revoltingly eloquent with chivalrous

concern for these pathetic creatures, who seemed to matter more to them than the needs of their own adopted kids. Betsy Forrest, an adoptee from our group, was so upset by this that when her turn came to speak, she deferred to adoptive mother Jane Nast to show that not all adoptive parents feel that way. This was one of the emotional highlights of the hearing.

There was more testimony by adoptees and more from birthmothers, including Dr. Elizabeth Omand, a birthmother and biologist, who spoke about genetic issues. Adoptee Pam Hasegawa did a wonderful job of summing up our side's position and of refuting on the spot the objections raised by our opponents. The cool men in suits were beginning to sweat. The testimony ended, and the voting and summing up by members of the committee began.

Only one member of the committee voted against us — Assemblywoman Clare Farragher, who said she planned to introduce a registry bill. But at least she was fair and saw that we got our opportunity to speak. One member had left early and abstained; the other five were for us and voted our bill out of committee with varying reasons and degrees of enthusiasm. Some cited

**The major theme of our opponents was those POOR birthmothers in the closet, and how meeting their kids would ruin their lives.**



personal reasons: Assemblyman Cottrell had had a foster child in his family when he was young, and Assemblyman Williams had a close friend who was an adoptee who had said he "did not feel he truly existed" until he found his birth family at age forty-nine!

But the high point of the day for me was the statement of Assemblywoman Nia Gill, a very beautiful African-American woman from Essex County, as to why she was voting for the bill. That Gill, a lawyer, was far and away the brightest person on that committee was evident in her remarks on other issues that came up while we were waiting for our issue to be heard. Although others voted for our bill, I feel she was the only one who really "got it"; who was able to make connections to her own concerns as a woman and as a person of African descent.

Gill's first point, taken from adoptee Barbara Cohen's testimony, was that if anyone with enough money could buy their information and bypass sealed records, there really was no "confidentiality." It was just another case of inequality between rich and poor. Poor searchers are stopped by the law; those who can afford to pay for a search are not.

Assemblywoman Gill's next point was that adoption is a woman's issue, and she skillfully turned the Catholic Conference testimony about the birthmother's "dark secret" back on them: she accused them of misleading and misusing women by foisting secrecy on them and told them to go back and start counseling birth mothers differently to correct the mistakes

they had made, not to perpetuate lies. Her righteous and beautifully controlled anger at Catholic bureaucracy was a lovely thing to hear!

When Assemblywoman Gill made her final point, there was a hush, and tears—for me, it was as if the primordial Goddess herself had entered the room. She spoke from the heart of her African heritage; of going from place to place in Africa and being told, "you look like this tribe, or that nation," but never being able to really know from whence her people had come. The real

tribal heritage of all African-Americans was erased in the dehumanization and attempted genocide of slavery.

I was honored to be in that room, to hear her "yes" vote for our bill, and to have her fine mind and bright spirit on our side, especially as this issue is not of central importance to most of her constituents, who are dealing with much more pressing issues of daily survival as people of color and poverty in a racist world.

For me, the greatest lesson of this day was that sometimes the men in suits don't win, in spite of their privilege and power. Of course, this is only one round in the legislative process, and we still have a long, hard way to go—but it was great to win one for a change! ▲

*Mary Anne Manning Cohen is a birth mother and a frequent contributor to Chain of Life, as well as editor of the newsletter of Origins, an organization for women who have lost children to adoption (subscriptions \$15. per year, P.O. Box 556, Whippany, New Jersey 07981.)*

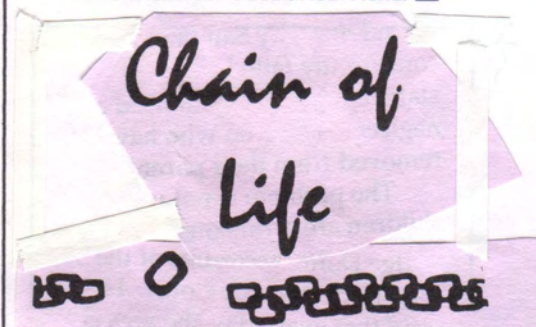
**She was the only one who really "got it"; who was able to make connections to her own concerns as a woman and as a person of African descent.**

## CHAIN OF LIFE

IS A FORUM FOR

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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.





...continued from front page

she has come in contact as a result of her previous books, to convey the texture and depth of their identity challenges and the outcomes of reunions with their birth families.

Toward the end of the book, Lifton concludes:

Adoptees are often alarmed that they still want to go on searching for something after they have completed their search for mother, father, siblings, and extended family. They don't realize that to be searching is to be alive; that the most healing thing that happens to adoptees is that the search makes them into constant searchers. Having made their personal journey through time, space, and emotion, they are now ready to join others in the human condition on the Eternal Search to answer the great mysteries of life and death (p. 272).

I couldn't put this book down and especially recommend it to adoptees.

*Growing Up Adopted*, the study of adolescents, also yields valuable information despite its sampling limitations. In a section on transracial adoption, which in this study refers almost exclusively to Asian adolescents raised by white parents in the Midwest, we learn that race is perceived by the adoptees as more of a "problem" growing up than is their adoptive status.

The report says much more than did the simplified newspaper proclamations that adoptees are as psychologically healthy as other adolescents. After all, it is possible that adolescents in the general population today are not doing as well as we would hope. On one psychological scale, three quarters of all adoptees in the study fall within the normal range for "total problems," with same-race adoptees doing no better than transracial adoptees. This raises questions about the other 25%

whose problems are outside the normal range.

*Growing Up Adopted* concludes with a list of recommendations for adopting parents that seem right on target, e.g., "Recognize the importance of open, honest and comfortable communication about adoption, but don't move the issue of adoption to center stage." Many adopted adolescents thrive from a "quiet openness" to adoption, "a willingness by parents to always be there when a child initiates dialogue about adoption." Another reminds parents that the desire to know their birth parents is not a sign of adoptee pathology. I recommend this book to adoptive parents for this list alone. ▲

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*On July 9, 1994, the New York Times published the following letter to the editor written by Betty Jean Lifton about the Growing Up Adopted study.*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

Your June 23 news article on a study of adopted adolescents conducted by the Search Institute of Minneapolis swallowed the good news whole — adopted teenagers are no more likely than other adolescents to suffer from problems of mental health or identity — without investigating the project or its methodology.

I find it curious that in 1993 this same study reported as preliminary findings: "Adoptees showed higher rates of licit drug use, illicit drug use, negative emotionality, anti-social behavior and amphetamine use than nonadoptees. They showed lower rates of optimism, interests and school adjustment."

What magic pill did adoptees take last year to make such a dramatic leap into health? Or perhaps we should ask, What magic voodoo did the researchers perform to reverse their results? And for what purpose?

In my book *Journey of the Adopted Self, A Quest for Wholeness*, I tell how this study came about through the initiative of the adoptive parents of a college student named Andrew who committed suicide during his freshman year. They hoped serious research into the psychology of adopted adolescents would help adoptive parents understand the needs of their adopted children and bring about overdue reforms in the closed adoption system.

This flawed study does not mention or reflect its own origins. It did not use a matched control group and is not the representational sample it claims to be. Participants are from predominantly Roman Catholic and Lutheran agencies in four Midwestern states. Adoptees needed parental consent to take part. Half the families approached refused to give it. What about them? Was their children's experience less sanguine than the researchers lead us to believe?

The study claims to represent non-clinical adoptees, but notes that 34 percent had been in counseling or therapy. Only 54 percent reported feeling attached to both parents; 16 percent did not feel strongly attached to either parent. What kind of good news is that?

As if oblivious to their own data, the authors of the study tell us that adoption does not typically complicate the period of adolescence or have a negative impact on forming identity. This not only goes against common sense, but also violates observations by leading child analysts like D.W. Winnicott and Erik Erikson and prominent researchers like David Brodzinsky and Marshall Schechter.

The adoption field is in need of valid research if we are to understand why adopted adolescents like Andrew have difficulty forming a cohesive sense of self. And why a disproportionate number of adopted adolescents are referred for psychological treatment. Empty reassurance like that given by the study benefits no one. ▲





## ADOPTEE/FEMINIST : Elena Marie Quinones DiLapi

She said, Maybe because I never met my own mother,  
my relationship even to people on the street  
— anyone, everyone! — has been affected.

She said, Maybe it was stumbling into that conference  
of adoptees — that surprise! — that readied me  
for the other revelation of feminism.

She said, Maybe it's because I've been in search for  
so many years — inner and outer searches —  
that I do uniquely appreciate "process."

She said, I am struck by how my mother Gloria's poverty  
thrust me into a life so different from hers  
and how class shaped the lives of two women  
who never met, each of them my mother.

She said, Maybe both my feminist and my adoptee  
perspectives led to my social work teaching  
about how people get marginalized.

She said, Maybe being born Puerto Rican in Harlem  
but raised Italian in Great Neck led to starting  
White Women Against Racism in Philadelphia.

She said, Maybe coming out as a lesbian helped me  
understand the self-defined versus the socially-  
imposed identity. Who I am is not always how  
I appear to others. I am good, loving, lovable.

She said, State regulation and declaration of legitimacy  
(and "illegitimacy") intricately work to silence  
both adoptees and lesbians. To silence us.

She said, But maybe it's not knowing if my birthfather was  
Quinones or an Irish-American that enrages me  
when inseminated women say their child has a  
donor — not even an unknown father somewhere!

She said, Some adoptive mothers attack those same  
people — adoptees and birthmothers — who have  
created their identities as mothers and thus  
validated them as women in our sexist society.

She said, Both feminism and "searching" have been  
my means of reclamation: of my self, my  
rights — especially of my identities.

And then this head (heart) of a Women's Center  
began dancing her way through six hours  
of feelings about all she had just said.

— Penny Callan Partridge





# EVENTS

## San Francisco Bay Area

### NOVEMBER IS NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH

**November 5:** Saturday at 8 pm in Oakland: "Motherhood, Hold the Pie," with singer/songwriter Betsy Rose and songwriter/storyteller Nancy Schimmel. Nancy and Betsy are both birthmothers—last year Nancy was reunited with the daughter she gave up for adoption in 1955; Betsy has had another child after struggling with infertility. Both have written songs, poems, and accounts of their experiences, and Nancy has been collecting relevant folktales. They are presenting this material together for the first time at *Mama Bear's*, 6536 Telegraph Avenue, Oakland. Programs at Mama Bear's Bookstore are for women only. \$8 to \$10 sliding scale, reservations are strongly suggested, 510-428-9684.

**November 12:** Saturday, 9 am until 5 pm in Oakland: "The Primal Wound, Adoption Issues and Answers," a seminar offered by Nancy Verrier with Leah Lagoy and David B. Cheek, at the Claremont

Hotel. Sponsored by The Association for Pre and Perinatal Psychology and Health. Cost is \$65 for APPPAH members; \$75 for others. For more information, call 510-284-5813.

**November 15:** Tuesday evening at Fort Mason in San Francisco. **Betty Jean Lifton**, author of the recently published *Journey of the Adopted Self, A Quest for Wholeness* (described in this newsletter) will be speaking at an event sponsored by PACER, the Post Adoption Center for Education and Research. Details about time and exact location are not known at press time. For more information call PACER, 510-935-6622

## Santa Monica, California

**November 5:** "Adoption: The Lifelong Impact" is a lecture/discussion presented by Marlou Russell, Ph.D., psychologist in private practice, at Santa Monica College, 9 am to noon. Cost is \$25. For more information, call Dr. Russell at 310-452-9214.

## Seattle, Washington

▲ The Adoption Resource Center of Children's Home Society of Washington offers support groups for birth parents, multi-racial families,

gay and lesbian parents, and teenage adoptees. In November there is an afternoon workshop on "Deciding to Search" that addresses ambivalence about searching. Call 1-800-398-1ARC for more information. (*The Center does not place children.*)

# RESOURCES

▲ **The Family Next Door**, a publication for lesbian and gay parents and their friends, has published a series of three first-person accounts of a reunion: the first two installments are by the adoptee and the third is by her birth mother. *The Family Next Door* can be purchased at feminist and gay bookstores around the country, or write them at P.O. Box 21580, Oakland, CA 94620 to obtain these recent issues.

▲ **To Prison with Love**, a book by Sandy Musser, will be available in November. Convicted and imprisoned for four months for activities associated with finding people separated by adoption, Sandy gives her views of the "real conspiracy" of closed adoption. Before October 31, 1994, you can take 20% off the retail price of \$14.95 + \$2. postage and handling. Write to: *The Awareness Press*, P.O. Box 41, Cape Coral, FL 33910.



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I am ☐ an adoptee, ☐ a birth parent, ☐ an adoptive parent, ☐ an adoption professional, or ☐ \_\_\_\_\_

