

ADOPTION CIRCLES

Canada's Post-Adoption Quarterly

Issue 49 Spring 2009 \$3.50



Alison Larkin

Inside This Issue

President's Message	2	Personality Profile- Alison Larkin	12
Walters' Web	3	"DNA" Song by Alison Larkin	14
Letters to the Editor		The Truth is Out There	14
Adoption Healing 101	5	Adoptees at the Movies- Part 1	15
Forgiveness or Understanding	6	Announcements	14
Comments by Alessandra	7	Lean on Me/ Support Groups	16
Poetry	8	Celebrity, Shari Ulrich	17
Focus on Celebrity	9	Waiting for Ontario	18
Celebrity & Adoption- PICS	10	Where do we Go from Here?	19
		Celebrity & Adoption- ANSWERS	20

ADOPTION CIRCLES

**Spring 2009
Publisher
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ADOPTION CIRCLES is published quarterly by the Forget Me Not Family Society, a non-profit organization. Individual membership is \$25.00 per year. Corporate membership is \$60.00 per year. Please send cheque payable to the **Forget Me Not Family Society** to: #102- 1860 Southmere Cres. E., Surrey, B.C. V4A 6Y7 Telephone: 604-777-2920 Fax: 604-833-4884 Residents of the U.S., please send U.S. funds. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part(s) of this Newsletter may be reproduced in any form without the written consent of the author and/ or the Society. Please send editorials and letters to the Editor, Sandra Walters at: walters.sandra@shaw.ca or by mail care of the Society at the address noted above.

FORGET ME NOT FACTS:

Forget Me Not Family Society is a provincially registered, non-profit society and a federally registered charity. Tax receipts are issued for donations to our Society. Charity #88908-4869-RR0001. Our Society was formed for education, consultation, peer counseling and to offer support to all those touched by adoption: adoptees, birth parents, adoptive parents, and concerned professionals. Our only source of income is through membership fees, fundraising, and donations. These funds go directly towards printing, postage, telephone, 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 through:

- Conducting monthly support groups in New Westminster and in Surrey
- Bi-monthly Internet "chat" support group
- Individual peer support
- Resource library
- Referrals to professionals and other service groups
- Speakers Bureau to educate groups on post-adoption issues
- Quarterly Newsletter

OUR MANDATE:

- To encourage and develop a recognition of the benefits of family preservation and openness in adoption practice.
- To establish and operate a Post Adoption Resource Centre providing education, consultation, counseling and support to those touched by adoption: adoptees, birthparents, adoptive parents, and concerned professionals.
- To provide community education programs, panel presentations and workshops on post adoption issues for any members of the community who wish to learn more about adoption and reunion issues.

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 forward to the Editor at: walters.sandra@shaw.ca



President's Message

Nancy Kato

I don't know about you, but I'm just about done with the cold and the snow. This has been a long winter and I'm ready for sunshine, flowers, and longer days!

This edition of Adoption Circles has us looking at celebrities in adoption. You can't help but see

"We often refuse to accept an idea merely because the tone of voice in which it has been expressed is unsympathetic to us."

- Friedrich Nietzsche, German scholar, philosopher, 1844-1900

constant reminders of those in the public eye who have chosen to adopt children - mostly from other countries.

It makes me wonder about the thousands of children in North America that need a home - why don't they adopt locally? Will adopted children of famous people be truly better off? Will they have a better chance of being successful? Will they wonder less about their birth/natural parents? I think we can mostly agree that adoptions are going to continue to be an option, that women are going to continue having unwanted pregnancies and want to place their children into adoption. Would you want a celebrity to adopt your child? Would you want to be adopted by a famous person? What do you think? Let us know - we'll print your letters in a future edition.

And while on the subject of personal opinion, I would just like to remind everyone that not everything we put in print is going to resonate with everyone. We all come from

different perspectives and we each own our own stories and feelings. What one person feels or thinks is not going to be the same as what you might feel or think. And that's okay. When someone is willing to share their feelings, we need to respect that it may have taken a great deal of courage to say something that is "against the norm". Some things may even upset you, yet you need to recognize that those triggers that create a sense of discomfort belong to you. I want people to

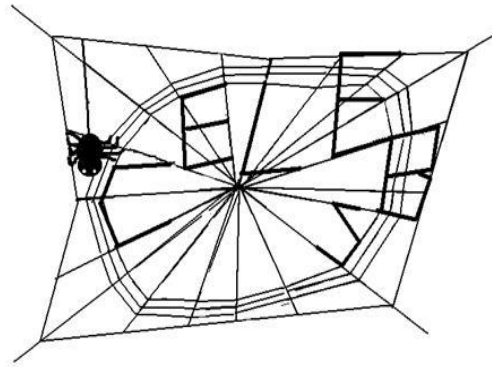
say what's truly on their minds and in their hearts and Forget Me Not tries to make it safe for everyone to do that. If you disagree with someone's point of view, by all means write us an article on why, what's different for you, and how do you feel.

Until next time,
Nancy

Our focus for the first 2009 issue of Adoption Circles is "Celebrity". As usual, the theme is a word that may cause people to consider its relation to adoption in a variety of ways. For me as an adopted person, I find the list of celebrity adoptees set out in centre pages of this issue to be an inspiration. These are people who have arguably started life with a trauma and yet have gone on to thrive and to reach a high level of notoriety in their field. Instead of identifying as a victim, they have become survivors, and many of them have also reached back to help fellow adoptees.



Walters' Web
Sandra Walters



The theory that adoption has caused a deep wound, a trauma, to all adoptees was postulated by Nancy Verrier in her important work seeking to understand adoptees, and is set out in detail in her book entitled "Primal Wound". Nancy Verrier has not concluded that "some" adoptees have experienced a trauma- i.e. those who have ended up in dysfunctional adoptive families- she says ALL those adopted as infants have experienced trauma by virtue of separation from their mothers. If we accept that virtually all adoptees started life with a painful, difficult experience, then we adoptees all face challenges in our lives dealing with this wound. We will all have our own, unique way of coping.

We can draw the conclusion that the adoptees who have reached a certain level of "celebrity" have dealt with the adoption wound sufficiently to function and to thrive. We can only surmise that they have either done the work necessary to dissipate the strong emotions attached to the trauma, they have suppressed them to a significant degree, or perhaps they have found an alternative, creative, outlet for these emotions. It is interesting that many of the adoptees who are "household names" are musicians or actors/ actresses- both very creative professions. They have all summoned sufficient energy and drive to go out into the world and triumph. And some, like Darryl McDaniels, from the band

Run DMC, have reached back to help others, through his advocacy for access to birth records. Run DMC has recently been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame for being one of the first rap groups to bring rap music to the mass market.

Many people will not acknowledge that adoptees have suffered as a result of adoption and that, in my opinion, is for political reasons. To acknowledge that the mother who places a child for adoption may suffer incredible grief and loss at her separation from her child, or that the child may experience a trauma by virtue of that separation, is to cast a tarnish on the perfect solution of adoption. For those who believe that life begins at conception, the position is often that we must support adoption as an option because, otherwise, women will abort their babies. In Nancy Verrier's words, "...pro-life people espouse the wonders of adoption, completely ignoring the pitfalls of this alternative, or the painful lives of unwanted children who daily suffer unspeakable atrocities at the hands of abusive parents" (Primal Wound, p.211) For those who are facing infertility and the prospect of not having children, there may be the same politics-based refusal to acknowledge that adoption itself causes suffering to others.

However, at the support group meetings and workshops held by the Forget Me Not Society, we see first-hand evidence of the

bodies "broken" as a result of adoption. We seek to help others afflicted with our same wounds (using a cliff analogy) both from the vantage point of the "bottom of the cliff" as well as at the "edge of the cliff". At the bottom of the cliff, we can tend to the injured by finding ways to encourage their healing. We can band together in groups and share methods that have worked for us. We can encourage others in all the baby steps they take. We can find ways to either share our stories of healing or give our opinion on the approaches that have worked best for us, either through peer support, Newsletters, and/ or Websites. We can seek the help of "doctors" (i.e. professionals) who have, through their studies, experience and research, developed an expertise on treating our wounds, and consult with them on an individual or group basis. Even though we may not personally like one person's method of healing, it may be effective for others and should, therefore, be shared with the group.

At the top of the cliff, we can explore ways to prevent people from falling, or being pushed, over the cliff. We can talk about the pain and explain the reason that people are suffering. We can let others know that adoption is causing injuries and we need to find ways to either discourage people from pursuing this option or, at least, make sure that they do so with their eyes open and in the most prepared, least damaging way. As a charity, the Forget Me Not Society can only do a limited amount from a political standpoint- we can express preferences to government policy and legislation only as ancillary to our main goal of helping those impacted by adoption.

If we hope to discourage people from pursuing the adoption option, the more positive approach may be to do everything possible to encourage women to keep and parent their children. Some members of the Society have also volunteered with organizations that seek to provide the supports necessary to allow disadvantaged women to do that. In terms of opening the eyes of those involved in adoption, some of our members have also told their stories of pain to pre-adoptive family groups. We can share our stories of suffering through our Newsletters and our Website. In these ways, we can all try to form a human "road sign" of "CAUTION" in an effort to prevent the casualties caused by falling over the adoption "cliff".

The common element to these approaches that we can take, either at the top or at the bottom of the cliff, is that we embrace the truth and rail against attempts to stifle our tales of pain and of personal healing. We need to examine and talk about the pain even when politics dictate that we should all be grateful that the problems of unwanted pregnancy and infertility have been dealt with in one easy step. Likewise, we need to consider and share forms of healing even when our politics dictate that certain things should be kept quiet. For example, if it is discovered that the wounds suffered by a mother who has placed a child for adoption seem to mirror those suffered by post-abortive women, there may be a benefit to both groups to sharing the ways of finding relief and peace from the torment. "Disenfranchised grief", according to the Living Through Loss Society Counseling Society of B.C., can occur for a mother both when a child is relinquished for adoption and when it is aborted.

This is grief experienced when the loss cannot be openly acknowledged, socially sanctioned or publicly shared: for adoption it's because the relationship is not recognized and for abortion it's because the loss is not recognized. In the words of Nancy Verrier, "...we need to keep in mind that women who have had abortions need to mourn their loss, just as birthmothers do, and that society needs to help them to do so. We can help...by showing compassion for the mother." (Primal Wound, page 212) In my opinion, we should not be allowing our judgments about abortion to cloud our thinking about helping mothers heal.

It takes a lot of energy to 'stuff away' emotions, or to maintain a secret. The movie "Secrets and Lies" is a chronicle of both the damage caused of "secrets" and also the healing possible for many people once "it" is out on the table. A lawyer who had done a stint in criminal law, once shared his opinion that many criminals who commit fraud are intellectually brilliant- it takes a superior intellect and an inordinate amount of energy to keep track of all the lies that they have told, and to keep them all straight. Likewise, "secrets" sap incredible amounts of our energy and harm our families. Most of my youth was lived guarding the secret of my pain, both from myself and from others, relating to the loss occasioned by being adopted, enduring my parents' acrimonious divorce, suffering sexual abuse and the trauma of having an abortion. Not only is a conspiracy of silence damaging for my own personal health but, by refusing to share my experience, I'm not providing anyone else with an opportunity to learn from my insights and to, perhaps, garner some ideas on how to help themselves.

Besides being difficult to keep, a secret is also damaging to an individual because she lives in constant fear that the secret will be exposed. In the words of the current US President, Barack Obama, I would much rather "...choose hope over fear". The hope for those with a "secret" of pain from experiences like adoption is that we have the power, at any time, to choose to make it no longer a secret and to reach for help. Rather than repeating the mantras of being "happy" that we were adopted and that we wouldn't have it any other way, we have the ability to admit that it hurts that our mothers chose not to parent us. (Even back in the 1950's and 1960's, there were some unwed mothers who did not place their children for adoption and, instead, parented them) In the beginning, the secret can be shared with one or two trusted friends. That's the first step.

The Forget Me Not Family Society provides a forum, in different ways, where you can share your painful experiences associated with adoption and find out what worked for others. The Society can also give a referral to a professional for those areas that require more one-on-one attention or guidance. This can be the year that you break free from the bondage of fear and embrace the hope of finding a way to heal.

If you would like to read previous Walters' Web articles, please follow the link from the Forget Me Not Website at:



www.adoptioncircles.net,

or visit me at: www.waltersweb.webs.com.

Letters to the Editor

Adoption Healing 101

by Nickie Fourchalk

As an adopted adult, I am finally going back to school. I don't attend classes at the local college or University. Nor do I take on-line classes. Because the kind of degree I'm getting is in Adoption Healing. At the end, I won't get a piece of paper to frame and hang on my wall. I won't get a higher paying job or make more money at work. And I won't need to make up new business cards to pass out to everyone I meet. For if I did, they would surely laugh at me and say, "You have a degree in WHAT?" You see, I'm getting my degree in Adoption Healing. And I'm not doing it so I can get a fancy piece of paper to hang on my wall, or to impress others with an important title behind my name.

I'm doing this degree now as an adult partly because I didn't have the time or money to go to school for real when all the rest of my friends did. And even if I did have the money to go to school, I would have never gotten in because my grades were too bad. So going to school after high school was never an option for me. I got a job, went to work, and supported myself like I had been doing for far too many years before that.

And I did well, worked hard, travelled, got married, bought a house, had kids, just like all the other girls my age. But the truth was, I was not like all the other girls my age, never had been. I was different. I was adopted. I always knew I was different because they all had their real moms and I didn't.

So when I was found by my natural family at the age of 22, I decided to go through with meeting them all because, after all, they were my family. There was no preparation, no counseling, no support groups, no on-line chat groups. I didn't even have a computer when I was reunited! So I did it alone, flying solo, with no guidance and without even reading a book. I met my mother and spent 15 years visiting and trying to deal with it all by myself. I didn't understand the issues, mine or hers, so really spent 15 wasted years in reunion just showing up and somehow expecting it to be OK this time. I think this is the definition of INSANITY. Doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results. Of course, without the information how could I possibly know what to do or what to expect? But I do get points for courage because I did have that. And I get points for never giving up, for if I had, I would have never found this group, my new friends, or anyone else who understood what I was going through.

So as I started my schooling, I read all the right books. I attended support groups, meetings, symposiums, and healing weekends. I spent countless hours getting to know other moms

and hearing their side of the story as they compassionately listened to mine. I journalled about what I was reading every day. I asked many questions. I looked at the past, my past, and began a journey of healing that was long overdue. You could say I was a real rookie when I first started this schooling. I had to start at the beginning and accept the fact that I had a lot of work to do if I was to be healed.

And many, many times I wondered if I was making any progress at all. I wondered what I was doing, why I was doing it, and would I ever feel better at the end of this schooling? I wept and cried during the book "The Girls Who Went Away". I saw myself on all the pages of "Primal Wound". I worked "Adoption Healing" like the Bible, and I struggled through "Journey for Self", discouraged at how much work I had to do. All the while with a big smile on my face to the world who had no idea what was really going on inside of me. I could sit in my car and cry and read "The Girls Who Went Away" and then get out of my car and pick up my daughter from kindergarten and not let on to anyone the anguish inside. The deep emotional pain that I was carrying around inside as I read the stories that broke my heart. The stories of the mothers and how they were mistreated and knowing that I was "that baby".

But, as time has gone on in my schooling, I have not given up. I often say, "I've come this far- I'm not giving up now". And I do think, in the end, that I will have earned that degree. Whether it be recognized by anybody or not makes no difference to me. Because I'm not doing it for anyone else, I'm doing it for me. And for my mother. Because we were the innocent victims of all this. Both of us. That is the most important thing that I have learned in all this. It wasn't her fault. It wasn't their fault. They loved us, they wanted us, and they were never given the chance.

They were controlled and brainwashed and treated cruelly by their parents and society. They never had a chance. There was no choice. For if anyone had a choice, who in the world would choose to live a life of suffering and pain that every single mom has lived with every single day since their child was taken? And that is so sad to come to terms with and yet healing at the same time. Because at least I know there was no choice. For in order for one to choose anything, they must have all the information to make that choice. Otherwise, it is not a choice. And the information was not given to the mothers. They had no help and no support. They had no birth control or education. There were controlled and then punished for their crime which was getting pregnant. They were cruelly treated and told that their baby was better off without them. They were lied to. They were shunned by their family and friends and told that if they don't do what they are told, they'll be out on the street. Pregnant teenagers were not even allowed in high school. Single mothers couldn't get employment. So how is it a choice? They were told what to do and that was the end of it.

I never spent a great deal of time blaming my mother, but we are conditioned growing up that we were given away. And that thought about being given away by your mother is terrifying. For a mother is supposed to love and be love. So if she loved me, why in the world would she give me away? Why wouldn't she fight for me? These are the thoughts that live unconsciously in the mind. And there is no one to give the answers. There is no answer to that. And that is because she didn't give me away at all. I was taken. I'd go as far as to say that I was stolen. I was bought and sold by the Catholic Church. Not a pretty thought at all, but it is the unfortunate truth. All because my mother was pregnant and not married. Hardly a crime that requires a life sentence. But that is what they got, and that is what I got, unless we have the courage to heal.

And so in doing my degree in Adoption Healing, I have come to realize that it is not helpful to blame the mothers. It does nothing to promote healing in any way. For there is nothing to blame them for. They did nothing wrong. They were victims just as much as I was and deserve to be treated with the upmost respect. And to blame the mother is to blame the victim and in

Forgiveness, or Understanding

by Marnie Tetz

One thing that I have found as my adoption journey has unfolded is how important wording can be. How important terminology can be. What sends one over the edge has little or no effect on someone else. We all have our own life experiences, ours alone, that no one else has shared. For sure we have each been brought up in families, with the same external experiences, but no one can ever possibly know what someone else is thinking, feeling, or how an event has shaped their lives after the fact. We can think we know, and from what we think we know we can then form opinions or judgments. One thing that I have learned along the way, something that Nancy Kato stresses on a regular basis, is that if we don't know something for sure, it's much better to err on the positive rather than take that dark and lonely path to the negative side. I agree totally with Nancy. My own experience has been that it was far more healthy and healing for me to have a positive story in my mind about my mother when I don't know it all, rather than to sit in judgment or form an opinion that could very well be wrong.

I remember early on, as I was collecting tidbits of information about my mother and her family life growing up, that I felt sad for her. I felt sad that her life had been as it had. From what I could gather, her parents had had a union of convenience not one of love, that the eldest daughter was the favourite, then of course the only son was the baby, so he held a prize place in the family. My mother, from what I could glean from the information that I heard,

doing that healing is not possible. We must stop blaming and judging mothers for we have not walked a mile in their shoes. And if we had, I'm sure that we would see that they had no choice and would have done anything to keep their babies, if only they had some help. And it is actually healing to know that they wanted to keep us. My mother wanted me.

And so I give thanks to the special Moms in my life that helped me to see that (Momma Linda, Lori K C, and Mary S Mom). Because in seeing that I could begin to heal, really and truly, for the first time in my life. And without these Moms being so brave about their journey, I would never have seen the truth the way I do now. And to my accountability partners, Marnie and Aleksandra, and my teacher, Joe, many thanks. And the Forget Me Not Society for providing much-needed land support. For without your love and support and belief in me, I would never have had the courage to do this work and take the risk to love my mother, whom I should have been allowed to love my whole entire life.

was maybe a bit of a problem for her mother, maybe a bit too high strung, whereas her father seemed to have a soft spot for her. I don't know any of this for sure, but from the bits and pieces that I was able to gather, that's the picture that I see. I can see that perhaps my mother was a bit sensitive, and that wasn't something that worked in her family. That makes me feel sad that she didn't have the support and love that she needed and deserved as a child.

From what else I could gather, I think my mum had to go out into the world on her own, as many young women did in the 40's and 50's and after, with little to no family support. I do believe that she made some poor choices, which resulted in multiple pregnancies and then relinquishments. I don't believe that my mother had a choice with her pregnancies. I believe that she had no support, and no guidance, and did the only thing that she could do. I believe that with each surrender, her self-esteem sunk lower and lower. This makes me feel sad for the life my mother had. I don't feel sorry for her, or pity her, I feel sad for her. There's difference between the two. I would never feel sorry for my mother, she was far too proud for that.

I also remember early on in my reunion someone asking me if I had forgiven my mother for placing me for adoption. I have to admit that I was shocked at that comment. I had never thought that I needed to forgive my mother for placing me for adoption. In order to have to forgive someone, they would have to have done something wrong. My mother had done nothing wrong. She had done the best that she could under the circumstances. There were no choices. She had no family help her with her babies, she had no support from the fathers other than one who helped pay for some of her expenses. He offered no help in

keeping the child. No one was there to help her, other than to help make sure that she surrendered her babies.

My mother had done nothing wrong, she didn't need my forgiveness. What she needed and deserved was my understanding. I believe that mothers who lost their children to adoption need just that, they don't need to be judged, they need to have our understanding. What we as adopted people need to do is take the gift that other mothers can share with us of learning what it was like for them. I believe that the only way that we can heal on our adoption journeys is to spend time with one another as we did in October at our workshop, "Reunions and Expectations... and what to do about them", as well as at our monthly support groups in New Westminster and Vancouver. I believe that mothers and those adopted need to be together to learn and to understand, not seek forgiveness. Needing forgiveness or needing to offer forgiveness implies that a wrong was done. Yes, a wrong was done to both children and mothers who lost each other, however it wasn't our mothers' fault that we weren't allowed to grow up with and know our mothers. I also believe it wasn't our mothers' fault that they couldn't keep us. There were no choices. If our mothers had no one to support them, if our mothers had no job because no one would employ a young pregnant unwed mother, if our mothers weren't able to parent us because of judgment of society, then there was no choice.

Comments by Aleksandra, adoptee

I am not sure how or where to start this letter. I have sat for four days trying to understand why the comment in the last Newsletter's editorial about moms apologizing would have upset me so much. You see, I am an adoptee, not a first mom, but the thoughts of having my mom say she was sorry stirs anger and sadness.

A wise teacher would ask me, "what do you feel? ask your inner child." So I sit in a chair with my eyes closed and quickly journey to a place familiar to me. The place is safe and surrounded by comforts of my past. The place is where my inner child plays... Asking her is easy now but sometimes the answers are not as easy as the asking.

Here in the safety of the past, I journey to the place that it happened. The court house. You see, I was older than most. Having been in and out of the foster care system for several years. I was there on a conscious level the day my mom signed the papers. The pain no less or no greater than that inflicted on an infant. A pain that all but consumes my heart. Back in that room, I feel that pain. I know that it is not happening now, it only feels like it is. I surround myself with love knowing that it cannot happen again.

My mom and dad were there that day in court. They brought a lawyer and two sides started a battle that would

I understand that some women chose abortion, to me that's a different story and not really adoption-related. In my opinion, it doesn't belong with adoption healing or learning. I do believe in freedom of choice, however like adoption it's really no choice at all. It's what had to happen, for that individual, just as adoption was no choice it was what it was, a sad thing that also wasn't a choice or a decision.

Now after writing that, for argument's sake, what if I were to say that some mothers had a choice, they could choose to surrender their child and then continue on with their lives, they had made the decision. I believe that that decision was made out of love for their child, not out of selfishness. I also believe that if that were the case, the mother still doesn't need or deserve to be forgiven, she was doing the best she could do for her child at that time. However, I don't believe that our mothers had a choice, I believe that they did the only thing they could do. After going through all of the excuses, and all of the explanations about adoption plans, I believe that once all the dialogue has been exhausted that there still was no choice.

These are my thoughts as an adopted person who has been able to learn from so many wonderful, caring and courageous mums.

change my life forever. It wasn't a perfect home, but it was a home. It was where my nine siblings and I lived together with my parents. The judge, the social worker, and our lawyer all said the same things. "This is in the best interest of the minor child." "She has a chance at a new beginning, a new identity." "She will have more opportunities than you can offer her."

In my best interest, they took from me all that I was. Exchanged it for what they thought I needed. What I needed was my mother's love. I needed her to kiss my head goodnight. I needed to fight with my siblings and build a bond that would last a lifetime. They took it all in the best interest of a child...

My mom tried. She loved me. She didn't have a chance against them. They threatened to take the other children... There was now no option. None that was safe. She signed the papers. She was an adoptee and now a first mom.

I watched my mom cry that day. Angry, frustrated and in pain, she cried. The tears that day were the tears of a mom losing her baby. I was older, but I was her baby.

I understand now why the article stirred such emotions. It is my belief that no person has the right to want or ask for an apology unless they walked a mile in the shoes of a first mom. I have not walked a mile in my mom's shoes. I wouldn't dare. For that journey carries its own horrors. I know I could not walk that mile. I know I could not judge her that way. I know she had no choice, no reasonable choice... I know because I saw her tears...



Poetry

*"Poetry heals the wounds reason creates."
~Novalis, aka Fritz von Hadenburg*

Happy Birthday, Babe!

By Evelyn Morin
(April 15th)

I'm sending you this wish today
For Birthday thirty-two
That you'll find joy and happiness
In everything you do.
So many things have changed for us
Throughout the passing year
The murky waters in our lives
Are turning crystal clear.
It's such a thrill to hear your voice
And hug you to my heart
It gives me strength to carry on
Whenever we're apart.
Just knowing that a piece of me
Lives on, not far from here
Gives my spirit such a boost
And always keeps you near.
So Happy Birthday, sweetie-pie
On this your special day
I love you, babe, you're in my soul
Forever there to stay.
So party down with all your friends
I send a hug or two
No matter where this day may lead
My love is there with you.
HAPPY BIRTHDAY SWEETIE!



Focus on Celebrity

ADOPTION, HUMOUR, HOLLYWOOD

By Marnie Tetz



The other day a member of another adoption group I belong to shared a link she thought to be humorous. It was YouTube or one of the like. I watched the video, it was about Angelina Jolie, and how she was going to be taking the

next year off. 2008 was going to be devoid of one of her movies. She will be devoting that year to her kids, adopted or otherwise. Holy smokes !!!!! The industry will lose an estimated \$300 million because she won't be making a movie. Now that is a crisis. But is it???

She will be devoting herself to raising her family... maybe adding to her family. Adopting, saving another child, from, hmmm their poor family. Taking that child from their poor family, and raising it in her rich celebrity-seeking one. The gist of the whole video was that, with adoption becoming such the 'in' thing in Hollywood, the "A" actresses of the era will be too busy raising their adopted children to be making movies. And we all know why they would rather adopt, why on earth would they want to become 'bloated smelly whales' (a phrase from the video) when the easy solution is to adopt, and, become heroes? What will this do to the economy of Hollywood? The celebrity adopting moms will be dropping like flies from the movie making machine... to become adoptive moms, saviours.

Now I know the person who sent this link thought this was 'oh so funny'. I think it's sad. That now celebrities who are perfectly capable of having their own children are adopting. I wonder what their motives are... do they want to save a child, or do they want to simply become something that isn't necessary? An adoptive parent. I recently read 'The Baby Thief' by Barbara Bisantz Raymond. It's a book about a woman, Georgia Tann, who in the early to mid 1900's, stole and sold babies and children in Tennessee. The epilogue of this book talks about a woman, Lauryn Galindo, also a baby seller, whose client was Angelina Jolie for her first adoption in 2003.

So how funny is it that Angelina or Madonna, or Rosie or Cheryl Crow are adoptive moms... taking time off from their careers... taking money away from the industry, oh My God. We won't actually get another Tomb Raiders movie or another chance to see Rosie as a talk show host? That is funny, I guess... to those not affected by adoption... thinking about these women up to their elbows in diapers... guess that could be funny. I don't think so, I think it's sad, that the truth of what is happening is being avoided.



"Celebrity and Adoption"



Did you know these famous people also have adoption in their lives?

(Celebrity names and their adoption association -
please see back page for Answers!)



Personality Profile



Alison Larkin



I. How have you personally been impacted by adoption?

I was adopted at birth in Washington, D.C., and raised in various locations around the world by British parents. I had a very happy childhood. Because of my father's work in international aid, we lived

all around the world in Washington DC, the south of England, Abidjan in West Africa and Kenya in East Africa. It's not every girl who gets to travel extensively and see giraffes and warthogs on her way to school! My mother told me I was adopted as soon as I was old enough to ask where babies came from. I was about five and I thought it was marvellous news. I knew my parents really wanted me because I had been 'chosen'. I felt special. Unlike my poor un-adopted friends who just came.

I didn't know much about my birth parents as a child, because my parents were told very little. When I was fifteen years old I found a file. On the file there was a label. "As supplied by the adoption agency, non-identifying information about Alison's biological parents. Mother, five foot two, a hundred and ten pounds, hair blonde. Born in XXXXXX Educated at XXXXXX. Relinquished baby because XXXXX."

"Father. 170 pounds, five foot 11, born in xxxxx, educated at xxxxxx. Politically ambitious. "

I assumed, from this, that I was a Kennedy. I wasn't, of course – but when you're told absolutely nothing, you make stuff up.

My adoptive parents did tell me that my birth mother gave me up so as not to ruin my father's career and marriage, but that was all the adoption agency had told them. The agency didn't tell them that I had had a twin who died. It was my birth mother who told me this when I first spoke to

her. As you can imagine, it was a shock, and something I feel my parents should have been told.

I didn't think much about my birth family until I reached my mid twenties. I was far too busy concentrating on the pesky task of growing up. But at the age of 28, even though no boyfriend had ever left me for someone else, I was convinced that even the most devoted of men would be making a date with the waitress if I so much as went to the loo.

It was not wanting to live - or love- like this for the rest of my life that finally made me seek out my birth mother. I figured that maybe if I found out that my mother gave me up for adoption because she had to - and not because she took one look at me and went "yuck"- I'd no longer have a fear of rejection. And then I might finally be able to fall in love totally, absolutely - and maybe even honestly, without the panic that sets in. Like normal people.

Although I live in the United States now, I'm still very close to my adoptive parents, who understood that the United States was a great place for me, work wise. Also I married an American, so my life and work were now here. While I maintain occasional contact with my birth parents, I'm on the telephone to Mum and Dad in England all the time. I continue to think of my sprawling adoptive family as my family.

I sought out my birth parents because I wanted to reassure them that I'd had a happy life and because I had questions about myself and my origins that only they could answer. Thankfully they were open to contact and 100% available when I needed them to be. When I found my birth parents- who are free-spirited, energetic Americans- I also found myself.

I don't regret finding my birth parents. However, I do regret the fact that at the time there weren't the support groups and counsellors available to people embarking on this momentous journey that are available to help people now. I feel so strongly about this I've put an adoption support referral list on my website to help any adopted person, birth parents or adoptive parents who may be affected by the adoption reunion experience.

II. When/Why did you get involved in the adoption field?

People who knew my story kept asking me "...what was it like meeting your 'real' parents?", and "...why would someone from a happy adoptive family want to do something like that?" My one-woman comedy show was my answer to both these questions- as well as an excuse to crack lots of jokes about the differences between English and American culture. However, there's only so much you can do in seventy-five minutes on stage, and the show only skimmed the surface of the bigger, deeper, funnier story I knew I had to tell one day.

So I wrote a novel- *The English-American*- which was published by Simon & Schuster in March 2008. I wrote the book because I was fed up with what seemed to me to be a lack of empathy and understanding for what the adoption and reunion journey might be like for the adopted person themselves. I had a growing sense that if I could create an appealing, funny, authentic vulnerable adopted heroine/narrator - and take the reader with her on her journey in an entertaining, accessible way - people might start to really 'get' what it might be like, for an adopted person's point of view.

I started with the premise of my show and jumped off into fiction from there. Instead of presenting the adoptee as yet another victim, I wanted to create an authentic, accessible adopted heroine at the centre of the kind of book I like to read. Which has to have short chapters because, I have neither time nor an attention span – go figure, I have two young children. If I am going to have a chance of finishing a book it has to keep me wanting to find out what happens next. Otherwise I get bored.

People have no idea of the huge internal and external obstacles that face adopted people who decide to try to find their birth parents. Instead of being seen as the heroes they truly are, in today's culture they tend to be portrayed as eternally damaged at best, or serial killers at worst. Or, they're just presented as rather blah- like the adoptee in Mike Leigh's otherwise excellent film *Secrets and Lies*, which told the birthmother's story authentically and sympathetically- and presented the adoptee as completely together and unaffected by what I knew to be an intense, life-changing experience for myself, and other adopted people I know.

III. What (adoption-related) issues/organizations have you been involved with?

I've performed and delivered keynote speeches for a large number of adoption organizations, from Families with Children from China to the Vietnamese heritage camp to

the JCICS annual conference to the American Adoption



Congress annual conference to the Barker Foundation annual conference, to After Adoption and Birthlink in the UK. I have also performed 'An Evening With Alison Larkin' as a fundraiser for organizations from the Evan B.

Donaldson Adoption Institute to the CFFC in Cambridge Mass to Shasta County Children's services in California.

IV. What do you see as the current issues of most concern in the adoption field?

I hoped to dispel some myths about adoption through the story I tell in *The English American*. Myths such as:

- making the decision to find your birth parents is something selfish adoptees do out of idle curiosity
- adopting a child is exactly the same as having one of your own
- adopted people who need time and space away from their birth or adoptive parents during reunion are "acting out" rather than undergoing the huge task of trying to integrate what they have learned into their sense of their identity
- adopted people are to be pitied and patronized because they were damaged irreparably when they're relinquished by their birth mother and can, therefore, never be truly happy, wise, strong or whole

Readers of *The English American* who have nothing to do with the adoption community have been shocked to learn that the part in the story about birth records being closed to most adopted people in the United States is true. I have always had a sense that if we can get the general public to see and understand this stuff at a gut level, the laws which are hurting the brave, wonderful, vulnerable adopted people they should have been designed to protect will have to crumble. Once the soccer Moms become aware of the injustice of this, watch out!

To learn more about Alison go to her website, www.alisonlarkin.com

The English American, a novel, was a *Vogue* most powerful book of the season, a *Family Circle* best beach read, *Redbook Magazine's* book club pick of the month and is under option to ABC TV to be turned into a half hour television series, with the Mark Gordon Company (*Grey's Anatomy*) attached to produce. The audio version of *The English American*, narrated by Alison, is available for immediate download from www.audible.com, and was Audible's top original audio book pick for 2008.

"DNA"

Song Lyrics by Alison Larkin

Music by Gary Schriener (©2009)



As an adopted kid, I didn't know about my kin,
When I looked into the mirror, I was always wondering,
If the face before me looked like anyone at all.
I loved my folks, but I wanted to know,
Would I be short or tall?

And then I found the truth about my past,
When I found my birth parents at last,
The truth isn't always easy, but it was mine to know,
And freed me up to be myself at last.

Chorus:

They say the truth will set you free,
That certainly was true for me,
Hear the words I have to say in this wee song of mine today,
To solve your inner mystery, it helps to know your history,
Every child born today deserves to know their DNA.

They say that genes count for a lot,
And I'm not meaning Levis,
From: can you roll your tongue?, to: can you roll your eyes?

Will you be a diabetic, will you have a stroke?

When medicine can save a life, it stops being a joke.

Even President Obama had to go and find his father,
He knows what it's like to need to know.
It's hard to be a future star if you do not know who you are.
Every child should have the right to know.

Chorus:

They say the truth will set you free,
That certainly was true for me,
Hear the words I have to say in this wee song of mine today,
To solve your inner mystery, it helps to know your history,
Every child born today deserves to know their DNA.

(If you would like to see Alison's song performed by her recently at an Adoption Conference, please visit her YouTube page at: www.youtube.com/alisonlarkin)

The Truth is Out There

By Dan Carson, Adoptee

The other day I was watching an episode of the "X Files" Show. Surprisingly enough, the central theme of the episode was adoption. During one scene, Fox Mulder (played by David Duchovny), is sitting, eating sunflower seeds and discussing inherited traits with his partner, Dana Scully (played by Gillian Anderson). The dialog went something like this:



Mulder: I remember my dad eating sunflower seeds and wonder why I eat them.

Scully: It can be explained by conditioning and your environment.

Mulder: But what if I am genetically pre-disposed to

like sunflower seeds? Some people say that traits can also skip a generation.

These three lines of dialog are central to any debate on adoption and the role that molecular DNA has in determining who we are. It defines the nature (DNA) vs. nurture (environment) contest.

I started thinking about how this applied to my reunion. After meeting my biological family I was amazed in the number of traits we shared. My grandmother and I are particularly alike. For instance, we share the same: phobia (fear of heights), complexion, favorite candies, skill and interest in flying planes (even with a fear of heights, we each have our pilot's license), and have the same sense for business (she owned a hardware store). However, my mother has none of these traits.

Doing the math, I determined that I had a greater chance of getting hit by lightning twice while simultaneously being run over by a city bus, than to randomly share all of these traits with another person. As a result, I have come to the conclusion that molecular DNA does indeed pre-dispose a person to like sunflower seeds whereas conditioning/environment plays a minor role. And traits do, indeed, skip entire generations. Wouldn't it then be logical that that detailed information about biological grandparents be included in our adoption files? These types of objective observations should be used to govern the policy of adoption, not economics and social engineering techniques.

Adoptees at the Movies

By Father Tom Brosnan

(A few years ago), I saw a little known film that received far too little coverage-- a Japanese film called "After Life".

Although it was directed by a Japanese of Buddhist background, it had many Catholic sensibilities. To me, as a Catholic theologian, "After Life" was a movie about what Catholic theology used to call the 'Four Last Things': Death, Heaven, Hell and Purgatory. It opens with recently deceased people arriving at an old abandoned school building and meeting with a team of helpers whose task it is, over the course of a few days, to help the dead person remember the happiest moment in his life. They then take that memory and make it into a movie. The dead person then views the film and takes the happiest moment with him into eternity. Movie-makers are magicians-- as Ingmar Bergman said, they're "conjurers".

...One of the characters in "After Life" was a luminosity to me. She was a sweet lady, elderly but exuding a child-like innocence. She sits before the team who are to help her discover her happiest memory that she would take into eternity. She finds it quite quickly. She had "never married", she told them. An unusual situation for a Japanese woman of her age. She had lived with her unmarried brother all her life. He had already died and she missed him terribly. Her happiest memory, she tells them, was when she was a child- the day her brother gave her a red dress for her to wear while taking dancing lessons. Recalling the day, her smile was exquisite, her eyes so youthful and gleaming. So convincing was her manner that the viewer wondered if it were her real memory, in real life. Then, to discover that the director did not use professional actors. There were no written scripts. It could well have been this woman's happiest memory and she made it eternal with the way she expressed it. Conjured or lived, virtual or not, it was indubitably true.

The scene touched me deeply because of the women's loveliness but I think also because it was wrapped in the bittersweet context of loss and happiness, of family and lack of family. She had been a sister and not a wife. She was no widow, but suffered a widow's loss. She had no children to comfort her in old age, yet she was delightfully joyful when recalling the memory of that red dress. It was mystical in its healing power.

I think adoption does that to us: choices are made for us that can bring us joy, but always mixed with sorrow- regret for what might have been. In Mike Leigh's "Secrets and Lies", the brother to Cynthia is suffering the effects of infertility with his wife. At one especially poignant moment in the film, trying to comfort his wife, he says, "...you know, you really can miss what you've never had." This truth seems to me to permeate the adoption experience, touching each member of the triad from his own particular perspective: the infertile couple planning to adopt always do so as a second choice, missing their fantasy child. The birth parents missing what they relinquished; and the adoptee missing his birth family, his birth name, his heritage.

(A number of) films have offered me a certain luminosity over the years, allowing me to experience those feelings vicariously, as it were, through the medium of film, the conjurer's art that heals on some inner plane. Von Balthasar, the great theologian of the past century, would redefine religion as "...the reuniting of previously separated parts." Movies can do that for us in a way, by exposing what pains us- although we vicariously experience the actor's pain or joy, we actually enter into it when we allow the emotion to enable us to see that we have suffered the same pain. Movies move us to remember, so that we might heal.

(To be continued- in the next edition of Adoption Circles. Don't miss Part 2)

Announcements

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: Please mark your calendars now and plan to attend on **Saturday, April 18th** for the upcoming AGM starting at 10:30 a.m. and followed by a catered lunch and showing of the movie, Obaachan's Garden. The meeting will be held in the amenities room at the residence of one of our members. The address for 'The Dunhill' apartments is: 7288 Acorn (at Beresford) in Burnaby. Look forward to seeing you there.

CHANGE TO SURREY MEETING: Please note that the Surrey support group for adoptees will be meeting the **third Tuesday** of the month at the **Strawberry Hill public library**, starting May 19th, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. The library is located at 7399- 122nd Street in Surrey, very close to public transit (Scottsdale Exchange). The coffee will be hot! Any questions, please contact Sandra Walters at: 778-994-2845.

NEW AND IMPROVED WEBSITE!!: If it has been a while since you visited our website, please have another look at:

www.adoptioncircles.net. Our web designer, Narius Dastur, has made our site more user-friendly. We've also added more content and information to keep you current with the Forget Me Not Society. We will be adding articles, stories, and poems published in past issues of the Newsletter, so if you object to your written submission being made available on the Internet, please notify the Editor ASAP at: walters.sandra@shaw.ca.

"ADOPTTEES ASSOCIATION": is a not-for-profit organization whose intent is to serve the interests of adopted people. We currently provide a venue for the exchange of ideas and support, referrals to counseling and advocacy services, guest speakers, panels, reading lists and website links. We welcome ideas on other services we can provide that may be of value to the community. One of our goals is to have a permanent resource centre including a lending library. We have a facebook group called 'Adoptees Association' and we hold a discussion and support meeting in Vancouver on the final

Thursday of the month. For more information please contact **Catherine** at: katiesue@shaw.ca

WRITERS WANTED: Adoption Circles is created by volunteers who have their own adoption stories and who feel a commitment to help others. If you have some original writing relating to adoption that you would like to submit for publication, please forward it to the Editor at: walters.sandra@shaw.ca.

The deadlines and focus of the Newsletter are as follows:

Summer	Youth	Jul 14, 2009/ Aug 25, 2009
Fall	Sexuality	Oct 13, 2009/ Nov 10, 2009
Winter	Disabilities	Jan 12, 2010/ Feb 9, 2010
Spring	Ethics	Apr 13, 2010/ May 11, 2010

LEAN ON ME

Telephone/e-mail Support List



Reunited Adoptees:

Cecelia Reekie (cecelia_r@telus.net) (604) 857-2125
 Betty Anderson (bettboop@telus.net) (604) 531-4074
 Dan Carson
 (ariete_132@hotmail.com) (604) 557-0230
 Kimberley-Ann Jandl – Abbotsford
 (kajandl@yahoo.ca) (604) 852-9663
 Leanne-Neighbour – Kamloops
 (neighbourhoodz@shaw.ca) (250) 374-0990
 Marnie Tetz (marnietetz@shaw.ca) (604) 535-4434
 Sandra Walters
 (walters.sandra@shaw.ca) (778) 994-2845

Reunited with Siblings:

Michael Hodgson
 (tiggerboots@telus.net) (604) 524-3686

Reunited Birth Parents:

Nancy Kato (katosan@telus.net) (604) 777-2920
 Susan Wiesendahl
 (susanwiesendahl@yahoo.ca) (604) 275-3243
 Alice McKinnon - Chilliwack
 (alicemck@telus.net) (604) 858-9970
 John Post - Castlegar
 (250) 365-5991
 Diane Herbert - Abbotsford
 (dalendi@shaw.ca) (604) 870-1821

Searching Step-Adoptee:

Edith Archibald
 (earchibald@shaw.ca) (604) 583-7792

Interested Professionals:

Judy Archer, MSW, RSW, (250) 758-1275
 Counsellor and Consultant in Adoption
 (judyarcher@shaw.ca)
 Lee Crawford, M.Ed. R.C.C. (604) 875-9957
 (leecrawford@shaw.ca)
 John Thomas - Quesnel (250) 992-5688
 Christine M. Gatzke, M.Ed., CPAC/ARC
 Psychotherapist (306) 352-4069
 (christine.lachaine@clc-apathtohealing.ca)

Genetic Attraction:

Anne Tasko, M.A. R.C.C. (250) 721-5995
 (anntasko@shaw.ca)

This is a peer support service.
 Please contact our office if you wish to be included on the
LEAN ON ME Telephone / E-mail Support List.

SUPPORT GROUPS



Abbotsford Hope Services hosts a support group for new birth mothers. The group meets bi-weekly in either Abbotsford or Langley. Please contact Hope for more information by telephone: 1-800-916-4673 or e-mail: hopesupport@shaw.ca

Nanaimo Family Life Association has a support group for adoptees. For details, contact Stephen Cochran at: 250-754-3331.

New Westminster The Forget Me Not Family Society holds a support group for birth parents and adopted adults. We meet the second Tuesday of each month at the New Westminster Public Library, 716- 6th Avenue, from 7:00 to 9:00 PM. For more information, contact Nancy Kato at: 604-777-2920; or e-mail at: katosan@telus.net

Surrey The Forget Me Not Family Society holds a support group for adopted adults. **NEW:** We will meet the third **TUESDAY** of each month in a meeting room at the Strawberry Hill public library at 7399 – 122nd Street, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. (next one May 19th) We take a break for July and August. For more information, contact Sandra Walters at: (778) 994-2845 or e-mail at: walters.sandra@shaw.ca

Vancouver Sunrise Family Services Society offers a birth mother support group meeting the last Thursday of the month 7:00 PM. For further information, call Marg Harrington by phone at: 604-984-2488 or by e-mail: marg@sunriseadoption.com. Additional details on the Website at: www.sunriseadoption.com

Vancouver facilitated by Lee Crawford. Meetings are held on the 1st Wednesday of each month, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.. As seating is limited, please call and let Lee know if you plan to attend the group. Lee can be reached at 604-875-9957. Meetings will take place at: 659A Moberley Road, False Creek, Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 4B2

Victoria The B.C. Chapter of Origins meets the third Tuesday of each month at 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. at Emily Carr Library- 3500 Blanshard Street. A support group for natural mothers (all mothers separated from children by adoption), with adopted persons and spouses, etc. welcome. Please e-mail Bryony to get on the 'contact list' if you are interested in attending at: bryony8@pacificcoast.net or see www.originscanada.org for more information.

'CELEBRITY', SHARI ULRICH



Born in San Rafael, California Shari first moved to Vancouver, British Columbia in the early 1970's in response to the Viet Nam War. After stints of backpacking and cycling around Canada and the US, (always with a guitar and a flute on her back) her search for her place and path in the world included a stint performing with her older brother and sister with the San Francisco Free Theatre, finally discovering that music was IT.

...In all, Ulrich has released 17 albums as a solo artist and as part of various groups -- which have garnered her 2 Juno Awards, several award nominations, and an induction into the British Columbia Entertainment Hall of Fame. She also became a role model for women after surviving near-fatal assault and speaking publicly about the experience.

...Shari has resumed touring and recording with The Pied Pumkin, since reuniting in 1997. They recently released a children's album "Pumkids" which has won a coveted Parents' Choice award in the US. She has also produced the popular Bluebird North concert series for the Songwriters' Association of Canada both in Vancouver and nationally for over a decade.

...Through it all Shari raised a daughter, Julia Graff, along with former husband, songwriter and visual artist David Graff. Julia, now 17 and herself an increasingly accomplished instrumentalist, has been joining her mother in her concerts on violin, guitar, piano and vocals for several years. Ulrich's collaboration with her daughter marks an exciting chapter in her rich and varied career.

My Dear Friends,

August 1, 2007

I have decided I need to write about this most miraculous turn of events in my life, as it is such an uplifting and inspiring story.

Some of you may know that I bore a child when I was barely 16 years old (I was a poster child for the need for Sex Ed in the schools, let me tell you - thank god times have changed!). He was born in the unwed mothers' home I was sent to in San Francisco and, thanks to my mother's wise influence, gave him up for adoption. I have never been secretive about this part of my past, and even wrote a song about him in the late 70's called "Mysterious Child". I have pictures his birth father and me holding him in "The Last Hour" we were allowed to hold him before I handed him off to the void. I tearfully signed the adoption papers a week later and a few weeks after that received a letter from the Children's Home Society briefly describing the family who adopted him as a lovely couple who enjoyed camping. (That's all I recall anyway).

Needless to say, it has been a 39 year mystery - always wondering the fate of this boy for whose existence in this world I was responsible. I'm sure you can see what's coming...

A week ago, after a wonderful three day visit from my sister and her son and his wife, I impulsively Googled adoption connection sites and registered on the first one that came up. I of course knew his birth date, place, and names on the original birth certificate, but nothing else. Within two hours

a woman in California - a "search angel" - wrote me with her own story of finding her birth family and offered to help me search (no fees or strings attached). I went with my instincts that she was indeed an "angel" and she dove in.

Within a day I had all the contact information - his name, his parents' names, father's occupation, wife's name and occupation, addresses and phone numbers (It's a bit disconcerting that so much information is available to all of us!). Needless to say, I was reeling. She offered to make "the call" for me, but I went with my instincts and composed an e-mail to his wife. She is a doula / midwife / childbirth educator, and though I know I was potentially putting her in an awkward position, (the big risk being, what if he hadn't been told he was adopted!) my instincts said to go for it. After I sent the letter, heart pounding, I noticed I'd misspelled her first name in the body of the letter. Feeling all was delicate, I sent another e-mail simply apologizing for misspelling her name. Within minutes, she responded that this was the only e-mail she'd received, but was VERY intrigued by the subject "...contact from Michael's birth mother", followed by one from Michael saying "I AM adopted"...his birth date and "I'm speechless - please tell me this isn't a joke or a mistake!" Barely able to breathe, I re-sent the letter with my phone number. Five minutes later the phone rang from an Oregon number. I'd found my son.

It is beyond my wildest dreams - not just finding him, which is in itself miraculous, but knowing him - discovering what a wonderful, happy, smart, sweet, sensitive, loving person he is. And talking for hours on the phone to his mother as well - hearing such warmth, wisdom and openness in her voice.

For all of us, we are blessed that we are all so excited to discover one another, in every sense. WOW. That's all we've been able to say for days. WOW. The brief stats are he is long and happily married, has a 3 1/2 year old daughter (YES, I'm a grandma!) is an architect and lives in Eugene. Tomorrow I will drive from the airport with my TWO kids in the car - words I have never before uttered. WOW. Saturday he will come with Bill and Roy and I to the Canmore Folk Festival where UHF is playing. WOW. More soon...

Beyond "WOW"

August 14, 2007

It has been almost three weeks since I miraculously found my 39 year old son, Mike, whom I gave up for adoption when I was 16. Okay, I guess any lying about my age is no longer an option. It has been the experience of a lifetime, to be sure. We originally thought his already planned trip North with his wife Ann and daughter Abigail at the end of August would be the ideal time to meet, but within two days of our first conversation, it was clear to both of us that it was going to be impossible to wait until then. He got the first flight he could. We knew from the first phone call that our communication was effortless, but I couldn't have fully anticipated the degree of ease with which he would connect with Julia and my entire world.

I "outed" him at the Canmore Festival at the first workshop with Stephen Fearing and David Francey and it was quite a moment for that audience - and him - and me - and my shocked cohorts on stage. The fact is, my peers and the audience and I have all sort of grown up together. I had to



Dear Editor, (Toronto Star)

I am the 68 year old mother of a son who is 48 years old today. This information in itself would make you think that this would be a happy day in my life. On the contrary, it was the most painful experience of my life, as I knew that I had to surrender my son to adoption.

I know nothing about my son except the date of his birth and the hospital in which he was born. In 1961 I had no one to support me and indeed I was banished, in shame, by my family to give birth to my son in Toronto, at the Wellesley Hospital. Did anyone ask me what this experience was like and give me support after the fact? No, the whole scenario was like the "elephant in the room". Therefore the years following were full of disenfranchised grief, which is still deep in my soul.

tell them! Then there was the unanticipated bonus of folks sharing with Mike their stories of how my music had woven through their lives over the years.... WOW.

We stuffed every waking hour when I wasn't on stage - and many that should have been sleeping hours - with the stories of our lives, and everything else that came to mind. We learned as much as we could as fast as we could with an indescribable unquenchable thirst. The depth and degree to which we "get" one another is profound and delightful. Our shared views, perspectives and lists of favourites is endless.

And then there was Julia. Their connection was natural and graceful and as I said before - utterly effortless. The three of us packed in walks and row boat rides and swims and popcorn and endless talking. Always the talking... Oh yes, it must be genetic.

I am eternally and profoundly grateful to Mike's parents, not just for the obvious - for giving him such a loving home and childhood, and for the accomplishment of raising such a fantastic son, but to his mother for being so loving and open towards me. The adoption agency did a miraculous job matching us. I feel as close to her as I do to Mike and feel so indescribably fortunate to have both of them in my life now.

So onward we go. Mike and Ann and Abigail will be coming up in a week or so for a good long stay, and this strange and fantastic life rolls on.

Waiting for Ontario

Why did this happen? I was an unmarried teenager, and in the day, known as "...an unwed mother". This was a term used by society to label us as sinful people... unacceptable in polite society. Times have changed and an adoption disclosure law, which takes effect on June 1, 2009, **may give me some information about my son as long as a veto has not been placed on his file.** I wait for this day with hopes that I will be one of the lucky ones, who is allowed information about my own grown son.

Isn't this so wrong to punish a teenager, (who thought she had found the love that was lacking in her own family), into her late 60's?? This has been the saddest experience of my life and it's time the Ontario government allowed us to live a normal life as others do. Adoption records have been sealed since 1927, in Ontario, and now only open with the option of a disclosure veto.

Yours truly,
Sharon A. Doerr
Langley, B.C.



Where do we go from here?

by George Robinson
Trenton, Ontario

It is disappointing that there has not been any significant progress in the human rights for adopted children in many years. While I have some specific knowledge of the adoption aspect of children's rights in Canada, my advocacy for positive change is no longer restricted. At the risk of preaching to the converted, I offer these thoughts for your consideration.

Various sectors of our society have had their way with children, beginning before the Depression. The lack of resources meant responses were ad hoc and aimed primarily toward the adoption option. Of course, not to mention the domination of the patriarchal society in which women were designated (along with their unwanted children) as the scapegoats and bearers of child responsibilities, in or out of wedlock. The legal system was designed to obtain the authority from the parent (almost always the women) that they would no longer have any legal decision-making authority over their child. This would have been fine, except that that same parent was also required to authorize adoption or foster care as part of the same legal separation. Over the years, this aspect of the legal system should have been reformed in order to protect the legal rights of the child. In other words, the short term saving of the child should not have relinquished their future adult human rights forever.

The next aspect of children's rights has been focused on abortion. Not actually, again, focused on a child, but on the adults. Abortion on demand became the battle cry of women for the first time since their being designated as 'persons' themselves. Although there have been some clinical medical attempts to define when a foetus becomes a child or living organism, etc. there still has not been any recognition of the human rights of that child that is beginning a life. Organized religion often cries "...abortion stops a beating heart", or words to that effect. However, they do not advocate for the protection of the human rights of any child's heart that has been kept beating by their efforts.

All the issues of abortion and adoption have to be viewed together with the objective of protecting children's lives as well as their human rights.

Although I believe there is a justification for abortion, I do not believe that the adult justifications for that action should completely ignore the rights of the unborn child. So, to begin with, the legal and political systems should be working towards establishing when a person becomes 'a person' and when that person's rights begin and end. Governments and legal systems have spent a lot of time in defining events and saying when an aging person loses his or her rights based upon medical assessments, etc. That same dedication should be used for the earliest parts of life as well.

Globalization and economic improvements were supposed to go together in our brave new world and solve all the problems of different civilizations. Some of this has happened. However, children have been left out of this prosperity equation completely and been left at the mercy of the pure economics of globalization. Rather than improving human rights at home, the result has been that poor children in many countries are now being adopted by rich people in faraway places. In fact, they (the children of the third world especially) are being treated as commodities, like any other on an unrestricted global market. Here in Canada, you could argue that our children's rights are not even protected as much as those for commodities. The Canadian Criminal Code says that you cannot change the Vehicle Identification Number ("VIN") on a car, but we (the government) can change the name of a child if we want.

If anything can be done about improving the human rights conditions surrounding adoption, you would think that many women would be at the forefront of activism for change. However, there do not seem to be the numbers, nor any unified voice that is speaking loud and clear enough to effect change on many specific violations issues. Therefore, let's all of us keep working towards the improvements that are needed everywhere on earth to help children into their lives, and try to prevent them from being abused by either adults around them, or by their own governments.



(...continued from center pages)



"Celebrity and Adoption"

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