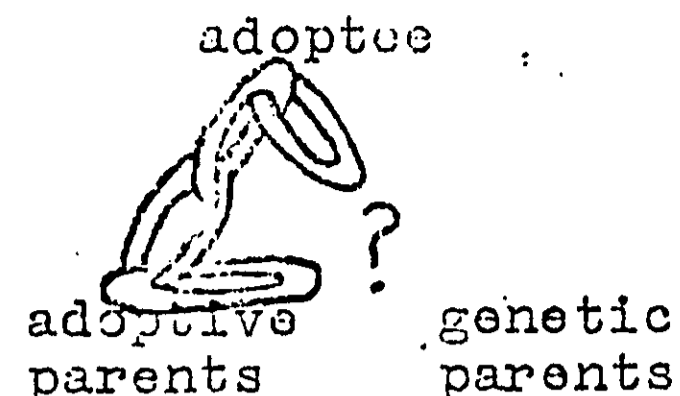


Though I am  
different from you,  
we were born involved  
in one another.

-Tao Chien



\*\*\*\*  
LINK NEWSLETTER  
\*\*\*\*

Vol. 4, May, 1976

Page 1

The time has come to share with all our members the many important things that have taken place since our last newsletter in October. The winter months have found most of us caught up in the rising tide of the approaching legislative hearings, which climaxed in March. The bill under consideration, concerning the accessibility of original birth certificates to adopted adults, has been of tremendous concern to all of us. In view of that fact, we are reproducing here a full report of the legislative activity by our legislative chairman, Larry Martin.

LEGISLATIVE REPORT - LARRY MARTIN

The bill to make original birth certificates available to adopted adults has been tabled or killed until the next legislative session in January, 1977. Here is a partial account of how that came about.

I feel we did a reasonably good job - all things considered - in our first legislative effort. We were resoundingly successful in bringing the issue before the people of Minnesota. We obtained major, front page newspaper coverage in the Minneapolis Star on March 1st. The articles, read by about 500,000 people (according to the Star), told of the grassroots movement of members of the adoption triangle who are searching for each other and working to obtain open adoption laws. One article carried a very large picture of Shirley Bullock and her genetic mother, whom Shirley had found three weeks prior to publication. Maxine Prokop and Larry Martin of LINK were quoted in the article, along with two genetic mothers, adult adoptees, and an agency official.

The issue is before the public and the Legislature. We are being taken seriously by the agencies, professional adoption workers, the public and the Legislature. I am gratified by the amount of understanding support and encouragement that I have received from friends and acquaintances who read the Star article.

Originally there were two adoption bills before the Legislature. The first was drafted by the Adoption Council about five months ago. Adopted adults in the Council wanted totally open access to original birth certificates (for adults). Many agency people wanted "protection" against unwanted disclosure of genetic parents' identities. So a compromise was worked out. In the language of this bill, the adopted adult would apply to the State Dept. of Vital Statistics at age 18 or later for his or her original birth certificate. The State would then have 120 days to find the genetic parents. If either or both genetic parent objected to disclosure of the information, the names would not be given out. If nobody objected, or if the genetic parents could not be located

within 120 days, the original birth certificate WOULD be released.

A south Minneapolis legislator, Rep. Stan Enebo (DFL), introduced a stronger adoption bill. His wife is adopted and would like to know her genetic relatives; thus, Stan's interest in the issue. It was this bill - the Enebo bill - which was heard by the Legislature.

The Enebo bill has NO waiting period and NO opportunity for genetic parents to block disclosure. Enebo does have an age limit of 25 or older. Many of us think age 18 is more sensible, but we went along with the Enebo bill anyway.

On Monday, March 1, 1976, the Enebo bill received its first hearing before a sub-committee of the House Judiciary Committee. The agenda was crowded. There was not enough time for adequate testimony. The bill was amended (in a way unacceptable to most of us) and was passed on the the full Judiciary Committee. The bill's sponsor and five other persons testified in favor of the bill for 22 minutes. Witnesses were Rep. Enebo, Shirley Bullock and Cheryl Hall of LEAF, Ruth Weidell, director of adoptions for the State Dept. of Public Welfare, Mrs Lois Enebo, and myself.

Testifying against the bill were Father Richard Gleason, Director of Catholic Charities in St Cloud, Peter Walsh, director of Catholic Charities, Winona, and a Mrs Amram, an adoptive parent. They testified for 21 minutes.

The vote was 4-3 in favor of our bill! It was a real cliff-hanger! However, toward the end of the debate, an amendment was added which would require that BOTH genetic parents be notified. THEN they would have 120 days to object. Most of us feel that is unacceptable. It is no better than the present situation where an agency may contact the genetic parent and the adopted adult is not told anything without the genetic parent's consent.

During the following week several members of the House Judiciary Committee went over the bill again. The following Monday, March 8th, the bill was heard by the full Judiciary Committee of approximately 22 men. It was amended there to give strong protection to the genetic parents. Nobody was given a chance to testify at this hearing. The committee passed the bill by a unanimous or near-unanimous vote.

Meanwhile, we were working to get the bill heard in the Senate. The chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Jack Davies, was reported to be disinterested in the bill. On Monday, March 8th, about twelve angry adult adoptees and a social worker descended upon Jack Davies' office to demand a hearing. We were given a hearing on the very last possible day of the legislative session for hearing new bills, Tuesday, March 16th.

The Senate Judiciary Committee tabled the bill. Members of the Committee were uninformed and mis-informed on the bill. Sen. Hubert H Humphrey III asked me, 10 minutes before the hearing, why he hadn't heard of the bill until that week. If the issue came to a vote, he was going to vote "no" simply because he felt he needed more background.

We got nowhere in the Senate. We have a sympathetic and aware Senate sponsor for the bill, Senator Allan Spear, an American history professor at the University of Minnesota. He feels it is important to

balance the interests of the genetic parent and the adult adoptee. Therefore, we would not sponsor the bill unless it contained the right for the genetic parent to object. Many of us disagree and feel genetic parents should have no "veto" over us. I feel we need to clarify our own thinking on this, as an organization, so that LINK can convey it's position to the Legislature in January.

You may want to know about the March 16th Senate Hearing in detail. The bill was scheduled for debate by the full House of Representatives that afternoon, March 16th at 4:00 p.m. It was not heard because the Senate Judiciary tabled it at 3:40 p.m.

I testified in favor of the bill, with about four others. The principal opposing witness was John Markert, Executive Director of the Minnesota Catholic Conference. He said he represented Catholic Charities of Crookston, St Cloud, Winona, Minneapolis, St Paul and - I seem to recall - Duluth. He gave the following peculiar reasons for opposing the bill: (1) the need for making original birth certificates available "has not been demonstrated"; (2) to his agencies' knowledge, no adoptive parents had come to the agencies asking that the law be changed; (3) he questioned whether LINK and LEAF represent all adopted adults (we do not claim to-we represent adults who want the law changed); (4) if adopted adults want to know their genetic heritage "they can ask the court to open their records" (he implied the courts are cooperative; actually, they rarely open records - two in Hennepin County in all these years, for instance); (5) the bill came up too hastily and the Legislature should take more time to weigh the issues more carefully; (6) adoptions of caucasian children may dwindle or cease altogether if genetic mothers are no longer guaranteed their privacy.

The Senate Judiciary Committee appeared merely to be going through the motions of giving us a hearing. I believe the outcome was certain even before the hearing began. A powerful member of the committee, Senator Knutsen of Burnsville (Republican) is an adoptive father and opposes the opening of records. He is close to some of the adoption agency people who oppose the bill. We didn't have a chance.

The committee tabled the bill until next session, January 1977. They will set up an interim study commission to dig into the issue. LINK and LEAF will participate in the study, along with adoption agency professionals and other interested persons, including, I assume, members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. We got off to a fast start with the bill. We had already gotten it through two House hearings before much of the opposition became aware of it!

When I was an undergraduate majoring in political science, I was impressed by the arguments in favor of a one house state legislature, such as Nebraska's. Now that I have seen how easy it is for a small group of legislators to block a bill they don't like, I am even more convinced!

If any of you want to talk further about our experience with the Legislature, you can call me at 920-2751.

THANK YOU'S

Our collective appreciation to Larry for his thorough and fine job as "our man in the Legislature."

In addition, to all of you who wrote letters, made phone calls and other efforts on behalf of the bill, we say a heartfelt "thanks."

As an example of one person's letter to all the members of the House Committee and the Senate Committee, we reproduce the following letter by Nancy Corey.

LETTER TO COMMITTEE MEMBERS - NANCY COREY

At the age of 33, I began a search for my genetic father. It took that long to crystalize in my mind that I could do it and that I should do it. I completed my search in about a year and a half against very great odds. About six months ago I went to see him. It was a cathartic, releasing experience and I have no regrets about doing it. My genetic mother had consistently refused to tell me about him, so I had to do it the hard way. The way I see it, she does not have that right; I am far more bound up with him than she ever was. Although his circumstances were not the best, that was not the important thing. What was important was finding the truth, no matter what it was; to come face to face with one's origins, roots, beginnings. I am not very concerned with whether or not I will ever see him again. In fact, it is likely that I will not. What is important is that one meeting - to look in the face, to exchange some words, some thoughts. Although I had never met the man before, I had the sense that "here is my father," in spite of the fact that few words passed between us. That can be called genes or heredity or blood. Whatever it is, it is there and it is tangible. I never had that feeling in all the years with my adoptive father and he was a blood relative.

I feel that the "sealed records" are very wrong and the role of most of the welfare agencies of "playing God" is a crime. No group or individual has the right to stand between genetic parent and genetic child in this issue. There can be no question of privacy or confidentiality between parent and child. To deny a person knowledge of his origins is to deny part of his birthright as a human being. No agency has any legal precedent to say that the right to privacy of the genetic parent shall carry more weight than the right of the child to know his origins. All the rights and balance of power have been on the side of the parents, both genetic and adoptive. The time is long overdue for the adopted adult to receive his rights.

CAPSULE THOUGHTS

"Let us not be discouraged by our first legislative defeat. Hopefully, we will gain by not having compromised what we really want - a truly open record!" - Kathy Demers

"It was appalling to me that so few legislators actually showed up. The apathy shown by these men was unbelievable and certainly inconsistent with the job these men should be performing." - Kathy Hill

"I was unhappy with the detachment I sensed in the committee members from the vital issues they were dealing with. They have no emotional involvement. How can we get their fingers on the pulse of the issue they have in their hands?" - Nancy Corey

THINGS HERE AND THERE

From Cathy Wallace, SEARCH, Colorado - "---our bill was tabled, not killed. But after you read it you'll see why. At the hearings, the adoptive parents were out in full force. ---we may tack on an amendment prohibiting the release of names unless permitted by the natural parents. ---yes, we heard about your bill through Jean Paton and no, we did not join as a group. Lots of problems there as we do not, at this time, have dues. ---we are growing rapidly and are in the middle of reorganization.

U.S. Senate Hearings - The A.I.S. group in Maryland has said that adoptees were not permitted to appear as witnesses in hearings which involved the black and gray market, although they were allowed to send in a written statement. The Act is termed "Opportunities for Adoption Act of 1974" and was introduced by Senator Cranston of California. Hearings are being held before the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Subcommittee on Children and Youth, of which Senator Mondale is chairman. Senate Committee members are:

Walter Mondale, Chairman, Minnesota  
Harrison Williams, N.J.  
Jennings Randolph, W.Va.  
Edward Kennedy, Massc.  
Gaylord Nelson, Wisc.  
Alan Cranston, Calif.

Wm. Hathaway, Maine  
Robert Stafford, Vt.  
Robert Taft, Ohio  
J. Glenn Beall, Jr., Md.  
Paul Laxalt, Nevada

From the AIM Arrow, Michigan - They received a letter from CONTACT, a tracing agency in England which maintains a register for reunions. They succeeded in putting a bill through Parliament enabling adoptees to receive a copy of their original birth certificate upon reaching the age of majority. (LINK has had favorable relations with CONTACT)

LINK WAS THERE

March - Maxine Prokop spoke to a political science class on adoption laws (which reportedly generated strong interest).

March 21st - Kathy Demers attended a meeting at Children's Home on "Identity Quest in Korean Adoptees."

April 12th - Nancy Corey attended the first meeting of the Minnesota ALMA Chapter. There were seven people present and a reported 25 members in Minnesota.

MEMBERSHIP

We need an active membership! We need everyone's support if we are going to achieve any measurable goals. You may think you do not have anything to contribute - that's not true - we need you all! To those of you who have not renewed - please give this your attention. To those of you who have been "on the fence" about joining, we can only say that the benefits you will receive will be in direct proportion to what you give.

FINANCES

Our current resources are about \$50. Our income fluctuates from nothing to not much. Most of our printing is donated, but we still have many expenses to meet. We would be most appreciative of any donations, whether it be money or services. When you are asked to renew your membership dues, we hope you will respond promptly.

COMING UP - SOCIAL MEETING

Our next meeting will be at Nancy Corey's on Monday, May 17th - 1700 West 76th St, Apt. 1C, Richfield - very easy to find - it's The Colony in Richfield, which sits at the top of the 76th St. exit off of 35W going South. After reaching the top of the exit, turn right and turn in the second driveway. A slight jog to the right and you will be facing the 1700 building. 8:00 P.M.

PERSONALS

We feel a significant loss in leadership due to the resignation of Maxine Prokop in February for personal reasons.

Letter from Dorothy Anderson - "Hi, really enjoyed the meeting last night even tho I didn't have anything to contribute to the conversation. Found a little article that might fit in somewhere and maybe interest even one more person to come to the meetings and try to help you in all your good works."

THERE'S A HITCH TO IT

With his thumb, a hitchhiker says, "you furnish the gas, care, attend to the repairs and upkeep, supply the insurance, and I'll ride with you. But, if you have an accident, I'll sue you for damages."

It sounded pretty one-sided, but one wonders how many hitchhikers there are in many organizations, schools and even churches. Many members (and eligible non-members) seem to say, "you go to the meetings, serve on boards and committees, do the paper work, study the issues, contact the legislators, and take care of things that need doing and I'll just go along for the ride. If things don't suit my fancy, I will get out and hitchhike to another group." Hitchhiker or driver - which kind of member are you?

Any problems or questions? - please do not hesitate to call - the following people will be happy to lend an ear:

- |                                    |                       |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Kay Koop, Secretary, 429-0587      | Nancy Corey, 861-4213 |
| Ed Loye, President, 722-0267       | Kathy Hill, 772-2027  |
| Katy Demers, Coordinator, 429-1768 |                       |

CLOSING THOUGHTS

From Jim Klobuchar's column in Minneapolis Star, April 6th - an account of a 40 year old woman's meeting with genetic father and siblings (the detective work and meeting, a gift by her husband for her 40th birthday).

"It had all been stifled so long. It was just an unimaginable feeling, as though a dark and hostile curtain had suddenly been thrown back and the sunshine came streaming in. It was just so beautiful to be with the people of your own flesh and blood for the first time."

\*\*\*\*\*

LINK  
P.O. Box 8528  
White Bear Lake, Mn. 55110