



THE CONNECTION

NEWSLETTER OF THE ADOPTION CONNECTION EXCHANGE

VOL. I, NO. 2

WINTER - SPRING 1976

*the Adoption Connection Exchange
cordially invites you to attend...*

ADOPTION AND BEYOND II

to be held
Saturday, June 12th, 1976
9:30 AM to 3:30 PM

at The Friends School
5114 N. CHARLES ST.
BALTIMORE, MD.
21210

ADOPTION AND BEYOND II

Yes, it is true! Arrangements are almost complete for our second all day conference, Adoption and Beyond II, and we're very excited about the plans we've made. We have tried to plan a day that will be stimulating, interesting and fresh whether you attended last year's conference or will be joining us for the first time.

WORKSHOPS

In planning workshop topics, our first objective was to repeat those from last year which seemed to have provided the best opportunities for sharing our experiences and feelings. The second was to try to deal with new topics suggested by the steering committee or by your responses on the questionnaire in The Connection. Third, we have made some changes in format. This year, the workshops will be offered in the morning and afternoon so each participant will be able to attend two. Also, the leaders will begin each workshop with a statement of its purpose and some prepared information and remain active in the group discussions.

The workshops are:

#1 - The Pain of Pre-Adoption

Discussion will center around the feelings of those who decide to pursue adoption, the sources available; and some facts regarding children with special needs who are awaiting families.

#2 - Telling the Adoption Story

Adoptive parents are faced with the problem of handling their child's questions although they don't necessarily feel they have the answers themselves. Aspects of the telling process from age two through the adolescent years will be discussed.

#3 - Who Am I?: The Process of Discovery

Struggle for a sense of identity is often painful for the adopted child, particularly the adolescent. Aspects of this "dual-identity" and its meaning will be discussed by the group.

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WORKSHOPS, cont.

#4 - The Adolescent Daughter & Her Adopted Family: Are there extra hassles?

Many adolescent daughters have difficulty in dealing with issues of sexuality with their adoptive parents. The group will delve into sexual myths and realities.

#5 - The Search: What are the conflicts?

Adoptees often have conflicting feelings when embarking on the search for their natural parents. How does "the search" affect their relationship with their adoptive parents? Aspects of this will be explored.

#6 - Nature and Nurture

Discussion will be concerned with the unique aspects of families consisting of both adopted and biological children.

#7 - The Right to Know vs. The Sealed Record

The discussion will center around the controversy dealing with permanently sealed adoption records and the rights of all members of the adoption triangle. Adoption laws now in practice will be discussed.

ONGOING SESSIONS

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of this year's conference is that some of the workshops will have follow-up sessions. The leaders will meet four additional times with those who are interested in continuing discussions after the conference day. Specific information as to times, dates and locations of the meeting will be provided at the conference.

So mark your calendar, NOW.

SATURDAY, JUNE 12, 1976 9:30 - 3:30

COMMITTEES FOR ADOPTION AND BEYOND II

1. Arrangements - Micki Sellman, Chairperson
2. Workshops - Babette Dalsheimer and Clare King, co-chairpersons
3. Publicity - Eva Jones, Chairperson
4. Brochure - Barbara Gemmill, Chairperson

CURRENT LEGISLATION - SUBSIDIZED ADOPTION

On January 14, 1976, one bill was introduced in the Senate of Maryland by the Legislative Council and another in the House

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CURRENT LEGISLATION (cont.)

by Delegate Cardin requesting an Adoption Subsidy Act.

Senate Bill #304 authorizes funds to make it possible for children in special circumstances to be adopted. The children eligible are those legally free for and in need of adoption placement, under public or private agency care, for whom a subsidy is necessary to assure their adoption. This may be because of physical or mental disability, emotional disturbance, a recognizable high risk of disease, age, sibling relationship, racial or ethnic factors or a combination of these. The adoptive family's income would not be a factor in determining eligibility for funds, barring another provision of law.

The bill suggests that the Social Services Administration establish an on-going program of subsidized adoption either with funds appropriated for the maintenance of children in foster care or from other sources not specified. It is expected that all established efforts will be made to place a child without subsidy first.

The agreement will be reached through a written document between the Social Services Administration and the adoptive family and subsidy will commence with placement or adoption decree. The subsidy will vary with the needs of the child but will not exceed the amount allowable for a child under foster care.

House Bill #607 is similar in context but seems to be more specific as to eligibility. It states, "income and resources of an adoptive family may not be considered if placement of the child is difficult because...the child is two or more years of age; is of a minority racial or ethnic group; suffers from a severe or demanding physical, mental or emotional condition; is a member of a sibling group of two or more children; or is available for adoption more than six months after the local department of social services has obtained guardianship with the right to consent to adoption." The bill also makes provision

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CURRENT LEGISLATION (cont.)

for the discovery subsequent to the adoption of a pre-existing condition requiring continuing attention of a physician. It states that if the disorder is not covered by the insurance of the adoptive family, the child may be eligible for medical assistance.

It was requested that both of these acts would take effect on July 1, 1976.

For copies of the bills or to learn the dates of committee meetings call the Legislative Reference, from Baltimore 269-6800; For information or questions call the House Ways and Means Committee 269-1858.

NEWS EXCHANGE

Katie Ryan, a member of ACE, has an article, "A Search for Yesterday" published in the March issue of BALTIMORE magazine. The article is based on interviews with five adoptees who are searching for their pasts. Interesting reading!

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All ACE members might want to give some thought to joining the Maryland Conference of Social Concern, because ACE operates under the auspices of the Maryland Conference. Individual membership is \$10.00 per year. The MCSC's address is
22 West 25th Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21218

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Eva Jones has taped a 30 second "commercial" for television during which she discusses Adoption and Beyond II. Watch for that and articles and press releases in our local newspapers.

POINTS TO PONDER

Each issue of The Connection will bring you a review of an article from a magazine, journal or newspaper, a book review dealing with a subject related to adoption, or an interview with a person who has something to say of interest to us. The articles will be written by a guest writer from our

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POINTS TO PONDER (cont.)

own group. The editors encourage your letters and comments about the subjects reviewed. Please let us know if you wish to contribute an article to this column.

Our guest editor is Mrs. Babette Dalsheimer, M.S.W., an adoptee and adoptive mother. Mrs. Dalsheimer is a social worker in private practice in Baltimore.

TWICE BORN: Memoirs of An Adopted Daughter
Betty Jean Lifton
McGraw - Hill Book Company
\$8.95 281 pages

Betty Jean Lifton, now in her forties and a successful writer who lives in New York with her psychiatrist husband and their two children, was adopted at two and a half, by a middle class Jewish couple from a hinterland called Ohio. Twice Born is Ms. Lifton's story of growing up and trying to define herself in another hinterland: the one we call adoption.

Like the autobiographies of all adopted children, this one begins a little late in life: in the author's case, not with birth, but with the adoption, which had been negotiated by a well regarded adoption agency in New York City.

By the time the happy parents took their new daughter home to Ohio, everything was ship-shape for the adults: the agency had made a good placement; the natural mother resumed the proper business of reconstructing her life; and the lucky couple from Ohio went about the proper business of raising their daughter. Betty Jean played her own part well: we read of how she romantically invested herself in daydreams of those star-crossed young lovers who did not live to raise her; she kept her promise to her adoptive mother never to tell anyone that she was adopted (not even her father--it would wound him to be reminded!); and she stopped tormenting her mother with questions about her parents and her past, when it became clear to her that it was indeed torment. She was even a good daughter in all the more usual ways:

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POINTS TO PONDER (Cont.)

a good student, popular with her social group, not a problem to a soul. This winner who in college was pledged to the best sorority and dated by the most desirable boys, tells us now how she really perceived herself:

"I write here of the adoptee as a survivor, the twice-born, the chosen, the hero; as the illegitimate, the bastard, the changling, the imposter, the double. I write of perilous journeys of the spirit, of labyrinths, of ghosts, of strangers with mysterious origins, of princesses and princes asleep under spells."

Clearly, something had been going on all along that no one had bargained for: the secret life of many adopted children.

To read of the author's sense of rootlessness and inauthenticity, of the two sets of parents she carried around in her head, may be unnerving to adoptive parents, who may shrink from the implication that even now, as their children seem to live in the family so totally (and a part of them does, of course), are all the while going about with a major and off-balancing hedge about their own place in the family unit. The many elaborations of these themes throughout the book will be equally troubling to those biologic mothers who think and wonder about their adopted children through the years, for they will learn that in some cases they have subjected their children to more than the usual share of life's irreconcilables and ambiguities, a burden with which the children must often deal alone.

Most of Twice Born is the story of the author's journey through the maze of irreconcilables and ambiguities: geographically the journey takes her from Ohio to college and on to New York, where she met and married her husband, and to their lives together in Japan, in New Haven, and back to New York. The interior journey, the more interesting one, begins with the author's own complicity as a child and even as an adult, in the pact of secrecy and silence; the next stage, like a descent into hell, is Betty Jean's growing sense of being an inauthentic imposter, which

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POINTS TO PONDER (cont.)

finally drives her to confront the mystery and ambiguity within herself by seeking the truth about her past.

"Ye shall know the truth and it shall make you free" is carved into so many American public buildings, but not the buildings that house our adoption agencies. But it is often only the agency that has the liberating truth, so it was to the agency that Betty Jean first turned. It was a decision to "Enter the maze that stretched ahead, and return whole." By the time she felt up to this step, still believing her parents were dead, she was in her thirties, her only ally her husband, who trusted her to know what was best for her, and a favorite female cousin.

It was decided that the psychiatrist-husband was the best bet to approach the agency, and the results were amazing: he came away with his wife's mother's maiden name and the information that Betty Jean's parents were fully alive when she was adopted. He was told that the natural mother, unwed, had cared for the infant Betty Jean for her first five months, and for the next two years placed her in a home for infants, where she visited her every week. Finally, under extreme pressure from her own mother, Betty Jean's mother released the child for adoption. Exit the fairy princess, and enter a spunky second generation Jewish teenager who hung on to her child for as long as she could. If she was still alive, she was the door both into and out of the abyss.

Other circles of hell had to be passed through first; the worst was a visit by Betty Jean alone to the agency, where she was advised to seek psychiatric help as a "cure" for her unwholesome interest in her past.

There was nothing to do but go it alone: to go out and seek her mother. Only those who have knowingly done the forbidden can know what it is like to pick up the phone and dial the one number in the world that must never be dialed.

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POINTS TO PONDER (cont.)

As the moment for that phone call moved nearer, the author finally came to feel that she was "grappling with something real and meaningful, something tangible. And in the process, I was becoming rooted to life."

That last sentence is perhaps the most important in the entire book. One gets "rooted to life" not by connecting oneself with dead princes and princesses, but by connecting with mothers who had problems with their own mothers and who blunder into disastrous relationships with all the wrong men. Even our disappointments in the weaknesses of the biologic parents, when we learn of them, steer us back into the path of reality. To grow up is to admit to oneself that there is no one out there waiting to be the perfect mother to us, and this is as basic a truth for non-adopted as for adopted children. Ms. Lifton writes, "I thought she would open not only her arms to me, but her house and her life. I did not expect to find the entrance barred, myself on the outside. She had been more nurturing as the ghostly mother of my fantasy than as a reality in life."

"Still I did not regret this new reality. Whatever it was, it was real... Such are the rewards and punishments of those who transgress the taboo."

The message could not be more clear: a disappointing reality is better than a gratifying fantasy, and the message is reinforced in the latter pages of this book, as Ms. Lifton learns the truth about her father, who died only shortly before she tracked down and learned about him from his best friend.

The latter third of Twice Born is out of the labyrinth: coming to terms with the limitations of Bea, the natural mother, and Betty Jean's final renunciation of any further relationship with Bea. In the process, Betty Jean finally becomes her adoptive mother's daughter.

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