

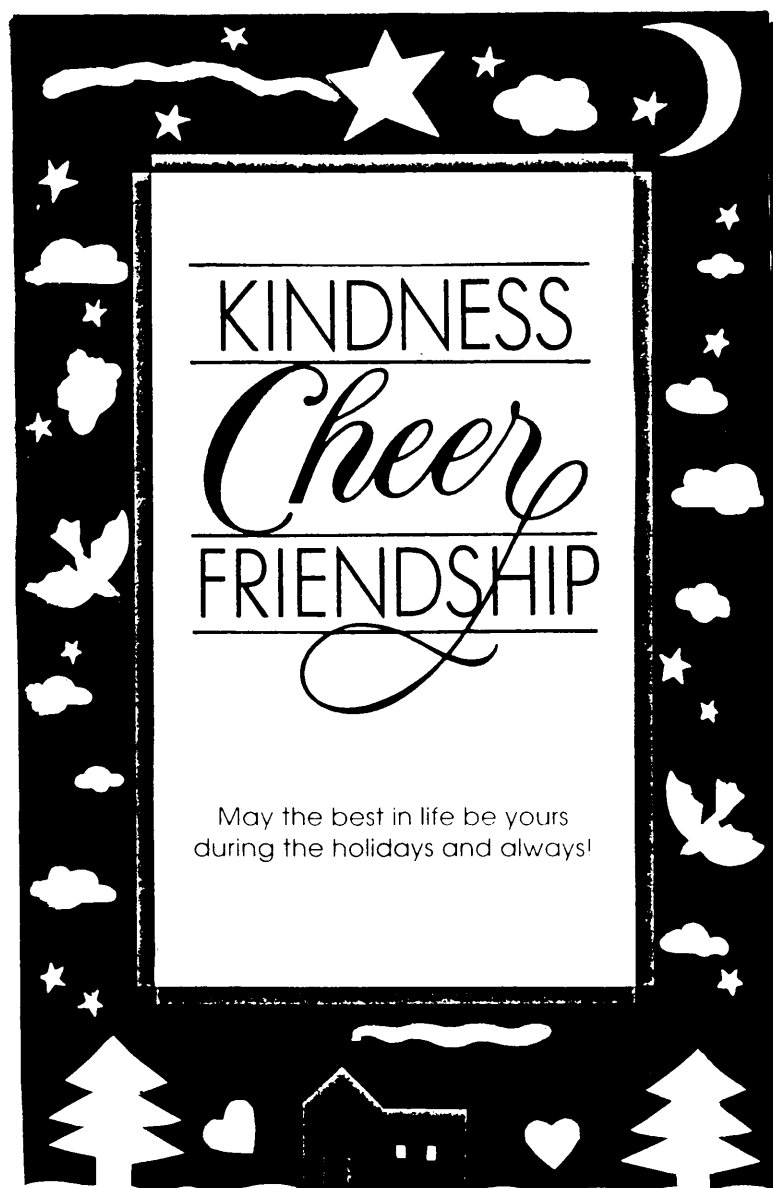
ADOPTION CIRCLES

CANADA'S POST-ADOPTION QUARTERLY

ISSUE 9 WINTER 1995

Inside...

EDITOR'S NOTE	3
POETRY	4
SECRECY IN ADOPTION	5
<i>Challenging Myths, Enriching Our Lives by Lee Crawford</i>	
CONFERENCE '94	6
THE MYTHOLOGY OF ADOPTION	7
<i>by Sharon Jinkerson</i>	
INTERVIEW WITH NANCY VERRIER	8
<i>by Kathryn Vea</i>	
BOOKS BY MAIL	10
FOR YOUR INFORMATION	11
<i>Update from Adoption Registry of B.C.</i>	
EXCERPTS FROM ADOPTION REUNIONS	11
<i>Michelle McColm's new book</i>	
LEAN ON ME LIST	11



ADOPTION CIRCLES

ISSUE #9 WINTER 1993

Publisher

**FORGET ME NOT FAMILY
SOCIETY**

President

ALISON ANDERSON

Vice President

SANDI BLACKIE

Secretary/Treasurer

GAIL DAVIES

Director at Large

CECELIA REEKIE

Executive Director

KATHRYN VEA

Editor

LISA CHAN

Contributing Editors

**KATHRYN VEA
SANDI BLACKIE**

Cover Illustration

SCOTT BLACKIE

Adoption Circles is published quarterly by Forget Me Not Family Society, a non-profit organization. Membership is \$24 per year. Send cheque to Box 61526, Brookwood Post Office, Langley, BC V3A 8C8 Canada. (604) 530-2160. US residents send US funds.

All rights reserved. No part(s) may be reproduced in any form without the consent of the author or the society. Content is author's opinion and may not reflect Forget Me Not Family Society's position. Send editorials and letters to the Editor to our Post Office Box or FAX to (604) 530-2160.

WHO WE ARE:

THE FORGET ME NOT FAMILY SOCIETY is a Provincially registered non-profit Society and a Registered Charitable Society with the Federal Government. Tax receipts are issued for donations to our Society.

Our Society was formed for education, consultation, peer counselling and to offer support to all those touched by adoption: adoptees, adoptive parents, birth parents and concerned professionals.

Our only source of income for the Society is through membership fees, fundraising and donations. This money goes directly towards printing, postage, telephone rental and office equipment and supplies.

WHAT WE OFFER:

Experience shows that at various times in life, the issues and concerns of adoption need to be addressed. We provide our members with opportunities to gain further understanding of adoption issues.

- Educational workshops on post adoption issues for all members of the adoption circle and concerned professionals.

- An annual "Let's Talk About Reunions" conference to address a variety of post adoption issues.

- Referrals to support groups for birth parents, adult adoptees, family members or interested friends and relatives of triad members.

OUR MANDATE:

To encourage and develop a recognition of the benefits of family preservation and openness in adoption practice.

ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER:

Adoption Circles is published quarterly and is available by subscription to our Society. Membership is open to anyone who is interested in adoption and post adoption issues.

Comments and contributions to our newsletter are always welcome. Please mail submissions to our P.O. Box number or FAX to (604) 530-2160.

**ADOPTION
IS
A LIFELONG
PROCESS
AND
HAS AN IMPACT
ON ALL THOSE
TOUCHED BY IT.**

EDITOR'S NOTE

As 1993 draws to a close, we reflect over the past year with our conference, various workshops and support groups. It has been an eventful, informative and extremely interesting year in the adoption circle. We have learned, we have grown, we have laughed, we have cried and we have started to heal.

It is with deep feeling that we extend our thanks to all of you who have contributed to our cause in any way during the past year.

There has been an unprecedented amount of movement towards openness in adoption across this country of ours. Issues that have been behind closed doors for years are finally being discussed openly and honestly.

This has undoubtedly been for the benefit of all those involved in adoption - adoptees, adoptive parents, birth parents and professionals.

It is an extremely emotional and stressful time while coming to terms with an adoption issue, regardless of the circumstances. We all struggle with the internal turmoil that seems to follow us wherever we go, no matter how hard we try to understand, analyze or ignore it.

We have found that upon joining with like individuals who have similar life experiences, that we really start to accept our personal trials. It is this deep need for understanding, that leads us to organize support groups.

To be able to go to a safe environment where your deepest secret feelings can finally be shared before non-judgmental peers is essential for healing. It can allow an incredible weight of guilt to be lifted or removed. It is where one can find solace, comfort and empathy without judgement or condemnation.

We are fortunate to have a number of support groups throughout the lower mainland of B.C. Abbotsford, Cloverdale, Langley, Surrey, Delta, Ladner, New Westminster and Vancouver all have active support groups.

Some gather in private homes and others in public facilities such as libraries.

We welcome any information about support groups related to adoption issues to add to our master list. To obtain a complete list of support groups

addresses and times please call our office at (604) 530-2160, between 9 to 5 on weekdays.

As Editor, and on behalf of the Executive, I would like to extend my Best Wishes for the coming Holiday Season. -LC

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

On August 20/93 Teena Sawan, a 20-year-old Cree birth mother from Alberta, lost custody of her 20-month-old son to a non-native couple from Victoria, B.C. Her son, Jordan, was placed with the couple when he was two months old. Teena Sawan revoked her consent to the adoption and won in the B.C. Supreme court. The couple appealed. The appeal court ruled that bonding did not occur between Sawan and her son. It also ruled that the lower court was wrong to place emphasis on Sawan's part-Cree background. She is a status Cree; the birth father is non-native and not involved in the custody.

Sawan made it known she did not want to go through with the adoption by calling the ministry and the couple within the 10-day period allowed under Alberta law. Apparently her written notice was not received by the Ministry in Alberta. Jordan was not returned to her. The appeal court claimed the move back to his natural mother would be disruptive.

Sawan's case, as well as the U. S. adoption custody case for Baby Jessica, shows us there is something seriously wrong with adoption. Adoption's mandate was to provide a home for a child without a family. Instead, adoption is about separating a child from its mother, or family, in order to fill a demand for babies. However, with

fewer babies available for adoption, and the known hurt that birth mothers and adoptees suffer, we can no longer look to adoption as a cure to infertility.

The tragedy of infertility must be addressed as a separate but equally important issue as providing support to women who face an unplanned pregnancy.

Teena Sawan may appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada. No doubt, the young woman will need support. She is currently engaged and pregnant with her second child. She will be returning to school and has made arrangements for day care for both children.

I urge readers to send letters of support to Teena Sawan, c/o Ms. Trudi Brown, Q.C., Horne, Coupar Law Firm, 3rd Floor, 612 View St. Victoria, B.C. V8W 1J5.

Teena Sawan is currently living in Manning, Alberta and her son is residing in Victoria, B.C. Donations of any size to help cover her travel costs to visit her son are greatly appreciated.

Millie Strom, Vancouver, B.C.

Editor's Note: On Nov 1/93 Teena Sawan filed the application for leave to appeal in Ottawa. The Supreme Court of Canada must now determine whether her appeal is of national significance before it will hear the case.

Regards to Catholic (un) Social (dis) Service

She has become 'for all purposes' your child
and you have become her parents
'As if' she had been born to you.'

'As if' anyone could ever take your place
a baby knows their mothers face
Familiar smell, rhythm of your heartbeat
Longing again for us to meet

Something so selflessly loving
yet painful in the same act
After they cut the umbilical cord,
did you ever look back?

So many years you've been my fantasy
I ache for you, a part of me
Who am I? When no one looks, feels or acts the same
with lost identity and a changed name

Always knew in my blood, I'd find you at any cost
Can we ever make up for all that we've lost
Could anyone really love my true self I used to say
When part of me remembers being given away

'For all purposes', Does this include abuse and neglect
healthy white, newborn female to select
2nd choice to their own, kind of love differs from the norm
of bonding with whatever sex, shape or form

Some things I've gained through my years of pain
Proud, wise strength. Would I have been the same?
I have to believe in this fate
Without a higher meaning the reality I would hate.

Dear mother, I do ask,
let go of the shame, guilt and past
Though childhood was very sad
The lessons I've learnt I'm very glad

I want you to know how I adore you so
Life has plans we never know
Children sense secrets, you have nothing to hide
Truth, love and openness will heal you deep inside

Nine months have gone by with you once again
It's come to term, my love is hard to contain
Mon ambre geneolique, I know some
It's hard for adult adoptees to say, but we need our mom

Maria Bailey
24 yr. old reunited adoptee, by letter

BEING ADOPTED

By Teresa Spring

Phantom Pain ---

*The pain that one feels
in a limb
that is not there.*

My amputations don't show.

*I live, I learn.
and most of the time.
I compensate so well that
even I forget ---*

But still.

*there are times
when the places I never had
hurt.*

MOTHERLOSS

Every day

*I will suffer the pain
Of a lost motherhood
I can't regain*

To end up

*Just being your friend
Will have to carry me
'till the end ...*

*Monica M. Buntun
August '93*

SECRECY IN ADOPTION

Challenging Myths, Enriching Our Lives

by Lee Crawford, M.Ed, R.C.C.

History of Secrecy in Adoption

Historically, social workers sealed adoption records to create the illusion that the new adoptive family was the same as any other family, supporting the belief that adoption information should be confidential not only to outsiders, but to other triad members involved.

Agencies offered participants a guarantee that the adoption would stand up in court and that once the adoption was finalized, no one need worry about an unwarranted intrusion from other triad members. Sealing adoption records created an illusion that the new formed family was "just the same as" any other family and would resemble a family that adoptive parents would have had through the birth of their own biological children.

The "just the same as" concept is now recognized as perhaps the key phase that eventually locked in the concept of secrecy in adoption. The beliefs were clear that children would be more attached to adoptive parents if they had no connection with the birth families; adoptive parents would fully claim a child as their own if birth parents had no means to contact their birth child and the birth mother would best be helped by making a clean break with the child she placed for adoption and "just get on with her life" as if she had not given birth.

Clearly, sealed records translate to sealed truth; closing off all possible relationships between triad members, pretending that these relationships did not exist or were not important.

Today, many triad members continue to uphold the values and beliefs that adoption practices reflected over forty years ago and are still unable to recognize the truth within adoption. The truth is simply that the legal fi-

nalization of an adoption will not, nor cannot, prevent triad members from grieving a tremendous loss, nor can it erase the fact that adoption has a uniqueness in family life like no other type of family system.

Although I do not blame the social work profession for creating closed adoption practices, I am more than aware of the outcome as I listen to triad members disclose their stories three decades later.

Secrecy only acts to further entrench the pain of loss and perpetuate the outworn values of a generation of people who were caught up in self protection and fear of social stigma.

The Impact of Secrecy Within the Family

In an adoptive family where the pain of loss and the difference in adoption is denied, adoption may be protected by a silent family rule of non-discussion. The outcome of keeping a secret isolates family members from one another, creating barriers in communication and loss of intimacy.

In his book, *The Techniques of Family Therapy*, David Freeman describes secret keeping as choosing a family member to know of specific family events that are not to be shared with other members of the family. He states that this hinders open communication in the family, creating negative implications for family functioning.

Secrets serve to mystify events and people in a family. As long as certain members are in a conspiracy to keep a secret, it prevents others from being able to speak freely about what has happened in the family. As a result, secrecy may become a learned way of coping with emotional issues in a family.

In the quiet thoughts of the secret keeper we hear, "If you knew me you would not accept me", or "if I told you the entire story you would fall apart", or "I can't tell now, not after all these years". Family members make a private decision not to disclose the secret based on how much trust or distrust rests within the family as; well as the strengths and weaknesses of each family member. Most people have a "felt sense" of whether or not it is safe to talk about the self or expose the truth behind emotional events.

Yet for some people, even if the family is seen as trusting, strong, or supportive enough, that person may still choose to keep a secret based on other reasons such as the fears of social stigma, the high need for self protection, a stronger loyalty to the family rather than loyalty to the self, or lastly, the individual is in a state of denial with regards to the content of the secret.

Today secrecy in adoption is no longer concerned with "should we tell" rather "how do we deal with the feelings after we tell", and it is my belief that this concern is what prevents triad members from sharing their feelings and experiences with other members of their family.

Many clients will ask me, "What's the right way or the easier way to tell my husband, wife, parents or children about my role as a triad member?"

When the core issues in adoption involve separation, infertility, difference, conflicting loyalties, powerlessness, reunion and grief and loss, it is no wonder families have a difficult time openly discussing the truth in adoption; especially when these topics contain intense emotional experience.

continued on next page

Dealing with these issues is a type of second level disclosure that triad members are beginning to accept as normal and okay.

As individuals let go of the ideology of the past, attend support groups, and read literature on adoption, it is my belief that disclosing feelings and experiences will be less difficult or overwhelming.

Interestingly, exposing family secrets often creates acceptance, understanding and increased closeness between family members assisting them to communicate a deeper range of emotions and experiences with one another.

Courage and Risk: Empowering the Self

The thought of openly discussing your adoption experience or disclosing that you are a birth parent may seem overwhelming. The following points may serve as a guide before you share your secret with a family member or close friend.

1. Consider what is causing you to hold on to your secret. Explore the "what if's" or fears behind your secret.

2. Explore how secret keeping affects your family or how your family communicates important emotional events.

3. Ask yourself what you hope will happen if you disclose your secret.

4. Find a safe support person or group that will validate what you have to say.

5. Develop a comfort level within yourself about your secret before you tell your family, especially if you suspect they may have difficulty hearing your story.

6. Telling your secret may have a profound ripple effect in your family. Should additional problems surface, find a family counsellor to assist you through difficult and painful feelings.

7. Read adoption literature and attend local workshops and conferences. You are not alone!

Individuals who choose to disclose a major life event are not only free from the pain of isolation, but also have the opportunity to work through and understand how that event has shaped his or her life.

Perhaps it is the liberating power of honesty that frees us in order that we can learn what we can become and experience a richer and more fulfilling existence.

As an adoption therapist, it is my hope that adoption, much like blended families or single parent families, will find a unique position in the fabric of family life.

Assisting family members to openly express their adoption experiences will only serve to strengthen the family and deepen our appreciation for the unique complexities adoption creates.

Lee Crawford is an Adoption Therapist and an adopted adult. Comments may be forwarded to her directly at 875-1155.

CONFERENCE '94 UPDATE

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

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

Lee Crawford, M.Ed., R.C.C., Adopted Adult and Adoption Therapist.

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

Arden Henley, M.A., Family Therapist.

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

Michelle McCollm, Reunited adoptee and author of *Adoption Reunions, A Book For Adoptees, Birth Parents And Adoptive Families*.

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

Workshops will deal with the following issues:

Post Reunion Survival for Adoptees
What It's Like To Grow Up Adopted
Unexpected Search Results
Adoptees In Relationships
Search Techniques
Discovering Calm After The Storm
Identity, Self Esteem & The Adoptee
Is Adoption A Women's Issue?

**Registration forms are now available.
See You At The Conference!**

THE MYTHOLOGY OF ADOPTION

By Sharon Jinkerson

The mythology of my life revolved around the concept that I became the child of my adoptive parents when the court accepted my parents' application and my birth certificate was changed. The system supported my parents' belief that I was now their daughter, that my biological history was insignificant, and love and security would suffice. Publicly I lived this role, privately I suffered, until as a young adult my biological heritage became the most significant factor in defining myself as a human being, smashing the myth of my adoption.

The youngest of four, I was placed in the role of being an equal and important part of my family. My parents were sensitive to my need to have my adoption explained and over the years they did their best to accommodate me. Alone, I struggled with the knowledge that my birth mother was Native Indian and this, beyond being adopted, separated me from the rest of my family.

Through at home I was treated the same as my siblings, at school I encountered racism and an ethnocentric school system which undermined my self esteem. My identity was overwhelmingly confused because at school I learned I was from a worthless culture, while at home I was a valued middle-class child. Alone and despondent, the pleasant adoption myth did not sustain itself in my private world. "Oh, a dark one!" "Go back to the reserve, squaw!" Which mirror should I believe?

The truth was I was different from my siblings. Physically, emotionally and spiritually I was connected to my birth family. I felt an intense longing for the familiarity of my kin; to see and to touch and to hear the stories that were mine from the thousands of years of history that created me. I was miscast in a role and it felt like no one understood, I was alone. I'd taken several hundred years of tragic history into a family, and no one understood that I had all these losses to grieve.

We were now five Caucasians and one Indian. My personal history did not mean adapting my adoptive family's history, rather including it in the history I already had. This is critical to a child's emotional wellness especially when there is a racial difference because it gives a child permission to respond to the confusing mirrors that are encountered along the way. I believe that cross-cultural families have a tendency towards breakdown because children cannot come to terms with the conflict between what is said at home and how the world views them.

The family has been credited with contributing to the adopted child. What is glaringly omitted is that the child contributes to the family. There is sharing of lives, an even swap. The child enriches the family. The child produces the family! Parents often do not encourage this view resulting in an unnatural, uncompromising loyalty. Underneath this loyalty can lay anger, due to the suppressed desires of the child to connect with their authentic feelings of curiosity about their past. Children will often deny how deep their

feelings are with respect to their families of origin because they sense the loss and pain their parents might feel if they disclose. More than "just a poor orphan," the child has the right to define herself according to her own internal voice.

What are the options? Children must decide where they will place their adoptive parents in their delicate ecosystems, which in order to be balance, must include at the minimum, an acknowledgement of their ancestral history, at the maximum, an integration of their original culture. It must be recognized that in the end they, not their parents, will construct their personal mythologies.

A friend of mine was working with a family of adoption. She recognized that the race was an issue, but the family refused to see it. They were striking the typical pose of the cross-cultural adoptive family. Mom and Dad were explaining how they "don't feel differently towards their native children" and intellectualizing their experience. The teens were sitting back saying absolutely nothing. They seemed to get embarrassed when I asked them questions which alluded to their race. Both parties were in agreement on one issue - they agreed that their difference in race had no significant impact on their lives.

I asked if they had seen "Dances with Wolves?" The two teens immediately became animated and described the pride in their peoples history and the beauty of their culture. On the other hand, the parents sunk into their chairs and dropped their eyes to the floor. Both of them described a deep shame for the way Indians were treated and how embarrassed they were at the ignorance of their people. After we sat silent for a few moments, the parents looked at me as they realized the different perspective their children had of the world.

I suggest that we are moving closer to the full meaning of adoption. Our interpretation of the act of adoption must expand to include the notion that the identity children are born with, impacted by all the ancestors and the spiritual connections to the heart of their nation, can in no way ever be cancelled by an adoption. Just as withholding water denies life, cultural deprivation confuses and confounds the development of the self of the child. Just as water supports life, a connection with the adopted child's past can nourish the development of the self.

Reprinted from B.C. Council for the Family Newsletter, Sprint 1993. Sharon Jinkerson is currently the supervisor of the Vancouver Aboriginal and Family Service. She serves on the committees that are reviewing adoption legislation and develops cross-cultural camps that heal families raising Native children. She will be facilitating a workshop for us at our March/94 Conference entitled "Healing The Wounds".

INTERVIEW WITH NANCY VERRIER

by Kathryn Vea

This interview took place in Lafayette, California on September 12, 1993. Nancy Verrier is the author of the book *The Primal Wound - Understanding the Adopted Child*. She has an M.A. in clinical psychology and is in private practice in Lafayette, Ca. She is the mother of two daughters - one who is adopted and one who is not. She writes and lectures about the effects of early childhood trauma and deprivation caused by premature separation from the mother under various circumstances. Ms. Verrier was a conference workshop presenter at our society's first "Let's Talk About Reunions" conference held in February 1993 at the Sheraton Inn, Guildford in Surrey, B.C. Her book is available from the Books by Mail section of this newsletter.

This article is the first of two parts. We begin with Kathryn Vea interviewing Nancy Verrier.

Q: In your book you said that your adopted daughter Gisele was hostile and angry towards you at home but close and loving in public. She seemed to have the desperate need to be in complete control of every situation. You stated that all the hoopla is the child trying to connect with the mother. How long did it take you to come to that conclusion?

A: At the beginning I didn't think it had anything to do with adoption. I was wondering what was going on. Why she was keeping herself distant from me. She was one of those babies that didn't want to cuddle and didn't want to be too close. I couldn't figure out why she was acting in that way because when I was teaching school, all the kids in school wanted me to take them home. They wanted me to be their mother, and here, the mere baby I loved was resisting it. I had the help of her therapist in understanding this when I took her to see him when she was ten. I had an idea it had something to do with adoption because by then I had Monique who was not acting in this way. She was only 3 days old when we adopted her and I was of the opinion that she didn't know the difference. But that was a long time ago, obviously.

Q: You were just like most other adoptive parents before, who believed you take the baby home and love it, and its yours and you live happily ever after?

A: Yes, that's right.

Q: You were like many adoptive parents who believed that?

A: Absolutely, I really didn't think about it very much. I had no idea. I knew that I wanted to have a child. The infertility issue wasn't a very big deal for me, but of course I got pregnant in two years but even then, I think that sometimes we blow that thing out of proportion. There are some women for who this makes a great deal of difference. They really want to be pregnant. They really want to give birth. But there are many adoptive mothers who just want

a baby, and they're not really concerned about how.

Q: There are a few Hollywood stars like that at the moment, aren't there?

A: Well, I think its just that its a really strong instinct to mother, I don't think we can just ignore that instinct to be a mother but I'm not sure about the instinct to give birth. Of course I loved being pregnant. It was a very good experience for me.

Q: Being pregnant is really an unexplainable thing.

A: Well, it's one of those things that if you were to try to scientifically talk about it, they would say, well, it's not a very scientific study. Like its the same thing with the birthbond. How could you prove there's a birthbond. I'm not really interested in proving it, I just know it exists. I don't think it can be proven probably. Except that mothers know it.

Q: And babies know their mothers. The same way they recognize the heartbeat and the voice as soon as they're given to their mother after birth.

A: Her energy, they feel her energy.

Q: Which would be a void upon separation.

A: No, I'm talking about just your inner energy. Everyone's energy is different. One of the things that adoptees talk about when reuniting with their birthmothers is that the energy is right. They recognize the rightness of her energy in relation to them. All those years they have lived in a foreign or an alien energy field you might say.

Q: So really the cabbage patch myth is in a way correct. I came from nowhere. I came from a cabbage patch, there I am with these people, and I'm supposed to fit right in.

A: Absolutely, but many of them say they never even thought much about having been born.

Q: What do you think the main cause the feeling of rejection would be? Would it be the actual separation trauma, that makes adoptees more vulnerable?

A: Yes, I think that separation trauma is what makes them vulnerable. That's the ultimate rejection. That first and very devastating rejection sets them up for always feeling as if that's a possibility, that in any relationship they're in, and so, that's the beginning of it.

Q: That's just the beginning?

A: Well, that's the turning point, the difference between, and it isn't necessarily just for adoptees, it's also true for babies who are in incubators. Any child who is separated from the mother at birth for any length of time is going to have that sense of impending rejection, I believe. And the ones who are in incubators, of course, usually go back and try to work this all out, with the original mother. Most of them that I've seen never really do work it out. They never do feel that they can trust.

Q: And these are the incubator babies, this is the actual mother that gave birth to them who is actually raising them?

A: Right. Because she wasn't there to protect them at the beginning of their lives, when they were the most vulnerable.

Q: Through no choice of their own.

A: Babies don't care about choice. They don't care about reason. They just know that she's gone. The same way with you...you were just gone...there's no way to explain it. As one adoptee told her birthmother, there isn't anything you could tell me that's going to be a good enough reason. There just isn't. For the baby part, I mean. The adult can understand it.

Q: It's amazing that the system didn't see that as a separation trauma. It's amazing that social workers told girls not to see, hold, or touch their babies.

A: It's amazing to me that the medical profession took until 1992 to discover that it's better to anesthetize babies during surgery. I mean, it was happening a year and a half ago.

Q: What type of surgery are you talking about?

A: Just about any kind. In many kinds of surgery they did not. They still do not for circumcisions, a lot of the time. And they think that babies are not in pain. They absolutely are in desperate pain.

Q: Of course they're in pain. They're cutting them.

A: Yes. But there was this myth that babies don't feel that. That their nervous system isn't developed enough. This is nonsense. And doctors should know better. What do they think the baby is screaming about? So the whole thing about babies knowing their mothers, babies are much more aware than they thought previously. In fact there was a Life magazine article about that not long ago. They're finally catching on, that babies are tremendously aware and are using all of their senses right at birth. There was a time not very long ago, maybe 25 years ago, when they kept telling mothers that babies were blind at birth. I mean, mothers knew differently, but I guess mothers never got around to telling the doctors that they were wrong.

Q: You know, I think part of it is that mothers have put doctors on pedestals until recently. Now more mothers question doctors on a regular basis.

A: And another thing to remember about doctors is that they are medical professionals, they know about medical problems but they don't necessarily know a thing about rearing children. And many of them aren't that great at it. So why do we keep going to them and asking them questions about our children or what to do with them when this or that occurs?

Q: Although mothers have only in the last ten years or so started to question the doctors. Because mothers talk to other mothers, and now adoptees talk to other adoptees, birthmothers talk to other birthmothers, and now, we find that we're not the only one who got told the same thing. Birth mothers are saying "And you believed them too?"

A: Well actually, it's power.

Q: Birth mothers were powerless then. What's your opinion on the newly named adoption option?

A: I think that one needs to make an informed decision

and in order to make informed decisions, one has to be aware of all the impact in everything that happens and I don't think this decision can be made when a mother has just given birth. She is in shock and totally confused. She needs time to consider what is happening, I think that she should be with her baby while she decides. If she wants six weeks to decide, then she should spend that six weeks with her baby. The baby does not deserve to be in limbo during that time that she is taking to decide.

Q: So you don't think that signing papers at 10 days is an informed decision for people?

A: No, I don't. In the US, we took our baby home when she was 3 days old, her mother had already signed the papers. What happens to the baby for those 10 days?

Q: Birth mothers today have some "power", but they didn't have any power 23 years ago. Today, they can hold their babies, feed them and bring them home and decide, or leave them at the hospital for the adoptive parents to come and pick them up, it varies. But they don't tell them not to see, hold or touch them, they want them to now. They want them to be more comfortable with their decision, so it seems. But I can tell you that if I saw my baby, held her and fed her, I know that I wouldn't have signed the papers.

A: I think that's true in a lot of cases which is probably one of the reasons that they didn't want you to.

Q: That's one of the reasons. They said it would be easier if I didn't see her. You have to name her, but you shouldn't see her. In your research you said many adopted children and their parents seemed alienated from each other. What percentage would you say had those feelings? Were they all alienated, was this the norm?

A: By alienated, I don't mean that they were having a lot of problems necessarily, what I meant was there seemed to be some space, there was something different about the relationship with the adoptive parents than the relationships with biological children. Just something missing there, in the relationship and I don't know what percentages because I wasn't doing a scientific study. This was when I was thinking about doing some research, I just noticed that there was some restraint there. Some way in which the child didn't feel quite at ease in the presence of his mother in the way that maybe her other children did or maybe what other mothers and their children did.

Q: So did you have them in your office?

A: No, I didn't even have an office then, but I had been a teacher for ten years and I also knew people with adopted children. It was more of an observation of people that I had met. I wasn't doing a study or trying to meet with them, it was just in their daily life. This was an observation I made and so I just started wondering about it. What is this difference?

Q: Was there anything to do with questioning the adoption story at a certain age?

A: It wasn't even about the story. It was very subtle. It may have been that most people wouldn't notice at all. It's

continued on next page

continued from previous page

sort of like what this woman wrote to me about, the puzzle piece. She said that when she was born she was born into this certain puzzle but she wasn't allowed to stay there and this little piece that was her was taken and put into another picture puzzle. Most people don't even notice that she doesn't fit there, they just kind of glance at her and don't notice. Maybe even her parents don't notice that very much but she feels uncomfortable, she doesn't quite fit in that picture. That sense of not truly belonging is what I'm talking about. It's very subtle. You really have to be tuned in, in order to see it.

Q: And you were tuned in because you were an adoptive parent and a teacher so you saw a lot of students daily.

A: I can't say that's why I was tuned in. I've always been tuned into people and I don't know why that is. Kind of intuitive about people, because I know of a lot of adoptive parents that aren't tune in. So I'm not sure that it's because I'm an adoptive parent. I think I'm pretty tuned in and that's why I probably went into this profession because there's a way in which you can intuit things about people. So it's more of an intuitive assessment you might say, no hard data on this.

Q: Someone has to start somewhere with the hard data.

A: I don't even think that you can have hard data on something like this. I think that sometimes we have to stop and think that maybe our left brain can tell us some things that our right brain can not and that we have to honour that. I'm not that impressed with scientific studies. I believe that sometimes we just know things.

Q: What do you believe is the main cause that adoptees in treatment have relatively consistent symptoms like being impulsive, provocative, aggressive and anti-social? Is it being separated from their biological mothers at birth causing the trauma?

A: The ones in treatment are the ones acting out their pain. Separation trauma causes those feelings that then manifests in various ways. Issues of trust, loss, control and intimacy are a result of some kind of separation and abandonment issues.

Q: How did you do your research for this book and how many adoptees were interviewed?

A: My original research was from my thesis which was done in 1985 and 1986. My original study was with 15 people. These adult adoptees were the same race as the parents who were raising them. Most were adopted at birth. They ranged in age from 14 to 60. There was a mixture of men and women, but more women than men. - Adoptees did not like the label bastard or illegitimate applied to babies. How can a baby be illegitimate? It's a legal term that should never be used like that. It's like blaming the baby for the fact that their parents weren't married. It's society, we are a blaming type of society. @

Books By Mail

To order the following books are available from the **Forget Me Not Family Society**. To order, please 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. Prices include GST.

The Adoption Triangle by Arthur Soroksy, Reuben Pannor & Annette Baran. Sealed or open records: How they affect adoptees, birthparents and adoptive parents. \$14+ shipping.

Birthbond by Judith Gediman & Linda P. Brown. Reunions between birthparents & adoptees - What happens after ... \$19.50 + shipping.

Lost & Found - The Adoption Experience by Betty J. Lifton. A classic exploration of the psychology of the adopted. \$16 + shipping.

The Other Mother by Carol Schaefer. A birthmother's true story of her love for her child that she gave up for adoption. \$18 + 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. \$24 + shipping.

Adoption Reunions - by Michelle McColm. A book for adoptees, birthparents and adoptive families. \$18.50+shipping.

Please add \$2.50 shipping charge for first book & \$.75 for each additional book.

The following books are available from Morning Side Publishing, (604)652-6248. To order please make cheques payable to Morning Side Publishing, and mail to P.O. Box 21071, Saanichton, R.P.O., Saanichton, B.C. V0S 1P0. Prices include GST.

Adoptee Trauma Book - by Heather Carlini. Workbook that addresses the problems many adoptees encounter due to being adopted. \$16.95+shipping.

Birth Mother Trauma Book - by Heather Carlini. Workbook for birth mothers. \$15.95+shipping.

Please add \$2.50 shipping charge for first book & \$.50 for each additional book.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

ADOPTION REGISTRY OF B.C. UPDATE

By Ken Derby

Reunion Registry Statistics From Oct 2/91 to Nov 30/93.

Total Applications Received	5287
Total Database*	6600
Searches Completed	2377
Reunions Completed	1477

Other outcomes of active searches:

Subject of search deceased	175
Subject of search refused contact	257

Other Services:

Matches on the passive database	235
Non-identifying information reports	705
Counselling request filled	450

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

From Adoption Reunions by Michelle McColm

Following World War I, there was a marked increase in the number of children born to single women. Yet this did not make society more accepting of single mothers. Feminism had not yet developed, and women's social roles were dictated by a patriarchal society. Yesterday's birth mothers suffered to a far greater degree under the "she's a slut, he's a stud" sexist mentality, which labels women and lauds men for premarital sexual activity. As a result, these women suffered incalculable damage: physical, psychological and emotional.

Ostracism of the young, unmarried birth mother began almost immediately upon conception. If she told her partner of the pregnancy, she was more often than not, abandoned. If she waited until she "showed" she was stigmatized by her family and her community. If she "ran away", not telling anyone in her immediate circle, her shame and feelings of isolation deepened, and the support from a familiar person was eliminated. The dislocated birth mother had only strangers with whom to share her feelings about her situation, about the pregnancy itself, and about life's most intimate moment: the birth of a child. Yesterday's birth mothers were trapped.

Excerpts from Michelle McColm's book, Adoption Reunions - A Book For Adoptees, Birth Parents And Adoptive Families, 1993. See the Books By Mail section of this newsletter to order.

Family faces are magic mirrors.
Looking at people who belong to us,
we see the past, present and future.

- Gail Lumet Buckley

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
Lisa Chan	(604) 732-9033

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	(604) 988-5281
North Shore Family Services	

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.

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 61526 Brookwood P.O., Langley, B.C. V3A 8C8 Canada.