

ADOPTION CIRCLES

CANADA'S POST-ADOPTION QUARTERLY

ISSUE 8 FALL 1993

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ISSUE #8 FALL 1993

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Many of us have lived through times of extraordinary social change. Back in the 1950s and 1960s adoption was a taboo subject. Adoption was believed to be one's "second choice" and certainly not the preferred way of creating a family.

Even the terms associated with adoption were frequently negative such as orphan, foundling, bastard, illegitimate, unwanted and rejected. Some adoptions took place because of the way society thought about illegitimate babies and unwed mothers. They were simply not accepted as part of that society. Other adoptions took place because parents were either unable or unwilling to care for their children.

The adoption process was designed to protect the babies, mothers and adoptive families. This protection was created by the sealing of records. It was assumed that adoptees and birth families had no reason to find one another, that there would be no feelings of loss. Adoptive parents could satisfactorily answer their adoptive children's questions with the little information they had.

In recent years, much more adoption awareness has come about. Media stories and books featuring search and reunion are becoming familiar. Reunions are happening everyday and are achieving greater visibility and sanction than was possible even ten years ago. People are initiating searches after reading or hearing about the reunions of others. Emotional support and guidance are now widely available from people within the triad and from professionals within the adoption field.

It's hard to generalize on the topic of reunion, as it is such a new development with the absence of precedent. With more people opening up and talking about their experiences with adoption, certain patterns emerge and allow us to chart a common course that will benefit future searches and reunions.

We would like to hear from you about your reunion experiences. Please take the time to share with us the

following topics as it pertains to your situation. Once we have received a collection of stories, we'll compile them into interest categories and publish them in future issues of *Adoption Circles*. Send us your essays, poems, notes, etc.

What Would You Do Differently?

*"If I could start my
reunion over again..."*

and

Amazing Coincidences

*discovered upon
your reunion.*

We welcome your response to the above topics. Submissions must include your name, address and daytime telephone number (not for publication) to verify authenticity. We reserve the right to edit submissions. Submissions will not be returned, they become the property of The Forget Me Not Family Society. If you wish anonymity, please advise us. Please send to: **Editor, Adoption Circles, Box 61525 Brookswood P.O., Langley, B.C. V3A 8C8 Canada.**

ENDLESS SEARCH

By Anne Christianson

Each year as your birthday
approaches,
My thoughts are distracted.
My emotions run high, and sleep
is evasive.

You are once again, a cry in the
distance.
A longing to hold you, but unable
to.

Empty arms await you, my child.

To envelope you with love.
So long ago buried, beneath the
sorrow and pain.

Even now the emptiness inside is
never abated.
Only one thing can fill that void.

My search will go on until I find
you.
I will never rest until that day.

Bus Roots

BY LISA CHAN

I used to look at strangers
on the bus going home from
school.
I would scan their faces
and then feel like a fool.

I thought that I could
somehow
find my roots on a bus.
But the ride home just
wasn't long enough.

I used to keep secrets
afraid to reveal my shame.
I had no past to speak of
my questions treated with
disdain.

I needed to know what they
were like
did we share a common
trait?
But my files were sealed, as
if never born
any hopes of reunion were
left to fate.

As I grew older, I decided to
search
for a man & woman whose
blood I share.
My intent was to make
contact
and to be honest and fair.

My reunions were well
planned
but not enough to prepare
me.
I found more than birth
parents
I now have a big second
family.

I still remain loyal to myself
I'm not in between.
I've searched and I've found
what belongs to me.

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, October 2, 1993

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

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

Saturday, October 16, 1993

Topic: Adoptees in Relationships

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

Saturday, November 6, 1993

Topic: Post Reunion Family Changes For Adoptees

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

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 about adoption.
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CALL (604) 530-2160.

ADOPTION REUNIONS - AN EMOTIONAL TRIANGLE:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION REGARDING THE ISSUES

By Raymond O. Ensminger, M.S.W.

For many years, many people in the adoption triangle, have had questions and have personally struggled with issues around reunions with birth relatives.

The following quotes from individuals within the adoption triangle represent some of the feelings:

"I have never forgotten my child. I hope she is well and happy. I hope she will someday want to know me. I will always long for the child I carried, but never held." (a birth mother).

"I can understand that my daughter might want to search for her biological mother when she becomes an adult. But, I do not believe that her biological mother has any claim on her at all. To allow her to have the right to start a relationship after all these years is morally wrong." (an adoptive parent).

"I look in the mirror and wonder who I look like - I wonder why I was given up. I feel I have a right to my nationality, background and heritage. All I want to know is what's rightfully mine." (an adult adoptee).

The issue of adoption reunions is a very emotional one. Many feelings and very personal concepts begin to surface - personal identity, adequacy of parents, confidentiality promised years ago, anger, frustration, disappointment, fear, elation, resolution of deep-seated questions, rights of adults, basic nuclear and extended family relationships, attitudes around illegitimacy.

Historically, the policies and practice regarding issues of disclosure (confidentiality, sealed records), of agencies providing adoption services are similar in both Canada and the United States. Ancient Greece and Rome practised adoption; however, the first adoption legislation in North America was enacted in Massachusetts in 1851. Adoption legislation was enacted in England and Wales in 1926, and in Scotland in 1930.

By the end of the 1930's the "as if born" concept had been introduced into adoption legislation in many jurisdictions. The intent of legislators was to ensure that children by adoption had the same rights and privileges as children by birth. However, a negative implication of the "as if born" concept is that it obscures the fact that having children by adoption rather than by birth is different. It is not less than, but it is different.

During their growing-up years many children fantasize about having another set of parents. For adopted children this fantasy has a reality to it. Unless adoptive parents acknowledge that fact, they will probably experience difficulty in responding to questions their children ask.

Generally, social agencies terminated their contact and involvement shortly after the adoption finalized. Adoption was not seen as a lifelong process but rather as a time-limited process. Since having children by adoption was "as if born", there was a very limited appreciation of some of the unique difficulties adoptive families may experience at various developmental stages. As a result, few services were developed to assist adoptive parents.

A similar attitude also existed in the provision of services to birth mothers. Birth mothers were told that they could never hope to see their child again. They were given little, if any, social information on the adoptive parents or the opportunity to share in the decision making process of selecting prospective adoptive parents for their child. They were discouraged from seeing their infant in the hospital. Once the child had been surrendered, it was assumed the process had been completed. Studies of birth mothers reveal that this is definitely not the case for most mothers. Mothers continue to have periodic and sometimes frequent unresolved feelings regard-

ing the surrendered child. The birth father was hardly ever considered a client in need of individual or joint counselling with the birth mother.

From the 1940's to the 1970's adoption laws and policies remained unchanged. Adoptee groups such as Adoptees Liberty Movement Association and Parent Finders began forming across North America in the early 1970's. Adult adoptees began to question and challenge the policies and practices of adoption agencies and the laws around sealed records.

When adoptees began to request for more information on birth parents, many adoptive parents were unprepared. This, in part, because adoptive parents had been assured that having children by adoption was no different than by having children by birth. Adoptive parents often felt that they had failed as parents because their adopted children were expressing an interest in birth parents.

During the mid 1970's, adoptees began organizing and lobbying with adoption agencies and legislators for changes to the policies and laws regarding sealed records. At the same time many adoptees began their own searches. Armed with minimal information, search aids and group support, adoptees found and were reunited with birth parents.

Individuals and organizations began conducting research into the results and implications of searches and reunions. Arthur Sorosky, Annette Baran and Reuben Pannor reported their findings in a book, *The Adoption Triangle: The Effects of the Sealed Record on Adoptees, Birth Parents, and Adoptive Parents*. Their study found that birth parents continued to mourn years after the relinquishment, wanted the child to know that they cared and were interested in knowing what kind of persons their children had grown up to be. Eighty two percent of those interviewed said they

would be amenable to a reunion if the adoptee wished it when s/he reached adulthood.

The basic premises and findings of such studies have not been refuted by more recent research. Even those cases where there has been a very limited ongoing relationship after a reunion, the parties to the reunion consider the search and reunion as successful and fulfilling in the sense that long-standing questions and concerns have finally been answered.

The results of research and also the experience of adult adoptee groups demonstrate:

1) The need to search for birth relatives (especially birth mothers) is very important to many adoptees.

2) Often there is initial apprehension on the part of adoptive parents when their adult children talk about and then begin the search.

3) Adoptees have a strong commitment to their adoptive families.

4) Adoptees are sensitive to the needs and feelings of their adoptive parents (and they do not want to hurt their parents), and to their birth parents (and they are discreet and careful in initiating contacts).

5) When the search is completed, adoptees feel a sense of completeness that was not previous to the search and reunion. This is true even for adoptees who have had very positive adoptive family experiences.

6) The majority of birth mothers do not want the confidentiality promised them years ago. They have continued hopes and dreams of their surrendered children. They would welcome a reunion if given the opportunity.

7) Birth mothers feel a sense of relief and diminished sense of guilt as a result of being able to share with the adoptee the reason for surrender.

8) Adoptees have a greater appreciation that their adoptive parents are the real psychological parents. This seems to be true whether or not there is an ongoing relationship with the birth parents.

It is essential that families have a sense of openness and honesty in responding to questions and concerns.

Often one issue for adoptees (especially during adolescence and adulthood) is to have more information regarding their origins. The evidence suggests very strongly that reunions generally do have a positive role in strengthening all parties in the adoption triangle.

There are exceptions to this experience, specifically birth parents who do not wish to be identified or found. These people may not have told either their family of origin nor their current family about a child who was surrendered for adoption. Although research and follow-up studies suggest that birth parents (especially birth mothers) who do not want to be identified are in the minority, their feelings cannot be ignored. At the same time, the needs and feeling of a small minority should not supersede the needs and feelings of a large majority.

Many people from all parts of the adoption triangle are beginning to be

more aware of the complexity of the issues involved in adoption and are more sensitive to the needs and feelings of the others. Reunions still are, and always will be, intense emotional processes.

Professionals are becoming more aware and sensitive to the issues and their responses to people struggling with concerns relating to adoption are beginning to address the issues more realistically.

The "jury is still out" regarding the ideal adoption process. Education, support and co-operation will contribute significantly to the development of the process of adoption.

Raymond O. Ensminger, M.S.W. is a clinical social worker with Alberta Mental Health Services, Stony Plain, Alberta and a consultant to Parent Finders, Edmonton. Excerpts from this article are reprinted with permission by the author.

Stages of Searching

Initial Stage: The time it takes to decide whether or not to search, usually a lengthy period of hesitation and ambivalence. The decision to search can be triggered by a significant life event.

Second Stage: Searcher becomes obsessed with process of searching. This phase is completed when a birth parent is located.

Third Stage: A limbo or cooling off period, a time to integrate thoughts and feelings about birth parents. Feelings of ambivalence, "what if's" are strongly felt. Inaction, immobility due to fear.

Final Stage: Penetration of the veil is when contact with birth parent/relative is made by either letter/phone call as person to person reunion.

Betty Jean Lifton. "Stages of Searching" taken from Lost and Found, 1979. Ms. Lifton will be speaking at our "Let's Talk About Reunions Conference" March 5 & 6, 1994.

Growth Phases Involved in Searching

Aggravation: Feelings of discomfort that motivates us to re-examine our lives. Aggravation remains when one resists change.

Awakening: Is where one ceases to resist change, shifting into an observation mode. An opportunity to trust your feelings and self evaluate.

Action: Is the participation in life and relationships. Awareness of discomfort creates an opportunity to change self-imposed limitations.

Absolution: Of guilt is experienced when we release our expectations - letting go of our limited visions and definitions.

Assimilation: Of information relationships is an ongoing and expanding experience or process throughout our lifetime.

Mary Jo Rillera. "Growth Phases Involved in Searching" taken from Adoption Encounter, 1987.

THE PARTICULAR CHALLENGES OF BEING ADOPTED

Penny Callan Partridge, M.S.W.

It is the case that all adoptees face particular challenges that must be mastered on the road to emotional maturity and identity consolidation. There are seven specific challenges which being adopted almost inevitably involves.

1) Losses that are less acknowledged and thus more difficult to resolve than losses such as death, divorce or dislocation that any human being may face.

2) Less grounding in "reality," since less of their own "reality" or self-knowledge, is, by legal decree, available to most adoptees.

3) A context, to varying degrees, of tension and secrecy around the subject of origins and adoption.

4) Doubts about one's own sense of being loved, wanted, or "good enough."

5) Certain kinds of invisibility, limiting the kinds of mirroring available from others.

6) A sense of dividedness between two sets of parents and two identities.

7) A sense of "differentness," of being an outsider.

Unacknowledged Losses

The most obvious loss faced by adoptees is that of their first set of parents. However, this loss, is not so obvious to adoptees, especially as they are growing up. Nor do people around the adoptee necessarily see or want to acknowledge this loss. There are many reasons that caring, concerned adults fail to help children deal with losses. These included the hope that the loss will not have a major impact on the child and/or the judgment that the child is too young or too fragile to handle it.

Less obvious than the loss of two specific people in one's life is the loss of growing up in the context of biological relatedness. The only way the adoptive family can make any pretence of supplying this is by denying the fact of adoption itself. Even then, the child is not surrounded by variations on the themes of his own features, colouring, and other inherited characteristics. He or she will still be confused about where

his or her own in-born qualities came from. The adoptee will still miss out on the visual experience of connectedness to the family.

Another loss is the loss of information. The adoptee is typically without names or faces to attach to those first parents, who are thus more like hazy concepts than real people. This lack of "realness" of the people lost tends to keep adoptees at that beginning stage of mourning: the denial stage.

Lack of Groundedness in Reality

A lack of knowledge about our origins can make us feel that we ourselves are unreal, too. This missing reality is the basis for what many believe is the typical adoptee's "overinvestment" in fantasy. This can lead to the feeling that one is not rooted in the physical. One's presence may seem to have a vaporous quality, or one may feel a product of the imagination - one's own or perhaps having been dreamed up in the adoption agency to meet the needs of one's waiting parents. This sense of oneself - or lack of sense of self - explains the passivity and other-directedness of many adoptees.

Tension and Secrecy

The added atmosphere of tension and secrecy surrounding that missing reality intensifies the challenge to the adoptee. Among adoptees who have known about their adoptions since childhood, some remember being told "a different story every time" in answer to their questions. Others knew they were being told the truth as their families knew it, but they also remember receiving nonverbal signs that this was a stressful subject. Even if the immediate adoptive family is relatively comfortable with and open about the adoption, tension and secrecy may abound in the extended family, or neighbourhood, or beyond - ultimately, in the state laws which maintain secrecy around adoptees' origins.

An important aspect of secrecy is the easily made assumption that if one is not allowed to know something, especially about oneself, it must be bad.

This assumption steers many adoptees' fantasies in a murky direction.

Being Loved, Wanted, or Good Enough

Some adoptees, like many foster children, repeatedly try to test whether adoptive families really want them, come what may, by pushing their own behaviours beyond a point of tolerance. Many adoptees wonder how much they were wanted by their adoptive parents relative to how much they would have preferred to produce their own child. Some adoptees also question whether they were wanted in any way by their birth parents: Am I not the kind of person who would merit the passionate care of my original mother, no matter what her circumstances? Many questions may leave adoptees striving always to be better in some way, thinking that if they only be just a little better still, they might manage to be loved more.

Invisibility and Mirroring

There we are growing up, but this person through whom we entered the world, came into this life, is not there to see us, cannot confirm for us that the very same baby she got started is now going to school, now learning to swim. That is one way adoptees may feel invisible. Another is that adoptees often receive far less parental feedback about their physical appearance than non-adoptees. One way connectedness is repeatedly affirmed in most families, impacting on the development of one's self concept, is through frequent comments and anecdotes about physical similarities. As soon as a baby is born, families begin to speculate about physical appearance and link the child with various progenitors. Furthermore, any consideration of what the adopted child looks like may be an unwelcome reminder of those other parents whose looks the child undoubtedly combines in some way. Adoptive families cannot provide adoptees with the kind of mirroring that comes from constantly being able to see and take in what others look like who have similar features, colouring, and so on.

Divided Identity

Because they have two sets of parents and, usually, an original name (know or unknown) as well as one bestowed at the time adoption, it makes sense that many adoptees feel they have two identities. And like Clark Kent/Superman, dual identities are separate, to be played out only one at a time. One identity is visible, while the other is living a kind of hidden existence. As was mentioned with respect to appearance, adoptees may feel unable to see or get a grip on their pre-adoptive identity. Yet they know they are both that person who is the child of their birth parents as well as that person who is the son or daughter of their adoptive parents.

A Sense of Differentness

Adoptees miss out on the "sameness" experience and the connectedness

implied in resembling other people in their family. Then comes the realization of "difference" from most people because they have been adopted. Gradually they come to understand more about adoption and more about how "differentness" is responded to in this world. And they begin to ask the same questions asked by other people who are different in one way or another: Does different mean inferior? Does it mean less valued? Which differences are acceptable and which are not?

Conclusion

Recognition of the particular challenges to identity formation and self-concept that face the adoptee can help to provide empowering therapeutic contexts for adoptees. Insufficiently recognized losses need to be acknowledged and mourned. Adoptees can be encouraged to revise and complete their

"life stories", so important in the identity-shaping process, through reformulation and, if the adoptee is ready, a search. Tension and secrecy can be confronted and dispelled. Adoptees can become more "visible." to themselves and to others, through integration of the seemingly divided parts of self. And the sense of "differentness", can be overcome by connecting with others with similar experiences. In self-help groups adoptees not only experience a profound sense of relief and affirmation, but often a first recognition that they need not feel powerless.

Penny Callan Partridge, M.S.W., is the founder of the Adoption Forum in Philadelphia. She is the author of the book Being Adopted, in which she explores the adoptee experience from a variety of perspectives.

SEARCH & REUNION

by Clair Gabriel Marcus

Children who are separated from their origins by adoption based on the "as if born to" concept are denied citizenship rights that are available to others. Their birth records have been sealed and a veil of secrecy separates them from historical connections that are a part of human identity. There are thousands of adopted adults who question the validity of such practice.

Eighty two percent of encountered birth parents are positive and accepting about being found by the offspring relinquished years before.

Adoptive parents, on the other hand, are threatened by the idea of search and reunion, having been programmed to believe that adoption can succeed only under the pretence that they are the child's only parents. Despite feeling guilt over offending adoptive parents, 90% of adoptees do very well emotionally, after a reunion with their birth family. This indicates that birth parents and adoptees do not want life-long secrecy and separation.

An adoptee's need to search usually follows a long period of concern with the mystery of his origins. The spur to active search often stems from a meaningful life event such as a marriage, birth of a child, or the death of an adoptive parent. Search usually progresses in four stages. Each stage may be distinct or all may blend together quickly.

The first stage is an internal process that can begin early in childhood and intensify as the child becomes concerned with his identity. Often, the child dares not to ask about his origins, for of fear of upsetting his adoptive parents. The family romance common to all youth is not a fantasy for the adoptee, who knows there really are two other parents.

The second stage is an active search carried out with

zeal and creativity. It may be abandoned, then picked up again or concluded quickly. An inner clock seems to direct the search process and some adoptees never get past this stage, preferring to live with their fantasies.

The third stage involves making contact with found relatives. This emotional stage of searching can be put off until the person feels ready to gamble on denial, rejection or acceptance. Making contact is vital for a variety of reasons. One is the lack of mirroring - the never have seen anyone who looks like you. Another is the need to identify the birth parents as real people. Often, only the birth parents can verify the relationship.

The fourth stage is an adjustment period as the excitement of the reunion calms down. There may be exhaustion and some depression in post-reunion as new information about oneself and one's ancestors are absorbed.

Even if there is no further physical contact, relationships have to be worked out within one's self. Following a reunion, it can take a year or more before life resumes to normal. New patterns may be established in every day life, which may start to include the biological relatives.

Undertaking a search is a healthy sign of coming to grips with the fact of adoption, of having two kinds of parents, the need to gain a sense of historical continuity and to normalize one's life.

Clair Marcus is the author of Who Is My Mother? and Adopted: A Canadian Search Guide. Clair Marcus died in 1992. This article was provided by her husband, Robert Marcus.

Books By Mail

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

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. \$24 + shipping.

The Primal Wound - by Nancy N. Verrier. Clarifies the effects of separation from the birthmother on adoptees. \$24 + shipping.

Please add \$2.50 shipping charge per book.

CONFERENCE '94 UPDATE

March 5 & 6, 1994
Sheraton Inn, Guildford
Surrey, B.C.

The following people will be facilitating workshops at our next adoption reunion conference:

Annette Baran, M.S.W., L.C.S.W., Co-author of *The Adoption Triangle* and author of *Lethal Secrets*.

Betty Jean Lifton, author of *Lost & Found: The Adoption Experience* and *Twice Born*.

Lee Crawford, M.Ed., R.C.C., specialist in adoption therapy for individuals, couples and families.

Arden Henley, M.A., Family Therapist.

Pat Roles, M.S.W., author of *Facing Teenage Pregnancy* and *Saying Goodbye To A Baby*.

Ken Derby, Director of the B.C. Active Adoption Reunion Registry.

Delma Hemming, R.S.W., B.C. Ministry of Social Services.

There will also be several panel presentations by volunteer participants and members of the adoption circle.

Workshops will deal with the following issues and more:

Post Reunion Family Changes for Adoptees and Birthparents

What It's Like to Grow Up Adopted

Living With The Decision of Relinquishing

Pre & Post Reunion Basics for Adoptees & Birthparents

Adoptees in Relationships

Unexpected Search Results

Identity, Self Esteem & the Adoptee

**Mark your calendars now for next March
and come participate.**

**Information & registration forms will be
available this coming Winter.**

Announcement

The September 26, 1993 Evening With Desparado Dinner and Dance Fundraiser Event at Silverado in Langley, B.C., has been postponed. We are looking forward to future events and we'll keep you posted. We regret any inconveniences this may have caused anyone.

LEAN ON ME Telephone Support List

Reunited Birthmothers:

Anne Christianson
(604) 888-1720
Connie Short (604) 534-9456
Monica Bunton (403) 327-7525

Searching Birthmothers:

Sue Finley (604) 888-0920
Mary Reynolds (604) 534-2851

Reunited Adoptees:

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

Denied Reunion Adoptees:

Sandra Pudsey (604) 534-4993
Liz Goadby (604) 574-7223

Devastated Adoptees:

Janis Wegrich (604) 856-2215
(birthparents deceased, reunited with siblings)

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.

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

CANADIAN ADOPTION

A study of Adoption in Canada by Kerry Daly and Michael Sobol, looks at adoption Canada-wide during the decade of 1981 to 1990. The report, released in May 1993, contains key recommendations for Canadian adoption policy, practice and legislation.

Public adoption fell 61% from 1981 to 1990. Private adoptions in relation to public adoptions rose from 17% of all adoptions in Canada in 1981 to 39% in 1990.

In 1981, 46% of unmarried, pregnant women under 25 years old chose to keep their child, 49% chose abortion and 5% chose adoption.

By 1990, the figures differed by 60% chose to keep their child, 38% chose abortion and 2% chose adoption.

The following are Daly and Sobol's key recommendations:

- Set up a national record keeping system for all adoptions. Open a national registry of adoption practitioners and agencies.
- Maintain a commitment to public adoption so that lower income adoptive applicants have equal opportunity to adopt healthy children.
- Reconstitute the public adoption of children without special needs under the auspices of free-standing, publicly financed units not associated with welfare and protection.
- Establish licensing for all private practitioners and agencies.
- Extend the opportunities to adopt by single and unmarried applicants, regardless of sexual orientation, when the best interest of the child are met.
- Provide greater flexibility in the granting of adoption orders for hard-to-place children by accommodating outstanding access orders.
- Make negotiated openness agreements binding in law.
- Require practitioners using openness procedures to offer long term

support services to all parties of the adoption.

- Train adoption practitioners in the use of more open facilitation procedures.
- Review the central legislative principle of "relinquishment" for relevance in current adoption practice.
- Increase the commitment to post adoption services, especially for hard-to-place and at-risk, international adoptions.
- Establish more Native agencies to facilitate placement of Native children in Native homes.
- Enhance public education about adoption as a pregnancy resolution alternative.
- Review waiting lists to determine if they should be closed for a period of time.
- Commit more resources to ensure that the goals of active registries are met.
- Consider the possibility of moving towards accessibility to open adoption records when adoptees reach the age of majority.

INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION

A new convention called the Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption was prepared at The Hague, Netherlands on May 29, 1993.

Canada was represented by T.B. Smith and Louise Lussier, both of the federal Department of Justice, Ron Perozzo of the Manitoba Justice Division, Lorraine Fernando of the National Adoption Desk, and Sandra Scarth, Director of the Child Welfare League of America/Canada, representing non-governmental organizations concerned with intercountry adoption.

The Department of Justice is responsible for the ratification process, and each province will manage their own implementation process. It is anticipated that most provinces will agree that the Convention should be ratified.

JESSICA RETURNED TO BIRTH PARENTS

A major custody battle in the U.S. involving 2 1/2 year-old Jessica DeBoer between her biological parents and her adoptive parents will surely bring about adoption law reforms. By a 6-2 vote, the U.S. Michigan Supreme Court has ruled that Jessica be returned to her biological parents.

It began Feb. 8, 1991, when Cara Clausen, who was single at the time, gave birth to Jessica (whom she calls Anna) in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The day after, she arranged through a lawyer, a private adoption by Jan and Roberta DeBoer. Cara named the baby's father as Scott Seefeldt.

By Feb. 25, a judge severed Cara and Scott's parental rights, after receiving signed release documents from them. The DeBoers returned to their home in Ann Arbor with Jessica.

Within days, Cara had changed her mind and wanted her child back. It also turned out that she had named the wrong man as the father. The actual birth father was Daniel Schmidt, who was unaware at the time that he had fathered Jessica.

After Daniel was told by Cara that he was the father, Daniel began seeking custody of Jessica. An Iowa court ruled that he never gave up his rights as Jessica's father, and the Michigan court agreed. Daniel and Cara later married in April, 1992 and had another baby daughter in June.

Although the adoption was never finalized because of the dispute, the DeBoers kept Jessica while they fought back with appeals. The DeBoers argued that Jessica would suffer if she were taken away from the only parents she has known and forced to change her name and identity.

They knew their chance of getting the court to reconsider was small because legal precedents in most states

are in favour of the rights of biological parents.

Why didn't the DeBoers return Jessica, to spare the anguish? The DeBoers maintained that they were told that Jessica would have been temporarily placed in foster care until the Iowa courts reinstated Cara's parental rights, and they believed it would have disrupted Jessica's life. The DeBoers also had their doubts about Daniel's commitment to either Cara or the baby, and they didn't believe that there was a relationship there.

Jessica was returned to her biological parents in early August, 1993. But the question remains, just how much trauma will Jessica experience and will it be long term?

"I think this case highlights what happens when adoptions are done independently, particularly by attorneys," said Joyce Johnson, spokeswoman for the Child Welfare League of America. "A lawyer's loyalty is to his clients, the prospective adoptive parents," she said, "had this adoption been handled by a licensed agency with qualified professionals trying to meet the needs of all the parties involved, this tragic case never would have happened."

Mary Beth Seader, vice-president of the National Council for Adoption, supports "putative father registries". These registries are present in some states, where an unmarried man can register with the court, if he suspects that he may be a father.

It is the man's responsibility to register, otherwise he will not have any parental rights. "This may also eliminate adoptive parents' fears that a father who can't be found during pregnancy will pop up later," Seader said.

--from *The Province*, Aug. 11/93, *The Vancouver Sun*, Aug. 3/93 and Aug. 7/93, *People Weekly*, Jul. 19/93.

ADOPTIVE PARENTS WIN APPEAL

On August 19, 1993, Jim and Faye Tearoe were awarded permanent custody of their adopted part-aboriginal child, David. The B.C. Court of Appeal ruled that the child, now 20 months old, should remain with the parents he knows best.

But the child's birthmother, 20-year-old Teena Sawan said she was heartbroken by the ruling. "I really love my son and I wanted him to be with me," said Sawan. "I am angry. I love him very much and I miss him."

Sawan gave up her 2-month-old son she had named Jordan in February 1992 to the Tearoes, who are described as being deeply religious Christians. But two days after the private adoption, Sawan telephoned the Tearoes to say she had changed her mind and wanted her son back. The Tearoes refused to give David up, provoking an emotional months-long court battle.

The ruling said, "Common sense dictates that to disrupt the child from his present environment, and to put him through the uncertainty associated with an attempt to establish a bond with his natural mother, would cause him considerable trauma."

"There is no evidence from which to conclude that a bond between the mother and the child had ever been established."

"Indeed, the evidence establishes beyond doubt that the only mother and father this child knows are Faye and James Tearoe."

The 19-page decision overturned an earlier ruling by the B.C. Supreme Court, which had ordered the boy be returned to Sawan because "the connection between the mother and the child has not been irretrievably broken."

The adoption was made under Alberta law, where a birthparent may

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rescind an adoption decision within 10 days by giving notice to the provincial government. Sawan said she wrote the letter, but the Social Services Ministry says it never received it. Sawan said her son was taken away because of a

technicality which the Tearoes should have recognized.

Sawan is appealing the latest ruling which will likely include an argument that the little boy is being robbed of his aboriginal heritage. Jim Tearoe reacted emotionally by saying "It's very

selfish and silly for Teena to do this. This is not in my son's best interest in any way."

-from Kitchener-Waterloo Record, Aug 20/93, & The Vancouver Sun Aug 28/93.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

REPORT FROM THE ADOPTION REGISTRY OF B.C.

by Ken Derby

The B.C. Adoption Reunion Registry has been operating for 22 months. The statistical table below shows that there is a high level of interest that exists among adoptees and birth family members, in getting information about each other, or participating in reunions. As well, the figures show outcomes of the activities of the Adoption Reunion Registry.

Some Reunion Registry Statistics From October 2, 1991 to July 31, 1993

Total Applications Received	4731
Total Database *	6067
Searches Completed	1989
Reunions Completed	1220

Other outcomes of active searches:

Subject of search deceased	136
Subject of search refused contact	211

Other Services:

Matches on the passive database	194
Non-identifying information reports	341
Counselling request filled	351

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

When an application is received by the registry, the information is entered into a computerized database. The passive registry searches the database initially for the birth registration number of the adoptee. If the system finds a file with the same number as the new entry, a match is found. In order to have a match, the system has to contain the birth registration number, which is obtained either from the adoptee's birth certificate or the original birth registration in the adoption record.

Searches are also made on other data, such as, the adoptee's birth date, the birth mother's birth date and name at the time of the birth/adoption. But matches are sometimes inconclusive and it's often necessary to send for the adoption file before a match can be confirmed. In practice, we find a match when the birth relative has applied first and the information from the adoption file has already been entered when the adoptee applies. If the adoptee has applied first, it is usually necessary to obtain the adoption record, which

is currently taking about six months.

An applicant for a search is contacted by letter when the adoption file comes in, along with an information package and our request for a search fee (if applicable). Anyone applying today for an active search will receive this letter in about six months. Once a search starts, there is no way of knowing how long it will take. When the search is completed a letter is sent by one of our searchers or counsellors to the subject of the search, asking that person to contact the sender by phone or by mail.

To date, we have completed 1989 searches. Of that number, 1220 have resulted in reunions. There are about 300 reunions in progress at any given time. Some 400 other searches had other conclusions, such as, refusal by the subject, the subject was deceased, the search was cancelled, the reunion has not proceeded to any conclusion (inactive at present). In an average month, about 110 searches are concluded.

Another area of interest, and one we are deeply concerned about, is non-identifying information reports. We have received a very large number of requests (over 1500) and have had difficulties producing them in quantity while maintaining quality. We are currently recruiting more writers to work on these reports. I feel confident that we will be able to reduce the present 12 month backlog over the coming months.

Finally, the registry's counsellors continue to provide a valuable and necessary service, appreciated by our clients. Kathy Gillstrom, senior counsellor and deputy registrar, who some may have met, has moved to the Sunshine Coast. Sharon Gove has taken over Kathy Gillstrom's position. A new counsellor, Sandra Moniz-Lecce, has joined counsellors Lee Nicholas and Christiane Bohn.

You can contact the registry weekdays 9 am to 5 pm., 202 - 1600 West 6th Avenue, Vancouver, B.C. V6J 1R3., (604) 736-7917 or toll-free 1-800-665-1899.

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