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Foster Parents and Birth Parents

Work Together

for the Benefit of the Children

by Krista McCoy, MSW, LSW

Many of us who work in the field of adoption understand the importance of working as a team. But many times we think of the team as being the caseworker, foster parents, therapist and teachers. Or we see the team as the birth parents, caseworker and recovery coach. We rarely see the birth parents on the same team as the foster parents and caseworker.

The reasons for this vary. Often it is the caseworkers' fear of hostility between the birth parents and foster parents. Sometimes it is the foster parents' fear of the birth parents or vice versa. Whatever the reason, a sense of teamwork and unity is often missing when we speak of birth parents and foster parents working together for the benefit of the children. Birth parents sometimes feel that the foster parents are trying to "steal" their children, or "brainwash" them to hate the birth parents. Foster parents sometimes feel that the birth parents are bad people who don't deserve to have the children returned to them. These sometimes deeply held prejudices need to be

dealt with head-on in order to work together to help the children.

Several innovative programs have been created in Illinois and across the country that dispel the myth that foster parents and birth parents cannot work in unity.

In order for the two groups to work together and accomplish their goals, both must set aside their hesitation, and most importantly, their fear of the other.

Many times the caseworker will need to act as a mediator, talking openly and honestly to each party before bringing the two together in a neutral location. I have been able to do this on



Krista McCoy

continued on page 4

**AMERICAN
ADOPTION
CONGRESS**



Families Rooted In Truth

Established 1978

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The AAC Decree (ISSN 1092-0730) provides educational information to facilitate changes in attitudes, practices, public awareness and public policies that will open adoption records to adult adoptees and foster open, honest, humane adoptions.

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The American Adoption Congress is a member of the Child Welfare League of America.

Editor's Corner



Sharon Pittenger

By now, readers have received their copy of the "10 Year Compilation Issue," and we are hopeful that you enjoyed reading and re-reading some of the articles that were included in the *Decree* since Tennessee's legislature passed its historic legislation in 1994. Since there have been so many fine articles in the *Decree* over the last ten years, imagine the task of determining which articles should be included. Even more difficult was deciding which ones we couldn't squeeze in. I enjoyed re-reading them all. There were certainly enough well-written pieces to publish at least a 50-page *Decree*! Mostly, we were impressed with the quality of the content and writing of so many of the pieces that have been published and wished that many articles that were left out could have been included. Thus, in upcoming issues when space is available, we're looking forward to sharing many more of these articles with you.

In addition, we received many comments, both positive and constructive, regarding our previous issue focusing on the theme of "International Adoption." Thank you very much to the readers who responded to the articles in that issue; we're looking forward to your comments regarding this follow-up issue as well. It is one of my goals for the *Decree* to become a forum for discussion of important issues related to adoption, even when we may not always agree on the outcomes we would like to see. In my opinion, informing and then listening, at first without judgment, are crucial to maintaining our communication as members of an organization that stretches around the world and offers few opportunities for face-to-face contact. I encourage you to respond and to write about your opinions on the topics we feature. We would like to compile and publish this type of reader feedback, so please keep your ideas and thoughts coming to help make the *Decree* your publication. Please send any submissions to spitty@teleport.com or mail them to Sharon Pittenger, 10031 SE Wichita Ave., Milwaukie, OR 97222.

In this issue, we've again featured some of our state representatives in our "Spotlight" column. I hope you enjoy learning about more of the people who work hard in their states to promote adoption reform. We'd like to include more articles about members who have made a difference through their commitment to AAC. If you would like to suggest someone, please let us know.



Carolyn Hoard

My final President's Message is an emotional one for me to write. I have come to the end of my second term on the Board and am stepping down in accordance with the AAC By-Laws. My time on the Board has actually been seven years after being appointed in 1998 to fill the unexpired term of Betsy Forrest as Legislative Director, a job I accepted with enthusiasm.

I have been blessed with many wonderful friendships formed with current and former Board members during these seven years, friendships that will surely last a lifetime. As an organization, we have made strides in legislation, highlighted by Paul Schibbelhute's success in New Hampshire. Our legislative fund has provided financial support to a number of state coalitions that continue to work tirelessly on behalf of adoption reform. As you send your membership renewals, many of you express your appreciation for the efforts of the AAC Board with words of support and encouragement while many others include donations to help us financially. I am grateful for the faith you have in AAC and am confident that the new Board will be successful in meeting the many challenges of adoption reform and helping the organization grow. In order to meet these goals, we need more members willing to give their time and talent to AAC. Many of our Board members are employed in a professional capacity and still manage to devote countless hours each week to the organization. Assignments such as Treasurer, *Decree* Editor, Conference Director and others are especially time-consuming. My mother used to say, "Many hands make light work," as she dragged my sisters and me out of bed on Saturday mornings to help with the weekly house cleaning. The same holds true of AAC; it belongs to each and every one of us. Because my responsibilities have consumed so much of my time over the past seven years, I am really looking forward to sitting on my deck with a good book instead of being inside at my computer. But, if asked, I know I will be back to serve on a committee or to help in other ways. I hope that many of you will give some thought to serving on a committee or simply offering to help the Board for a project or two.

As many of you know, for health reasons I was unable to travel to Las Vegas for our annual conference this year. Then, several days before the conference was set to begin, our Conference Co-Chairs advised the Board that they, too, could not attend due to professional commitments. I am so very proud of the way all the Board members and many state representatives stepped up to the plate to assist our conference planner, Blake Stiles, in putting together a first-class event. Blake was indefatigable in the days immediately preceding the conference with a cell phone glued to his ear and his fingers on his computer keyboard. He is amazing! AAC's Directors went to work immediately upon arriving in Las Vegas, beginning with the two-day Board meeting and election of officers, and then working with our state representatives and other volunteers wherever they were needed throughout the next four days. From the many e-mails and phone calls I received, and comments on the evaluation forms I have read, the conference met the needs of the attendees and exceeded the expectations of many. A special "thank you" to all who helped make the conference a success, including the many workshop presenters and our keynote speakers, Fr. Tom Brosnan, Adam Pertman, Dr. Russell Friedman and Jean Strauss.

On a personal note, this past spring I was able to visit the grave of my son Eric in Florida. As many of you know, Eric died of meningitis at the age of 37. I never lost hope that he would be willing to have contact with me one day, but that must now wait for another time and place.

As I leave the AAC Board, I wish all of you the very best and extend my sincere appreciation for letting me be a part of your lives for the last seven years. I will miss you.

Cover Story

for the Benefit of the Children, cont.

separate occasions, carefully laying the groundwork prior to the actual meeting while not disclosing any information that either does not want disclosed.

When planning the actual meeting, I have found that it is best to make sure that a clear agenda has been laid out for everyone involved. The initial meeting should also have a time limit, often decided by the ages of the children if they are going to be present for part of the meeting. At these meetings, I have watched in amazement as birth parents and foster parents shared information and feelings about the child they have in common. I watched as defenses fell and they were able to begin planning for the child's future.

The meeting and conversation between birth parents and foster parents can be powerful for the children to witness as well. When children observe both sides agreeing, it sends the message they needn't love one and lose the other but can love and be loved by all. When this occurs, it is a powerful therapeutic tool. Counselors often spend years trying to help children bridge the "loyalty gap."

In practice, I also made a point to debrief with the birth parents and the foster parents separately after each meeting. I asked both the birth parents and the foster parents what they thought of the other. They all expressed their relief in meeting each other and admitted that they were nervous and afraid of being judged. We were able to talk about how the meeting was important, and I thanked them for putting aside their own differences to help the children. The debriefing can also be done with the child's therapist. It is particularly important to have this conversation if another meeting is planned.

Over time, some birth parents and foster parents have been able to work so closely that if the children are returned, the birth mothers have called upon the foster parents to act as relief parents. This is also a therapeutic tool in transitioning children in cases of reunification.

Even if reunification is not possible, after meeting

each other, the foster parents are sometimes chosen by the birth parents to become the adoptive parents. When that occurs, the birth parents can feel empowered, and sometimes make the process less adversarial for everyone. I have worked with several birth parents who opted to sign specific adoption consents and avoid a painful and possibly lengthy trial to terminate their parental rights.

When both sets of parents have met, it makes for smoother transitions when visitations are part of the case plan for children. If face-to-face meetings are not possible, then phone calls can be used as well. Each person needs to continue to keep the child's best interest in mind at all times. In all reality, this is often difficult, but important to do.

I have watched as father spoke to father, and mother to mother, both seeing the humanness of the other, realizing that both loved and cared for the children in their own ways. Some of these relationships even continued throughout the years. Now that is what I call teamwork.

I have watched as father spoke to father, and mother to mother, both seeing the humanness of the other, realizing that both loved and cared for the children in their own ways. Some of these relationships even continued throughout the years.

Krista McCoy, MSW, LSW, is a biracial, transracial adoptee. She is an appointed member of the Illinois Adoption Advisory

Council where she advocates for children and families from the foster care system. She is also the Executive Director of Children Remembered, a not-for-profit organization that provides support, education and advocacy for people separated from birth parents by adoption, foster care or divorce. She has been a public speaker on issues of foster care, adoption and child abuse for the past 13 years. To contact McCoy, or have her speak at a conference or workshop, e-mail her at keptsafe@sbcglobal.net or mail her at P.O. Box 234, Northbrook, IL 60065-0234.

This article was adapted from a previous version that appeared in the March/April 2005 issue of Fostering Families Today and has been used here with permission.

Spotlight on Mary Zoller



Retiring Virginia State
Representative
Mary Zoller

By Pat Lubarsky

Triad members have been known to dedicate their entire lives to adoption issues, and Mary Zoller has been no exception. Mary, AAC's former Virginia state representative, has retired after many years of dedicated service. Her list of credentials is extensive. She served on the AAC Board of Directors for one term and was editor of the *Decree* in 1996 when it won its first place Gold Circle Award for Excellence in Communication in the competition sponsored by the American Society of Association Executives. In addition, Mary founded Virginians for Adoption Reform and Education to educate policy makers and the public about the importance of adopted people obtaining the true facts of their birth. Over the past four years she has actively combated legislation that would have promoted closed adoptions.

Recently, Mary planned and directed a two-day symposium on secrecy and openness in adoption that considered the historical, legal, ethical, religious and political issues surrounding access to birth records. Her proposal to do this led to event funding from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy. The symposium attracted nationally known experts in each field and was considered a "first of its kind" event. As such, it secured favorable publicity as an open and frank forum for airing these important adoption issues.

"Baby Abandonment Laws: Is the solution worse than the problem?" was the subject of Mary's recent research presented at the 2002 annual meeting of the American Public Health Association. Based on her work in this area, she was chosen to advise the Evan B. Donaldson

Adoption Institute, an adoption policy think tank in New York City, where she conducted research and prepared a report on the Virginia experience with safe havens. Mary also consulted with legislative staff from other states, the National Conference on State Legislators and other organizations concerned about the unintended consequences of these laws. Her efforts were largely responsible for successfully combating new safe haven legislation in Virginia.

Mary indicates that finding her birth mother and siblings in 1989 "opened parts I did not know." Mary has now dedicated the first half of her adult life to social change and educating people about the importance of adopted people having the true facts of their birth.

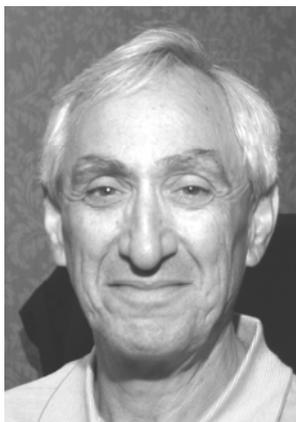
In the future, Mary wants to focus on two other lifelong passions and is developing a second career as a dog trainer and photographer. Though the venues have changed, for her it is still all about making connections. She is honoring her

birth mother by using her "dog lovin' genes" in this endeavor. Mary says, "I enjoying teaching people how to deepen their relationship with their dog and sharing my life with four Australian Shepherds."

Petite but powerful, policy analyst and adoption activist, photographer and dog trainer—these are all descriptions of Mary Zoller, AAC's former Virginia State Representative. Those of us within the AAC who have had the privilege of working with Mary and trying to keep up with her boundless energy and enthusiasm know that she will be successful at anything she attempts. We wish Mary well in all her new endeavors and know that we can still count on her support when we need it most!

Triad members have been known to dedicate their entire lives to adoption issues, and Mary Zoller has been no exception.

New State Representatives



New Kentucky State
Representative
Bob Chastang

Bob recently became the state representative for Kentucky. A long-time member, Bob states, “It is time for me to do more. I have gained so much knowledge from my experiences of being adopted, adopting two special needs children, and losing my only grandchild to adoption.” Since the AAC has been important in Bob’s personal journey, he hopes to bring it to others who could benefit as well.

Bob’s birth mother was seventeen years old when he was born in a maternity and foundling home. After his birth, Bob remained in the home for approximately three years, at which time he was placed with a foster family and adopted by this family at age seven. At 44, Bob decided to search for his birth mother. It was not a long search. Upon petition to the state registrar, Bob received his (unamended) original birth certificate and the adoption decree. To his shock, his birth mother was in fact his sister, and his adoptive parents were his maternal grandparents.

In addition to being an adopted person, Bob is also the adoptive parent of two special-needs children, who were adopted at ages six and eight. It was a difficult experience; Bob’s son struggles with mental illness, and he and his wife have not seen their daughter in ten years. Bob’s anguish helped him find the AAC, and, through the support and friendships that he received, Bob found strength and the opportunity for personal growth. In Bob’s own words, “I have rubbed shoulders with others who have had much less than me.” He has gained empathy for all triad members. In this process, he learned that he had always been loved, even when he didn’t recognize it.



New South Carolina State
Representative
Stacie Byrd

Stacie is South Carolina’s new state representative. In 1999, she took on a search for an adopted man looking for his birth family. During the search, Stacie joined an online support group and learned of the injustice of not having access to one’s own information. Last year Stacie attended the national conference in Kansas City and realized that AAC is committed to increasing public awareness, changing public policies, passing legislation to access identifying information and working towards adoption reform. Stacie’s own goal is to educate the larger community about the very basic right to one’s identity. As the state representative, Stacie is involved in searches, recruiting new members, looking for volunteers to help make Reg Day a success in Charleston, SC, and networking with others to initiate changes in adoption laws.

Search and support are Stacie’s passions. As a volunteer searcher, she has discussed closed records on a local television program and started a support group in Greenville, SC. She is also a co-founder of *Lifechoes*, a multi-media website where triad members who are terminally ill or aging may leave behind life stories for future finding, and recently received a Completion Certificate on “The Journey of Attachment.” She is a firm believer that, “If there is a question, there has to be an answer.”

Stacie lives with her partner, Ron, who shares her tastes for Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, movies and wine. She has two children, Peter and Ayers, and a one-year-old rescued pit bull, Sybil.

New State Representatives



New South Dakota State
Representative
Lynn Banks

The new state representative for South Dakota is Lynne Banks. While Lynne is a relative newcomer to AAC, her experiences and expertise are unique. As a state representative, Lynne looks forward to changing the laws in South Dakota and other states, educating people on adoptees' right to receive their original birth certificates, putting a stop to immoral and unethical practices in adoption, and bringing adoption into a more positive light. According to Lynne, "I believe that adoption should be handled in a very ethical manner. I lead by example, and my motto in life is 'nothing is set in stone except for the Ten Commandments'."

In 1977, Lynne gave birth to a premature baby girl, Jamie. After the birth, Lynne decided against placing Jamie for adoption with strangers and chose to raise her daughter herself. Sadly, Jamie passed away from SIDS five months later. After a few years, Lynne married, but she and her husband were unable to conceive. Living in southern California, they considered open adoption because, according to Lynne, "I was almost a birth mother, and it would have been extremely difficult to place and then to find out 18 years later that my little one had died at five months." After a few failed adoptions, Lynne and her husband became aware that adoption laws needed reform and joined Families for Adoption Reform and Children's Rights (FARCR). In 1992, they adopted a girl and, to this day, cherish the open adoption with her birth parents and biological families. Six years ago, during the adoption of their second daughter, Lynne met an adult adoptee and assisted her with her search, which educated Lynne about the need to reform laws and consider adoptees' rights.

A stay-at-home-mom, Lynne works as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), volunteers with BirthRight and devotes her time to the Elizabeth Ministry at her parish. Lynne and her husband, Herb, and their daugh-



New Connecticut State
Representative
Jane Servadio

Jane Servadio is the new state representative for Connecticut. According to Jane, "Joining the AAC in the early 1980's was a great step forward for me. I was able to attend conferences in different parts of the country and gain an understanding of the larger adoption world, not just my personal part in it." Jane has also enjoyed meeting people "who are putting in a tremendous effort to reform the system that has given so much pain to all of us. It's given me a purpose in life that keeps me going every day." She looks forward to working with AAC and other local groups on access-to-information bills.

Jane, who became a birth mother in 1962, reunited with her daughter more than 20 years ago with the help of The Adoption Connection in Peabody, MA. While her daughter has not expressed interest in a close relationship with Jane and her husband, the birth father, they still have periodic phone contact. Jane attends weekly meetings of Adoption Healing, a 12-step support group for adoptees, birth parents and adoptive parents. Additionally, as a member of the Connecticut Council on Adoption (CCA), Jane has served on the Committee to Promote the Rights of Adopted Individuals since 1991. As the state of Connecticut gradually closed records from 1974 through 1977, the CCA worked to enact several changes in the law. Last year a bill was introduced to allow adoptees access to their original birth certificate.

Employed as a nurse since 1963, Jane works at a foot surgery clinic in Milford, CT, where she lives with her husband, Rino, and her cat, Lucy.

ters, Katie and Annie, live in Sioux Falls, SD, where Lynne enjoys reading, conducting adoption searches, researching genealogy, and fishing and camping with her family.

New State Representative



New Washington State
Representative
Darline Robinson

The new state representative for Washington is Darline Robinson. She joined AAC to gain more knowledge about adoption and to discover where she could make the most significant contributions. After attending her first conference in July 2005, she realized how large the need is and learned that adoption is a life-long journey. By participating in AAC, Darline feels that she will stay informed of the areas of greatest need. As a state representative, Darline is committed to making differences in the adoption world that are long-lasting and have a positive impact on triad members and their extended families.

As a birth mom, Darline's experience began in 1972 when she relinquished her son for adoption and began hiding the truth. In 2001, Darline joined Washington Adoption Reunion Movement (WARM) and began her search; she found her son five months later. According to Darline, "My reunion with my son has been a reunion of love and, as a result, I am compelled to give something back by volunteering with the AAC." Since her reunion, Darline has been active with WARM; she assists in publishing the quarterly newsletter, volunteers as a "WARM shouldered person" and attends monthly support groups. In addition, Darline is a Certified Professional Life Coach, holds a Certification of Emotional Intelligence Assessment Tool and intends to complete her Certification of Grief Counseling in the near future. She also plans to begin a local support group through WARM. Darline realizes what she would have valued most was someone to support her along the journey; now she wants to support others who are thinking about searching, are currently searching or have completed the adoption and reunion journey.

Raised in Ilwaco, WA, Darline worked for Weyerhaeuser, a forest product company, for 25 years, including 18 in Tacoma, WA. In 1998, Darline relocated to Longview, WA, where she is employed by NORPAC Newsprint.

Photos from our Archives



One of the blessings of AAC conferences is that adopted persons, their parents and adoption professionals are able to come together to dialog on a multitude of issues related to their personal and professional lives. Ken Watson and Annette Baran, respected and beloved adoption professionals, and Jean Paton, (aka Ruthena Hill Kittson), author of The Adopted Break Silence (1954), share memories of milestones in adoption reform at the AAC conference in Dallas in 1997.



This is the team at Rehabilitation Opportunities, Inc. in Maryland who mail out every issue the Decree when they receive it from our printers. We made a visit last December, and they were delighted to be photographed.

Photo by Pam Hasegawa.

The China Sisters

Two families, linked by a shared adoption experience, discover that they are bound by DNA as well.

By Martha Groves

In the decade since adopting, Denise Shields has regularly sent photos of her daughter to the other families in her travel group. Though living in different parts of the country, the 10 girls call themselves “the China Sisters,” connected by a bond as deep as a biological tie.

Nancy Hinkeldey, one of Denise's traveling companions, has been struck over the years by subtle similarities between Emily Shields and her own daughter, Anna. Both girls were adopted from the city of Nanning on November 7, 1994. As Denise's photos piled up, Hinkeldey noticed likenesses in the girls' jaws and cheek lines, in their eyebrows and foreheads, in their hairlines.

Last July, as the girls romped on the beach at the group's 10-year reunion, the two single moms compared notes. Both girls lost their baby teeth late. Both were musical and artistic. When Shields noticed a peculiar indentation on the back of Anna's right thigh, she blurted out, “Emily has that same mark!”

The women discussed with their daughters the idea of DNA testing. The mothers cautioned their daughters that a match was far from likely. But both agreed that they owed their girls the chance to learn whether the similarities were accidental or hereditary. Anna and Emily, both age 10, eagerly consented to be tested.

The news came from a DNA lab in August: the girls share at least one birth parent, and possibly have both birth parents in common.

A complex connection

For Emily, who had pined for a sibling, and Anna, who, despite having two sisters (both adopted from China), had sometimes felt “like a little part was missing,” the relationship has been a dream come true.

Like Shields and Hinkeldey, some other adoptive parents are turning to DNA technology to establish biological links between children living in different households,

sometimes thousands of miles apart. The few families who have identified such an against-the-odds match find themselves venturing into exciting but controversial territory. Many are at first thrilled to find a biological link for their children, who never were expected to make a connection with a member of their birth family. That exhilaration is soon followed by practical concerns, such as how to keep the children connected if they are separated by vast distances.

Keeping in touch

The Shields and Hinkeldey families have spent a long weekend together in Southern California since learning the news. They plan to rent a beach house together next summer. Meanwhile, Anna and Emily—and Anna's sisters, Eva, 12, and Lily, 5—have burned up the phone and e-mail wires, as they all develop a new sense of extended family.

When school started in the fall, Emily Shields, for the first time, could write on her forms that she had siblings—count them, three. Eva Hinkeldey, meanwhile, is happily tackling the role of big sister, not just to Anna and Lily, but to Emily as well. For all of them, “China Sisters” has taken on a powerful, new meaning.

“These things are still evolving,” Hinkeldey said. “Our understanding may be different next year. As it is now, everybody seems happy we found the connection.”

Martha Groves is a reporter for the Los Angeles Times. She is the mother of Nora Tai-Xiu, adopted from Taizhou, China.

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Stories from the World of Adoption

For all the little girls from China

Whenever I see one
I know there will someday be
this incredible sorority
of women brought here
as babies from China.

And their great wall
will always go all the
way through them to split
what happened in China/
what's happened here.

But they will help each other
over this wall all their lives
until those walls at their
centers are merely their
strong and flexible spine.

Maybe on the basis of
collective cultural hybrid
strength which they'll find
many ways to cultivate
(the strength of their stories!)

these women of the world's
first international
female diaspora
will inherit the earth.
And do something good with it.

- Penny Callan Partridge

*For a poster of this poem please contact
Penny at 413-253-1543.*

Conference Tapes Available!

Audio cassette tapes and CDs from the AAC 27th
Annual International Conference are available from
Egami A/V.

Tapes are \$8.
CDs are \$10.
Shipping is \$1 per tape or CD, \$6 maximum.

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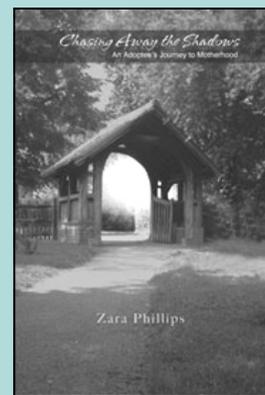
Book Reviews

Chasing Away the Shadows: An Adoptee's Journey to Motherhood

Chasing Away the Shadows: An Adoptee's Journey to Motherhood

Zara Phillips. (2004).
(Baltimore MD: Gateway Press, Inc.)

Reviewed by Deborah Siegel



Much has been written about the emotional experiences of people adopted as infants, and so it is striking that yet another book on this subject is a useful contribution to the literature. Zara Phillips, now in her fourth decade of life, married with three children by birth, eloquently and articulately describes her feelings as a child and adult struggling to manage the often unspoken, overwhelming feelings of fear, disconnection, isolation, grief, despair, depression, anger, guilt, longing, bewilderment, and pain she attributes to growing up in a closed, confidential adoption in London. While she is careful at the start of her tale to point out that her experience is merely one person's story, it is clear that her saga speaks to themes that many other adoptees share.

The author is courageous in detailing how her anguish propelled her into dysfunctional sexual relationships with men, drug addiction, frustration and emotional walls within her loving, stable adoptive family.

Her story reaches into the reader's heart. While the book is intended to describe an adoptee's experience, and thus can be a source of affirmation and support to other adoptees living a similar emotional journey, it is also useful reading for adoptive parents, birth parents, therapists and professionals involved in adoption planning.

Adoptive parents can use this book as a reminder that the children they've adopted may not ask questions or share any pain about adoption, out of fear of hurting the adoptive parents or being rejected by them. Irrational though those fears may seem to the adoptive parent, they can be distressingly real for the adopted child who yearns for permission to

air the feelings and find parental support and comfort in coping with them. Prospective birth parents may find it useful to have information about how their children may feel about adoption and about how secrets and cut-offs in adoption harm those they are intended to protect. The book gives insights into potential mismatches of needs in the search and

Adoptive parents can use this book as a reminder that the children they've adopted may not ask questions or share any pain about adoption, out of fear of hurting the adoptive parents or being rejected by them.

Book Reviews

Chasing Away the Shadows, Cont.

reunion process and how birth and adoptive family members can navigate that territory. Therapists will find the book a useful reminder of the normal crises in the adoption journey. All these prospective readers can use the book as reassurance that the seemingly bottomless, endless tangle of feelings and issues in adoption is simply an inescapable outgrowth of loss for which there is no fix.

The book powerfully shows how closed confidential adoption needlessly harms the participants; the author advocates openness in adoption as a way to short-circuit some of the misery that total cut-offs and secrecy create. While many may share this view, it is important to recognize that openness is not a panacea for the losses and pain that are inherent in the adoption experience. There is no adoption without loss, no loss without pain, no life free of triggers that may reignite pain that cannot disappear.

Given the powerful writing in this book, it is unfortunate that the tale is told so redundantly; the repetition of issues, feelings and themes gets tiresome. The upside of this repetitiveness is that it may help the reader experience a tiny bit of the impatience and weariness that the author and those who care about her may have felt as they struggled over and over again with persistent feelings and issues. It provides insight into how daily life can trigger profound emotions stemming from unacceptable losses that are unrecognized, unexpressed, minimized and dismissed.

Readers who expect the book to be organized explicitly around the theme of how an adoptee chose to become a mother may be disappointed. The book ends with

the author addressing how her lifelong struggles with adoption issues manifest themselves in her role as mother, but the theme suggested in the subtitle, “An Adoptee’s Journey to Motherhood,” is implicit throughout the book.

Lifelong recurrent struggles, by the end of the book, have led the author to personal growth, healing and redemption. Her self-awareness, including deeply psychodynamic insights, good-natured, humorous self-deprecation; and persistence have led her to a strong sense of self and contentment in marriage and motherhood. She ends with greater compassion towards herself and others and recognition that the impacts of adoption losses do not go away, no matter how courageously and tenaciously one grapples with them; the impacts reverberate throughout the extended birth and adoptive family systems and across the generations.

Zara Phillips’ message gives those touched by adoption permission to feel, express, forgive, connect with one another, and live fully satisfying lives.

There is no adoption without loss, no loss without pain, no life free of triggers that may reignite pain that cannot disappear.



Zara Phillips

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Book Reviews

Somebody's Daughter

Somebody's Daughter

Marie Myung-Ok Lee. (2004).
(Boston, MA: Beacon Press)

Reviewed by Deborah Siegel



A novelist is an artist, conveying ideas and feelings through fiction. Marie Myung-Ok Lee creates an effective work of art in *Somebody's Daughter*, the story of nineteen-year-old Sarah Thorson, born in Korea and adopted at eighteen months by a northern Minnesota couple of Scandinavian descent.

I contacted the author, Marie Lee, to request an interview before writing this review, and she readily agreed. We met for coffee; she quickly emphasized that she is a writer, not an adoption expert, and is unwilling to present herself as one. But her book's stunningly accurate depictions of her characters' adoption experiences show understanding usually found only in those personally touched by adoption. While Ms. Lee is not an adoptee, birth parent or adoptive mother, her writing reflects other relevant experiences. She was born in Minnesota to Korean-born parents; she knows the challenges that come from having each foot in different worlds, and has personally experienced racism. Growing up in Minnesota, home to over 10,000 Korean adoptions, she has had a lot of contact with Korean adoptees and their families. In addition, she traveled to Korea as an adult to learn the language and do research for her novel, including interviewing Korean birthmothers. As the mother of a child with autism, she knows about being misunderstood, judged, dismissed, marginalized and blamed for issues beyond her control.

Ms. Lee is an accomplished writer; her novel will appeal to different audiences. It is an adroitly composed, intriguing juxtaposition of stories, with tense, wrenching moments, laugh-out-loud-passages and unanticipated endings. It illuminates cultural misunderstandings, teaches about Korean culture and history, explores inner struggles of an adoptive family in an era when pre-adoption education was scant, and examines intrapsychic and cultural conflicts embedded in an international, transracial, transcultural, adoption.

The book can serve as an educational tool and source of support for people whose lives are touched by adoption. Adoptees are likely to relate to Sarah Thorson's search for self and connection. Adoptive mothers will wince at Sarah's mother's well-intended but hurtful ways of keeping Sarah's pain at bay. Birthmothers may see themselves as well, and readers' prejudicial biases against birthmothers will be challenged. Those who pick up the book looking only for an absorbing story skillfully crafted will be satisfied.

Deborah H. Siegel, Ph.D., LICSW, DCSW, ACSW is a professor in the School of Social Work at Rhode Island College.

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Upcoming Events

September 2005

28-30 “Sparking a Renaissance: Making Children a National Priority.” Providence, RI. Sponsored by the Child Welfare League of America. For more information, visit www.cwla.org/conferences/conferences.htm.

October 2005

8-9 Adoption Forum’s 32nd Annual Conference. King of Prussia, PA. Sponsored by Adoption Forum. For more information, email info@adoptionforum.org.

14-16 CUB Retreat. Monterey, CA. Sponsored by Concerned United Birthparents. For more information, email to info@CUBirthparents.org.

November 2005

13 Midwest Adoption Conference. Palatine, IL. Sponsored by Stars of David, Chicago, Adoptive Families Today, and Families with Children from China, Chicago. For more information, email macadopt@comcast.net.

17-20 Conference on Adoption and Culture. University of Tampa. Sponsored by The Alliance for the Study of Adoption, Identity and Kinship and the University of Tampa, Rutgers University—Camden and The University of Pittsburgh. For more information, visit utweb.ut.edu/Faculty/Ehipchen.

February 2006

27– 3/1 “Children 2006: Securing Brighter Futures.” Washington, DC. Sponsored by the Child Welfare League of America. For more information, visit www.cwla.org/conferences/conferences.htm.

Are you interested in finding more conference information? Visit the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse website at naic.acf.hhs.gov/search/view_calendars.cfm.

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AACs 28th International Conference

AACs 28th International Conference will be held in spring 2007. Information about it and additional 2006 regional and local conferences will be posted on the website as it becomes available. Check at www.americanadoptioncongress.org.

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