

ADOPTION CIRCLES

CANADA'S POST-ADOPTION QUARTERLY

ISSUE 7 SUMMER 1993

SOLOMON'S MOTHERS

A special case of
Pathological Bereavement

A LETTER TO LORINE

A Birthmother's Letter

A MILLION TEARS

Poetry by Monica M. Burton

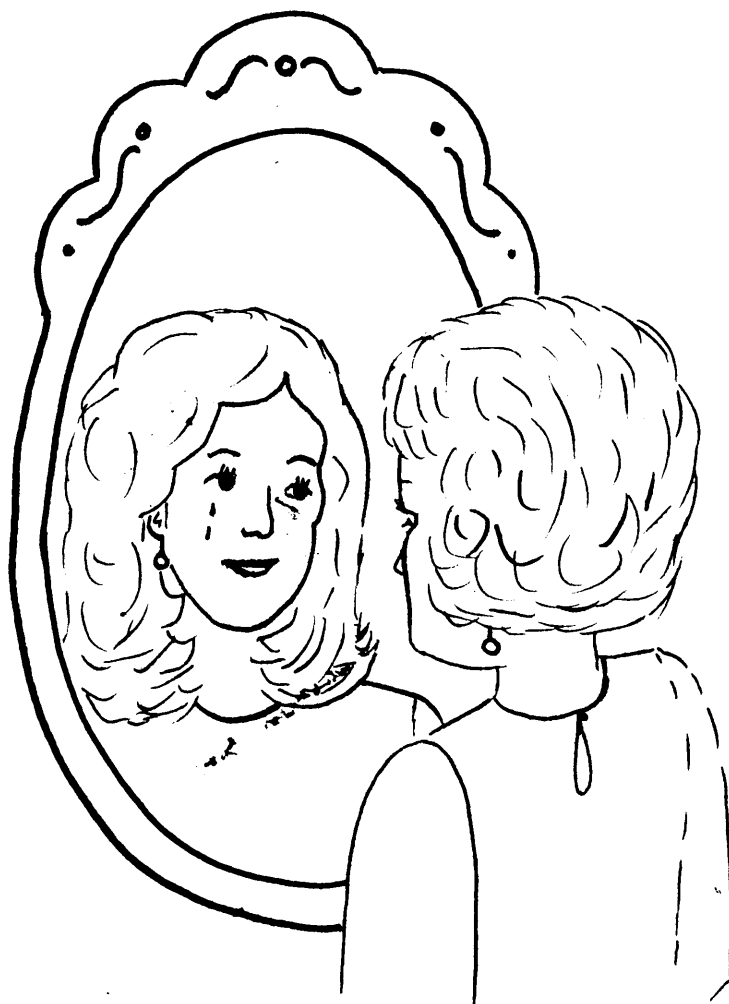
MAIL-ORDER BOOKS AVAILABLE

IN THE NEWS

Tearoe vs. Sawan

AN EVENING WITH DESPERADO

A Dinner & Dance
Fundraiser Event



ADOPTION CIRCLES
ISSUE #7 SUMMER 1993

Publisher
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EDITOR'S NOTE

Our Summer issue #7 is finally here! A little late, but better late than never. We've had some changes these past couple of months and will have more in the future. Our newsletter will be increasing in size and we welcome your letters to the editor, poetry, reunion stories and articles that you feel may make a difference to someone. Now on to our changes in staff.

First, it is with deep regret that the executive of The Forget Me Not Family Society announces the resignation on May 15, 1993 of Millie Strom as Newsletter Editor. Her sensitivity, hard work and professionalism will be greatly missed by all of us. We sincerely wish Millie her health, happiness and much success in her future endeavours. Thank you, Millie for all you have done.

Secondly, we will take this opportunity to introduce our new Editor, Lisa Chan. Lisa, a reunited adoptee, brings to our organization incredible enthusiasm, unending computer knowledge and first hand experience in the adoption circle. We look forward to a new outlook and appearance to The Forget Me Not Family Society newsletter. Welcome aboard, Lisa.

This issue is dedicated to "Birthmothers". We hope our recognition and understanding of their position within the adoption circle will pave the way for more birthmothers to come forward and find solace and understanding among others who have had similar experiences. We highly recommend support groups, counselling and workshops as a means of beginning or continuing the healing process within a safe and secure environment.

Our monthly workshop at the New Westminster Library, is on July 17, 1993 at 1 pm and our topic is Pre & Post Reunion Basics for Birthparents and Their Extended Family. We urge all birthparents, adoptees and anyone connected to a reunion to attend.

Finally, in closing, we wish to thank two birthmothers, Monica M. Bunton of Lethbridge, Alberta for her poem "A Million Tears" and Gail Davies of Surrey, B.C., for her letter in "Letter To Lorine". Both of you have put into words and on paper, feelings and emotions many of us feel each day. Our heartfelt thanks goes out to both of you and to all birthmothers who have had the courage to be a birthmother.

*Sandi Blackie,
On behalf of the executive of the
Forget Me Not Family Society*

Remember to mark

your calendar for the 2nd

**"Let's Talk About Reunions"
Conference**

March 5 & 6, 1994

**CONGRATULATIONS
Raffle Prize Winners**

1st Prize

*Accommodations at the Inn at
Westminster Quay &
Sunday Brunch
J.A. Kautzman
Surrey, B.C.*

2nd Prize

*Hot Air Balloon Ride
courtesy of Remax Royal City
Dianne Sherritt
Aldergrove, B.C.*

3rd Prize

*Dinner at La Rustica Restaurant
Sherry Niessen
New Westminster, B.C.*

4th Prize

*Dinner at La Spaghetteria Rest.
Teresa West
Aldergrove, B.C.*

POST-MEETING NOTES

Birthmothers Support Group

Starting Sept 21/93

Adopted Adults Support Group

Starting mid-Nov/93

8 Weekly Meetings

Call Lee Crawford, M.Ed., R.C.C.
for more information.
(604) 875-1155

ACCESS TO ADOPTION RECORDS

On June 9, 1993, the B.C. Ministry of Social Services held its first roundtable discussion meeting regarding access to adoption records. Kathryn Vea, representing The Forget Me Not Family Society, participated in that meeting. Discussions involved recommendations for the following issues:

1. Who should have access to adoption records?
2. Aboriginal Concerns.
3. Retroactivity issues.
4. Sensitive and difficult case issues.

Also discussed was support services required for adoptees, birth relatives, adoptive parents and aboriginal people. Representatives from the ministry said that the issues dealt with at the meeting will become part of the proposed recommendations to be presented to the Minister of Social Services during the next Spring 1994 sitting of the legislature. We must keep in mind that the reason these discussions took place is because of the recent Freedom of Information Act that took effect in the province of B.C. Any changes in legislation receive a first reading (tabled) then after a second reading they are discussed. At a third reading they are voted upon and either pass or fail. If passed, they take effect on the date agreed upon by the legislature. At this time, we don't know when records will become open or how open they will become. It appears, however, that it may possibly be in late Fall of 1994 or early Spring 1995.

As with other government decisions, we must all wait once again. It does seem more hopeful that the records will become open with the NDP government, but only time will tell.

Kathryn Vea

WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

Place: New Westminster Public Library, Auditorium
716 - 6th Avenue, New Westminster, B.C.

Times: 1 pm - 4 pm / Social 4 pm - 4:30 pm

Cost: \$30.00 per workshop

Saturday, July 17, 1993

Topic: Pre & Post Reunion Basics for Birth Parents and
Their Extended Family Members

With: Lee Crawford, M.Ed., R.C.C.

Saturday, August 21, 1993

Topic: Post Reunion Family Changes For Adoptees

With: Arden Henley, B.A., M.A.

Saturday, September 25, 1993

Topic: Living With the Decision of Relinquishing

With: Pat Roles

Saturday, October 16, 1993

Topic: Adoptees in Relationships

With: Lee Crawford, M.Ed., R.C.C.

Saturday, November 20, 1993

Topic: Post Reunion Family Changes For Birth Parents
and Their Extended Family Members

With: Arden Henley, B.A., M.A.

All workshops are open to any persons concerned with adoption.
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CALL (604) 530-2160.

LEAN ON ME Telephone Support List

Reunited Birthmothers:

Anne Christianson
(604) 888-1720

Reunited Adoptees:

Cecelia Reekie (604) 530-9017

Adoptees:

Peter Burnett (604) 589-8123

Interested Professionals:

Judy Archer, North Shore

Family Services (604) 988-5281

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

SOLOMON'S MOTHERS:

A Special Case of Pathological Bereavement

Leverett Millen, Ph.D. and Samuel Roll, Ph.D.

Giving up a child for adoption presents a serious emotional and psychological challenge for the mother. Using the components of normal grieving, this article illustrates the ways in which the bereavement process was distorted and delayed in 22 women seen in psychotherapy who had earlier given up a child.

In a society that defines women as mothers, mothers-to-be, or childless, the woman who has given birth and then relinquished her child for adoption is an enigma. Having signed away her legal claim to the child, she is often perceived as the most unnatural of women, a rejecting mother. It is generally expected that the woman who has relinquished a child has severed any emotional bond that had developed, and has gladly resumed her interrupted life. Our work with women who have relinquished children has contradicted this view. The maternal experience does not end with the signing of surrender papers. The woman returns to living her life without the child but with much pain and anguish. The child's existence - and her separation from that existence - becomes a painful reality in the mother's life.

In seeking a term that would encompass both the psychological and the biological connections the mother experiences toward her child, we were reminded of the Old Testament incident in which two women asked King Solomon to decide who was the actual mother of the child they both claimed. When Solomon decreed that the child should be cut in half, and one part be given to each woman, the mother of the child, though she yearned to be with her son, was willing to give up the baby so that he would not be harmed. Solomon concluded that this sacrifice revealed the depth of the woman's feelings for the child and acknowledged her as the mother.

That the two women in this tale were presented as harlots only adds to the appropriateness for our purpose. A harlot is defined as an immoral woman and is subject to some of the same unsympathetic judgments that the relinquishing mother faces. The stigma of bearing an illegitimate child has much impact on the decision to relinquish a child. The taint of immorality also contributes to the lack of social support that will make the relinquishing mother's situation more difficult.

The title reference to "Solomon's Mothers" tries to depict the dilemma and the intense experience of these women who have chosen the alternative of adoption for the sake of their child's well-being. This decision is influenced by social values which define such women as immoral and as incapable of being suitable parents, by the stigma their children would bear in such a situation, and by overwhelming economic pressures.

Our clinical work and a review of the literature on women who have relinquished children have revealed a bond of such enduring intensity that time and physical separation often do not seem to weaken the affinity of the mother for the child. The women we have worked with have struggled to understand the intense bond they feel for a child whom they know only as memory or fantasy. At the time of the surrender, they were usually reassured by all involved that the experience was then over. Thus, it is with much confusion as well as pain that they attempt to work through the anguish they are still experiencing five, ten, even twenty or more years later.

ASPECTS OF LOSS

In the following discussion, we will attempt to describe each feature in the grief reaction of the relinquishing mothers with whom we have worked.

Realization

In a normal grief reaction, it is through the process of realization that the bereaved moves from a denial of the loss to acceptance. To come to terms with a loss, the individual must accept the loss as permanent. The yearning and searching impulses present in the grief reaction must be recognized as expressions of longing but cannot be used to deny the finality of the loss. Like the person dealing with a death, the mother who has given up her child may deny the permanence of her loss through a persisting experience of the child's presence in thought and fantasy.

Alarm

Alarm is a stress reaction often expressed through somatic symptoms and restless anxiety. Many of the mothers in our sample faced this same situation, seeing the security of their lives shattered as those around them began to withdraw emotionally.

At the same time that they attempted to deal with this withdrawal, many had to leave their homes until the birth of their child. Loss of child is a situation clearly capable of producing a high state of alarm.

Searching

The women with whom we worked also developed a visual picture of their relinquished child based on the physical appearance of the mother herself or of the child's father, or both. This picture helped to sustain their fantasies of an accidental meeting with the child. The urge to search is complicated for these women since their searching impulses are not irrational and, further, may not be futile. Unlike the grieving person who eventually comes to terms with the fact that the lost person is truly dead, these mothers know that their child is alive and that the possibility of future con-

tact may be more than a fantasy.

Anger and Guilt

Self-reproach and guilt in the normal grief reaction most often are part of the constellation of feelings focusing on not having done enough to prevent the loss. With time, there is a diminution of self-reproach as the bereaved person realizes that the loss was inevitable and beyond control. Like the grieving person, the relinquishing mother's guilt and anger at herself intensifies with the passage of time as she comprehends her role in setting up her loss and the consequent feelings of remorse and grief.

Loss of Self

Feelings of loss of self and mutilation, are expressed by feelings of emptiness and destruction, though, with time, the intensity of the feelings diminishes as the bereaved individual resumes and reconstructs a life without the lost person. The grieving person's experience of emptiness and loss of self are exacerbated in these women by the reality of a child having indeed been a part of them physically as well as emotionally.

Identification

The relinquishing mother's identification phenomena are intensified as a result of the nine months of carrying the child within her. The reality of the pregnancy facilitates the mother's sense of a presence of the lost object within her and slows down the letting go which is necessary for the working through of grief and the building of a new identity that is separate from the lost object.

The foregoing discussion has outlined the ways in which the major aspects of the bereavement process can be confounded and impeded in women who have relinquished a child.

Our work with women who have relinquished their children suggests that the emotional bond they develop with the lost child must not be denied, overlooked, or demeaned.

Rather, the connection must be seen as valid and the break in that

connection which occurs at the time of relinquishment must be recognized and mourned.

Recommendations

De-Stigmatizing the Loss

A loss viewed as real and valid can be more readily mourned than a loss that is shrouded in secrecy and shame.

Counselling

Exploration of alternatives, examination of earlier loss and realistic expectations of grief reaction are nec-

essary. Support is required for the mourning process by having the availability mourning ritual and grief counselling.

It is evident that the experience of a mother relinquishing her child is similar to pathological mourning, including feelings of intense loss, enduring panic and unresolved anger.

This article contains excerpts from a paper submitted to The American Orthopsychiatric Journal. in October 1984.

A Letter To Lorine

You were so peaceful and wonderful to hold the last time I saw you when you were 11 days old. I did not want to let you go, I just wanted to hold you forever but even though the staff at the home for unwed mothers said that you were the most beautiful baby they had ever seen and even though my mother thought you looked just like me, I let you go.

I was 17 and naive - I believed everyone. I believed that you would have a better life with a loving family with two parents. I, too, grew up feeling abandoned and unloved because my mother left when I had just turned 7. I never dreamed that you would have recurring nightmares, like I did, that the rest of my family would be taken from me, but you probably did.

I thought that I was giving you a chance at a better life than I had. I turned you over to strangers. At least I still had my father, grandmother, younger brother and sister. How I cried that last day I saw you, Lorine, but I did not dream of the pain to come, the longing to see you and know how you were.

You were 9 when your sister was born. I cried, remembering the day I had you. When you were 18

and your sister 9, she asked me, "Do I have a sister? I have this feeling I have a sister". She couldn't wait, she wanted me right then and there to find you. She dreamt of you and wanted to find you. I wanted to find you, too, but I was afraid. I was afraid to tell you about your father, afraid that you would reject me but when we found each other last year, just after your 27th birthday, you did not reject me. You wanted to find me as much as I wanted to find you.

We have had so many wonderful times since then, but it does not take away the pain and sadness of all the missed years, but it is getting better. I just want to take you in my arms and make all your pain and sorrow go away, and be there like the mother that I should have been - but I can't.

You have another mother. I understand, Lorine, and I know how difficult it is for you. The anguish and joy of having two mothers and two families. It must be hard to take sometimes, but I just want you to know, Lorine, that you have and always will have a special place in my heart. We all love you and together we can work all of this out.

*Love,
Your birthmother Gail*

Books By Mail

To order the following books make cheques payable to: Kathryn Veal and mail to Forget Me Not Family Society. P.O. Box 61526 Brookwood P.O., Langley, B.C. V3A 8C8.

The Adoption Triangle by Arthur Soroksy, Reuben Pannor & Annette Baran. Sealed or open records:

How they affect adoptees, birthparents and adoptive parents. \$13 + shipping.

Birthbond by Judith Gediman & Linda P. Brown. Reunions between birthparents & adoptees. \$19 + shipping.

Lost & Found - The Adoption Experience by Betty J. Lifton. A classic exploration of the psychology of the adopted. \$15 + shipping.

Making Sense Of Adoption - A Parents Guide by Lois R. Melina. What to tell, when to tell and how to tell. \$13 + shipping.

The Other Mother by Carol Schaefer. A birthmother's true story. \$17 + shipping.

Stories of Adoption by Eric Blau. Photographic images & personal reflections of adoptees, birthparents & adoptive parents. \$23 + shipping.

The Primal Wound - by Nancy N. Verrier. Clarifies the effects of separation from the birthmother on adoptees. \$23 + shipping.

Please add \$2.50 shipping charge per book.

ADOPTTEES WANTED

Vancouver General Hospital's Department of Psychiatry wishes to form a group of 12 adoptees to explore issues and themes that seem to be common for adoptee's.

Therapists: Dr. Irene Straszak, Psychiatrist
Outpatient Psychiatry Department
Vancouver General Hospital

Darlynne Gehring, MSW, RSW
Social Worker
Outpatient Psychiatry Department
Vancouver General Hospital

Location: Vancouver General Hospital
715 West 12 Avenue
Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 1M9

Time: Wednesdays 1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Date: Targeting January 1994

If you are interested in this program, please contact Darlynne Gehring at (604) 875-4794 for more details about the group.

A MILLION TEARS

by Monica M. Bunton

A million tears I've cried.
A thousand deaths I've died.
My baby and I were torn apart,
now there's an emptiness in my heart.
It's best for all they say -
You'll get over it some day.
Your baby will have a mom and dad still - why do I feel so bad?
You and I we worked so hard to be born
and at last you greet the early morn.
All I get is that one glance.
Oh baby, if only we had a chance.
The hospital is an empty place
when I can no longer see your face.
A memory to carry me through the years
Thoughts of you release the tears.

A million tears I've cried.
A thousand deaths I've died.

Some other mother will be foremost
in your heart.
I'll have to go on somehow, get a
fresh start.
But to every child your age I look
and see
if there might be some inherited part
of me.
And every time a child is lost or
dies-
a hope that he's not mine - my heart
and soul cries.
I hope your parents will love you as
much as I do
And that your troubles in life will
be few.
And every year on that special day
my heart celebrates in its own way.
For you are alive and growing
and I take comfort in knowing
that perhaps some day my heart will
be free
when your loving face again I see.

IN THE NEWS

Tearoe vs. Sawan

This is a case of a Solomon-like dispute in which a Victoria couple, James Tearoe, 47, and his wife Fay, 49, adopted the son of Tina Sawan, 20.

According to newspaper sources, Sawan relinquished her child under Alberta's adoption laws. But days after the adoption was formalized, she told Alberta officials she wanted the adoption order reversed.

Sawan wrote a letter to the Tearoe's to explain why she wanted her child back. "I felt like people were pushing me to give him up, saying it was the best for him", Sawan wrote.

On June 18, 1993 B.C. Supreme Court Justice Allen Melvin ordered that the child be returned to the birth mother. He described Sawan as "na-

ive" and "unsophisticated" but said that her desire for her child was unwavering. "The connection between the birthmother and the child has not been irretrievably broken".

When Sawan arrived at the Tearoe's home on June 19, 1993 to pick her son up, she discovered that the Tearoe's had disappeared with the child. Brian Young, the Tearoe's lawyer said "They're not coming back with the child". Jean Morgan, Sawan's lawyer said "Tina was given an order and relied on that order. She believed they would act in good faith and they didn't. She is very upset."

In his judgment, Melvin said that the natural mother had made it clear that within days of giving up her child that she wanted him back, even if she hadn't fulfilled all the technicalities.

There was to be an appeal hearing

on June 24, 1993, seeking a stay of the custody order, but the B.C.. Court of Appeal said it would not listen until the child was returned to his birth mother.

Brian Young argued that the child had bonded with the Tearoe's, who adopted him when he was two months old. Young told Justice Jo-Ann Prowse that Justice Allen Melvin erred in awarding custody to Sawan by not properly taking into account the best interest of the child.

Allowing the child to stay with his unfamiliar birth mother could, argued Young, "be damaging".

Sawan spent two days with her son and he was returned to his adoptive parents for two weeks pending the appeal. Justice Prowse said she doesn't doubt for a moment that the birth mother loves her son. But she says she wants the least disruption for the child, who has lived with the Tearoe's for the past 16 months. At the time of printing, the appeal has not been heard.

With all the legalities surrounding this case, it seems that the basic concept of adoption has been forgotten. Adoption's original intention was to find homes for children whose parents were unable or unwilling to look after them, not to find children for childless couples.

The real question here is not why did Tina Sawan change her mind, but does this child have a family of origin who wants to raise him?

Is he in need of an adoptive family?

-- excerpts from *The Vancouver Sun*, June 25, 1993.

Please send letters to the editor, reunion stories, news and information on community events to:
Adoption Circles
c/o Forget Me Not Family Society,
Box 61525 Brookwood P.O.,
Langley, B.C. V3A 8C8 Canada.

FORGET ME NOT FAMILY SOCIETY Presents

AN EVENING WITH DESPERADO

Dinner & Dance Fundraiser Event

Tentative Date: Sept 26, 1993

Place: Silverado, 20299 Industrial Ave., Langley, B.C.
(formerly Club 88)

Bing Armstrong & Desperado are
volunteering their services towards the worthy cause of
promoting education in adoption.

Get your friends together for a girls/guys night out...or a
team night out...or any group night out.

Come and enjoy a fabulous evening with Desperado.

Tickets available beginning Sept 1, 1993

For more info contact the Society at
(604) 530-2160.