

# Mothers in Action

The newsletter of  
 Origins-USA

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 3 FALL/WINTER 2009

## NATIONAL ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH: SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE?

BY DENISE ROESSELE

Phew! November is over for another year...

For most birthmothers, the angst that November brings is second only to May (Mother's Day) and the month of her lost child's birth and surrender.

In 1976, then Governor of Massachusetts, Michael Dukakis, announced an Adoption Week for his state. Later that same year President Gerald Ford proclaimed that Adoption Week would be celebrated nationally. As more and more states started to participate in Adoption Week it was decided that more time was needed for events and in 1990 National Adoption Week became National Adoption Month.

The original intent was to increase awareness of the hundreds of thousands of children in foster homes awaiting adoption. States, communities, and agencies held events during the month to bring the need for families into public view. Today National Adoption Awareness Month usually includes National Adoption Day with courthouses throughout the nation participating and hundreds of adoptions being finalized simultaneously. What was once supposed to help children in need of families has turned into an adoptive parents love fest.

Not everyone with a connection to adoption has a reason to celebrate: mothers and fathers, siblings and extended families who have lost a family member, as

*It's a sad fact that much of the public and many decision-makers still believe that women give up their babies freely and get on with their lives. Every year state legislators pass laws eroding the rights of mothers to nurture their babies. If we don't tell our stories, they assume we have no stories to tell.*

well as adoptees who seek their origins, to know where and from whom they come from being denied access to their records.

Adoption in its present form has disaffected many more lives than it has lifted. And until family preservation becomes a priority and adoption (better yet, guardianship) starts serving the children instead of the wanting parents, nothing is going to change.

The nation will keep celebrating adoption, not just in November, but always.

### BLOGGERS SPEAK OUT

For all the pictures that appeared as a result of web site Grown in My Heart's call for "Favorite Adoption Photos" — and on other celebratory sites — I was pleased by the number of photos posted representing birthmother loss and reunion.

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## NATIONAL ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Many adoption bloggers devoted entire posts to the topic. Like these tidbits from Claudia Corrigan D'Arcy in "November: A Birthmothers Season of Loss" ([www.musingsofthelame.com](http://www.musingsofthelame.com)).

*Here it comes. I don't know why I am surprised. It's November. It's National Adoption Awareness Month. Max's Birthday is on Saturday.*

*Everything makes me cranky. I just want to be left alone. I want to haul off and scream at people. I want to shout out about how adoption is not great or wonderful or something to celebrate.*

*I HATE THIS. HATE IT HATE IT HATE IT.*

*I swear I am NOT trying to think about it or work myself into a mess or make something out of nothing. It just is THERE. Like a huge black cloud hanging over my soul... like a low grade fever... like festering boil... like a rotting limb on a tree... like a volcano building up pressure. I feel it growing.*

*Go celebrate adoption somewhere else, please. For me, even 22 years after giving birth and relinquishing my son, I don't want this to be my life. I want a do over. I call foul. I call bullshit. I don't want to play this game anymore. I don't like it. I don't want and it really is unfair that I have to do this crap for the rest of my freaking life.*

*God, I hate adoption. It's November. Nothing is right about November any more.*

### THE IMPORTANCE OF STORIES

Ponder these excerpts from some of the Mother's Stories posted on the Origins-USA web site:

*I was told that giving my child away was a wonderful gift to give my child to two parents that could provide her things I could not. Since when is it my responsibility to provide someone with a child? Since when is a child a "gift?" I feel that the trauma of losing my child to adoption has left a great void in my life I am constantly battling with depression and have difficulty trusting friends, my partner, my parents, my doctor etc.*

— Hanne, 1983, lost her child at age 16

*Losing my daughter has affected every area of my life. I am nothing like I was before she was taken from me. After losing her, I began life-long depression and anxiety. I was*

*petrified that my other two children would also be taken. My life became focused on constantly proving I was a good mother.*

Kathy, 1972, at age 20

*My daughter was born 12/22/1979. I left the hospital Christmas Day, handing my daughter to the SW in the hallway. It was the only time I was permitted to hold her. I was told to "forget, and move on with your life," "I had no rights," and I wasn't going to "ruin the family name." You never forget. Every Christmas brought with it the pain of not knowing: Is she happy? Is she healthy? Does she look like me? Is she alive or dead? Having found my daughter has opened floodgates of questions, feelings, thoughts, what ifs etc. It may have turned out to be the best for her, but what about me?*

Anne, 1979, 16

*Fourteen years ago, I gave my daughter up for adoption through Children's Home Society to a family unable to have children. This was supposed to be an "open" or "independent adoption" as I had met the family through a mutual friend and all parties verbally agreed on this. Had they not agreed to this, I would not have allowed the adoption to take place. When my daughter was around 4-5 months old, I got a visit from my caseworker who told me the family changed their minds and they no longer wanted contact. This came as a complete shock to me as it was totally out of the blue, I never got a reason.*

Amy, 1997, 15

*I feel so sad. I was told such lies... I believed them when they told me I was doing the best thing for my baby. I believed them when they said I would forget and just get on with my life. They took advantage of my youth and naiveté. I didn't know enough to defend or speak up for myself, to ask for information, to demand respect as a human being. How could they do that?*

*And I never understood why I was so depressed for years and years. Why I wanted to kill myself when I was 19. Then again when I was 30. Then again when I was 50. Why even now I feel comfortable and safe only when I am alone. Finally I understand.*

Jesse, 1958, 17

*I lost my son to closed adoption because of shame of being pregnant & unmarried. I only told my parents, who talked it over and TOLD me what I would do. I had NO choice, no options. I was such a bad girl that I had no*

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## NATIONAL ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH

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*rights or choices but to obey.*

*Barbara, 1959, 22*

*I was divorced, a single mom with a 3 year old, working and going to college part time when I found out I was pregnant. I knew I couldn't manage raising another child alone and my family refused to help or acknowledge my child's birth. I was told to adopt and forget about it. I went through my pregnancy and delivery totally alone and with no support. I was living 600 hundred miles from home and was told to stay there until 'my situation' was over. I was not allowed to come home for my own sisters wedding! In those days there was no open adoption and I was not even supposed to know the sex of my child but I demanded to see her. A nurse brought her in but I was not allowed to hold her for fear I would change my mind. Well I didn't "get over it." To ask a mother to deny her child is inhumane. It is part of who you are.*

*Marcie, 1978, 23*

*I had broken up with my boyfriend and my parents decided I would go to the Florence Crittenden Prison (I refuse to call it a home). I was not told that I was expecting twins until they were born. I was not given any other option, no counseling and no legal advice. Losing my sons has affected all aspects of my life, my health, my parenting of other children, my relationships, everything.*

*Susan, 1968, 18*

*When I was 6-7 months along they put me on a train and I was sent to a Florence Crittenden Home to await the birth of my daughter. After she was born I changed my mind. I just couldn't do it. I knew it would be difficult but I was willing to accept the challenge. My caseworker from Easter House, threatened to sue my parents for the thousands of dollars Easter House had spent on my care. I had no choice but to go home without my baby.*

*Sandra, 1981, 14*

*The day I left the hospital I lost my heart. For the next 4 years I did get letters and pictures of my son and saw he was happy and healthy. Just what I wanted for him. But the pain in my heart NEVER went away. I lost all self respect, hated myself, hated life, I wanted to die. No one was there to help me though this and it wasn't until many years later that I had to try to forgive myself.*

*Christine, 1991, 26*

## LET'S RESOLVE

As we move into 2010, let's resolve to stand together as mothers, to stop unnecessary adoptions, and demand reform and the unconditional unsealing of records.

Let's tell our stories wherever we can. Be on the look out for legislation that either erodes our rights as mothers or open records and fight or support it. Write our legislators.

Origins-USA goals are to:

- Extend the time to decide. In some U.S. states, mothers sign away all parental rights before the child is even born, while in other states mothers sign irrevocable surrenders of parental rights upon leaving the delivery room.
- Give mothers and mothers-to-be accurate information and unbiased counseling so that they can make informed decisions about their future and that of their child. In most states, if a mother receives any counseling, the adoption industry usually provides it and the industry is paid only if the mothers surrenders her child.
- Assure that mothers have independent legal counsel. In many states, the same attorney represents the prospective adopters and the mother. In other cases, the mother's attorney, if she has one, is paid for by the prospective adopters.
- Require open agreements to be enforceable. The adoption industry and prospective adopters often promise mothers-to-be that they will have contact with their child. After the adoption, the mother learns that these promises are not enforceable.
- Allow mothers to receive a copy of her child's birth certificate and stop creating false documents. All states create false birth certificates showing the adopting woman as giving birth to the child. No state allows mothers to receive a copy of the false birth certificate, even after the child becomes an adult.
- Stop adoption broker businesses from trying to recoup money spent on mothers-to-be if they decide to keep their child.

*Denise Roessle lost her son to adoption in 1970. She is a reunited mother and lives in Arizona.*

# HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL: EQUAL ACCESS TO OBC

BY MIRAH RIBEN

*“Where after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home.”*

— *Eleanor Roosevelt*

At the last AAC national conference, I suggested a switch to the more inclusive language – persons separated by adoption – when speaking of equal access, as opposed to simply addressing the rights of adult adoptees. I was attacked as a heretic and called a communist!

I tried in vain to explain the example of Ontario’s recent successful passage of bilateral access – giving adoptees and their natural parents access to both original and amended birth certificates. I was vilified for suggesting a bill that contained a veto, despite the fact that all Canadian access laws contain a veto and this one would have regardless of whether it applied to one party to or both. To clarify, at the time I had not seen the law, only heard about it verbally and I was unaware that it actually unsealed records and gave original parents access to the falsified amended certificate.

The Canadian legislation, which was based on New Zealand’s legislation, reluctantly accepted a veto knowing that in new Zealand the use of such veto power has decreased by ten percent each year it was in existence, making it virtually non-existent with then years “and by now almost everyone has access to identifying information about their natural. Parents or their children lost to adoption” (Grand, Lynn and Rowney, “Adoption Disclosure the Canadian Way” AAC Decree, Winter 2009, Vol 26, No. 3).

I recently had the pleasure to spend time with our Canadian colleagues in particular Karen Lynn, president of Canadian Council of Natural Mothers. We discussed at length why this was possible there and why American legislatures are more insistent upon “protecting” mothers alleged promises of anonymity, and thus view access as an issue of rights of two parties in opposition.

Karen believes Canadians and Canadian law makers view human rights differently from civil rights – a very American concept. The term “civil rights” limits

our understanding, since it refers specifically to rights guaranteed by the Constitution or protected through legislation such as the right to vote. They – and most of the rest of the free world – see human rights as applying equally to all humans and thus mothers too. Imagine that! What a concept.

I, of course, being American and far more cynical, believe it is just one more aspect of the over-reaching greed of unregulated capitalism running as it does, out of control, and the power of lobbyists such as the NCFA who created and perpetuate the anonymity promise myth to keep records sealed, providing a lovely cover of secrecy behind which baby brokers can operate more lucratively. And, adoption is, after all, a quintessential American institution that embodies... confidence in “social engineering” (Barbara Melosh, *Strangers and Kin: the American Way of Adoption*).

Capitalism and reversing sealed records aside, the argument seems to rest clearly on a classic philosophical one that is being raised by Michael Sandel, a Rhode Scholar who did his graduate work at Oxford and teaches a class on Justice at Harvard and authored a book entitled *Justice: What’s The Right Thing To Do?* which is also a PBS series with some videos available online.

Putting morality, ethics and justice in very human and everyday terms: Sandel asks us to ponder right and wrong in scenarios such as: Would you steal a drug that your child needs to survive? If you had to choose between (1) killing one person to save the lives of five others and (2) doing nothing even though you knew that five people would die right before your eyes if you did nothing — what would you do? What would be the right thing to do, Sandel asks us to ponder.

What Sandel is asking us to do is to weigh two philosophical theories: Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarianism versus Immanuel Kant.

Utilitarianism is simple: What is best for the most is what counts. Utilitarian theory is the rationale for killing or torturing one human being to save the lives of more than one or many.

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## ARE LAWS TILTED TOWARD ADOPTING PARENTS? WELL, YES, EVEN IN OREGON

BY JANE EDWARDS AND LORRAINE DUSKY  
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Are laws pertaining to surrender titled towards the person surrendering a child or to the receiver of the child? Even in an open-records state such as Oregon?

An interview with an adoption attorney, Scott Adams, in the June 2009 Oregon State Bar *Bulletin*, written by another attorney and adoptive parent caught my attention. Noteworthy was that Adams represented the natural mother of the author's adopted son and delivered the baby to the author the day after he was born. Adams, boasted that he takes only cases that "help build families" apparently ignoring the destruction of his client's family.

I decided to take a closer look at Oregon adoption law. I asked Lorraine Dusky, the author of *Still Unequal: The Shameful Truth about Women and Justice in America* as well as *Birthmark*, the first memoir to tell a birthmother's story, to collaborate on a response to the Bar Bulletin with an analysis of Oregon law regarding adoption.

What did we find? That Oregon law quite conspicuously favors the interests of the adopting parties over those of the individual relinquishing a child and that mothers have virtually no rights. "Counseling" comes from the adoption agency and an attorney paid by the adoptive parents. Sign the surrender paper while on the delivery table, groggy from drugs, and that's it.

The editor of the *Bulletin* did not accept our piece even though it was "interesting and compellingly written" but "too far afield of the *Bulletin's* mission and scope." As the laws that I uncovered are such a good example of how laws can be tilted towards one party to the detriment of the other, Lorraine and I published the article on the First Mother Forum blog ([www.firstmotherforum.com](http://www.firstmotherforum.com)). Check it out!

*Jane Edwards of Portland, Oregon lost her daughter to adoption in 1966. Lorraine Dusky of Sag Harbor, New York lost her daughter to adoption in 1966.*

## OUSA NEEDS YOU

### TREASURER

Treasurer Demi Morgan resigned because of recent surgery. Origins needs a new Treasurer immediately. The Treasurer's duties take about 10 hours a month. Additionally, the Treasurer serves on the Board. If you have experience in maintaining financial records, Origins needs you!!!

Call Bernadette Wright at 571-278-2593 or email her at [bwright@origins-usa.org](mailto:bwright@origins-usa.org) and learn more.

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Be a Website Editor or a Membership Records Manager, only five hours a month.

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## HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL

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In business, viewing a corporation as a “being” with rights that this translates into cost-benefit analysis such as was used by the Ford company in deciding how to handle the Pinto exploding defect. Ford weighed the cost of law suits when people were killed or injured against the cost of fixing it. They decided that fixing it, knowing that people would be harmed and killed, was in their best interest.

On the other hand, Kant, believed that it is morally wrong to use a human being as a means to an end. Objectification - or putting a dollar value on human life - violates basic human dignity. Kant argues that maximizing happiness is not the only thing that matters; respect for human rights is primary.

Sandel works to stimulate discussion on these issues as they relate to real-life situations. He challenges students and those attending his lectures to “listen more closely and argue more explicitly about moral questions of justice.”

It seems a no-brainer to me to relate these philosophical theories to adoption, challenging us to think about the similarities and differences between adoption and kidnapping; or adoption and slavery or indenture. When is it right to separate someone from their family and take away their name? Dr. Rollo May, in *Man's Search for Himself* reminds us that in the Old Testament, the phrase “I will blot out their names” (to erase their identity...as though they had never existed) is a more powerful threat even than physical death. And yet that is exactly what adoption does; blots us out as if we never existed.

Tobias Hübinette notes that “[b]oth the slaves and the adoptees are separated from their parents, siblings, relatives and significant others at an early age, stripped of their original cultures and languages, reborn at harbours and airports, Christianized, re-baptized; both assume the name of their master/parent and, in the end, only retain a racialised, non-white body that has been branded or given a case number. ... These children were objects of rescue fantasies and relief projects for the European homeland populations and especially feminist and Christian philanthropist and humanist groups.” (“Between European Colonial

Trafficking, American Empire: Building and Nordic Social Engineering: Rethinking International Adoption From a Postcolonial and Feminist Perspective.”)

These philosophical theories also directly apply to equal access legislation. “The [Canadian] judge did not differentiate between them [adoptee and original parent] when it came to his ruling about a disclosure veto....at no time did anyone in the courtroom suggest that this case was about birth parents’ ‘right’ to privacy; it was about privacy, plain and simple.” As a result: “The law has accomplished 200% increase in the number of those gaining access to information.”

In this country, we rail about losing the ten percent of those who MIGHT be barred by their parent filing a veto, but think nothing of excluding 50% of those separated by adoption, which would impact far more on the number of possible reunions.

It is interesting to note an example given by Sandel when I attended a recent lecture. He first asked it we should (or would) torture one suspected terrorist in order to possibly save the lives of many. Classic utilitarianism says yes, unequivocally. The good of the many outweighs the welfare or any “rights” of the one.

Sandel then asked if it would also be right to torture the child of the terrorist in order to get the life saving information from the suspected terrorist. Far fewer raised their hands in agreement. Why? Because explained Sandel, we are more likely to sacrifice the “one” when we feel that one is somehow “bad” or “deserves” it. Not all lives are valued equally. Should they be? Kant says yes.

The time has come for mothers who have lost children to adoption to demand that we not continue to be used by adoptees who want us to dispel the myth that we were promised anonymity but then go away and shut up and ask for nothing for ourselves. After all, they argue, they and only they are the ones who lost their identity, not us. And, they argue, we did – no matter how coerced – sign away our rights.

I have met with hostility and a strong feeling of being threatened for suggesting that mothers deserve to equal access. Perhaps it is because I have not been clear

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enough that I am speaking of access to the original birth certificates (OBC) of children we bore – documents that we are party to – and which predate any subsequent loss of custody. Apparently having bought into the competitive nature of this rights issue perpetuated by the NCFA, pitting us against one another in an effort to divide and conquer because there is strength in numbers.

I do not disagree that we did – albeit under duress – sign away our rights.

That is why, unlike in Canada, it will take far longer to totally reverse the concept of secrecy in adoption and it probably will not happen retroactively for mothers who had it forced on us in the past, but will, hopefully, occur as we move forward hopefully to a form of enforceable open adoption or better still simple adoption in which no name change at all occurs unless requested by the adoptee when he or she is old to enough to make such a request.

However, I think in terms of equal human rights - not “open records.” Thinking in terms of opening sealed records allows adopted people to feel they also deserve access to our medical records, over-riding our HIPAA protected right to privacy in that regard. So let me perfectly clear: I am not speaking about reversing sealed records and I think that is the wrong approach for adoptees and have been saying so for decades.

Adoptees seek and deserve access to their original birth certificate (OBC) and the mothers and fathers who are named on those certificates deserve an equal right to that document because it belongs to them equally. This takes the whole argument to a level that any American can clearly understand. It is totally uncomplicated and instead of pitting one party’s alleged right of anonymity or confidentiality or privacy against another’s right “to know,” instead it makes allies of the two wronged parties denied access to a document that they are both equally named on.

The Canadian legislation gives parents and adult children access to both the OBC and the falsified certificate. This would never pass here in the states. American adoptees seeking access, however, would do themselves far more a service to recognize moth-

ers and the adoptees we have been separated from as being on the same side of the issue, at least as concerns of OBC. It would in no way hurt them or their cause, and would in fact strengthen the argument by focusing on how all parties to adoption separation are denied such a simple basic human right as a mother’s right to the birth certificate of a child she has born. For many of us that piece of paper might be the only actual proof of our grievous loss.

There is nothing more human and more basic than the mother child relationship, and in fact the right to continue that relationship is protected by the U.S. Constitution (see <http://crckids.org/law-constitutional-rights.php>). Denying us the proof of that relationship violates our constitutional, civil and human rights. We can either all stand together and seek equality for all parties separated by adoption in regard to access to the OBC, or continue to allow ourselves to be divided as enemies. Which will benefit more of us and at the same time be more moral and humane?

*Mirah Riben of Monmouth, New Jersey lost her daughter to adoption in 1967. She is the author of The Dark Side of Adoption and The Stork Market. Visit her web site at: <http://www.advocatepublications.com>*

### THE VOICE OF MOTHERS

Origins-USA, a national tax-exempt non-profit organization is THE Voice of Mothers.

Origins-USA is working to protect the natural right of mothers to nurture their children.

Origins-USA envisions a society where mothers receive the support they need to nurture their children.

If mothers and children cannot remain together, children should be provided stable living arrangements that honor and maintain their connection to their natural families.

Please join us!

For membership information, go to page 12.

# “LESSONS OF THE MAGDALENE SISTERS”

BY DEBRA BAKER

Though the film “The Magdalene Sisters” was released several years ago, the message remains current. The film, set in Ireland in the 1960s, seems 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 girl became pregnant, she was usually sent off to live elsewhere so no one would know. She may have been sent to live with a relative, a family friend or to a maternity home. Wage homes were also available, where 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 new-born son, imploring her mother to look at him, while the mother sits rigid, silent, ignoring her daughter’s pleas. As the girl signs the papers the priest hands to her, the full knowledge of what just transpired grips her as her baby is taken away.

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 mother, and refused to see her pain. This not seeing, not comprehending, continues today, in the way mothers who surrendered their babies are depicted in the media, 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, the adoptive parents. We are the peace disturbers, now wanting to find the children we “willingly” gave up.

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

Though most maternity homes here were not as harsh as the Magdalene laundries, they were adept at propagating a group mentality, a conformity that would culminate in the girl buying into the adoption plan. The girls were to use only their first names, mail was censored and they had to sign in and sign out if they left the facility. 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 that to consider keeping their baby was selfish. Many homes did not allow a mother to see or hold her baby, and there were cases when the girl was told her baby was born dead, when in fact, the baby was 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, were resourceless, defeated and full of grief.

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

*Debra Baker is an award-winning filmmaker (“Broken Ties” & “Lost and Found”) and a frequent presenter at adoption conferences. She found her son in 1998, and is a grandmother. This article appeared in the Marin Independent Journal’s “Marin Voice” in 2003.*

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# RADICAL LEADERSHIP FOR RADICAL CHANGE

BY SANDY MUSSER

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Excerpts from her remarks presented at SAGAS (Secret Adoption Grief Art Show), Spokane, WA November 3, 2000

*Editor's Note: Sandy Musser has been involved with adoption reform since 1976. In 1993, after 17 years of reform work, she paid the ultimate price. Sandy was indicted by the government and sent to federal prison for her work of reuniting families.*

Since the birth of our nation there have been individuals in the forefront of every movement who were known as "radical." Were it not for radical leadership, slavery would still exist and women would not be allowed to vote.

It was sometime during the early 80's that I first recall someone referring to me as a 'radical.' I remember feeling uncomfortable with that label because it seemed to have such a negative connotation. But it was during the late 70's that I had become committed to the cause of adoption reform. So the radical label was apparently correct. It was November 5, 1993 when I walked through the gates of a federal prison for daring to challenge our adoption laws. Why was I sent to Prison? Because I turned down a plea bargain and refused to plead guilty to the government's ridiculous charge of "conspiracy to defraud the government of confidential information."

Prior to being processed into the general population, I was placed in solitary confinement. I'm extremely claustrophobic and I was denied medication during those three days. Needless to say, I was a basket case by the time I got out of solitary. Did I question myself as to whether it was really worth what I was going through? Yes, I did. But do I have any regrets about my decision to stand my ground? No, I don't! What I'm going to share with you today may seem radical, but if it resounds within your heart and spirit, then I pray that you will commit yourself to radical leadership.

Adoption has always been a charade using a game we all played when we were kids - the game of "Let's Pretend." To mothers we say - 'let's pretend' you never had a baby; then you can go on with your life, start a career, and put all this behind you like a bad dream; to

adopters we say - 'let's pretend' that this child was "given away" because he wasn't wanted and even though this child comes pre-packaged with his own unique genetic makeup, let's just pretend that adoption will wipe it out; and then when the adoptee gets older and starts asking "Who Am I," we tell him to pretend that his ancestral roots which include his entire cultural, medical and social history really don't matter.'

This game of 'let's pretend' allows adoption service providers to legal documents to be falsified and true and accurate information hidden under the cloak

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## ORIGINS WELCOMES YOUR SUBMISSIONS

Origins-USA invites members to contribute articles to the newsletter. Guidelines are below. Email your contribution as a Word attachment to Denise Roessle, editor@origins-usa.org. We reserve the right to edit for length, clarity, and grammar.

- *Articles and reviews should be no more than 500 words in length;*
- *The subjects of photographs must be identified and consent to publication of their photos;*
- *All material must be original unless consent of the author or producer has been obtained;*

Content must accomplish one or more of the following:

- *Promote Origins' views;*
- *Present an accurate account of mothers' experiences;*
- *Present a positive picture of mothers;*
- *Be uplifting to mothers;*
- *Provide factual information about the adoption industry;*
- *Provide insights into the experience of adopted persons without disrespecting mothers;*
- *Provide insights into the experience of fathers;*
- *Promote family preservation;*
- *Promote advocacy or activism;*
- *Identify areas for activism;*
- *Show mothers taking control and action.*

## BOOK REVIEWS

### FOLLOWING THE TAMBOURINE MAN: A BIRTHMOTHER'S MEMOIR, JANE MASON (2007)

*Reviewed by Jesse Jordan*

Set during the sexual revolution of the sixties, this well-written work recalls the decade's prodigious effect on a generation of Americans that came of age during that transformative time of changing mores. The author follows the crooked path she took from a protected and privileged childhood and early adolescence to her unplanned pregnancy and banishment and to her daughter's birth and adoption. She then delves into the complex journey embarked on over the next thirty-five years, haunted by her first child's memory and attempting to compensate for her loss. Rarely do we see such excellent writing.

### ADOPTION REUNION: ECSTASY OR AGONY? EVELYN ROBINSON (2009)

*Reviewed by Jesse Jordan*

This is Evelyn's third book and her best yet. Each chapter is, for the most part, an updated and condensed version of her first two books. She explains concisely what it is about adoption separation and reunion which causes such intense and varied emotions. At the end of each chapter Evelyn has included a selection of her responses to some of the many questions she has been asked over the years. The questions are familiar to us all and her responses demonstrate her insight and experience with the minefield of adoption. Highly recommended!

*Both books are available through Amazon.com. Please enter Amazon from the Books & Movies List on the Origins-USA.org website.*

*Jesse Jordan of Portland, Oregon lost her daughter to adoption in 1958.*

### EAT, PRAY, LOVE. ELIZABETH GILBERT

*Reviewed by Joan Sanaker*

I just finished reading *eat, pray, love*. It is a most remarkable book about a woman searching for peace and personal resolution after a bitter divorce. Sounds like another self-help book, right? That's what I thought, too. I didn't really need another "chicken soup for the" whatever in me. It sat on my bedside

table for two months while I read other books and distracted myself from even opening the cover. Was I ever surprised! Liz is an exceptional writer and has a very touching way of both revealing the deepest of fears and longings we all carry inside us and making fun of herself and others who periodically indulge in the self-pity and loathing of our human frailty, and she is a darn good storyteller! I won't say much more other than it was tough to get through the first 101 pages but I pushed on and the reward was a book that, I think has transformed me.

I am finally ready to forgive myself for having placed my child, Michael for adoption when I was 20 years old. Most of you know that he took his own life earlier this year. I blamed myself, in part, for that, as well. Missing his life and then finding him just to lose him again has been the rock around my heart for 41 years. I've been wandering in a desert of my own making since the day I learned he was gone.

I'm ready to embark on the perilous journey to find and make peace with my self. And, then, just maybe I can open my heart to love again. That is the gift I received from this book.

*Joan Sanaker of Mesa, Arizona, surrendered her son in Hawaii in September 1967. She reunited with him on Mother's Day Weekend, 1988, and lost him to suicide in February 2009.*

### SEEKING BIRTH EXPERIENCES FOR AAC CONFERENCE PRESENTATION

Origins-USA member Kathy Aderhold is seeking input from mothers for her upcoming presentation at the March American Adoption Congress (AAC) Conference in Sacramento about the birth experiences of first moms. If you would like to share your experiences with Kathy, respond to her survey, below.

*I would love it if you all would share with me YOUR childbirth experiences so that I can have lots of examples. I intend to make a Powerpoint presentation entitled: UP FOR ADOPTION: THE SURRENDERING MOTHER'S EXPERIENCE OF CHILDBIRTH. I would like all ages to reply to compare the differences. Please go to this link and answer my survey:*

<http://obsurvey.com/S.aspx?id=82ad1ea4-74e9-4d93-8c2e-42d02c081620>

## RADICAL LEADERSHIP

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

of secrecy. The final decree states “as if born to the adoptive parents now and forevermore.” But more outrageous is the surrender paper which uses the term “abandoned!” Can you think of anything worse than for a child to feel or be told that they were ‘abandoned’ by their own mother - or for a mother to feel she abandoned her child?

I left the hospital that July day in 1954 with empty arms and a broken heart and though I was told to forget, I never did. I can assure you that I never believed I was abandoning her, but that’s what the paperwork would have us believe. The truth is that no mother wants to ‘give away’ her child. It is probably one of the most unnatural acts known to the human race and, sadly, we are one of the few countries in the world that encourage mothers to give away their babies and endorse the taking of young children from poor families.

My friends, the time has come for us to end this charade. We need to have a vision that no child is permanently separated from his family of origin - his birth kin. I’m not so naïve that I don’t realize there are times when a child needs to have other caretakers (formerly called guardians), but when it becomes absolutely impossible for a child to remain with the family of origin, then let us at the very least establish a way for him to maintain his family ties. And let us NOT eradicate his family name. Many of you are probably thinking that these are lofty, idealistic or unrealistic ideas, but if we are really pro-family, then we’ve got to begin somewhere. It’s so important to remember that we don’t just remove a child from a mother or a father; when a child is taken, he is taken from an entire family of aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents - his whole root system.

The trauma of separation caused by adoption affects all of us all of our lives. Our jails, mental health facilities, and treatment centers are filled with those who became separated from their family of origin at an early age. And they’re filled with rage. The repressed anger that results from the trauma of separation is, I believe, the most toxic emotion known to man. Traditional, closed, sealed, secret adoption has got to stop. Too many lives have been devastated in its wake.

So what needs to be done? We need to do everything we can possibly do to prevent the loss of separation from occurring in the first place. As Hal Aigner, au-

thor of *Adoption in America*, stated: “adoption healing is wonderful, but the better path is not to contract the disease.”

On this cool Friday in November 2000, seven years to the day that I went to prison for adoption reform, I am calling for the abolition of adoption. As we go forward into the 21st Century, let’s end this charade once and for all, and allow this archaic institution to fade into obscurity. In doing so, we will truly be proponents for family preservation.

*Sandy Musser lost her daughter to adoption in 1954. She is the author of I Would Have Searched Forever and To Prison With Love.*

## “HEAR OUR VOICES” VIDEO NOW AVAILABLE

Origins-USA’s compelling video “Hear Our Voices” is available now! Watch it at <http://www.vimeo.com/7648170> or click on the link on Origins’ website, [www.origins-usa.org](http://www.origins-usa.org).

Award winning filmmaker Sara Aderhold graciously donated her time to produce Origins-USA’s promotional video featuring mothers telling their stories of surrender, loss, and reunion, as well as presenting facts and statistics about adoption today. The video serves as a tool to educate the public, change societal attitudes about adoption and mothers, and inform new mothers of options. Thanks to generous donations from members, Origins-USA raised \$1000 to cover production costs! Many thanks also to the mothers who were interviewed for the video and to those who allowed their photos to be used in the film.

Invite your relatives and friends over and share the video with them. View it for free online, or order copies on CD by making a \$5 donation to Origins-USA and note that it is for the video.

It’s a sad fact that much of the public and many decision-makers still believe that women give up their babies freely and get on with their lives. Every year state legislators pass laws eroding the rights of mothers to nurture their babies. If we don’t tell our stories, they assume we have no stories to tell. That’s why it’s critical to share your experiences and that of other mothers.

[www.Origins-USA.org](http://www.Origins-USA.org) - Protecting the right of mothers to nurture their children



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WE ARE ON THE WEB!  
VISIT US AT  
[ORIGINS-USA.ORG](http://ORIGINS-USA.ORG)

Origins-USA, a national tax-exempt non-profit organization is THE Voice of Mothers. Origins-USA is working to protect the natural right of mothers to nurture their children.

Origins-USA envisions a society where mothers receive the support they need to nurture their children.

If mothers and children cannot remain together, children should be provided stable living arrangements that honor and maintain their connection to their natural families.

## JOIN TODAY

Your membership is vital for supporting Origins-USA's work to protect mothers' rights and be the voice of mothers who lost children to adoption.

To keep membership affordable for everyone, *dues are just \$5 a year. Give more if you can, less if you can't.* Donations are tax deductible.

Give \$100 or more and receive an autographed copy of *The Stork Market: America's multi-million dollar unregulated adoption industry*, donated by the author, Mirah Riben.

Give \$500 or more and become a Lifetime Member.

Go to [www.Origins-USA.org](http://www.Origins-USA.org) and click on "Join." You may pay online by credit card or print the application form and mail it with you check to Jane Edwards, Treasurer, 6625 W. Burnside Rd. #236, Portland, OR 97210.

## ORIGINS-USA'S MISSION & VISION

### *Mission*

Origins: Protecting the natural right of mothers to nurture their children and advocating for keeping families together.

### *Vision*

Every mother receives the support she needs to nurture her children. Mothers and children are separated only after all efforts to keep them together have been exhausted. Children separated from their mothers shall be provided stable living arrangements that honor and maintain their connection to their natural families.