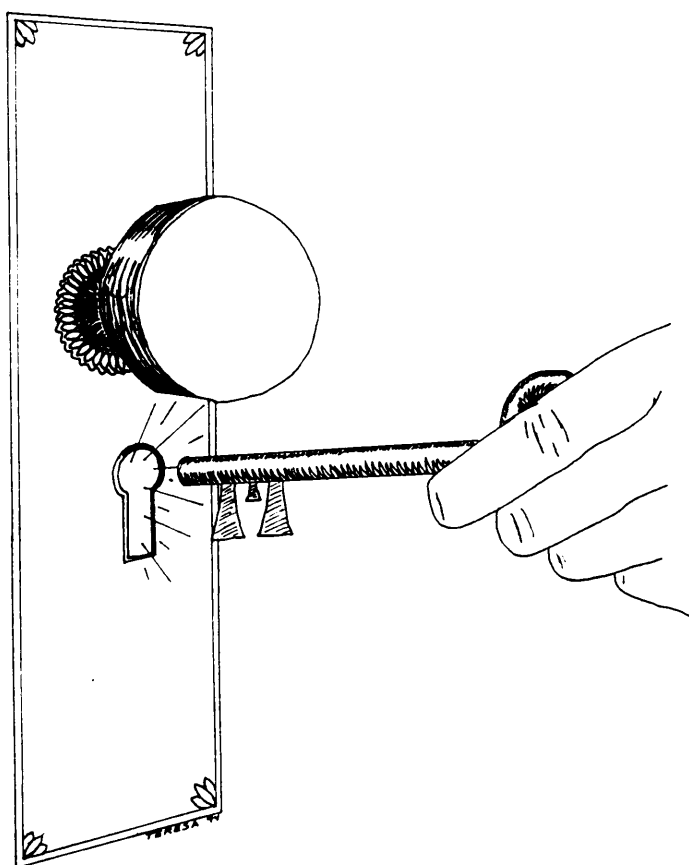


ADOPTION CIRCLES

CANADA'S POST-ADOPTION QUARTERLY

ISSUE 13 WINTER 1994 \$3.00



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ADOPTION CIRCLES
ISSUE #13 WINTER 1994

Publisher
**FORGET ME NOT FAMILY
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 office or FAX to (604) 581-0550.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It has been an eventful year for the Forget Me Not Family Society and the Adoption Circles newsletter. We have been through a lot of changes, which reflects growth and progress. As I sit at my desk during a rare moment, I reflect on my own observation as President of the Society. I see areas where we have moved forward and achieved ground, but I also see other areas where we still need to go; so many services we need to offer and so many people we need to reach.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have put forth the effort to become involved during this last year. To be a volunteer in any organization takes time and commitment and it has not gone unnoticed. I only hope that it has been a learning process towards knowledge and a deeper understanding about how adoption can be a lifelong process.

It is with deep sadness that the Society must say goodbye to Kathryn Vea, our Executive Director and one of the founders of Forget Me Not. Kathryn has devoted the last 5 years to addressing the heartfelt issues of post adoption. Personally, I know the effort, the sacrifices and the tenacity it has taken to achieve what she has. I don't know if we, as a Society would have moved as far as we have or gained the respect amongst the adoption community, that we feel, if it wasn't for her endless devotion and energy. Thank you, Kathryn, you are truly a pioneer. We will all miss you.

On Dec. 1/94, we moved our office to 10693 - 135A St. Surrey, B.C. V3T 4E3. Our new telephone number is 581-0550. Our office will be staffed by volunteers on a rotating basis. So, please bear with us, as we work out the details and schedules.

Finally, in closing, it is with deep regret that I must leave my position as President of the Society. Career, family and personal obligations have consumed all the available time in my life and it is not fair to the membership and the executive, who count on me, to hold up my end. I have perceived myself as superhuman, to work an average of 75 hrs. per week at my chosen career, then be a full time wife and mother of 4 children. For awhile, I was able to do it, but my body clock has kicked in, and I have had to re-evaluate my life and obligations.

My association with the Society has been one of the most fulfilling relationships of my life. We met at a time when my life was upside down - pre-reunion. I found all the understanding and compassion I had searched for. You all gave me the strength to survive post reunion and the ability to work out the dynamics of a blended family, with tolerance and understanding. I will never be able to repay what I received. I will only be eternally grateful. All the best for the future to all of you.

Respectfully,
Sandi Blackie

EDITOR'S NOTES

It's been a busy time lately in the adoption reform movement. The Adoption Review Legislation Report by Margaret Lord's team was released on Oct 5.94 (see excerpts on the Access to Records in this newsletter). The review contains 103 recommendations. I urge you to write to either Joy MacPhail, Minister of Social Services, or Margaret Lord, MLA, in Victoria with your comments.

It is also important to respond to the ARCC questions we are including in this newsletter. It's up to members of the adoption community who feel changes are needed to respond before this reaches the legislature (hopefully Spring '95 unconfirmed).

After reading this document it seems that it is more of a make work project for social workers. It continues to make the members of the social work profession more important in adoption than the actual people whose lives will be impacted by adoption. More social workers means more control no matter how you look at it. What happened to sharing responsibility and being responsible for ones own actions for social workers?

If more social workers are involved, it will make it easier for them to continue to play the role of "God" with birth mothers and adoptive parents (the adoptee is impacted during their life). When you read Marjorie Laird's article you will understand why hiring more social workers will only help history repeat itself in adoption.

Adoption should not be a matter of control. The only

one who should have control over you is you. The sooner the Ministry can learn to respect that, the better.

I can remember seeing Sue Rodriguez during her many court battles requesting the right to die when she chose, and I can still see her in my mind saying "If I cannot choose when to end my life, then whose body is this anyway?" Such a valiant fight it was for Sue but she did not win; her rights were suppressed by the highest court in the land (Supreme Court of Canada). If pregnant women cannot examine all of the options available to them at the time of an unplanned pregnancy, if adoptive parents cannot find out ALL of the history of the children they want to adopt (not only what a social worker chooses to tell them) and if adoptees cannot choose to meet with their family of origin when they feel it is necessary ... then whose life is it anyway?

If you have not written to your government representatives about an issue but always said you were going to, now is your opportunity. They need to hear voices of people who know what its is like to grow up adopted, from mothers who were separated from their children by adoption and from parents who have raised children they are not biologically related to. This opportunity doesn't come around very often, the Adoption Act hasn't been ammended since 1957, so who knows when it will get looked at again.

We are our own destiny ... or are more social workers our destiny?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

As the co-founder, Past President and Executive Director, I have been responsible for starting the Forget Me Not Family Society, coordinating two conferences (1993 & 1994) on adoption reunions, managing the office, coordinating workshops (1993) and assisting support groups along the way. The Society has been a part of my life for the past 4 1/2 years. I have recently decided to resign from my current position as Executive Director and to take a break from adoption related issues.

I have enjoyed talking to many of you over the phone during the past few years. I have heard so many of the stories of your lives, your ups and downs, some very personal information and your own views on adoption. Many of you would not believe how a common thread runs through all of your stories (usually it's pain) and how similar many stories are. When the situation is your own, however, it's as if you are the only one going through it. I know it well from my

own personal experience. So many of you need a place to talk to other people who really can understand what it is you are going through. A need to reconnect with our past history as well as a need to connect with others in similar circumstances is important to all of us.

Working with the Society and its members has been very rewarding for me. It has been enlightening for me to hear of the many positive reunions that have occurred. It has been very sad to hear of those denied a reunion because of death or because the person they have found denies contact.

I will miss all of you and wish the Forget Me Not Family Society well in their future. May you all have a joyous Christmas and a prosperous New Year in 1995.

It is time for me to move on to something else in the future, I know not what, just yet. I like to think of it as ... between opportunities at the moment.

--Kathryn Vea

Reunion Conference By Audio Tape

As a birthmother, who is unable to attend conferences or support group meetings due to a long term disability, I wish to say a huge thank you for the audio taping of sessions at this year's "Let's Talk About Reunions" conference in March. I have read everything I can about adoption & reunion, but I received so much more by actually listening to adoptees, adoptive parents and birth parents talking about their experiences.

I have just finished listening to the 7 tapes I ordered and I'm enclosing another order form for tapes from other sessions. I was impressed with the sound quality of the audio tapes. I sincerely hope that next year's conference will be taped as well for those of us unable to attend.

Many Thanks,
Heather Vaughan

Incorrect Background Information

Millie Strom, a reunited mother, was recently awarded a Canada Council grant to write a nonfiction book emphasizing the birth mother perspective. She is interested in stories from adoptive and birth parents who were given false or incorrect information by social workers or counsellors. Sometimes adoptees too, receive incorrect information on their background information. Please contact the author with your story or non-identifying information at:

Millie Strom
Suite 102, 2045 Franklin Street, Vancouver, B.C.
CANADA V5L 1R4
(604) 255-2055

Adoptive Parents & Adoption Reunion

I am a MSW Candidate at UBC School of Social Work conducting research on adoption reunion. Specifically, I am interested in the experiences of adoptive parents whose adult child(ren) reunite, or are seeking to reunite with birth parents.

Participation is entirely voluntary and all information gathered will be kept strictly confidential.

If you are willing to be interviewed or would like more information please call:

Rebecca Easson at (604) 325-5014.

FORGET ME NOT FAMILY SOCIETY 3rd Post Adoption Conference

"A TIME TO HEAL"

February 25-26, 1995

**Sheraton Landmark Hotel
1400 Robson Street
Vancouver, B.C.**

Plans for the 1995 Conference are moving right along. We have spent endless hours searching for a new location and lining up speakers. The title for this conference is "A Time To Heal". We have had many of the presenters themselves comment about how necessary it is to focus on the healing aspect of adoption reunions.

The conference will be held on February 25 & 26, 1995 at the Sheraton Landmark Hotel, located at 1400 Robson Street in Vancouver, B.C.

Some of the presenters who have agreed to facilitate workshops for us include: Lee Crawford, May Boyden, Sharon Jinkerson, Nancy Verrier (Primal Wound) and Carol Schaefer (The Other Mother). Joy MacPhail the Minister of Social Services will address the issue of the direction that adoption will take in the future in the province of B.C. on Sunday afternoon.

The conference committee would like to request that any members of our Society who have any pictures that can be made into slides about their own personal life (for example, as a child, a young person, or their reunion) for use in the Opening Ceremonies please send them in as soon as possible, in care of Cecelia Reekie.

Mark these dates on your calendar and we hope to see you there. **Registration forms and conference schedules will be mailed in December.**

Thanks go out to everyone on our Conference Committee: Nancy Kato, Bonnie Milne, Cecelia Reekie, Ginny Paulson and Catherine Moore for their time and effort that goes into this event. Great job, everyone!

POETRY AND BIRTHDAYS

Reunion Dented

Fingers tremble and caress the pages
Of a letter carefully penned
Words that quiver across the page
I struggle to comprehend

Touching the photos yellowed with time
I trace the silhouettes from the past
The shadows are my flesh and blood
The letter is her last

The doors have shut, my files resealed
Whispers have changed her mind
Though we are forever apart
Our spirits are intertwined

Twenty years I've sought her name
Her image is my reflection
I feel the fears and know the love
Reunion denied is not rejection

by Heather England

Published in the Vancouver Sun:

Birth Mother, Oct 23/89

(5:37 pm) Burnaby, B.C.

Relinquished Oct 27/89

Birthday boy Kyle is happy, healthy, kind & loving.
Much loved by family and friends. Please pick up our
correspondence to you at Lawyer, J.M.'s office in N.
Vancouver.

Adopted Mom & Dad

To birth mother of adopted girl, born November 2, 1984,
Grace Hospital. She is an exceptional child & we are
extremely grateful for her.

We all thank you.

By the Crib I Stood

By the crib I stood
I watched you there
Saying my goodbyes
I cried on your little shoulder
Did you feel the sorrow?
Selfish tears flowed out from me
Out from the depths of self pity
Asking myself,
"Why do I have to leave
and let you go?"
But human nature tried its test
to want me to go against
What I knew was right
for me and for you,
for us.
I had the night staged out in my mind
I stayed with you as long as I could
I cried for you,
then I cried for me.
By the crib I stood
And I loved you
And I told you goodbye.
And that God would be with you.
I walked away,
then turned back
to watch you,
to want you,
to hold you.
Asking God for strength,
I walked away
and did not turn back
But my heart would be with you
for always

by Jennifer Steel

Jan 8/84. evening before I said my last goodbye

A DREAM

by Sharon Jinkerson

Sometimes knowledge concerning our past comes in strange forms...

How long do we take to heal from the adoption experience? What impact does this early experience have on our lives? I came face to face with these issues one more time when I woke up from a nightmare with a feeling of terror deeper than I had ever experienced before. I got up and sat in the living room trying to catch on to thoughts and feelings that were dark and confusing. As soon as I realized that my family was safe I burst into tears and began to release some of my anguish.

This was the eve of my thirty-seventh birthday. I waited all day for "THE CALL" and thank God my birth mother didn't disappoint me. She had remembered this occasion, it, after all these years, was still a special day for her. I was thrilled and even allowed myself to be vulnerable and feel the relief and excitement. Why then, was I sitting there terrified a few hours later?

I sat alone in the middle of the night and allowed myself to recall the frightening images of my dream. A man appeared at my front door and began a rather innocuous conversation, I was wondering what he was doing at my doorstep when suddenly the dream turned ugly. The man began to force his way into my house! The dream moved faster and faster as I realized he was there to take my son. I tried to protect my baby but other people who I know recognized as social workers appeared and the struggle to keep my child in my arms became more and more hopeless. In vain I yelled at my partner to call 911 but he was frozen with terror and couldn't dial. At the split second when my son was finally being wrenched from my arms, I woke up.

As you might have guessed, I am a reunited adoptee. My birth mother and I had a wonderful conversation earlier that evening but I wanted to get down to all the details concerning my actual apprehension and subsequent adop-

tion. As I carried on a rather pleasing conversation, I silently pondered many questions. What does she remember? What were her feelings at the time of the apprehension? But I didn't ask, I couldn't. I was frustrated with myself. After all the years of personal growth and development I was still the loyal adoptee unable to address my own needs, but rather, pleasing Mom. I wanted to hear her tell her story. What was she feeling the moment she first realized we would never see each other again? Instead, I croaked out a few vague questions dealing with the past. But I ached as I allowed myself to wonder if I was a lovable baby.

My desire to know the truth became the catalyst for this nightmare. I experienced a scene buried deep within my soul. Although the myths and facts surrounding my early childhood are scattered and few, in my subconscious mind lay the full impact of the last panic moments with my family of origin. No matter how much I decide to deal with the issues surrounding my adoption, there

at the base of my soul lies a scare which impacts every turn of my life especially in my role as a mother.

I was six months old when my father had a nervous breakdown. Apparently, the scene was ugly when the authorities removed my Dad. I do not know if it was the stigma attached to mental illness or the stigma attached to the fact that my mother is native, but shortly thereafter, social workers came to remove my four brothers and me from our mother.

So why the dream? This particular dream is a psychological drama that has been played out over and over again in First Nations Communities. My grandmother and mother were both taken away from their family of origin to be raised in residential schools. At the age of six my grandmother told of the loneliness and longing to live with family and practice a familiar lifestyle. She kept alive memories of home by

"My desire to know the truth became the catalyst for this nightmare. I experienced a scene buried deep within my soul".

sharing with other children in the few moments of privacy they were allowed. My grandmother frequently told of the terror they had of leaving home to face life in an institution. In this institution, they learned one cardinal rule, that dominant society had all the power.

"We needn't look only to First Nations communities to find examples of social injustice: age, class and other racial issues resulted in many adoptions".

I have no conscious memories of those final moments with my family but if the dream symbolically represented my apprehension, it told me I was terrorized as a child and that a piece of me was taken at the moment never to be given back. It also allowed me to see inside my mother and feel the gravity of the situation. This terror was not a familiar feeling to me. Of course, I was raised with the myth that adoption is a normal process. Accepting this, I learned to block out most of my feelings that came up surrounding the issue of my adoption. The feeling that I was able to acknowledge was curiosity. Where did all the anguish go?

Like many adoptees, I was forced to rely upon the goodwill and good memories of various family members. After interviewing everyone except my birth mother, I was able to put together a sketchy picture of my history. Some of the facts were to always haunt me. My adoptive mother was honest and explained to me that my physical condition, upon the apprehension, was bad. She said that I was suffering from malnutrition and impetigo. This always made me think that I was not really loved by my birth mother. The social workers had accused my birth mother of neglect as opposed to the history I received from the government that reported I had a "loving mother".

Sometimes knowledge concerning our past comes in strange forms. In November of 1991 I gave birth to my son. His skin was a mess. His little legs, arms and face were covered in a painful looking rash that weeped and bled. Our family doctor tried unsuccessfully to treat it and we were referred to a skin specialist. By this time my son's skin was a shocking mess. We were told then that it was a hereditary skin condition that amounted to extremely dry skin. The doctor asked my partner and I if either of us had had this as infants. The implications of this skin disorder with respect to my past were enormous. I began to consider as well, the allegations of my malnutrition. Perhaps it was a lack of education or finances; after all my father had a serious

mental collapse in a town thousands of miles away from his family.

It is a gift to know my skin condition was hereditary; that after looking after my son with daily baths and creams he was still a mess. It also became clearer to me that my mother was not given any benefit of doubt. She was an Indian in the Fifties who was loving but negligent in the eyes of those social workers.

Was caring for me the only item on the agenda? Perhaps it was their moral and social arrogance which caused them to decide my family's fate. There is no question I had a stable life; raised with a loving family. I am sure those social workers and the government were patting themselves on the back for a job well done. They had rescued an Indian child from malnourishment and impetigo. Like most First Nations families, the scars are evident of the holocaust which took place in the Americas. We needn't look only to First Nations communities to find examples of social injustice: age class and other racial issues resulted in many adoptions.

Social justice issues aside, what of the emotional pain that adoptees face in the aftermath of their adoption? I have a very typical adoptee profile. I've had difficulty trusting and belonging in my adult life. The decision to have family was extremely difficult. I was 34 years old before my son was born. I had always loved children but felt I was far too independent to have a family. Maybe that is what my mind processed, but after that dream, I believe I was protecting myself from triggering my early life experiences. Although my adoption story is relatively traumatic, I now wonder what the impact is for people with more conventional adoption stories. It's clear that this experience is shattering for adoptees like myself. I have spent many hours tuning into my emotions, which I believe lead me to this dream. Ultimately, I feel it was a passage into the future, that I needed to experience this horror in the context where I was safe and in control. As I cried, I knew they were healing tears; I was transcending this original pain.

"Social Justice issues aside, what of emotional pain adoptees face in the aftermath of their adoption?"

No matter the rationale, my life has been shaped by these haunting shadows that reach back to the genesis of my being. The central cedar pole of my life which reaches up to the sky is rooted in pain and loss. At the age of thirty seven, I was cast back decades to re-experience the emotional terror. As I got up from the chair, in the lonely hours before dawn, I couldn't help but peak in and reassure myself. Feeling each breath rushing in and out of my chest, each beat of my heart, I reached down and softly touched the face of my sleeping son. □

ADOPTION ISSUES: FILES AND RECORDS --LEARNING FROM THE PAST

by Marjorie Laird, BA (Hons), LL.B.

Marjorie Laird is a Vancouver writer. After raising five children, she returned to university at the age of 40 and completed two degrees. She is not a lawyer, but has an ongoing interest in equity and trusts; Lord Denning has given his written imprimatur to her equity project, which she has dedicated to him. The following contains excerpts from Marjorie Laird's article. Reprinted with author's permission.

We must say "Never Again," and this resolution must touch all of us.

Adoption interest groups are formidable, fuelled as they are by the personal experience of their members. Outspoken and often outraged, these people refuse to be silenced by government. They deserve the power they have developed. It is thanks to such determined and dedicated people that we can look ahead to some positive changes in adoption law.

But a warning must be given not to become too complaisant. The battle is not yet over. My direct and recent experience with adoption issues in the year and a half that I worked for the Adoption Reunion Registry (ARR) has been a revelation, and what I saw was shocking.

"OPEN" RECORDS: FULL DISCLOSURE IS NECESSARY

The recently released Report to the Minister of Social Services of the Panel to Review Adoption Legislation in British Columbia (hereafter "Report") recommends opening the adoption records after January 1, 2000. Nowhere in the Report, however, does the Panel define "open," and this is a crucial issue. I believe that entire records must be made available to individuals. I believe that every bit of information in the adoption records is absolutely necessary, even the smallest, apparently insignificant details. People will not be able to come to terms with their lifelong anxieties and grief unless they can see and understand the force and direction of past events.

If the issue of privacy arises, then appropriate legislation must set that issue aside. I believe that this is absolutely necessary for two reasons: first, this complete information is critical to the real recovery of those who have been subjected to adoption trauma; secondly, there is (and has been) a crisis in social services--there must be a thorough cleansing of this system. For clarity, I will discuss the social services system first, and then explain why it is not just useful, but necessary to allow records to be examined, to be opened completely.

SOCIAL WORKERS: UNLIMITED POWER AND UNLIMITED EXCUSES

At first--before working at the ARR--I had thought that total disclosure of information within the adoption records would not be useful, and would lead to lawsuits, resulting in a lot of grief and loss of money for plaintiffs: only the lawyers would get rich. Now, I have come to realize how deep and how serious the wounds of adoption trauma are, and how long-lasting. And now, realizing how pervasive government incompetence and bad faith is, I am convinced that total disclosure of files is necessary.

While working as a writer at the ARR, I read well over a thousand adoption files. This was not light reading, for compiling Non-identifying Reports for adoptees and birth relatives meant that I had to analyse and coordinate all information into a file, and then put everything available into a readable report. If information was good, the task was pleasant; harsh or tragic facts had to be told as well, and often I had to struggle so as to present this in the least hurtful way possible. Some files were not large, and others were massive; most fell in between. All contained a range of information that included Children's Aid reports, doctors' and psychiatric reports, and Ministry of Social Services files, documents, and records, as well as Court documents. There were hundreds and hundreds of files, thousands of reports within them.

I had thought that I was well-acquainted with the entire range of human misery, but reading adoption files with their sad residue of so many lives really completed my education. I now find it very difficult to be anything but pessimistic about humanity.

I was shocked, to see notes in the file by social workers that adoptive parents should not be told what was certainly very vital information. I was shocked, at how the files of a

child who had been abused in foster or adoptive care were often "missing," often listed as "file destroyed." Although I have not seen the social services central records depository in Victoria, I have heard from several reliable sources that these records are kept in permanent disarray, scattered about in old cabinets and cardboard boxes. My own experience in requesting further information on particular files confirmed such disarray.

Earlier microfilming of some records also appeared to be equally haphazard--omissions or duplications were without rhyme or reason. In this day and age of state-of-the-art information management, there is no excuse for such a mess. It seems to be that such disarray is purposeful--useful, to cover up mistakes.

UNLIMITED POWER

What was most shocking in the adoption files that I read, was the extent to which social workers worked hard to protect themselves at the expense of those in their car: to protect themselves, their colleagues and bureaucratic bosses, their masters the politicians, and their paycheques. This was done, I believe, only because it is career suicide to create an "incident" in social services, or to do that which discredits the Minister. I frequently read social workers' accounts which emphasized how, over the course of several "meetings," clients such as adoptive parents or birth mothers who had validly complained would "be made to see" or "come to understand" that such complaint was "wrong" or "unfounded." As I reviewed each instance, I found that about 95% of the time, the complaints were valid. Clients were obviously not able to withstand the relentless pressure by an unscrupulous force--the social worker, who really held all the cards.

Just as relentless as the social workers' instinct for self-protection, is their quest for holiness. The fact that they attend on the less fortunate in our society allows social workers the basic smokescreen of missionary zeal. Behind this convenient fiction is a very unhealthy reality. There seemed to be a lot of social workers who sought a kind of self-righteous validation--a self-congratulatory state of mind achieved by contact with their clients, whom they described--frequently--as undeserving poor, and "fallen women" in need of adoption services. One might say that such social workers were only reflecting the morals of their times, in which case we, as citizens, must examine ourselves and insist on new and equitable standards. I encountered far too much enthusiasm in this quest for holiness on the part of the social workers and, as I read the adoption files, I could only conclude that this self-righteous instinct seems to be frequently characteristic of those who are attracted to social work.

What is truly frightening is that, the social workers hold all the power. One might contend that the clients could have been more persistent with complaints, but such a contention

is foolish: I have referred (above) to the notes in files of how those who did complain were subjected to what amounted to brainwashing until they came to see their complaints as "unfounded." Many persons who had good reason to complain but did not do so, I saw that these people were truly at a disadvantage; they were poor, often inarticulate, frequently without supportive family or friends. Many times adoption files record such persons as isolated in bleak and unfamiliar places, or emotionally devastated by the break-

down of a relationship and/or unexpected pregnancy. Forced to fight with social workers for a few dollars for adequate food and shelter, a person with a valid complaint would have little choice, for if the complaint was made, the social worker's "generosity" would disappear. Those in need were unable to prevent defeat and, thus defeated, had to yield to the whims of the social worker. The social workers, in all cases, were

always very much in control.

UNLIMITED EXCUSES

Now, in 1994, thanks to the determined voice of people who have experienced the adoption system, we may have changes in legislation. We must also restructure the social services system, because it is through the social services system that adoption services are delivered. How much suffering must we see and experience before we demand and enforce change?

A primary consideration is the basic education of social workers, which has been proven to be inadequate; then there is the structure within which social workers operate: taken together with education that is inadequate, one finds the current social service profile--unlimited power and unlimited excuses. Looking first at social worker education, one cannot help but be aware of the inadequacies being presently revealed by the Gove commission. Even before this, much was reported in the media. In 1992, the Community Panel published their report Making Changes: A Place to Start, and this report contains many comments gathered from all over BC about social worker inadequacy, educational deficiencies, and insensitivity.

The recently released Report (Panel to Review Adoption etc.) also has such comments about the competence of social workers. The universities, the government, and the BC Association of Social Workers have had forever and a day to fashion a curriculum and standards which are appropriate to the task, yet they obviously have not done so. Why? Instead, almost as a substitute for substantial education, social workers have managed to surround themselves with jargon. I can only conclude that jargon is an artificial means of achieving some kind of status: "Say it in jargon, and we (the social workers) will get respect because we have such

Now, in 1994, thanks to the determined voice of people who have experienced the adoption system, we may have changes in legislation, and that is a start.

continued on next page

very specialized knowledge." Jargon acts in many cases as a wall of unanswerable bafflegab, allowing an escape from accountability, and functioning as a substitute for hard educational standards.

How do we deal with such incompetence? Many escape answering for their misdeeds: they hide or are hidden by going on long-term "sick leave," or by being "transferred"; someone is "fired," but soon given a lucrative job in a government-funded satellite agency; still others retreat, do not talk about what they know, and are later hired as "consultants."

It is clear that we need the safeguard of accountability in social services, and a reliable mechanism for enforcing accountability which must be situated well out of the control of those who work within the present social services parameters of political expedience. This necessary accountability must apply to social worker education, but the most important area which needs such a safeguard is that of social worker performance.

THE FUTURE: NOT-SO-HIDDEN DANGERS

We must restructure the basic qualification framework and workplace ethics of social work. It is very amusing to see such expediency and avoidance of blame--surfacing in the Report on pages 19 and 55 where there are sympathetic bleatings about the pressure to relinquish put on birth mothers. The Report blames "physicians and nurses", and "neighbors...and adoptive parents" for such pressure! The Report would have us believe that "consent under duress" had nothing at all to do with the social worker! Sorry, but it just will not work! I have read the files, and I know social workers are most culpable.

The Report goes even further and gives social workers a halo: page 55 tells of "consent under duress" as being "a concern shared by lawyers and social workers." On page 19, when sternly addressing the nasty "physicians and nurses," the Report speaks of "the opinion of the mother and social workers." This Report thus goes against all the evidence within the adoption files that I have read. There is no doubt that pressure was brought to bear by physicians, nurses and, perhaps, neighbours--but the controlling hand which set the stage was always that of the social worker!

Looking into the future, one cannot be reassured. For example, the 1992 Community Panel on Family and Children's Services Legislation; everyone got to speak, or submit a paper, and the impression of the populace was that things were really happening. But nothing happened. The 1994 Panel to Review Adoption Legislation was another such exercise, although during its term it was very hard to get information about it, much less make a presentation. I know of one person, a highly-qualified counsellor very experienced in adoption issues, who was refused a chance to speak. (I believe that the Panel feared the direct speech she had to offer about the ARR--yet such information would be of vital interest to the Panel.) And in the Report of this Panel, there is no reassurance for the future; like the Community Panel, it is a "feel-good" exercise--one can expect nothing else.

Such negative expectations are confirmed by the Report such as counselling and the ARR. From its inception, the ARR has been a troubled place; of a working-average total of 15 employees, 10 have left, and only 2 such departures could be considered "ordinary." The ARR has made a policy of suppressing the very valid concerns of its counselling staff. The ARR was not set up as a clinical programme, but that does not mean that the counselling component of the ARR should be suppressed, and a "happy camper" philosophy of assembly-line reunions substituted. That four highly-qualified, well-respected counsellors, all outstanding for their concern for and sensitivity to adoption issues, have felt it necessary to make the decision to leave the ARR speaks for itself. The government is not to be trusted when it recommends that counselling be available: if the ARR, which is the "delivery system" removes counselling as a high priority, what can we expect in the future? The ARR must be investigated, and among the questions asked are: why counselling became such a bramble of an issue; why people have complained about ARR insensitivity (Report, page 36); and the hiring policies and qualifications for positions such as that of Registrar.

THE FINAL WORD: A VOICE FROM THE PAST

In summary, we as citizens, must insist that social services be given a major overhaul. If we open the adoption files in their entirety, the outcry against the social services system will be such that restructuring will be quite inevitable: reading adoption files would convince any person that major changes are necessary. We as citizens must fashion safeguards against abuses committed by the system, not by its clients. Although counselling is acknowledged as necessary for recovery in many cases, the focus is definitely not on counselling at the ARR. Why?

What is even more important is that adoption files must be totally opened. Adoptees will better understand the reasons for relinquishment if they can but see the grievous indignities to which birth mothers were subjected, the fear and loneliness, the poverty, and the contempt which their mothers had to endure. Adoptees themselves suffered abuse in foster or adoptive homes must see exactly what happened if they are to escape the fatal thought that somehow they deserved their bitter circumstances. For all the grief, the cruelties, and the bitter circumstances that have stunted and afflicted so many souls, the beginning of healing is knowledge. Open records must be entirely open.

We must resolve to honour those who gave us birth and those who nurtured us: we must ensure that our children, and our grandchildren, and all the yet unborn do not suffer the indignities previously inflicted by government.

Persons with information to share are invited to write to Marjorie Laird, Box 368, Station A, Vancouver, B.C. V6C 2N2. Comments and criticisms are also welcome. The author is also interested in hearing the effects of adoption and the adoption process in later life, in relationships, and also in early development; as well, the experiences of grandparents, sisters and brothers, spouses, and all other relatives are important.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS OF ADOPTION PRACTICES IN BC

The report from the Panel to Review Adoption Legislation in British Columbia was released by Social Services Minister Joy MacPhail on October 7, 1994. The report is the final phase of a 2 year process which gathered public input on this complex and emotional issue.

During the process 2,070 written submissions and 600 telephone calls were received. Consultation was also undertaken through public forums, roundtable discussions, and with individuals.

The report includes 103 recommendations regarding adoption policies and practices. Some key issues affecting access to records from the report are as follows:

The Review Panel recommends that the phrase "as if born to" be removed from the Adoption Act.

In reference to information sought by members of the adoption circle, the Panel recommends that all adoption records be made available to adult adoptees after January 1, 2000. Every person, regardless of where they were adopted, be able to access information about themselves when they reach the age of majority. This would apply to provincial, inter-provincial and international adoption. After January 1, 2000, birth mothers be able to veto contact with children for up to two years by including a "no contact" letter in the adoption record. The letter must detail reasons for "no contact". The force of this veto will only extend to cover contact with the birth mother and will not limit access to records. This veto is renewable, every two years, upon receipt of the birth mother's written request. The contents of the letter must be made available to adoptees upon request. On January 1, 2004, the minister commence a review of a birth mother's right to veto contact in order to assess whether the right to a veto should be continued.

The importance of foster families to a child's experience must be acknowledged, therefore, the Panel recommends that adoptees be able to access more detailed information about their time in foster care. This information could, at a minimum, include the names of foster parents and their location.

In reference to who should get information and when, the Panel recommends that once an adoptee reaches the age of majority, adoptive parents be denied access to information about the adoptee or the adoptee's birth family without the written permission of the adoptee. This restriction should be

waived if the adoptee has a disability in which the adoptee cannot make a decision. Information in the Department of Vital Statistics be cross-referenced to the Adoption Reunion Registry/Ministry of Social Services so that information on the death of a relevant party could be easily accessed. Upon the death of an adoptee, effort be made to inform the birth family. Upon the death of birth parents, effort be made to inform the adoptee. If the adoptee is under the age of majority, then the adoptive parents should be informed. Adoptees, once they reach the age of majority, have access to any and all information in their file including the original birth registration. The adoptee should be forewarned if the information is of a sensitive nature. In exceptional situations, adoptees under the age of majority have access to information with the consent of their adoptive parent(s); or the agreement of the director of adoption; or on the recommendation of the office of the Child, Youth and Family Advocate. At the time of a foster placement, foster parents be given an opportunity to permit future release of their names and whereabouts to a former child-in-care.

In reference to medical information, the Panel recommends that the Ministry of Social Services initiate consultation between the BC Medical Association, the Registered Nurses Association of BC and the BC Association of Social Workers to look at current forms for recording medical history and the way in which this history is requested, recorded and presented to clients. One outcome of this consultation must be standardizing the collection of medical information. Medical forms be

completed by the birth mother and father at the time of relinquishment. Birth parents and adoptees have the opportunity to update adoption records over the course of their lifetime(e.g. medical issues, declaration of paternity). Adoption records include a child's nation of origin. The Ministry of Social Services, in consultation with community groups and First Nations, identify the types of information to be included on all records and forms relating to the adoption of children in BC. This information should be collected by the Ministry of Social Services to form an accurate and easily accessible data base.

"The phrase "as if born to" be removed from the Adoption Act."

Copies of the report are available from the Ministry of Social Services, Adoption Services, Parliament Buildings, Victoria, B.C. V8W 3A2 or contact Michael Edge, Communications Division, Victoria at (604) 387-6485.

Adoption Reform Coalition of Canada
#203 3719 West 8th, Ave. Vancouver, B.C. V6R 1Z2
Phone and fax (604) 222-2892

To: Members of the Adoption Community of British Columbia.

Re: Finding Consensus further to the recommendations by the Adoption Legislative Review Team, made public in a report Oct. 7, 1994.

In a community where competing interests have historically fractured many well intentioned initiative for positive change, we value your input as it will assist the entire adoption community in the development of a more open, inclusive, accountable and ultimately a healthier system of adoption in BC. We would like to have as consensual and as definitive a platform as possible in light of the probability that changes to the Adoption Act using this review document as a framework could be enacted in the spring of 1995.

Therefore, we ask that you provide us with a yes or no response to the following questions. If you wish to sign it as an individual or an organization please make sure to differentiate, or if you wish to remain anonymous that is fine. Please circulate this questionnaire to as many interested parties within your group(s) as this will be part of a larger information gathering effort. Any questions or further comments please direct them to Nigel Harvey at ARCC.

Please return it via: Phone/Fax: (604) 222-2892

Mail: ARCC (address above)

We will be gathering responses for a six week period, commencing November 5, 1994 and will be presenting our findings to the Minister of Social Services, Joy MacPhail.

Question One:

Providing there is a contact notice mechanism in place for both parties, should adoptees upon reaching adult status, have an unqualified right to their long form original birth certificate and such additional information as may be necessary to establish their origin, medical history, and legal name at the time of their birth, effective spring of 1995?

Question Two:

Providing there is a contact notice mechanism in place for these parties, should a biological mother, and biological father have a right to the adoptee's amended birth certificate upon the adoptee reaching the age of majority and such information that may be necessary to establish his/her identity, effective spring of 1995?

Question Three:

Should the primary participants in the adoption circle, ie. birth parents, adoptees and adoptive parents, be equal partners with government agencies in the development of policy formation and implementations of legislative initiatives for the spring of 1995 and beyond?

Any additional comment please use separate page.

Signature:

Address:

MEDIAFILE

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

*** *Whose graveyard?*** was the chilling headline of an article by Stephen Hume in the Vancouver Sun (September 30). The story is of a 15 year old girl, Roxanne, who was born to Gayle Bruyere, a member of the Saykeeng Nation at Fort Alexandra, Manitoba. Thirteen years ago, Gayle, a teenage alcoholic, was an emotional wreck, exploited by the street and unable to care for her children. Because of her many hardships she thought it best that her children be raised by somebody else. Legal guardianship of little Roxanne was appointed by Court Order to Mildred Unruh of Quesnel.

In May of this year, Gayle was working on control of her life and contacted Roxanne to start putting the pieces of her life together, but on June 27th, Roxanne ran away from Mildred's Unruh's home. Her disappearance was not reported until August 11 and on August 17 Roxanne's remains were found in a bush, four miles west of Burns Lake.

Today, Roxanne's remains lie in a cold box in Prince George until final results are reported by the forensic pathologist. To whom Roxanne's body will be released is the question - still unanswered. Gayle Bruyere wants to bury her daughter on the sacred ground near the rapids of the Winnipeg River, where her generations lie. Mildred Unruh wants to bury her daughter in the town where she was known. Both mothers have sought legal council to solve this custody battle.

*** *The Supreme Court backs adoptive parents*** was the headline of an article in the Vancouver Sun (October 8) written by Larry Still, after an unsuccessful bid of a natural father to gain custody of his 14 month old son, Matthew Matheson. Baby Matthew was born August 1/93, to Jennifer Landry, 17, and Tony Johnston, 24, after a single sexual encounter, and was placed with his adoptive parents Jo-Anne and Steven Matheson of North Vancouver, at 11 days old. Johnston filed for custody of his son, believing he may be denied his 1/6th to 1/8th Squamish Indian heritage, but Supreme Court Justice Mary Ellen Boyd dismissed Johnston's application for permanent custody (and denied visitation access to the child until he is at least 6 years old) and granted the Matheson's petition to adopt the child.

Boyd described the Matheson's as intelligent, sensitive, caring individuals who are emotionally and financially stable, but described Johnston as an immature young man

and stated she had no confidence in his ability to meet Matthew's needs. The biological mother opposed Johnston's custody suit and was in full support of the adoptive parents.

*** *Family Matters - but not very much*** new studies find - your character is shaped more by your friends. The Weekend Sun (October 8) brandished an article by Stuart Sutherland, a professor of psychology at Sussex University, suggesting the view that personality is largely formed by parental upbringing is entirely mistaken. Studies have suggested (especially those involving identical twins) that the behaviours of adopted children are more likely to resemble those of their biological parents, however, more studies state that the influence of contemporaries are a large, often overlooked factor in personality and behaviour development.

Though children may turn out to be very dissimilar from their parents, they are still influenced by them, but for social workers to concentrate on the parents of delinquent children, they may be wasting their time and would probably do better to attend the child's peer groups.

*** *The Alberta government will help adoptees*** find their biological parents under a newly proposed provincial legislation introduced in October. An article in the Edmonton Journal, by Tom Arnold (October 21), announced that if the legislation is passed, an agency will be established to allow adoptees to search (at a cost of \$250) for their biological parents.

However, the new legislation will not afford the biological parents the same right. Alberta Social Services Minister Mike Cardinal is quick to say "there will be some people dissatisfied we may not have gone as far as we should have in the adoption issue" and mentions that at least this is a "step in the right direction".

Groups such as Parent Finders of Edmonton, lobbied for open records with veto protection but Cardinal thought it best to "take our time because it's a very sensitive issue and could hurt people on both sides". If the proposed changes to the existing Child Welfare Act are accepted this Fall, they will be reviewed annually and extensively re-examined in four years.

BOOK REVIEW

FINDING FAMILY

Rick Ouston's book Finding Family is available through the Society. Please refer to the Mail Order section of this newsletter to order your copy.

Rick Ouston's mother disappeared shortly after his birth, leaving him to be brought up by adoptive parents. More than thirty years later, armed with just a handful of clues - her birthdate, her home province - Ouston sets out to find her.

Using skills and techniques he learned as an investigative journalist while working for CBC TV and the Vancouver Sun, he began the search for his mother and for an older sister who was also given up for adoption earlier.

Finding Family is an engrossing detective story, but it's also a story about what it means to find your family - whether it's your blood relations, or the strangers who take you into their own family, or the communities we choose to make for ourselves to provide the love and support that "family" represents.

Ouston's search began at a time of crisis. His marriage had just collapsed and he had just lost his job at CBC TV. He had money in the bank and time on his hands. A friend suggested that he use both to find his family.

A well written and poignant book. It will be considered excellent reading for all members of the adoption circle.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Support Groups For birthmothers, adoptees, and adoptive parents

Cloverdale

The second Wednesday of each month, a support group meets at Cloverdale Public Library, 5642 - 176A Street. For more information contact Cecelia Reekie at 530-9982.

New Westminster

The second Tuesday of each month, a support group 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 Katherine Moore at 929-6309, for more information.

Quesnel

The first Tuesday of each month, a support group meets at the Community Services Building. Contact Sharon Stevens at 992-9087 in Quesnel.

REUNION REGISTRY UPDATE

By Marg Harrington

Reunion Registry Statistics From Oct 2/91 to Oct 31/94.

Total Applications Received	6730
Total Database*	9005
Searches Completed	3239
Reunions Completed	2419
<i>Other outcomes of active searches:</i>	
Subject of search deceased	225
Subject of search refused contact	337
<i>Other Services:</i>	
Matches on the passive database	367
Non-identifying information reports	1552

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

LEAN ON ME Telephone Support List

Reunited Birthmothers:

Monica Bunton (403) 327-7525
Sue Finley (604) 888-0920
Nicole Quittenton (604) 731-0605
Connie Short (604) 534-9456
Betty Coutts
(100 Mile House) (604) 395-4969

Searching Birthmothers:

Mary Reynolds (604) 534-2851

Reunited Adoptees:

Cecelia Reekie (604) 530-9982
Sharon Stevens - Quesnel (604) 992-9087
Sue Travis (604) 534-2477

Reunited with Birth Father:

Sandra Pudsey (604) 534-4993

Reunited with Siblings:

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

Denied Reunion Adoptees:

Liz Goadby (604) 574-7223

Adoptive Parent of Reunited Adoptee:

Sue McBeatch (604) 538-8301

Adoptive Parent:

Elsa Weinstein (604) 876-4543

Interested Professionals:

Judy Archer (604) 988-5281
North Shore Family Services
Michaele-Sue Goldblatt (604) 921-6425

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.

VOLUNTEERS

The Forget Me Not Family Society seeks committee volunteers. Please call our office at 581-0550 for more information about a committee that interests you.

Mail Order

The following books and products are available from the Society. Please make cheques payable to **Forget Me Not Family Society** and mail to Forget Me Not Family Society, 10693 - 135A St. Surrey, B.C., V3T 4E3 CANADA. 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, birth parents and adoptive families. 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 birth parents. \$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.

Finding Family by Rick Ouston. Very compelling for adoption circle members. A great search & reunion book which Rick has dedicated to All The Secret Mothers. \$16.00 plus shipping.

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

T-SHIRTS! GET YOURS NOW!



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

Please send letters to the editor, reunion stories, news and information on community events to: Adoption Circles, c/o Forget Me Not Family Society, 10693 - 135A St. Surrey, B.C., V3T4E3 CANADA.