



**CATA**

CAPE COD ASSOCIATION FOR TRUTH IN ADOPTION  
BOX 606, WOODS HOLE, MASSACHUSETTS 02543

January 18, 1983

Dear Member:

Once again, it is time to resume our regular activities. We have a brand-new year to work with, and many things to do. This is a catch-up issue! You'll find lots of news and several items which I hope you'll respond to.

Meetings

We had no December meeting, due to holiday activities. Our January meeting was cancelled as many people were unavailable to attend. So, mark February's meeting date on your calendar now, and plan to attend.

--Sunday, February 6th, 2:00 pm. Whitcomb Pavillion basement meeting room, Cape Cod Hospital, Hyannis.

--Sunday, March 13th, 2:00 pm; same location.

Look

Who saw the Look program on December 27th? Look is on Channel 7, weekdays at 4:00 pm. On Mondays, the program deals with interpersonal relationships. On Dec. 27th, part of the program was devoted to adoptees in Search.

Featured were: Susan Darke of the Adoption Connection, the MacLaren family, and the Rossario family.

Susan Darke spoke of the need to Search, and emphasized that it is not an attempt to hurt one's adoptive parents.

She said she'd always felt she was "different".

Susan related her first recollection of being aware of her adoption. This incident occurred when she was 7 years old; she was taunted in the schoolyard by other children. She was later reassured by her adoptive parents that she was loved and wanted by them. The memory stayed with her.

She went on to say that "it's not what you've found, but that you've found it."

Susan explained that Search is emotionally and physically draining. She feels that it is right to wait until the adoptee reaches 18, because a child is not prepared to deal with the strain.

She reports a 95% success rate in Mass.

She mentioned that all members of the adoption triad must cope with the fear of rejection.

Alicen MacLaren described her reunion with Betty, her birth-mother: "When I first saw Betty, I saw me, too...I felt great when I saw her." She discussed the thrill of resembling someone. Alicen felt apprehensive at first, as didn't know who knew about her, in her birthfamily.

Ben and Marie MacLaren, Alicen's adoptive parents, never kept it a secret that Alicen was adopted. However, the situation had an unreal quality: "we knew her 'other' parents were out there, but we never really thought of them as real people."

Betty's greatest fear as a birthparent was that Alicen would hate her, and prayed she would understand.

Mrs. Rossario is an enlightened adoptive mother who realizes that most people have a need to know their roots. She hopes that her son will want to know his birthparents. He is now 9.

Mrs. Rossario mentions adoption a lot, so he will know it's okay to discuss it with her.

Look also had an interesting News Flash: Catholic Social Services of Green Bay, Wisconsin, started arranging open adoptions 7 years ago. They also keep information, names, personal profiles, and messages from the birthparents in a file for the adoptees' reference.

I have written to this agency to request more detailed information on their policies, which I hope to share with you soon.

Please respond to Look, for their positive presentation on adoption and Search; be sure to encourage them to have more of these programs in the future.

Look  
P.O. Box 7777  
Boston, Mass. 02114

#### News from California

Last year, Triadoption Library, Westminster, Calif., received \$4,600 from football pro/actor Jim Brown's Celebrity Bullseye appearance on their behalf!

#### State Reunion Registries

We now have up-to-date information on state reunion registries; states that will conduct a Search on behalf of adoptees; states that will act as intermediaries in reunion; and states allowing partial/complete access to adoption records, to adoptees.

All of this is compiled according to each individual state. If you have questions regarding new developments in a particular state, please ask.

## The AAC and the National Committee on Adoption

"...I firmly believe that we can make a difference but we must stand tall and together. By your support to the AAC the time for change could be cut in half. Our opponents call themselves the Nat'l. Committee on Adoption and let me assure you they are very well organized and appear to have no problem with financial backing. They do in fact have a full-time lobbyist in Washington. This is one of the goals of the AAC. In future months we will keep you abreast of AAC organization goals and gains."

--Susan Darke

Adoption Connection Dec. 1982  
newsletter

The AAC is the American Adoption Congress, an organization that seeks to join all adoptee and birthparent groups together into a unified whole. I have joined, and hope you will, too. Yearly membership is \$10.

## The Importance of Public Education

I often discuss the importance of "speaking out" with our members. Recently, an opinion was expressed that it's hopeless to try and educate people about the realities of adoption. My friend felt this was true, because it is so difficult for those who have not lived the experience to understand it. She related the inability of some family members to comprehend our feelings about the adoption situation.

I agree that it is hard for anyone who isn't adopted, to understand "what it feels like", to know our needs and yearnings. Likewise, it is easy for non-birthparents to perpetrate the myth that "birthparents don't care" and "birthparents forget".

It is vital that we don't give up. No, we can't change everyone's mind. Wherever one goes, one finds people whose minds are closed to Truth. Some people simply "don't want to hear it". But, the world is also full of receptive minds--people who will at least listen.

Many changes have taken place in adoption: people daring to Search; sharing their experiences; expressing their needs. Changes are even being made in adoption policies and legislation.

All this is a relatively new phenomenon. These things never would have happened if the people involved hadn't spoken up for themselves.

On January 15th, we celebrated Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday. May we all remember Dr. King, and the example he gave us, as we consider our own struggle for freedom.

It is important to realize that each life touches many other lives. When you share your adoption experience with one person, that information will be spread to a wide circle of people. This is how attitudes change; with person-to-person sharing.

We will never convince the entire world, but we can open a few eyes. We must never stop trying.

#### Progressive Adoption Reform Legislation

As you know, we all have a responsibility to do all we can for adoption reform. As a Goal for 1983, we all should make the effort to actively support legislation for progressive adoption reform.

To start this project, I have obtained the names and legislative addresses of our state and federal lawmakers. I have requested information regarding all bills on adoption for 1983. We will receive additional in-put from the Adoption Connection, CUB and AAC newsletters.

It is necessary to support legislation for two reasons:

1. to make future adoptions more humane, and to break down existing barriers separating triad members;
2. to protect the rights we already have.

For example, Mass House Bill #7441 sought to limit the amount of non-identifying information which can legally be given an adoptee. Any adoptee requesting background data, would be given even less to work with than now.

At our next meeting, we will work on drafting general letters to our legislators. The idea is to have several copies on hand, so that we will be ready to respond when new legislation is proposed. Hand-outs with sample letters and directions on contacting our legislators will be available.

#### Select Committee on Children and Youth

The following comes to us from the August 1982 CUB Communicator:

George Miller, Democratic House member from California, has proposed creation of a bipartisan Select Committee on Children and Youth, to highlight the condition of the nation's children, young people, and families. The proposed House committee would have continuing oversight responsibilities for the status and needs of children, youth and families. The committee proposal was introduced in the House March 13st, as House Resolution 421, and has been referred to the Rules Committee.

It is vital that we write our Congressmen to let them know

that birthparents and adoptees should have a place on the committee.

#### Release of Confidentiality to State

Each state has a department which supervises all adoptions. Birthparents are encouraged to write to the department in the state where the adoption was processed. They should: 1) send a Waiver of Confidentiality, and 2) express their feelings about being "protected" by confidentiality.

In some cases, taking this action has opened doors for adoptees in Search. Apparently some agencies have been willing to help them, because the birthparents have given written consent to be contacted.

Of course, each birthparent should follow these same steps to directly inform the agency of their wishes.

#### Comparing Abortion and Adoption Loss

CUB is putting together a leaflet designed to give several women's comparisons of living with abortion and adoption loss. The leaflet is intended as an educational tool for those who believe that adoption is the "solution" to an untimely pregnancy and that abortion is always the "wrong" alternative. I am not taking a stand on abortion here; merely suggesting that these people listen to those who have lived with both experiences, before making a judgement. Address your statement to:

Attn.: Leaflet Committee  
CUB, Inc.  
595 Central Ave.  
Dover, N.H. 03820

Warren E. Siegmund

When I ordered my copy of In Search of a Stranger, it arrived with a surprise! I was sent a stack of posters and news items to share with you. Two are included in this letter.

Mr. Siegmund is coordinator of a project to have the words "adoptee" and "birthparent" included in dictionaries. He has offered a contest award of \$100 to the person who sends in the best definition of "adoptee".

Those of you who have already read In Search of a Stranger may wish to give Mr. Siegmund your reactions to the book, as well as to participate in his contest:

Warren E. Siegmund  
382 Central Park West  
New York, NY 10025

Pen-Pal Request

Included is a letter from Larry Bart lien, an adoptee from Oregon. I'm sharing it with you in hopes that someone will know of an appropriate pen-pal for Larry. His request has also been forwarded to the Adoption Connection and CUB newsletters.

Ann Landers

Ann Landers has been notorious for printing anti-search, pro-adoption letters. It has been suggested that we write to Ms. Landers' boss, requesting that her column include letters from "our side". It would be good to see a wider range of opinions expressed.

Write:

Mr. Steve Jehorek  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Field Newspaper Syndicate  
1703 Kaiser Ave.  
Irving, Calif. 92714

Larry Bart lien

~~Pen-Pal~~ ~~Pen-Pal~~ ~~Pen-Pal~~ ~~Pen-Pal~~ ~~Pen-Pal~~  
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Oregon  
Adoptive  
Rights  
Association  
P.O. Box 1332  
Beaverton, Oregon 97075

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Hello,

I am searching to find adoptees who've lived a life as nearly similar as possible to the life I've lived. Please help me in my search to locate these Pen-Pals. In my specific search, I am looking for: 'within the family' adoptees (preferably, like myself, adopted from birthmother by her blood brother and his wife). Plus, the very same adoptee searched for must be an only child.

I have known that my birthmother was my Aunt for about five years now. I stole the information to find out. Last year I told my birthmother that I knew. She will not tell me anything to help me locate my genetic father. She hasn't had any other child. I am the only child in my adopted family.

Meeting other adoptees has helped to melt down some of my anger and isolation. Since meeting O.A.R.A. members and other adoptees, I have felt like I have been meeting real human people for the first time in my life. It feels great being better understood. However, better is not always being quite completely or easily understood. Thus brings me to find reason for doing this search.

I know you'll understand my urgent need to search for a common understanding. -In that my need extends to a more rare circumstantial extreme. Thankyou for your help. I'm sure that any Pen-Pal you can find, who qualifies for this search, will be thankfull also.

Adoptee,  
Larry Bart lien

Larry Bart lien

### Women Searchers Needed

We have a request from Mrs. Lyle Warner, of Boston. She is conducting a study for her doctoral thesis on women adoptees who Search. She would like to know about:

- 1) how and when adoptees were told about their adoption, and their birthparents;
- 2) their decision to Search;
- 3) their reunion experiences, if applicable;
- 4) women aged 20-30 years

Subjects will be interviewed in their homes; their identities will remain confidential.

Those who would like to be interviewed, please call or write Mrs. Warner as soon as possible. She will be coming to the Cape soon for this purpose.

Mrs. Lyle Warner  
24 West Cedar St.  
Boston, Mass. 02108  
Phone: 523-1922

### New Reading

I'm Still Me, by Betty Jean Lifton; Bantam, \$1.95. Recently available, this concerns a teen-age adoptee and makes excellent reading. Suggestion: it would make a great gift!

Lost and Found will be available in April, through Dial Press.

In Search of a Stranger, Warren E. Siegmund; Cameo Press, \$5.95.

Once Removed: Voices from Inside the Adoption Triangle, Wendie Redmond and Sherry Sleightholm; McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd.

Death by Adoption, by Joss Shawyer

One Against the Storm, by Stanley C. Mann; Quest Publishers, \$6.95.

Open Adoption, Open Placement, by January Roberts and Diane Robie; Adoption Press, \$3.95.

Search Aftermath and Adjustment, available from Nancy Sitterly/Orphan Voyage Conn., \$4.50

How it Feels to be Adopted, by Jill Krementz; published by Alfred A. Knopf. Available since Nov. 1982.

--Who has our copy of Orphan Voyage, by Jean Paton??

We now have I'm Still Me and Once Removed in our group library.

#### Greeting Cards

How many of you have wanted to send a greeting card to your newly-found relatives (or to put into your child's adoption file)? I've been doing this for over a year now, and have learned it's quite a problem!

When will someone create a new line of greeting cards, made for people in our situation? We have a real need for this.

For instance, you can't send a card saying, "thank-you for all the wonderful memories"; or one that talks about "the years we've shared"; or "all the nice things you've done through the years"! It can be an awkward problem.

When will someone design cards that say, "how I've missed you through the years!", or "how good to see you at last!"

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A happy and productive New Year to us all.

Sincerely,

*Luana*



## 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 such 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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## GENERAL BACKGROUND MATERIAL

There are approximately 5,000,000 adoptees in the United States who share with all of humanity the need for roots, for heritage—yet, since the 1920s they have been prevented by law from learning the names of their natural parents. These statutory restrictions on access to personal histories deny a truth about the past to an ever growing army of searchers who are being forbidden a basic human right—the right to know the truth about one's origins. Thus begins the expensive, time consuming and often heartbreaking "search for a stranger," for most adoptees feel that they can fill in cultural and ethnic gaps and reach an honest understanding of themselves only by looking for and meeting with their natural parents.

The desire to know one's own mother and father is not confined to any single social or economic class nor does it have anything to do with childhood happiness or unhappiness. The longing is simply a human need for identity. However, as far as adoptees are concerned, the law prohibits them from satisfying this need. For nearly a century the records of their births and adoptions have been sealed.

The adoption process is often a triangle of despair, loneliness and sorrow—a secret and final thing affecting adoptive and natural parents as well as adoptees. Natural parents almost always have genuine concern over the fate of the child they relinquished; and adoptive parents, no matter how much they love and want to help their children, simply do not have and cannot get the missing information.

An adoptee is issued a new birth certificate. Whatever life he may have had before the signing of the papers is assumed to have never occurred. In many instances, the natural mothers who have been convinced to give up their babies haven't fared any better.

Annette Baran, a Los Angeles social worker, has spent nearly twenty years working for adoption agencies. At the annual conference of the American Orthopsychiatric Association in 1974, she described her profession:

... We helped a terrified pregnant girl to understand that out of love she would relinquish her child. We put her in a maternity home and said that afterwards she could go back to her way of life (with contraception) and that everything would be beautiful again and that emotionally she would once more be a virgin.

... The agency head bragged that their agency was the best because only 3 percent of their natural mothers kept their children.

... When adopted adults came back to seek information, we saw this as sick and obsessed and we spent the time quizzing them about why they had a need to know. We sat there in possession of their record, their identity, and we grudgingly offered them bits and pieces that we decided they could and should have.

... Over the past fifteen years I have seen many birth parents who should never have relinquished their children and would not have if they had really been given the right to decide, and not made to feel guilty if they kept, and I have to admit that I was probably instrumental in perpetuating this practice for a long time.

Little wonder that the lonely road to finding a biological parent has become a trail of tears. Nevertheless, the number of adults who had been adopted as children, who had spent their formative years as the unquestioning (but secretly curious) sons or daughters of adoptive parents, and who at middle age have started searching for their "birth parents" is growing.

Statistically, most of these searchers are women; and it is most often their mothers whom they seek. But virtually everyone who was adopted (according to adoptees and the social scientists who study them) has a desire to find the answers to at least two major questions about their biological parents: What are, or were, they like? and Why did they give me away?

In years past, it was considered that searching or even consciously thinking about searching was a sign of disloyalty and ingratitude toward one's adoptive parents; and according to psychoanalysts, "It was also generally considered a symptom of personal maladjustment.

All this is changing. A growing number of adoptees—though only a small percentage of the overall total are searching, and—they're becoming more militant. This shift is attributed to a number of factors: the present climate of increased social and political candor, the increasing liberalization of attitudes toward new sexual relationships, racially mixed families and children born out of wedlock, a stimulation of the national curiosity by such best sellers as *Roots*, and organizations formed in recent years to assist adoptees such as the Kansas City Adult Adoptees Organization. →

Many of the searchers want to repeal the laws which require the sealing of adoption records and do away with almost a century of secrecy. This would have enormous repercussions if applied retroactively, since an integral part of the agreement between two sides of the adoptive triangle has always been an iron-clad guarantee of confidentiality.

The sealing of adoptees' birth records has given rise to one of the most controversial issues in America today. Natural parents, adoptive parents, half-sisters and half-brothers—all are affected by legal rulings which have made it impossible for children adopted in most of the western world to learn the facts about their origins.

The reasons behind the search? Some have a medical mystery they hope to solve, some hope to discover their racial origins. Still others have learned that they were abandoned as infants, or adopted on the black market. Whatever their motives, these adoptees believe that theirs is a valid reason.

To satisfy this curiosity, adoptees are willing to go to great lengths, some legal, some illegal. Many, even after a lifetime of searching never succeed. However, if the continued efforts to open closed records are ultimately successful, an adopted person would be permitted to examine court and adoption agency files—now permanently impounded by state law—for clues to the reason he was surrendered for adoption and where he might look for his maternal and paternal ancestors.

Although England, Scotland, Finland and Israel have open adoption records, many American adoptive parents believe such legislation is a threat to an adoptees' loyalty and affection. In their opinion, if the sealed envelopes were opened to the searchers, there would no longer be a legal means of preventing a mature child from alienating them and establishing a relationship with his "real" parents.

Are successful searches happy occasions for the birth parents? Not always. Many are learning that reunions can suddenly turn into confrontations. In one instance, an adopted daughter caused a divorce by searching out her natural mother. The girl appeared at the mother's door and said, "Hello, Mother," in the presence of the mother's husband. The husband had not been informed about the illegitimate child and felt he could no longer trust his wife.

Yet the search continues. At least four legal actions brought by adult adoptees on the grounds of a denial of their constitutional rights are pending in California. Two court decisions in New York and New Jersey have strongly supported the right of adult adoptees to obtain information about their natural heritage, but stopping short of throwing open adoption agency records. These decisions noted that the secrecy cloaking adoptions, "served all parties extremely well for many years at a time when society was not prepared to accept out-of-wedlock pregnancy or the single-parent family."

A class action suit brought in Federal District Court in Manhattan (apparently the first of its kind in the nation) is directed only at New York State and City laws, but a victory would set a precedent for other states. At present, Kansas, Alabama, Virginia, Alaska, South Dakota and Kentucky open records to adoptees on request.

The organization that brought the suit, the Adoptees Liberty Movement Association, contends that the sealing of records violates the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment by causing adoptees "psychological pain, suffering and damage not experienced by non-adopted persons."

There are other excellent reasons for abandoning the archaic concept of anonymity—a child might be carrying a difficult-to-diagnose heredity disease. Without his family's medical history, he has no way of knowing what he had inherited. He could become a cripple—or worse. Another problem is incest. By one estimate, there may be as many as fifty thousand incestuous marriages in the United States involving adoptees who are unaware of a blood relationship with their partners.

Advocates of the open record movement contend:

No one really seems to get the message. Whether you have a good or a bad adoptive home, you have an identity crisis. Most people especially adoptive parents cannot understand the compelling need for identity experienced by many of the adopted children. All too often adoption agencies believe that adoptees who search are shallow and ungrateful, neurotic and maladjusted, disturbed and psychotic and that generally they should be glad that somebody took them in.

In some respects, this attitude is shared by New York State's Adoptive Parents Committee:

Not all biological parents want to be identified. It's an invasion of privacy. It's also an invasion of privacy on the part of the biological mother who could go to the records and find her child who might be very contented.

An adoptive mother replied:

These are people we are talking about, not puppies or kittens that one takes in. You cannot deny the existence of the people who give birth. You might like to but you can't. Adopted children have the right to know about biological parents. Determining identity is a difficult enough process for someone brought up by his natural parents; it is terribly more complex for the individual whose ancestry is completely unknown to him.

An adoptee states:

There was a strong sense of being a guest in the house . . . the relationship hinged on being able to satisfy the needs of the parents. They made an orphan of me although I was not. I didn't have ancestors, history or heritage. Why is it necessary in adoption to cut away all of your history? Why must adoptees be forced to live a contrived identity in a contrived reality, not just as a child, but for all our lifetime?

Another adoptee:

I had a very happy adoptive home but I was always curious. I was afraid to ask anything because I felt guilty. I had a loyalty to my adoptive parents and I didn't want to hurt them.

Many adoptive parents ask:

Why did you want to find the woman who gave you up? She never did anything for you, we took you in and cared for you and this is the thanks we get?

With it all the search goes on. It is uncertain, expensive and humiliating. It can be time consuming, emotionally draining and degrading. It requires courage, cunning, persistence and luck. What drives them on? Why start a search that is stacked against them from the very beginning? Perhaps it can be summed up in this way:

Every adolescent, adopted or not, goes through an identity crisis. In some people's judgement you find your identity when you find and know your birth parents. In the opinion of others, identity is something INSIDE you, not outside—and the search goes on all your life. For some, the search is a joyous experience to be shared with the entire family, but for untold thousands of less fortunate children the time to search is indeed a time to cry.

