

"ALMA"
ADOPTERS' LIBERTY MOVEMENT ASSOCIATION
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*The truth of his
origin is the birth-
right of every man.*

President
FLORENCE FISHER

"THE ALMA SEARCHLIGHT"

Summer, 1976

President's Message:

"To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the heaven.

"....a time to keep silence, and a time to speak...."

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

OUR TIME IS NOW!!

Several months ago the following letter was sent to ALMA members who were adopted in the State of New York:

"It is with great happiness that I write today to bring you news for which some of us have waited nearly a lifetime. The lawsuits which A.L.M.A. will bring to seek invalidation by the courts of New York State's sealed adoption records law, so far as adult adoptees are concerned, are now being prepared. Professor Cyril C. Means, Jr., of New York Law School, will act as A.L.M.A.'s attorney in bringing these suits in Federal Courts in New York City. In addition to A.L.M.A. as an organization, there will be a number of individual adult adoptees as co-plaintiffs in these suits, which will be brought as class actions to benefit all adoptees. We look forward to your testifying at the trial, if it is possible for you to attend. However, if distance prevents you from testifying, you may still be a co-plaintiff. Participation in the lawsuits as a co-plaintiff will not obligate you financially in regard to Professor Means's fee or the court costs. These will be paid from gifts to A.L.M.A. made for this purpose.

"I enclose an explanatory letter and questionnaire prepared by Professor Means. Please read them carefully, fill out the questionnaire as completely as you can, and as soon as possible, and send it to Professor Means.

"Today, I think of all the years I was alone and remember how I sought only one other person who would understand. Now, we are thousands united by a common cause.

"We pass this way but once. We make a mockery of life if we do not pursue our dreams, if we hedge against reality and know but half of what we are. The right to self-determination is yours....Reach out, take it, and have faith in the future."

ALMA's suit will be filed shortly after Labor Day! Only persons adopted in certain counties of New York may be plaintiffs in the suit. Those of you who have expressed your desire to become plaintiffs in the suit by filling out and returning the questionnaires to Professor Means will be contacted by him by mail or phone this summer. If you are taking off for a "season in the sun" - have fun! - but bear in mind that Professor Means's expertise is law, not "searching"! Do write him a brief note giving him your summer address, phone number and the inclusive dates you will be reachable there. The "Registry" won't help you in this case, so don't get lost! Write Professor Means c/o New York Law School, 57 Worth St., New York, New York, 10013.

ALMA members adopted in States other than New York are not eligible to be plaintiffs in the suit here. BUT...this is how our Federal Court suit in New York, against New York's sealed records law can help you! When this suit reaches the United States Supreme Court, its decision, though technically limited to declaring unconstitutional only the New York law, will have the effect, as a precedent, of invalidating similar laws in all other States. This suit could have been brought in any state. We decided on New York because the ALMA National Office is here, Professor Means is here, our largest membership is here, I'm here, and, it's just plain easiest to handle here ...but the decision will affect the entire country!

Filing our suit was delayed until now because of events occurring in the State of New York which we had not foreseen (did I just say it was "easier" here?) In November, 1975, Joy Perlow, a consultant of the New York Temporary State Commission on Child Welfare contacted me explaining that a staff study of the New York sealed records law was being prepared for the Commission, together with recommendations as to if and how the law should be changed. She requested that I meet with her and Philip Pinsky, the Commission's counsel. They came to New York and met with Professor Means, Dr. William Reynolds and myself at my home and asked us what changes ALMA wanted. We replied that ALMA has never advocated any legislative change. If we try to change the law State by State the adoptees who are being hurt by the present laws would all be dead and buried before the States would open up unconditionally. Some legislators may still be in adoption agencies' pockets, so that the solution to adult adoptees' needs is not to be expected from that quarter.

We then explained that, as now administered to the detriment of adult adoptees, we consider the present laws so barbarous that the only proper way to erase them from the statute books is to obtain a United States Supreme Court declaration of their unconstitutionality and injunction against their continued enforcement.

At the time of this meeting, Senator Al Lewis had already introduced a bill in the New York Legislature which, if passed, would have unsealed agency and court records to adult adoptees. If enlarged to unseal original birth certificates as well, the Lewis bill would have made our suit unnecessary in New York. We made it very clear that anything less than that -- any measure such as an intermediary bill -- would be just as unconstitutional as the present law.

The Commission's staff has finally completed its study and made its recommendations as follows:

1. They have declared the Lewis bill unacceptable.
2. The bill they have recommended would unseal the records to adoptees adopted after it is passed, as soon as they reach 18. If passed

this year, 1994 would be the earliest year this part of the staff-recommended bill would benefit anyone. To be explicit - the only adoptees affected positively by this bill are those who have just been conceived!!!

3. They further recommended that adults already adopted be subjected to agency intermediation between themselves and their natural parent(s). In other words, the agency worker would contact the natural parent to ask if she would or would not consent to see her child. This last recommendation is absurd and unacceptable to any adult adoptee who considers himself a human being and not an object. The intrusion of a social worker or, indeed, any third person, into a reunion between parent and child is an obscene violation of the privacy of all parties.

There is nobody in the entire world better qualified to handle the reunion than the adult adoptee!! There is no one less qualified than the social worker whose orientation has been toward separation of parent and child - not reunion.

This recommendation, made under the guise of considering the rights of all parties, is a smokescreen for the real intent of this Commission and various State legislatures into which such laws have been introduced. Their ulterior motive is to save the caseworkers' jobs! Why? There are no babies. The adoption market has dried up. Where there is no need, let us create a need! Counselling, that's the answer! Who need it? Why, adult adoptees in search, of course - and their natural mothers as well! Who are the best qualified to supply it? Adoption caseworkers, of course! The program? Put the adoption agencies in the search business. When an adult adoptee approaches an agency requesting information, and pays his fee in advance, have the agency trace and locate the natural mother. What a superb solution to the agencies' real problem, which has nothing whatever to do with the welfare, sensitivities, or "privacy" either of natural mothers or adult adoptees, but merely with the agencies understandable, but always concealed motive, to save caseworkers' jobs and keep up the flow of income!

On April 28th, 1976, the Temporary State Commission on Child Welfare and the Assembly Standing Committee on Child Care held joint hearings in Albany on the subject of "opening records for those adopted persons wishing to learn of their backgrounds" and inviting testimony "from individuals and organizations concerned with this issue."

As President of ALMA I refused to participate in the charade at Albany. The following are excerpts from a letter sent by me to the Commission and Committee:

"The adult adoptee is the only side of the adoption quadrangle who never consented even to the adoption itself, much less to the sealing of his or her records. At the time the contract was entered into, the adoption agency was represented by an adult caseworker, the adoptive parents were adults, and the natural mother, while typically a teenager, was nevertheless treated by the law as sui juris for the purpose of signing the surrender, and was clearly old enough to understand what she was doing, however reluctantly she may have given her consent. The only party who was not an adult, but a baby with no understanding of what was going on was the adoptee. Like a Negro slave on the auction block of a Southern city before 1865 he was merely the object of, rather than a party to, the transaction. For your Commission and Committee now to consider perpetuating, in any degree or form, a system which purports to bind an adult by what was done in regard to him by other older adults when he was only a baby, is so grotesque an aberration from

the norms of civilized jurisprudence as to shock the conscience of mankind....

"The foregoing are reasons which....impel me to choose not to dignify your proceedings with my testimony.

"Any law the Legislature now enacts which does not fully and unconditionally unseal the records to adult adoptees will be as unconstitutional as the one now on the books. ALMA's only request is that whatever the Legislature proposes to do, it do quickly, so that we may get on with the serious business of bringing our suit to have it declared unconstitutional."

The adoptees and natural mothers who testified in good faith had the courage and eloquence to tell the Commission and Committee what they needed to hear and what they could effectively learn from no other source. These witnesses had no way of knowing that what they were participating in was not a joint hearing, but a joint charade! That the Commission and Committee did not want to hear positive testimony toward opening records to the adult adoptee was evidenced by the negative questions asked of the witnesses by various members of the Commission and Committee. The Commission and Committee have not yet decided whether, and if so, what, new law to recommend. However, of one thing we are certain, and that is that whatever they come up with, it most assuredly will not be unconditional opening of the records.

Bills to open up records to adult adoptees have been introduced into the various State Legislatures. Hearings have been held in California, Colorado, Minnesota, Ohio, etc. Adoptees around the country have testified in the hope that they could persuade their respective legislators that adoptees' rights have been violated. The results speak for themselves. These bills have been SHELVED, KILLED or otherwise MUTILATED! To date, no bill granting an adult adoptee unconditional access to the records of his birth and adoption has passed any State Legislature.

LOBBYING FOR LEGISLATION IS NOT THE ANSWER! COURT ACTION IS!

ALMA's reasons for not bringing suit during this current legislative session is that were we to file now it would be against the present law, but if a new law were to replace it such a suit would be dismissed for technical reasons. We would then have to refile in opposition to the new law. This session of the Legislature will adjourn shortly not to reconvene until January, 1977. Until the Legislature adjourns we shall not know what law it is we shall have to attack in the suit, the old or a new one. As adult adoptees BORN with the same rights as non-adoptees we will accept no compromise that deprives us of complete autonomy.

Over the coming summer, Professor Means will be preparing the complaint, the trial memorandum and other necessary steps in order to file suit shortly after Labor Day.

"To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the heaven."

OUR TIME IS N O W!!!

with love and faith in the future....

L. House

THE SEARCH IS OVER!!!

With the expansion of ALMA's membership has come an explosion of REGISTRY MATCH-UPS! Some ALMA members find their families only through diligent searching...for others "the search is over" that miraculous moment the person they are seeking also registers! We bring you some reunion stories in the hope that all ALMA members will share in the happiness of their fellow-members for whom THE SEARCH IS OVER!

MATCH-UP on MOTHER'S DAY, 1976! Reg Niles, our non-adopted Search Consultant, whose own mother lives too far for them to be together on Mother's Day, spent the day registering members who had joined the previous week. He came to the questionnaire of LOIS VANCE, adoptee, California, and excitedly rushed to the phone! No answer...undaunted, he then phoned MaryAnna deParcq, So. Calif. coordinator. Resourceful MaryAnna phoned Bea Castellano, adoptive mother (a dedicated member of our hardworking So. Calif. Core Group), who lives near Lois. Bea dashed to Lois' home, slipped a note under the door asking her to phone ALMA immediately...and we all waited. Lois phoned MaryAnna and was stunned by the wonderful news! Unable to believe it was true, she held her breath as she placed a phone call to an incredulous JEANNE SANBORN of Washington, her natural mother, who had registered with ALMA in September, 1975. By midnight on Mother's Day, 1976, for Lois Vance, and her natural mother...the search was OVER!

JAMES NIXON, adoptee, 30, of New Jersey began his search last September. After just three months he located and talked with his mother by telephone on December 23rd. "It was the happiest Christmas either one of us has ever had." Jim was reunited with his mother, brother and four sisters on December 26th on Staten Island, New York (a fifth sister was murdered two years ago and his father was killed after falling from a truck). "I can only thank God I found ALMA. Before that I accepted society's false notion that adoptees have no right to search for their true parents. How wrong and unjust that ideal is! For my entire life I've lived only 50 minutes away from my natural mother. If I had not found ALMA when I did who knows, but what my mother may have died before I found her -- or, if I had discovered ALMA earlier I might have had the additional pleasure of meeting my father. The fact that I will never know him or my fifth sister is sad..but it is a sadness greatly outweighed by my fortune in finding the rest of my wonderful new family and the way they have welcomed me back to the fold."

Less than two months after joining ALMA, DONNA LANGTON, 28, adoptee of Nevada, found her 79-year old grandmother, 81-year old great-aunt and two brothers in Oregon. She was "welcomed with open arms." Donna just returned from a week in Oregon with her older brother. "He's fantastic, and for the first time in my life I saw a picture of my mother and now I finally know where I get my looks from. I look just like her. It's great to know who I am at last. She passed away 22 years ago, but my lifetime longing is finally at rest."

STORY OF A "SAFECRACKER"! An adoptee in her mid-twenties asked her adoptive parents for her adoption papers. They refused, denying her right to her documents. The adoptee then decided that she and only she would be master of her own fate. She "cracked their safe", took possession of her birth certificate and her adoption papers, joined ALMA and found her natural mother in FOUR days!

MORAL OF STORY: ADOPTEES! Your birth records are yours! Your identity has been stolen! It is immoral for anyone to withhold your documents which are vital to your life from YOU. You have been robbed of your birthright! Only YOU can take it back!

