



POST ADOPTION CENTER FOR EDUCATION & RESEARCH

Where We Came From:

The Natural Mother In Adoption Film

By Marley Greiner

“Stretch the paint, Todd. All we wish to do is put up a good front”

.....Arthur Kennedy to the handyman, A Summer Place (1959)

(The following is excerpted from Ms. Greiner’s presentation at the Alliance for the Study of Adoption, Identity, and Kinship Conference held at the University of Tampa, November 19, 2005)

I have always been a big movie fan - especially of old films and maternal melodramas. After co-founding Bastard Nation in 1996, I began to seek out cinematic representations of bastards and adoptees. Although I grew up with Stella Dallas, Penny Serenade, Blossoms in the Dust, Shirley Temple, Disney, and the now impossible-to-find That Hagen Girl, I had never consciously identified with any of the characters, nor with adoption narratives in general. But with a newly honed bastard consciousness, I began investigating how Hollywood constructed cultural ideology and myths about us.

Out of the hundreds of adoption-themed films made, few examine the turmoil surrounding adoption as a social and political institution. Few take the adoptee point of view. Instead, most treat the adoptee as undeveloped, an object of desire/undesire. Adoptive parents, though often “heroic” are secondary characters, except when pursuing adoptive parenthood. Natural fathers are weak, ineffective, invisible, or dead. These textual silences are filled by the voice of the natural mother, whether she be passive victim or active agent of progress, or more likely, something between the two. In real life, the natural mother is disempowered, disregarded and stigmatized. In film she is the star of her own narrative and psychologically, a transgressive female heroine to her female audience.

Consequently, I had to investigate where bastards came from in film – the natural mother. Two reference points: (1) the natural



Mary Astor in The Great Lie (1941)

mothers are sometimes married to the natural father, but due to class, connivance, or shame, are treated as though they are unwed mothers; (2) bastard means born out of wedlock or born in wedlock, but to women isolated from the normative family for status reasons.

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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.

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Editor's Note: The opinions expressed in articles published in the PACER Newsletter are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent PACER's position as an organization.

President's Message

by *Malcolm Pearson*

It has been a while since the last newsletter reached your hands. This is because we lost our long-time and much loved publisher, Denise Roessle. She and her husband got an opportunity to move to Green Valley, AZ where she will be just an hour's drive from her birth son. We miss her and wish her the best and, since she managed to sell her house at the very top of the Bay Area house market, we will be calling her regularly for investment tips.

A void must eventually fill and that of publisher is filled by Michele Stern. Michele has published before. She has a marvelous eye and an artistic flair. Denise is a very tough act to follow but Michele has a few ideas which you will see as you turn these pages.

Also new to the behind the scenes workings at PACER, is Jim Gabbard, our new treasurer and newest board member. This isn't Jim's first time taking a leadership role in a not-for-profit organization. He was on the board of the Northern California Basketball Officials Association, where he was also treasurer. So this gig should be a slam dunk. Jim is a musician, a pianist, and a retired software developer for Visa International. We are grateful to have both he and his sense of humor on our board.

The E in PACER stands for Education, but it has been years since we have had the resources to put on a major event. That changes this spring. I am very please to tell you that PACER and the Northern California chapter of the AAC are putting on a one-day educational conference. The theme we are working with is *The Changing Picture of Adoption: Voices of Adoptees, Adoptive Parents and Birth Parents*. Stay tuned to our website, www.pacer-adoption.org. We will post more details more details about the program, date, location and cost when things are finalized in a couple of weeks.

And finally, PACER held our fifth Unity Day gathering this last September. In the past these took place in San Francisco. But we hadn't been able to make one happen for several years until Linda Orozco, our un-official leader in the capital city decided to try one. The PACER community owes a debt of thanks to Linda, Diane Thompson, Rachel Smith, Beth Blee, Imogene Speed, Lydia Love, Linda Franklin, Fred Wynbrandt, Jim Dunn, and many others, including our keynote speaker, Sheila Ganz, for creating a beautiful and moving event.

Turn to page 11 for photographs of this event.

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, birth parents and adoptive parents).

We provide comprehensive information, support, public education and advocacy for positive change in adoption policy and practice.

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.

Future Frozen Adoptees

By Judy Norris

At a White House photo-op last May, a smiling President Bush posed, in his arms a young baby, who wore a sticker, "Former Embryo." Also pictured were a group of proud new mothers along with their healthy and newly hatched infants. The adoption agency which pairs the frozen embryos with prospective parents likes to call them "Snowflakes."

"Like snowflakes, these embryos are unique, they're fragile and, of course, they're frozen....a perfect analogy," Ron Stoddart, the executive director of Nightlight Christian Adoptions, said in a Washington Times interview. The agency has been in the embryo business since the late 1990's. So far, the actual number of "Snowflake" babies is said to be fairly small.

Some 400,000 frozen embryos exist in storage facilities in the U.S. Of these, 9,000 are designated for possible families, according to the Rand Corporation (N.Y. Times Magazine, 12/11/05). A similar number are headed for scientific research. The majority remain in a deep freeze limbo.

Politics are involved here, of course. The President used the picture taking session to reinforce his administration's position against stem cell research. Nightlight likes to use terms like pre-born children and genetic parents to mold public opinion to their cause. The California-based agency acknowledges that the legal framework for embryo adoptions has not been implemented in most states.

Most of their work is with traditional domestic adoptions, but they have a history of arranging placements for children from Russia and Belarus. In recent years they flew Russian orphans over to the U.S. to be toured around the country in meet-and-greet sessions with Americans interested in adopting them.

Even in this brave new world scenario, a few familiar issues arise concerning embryo adoptions. Will the little "Snowflakes," growing into adulthood, return to the agency with questions about their origins? If so, how much truth will they be given? An Evangelical Christian couple, interviewed by a New York paper, admitted donating their extra embryos to another similar faith couple. But they insisted on anonymity and would refuse any future contact with children born from their genetic matter. Other adoptive parents feel differently, however. A popular magazine ran a story about parents who adopted frozen embryos and continue to support openness. They even facilitate play-dates for their children with their genetic siblings. One thing remains true for many of us adult adoptees: a need to reclaim our personal history and/or reconnect with lost family.

Judy Norris, Pacer board member, and newsletter editor, can be reached at charlottesfirst@aol.com.

Open And 'Not So Open' Records Legislation

Whopping Fines for Ontario Adoptees

In the Canadian province of Ontario, adoptees will be able to apply for their original birth certificates. But, if the birth mom or dad says NO, and if the adoptee attempts contact, they'll pay a whopping big fine of \$50,000. Under the open records law just passed, birth parents may seek information about their natural children, also. Those cautious Canadian lawmakers have imposed an 18 month wait time before the law goes into effect. The opposition has threatened to sue to prevent enactment.

Around the U.S

New Jersey

Activists have long campaigned for a law granting adoptees access to their original birth records. Legislators loaded the proposed bill with amendments: (1) \$1,000,000 for publicity (2) a wait time of 3 years, after passage, before the law goes into effect (3) a birth parent may request a no contact veto, similar to a restraining order, without showing cause. (4) adoptees fined for violating the veto. The "not so open" records law was sent to the Appropriations Committee.

Massachusetts

SB 959, a clear open records bill, without a contact veto, got a positive reception in October from the Committee on Families and Children. Adam Pertman spoke in favor of the bill. The Committee is expected to vote on the measure soon.

Maine

Supporters here got a boost from a local newspaper which endorsed the proposed open records law in a recent editorial. The editor wrote that 'knowing one's own past is a right, not a privilege.' The bill faces a long road ahead in the legislative process.

Pennsylvania

HB 2056 contains a contact veto which the sponsors call a disclosure veto. Now in the Judiciary Committee, the bill is expected to be heard soon.

Adoptees Contribute their Stories at International Adoption Conference in the Philippines

By Lorial Crowder and Mark Kunkel



October 2005 - This summer, the Inter Country Adoption Board of the Philippines hosted the 3rd International Conference of Adoptive Families of Filipino Children. Over 160 adoptees, adoptive families, and adoption professionals attended the conference, held from August 15 - 16, in Manila.

Adult adoptees from the Philippines and from around the world gave presentations about our experiences as adoptees - our challenges and successes, searching and connecting to our Filipino roots, and our hopes for the future of Filipino adoption.

As Ian Truelove, a 15 year-old adoptee from Albion, Indiana said, "It was inspirational, a more-than-imaginable experience."

One highlight of the conference was Lorial Crowder's introduction of the Filipino Adoptees Network, the first global organization of Filipino adoptees. FAN's website, supportive services, and plans for the future were well received by the international adoption community. The Inter-Country Adoption Board, child caring agencies in the Philippines, and foreign adoption agencies all expressed support of FAN's mission to "link the past to strengthen our identities."

Lorial reported, "This visit was significant to me because my mother was accompanying me for her first time to the country that I once called home. We spent the first week traveling through the Northern Cordilleras, and the following week and a half attending the conferences organized by the Inter-Country Adoption Board. I was especially elated to bring more recognition of the Filipino Adoptees Network to the international adoption community. I felt as though I was another step closer to rebuilding my past while also uniting global Filipino adoptees and bringing attention to the need

for post adoption services."

The conference was a wonderful opportunity to meet other adoptees from different parts of the world. Adoptees from as close as Manila and from as far away as Norway told about our challenges, successes, identity struggles and discoveries, and gratitude. Becoming acquainted with one another expanded our perspectives: Adoptees from the United States told of developing our identities as people of color in America, our experiences in our multi-cultural families, and the unfolding processes of reconnecting with our Filipino heritage and culture. Adoptees from the Philippines told of prejudices and challenges they had experienced growing up, as well as the love and support they had received throughout their lives. We all expressed gratitude for the privileges we enjoy, and marveled at the elusive meaning of it all.

Ms. Marilyn Kirby gave the opening remarks for the conference. Hailing from Virginia, she traveled with her adoptive mother to search for her biological mother.

For Marilyn, "Preparing for this trip was a last minute decision, because a majority of people didn't expect me to find my family, especially my biological mother who had been missing for years. I was very excited when I found out that the RSCC (Research and Study Center for Children) found other family members. I instantly knew that this was the moment I had been waiting for all my life. On top of that, at the conference I was given the honor to speak about my experiences, struggles, and challenges as an orphan while growing up."

Marilyn was successful in reuniting with her biological mother, along with numerous other relatives eager to meet her just before the start of the conference. Her words spoke of her emotions before, during, and after her reunion with her biological family. Speaking at the conference drudged up many emotions and feelings for Marilyn and sharing her story with the audience at the conference was also very intimidating.

"Talking about my struggles brought back flashbacks as if they were yesterday. It also made me reflect on the person I have become, and realize how much I have accomplished. It inspired me to write honestly, so that I could motivate other young adoptees and families who have similar struggles to believe that everything will work out" said Marilyn, "Imperfection is perfection."

The 3rd International Conference brought together many first time delegates. FAN delegates were delighted to encounter Rosario Malayo de la Rosa, otherwise introduced to us as Rhea. She was adopted domestically in the Philippines when

CONTINUED from previous page

she was an infant. Rhea's mother is the Executive Director of Kaisahang Buhay Foundation in Quezon City, and encouraged her daughter to accompany her.



Rhea commented, "I have never attended a conference like this before and the only reason why I went there was to support my fellow adoptee friends who were presenting that morning. It was worth a try to attend and sit there listening to the speakers. The thing that struck me most was the friendships that I made with them."

Also attending the conference was Mark Kunkel from California, who shared his insights about his experience growing up in Virginia, as well as his hopes for the future.

Mark said, "At the 30th anniversary of the Inter-Country Adoption Program, we have the opportunity to develop post-adoption resources for current and future adoptees. Adoption is a transformation of relationships, and the creation of the Filipino Adoptees Network is an opportunity to go from isolation and Diaspora into community."

Additional sessions at the 3rd International Conference of Adoptive Families of Filipino Children included reports from child care agencies and foster families about specific processes for "Letting Go of a Filipino Adoptee" and "Information Needed by Adoptees in Searching for Their Roots." The former is an important topic on which there is much work to be done to improve existing systems, practices, organization – (lack of), and collected information. This is where FAN can make important contributions. For all who attended, the 3rd International Conference of Families for Adoptive Families of Filipino Children was very meaningful and significant.

As Tia Truelove (Ian's older sister) astutely commented, "It made me take a deeper look at my abandonment/adoption. The conference caused so many emotions to surface - among them sadness, joy, anger, and immense gratitude. The whole experience made me feel small, yet part of this wondrous phenomenon - Filipino adoption."

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Post Reunion Anger and Harmony

By Robert Allan Hafetz

I was conducting a workshop not too long ago when a birth mother shared something with me that increased my insight into what she was feeling. She told me that every time a book is published lamenting the adversity adoptees endure; such as their fractured identity, and their pain, it increases the burden she carries. Having lost her child to the adoption process, she must wonder if her child is also enduring the endless trials and tribulations that adoptees speak about when they publish their stories. She helped me see adoption through the eyes and heart of a birth mother. While I have spoken and published about my own experiences many times, I never considered that I could be unintentionally adding to the anguish of birth mothers. I believe that when adoptees and birth mothers come together, this experience manifests itself and can cause unintended hurt and anger. Consequently, when I speak to birth mothers, I always put my remarks in context by expressing my resolved feelings by stating; "If I could meet my birth mother today I would say, thank you for creating me and giving me life, not once but twice." The sum of my life experiences are all part of me. I wouldn't have any life without my mother's will and love. I keep that in mind when I speak of how hard it has been. Beneath the feelings of hardship, there is always gratitude.

Though they are both present, the power we have to heal each other is far greater than the power to hurt each other. It takes great effort to utter words that express anger and hurt but little effort to say the words that heal. Human beings have this intrinsic bias toward the good. We can love an unlimited number of people, but we can feel anger at only one or two. It takes a great deal of energy to express anger, and it's painful but anger must be expressed. In a post-reunion emotional environment, often the adoptee feels anger when the birth parent needs support and understanding. Their needs are not in harmony, and the result can be frustrating leading to a withdrawal by one or the other. Now we have a situation of

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Where We Came From

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THE MATERNAL MELODRAMA

Traditional melodrama depicts morality with tension between realism and hyperbole. The maternal melodrama itself centers around a virtuous, but compromised mother, who due to moral lapse, scandal, or circumstances beyond her control is compelled to believe that she must surrender the child to others (sometimes the natural father and his wife) for a proper and privileged upbringing. Separated from her child and anonymous (usually the child doesn't even know she has another mother), the natural banished mother watches from afar.

The 1930s: THE FALLEN WOMAN

Fallen Woman films sprang from 19th century European women's domestic serials and novels full of tainted sex, corrupt aristocrats, seduction, and abandonment. The writers portrayed female sexuality sympathetically, yet with the protagonist ultimately forced to pay for her sin with rejection, anonymity, or death.

The first important American film was Frank Capra's *Forbidden* (1932) with Barbara Stanwyck creating the archetype of the energetic, decisive, and liberated heroine. This film was followed by John Stahl's *Only Yesterday* (1933) featuring Margaret Sullivan as an unwed mother who chose anonymity of her own free will, rather than respectable marriage with a man who forgot her, just as Ginger Rogers would do later in *Kitty Foyle*

(1940). Setting the course for unwed mothers to follow, Sullivan found honorable work, and unlike her European counterparts, refused the life of a social outcast.

The unwed mother, usually with working class origins, took up a profession. Kay Francis moved from small town theatricals to the *Great White Way* in *Comet Over Broadway*, and Mary Astor was a famous concert pianist in *The Great Lie* (1941).

The natural mother was played by a well-known lead, while the second-banana natural father was seldom played by a name actor – at least at the time of the release. He was weak-willed, vacillating, and wanted his family to make decisions for him. In *That Certain Woman*, Bette Davis and Henry Fonda were married only three hours when Fonda acquiesces to his wealthy father's demand for an annulment.

The natural father was either overly attached to his mother in *Wayward* (1932), creating young mother/old mother conflict, or committed to someone of his own social class as in *Forbid-*

den or *That Certain Woman*. Occasionally, the natural father was a determined cad. In *Sarah and Son*, though married to the mother, he stole the baby, put it up for adoption, then joined the Marines.

After a long attempt at single parenting, the natural mother, unlike her European sister, voluntarily relinquished her child for a better life to a childless couple, often the natural father and his infertile or sickly wife. Voluntary relinquishment no matter how painful, however, bears fruit. In *Always Goodbye*, and *Gallant Lady*, Barbara Stanwyck and Ann Harding marry the adoptive fathers of their children after the adoptive mother dies.

The 1960's: TEEN SEX

Earlier films such as Ida Lupino's neo-realistic *Not Wanted* (1949) gave a hard-edged look at teen pregnancy and maternity home life, but not until the mid-late 1950's did Hollywood's emphasis on the noble, sacrificing, and respectable fallen woman take a turn south and begin to explore teen sex – a sure money-maker in the midst of the mid-century teen rumble. Films such as *Rebel Without A Cause* (1955), *Splendor in the Grass* (1959), and *All Fall Down* (1962), *A Summer Place* (1959), *Blue Denim* (1962) were a far cry from fallen woman films. *Peyton Place* (1957) carried a triple

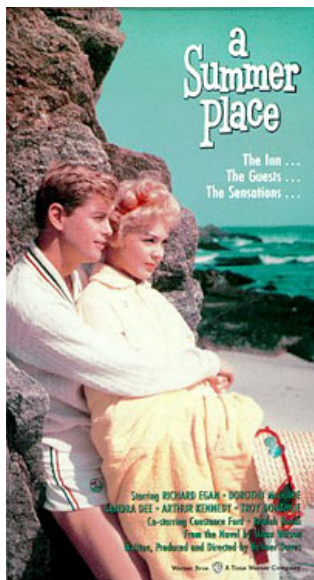
whammy: The stepfather rape, impregnation, and illegal abortion of Selena Cross; the bastardy of Allison MacKenzie; and the issues of Allison's mother who moved from noble fallen woman to an angry, sexually repressed business woman who wants to keep her past secret from her daughter and the town.

Two films particularly broke ground exploring teen pregnancy. With stomach-churning precision, *Blue Denim* and *A Summer Place* depicted the consequences to "good girls" who transgress middle class sexual mores in the name of love.

Blue Denim is an important, though flawed, portrayal of teenage sexuality, a subject previously taboo in Hollywood which had portrayed sexually active women as those who knew the score. Based on James Leo Herlihy's hit Broadway play, *Blue Denim* tried an honest and sensitive portrayal of teenage sexuality, pregnancy and family dysfunction through Arthur (Brandon DeWilde) and Janet (Carol Lynley) who found themselves "in trouble" after their first and only sexual encounter. The play was hard-hitting and controversial, but the illegal abortion ending was too hot for Hollywood. *Blue Denim* was toned down, much to the dismay of even conservative Catholic critics who complained that Arthur and Janet's compulsory marriage should never have happened. A reviewer for the Catholic Legion of Decency was so unhappy with the ending he insisted Janet



should have been allowed to reject the shotgun marriage, but keep the baby and to grow into a mature relationship with Arthur.



A Summer Place, the penultimate dirty movie for a generation of high school girls, is full-blown melodrama, featuring family secrets, illicit sex, repressed sexuality, and alcoholism all exposed in public scandal. The plot centers on nice girl Molly Jorgenson (Sandra Dee) and her summer romance in Maine with clean-cut Johnny Hunter (Troy Donohue). Molly is sexually precocious but clearly a virgin (with a disturbing habit of chatting up her dad while wearing nothing but baby doll pajamas). Johnny vacillates between wanting to sleep with

Molly and putting her off. Only a few days into the vacation, Molly and Johnny take an afternoon boat excursion and get caught in a storm that forces them to spend the night on an island. When the Coast Guard brings them home the next morning, Molly's man-hating monster mother (Constance Ford), obsessed with Molly's virginity, her own dirty thoughts, and social status, sends for a doctor to make sure Molly is still intact. The forced and degrading gynecological exam, which Martha Mays rightly calls "maternal rape," is one of the most chilling scenes in teen film, with Molly wrapped in a blanket pleading – "I haven't done anything wrong. I'm a good girl."

Eventually, Molly becomes pregnant by Johnny. At the end the married Molly and Johnny are mentored by Molly's father (Richard Egan) and Johnny's mother (Dorothy McGuire), former teenage lovers themselves, who have left their respective abusive spouses and are now married to each other. Molly and Johnny are seen arriving at the island where they first met, holding hands, untroubled by being totally unprepared for marriage – much less parenthood.

CONCLUSION

The maternal melodrama of the 1930's introduced a so-called progressive portrayal of American unwed motherhood. With the exception of Forbidden, unwed mothers remain victimized by their families, the father of their children, and society at large. But more importantly - by themselves. Unlike their European counterparts who are forced to give up their children through social pressure or very real coercion, American film heroines, after giving it the old college try, voluntarily relinquish their rights to the child; thus making them not only victims of economic, family, and societal pressure, but of their own self-delusion and ultimately their other-directedness.

Their "choice," then, is seen as an individual "responsible" decision, not a product of historical social force. While they may show a spunky, independent front, the desirable natural father is never far from their minds. Unlike their European sisters who walk the gutter, and are emotionally destroyed by the loss of their children, the American line actively schemes (or at least dreams) of ways to reunite with father and child – and use the child (whether still with her or in the natural father/sickly wife environment) as an instrument to regain the loss.

Blue Denim and A Summer Place were also considered progressive for their day. A Summer Place, especially, seemed to imply that teen sex was normal and to be expected. A closer reading of these films and others like The Young Lovers, where illegal abortion is rejected, and balloons gently float skyward at the end, suggests a contrary and reactionary message quite different from the preceding decades. Teen sex may be a fact, but the wages of sex is marriage. While "nice kids" Arthur, Janet, Molly, Johnny, superficially represent a turn from post-war conservatism, they are simply cautionary tales of youth and its consequences. One expects to see this unhappy foursome a few years down the road, trapped in group therapy sessions after a day at some low-end job. Arthur and Johnny will eventually chuck it all for the Summer of Love. Janet and Molly will collect ADC and food stamps, start keypunch school and wonder what they ever saw in those guys, other than their cute dimples and blond surfer looks.

Fallen Woman films were produced not only during the Golden Age of Hollywood, but the Golden Age of Hollywood adoption – with numerous big name stars including Ruby Keeler, Al Jolson, Dick Powell, Edward G. Robinson, George Burns and Gracie Allen, Bob Hope, Jack Benny, Bette Davis and Joan Crawford for instance – adopting from places like "The Cradle" and Georgia Tann's "Tennessee Children's Home Society" baby mill.

Both sub-genres, the Fallen Woman and Teen Sex films, nudged the portrayal of female sexuality into more realistic territory and reflected in melodramatic terms, a growing awareness or even acceptance of sexual behavior outside of normal marriage routines. The final message, though, continued to caution women to remain within the bounds of traditional bourgeois femininity, family and behavior. As that other icon of femininity of the 1960's, Gidget learned:

Nice girls go on a date, go to bed, and go home.

Good girls go out on a date, go home, and go to bed.

(Complete text with bibliography appeared in 2005 at <http://bastardette.blogspot.com>, edited by Erik L. Smith).

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Post Reunion Anger and Harmony

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rejection, once again perpetuating the anger, when all that is needed is some time to breathe and reflect.

Anger like all emotion arises with a life of its own and a mind of its own. It doesn't ask if it can make itself felt, and we don't choose to be angry in the moment. Anger asserts itself when stimulated by others and often we respond in kind. Anger is a **reaction** not an action. Volatile and spontaneous emotions add to the difficulty of reunion dynamics. The adoptee feels pressure from his adoptive family. The need to show loyalty is mixed with the confused grief now coming to the surface. Adoptees often feel the need to please everyone and put their needs last. The birth mother has a sense of urgency regarding her own feelings. She has been waiting for years, wondering if her child was loved and cared for. She carries a heavy burden and longs to set it down. The adoptee is only discovering what has been hidden beneath the surface for years. The birth mother remembers a cognitive togetherness and then a separation. The adoptee remembers only the emotion of separation. How then, can we expect harmony once again from this dynamic combination of emotions? As it was once, so it can be - once again. They (adoptee and birth parent) must give themselves permission to feel and experience each others' emotions. They must not react when powerful emotions are expressed. Wait, think, and then act. Try and see things through the others eyes. You will be judged not by what you feel, but by how you act on those emotions. Do not take a categorical view of the relationship. Wanting all or nothing will often get one nothing. Patience, hard work, and time can move mountains. Forgiveness when the time is right goes a long way.

I want to offer this excerpt from my book, *Not Remembered Never Forgotten* because it addresses the resolution of my feelings regarding my two mothers.

My Two Mothers

From: Not Remembered Never Forgotten

Gateway Press (2005) ISBN 0-9770202-0-7

My adoption was arranged before I was born and should have gone smoothly after my birth, but my natural mother refused to sign the release for adoption. For five months, she delayed the adoption as she sought a way to keep me. It must be difficult for a seventeen-year-old child to resist the pressure from the adoption agency, her parents, and adoptive family, all demanding that she go through with the adoption as arranged. While my mother resisted the process, I lived in a foster home, visited often by my natural mother. During those five months the bonding of mother and child intensified. My mother named me after her departed brother, most likely, to compel her parents to keep me themselves. I believe my maternal grandmother, Irene,

also saw me as a replacement for her son, Marvin, who died at the age of seven. It must have been terribly painful for her as well as for my mother.

I am a blessing and a scandal all at the same time. The adoption agency told me that there was some serious discussion between my grandparents as they considered adopting me themselves. It was not to be and eventually my mother gave in and I became the child of Dr. Morris and Florence Hafetz. After my adoption was final, my natural mother wrote frequently to the agency asking for information about how I was doing in my new home. The letters continued for two years and then simply stopped. Clearly my natural mother wasn't letting me go so easily. In speaking to her cousin, Elaine Bennett, I discovered that she always intended to come back for me.

My adopted mother Florence was all too aware of this and it filled her with a fear that she carried for the rest of her life. When I was a child, she never spoke of my adoption and even as an adult when I would ask; she would refuse to discuss it. I could see the pain on her face and, out of loyalty and love for her; I could never press the issue. The issue, however, never stopped pressing me. Florence always felt she should share what she knew with me, but her fear kept her from doing it.

My natural mother, although unseen, was a real part of the relationship between adopted child and adopted mother. As a child I could never understand the emotions Florence was feeling, but today, as an adult I understand them all too well. She was fearful that no matter how much she loved me, I would always have a longing for my natural mother, who fought the adoption and wrote letters to my adopted family for two years. The possibility that our mother-child relationship could be shared was too terrible for Florence to imagine. It was one thing for her to resist the ghost of my natural mother, but when I asked it became even more threatening. The prevailing wisdom of the era was that the adopted child will have no memory of his natural mother and consequently no desire to know anything about her. Just as I suppressed my grief, my mother suppressed her fear. There it was between us, unmentioned, and yet profoundly felt by us both. Somewhere else a young woman was suppressing her grief too. Like most fears they are larger in thought, than in actuality. There has never been any question in my mind as to who my mother was. She was the woman who nurtured me, raised me, supported me, and guided me for fifty years. I cannot however forget the mother who I was part of, and who gave birth to me. The mother, who fought for me and after much pressure, lost me in the adoption process. She believed that no matter how much she loved me it was best for me to be adopted. One does not replace or displace the other; they both are a part of me and me of them.

Robert Hafetz can be reached at: RobertHafetz@comcast.net.

A review of this book can be found on the following page.



BOOK REVIEWS

In the following memoir, Jane Jeong Trenka, adopted from Korea, gives the reader a rare opportunity to understand the complexities of transnational adoption – from the child’s viewpoint. She writes, “I wanted parents who wanted me for me; not to look and act like the white child who’d never existed.”

The Language of Blood

By Jane Jeong Trenka

Paperback edition: Graywolf Press, 2005

Reviewed by Jim Gabbard

The author’s name sounds like a mixture of cultures – and indeed it is. Her ‘Christian name’ comes from her adoptive parents who lived in a town in western Minnesota. ‘Jeong,’ her middle name, is taken from her birth family. She and her older sister were surrendered for adoption by their married Korean mother, who feared that her husband would try again to kill the daughters that he believed were fathered by another man. Her last name is her married name.

The names imply multiple personal identities. And Trenka makes it clear how daunting it has been to merge them into one functional, meaningful, and happy life. Nevertheless, she faces this task with admirable courage and objectivity. Clearly, writing this book has been part of her therapy.

“Language” is more ambitious than most of the search and reunion books in that the author tries to glean profound meaning from the chaos in her life. Trenka tries to understand and explain what happens when a baby born in one culture is raised in another, totally different culture. It is more meaningful, therefore, for people involved in cross-cultural adoptions. The book does describe the usual frustrations experienced by searching adoptees: the classic “my hands are tied” when she asks to look at her adoption records. Or, the wan “we have no way of knowing,” when she asks for the kind of literature that was given to prospective and new adoptive parents – about the time of her adoption.

In rural, non-cosmopolitan Minnesota, she is clearly treated as a freak, despite (or perhaps because of) her superior grade point average in high school. One gets the feeling that the town missed a golden opportunity to teach tolerance and open-mindedness toward “outsiders.” The situation is somewhat relieved when she attends the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. She encounters and makes friends with several other Koreans. In early adulthood she is the object of a stalker. Even though he is eventually jailed, the scars from the experience remain with her. Trenka describes two of her visits to her extended birth family. She is quite emphatic about how she feels better, i.e. more real, while in Korea. Small wonder. The author doesn’t come out and say so, but the real basis of her feelings isn’t the way that she perceives her surroundings,

but the way people around her perceive and interact with her. No one can write a universal book on what it’s like to be an adoptee. For those who have read their fill of stories of ‘white America’ adoptions, this book competently provides a different angle.

The Language of Blood is available online at Barnes and Noble for \$23.95 and by order at most book stores. A Korean edition came out in 2005. Contact the author at <http://www.languageofblood.com>.

Jim Gabbard, PACER treasurer and board member, may be reached at jimandyana@msn.com.

Robert Hafetz presents a very different story. As he honors the memories of his two mothers, he finds strength in taking ownership of his personal truth.

Not Remembered, Never Forgotten, An Adoptee’s Search for His Birth Family

By Robert Allan Hafetz

Gateway Press, Inc., Baltimore, MD. 2005

Reviewed by Judy Norris

Robert Hafetz’s search for his birth mother ends at a grave in Texas. Considering the time he invested in the search, as well as the heavy emotional toll, he asks a logical question. Was it worth it? His answer is revealed in a letter he writes to his mother.

“Now that I have found you, mother, I am at peace. I can call you by name....see a picture of your face, I have the memories of those who loved and knew you.”

Shortly after his 52nd birthday, Bob Hafetz began a year long search for his birth family. His fluid style of writing encourages the reader to join him on this journey. Initially, he is frustrated and encounters the proverbial brick walls and dead ends. But, Hafetz does get unexpected help from a number of people he meets along the way. They play a pivotal role and become his ‘family of circumstance.’ One such individual is “Big Al” Stepner who went to high school with Hafetz’s natural mother. This warm-hearted man readily volunteers a key piece of information: the name and phone number of a cousin in the birth family. Sadly, he learns of his mother’s death, but at the same time meets his two half-brothers, the sons from her marriage. As an added bonus, Hafetz compiles a complete history of his maternal ancestors, a listing of names and dates that served as important markers of their lives. He concludes with simple eloquence, “The knowledge of what they (i.e. the names) represent has the power to validate my path in life. I am lost, no more.”

Not Remembered, Never Forgotten is available for \$20, plus \$3 shipping/handling. Send a check to: Robert Allan Hafetz, 1014 Surrey Lane, Warrington, PA 18976. Or purchase online at www.neaspa.com/id14.htm.

Judy Norris, PACER board member and newsletter editor, can be reached at charlottesfirst@aol.com.

SUPPORT GROUPS

*Newcomers, please contact the facilitator for meeting location.
Groups start promptly at the time indicated.*

CAMERON PARK (SACRAMENTO AREA)

Second Tuesdays (6:30 p.m.)
Rachel, 530/558-5336
Beth, 530/677-5650
CameronParkTriad@pacer-adoption.org

CONTRA COSTA TRIAD

Fourth Mondays (7:30 p.m.)
Walnut Creek
Judy, 925/952-4853
CCTriad@pacer-adoption.org

EAST BAY ADOPTEES

Fourth Mondays (7:45 p.m.)
Oakland
Malcolm, 510/336-9284
Or Mark, 510/207-0142
EBayAdoptee@pacer-adoption.org

EAST BAY BIRTHMOTHERS

Third Mondays (7:30 p.m.)
Berkeley
Arlyss, 925/253-0435
EBayBirthmom@pacer-adoption.org

MARIN TRIAD

Last Thursdays (7 p.m.)
San Anselmo
Ellen, 415/453-0902
MarinTriad@pacer-adoption.org

SACRAMENTO TRIAD

Last Tuesdays (6:30 p.m.)
Sacramento
Linda, 916/359-6777
or Diane, 916/442-1812
SacTriad@pacer-adoption.org

SAN FRANCISCO ADOPTEES

Second Wednesdays (7 p.m.)
Doug, 415/285-8639
or Shelly, 415/225-7669
SFTriad@pacer-adoption.org

SAN MATEO TRIAD

Third Thursdays (7 p.m.)
Burlingame
Sally, 650/344-7789
Alison, 650/738-9178
SanMateoTriad@pacer-adoption.org

SONOMA COUNTY ADOPTEES

Third Mondays (7 p.m.)
Santa Rosa
Vicki, 707/526-1275,
SonomaAdoptee@pacer-adoption.org

SONOMA COUNTY TRIAD

First Wednesdays (7 p.m.)
Sebastopol
Jerilynn, 707/823-7840,
SonomaTriad@pacer-adoption.org

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.

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Pictures from Unity Day 2005



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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.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

“The Changing Picture of Adoption, Voices of Adoptees, Birth Parents & Adoptive Parents”

PACER/AAC to host Regional Conference.
Headlands Institute, Golden Gate National Recreation
Area. Saturday, May 20, 2006.
Visit: www.pacer-adoption.org for updates.



Blogs for Birth Moms

www.adoptalk.blogspot.com.
Author Mirah Rubin of The Birth Mother Project

CA Adoption News

Open Records info with links to PACER/Sacramento
Support Groups, Join the Discussion List, Read about
CA adoption events: www.adopteerights.org.



Bay Area Attachment Center Opens

Susan Love and Virginia Keeler-Wolfe announce the
opening of the Center at 1425 Leimert Blvd., Suite
302, Oakland. Monthly parent support groups feature
speakers, refreshments, child-care with reservations.
Call Susan Love, PsyD. (510) 287-8981
Email: bayattach@aol.com.

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

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