

ADOPTION CIRCLES

MISSING PIECES THRU ADOPTION NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 1 SPRING 1991

WELCOME

by THE EDITOR

In 1988 two women started an adoption support group in Surrey, British Columbia, Canada. Marg Beddington, one of the founders, is now the president of *MISSING PIECES THRU ADOPTION*. This non-profit organization has grown rapidly to five chapters — a new one every eight months. The newest chapter is in Thunder Bay, Ontario. The other chapters are in Abbotsford, Vancouver and Coquitlam. *ADOPTION CIRCLES* is our quarterly newsletter. (*Chapter details are on the back cover.*)

The term “adoption triangle” was coined by Annette Baran, co-author of *The Adoption Triangle* and *Lethal Secrets*, in an attempt to bring attention to the three roles in adoption. This evolution was particularly important for adoptees and birth mothers. Prior to *The Adoption Triangle*

study, adoption theory assumed that birth mothers — simply — went on with their lives; it was also assumed that adoptees did not need a connection with their roots.

However, the circle goes one step further than the triangle. It symbolizes the integration that both adoptees and birth parents obtain after reunion. As well, studies have shown that the reunion enhances the adoptive parents relationship to their children.

The circle also represents an important tool in healing — the circle of sharing. We encourage all triangle members and siblings to attend our monthly support groups.

Contributions of letters and reunion stories are welcome. Address correspondence to the editor, Suite 102, 2045 Franklin Street, Vancouver, BC, CANADA V5L 1R4.

MY REUNION

by KATHRYN

On October 27, 1990, I met my daughter Trina for the first time since her birth. I never really met her at the birth since she was whisked away from the delivery room very quickly.

This meeting was much nicer — it was at the home of Audrey Scammell of *TRIAD* in Victoria. I had some assistance in my search from Audrey and she graciously offered us the use of her livingroom.

I must admit it was a strange feeling meeting an adult blood relative. I didn't know what to expect, I thought she might be really upset about being put up for adoption. I just didn't know what it would be like.

Well, I didn't have to worry about it at all. Within a few minutes it was as if we'd been friends for a long time.

Trina is 21 now and a college student in Victoria (where she was born and raised). I heard all about

boyfriends and her Mom and Dad. It was all very interesting to me, of course.

Her Mom sent a photo album of pictures from when she was a baby to her teen years, which I got to bring home to get reprints made. I was happy to have the pictures but it kind of made me sad to see what I had missed also.

We compared pictures of her in her album to pictures of my other two girls for some resemblances, but we couldn't see any.

We talked for about three hours and then got hungry and went to a restaurant and bar for supper.

Trina said she never really thought much about why she was put up for adoption, just that she figured there must have been a good reason. This really surprised me

continued on page 3

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REVIEWS

REUNIONS

Sundays on NBC at 2:30 p.m.

The producers of a new half-hour television show search and arrange reunions between people separated by adoption, kidnapping and other events. It re-enacts the initial separation with artificial acting, but, the interviews and live reunions are tear-jerkers.

The December 9, 1990 show featured an adoptee, Kim, searching for her birth family. As a teenager, her grandmother had contacted her birth family. Unfortunately her adoptive mother would not allow her contact.

Kim is now married with three children who suffer from physical ailments. She lives in the state of Nebraska which has very stringent disclosure laws and she is still searching.

The other feature was a reunion between a 35-year-old man and his mother. The man had been kidnapped by his father at the age of 2½. The mother had also searched over the years. *REUNIONS* found his mother and the reunion was filmed *live*.

If you are searching, a free 16-page booklet is available by calling 1-900-454-0454.

REUNIONS' "Bulletin Board" features shorts clips of people searching. This program offers an opportunity for the public to gain awareness of some of the issues surrounding adoption. The downside of the show is the host, a monotonous James Brolin.

— MS

THEN SHE FOUND ME

by Elinor Lipman,
Pocket Books, New York, 1990.

THEN SHE FOUND ME succeeds to be an exciting novel by an accomplished writer, but it falls short in providing insight into the issues that adoptees and birth mothers face. In fact, this book reinforces some of the myths of adoption.

Only two pages cover the main character growing up as an adoptee. She apparently never thought twice about her birth parents. That is, until her birth mother showed up out-of-the-blue.

The birth mom is a flamboyant woman with her own talk show. She is portrayed as a self-centered, man-hungry, manipulative woman who wants to take over her daughter's life. She is excessive, particularly in talking about her sexual adventures.

The adoptive parents, however, are beyond any humanly fault, impenetrable as Holocaust survivors, and now dead. The adoptee falls into Betty Jean Lipton's theory of the good-adoptee. Her loyalty to her dead adoptive parents inhibits her, at first, from enjoying her new mother.

Over time, and after a few twisted stories from the birth mom about her daughter's father, the two women become best friends.

Although the book lacks insight into the complexities of adoption and reunion, it recovers and succeeds by Lipman's exceptional talent for pitch and dialogue.

— MS

IN BRIEF

AUTHORS FROM BRITISH COLUMBIA

My Search For Catherine Anne by Barrie A. Clark
James Lorimer & Company, Toronto: 1989

Clark, a talk show host and former alderman, MLA and BC Rentalsman, writes about his search for his daughter. (See interview on page 4.)

Webster! by Jack Webster

Douglas & McIntyre: Vancouver/Toronto: 1990

Webster and his late wife Margaret Webster are birth parents. They found their daughter when she was 36. Throughout their marriage, Jack Webster invalidated his wife's need to search, however, he had a change of heart after he met his daughter.

Getting the Goods: Information in BC by Rick Ouston
New Star Books, Vancouver: 1990.

Ouston is an investigative reporter who upset some of his colleagues with this book that reveals many investigative techniques. He is an adoptee who found his birth mother and includes a chapter for people searching in BC, Canada.

Saying Goodbye To A Baby, Vol. 1 & 2 and *Facing Teenage Pregnancy* by Pat Roles, MSW.

Pat Roles is a birth mother and social worker who provides insight into the complexities of adoption. Available from: CSSC, PO Box 7816, 300 Ranitan Centre Parkway, Edison, NJ 08818.

JOAN VANSTONE AWARDED

Joan Vanstone of Parent Finders was honoured with an award from the Adoption Council of Canada for her unswerving efforts in the area of adoption over the past 17 years. Congratulations Joan!

REUNIONS

Gail Beck (Surrey, BC, chapter) found her birth daughter in Ontario.

Beverley McKay (Coquitlam, BC, chapter) found her daughter in Alberta.

NEW CHAPTER

Marie Maidment, Tom Nelson's birth mother, has formed a MPTA chapter in Thunder Bay, Ontario. The chapter meets every two weeks. See back cover for chapter details.

RADIO SHOW TRANSCRIPTS AVAILABLE

A two-part show on reunions was aired on CBC-AM, IDEAS 9 pm, February 20, 1991 by Toronto writer Ann Silversides and producer Alison Moss. The show was an excellent production of taped interviews and comments on accessing adoption information. However, the transcripts may not be as powerful as the voices.

The transcripts are available from CBC, *Ideas* Transcript: Reunion, Box 500 Station A, Toronto, Ontario, CANADA N5W 1E6. \$10 for both transcripts or \$5 for either one. Allow 6 weeks for delivery.

MY REUNION

continued from page 1

because I haven't forgotten and have worried about her for 20 years and I just thought she would really want to know.

She came over to our place on December 27th to meet my two girls who are eight and five. They wouldn't leave her alone for one minute. I think she enjoyed herself but mentioned the fact that my girls have a lot of energy. She hasn't been around little kids much I gather.

We've had several phone conversations since and it's really like you're talking to another friend (just one much younger than yourself). So far — it's a really pleasant and

positive reunion but when I talk to her I know I am her biological mother but I somehow don't feel that I am. Reunions are definitely full of mixed emotions and ours is no different.

The best thing about it is now I know who she is, where she is and that she's okay. That was important for me.

Kathryn did not receive her non-identifying information from the provincial government registry until February 14, 1990 — 4 months after her reunion. —MS

INTERVIEW WITH BARRIE A. CLARK

THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION

by MILLIE STROM

THIRTY YEARS AFTER A BABY WAS CONCEIVED, Barrie A. Clark learned that he had fathered a child. The baby girl was placed for adoption and Clark was not privy to this information until many years later when he met with his former girlfriend.

"My response to know my daughter was instantaneous," Clark recalled. "I had three sons and was re-married, but needed to know who my daughter was, where she was and of her well-being."

Clark, like many birth parents and adoptees, embarked on a search that is described in his book, *My Search for Catherine Anne*. The search was difficult and frustrating, and along the way, Clark met many people on the same arduous journey.

Clark currently hosts a talk show on CKOV in Kelowna, British Columbia. He has worked, both as a politician and bureaucrat, in British Columbia.

"I know how impersonal government can be. There is no compassion or understanding in adoption law for circumstances like mine," he commented in his book on his search.

"There is no comprehension of what the secrecy and deceit is doing to human beings who simply want to discover their roots," Clark says, addressing the estimated one million adoptees living in Canada today.

Clark asserts that the adoptee's right to information supercedes all arguments against opening the records, "The rights

of the child are paramount. Sealed records violate the rights of the child." Even outside of adoption circumstances, Clark insists that when in conflict with parents, the child's rights are to be honoured.

He also believes that birth mothers and birth fathers should have access to adoption information. "If a birth parent needs to communicate medical, or any other information, even if it's just to know of their well-being, the closed system prevents that communication and violates the adoptees' rights in a very fundamental way."

But birth mothers and birth fathers should be allowed access to information, not only to fulfill the adoptee's right, but their own right as well.

"You can get information such as where someone was born, whether they are married or divorced, the grounds for divorce, how much they paid for their homes or if someone has a criminal record. But adoption information is exempt. Why do we place anonymity on the birth parents to be so sacrosanct?"

The logic of the system, says Clark, is Christian based. "When the relationship is sanctified such as in marriage, then all information is available," he explains.

Clark questions the political implications of secrecy. "In a free and democratic society, does an elected government have the right to withhold this type of information? When a birth mother and birth father

have a baby — that is a fact. The government does not have a right to withhold that fact."

In response to the small group of adoptees who feel that access should be granted to adoptees only, Clark says, "I respect their position, but they have not thought it through." This is because, to Clark, open means OPEN.

Not only does Clark propose open records to adoptees and birth parents, but feels this access should extend to all members of the birth and adoptive family, and the public as well [when the adoptee reaches the age of majority]. "We don't have to worry, it's not like hoards of people will want this information."

One of the strong forces against open records is a small group of adoptive parents. While Clark is sympathetic to adoptive parents who fear open records, he says, "it is not an important consideration."

He is aware that for adoptive parents who entered adoption arrangements decades ago, change may be difficult. "For women, now in their 60's and older, who were not able to conceive decades ago, it was considered a reflection of their sexual capabilities."

The falsified birth certificate and secrecy in adoption practice generates a fear in adoptive parents. "This is not unique," he says, "but they have nothing to fear — it's the rights of the child."

continued on page 6

SPEAK OUT

These letters appeared in THE LEADER, a Surrey, BC, bi-weekly newspaper.

ADOPTION HARD ON BIRTH MOTHER

In response to the letter to the editor entitled, "Adoption can be a happy ending," I would like to express an opinion from the point of view of birth mothers. While I may not speak for all birth mothers, I know my opinions are shared by many, with regard to the outcome of relinquishing a child for adoption at birth.

For us, it has been anything but a "happy ending." The long term consequences of relinquishing has meant spending a large portion of our lives in an unresolved state of grief. We want to know where our children are, but the required changes to the current laws in British Columbia are being resisted by government.

Like parents whose children go missing, not knowing where our children are, makes acceptance difficult, if not impossible for some of us. Accompanying the grief and the complications which arise from prolonged grieving, is the remorse we feel when we learn about the added difficulties many adoptees face during adolescence, as they struggle with their identity. Also the simplistic expectation of most people, that because we made the decision we must accept it, has made us feel abnormal if we don't.

How could anyone forget being pregnant for nine months, feeling the movement of a human life inside, watching and feeling your body change and then giving birth, hearing your child's helpless cry — and then the child disappears out of your life forever, leaving a vacuum.

Twenty-one years later, I still haven't forgotten and I don't expect that I ever will. I am not masochistic — I don't enjoy this pain — but I no longer deny that it exists. It has taken too great a toll on all of the relationships in my life and I need to get on with life. That is why I feel I must find my child.

According to almost all who have suc-

cessfully located the missing person(s) in their life, both adoptees and birth parents benefit from the experience, even though sometimes there is anger or denial which needs to be addressed before healing can begin. The laws in British Columbia regarding access to adoption records unfortunately make it extremely difficult to search for our children, especially those born after 1969 when new legislation was passed; names were replaced by numbered files and the records were sealed.

Available upon request from the Ministry of Social Services and Housing in Victoria (British Columbia) is strictly non-identifying information about the adopting family at the time of the adoption. Despite Canada's freedom of information laws, any further information is withheld.

It is so amazing that
a "spiritual"
connection should exist,
despite the laws of the
country that severed
connections at birth?

Originally, the purpose of adopting children was to fulfil the needs of children who had lost their families. However it seems that the focus has shifted to infertile couples who desire children and seem to feel that it is their constitutional right to have children.

While I sympathize with them, I don't believe their inability to reproduce should ever become the issue which determines whether or not the bonds of blood be severed. The concept of "co-parenting" with single mothers may be a possible solution for some couples and young mothers who would otherwise struggle in poverty with a child.

I find the concept of private adoption repulsive; the "marketing" of babies is the natural consequence of such a practice. Children are not commodities and if we condone the purchase of human lives through private adoption, society will have regressed to the days of slave trade once again.

Each member of the adoption triangle develops perceptions of the practice of adoption based on their own experience with it. For me and many other birth mothers, it has been more painful than we could ever have imagined, but I pray that when I do find my "baby," she will have a happier story to tell than I do.

I am seeking my daughter, born October 20, 1969 at Vancouver General Hospital.

— Susan Davenport

Surrey, British Columbia

ADOPTION COMPLEX FROM ALL ANGLES

In the past three weeks, *THE LEADER* has published a letter or article giving the views of people in different sides of the adoption triangle. I would like to add my opinions on this subject. I am an adult adoptee who had a normal and successful adoption, and who has recently been reunited with my birth mother. So I believe I may have some understanding of all sides of the triangle.

I agree with the letter that states that adoption is the hardest on the birth mother. Society shows great sympathy for the severe grief afflicting mothers who have still births, miscarriages, and even abortions. The death of a young child is considered by some as the most difficult grief of all. And yet birth mothers are expected to sign away a child — usually their first born — and forget it. They don't forget.

It is often true that young girls who get pregnant come from families where there is some unhappiness and lack of acceptance or caring — the pregnancy might be considered a symptom of a family that is hav-

continued on page 6

INTERVIEW

continued from page 4

Clark is also sensitive to the fact that some birth mothers remain shrouded in shame and the adopted child is a buried secret. "They were given a guarantee of secrecy by the state, but it's not a matter of whether some blood relatives will be embarrassed."

To facilitate the adjustment to open records, Clark proposes a three year waiting period. The government could announce the change and allow time for parties involved to come to terms with their feelings. He says that government often changes laws, such as with taxes and pensions, with a period for adjustment.

He does not, however, recommend reform to include a veto

clause. New Zealand's access to adoption records allows a veto to be placed by either adoptee or birth parent(s) if they do not want contact. The veto lasts ten years and can be renewed. Since access to adoption records was established in 1985, only 6% applied vetoes.

In New South Wales, Australia, and Hawaii, the veto clause expires in the year 2000. However, the most recent state to legislate for access to records, Queensland, Australia, does not have a veto clause.

Clark is adamant about access to adoption information — no veto. He declares, "Do not demand lesser than your rights."

SPEAK OUT

continued from page 5

ing trouble dealing with their teenage girl, or she is experiencing a lack of love (most families have trouble dealing with teenager, and a pregnancy certainly doesn't always result. But if there is a pregnancy, it is not necessarily simply the result of a "bad" girl).

So many birth moms have a triple whammy — the grief of having lost their first-born, the shame of being an "unwed mother," and the contributing legacy of a family who remains even less supportive than before the young girl was "looking for love in all the wrong places." The triple trauma most often lasts a lifetime.

The adoptive parents are usually the happiest about an adoption. Many are unable to have their own children, and the adoptive child is looked upon as a precious gift that they cherish fondly. Many adoptive parents try even harder than birth parents to do the right thing with this precious infant they have been given.

The adoptive children are in the middle. They may be grateful for the adoptive parents and advantages they have gained by being adopted. But part of their hearts remains connected in some way to their birth heritage. This part is encouraged to be denied and forgotten. Some adoptees continue for a lifetime to deny this part of themselves to avoid hurting their adoptive parents.

But with growing maturity and often after the birth of their own children, it usually becomes more urgent for adoptees to discover their heritage, their identity, roots, a part of themselves.

Recent research shows personality is at least 55% genetic. Does this mean adoptive children can only be expected to be 45% like their adoptive family? Does it mean that the close ties that normally develop between mother and daughter or father and son will not likely be as close in an adoptive family as in a genetic family?

Many adoptees who reunite with their families experience an instant bonding and feeling of connectedness that they did not feel with their adoptive families. It is so amazing that such a "spiri-

tual" connection should exist, despite the laws of the country that severed connections at birth?

It is sometimes difficult for adoptive families to understand why they have problems with rebellion, hostility, addictions, etc., in their adoptive children, especially in their teens. There is a disproportionate number of teens in various kinds of difficulty — psychiatric treatment, in trouble with the law — who are adopted.

Is this genetic? Or do these children have greater difficulty with issues of identity, belonging, the rage that goes with feeling abandoned? The young adopted boy in trouble with gangs and drugs in *THE LEADER* three weeks ago — has anyone helped him sort out his adoption issues? Is he just another adoption failure?

Unfortunately, we cannot simply sign a paper and say some child now has different parents. There are physical, psychological, and perhaps spiritual bonds between mother and child which man and his laws cannot break.

Until we acknowledge that birth is a more profound event than we understand, that adoption is a more complex agreement than we understand, we will continue to sacrifice the lifetime happiness of many birth moms and deliver "abandoned" children to unsuspecting adoptive parents who simply thank their good fortune at having been blessed with a child they feared they would never have, but are unprepared to deal with the problems.

Proposed changes in public policy to restrict abortions, to privatize adoptions, to encourage fertility technology, will further complicate the adoption choice. Decisions regarding pregnancy, planned or unplanned, are very complex, profoundly affecting the total future lives of all involved.

It would be more appropriate and wise if public policy could reflect the true complexity and profound importance of these decisions. It is not a problem that will just go away.

— Carol Crook
Surrey, British Columbia

REPORT FROM THE ADOPTION AWARENESS COUNCIL

by TOM NELSON

Keith Griffith from New Zealand was a guest speaker at the Adoptive Parents Association's Annual Convention last September. He discussed his role in educating the public on adoption issues and the ten year process of law change. He encouraged the growth of groups like *MISSING PIECES THRU ADOPTION* and emphasized the educational process that must take place prior to change. [*New Zealand's population is approximately the same as British Columbia.*]

With this in mind, *MISSING PIECES* formed an educational committee, the *ADOPTION AWARENESS COUNCIL* to provide information for social change with a goal of access to adoption information.

Anyone interested in becoming involved, please contact Millie at (604) 255-0255 or Tom at (604) 941-5674.

THE COMPLETE BREAK THEORY

New Zealand was the first country in the British Empire to introduce legal adoption in 1881. For 60 years until the 1940s, adoptees had access to their original birth entry. There were no recorded complaints of any abuse of the system. However, in the mid 1940s and 1950s, secrecy was imposed, under the influence of the "Complete Break Theory."

This theory proposed that if an adopted child is completely cut off from its genetic origins, then environment will develop the child's personality to become integrated

into the new family. In "good" adoptions the children will not want to know or meet their genetic forbearers. In fact, if the child wants to know or search out the truth of their origins, it must not be a "good" adoption, or the adoptive parents must have failed in someway. If the parents are O.K., then it is the adoptee who is to blame.

Therefore, if adoptees are searching they must be renegades. Agencies, social workers and the law must do everything within their power to stop them.

This view dominated the practice of adoption and adoption law in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1985 the Adult Adoption Information Act was passed giving adult adoptees and birth parents access to identifying information. New Zealand was one of the first countries to pass legislation granting birth parents access to information. — *Adapted from Access To Adoption Records: New Zealand Law Change, The Process and Results by Keith C.Griffith, MBE.*

England, 14 years ago on November 12th, opened their adoption records. Please note that British Columbia's Adoption Legislation was taken from England's Adoption Act which dates back to 1889.

I close with these thoughts, "Where does this leave British Columbia's adoption legislation? Why do we still have no access to adoption information?"

Ask your member of parliament.

QUOTES

ON SECRECY

The ancient Sumerians thought that adoptions should be kept secret. The penalty for people disclosing information about adoptions was harsh: their tongues were cut out.

— Rick Ouston, *Getting the Goods: Information in B.C.*, NewStar Books, Vancouver: 1990

ON ADOPTION PRACTICE

I wonder about the women and young girls who are pressured and sometimes forced to give up their newborn infants for adoption.

— Excerpt from House of Commons Debates by Dawn Black, Member of Parliament, New Democratic Party, 22 May, 1990

ON POPULATION

Due to the population explosion, each person's popularity has been reduced to 14 minutes.

— Dennis Miller, *Saturday Night Live*, 12 Jan. 1991

NEXT ISSUE

- Review of *Birthmother: America's First Surrogate Mother* by Elizabeth Kane.
- Reunion story by Gail Beck, Surrey chapter.
- Report on the AAC 1991 13th International Conference in Garden Grove, California.