

CHAIN OF LIFE

A FEMINIST ADOPTION REFORM NEWSLETTER

EDITOR: JANINE BAER

Issue 9 • September/October 1990 ▲ P.O. Box 8081, Berkeley, CA 94707

REFLECTIONS ON THE ADOPTION AND NEW BIRTH TECHNOLOGIES CONFERENCE Wellington, New Zealand, May 10-13, 1990

by Anne Mi Ok Bruining

I was invited as one of two international guest speakers at the 1990 Adoption and New Birth Technologies Conference, which was sponsored by the Hutt Adoption Group, a fifteen year old local support group of adopted people, birthparents and adoptive parents. I was the only participant from the U.S. and the only Korean (american) adopted person at this conference.

I arrived in Wellington, after five different airport stops, 24 hours in flight, eight meals, four films (none of which I watched), 11,000 miles, a 16-hour time change and lots of erratic sleep -- two days after departing from Newark Airport. It was late autumn in New Zealand and I left New York when the spring leaves were just budding. I was allowed two days to recuperate from my flight and look around Wellington before the conference officially began. The conference was held on the Victoria University campus and I was most comfortable in my own dormitory room overlooking a breathtaking view of Cook's Strait and Oriental Bay Harbor. I was struck by how much Wellington was like San Francisco, except smaller, more casual and cleaner. The new environment felt very familiar to me.

Wednesday morning, Damien Ngabonziza and I were interviewed at a press conference with the local newspapers and media. Damien was the other international guest speaker, a man from West Africa who works for International Social Services of the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. Thursday morning I was interviewed on a live national radio show. Thursday

evening, the conference officially began. On Friday afternoon, I presented my paper and speech entitled "Transracial Adoptions: A Personal Perspective," a four-part paper that included my personal history, the myths and realities of the politics of international adoptions, and changes I would like to see in the international adoption industry. Some of these changes include cultural education of pre-adoptive families, mandatory post-adoption clinically-based services, promoting adoption of domestic and "unadoptable" children; offering services that would enable birthmothers to keep their children; and eventual drastic reductions of intercountry adoptions. I pointed out that the adoption of children from Korea to the U.S. and U.S. military intervention was not a coincidence, but an exercise of trade export and U.S./Korea relations agreements. I then opened the floor up for a question and answer session from the audience and delegates.

Not surprisingly, I evoked a great deal of hostility and invalidating remarks, particularly from white, fundamental Christian "Pakeha" (New Zealanders) who had adopted children from Thailand and Peru. While ninety-five percent of the audience were supportive and encouraging of my perspectives, that 5% of the audience was most vocal and attacking. For example, a pakeha social worker asked me if I would have preferred to remain in Korea rather than be adopted and thus experience all the privileges I had in my adoptive family. I responded that her question was racist. The session was certainly an interesting learning experience.

I spent two days. . . engaged in provocative, enlightening, comparative discussions of feminism, the adoption movement, lesbianism, and women of color communities in New Zealand and the U.S.

On Sunday, I presented a workshop called "Understanding Racism in International Adoptions," which evoked a great deal of constructive dialogue and discussion. I was particularly reaffirmed and supported by one Chinese lesbian who had been adopted by a Pakeha family who attended my workshop. This woman and I connected almost immediately. Meeting her and another lesbian, who is Samoan and was adopted in New Zealand, was perhaps the most empowering and exciting highlight of my experience in New Zealand. I spent two days with them, engaged in provocative, enlightening, comparative discussions of feminism, the adoption movement, lesbianism, and women of color communities in New Zealand and the U.S.

I learned about and was impressed by the adoption movement in New Zealand and its positive effect on the national adoption community, realizing that New Zealand is much smaller than the U.S. I found the country itself to be breathtaking in beauty, charm and quaintness and took the opportunity to travel, tour and sightsee around the South Island for two days on my own, driving a right-handed rented car cruising the left hand side of the road, which was most fun. Most importantly, I was especially struck by the warmth, humor, welcoming friendliness and genuine sincerity of the people I met and stayed with. These are the fond memories of New Zealand that will remain with me until I return there, hopefully after August 1992.

I truly believe that the U.S. has much to learn and gain from the progressive policy changes established



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

by John Goldberg, Adoption Forum Legislative Chair

ALABAMA records will close January 1, 1991. Legislative information can be obtained by writing David Speight at 1004 Meadowbrook Rd., Monroeville, AL 36460.

ALASKA opened its records to adult adoptees in 1986. Lawyers and some social workers worked for a registry but adoption reform activists won access to original birth certificates for adult adoptees. Birthparents can attach information to the birth certificate if they want.

CALIFORNIA is in the midst of a campaign for open records. **Assembly Bill 3907** passed the state Assembly (House) with some controversy over the privacy of birth parents. It just passed the Senate Judiciary Committee unanimously. The bill would provide access to records to adult adoptees and birth parents. An amendment was added to give adult adoptees and birth parents the power to deny access to information to the other party. The National Committee for Adoption is opposing the bill. To lobby on the bill write Senator Robert Presley, State Capitol, Sacramento, CA 95814. For more information write CUB at PO Box 816, El Toro, CA 92630.

GEORGIA legislators passed an intermediary law for adult adoptees this year.

HAWAII opened its records this year after an active campaign for the bill.

IDAHO adoption reform activists are planning to introduce a bill this fall to require the courts to provide identifying information to adult adoptees and adoptive parents upon petition. They also propose that birth parents should have copies of all documents they signed. A further provision would be to make it possible for the records to be open in future adoptions. For more information write Search-Finders at PO Box 7941, Boise, ID 83707.

INDIANA adoption reform activists are using the state legislature's interim studies session to educate legislators about the open records issue. They are preparing packets for the legislators on the Family Law Issues Committee. For more information write the Indiana Adoption Coalition at PO Box 1292, Kokomo, IN 46901.

KANSAS state legislators this year eliminated county court discretion in providing birth parents with access to information about children they lost to adoption. Adoption reform activists fought the bill.

MICHIGAN adoption reform activists recently won a campaign for access to post adoption medical information and other rights. They plan to have an open records bill introduced into the state legislature in the fall. For more information write the Adoption Reform Movement at 95 N. Whitesbridge Rd., Belding, MI 48809.

MISSOURI adoption reform activists have six more months to get signatures to put an open records initiative for adult adoptees on the state ballot. They also plan to introduce a bill next year. For more information write Susan Foglesong at PO Box 18142, Raytown, MO 64133.

MONTANA activists lost a campaign for a bill for adult adoptee access in the Senate Judiciary Committee last year. They put up a great fight including gathering 15,000 signatures on a petition for the bill.

NEBRASKA adult adoptees won access to their original birth certificates in 1988 subject to veto by their birth parents.

NEW JERSEY Open Adoption Records Coalition is working for bill A 2478 in the state Assembly. The bill would provide adult adoptees with a copy of their original birth

certificate. Write Assembly members George Otowski at 262 Madison Ave., Perth Amboy, NJ 08861 and Thomas Deverin at 24-52 Rahway Ave., Elizabeth, NJ 07202. For more information write the Coalition at 647 Plympton Street, New Milford, NJ 07646.

OHIO House Bill 256 passed the state House of Representatives by an overwhelming majority. The bill would provide adoptees with identifying information when they reach 21. The bill is opposed by probate judges. Write senators Grace Drake and Roy Ray at the Ohio Senate, State House, Columbus, OH 43216. For more information write the Adoption Network at 302 Overlook Park Drive, Cleveland, OH 44110 or call (216)481-7019.

OREGON adoption reform activists lost campaigns for access to records, open adoption and American Indian adoptees' rights last year. They plan to have bills re-introduced next year on access to records and open adoption. They will go to court for Indian adoptees' rights. For more information write ALARM at 9203 SW Cree Circle, Tualatin, OR 97062.

PENNSYLVANIA is the site of a controversy over **House Bill 142**. The bill would provide adult adoptees with access to their original birth records including identifying information. It would also provide that information to birth and adoptive parents. The Pennsylvania Catholic Conference and pro-life legislators are opposing the bill. They say that birth mothers were promised privacy from their children and they deserve it. An underlying issue is that some believe that if a pregnant woman thinks her child will find her someday she will get an abortion. Catholic Conference director Howard Fetterhoff should hear especially from Catholics (practicing or lapsed) and birth parents. His address is PO Box 2835, Harrisburg, PA 17105. State representatives Mark Cohen and William Lloyd can be reached at the Main Capitol Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120. If the bill passes the House in September it will move to the Senate. There is also a similar piece of legislation, **Senate Bill 366**. Please write your state senator and Senators Joseph Loeper and John Peterson about these bills at the Main Capitol Bldg., Harrisburg 17120. In addition, please visit your state representative and senator this summer. Personal stories told face-to-face are the most effective lobbying technique. The letters and calls from Adoption Forum members helped the bill get out of committee to the House floor. **Thank you! Please keep up the pressure.** For more information call the Adoption Forum Legislative Chair, John Goldberg, at (215)729-1029.

QUEBEC adoption reform activists are working for open records. Parent Finders should be able make a referral for more information. Their address is PO Box, 5211, Station E. Ottawa, Ontario, K2C 3H5.

SOUTH CAROLINA has a mutual consent registry for adult adoptees and their birth parents. Until this year adoptive parents could block a reunion through the registry. Adoption reform activists get state legislators to eliminate that provision. The state government is now considering doing searches.

WASHINGTON state legislators passed a secret intermediary bill this year.

UNITED STATES Senators are debating **Senate Bill 1530**. This bill would establish a national registry system. The idea may look good on the surface but it will only serve to stall true equal access legislation. Write U.S. Senators John Heinz and Arlen Specter at the United States Senate, Washington, DC 20510. For more information write the American Adoption Congress at 1000 Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20036.

... continued from front page

and exercised in New Zealand regarding the adoption movement and the rights of the adoption triad, particularly those of adopted persons.

One realization I discovered while I was at this conference is that adopted persons are adoption survivors, and I am now convinced that adoption itself is child abuse, neglect and misogyny -- (because) adoption affects children (who are adopted) and women (who are birthmothers). For these reasons, alone and collectively, I believe that adoption is a feminist issue and a lesbian issue, for those of us who are lesbian adopted people as well as those of us who are lesbians and not adopted but who want to adopt, particularly children from "third world" countries. If any readers wish to discuss these issues with me, I am most willing to address them either in writing or by telephone, or better, in person. ▲

Anne Mi Ok Bruining
3525 Rochambeau Ave. #5C
Bronx, NY 10647
212/881-7477

(c) Anne Mi Ok Bruining. All rights reserved.
June 16, 1990.

ACTION FOR OPEN RECORDS AND ADOPTION REFORM is a newsletter distributed every few months. It consists of xeroxed pages of information sent in by adoption reform groups, and is available by sending \$1. to

EMMA MAY VILARDI DIES. Emma May Vilardi passed away of natural causes on July 9 at the age of 68. She was the founder of International Soundex Reunion Registry, which has facilitated more than 2,500 reunions between adoptees and birthfamilies since it began in 1975. Mrs. Vilardi was the daughter of an adoptee, a historian and a genealogist. Memorial donations can be made to ISRR at P.O. Box 2312, Carson City, NV 89702.

Adult
Children of
Parents

Copyrights to all articles in Chain of Life are retained by their individual authors. Please write for permission to reprint any articles.

Linda Nave, 180 Buckingham Road, Rocky River, OH 44116. The national Legislative Update reproduced above was originally in this newsletter. The next deadline for sending in your group's news to Action for Open Records is Sept. 25.

THE FORGOTTEN MOTHER

by Millie Strom

Adoption is promoted by anti-choicers as the alternative to abortion. The pro-choice movement also views adoption as a viable option. The forgotten woman -- the birthmother -- can have a very different view.

I am a birthmother who became active in pro-choice because I am angered by the anti-choice promotion of adoption. But I found both sides of the abortion issue have many misconceptions about adoption, particularly the effects on the birthmother and the adoptee.

In adoption, three sides exist: a woman -- often young and poor -- who is very frightened because she faces an unplanned pregnancy; an infertile affluent couple, a single heterosexual, or lesbian women, who want and feel they deserve a baby; and of course, the baby.

Marsha Riben, a birthmother and proponent of adoption reform, in her book *shedding light on... the Dark Side of Adoption* states, "adoption is a social system that impoverishes and punishes certain groups of people."

As a mother who lost my child to adoption over 21 years ago, I can attest to the ongoing pain. Like over a hundred other birthmothers I have met, and thousands of others attending support groups across North America, I have not forgotten my child as I was told I would. Other birthmothers have forced themselves into denial and secrecy, advised by the experts to pretend it never happened. Birthmothers internalized the shame and degradation that society held about sexuality. We spent the rest of our lives unable to grieve the loss of our children because we were buried by society's shame, reinforced by the concept of what a family should be.

Relinquishing a child does not dissolve the crisis of an unplanned pregnancy. A prominent U.S. study in adoption reform, *The Adoption Triangle* by professionals Arthur Sorosky, Annette Baran and Reuben Pannor, confirms the tremendous negative effect on the birthmother.

Now, when women are challenging our woman-unfriendly society, many birthmothers are able to tell of the cruel injustice of surrender. Riben explains, "Birthparents have no grave to bring flowers to, no one sends them condolence cards." Birthmothers are not remembered on mother's day, yet they never stopped caring for their children. They go underground with their feelings.

Social workers identify more with the prospective parents -- older adults, formally educated with higher incomes -- than with the pregnant women.

The adoptee, too, suffers. "The adoptee is a product of social engineering," states Betty J. Lifton, adoptee and author. Her work with members of the triangle is documented in her books, *Twice Born* and *Lost and Found*. "To be chosen is a burden and its specialness isolates one," states Lifton, "you are chosen and everyone else is born."

When adoptees are raised, emphasis is on being chosen, but the sense of rejection is not addressed. My son, whom I have been reunited with for two years, says,

"When I hear other adoptees make a point of saying that they were chosen, it's because they're hiding and repressing the rejection. Because to be chosen, you have to first be rejected."

Many adoptees reside in this denial until they reach their late 20s and 30s. Many adoptive parents, operating under the myth that adopting is the same as having one's own child, do not understand their children's need to search. As a result they respond negatively to the search, forcing some adoptees into clandestine reunions.

The Adoption Triangle also discloses some shattering facts: adoptees are over-represented in therapy, in group homes, in crime and in child sexual abuse statistics. Because the adoption process makes adoptees feel grateful to have been chosen, it insulates them from coming out of denial regarding abuse.

both sides of the abortion issue have many misconceptions about adoption

The newer, open adoption system (where the natural mother chooses the adoptive parents and stays in contact with the family) eliminates the secrecy and shame inherent in a closed setting. But the mother is still pressured to relinquish her baby and suffers enormous grief.

Open adoption was not created to ease the pain of birthmothers and adoptees, but was a result of a market shift. Some women have gained access to birth control, abortion, day care facilities and education; consequently, fewer women relinquish babies. With fewer babies available, birthmothers were encouraged to participate in an open setting, in an effort to lure their babies away.

Social workers identify more with the prospective parents -- older adults, formally educated with higher incomes -- than with the pregnant women. A national survey in 1982 found that 14 percent of unwed mothers who had been counselled decided to relinquish their babies. Only 1.5 percent who were not counselled made the same decision. In addition, social service agencies perpetuate the image of a birthmother as inferior, irresponsible and incapable of raising a child. *The Adoption Triangle* shows that birthmothers have been portrayed by social agencies as "a picture of severe emotional disturbance. They insist on the birthmother's permanent anonymity to reinforce the view that she had sinned and suffered for it."

Chana Fay, an adoptee and Vancouver filmmaker of the adoption-reform documentary *Life After Adoption: Open vs. Closed Records*, has talked with many social workers for her second film. She found "this attitude toward the birthmothers still exists today." Fay also questions "why we should be protected from our own mothers." Birthmothers have become the adversary. The fraudulent birth certificate supports this fear of her. (Adoptees' birth certificates read as though their adoptive parents are their natural parents.)

Along with open adoption, a growing private adoption market has evolved. This is clearly the buying and selling of babies. In an article in the L.A. Times Magazine titled "The Baby Brokers," the author states that the most powerful people in the adoption relationship are the lawyers because they can "beat nature." Mothers and their babies can easily be exploited to serve the client: an affluent couple who want and feel they deserve a baby. In the U.S. the ratio of adoptive parents to babies is 40 to 1 (in 1982 according to the National Committee for Adoption). Locally in B.C., the ratio is greater. According to the Adoptive Parents Association of British Columbia, during October and November of 1989 there were 2159 adoptive parents wanting a baby. Twenty children, including eight special needs children, were placed by government agencies.

In the North American adoption system, not all babies are equal. It is well documented that adoptive white parents will hold out for healthy white infants, while

... continued on page 4

FOSTER CHILDREN HAVE HIGH RATE OF MENTAL ILLNESS

Foster children ages 6 to 17 in California are using mental health services offered by Medi-Cal at 10 times the rate of other children, research of medical records for 1988 revealed. Although foster children account for only five percent of the 1.3 million children in Medi-Cal (the state-funded medical program), they used about half the psychiatric visits made in 1988; among adolescents the percentage rose to 60. For other medical conditions, there were no substantial differences in utilization rates between the two groups.

Rate of use for mental health services cannot be attributed primarily to drug exposure, since the children most likely to be treated were older than the current crack epidemic. "I expected the foster children to use more, but I never expected it to be this high" said Neal Halfon, principal investigator of the research project. He thinks these statistics result from the "emotional devastation" the children experience moving from home to home. Generally they get very little in the way of preventive and support services. The report was written by Gale Berkowitz and Linnea Klee of the Center for the Vulnerable Child at Children's Hospital in Oakland.

Summarized from an article by Patricia McBroom in the July 25-Aug. 28, 1990 Berkeleyan, a newspaper for the campus community of U. C. Berkeley. ▲

Suicide is Leading Cause of Death Among Gay Youth

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Task Force on Youth Suicide released a report last year that acknowledges that lesbian and gay youth are at increased risk for suicide, and calls for "an end [to] discrimination against youth on the basis of such characteristics as disability, sexual orientation, and financial status." One paper describes suicide as "the leading cause of death among gay male, lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual youth" and concluded that lesbian and gay youth "may comprise up to 30 percent of completed suicides annually."

-- *Empathy, Fall/Winter 1989/90. Empathy is an interdisciplinary journal for persons working to end oppression on the basis of sexual identity, published by Gay and Lesbian Advocacy Research Project. Subscription info can be obtained from GLARP, P.O. Box 5085, Columbia, South Carolina 29250.*

Jewish Down Syndrome Children Need Homes

Janet Marchese, president of the Down Syndrome Adoption Exchange in White Plains, New York, has placed 1,650 Down Syndrome children in adoptive homes. Eighty-five percent of them have been relinquished by Jewish birth parents, though most are placed in non-Jewish homes "because we cannot seem to find enough Jewish families" says Marchese, who is Catholic. It seems that over 80% of Jewish born babies with Down Syndrome are given up for adoption, while only 5% of children with this form of mild to moderate mental retardation are relinquished nationally, according to Marchese. She can be reached at Down Syndrome Adoption Exchange, 56 Midchester Ave., White Plains, NY 10606, (914) 428-1236.

This topic was covered in the Summer 1990 issue of *Lilith, The Magazine for Jewish Women*, as was an article titled "Abortion Foes are Bad News for Jews." *Lilith* also included an announcement about *Chain of Life*. You can subscribe to *Lilith* for \$9.97 for 4 issues from: Lilith Subscription Services, Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834.

▲
Audiotapes of workshops from the last **International AAC Conference** are now available by mail from **Von Ende Communications, 3211 St. Margaret Drive, Golden Valley, MN 55422**. Topics range from Mary Iwanek's speech on how records were opened in New Zealand to workshops on counseling triad members pre- and post-search. If you didn't go to Chicago, cassette tapes are the next best thing.

California Open Records Bill Attracts Opposition

Assembly Bill 3907 that would open records retroactively in California passed the Senate Judiciary Committee unanimously July 3, but failed to pass its next step, the Senate Appropriations Committee August 23. What happened between July 3 and August 23 was that the National Committee for Adoption mounted a campaign against the bill. Senators received pre-printed postcards from adoptive parents in opposition -- though at least some had crossed out "No" on AB 3907 and wrote in "Yes" on the card, explaining that they wanted their children to have access to medical and other identifying information of their birthparents. The bill will be reintroduced early next year and we will have the opportunity to contact our state assembly members and senators again, having gained experience and knowledge about who favors and who opposes the bill, and hence who needs the most education about the open records perspective. The opposition claims to be concerned that birthmothers will not know that they can block access to their names, resulting in a breach of confidentiality by the state. I think it would be especially helpful for birthparents to write to these legislators, rather than allowing adoption agencies to speak for their needs.

The aide to the state senator in my own home district said that a personal call from a constituent can be worth 12 pre-printed postcards from non-constituents.

If you want to be informed of when to write or call your representatives for this bill, drop me a card or letter and I'll send you a post card or flyer when I learn of future letter-writing campaigns. ▲

... continued from page 3

thousands of other children -- older, Black, or handicapped -- go without homes.

Dr. Henry Morgenthaler [Canadian abortion rights supporter], during his April visit in Vancouver, was asked about the diminishing supply of babies available for adoption. He replied that there are plenty of Third World babies available. However, this view ignores the needs of women throughout the world to provide for their children. Is turning to foreign wombs for babies, because the number of "handmaids" is diminishing in our country, consistent with a feminist outlook?

Viewing the two sides -- unplanned pregnancy and infertility -- as two distinct issues may be the solution. "Infertility is not a social injustice but a physical incapacity," states Carole Anderson, vice president of Concerned United Birthparents (CUB). CUB is an American non-profit organization with chapters in Canada and other countries formed in 1976 to provide support to birthmothers. It has evolved to include adoptees, adoptive parents, birthfathers and professionals.

Anderson adds, "Separating adoption from infertility would do more than reduce psychological and other abuse. It would reduce the number of adoptions, a social practice that treats children as things, as cures for infertility, rather than as human beings with their own individual backgrounds, needs, relationships and rights. There is a strong tendency to view adoptive couples as parents who need and deserve a child rather than as people who need help in accepting and learning to live with a tragic physical incapacity."

There are alternatives for people wishing to parent: adopting one of the thousands of older children who linger in foster care and need homes; working with children; starting day-care centres; or lobbying for changes to stop the causes of infertility may be rewarding alternatives.

Owning children, along with denying women their reproductive rights, are patriarchal devices to ensure the continuing domination of women.

I believe in choice -- but choices that leave no victims.

▲ *This article is reprinted here with permission of the author and of Kinesis, a Vancouver, B.C. feminist newspaper, which originally published it in May 1990 as "Adoption: The Injustice of Surrender." To contact CUB in Vancouver, you may call the author at (604) 255-0235.*

▲ ANNOUNCEMENTS ▲

MAKING FACE, MAKING SOUL / HACIENDO CARAS: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color, edited by Gloria Anzaldúa includes a poem to her birth mother by adoptee Anne Mi Ok Bruining whose article appears in this issue. "A Letter to My Daughter" by adoptee Siu Wai Anderson is also included in this book, which is available at your local women's bookstore for \$14.95.

GEBORENER DEUTSCHER, a Newsletter for German-born Adoptees and Their Birth/Adoptive Families is published sporadically and is available for no charge from William Gage, 2300 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, New York 11229.

THE RIGHT TO KNOW: AMERICA'S ADOPTION CRISIS is an excellent one-hour program now available on VHS home video. Narrated by Michael Reagan and including interviews with noted adoption reformers in the United States, this film was broadcast on KQED in San Francisco in June. The timing was especially good since we are in the midst of a campaign to open adoption records in California. Proceeds from sales of the film will be donated to the American Adoption Congress. Send \$19.95 plus \$2. postage to: Two Peas Productions, P.O. Box 691, Tujunga, CA 91043.

GLASS has a new address: Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services, Inc., 8901 Melrose Ave. #202, West Hollywood, CA 90069, (213) 288-1757.

The **NATIONAL CENTER FOR LESBIAN RIGHTS** offers article reprints about Lesbian and Gay parenting; costs reflect NCLR's copying and postage costs. Write for an order form. Titles include: *Lesbian Mothers and Their Children: A Comparison with Solo Parent Heterosexual Mothers and Their Children*, \$2; *Preserving and Protecting the Families of Lesbians and Gay Men*, 1990 (\$5.); *Lesbians Choosing Motherhood: Legal Implications of Donor Insemination* (3rd edition available 1990), \$5.; *A Lesbian and Gay Parents' Legal Guide to Child Custody*, 1989, \$5.; and *Lesbian Mother Litigation Manual*, D. Hitchens, \$35. Any lesbian mother involved in a custody case for whom the cost of materials is a hardship may receive these items free of charge. Please allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery; make checks payable to: NCLR, 1370 Mission St., 4th floor, San Francisco, CA 94103.

PHYLLIS R. SILVERMAN, Ph.D., wants Chain of Life readers to know about an article she co-authored, **Reunions between Adoptees and Birth Parents: The Birth Parents' Experience**, published in *SOCIAL WORK*, Volume 33, Number 6, Nov./Dec. 1988.

THE AMERICAN ADOPTION CONGRESS' WESTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE will be held in Boise, Idaho, October 12-14, 1990. For more information, write: Search-Finders of Idaho, P.O. Box 7941, Boise, ID 83707 or phone (208) 375-9803.

▲

TIME TO RENEW? Chain of Life is funded entirely by your donations and my donated labor. With this issue, you and I have published 9 issues. Good for us! To keep this momentum going, please send in your subscription renewal and I'll add 6 issues to your sub. The number on your mailing label indicates the last issue you have paid for. Send a check (payable to Janine Baer) for \$7. to \$15., a sliding scale depending on your ability to pay, for 6 issues; or \$5. for 3 issues. If you are totally broke but want to stay linked to Chain of Life, let me know. Your comments and feedback about Chain of Life, both pro and con, are also very welcome. (Just send them to P.O. Box 8081, Berkeley, CA 94707.) Thanks!

The WOMB BBS

An Adoption- and Search-related
Computer Bulletin Board System

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

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

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

The Womb BBS is Now On-Line

It's 2:00 in the morning. You're pacing. Adoption issues are keeping you awake. Where can you turn?

Try THE WOMB BBS. It's a specifically adoption- and search-related bulletin board system (BBS). All you'll need to log on is a personal computer, a modem, some communications software and the price of a telephone call to Brooklyn.

Post your personal search data, or your adoption- and/or search-related questions or observations in the "Adoptees' Echo" of FidoNet and get feedback from all around the country. Find out what your state's law is regarding access to adoption records. Find the address of a search-and-support group near you. Or download the book list of adoption- and search-related reading materials.

Read the on-line newspaper and magazine article reprints, or the transcripts of radio and television programs about adoption and search.

THE WOMB BBS may be reached via modem at (718) 998-6303. Communications protocol is 8 data bits, 1 stop bit and No parity (8/N/1). THE WOMB BBS may be reached 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, except between the hours of 2:30 am and 8:00 am (Eastern time), when the BBS is taken off-line for a system maintenance and network mail exchange.

— William L. Gage (from *Origins* newsletter)



This is a frame from a full-page cartoon by Alison Bechdel in **CHOICES: A Pro-Choice Benefit Comic** supporting abortion rights following challenges to Roe v. Wade. CHOICES is available at your local women's bookstore, or send \$4. + \$1. postage U.S. (\$6. US to Canada) to **Angry Isis Press, 1982 15th St., San Francisco, CA 94114**. All proceeds go to the National Organization for Women.

June 26, 1990

Hi, Janine!

Thanks for the Origins' "plug!" Glad you found Sherry Rosen's article "a little bit" acknowledging of the needs of triads. I found it rather disappointing but I guess that's because I spent many hours communicating with Sherry on these issues. (Gail Davenport and I are the Jewish birthmothers "visible in the leadership ranks of birth mother . . . groups" she mentions.)

Mary Iwanek's quote is great, but unfortunate that you didn't include Mary's title and where the quote came from. Perhaps you could include that information in the next issue.

Anyhow, the real purpose in writing is in response to Millie Strom who shared with your readers the article on abortion [see page 3 this issue]. I could not agree with Millie more that "if adoption and abortion are a woman's options, that is clearly NOT choice." I think it is very important that we let this point of view be known. For that reason I have written the enclosed article which you are welcome to print.

I was interested in the study on children, particularly girls, who live with one parent or two. Once again a study has documented a phenomenon I have seen repeated over and over again in life. I know many single mothers who are raising their children despite terrible obstacles of poverty, loneliness and even seemingly putting their children through their own misfortunes (i.e. inconsistent partners), and yet over and over I see that their daughters are coming out on top. They are bright, good students, going on to college and in general doing very well. None are old enough to have relationships of any real meaningful duration as yet, so we cannot predict on that score, but self-esteem is self-esteem and these kids seem to have a healthy dose of it. As a mother newly emerging from a subordinate role in my marriage (which is another long article I will do some day on why so many birthmothers do this -- again, the obvious, low self-esteem) and becoming a single, liberated mother, I think your "guess" is quite accurate, or at least hopeful and inspiring.

Keep up the good work.

Love and Peace,

Marsha Riben

Thanks for writing, Marsha. I hope to publish your article in a future issue.

*Mary Iwanek is an internationally known adoption expert, a researcher and lecturer at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand. The quote about the importance of the first contact between adoptee and birth-parent taking place without an intermediary is from a report she wrote for the New South Wales, Australia Standing Committee on Social Issues, a chapter of which was included in Issue 7 of Chain of Life. Ms. Iwanek's entire report is included in a document titled "Assessing Adoption Information" (1989), which addresses the question of opening records in New South Wales. I'm happy to say that this book is now available in the U.S. by sending \$6. to Orphan Voyage,*Cedaredge, Colorado 81413. This price basically covers the cost of postage from Australia and within the U.S. (I originally obtained a copy of the report from Mr. Tony Pooley, Senior Project Officer, Standing Committee on Social Issues, Parliament of New South Wales, Level 3, 99 Elizabeth St., Sydney, N.S.W. 2000, Australia.)*

For those who didn't read it, my guess about why girls with one parent have higher self-esteem than those with two was that they don't have to see their mothers in subordinate roles to men on a daily basis.

Marsha Riben is the author of an excellent book that I finally had time to finish reading in July. Titled shedding light on . . . The Dark Side of Adoption, it describes problems with adoption and offers recommendations for how to prevent abuses in the future. I was

* 2141 Road 2300,

SUIT SEEKS EXPANDED FOSTER-CARE AID

by Rick DelVecchio
S.F. Chronicle Staff Writer, May 24, 1990

San Francisco welfare officials and children's advocates filed a federal lawsuit May 23 in a move to provide state foster care benefits to relatives struggling to bring up abused or neglected children.

Family members who take care of foster children are not entitled to monthly benefits from the state -- a law that is not only unconstitutional but also misguided, according to the suit filed in U.S. District Court in Sacramento.

"The assumption was that relatives would be willing to care voluntarily for children, whereas nonrelatives had to be paid to do it," said David Neely, a member of the San Francisco Social Services Commission.

A "crack" cocaine epidemic has increased the number of relatives who are taking responsibility for children of drug-abusing parents, Neely said.

The state social services department maintains that relatives have "more of an obligation" to take care of family problems, said spokeswoman Kathleen Norris.

Moreover, she said, payments to relatives would be taken from existing child-welfare programs, such as emergency services for children in immediate danger of being harmed by abusive parents.

The class-action suit was prepared by the National Center for Youth Law, other children's advocates and the San Francisco Department of Social Services. It names Linda McMahon, director of the state Department of Social Services, as the sole defendant.

Most states, including California, limit foster-care benefits to nonrelatives. In the first successful challenge to such restrictions, the U.S. Court of Appeals in San Francisco overturned a similar law in Oregon last year.

If the California suit is successful, it would channel an estimated \$80 million a year in benefits to the foster parents of 9,100 children throughout the state.

Relatives who act as foster parents are eligible for federal welfare benefits of \$341 a month per child.

Those payments are often inadequate to cover both the children's expenses and the lost wages when a foster parent must miss work to take care of the child, said Sue Trupin, a nurse at San Francisco General Hospital who founded an association of foster grandparents.

State benefits for foster care range from \$294 to \$920 a month, depending on the level of care a child requires.

Because so many children were damaged physically and emotionally from their parents' drug use, relatives must stretch their welfare checks to medical care and special educational needs, as well as cover room and board.



Kitty Dukakis Traces Addiction to Secrecy of Her Mother Being Adopted

Kitty Dukakis, in her soon to be released autobiography *Now You Know*, blames her early diet pill habit on her mother hiding the truth about being adopted. The former presidential candidate's wife said she started taking diet pills a year after she learned that her mother, Jane Goldberg Dickson, had been adopted and was "illegitimate." --SF Chronicle, Associated Press, July 31, 1990



especially moved by stories of birthmothers who, sensing that their children were in trouble, found their minor children and regained custody from adoptive parents (or from institutions) who were only too happy to let them take the children. The book is available for \$13.95 (U.S. funds) which includes book rate shipping. Checks can be made payable to Mirage and sent to 268-2 Pleasant Valley Road, Old Bridge, New Jersey 08857. ▲