

ADOPTION CIRCLES

Canada's Post-Adoption Quarterly

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Olivia Pratten

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ADOPTION CIRCLES

**Winter 2010
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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, Surrey & Cloverdale
- Individual peer support
- Resource library
- Referrals to professionals and other service groups
- Speakers Bureau to educate groups on post-adoption issues
- Quarterly Newsletter
- Website: www.adoptioncircles.net

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

The Forget Me Not Society reserves the right to edit all material submitted on the basis of space, relevance, and suitability. **Please note that the material published in the Newsletter, including the article by the Editor, does not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the Forget Me Not Family Society.**



President's Message *Nancy Kato*

Wow – the 2010 Olympics – they're here! All of a sudden, we had the torch running through our communities and the Canadian flag showing up everywhere. Houses in my neighbourhood were decorated with red and

white lights and hula hoops made into the Olympic rings. The feeling of solidarity and pride for our country is everywhere – it's quite intoxicating when you're in the middle of it all. I hope that some of you had the opportunity to share in the excitement. As much as I love watching the athletes and being a part of a huge party, I did take off for a well deserved vacation. Puerto Vallarta was my destination for 7 days of all inclusive pampering and relaxation.

It's ironic that our newsletter is coming out around the same time as the Para Olympics and our focus on disabilities. Like the Para Olympics, disabilities are something that most of Society would prefer to not see, to pretend they don't actually exist. All this hype for the Olympics and hardly anyone talks about the hundreds of dollars they have spent on Para Olympic tickets....because they haven't! What a shame that they have to come in on the tail wind of the "other" Olympics.

But what is a disability? If you Google or Bing the word, you come up with dozens of definitions. I see it as a barrier to doing something that others take for granted or have the opportunity to do. And there are so many variations on what that can mean. I wear glasses and therefore unable to do some sports. I am a woman and have often been prevented from

moving ahead in business. I have arthritis in my knees and can no longer walk down stairs, or hike, or snowshoe. And I am a birth mother - unable for so many years from moving ahead with my life, prevented from being a whole, complete person.

Society "disabled" me - they told me I would forget about my baby and get on with my life. They made it financially impossible for me to keep my baby. They told me I would ruin my parent's life. They took away my self esteem, my capacity to have the life I should have had. All these barriers in front of me - what was I supposed to do? The depression and shame and humiliation associated with relinquishment has crippled many women from moving ahead with their lives. Yet the act of reuniting with a birth parent has freed many adoptees from the barriers that had prevented them from having something others take for granted - a birth certificate. Did being adopted impact my daughter negatively? Did it create a barrier that prevented her from being all she could be? I think so.

Science has done some amazing things to help remove disabilities, or enhance one's ability to function more "normally". But can science fix the things that cause those in adoption to feel disabled? Society still wants to maintain the secrecy of who you are and who gave birth to you. Family members still want us to pretend we are something we are not. Friends think we should be grateful for what we have and not ask for more. Yet there are changes to remove the barriers - open adoptions, open records in some areas, and increased awareness of being adopted or a birth parent. Gold medals are not won for just showing up - you have to work years to achieve your goal ... one step at a time, one day at a time.

Nancy

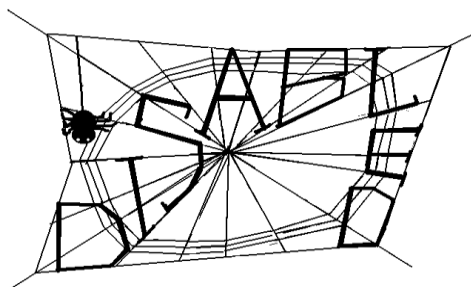
Disabilities is the focus this issue of **Adoption Circles**. To be at a disability is to be lacking an ability or strength, either physical, moral or intellectual. As with many of the one word themes for the Newsletter, this concept can be applied in various ways to adoption.



Walters' Web
Sandra Walters

As parents, we can have good intentions yet effectively cripple our own otherwise healthy children by our over-bearing approach. When we continually "rescue" a child and jump in to fix any and all problems for her, we send a strong message that she is incompetent and unable to handle situations on her own. Some professionals have stated that parents' over-protectiveness is a form of emotional abuse ("Adult Children" by therapists, John and Linda Friel, p. 115). When faced with a crisis pregnancy, several mothers speak of their parents making the decision to place the child for adoption and 'fixing' the problem for all concerned. However, many individuals pay the price for their parents having grasped at a permanent solution to what, in many cases, was really a short-term problem.

In these pages, at least one mother shares the long-term effect that her parents' approach to her pregnancy had on her life, essentially putting her at a disability through lack of confidence and an arrested emotional development. It's unfortunate more parents don't heed the wisdom of parenting experts like Barbara Coloroso who stresses the importance of supporting our children to find their own solutions to problems, even crises, while they live with us. Then, they can grow into capable adults



who know they can take care of themselves when we're no longer around to 'fix' things for them.

As a nation, we can have good intentions yet inflict more harm than good by seeking to "rescue" the children of another nation in crisis, like Haiti. By claiming that adoption by North American families is the best solution, we send a message that the families of Haiti are permanently incapable of caring for their children. Another approach would be to recognize that the country is temporarily disabled by the effects of a massive earthquake and that funds from other countries can be used to help the people of Haiti help themselves. Help them find a living adult family member who can care for their child relative, with assistance. Help them to keep their traumatized children in the country and culture that is familiar to them. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves- are we really the best nation(s) to care for traumatized children? Suicide is the second leading cause of death in Canada for young people aged 10 to 24! Despite our relative material wealth (or, perhaps, because of...) we are doing a pathetic job of properly caring for the children with which we've already been entrusted.

Or, perhaps the eagerness to "fast track" adoptions from Haiti is not really motivated by a desire to rescue children. Maybe the pent-up demand for healthy children puts increasing pressure on governments of developed nations to take advantage of disabled nations in their times of crisis. A prospective adoptive mother who was recently interviewed on CBC radio told of her growing impatience, having already waited four years to process the adoption of two children, siblings, from Haiti. She spoke of the slowness of the process and how she was now hopeful her children would finally come to fill the beds she had waiting for them. When a caller to the radio station asked why she did not just adopt one of the thousands of children waiting for adoption in Canada, the prospective mother spoke vaguely of "...always having a heart for Haiti", and that "...everyone needs to know what they want and what they can deal with". Sounds to me like the perception is the children in Canada have special needs (are disabled) whereas those in Haiti are comparatively healthy.

Like all the healthy girls needing "rescuing" in China. Recent stories in the media speak clearly of how the high demand for children from China increased the price that government-run orphanages would pay for "found" children to the point that many otherwise law-abiding, but dirt poor, citizens were lured into the business. Abandoned babies were collected and sold to the orphanages paying the best prices. Information for the baby's files was simply fabricated by the orphanage. Another problem with the high prices being paid, is that children are also being taken, forcefully, from families who want them. They are taken either under the guise of punishment for offending the one child policy, or as an outright kidnapping, because the potential risks to being caught are worth the benefit of the high prices that can be had. One recent article in the Vancouver Sun quoted Chinese government numbers of between 30,000 and 60,000 children missing in China each year, with most of those being abducted.

Over the past decade, scandals in various parts of India have also exposed severe breaches of adoption protocol and claims by parents who have lost children to foreign families. A few years ago, an organization was caught trying to fly out of Africa with over 100 children that it claimed were Sudanese war refugees and were later discovered to have been stolen from families. Another recent news story told of close to 40 Samoan children brought to the United States for adoption after the adoption agency misled the birth parents and told the

prospective adoptive parents that the children had been orphaned or abandoned.

If I was the parent of a child of international adoption, I would be taking a hard look at the information provided to me by the orphanage and the government officials who processed the adoption. There may be questions that need to be asked. My child may not be an "orphan", she may not have been "abandoned", and she may have a family desperately searching for her. For her sake, I would need to find out. Otherwise, the questions will still be there when she's a young woman, when she's educated, and when she has the resources to take care of herself. If she gets a collective shrug of the shoulders from her adoptive parents, or a "...that's what the adoption agency told us" response, she may not be entirely satisfied.

As many intelligent young people are discovering, it may ultimately take the power of the courts to acknowledge and enforce their rights. In 2008, a court in Buenos Aires sentenced adoptive parents to several years in prison for concealing a child's identity and falsifying adoption documents. Maria Eugenia Barragan brought charges against her adoptive parents when she discovered her true identity as a stolen baby of Argentina's "Dirty War". In 2001 Ms. Barragan discovered through DNA testing that her adoptive parents were not her biological parents, and she also located her biological grandmother. According to the Vancouver Sun, Ms. Barragan considers her adoptive parents her "abductors" who had "appropriated" her life. A law suit is currently being considered by an adoptee in B.C. to seek to have the court overturn his adoption order, severing the legal parent-child relationship.

With the improvements in DNA testing, making it more readily available and affordable, and the dissemination of information about cases like that of Ms. Barragan's, adoptive parents had best take heed. Not only can deception about one's identity engender anger, but the 'offspring' are becoming more aware and resourceful. In the future, there may be significant consequences to taking an approach of active deception, or even wilful blindness. Honest and accurate information about one's genetic identity is a basic human right that should not be trampled lightly. Parents may be increasingly held accountable for playing fast and loose with children's rights in the rush to have their own needs met.

AC~

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



(Letter to the Editor in response to your article in the Fall 2009 Edition of Adoption Circles)

Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to your article which was published in the Fall 2009 Edition of Adoption Circles. In your article you made several references to adopted children being 'unwanted'. While I respect that this may be your experience, I want to assure you and your readers, and especially adoptees that this was certainly not my experience as I carried and gave birth to my beautiful daughter. I would also venture to say that this was not the experience of most of the birth mums whom I have met through the FMNFS. From the moment I knew I was pregnant I loved my child and wanted her more than I had wanted anything in my then young life. The love and wanting I felt for my child did not stop on that fateful day that I was forced to sign the adoption papers, but continued painfully every day and deepened as days grew into months and years.

I had two major feelings in response to the concept of adoptees being unwanted. I felt very sad for adoptees who may have felt and/or believed that they were 'unwanted' by their birth mums and also I felt angry because your comments not only did NOT represent my experience, but I believe it presented a distorted picture of what many birth mums experienced.

Over the past 2 years I have read many books and articles, and watched movies focusing on adoption. I can't think of one mum who did not want her baby, although I do acknowledge that there may be some who did not want the **inconvenience** raising a child. This is not that same thing as not loving or wanting the child. (I accept that some may say this comment is merely splitting hairs but it is what I believe.) Because most birth mums very much wanted to keep their babies (but could not given

societal, religious and family pressures), it follows that most adoptees were very much wanted by their birth mums, and in many cases by their birth dads.

While the thoughts I have shared here are mine, I hope that they are words of encouragement to both birth mums that I understand your pain and how much you wanted to keep your children, and to adoptees that you were never unwanted by your birth mums- **your Primal Love**.

Past editions of Adoption Circles included a disclaimer that opinions and thoughts shared in the newsletter were those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the FMNFS executives or board members. I could not find that disclaimer in the Fall 2009 edition in which your comments were made. My I suggest that this disclaimer is included in every edition and that it be placed in a prominent place as close to the front of the newsletter as possible.

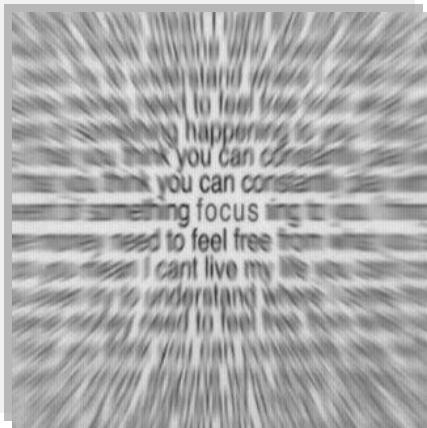
And to the Editor: While my adoption experience was very different to yours, I do want to acknowledge and thank you for your hard work in editing Adoption Circles. Many comments you have made in other editions have been very helpful to me. While I take exception to your comments in the Fall 2009 edition, they have provoked me into action to speak out and reach out to birth mums and adoptees. I believe that more responses to articles in this newsletter will open new lives of communication between us as we reach out to others who are in pain, and in so doing will strengthen who we are individually and as a society.

Respectfully submitted,
Bernadette Rymer, Ashcroft BC

FOCUS ON DISABILITIES

To all members and supporters of the FMNFS,

by Bernadette Rymer, December 2009



As a birth mum, I have (over the past 18 months) read with intense interest the stories other birth mums, adoptees and adoptive parents have shared in this newsletter. It would be closer to the truth to say that I devoured these stories. I was

like a dried out sponge soaking in the thoughts, ideas, feelings, knowledge and experiences shared. I attended the FMNFS workshops in New Westminster in 2008 and 2009, read almost every book recommended and chatted with many participants in those workshops. From my first contact with FMNFS I felt a sense of support and understanding, and then came to the realization that I am not alone. While my story is particular to me and my history, I realize that while no 2 stories are the same, all stories are woven together by the same thread: trauma, loss, grief, yearning and for some of us joy in the reunion process.

I have wanted to share my story but did not know how or where to begin. I wondered who, if anyone, would want to hear my story. When the theme 'Disabilities' was announced for this issue I knew that this was my turn to talk, to share my story.

I am very moved by the knowledge and experiences shared by Nancy Verrier in her books 'Primal Wound' and 'Coming Home to Self: The Adopted Child Grows up'. Many of her messages resonate deeply within me. I would like to share some of these messages and what they mean to me as my way of connecting with and sharing my story.

One message Nancy talks about is the affects of the trauma experienced when mother and child are separated at birth. Many other authors have also studied and written about this trauma. While I was well aware of my own trauma and how it affected my life in every way, I was not aware of the trauma my daughter was experiencing. This new awareness shocked, saddened and angered me.

Another message that hit home is about how secrets are toxic and how they affect how we behave in all relationships. In order to have meaningful, lasting relationships we must get beyond the secret life. Since the day I told my parents I was pregnant my life became one big secret. I spent my life hiding from myself and from the world. Before contact with the FMNFS I knew it was high time to quit living a secret life. But I did not know how.

Nancy Verrier also talks about the importance of having a strong sense of self, and the role self regulation plays in developing and maintaining good mental health, and therefore a strong sense of self. In order to connect with others I must first connect with myself: I need to have a sense of self so that I can have a sense of others, for is it only in having a sense of others that I can connect with them. As we are in essence social beings connecting with others in meaningful ways is pivotal in our social, emotional and intellectual development. I had to admit to myself that I had spent much of my life after losing my daughter making and then breaking relationships the minute they became meaningful. The results of my behaviour were for the most part very destructive.

These three messages -trauma, secrets and lack of sense of self - for me have become the threads which have woven my life. They have dominated and perhaps also dictated most areas of my life for far too long. As I struggle with sorting these three threads out to gain a better understanding of me, I am thinking that perhaps the threads are interwoven and only together can they help me tell my story.

So why share my story in this issue focusing on disabilities?

In preparation for sharing my story I googled definitions of 'disability': there are many describing the condition. The United Cerebral Palsy Society's definition is "A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or



more of the major life activities of the person”. While this partially describes my functioning, the definition that best describes how I was affected comes from The World Health Organization: “A disability is a complex phenomenon reflecting an interaction between features of an individual and features of the society in which he/she lives”.

As it was society and the church which dictated the norms of how I should think, act and feel, and I had, in their eyes, stepped outside the norms. I became not only disabled but also a disability for society, the church, my parents. I have 10 siblings and my parents had the material means to do whatever was needed or wanted. So to keep the secret they went to great lengths to hide me away so that nobody would know. We moved from Australia to Canada for a 6 months ‘holiday’. While the rest of the family was playing, skiing and travelling, I was placed in a home for unwed mother and a social worker from the church was brought in to counsel me. These ‘counseling’ sessions focused on convincing me to place my child for adoption.

Advice consisted of many mistruths and lies such as:

- Your child would be far better off without you;
- Your child needs both a father and a mother;
- You won’t be able to support your child;
- You don’t have what it takes to raise a child;
- No man will ever marry you if you keep the child;
- How would you feel if you were raised by an unwed mother?
- You will forget all about her;
- Your life will go on as if nothing had happened;
- You will get married and have other children and never think about ‘this one’;

The result of these sessions and the continuous pressure from my parents to place my child for adoption was that my sense of self was completely eroded. With each session I developed a stronger belief that I was dumb and stupid, less worthy and not only less loved but totally unloveable. I fought for my child and for myself for as long as I could but it was only when the writ was lowered not long before my child was born, that I finally conceded defeat. The writ, from my parents was that if I kept my child I could never again have contact with any member of my family. By then I was so worn down by ‘advice’ and mis-trust that I decided that the experts must be right. After all, what did I know? I believed I knew nothing and was not capable or worthy of raising a child.

My beautiful daughter was born in the Spring of 1970. At the instant of her birth I was filled the most amazing sense of awe and such an intense love for her to this day I cannot find the words to describe how I felt at that moment. As it was the practice in those days for mothers to stay hospital for 3 days, I was determined that for those 3 days I would mother my child to the best of my ability. My baby was brought to my room for every feeding. I cuddled her, fed her, sang to her and cried with her. Those days were like time out of time- I treasure every moment.

When I lost my daughter on that dreadful day in 1970, I was so traumatized that I did not then realize that she was actually stolen from me: stolen by society, the church and my parents. I became seriously disabled by my trauma, by the secrets surrounding me and by my shattered sense of self. This trauma was intensified when we returned home to Australia. My 2 oldest sisters had also delivered their first borns: my nephew was 6 weeks old and my niece was born just 2 weeks before my daughter. I remember the crushing- suffocating feeling I had when I walked into the house and saw those 2 beautiful babies lying on my parents’ bed. ***My baby should have been there too!*** Not only was I physically separated from my child, but I was also globally separated and being so far away from her was insufferable. My rage was so extreme that I could not bear the pain. At that moment I shut down! I buried my shattered self in my secrets and in my shame. I moved (I cannot say that I lived) through the next 21 years in a constant state of shell shock. While I dearly loved my nephew and niece, and the many more that followed, each moment with them was like one more nail pounding into my heart. The pain was so intense that I believed my heart would explode. I isolated myself from people and it was like living in a glass telephone booth: I could see what was happening all around me but I could not reach out, and nobody could reach in (though many tried to reach me- I was unreachable).

Six months after returning to Australia my parents announced that we were going to be moving back to Canada. I was dismayed by the announcement as it seemed to me that they had this move planned all along, but kept it from me. I went to my parents and told them that I wanted my baby back and was told that it was too late to reverse the adoption. Two years later my family returned to Canada to live. I moved away from that city and while I often visited my family, I have never since lived in the same city. However being back in Canada gave me a glimmer of hope that one day I would find my baby.

My disabled functioning continued for 21 years. I made the conscious choice that I would never have another child: the risk was too great. What if *they* stole that baby too! I couldn't bear the thought. I also made the choice to not marry although I had many suitors and several marriage proposals. I suffered from what I now know to be chronic post traumatic stress syndrome, although in the 1970s it was not a recognized condition. To the world I appeared moody and sometimes uncooperative. I sought help from 2 counsellors and later a psychologist. Never was the issue of adoption or trauma addressed in the sessions.

During this 21 year period 4 of my siblings adopted children. So of my 54 nieces and nephews, 7 were adopted into our family. It was and still is the cruelest of ironies to me that these children were loved and accepted as part of the family, but my child was not!

I continued existing by developing a very successful professional life first as an elementary teacher and then as a Speech-Language Pathologist. My career gave me a sense of purpose and a reason for getting out of bed every day.

However there was always a deep dark hole within me, one that nobody could fill, or even touch. I thought about my daughter many times every day: does she have her first tooth, has she said her first words, taken her first steps, lost her first tooth, started Kindergarten, graduated from high school, does she have a boyfriend? The wonderings were endless: always question but never answers.

When my daughter turned 21 my sister placed an ad in the newspaper: "Birth mother wishes to reunite with her daughter, born...." My sister did not ask or tell me about this as she did not want me to be hurt if no contact was made. However, my daughter had been reading this column every birthday since she was 18. We made contact and the long reunion process began. It was both a painful and joyful process, with lots of false starts, pulling back, facing fears, and dealing with anger at how we were victimized by society, the church and my parents, learning about and facing the reality of what happened and eventually growing into a loving relationship.

My daughter has met my extended family and most of her 1st cousins and is now (finally) loved accepted and by all. My father died many years ago and while my mother did meet my daughter several times, as she was in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease, I never had the opportunity to discuss what happened with her.

My daughter will turn 40 this year. Both our lives are filled with hurt and now thankfully they are filled with healing. This healing process will never be over but I am confident that over time the hurt will lessen and the healing will open our hearts to more joy, laughter and sharing. I now have two gorgeous grandchildren and while I know that I can never make it up to my daughter for our lost past, I can be a loving, supportive presence in her life now, and I can be a doting grandmother to her children.

I am delighted to share with you that I am no longer disabled. The secrets and the feelings of shame are behind me and I am no longer isolated in that glass telephone booth. I have developed a strong sense of self and I am developing meaningful relationships with my siblings, my nieces and nephews, many friends and professional colleagues.

And Miracle of Miracles: since our reunion and the beginning of the healing process, I have been so blessed to meet (on a blind date no less) and marry my wonderful husband. He has loved and supported me in the healing, growing process every moment since our meeting and, while he was not part of my life during the worst of times, he understands my feelings and he is a terrific dad for my daughter and granddad for our grandchildren.

There is a saying that there is no love like the love of a good woman. I want to thank the FMNFS, my daughter and grandchildren, my husband (and his children and grandchildren) and several of my siblings for your love and support and belief in me. You have helped me to love and to believe that I am loveable. Without you I would never have had the courage to move forward from hurt to healing, from despair to hope, from isolation to relationships and from mere existence to living a full, healthy and happy life.

PERSONALITY PROFILE

Olivia Pratten



How it started:

"You should be grateful... at least you were wanted", is a statement that Olivia Pratten has heard many times before. Yes, being wanted by one's parents is a good thing. Feeling wanted instills confidence and a sense of fundamental worth as a human being. However,

the statement is also very much about the needs of an infertile couple, and nothing about the current rights of a vibrant 27-year-old journalist living in Toronto. Olivia's parents have readily admitted that, at the time of their diagnosed infertility, it was all about what they wanted as a couple. Olivia's parents had tried for some time to conceive a child but eventually discovered that her father was unable to produce viable sperm. Olivia's mother then went through a process of donor insemination ("DI") with the sperm of an anonymous donor provided by a fertility clinic. Olivia's parents wanted a child and they ultimately entered into an arrangement with a fertility clinic to get that child. But can it be said that they legitimately made an arrangement to secure a child at any and all costs to her?

Some may assert that Olivia's parents agreed to the anonymity of the sperm donor when they entered into the agreement with the fertility clinic and that her recourse would be against her parents. However, as many who have endured the tests and procedures prior to and following the diagnosis of infertility have testified, one reaches a certain level of desperation in their quest to have a child. If an anonymous donation is all that's being offered, when there are no other options, that's what a person takes. It's similar to any contract where the other party holds all the power and even if we might not like all the terms and conditions in the fine print, we hold our noses (and maybe even close our eyes) and sign because it is perceived to be the only way that we will get what we want. It doesn't make sense to presume that a parent would want a result from a contract that is not in the best interests of their own child.

Everything changed for Olivia's parents when she was born. After being honest with Olivia and telling her at the age of 5 that she was conceived through DI, and appreciating in the years that followed that Olivia was naturally curious and wanted

to know more about the other half of her genetic makeup, Olivia's mother quickly realized that knowing about one's complete genetic identity is a crucial human rights issue. Being professionally trained as a mental health nurse, Olivia's mother, Shirley, has never bought into the "doctor knows best" justification for continuing anonymous donation. Ever since Olivia can remember, as a very young child, her mother has been lobbying and advocating for open records for offspring conceived through gamete donation. As soon as Olivia was mature enough, she joined the fight and has also been a vocal proponent of open records for all offspring of gamete donation.

Seeking a political solution:

In the early years of the 1980's, there was not the same access to the internet and there was no support for advocates of open records. Nevertheless, Olivia's mother pressed on and made presentations over the course of 15 years to the federal Royal Commission on New Reproductive Technologies struck in 1989 to study the issues. They attended many hearings to stress the importance of one's genetic information and the need to have access to these records, and they saw many Bills (Bill C47, Bill C56, Bill C13) die on the order paper. Finally, in 2004, federal legislation was enacted in the form of the *Assisted Human Reproduction Act*. Even at the hearings, Olivia says, it was evident that great deference was being paid to doctors and there was a pervading belief that doctors would be best qualified to handle these situations and to decide what was best. However, there was no evidence to suggest that physicians have expertise in the social consequences of these decisions and their significant impact on families. When Olivia approached the federal Agency about ensuring her records were maintained and seeking access to them, she was told that the new legislation only makes provision for maintaining identifying information of donors from the date of the legislation forward. So, after all the lobbying and years of presentations to committees, the federal legislation leaves a gaping hole into which Olivia Pratten falls. All the DI offspring conceived prior to 2004 are stuck with the old anonymous regime, and with the likelihood that all their records with the fertility clinic could be destroyed, as regular health records, after 6 years from last contact with the patient (being the parent receiving the treatment).

When the Prattens initially approached the provincial government about finding a solution, the B.C. Health Ministry responded that their hands were tied because the federal government was dealing with the issue. In 2001, the B.C. College of Physicians wrote a letter to Olivia letting her know its position that physicians have a right to shred or incinerate all

records of the gamete donor. Interestingly, after Olivia launched her lawsuit against both the province of BC and the College of Physicians, the College claimed that it should be dropped from the law suit because it wasn't really involved. Good thing Olivia kept a copy of their letter- at least they claimed to have an impact on what physicians can or cannot do with donor records!

The law suit:

After the many years seeking a fair political solution on behalf of DI offspring and being sorely disappointed, Olivia says that the only option left to her was to commence legal action. Her claim against the Attorney General of British Columbia and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia is for a number of remedies, namely:

- an injunction to prohibit the destruction of any and all gamete donor records in British Columbia;
- a declaration that provisions of the *Adoption Act* and Regulations contravene the equality section of the *Charter* (s. 15) and are, therefore, of no force and effect;
- an allowance for a period of time for the provincial government to enact legislation to preserve gamete donor records and to facilitate the release of identifying information;
- a declaration that the failure to preserve gamete donor records contravenes the security of person section of the *Charter* (s. 7); and,
- an order requiring the College to permanently preserve these records.

An interim injunction has already been ordered by the B.C. Supreme Court so that the gamete donor records are to be preserved until there is a final determination in the legal action. Counsel for Olivia would not be surprised if this case winds its way to the Supreme Court of Canada.

The meat of the argument in the action is that when the *Adoption Act* was amended in the mid-1990's to provide for open records in the province, it reflected a change in society that now recognizes having access to this information is in the best interests of adopted offspring. All of the concerns raised with a closed adoption system, i.e. that genetic medical information may be crucial to proper detection and treatment of various diseases and conditions and that adoptees have difficulty forging an identity cut off from their genetic heritage, applies equally to the children of gamete donors. The failure to extend the legislative process for storage of and access to records regarding the biological parents to those conceived by gamete donation deprives them of their right to security of person (contrary to section 7) and unfairly discriminates against them through their mode of conception which relates to physical disability (infertility), sexual orientation (same sex) or family status (single), or is analogous to the grounds enumerated in section 15 of the *Charter*.

Although Olivia would likely present as an extremely articulate and confident witness, were she to get her "day in court", it seems that there has been a recent change in strategy by the

legal counsel. Rather than have the action certified as a class proceeding on behalf of the whole class of all offspring of gamete donation in the province, they have decided to proceed with a less costly claim on behalf of Olivia alone. This allows them to make a request to proceed by summary action on the basis of affidavit evidence only. Whereas the trial date had originally been set of October 25, 2010, there is now a chance it will be heard by the court as early as this spring.

Olivia will get a chance to explain the effect on her of the lack of information about her genetic father through a sworn, written statement. Olivia says there are over 20 other gamete donor offspring who are prepared to provide written statements as well. There may be a risk that this approach removes the human face from the claim, but perhaps the B.C. Supreme Court is seen as only the first step on the road to the Court of Appeal and from there to the Supreme Court of Canada (if permission-"leave"- is granted by the court to go to the highest level). Leave will be granted by the Supreme Court of Canada only when the court finds that the case raises an issue of public importance, or one that transcends the immediate interest of the parties to the case. It would seem apparent that these issues go beyond one woman's desire to know the identity of her genetic father.

Why it's important:

This lawsuit is incredibly important for all those who advocate for open records, whether on behalf of adoptees or on behalf of the offspring of gamete donation. If Olivia is successful, adult offspring of gamete donation will have the same right to information as those enjoyed by adult adoptees in B.C., subject to a veto. And, if there is ultimately a decision from the Supreme Court of Canada, it will set an important precedent and help the offspring of gamete donation across the entire country and even around the world. We need to show solidarity with this cause since the more momentum that builds in the courts, the more likely other provinces will start to have a hard look at their own legislation relating to adult adoptees.

What can we do?:

This is an exciting opportunity to raise awareness in our communities about the importance of genetic information for every Canadian. As so eloquently stated by Olivia's counsel, Joseph Arvay, QC, this identifying information is "...of the most basic and fundamental to the human condition. Knowing about one's biological origin and thus their biological parent's medical history, may be vital to our client's present and future health." Because of its significance, many organizations are showing support for Olivia's legal action, either by way of formal statement, such as the Adoption Council of Canada, or by making a financial contribution to the needed fundraising, such as the American Adoption Congress.

Individually, we can each make a difference by getting involved with Olivia's initiative. These are the simple actions each of us can take to support a person's right to genetic information:

-we can start talking to people we know about Olivia's pending court action and finding out their opinion- we might be able to help educate even one person about why this information is important

-we can show support for Olivia's legal action when it gets before the court by some forms of public demonstration or by writing letters to our local newspapers

-we can visit the website set up by the organization started by Olivia and other offspring of gamete donation (www.canadiandonoroffspring.ca) and make a donation to help fund her litigation; although her counsel are acting *pro bono* (as volunteers), there are many out-of-pocket expenses to commencing and advancing a court process, especially if it goes to the Supreme Court of Canada

-we can put a personal face on the violation caused by the denial of genetic information on the rights of donor offspring and adoptees alike by asking anyone who discounts the significance of this information to imagine a scenario:

Ask them to imagine that they have just found out that the person who they have always thought of as and have been told is their father is actually NOT their genetic father. Ask them to put aside the betrayal they may feel when they think about how they have lived for decades believing in false facts

represented about their identity by the very people entrusted with their care and protection and ask them, instead, to think about how this information about their genetic identity plays out in their extended family. Ask them to think about how they are not genetically related to their paternal grandparents or any of these ancestors. Ask them to consider having children now that they have no information about the potential genetic disorders they could pass along to their own offspring. Ask them to think about past medical check-ups they have had with their own family doctor where they confidently replied that there was no history of heart disease in their family, and what this new information may mean.

Now ask them to imagine that a staff person at a fertility clinic or a government office holds a file folder with this critical piece of information- the identity of their genetic father- but they are told they are not entitled to this information and, in fact, their file will likely be shredded this very afternoon to avoid any further disruption to their office by these questions.

Ask them to consider now whether this information is important, and whether the current laws violate a fundamental human right, a right that cannot be contracted away by third parties.

There is tragedy in adoption.....

by Annette Kelly February 3, 2010

A tragedy for the birthparents that will not raise their biological child.

A tragedy for the child that will not be raised by their biological parents.

A tragedy for the adoptive parents who have given up their dream of conception and raising their biological child.

So given that doom and gloom, why did I adopt three children?

I must start by telling you that when I was 16, my best friend Sherry got pregnant. Her mother, quite literally, forced her to place her daughter for adoption. The pain that Sherry suffered every day following that day they took her baby away, was more than one person should endure. We both hoped and prayed that one day her daughter would search for her.

In early 1981 after 6 years of marriage and 5.5 years of infertility workups, I found myself childless and filled with despair. I didn't think there were any newborns

available for adoption and I did not want to adopt an older child. I couldn't believe that God would have blessed me with this enormous desire to be a mother and not expect me to do whatever I could to have a child.

Part of the process of moving towards adoption, included the acceptance that I was not going to get pregnant and give birth. In my heart, I had to bury the baby I was never going to have. The only difference in this and a real death is that there was no body. This was one of the saddest times in my life...but in turn, my own life was reborn.

I just knew that there was a pregnant woman out there who was scared. A woman who knew she couldn't keep

her baby. A woman that deserved to choose the family for her baby. A woman that absolutely should be able to find some peace in her decision. I did not want the woman that was going to make me a mother to suffer the way Sherry did. And so...I set out to find her.

I mailed letters to doctors...letters that looked much like a resume. Three weeks after the first round of letters went out, I got a call from a doctor near Yosemite who said he had a pregnant girl for us. She was 7 months along. He gave her our letter and we waited. She carried our letter with her for another three weeks before calling. The conversation went something like this...."my name is Cathy and I am calling because I want you to be the mother of my child." I begin to cry and *she* comforts *me* with, "...everything is going to be all right now." And it was...

We drove to meet her. I wanted her to like me....I already *loved* her! While we were sitting in her living room she asked me if I would like to feel my baby kick. *Was this a dream???* She had one request and that was to see the nursery. Now, the funny thing about this is that we had done the nursery against everyone's advice. Our friends and family didn't want us to get hurt and were afraid that we would never find a baby. Part of this "private adoption" process is that you must believe...and I did...and now my hand was placed on the tummy of the woman who wanted me to be the mother of this baby. I was so in love!

We brought her to our home and she went into labor three weeks early. Katherine was delivered by the doctor that had treated me all those years for infertility.

I knew that my love for this baby would be no different than the love I would have for my biological child...but I had to accept that it would be different for Katherine. I believe that babies know when they are separated from their mother. Although they have no words, they *know*.

I am so lucky that I was able to spend time with Cathy. I got to know her deepest thoughts, what she likes and dislikes, her favorite color, stories of her childhood and most important...how she loved her baby. She gave us a photo of her birthfather. We took lots of photos of her...and these photos were placed on the wall in Katherine's nursery.

There are many adoptive parents who "take the baby and run." There are those who think an international adoption

or a closed agency adoption is better because there are no birthparents to deal with. They think this is the best way for all of the triad, but I totally disagree. Adoption is accepting the reality that you are raising a child with two sets of parents and I would never deny Katherine her birth right.

We went on to do this two more times. Michael was born the week before Katherine turned two. When Michael was 18 months old, his birth mother called to say she was pregnant again. Lauren was born just after Michael turned two. In 4 years, I went from childless to the mother of 3 children! How special that Michael and Lauren are biological half-siblings.

In 1986 when Sherry's daughter turned 18, she and I set out to make her daughter's journey back an easy one. I installed an additional phone line, listed in Sherry's maiden name. No calls... we feared many things...that she didn't know she was adopted...that she did know and wouldn't search and worse...that she had died. Then one afternoon the phone rang. Silence on the other end when I answered. Click. Then another call...silence and a click. I called Sherry and told her I thought her daughter was trying to find her. One week later, she found Sherry through the birth father and they reunited.

This changed Sherry forever. They have quite a lovely mother-daughter relationship. Sadly, the adoptive mother wants no part of Sherry. I will always treasure the day that Sherry and Michelle, Katherine, Michael, Lauren and I were all in the same room together. So much love!

The emotional journey of adoption came up all the time, while raising my children. It was never a "quick fix." They had to work through the fact that their mothers didn't keep them...for whatever reason, they were given up – and that's a pretty tough call for a kid. This pain had nothing to do with their love for me or the life that they had. It is two separate issues. As their Mom, I wanted to take away their pain. We got through it and continue to deal with it as situations come up. Adoption is truly a lifelong process.

Recommended reading for the entire Triad:

"Journey of the Adopted Self", by Betty Jean Lifton

Not for the faint of heart – read:

"Primal Wound" by Nancy Verrier

The Big Wheel Just Keeps On Turnin'

by George Robinson

I was recently reading and taking notes from the 1947 book titled "Welfare in Alberta" (A Report of a Study undertaken by The Imperial Order, Daughters of the Empire, Alberta Provincial Chapter - Submitted by Charlotte Whitton). In Chapter IX. CHILD PROTECTION AND CHILD CARE IN ALBERTA, written by Robert E. Mills, M.A., Director of the Toronto Children's Aid Society, I was surprised to see a familiar theme:

"If indenture agreement or surrender is to be tolerated in the transfer of guardianship of children it should be subject to safeguards that are at least as regularized as those which prevail in the transfer of land, or of registered cattle or swine."

Although the theme is familiar and is a serious one, I could not help in my earlier years of Monty Python adoration to use it to portray adoption in the silliest way possible. Therefore, as a prank, I submitted the following article to an advocacy group to which I belonged at the time. Unfortunately, some of group thought that it was real - probably due to my selection of Ralph Klein as the main character and to my serious news story format. So, for those of you with no reverence whatsoever for our various "governments" and their idiotic administration of adoption I give you:

And Now For Something Really Different!!!

In a recent interview, Premier Ralph Klein of Alberta expressed his deep concern over the recent "mad cow" outbreak being traced to a young animal on a farm in his province. It has been particularly distressing, considering the recent extensive measures taken to protect the Alberta beef industry by improving the documentation of cattle birth records and sales.

He also expressed his concern over the possibility of transmission of the disease from cattle to humans. Until now his concern has been focused on the health of Alberta cattle herds, rather than on specific individual young animals. In fact this type of policy has pervaded his government's attitude in many departments over time. One in particular has been Children's Services.

During the protection of the adoption industry in 1999, Alberta did not initially support Canada's ratification of the United

Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It has, up until very recently, refused to endorse the Convention on the grounds that the promotion of children's rights under the Convention undermines parental authority.

However, On July 13, 1999, Premier Klein wrote to Prime Minister Chretien expressing Alberta's qualified support for the objectives and principles of the Convention:

"As a further indication of our commitment to children and families, we would like to extend our formal support for the federal government's ratification of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our support is based on the understanding that the U.N. Convention does not usurp or over-ride the

authority of parents and that any interpretation of same with respect to Alberta will be undertaken as though a reservation had been placed at the time of ratification in that regard."

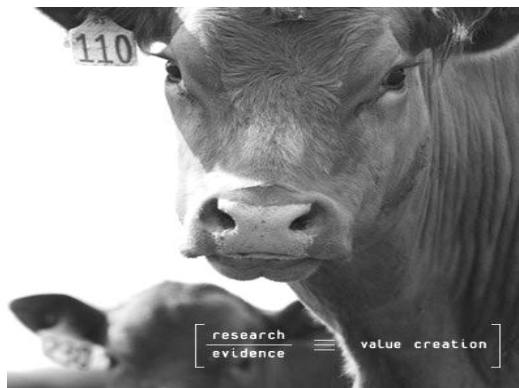
This protection has unfortunately maintained the secrecy of adopted children's records and may have to be reviewed under current conditions.

With this in mind, Alberta recently sent Iris Evans to the meeting of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva. Although she was a

member of Canada's delegation, her real purpose was to visit the World Health Organization to determine what disease control measures her province should be implementing. However, she was unable to complete her Alberta mission after she confided in the UN Committee chairman that she didn't know why she was there.

Meanwhile, the Premier noted that if adoption records remain permanently sealed and secrecy is maintained, there would be no quick or efficient way of tracing the birth and adoption records of Alberta children when and if any disease were transmitted from animals to humans. In light of this new health threat, Premier Klein is considering the implementation of tagging system for all humans in Alberta - this would be similar to the one used in the cattle industry now. He feels that although there must be a shift in support from the cattle industry to the adoption industry, that this shift is in the interest of the health of all Albertans.

Cheers,
George Robinson



RATTLE SNAKE

by Sandra Walters, February 2010



The baby rattle snake wasn't sure how he ended up in the backpack, but he did remember finding a dark, quiet place to sleep. When he awoke, the small snake knew he was no longer in the dry, sandy landscape of his home. The air tasted moist and unfamiliar.

While the snake had been curled up, sleeping, the backpack had embarked on an adventure. It was suddenly thrown and landed with a "clunk" at the bottom of an aluminum fishing boat. Startled, the rattle snake quickly slithered out of the pack to the cold surface of the boat. Just as quickly, and with some shouted words, a man grabbed a branch from the bank of the lake and flicked the infant reptile into the marshy bushes.

Landing in the muddy, wet earth, the little snake's blood began to cool. He wiggled as best he could to higher ground, but he felt slow and the mud was sticking to his scales. He was scared and hungry.

Mrs. Frog burped happily as she hopped out of the lake, having had a wonderful fill of juicy flies and water bugs. She was making a connection in her mind between the appearance of the dead fish rotting on the bank and the recent ease hunting for insects, when a movement in the grass caught her large black eyes.

Curious but cautious, Mrs. Frog approached the patch of green. She noticed the short, grey piece of rope right away but, when it flinched, she also saw that the rope had two sad eyes and a flicking tongue. As she came nearer, the baby snake tried to tuck down and make himself disappear. Having a kind and gentle nature, Mrs. Frog spoke soothing words. She only wanted to help, she said. Baby snake needed help, so he came forward out of the grass as she coaxed. When their eyes met, his tale of being taken from his home slid easily off the fork of his narrow tongue, and Mrs. Frog took pity. Taking charge, she ordered him onto her back, as she leaped towards her marshy home.

Despite his initial resistance, Mr. Frog began to like the odd addition to the frog family. Perhaps this skinny reptile could learn to swim better than the lazy offspring he'd fathered to date. As the weeks went by, however, anticipation slowly turned to disappointment. Mr. Frog discovered that the snake was afraid of the water and wanted nothing to do with getting wet, let alone swimming. The snake wasn't so little anymore, either. He was eating more than any of the other offspring and he wanted to sleep most of the time. And there was that incident a

couple weeks ago when the snake almost scared Mrs. Frog to death...

The frog family had planned an outing to the other side of the lake, since they'd heard there was some good insect hunting down there.

Snake had been asleep all morning and Mrs. Frog had waited patiently, assuring Mr. Frog that he was a growing teenager and that he would likely be soon to join them. When the entire frog family began to grow impatient, Mrs. Frog had gone to snake's sleeping area to wake him up. She saw him curled up where she had last seen him the night before. She called him again and again, but there was no answer. Then she started to get worried and she jumped over to the snake to touch him gently on the tail. As her hand pressed down on the grey, scaly skin, it collapsed into a long, thin pile of dried scales. The snake's skin was there, but not his body. Mrs. Frog's heart almost stopped beating that day, and Mr. Frog would never forget it.

And the snake seemed to be in a constant state of irritation. Whereas the frog family loved the mud and moisture near the lake, the snake's skin ached when he spent too much time in the wet. He was often forced to slink off on his own to find a dry, warm place to sleep. He had grown tired of the flies and water bugs for breakfast lunch and dinner and he never felt properly filled. He loved Mrs. Frog for her kindness, and he had tried to be more like her and the rest of the frog family because he knew it was important to them. And he knew Mr. Frog would never forget the time he found Mrs. Frog passed out by his discarded skin, with her heart barely beating. But the young snake didn't realize that his skin would come off. No one told him, and none of the other frog family members had ever left his or her skin behind. And since that day, there was an annoying rattle coming from the end of his tail. Everything about him seemed wrong. A resolve to leave the frog family had begun to form in the snake's thoughts.

At the same time, Mrs. Frog was desperately trying to figure out what to do to help snake. She had hopped all around the lake talking to frogs who had lived longer and seen more. She got a variety of advice. Some said she needed to ignore all of snake's differences and continue to treat him like her other offspring and that he would eventually smarten up. Another old frog said that snake was obviously rebelling against all the frog family rules and that he should be disciplined for sleeping too long or going off on his own. There was one voice that made sense to Mrs. Frog, and it was her own growing feeling that she needed to find out what was different about snake besides his unsettling ability to come out of his own skin. She decided she needed to help him discover who he is as a creature.

As she spoke with snake about her recent realization, she thought she detected a sense of relief in snake's demeanour. His eyes opened wide and his mouth curled up at the corners. She would help him find others like him so they could tell him about what to expect as he grew and why he had felt so different, she explained. As she saw the hope reflected in snake's face, Mrs. Frog wondered why she hadn't thought of this when she first found the little snake in the bushes.

But, then, something happened that took all the good in that afternoon and crushed it until tears fell from the sky itself. Seeing snake and Mrs. Frog engaged in a conversation, Mr. Frog felt a fatherly desire to join in. He leapt over the log to land right beside Mrs. Frog. Snake was not sure what happened next, but the sudden appearance of Mr. Frog so close to Mrs. Frog caused snake's body to pounce from his coil, and for his teeth to puncture deep into Mr. Frog's soft, moist skin. Snake wriggled quickly to pull his teeth out, in horror. But Mr. Frog was already filled with venom and the gathering frog family watched as his blackening body slowly decomposed.

Before he left the lake forever, snake wanted to apologize to Mrs. Frog for her pain. She had taken him in when he was only a few inches long and had provided him with enough to survive all these many months. But when she saw snake, all Mrs. Frog could do was to ask, "Why? Why would you do such a horrible thing?" And the snake wanted to answer her as honestly as he could. It was the least he could do for the devastation he had caused to the frog family. As he departed from their presence for the last time, snake replied,

"I am a snake. This is who the Maker designed me to be. I am a snake in my innermost parts. Even if I- or anyone else- denies this fact, I will be true to my nature."

As snake slipped into the darkness of his uncertain future alone in the wilderness, he could hear the frog family croaking out to others, as they did every night when the giant stage light shone down from above

Adoption & The Missionary Position Part II

Presentation in Dublin, Ireland 2003

By Father Tom Brosnan

As continued from the Fall 2009 issue: *"Indeed the secrecy that many now say was so downright evil in these recent sex scandals was the same secrecy employed-- and still employed by the church-- regarding the histories of adopted peoples placed under its care..."*

If you're Irish and you're Catholic you no doubt remember the story of Bishop Eamonn Casey, Bishop of Kerry, who fathered a son by an American woman, Annie Murphy, back in 1973. His meteoric downfall signaled the beginning of a catastrophe the Irish Church still is experiencing. When Bishop Casey placed Annie in a home for unwed mothers she claims the following argument ensued:

"I told him I wanted my son," Annie said.

Annie claimed the bishop told her she was not capable of caring for a child, that the child was a mistake.

"He made it clear," she said, "that through the adoption of the child, I would be cleansed..." (New York Times 5.9.92)

This desire to control sexuality and its expression can take extreme forms as it did in Irish society when illicit sex and illegitimate children were involved. It took a nasty turn -- a downright brutal turn -- in the lives of those birth mothers of Ireland of whom the recent film *The Magdalene Sisters* is concerned. I didn't yet see the film but am somewhat familiar with the controversy it engendered. In my opinion, even if it might be a cinematic exaggeration of the actual events, the underlying truth is still scathing: the way religion, in this case the Catholic Church, treated unwed mothers in an attempt to keep the secret (at all costs, it seems -- at any cost) to keep the

secret. And so thousands of women were forced to work virtually their entire lives in convent laundries; and some buried in unmarked graves -- right here in this city -- right here in Dublin. In places with words like Mercy and Charity engraved over their doors -- but no mercy, no charity for those birthmothers.

But Ireland, and the Irish Church, have no monopoly on secrets and lies. The recent film *Rabbit Proof Fence* has brought to light the especially unnerving practice of the Australian government -- and the Catholic Church in Australia -- vis-à-vis Australian Aborigines. "An estimated 100,000 Australian Aborigines make up Australia's so-called lost generation. Under a government policy that ran from 1910 through 1971 (that's right, I said 1971) as many as one in ten of all Aboriginal children were removed from their families in an effort to civilize them by assimilation into white society, a practice based on a theory of eugenics widely accepted in the early 1900s that thought by few generations." (Time Magazine 10.2.00) The Catholic Bishops of Australia said they "...sincerely regretted that some of the church's child welfare services assisted assimilationist policies and practices." (New York Times 7.18.96)

Canada's government and church also conspired to (shall we say) practice a missionary position regarding what have come to be known as the Duplessis Orphans. "Between 1930 and 1960 at least fifteen hundred children born out of wedlock to parents too poor to support them were wrongly labelled as mentally ill or mentally retarded and interned in psychiatric

institutions, gaining for the orphanages subsidies triple what they would have gotten otherwise.” (Montreal Gazette 5.31.00)

Just last year the pope beatified one of his predecessors: Pope Pius IX aka Pio Nono. Pius IX ruled the church a good part of the nineteenth century. With his beatification came a discussion about his extraordinary and, to my mind, very unsaintly behavior regarding Edgardo Mortara. In 1852 Pius IX was still temporal ruler of the Papal States and, one fateful night, sent his police to the Jewish home of the Mortara family in Bologna. It seems that when the Mortara’s son Edgardo was an infant and sick their Catholic servant girl had secretly baptized him. When the boy was six the story of the baptism was told to the papal inquisitor and relayed to the pope himself. Pius IX intended to apply a dubious church law claiming that a baptized Christian child could not be raised by Jewish parents. The papal police then took the boy from his parents -- never to return him. David I. Kertzer, in his book *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), makes a good case in saying that the incident was pivotal in the collapse of the Papal States and the unification of Italy: European governments were so appalled at the pope’s action and subsequent refusal to return Edgardo to his parents that they withdrew military support for the defense of the Papal States.

There’s a revealing scene between Pius IX and representatives of the Jewish community when they met him some ten years after the event and after Edgardo was placed under the pope’s personal supervision. Edgardo had become a seminarian. The pope addressed Edgardo that day: ‘My son,’ he said. ‘You have cost me dearly, and I have suffered a great deal because of you.’ And then turning to the Jewish community he added:

“Both the powerful and the powerless tried to steal this boy from me, and accused me of being barbarous and pitiless. They cried for his parents, but they failed to recognize that I too am his father.” The missionary position makes others feel guilty for your fault; there’s an innate arrogance to it.

Edgardo would eventually become a priest and travel the world preaching for the conversion of the Jews. He took as his religious name, Pius, in honor of his spiritual father – as he called the pope. He would be the first to testify in favor of Pius IX’s beatification. (You see, Edgardo was that loyal adoptee to the end). And he lived some 88 years, dying in a Belgian monastery (thankfully) just two months before the Nazis invaded. Thankfully, I think, because the Nazis would no doubt have arrested him and sent him to the camps – because they would have recognized his Jewish blood and the fact that not even the grace of baptism could change the truth. What Pius IX failed to recognize is that baptism doesn’t seek to change the truth, in this case the fact of blood. He failed to recognize that grace builds on nature – it doesn’t seek to annihilate it.

My mother gave birth to me in a Catholic hospital in which I was baptized a few days later. Yet, on the baptismal certificate issued my adoptive parents, it says that I was born to my adoptive parents and baptized at their parish church on a different date, some six months after my birth. This certificate (which I have in my possession) is an official church document yet it is a lie, all of it lies, and implies that I was intentionally baptized twice – a practice strictly forbidden in sacramental theology and by church law.

To be continued in the next edition of Adoption Circles... stay tuned.

Announcements

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:

EDITION \ FOCUS \ DEADLINE \ DISTRIBUTION

Spring - <i>Ethics</i>	April 13, 2010	May 11, 2010
Summer - <i>Undisclosed</i>	July 13, 2010	Aug 24, 2010
Fall - <i>Suffering</i>	Oct 12, 2010	Nov 9, 2010
Winter - <i>Belonging</i>	Jan 10, 2011	Feb 14, 2011

(**Thank you to all who have forwarded contributions, which may appear in this edition, or in an upcoming edition.)

ATTENTION VANCOUVER ADOPTION PEER

SUPPORT GROUP: The adoption peer support group has evolved over time. The group has been successful within the peer support model and has continued to grow and evolve.

The group process continues to evolve also with a deepening sense of trust, understanding, advice and compassion between its members as personal adoption stories were shared. The group was flexible and forthcoming in addressing a variety of adoption themes, myths and issues from historical, political to personal perspectives.

I feel privileged to facilitate the adoption peer support group and to have provided the meeting space for its members. I have been moved as you were moved and have witnessed how each and every one of us copes with and heals adoption issues. After careful consideration, I have decided to provide separate therapy groups for birth mothers and adopted adults and adoptive parents. My professional concern is to evolve and broaden the services for adopted adults and birth mothers, their spouses and their families. It is also my professional belief that a range of service should be provided in our community for the differing needs of adopted adults and birth mothers. Adoption reunions and post adoption services/ counselling has been part of the family life landscape for nearly thirty years. It is my belief that if a variety of services are available, it communicates to our broader community that

adoption issues are as serious as other family life issues and services should reflect this belief.

The central reason for this notice is that the Vancouver adoption group has grown to a place of emotional safety wherein many of you have gone beyond the support group model and are really beginning to experience a group therapy model. As a facilitator I have wanted to be able to use my clinical skills, and at times have felt caught somewhere in the middle. My role has become blurred and challenging. Because I am a therapist, it is my ethical responsibility to express to you my understanding of what has happened and to make a decision. I don't think that it is ethical to offer professional therapy services when you as a group expected a support group model. I also don't think it is wise to blur these services when I provide therapy services for a set fee.

I have chosen to end my role as the Vancouver support group facilitator. If you as a group want to meet one last time to process this change I would be happy to do that with you. Please email me if you want to meet. We need a minimum of four people to run the closing group.

I am saddened that there isn't a foundation that provides the resources for an adoption therapy program. Until such a time exists, I must follow my own professional instincts and meet the need for the gap in adoption services. This adoption support group has been a very enriching and rewarding experience for me and I wish all of you the very best as you take the next steps in your adoption journeys. Blessings to you all, Lee Crawford, M.Ed, RCC, BCATR

ARE YOU MOVING?: If so, please email the Society secretary, Gloria Sweder, at gsweder@shaw.ca. Please include your new mailing address and phone number and the date of your move. This will ensure that you don't miss out on any copies of Adoption Circles, or other communication from the Society.

UPCOMING ADOPTION CONFERENCE: September 24-25, 2010 in New York City- Adoption Crossroads is proud to announce its 6th international adoption conference, featuring Betty Jean Lifton, author of "Journey of the Adopted Self", Nancy Verrier, author of "Primal Wound", Ann Fessler, author of "The Girls Who Went Away", Rickie Solinger, author of "Wake Up Little Susie" and Joe Soll, author of "Adoption Healing... A Path to Recovery." This conference will be a superb educational conference on adoption related issues. If you are someone whose life has been touched by adoption, or a mental health professional whose clients have adoption related issues, you cannot afford to miss this learning opportunity of a lifetime.

There will be approximately 40 seminars, half of which are designed self-help experiences for those whose lives have been affected by adoption. The other half of the seminars are clinical in nature and are geared to increasing the knowledge of mental health professionals about adoption related issues in current practice. These two days of immersion in adoption will give you new methods of dealing with these issues. Presenters are from Australia, Canada, Holland, New Zealand and the United States.

There will be ample time to network with colleagues, meet new friends and celebrate this gathering of those who are involved with the lifelong issues of adoption. Join us at the hospitality suite in the evenings to unwind and to get acquainted with others who share so much of your experience. Please join us for the Banquet & Entertainment on Saturday evening. Full conference registration includes all seminars, access to receptions, exhibit hall, hospitality suite gatherings, support group, five plenary sessions, Saturday evening banquet, and entertainment. Conference brochure is on line at: www.adoptionhealing.com/Conference

BIRTH DAY PARTY

by SADONA February 2010

Happy Birth Day to you
Happy Birth Day to me
Happy Birth Day Dear Adoptee,
Rip off the mask and maybe you'll see

Play fun games and set the laughs free
Cross your heart and hope to live
Stick a needle deep in your eye
Pull out the blindness and make you cry

Tell kids stories to show us why
Birds are flaky and cannot be trusted
While elephants are faithful 100 per cent
Love transforms nature in a circus tent

Did you hear the one the Joker sent?
Not just '...a face only a mother could love',

But a face *not even* a mother would keep
Stranger than fiction, we all need to weep

Celebrate with a cake while honesty sleeps
Hansel and Gretel have lost their teeth
Their house is made of candy, what a treat!
But the witch at home's fattening someone to eat

A small little baby so fresh and sweet
Open the gift given from the hands of God
Set aside for re-gifting to someone new
Salty words in a wound will always sting true

Cabbage patch human's a toy that's new
Rescue her from a messy garden of thorns
She needs a saviour since we've lost our way
Now smile, be happy you joined us today

Poetry

small

by Tim Mack
December 2009

When this all began I was no bigger than a grain of sand
In the belly of a mad woman who would later hurt me by her hand
Rotten milk, broken nose, my bum full of sores
On the shelf I went, at the lovely adoption store
Shuffle, shuffle, from foster place to place
And then came the miracle - I was finally "placed"

Here is your new home, with this man and lovely lady
It doesn't matter that she also happens to be crazy
She didn't put it on the form, so none of us knew
The length of the committal or the shock therapy she'd been through

You're the problem little one, the one who must be fixed
With only them to report, the ratings are not mixed
You need to go to a different school, one with different rules
A class of what the other kids could only think are fools

Talk to the puppet, have a look at these blots
What do you see – an evil bat, a rat or a leprechaun with spots?
No, this one is a tree, the other is a bee
That really nice one, well, it looks just like me

Well, OK then, perhaps you're not all bad
We should have spoken privately with your dad
Let's go for a drive, to a great big house
One full of other boys, you'll be quiet as a mouse

Now that we're here, let's give you some voice
You know the system favors freedom of choice
Would you like to live here, or back with your folks?
Hurry up now, this isn't a decision we should have to coax

At the age of 10 I finally had voice
But come on now, was that really a choice?
The other boys looked so scary and mad
When I looked inside, I was only sad

Back "home" I went, to figure it out
Back to the place where we don't talk, only shout
It was then I decided, things weren't all that rough
I just needed to buck up, just needed to be tough

So the next time she threw me and pinned me to the floor
A brief thought flashed, I just can't take this any more
Something came over me, like I was floating in space
The pictures are so clear, I can still see her face
Strength out of nowhere, quick as I could be
I had the tables turned, yay, good for me!

Then came the words, from the adult to the child
She kicked and screamed and went totally wild
I hate you, little fuck, I should have never adopted you
I spit in your face, with foul smelling goo

On went the day, and then came the night
Time to go to bed, to turn out the light
Why won't you say you love me, how could this be?
You're so ungrateful, why can't you see?

Don't you know I'm your mom and he is your dad?
Your thoughtless behavior, it just makes us so mad
How could you ever think to call us by name?
Don't you know, those aren't the rules of this game?

Now you are an adult, why don't you call?
Don't you know we love you?
You make us feel so small...

SUPPORT GROUPS



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
 Marnie Tetz (marnietetz@shaw.ca) (604) 535-4434
 Sandra Walters
 (walters.sandra@shaw.ca) (778) 994-2845
 Kimberley-Ann Jandl – Abbotsford
 (kajandl@yahoo.ca) (604) 852-9663
 Leanne-Neighbour – Kamloops
 (neighbourhoodz@shaw.ca) (250) 374-0990
 Lynn Carrier- Edmonton
 (carrierlynn@hotmail.com) (780) 455-8528

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
 (eearchibald@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.

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

Cloverdale **NEW support group** started by the Forget Me Not Society for adoptees, birth / natural mothers, adoptive parents and those in a supportive role. We meet the first Thursday of each month, except for July & August, at the Cloverdale public library on the 2nd floor at 5642- 176A Street from 6:30 to 8:30 PM. For more information, please contact Marnie Tetz by e-mail at: marnietetz@shaw.ca or call: 604-535-4434.

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/ natural parents, adopted adults, and adoptive parents . We meet the second Tuesday of each month at the New Westminster Public Library, Plaskett Room (2nd floor) at 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 for coffee from 7:00 to 9:00 PM. We take a break for July and August. For more information regarding meeting place, contact Sandra Walters at: 778- 994-2845 or e-mail at: walters.sandra@shaw.ca

Vancouver Please see the notice in the Announcements. The support group as facilitated by Lee Crawford has been discontinued. Lee is looking at running separate therapy groups for a fee. Please call and let Lee know if you would like to be part of a therapy group, at 604-875-9957. Meetings will take place at: 659A Moberley Road, False Creek, Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 4B2

Vancouver The Adoptees' Association holds a discussion group for adopted adults the third Wednesday of each month at 7:00 PM at the Rhizome Cafe, 317 East Broadway (near Main Street) Please e-mail Catherine for more information at: catiesue@shaw.ca or visit www.adopteesassociation.ca for more information.

MARK, Helen Louise
May 8, 1941 – December 26, 2009

Passed away at home after an 8-month illness with multiple myeloma. Helen was born in Kimberley, BC and moved to Vancouver to study nursing at UBC. In 1966 she met Don Mark, a lawyer, and they were married in 1968 and had four children. After adopting her youngest son from Vietnam in 1975, she began to gather and distribute information to assist people in the adoption of children from overseas. Her organization grew from her kitchen table into the Adoptive Families Association of BC incorporated in 1981. She remained committed to the AFA for 30 years, first as a volunteer, and later as an employee. In 2004 the AFA created the "Helen Mark Excellence in Adoption" award, which is given annually to an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to adoption. (summary from the AFA)



told me that she finally understood, after 20 years in adoption, what reunion was. To see the pain and loss on her son's face was devastating - she had no idea that much pain was in him.
Nancy Kato

I was very sad to hear the news that Helen Mark, a former colleague who I admired greatly, passed away over the Christmas holidays. We worked together at the Adoptive Families Association for seven years, and although she was 25 years older than me, we probably had the most in common in our office. She had an upbeat personality and loved to kayak, cycle, camp and read, and she was passionately committed to adoption. Her youngest son was adopted from Vietnam in the '70s, and she traveled with him to his home country to visit the orphanage he came from. She often shared humorous stories of all of her four children's antics. Helen was raised in a generation where women took care of their husbands, and I know that one of her secret thrills was eating alone at White Spot when her husband was out as she didn't have to cook dinner. That said, she had one of those rare lifelong love affairs with her devoted husband Don. She will be deeply missed. Harriet Fancott

The Forget Me Not Family Society is deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Helen Mark - a pioneer in adoption, and a truly lovely person. I have known Helen for many years and what I remember most, is her willingness to listen and learn. I remember when she took her son to Viet Nam to see where he was adopted from, knowing that there was no chance of finding his birth parents. When she returned from that trip, she

To place a sponsorship ad, please call: 604-777-2920. Business card size available for \$40. Please note that advertising is limited to members of the Society, which reserves the right to determine the appropriateness of the proposed Ad to the purpose of our publication.

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- ✓ Subscription to **Adoption Circles**, a quarterly publication
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Forget Me Not Family Society to:
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