

FIND & SEEK

"Seek and ye shall find," Matthew 7:7

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FIND & SEEK is the official newsletter of

ORIGINS

AN ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN WHO HAVE LOST CHILDREN TO ADOPTION

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NEW JERSEY ENTRAPMENT ----- THE FACTS

You may have heard rumors of something happening in NJ, or you may already know most of the facts, but we wanted to let you know here, as clearly as possible, what we know about the recent entrapment. Earlier this year there were several mentions made about the selling of information from sealed adoption records in NJ. In a Newark Star-Ledger Mother's Day article about reunions a birthmother was quoted as saying that she had paid someone (whom she named) a specific amount of money for information about the daughter she'd surrendered. In addition, several issues of the CUB Communicator referred to Lucy Pare's search activities, as you know from our last newsletter. Some of this information was noticed by an adoptive parents' group in NJ who contacted the NJ Attorney General's office and demanded prosecution of those involved. The A.G.'s office said that although they were reluctant to prosecute a birthmother, if the adoptive parents' group could present evidence to them about the exchange of money for information which might indicate evidence of a crime they would investigate the matter. The adoptive parents' group then contacted Betty Furness, now a reporter with NBC News in New York City and known for her consumer advocate role. She is also an adoptive grandmother in that her daughter has two adopted children. Betty Furness got adoptive parents, Jan and Claire Pero of NJ, to pose as a birthmother and her husband looking for the son she surrendered 12 years ago. The Peros attended a meeting of CUB in South Jersey. They were working in collusion with NBC News and used hidden microphones to tape the entire meeting. Their purpose in this masquerade was to entrap a person allegedly selling information from the adoption records in NJ. Beyond the fact that they are adoptive parents we do not know their motives for taking part in this action. According to eyewitnesses at the CUB meeting, they were very convincing actors. Mrs. Pero even cried for her non-existent lost child. The information they used in the set-up was about a real child surrendered for adoption, although it did not pertain to the Peros' adopted child. At the CUB meeting they met a birthmother who, believing Mrs. Pero to be a real searching mother, referred her to

ORIGINS and Lucy Pare for support and search help. While at the CUB meeting, the Peros taped confidential conversations, and stole literature that belonged to CUB members. They also stole the May/June ORIGINS newsletter.

Continuing to pose as a birthmother named Denise, Mrs. Pero called Lucy in late June and persuaded her to aid in Denise's search for her son. Mr. Pero arranged to meet Lucy to get the information in an all-night shopping center at midnight, after Lucy got off work. When Lucy arrived, tired and apprehensive of the strange circumstances Mr. Pero had requested for the meeting, she was met by an NBC News crew, complete with lights, camera and a reporter. Although terrified and shocked Lucy handled herself very well, threw the money Mr. Pero had paid her for the information about Denise's child on the ground, and made some strong statements about the rightness of our cause. Betty Furness, who staged the entire fiasco showed footage of Lucy "selling sealed adoption records" in the parking lot on promos every half hour the next week. There were also scenes of young children playing in a playground with a voice-over saying how adopted children's safety was now in jeopardy because of Lucy's actions. In a four-part series on the 6 o'clock news on Aug. 3 - 7 two nights were devoted to the filmed "bust." During the second two nights an interview, taped several days after the "bust" with Lucy, Mary Anne Cohen and Alison Ward, told our side of the story. It was unfortunate, however, that Betty Furness edited their interview so badly, and chose to end the four-part series with the comment that according to the many phone calls she'd gotten from adoptive parents during the four days of the series they were distraught with fear that their children would be snatched from them by searching birthmothers. During the series these unfounded fears were repeated several times by adoptive parents, although never substantiated. The segments also featured the Peros and the family of an adoptee whose birthmother had made contact. Although it was inferred that the adoptee was a child, we now know that he is a 24 year-old married man. None of the adoptive family members showed their faces or gave their names, and they were presented in shadow. In contrast, the three ORIGINS members were in full view and gave their full names. The big "horror story" that NBC presented was the fact that the adoptive father of the 24 year-old adoptee had a heart attack shortly after the birthmother's contact, which may or may not be related. Obviously, NBC was unable to come up with any stories of minor contact with disastrous results because we're sure if there had been anything

that NBC would have used it.

As to pending legal action, the Attorney General's office is investigating the case. The Deputy A.G. and representatives of the Official Corruption Unit of the NJ State Police have contacted Sandy Musser by telephone (Sandy is the VP Branch Administration of CUB and used to be the CUB Coordinator for PA/So. Jersey. She now lives in Florida.) These men also visited Mary Anne Cohen and Lucy Pare at their homes. If any of you or anyone you know has been questioned about this matter it is VITAL to Lucy's legal case that you notify her immediately. Lucy's attorney has been told by the Deputy A.G. that Lucy may be indicted for conspiracy shortly. At this point no indictments have been made although we do expect that some legal action will be taken.

Lee Campbell, the President of CUB, has been wonderfully supportive and understanding throughout this crisis. She feels that what happened to Lucy could happen to anyone who searches for information and believes that we are all in this together. She has referred Lucy to an attorney who will defend her should any legal action arise and is trying to establish a "Right To Search" legal defense fund for this purpose. As we all know too well, legal representation is expensive. If CUB is able to establish and administer this fund, Lucy will get good legal defense. We will let you know more about this fund in the next issue of FIND & SEEK.

Many people all over the country that we have spoken with in recent weeks have said "What can I do to help?" One answer to that is to contribute to whatever legal defense fund that is set up. Another answer is to voice your personal support to Lucy Pare (19 Southard Place, Basking Ridge NJ 07920) for what she has done for others searching for their children lost to adoption or their birthparents. If Lucy helped you in your own search, you not only owe her your moral support, but additionally some kind of financial support. She came through when you needed her. Another effort that is needed is for you to express your feelings about all this to Betty Furness, NBC News, 30 Rockefeller Center, NY, NY 10112. Don't let Furness get away with perpetuating the myths that birthmothers spy on and snatch young children from the playground, and that any contact by the birthmother to the adoptive family will leave them distraught and devastated.

As Sgt. Friday used to say "Those are the facts, ma'am." As to our feelings...we are very frightened, especially because Lucy received an anonymous and threatening phone call from an adoptive mother, but we are also hopeful of what is to come and proud to be in the forefront of the fight for the rights of birthparents and adoptees to search for one another. The response from individuals who represent all sides of the adoption triangle has been very encouraging and is much needed if we are to continue this fight and win. Lucy wishes to express her most sincere thanks to all the people who have sent her their good wishes and support in her time of need. There is no time now for organizational or personality clashes. Solidarity should be our rallying cry.

- Mary Anne Cohen and Alison Ward

"THE WORST SIN TOWARD OUR FELLOW CREATURES IS NOT TO HATE THEM, BUT TO BE INDIFFERENT TO THEM: THAT'S THE ESSENCE OF INHUMANITY."

- This quote by George Bernard Shaw was submitted by Carol Gustavson who thought it was appropriate in regard to what our response should be to our opponents' efforts to destroy search activities.

HANDLING QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR SEARCH

We must all ask ourselves, "How can this entrapment happen and what can I do to ensure that it never happens again?" The answer is CONFIDENTIALITY. One contributing factor to Lucy's entrapment was the *Esquire's* Day article where the birthmother admitted paying a person a stated amount of money for information which would lead to the conclusion of her search. This article was picked up by Associated Press and was printed in many papers throughout the country. The birthmother made certain comments off the record to the reporter (who ironically is an adoptee) and didn't think the reporter would print all the information she gave.

When you enlist the help of anyone in your search, this is a very confidential relationship. Just as you would not want that person to reveal information about you, your birthmother status, and your child and his or her adoptive family to the media, so you should respect the privacy of that individual. In addition, and more importantly, you may be jeopardizing more than just privacy should any legal action occur because of your indiscretion about how you got your identifying information.

You may, of course, feel free to share with another birthmother (whom you know personally and can vouch for) the path you took. Be certain that in sharing information you are not jeopardizing many for one. Our search contacts have only our recommendations to go on. We cannot let them down.

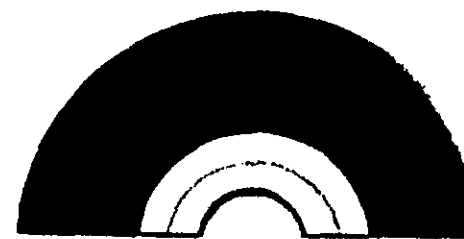
It is important to know how to handle questions posed to you about your search methodology by social workers, your child's adoptive parents and news reporters. What do you say when you are asked, "How did you locate your child?" Here are some ways that have been used to handle this potentially disastrous situation:

- * That's confidential. I'm not at liberty to reveal that information.
- * Someday, perhaps when you and I know one another better, I can share that with you.
- * It was a long and difficult search that ended with a lucky break.
- * A fairy godmother
- * I'm psychic (or I used a crystal ball or a Ouija board)
- * The way I found my child is not important. What is important is that I know that my child is alive and well.

There are obviously many other ways to handle the sticky questions. You can, and should, emphatically state when asked that you did not get your information from the agency (unless you really did). You should NEVER say or imply that any fee was involved, although you can say truthfully that it was a costly search for you in terms of phone bills, letters, travel, emotional drain and "fees for genealogical research."

One of the benefits of a support group such as ORIGINS is that we can benefit and learn from each others' mistakes and experiences. If this entrapment has taught us anything, it is that confidentiality about your search contacts and methodology must be maintained. It's unfair for any of us who already have our identifying information to in any way jeopardize the rights of others to get the same invaluable data about their children. Remember--these lips sink ships.

- Marsha Riben



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AN ADOPTIVE MOTHER'S LETTER TO BETTY FURNESS

Dear Ms. Furness:

8/2/81

I am writing you with respect for your contributions of service to the public over the years. It has been brought to my attention, through NBC News coverage as well as members of the adoption movement, that you will be presenting a special report this week on the efforts of birthparents searching for their children placed for adoption.

I wish to express my views as an adoptive parent who believes in open records as well as the right for adoptees to connect with their heritage.

It is difficult for me to control my anger and disappointment with the lack of perception in the presentation of the plight of others who are as human as you, me, and the rest of the world.

Search needs are a part of life that many tend to look upon with disgust and vengeance. People cannot look beyond their own place in life to see what is really happening and why. Many of the issues should have been faced years ago in an open, understanding way, rather than clamping the lid shut on a hot situation that is now boiling over into the lives of those directly involved in adoption.

There is ignorance involved when a statement can be made that most adoptees are happy and their lives are being ruined by birthparents. Search needs do not hinge on whether an adoptee has wonderful life with their adoptive family or an unhappy life with them. Many adoptees have a true need to touch the reality of their heritage. They are denied the right to their feelings by laws, adoptive families who place guilt trips on them for "not appreciating all that has been done for you", and for fear of disrupting lives they are told are not open to them. Contrary to this belief, a very high percentage of birthfamilies have enfolded their lost children. They recognize their obligations to grant them peace of mind and welcome the opportunity to share in their children's lives in a positive way.

I have been involved in trying to understand the needs of all involved in adoption for many years, and I am happy to share another point of view with you. There are other adoptive parents, aside from my family, who are working hard to present an honest picture beyond that of sensationalism. We hurt deeply that human beings are reduced to acting in ways that are not acceptable to society because their moral convictions outweigh their personal regard.

I find it difficult to tolerate the feelings of many adoptive parents who look at birthparents as emotionless pieces of humanity. We, above all, should have an acute awareness of the miracle of life. Would any one of us feel less pain in being separated from a part of ourselves? Would any one of us be able to place a child for adoption and forget? Life does not begin when a child is placed in your arms through adoption. A mother nurtured her child as she carried the babe in her womb. How can we deny that to mother or child?

I am enclosing material for you to read with the hope that it will stimulate your very being to touch base with this sensitive area of life. I have a deep, abiding faith that does not allow me to structure my thoughts around our small family unit. We are part of much larger visions.

- Carol Gustavson



(Carol is an adoptive mother who is in charge of CUB's liaison committee. She has always been supportive of ORIGINS and has attended several of our meetings. Whenever we are tempted to stereotype adoptive parents as uncaring, insensitive people we remember Carol and others we know and reconsider. She's wonderful.)

AN ADOPTEE'S LETTER TO THE PEROS

8/6/81

Dear Mr. Pero:

I want to compliment you on your convincing T.V. performance, and the excellent job you did exposing "Lucy" to the millions of T.V. viewers in the metropolitan area.

This woman, nurse, mother and sister will now be known to possibly thousands of birthmothers as a social reformer, modern day Robin Hood, crusader and martyr. To the ones she has previously helped, both natural parents and adoptees, she is already known as a sympathetic, compassionate and daring pioneer.

Thank you for giving other birthparents hope that they, too, will now be able to locate their lost and borrowed sons and daughters.

Surely you must realize that mother love will outlast all society's backward laws and rules. It is far stronger than locked doors and sealed records, and it cannot be diminished by time, but will persist and grow richer.

Birthmothers are united. You have brought them together. They have a cause. "Lucy" has paved the way and many more will follow. The truth will free them and they will be ready to defend their rights and fight for needed change.

Yes, Mr. Pero, their surrendered children will find them, meet them, know and love them, and you can be proud, for unknowingly you have helped to accomplish their goals.

Without thought of consequence, you have lied and deceived good people and now it will backfire. You cannot keep your children from finding their true origins. The bonds and blood ties are a part of them and will increase in strength as time passes. These are facts you will have to accept.

One day you will have to share your children with their birthparents, whether you like it or not. Because of the recent publicity that day, for you and for them, is closer than you think.

In truth and justice,

T.I.H.

An Adoptee For Assertive Change

* * * * *

From a letter in the Los Angeles Times 12/24/59 by Jean Paton, the founder of ORPHAN VOYAGE and a pioneer of the adoption movement. Jean is an adoptee who believes every adoptee should have at least one contact with a member of their birth family by the age of twelve.

"In remembrance of today's forgotten woman, the one who has given her child to adoption, never to hear of him again.

To such mothers, to those who grieve, may I send assurance that not everyone has forgotten them, especially not their children, many of whom, when grown, think of them with growing wisdom and in the spirit of forgiveness.

Those of us who are less than perfect can never understand the reason for this lifelong punishment for what is, often enough, scarcely a sin, certainly not the mortal one."

* * * * *

TIME AND CIRCUMSTANCES CAN KEEP TWO PEOPLE APART---

PATIENCE AND LOVE CAN BRING THEM TOGETHER.

* * * * *

IN MEMORY OF PAT O'ROURKE

In February 1981 a birthmother living in Manhattan contacted ORIGINS for help in finding her only child whom she'd surrendered 17 years ago. Within a short time she located her daughter who lives with her adoptive family in NJ. Pat contacted the adoptive parents who assured her that their daughter was a happy, well adjusted teenager who had never asked questions about her birthparents. They told Pat that when their daughter was older they would tell her about Pat. Although wanting to respect the parents' wishes, Pat decided to contact her daughter directly before she was 18. She found that, contrary to what the adoptive parents had told her, her daughter did not have a wonderful relationship with her parents and had asked many questions over the years about Pat which had gone unanswered. Pat met her daughter and her adoptive parents and developed a good relationship over the next several months.

When the NBC expose was going to be shown on television an ORIGINS member who was a friend of Pat's tried to contact Pat to tell her to watch the show. She found out through a co-worker of Pat's that several weeks earlier there had been a fire in Pat's apartment and that she had been hospitalized. Pat died from her burns and her daughter and her adoptive family attended Pat's funeral. The co-worker, who knew of Pat's reunion with her only child, said that the last few months of Pat's life were her happiest.

Our detractors will say that this is a fluke and should have no impact on whether or not birthmothers have the right to search, much less search for minors. But, had Pat postponed her search until her daughter was 18, she might never have met her and her daughter might never have known how much she was loved by her original mother. I don't mean to sound like an alarmist, but life is so fleeting. The next time someone tries to make you feel guilty about searching, regardless of your child's age, remember Pat O'Rourke.

- Alison Ward

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FOR MICHAEL OF SOMEDAY



I'm looking for a
Someday
When you and I can be together
before God,
before all
who have yearned for you with me,
before all who have taken you
from me,
I think of it as heaven
in this world
or the next
to hold you with my smile,
to kiss you with my joy,
to touch you with my heart,
once again, Manchild,
and
forevermore.

But I'm hiding from a
Someday
Because I could not bear it
if you turned away,
then
I could not reach you.

Or
if I reached you,
and it hurt you to know me
then
that would hurt me, too.
Then I would be
alone.
And if you could not
forgive me
(as I cannot
forgive myself)
for letting you go
even though I
could not/would not believe
that you don't need me,
then what would happen to the part of me that I
have saved for you?

Maybe I'd die,
or worse, I'd survive
as I did twelve years
before I found you,
but I didn't know
I'd be paralyzed
until the fear has lifted.

Love, Ellie (Mom)

- Ellie Maldonado

* * * * *

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THE STORY OF JULIE AND JEFF

With the 'highly professional' advice of my family doctor and social worker (who of course knew best) I was forced to give up my son when I was 17 years of age.

The day they came and took him from me in the hospital I kissed him goodbye with little hope of ever seeing him again.

As the years went by, the hurt worsened and this awful feeling that something was wrong grew inside me. I knew in my heart it just wasn't supposed to have happened this way and I could not accept not knowing about him.

In between all this turmoil I married, and had two more beautiful sons. My husband had always known of Jeff, but I'm sure never completely understood. He was always supportive. My immediate family knew about Jeff but no one else did. Therefore, he was not a topic of conversation.

When Jeff was about six, I got up the courage to go back to the agency, naively thinking that they could just contact his family and let me know how he was. They refused to give me any information and did a real job on me by letting me think that I was the only one who had ever come back and that I had "problems" to feel such "over concern" after this period of time has passed. Also, one very dear social worker (my original case worker) told me that my records had been burnt in a fire a while back. I came home totally devastated, thinking that there was just no way at all. After a long talk with my dearest friend, I came to the realization that I had been conned once again. I developed more strength and confidence by doing lots of talking, taking lots of advice and doing lots of research.

I had a lot of ups and downs, did lots of praying, reading, and heavy rap sessions and a full self-analysis of just what was really going on. Now I know it was all necessary--for I finally found Jeff.

When I found out where he lived, I did the usual--riding past the house, school, and asking lots of discreet questions. Yet every time I drove past, the home always looked so dead, with no sign of Jeff, and that awful feeling that something was wrong continued to grow. After

