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Bitter and Sweet

By Bill Cordray

For over a hundred years, the people conceived through donor insemination (DI) have been unknown, not only to the general public but also to each other. We have had no real community like the American Adoption Congress. There are probably well over one million of us alive today. The vast majority are unaware of their genetic fathers' identities. In fact, the greater majority of us have not even been told about our origins. The few of us who have been told have struggled to educate the world about our plight, so nearly identical to the experiences of adopted people.

Our cause has received little public attention until recently. That is changing thanks to the internet, a positive tool for people such as ourselves to connect. Today support groups and information may be found online for both adults who were conceived through donor insemination ("DI adults") and infertile couples considering donor insemination, allowing our voices to be heard. One particular internet resource—the Donor Sibling Registry (DSR)—mentioned in "Kith and Kin" has brought our cause into further light of the media and public. Public interest in DI offspring started with a few minor articles but hit the media hard three years ago when *The Oprah Show*, then the *Today* show, both had dramatic programs featuring the members of DSR who have made connections with their half-siblings as well as other DI adults who are searching. All these secret



Rebecca Thompson Symes

issues and personal stories had been frozen for far too long, much like the cellular essence of our fathers in countless nitrogen tanks in hundreds of sperm banks and clinics around the world. The increasing coverage of the DSR is like a global warming. Thanks to the media and the power of DSR and many other internet groups, our stories are beginning to create a rising tide of knowledge. Our voices threaten to erode the foundations of secrecy and ignorance that support the infertility industry. People are becoming aware of the psychological and sociological brotherhood we share with the adopted community.

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AAC Mission Statement, June 2006—"The American Adoption Congress comprises individuals, families and organizations committed to adoption reform. We represent those whose lives are touched by adoption or other loss of family continuity.

We promote honesty, openness and respect for family connections in adoption, foster care, and assisted reproduction. We provide education for our members and professional communities about the lifelong process of adoption. We advocate legislation that will grant every individual access to information about his or her family and heritage."

AMERICAN
ADOPTION
CONGRESS



Families Rooted In Truth

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From the President



Pat Lubarsky

By Pat Lubarsky

Listening to a commentary on the combat in Iraq, I was surprised to hear a speaker say that the first casualty of war was truth! I found this reverberating in my mind as I thought about how much adoption is also affected by truth – or the lack of it.

Historically, why did the "American way of adoption" become a process based on falsehood rather than truth? Why is this system based on lies taking so long to dismantle? Why is our democracy, supposedly based on truth, so dedicated to maintaining the status quo of secrecy in adoption?

Recently I found a birth certificate from the late 1800s and noted the box that said, "Legitimate or illegitimate." As a birth-mother from the 1950s, I have been shocked to learn that, for many decades of the 20th century, unmarried women who became pregnant were considered mentally ill and societal disgraces, and their stories were kept as family secrets. This same mentality extended to adoptive parents who were told under threat of some unmentioned penalty that a breach of confidentiality would place their adoption in jeopardy. Thinking that love would heal any wound, agency workers often underestimated the challenges of parenting in some adoptive homes. Some parents were overwhelmed with parenting, and some even kept secret the fact that their children were adopted and took that knowledge to their graves. Thus, we have the late-discovery adoptee.

Every human being has the fundamental right to learn the truth about her or himself, yet adoptees have often been denied the truth of their heritage, beginning at birth. Agencies have often presented an *alternative truth* to prospective parents to encourage their adoption plan, thus neglecting to be totally honest with either parents or children. As I write this, I fully realize that adoption is a truth that remains for a lifetime for those who experience it. We just cannot wash it away, scrub it away, give it away or even put it out of our minds. We can "get over" a rotten relationship or most illnesses, but adoption is etched in our hearts, our minds—and in our lives—forever.

The truth is that this is not the adoption world of the 1800s, 1900s or even the 1950s, when I surrendered my son to adoption. This is 2006. This is a new era, and AAC must adapt itself

From the President

to the realities of adoption now, if we are to be credible witnesses to adoption reform.

A quarter of a century ago, the reform movement was new and so was AAC. Today, secrecy is less pervasive, single parenthood is accepted, and reunion between adopted adults and birth family members is considered normal. Except for our role in making records accessible and in supporting reunion-related topics, AAC has thus far taken a subdued approach to current adoption issues. We need to become much more visible—and audible—in the world of adoption. We need to speak the truth about adoption in a unified voice representing the full constellation—adopted persons, their families by birth and adoption and those professionals who are committed to the highest ethical standards in adoption.

TRUTH: ACC needs a very strong and visible presence in the world of ethical adoption so that we will continue to be sought out by the media for honest answers to their questions as well as cogent rebuttals to our adversaries' arguments.

TRUTH: We need to reach out and advocate justice for the unheard voices we have missed, such as those of donor-conceived persons, international and late-discovery adoptees, our Native American brothers and sisters, and children languishing in foster care.

TRUTH: AAC needs an unyielding commitment to advocacy for adopted adults' access to personal records and for family preservation.

TRUTH: AAC needs to make a concerted effort to focus on the issues that most desperately need changing and to resist the temptation of engaging in distracting minutiae such as word games.

I take the words of my friend Julie Bailey very seriously, and hope you will, too, when she says, "Adoption is about LIVES...not LIES. Support truth in adoption. Advocate for open records everywhere."

If your life has been touched by adoption in any way, we hope you will make it your mission to join us in making AAC a powerful and increasingly respected voice in the world of ethical adoption.

Are you interested in joining AAC?
Please visit www.americanadoptioncongress.org
for membership information.

Spotlight on State Representative

New Jersey State Representative
Judy Foster



By Jane Nast

Judy Foster relinquished her daughter to adoption in 1961 at age 18. She "went on with her life," including a successful career. She never forgot her daughter and never had other children. In 1982, when she was in her late 30's, Judy married George Avenier, who had four adult children and one grandchild. She didn't tell her husband "her secret" until eight years into their marriage. After George got over the shock of learning such an intimate detail of Judy's past, he wanted to find her daughter right away. It took eight more years for Judy to take the first step. Judy contacted Catholic Charities, but they were no help. In September 1998, within three weeks of enlisting the support of a private investigator, Judy and Donna were reunited. Today, Judy and Donna enjoy a joyful relationship, together with granddaughters Megan (20) and Samantha (18).

Since 2000, Judy has been the New Jersey State Representative for the American Adoption Congress (AAC). She is an active member of the New Jersey Coalition for Adoption Reform and Education (NJ CARE). For the past seven years, she has lobbied for legislation that would restore access to original birth certificates for New Jersey adoptees. Judy researched adoption and abortion statistics and created documentation for legislative use and the NJ CARE website, www.nj-care.org. Judy co-facilitates the Morristown (NJ) Post-Adoption Support Group, and she has been instrumental in reuniting several birth families. She has been a panelist or presenter at adoption conferences sponsored by AAC, North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC), Concerned Persons for Adoption (CPFA), and the NJ Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). Judy also participates annually in adoption law and adoption counseling classes at Seton Hall and Montclair State Universities.

Judy retired in February 2000 from Lucent Technologies after a 40-year career with Bell Laboratories, AT&T and Lucent where she held various management and leadership positions in finance, facilities management, information systems, human resources and benefits. Judy was an executive sponsor and mentor for Lucent's Information Technology Leadership Development Program with Babson College, Wellesley, MA. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Management from Fairleigh Dickinson University, and completed Northwestern University's Kellogg Executive Development Program.

Judy lives with her husband in Randolph, NJ.

Kith and Kin

By Kendall Wild, for *The Rutland Herald*
January 25, 2006

A feature in a recent issue of the Guardian Weekly illustrated something that needs increased attention as knowledge of genetics assumes more and more importance in the health and stability of people. The correspondent, Suzanne Goldenberg, got together with five teenagers from three families in Denver. There were Tyler Gibson, 18; his sister, McKenzie Gibson, 12; twins Erin and Rebecca Baldwin, 17; and Justin Senk, 15.

And what did all five have in common? A father.

All five were products of artificial insemination from a single sperm donor. They would probably never have met if it weren't for a web site recently created called the Donor Sibling Registry. By signing on, they get in touch with half-siblings. The web site is only five years old and has already recorded more than 1,100 contacts, which shows that as medical science becomes increasingly detailed, genetic information is going to become increasingly important.

Early in 1987 Tina Gibson, a single professional woman, went to a Denver clinic specializing in helping single women conceive babies with donor sperm. She specified only that the sperm donor look like her "so the kid looks as much like me as possible." Late that year Tyler was born. A few years later she went back to the clinic and got sperm from the same donor to conceive McKenzie.

Completely separate from her, another single professional woman who had left the Air Force, Sharilyn Baldwin, decided she wanted a family. She got sperm from the same donor and conceived the twins Erin and Rebecca.

Susanne and Henry Senk had tried several fertility treatments without success. At the clinic she was told, "We know this donor personally. He is a wonderful guy." And so Justin was conceived.

After she got the five teenagers together for the interview, the reporter's photographer got them to lie on the floor putting their heads together in a circle. He got on a ladder and shot the circle of faces looking up at him. There's no doubt of a kinship. All have light hair and blue eyes. Their noses are alike. They have the same wide smiles.

When Justin saw Tyler's number on the web site and called him, he thought he was talking to himself. "When I first called, I said hello and he said hello, and it was like an echo of me. He sounded so much like me, it was creepy."

The article continued:

"It is more than just physical. All are bright and do well at school. Tyler and Rebecca lean toward the sciences. In college he will study astronomy and she will study molecular biology. Justin, though he attends a high school specializing in the arts, is also strong in science and math. They laugh at the same jokes. They like the same card games."

So what do they know about their biological father? This is about all:

Donor Number 66, a surgical assistant with above average intelligence, afraid of heights, fond of skiing, old cars and woodworking, with no history of treatment for medical or psychological problems except for periods of bad temper while his divorce was going through. These days he would be in his mid-50s.

The Food and Drug Administration requires sperm donors to be screened for transmittable diseases such as HIV. Except for that, there's very little regulation of sperm banks. Until recently, some clinics didn't even keep records, but they are beginning to realize that they should.

There are two curious and opposite aspects. One is the sperm donor's desire for anonymity. Most don't want to have children turning up in later decades asking for money. The mothers sign legal waivers absolving the donor of responsibility in bringing up a child.

The other aspect is the need for people born by this method to have full knowledge

of the genetic background of both parents, for their own health and to help them make good reproductive decisions themselves. There's also the need not to marry a half-sibling inadvertently.

The Denver teenagers are still finding new things in their status. Rebecca at 17 said she now has big-sister feelings toward McKenzie, 12, that she never could have experienced with her twin sister.

It was Justin who put it succinctly: "There is family, and then there is family. It's a new definition. It's not like these are my cousins. They are my half-brother and half-sisters. The meaning of 'family' has become different and expanded."

This article originally appeared in the January 26, 2006, edition of The Rutland Herald. It is reprinted here by permission.

**There's no doubt of a kinship.
All have light hair and blue eyes.
Their noses are alike. They have
the same wide smiles.**

Bitter and Sweet

continued from page 1

People who have suffered the trauma of infertility are the parents of both adopted people and people conceived through DI. Critics point out that adoption exists in the realm of social workers and courts while DI is controlled by the medical world. But these are only differences in how some families began. DI families face an additional challenge in that the pregnancy and genetic link to the mother offers the temptation and opportunity to conceal the socially absent donor father and any subsequent half-siblings. Both of these families raise children of unknown origins. Children raised in families created through both adoption and DI bear the scars and the unhealed wounds of infertility.

It is no wonder that adoptive and DI-conceived children would share the pangs of lost origins and a desire to search for siblings or lost biological parents.

Whenever we, DI adults, read articles like “Kith and Kin,” we have bittersweet feelings. We are delighted that the topic of DI is getting so much attention these days. This is wonderful, especially when compared to the time many of us began speaking about the complexity of the social and psychological issues that DI shares with adoption. We are happy for the teenagers who have been able to connect to their half-siblings with apparent ease. We hope that more parents will be encouraged by this and other articles to tell their children the truth about their origins. Perhaps many more will help their DI children make the same kind of connections by joining the admirable Donor Sibling Registry web site created by Wendy Kramer and her brilliant DI son Ryan. The site has helped over a thousand DI children become connected with some of their half-siblings, and even to a few brave former sperm donors, their genetic fathers.

The bitter irony for us is that the registry works extremely well for those parents who used frozen sperm from banks that use coded numbers for their donors, but not for us. This system did not exist before the era of frozen sperm banking, which began when the AMA discovered that HIV could be transmitted via fresh sperm. Quarantines and coded frozen sperm vials became the way to protect against the spread of AIDS. To those of us born during the fresh sperm era of 1884 to 1984, the web site offers little hope for making connections. Many older DI adults are registered on DSR but so far none of us has made any contact. Prior to the current artificial reproductive technology era, secrecy was encouraged—as shame accompanied infertility—leaving many DI-conceived adults never having been told their ori-

gins. This secrecy in connection with a lack of donor numbers and private physicians rather than regulated sperm banks carrying out donor inseminations partially accounts for the lack of success in connecting older DI adults via the DSR.

Members of the adoption community know the frustration that surrounds secrecy agreements and sealed or non-existent records and the limits imposed on searches as a result. The AAC has been moved by the similar challenges that DI adults share with adopted people and has welcomed us with open arms. Although DI adults face even more difficulties in their search than many adoptees,

It is no wonder that adoptive and DI-conceived children would share the pangs of lost origins and a desire to search for siblings or lost biological parents.

one new ray of hope exists that will eventually benefit adopted people as well. In the last two years, several new web sites have created DNA databases that provide genetic clues to distant ancestors. For males, these clues center on the Y-chromosome, which is passed paternally with no real changes in the code. Since surnames are also passed from father to son, this data is a small chink in the wall protecting anonymity. Combined with traditional methods of adoption search, this code will make genetic connections possible, despite all the blocks set in place by the infertility industry. Already one DI teenager has broken through and has happily “reunited” with his genetic father. For females, however, these sites offer maternally passed mitochondrial clues that are not tied to surnames. A sperm donor can not pass his Y-chromosome to his unknown daughters. We hope that genetic scientists will discover some means to untie this Gordian knot.

The amazing appeal of these new DNA/genealogy web sites eloquently expresses the power of our genetic heritage. Their databases are growing exponentially. The irony here is that biological technology itself will break down the barriers that reproductive technologies have built.

The truth will out!

Bill Cordray is a 60-year-old architect from Salt Lake City, Utah. He and Pauline, his wife of 37 years, have two grown children. He has spoken and written about DI issues for nearly twenty years in many venues. In 1983, when he was age 37, his mother disclosed to him that his deceased dad was not his genetic father. His infertile parents had adopted an older brother in 1942 but, when two subsequent adoptions fell through, they went to a gynecologist, who provided sperm from one of his thirty-one white male medi-

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The Search

By Karen Clark

I was 18 when my mother told me that my dad, who had recently passed away, wasn't my father. My biological father was a nameless, faceless person. I was shocked by her acceptance of uncertainty. How could she deliberately conceive a child without knowing the other half of its biological origin? More than twenty years have passed since then, and, when I recall that moment, my stomach still flutters. Everything I'd lived and thought I fully understood through one identity, I began to second-guess with half of my identity missing.

When I looked back on it, I guess I wasn't fully surprised by the news. It actually answered many questions that I had simply shrugged off in the past. My dad and I did not share many traits. Whenever I would attempt to find family similarities with my father and his side of the family, my parents would give me polite smiles with nods and averted eyes. The subject was quickly changed or redirected.

I remember very clearly a strange and unnerving dream that I had when I was 13 years old. I dreamed that my parents were keeping something from me; I was adopted and no one had ever told me. The dream awakened me and I knew something was not right. I knew that it was more than a dream. The feeling was intense but it faded away after a few hours.

The uncertainty of my biological father's identity had a profound effect on me, all the more because the secret was kept not just from me but also, as far as I knew, from everyone else in the family as well. Would my family feel differently about me if they knew who I wasn't any more? How could they not?

I felt illegitimate, ashamed, unrecognized and abandoned by my biological father. I was a secret not only in my own family, but most likely in my biological father's family as well. I often saw people who I resembled and wondered, is that him? Could that be my sister or brother? I could never ask. That would be absurd. I was not entitled to know. My self-esteem was faltering but I never shared these feelings with anyone.

I felt alone but never angry. Not at that time. I was too busy putting all the pieces of the rest of my puzzle together. I would quiz my mom every now and then about the particulars of my conception. I was apprehensive about believing this story, but I couldn't imagine that she would lie to me about something so incredibly monumental to my being.

She would never do that; she loved me more than anything in this world. Nonetheless, I kept asking, looking for inconsistencies in her story. Did she know for sure daddy was infertile, why did they decide to do it, why didn't they just adopt, who was the doctor, how was it done, how many times, and most importantly, who is my biological father?

She could answer all the questions but one.

The only thing she could tell me about my biological father was the information that her doctor had given her. In the 1960's he was a doctor in the same area where we lived; he was of Northern European descent with a family "of his own." Other than that, it was up to my imagination. My imagination just left me with so many more questions and revelations. I might have more grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. I might even have siblings! I was so excited! I couldn't wait to find these people and introduce myself. We shared a biological connection. We were family. I was sure they'd want to meet me.

My mother realized that this information was just not enough for me. She contacted the doctor who inseminated her, and he agreed to speak with me. My mother gave me his telephone number and I called him. I was so nervous I could barely speak. I didn't know how to organize all my questions; my voice was quivering and my mind went blank. He just repeated to me what he had already told my mother. He suggested that my dad might still in fact be my biological father. I didn't question it. We said good-bye, I hung up and cried.

I clung to the doctor's suggestion that my dad might still be my biological father but, instinctively, I knew it wasn't so. The question lingered for another 19 years before I tried to contact him again. I now had children. It no longer was just my need. My children had a right to know their origins as well. At this point I was determined. I was entitled. I only wanted to know his identity without the expecta-



Karen Clark

tions of reunion or relationship, which I had so naively hoped for when I was younger. In final appeal to my mother's doctor, I wrote to him explaining why I needed to know my biological father's identity and why it was so important to me and my growing family. I asked if he could contact the donors he used to relay this message. But unfortunately he was not in a position to reciprocate and I cannot take my search any further. I have discontinued further correspondence with my mother's doctor.

In hindsight, my mother told me that she would have chosen a donor who would have been open to contact when I was older.

Whoever my biological father is, I would like to set his conscience free. I would like to let him know that I think my dad, the man who unselfishly raised me as his own, was a beautiful person and I would never have wanted or attempted to replace him. I wish I could have told my dad that it doesn't matter that we are not genetically related; no one could have substituted his meaning and importance in my life. After all, I am a product of my parents' union. Together, with the help of another person, they chose to bring me into the world out of their love and commitment to each other and the desire for a family of their own.

However, there is no denying the pain I feel from being intentionally disconnected from half of my genetic identity and biological kin. My biological father is so much more than a mere 'sperm donor' to me. I see part of him looking back at me in the mirror and believe I see a resemblance when I embrace my children. He is a part of my life, forever and always. Am I allowed to say that I love him? I don't know him, but I feel that he is a good person who lives on within me and my children. I only wish that we could have had the opportunity to develop a relationship and allowed to be known and fully embraced by this side of our family.

There were many things that, ideally, my parents and doctor should have handled differently. Of course, honesty from the very beginning would have been best but secrecy was the advice of the era and the only option my parents believed they had. They were never counseled, and went into this blindly. The secret was a terrible burden to them. My mother confessed that it weighed heavily on my father and that he occasionally had difficulties handling his own feelings over raising his wife's and another man's biological child as his own. He didn't have any outlets other than my mother. They were stuck and alone in the secret. I am sure that it affected our family interactions in many subtle ways.

I am incredibly grateful that my mother disclosed the details of my conception with me. It answered questions about me and our family that I had no way of understanding until I was told the truth...my truth. I felt that my mother respected me enough to understand the importance of this information to my personal identity. There isn't any dignity in ignorance.

In hindsight, my mother told me that she would have chosen a donor who would have been open to contact when I was older. But again, my parents were never given this as an option and my mother was desperate to have a baby. They couldn't see beyond that. My parents did the best they could; they provided me with many advantages in order to help me to prepare for the many challenges of life. I was loved and wanted by my family and I am eternally grateful for all the personal sacrifices they made on my behalf. I adored my parents and have incredible respect for them and pride in being their daughter. But I know from personal experience how difficult it *might* be for a child to follow

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The author recommends the following Internet groups:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PCVAI>

This is a group for people who were conceived by donor insemination. We get together here and share our ideas, frustrations, and hopes. We restrict our group to donor-conceived people.

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/DonorMisconception-Open>

The new DonorMisconception group, discussing the issues related to donor conception. We have an emphasis on supporting and extending the rights of donor-conceived people.

We intend to allow everyone to join, and to moderate the discussion as little as possible, to encourage the flow of debate.

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/DonorSiblingRegistry>

The focus of the Donor Sibling Registry is to assist individuals conceived as a result of sperm, egg or embryo donation who are seeking to make mutually desired contact with others with whom they share genetic ties.

<http://www.tangledwebs.org.au>

TangledWebs is an action group challenging Donor Conception (DC) practices in Australia & internationally.

Members have personal and/or professional experience that relates to DC or adoption. TW provides an alternative voice to ART through greater recognition of the complex, lifelong issues that affect the person created through DC. It is our view that there are significant moral, social and legal issues that arise from DC practices that have inter-generational consequences for the wider community.

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/SpermDonors>

For people who have provided or used donor and for donor conceived persons interested in issues of known vs. unknown anonymous donors and potentially finding one another, reuniting and having a relationship.

Looking for Ann

By Gwinnetta Malone

I knew Ann Majors better than anyone. She carried a secret she knew she could never reveal without tragic consequences, and the only reason she was living on Hemphill Street in Fort Worth, Texas was to hide that secret. Thirty-two years would pass before I knew how much my own emotional well-being depended on finding Ann Majors. How did I know more about Ann than anyone? Because for six months in 1966, *I* was Ann Majors.

Shortly after starting college, I discovered that I was pregnant. There weren't a lot of things worse in 1965 than a girl being unmarried and pregnant. Abortion was illegal, expensive, and dangerous. Keeping a baby as an unwed mother was a guarantee of scandal and shame, not only to the girl, but also to her family and innocent baby. The only option left to keep total disgrace at bay was to disappear into a maternity home and give up the baby for adoption.

Since I never considered destroying my baby and no amount of begging or pleading would convince the father of my baby to marry me, I felt giving it up for adoption was my only alternative. Reluctantly, I decided to go to the Edna Gladney Maternity Home to "hide out" and ultimately give away my own flesh and blood. Because secrecy was paramount, all the girls entering "Aunt Edna's Finishing School" changed their last names. Since my first name was so unusual, it was decided that I should use my middle name, and I became Ann Majors.

I lived at the home with perhaps 100 other girls. Young and immature, we blindly groped for what lay ahead, never comprehending the lifelong trauma and devastation the experience would have on our lives. We were indoctrinated with the belief that we must keep the ordeal secret the rest of our lives. A continual theme was preached over and over again – if you *really* love your baby, if you do the *unselfish* thing – you will give the baby growing in your womb to someone else. Throughout the duration of our stay, we were assured, "You will leave here, go back to your lives, and forget this." No one bothered to tell us that the price for the secrets and lies would be unresolved grief, fear of intimacy, and agonizing guilt.

Finding myself in a home for unwed mothers was a living nightmare. The golden girl I once was would have *never* been found in a place like this. Assuming the new identity of Ann Majors helped perpetuate the fantasy that this couldn't be actually happening to *me*. It was easy to pretend that Ann was the "bad girl," the one who needed to hide from the rest of the world. *She* was the one who was "in trouble" and forced to engage in the secrets that society demanded of the social and moral outcasts of the '60s.

My baby was born in the early predawn hours of June 7, 1966. On June 13th, I was taken into a little room attached to the baby nursery for the one and only visit I would ever be allowed with my baby. As I waited, I thought to myself, "This can't be happening to me!" My daughter was finally brought in and placed in my arms. We were given one hour together.

How do you cram a lifetime of memories into sixty minutes? I carefully removed the blanket and stared at the wonder of this beautiful baby girl. She had a head full of black hair, fat little legs, and long toes. She was perfect. I remember that she never cried during our time together. I told her how much I loved her and how very much I wanted to keep her. I wept as I cuddled this miracle of life to my breast. My heart began to ache knowing that this was the

one and only time I could ever hold her, touch her silky hair, and breathe in the sweet scent of her skin. Another woman would be rocking her to sleep and soothing her fears. Another woman would celebrate her birthdays and holidays. She would run to her new mother with her hopes and

dreams. How could I give away my own flesh and blood? This was like death. The only way a "real" death could possibly be more painful would be if I had caused it. But then again, I knew that my indiscretion had caused this death—the death of a mother and child relationship. The tragedy was that, except for the so-called rules of society, it was a needless death. A death I would mourn alone and in secret for many years.

When my precious 60 minutes were up, the nurse returned to take my baby. Anguish and despair rose up within

I carefully removed the blanket and stared at the wonder of this beautiful baby girl. She had a head full of black hair, fat little legs, and long toes. She was perfect.

me as my daughter was carried out of my life forever. How I wanted to take my baby and race out the door. I wanted to be bold and courageous and take what was mine. Instead, I meekly handed her to the nurse and was led into another room where, in a daze, I signed the required legal documents. As I signed “Gwinnetta Malone,” the months of pretense, of not really being involved and placing all the blame on Ann Majors came to a screeching halt. I was forced to face the horrible truth. Ann may have been the girl “in trouble,” living in a home for unwed mothers, but it was Gwinnetta who gave away her own flesh and blood.

I left Hemphill Street two days later, broken hearted and suffering intense grief and guilt. For the rest of my life, nothing, not even the death of my own mother, would hurt as deeply as walking out of my daughter’s life. I erected an invisible wall around myself to prevent anyone from getting too close, fearing that if they did, my terrible secret might be revealed.

Through the years, I struggled to make peace with myself over my decision. I had learned the painful lesson that life doesn’t always give us the opportunity to fix our mistakes, and some decisions cannot be undone or changed. Occasionally, a small voice would taunt me, “What kind of a woman gives away her own baby?” I finally learned to stop beating myself over past mistakes. There was nothing I could do to change my decision. I found that the greatest step toward healing was to start the process of forgiving myself. My faith in God taught me the lesson of forgiveness and the bulk of the wounds were healed over time.

What I didn’t realize was that a big part of the healing process would involve going back and looking for Ann and the daughter we gave away. My own healing required that Ann be comforted and allowed to grieve. There were few efforts to remember the young woman I once was and recall her confusion and pain. I failed to see that by locking her away, I was also locking away a part of the woman I had become.

In March of 1998, I started what seemed the impossible quest of finding my daughter. In spite of wishing for more, my goal was limited to discovering three things: her name; what she looked like; and if her parents took care of the most precious gift I had to give. Armed with nothing more than a date of birth and a county name, I started my search.

After only a few weeks of actual searching, I found my daughter, Juliana Gomez. I found Juli on the 32nd anniversary of the day I gave her away. A date that once represented a day of devastation and loss would now be cele-

brated as the day of restoration and reunion. I quickly sent a letter, saying, “*If you were born on June 7, 1966 at Duncan Memorial Hospital and adopted through the Edna Gladney Adoption Agency, I have reason to believe I am your birth-mother.*”

Juli responded with an e-mail a few days later. I stared in astonishment at the e-mail address, my mind reeling. I was sure she was going to say I had contacted the wrong person, or worse, that I found the right person, but if I ever contacted her again she would have me arrested! However, I was reading the most beautiful words ever written, “*I am the daughter you have been searching for.*” At the end of

her letter she wrote, “*I want you to know you made the right decision. I have been blessed and somehow I always knew that you were there and that you loved me.*”

Juli and I met the following Sunday at her church. I stood outside a little room, heart pounding, with tears in my eyes, and thinking to myself, “This can’t actually be happening to me!” Once again I walked into a little room to see my first-born daughter, only this time there stood a grown and beautiful woman with my hands, feet, and features. This time we both embraced for what seemed like hours and wept in each other’s arms.

A few months later, I returned to the Gladney Center for a tour of the facility. Memories came rushing back as I wandered down the halls of the now closed and empty hospital. I remembered that young girl, Ann Majors, as she wandered the halls of the hospital. I stopped at the room I had laid in my last seven days on Hemphill Street. As I stared at the empty hospital bed, I remembered Ann as she had been on June 14th, weeping for literally hours over what she had done the day before. I suddenly realized that for 32 years I had locked away that young girl who had suffered unimaginable grief and guilt. I wanted to find her and tell her that everything was okay now. Ann and I had made the right decision. Our baby had been placed in the arms of the most wonderful mother and had grown up understanding and even loving us. I wanted to tell Ann that I had held Juli in my arms again, and this time she hugged me back. I wanted her to know that it was safe to come out.

But Ann was no longer there. She was free. She already knew.

*Gwinnetta Malone Crowell ©2002.
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**I found that the greatest step
toward healing
was to start the process of
forgiving myself.**

The Baby Business: How Money, Science, and Politics Drive the Commerce of Conception

By Debora L. Spar
Reviewed by Barbara Busharis

Readers who are dismayed by the increasing commercialization of family-building and the skyrocketing cost of reproductive technologies may be tempted to skip this book. That would be unfortunate. The author of *The Baby Business*, a Harvard business professor, does not claim to solve the difficult ethical and emotional issues that have resulted from new reproductive technologies. She does, however, make a cogent argument that a marketplace is already at work and will continue to grow.

“In the end...it is far better to concede the commerce and examine it than to insist it does not exist. We are selling children. *The Baby Business* describes how.”

The book sets the stage for the current market in reproduction by surveying the historical treatment of infertility. It explains the emergence of the market in the 1970s and 1980s with the advent of fertility-stimulating drugs such as Clomid and Pergonal, and the success (after many years of attempts) of in vitro fertilization (IVF) in 1978. Subsequent chapters go into fascinating details about current practices in the sale of eggs and sperm, advances in IVF and related techniques, and surrogacy. Anecdotal illustrations are interspersed with facts and figures, which keeps the text from becoming dry or impersonal.

The book concludes with a call for rational regulation, arguing that the market needs a political debate to arrive at an approach that will set boundaries we can live with. “[O]nce we decide to approach the baby business as a market subject to regulation,” the author writes, “we can begin to determine which pieces of this market should be treated like kidneys, which like heroin, and which like hip replacements. The remainder can stay as jewels.”

At times the emphasis on economics is frustrating. A section on the emerging market for excess embryos, for example, notes that the early providers in that market have chosen to label the practice of transferring embryos from

one couple to another “embryo adoption” rather than “sale” or “donation.” The book acknowledges that defining embryos as “entities capable of being adopted” will ultimately make them more difficult to destroy, but sidesteps the political and ethical choices that led to the choice of label in the first place.

Another criticism some readers may have is the author’s relatively uncritical treatment of adoption. The chapter on adoption places adoption squarely within the framework of the overall “baby business,” so much so that the book’s subtitle, focusing on conception alone, starts to feel almost misleading. However, the book does not subject the adoption market to the same scrutiny it brings to the reproduction market. Moreover, although the sources cited are sound, some of the assertions about adoption are simplistic and superficial. The book acknowledges that open adoption has rearranged some of the market features in domestic placements, for example, but describes open adoption as a “recent” and “radical” version of adoption offered by independent brokers and agencies — disregarding the fact that established non-profit agencies have been offering open adoptions for more than a generation. The book is also dismissive of the effects of relinquishment on birth parents and adoptees, in keeping with the author’s focus on what can be quantified. Perhaps the most questionable assertion is the blanket statement that “adoption works” — backed up primarily by evidence that adoptive parents are happy with their experiences. There is another book waiting to be written about the excesses and abuses of the adoption market, one that will take a more critical look at the way supply and demand are being encouraged. This is not that book.

Despite these omissions, *The Baby Business* offers a compassionate and humane treatment of a difficult topic. While it does not purport to solve the ethical issues involved in creating children, it makes a compelling case that those issues are going to have to be resolved in connection with, not outside of, market forces.

Barbara Busharis is an attorney, an adjunct instructor at Florida State University College of Law, and the mother of two. Her younger son was adopted in the U.S. in a fully open adoption.

Going Home: A New Solution for Long-Term Foster Youth

By Mary Martin Mason

Approximately 515,000 foster children reside in foster care in America, removed from their parents for reasons of neglect, abuse and addiction. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, the estimated number of children exiting foster care to be reunited with birth family increased between 2000 and 2005 from 272,000 to 287,000, an increase of 1,000 children during 2005. Foster care was designed to provide temporary protection and nurturing for children who for safety reasons are removed from their homes. Temporary protection in all too many cases extends into permanency as children become stranded in a system that is ill-equipped to provide for them.

Recently, *60 Minutes* profiled teenagers such as 13-year-old Samara who, like many of her peers, has been a state ward her entire life and lives at a treatment center for troubled youth. She has multiple diagnoses, including severe depression. Last Christmas, with nowhere to go and no family to invite her, she tried to commit suicide. Her therapist, Marylou McGuirk, attributes her suicide attempt to the loss of her family, saying, "Not having a support system around her. And that trauma ... there was no healing process for that."

For Samara and other teens appearing on *60 Minutes*, healing is now possible through an innovative solution where counties search for the birth families from which the children were taken and explore the prospect of the children returning to the family in some way. Kevin Campbell, a national expert in transforming the child welfare system, starts the process by training staff at group and residential homes on ways to search for families such as Samara's. Campbell sets a goal of finding, at a minimum, 40 relatives for each child in a process that he calls "Family Finding." The goal is to connect foster youth with relatives who might adopt them or provide a sense of family and connectedness.

Campbell derived his family-tracing techniques from the Red Cross. He surmised if the Red Cross could locate families separated by wars and natural disasters, there must be a way to reunite families separated by the child welfare system.

As for safety concerns in returning a child to parents who endangered the child, Campbell says, "We may not be ever considering placing the child back in that home. What I'm looking for is, does he have an aunt or an uncle or a great-aunt or uncle who's safe with their kids and has done a good job and would be there for them." For Samara, the search began by tracing the few details known about her mother that were fed into a database at U.S. Search. Within

two hours, 44 family members had been located. This led to a family reunion barbeque where Samara met her great grandmother, grandparents, cousins, and aunts, most of whom did not know she existed. Ultimately, she was reunited with her mother, Laekesha, who first met with Samara's therapist and underwent a criminal background check before she was allowed to meet with Samara. Laekesah says she is a different person than she was at 16, when she gave birth and lost custody of Samara for reasons of neglect.

Even though Samara has longed for the day she would meet her mother again and, eight months after their reunion, she plans to move back with her eventually, there are obstacles. Samara is not accustomed to physical or emotional closeness. Her mother needs instruction on how deal with her child who is no longer a child. The \$60,000 annually spent by California on therapeutic and residential services for children like Samara will soon not be available to them. Even so, if Samara does move in, her mother will have a back-up team of relatives who are enlisted by Family Finding to create a plan to ensure Samara never returns to foster care.

The concept of enlisting extended family to support parents in crisis has historically been under-utilized. When children are removed and termination of parental rights is a possibility, a search for relatives, particularly the father's relatives, is often limited by time restrictions, budget constraints, and other barriers, such as a bias against extended birth family that a social worker may assume are inadequate. Even in states with statutes that require that relatives should be a first consideration in out-of-home placement, statistics show that is not happening consistently. A social worker can do a cursory search and create a paper trail as proof that efforts failed to locate potential kinship care providers. Sometimes the custodial parent will not identify a father or other relatives, or the relatives are unable to meet licensing standards for foster care. Meanwhile, children such as Samara grow up assuming that no one in the family cared enough to step forward.

Research shows that relative placement is in the best interest of the children who experience loss on multiple levels. Children placed in relative or kin homes avoid the trauma associated with having to live with strangers. They are more likely to have their cultural needs met and remain connected to their traditions and lineal history. Children placed with extended family are less likely to experience disruptions and multiple foster care placements.

Youth who age out of the foster system face a grim future: 36 percent become homeless, 31 percent go on welfare, 36 percent enter prison and, for girls, the unplanned pregnancy rate doubles that of their peers. The human need to be enfolded into a family is primal and basic. For 515,000 of America's children, going home represents hope in an increasingly hopeless system of child welfare.

Legislation

States with Access to Birth Certificates for Adoptees

Since new laws have allowed adult adoptees access to their birth certificates, 13,104 adoptees have received their original birth certificates from Alabama, Delaware, New Hampshire, Oregon, and Tennessee with no harm

shown to anyone including birth parents.

The data reveals that if access has had any effect on adoptions and abortions, it was to increase adoptions and decrease abortions.

STATE	CONTENT OF LAW	ACCESS RESULTS	ABORTION/ADOPTION STATS
Alabama	Original birth certificate (OBC) is made available to adoptee, age 18 or older, upon request. Birth parents may file a non-binding Contact Preference Form, requesting direct contact with adopted adult, contact through an intermediary, or no contact at all.	Since the law passed in May 2000, approximately 2,722 adult adoptees have obtained copies of their original birth certificates with 131 Contact Preference Forms filed. (State is not tracking type of preference.)	In the five years since adoptees obtained access to their OBCs, resident abortions declined 17%. http://ph.state.al.us/chs/HealthStatistics/Pregnancy/PregBirth-Term.htm
Alaska (always open)	Alaska provides access to adoptee, 18 and older, and birth parents of adoptee, 18 and older, to facilitate reunions.	Alaska never sealed birth certificates for adopted persons.	Alaska, a state that never sealed birth certificates, has the nation's highest adoption rate (http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2003/adopt.htm) and one of the lowest abortion rates. http://www.guttmacher.org/statecenter/
Delaware	Birth parents have the option of filing a veto against disclosure. If a disclosure veto is filed, the OBC is not released to the adoptee.	From January 1999 to October 2006, 695 adult adoptees have received OBCs with 16 adoptees getting incomplete OBCs under the disclosure veto provisions of the law.	

STATE	CONTENT OF LAW	ACCESS RESULTS	ABORTION/ADOPTION STATS
Kansas (always open)	Grants access to the adoption file and to the OBC of adopted adults, 18 and older, birth parents and adoptive parents of minor child. Birth parents may contact the adopted adult if he/she agrees to contact.	Kansas never sealed birth certificates for adopted persons.	Kansas, a state that never closed records, has the nation's fifth highest adoption rate. (http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2003/adopt.htm). Kansas has lower resident abortion rates than the United States as a whole. http://www.guttmacher.org/statecenter/
New Hampshire	Original birth certificate is made available to adoptee, age 18 or older, upon request. Birth parents may file nonbinding Contact Preference Form.	As of September, 2006, a year after enactment, 895 adoptees have received their OBCs and 12 birth parents have stated their preference for no contact. www.sos.nh.gov/vitalrecords	Current adoption and abortion data are not yet available on New Hampshire's access bill.
Oregon	Original birth certificate is made available to adoptee, age 21 or older, upon request. Birth parents may file a non-binding Contact Preference Form.	In the six years since adoptees obtained access, 9090 adoptees have requested and 8,792 adoptees have received OBCs with 83 birth parents not wishing contact. http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/chs/58update.shtml	In the four years since adoptees obtained access to their OBCs, resident abortions dropped 18.2%. Oregon Vital Statistics Annual Reports, Vol 1, Table 3-6, 2000-2004. http://dhsforms.hr.state.or.us/Forms/Served/DE9079.pdf After adoptee access, a six-year year decline in adoptions stopped and adoption numbers leveled off, according to statistics from the Oregon State Office for Children, Adult and Family Services.
Tennessee	Adoptees, age 21 or older, may have access to OBC and adoption records unless adoption records indicate that adoptee was product of rape or incest and birth parent victim does not consent to disclosure. Birth parent may veto contact.	Tennessee stats have not been successfully tracked by the state.	Tennessee has lower resident abortion rates than the United States as a whole. http://www.guttmacher.org/statecenter/

Take the Freedom Trail to Truth in Adoption

Dear Friend of Adoption Reform,

The members of the 2007 Conference Committee invite you to AAC's 28th International Conference, "Take the Freedom Trail to Truth in Adoption," on March 7-10, 2007 at the Sheraton Colonial Hotel and Golf Resort in Wakefield, MA.

We'll kick off the conference with the Youth Advocacy Day, March 8, 2007, offering opportunities for area youth to support sibling connections, foster care reform and truth in adoption. In addition, we're excited to offer two pre-conference events, an afternoon of workshops directed at adoption professionals as well as an afternoon bus tour to see the historical sites in downtown Boston. For evening options on Thursday and Friday, a shuttle bus has been arranged to provide transportation to local restaurants, so you and your friends can easily get together and dine out.

While the pre-conference professional workshops and the move of the Opening Night Reception to Wednesday will be new this year, many "traditions" will continue. On Thursday, attendees will be able to have lunch with other members from their region, and we can look forward to a delicious Just Desserts reception, at which the Memorial Scholarship winner will be introduced. We will also have the AAC State Representative Dinner and close the entire conference with the Town Meeting Saturday afternoon.

Please visit the AAC's website for continual updates about the 2007 Boston conference at www.americanadoptioncongress.org.

For more information about the conference, please contact one of the following people:

Sharon Pittenger, Conference Chair, sharon.pittenger@gmail.com

Carolyn Hoard, Conference Registrar, choard@comcast.net

Paul Schibbelhute, New England Regional Director & Local Operating Committee Chair, pschibbe@aol.com

Eileen McQuade, Treasurer, eileen2155@gmail.com

Amy Winn, Education Chair, amy.AAC@gmail.com

We look forward to seeing you in Boston in 2007!

We have an excellent line-up of keynote speakers:



Darryl "DMC" McDaniels **My Story and My Mission**

RAP legend, Darryl "DMC" McDaniels will be the keynote on Thursday, March 8, 2007, with "DMC: My Story and My Mission." Co-founder of the first RAP group to go multi-platinum, DMC will tell his adoption and reunion story that aired on VH-1. At 35, DMC made the startling discovery that he was adopted. Even more startling was that he, like many adoptees, was denied his birth certificate. Today, DMC calls himself the Moses for the access movement, advocating for all who struggle for the right to know who they are.



Sandy White Hawk **Truth, Healing and Reconciliation**

Sandy White Hawk is co-founder and director of the First Nations Orphan Association (FNOA). A Sicangu Lakota, her adoption robbed her of her culture, family and spiritual traditions. Through ceremonies and Talking Circles, White Hawk offers healing and advocacy, in accordance with Native traditions and spirituality and the Indian Child Welfare Act. Our AAC audience will certainly enjoy Sandy's presentation as she eloquently addresses intergenerational trauma and pain with wisdom and healing that applies to all who have been impacted by adoption.



Dr. Gerald P. Mallon **Foster Care and Adoption in Twenty-First Century Child Welfare Practice**

The gap between foster care and adoption during the past ten years has become increasingly narrowed as child welfare practitioners acknowledge the changing nature of the field of children, youth, and family services. Using these themes, which bridge the two areas of child welfare practice as a guide, this presentation focuses on the intersection between foster care and adoption for the twenty-first century practitioner. Join us on Friday afternoon and learn about these vital subjects from this noted professor, researcher and author.



Ann Fessler **Giving Voice to Women Silenced by Shame**

*Saturday afternoon is your chance to meet and hear Ann Fessler, professor, artist, adoptee and noted author of *The Girls Who Went Away*. Ann has appeared on Good Morning America as well as Fresh Air with Teri Gross and The Diane Rheem Show on NPR. Based upon personal experience and 100 oral history interviews with women who surrendered children between 1945 and 1975, the work is subtitled, *The Hidden History of Women Who Surrendered Children for Adoption in the Decades Before Roe v Wade* (The Penguin Press, May 2006). Critics in *The New York Times*, *the Chicago Tribune*, *the San Francisco Chronicle*, and *the Providence Journal* among others, have acclaimed her book for both great journalism and solid analysis. For our AAC audience, Ann will play excerpts from the oral histories and discuss the post-publication response. Don't miss this opportunity to share Ann's insights.*

Musician on a Mission: DMC Embraces His Adoption Story

By Mary Boo, NACAC Staff

From Adoptalk, published by the North American Council on Adoptable Children, 970 Raymond Avenue, Suite 106, St. Paul, MN 55114; 651-644-3036; www.nacac.org.

As one-third of rap pioneers Run-DMC, Darryl McDaniels (DMC) has lived a dream. Run-DMC sold millions of records, had the first Billboard Top 10 hip-hop song, and was the first rap act to appear on *Saturday Night Live* and the cover of *The Rolling Stone*. Darryl's group forever changed the face of music, and for some this would have been legacy enough—but not Darryl. These days he has a new mission: to share his adoption story to help erase the guilt and shame that often shadow adoption.

Surviving a Time of Pain

On tour in Europe 10 years ago, Darryl fell into a deep depression. He and his band were celebrated, and he had plenty of money, but he wondered if being a rap star would be his only accomplishment. His despondency intensified when he returned to New York. He continued to have a powerful sense that there must be a greater purpose for his life; unable to find it, he felt lost, even suicidal.

One day during this crisis, he heard a song that had no rap credibility, but comforted him to the core. It was Angel by Sarah McLachlan, in which she sings, “In the arms of an angel, fly away from here. From this dark cold hotel room, and the endlessness that you fear.” Listening, Darryl began to believe again that being alive was a beautiful thing. Before long, his friends began teasing that all he did was listen to Sarah McLachlan. But her music had sparked his emotional rescue.

Three years later, someone suggested that he write a book about his life. Intrigued, he sat down to tell his story, but stopped short when he could not recall any early details. He called his parents and they told him where he was born, how much he weighed, etc. An hour later, Darryl's whole life changed. His mom called back. “We have something else to tell you,” she said. “You're adopted.” Darryl, then 35, flashed back to the hotel room in Europe, and suddenly understood that this was the missing piece he had been seeking.

Learning to Question

During his childhood in Queens, Darryl never considered that he wasn't born into his family. His life was won-

derful; school was interesting, and he excelled. After high school, he went to college, where he and his bandmates put out “It's Like That,” the single that launched his career.

Initially relieved to hear the truth, Darryl struggled to deal with the news that rocked his reality. He hadn't heard of adoptees' rights or birth parent searches, so he latched onto one thing his parents had said—that his birth mother was Dominican. He scooped up Dominican T-shirts and CDs, learned Spanish, and planned to lead the Dominican Day parade. But he was also drinking heavily, in part to mask the pain of not knowing who he was. His wife, Zuri, told him, “You're just drinking because you don't know how to deal with the fact that you're adopted.”

Four years after learning he was adopted, Darryl was hitting bottom hard when he met Sheila Jaffe, a casting agent for *The Sopranos* and *Entourage* who had also been adopted. Until then, he says, “I was the only adopted person on earth.”

Darryl also began to understand why adoptees who can't access their own records and identities feel so helpless.

Darryl attended his first adoptee support group with Sheila, where he learned that “every story is the same, and every story is different.” He listened, shared his own sense of powerless, and found out he could search for his birth parents. “You never start a book from chapter two,” he explains. “I want to know the beginning of my book.”

Darryl also began to understand why adoptees who can't access their own records and identities feel so helpless. “We have no rights!” he exclaims. “People are making laws about your existence.... We're in the same class as people in the witness protection program—we don't have an identity...and we had no say in it.” He believes in the importance of the search. “As long as you know who you are,” he advises, “you are going to be OK.”



Darryl “DMC” McDaniels

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Conference Information

DMC

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Finding His Roots

When Darryl decided to search in 2005, he hired Pamela Slaton, an adoptee and private eye who helps adoptees seek their birth families. She found Darryl's birth mother's name—Berncenia Lovelace—and he requested his original birth certificate from public records. He was turned away. Next, Darryl searched the library's birth records for children named Lovelace born May 31, 1964. There, in the big book of records, he found a Darryl Lovelace born at Harlem Hospital that very day.

At the hospital, he looked at a book of the 1964 births and found an address inadvertently left on his birth mother's record. He went to the house, but was scared to push the bell so his friend—along for moral support—rang instead. Darryl's great aunt came to the door and told him his birth mother lived in Staten Island.

Making the connection was hard. His therapist warned him of the usual perils: his birth mother may have kept him a secret and might refuse contact. To protect his emotions, Darryl decided to write a letter. Once it was in the mail, he was sick for almost a week. Finally, the day he felt better, his letter came back; he had gotten the address wrong. He and Zuri agreed this meant he was supposed to call.

Deeply afraid, he dialed the number and told the woman who answered that she might be his birth mother. "It's possible," she responded, "When were you born?" After comparing dates, she knew he was her son and they talked for several minutes. Berncenia let the news sink in for two days, then she called Darryl back.

A week later, Darryl met his birth mother. "For the first time in my life, I had seen somebody who looked like me," he recalls. He found other common links too: He and his birth mother had the same Buddha statue, and each has a tattoo that means beauty. His birth brother looks so much like Darryl, friends had said, "You look just like that DMC guy." There was musical talent in the family, an interest in the metaphysical, and more. Darryl also learned that his birth family was not Dominican. He laughs about it now—"I was Dominican for five years!"

Darryl sees his birth mother and family regularly. He and his therapist are working through when his birth and adoptive mothers may meet. He is not quite ready yet. In the meantime, Darryl has learned his birth father's name—and about the history of alcoholism they may share—and hopes to make that connection soon.

Sharing a Personal Story

Darryl had a long battle with drugs and alcohol, but he has been sober since he began seeking his past. He is bolstered by a new sense of purpose. "I gotta use that founda-

tional platform of DMC to make a difference in people's lives," he says. "It's some real responsibility and some destiny going on." Through articles and a VH-1 documentary about his search, he is sharing hope with other adoptees. An earnest advocate, Darryl says, "I represent a multitude of people.... I have to be the Moses or the leader that's going to go and get the laws changed about the sealed records."

He also plans to do more. With Sheila Jaffe, Darryl has started a foundation for kids without parents. He spreads the message that adoption is positive: "All of this is leading up to the big purpose—to remove all the guilt and shame." He talks to youth who were adopted or are waiting for a family and shares his feelings openly so adoptees aren't ashamed of being adopted, birth parents don't feel guilty for placing their children, and adoptive parents don't feel bad for raising someone else's biological child. "It's all because of love," he says with passion.

Darryl has also used music to share his message. He remembered how Sarah McLachlan's music helped him during the darkest days and thought, "I want to write a record for kids who were adopted or in foster care." Darryl asked Sarah to make the record with him and she agreed. Together they recorded "Just Like Me," which tells Darryl's life story:

They say that life is a mystery
And I just wanna know my history
Understand that life is good to me
That's the way it is so let it be...

Understand what I'm rapping
no pain and sorrow
I just want you to know, yo yo [2x]
I'm alright ma and I'm alright pa...

After they finished recording, Sarah revealed that she too was adopted. It confirmed Darryl's belief that everything had happened for a reason.

Personally, Darryl has helped his birth mother let go of her pain. Through therapy, he is working on his journey too—"Now I've got the guilt and shame!" When he visits his birth mother, he feels he's betraying his adoptive mother. He is also coming to terms with being denied his history for so long. "I'm not mad," he says, "but I'm amazed that everybody in my family, except me—even my younger cousins—knew I was adopted."

"Adoption is a beautiful thing," Darryl emphasizes. "If it hadn't happened, where would I be?" Revising his first hit, where he rapped, "I'm DMC in the place to be, I go to St. John's University," he starts, "My name is Darryl Lovelace, and I'm in the place...." Trailing off, he laughs and concludes, "There would be no DMC."

Sandra White Hawk Offers Truth, Healing and Reconciliation

By Mary Martin Mason

Sandra White Hawk, keynote and workshop presenter for the March 2007 AAC conference is a healer in adoption. A co-founder of the First Nations Orphans Association, White Hawk is an internationally recognized presenter whose experience echoes those of thousands of Native Americans forcibly removed from their families by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to be adopted and fostered by white families. Her vision and mission is to help those separated from their people to find their way home and to develop a sense of belonging to a spiritually rich family. It is a vision that she shares and translates to all who have been affected by adoption, Native and non-Native.

Beginning as early as 1890, a movement of forced assimilation began that was based on a belief of white Christian superiority. Between the years of 1941 through 1978, when the Indian Child Welfare Act was passed, First Nations people lost sixty-eight percent of their children to boarding schools, to state and private adoptions and to foster care. In the beginning of this movement, children were compulsorily taken to boarding schools where they were beaten for speaking their own language. Without their native speech, they had no means of expression of identity that is found in one's language. The result was cultural genocide and near destruction of the extended family system.

Today White Hawk knows that she is Sicangu Lakota and is an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. She proudly wears her biological mother's family name. Her journey back to the Sicangu Lakota and to the family who remembered her and had mourned losing her began with abuse, addiction, and resentment. In coming full circle, her journey also has included recovery, fulfillment and a new pride in her heritage.

At the age of 18 months she was adopted by a white missionary family that had moved to South Dakota to "work with the Indians," a phrase her adoptive mother used to refer to her missionary call. White Hawk says, "All they saw was the poverty and alcoholism that they compared to their privileged life and came to the conclusion that their way of life was superior. It was

from this false superiority that I suffered the cruelest form of abuse: a complete rejection of my natural spirit. My adoptive mother constantly reminded me that no matter what I did I came from a pagan race whose only hope for redemption was to assimilate to white culture. From the time I was small I heard things like, 'You better not grow up to be a good-for-nothing Indian.'"

As a child, the face and body that looked back at her from a mirror was different from everyone she knew. "If you grow up within your culture, you look like your surroundings," says White Hawk who did not understand who she was and where she fit. Lacking a way to express her isolation and loneliness, she struggled with the constant message that she had been saved from poverty, abuse and alcoholism.

After her adoptive father died in a farm accident, she was left in the care of an emotionally unstable, abusive mother who worked minimum wage jobs while fading in and out of insanity. White Hawk says, "At the age of fourteen I learned to numb those desperate feelings with alcohol and drugs. I survived and graduated from high school, joined

the Navy, got married and had two children. During the last twenty years I divorced and have overcome the cycle of addiction to alcohol. I also began healing from the wounds caused by abuse."



Sandra White Hawk

Today White Hawk knows that she is Sicangu Lakota and is an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. She proudly wears her biological mother's family name.

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Sandra White Hawk

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In 1988, White Hawk found her way back to Rosebud, South Dakota. Not only did her welcoming family remember her, but her arrival had been expected and prophesied. Each year marked the return of one of her nine brothers and sisters who had been fostered or adopted away from White Hawk's family. She would learn that her deceased mother, Nina Lulu White Hawk, was the oldest of twenty children who had endured the hardships of boarding schools. Boarding schools removed the language, culture and even the Indian names from children. As orphans, a word unknown in Indian languages, the children were raised in dormitories where they gradually forgot the nurturing parenting and traditions that defined them.

As adults these children would suffer from high rates of depression, addiction, incarceration and suicide. White Hawk's mother would lose her children in a repeat of the cycle she had lived as a child with all but two children taken and adopted or placed in foster homes. "From what I gather," White Hawk says, "she had a hard life."

White Hawk was encouraged by her family and tribe to attend social gatherings, ceremonies and powwows. She says, "Doing so has eased the years eaten away by the pain of separation from my spiritual center. There was a time when I felt that my feelings of isolation and confusion were solely a result of the abuse. But that's not true. They are a result of being disconnected from my spiritual center as an Indian woman."

Finding her spiritual center required reconnecting with a proud lineal heritage. She would learn that Native laws and traditions were designed with the view of the potential impact on the seventh generation to come. Adoptions, when they occurred, were arranged informally within the tribe, unlike the white man's method that disrupted the continuity that was the cornerstone of the Native belief system. She would also hear how elders in ancient times had predicted that generations of children would be lost, but would begin to return to their people in the seventh generation, a prophecy that White Hawk embodies.

The First Nations Orphans Association (FNOA) is an outgrowth of White Hawk's personal healing, facilitated by ceremonies such as The Wiping of Tears, one of the seven sacred ceremonies given to Lakota people. She says, "Most go through life not putting words to the kind of pain inflicted by adoption. In the Wiping of Tears Ceremony one can stand in the circle and open that part of their heart where no words can go and let the healing medicine of sage and the song go into that dark place and begin healing."

The First Nations Orphans Association is an outgrowth of an overwhelming need for healing for those affected by adoption and foster care. Through FNOA, White Hawk offers advocacy to adoptees, fostered individuals and

their families in accordance with Native traditional spiritual heritage and the Indian Child Welfare Act. She also helps individuals apply for tribal enrollment and do relative searches and educates social services providers about Native cultural traditions and values of Indian families with the goal of bridging and enhancing services to children.



Sandra White Hawk

White Hawk facilitates monthly FNOA Adoptee Talking Circles. Held in a Minneapolis Native community church, regular attendees include Indian male youth in foster care who reside in a nearby halfway house. White Hawk says, "We have seen the healing through the telling of all sides of the story by all those involved. Shame is reduced as individuals share and encourage one another. It is an honor to sit in the circle with them."

Each Adoptee Talking Circle begins as White Hawk offers a prayer of blessing and explains to participants that an eagle feather will be passed around the circle. Individuals taking their turn holding the feather may tell their stories or sit in silence without comment from others in the circle. At the end, White Hawk reminds those present of the power of the circle that includes ancestors and relatives whose powerful prayers still follow their children who were lost to them.

FNOA's motto is "Wicoicage Ake Un-Ku-Pi" that translates as, "Generation after generation, we are coming home." White Hawk believes that it is time to take back what was taken through adoption. Skilled in the art of healing, she tempers this by saying, "Let us take it back in love and compassion."

Visit the First Nations Orphans Association www.geocities.com/fnoac

Sandra White Hawk will deliver the keynote "Truth, Healing and Reconciliation" at the March, 2007 AAC Conference. She will be featured in Outsiders Within, an anthology of transracial adoptees to be released by Southend Press and is available in stores now.

AAC Seeks Sponsors for 2007 Conference

The American Adoption Congress is looking for sponsors for its 28th Annual International Conference entitled "Take the Freedom Trail to Truth in Adoption" to be held in Wakefield, MA, March 7-10, 2007. We are looking for support in a number of areas:

- o Grand sponsors will receive acknowledgement in the conference program, a table in the registration area, a one-year organizational membership in the AAC, and two conference registrations. Grand sponsorships are available for \$1000.
- o Supporting sponsors will receive acknowledgement in the conference program, a table in the registration area, and a one-year organizational membership in the AAC. Supporting sponsorships are available for \$500.
- o We are looking for on-site hospitality hosts for March 8 and 9, 2007.
- o Contributions are needed to sponsor adolescents in foster care and their social workers to attend Darryl McDaniel's keynote

address. These sponsorships are available at \$50 per attendee, which includes lunch and transportation. A limited number of tickets are available.

Publicity is needed from your organization or business. Flyers and registration information will be available for distribution to students, clients, professionals, and anyone else with an interest in learning more about adoption. Please check for updates on AAC's website at www.americanadoptioncongress.org.

For more information about sponsoring the 2007 Boston conference, please contact one of the following:

Eileen McQuade, AAC Treasurer, eileen2155@gmail.com, (561) 414-1810;
Paul Schibbelhute, AAC New England Regional Director and Local Organizing Committee (LOC) Chair, pschibbe@aol.com, (603) 880-7790; or
Sharon Pittenger, AAC Conference Chair, sharon.pittenger@gmail.com, (503) 794-0915.

Call for Volunteers

for the

2007 "Take the Freedom Trail to Truth in Adoption" Conference

Volunteering is a wonderful way to support your American Adoption Congress and to be an integral part of the 28th International Conference. Volunteers will help with monitoring of the conference keynote sessions and workshops, welcoming attendees, providing security, assisting with hospitality, registration and the book room. Please email Carolyn Pooler gap-mother@aol.com and Amy Winn amy.aac@gmail.com to find out more.

Finding My Path

By Pernilla Webber

I am an adoptee born and raised in Sweden. I moved to the US for a job when I was 25 and have lived in Bucks County, Pennsylvania ever since. I attended my first AAC conference in Las Vegas in 2005, which was a very powerful experience for me. It wasn't just my first adoption conference—it was also the first time I talked to other people about my adoption and my feelings about it. It was such an enlightening event, and I was amazed by all the new impressions and thoughts about adoption that I gained from the conference. The presence and participation of all the great attendees, speakers and staff—all with different stories, goals, backgrounds and knowledge—opened up a new world to me.

My sister and I always knew we were adopted; our parents explained it to us when we were very young. We were fortunate kids. We were raised well, taken care of, loved and had what I would consider a good childhood. If anyone asked me about being adopted, I would claim without hesitation that adoption had no impact at all on my life, my choices, or my personality. But as I hit my thirties and a five-year relationship ended in a cloud of confusion, tears and desperation, it hit me like a ton of bricks—I had successfully managed to destroy every relationship I had ever had! I realized that I simply didn't trust or believe in Love. This realization started my Search, but it wasn't only a search for my biological parents; it was equally as important to Search for myself—for that part of me that I had lost in there somewhere along the way.

Throughout my childhood and teenage years, I never thought that Love was meant for me. The first definition of Love that we learn growing up is the love found between mother and child. In my case my mother didn't want me—in my mind, she gave me away and didn't look back. This translated into the belief that Love didn't exist for me and I had no right to it. It simply was not meant for me to receive or to give Love. I surrounded myself with many friends and had many fun and loving relationships, but was never able to commit to anyone; I always ended up deciding to leave because I didn't feel that my love was “real” or “enough.” I didn't deserve to stay, so I had to go.

My goal with starting the Search was to be able to believe in myself, to believe in Love and to feel Love in my heart. This was a very painful, emotional and internal phase of my life, because I was analyzing everything—every thought, every decision, every relationship, every situation—to try to understand how my adoption was influencing my life and my life decisions. As I came

to learn, many of my reactions, decisions and choices came from the hurt inner child, and the challenge was to decipher which reactions were truly made by me and which ones the wounded child made. I was doing a lot of research on the Internet, reading books and forums, writing down my thoughts or just sitting around for hours thinking and analyzing and pondering.... I wrote a letter to my biological mother and she responded with some information that she felt I had the “right to,” but in the end she rejected me a second time and didn't want to have any contact with me. I tried to reach out to my mother and father but they weren't

overly supportive, as they felt threatened and uncomfortable talking about the adoption and answering my questions.

Naturally this process turned over many stones and left many fears and feelings uncovered and exposed. This internal

search phase included a lot of pain and hurt. Many times it felt like my heart was pushed even further away from me, but at my lowest low there was always something that kept me going. I didn't want to live a life without Love so if finding Love meant digging into the pain—that's what I had to do! There was nothing to lose! In the end I came out stronger and wiser and I learned a lot about myself. The search basically saved my life.

Attending the conference was a milestone for me and I will remember it for as long as I live. Rather than looking inward at my own situation, I also became aware of the big-



Pernilla Webber

I would claim without hesitation that adoption had no impact at all on my life, my choices, or my personality.

ger picture, such as the adoption issues in society and in the community, and the importance of legislation to try to help people in the adoption triad. It was a very humbling experience to be able to be part of a group of people where I felt totally accepted, understood and supported. To step into a room full of strangers the first day, and to leave a couple of days later with hugs, farewells, phone numbers in my pocket, take cares and lasting friendships—that has never happened to me before!

Leaving for the airport to go back to Pennsylvania, I felt like a different person—I could feel how my heart was smiling! The sessions I attended, the people I talked to and the invaluable interactions we had confirmed and verified to me that I was on the right path. I also know that I am ready to look outside my own four walls for answers and that talking to people is really helpful. I am looking forward to participate in various activities, initiatives and support groups to help others and to learn more about life through the people with whom I cross paths.

Bitter and Sweet

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cal students at the University of Utah. In that era, as the practice had always been from the beginning up to 1980 or so, parents did not choose their sperm donor. All they knew is that he was married with one daughter and graduated one month before Bill's birth in July 1945. Bill has two younger DI brothers who have different donors.

Rebecca Thompson Symes is a DI adult from Salt Lake City, Utah. She holds degrees in Sociology and Human Development & Family Studies from the University of Utah. Rebecca was told about her DI origin at the age of four. She began searching for her donor father at age 10 with very limited information: the donor's height, eye color, hair color, religious affiliation, marital status, educational background (also a medical student) and other such "non-identifying" information provided by the private physician that arranged her conception. Now 28, Rebecca believes she has identified her donor, though no verification is available as the records surrounding her conception have been destroyed. Rebecca has participated in programming and news articles with media in the UK, Germany and Japan, sharing her experiences as a product of DI. She is also currently undertaking academic research on the effects of artificial reproductive technologies on the family system and international social policies. Rebecca and her husband are the parents of one daughter.

The Search

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a script that *might not* reflect his own intimately personal feelings. My parents' donor is my biological father. It is difficult to accept that I was never loved or wanted by my biological father. I was never allowed to know who he is. I was never allowed to connect with any of my half-siblings or paternal grandparents. My children will never be allowed to know who their grandfather is or any of their cousins. What if they unknowingly date each other someday? Where is the dignity in this?

I do not believe that the pain of infertility is necessarily greater than the pain of never knowing your full identity...never being able to have a relationship with your biological other half and extended biological family. It is all relative.

Over the past couple of years I have made contact with many other donor offspring through internet support and advocacy groups. We come from all around the world (including the United States, Canada, England, Australia, New Zealand, Netherlands, and Japan...). Our donor conceptions have brought us together with one shared commonality, we all would like to be given the chance to know who our biological fathers and extended kin are. While many would like to believe that the abolishment of anonymity solves all the inherent problems in separating kin, it merely serves to increase the complexity of emotions behind our shared experiences.

Although some of us might not like what we find in the end, I do believe that it should be a human right to at least be *allowed* to know our biological kin and identity without the veil of anonymity agreements which we were never consenting parties to. I strongly believe that we should be permitted to negotiate the terms of our connections with our biological/genetic parents for ourselves.

Donor anonymity is a violation of our identity rights, liberties and freedoms. People who make their gametes available for collaborative reproduction in the future they need to be advised that their potential offspring might contact them when those offspring become adults. Ideally, if gamete providers don't want to be available to their offspring who may want a meaningful human connection, then they simply shouldn't donate their genetic material. I do believe that it is a matter of ethics and that there is a moral responsibility attached to our eggs and sperm when they are combined to create new life.

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Join the AAC for its 29th international adoption conference in spring 2008 in Portland, OR!

Announcements

The 34th Annual New England Adoption Conference, sponsored by Adoption Community of New England, will be held Saturday, April 28, 2007 in Milford, MA. For over a decade, this has been the largest single-day adoption conference in the country, with over 1000 people choosing from 100+ workshops for all those interested in adoption. There are tracks providing workshops for pre- and post-adoptive parents, adopted persons, birth parents and extended family members. The extensive book store and exhibits offer a wealth of information and services.

2007 marks the 40th Anniversary of the founding of Adoption Community of New England, known for over three decades as Open Door Society of MA. Come join in the celebration, while experiencing the broad range of workshop topics.

For more information, or to receive the brochure, contact Adoption Community of New England, 1750 Washington Street, Holliston, MA 01746-2234, call 508.429.4260, or visit www.AdoptionCommunityofNE.org.

AAC Announces:

Adoptee Access Action Kits

Release Hope



Release Birth Certificates For Adopted Adults

Contains: Legislative advocacy materials
"Vital Records" documentary by Jean Strauss
Bumper Sticker

Available at AAC Boston Conference
\$10.00

conference registration

Name _____ Organization _____

Address _____ City _____

State/Province _____ Zip Code _____ Country _____

Daytime Phone _____ Evening Phone _____ E-mail _____

Triad Position (if applicable) Adoptee Birthparent Adoptive Parent Professionals Support/Other

Registration Opens Dec. 1 Register by 2/5 On-Site

Full Conference

(Includes all workshops, keynote speakers, continental breakfasts, breaks, Thursday reception and Saturday luncheon.)

- AAC Member \$ 250 \$ 325
 Non-Member \$ 325 \$ 400

Student/Senior Full Conference

(Includes all workshops, keynote speakers, continental breakfasts, breaks, Thursday reception and Saturday luncheon.) NOTE: A copy of your CURRENT student ID must accompany your registration or full conference rate will apply.

- AAC Member \$ 200 \$ 275
 Non-Member \$ 275 \$ 350

2-Day Conference

(Includes all workshops, keynote speakers, continental breakfasts and breaks on days of attendance.)

- AAC Member \$ 200 \$ 250
 Non-Member \$ 275 \$ 325
 Saturday luncheon \$ 25 \$ 25

Indicate days of attendance below:

Thursday (includes reception) Friday Saturday (includes lunch)

1-Day Conference

(Includes all workshops, keynote speakers, continental breakfast and break on day of attendance.)

- AAC Member \$ 125 \$ 225
 Non-Member \$ 200 \$ 300
 Saturday luncheon \$ 25 \$ 25

Indicate day of attendance below:

Thursday (includes reception) Friday Saturday (includes lunch)

AAC Membership Application

1-Yr	2-Yr	Membership Type
<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 50	\$ 90	Individual
<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 40	\$ 70	Student
<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 45	\$ 80	Senior
<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 60	\$ 110	Household
<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 70	\$ 130	Search/Support Group
<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 110	\$ 210	Friend of AAC (5 yr commitment)
<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 160	\$ 250	Organization (1 to 5 attendees)

Membership includes:

- Discounted registration at AAC National and Regional conferences
- Subscription to the AAC's award-winning quarterly publication, *The Decree*
- All other publications sponsored by the AAC

Note: If you are a renewing member, please visit our website for discounted membership rates.

www.americanadoptioncongress.org

Registration Amount	\$ _____
Just Desserts – AAC Memorial Fund (Donor Reception Thursday evening. All proceeds will benefit the AAC Memorial Scholarship fund. <i>Suggested donation \$25.</i>)	_____
Boston Tour on Wednesday – \$40 (Afternoon tour to downtown and the North End.)	_____
Display Table – \$100 (Includes 6' skirted table in/around book room.)	_____
CEU Credits – \$40 (Includes all application, processing and filing fees.)	_____
Total Conference Fees	\$ _____
Membership Fee (To join or if you need to renew – be sure to take advantage of the lower Conference rate!)	_____
Presenter's Discount (We are pleased to offer you a discount for your participation! Please deduct \$50 from your registration fee. NOTE: Only one discount per presenter and a maximum of two presenters' discounts allowed per workshop.)	_____
GRAND TOTAL ENCLOSED	\$ _____

Method of Payment: Check (made payable to AAC) MC Visa AmEx

Card # _____ Exp Date _____

Signature _____

(Required when payment is made by credit card.)

Please check all that apply:

- First time AAC Conference attendee?* Yes No
May we include your name in the Conference Directory? Yes No
Are you an AAC member? Yes No

Three easy registration options!

1. By Mail – Mail registration form along with check, money order, or credit card information to:

Carolyn Hoard
 AAC Conference Chair
 402 Foulk Rd. Apt. 2C5
 Wilmington, DE 19803

2. By Fax – Fax registration form, including credit card information to: AAC Conference Registrar (866) 648-8916.

3. On-line – Visit us online at www.americanadoptioncongress.org and follow the convenient link to our on-line registration form. You may deduct \$5 from your registration total for registering on-line.

DMC, of Run-DMC, Headlines Adoption Conference



Darryl "DMC" McDaniels

At the age of 35, hip-hop pioneer and co-founder of the multi-platinum group Run-DMC, Darryl "DMC" McDaniels made a startling discovery: he was adopted. Suddenly everything he thought he knew about himself changed, plunging him into a quest familiar to other adopted adults who in seeking information about their family of origin find that they are denied their original birth information.

DMC will keynote the American Adoption Congress (AAC) 28th

Annual Conference, March 8, 2007. In his presentation, "DMC: My Story and My Mission," he will describe his reunion with his birthmother, the personal reconciliation with two families that love him and his new mission: to help adoptees

access their sealed birth certificates. His workshop, "DMC as Moses: Leading a Reform Movement" will recap his part in a national reform effort. DMC says, "I represent a multitude of people. I have to be the Moses that's going to go and get the laws changed about the sealed records."

The AAC conference, "Take the Freedom Trail to Truth in Adoption" will be held March 7-10, 2007, at the Sheraton Colonial Hotel in Wakefield, MA, a suburb of Boston.

For information including updated workshops and scheduling, go to: www.americanadoptioncongress.org.

Youth Advocacy Day – March 8

On March 8, Thursday, 2007, AAC invites adopted and foster youth to join in Youth Advocacy Day:

- Meet and greet Darryl McDaniels, DMC of Run-DMC fame
- Work with national leaders in adoption and foster care reform
- Attend workshops designed and presented by youth
- Inform policy makers about what adopted and foster youth need to have in order to enjoy a healthy childhood and productive adulthood



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