

ORIGINS

AN ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN WHO HAVE LOST CHILDREN TO ADOPTION

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SORRY WE'RE LATE !!

P.O. BOX ONE, BOUND BROOK NJ 08805

MAY 1982

CLARIFICATION ON NEW SEARCH POLICY

In our March 1982 newsletter, there was an article announcing a new search policy on search help. We stated that ORIGINS would no longer offer search help to mothers whose parents, children, and husband did not know that she had given birth to the surrendered child. We also advised trying to find the birthfather and tell him he had fathered a child, if he was never informed at the time of the birth.

Several of our members misunderstood the intent of this policy and thought we meant that all searching birthmothers should inform all of the above that they were searching, and discuss the progress and outcome of the search with their parents and the birthfather, as well as with their husband and other children. This was not our intent.

While we feel strongly that your other children have a right to know about their brother or sister as soon as possible, and don't know how a married woman could conduct a search without her husband knowing, we see no reason to discuss any aspect of search with your parents or the birthfather, unless you want to and feel it would be helpful to you. As long as your parents and the birthfather know that the child exists, we would not ask anyone to pursue the subject any further if it was too painful.

It has been our experience that the sooner you tell your other children about their lost brother or sister, the easier it is for them and for you. There will never be a better time than now for telling your children, no matter how young they are. We understand how difficult it can be to tell your other children, and intend no criticism of those birthmothers who have already completed a search without telling. We all learn from our past mistakes. We are here to help any of you take this big step, whether you have already found, or are searching. We plan to write more about this subject in future newsletters, and to discuss it at meetings.

I am sure you all want what we want: the best, most honest, welcoming reunion we can offer when we contact our lost children.

Mary Anne Cohen, NJ

ANOTHER VIEWPOINT

Thanks for printing your announcement about the Chicago meetings in the newsletter. I contacted a number of people from the Chicago area and held a meeting March 27 to which 6 people came. It went pretty well and we'll be having monthly meetings. The people who came were all very much "in the closet" and they are the people I would like to reach the most. Until you work through your feelings and come out of the closet you are not ready to find your child.

At the same time, however, it is important for some people to begin a search in order for them to be able to open up about their feelings, i.e., it really helps to take the beginning steps of contacting the agency, doctor, lawyer, court, hospital, etc. Many people are totally unaware that they may do this and that they have a right to any papers they signed and to their own medical records. Perhaps ORIGINS should devise a "Helping Hand" for its membership for the purpose of aiding people in obtaining the information they are legally entitled to.

Glad to see you decided to remain an organization for birthmothers! Birthmothers do need groups of their own so that their voices can be heard. The group I've started here is also for birthmothers although we may open some of the discussion meetings to others. But, basically, it will be limited only to birthmothers. We need a forum where we can express our own thoughts and feelings to each other with impunity.

ANOTHER VIEWPOINT ... CONTINUED

I'm also glad to see that you have come up with some guidelines about search aid. However, I do take exception to the stance that the birthmother must tell her other children and the birthfather. This could be detrimental, depending upon the circumstances. If the other children have not been raised knowing that they have another sibling somewhere out there in the world, the news could be devastating, especially if they have not reached an age where they can understand the circumstances. They may internalize the news and feel that if they are not "good" Mommy may give them away, too! As to the birthfather, what if it's a rape case? Or a gang rape? A person should not be forced to contact the man (men) under those circumstances even if they do know the man's identity. In my own case, which was not rape, I do not feel any obligation to contact the birthfather at all. Should I find my daughter, or she finds me, I will give her all the information I have regarding her father and help her to locate him if she desires to do so. Anticipating that she might want to find him, I am attempting to find out his date and place of birth, but I have no intention (at the moment, anyway) of completing a search for him. I have not seen nor heard from him since before my daughter was born and, frankly, he has no place in my life. I do, however, recognize the place he has in my daughter's life and I am not opposed to giving her information and assisting her in locating him. Beyond that I do not feel that I have any obligation to contact him.

While it is necessary to have some rules and regulations I hope this current set of rules will not be iron clad. ORIGINS needs to exhibit some flexibility in enforcing these rules, or else they will become punitive. Temper them by human judgement and knowledge of the individual circumstances involved.

Marie Cavaleri, IL

MATERNAL INSTINCTS

Don't berate yourself for the strange, awkward feelings that arise upon seeing your long, lost child--your baby, now all grown up.

I can well remember the myriad of feelings that flooded through me and constantly changed over the hour or so I first gazed upon my daughter, now almost a grown young woman. The first thing I felt was the strangeness of the whole situation, the awkwardness. Then there was the embarrassment for not knowing which one she was. I remember feeling so foolish having to ask my husband of each girl her age, "Do you think that's her?" And then, really feeling downright dumb when I came to the conclusion that it MUST be the one who resembled my sister's kid so much, and I was wrong!

There is no need for guilt or shame, though, because these feelings are actually not unlike what any mother feels gazing into the nursery window for the first time. There is no magic that makes one instantly know which one is your own. In fact, when mistakes are made in hospitals, and the wrong baby is brought to a mother, she sometimes doesn't know the difference. So, how can we expect to know our children, so many years later?

I can also remember feeling the same feelings the first time I visited another new mother after my son, Adam, was born. Her baby and mine were very close in age and we put them both to sleep in the bedroom while we chatted. When they awoke, I was embarrassed because I thought her baby's cry was mine.

Someone once said that a mother can always recognize the cry of her own baby. Not true. As a well seasoned mother of three, I firmly attest to the fact that all two-month-olds cry similarly and all one-year-olds' voices resemble each other to some extent. I still turn around in the supermarket when I hear

a four or five year old call, "Mommy," even though mine are now in school.

There are many other feelings that crop up when seeing our newly found children. We are once again flooded with remembrances of the other person who took part in their creation. And, depending upon how much they look like their fathers, and how much they look like us... and depending upon how much we loved and/or still still love, or hated and/or still hate, or how much we love/hate their fathers will account for a multitude of other weird feelings.

I can remember, too, feeling as if what everyone had told me was true: that she was part of the past, that she belonged to someone else and not to me. That she was theirs, and not a part of me or my family. But then that feeling was replaced by overwhelming pride in her beauty, poise and intelligence.

There is also the death of the fantasy we must deal with. I am sure there are few amongst us who does not fantasize that their child will look so much like them that both will recognize each other across a crowded room and run into each others' arms crying, "I would have known you anywhere!" My fantasies resembled a scene from "Gone With The Wind"! Reality was more like "Our Town". She looked right at me and right through me, like I was a ghost. It hurt. I wanted to cry out, "Hey, don't you know who I am?" But, she didn't, and I didn't.

Marsha Riben, NJ

ON THE SUBJECT OF UNDERAGE SEARCHES

by Jean Paton, Founder of Orphan Voyage

Both the purpose of the AAC (American Adoption Congress) and its policy on "underage searches" are derived from the same roots: The problems which beset adopted people in their maturity, which have origin in their childhood years. From the point of view of the birthparent, the problem faced is the agonizing period of years and years during which they have no significant, if, any, information about the children who were surrendered to the adoption process. In fact, the adoption, carried on under the sealed record policy, has much the form of death, a social death, but none the less difficult to bear.

We in this work are trying to help people who have been hurt by this social death. A child grows with normal questions about ancestry and events of adoption surrender, and is repelled by the policy of silence and evasion. The work of distortion of the human character begins at that point, and is released with great difficulty, the more so in cases where adoptive parents are unable or unwilling to deal with the matter.

Likewise, birthparents are harmed. If we have been in the work long enough we know directly, from accomplished searches, and other means, what these effects are. Some of us find birthparents in mental hospitals, or learn that they have suicided. Often they die early of diseases which may be attributed in part to the stress of their unnatural condition, people who gave birth but are now without offspring.

To say nothing of alcohol and drug abuse which frequent both populations. This all relates to illegitimacy, the impact upon the individual. Can we not face it?

We are a movement without focus until we say we want our brethren to be spared the pains we have been through, and that these pains begin in childhood, or in the birthparent at unpredictable times after the surrender, but always they come.

To spare people these pains there must be a process begun in the childhood of the adoptee, to help both adoptees and birthparents. Adoptive parents have the principal responsibility in this and we should notify them that we believe this is the situation, and that we stand ready to help.

We exist to promote fullness of life in ourselves and in all whom we now help, but also in those we do not yet reach, but who are rapidly becoming of age and need us now.

I think we can say we look with anxiety upon intrusion by a birthparent into the life of a surrendered child directly, for they can both be harmed by this. But let us realize that it is understandable, because of her distress. Adoptive parents should be prepared by us to expect the approach of the birthparent, sometime after the adoption. There is no form of adoption which can bypass the facts of life forever.

This approach need not be viewed as a threat, but as an inevitable consequence of the separation which produced an adoption. It can be constructively dealt with for all parties, by adoptive parents who learn why it must be, and that it will have its reward for all concerned.

(This memo was sent to the AAC Board of Directors and submitted in advance to members of Orphan Voyage.)

Dear Friends in ORIGINS,

I just got through reading some of your reports about your searches and contacts and I wish to enter some comments at this time. I can still feel all those reactions that you are experiencing or perhaps have yet to go through even though I was reunited with my son on August 31, 1981. He was gone for only three years but it seemed like forever. It was to have been an older child adoption, but he was never legally adopted by the couple he was placed with, much to the embarrassment of my agency. Normally under the current Ohio adoption laws we would have never been considered by the agency for a reunion.

I was contacted by his "other" mom who explained why she wanted him back with his own family and not thrown into the foster care system. I did not want that for him either, so after the shock and the crying, his birthfather and oldest brother (his half-brother) went and picked him up. He had lived in Texas most of the time, I did not know the exact location, but around the Ft. Bliss area. The agency still holds permanent custody but is working with us to reunify Dana with his natural parents. He was officially placed with us in November. It was the best birthday present I had in three years! The pain and trauma or the surrender experience are still a part of me although I took it for granted it would automatically disappear upon the inevitable return of my beloved son. Sometimes the fear of having to let go of him again is reflected in that moment of time when we were provoked into surrendering him in July of 1978. Perhaps it will never completely be resolved for my son or myself. He is still angry at us for giving him away, which is understandable under the circumstances. He is going to need therapy to vent his anger in more constructive ways. The agency has offered to finance our counseling, which I feel is only fair since the State neglected him all the time he was to be adopted!

To Mary Anne Cohen, I share your feelings of rejection, for I have suffered much rejection in my life, and my prayers are with you. To Alison Ward and Evelyn Zeimet, my appreciation for your reassurance that I do count and matter to ORIGINS. I realize that our children are not forever lost to us now, but just loaned to others for a while. May God judge other adoptive parents who act deceptively towards our children. He will, because the return of my son was a miracle!

Marcy Dent, OH

SOME PEACE OF MIND

Last October I wrote to Michele's parents but heard nothing from them. In March I sent another letter. Last week I received a reply. I couldn't believe it! I was shaking so bad I could hardly open the letter. It was typewritten, nothing really personal, but they told me Michele was a happy, healthy 16 year old who does well in everything she does. General information, but it meant the world to me. They said they could understand how much I needed to know of her welfare and hoped the information would ease my mind. They said that at the present time they felt they couldn't send a picture but they didn't say they never would, and they didn't close the door in my face. I was so encouraged. I have been on cloud nine and full of more hope than I'd ever thought possible. I have not given up on seeing her someday. It was a year ago on Good Friday that someone special called me with the information I needed to find my daughter.

Thanks to everyone for your help and encouragement. Your newsletters have helped me get through so many bad days. I shall be forever grateful to you.

Linda Dick, MI

Any ORIGINS members desiring search assistance should contact Marsha Riben, 268 CC, RD2, Old Bridge NJ 08857. Please remember our guidelines about being out of the closet.

There are moments in life
when it would be wonderful
if the world would stop...
so those moments could last forever.

My life began anew last night when fantasy became reality. Twenty-one pain-filled years were swept aside and replaced with the promise of sweet tomorrows when I heard my first-born child's voice for the first time! All the years of wondering, hoping and praying for this very moment were realized in an hour long phone conversation as my son, Jeff, erased my fears and eased my aching heart with his happy, friendly and understanding attitude. The door of our past is wide open now, freeing us to live our lives with the truth, instead of lies; with openness, instead of closeted secrets.

Jeff assured me he has had a good adoptive home and parents, and his attitude reflected this as we talked. He is a very personable, contented and happy young man!

Someday soon we will meet, but for now I am contented 'touching' as we have and learning about each other. I am experiencing an overwhelming sense of peace I never thought possible and want to share my new found happiness with you.

For those of you still searching and anticipating a reunion with your child or birthparent, I wish you success and know you will someday soon be experiencing what I have now.

To my friends and family, rejoice with me, for my heart is full. I have traveled a long, emotional road and with God's blessings have come full circle with my past.

Special love,
Mickey Carty, IN

Editor's Note: Oh, Mother of Two Feet, we're so happy for you!

Isn't it odd that adoptive parents tend to discredit hereditary influences on the adoptee except that well-known dominant gene--promiscuity-- which female adoptees inherit as part of the "bad blood" syndrome?

Ask a female adoptee how her adoptive parents, particularly the adoptive mother, treated the subject of sex and the frequent answer will be that she was suffocatingly over-protected.

Why couldn't we be praised when a particular talent blossoms, i.e., "Your mother was an excellent pianist", etc.? Ah, but that would be utopia, and if we were in utopia we would never have had to surrender in the first place.

Joan Smith, NJ

FINDING -- A QUIRK OF FATE

A month ago I sat at an ORIGINS meeting feeling alone. So many women had found and I was one of the few still searching. I had resigned myself to a long, long search.

And then, by some quirk of fate, I found myself one of the others. I had found out the names of my children, surrendered so many years ago. I feel as if I've lived in a vacuum and someone has just pulled out the stopper. Along with this numbness, I feel peace and contentment and doubt.

This is all so unreal. There is still one search ahead of me, but it is a short one. There will be an end for me.

I thank God, and I thank ORIGINS, for without God's guidance ORIGINS would not be here to help me, and without ORIGINS God's hands would have been tied!

In Sisterhood,
Kathy Loewenberg, NJ

P.S. I found Carole on May 18th. On May 19th I saw her get off the school bus and enter her house. She has changed so much, a babe the last time I saw her but now a grownup. There is so much for me to absorb. I feel like an intruder; as if everyone in the neighborhood knew I was her birthmother and she had been found.

Editor's Note: Kathy has come a long way in the past six months and we're very proud of her. She is one of four ORIGINS' members who surrendered two children to adoption. There are some who say they cannot understand how anyone could go through that twice, but we must all realize that the forces which contribute to separating child from mother are ever present, especially to a young, unwed mother.

Independent American artist, 96 year-old Georgia O'Keefe, was once asked if she weren't afraid during her frequent solitary travels through the desert. Her reply was, "I've been afraid every day of my life, but I never let it stop me."

It's time that birthmothers stopped hating themselves and blaming themselves, and letting their fears immobilize them. We have already suffered enough and we have learned through bitter experience that adoption is cruel and unhuman, especially to us, the natural mothers, and in some cases our children have suffered, too.

Those who have found their minor children need to stop agonizing and martyring themselves by begging adoptive parents for information. The adoptive parent uses the birthmother's guilt very cleverly. By making her wait patiently for occasional snapshots and scraps of news, they manage to keep her out of their lives that much longer and away from the child whom she has every moral right to meet. Their "fear of harassment" from the natural mother never materializes, but they withhold their "prize" anyway and the birthmother becomes a willing waiting victim, a curse from the past, as Mary Anne Cohen's excellent poem says so well. The old self-punishment keeps her in this submissive role and a meeting with her child, the one event that will bring her peace, eludes her.

Most birthmothers have retained feelings of worthlessness, left over from the day the "papers were signed" and her baby was instantly taken from her life. Society, social workers, and the agencies did their job well. She was robbed of her child and also her self-esteem.

When a natural mother is fearful of a direct contact with a minor child, she sometimes uses a third party to act as an intermediary. This can add confusion to the situation and usually brings her no closer to the meeting she desires. Adoptive parents use numerous excuses to postpone the reunion. They tell us the child is "too young," "not ready," or "too immature." Most often it's the adoptive parents who are "not ready." There is no ideal time or age for a reunion and whether or not to postpone it is the birthmother's decision, no one else's! We don't need anyone's permission to meet our own children.

After my reunion with my 19 year old daughter, she confided that she would have been "ready" to meet me at any age. She was not only pleased, but relieved, that I contacted her directly and bypassed her adoptive parents or a third party. After all, a reunion between a mother and her first-born child is a personal, highly emotional experience. Initially, the relationship should be theirs alone to share.

judie Ferrante, NJ

Dear Sister Birthmothers,

Am enclosing a check for renewal of ORIGINS newsletter. Wish words would flow from my typewriter as they do for those of you who put out the news.

I do put out a newsletter for CUB of Ohio branch, but nothing like yours.

I met Alison Ward at the Reunite Conference in Columbus but did not have the time or opportunity to speak with her. I sat in on her "Minor Search" panel, though. Pros and cons-- everyone's search is different and reasons for or not to make contact are so different. Each one must make that decision themselves. I'll be here to help them with all the support I can; cannot tell them what to do if they find. I found my daughter before I became involved in the movement and within three hours after getting a name I was talking with her on the phone. If I had been involved in the movement I don't believe I would have moved so quickly as it was a very emotional time for all of us. Time would have given me more to settle myself down and I would have not been such a terrible wreck. She was almost 23 years old, so I did not go through her parents. Everything has been great, though. Never want to go through that again.

Keep up the good work and will look forward to more newsletters.

Carol Colon, OH

ONE BIRTHMOTHER'S STORY...

WITH A NICE MOTHER'S DAY ENDING

Sixteen years ago I was an unwed mother. I was thrown out of my house by my parents and family. I was one month along and could have stayed home for at least five months. My mother took me to a psychiatrist to see if I could get an abortion. I was totally against this and he agreed. Then she took me to Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Newark. My mother did not want me in a home for unwed mothers. So they sent me to a private home in Montclair, NJ, to be a nanny to a well-to-do family. I took care of her two sons, aged two and four, cleaned and cooked and watched the lady and her husband enjoy their tennis, golf, and all their other country club activities. Also, she was pregnant...I did this for seven months. Then, in early December, I got the flu and the lady did not want me in the house with her, so Catholic Charities sent me to a hospital, St. Mary's in Orange, NJ. I spent the next month in a room all by myself. My mother came to see me once a week the whole time I was away. She was my only visitor. Then, on January 3, 1966, I spent 12 hours in hard labor. No one told me what to expect. It was the worst experience of my life. I think they let me suffer for my "sin."

I saw my daughter once in the hospital. They let me hold her and feed her. I will never forget her big eyes looking at me as if she knew what was going to happen. I left the hospital and returned with my mother to sign the adoption papers on Jan. 19, 1966. I had just turned 22 two weeks before my daughter was born. I listened to everyone tell me to give this beautiful baby girl who I loved to two people who could give her a good start in life. I felt that I was undeserving of my baby. Catholic Charities never told me about foster care, welfare, etc. They wanted a healthy, white baby. They wanted my product, to sell to the adoptive parents. They won.

I was allowed to go home again without my baby. I went back to work and in June met the man I would later marry in October of 1966. In June 1967 I gave birth to another baby girl. This kept my sanity, but it was not over for me. I did not forget my first child and all the guilt I felt in surrendering her. In 1974, I gave birth to a son. After his birth I was very depressed and was hospitalized four times in one year. The fourth time they made me have shock treatments and after a long haul, I started to get better.

Then the best thing happened to me: I learned about CUB. I started to get their newsletters and it made me realize that I was not crazy. I was normal. I went to my first CUB meeting in New York City and there I met Lucy Paré. I did not know that my life was going to change for the better at that time. I was put in touch with "Jack," and I finally had the peace of mind that my daughter was alive and hopefully well and happy. That was when she was 13 years old.

When she was 15 I met with four other birthmothers from New Jersey and together we formed the group now known as ORIGINS. I also met Carol Gustavson (an adoptive mother who heads CUB's Liaison Committee). Mary Anne Cohen, Lucy Paré, Marsha Riben, Alison Ward, Ron Buchmann ("Jack"), and Carol Gustavson have through their help and support given me the strength to move forward and do something that I never thought I would do. I want to thank each of the people who made this possible for me. Without other people to help me and give me encouragement, I would still be in the closet. Thank you all.

I wrote my daughter's parents a letter one year ago. Carol also wrote to them in my behalf. Then we waited for six weeks and wrote another letter. Four days later I got a nice letter from her parents. They said a lot of nice things about Elizabeth to help me to know her a little. But they said that they were not going to tell her of my contact until she was 18 or 19. I accepted this as I felt that they knew best. I wrote back and sent them pictures of my family and myself and asked for a picture. They sent me many pictures of her and her two brothers and themselves. This went so far in relieving the anguish I've felt all these years.

We have been writing for one year now and in the last letter they said they are now ready to meet with me and my husband. I am waiting to hear when we are going to meet. It should be within the next month or so. I have been patient and I am hoping that they want to tell Elizabeth before she is 18.

I did the right thing in searching and contacting my daughter's parents. It is a very personal decision. I only wish that other birthmothers could share in the peace of mind I have in knowing that my daughter is alive and well, and that I can communicate openly with her parents.

Most birthmothers had little choice when they were forced and coerced into surrendering their children. I will continue to work toward humanizing adoption and help birthmothers to know that the truth sets them free. Even after you search and find, and even if it is a "good find," it is never over. Never. The lost years will never come back to you, but you can have

the comfort of knowing the truth. Knowing is better than not knowing.

Again, please let me thank Carol, Ron, Lucy, Mary Anne, Marsha, and Alison. We become different persons ourselves as we grow older. If life is to be continually enriched, we must be constantly making new friends. All of us are not only what we have willed ourselves to be, but also to a great extent what our friends have made us. Thanks for being my friends.

P.S. I had the meeting with my daughter's parents the day before Mother's Day. We were together for 5½ hours. They are very warm and understanding people. Everything went very well and they are planning to tell her within the next six months. It could not have been more positive. They feel that Lisa and I will have a loving relationship. What more could I ask for?

Evelyn Zeimetz, NJ

DON'T CONTACT THE ADOPTIVE PARENTS...
AN ALTERNATIVE TO CONSIDER

As more and more birthmothers find their children between the ages of 8 and 18, while those few adoptive parents who are open become more visible, it has become almost automatic that a contact to the adoptive parents follows the conclusion of a minor search. Everyone wants to get on the bandwagon, to be the next one to compose a letter that would soften the hardest heart, the next one to come to a meeting with pictures of their child that the adoptive parents have sent. Everyone is so eager to prove to the adoptive parents how "open, honest and worthy" they are, like peasants throwing themselves on the mercy of the King and Queen, kissing their feet and hoping they'll get some kind words, not a swift kick! Everyone thinks they are ready for rejection, but secretly feel it could not happen to them because they are being so good, doing everything the "right way," seeking the approval of the almighty adoptive parents, who will surely bless them. Nobody wants to be the only one in the group who is doing nothing, or who is being "sneaky," or "unfair" to the adoptive parents. I know, because just a year ago, I had gone through all this and had just sent my son's parents a letter. Now, I offer all of you who are considering the same step a word of caution.

When I found my son, he was very young, only 8 years old. I was one of the very few birthmothers who had managed to locate a minor. I saw my son immediately, but the thought of contacting him at that time was ridiculous and unthinkable--direct contact would be very frightening to a pre-teen child, and the last thing I wanted was to hurt or frighten him. As far as contacting the parents-- I assumed they would not want to hear from me, and never even considered contacting them until 5 years later, when other mothers began to find and contact the adoptive families. My gut feeling had always been that the adoptive parents would be hostile, and this proved to be true. I very much regret that I let myself get caught up in other people's situations, which were really quite different from mine, and that I allowed my mind to be clouded with a lot of overly optimistic, sentimental garbage that I temporarily believed, because I wanted it to be true; because I thought I could beat the odds as a few others had. Now, if I could take that letter back I would, and would wait until my son was old enough for direct contact, which is what I had originally intended to do.

I still will go to Michael directly when he is older--he is now 14-- but in the meantime, I have lost the chance to see him or find out anymore about him, because the adoptive parents now know who I am. Also, I have given them several years to try to poison his mind against me, which I am sure they will attempt to do. I feel that contacting the parents has gotten me nothing, except some new information I might have obtained anyway by other means, and that it has cost me a lot, in terms of mental suffering, regret, and loss of the few opportunities I did have to look at my child as he grows. I feel that I made a fool of myself in writing to them--why should they care how I feel, or want to know anything about me? I hope everyone who has not yet made contact will consider the possibility of ending up in a similar situation, before they act.

I think it is realistic to assume that most adoptive parents of minors do not want any contact with birthmothers.

As one birthmother said, "They want to hear from us about as much as they want to find termites in their house." Everyone loves a winner, and those birthmothers who find a positive situation are more likely to write and speak about it than those who got the reaction I got. The publicity that these happy exceptions receive may lead birthmothers to expect that open-minded adoptive parents are the norm, raising expectations unrealistically, and causing great disappointment, when rejection comes. For every adoptive parent who is favorable to contact, there are many more who either never respond to the birthmother, or who respond with threats from a lawyer, or the agency, to prevent further contact. Even

DON'T CONTACT THE ADOPTIVE PARENTS...
AN ALTERNATIVE TO CONSIDER cont'd.

those who are not totally negative often seek to manipulate and judge the birthmother, making sure that the situation proceeds on their terms, under their control. If you are in this situation, try to remember that NOBODY has to give you permission or approval to meet your own child, and you do not have to offer yourself for inspection by the adoptive parents, unless you choose to do so.

If you are considering direct contact to an adolescent, it is good to remember that, if you are one of the lucky few whose child's parents are open and eager for contact, you can get to know them AFTER you have contacted your child, as Alison Ward has done. If they react terribly to learning of a direct contact, they couldn't have been so "open" in the first place. By going direct to your young person, you are at least giving them the choice of whether or not to tell their parents that a contact has been made, and showing that you feel they are mature enough to make their own choices about a further relationship with you. Our children are not mindless pieces of property until they are 18. We do not have to respect the adoptive parents' "property rights" unless we choose to.

Of course, direct, face-to-face contact opens you up to direct rejection. If your child tells you to your face that he does not want anything to do with you, that is the final blow. You can't go any further. There is a great temptation to avoid this, by going through the parents, by various kinds of intermediaries, either to the parents or child, or by sending letters which may be lost, intercepted, or just never answered. Many people would disagree with me, but at this point I cannot recommend contacting the parents, or using intermediaries, except in very special circumstances.

Each of you must make your own choices concerning contact. Nobody can tell you what to do about your own life, and nobody can really do it for you. If you are not ready to make your own contact, perhaps rather than seeking intermediaries you should work on getting yourself to the point where you can do your own contact.

There has been much said and written about the advantages of contacting the adoptive parents of minors, and a lot of it is valid. What I have tried to do here is to fairly present an opposing view, which has not been explored as often. I hope that those of you who are trying to decide what to do will realize that you DO have the choice to go directly to your adolescent adoptee, and that this may be a better choice than trying to deal with the parents, in some cases, especially if you are in a position to see and find out about your child while you are waiting.

Don't be misled by romantic theories about "sharing" with the adoptive parents, or creating open adoption where none exists. Adoptive parents, by and large, wish they had had their own children. They resent all the complications and pain that comes with adoption just as much as we do! To them, we are one more reminder of their infertility, that the child is not really theirs. No wonder they are so angry and scared, and wish we would stay away.

I hope I have given all of you something to think about, and that you will avoid my mistake. Whatever you choose to do, get ALL the facts first, even the unpleasant ones, and then do what you feel is best, not what others are doing, or telling you to do. It IS all right to do nothing, if you have found a young child, and it IS all right to make a direct contact to an adolescent, if that is what seems best for you and your child.

Mary Anne Cohen, NJ

THE LAW OF LOVE

The concept of loving trusting relationships among human beings is basic to the premise of God's universal teachings. So fundamental, yet so righteous, this Law of Love eclipses all else in life and remains a higher principle than mere man-made adoption regulations which were designed to "protect" people from ever knowing each other.

If learning the past, for whatever reason, will ease suffering and pain, then why not draw aside that cold dark curtain of ignorance and fear, let the warming light of love shine through, and eliminate forever those terrible shadows of secrecy? Why is it considered a threat for people involved in the adoption triangle to know each other? Do we really need to protect one another from learning the truth about each other?

I think not.
I say, let's make adoption more human. I say, closed records is an idea whose time has passed. It's abhorrent to all I hold dear and sacred. To my way of thinking, it's contrary to God's way, and above all...against His Law of Love.

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FINDING BILL AND MEETING FRIENDS

I want to thank you for the help and kindness I've received since joining your group. Everyone I've met is beautiful, warm and sincere.

Since joining ORIGINS my life has changed completely. I don't feel alone anymore. For 12 years I've kept it hidden, unable to talk about it to anyone, even my best friends. Sure, we can share the bond we have as far as homes, money, and children, but never the frustrations of adoption. Because no one can understand that kind of heartache you suffer and remember alone. Now I'm free, I'm not alone and I can express my feelings without being ashamed. Who cares if anyone feels I'm doing the wrong thing as long as I feel it's right for me? Besides, not only finding my son, which is the greatest, I have met and made new friends who I feel are wonderful people. For I wouldn't know what to do without them. Thank you, friends, thank you all!

It took only two months to find my son, Bill. My surrender was private and I was lucky enough to see the adoptive parents' last name on the folder. Not knowing what to do with it, I buried it deeply in my head. I finally remembered the name a few months ago. I played a hunch and got the birth certificate in March. I called the Surrogate's Office in the county where the adoption was finalized and asked for the name of their lawyer- that is public information. I learned that their lawyer was the same lawyer I had. That lawyer lied to me, the bastard. He told me they had their own attorney. The man at the Surrogate's Office told me to make copies of any medical or other information I wanted sent, and to send one to the lawyer and one to him. He'll do a follow up to make sure the lawyer contacts the adoptive parents. I have the parents' address, and I hope it was Bill and not one of his friends playing on his front lawn who I saw one day. How I prayed he would walk away from the house so I could ask him directions or something else just to hear his voice. Just to see him closer, maybe even to touch him.

I've been on cloud nine ever since. He's beautiful!!
God, am I nervous about contact! I wish I knew more about them and knew what I am up against. I wish I knew someone who knew them to get more insight. I guess I'll find out sooner or later, when I make contact.
Thanks again for your advice, support and kindness.

Diane LeMasson, NJ

God bless that mother far away
Who, feeling life too much to bear,
Gave up this child one desperate day
With one last hope for love and care.
With one last hope for love and care.
For could that be an easy task?
--Oh, how it must have hurt to say
"Be good, my child- don't be afraid"
...And turn and walk away.
And how she must still ache to feel
Those little arms so frail and thin
Pressed tightly 'round her in appeal,
And how she must feel guilt and sin.
But hers was tender, selfless sinning
That God forgives, and she is blessed
For she gave life and new beginning
To that small child; and may she rest
In peace and comfort, may she know
Her heart was pure, and God has smiled
On such a generous act of love
And blessed her child.
And now those little arms hug me,
Those big round eyes so dear
Look up in perfect trust and love,
And oh, thank God, this child is here!!!
---That another mother loved her so
She found the strength to let her go.
And may our lives be worthy of
That final, total gift of love.

Written by Jeannie Linstrom and
Contributed by Marsha Riben

In the midst of winter, I finally learned
that there was in me an invincible summer.

-Camus

MARK YOUR CALENDARS ...

* The next Philadelphia Adoption Forum Conference will be on October 2nd. The annual Conference is always an excellent one which includes participation from all members of the triad and the social work community. Lee Campbell, the President of CUB will be speaking this year, and there will be many workshops of interest to everyone, regardless of your level of search and contact. Charleen Justice, Coordinator of the CUB Sister Program is in charge of getting birthparents to conduct the workshops at the Conference. This functions as a East Coast regional conference for all intents and purposes.

* The next national American Adoption Congress Conference will be held in early June 1983 in Columbus, Ohio. Please try to attend, for your benefit and to contribute to the strength of the AAC, a coalition of adoption related groups. ORIGINS has been an organizational affiliate for a year, and many of our members have joined as individuals.

Please let us know of other conferences in your region so we can let others know who might be interested in attending.

CONCERNED UNITED BIRTHPARENTS TO PUBLICLY COME OUT
AS SEARCH GROUP

One of the many lengthy discussions held in San Antonio at the AAC Conference dealt with CUB's policy on search, which has heretofore been considered a "personal venture." Many people believe that, in order to attract new members and to fully serve current members' needs, CUB must openly become a search group in addition to the other valuable services they provide in the areas of support, understanding, and public education. It was decided to make public and above board CUB's efforts in the area of search, but to recognize personal limitations on the part of many CUB regional representatives and branch leaders as to their level of search expertise.

We applaud CUB's emergence as a national search and support organization. We hope that all ORIGINS' members will hold dual memberships, as CUB provides many services that ORIGINS does not and can not. ORIGINS will remain a highly activist and vocal organization primarily for birthmothers of minor children. As someone once said, "If CUB is the NAACP, then ORIGINS is the Black Panthers."

YOU ARE HERE

Though you are not here now-
You are here.
Though my eyes do not behold you-
My thoughts retain your vision.
Though my arms do not embrace you-
My spirit won't let you go.
And though my heart cries out to me,
Wishing your presence,
Here, Now ---

I have the consolation of knowing that
Mentally, I can behold you,
And
Spiritually, I can embrace you.

By M.D. Rubin, 1977

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR ADOPTION GETS THE AWARD FOR
DISHONESTY IN ADVERTISING ...

The May 24, 1982 issue of TIME magazine which was on the stands in California carried a full page advertisement placed by the NCFCA. Two-thirds of the ad was a young, white (and supposedly in good health) naked baby looking helpless and appealing. The headline read:

HELP US WORK FOR THE ADOPTION OF UNWANTED CHILDREN

It went on to say: "We're the National Committee For Adoption, a rapidly growing group of people coast to coast who think it's senseless and tragic that thousands of couples can't find any children to adopt while the number of unwanted children skyrockets.

If you think adoption is a better way, join us. Call our number now (please keep trying if it's busy). We'll tell you what we're doing to bring unwanted babies and wanting parents together.

Call one of these toll-free numbers and help us work for the adoption of unwanted children: 800-638-2000. In Maryland, call 301-933-4801."

If you are as outraged by this blatant example of false adver-

NCFCA USES FALSE ADVERTISING, cont'd.

tising as many of us are, please voice your objections to:

*National Committee For Adoption, Suite 326, 1346 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036

*Letters To The Editor and/or Advertising Department, TIME, Time & Life Building, Rockefeller Center, New York NY 10020

If the NCFCA's members truly wanted to adopt unwanted children, they could do so quickly and easily by taking one of the available special needs children into their homes and hearts. There are tens of thousands of them, and around the country their pictures are in books similar to the Sears & Roebuck catalog for all to see. They desperately need loving parents and homes. Instead, NCFCA members hold out for healthy, white infants.

So much for truth in advertising. Please let us know if you see these ads in your local papers or magazines.

MINOR SEARCH BOOK TO BE PUBLISHED BY
TRIADOPTION LIBRARY IN JULY

A book about people's experiences with minor search and contact will be published in July 1982 by Triadoption Library. The need for such a book is obvious, but this is the first effort in this direction. Fifty questionnaires were mailed out, and only a small percentage were expected to be returned, which is the norm for such mailings. Instead, they received over a 200% return-- it seemed that most people who received the questionnaire completed their own, and also made a copy for a friend to complete. This response rate is phenomenal, and should make for an important piece of work in this area of concern for all of us.

To order your copy, send a check or money order to: Triadoption Library, 7571 Westminster Avenue, Westminster, California 92683. The title of the book is "Searching For Minors" and its cost is only \$5.



"There's something I have to tell you, Harold. You were adopted."

NATIONAL RIGHT TO LIFE CONVENTION IN NJ IN JULY

The national Right To Life Convention will be held in Cherry Hill NJ on July 15-17. Marjory Mecklenberg, a friend of The National Committee For Adoption who is the Director of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs in DC will be a major speaker. There will be workshops on Adoption, Prenatal Counseling, and Adolescent Pregnancy, among other topics. A number of ORIGINS members will attend the Convention and those workshops mentioned earlier, with the express purpose of educating those there about the truths of adoption and not permitting lies to be told. RTL uses the slogan, "Adoption Not Abortion." We say "Adoption Means More Abortions." We'll write about the Conference in our July newsletter.

NATIONAL AMERICAN ADOPTION CONGRESS CONFERENCE
HELD IN SAN ANTONIO TX JUNE 3-6

This article won't be as polished as I would have liked, but I wanted to include information about the Conference in this newsletter so ORIGINS members would have this as soon as possible.

This was the first national conference I'd attended. Last year, when the meeting was in Kansas City, I was meeting my daughter and her adoptive parents for the first time. The year before, in 1980, I was just barely out of the closet, and was not a likely candidate for a national meeting. Many of my impressions may be without the benefit of experience with previous AAC Conferences, so please bear with me.

Even though a trip to San Antonio was not included in my 1982 budget, I felt I had to go to this conference. I was paid for an article I wrote for The New York Times' New Jersey Section about the need for adoption reform, and that provided my registration fee. Although there were only a few other people attending from the New York Metropolitan area, I knew there would be many others there from all over the country whom I'd come to know over the telephone and through letters. I wanted very much to match faces with voices, and meet others who might broaden my perspective about adoption.

This year's conference was sponsored by Lutheran Social Service, an agency in San Antonio which promotes and is involved in open adoptions. The theme was "Progress Is: The Adoption Triad United." I flew out to Texas with Betty Jean Lifton, which was an experience in itself for me. Although I've spoken with her many times over the past year, since the set up of "Jack" last summer, and met her in person, I felt fortunate to have the benefit of so many hours with her now. As I've said before, reading B.J.'s "Lost and Found" changed my life, as it has many others'.

Wednesday night now seems a blur, but Alicia Giesa and I finally found each other and stayed up late talking with Tom Allington, the President of the AAC who had stepped in when Penny Partridge resigned. Tom had taken offense at the article in our last newsletter when I criticized the AAC for not permitting any discussion of minor search at the conference, much less anything else controversial, but I insisted that my criticism was valid.

Thursday morning was taken up by registration and reviewing the Sales & Exhibit Room, which was filled with books, papers, buttons, and other information supplied by many individuals and groups. Jean Paton, the founder of Orphan Voyage, was there with chains draped around her shoulders, to signify the bondage closed adoption creates. I'd never met this very wonderful woman before, although I had spoken with her on the phone and exchanged letters. She has been talking about all this for 30 years--only nobody listened before. People met in groups informally, and there were many of us who were mothers of minor children who congregated to exchange views.

The speaker at the luncheon on the first day was Linda Cannon Burgess, the author of "The Art of Adoption" and former Exec. Director of Pierce Warwick Adoption Agency & The Barker Foundation in Washington, D.C. Linda spoke of the history of adoption: she should know because she arranged over 900 adoptions. One statement of hers later became the buzzword of the conference: "What we don't need is birthmothers making surreptitious contact with their teenage children." Now, many of us know what we are: surreptitious contacters. That afternoon there was a panel discussion given by Lee Campbell, the President of CUB; B.J. Lifton, author and "professional adoptee"; Marge Gilling, Adoption Supervisor for Catholic Charities of Green Bay WI; and Phyllis Speedlin, adoptive parent in an open adoption.

Thursday night provided a meeting of CUB leaders, which included a discussion of coming out as a search group (which passed), the ethics of paid researchers, and what our response would be if the AAC's Directors came out with a statement against minor search, as they had been pressed to do by many adoptees' groups all over the country. I'm proud to say that the room, which was packed with people, was unanimous in their decision that we would walk out of the conference if the Board made such a statement. Luckily, we never had to make good on our promise, because minor search wasn't even mentioned except by Jean Paton (God love her) and, indirectly, by Linda Burgess.

Friday morning provided a general session about "Working Together For Common Goals," presented by Mary Jo Rillera, Pres. of Triadoption Library; Dr. Dirck Brown, Director of PACER; and Jim Gritter, Child Welfare Supervisor of the Community, Family and Children's Services in Michigan. Mary Jo also presented her slide show entitled "We're Together Now," named after a moving song written by her husband. For me, as for many, that song will always remind me of the 1982 Conference, and all the emotions and tears I shared with so many friends.

There was a choice of workshops on Friday morning and afternoon, and AAC Regional Meetings early in the evening. Then, due to a change in schedule, elections were held later that night, much to the chagrin of some who had come to hear "Issues We Agree to Disagree About." Some members, inclu-

ding some who had proxies from their groups, were unaware of the last minute change in plans, and were unable to vote in the election of Board members.

Late on Friday night, there was a discussion of Feminism, and its relation to adoption, in the CUB Suite. There were many ORIGINS members there, some of whom I'd never met before.

Early Saturday morning, a few people who had requested to speak about what we agreed to disagree about spoke for 10 minutes each, including Jean Paton of Orphan Voyage, B.J. Lifton, and myself. I reacted to something that had happened the day before: someone objected to Lee Campbell's anger, as if she had no reason to be unhappy. Everyone seems to treat open adoption as a panacea to birthmothers' pain, and I spoke of my belief that there can never be anything good for a mother when she loses her child, and that we have every right to remain angry.

Workshops continued all day. On Sat. afternoon, Lee Campbell conducted "Beyond The Shadows: A Study of Birthparenthood," which was an intense session for many of us. She included sensitivity awareness in the workshop, which involved remembering many of the feelings we all went through when we first were pregnant with the child we would later lose, and how we were forced to make our decision.

Saturday's dinner was a Mexican banquet, with Albert Burstein, former Assemblyman from New Jersey and a member of the Model States Adoption Act panel. The "mini-fiesta" was enjoyable, and Burstein's speech was effective in explaining his reasons for supporting open records legislation. In his speech, he made mention of the "extremely vocal birthmothers organizations" in New Jersey which were helping in the push for openness in adoption, which made me feel that all our hours of effort aren't in vain.

There was a wine and cheese open house in the CUB Suite on Saturday night, which was packed until about 2 A.M. The diehards stayed up until (I know you won't believe it) 5 A.M. This was due, in large part, to the legendary staying up abilities of Carole Anderson and Mary Jo Rillera. We even kept Lee Campbell up until 4 A.M., which if any of you know Lee was no small accomplishment.

Sunday morning was pretty much a washout, and seemed to have no real purpose except to provide a forum for anyone to speak of anything which had gone unsaid. That, in itself, was valuable. We discussed the 1983 conference, which will be held in Columbus, Ohio, and the 1984 conference to be held in Seattle. Someday, we hope to get it back to the East Coast, but at least Columbus is fairly cheap to fly to.

I missed my plane, along with Sandy Musser and another birthmother, thanks to the expert driving of Robin Wilson of North Carolina. I hope Robin has better luck finding her child lost to adoption than she did finding the airport! We returned to the hotel, which was across the street from The Alamo, and spent yet another night with Mesdames Anderson and Rillera.

I can't possibly impart to you all of my feelings and remembrances from the 1982 Conference. I've left out things like:

- * Warren Siegmond, author of "In Search of A Stranger", singing the song he wrote to the tune of "I've Been Working On The Railroad" entitled, "We're The Girls of Edna Gladney".
- * Long conversations with birthmothers and adoptive mothers who have an open adoption, complete with pictures, letters, and open communication from day one.
- * Meeting one of my idols, Jean Paton, and trying to learn from her about helping people and reconciliation.
- * Trying to educate social workers about the truths of adoption from the birthmother's perspective.
- * Meeting Emma May Vilardi, who runs International Soundex Registry; Rachel Rivers, of OASIS in Florida; Keg Niles, whose search handbooks are so valuable; and so many others who I enjoyed talking with.
- * Realizing that ALMA is NOT considered the national organization for adoptees except in New York and California. Since I have so many problems with Florence Fisher, and ALMA's "over 18" policy, this was a great relief.
- * Consuming many margaritas, and sharing many tears with other birthmothers with whom I had so much in common.
- * The strong emotions we all had when Mary Jo Rillera played the tape of "We're Together Now."

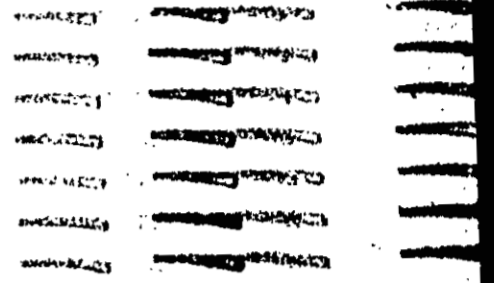
I miss all my friends who were there with me in San Antonio, and I look forward to being with them again in Columbus next June, where no subject will be considered out of bounds to cover in workshops. The 200 people who were in Texas shared many valuable experiences, and I wish everyone could have been with us.

Next year, please plan to attend. You'll be so glad you attended, not only because of the people you'll meet, but also because of what you'll take home with you: recharged batteries and a broader perspective of what needs to be done.

To Lee, Carole, Gail, Susan, Alicia, Barbara, Jana, Kathy, Ginnie, Mary Jo, Dorothy, B.J., Jean, Robin, Marie, Ann, Sandy, and all the others who made my first national conference so very special, I love you all and miss you.

Alison Ward, NJ

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