

EST. 1978  
**PACER**  
 NEWSLETTER

**POST ADOPTION CENTER FOR EDUCATION & RESEARCH**

**Profiles in Adoption**

*In this issue, we feature two adoptive mothers, long-time PACER members and advocates for open adoption, who searched for their children's birth families and welcomed them into their hearts and homes.*

**Reflections of an Adoptive Mother**

*By Ellen Roseman*

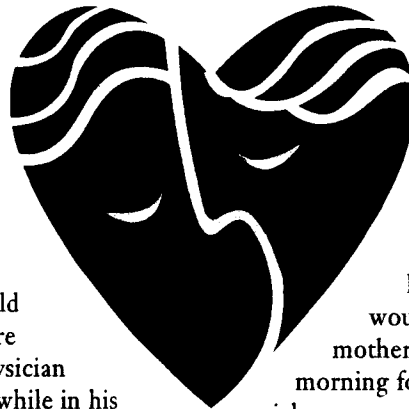
In the summer of 1980 when my husband and I adopted two baby girls within a ten week period, it didn't occur to me there would be much to learn about adoption. These were standard closed adoptions. Although my physician husband had relinquished a son to adoption while in his late teens, and I had been adopted in a stepparent adoption, closed adoption seemed appropriate to both of us. I'd had a foster child for several years and maintained contact with his birth family, which seemed normal to us, if somewhat unusual to those around us.

Ten months after adopting our second daughter, I gave birth to a third daughter following a high risk pregnancy. With three car seats in the back of our van, people often said: "We don't know your name, but we have heard about you." Our family was complete with a foster child, two stepchildren, and three babies born within one year!

Shortly after bringing home our first baby daughter, I was invited to a lecture presented by the eminent social worker and author, Sharon Kaplan Roszia. She spoke about past and present adoption practices. Almost immediately her clarity and eloquence brought forth a paradigm shift in my archaic thinking.

Without sounding radical, she was able to present a strong logical case as to why closed adoption practices needed change. With humor and grace, she spoke about her early years as a young social worker in Arizona, taking children from Indian

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8



**Breaking the Silence**

*By Sandra Lenington*

As I prepared the lunch for our trip to the zoo, I glanced at the clock. The hands on the clock seemed to drag. Today would be our first meeting with Jamie's birth-mother. My stomach felt almost as jittery as that morning four years ago when we drove to Monterey to pick up our one-month-old son at the adoption agency. Jamie had grown in to a beautiful blond, blue-eyed child full of life and love.

**Questions**

My mind raced back to that time. At first I did not think too much about the woman who had given him life or what she was experiencing. We had conflicting stories from two social workers about his background and the circumstances of his birth. We wondered what we would tell Jamie when he began to ask questions. In addition I had gone to a post-adoption meeting where I heard all the adoptive mothers share how their birthmothers had left letters and presents for their babies. I had nothing for Jamie, not even accurate information. What would I tell him? My heart ached. I knew that anyone who had given life to such a wonderful child and had seen him would never forget, but I had no evidence to back up my feeling. We wrote letters and left them in the file at the agency, but they told us they would not forward any letter unless the birthmother contacted them. I longed to find the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

**INSIDE . THIS . ISSUE**

Dirck Brown Tribute..... 3  
 Upcoming AAC Conference ..... 3  
 The Lesson of the Magdalene Sisters ..... 4  
 PACER 25th Anniversary Celebration ..... 6-7  
 Learning to Parent in Reunion ..... 9  
 Support Groups..... 10

**IN MEMORIAM**

*Dirck Brown, Ed.D., MFCC  
 PACER Founder  
 (See story on page 3)*

# PACER

P.O. Box 31146  
Oakland, CA 94604-7146  
1-888/746-0514  
Fax: 1-888/378-4451  
www.pacer-adoption.org

**PACER, the Post Adoption Center for Education and Research, is a nonprofit, volunteer-run organization established in 1978. It serves the adoption community in the greater San Francisco Bay and Sacramento areas by offering monthly support groups, peer counseling, workshops and seminars, a quarterly newsletter, and referrals to related services.**

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Bob Crowe, President**  
**Sally Caldwell, Vice President**  
**Denise Roessle, Secretary**  
**Malcolm Pearson, Treasurer**  
**Susie Love**  
**Judy Norris**

Board members may be reached via email: first name (dot) last name @pacer-adoption.org (e.g.: Bob.Crowe@pacer-adoption.org).

Board meetings are held on the third Monday evening of each month. PACER members are welcome to attend.

## NEWSLETTER

Editor: **Judy Norris**  
charlottesfirst@aol.com  
925-952-4853  
Desktop Publishing:  
**Denise Roessle**  
deroe@earthlink.net

Please direct any newsletter comments, submissions and requests for permission to reprint articles to Judy Norris. For advertising information, contact Denise Roessle.

## President's Message

by Bob Crowe

# Continuing Our Founder's Vision

Dirck Brown, PACER's original voice, has fallen silent. Our founder's own search for his birthparents planted the seeds that became the Post Adoption Center for Education & Research in 1978, and would affect his life and career from then on. How many in our community even know from PACER's genesis would spring the inspiration that would then lead to the creation of the American Adoption Congress (AAC)?

Barely two months ago, Dirck graciously provided our most recent newsletter cover story with his memories and reflections of Dr. Joe Davis — former Stanford colleague and mentor whose passionate voice of advocacy was also lost to us late last year.

I didn't know Dirck personally, although in the handful of times we communicated, he was always interested and supportive of our ongoing efforts. A couple of years ago Dirck donated several boxes of books and material to PACER and his early notes and papers are a big part of our archives. Recently, while organizing my notes and files after year's end, I found a short note Dirck wrote on the back of a membership appeal sent out with last summer's newsletter — a simple exclamation of gratitude and best wishes for the work PACER continues to foster. It's one of those simple, little items you look at and you're grateful you kept.

Dirck Brown's adoption story, like many of the millions of others walking among us, resonated in ways that were reflected in his beliefs, values and principals. It was something he believed was important enough to devote so much of his time and energy. Those of us who believe in PACER's mission

would like to see his vision continue for another 25 years. I (enthusiastically) encourage anyone who can to devote a small but very important amount of time to help or volunteer with our Support Groups, serve actively on PACER's board, pitch in at special events or lend a certain skill that will help us move forward. WE NEED YOUR HELP to keep doing the work that Dirck began some 25 years ago.

We thank and remember Dirck Brown — for his inspiration, activism and advocacy that have touched so many lives. More than he could ever know...

I'd also like to send my thanks to all of you who helped us and attended PACER's 25th Anniversary Event in Oakland last November. The photos in this issue are but a small handful of terrific memories of the stories and fellowship we shared. It was truly heartwarming to have five of PACER's previous eight Presidents with us, and a wonderful opportunity to reflect on how important connections are in our adoption world. I was certainly grateful to participate and be a part of our story.

And finally, a big thank you to Maureen Armstrong. Maureen's tenure with PACER was just a few short years, but her caring and outspoken passion will be sorely missed. Most recently serving on our Board she also held a dedicated role as facilitator for our Marin Triad Support Group and was a first-in-line "I'm here" volunteer for practically every major PACER event. She's promised that she'll come out of the background some day in the future to help PACER once again. I'm confident she will and we wish her all the best.



## PACER'S MISSION

is to foster understanding of adoption as a lifelong process and intergenerational journey, and to serve members of the adoption triad (adoptees, birthparents and adoptive parents). We provide comprehensive information, support, public education and advocacy for positive change in adoption policy and practice.

## Dirck W. Brown, 1928-2003

It is with a huge sense of loss that we share the news that PACER's founder, Dirck Brown, died on December 30 of apparent heart failure at his home in Lexington, Virginia. He was known as a lifelong advocate for the betterment of education, community, and family. He was 75 years old.

Molly and Dirck Brown moved to Lexington in 1992 and became immediate and active contributors to the community. One of their projects was the Roots and Shoots Intergenerational School Garden program at Waddell Elementary School. This program has been nationally recognized as a model educational program and is used in the curriculum of schools across the country. He served as President and a member of the Board of Trustees for the Yellow Brick Road Early Learning Center from 1998-2003.

Born in Kansas City, June 14, 1928, he was the son of Dr. Kenneth I. Brown and Muriel Handy Brown. In 1950 he graduated from Denison University and served in the U.S. Army Signal Corps as a Second Lieutenant. Stationed in Japan, he trained troops during the Korean War. After his discharge he earned a doctorate in education from Columbia University and later became Dean of Men at the University of Iowa and Dean of Students at the University of Denver. From 1965 to 1978 he worked for the National Educational Association in both Washington, D.C. and Palo Alto, CA.

PACER came into being in the Palo Alto living-room of the Browns to provide

support to adoptees, adoptive parents and birth parents. Before long it became the hub of adoption research and counseling throughout Northern California. He served as its first Executive Director and went on to help found the American Adoption Congress.

After moving to Orient, New York in 1987 Brown worked with the Bridgehampton Counseling Center and co-wrote a book, "Clinical Practices in Adoption," that grew out of his work with PACER.

In our Fall 2003 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary newsletter, we were fortunate to have Dirck write both a tribute to the late Dr. Joe Davis, as well as a warm and honest account of his decision to search for his birth family. His story in his own words spoke volumes about the generosity of this man and his courage to speak both eloquently and with a bare bones truth about the emotions generated by his adoption experience.

Of Dr. Joe, Dirck wrote, "PACER owes a debt of gratitude to this wonderful man." With sadness we acknowledge a debt of gratitude to another wonderful man, a friend to all in the adoption community and our founder: Dirck W. Brown.

Memorial contributions can be made to The Roots and Shoots Intergenerational School Garden, Waddell Elementary School, 306 Overhill Drive, Lexington, Va 24450, or Yellow Brick Road Early Learning Center, 123 W. Washington St., Lexington, Va 24450.



## AAC Conference Slated for April in Kansas City

The American Adoption Congress (AAC) will hold its 26th annual international conference April 1-3, 2004, at the Fairmont Hotel on the Plaza in Kansas City, Missouri.

The conference theme will be "Back to our Roots," with keynote speakers: comedienne Alison Larkin (The English American) on "Why My Adoption is a Laughing Matter;" Ron Nydam, PhD, on "Has Adoption Evolved? From Orphan Trains to Maternity Homes to Baby Abandonment;" and Marcy Axness, PhD, on "The 57 Varieties of Open Adoption."

Other outstanding speakers will include Diane Allen, Annette Baran, Sherrie Eldridge, Lynn Franklin, Betty Jean Lifton, Joyce Pavao, Adam Pertman, Kris Probasco, Elizabeth Samuels, Randy Severson, PhD, Nancy Verrier and Ken Watson. Among the workshops will be:

- Are You Still My Sibling? Getting From Reunion to Reconnection
- Safe Havens: Is the Solution Worse Than The Problem?
- Male Adoptee Issues: Living an Authentic Life
- Becoming or Locating an Effective Adoption Therapist
- Interracial and Intercultural Adoption: Adoptees Speak
- Birthparent Grief and Healing: The Decision to Search
- Legal, Medical and Social Aspects of Donor Conception
- Adoption by Gay and Lesbian Parents
- Parenting After Infertility: The Effects of Secrecy on Families
- Ask The Experts Panel: Those Damn Family Tree School Projects

Social worker CEUs will be available. If you are a member of AAC, you will be receiving a conference brochure and registration form in the mail. If you are not a current member, email Alicia Lanier, AAC California State Rep, at [aliciakla@earthlink.net](mailto:aliciakla@earthlink.net). For hotel reservations, call 1-800-866-5577.



## Resolve Conference for Pre-Adopt Parents

Resolve is presenting a program for pre-adopt parents on Feb. 28 from 8 to 5 at Holy Names College in Oakland. Several authors will be featured at the day long conference. Mary Martin Mason, whose book, *Out of the Shadows*, focuses on the issues of birth fathers in adoption will be a featured speaker. She is an adoptive mother as well as an adoptee. Others scheduled for the event are Kathleen Silber, the author of *Dear Birthmother*, and writer Leslie Foge. Tickets may be purchased at the door or through Resolve in San Francisco, (415) 788-6772.

On Sunday, Feb. 29 Ms. Mason will be the presenter at Ellen Roseman's monthly support group. Call (415) 453-0902 for information about this event.



# The Lesson of the Magdalene Sisters

By Debra Baker

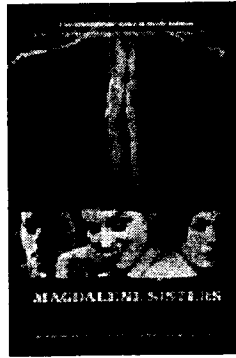
The film, "The Magdalene Sisters," set in Ireland in the 1960s would seem like a world apart from the United States. But to the young American women who found themselves single and pregnant during that same time, there are too many parallels.

If a single woman became pregnant, she was usually sent off to live with a relative, a family friend, or to a maternity home. Wage homes were also available. There the girl worked off her room and board during her pregnancy. For those of us who were sent to the "homes for unwed mothers," our penance was the same as for the pregnant girls in the Magdalene laundries: Give up your baby.

Early in the film, a young girl sits in a hospital bed, holding her newborn son, imploring her mother to look at him. The mother sits in rigid silence and ignores her daughter's pleas. As the girl signs the papers handed to her by a priest, the full knowledge of what has just transpired grips her as the baby is taken. The girl's mother is a metaphor for the whole experience of this girl and those like her. The mother did not see her daughter as a (new) mother and ignored her pain. This not seeing and not comprehending continues today in the way that mothers who surrendered their babies are depicted in the media and in the vast subconscious of our culture. We are the horrible birthmothers who want to rip our "children" from the arms of their "real" parents. We are the peace disturbers – now wanting to find the children that we "willingly" gave up.

Maternity homes were sanctioned by society and by a girl's parents as a way to deal with the shame of unwed pregnancy and to keep it secret. The social work literature of the times actually labeled the girls as deviant and neurotic, thus adding to the belief that these young mothers were incapable of mothering. The accepted doctrine was that the girl would give up her baby and go on with her life, forgetting this ever happened.

Though the maternity homes here were not as harsh as the Magdalene laundries, they were adept at propagating a group mentality, a conformity which would culminate in the girl buying into the adoption plan. The girls were to use only their first names and personal mail was censored. They had to sign in and sign out if they left the facility. And they were



never to see or talk to the baby's father. They were told that they were doing the best thing for their child and to consider keeping it would be selfish. Many homes did not allow a mother to see or hold her baby. There are cases where the girl was told her baby was born dead, when in fact the infant had been whisked off to be adopted.

Unlike the Magdalene laundries, girls left the maternity homes after delivery. But they often remained in a mental prison for much of their lives – locked in that moment of being young and alone with no one to talk to. It was expected that they would pick up where they left off and not mention what happened. These girls – like those in the Magdalene laundries – lacked resources and were defeated and full of grief.

I applaud director Peter Mullan for bringing to light this blight on Irish history. Unfortunately, it is easier to point the finger across an ocean than to take a hard look in our own backyard.

(Ed. note: "The Magdalene Sisters" will be available on home video in March 2004)

Debra Baker has produced two documentaries about adoption and reunion, "Broken Ties" and "Lost and Found." She can be reached at [pootypie@aol.com](mailto:pootypie@aol.com). This article originally appeared in the *Marin Independent Journal*.

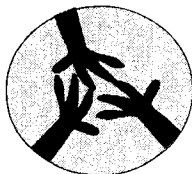
## Justice for Magdalene Campaign

If you would like to join in a call for justice for the women incarcerated in the Magdalene laundries, please visit the website: [www.adoptionireland.com](http://www.adoptionireland.com) where a short click sends an e-postcard to the Irish government to add your support for an inquiry. The organizers feel that the Catholic Church, the Irish State, and the people of Ireland should acknowledge and accept responsibility for what they term the horrendous abuses of human and civil rights inflicted on thousands of Irish women.

Specifically, they ask for an investigation into the mystery surrounding the bodies recently exhumed from one of the Magdalene graveyards. The Sisters sold the land to a developer in 1993 who sought an exhumation license for the 133 bodies there. Yet 155 bodies were found. These deaths were not notified or registered as is required by law. There are no death certificates for the women. Names on gravestones do not match those on the exhumation licenses. Furthermore, the bodies have been cremated which hampers an investigation. Adoptionireland notes that of the children placed for adoption some became American adoptees.

### BIRTHMOTHER

*Specializing in adoption issues  
for all triad members*



**Barbara Shafer, M.A., M. F. T.**

Marriage and Family Therapist  
CA License #33217

1749 Alhambra Ave., Martinez 94553

E-mail: [shaferMFT@aol.com](mailto:shaferMFT@aol.com)

**925/988-8871**

# Breaking the Silence

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



person who would resemble Jamie and thank her personally for the joy she had given us.

## A Clue

When we went to court to finalize the adoption, Jamie was almost two years old. Our attorney had the original birth certificate and by mistake, I saw Jamie's birthmother's name. It was Mary K. I knew I would never forget it.

In August 1985 I decided to try to find Jamie's birthmom. The search was for Jamie and for his birthmother and for me. Jamie would grow up knowing he was loved by two mothers, and his birthmother could be a part of his growing up years, if she wanted to. I realized that I had fears, too. If he knew his birthmother, would I still be his mother?

The search was relatively easy. I knew she had been in a branch of military service, and having been in the Air Force myself, I knew about the Worldwide Army Locator. A month later I was holding Mary's address in my hand. Excitement filled me in spite of the fact that everyone except my husband thought I was crazy. "She'll come and take Jamie back," they warned.

## Making Contact

I wrote a letter explaining that we were the couple who adopted her son and how happy we were and would correspond openly with her, if she wished. We began to exchange letters and information. We learned the circumstances of Jamie's birth and received photos of Mary and of Jamie's birthfather. Jamie looks just like Mary! We came to know Mary as a loving, mature, and responsible young woman.

## Another Step

In April of 1986 we met Sarah and Rob, the birthparents of our second child. Our meeting reminded me that I had never talked to Mary about meeting. She lived in another state, but I also had some fear that she would think we were too old or wish she had chosen someone else. I knew these thoughts revealed my own insecurities. I wrote to Mary, and she responded that she did not want to meet us, but would like the video I offered. At Easter we took an hour long video and mailed it off. Mary was thrilled and then wanted to meet us. She was coming to Monterey and would call when she got in. When her call came, I was shocked the first time I heard her

voice which was lower and stronger than I had expected. We made plans to go together to the zoo the next day.

## The Meeting

When the time came, I was sick with excitement. As she approached, we gazed at each other in a moment that seemed frozen in time – strangers, yet intimately bonded. Mary explained to me that she had refused to meet at first because she was afraid she would "fall apart in front of Jamie, and it would be bad for him." But when she saw the video, she realized that "here was a little boy I didn't know and I wanted to meet him." As she left our reunion that day, Mary gave us another precious gift when she exclaimed, "Now I know I made the right decision."

## Epilogue

This is our story. If our birthmother had chosen no contact, we would have honored that. Contact with birth families is an issue which needs negotiation between both families. This sensitive issue comes up continually in our relationships with birthparents and birth grandparents. We have found that it needs constant renegotiation as our relationships develop.

Following her marriage Mary became the mother of a little boy in 1990. She sent a special message to Jamie that "he would always hold a special place in my heart that his little half-brother won't take away from him." Jamie beamed when he heard that.

In 1995 both the adoptive and birth families spent Thanksgiving together in Hawaii. And, after ten years of corresponding, the birth grandparents agreed to a meeting. At adoption seminars and on television, Jamie, his birthmother and I have had the opportunity to share our story and relationship. Mary and I are close as sisters.

Jamie is currently serving his country in the Air Force in Saudi Arabia. He is 22 years old, and a handsome, well rounded and mature young man. Both of his families love him deeply and are extremely proud of him.

*Sandra Lenington created the first national open adoption newsletter, "AdoptNet," in 1989. She is an adoptive mom to three children in fully open adoptions. Besides founding the web site: [adopting.org](http://adopting.org), Sandra serves on the boards of Resolve and Attachment Disorder Network and is a frequent presenter at adoption seminars. She publishes related books through Adoption Press: <http://www.adoptionpress.com>*

Individual, Couple, and Family Therapy

**Catherine Eliaser, M.A., M.F.T.**

Specializing in Adoption Related Issues

Lic. # MFC 36132

711 D Street, Ste. 207  
San Rafael, CA 94901  
415 721-2818

Novato office  
also available

**SUSAN L. LOVE, Psy. D., MFT**

Psychotherapy  
Post-Adoption Counseling

(510) 287-8981  
Berkeley, CA

Lic. # MFC 35413

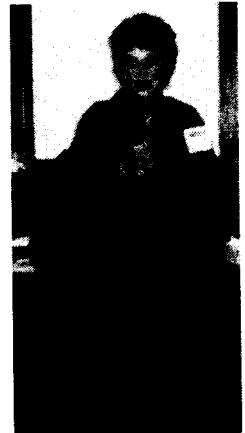
# Happy 25th Anniversary, PACER!

PACER's 25th Anniversary Celebration, held in November, drew a wonderful crowd of members, volunteers and board directors, both past and present. We were honored to have five past presidents in attendance (pictured at right and below), as well as past and current facilitators from as far away as Sacramento and Sonoma County. Thanks to Sheila Ganz, Nancy Verrier, and others who donated raffle prizes, and everyone who helped make it a very special day — especially Henry Jamison, who took pictures and provided the music.

*Here's to the next 25 years...  
and beyond!*



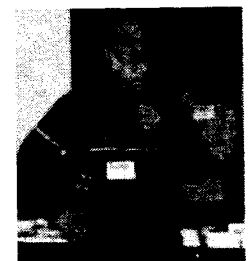
*PACER President Bob Crowe introduces past presidents, (l to r) Martin Brandfon, Jane Calbreath, Catherine Sharp and Jim Mehlfeld.*



*Above, l to r, the past presidents share memories from their terms: Jane Calbreath, Jim Mehlfeld, Catherine Sharp, Diane Michelsen, and Martin Brandfon.*

*At left: President Bob Crowe introduces the current board: Sally Caldwell, Vice President; Malcolm Pearson, Treasurer; Maureen Armstrong, Director; Denise Roessle, Secretary. (Missing from photo: Directors Susie Love and Judy Norris.)*

*Thanks to Ellen Roseman (right), long-time volunteer and devoted coordinator of book sales for PACER.*





*PACER support group facilitators, past and present.*



# Reflections

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



reservations to be placed with “good families” in New York. She recounted one story about a baby boy whose name was “Geronimo” being placed with a Jewish family whose last name was “Finkelstein.” (Yes, he was a great grandson of Geronimo.) His records, however, were tightly sealed.

After listening to Sharon, I eagerly began reading the classic book, *The Adoption Triangle*. It was authored by social workers Annette Baran and Reuben Pannor who began their first studies of closed adoption in the 1950s when they were co-directors of “Vista Del Mar.” (Ed. They co-authored with Dr. Abraham Sorosky, M.D.) Vista was and is a well-known adoption agency in Los Angeles. Both my husband and I were stung and electrified by what we read as feelings of loss related to adoption began to emerge in each of us.

We made a deliberate and thoughtful decision to try to connect with our two daughters’ birth families through letters and pictures. My husband then filed information with the Catholic agency in Des Moines, Iowa which had placed his infant son for adoption. Years earlier I had searched and found my own unknown birthfather, so that piece was in place and felt complete. I had a wonderful loving stepfather who, fortunately, understood and respected my need to know about my genetic heritage.

We had some contact with my foster child’s birthmother who resided abroad. I was consistent about sending her updates. She rarely responded, but sounded grateful that he was being well cared for.

People have often told me that I am pretty old-fashioned and traditional; so it surprised those around me to see how passionate I was about open adoption. Somehow I knew I was doing the right thing for my daughters. I was parenting from their long-term needs and not focusing on myself and my own fears and reservations about all of this.

I faithfully sent letters and pictures to my daughters’ birth families. They did not respond! Nothing I sent was ever returned, so I continued. My husband regularly sent updated information to the agency which had placed his son for adoption out there “somewhere.” Six years passed without any contact from anyone.

Christmas week 1986 arrived and within days everything changed. My birth father suddenly died on December 23rd. On the 24th we heard from my oldest daughter’s birth mother for the first time, thanking us for the correspondence, pictures and gifts over the previous six years. Nothing unusual happened on Christmas Day.

On December 26th my husband received a telephone call from his 20 year old birth son, Mark, who had completed a search and called to introduce himself. No, he had not seen his file at the agency, nor did he know that we were hoping to hear from him someday. He had completed a search with the help of his supportive adoptive mother who worked for the DMV in Des Moines.

The following day a call came from our middle daughter’s birthmother, saying she appreciated all the information sent and would like to see us. She expressed nervousness about this, but said she had good emotional support in spite of her fears.

The first thing we did was provide a plane ticket for my

husband’s birth son. The two men not only looked alike, but had similar mannerisms. Two full siblings awaited him from my husband’s marriage to the birthmother the year following his birth. They were thrilled to meet this unknown older brother.

Next we began talking to, visiting, and getting to know the girls’ birth families who lived a few hours away. My older daughter seemed to have a greater need for this than her ten week younger sister. While Tori was enthralled meeting so many relatives and over the years loved attending family reunions, Tara was more reserved with her feelings and emotions.

Looking back, it doesn’t seem odd we were able to incorporate all of these people into our already busy lives. It did take a great deal of juggling, but we did it and have no regrets.

We made a commitment to fully fund my husband’s birth son’s college education which included graduate school. Although he was a National Merit Scholarship winner and was able to attend the University of Chicago for one year, he lacked funds to continue his education there. A delightful young man, he is now married and has three children.

As the years passed, we spent some holidays and vacations with extended birth families. Graduations and birthdays were usually honored with all of us present. As the girls grew older, they visited and spent time alone with their birth families.

Asked now to look back about this journey, it all seems to be what Sharon Roszia calls a big “ho hum.” Our two adoptive daughters have no angst about adoption. There are no secrets or longings about the unknown. Each chose to search while in high school and found birthfathers who welcomed them.

My stepchildren and foster child are now grown and in their thirties. My three daughters are all in college and doing well. This past summer as I was thinking my full-time parenting days were over, my doorbell unexpectedly rang. A 12-year-old girl I had faithfully tutored for the past six years was on my doorstep needing a home and parenting. I wasn’t sure I was up to this one more time, but...

In 2002 I became guardian and foster parent to Ashley, a delightful seventh grader. Because Ashley is African American, we began working through cultural differences and racial issues. A beautifully talented and loving young girl, she has been a joy to parent. She has enriched my life, bringing challenges as well as satisfaction. And, true to my belief system of maintaining open contact, I maintained connections with her brother who lives with his tutor and many other relatives during the year she lived with me.

No, our relationships are not always easy or calm. They are typical of all families with ups and downs. My former husband’s birth son became distant; it seems that his wife finds it extremely difficult to integrate us as family. She seems to view the reunion thing as unnatural and odd. At the present time his loyalties are leaning towards her needs.

My middle daughter’s birthmother is in an alcohol treatment center. Because my college daughter lives in Virginia, it falls on me to visit and maintain family contact and support, which I do faithfully.

Based on longitudinal studies completed by the Child Welfare League and others, it is imperative that adoptive parents realize the importance of providing all of the information that they wisely can for their adoptive children. It never occurred to me when adopting in 1980 that openness would

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

change and broaden my life in so many wonderful and challenging ways. It is the challenges which have helped me to grow and expand. I would not be the person I am today without them.

A transformation took place without my realizing it. I had heard that parenting could bring about these changes, but it never occurred to me that opening our hearts and home to those who were genetically connected to our children would enrich our lives so much. I continue to give thanks for the many wonders and gifts of adoption.

*Ellen Roseman has worked in adoption placement as a consultant in California for 24 years. She has helped facilitate more than 1,850 infant and older child placements through both private/independent and agency sponsored adoptions. Couples and singles wanting to adopt seek out her services from all parts of the country as well as military families abroad. In addition Ellen serves on the boards of Resolve, the American Adoption Congress, and is treasurer of the Academy of California Adoption Professionals. She is a licensed book seller and a former PACER board member. She volunteers in the YWCA Mentoring Program and serves as an advisor for "Safesoul," a center for the prevention of violence towards women. A frequent presenter at adoption/child related conferences, Ellen has written and published numerous articles on adoption. She is known as someone who is passionate about children's rights, openness in adoption, and open records. Ellen lives in the Bay Area, and has four daughters who came to her through birth, foster care, and adoption. To reach Cooperative Adoption Consulting: email: er1001164@onemain.com or call (415) 453-0902.*



## Learning to Parent in Reunion

By Denise Roessle

Eight years ago, I became the mother to a 26-year-old man, a virtual stranger with whom I had little in common other than genetics and the nine months he had spent in my belly.

Like about half of birthmothers, I didn't have more children after relinquishing my baby. My only experience with parenting came when I got married and became stepmother to my husband's 16-year-old son—which I felt I had failed miserably. Not to put all the blame on myself. Having not been a part of his formative years and being dropped smack in the middle of his troubled adolescence, I probably didn't have much of a shot. My tendency to duplicate my own parents' cold and rigid style (which I had hated, growing up) didn't help matters. My stepson and I have a wonderful relationship today, but that experience—coupled with my guilt for having given up my only child for adoption—left me certain that I was not mother material.

When Soundex called—many years after I had registered and just two weeks after my son had—everything changed. During our first phone call, Joshua called me "Mom" and said he loved me. He'd had a very difficult childhood and was estranged from his adoptive parents (so much so, that we didn't know until later that his adoptive mother had died a month before). He was clearly looking for a mother, and I desperately wanted the job.

From the many triad members that I've met during my years in PACER, I know that the majority of adult adoptees don't need parenting, any more than adults who grew up in their biological families do. In reunion, there are issues to address and resolve, feelings to process, and the sorting out of the relationship you will have. Sometimes there's regression, on both sides. But after the dust settles, the birthmother and her son or daughter are still two grown people with their own lives—which hopefully will include each other on a healthy adult level.

I didn't know that in 1996. In fact, I was in reunion for almost a year before I found PACER and learned that there were books and support groups where I could get help. I leaped wholeheartedly into the relationship that Josh seemed to want and need. We had one of the most joyful "honeymoons" that I know of, until his expectations of what a mother should be and my inability to meet them (and indeed, I felt I should have been able to) crashed head-on.

After months of enjoying his childlike ways—the cute little magnets and stuffed animals he sent me, his inability to make even the smallest decision without my advice, and his insistence that he didn't want to grow up—I began to struggle with some of his behavior and rethink my reactions. I had to learn to set and uphold boundaries. I had to resist the urge to try to "fix" him and solve all of his problems (which may or may not have come as result of being relinquished, and boy did I struggle with guilt about that one). I had to let go of my judgments, as well as my belief that he would have turned out "better" if I'd kept him, and learn to accept him for who he was. I had to learn to stand up to his tests and manipulations, and trust that our relationship would endure, despite his threats to disappear. I had to model healthy adult behavior and teach him how to treat me, and respond to him with love, even when I didn't like him very much. Making these changes in myself was hard work, and met with much resistance from Josh. Slowly but surely though, things between us began to improve.

Parents, whether biological and adoptive, learn these lessons every day, and often through trial and error—although mostly when they're a lot younger than I was and with the advantage of starting at the beginning. And they have plenty of role models, while birthmothers do not. What I did have, and must give credit to: PACER's birthmother support group, led by the wise and warm Arlyss Anderson (where I spent a year-and-a-half, before moving on to facilitate a triad group); all of the books on the PACER list, which for me began with *Birthbond* by Judith Gediman; and the insight and loving guidance of therapists Nancy Verrier and Barbara Shafer.

Those of you who know me and my story know that Josh and I have been through numerous ups and downs, including long periods when we were not in touch, when I was sure I'd lost him again... forever. I'm pleased to say that we are back on track. We still hit bumps, and probably always will. But like most parents whose children are grown, finally I can relax a little and enjoy being a mother and grandmother.

*Denise Roessle serves as Secretary on the PACER Board and facilitates the Contra Costa Triad support group. She may be reached at 925/828-4644 or deroe@earthlink.net.*



# SUPPORT GROUPS

*Newcomers, please contact the facilitator for meeting location.*

*Groups start promptly at the time indicated.*

**CONTRA COSTA TRIAD**  
Second Wednesdays (7:00 p.m.)  
in Walnut Creek  
Contact Denise, 925/828-4644  
CCTriad@pacer-adoption.org

**EAST BAY ADOPTEES**  
Fourth Mondays (7:45 p.m.)  
in Oakland  
Contact Malcolm, 510/336-9284  
EBayAdoptee@pacer-adoption.org

**EAST BAY BIRTHMOTHERS**  
Third Mondays (7:30 p.m.)  
in Berkeley  
Contact Arlyss, 925/253-0435  
EBayBirthmom@pacer-adoption.org

**MARIN TRIAD**  
*Temporarily Suspended*  
MarinTriad@pacer-adoption.org

**SACRAMENTO TRIAD**  
Last Tuesdays (6:30 p.m.)  
in Sacramento  
Contact Linda, 916/359-6777  
or Edie, 916/653-8347  
SacTriad@pacer-adoption.org

**SAN FRANCISCO ADOPTEES**  
*Temporarily Suspended*  
SFAdoptees@pacer-adoption.org

**SAN MATEO TRIAD**  
Third Thursdays (7 p.m.)  
in Burlingame  
Contact Sally, 650/344-7789  
or Alison, 650/738-9178  
SanMateoTriad@pacer-adoption.org

**SONOMA COUNTY ADOPTEES**  
Third Mondays (7 p.m.)  
in Santa Rosa  
Contact Vicki, 707/526-1275,  
SonomaAdoptee@pacer-adoption.org

**SONOMA COUNTY TRIAD**  
First Wednesdays (7 p.m.)  
in Sebastopol  
Contact Jerilynn, 707/823-7840,  
SonomaTriad@pacer-adoption.org

## **PACER NEEDS FACILITATORS FOR EXISTING AND NEW GROUPS.**

If you're interested, please contact any of the facilitators listed above.

**Single-focus groups** are for the adult individuals specified only. (*Birthmothers, adoptees, etc.*)

**Triad groups** are open to all adult members of the triad plus spouses or significant partners.

**Guests:** It is important that you notify the facilitator prior to bringing a guest.

**First-timers:** Be sure to telephone prior to attending your first meeting so that the facilitator may welcome you, provide location and directions, and answer any questions you may have.

## **PACER'S WARM LINE**

Catherine Eliaser, MFT, is the voice of PACER's "Warm Line" each Monday evening from 7:30 until 9:30 p.m. Catherine provides a variety of services which include support, information and referrals. Her number is 415/892-9422.

## **ADVERTISE**

### **IN THE PACER NEWSLETTER**

Business Card Ads: \$50 per issue  
or \$160 for one year (4 issues paid in advance)  
Contact Denise Roessle, 925/828-4644

## **Newsletter Submissions Invited**

Are you a writer? A poet? A reader or filmgoer who would enjoy reviewing books and movies? Perhaps you have suggestions for adoption-related pieces that would interest our audience. Or an unusual or compelling adoption, search or reunion story, but just need some help writing it.

We welcome your ideas and submissions. For more information, contact Judy Norris at 925/952-4853 or charlottesfirst@aol.com.



## And the Survey Says... Adoptees Should Have Access to Records

A new national survey conducted by FindLaw found 84% of Americans believe adult adoptees should be allowed to view their adoption records. The survey used a representative sample of 1,000 adults nationwide. Only 12% said adopted children should not be granted access to their adoption records.

By some estimates, six million Americans were adopted as children. Currently, adoptees in many states are only allowed to view partial or edited versions of their adoption records, which often omits information such as original birth name, name of birth parents and place of birth. Several states are currently considering legislation that would fully open adoption records.

"The survey results come as no surprise," said R. David Cousineau, President and CEO of Holt International Children's Services, a leading adoption agency. "We have placed more than 40,000 children with adoptive families. Our experience with three generations of adoptees has provided consistent evidence that adoptive families understand and believe in the necessity of adoptees to know their birth history. It is the fundamental right of all individuals to have access to information about themselves. For adoptees, that includes access to their own birth records with the same equity as other individuals are entitled."

*FindLaw is the leading provider of online legal information and solutions for the legal community, businesses and individuals. For more information, visit [www.findlaw.com/](http://www.findlaw.com/)*

## Nevada Papers Support Open Records

The Reno *Gazette-Journal* and the Las Vegas *Review-Journal* recently wrote editorials that for the most part affirmed the rights of adoptees and foster children to the information about themselves that are contained in birth and medical documents.

In the Sunday edition, Jan. 4, the *Review-Journal* addressed the recent Nevada Supreme Court decision that allows a teenage girl in foster care to learn the whereabouts of her three younger sisters. The editorial complained of the "high-handedness and secrecy even to the extent of requiring new legislation just to make it possible for a child to lay hands on parental medical records which could contain important information for the child's own health care."

In mid-December, the *Gazette-Journal* spoke directly to the issue of adult adoptees. "Closing records under the seal of privacy protected the parent, but it bred a generation of children who were stigmatized. Lawmakers will have another chance to give adults access to their birth and adoption records." (*Ed. note: Last year's bill died in committee.*) The editorial writer went on to say, "Adoptees have sought birth parents in growing numbers since laws sealed records in the mid-twentieth century. Putting the policy in the last century like that - where it belongs - indicates just how outdated it is."

# BECOME A MEMBER OF PACER TODAY!

### BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP INCLUDE...

- ▲ SUBSCRIPTION TO THE NEWSLETTER
- ▲ SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS FOR ONE YEAR
- ▲ DISCOUNT ON PACER EVENTS
- ▲ THE SATISFACTION OF GIVING BACK TO THE ADOPTION REFORM COMMUNITY & SUPPORTING PACER'S WORK.

If you aren't already a member, or if you haven't renewed your membership, please take the time to do so now. You may also use this form to send a donation of any amount. If you would like to volunteer your time to work on one of our upcoming events, please leave a message on the PACER voice mail line: 1-888/746-0514.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

STREET ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

( ) \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

Are you currently attending a PACER support group? If so, which one?

- |                                             |                                          |                                                |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> NEW MEMBER         | <input type="checkbox"/> ADOPTEE         | <input type="checkbox"/> REGULAR MEMBER (\$40) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> RENEWAL            | <input type="checkbox"/> BIRTHPARENT     | <input type="checkbox"/> AGENCIES (\$50)       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> DONATION: \$ _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> ADOPTIVE PARENT | <input type="checkbox"/> SPONSOR (\$125)       |
|                                             | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: _____    | <input type="checkbox"/> PROFESSIONAL (\$50)   |

TOTAL ENCLOSED: \$ \_\_\_\_\_



# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## Member Survey

Your input is important to us!  
If you have not yet responded to PACER's member survey, you may still do so online at: [pacer-adoption.org/survey/](http://pacer-adoption.org/survey/)  
Nonmembers who attend PACER support groups and other events are also welcome to participate.



## ALMA

Adoptees' Liberty Movement Association  
holds a Search Workshop/Rap Session  
every second Friday, 7:30-10:00 pm, in Pleasant Hill.  
FOR MORE INFORMATION,  
CONTACT BERNEY AT 925-686-2469.

## Concerned United Birthparents

Concerned United Birthparents (CUB) holds a monthly meeting with speakers and group support for parents who relinquished child to adoption, adult adoptees, and all others touched by adoption. Meets 7-9 p.m. every second Tuesday, at the Retirement Inn, 290 N San Tomas Aquino Rd. in Campbell.  
FOR MORE INFORMATION: [aliciakla@earthlink.net](mailto:aliciakla@earthlink.net)

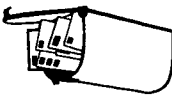


## CUB Annual Retreat

November 19-21, 2004  
Asilomar Conference Center  
Pacific Grove, California  
For details, visit the CUB website at [www.cubirthparents.org](http://www.cubirthparents.org)  
or email: [kayleevee@earthlink.net](mailto:kayleevee@earthlink.net)

**Visit our website at <http://www.pacer-adoption.org>**

**KEEP YOUR PACER NEWSLETTERS COMING!**



Your mailing label includes the renewal date for your PACER membership and newsletter subscription. Please check this information and be sure to renew in plenty of time, so you won't miss out on a single issue!

W N T I E R 3 T O 4  
U . S . P O S T A G E  
P A I D  
O A K L A N D , C A  
9 4 6 1 5  
P E R M I T # 2 2 8 0

ADDRESS SERVICE  
REQUESTED

POST ADOPTION CENTER FOR EDUCATION & RESEARCH  
P. O. Box 31146  
Oakland, CA 94604-7146  
888/746-0514

