

# CHAIN OF LIFE

A FEMINIST ADOPTION REFORM NEWSLETTER

EDITOR: JANINE BAER

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## Open Records: Jean Paton Speaks at Rally

Early founder of the open records movement Jean Paton, now 80, spoke to American Adoption Congress members and other attendees at the speak-out at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. on August 5, 1989. She spoke in favor of open adoption records rather than intermediary systems in which a third person attempts to facilitate a reunion

*Dear Fellow Adoptees, and others in the adoption population:*

It is now forty-six years since I walked into the office of the Probate Court in Detroit and asked to see my adoption file. The clerk smiled, went about the office, brought me my file and said, "Would you like to take it over to that little reading room there and look at it?" I looked at the file and saw my mother's signature, and from that moment she became for me a living human being connected with me forever.

This does not happen any more. Two years after I went into the Court, the state of Michigan sealed adoption records, and from that time on, in state after state, the same thing was repeated. All over the country the simple and human procedure of letting a person who was able to walk into a court and ask for their records have their records, from that time on no one in this fair land would be received in this way.

In my home state of Colorado, the State Department of Social Services persuaded the Denver adoptee group to sponsor a piece of intermediary legislation. The scuttlebut is that it will take them a year to set up the training manuals that are needed to be sure intermediaries know what they are doing. Once set up, this special adoption bureaucracy will be next to impossible to dismantle. For this time forward, adopted people in Colorado are assured that they may never go directly to their records and look upon them in a personal and private way. Whatever they feel in the way of inferiority, lack of self-assurance, and bewilderment will be hardened in to steel.

Whereas what it should be like for an adopted person is to go to a court, see their records, be accepted and dealt with courteously, and left to their own wisdom as to what to do with the information. This experience should strengthen them, stiffen their spine, give them pride and a sense of belonging as an equal in society. The presumed inferiority of their origins should be wiped away by their acceptance at the point of search.

All laws which segregate any adopted person from his/[her] fellow-humans do their destructive work upon his spirit. All know this, and yet all persist in the practice. Somehow they cannot believe in freedom for someone who has been wrenched away from their roots. Society finds a thousand ways to deter them in their search for peace and belonging.

You, all of you, the marchers especially, have demonstrated that you are no longer to be considered people whose origins can be washed

## East Bay Adoption Class Starts January 10

A class on contemporary issues in adoption will be offered by *Chain of Life* editor Janine Baer through Richmond (California) Adult School. It starts January 10, 1990, 7 to 9 pm, at El Cerrito High School, bungalow 704 (park on Eureka, between Colusa and Ashbury). Cost is \$17.50 for all 4 meetings; you can register at the first class. Guest speaker Colleen Houlihan, an adoptive mother with an open adoption, and Sheila Ganz, a filmmaker producing the documentary SEALED RECORDS are scheduled to speak on January 17 and 24. (The class may be cancelled if too few people show up at the first class.)

Hope to see you there! ▲

## DIRECT ACTION FOR OPEN RECORDS

BY JOHN GOLDBERG

**Laws change for the benefit of an oppressed minority only when the majority wants them to change.** The first

step in that process is for the public to become aware that there is something wrong with the laws as they are. Society is aware that there are adoptees and birthparents searching for, and finding, each other, and that there are happy reunions. The public is *not* aware that the records are sealed and that we want them opened. The majority of Americans would agree that people have a right to have the information that government and private agencies have on them. A major goal at this time needs to be to make the issue of open records a public issue.

In our age of mass communication through electronic and print media, it takes dramatic actions to get the attention of the average person who is bombarded by advertising and sensationalism every day. It takes dramatic action just to get significant media coverage in the first place. Many groups of citizens with sincere concerns about environmental, peace, abortion, and other issues have successfully used direct action as a tool to reach the public through the media. That is the strategy presented below. An example:

*Since the abolition of slavery, Blacks had struggled for equal rights with little success. Then Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Birmingham bus and was arrested. One of the most*

(DIRECT ACTION, continued on page 2)

away and obscured by paper shuffling, and locks and keys. You have demonstrated your pride, you have demonstrated your firmness of will, you have demonstrated the quality of your origins and of yourselves. People will at last learn to respect you. They will believe in your request. They will look upon you with new eyes, and with informed hearts. You are establishing a new hope for the millions who need hope. You will continue until you succeed. ▲

Jean Paton

(DIRECT ACTION, continued from page 1)

successful social change movements in history was launched. Equal accommodations and voting rights followed. The struggle continues today but it is clear that Blacks are much better off now in these areas than they were in the early '50s.

The action of Rosa Parks was not taken in a vacuum. There was organization, the violation of widely held beliefs (that people should be able to sit where they want on a bus) and the exhaustion of normal channels for the redress of grievances. The crucial element needed was someone willing to act as a full person and insist on keeping her seat regardless of the consequences.

The adoption reform movement today is in a similar situation to that of the civil rights movement in the early '50s. We have organization, the violation of widely held beliefs (that everyone has a right to their own records), and we have used the normal channels with little success. We now need to act as full human beings and insist that we be given our records.

One possible scenario is for adoptees and birthparents to go to where the records are kept and insist that they be provided. They would be accompanied by supportive adoptive parents and others. Several supporters should be willing to go to jail with the adoptees and birthparents when they are ordered to leave and refuse. All of this would be covered by as much media as possible. With the proper preparation, groups across the country would begin to demand their records. This would bring the issue of open records onto the public agenda where it has to be before we can win.

If you are interested in being part of actions like these, contact: John Goldberg, 4719 Springfield Ave, Philadelphia, PA 19143. ▲

## ▲ Letters ▲

October 15, 1989

Dear Janine:

... Our group (of lesbian birthmothers) began to have dinner at each others' homes only one month ago. . . Suzanne approached me at a CUB meeting in June and asked if I might have more in common with her than being a birthmother! I said something sensitive like, "What could that be?" She replied, "Like being gay." I was really surprised and also excited. We discussed the possibility that there were probably other women there too.

Two months later, in August, we discovered Barbara. We decided that day that we should get together somewhere away from the larger group and discuss the issues that we all have in common that are different than the rest of the group. Three of us are birthmothers, two are adoptees. So far, only four of us have been able to meet.

We are meeting every other Monday for about 2-3 hours. We're finding some surprising things in common, one of which is that we are much more aware of homophobia than we were before we found our children/ birthparents. We have all pretty much worked through most "coming out" issues in our lives; NOW WHAT? That's pretty much where we are now. As we do evolve, I'll keep you informed. . .

Sincerely,

Marty

P.S. I have approached our CUB chapter and asked them to publish our small group in their newsletter and they are very glad to do so. YEA!▲

November 1, 1989

Dear Janine:

A belated reply to your letter of September 22, in your "other" and rather wonderful role. I have heard many stories of adopted kids, when adults, undertaking the quest for their biological parents, and have always been very touched by it. There are few dramas in life as gripping as this.

I'll try to publish the letter [by a Native Canadian group seeking their children adopted by U.S. families; see Issue 4] in the next issue of News. Thanks for keeping in touch.

Warmest regards,

Malcolm Margolin, Publisher  
News from Native California  
P.O. Box 9145, Berkeley, CA 94709

December 1989

Dear Janine,

Congratulations on a very interesting, intelligent, and lively newsletter -- one of the best in the Movement! You cover a wide variety of topics, from a different perspective that we all could learn more about.

I am a birthmother and co-founder of Origins, a birthmother search and support group. We also publish a newsletter, which is \$15.00 for a new subscription and \$10.00 to renew (write to Box 444, East Brunswick, New Jersey 08816). Although we are a mothers-only group, anyone can get our newsletter. We feel that anyone interested in adoption reform could learn a lot from our newsletter.

We also would like to learn from you, and would welcome any article about the experiences of gay and lesbian adoption-related people. I noticed in your story about the AAC gay and lesbian workshop someone complained that there were no straight birthmothers there to be educated. Please, next year, invite us, and we will come. I had assumed that it was a closed workshop. We are not all narrow-minded, and some of us are eager to learn from you.

On a lighter note, I loved the article about music and adoption [issue 3], and I would like to add a few of my own favorites. How could you forget "Mother and Child Reunion" by Simon and Garfunkel? I never knew if that song was about adoption, but it sure sounds like it -- "I would not give you false hopes, on that grey and mournful day, but the mother and child reunion is only a motion away. . ."

Another one is a song called "Searchin'" from the late '50s -- I forgot the name of the group, but it's the one that says, "I been searchin' every which way, and like the Northwest Mountie, I'm gonna bring her in some day."

Personally, many songs remind me of my surrendered son -- in fact any love song that is not overtly sexual can be taken in that context. This may sound horrible, but there are several old ballads about infanticide that remind me of the surrender experience -- especially the part about the price that the mother must pay for what she

(LETTERS continued on next page)

Deadline for submissions to Issue 6 is February 1, 1990

did to her child. One of these is "The Cruel Mother," which was recorded by both Judy Collins and Joan Baez in the sixties. This tells the story of an unmarried mother who kills her infant twins, who later come back to haunt her, and to tell her what her penance will be -- a penance she willingly accepts. For the birthmother, surrender is like a living death-- so I really identify with this song.

My surrendered son doesn't want anything to do with me, so I am into rejection and separation songs. There is one on the latest Todd Rundgren album called "Parallel Lines" that reminds me of my situation -- "Kindred spirits, moving along a spiral, I can see you, up on another level. . . very soon I have to face the fact, some things never come together, parallel lines, running on forever. . ."

These are just a few of the songs that remind me of adoption. I would love to hear from others about their favorites.

Keep up the good work.

Sincerely,

Mary Anne Cohen

come  
out  
of the  
adoption  
closet

wondered about his heritage. In the suit, he claims four Causes of Action: Liberty, Segregation, Human Rights, and Physical Endangerment due to secrecy of sealed records. The suit seeks to establish civil rights equality for adoptees (*info from AmFOR*) ▲

### Broken Trails in Search of Adopted Canadian Indians

The address of the Adopted Canadian Indian Research Center, inadvertently omitted in the last issue, is: **B.M. Monk, Broken Trails, Road 2, Box 196, Belleville, PA 17004.** They would like to hear from Native adoptees who are interested in their heritage or would like to tell their stories. ▲

### Womyn's Music Festival

When European-American women felt left out of the Womyn of Colors Tent at the 1989 Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, singer Alix Dobkin said, "All womyn need to know their roots and identities -- all you womyn should be exploring that" (*Off Our Backs*, October 1989). However, this is not an easy task for adopted people who cannot find their birthparents. For this and other reasons (see Marsha Riben's article on p. 4), the feminist and lesbian communities should support open records for adoptees and donor-conceived people. Without our records, we cannot know, much less explore, our ethnic identities. ▲

### YOUR SUBSCRIPTION ENDS WITH THE ISSUE NUMBER ON YOUR MAILING LABEL

If there is no number on your label, or if the number is 4 or lower, your subscription to CHAIN OF LIFE has expired and you are reading a complimentary copy.

## ▲ ANNOUNCEMENTS ▲

### Adoption Issues Educator

A Korean adoptee with experience in public speaking, consulting, and facilitating workshops on issues regarding international adoptions is available to teach courses, facilitate workshops or seminars, or conduct lectures on adoption issues.

Anne Mi Ok Bruining has presented workshops on "Understanding Racism in International Adoptions" and "The Social Implications of Korean Adoptions in the U.S." She has written articles, including, "The Politics of International Adoptions," "A Radical Perspective of Korean Adoptions in the U.S.," "Wanted: Other Korean Adoptees," and "Maintaining Cultural Identity in Cross-racial Adoptions."

She can be contacted at 348 Franklin St., C, Cambridge, MA 02139, 617-864-6009. ▲

### Help Gay and Lesbian Teenagers

GLASS, Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services, Inc., helps gay and lesbian youth who live on the streets of Los Angeles by housing, feeding, and clothing them and taking them on outings. Contributing to GLASS is one way to "parent" the next generation. For more information, or to make a donation, write: GLASS, 8235 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite #214, West Hollywood, California 90046. ▲

### Adoption Group Formed at UCLA

Triad-West is an independent organization at the University of California at Los Angeles that seeks to be supportive of members of the adoption triangle in the UCLA community.

In the 1980s, attitudes regarding adoption have taken giant steps toward re-evaluating the entire adoption process. Triad-West was formed to provide networking with students and faculty members who are directly or indirectly involved in the adoption triangle.

For more information, write *Triad-West*, 4259 Dixie Canyon #2, Sherman Oaks, CA 91423, or call *Blaire Davies* at 818-990-2686. ▲

### California Sued by Adoptee

Adoptee Richard Justice filed a \$10-million dollar class action suit in US District Court against the State of California during National Adoption Week (November 19-25 1989). For 43 years, Justice has

## For Donna

BY PAT PARKER

Somewhere you live  
and i  
am many years away,  
no longer a frighten child  
capable only of giving birth.

i wonder of your mother  
not me --

for i have never washed you  
never fed you  
never touched you.

If she tells you of me,  
will you understand?

understand my choice =

give away a part of myself  
to save a part of myself

If she tells you of me,  
will you hate me?

i know hate.  
i know the hate of your father,  
i know the hate of the mothers --  
who kept their children,

i will accept your hate  
but my child,  
you can never hate me  
as much as I have hated myself.

Copyright Pat Parker, from her book of poetry, "Child of Myself," 1972. Thanks to Pat Parker's Literary Estate for permission to reprint this poem. To help keep Parker's poems alive and at the forefront of the struggle against all forms of oppression, contributions can be sent to: L. Haley, 468 - 38th St., Oakland, CA 94609. Pat Parker was a Black lesbian who died of cancer in 1989. ▲



# ADOPTION: A WOMEN'S ISSUE

BY MARSHA RIBEN

Adoption is a women's issue.

Attend any search and support group for adoptees or birthparents in this country, and you will find the same thing: women outnumber men ten to one. For whatever reasons we wish to speculate, female adoptees and birthparents are obviously more curious, concerned and interested in finding their lost counterparts than are males.

In terms of birthparenthood, it is clear why women would be more affected and therefore carry a more continued interest than men. For men pregnancy is merely speculation, while for women it is a very tangible fact of life that can no more be forgotten than it can be ignored. Conception has always been a women's issue and a women's problem, regardless of the fact that until recently it required the physical presence (if not cooperation) of a male partner. No fertile woman is ever safe from the possibility of unintended pregnancy since there is no method of contraception that is one hundred percent reliable. Even abstinence has its failures since rape exists.

Pregnancy and birth become even more of a women's issue for the single mother.

Women must take an active rather than a passive role in order to abolish the pregnancy. They cannot ignore it, block it out, deny its existence or their contribution to it, or walk away from it. There are choices and decisions to be made and whatever she chooses, a woman's life -- from the moment of first conception -- will never again be the same as it was before, no matter how the pregnancy ends.

Adoption is often one of the options offered to a single mother. She must decide: abort, adopt out, raise, marry, remain single. For some, these choices -- difficult as they each may be -- are the woman's to make. For many, age, marital status, education, and financial means limit the choices drastically. We live in a society that still, despite the inroads of the feminist movement, exploits and victimizes its women. We live in a society that was founded on the principal that women and children are the property of men.

*In a male-dominated society, a woman's expression of sexuality is permitted only within strict bounds. Only when she is married, and thus an appendage of a man, is sexual activity considered legitimate for her and accepted; indeed, it is expected at a husband's whim as his right. Those women who are sexually active before or outside of marriage, though, and that includes the majority of young women, risk severe punishment if they become pregnant. In America that punishment is adoption.<sup>1</sup>*

Within the sanctions of holy matrimony, pregnancy is a blessed and joyous event, to be celebrated when it occurs and mourned when it does not. Joss Shawyer, feminist and founder of the "Council for the Single Mother and Her Child" in Auckland, New Zealand, writes:

*The few single mothers I have known who survived pregnancy with their babies and person undamaged wore wedding rings when booking into ante-natal clinics. Inventing fictitious, legitimately absent husbands (sailors are convenient), they enjoyed being fussed over by hospital staff whose only concern was that hubby couldn't be there to share in the joyous experience. Adoption was never mentioned and they met no social workers, who were busy elsewhere routinely interviewing the 'unmarried' mothers.<sup>2</sup>*

It is estimated that some five to nine million women in this country have suffered the loss of one or more children to the exploitation of adoption. This is an ongoing practice and one that has not ended. While it is true that fewer women today are faced with an unplanned, full term pregnancy, the pressure on women to surrender is every bit as strong (if not stronger) today as it has been for the past several decades. This is because of the increase in infertility and the decrease in babies available for adoption due to advances in birth control and the availability of abortion.

There are new vocabularies to sugarcoat the pill and presumably make it more palatable. Social workers are being urged to say "make an adoption plan" rather than "surrender" or "give up your child for adoption." And while anonymity and confidentiality were the hot selling points of the '60s, "open adoption" is the gimmick of the '80s. Open adoption is promoted as a way to have the best of both worlds -- to be a Sunday parent. One can have the peace of knowing one's child, obtaining photos, perhaps even visiting in rare instances, without the daily "chore," responsibilities, and limitations of parenting. Just as we have learned twenty years after the fact that the women who surrendered in the '60s and were promised that they would "forget" and have "new lives" often did not, so too will future birthmothers discover that pictures do not replace the loss of the parenting experience, which has now been documented to be the major cause of the birth-mother's ongoing grief. Though better than lies and secrecy, such openness will not alleviate the

*... future birthmothers will discover that pictures do not replace the loss of the parenting experience*

adoptees' inevitable feelings of rejection and, in some cases, anger.

What can we do to put an end to this aspect of the victimization of our sisters? We can start by saying that a woman and her baby represent a basic family unit and that the strength of our nation lies in the strength of our families. Every adoption, no matter how good, begins with a tragedy. Every family that is formed or grows through adoption represents another that has failed to receive the financial and emotional support it needs to remain together.

We must now fight to prevent a continuation of the same destruction of the next generation through family separation. We can do more than speak about it. We can use the rights that we have fought so hard to obtain: the right to petition, the right to vote. We are living under a current administration that is pro-adoption; a self-righteous, religious, conservative, "pro-life" administration that sees adoption as a practice that needs to be promoted among our pregnant teens, while it shuns sex education in the schools, the dissemination of birth control without parental consent, and other preventative measures. Instead of seeing public assistance as the duty of a society to help support its cast-out women and children, our legislators see the poor as lazy, not as victims of circumstance often in need of temporary assistance rather than a permanent solution like adoption.

(WOMEN'S ISSUE continued on back page)



# Traditional Hawaiian Adoption

BY CLAUDIA GLIENKE

**HANAI** to foster; a foster child; to adopt, an adopted child. Deriv: to feed; to nourish

The Hawaiian word *hanai* as it is most often used means a child who is taken permanently to be reared, educated, and loved by someone other than the birthparents. This was traditionally a grandparent or other relative. *Hanai* had a slightly different meaning among the *ali'i* (persons of royal blood), who served and were usually related to a ruling chief. The ruler "cared for" these members of the court and therefore became their *hanai*.

## Adoption of Royalty

In her book *Hawaii's Story* (1898, Lee and Shepard), Queen Liliuokalani describes being *hanai'd*:

*But I was destined to grow up away from the house of my parents. Immediately after my birth, I was wrapped in the finest soft tapa cloth, and taken to the house of another chief, by whom I was adopted. Konia, my foster-mother was a granddaughter to Kamehameha I., and was married to Paki, also a high chief; their only daughter, Bernice Pauahi, was therefore my foster-sister. In speaking of our relationship I have adopted the term customarily used in the English language, but there was no such modification recognized in my native land. I knew no other father or mother than my foster-parents, no other sister than Bernice.*

*I used to climb on the knees of Paki, put my arms around his neck, and he caressed me as a father would his child; while on the contrary, when I met my own parents, it was perhaps more of interest, yet always with the demeanor I would have shown to any strangers who noticed me. My own father and mother had other children, ten in all, the most of them being adopted into other chiefs' families; and although I knew that these were my own brothers and sisters, yet we met throughout my younger life as though we had not known our common parentage.*

*This was, and indeed is, in accordance with Hawaiian customs. It is not easy to explain its origin to those alien to our national life, but it seems perfectly natural to us. As intelligible a reason as can be given is that this alliance by adoption cemented the ties of friendship between chiefs. It spread to the common people, and it has doubtless fostered a community of interest and harmony.*

## Adoption by Grandparents

Among the common people, *hanai* traditionally functioned within the Hawaiian *'ohana* (nuclear family). This was the "family clan" in which blood relationship was recognized and family loyalties and mutual responsibilities were extended to 13th or 14th cousins.

Within the nuclear family, authority, knowledge, privilege and clan responsibility were vested in senior members, usually those of the grandparent generation. Among the privileges of grandparents was that of taking as *hanai* the first-born child of one's children. The first-born son belonged to the paternal grandparents; the first-born daughter to the maternal grandparents. The child was given outright; the birthparents renounced all claims to the child. This became a binding agreement when the parents said, "*Heu ke keiki kukae a na'au*," meaning, "I give this child, intestines, contents and all." Emotions, intelligence, and qualities of character were associated not with the brain or heart, but with *na'au*, the guts or intestines.



In this traditional practice, there was no feeling of turning the child over to strangers as there is with present-day closed adoptions. The feeling was that the first grandchild belonged to the grandparents. The natural mother had the baby on a kind of "loan" basis. The baby remained within the all-important unit -- the family clan or *ohana*. However, the child knew and was usually visited by his natural parents. The *hanai* child had his or her own sense of personal and family identity. Often birthparents, adoptive grandparents, or other adoptive parents conferred over the child's welfare, talking over decisions that might be important to the child.

However, the natural parents could not reclaim their *hanai'd* children except in the case of death or serious incapacity of the adoptive parents. This total surrender of the child was planned so he or she would not become a pawn in later *hukihuki* (literally "pull pull"), the adult struggle that could make the child get sick or even die.

The system of giving the first-born to the grandparents filled many of the needs of the society in which it existed. Hawaiians placed great value on traditional ways and in knowing family genealogy and the family ancestor gods. Yet there was no written language to record history. The *hiapo*, first-born *hanai'd* child, was the living history book. While other children of the nuclear family learned to fish and grow crops, the *hiapo* memorized the family genealogical chants, social and religious customs, *papus* (taboos), and specialized skills and knowledge. To do this, the *hiapo* became the constant companion of the grand-

*This total surrender of the child was planned so he or she would not become a pawn in later hukihuki (literally "pull pull")*

parents, listening, learning, and rehearsing, so even the tempo and cadence of each *pule* (prayer) and *oli* (chant) would be traditionally correct. The *hiapo* was also taught to assume family responsibilities and would become the one to advise in all matters of family illness, disputes, or other crises.

Today, many of the traditions and certainly the emotions associated with the *hiapo* still exist. In his or her adult status as senior member of the family, the *hiapo* is still an influence in Hawaiian family life as arbitrator, counselor, and comforter in all domestic difficulties. The first-born child is no longer given to the grandparents, yet Hawaiian grandparents feel strongly possessive of *hiapo* grandchildren.

Today, many Hawaiian grandparents and other relatives feel strongly that even the child of unwed parents should know his or her family background, and object to legal adoption because it blots out the past. The Hawaiian couple who wants to adopt a child feels much the same way. They are concerned about adopting a child whose parentage is concealed. "A child has a right to know his genealogy," is a frequent comment heard by adoption social workers in Hawaii. Nonetheless, 15,000 closed adoptions were finalized in the Family Court, State of Hawaii, between the post-war era and the late 1960's. ▲

*Claudia Glienke is a birthmother living in Hawaii, and a branch representative for Concerned United Birthparents. She searched for and found her 22-year-old daughter in 1988, is corresponding with her regularly, and is anticipating a future reunion. Since moving from California to Hawaii in 1986, Claudia and her husband Roy, an adoptee, have become interested in ancient Hawaiian customs, particularly as they relate to adoption.*

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# The Invisible Villain

BY JANINE BAER

"The social ramifications of wealthy families basically 'buying' poor babies doesn't occur to the couple, but it does occur to [actress Glenn] Close" writes Bonnie Allen (November 1989 *Ms.*) If you have seen the feature film "Immediate Family," in which Close plays an infertile, upper middle class wife, it probably occurred to you too. "Adoption is used so much by the antiabortion people as an alternative to abortion and we have to make it clear why this is happening. Because there are no social programs to help poor people take care of their children, Mary Stuart Masterson [who plays a pregnant teenager in "Immediate Family"] made the most responsible decision by giving her child up. It's romantic to think she shouldn't give up her child, but with no help, she had no alternative" (*Ms.*, pp. 49-50).

The film portrays no visible villains; the main characters are basically likable people caught up in circumstances largely beyond their control. Instead, we see sympathetic portrayals of Lucy and Sam, a pregnant teenage couple from working class families in Ohio -- and a childless couple consisting of Michael, a veterinarian, and Linda, a real estate agent who sells fancy homes, generally for families with children. Michael and Linda Spector live in their own gorgeous house in Seattle overlooking the water. Lucy and Sam, each coming from homes with an absent or dead parent, are trying to do what's best for their baby. The characters meet in the offices of a slick woman lawyer, who assures the prospective parents that the young woman is "motivated." The invisible villain is our society's lack of concern for the poor. "Too bad none of this thinking appears in the film," Allen writes of Close's political analysis.

With the age gap between them, Linda and Michael could be the supportive parents Lucy lacks. Lucy's mother died young, and Lucy never knew her biological father. She lives with a truck-driving stepfather and two young children who play wicked step-siblings to Lucy's Cinderella. (In fact, throughout the film child after child is portrayed as a brat, an ironic counterpoint to the main theme, and one that may lead viewers to wonder why anyone would want a child so badly in the first place.)

Far from being the villain in this story, Sam the birthfather is, by his own accurate description, a responsible guy. He wants to break into the music business and, only after he is successful, to raise children with Lucy. Now he lives with his mother and is not ready to be a father or husband. But he cares about the future of his child, and takes the long bus ride to Seattle to visit Lucy and to check out his baby's future parents.

## *I wanted Linda and Michael to adopt Lucy and Sam along with the baby.*

Some humorous moments in the film are conveyed in the awkwardness between the couples, as they try to please, like, and understand each other despite their socioeconomic differences. However, to my disappointment it becomes clear that Linda and Michael's concern for Lucy and Sam will be short-lived, motivated as it is by their desire for the baby. Linda is a woman of her class, a kind person but not a hero, and she misses the opportunity to have a truly open adoption with Lucy and Sam. This is revealed in the hospital after the child's birth, when Linda silently assents to Lucy's statement that she guesses she won't be seeing them -- Linda, Michael and the baby -- much any more. In this so-called open adoption,

there is no guarantee of openness beyond an initial meeting. In the off-screen world too, this is a major weakness in "open" adoption since, as the laws now stand, adoptive parents hold all the cards and can choose whether or not to stay in contact with the birthparents.

While adoption reformers and feminists can criticize the film for what Hollywood left out, there is also much to commend its portrayal of birthparents. The social and economic forces that affect so many birthparents are clearly depicted. Lucy and Sam are likeable kids trying hard to transcend the pain of their own family disappointments. When was the last time you saw a sympathetic portrayal of a relinquishing mother, much less a father, on the big screen?

"Immediate Family" is touching, as persuasive adoption stories tend to be. Lucy's love for her baby and her pain in relinquishing him are convincingly portrayed in Mary Stuart Masterson's performance. The misery of the infertile couple is also conveyed; sex becomes a chore or medical procedure as they try every possible method to conceive, and then an act separate from reproduction as they accept their infertility.

There is humor in the film, too, as when Sam borrows Michael's sports car, precipitating Michael's "most paranoid fantasy" -- that the birthparents will disappear with the car and unborn baby, and he and Linda will be interviewed on the *Geraldo Rivera* show as "most gullible couple." But Sam and Lucy return to follow through with their plans to relinquish.

I rooted for a different outcome. I wanted Linda and Michael to adopt Lucy and Sam along with their baby. Certainly their house was big enough. Or the teenagers could have rented an apartment nearby and shared parenting with the older couple. But that would not have fit in with the Spectors' plans -- and how could they explain such a situation to their friends and neighbors? These are not the days of hippie communes, but of increasing poverty, increasing infertility, and a push for adoptions that "solve" both problems by separating poor people from their children in the name of family values. ▲

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We must not allow women to continue to be used as brood stock to provide babies for the wealthy and married. Just as society condemns unmarried pregnant women, it puts pressure on married women to have children. We must not permit either. A woman's desire and right to have children or not must remain separate from her marital status. Women who want children but have lost their ability to function reproductively -- because of delaying childbearing, prolonged use of birth control, abortions and/or venereal disease -- are no more deserving to be a parent than their pregnant sisters who perhaps simply lacked their sophistication or luck.

Adoption, like so many other areas of exploitation and persecution, boils down quite simply to a matter of dollars and cents, the exploitation of rich over poor. In the American jungle, it is the survival of the richest. We must put an end to the marketing of women and children as commodities bought and sold, like dogs and used cars, on the streets and in the newspaper ads of our country. ▲

Marsha Riben is author of the book *Shedding Light on ... the Dark Side of Adoption*, available from *Mirage*, 268-2 Pleasant Valley Road, Old Bridge, New Jersey 08857 for \$12.95 plus \$1. shipping.

<sup>1</sup> Anderson, Carole, "Eternal Punishment of Women: Adoption Abuse," Concerned United Birthparents, 2000 Walker St., Des Moines, Iowa 50317

<sup>2</sup> Shawyer, Joss, *Death by Adoption*, Cicada Press, 1979