

# Chain of Life

## Issues in Adoption and Child Welfare

▲ SINCE 1989 ▲

P.O. Box 8081 • Berkeley, California 94707  
Issue 38 • SPRING 1996 • JANINE BAER, M.A., EDITOR



### *Planned Parenthood and Anti-abortionists Both Oppose Open Records in Vermont*

Although there is no proof that opening adoption records would lead fearful pregnant women to choose abortion rather than adoption, it is no secret that organizations against abortion have been major forces opposed to reversing sealed records laws. The National Council for Adoption is listed on the Internet as a "Pro-Life" organization and information in one of the books produced by the NCFCA attempted to correlate the increase in abortions with the decrease in adoptions in the years after abortion was legalized nationally in 1973. According to Kate Burke, writing in the Spring 1996 *American Adoption Congress Decree*, a study has shown that only 5% of women denied abortions chose adoption placement for their children. Nevertheless, this is the view of anti-abortionists in Vermont, where adoption reform legislation was proposed this past winter.

Particularly disturbing and bizarre is that one of the anti-abortionists' allies in Vermont is Planned Parenthood of Northern New England. PPNNE has come out

against adoptees' unequivocal right to know their birth parents' names. The organization's policy statement on Vermont's recent adoption reform bills (S 136/H 307) says that PPNNE is against "retroactive disclosure" of the names of birth mothers, which they consider to be "a violation of individual privacy and autonomy." Planned Parenthood's regional public affairs office wrote,

Women who have made reproductive choices with the promise or understanding that their confidentiality would be protected into the future should not now have that protection removed without their affirmative consent. Their reproductive decisions were made based on the laws at the time and cannot now be changed; to change the laws retroactively would set a dangerous precedent and constitute poor public policy.

As noted by Burke in the *Decree*, birth mothers who were told they relinquished all rights to their child may feel they have no right to make contact. People against opening

original birth records fail to consider that the birth mother already knows she relinquished a child and the child, one hopes, knows he or she was adopted; therefore, direct contact between the two does not reveal this information to a third party, as an intermediary system would. Revealing the birth parent's name to an adoptee is certainly not telling the general public.

Planned Parenthood of Northern New England can be reached by mail at: 51 Talcott Road, Williston VT 05495; by phone at 802-878-7232; or by fax at 802-878-8001. Messages can be addressed to Ms. Allie Stickney, Executive Director.

The organization does support "policy changes that would facilitate the exchange of identifying information of all members of the adoption triad, for both past and future adoptions, with the consent of the person(s) being identified. ..."

*Thanks to Marge Garfield of Vermont for sending this information.*



## CHAIN OF LIFE

is a forum for exploring adoption and related topics with special emphasis on the views of adopted adults.

Viewpoints of authors are not necessarily held by the publisher and discussion on any topic is welcome. Please indicate whether any item you send to Chain of Life may be published.

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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. ▲

## CHAIN LETTERS

*The following message was posted to the Adoptees Mailing List on the Internet. The AML ended February 29 and has since been reborn in other forms, including the "Adoptees' Internet Mailing List." I asked the author for permission to publish this message in Chain of Life; her permission was contingent on my not using her name, just in case her adoptive parents might read it. It follows here, unedited, as it appeared in cyberspace.*

*Friday, February 23, 1996*

My birthfather and I have been writing Email for a week now, and it's been going great — better than I ever could have expected.

He just wrote me that his ex-wife and mother of my half-sister (who's only 6 short months younger than me) phoned him up to say how thrilled she was for us. They are still very good friends. She said that she had read that often the newly found birthparent will COMPETE for love and attention against the adoptive parents. He's been very worried about this since he talked to her, and I had to reassure him a lot that he hadn't been doing that, and that there was room in my heart for every one (I've already told him that a couple of times).

Also, one of my friends who was really HAPPY for me said, "Don't forget your adoptive parents, just because you've met him now... Remember all those nights they stayed up when you were sick... etc...?" For ME, this is PART OF RAISING A CHILD and presumably WHAT THEY WANTED since they went through so much effort to get me. I agree that changing diapers isn't the best part, but should a biological child feel grateful that his parents

changed his diapers?

My question is...why is it ONLY adoptees who aren't deemed intelligent enough to manage their own relationships?? I'm 32 years old...I had a

*why is it ONLY adoptees who aren't deemed intelligent enough to manage their own relationships?*

childhood, my parents are my parents. I am a success and they can be (and are) proud of me. What else does society expect from me? His and my relationship will have no effect on my relationship with my parents, and he has never tried to replace them or compete with them (well, it's only been a week — but he won't).

If a biological child didn't have a particularly good relationship with one of his/her parents, that is accepted, while WE adoptees are supposed to try EXTRA hard because we were once orphaned? Of course, it's always the people who have absolutely NO experience with adoption who are ready to hand out this kind of advice. I told him we have to work together to set the world straight. He said as long as I didn't make him go on Oprah.

Anyway, I knew you guys would understand.

— *Happily Reunited in Cyberspace*





# CHAIN LETTERS

February 26, 1996

Dear Janine,

Regarding the notice in your newsletter on page 7 about CASA [Court Appointed Special Advocates, an organization of volunteers for children taken from their families because of abuse or neglect], I'd like you to know my experience. First, some background. I have a Bachelor's degree from Loyola University and two paralegal certificates. I worked five plus years as a Paralegal and in 1992 decided to leave my job to spend time with my daughters. I'm a birthmom from 1970, married and have two girls. My husband is self-employed. In 1989, I reunited with my lost son.

CASA frequently advertises in the Illinois Paralegal Association newsletter. With time on my hands, I started the long process to volunteer. There is considerable paperwork to be completed, referrals, a personal interview and then, if chosen, training. Finally, I had received word that I had been chosen for training. At that point the personal interview was scheduled. Most of the interview was spent informing me as to the seriousness of the training program. However, the Director did mention her displeasure at how long children remained in the "system" and her opinion at how unlikely she felt it was that abusive moms could or would be retrained away from the abuse cycle. At the close of the interview I revealed my adoption triad status. Words can't describe the Chicago CASA Director's face, although she remained pleasant and kept assuring me I was in the program.

Briefly, I spoke to the possibility of issues that single moms might be vul-

nerable and in need of help in order to parent. For five minutes I advocated for single moms. A few days later, the Director called to tell me that she was removing my name from the program precisely because I am a birthmother. She felt I would be prejudiced. When I asked how, she became nervous and couldn't answer. I was stunned. The conversation was not long. Her decision was not confirmed in writing.

I wrote to an admired and perceived adoption reformist for help but never heard a word back. In Illinois, silence is the best defense. This is a conservative state. In retrospect, I had the experience of viewing first hand the agenda of the Chicago CASA Director. I don't think Chicago CASA is interested in helping children stay with their biological families. It appeared the agenda of Chicago CASA is to sever biology as quickly as possible. Most of the volunteers seemed to be law students. Law students need internships; some volunteers may be closet triad members working to validate their adoption status. I think my triad status and viewpoint was threatening to the Chicago CASA Director and if that is so, one can only ask, WHAT IS CASA REALLY ABOUT? WHAT IS THE CASA AGENDA?

Sincerely,

Cindy Bhimani



## I don't think Chicago CASA is interested in helping children stay with their biological families

*Editor's Comments: I appreciate this information about CASA as I had no personal knowledge of the organization when I included information about it (see Chain of Life, Issue 37). After receiving Cindy's letter, I sent a brief e-mail note to the California CASA Association, without mentioning Cindy's name, asking whether they have a policy similar to the*

*apparent policy in Chicago. I received the following response: "Dear Janine: Thank you for your letter regarding CASA volunteers and birth parents. Our executive director, Susan Carter, is very interested in responding to your concerns regarding this important issue. She will be on vacation until the beginning of April, but you should receive a response some time in April. Sincerely, Linda Atkins, Communications Coordinator." I have not yet received a response but if I do I will let you know in the next issue of Chain.*

— JB





## Flirting With Disaster and The Ten Commandments: Adoption Hollywood Style

# Movies

*Flirting with Disaster* is a funny movie — if you don't think about it too seriously. The film is more about flirting than about adoption issues. Critics say this film is wonderful — both hysterical and funny according to the *East Bay Express* — but careful scrutiny could take away some of the fun. In this film an adoptee in his twenties named Mel is so wrapped up in his search that he ignores his wife, even forgetting a sexual date they had planned. Mel feels unable to name his baby son until he learns more about his own identity.

The main flirtation with disaster is Mel's search itself, a wild goose chase across the country, guided and misguided by a young adoption agency worker who joins Mel and his wife and baby on the search, supposedly to do psychological research on reunions but really to enhance the flirting theme. She is a good example of how an intermediary can obstruct a search rather than facilitate it.

The triad characters are caricatures. Mary Tyler Moore plays an overly protective Jewish adoptive mother. (This is at least Moore's second adoption role; she played baby seller Georgia Tann in a television drama in 1993.) Poor Mel is a good-natured schlemiel, led to believe that various unlikely people are his birth parents. Although those people have nothing in common with him,

Mel tries to see familiar traits.

By the time Mel meets his real birth parents, played by Lily Tomlin and Alan Alda, toward the end of the film, he has had enough of this insanity and is ready to go home. Tomlin and Alda play warm, spacey, aging hippie artists who sell LSD to supplement their income. Their angry teenage son is not happy with the arrival of his newly found brother and tries to poison him.

The film's matter-of-fact theme of adoption search does suggest that the search for birth parents has become a mainstream topic. Except for his overwrought adoptive parents, who are sure they are losing a son because of Mel's search, everyone else in the film seems to understand and accept that part of the plot. The birth parent characters do not hide from him or deny who they are.

While *Flirting With Disaster* was supposed to be about adoption but only used the search as a structure for a series of jokes, *The Ten Commandments*, not usually noted as an adoption story, had some very dramatic scenes on that subject. I had never seen the 1956 classic and found it accidentally. While I was channel surfing Easter night, up popped a powerful adoption story somewhere in the middle of this film. Moses (Charleton Heston) had just figured out who his birth mother was and wanted to see her. His adoptive mother, the

Egyptian queen, tried to stop him by telling his Hebrew slave birth mother to leave town with her other children immediately. The birth mother said it would be difficult to leave her son, Moses; she did not want to go.

Shortly thereafter, Moses burst into the room, asking if this was his mother. "Has she done more for you than I?" asked the Egyptian queen. Here was the typical dilemma of the adopted person who wants to find out his personal truth being blocked by adoptive parents who take the quest as a criticism and threat. Upon meeting his birth mother, Moses/Heston said, "If there is no shame in me, how can I have shame for the woman who bore me?"

Moses fulfilled his adoptive family's worst fears by reuniting with his people by birth, leaving his adoptive culture, and leading the Hebrews out of slavery. I wondered if the dialogue was a reflection of 1950s attitudes toward adoption — that knowing the identity of a birth mother would be dangerous to the conventional family structure, requiring her to be banished once the truth was known. How, I wondered, did this film affect triad members in the viewing audience? The reunion scene certainly jumped out at me. *The Ten Commandments*, more than *Flirting with Disaster*, has the potential to be a starting point for a serious discussion of adoption.

— JANINE BAER



# Anger Surfaces in Reunion

by Bill Wattendorf

Developing the new relationships we find after reunions is often a roller coaster ride. The heaven we never dreamed was possible can only be matched by the hell that makes us think we should never have opened Pandora's box. When relationships don't develop according to our hopes, the anger I see is often disproportionate to the shortcomings that provoke it. I believe that this anger, when asymmetrical to the alleged stimulus, actually comes from the pain that the original adoption experience created, not necessarily the current altercation at hand.

Childlessness, relinquishment, and being adopted are all insults to the very core of our being. The childless couple has lost their dreams of their future children, their life purpose arrested within a critical and unsympathetic society. The birth parents are devastated by their loss and inability to care for their own children, their self worth decimated in a shaming and unforgiving community. The adoptee is a reject unworthy of self-esteem, a bastard. The predicament leaves us all deeply scarred.

None of us in the triad has been allowed to vent our pain. Our pain, if

revealed, is usually invalidated. No one wants to listen to the laments of the childless couple; they're told something is wrong with them and to enjoy their uncomplicated life as it is. The birth parents "got themselves into this mess" and are told to be happy that their child will have a better life without them. The adoptee is given no information to even have a dialogue about the subject and is told how lucky he is to be adopted. No one has the answers for us. We're told our pain is not real. We try to live like it's not there.

The reunion puts us in contact with the original perpetrators of the contravention. The situation that was largely conceptual to us all our lives is now incarnated in flesh and blood when all the players are present. When the parent we find is not as receptive as we'd like, the primal rejection that we

were unable to let ourselves feel all our lives slaps us hard in the face.

When the relationship with the child we find hasn't turned out like we hoped, the original loss that had been biding its time is reborn. When our adopted children search, the previous pain from our inability to conceive returns in a new form. The original anger that surfaces is unmanageable and we direct it at the very people we set out to love.

How could you be that mad at these people? You just met them. Is it them you're really angry at? Or is it the horrible hand of cards that fate has dealt you?

*Bill Wattendorf is an adoptee in reunion for nine years. He has counseled prospective adoptive parents in Boston and Florida and has helped in searches between adoptees and birth parents for various organizations.*

**We're told  
our pain is  
not real.**



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# Improvements Made to Ohio Adoption Law; Birth Certificates Are Still Out of Reach

by Betsie Norris

*A different version of this article was published in the March/April 1996 issue of Adoption Network News, the newsletter of Adoption Network Cleveland, and is used with permission of the author.*



There has been a flurry of activity on House Bill 419 since the last newsletter, culminating in its passing both the Ohio Senate Human Services and Aging Committees and the full Senate on February 14, 1996 in

another substitute form. On February 21, 1996 the House concurred with the changes. The Governor is expected to sign the bill into law some time this spring, resulting in the bill taking effect in July. In its final form, House Bill 419 substantially improves current Ohio adoption law in almost every area, but does not go as far in some areas as was hoped.

While the bill revises all areas of Ohio's adoption laws, the issues regarding access to information were the most hotly debated throughout. As reported in our last newsletter [and in the last issue of *Chain of Life*], last minute regressive changes regarding access to information issues were made in the

**the issues regarding access to information were the most hotly debated throughout**

House committee before the bill was passed along to the Senate.

In the Senate committee, adoptees, birthparents, adoptive parents and professionals lobbied for these changes to be reversed. Representatives from Adoption Network Cleveland met individually with Senators and testified in committee about these provisions' importance. The committee seemed very sympathetic.

However, the opposition — Ohio Right to Life joined by the National Council for Adoption (NCF) based in Washington, DC — put tremendous, unceasing pressure on the

committee members, attempting to further modify even the existing access to information provisions, in the end claiming that even access to non-identifying information could not be allowed "retroactively." The Senate committee handled this by clarifying the definition of what information can be given, but specifying that the legislated right to receive "non-identifying information" be applicable in future adoptions only.

On the Senate floor, Senator Gary Suhadolnik (R-Strongsville) attempted to amend the bill to ban homosexuals from adopting or being foster parents. After quite a drama, his amendment was tabled by a 20 to 11 vote.

Senator Judy Sheerer (D-Shaker Hts), a member of the Senate Human Services and Aging Committees, emerged as a real champion for adoptees' rights. Bothered by the abrogation of adoptees' rights that would result from a birth mother being able to refuse the adoptee a copy of his or her own birth certificate, Senator Sheerer researched other approaches. Impressed with the "contact veto" system used in Tennessee and in other countries, Senator Sheerer proposed such an amendment in committee. She also carried several positive amendments at the request of Adoption Network. Unfortunately, each of





amendments was voted down by the Republican majority.

As the bill was being considered on the Senate floor, Senator Sheerer made an eloquent and moving speech, pointing out that, although generally beneficial, this bill falls short in the area of adoptee rights. She called for a greater balancing of the rights of birth parents and adoptees and called attention to the fact that this bill omits adoptees' rights to information about themselves in a way that would outrage non-adopted people if it happened to them. This was in sharp contrast to the rhetoric of the bill's sponsors, who touted the needs and best interests of adoptees as the guiding principle of the bill.

Compromise is recognized as an inevitable part of the political process. Adoption Network Cleveland took an integral role in formulating and lobbying for the provisions in the bill. Through this almost two-year process, we succeeded in putting ourselves on the map as important interested parties in adoption in Ohio, earning the respect and admiration of many with whom we worked. Over the course of the bill, Adoption Network Cleveland was strongly represented at every public meeting and hearing about the bill. We were part of the working group that developed the bill and saw it through; many Adoption Network members testified about its provisions in both the Ohio House and Senate.

Selected provisions of House Bill 419 follow; all provisions are effective regarding future adoptions only:

- As a condition to the consent of adoption, birthparents will be required to sign a statement indicat-

ing whether or not the adoptee may learn the birthparents' names when he or she turns 21 (the adoptive parents may obtain their names when the child turns 18). Identifying information will be available to those parties unless the "no" box is checked.

- The bill defines identifying information as: first name, last name, maiden name, alias, social security number, place of employment, number used to identify the person for the purpose of the statewide Education Management Information System, and any other number used to identify the person.

- Allows a variety of people to request non-identifying information (which includes everything except identifying information) directly from the court, agency, or attorney who handled the adoption and requires these parties to provide the information requested. The people who can obtain non-identifying information are adoptees who are at least 18 years old, adoptive parents, adoptive family members, birthparents, birth siblings, and birth family members.

- Requires that at least 72 hours prior to signing a voluntary surrender or consent, a birthparent meet with a qualified professional to be given educational information and material about adoption. It also requires that certain information be collected

from the birthparent.

- Establishes that open adoption is legal and that an adoption cannot be denied by a probate court solely because it is an open adoption; and that non-legally binding open adoption agreements can be entered into between adopting parents and birthparents.

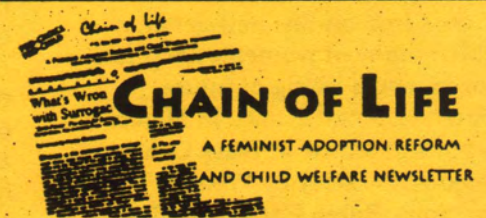
- Requires that the birthparents and the adoptive parents both "sign off" on fees related to the adoption; establishes what services can be included in fees, and allows a court to order a reduction in fees if it so desires.

- Generally streamlines the adoption process for older children in the system who are awaiting permanent families.

## One Senator attempted to amend the bill to ban homosexuals from adopting or being foster parents. After quite a drama, his amendment was tabled.

Quite a few organizations endorsed the original "access to information" provisions of House Bill 419.

*Adoption Network can be reached at 291 East 222 Street, Cleveland, OH 44123-1751; phone (216) 261-1511. Betsie Norris is Adoption Network's executive director. ▲*



▲ the politics of adoption, past and present, domestically and internationally

▲ donor insemination, surrogacy



▲ In the April 15, 1996 issue of *The Nation*, Ellen Ross, a women's studies and history teacher in New Jersey, reviewed the book *Going All The Way: Teenage Girls' Tales of Sex, Romance, and Pregnancy* by Sharon Thompson. Ross says, "The sex lives and childbearing of teenage girls have been hot topics with the middle-aged males in Congress this year, issues they have approached with breathtaking ignorance of social realities." Congressmembers are upset that some teenage girls are having babies outside of marriage without punishments of the past such as maternity homes, forced adoptions, or juvenile detention centers. Thompson interviewed teenage girls from a wide range of social and ethnic groups, concluding (among other things) that denying welfare payments to single teenage mothers will not stop them from having babies because it does "absolutely nothing to dismantle worlds in which tales of love and romance are what endow women's lives with meaning."

▲ Cyberspace travelers may be interested in accessing the new web pages of Susan Wadia-Ells and her **Adoption Connections Project**. The address is: <http://www.rovers.net/~adopt>. Susan is editor of the anthology *The Adoption Reader*. She offers a free on-line newsletter, a bibliography of women's adoption stories, and a listing of future conferences and events. In March, Susan was joined at Black Oak Books in Berkeley by Wendy Lichtman, Robin Flatley, and Denise Sherer Jacobson, all of whom have written pieces for the anthology, at a standing room only reading.



▲ As a Valentine's Day story February 14, Channel 7 (KGO) in the Bay Area aired an adoption reunion on its 6 pm news show that highlighted the absurdity of sealed records laws and the obstinacy of people who enforce them even when a birth parent and an adult adoptee waive their rights to confidentiality. News anchor Dan Noyes helped reunite adoptee Patricia Womack with her birth mother (and extended family); both women had indicated to Children's Home Society of Oakland, California that they wanted to meet. CHS and a California state government representative both refused to tell the two searchers about each other, giving lame excuses, videotaped for posterity, for why they could not possibly break confidentiality and reunite the two women. The agency claimed to be concerned that the birth mother could have changed her mind since contacting it with her request for a reunion. This is the ridiculousness with which consenting adults must contend. Noyes provided a view of adoption search rarely seen by the general public.

If any adoption reformers reading this can obtain a videotape of this story, I think it could be used as a consciousness raising tool for our elected representatives when access to birth certificate (aka "open records") bills are debated in state legislatures.

▲ I came across two items about adoption from Paraguay. One was an exposé in the *New York Times* about babies being stolen from mothers in Paraguay and given to foreign adopting parents. The other was the first issue of a newsletter, *On Paraguay*, by a woman who adopted a child from Paraguay and who wanted to connect with other families to share information about the country and its cultural heritage for their adopted children. Lynn Van Houten's newsletter can be obtained from: *On Paraguay*, 1724 Burgundy Ct., Petaluma, CA 94954. Half of the newsletter has activities for adopted children; the other half is aimed toward their adoptive parents.

The *New York Times* article, "Adoptions in Paraguay: Mothers Cry Theft" by Diana Jean Schemo was on the front page March 19. Schemo wrote that Paraguay is now the leading supplier of children for adoption from South America to the United States and in some cases, children have been stolen from their mothers.

▲ *Roots and Wings*, an adoption magazine primarily for adoptive parents, has some articles in its Spring issue that I found very moving and informative. An article about open adoption begins with Rosie Burr, an adoptive mother, describing her extreme reluctance about meeting a birth mother. An open adoption seemed to be the only way she and her husband could adopt a child; it was not their first choice. But after meeting Cheri, the pregnant woman whose twins the Burrs adopted, Rosie's attitude changed. To her surprise, Rosie became "bonded" to Cheri as well as



to the babies. The adoptive mother concludes, "She has given us so much joy that the very least we could do was share some of it with her. She is their mother and just giving her those few days a year to experience it is not much to give."

Korean adoptee Su Niles wrote a painful letter to her deceased adoptive mother, also in this issue. Breaking the taboo against openly criticizing one's parents, this 36-year-old woman describes the verbal abuse she experienced by an alcoholic mother who insisted on gratitude for "saving" Su's life by adopting her. Niles writes, "You may have saved me, but I paid a very high price. In my self-image, my self-esteem and confidence, and my ability to trust."

In the same issue of *Roots and Wings*, Penny Callan Partridge, who is an adoptee, adoptive mother, poet, and adoption activist, reviewed *The Adoption Reader* anthology. *Roots and Wings* is available quarterly for \$19.95 per year. Write to P.O. Box 638, Chester, New Jersey 07930. E-mail address is [Rootswings@aol.com](mailto:Rootswings@aol.com). Web page is <http://www.adopting.org/rw.html>.

▲ An adoptive mother wrote a review of *The Adoption Reader: Birth Mothers, Adoptive Mothers and Adoptive Daughters Tell Their Stories* (edited by Susan Wadia-Ells) in the March 1996 issue of *The Women's Review of Books*. The reviewer, Carol Sternhell, afraid to open the book, was afraid she would find "attacks from angry birthmothers and bitter adoptees" that she did not want to hear. Although she did not find as many happy adoptees and birthmothers as she had hoped, she "loved *The Adoption Reader* anyway."

Sternhell believes "it's possible to develop a feminist politics of adoption that respects the rights of all involved — that helps birthmothers who want to parent their children to do so...that never hides birth records from adult adoptees—but sees adoption as an exciting path toward family, not as a choice of last resort."

▲ For the May / June *Children's Advocate*, Daphne Muse wrote a review of Hillary Rodham Clinton's book *It Takes a Village and Other Lessons Children Teach Us* (Simon & Schuster, 1996, 318 pages, \$20.). Muse was disappointed that Clinton "did not use her analytical skills and political savvy to address the fact that, for the most part, the village no longer exists....And if half the village is in jail, cracked out, marginally employed or unemployed, the village is bound to become extinct." Muse is editor of *The New Press Resource Guide in Multicultural Children's Literature*, due to be published in Fall 1996. *The Children's Advocate* can be reached at: Action Alliance for Children, The Hunt House, 1201 Martin Luther King Jr. Way, Oakland, CA 94612-1217.

▲ A one-time \$5,000. tax credit for anyone who adopts a child in the United States is on its way to becoming law since passing the House of Representatives on May 10 with 393 in favor and 15 against. Families who earn up to \$75,000 a year will get the credit, with smaller awards for families earning up to \$115,000 a year.

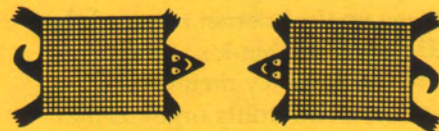
No doubt this credit will help some families who must pay lawyers or adoption agencies. But it appears that adoption is considered to be so beneficent by both political party mem-

bers that giving subsidies—a form of welfare—to relatively high-income families to adopt children while at other times cutting welfare payments to a child's first family is not considered odd or hypocritical in the nation's capital. It remains to be seen whether the tax credit will be used for the adoption of older children in foster care or for infants. No provision was included that would educate adopting families about the life-long emotional impact of adoption on their children.

In addition, the adoption bill will limit the jurisdiction of tribal courts over adoptions of American Indian children who, according to Representative Deborah Pryce (R-Ohio), have been taken from non-Indian families, in some cases after having lived with them for years, to be placed with Native families. According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, President Clinton had supported attempts by Don Young (R-Alaska) to delete the provision, which Young called "anti-Indian family."

And finally, this bill will impose fines on states in which adoptions are delayed by agencies while they seek same-race adopters. Race matching can only be a consideration if two or more prospective families are vying to adopt the same child.

A similar bill is pending in the Senate. If the bill passes both houses, President Clinton has indicated that he will sign it. (*Information from San Francisco Chronicle, May 11, 1996.*)





▲ *In the Family* is a new therapy magazine devoted to lesbian, gay, and bisexual families. "What do lesbian and gay parents need to know before they talk to their kids about sex? How can gay and lesbian stepparents forge strong, loving bonds with stepchildren? Why do some couples lose their sexual spark once they have or adopt children? What is the psychological fallout for families when one parent has no legal rights or responsibilities toward the children?" For a quarterly subscription, send \$22 (\$26 outside the U.S.) to: *In the Family*, P.O. Box 5387, Takoma Park, MD 20913. Questions? Call (301) 270-4771.

▲ Lois Melina has been publishing *Adopted Child* newsletter since 1981. Now you can purchase the complete set of back issues for \$165, or \$2 per issue. Or you can order 10 newsletters for \$12 per topic in sets that address: *For Waiting or New Adoptive Parents, The Growing Years, For Parents Adopting Transracially or Transculturally, For Parents Adopting Older Children, For Parents of Teenagers, For Parents Adopting Children Affected by Substance Abuse or Sexual Abuse, or Issues Children Face in School*. Annual subscriptions are \$22 for 4 page newsletters sent monthly. Melina has also written books and produced audiotapes. For a brochure describing her products, write: *Adopted Child*, P.O. Box 9362, Moscow, Idaho 83843, or call (208) 882-1794.

▲ In past issues, *Chain of Life* has addressed the rights of children conceived by donor insemination. A journey on the Internet revealed the California Cryobank's answers to questions posed by members of Resolve, an infertility organization.

In response to the question, "Do

you keep a medical history on the donor?" the sperm bank answered "yes," and that the 20-page, 3-generation medical and genetic history is available for \$9. Shorter versions are available at no cost. (This reminds me that most adoptees cannot donate sperm because they rarely will know 3 generations of medical history, but I digress.) In answer to Resolve's question about how long the sperm bank keeps those records, the Cryobank responded that they have never destroyed donor records and plan to keep them indefinitely. Resolve also asked how much non-identifying information is available to the "consumer" and whether adult children conceived by donor insemination can have access to medical information (they can).

The question of the child or adult child's ability to learn the identity of his or her biological donor/father and his family was not included. But there is hope that this question can be answered in the affirmative, at least theoretically, as long as the Cryobank never destroys its records. I would like to see those of us who have dealt with the question of genetic identity as adoptees join with children of donor insemination to make that information available for all of us.

▲ The following information arrived in my mailbox recently from Australia: "Mothers for Contact in Adoption is a non-profit self-help group representing the interests of mothers who have lost their children to adoption; there are 100,000 such women in New South Wales [Australia] alone.

"Our purpose is to provide a formal structure through which to effectively deliver advice and support to mothers who have lost their children to adoption. We

encourage women to make use of the 1990 NSW Adoption of Children Act which guarantees the rights of original mothers to the amended birth certificate (which states the names of the adoptive parents) once the child is 18 and on payment of a \$123 fee to the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. Where a child has stated that no contact is desired (by lodging a contact veto with the Department of Children's Services) the legislation guarantees the original mother's right to the amended birth certificate on receipt by the Registry of a written undertaking from the mother that she will not attempt to contact her son/daughter.

"Since the legislation was enacted in April 1991, our group has had numerous inquiries and requests for personal and telephone support. While the State Government established the Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC) to assist all persons affected by the Act, many mothers prefer to seek assistance from a self-help community-based organisation, often due to negative experiences with social workers and government/agency services. We are in the position to advocate solely for such mothers but do so completely unfunded.

"Our expertise is recognized by the NSW Committee on Adoption and the Advisory Committee of the PARC as we have been members of both bodies. Members of our self-help group offer support not only to other members, but to anyone concerned about the practices and philosophies surrounding the system of adoption. Some group members contribute formally to community debate about adoption and we are members of the national Association of Relinquishing Mothers."

For more information, write to: Jennie Burrows, Secretary, Mothers for Contact in Adoption, 13b Cavey St., Marrickville, New South Wales, Australia 2204.



# CONFESSIONS OF A LOST MOTHER

The first book of personal and public correspondence to make its way from the electronic to the printed page, e-mail letters from the hearts of women and men as they share their lives.

BY ELISAMB@AOL.COM



May 1996

Dear Janine Baer:

...I am an 8th grade student at Martin Luther King Jr. High. I am currently doing a search for my English class, called the "I-Search." The I-Search is basically what it sounds like. It is a search for something you need to know. This means your topic must apply to you and your life. You must choose a searching question that all other questions can fall under.

My searching question is "What are the main issues of Adoption?" What do I want from you? I would like you to send to me some information on my subject (I have enclosed a self-addressed envelope). Specifically, books I can get information from, people I can talk to, or any cases where the child looks for the parent and the parent looks for the child. I would also appreciate it if you would send me some information on what steps you have to go through in order to find your child or your parent(s).

May I add that I do have a time constraint and I would appreciate it if you could get this information to me as soon as possible. If you are too busy, please give this letter to an intern or someone else. Again, I would appreciate it if you can send me something as soon as possible. Thank you for your wonderful time.

*Sincerely,*

(Student's name)  
Berkeley, California

In **CONFESSIONS OF A LOST MOTHER**, the author, the "lost mother" of the firstborn she gave up for adoption gives us the day-by-day accounts of searching and reunited mothers, fathers, adoptees and adoptive parents, weaving them into her own poignant story. Layer upon layer, as the tales and e-mail confessions unfold before the reader, Ms. Barton builds an expert critique of the adoptive system. Her arguments and conclusions are startling and, for the stark honesty of the stories which illustrate them, convincing.

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## EVENTS

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### JUNE 1, 1996

WASHINGTON, D.C.

The **Stand for Children** rally was convened by the *Children's Defense Fund*. According to *Ms. Magazine* (May/June 1996), CDF organized the rally at the Lincoln Memorial to draw attention to the needs of children who suffer from poverty, neglect, and other abuses. More than 1,000 national, state, and grassroots organizations have endorsed the event.

### JUNE 22, 1996

**MILLS COLLEGE, OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA**  
Pact, An Adoption Alliance (San Francisco) and Black Adoption Placement and Research Center (Oakland) are co-sponsoring a workshop titled, "Race Matters: The Role of Culture and Ethnicity in Adoption." This will be a day of training for parents, parents-to-be, and professionals. "Join in for a deeper than usual look at what having more than one culture means for kids. The tone will be informal, challenging and candid." 8:30 am to

4 pm. \$70. per person after May 22. For more information, call Pact, 415-221-6957.

### JULY 15, 1996

is the date American Adoption Congress would like to receive your workshop proposals for its 1997 conference (to be held April 3-6, 1997 in the Dallas/Fort Worth Texas area). Mary Anne Cohen is the AAC Education Director. She can be reached at (201) 428-9683 if you have not received a call for proposals or need more information.

### AUGUST 3-11, 1996

**PROVINCETOWN, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**Gay and Lesbian Family Week** sponsored by **Gay and Lesbian Parents Coalition International**. The location was chosen as a gay-friendly and kid-friendly vacation spot. Accommodations must be made individually by each family. GLPCI will host a barbecue; otherwise there are no events planned — and no fees charged. GLPCI plans for Family Week to become an

annual event in Provincetown. For more information, call 202-583-8029.

### AUGUST 8-11, 1996

DALLAS, TEXAS

"*Through the Eyes of the Child*," a training conference sponsored by the **North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC)**. Among many pages of workshops are, "An Outcome Study of Canadian Indian, Vietnamese, and Korean Adoptees," "Exploring Issues in Gay and Lesbian Adoption," "Maintaining Ethical Practice in the Changing World of Adoption," "Post-Legal Adoption Services for Minority Children," "Finding Homes for Adolescents in Residential Care," "Access to Birth Family Information: An Essential Post-Adoption Service," and "Preparing AIDS Orphans for Adoption." There are programs for children as well as adults. For the full brochure (20 pages long), write to NACAC, 970 Raymond Ave., Suite 106, St. Paul, MN 55114-1149. Or call them at (612) 644-3036.



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