

ADOPTION CIRCLES

CANADA'S POST-ADOPTION QUARTERLY

ISSUE 11 SUMMER 1994 \$3.00

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ADOPTION CIRCLES

ISSUE #11 SUMMER 1994

Publisher
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SOCIETY**

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WHO WE ARE:

THE FORGET ME NOT FAMILY SOCIETY is a Provincially registered non-profit Society and a Registered Charitable Society with the Federal Government. Tax receipts are issued for donations to our Society.

Our Society was formed for education, consultation, peer counselling and to offer support to all those touched by adoption: adoptees, adoptive parents, birth parents and concerned professionals.

Our only source of income for the Society is through membership fees, fundraising and donations. This money goes directly towards printing, postage, telephone rental and office equipment and supplies.

WHAT WE OFFER:

Experience shows that at various times in life, the issues and concerns of adoption need to be addressed. We provide our members with opportunities to gain further understanding of adoption issues.

- Educational workshops on post adoption issues for all members of the adoption circle and concerned professionals.

- An annual "Let's Talk About Reunions" conference to address a variety of post adoption issues.

- Referrals to support groups for birth parents, adult adoptees, family members or interested friends and relatives of triad members.

OUR MANDATE:

To encourage and develop a recognition of the benefits of family preservation and openness in adoption practice.

ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER:

Adoption Circles is published quarterly and is available by subscription to our Society. Membership is open to anyone who is interested in adoption and post adoption issues.

Comments and contributions are always welcome. Please mail submissions to our P.O. Box or FAX to (604) 530-2160.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Our second "Let's Talk About Reunions" Conference held on March 5 & 6, 1994 at the Sheraton Guildford was one of the most interesting weekends I have ever had. I thank everyone who attended and participated. Your openness and honesty continue to contribute to my personal belief that adoption is a lifelong process. Everyone has unique issues and concerns that should be addressed through out their lives.

Special thanks go out to B.J. Lifton and Michelle McColm, whose workshops were well attended and greatly appreciated. Michelle's book "Adoption Reunions" was highly recommended at the National Adoption Conference in Calgary this past May, as a great Canadian resource for reunions. Thanks to all of the local presenters...Arden Henley, Sharon Jinkerson, Ken Derby, Sharon Gove, Gail Beck and to all the panellists. Also, a very special thanks to all the volunteers who put so much effort into making it happen. Without volunteers, our Society and Conference could not exist.

The Adoption Review Team is working at formulating a report to be presented to the Minister of Social Services at the end of June. Cecelia Reekie and I had the opportunity to present submissions. I commend the Minister for her choice of the team. I spoke to two team members, Margaret Lord and Larry Gilbert and I appreciate their compassion towards our concerns and suggestions for reform.

The Annual General Meeting took place in April 1994 at the New Westminster Public Library. Our new executive was elected unanimously including 13 directors at large. As President, I am thrilled to see all of this new energy and talent in the executive. I know it will be an exciting year ahead. Several Society committees are currently working on memberships, fund-raising, workshops, support groups and the next conference. We need your input, too. Please send us your ideas and proposals by mail, phone or fax.

Cecelia Reekie, Kathryn Vea and I represented our Society at the National Adoption Council Conference in Calgary on May 27 & 28, 1994. We presented our workshop "Let's Talk About Reunions." It was a fascinating two days and the networking was invaluable. It never ceases to amaze me how people across Canada are involved in the adoption process in so many different ways. It will certainly take ALL of us, Adoptees, Adoptive Parents, Birth Parents and Professionals to work together with tolerance and understanding to reform adoption practice.

To all of you who extended good wishes to my friend Nadine ("The Missing Piece" Spring Issue #10). Nadine Leslie Brown/Elaine Connor died on March 12, 1994 in Auckland, New Zealand after a courageous battle against ovarian cancer. I miss her and I cherish our time spent together. In her memory, I will tell her story as an excellent example as to why adult adoptees deserve the right to have access to their own history. Nadine, I will never forget you.

--Sandi Blackie

EDITOR'S NOTES

With this edition of Adoption Circles, a new group of directors join president Sandra Blackie, vice-president Cecelia Reekie, and executive director Kathryn Vea in bringing energy and ideas to the Forget-Me-Not Family Society. At a brainstorming session on April 28, Nancy Kato, Bonnie Milne and Debora Sky met with Sandra Blackie to review the mandate of the Forget-Me-Not Family Society. At one point during our discussion Sandra was asked: "Are we merely re-creating the wheel?" Already, the Forget-Me-Not Family Society has successfully mounted two conferences, held numerous workshops, hosted support groups, met with provincial legislators, not to mention, of course, that this is newsletter #11. New faces bring fresh perspective and possible change which can be challenging no matter how you frame your politics. The discussion was fruitful, however, and out of it was born a simple mission statement: To create a climate of openness, understanding and respect for all members of the adoption circle through education, support and empowerment; and encourage changes in attitude and legislation.

Input concerning the mission statement is welcome and can be directed to Nancy Kato or Bonnie Milne. The purpose of a mission statement is to focus attention on the reason for all this activity.

When changes in attitude are made, legislation follows. In B.C., a final report from the adoption review committee is expected June 30th. Hopefully, this document will bring an era of openness to the adoption circle, dispelling the concealment of days gone by. The issues are many and multi-faceted and there is one outstanding question: How much control over the disclosure of information will the province retain? Government appointee Margaret Lord is very aware that lack of disclosure and the aura of secrecy created has been damaging. This was one message most often repeated by presenters to the review committee.

At our mission statement meeting, we also discussed the question of how to heal, and how to enlarge the adoption circle - how to make wider arms to include others. I see the effect of closed records as resulting in a particular wound. Part of who I am disappeared mysteriously when files were sealed and I was excluded from a context of relatedness that others take for granted. This happened in an era when removing native children from their families and placing them in foster homes and residential schools was also seen as acceptable.

As I've moved along in my own reunion process, I've become more appreciative of native traditions. At this year's FMN conference, I especially enjoyed the simple ritual of joining the circle, which conference presenter Sharon Jinkerson and Pemina Yellowbird offered. I see "the circle" as a valid and helpful symbol for repairing the damage which can be done by denying ancestral roots. Denying such roots, one tends to see oneself, as an outsider - outside the circle - and outside that context of relatedness others take for granted. This kind of simple ceremony effectively casts a wider circle and promotes healing.

Actions that were taken in the past, such as removing native children from their homes and families, were authorized by a sweeping assumption: one cultural model, presumed to be superior, was reason enough it seems to flatten others. Social workers cannot be held wholly responsible for they were merely

acting on behalf of many - and widely held views. Yet this is one of the many assumptions - a central one, I feel - crying out for re-examination in adoption practice. As a presenter to the review committee, I made a pitch that such assumptions be re-examined. I was pleased to find a receptive audience.

As an adoptee who has had a re-union, my own process now is one of assimilation and reflection. Yes, I have felt excluded and like an outsider and my anger and my feelings of exclusion have often alluded me. Yet now when I watch programs on television and see stories about family disputes involving adoption, I have become increasingly sensitive to stereotyping. All stereotypes are limiting and this one no less than any other. This one is "the angry illegitimate child." "The outcast." "The bastard son who seeks revenge" as in Jon in Much Ado About Nothing. Even Star Trek had an episode where a young woman was in love with a man from "the wrong planet." Her father threatened to disown her and any potential "bastard" child. This was so unhip and un-nineties of Star Trek, I was very disappointed.

Now that I've met my bio-family, however, who am I? Am I an enviro-child, a bio-child, or both? If both, how much of each do I embody?

Embody is a descriptive word which suggests the significance of biology and heredity. This context of relatedness - a biological and hereditary one - was denied me for a very long time. My first mother and only mother, in that sense, "embodied" me in an undeniable way for nine months. I feel that MUCH damage has been done by seeking to deny the fact that a woman - as a young mother - DID CARRY a child for nine months. To "get on with one's life" as if this is an event that never happened meant that a woman had to disassociate for the rest of her life from an experience she DID HAVE. Is it so surprising, then, that many birth mothers never went on to have a second child? Or that an adoptee might feel oddly invisible; as if he or she had never been born?

Betty Jean Lifton, featured speaker at the FMN conference this year, has written a new book entitled *Journey of the Adopted Self - A Quest for Wholeness*. BJ is an adoption counsellor in New York and has a life-time of reflection on her own reach for wholeness to share. This book is well-timed, for many adoptees who are adults and have formulated and set views of themselves, face a peculiar journey upon receiving new information which only yesterday was not in the script. Any help on how to gather and re-incorporate a self in fragments is both rare and needed.

Too often adoption is a sad tale, and to counteract this, we are seeking humorous stories from any member of the adoption circle. My own mother, for instance, wondered, when at last we met, if I liked bananas. For when she was pregnant, her sister, with whom she was staying, would get bananas on the cheap from the local grocer. So many of them, in fact, that by the time my mother's term was up and I was on the way - my mother had had enough bananas, thank you very much, almost for the rest of her life. She eats them now occasionally, but not very often. This is the kind of story an adoptee comes to treasure.

Not long ago, I heard a quip attributed to humorist Ashley Brilliant who apparently once said: "No wonder I'm confused. One of my parents was a man and the other was a woman!" Well, Ashley, welcome to the adoption circle, a sometimes confusing place, especially on Mothers' Day. For, you see, Ashley, one of my mothers is a woman - and so is the other one.

—Debora Sky

Cultural Chameleon

Floating rootless in space
touching down in this culture
or that

No food is verboten
Palate pleased
with Chapatis or Borscht
yet a hunger remains

You can wear sari or sarong
when there's no place you belong

I've worshipped the Goddess
Chanted with Buddhists
Studied Taoism, then Zen
Kissed the feet of Jesus, cast a Wiccan spell

My spirit flits and flies,
finding no place like home

I've tried on different customs
like some try on clothes
But when I slip the fabric up
over my arms
let it drop to the floor
Nothing's left
but empty cloth.

Michelle McColm, March 27, 1992

Michelle McColm was a presenter at the 1994 FMN conference. Her book and workshop tapes are available through the Society (refer to page 5 of this newsletter).

The Gift

by Monica M. Bunton
written Mother's Day, May 9, 1993

It wasn't a gift of shiny glass
or gift of expensive brass.
Not a gift made to be worn
or in some closet forever shorn.
No fancy new kitchen tool
of softly upholstered footstool.
It wasn't a box of sweets
or delicious gourmet treats.
No flowers too quickly gone
or diamonds that brilliantly shone.
Yet its value was greater than all of
these
little did he know how much it
would please.
You see the gift was something rare
it showed someone that he did care.
The gift was letting me in his heart
and in his life forever to be a part.

From The Vancouver Sun, May 21, 1994

To the birth mother of a girl born
May 22, 1990, in Langley - she is healthy,
happy and very bright.
Wish we could thank you in person
for a wonderful daughter.
Salamat.

AUDIO CASSETTES ORDER FORM

Professionally recorded at the
Forget Me Not Family Society

"Let's Talk About Reunions" 2nd Post-Adoption Conference

The following audio cassettes of conference workshops are available from the Society. To order, please photocopy this page and indicate your choice of tape(s) at \$6 each (includes GST & Shipping).

Please make cheques payable to:

**Forget Me Not Family Society,
P.O. Box 61526 Brookwood P.O.,
Langley, B.C. V3A 8C8.**

- | | | | | | |
|----|--|-----|----|---|-----|
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Michelle McColm | [] | 13 | Birth Mothers Memories of Separation
Panel | [] |
| 02 | Adoptive Parents Speak Out
Panel | [] | 14 | The Reunited Talk About Reunions
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Panel | [] | 15 | Examining The Issues In B.C.
Ministry of Social Services | [] |
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TOTAL SELECTIONS COLUMN 1: _____

TOTAL SELECTIONS COLUMN 2: _____

TOTAL SELECTIONS BOTH COLUMNS: _____ X \$6.00 each \$ _____

NAME: _____ **ADDRESS:** _____

CITY/PROV: _____ **CODE:** _____

Canadian Adoption Disclosure Stats

Earlier this year, Kathryn Veal sent a letter to each provincial agency responsible for the disclosure of information, asking for current data concerning fees, staffing, turn-around time, the availability of counsellors, and the prospect of open records. Eleven replies represent every jurisdiction in Canada with the exception of the Northwest Territories.

A few replies were specific and detailed, notably Saskatchewan, Ontario, B.C., New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Others were brief, though the adoption disclosure worker in each case did his or her best to answer her questions.

Please feel free to use or distribute this information in any way that is useful to you, a friend or a colleague.

Alberta

Adoption Disclosure Registry
Alberta Adoption Services
9th Floor, 7th Street Plaza
10030-107th Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 3E4
(403) 427-6387

Non-identifying information: usually completed within 6-8 weeks.

Fees: none at the moment

Passive registry: A new application is checked for a match within five working days. If a match is identified, individuals are usually contacted within 30 days.

Active search: There is presently no legislative mandate to conduct active searches.

Counselling: Clients who are matched all receive preparational or informational counselling during the reunion process.

Staffing: Two professional counsellors supplemented by community resources, and private search and support groups.

Inquiries: Currently, more than 19,000 people have registered for direct contact.

Access/openness: Access to adoption records is under provincial review.

B.C.

Adoption Reunion Registry
#202 - 1600 West 6th Avenue
Vancouver, B.C. V6J 1R3
(604) 736-7917 or
1-800-665-1899

Non-identifying information: A no-fee service with up to a nine month wait from the date of inquiry until the document is completed and mailed.

Fees: \$25.00 to accompany the registration form for either an active or passive search.

Passive Search: New entries to the passive registry are processed the day they are received. A match will occur if there is a corresponding applicant. Registrants are informed right away if there is a copy of the adoption file on record to confirm the information. (Presumably, if there is no file, there is a waiting period of some duration).

Active Search: An additional \$250. Subsequent Search (if an initial party sought is deceased or declines contact) \$180. The waiting period from the date of application until the search is ready to start can be seven months.

Counselling: available to any registrant affected by the reunion process, at no charge. For clients outside of the Lower Mainland, telephone counselling is available or a referral may be made to a counsellor in the area the client resides, also at no charge. Workshops are offered periodically in Victoria and Vancouver.

Staffing: Four searchers and five counsellors.

Inquiries: As of January 31, 1994, there were 1,100 outstanding applications for active searches.

Access/Openness: Currently under provincial review.

Manitoba

Post Adoption Registry
Adoption Disclosure Services
1st Floor, 114 Garry Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 1G1
(204) 945-8301

Non-identifying information: the Manitoba registry only handles requests for

information from out-of-province. In-province requests for information are directed to the individual agency where the adoption took place. There are no fees, at least not at the Manitoba registry. When contacted in January, the registry was working on requests from March '93.

Passive Search: Receive priority and take four to six weeks.

Active Search: Done on behalf of adoptees seeking birth parents only. When contacted in January, there was a backlog of requests (1500) dating back to March '87. A search is given priority if birth parents are more than 70 years old, if there is a medical emergency, or if the registrants are members of a Manitoba Indian Band.

Counselling: Available through the registry for out-of-province applicants. Other provincial agencies offer counselling prior to reunion.

Staffing: One full-time searcher. One very part-time.

Access/openness: Open records are not being discussed at present.

New Brunswick

New Brunswick Dept. of Health and
Community Services
P.O. Box 5100
Fredericton, NB E3B 5G8
(506) 453-2949

Non-identifying information: Prepared within two months, though applicants at one time had to wait 18 months. With the backlog reduced, hopes to respond within six months (at the most) in future.

Fees: none at present.

Passive search: Underway within a month. Records are in the process of being computerized, a step that could reduce the waiting period.

Active search: More than 600 adoptees have requested an active search, but there is at least a four year waiting period for a search to begin. (A semi-active register was established in the fall of 1989 with searches beginning in earnest in January of 1990. Search requests stem from the days when the

registry first opened in 1981).

Counselling: Once offered routinely, but curtailed in an effort to deal with a lengthy waiting list. Members of the adoption circle are encouraged to seek private counselling.

Staffing: One searcher, two social workers/counsellors who as well as counselling, attend to other requests such as referrals from Indian Affairs concerning re-establishment of Indian status or inquiries from Vital Statistics about clarification of irregular birth registrations.

Access/openness: Not currently under consideration in New Brunswick.

Newfoundland/Labrador

Post Adoption Services
Dept. of Social Services
Box 8700 Confederation Bldg.
St. Johns, Newfoundland A1B 4J6
(709) 729-2662

Non-identifying information: The wait for a file review is approximately 22-24 months from the date of inquiry.

Fees: None at present

Passive Registry: A passive match is given priority and every effort is made to work on them immediately.

Active Search: As of January, 1994, there were approximately 640 search applications. Projected wait time for an active search is at least five years.

Counselling: Not mandatory, but available to all members of the adoption circle.

Staffing: Two full-time temporary social workers, responsible for all aspects of post-adoption services including search, counselling, and the preparation of non-identifying information. One trainee. One consultant performing limited client services.

Access/openness: uncertain at this time.

Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia Dept. of Community Services, P.O. Box 696
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 2T7
Fax (902) 424-3205

Non-identifying information: prepared within six months.

Fees: \$50.00 as of February 1, 1994

Passive registry: A match (if there is a corresponding applicant) within six

months.

Active search: 135 requests for an active search on file. Two years from the date of application for an active search to start.

Counselling: parties are referred to outside services.

Staffing: two part-time people job share, providing all services

Access/openness: currently under review by a ministerial committee.

Ontario

Adoption Disclosure Registry
Ministry of Social Services
2 Bloor Street West, 24th Floor
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1E9
(416) 327-4730

Non-identifying information: If the adoption was arranged by an Ontario Children's Aid Society, the society would have the record and would respond to a request. The length of time for a response can vary from six months to two years. If the adoption was handled privately, information is prepared by the ministry. For private adoptions prior to June, 1979, however, there is virtually no non-identifying information available. Unless an applicant knows which agency is involved and can make a direct inquiry, there can be a longer wait while the ministry determines and informs the applicant where

"Regarding counselling services, to date I have managed to see people within the week. I have had people walk in or phone, having just experienced a reunion and needing to talk to someone about the confused feelings, torn loyalties, and emotional roller-coaster they have been on."

**-Richey Mayne, Coordinator,
PEI Post-Adoption Services.**

to request information.

Fees: None at present, except a fee of \$15.00 for a certified copy of an adoption order.

Passive registry: A initial check of the computerized registry is made for a corresponding applicant. Parties are

informed if the match is valid. If no match appears immediately, the application is processed in turn according to the date of receipt. It can take up to one year to fully process the application and enter all the correct data. The applicant remains in the data base until a match is made or requests that his or her name be removed.

Active search: There are more than 9,000 outstanding requests for an active search. When the ministry began to conduct active search, registrants from the passive registry, started in 1979, were first in line. This accounts for the backlog. Requests are now being processed from the spring of 1988.

Counselling: mandatory prior to the disclosure of identifying information. Most counselling is provided by the Children's Aid Society, or, if the parties reside outside Ontario, by other counselling agencies. Counselling is usually available within one to two months if a match is made. Counselling is also available by telephone. There are mail-out counselling packages also available.

Staffing: Three searchers. Four counsellors do outreach to the found person and provide counselling.

Access/openness: Reviewed in 1993.

If interested in particulars contact Tony Silipo, Office of the Minister, Ministry of Community and Social Services, Hepburn Block, Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario M7A 1E9.

Note: from Patricia O'Brien, assistant registrar, Ontario Community and Social Services:

Frequently, an applicant will register, then move and forget to provide a new address. We have a number

of applicants for whom there is a corresponding match; others who may wish us to begin an active search - but our information is out of date. Please keep addresses and phone numbers current with any

continued on next page

provincial register or private group such as Parentfinders. Unless information is current, applicants could miss the opportunity to meet the person he or she hopes to find.

Prince Edward Island

Provincial Adoption Services
Department of Health and Social
Services, Box 2000
Charlottetown, PEI C1A 7N8
(902) 368-4932

With the passing of a new Adoption Act in 1993, provision was made for the establishment of Adoption Disclosure Services. As of January, 1994, two government employees were contacting people who have made inquiries over the years to see if they still require services.

Non-identifying information: No fee. However, other fees were decided upon in order to be able to offer the service and justify staffing during times of government restraint.

Passive (Reciprocal) Registry: \$35.00 to accompany application.

Match/Reunion: \$70.00 for each party
Active Search: (For adult adoptees only) \$150.00

Counselling: Available.

Access/openness: A provincial review in 1993 brought significant change.

Quebec

Ville Marie Social Service Centre
Succursale West Island ASC
315 Rue Brunswick Street, S. 200
Point-Clare, Quebec HR9 1A7
(514) 695-5251

Files for adoptions completed by the Children's Service Centre, Catholic Family and Children's Services, and Jewish Family Services are now held by the Ville Marie Centre. Inquiries should be directed there.

Non-identifying information: Available, but the centre is "years behind the requests." Fee not indicated.

Passive search: Because of limited staffing, gives priority to reunions re-

quested for medical reasons and where the birth parent is more than 70 years old. If there is a corresponding applicant, a match is generally made within six months. Services are available to adoptees and birth parents.

Active search: The centre was involved in a pilot project from September, 1993 to March 1994 providing active search and reunion on a fee-for-service basis. The fee was \$450. Requests for reunion from February, 1989, were being completed at the time of the pilot. There are approximately 1500 outstanding requests, but there was no suggestion that this project will be renewed.

Staffing/counselling: No details provided.

Access/openness: Not at present.

Saskatchewan

Provincial Adoption Registry
Ministry of Social Services
207 - 2240 Albert St.
Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 3V7
(306) 787-3655

Non-identifying information: No fee. Documents are usually prepared within four weeks. There is a longer wait if staff is reduced and requests increase. Copy of an adoption order: \$15

Passive registry: \$35 to accompany registration. Contact by mutual request: \$90. (Registration and contact fees are applicable to adoptees and adoptive parents only. If you are a birth parent or other family member, you may request that your name be placed on an adoptee's file in the event that an adoptee requests a search or contact in the future. Other birth family members, such as siblings or grandparents, may request contact, but contact is normally cleared first with the birth mother. When an adoptee requests contact and the request is mutual, the registry will move as quickly as possible to facilitate a meeting, averaging within two months of the date of registration.

Active search: \$265. Search and contact with second and subsequent family members: \$180. Current waiting period for an active search is roughly eight months.

Counselling: Prior to a reunion, the

registry prefers to have personal contact with the adoptee and the birth parent. This contact is frequently by telephone because 40 per cent of the registry's clients live outside of Saskatchewan. Referrals for counselling are sometimes made to an agency. Informational counselling is available upon request.

Staffing: Three searchers are also counsellors.

Access/openness: Saskatchewan recently circulated a discussion paper and one of the options is open records. *As of December 31, 1993, the Saskatchewan registry had no backlog because additional staffing countered the number of outstanding requests. Added personnel returned to their usual posts on March 31, 1994. Since then the backlog has increased to 8 months.

Yukon

Yukon Health and Social Services
Family and Children's Services
Box 2703 (H-10)
Whitehorse, YT Y1A 2C6
(403) 667-3002

Non-identifying information: No fees. Depending on the number of requests, a response can take between six months and one year.

Passive search: No fee. One month or longer depending on the number of requests, and, of course, there must be a corresponding applicant.

Active search: Not provided for in government legislation.

Counselling: Depending on case load, counselling is either provided or a referral is made to a counselling agency in the community.

Staffing: One half-time person covers all matters pertaining to the adoption registry.

Access/openness: No discussion of open records at this time.

Registration for contact if you are a birth parent or other family member. You may request that your name be placed on an adoptee's file, in the event that an adoptee may request a search or contact in the future. A birth family's members (ie. siblings or grandparents) contact with an adoptee is normally cleared first with the birth mother. □

YET ANOTHER LIFE?

- by Teresa Spring

Robert and Vicky were married and had two children when they were overwhelmed by various health and emotional problems. Vicky simply could not cope with raising two children. When their second child was seventeen months old, they made a difficult decision. I was that child - and I was adopted by a close relative of Vicky's.

I was raised at the other end of the country, unaware of my origins. I knew nothing about being adopted. When I was eleven, we moved back to the town where I was born, but we rarely saw Robert and Vicky. When we did meet, there was always tension between the two families, but I never understood why. When I learned the truth at nineteen, I wasn't surprised, for over the years there were many inconsistencies and I always suspected my parents were hiding something from me.

When I learned the truth,, I was newly married and very busy. I pushed the information to the back of my mind, convinced that it made little difference. I never confronted Robert and Vicky for I didn't want to upset them or my adoptive parents. (I guess you could call me "the good adoptee").

I have always had an interest in family trees, and I was busy working on my maternal history, when I learned about my adoption. Because my adoptive mother was a close relative, the adjustment was a small one. I told myself that someday, when the time was right, I would learn about my paternal ancestors. But that day was more than ten years in coming.

My adoptive parents passed away in 1984. Then, two years ago, I received a phone call from an aunt. My father, Robert, had died of a sudden heart attack, and Vicky wanted to make sure I had the opportunity to come to the funeral. I had not seen Robert in more than twenty years. I could not even recall speaking to him. Yet I felt so badly that what I felt and the impact the news had made surprised me.

I went to the funeral and the experience was amazing. I recognized six people. The others were all members of Robert's very large family. One of his sisters approached me, mistaking me for the daughter of another sister. A cousin approached and when told that I was a "relative" of Vicky's, commented: "You sure look like some of OUR cousins!"

This experience got me moving. I searched through a city directory for the year before Robert and Vicky were married and found his entry. By following all the people at that address back through the years, I was able to compile a complete list of Robert's (ten!) brothers and sisters, and determine his parents' names and years of death. I then located certificates, obituaries, etc. and before a year had passed, I had traced Robert's ancestry back to the late 1700's. I never had such immediate success tracing my "own" family!

I wrote a letter to Vicky in March, 1993, telling her I was aware of my origins, that there were no hard feelings, and that I understood the conditions at the time she and Robert made their decision. I thanked her for the courage it took to make such a move. I told her I would not push to talk about it, but that I would like to if she was willing.

By September, 1993, I had not heard from Vicky, but I had a strong desire to learn more about my father and see pictures of my grandparents. My thoughts turned to Robert's brothers and sisters, most of whom were living in the immediate area and whose current addresses I had been able to trace. I chose one of the sisters at random and wrote to her. I was terrified - and I didn't know what kind of reception, if any, to expect!

A week later, I got a phone call. A friendly voice said, "Hello! This is your Aunt Lil!" We talked for about half an hour and made plans to meet the next day. I was calm and coherent on the phone, but as soon as I hung up I started to shake and cry. I was aware of a little voice inside me that kept repeating - incredulous: "They WANT me! They WANT me!"

Things moved very slowly, as I wanted to retreat and take everything in after meeting Aunt Lil the first time. I saw her again in November, met three of the other sisters, heard family stories and took home pictures to copy as well. I was able to tell my newfound aunts things about their ancestry they were unaware of, even though one of them had begun working on the family tree a few years earlier.

I attended another funeral in March of 1994. This was my first "official" function as a member of the family. I had a nagging feeling that I was doing something forbidden, but the feeling came from what I remembered of all those

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"In her books, B.J. Lifton talks about an experience unique to the adoptee who is able to contemplate the person they might have become if the adoption had never happened."

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years of secrecy - not from my newfound relatives. They were wonderful! Many of them remembered me as a baby, and always wondered what had become of me. They were delighted that I'd made my way back to the family.

In her books, B. J. Lifton talks about an experience unique to the adoptee who is able to contemplate the person they might have become if the adoption had never happened. I had thought about the person I might have become had I stayed with Robert and Vicky. But I had this experience again at the funeral when I learned that one of Robert's brothers (now deceased) had kept me for a month and had very much wanted to adopt me. His daughter was thrilled to meet me and told me that she remembered me well and still had some baby pictures of me with her family. It was a profound experience to stand there talking with this woman I had never met before, knowing that in yet "another life" she would have been my sister.

If I could start all over again, there are two things I would change. First of all, I would have been braver and would have learned my paternal history a few years earlier, while Robert was still alive. I feel he would have welcomed me as readily then as other family members do now. Given Vicky's reluctance to deal with me, though, it's possible that coming forward earlier would have been a strain too big for their marriage to endure. Perhaps things have turned out for the best.

Secondly, I wish that Vicky had been more receptive. I have no control over this, however, and I feel that the best way to handle this situation is to remain non-threatening, and keep the lines of communication open through holiday cards, etc. Perhaps some day she will come to me. Even if she does not, the contact with and acceptance from my paternal family has been a very healing and comforting experience.

I am grateful for both of my families, for the unique gifts I have received through each of them, and for the person I've become. Nature and nurture both have played a part. As I re-establish connections with my birth family, I am aware of a sense of completeness that I've never really felt before. I know where I came from. I know who I am. □

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

ADOPTION REGISTRY OF B.C. UPDATE

By Ken Derby

Reunion Registry Statistics From Oct 2/91 to Apr 30/94.

Total Applications Received	5925
Total Database*	7238
Searches Completed	2822
Reunions Completed	1762

Other outcomes of active searches:

Subject of search deceased	193
Subject of search refused contact	291

Other Services:

Matches on the passive database	312
Non-identifying information reports	1062
Counselling request filled	617

* Includes all files opened since Oct/92 and files transferred from the former Passive Registry for which no new applications have been received.

MEDIAFILE

ARTICLES, MOVIES, DOCUMENTARIES ABOUT ADOPTION OR ADOPTION-RELATED MATTERS

*The same weekend as this year's FMN conference, (March 5) the Vancouver Sun carried a commentary by Margaret Brown, a young woman who is a biology major at St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas. In the article, Margaret tells her story. As a "child" of donor insemination, she challenges the concealment of information and asks why decisions about donor insemination are made purely in the interests of the parent's and physician's privacy? "Who gave my family the idea that my biological roots are not important? To deny someone the knowledge of his or her biological origins is dreadfully wrong," she states. Ms. Brown speaks of a recurring dream of falling through space. She wants to put her feet down and gather herself together - but there's nothing for her to stand on. An excellent article for reference/research and well worth the read.

*Sixty Minutes recently carried a documentary segment about a woman in the U.S. who was caught in a sting operation and jailed for three months for giving out information to adoptees and birth mothers. What the documentary failed to examine is the Republican party connections and right-wing sentiments of the man behind the sting operation. For more information about this documentary segment

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contact Michelle McColm, who was a guest speaker at this year's conference. Her address is available from the FMN office.

***Mary Tyler Moore** recently appeared in quite a good made-for-TV movie called *Stolen Babies*. The movie is based on actual events in the state of Tennessee when an adoption agency fell into the hands of the ill-motivated for a long period of time - too long - decades, in fact - impacting the lives of many people. Moore plays the role of the well-intentioned matriarch with no children of her own, who in the end, becomes unstable and emotionally involved with the children she is "placing." Her good intentions run amok when she begins separating families to feed the wheel of her own increasing fortunes. There is a bizarre scene in which she "gives birth" to one of her "babies" throwing back the covers of her own bed to reveal a little bundle underneath - all ready for one of her client's. (It gave me the willies.) □

LEAN ON ME Telephone Support List

Reunited Birthmothers:

Monica Bunton	(403) 327-7525
Anne Christianson	(604) 888-1720
Sue Finley	(604) 888-0920
Nicole Quittenton	(604) 731-0605
Connie Short	(604) 534-9456

Searching Birthmothers:

Mary Reynolds	(604) 534-2851
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Reunited Adoptees:

Cecelia Reekie	(604) 530-9017
Sue Travis	(604) 534-2477

Reunited with Birth Father:

Sandra Pudsey	(604) 534-4993
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Reunited with Siblings:

Janis Wegrich	(604) 856-2215
(birthparents deceased)	

Denied Reunion Adoptees:

Liz Goadby	(604) 574-7223
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Adoptive Parent of Reunited Adoptee:

Sue McBeatch	(604) 538-8301
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Interested Professionals:

Judy Archer	(604) 988-5281
North Shore Family Services	

Send your name and telephone number if you wish to be included on the LEAN ON ME Telephone Support List. Out of town numbers are always welcome.

Mail Order

The following books and products are available from the Society. Please make cheques payable to **Kathryn Vea** and mail to Forget Me Not Family Society, P.O. Box 61526 Brookwood P.O., Langley, B.C. V3A 8C8. All prices include GST.

The Adoption Triangle by Arthur Sorosky, Reuben Pannor, & Annette Baran. Sealed or open records, how they affect all members of the adoption circle. \$14.00 plus shipping

Adoption Reunions by Michelle McColm. This book is the most comprehensive reunion guide to date. A sensitive and compassionate book about the reunion process for adoptees, birthparents and adoptive families. Michelle is Canadian and this book deals with Canadian laws and practices. \$18.50 plus shipping.

Journey of the Adopted Self - A Quest for Wholeness by B.J. Lifton. A brilliant contribution to the work of healing in adoption. Valid for all members of the adoption circle and professionals. Hardcover. \$30.50 plus \$3.50 shipping.

Lost & Found - The Adoption Experience by B.J. Lifton is a sensitive literary journey through the emotional labyrinth of the adoption experience. Written for adoptees, adoptive families and birthparents. \$18.00 plus shipping.

The Other Mother by Carol Schaefer. A wonderful book written with poignancy, tenderness, depth and honesty. A remarkable portrayal of what it is really like to relinquish a child for adoption. \$18.50 plus shipping.

Torn from the Heart by Louise Jurgens. A terrific book, warm, intimate and full of love, describing an inner journey of courage in a birthmother's search for her child. \$19.50 plus shipping.

Other than B.J. Lifton's new book, shipping charges are \$2.50 for the first book and \$.75 for each additional book.

Society T-Shirts with the Forget Me Not Family Society Logo screened on the front are now available in good quality 100% cotton. Please state size M/L/XL. Colour: white only (logo is black). \$14.95 ea. + \$1.50 Shipping.

Support Groups

For birthmothers, adoptees, and adoptive parents

New Westminster

The second Tuesday of each month, a support groups meets at New Westminster Public Library, 716 - 6th Avenue, from 7 to 9 p.m. For more information contact Nancy Kato at 525-8383.

North Vancouver

The third Wednesday of each month, a support group meets at Sea Cove Community Secondary School. As the location may change, contact Kathryn Moore at 929-6309, for more information.

Please send letters to the editor, reunion stories, news and information on community events to: **Adoption Circles, c/o Forget Me Not Family Society, Box 61526 Brookwood P.O., Langley, B.C. V3A 8C8 Canada.**