TENOR: What We’ve Accomplished and What Lies Ahead
by Frederick F. Greenman, Esq.

In the last issue of the Decree, Bob Tuke and Denny Glad described the four-year effort led by them and Caprice East that culminated in the passage of Tennessee’s 1996 adoption law, which gives adult adoptees access to their records as a matter of right. That monumental effort created the terrain upon which the two lawsuits entitled Doe v. Sandquist were fought. I joined the effort only after the first of those lawsuits began in June 1996. In this article I want to discuss what we accomplished in those lawsuits and what lies ahead.

Within three days after the first lawsuit began in federal court, AAC created the TENOR fund to help defend the Tennessee law. Within a few more days, AAC retained Harlan Dodson’s firm, Dodson, Parker & Behm, to represent the group of birth parents, adoptive parents and adoptees who became amici curiae in the case. Denny Glad immediately began assembling that group.

More than three years of often furious activity intervened between that moment and the final decision by the Tennessee Supreme Court. The defenders of secrecy began a second lawsuit in the Tennessee state courts, and the two lawsuits eventually passed through six courts: the federal suit through the District Court in Nashville, the Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit in Cincinnati and the U.S. Supreme Court; the state suit through the trial court, the Court of Appeals and finally the Tennessee Supreme Court, all in Nashville. In those lawsuits, we filed 127 affidavits (most of them drafted by Anne Martin of the Dodson firm) and 14 briefs (most of them largely drafted by Julie Sandine of the Dodson firm). I drafted the bulk of a couple of briefs and some of the more technical affidavits. Harlan Dodson supervised the effort. Among the sophisticated legal talents which he masks with his good-ol’-boy manner is an ability not only to spot problems in a brief, but also to tell you how to correct them; the only other lawyer with whom I’ve worked who could do it as well was Abe Fortas.

What did our efforts accomplish? In the first place, we won every substantive issue. The Tennessee statute allows adult adoptees to see almost all of their records concerning themselves and their birth parents, subject to a contact veto. The final decisions by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit and by the Tennessee Supreme Court held that the statute violates no right of birth parents (or anyone else) under either the federal Constitution or the Tennessee Constitution.

In particular, the federal and Tennessee courts held that such a statute does not violate any right of (continued on page 3)
Editor’s Corner

This issue of the Decree will be the first to come out as we enter the new year, and it seems fitting that we have some editorial staff additions and changes to share with you. AAC Vice President and Communications Director Abigail Lovett, who recently joined the editorial staff, is on a leave of absence. I am honored that the Publications Committee asked me to help out as Acting Editor in her absence. Abigail took on the editorial post during a time of transition for the Decree and other AAC publications, and we have all benefited from her perspective, her creativity, and her connections with people who think and write about adoption issues. The committee still includes Canada Co-Liaison Monica Byrne, Illinois State Representative Melisha Mitchell, and AAC President Jane Nast. Former Editor Leslie Goodwin continues in her role as Production Manager, for which we are all thankful. In addition, Acting Communications Chair Pam Hasegawa and Education Director/Northwest Regional Director Delores Teller will join the committee. Pam, an adoptee, photographer, and motivator, among other things, is active in educational and legal reform efforts in New Jersey and elsewhere. Delores is already familiar to many Decree readers, even outside of the Northwest region, for her work supporting Measure 58 in Oregon and her passionate advocacy of honesty in adoption.

1999 was a good year for adoptee rights. In this issue we continue our coverage of one of the most significant legal cases in recent years: Doe v. Sundquist, the Tennessee decision that has finally established that giving adoptees access to their records does not violate anyone’s “vested rights” to secrecy. Fred Greenman, AAC Legal Counsel, explains the significance of the decision and outlines the next challenges he sees for adoption reformers on the state and federal levels. In addition to challenging reform in Tennessee and Oregon, proponents of secrecy have moved the battle into the international arena by inserting “confidentiality” language in federal bills implementing the Hague Convention. Contributor Maureen Hogan expands on other objectionable provisions the secrecy proponents have inserted into those bills. Their articles emphasize that we cannot rest on the court victories of 1999. We will continue to monitor this area closely for you.

In addition to supporting legal reform, of course, AAC educates people both inside and outside of the triad about the benefits of open, humane adoption practices. To that end we will continue to publish articles addressing diverse viewpoints and experiences from within the broad spectrum of people touched by adoption. One of the best ways to educate, as well as to gain strength, is to come together with others, and so we will endeavor to keep you informed about conferences sponsored by AAC, member groups, and other organizations. A significant gathering of Korean-born adoptees took place in September, for example, and is described on page 7.

Our contact information is on the masthead to your left. We want to hear from you. Please don’t hesitate to contact me directly with any comments, criticisms or suggestions for upcoming issues of the Decree as we move forward into a new year.
privacy of birth parents, whether under the federal Constitution or the Tennessee Constitution, and whether such a right is called familial privacy, reproductive privacy or confidentiality.

The federal court also held that the Tennessee statute does not violate the federal right to equal protection.

Finally, the Tennessee Supreme Court held that the Tennessee law was not “retrospective legislation” and did not violate any contractual right or other vested right of birth parents.

These decisions by the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals and by the Tennessee Supreme Court set unanimous precedents that uphold granting adult adoptees access to their adoption files. They are the only decisions on the subject by appellate courts. They will be cited repeatedly in decisions and debates over granting such access in other states and in the federal government.

As most Decree readers know, in 1998 Oregon passed an Initiative sponsored by Helen Hill and Bastard Nation which grants adult adoptees full access to their original birth certificates. The usual suspects (NCFA, LDS Social Services, etc.) organized a lawsuit to enjoin the Initiative; the lawsuit was dismissed by a trial court, and the Oregon Court of Appeals unanimously affirmed that dismissal on December 29, 1999. In its affirmed, the Court of Appeals relied in part on the Sixth Circuit decision.

As most readers also know, a group in Delaware led by Carolyn Hoard induced the Delaware legislature to revise its adoption law and grant adult adoptees retrospective access to their original birth certificates, subject to a birth parent disclosure veto. The statute took effect in January 1999, and there was no lawsuit. Only 2 percent of affected birth parents have filed disclosure vetoes. Over 100 original birth certificates have already been issued to adoptees in that tiny state. It is my hope that the Tennessee and Oregon decisions will discourage any further lawsuits seeking to bar adult adoptees from access to their own records.

Myths Exposed: (1) “Confidentiality”

The benefits of the Tennessee lawsuits go far beyond the precedents they set. The evidence we assembled in the course of these lawsuits disproved the arguments raised by the National Council for Adoption and other partisans of secrecy, and demonstrated for all to see that those arguments were based on lies.

The secrecy advocates used to argue that most birth parents wanted to hide their identities from their surrendered children. Using statistics compiled by various confidential intermediary programs (most of them under the auspices of state governments), we showed instead that approximately 95 percent of birth parents want to be contacted by their surrendered children. Only about 5 percent want to hide from their children. (While the lawsuits were in progress, these figures were confirmed by data developed separately by the Connecticut Law Revision Commission.)

In short, in place of the revolting lie that birth parents only want to be quit of their children, we have established the truth that birth parents are first of all parents and want to know above all that their children are alive and well.

Another false argument demolished in the litigation was that former laws authorized promises to birth parents that their identities would be kept secret from their surrendered children, and that such promises were commonly made. As a by-product of the lawsuit, it became clear that no such promise has ever been put in writing anywhere at any time. In July 1998 I finally wrote Bill Pierce of NCFA challenging NCFA to produce any such written promises from the files of their member agencies. They received the letter, but have never replied.

As the Tennessee decisions confirmed, no adoption agency or individual could have made such a promise without exposing themselves to liability, because courts in Tennessee and elsewhere have always had the power to grant adoptees access to their records, over the objection of birth parents or without even notifying them.

Myths Exposed: (2) Abortion and Access to Records

We also demolished the most despicable argument of the pro-secrecy forces. They claimed that giving adoptees access to their records would increase abortions and decrease adoptions, because birth mothers would abort their children rather than bear them and place them for adoption, if they knew the children could later find them. The fact that 95 percent of birth mothers want to be found was one refutation. The other refutations were statistical comparisons of adoptions and abortions over time and between different states.

For years, NCFA has claimed that adoptions declined and abortions increased in England and in Australia (continued on next page)
because adoptees were granted access to their records in those countries. The claim was repeated in the Tennessee federal complaint, which claimed that adoptions declined and abortions increased after records were opened in England in 1976. It was suspiciously silent about what had happened earlier. With the help of a friend studying at Cambridge University, I obtained the annual statistics of unrelated (i.e., not step-parent) adoptions in England and Wales from 1960 to 1984. They showed that the decline in adoptions began in 1969, long before records were opened. Similarly, statistics compiled by the Alan Guttmacher Institute showed that the increase in abortions started even earlier, in 1962. These statistics, which we submitted to the court, made it clear that opening records did not cause any decline in adoptions or increase in abortions. On the contrary, the statistics showed that if opening adoption records had any effect, it was to increase adoptions and decrease abortions.

We also obtained statistics on adoptions in New South Wales, the largest state in Australia, from the Registrar of New South Wales. They showed that the decline in adoptions began in 1973, long before records were opened in 1991. These statistics we also submitted to the court.

Shortly after we submitted these statistics, one of the attorneys for the pro-secrecy plaintiffs in the Tennessee lawsuit said that the case was not about statistics.

The final nail in the coffin of the abortion/adoptions argument was a comparison of adoption and abortion rates among states in this country. Kansas and Alaska are the only two states which have long given adult adoptees unrestricted access to their original birth certificates. That comparison showed that the adoption rates in Kansas and Alaska have been higher than those in the United States as a whole and that the adoption rate in Kansas was higher than in all four states that surround it. A comparison of resident abortion rates in the different states also showed that such abortion rates in Kansas and Alaska were lower than in the United States as a whole and that the rate in Kansas was lower than in any of the four surrounding states. These statistics we also submitted to the court.

These statistics have been widely circulated since we developed them in the litigation. They have helped to educate many anti-abortion groups and advocates that access to adoption records and open adoptions serve to reduce abortion rates, not increase them.

In its recently issued “Fact Book III” (more appropriately called the “Mythbook”), NCFA has tried to resurrect its statistical arguments about abortion. Hiding behind the skirts of a rather foolish English author named Patricia Morgan, Pierce once again claims that adoptions declined in England after 1975, without looking at what happened before that year. Morgan claims to have been unable to find earlier statistics. Similarly, Pierce tries to evade the state-to-state comparison by using overall abortion rates, without distinguishing between resident and non-resident abortions. Apparently, it’s somewhat easier to get an abortion in Kansas than in some of the surrounding states; that says precious little about the effect of Kansas’s adoption laws on the decisions of Kansas residents.

The final refutation of the secrecy advocates is yet to come. They claim that when adoptees are reunited with their birth parents, the birth parents’ lives will be ruined and their marriages disrupted. AAC members know that this argument is hogwash. Those of us birth parents who have been found by our children know that these reunions have generally been our salvation. Anyone watching the television or reading the newspapers or the magazines must also know that there have already been tens or hundreds of thousands of such reunions without any of the ruined lives or disrupted marriages predicted by the secrecy advocates.

As formerly sealed records in Tennessee are opened to the 3,000 or so adoptees who have asked for them, I expect that there will similarly be no problems. Because the Tennessee lawsuits did not affect the release of records of persons adopted before 1951, over 300 pre-1951 adoptees have already received their records; no adverse consequences have been reported. Similarly, in Delaware, over 100 adoptees have received their original birth certificates since April 1999, without incident. I expect the results in Oregon will be similar, once that case is ended.

As Conan Doyle wrote in Silver Blaze:

"Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"

"To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

"The dog did nothing in the night-time."

"That was the curious incident," remarked Sherlock Holmes.

Where Do We Go from Here?

In the States

In Kansas, adult adoptees have unrestricted access to all their adoption records. In Alaska, they have unrestricted access to their original birth certificates. In Tennessee, they now have access to virtually all their adoption records, although reunions are subject to the contact veto. In Delaware, they have access to their original birth certificates, subject to a disclosure veto; that veto is being exercised by only 2 percent of birth parents. In Oregon, as of December 29, 1999, when this article was written, adult adoptees had also obtained unrestricted access to their original birth certificates.
That leaves 45 states (plus the District of Columbia) where adoption records remain generally sealed from the persons whom they most concern—the adoptees. We must work to reform every one of those laws, so that adult adoptees will no longer be treated as second-class citizens. The facts we developed in the Tennessee lawsuit should help persuade the legislatures and the voters that reform is long overdue. The Tennessee and Oregon decisions should assure that once a state’s laws have been reformed by the legislature or by popular vote, the reform will not be further delayed by a lawsuit.

In drafting and negotiating reform legislation, we should bear in mind that in most states adoption records fall into three time periods. Originally, adoptees had access to their original birth certificates and other records. In many states, that access continued until recently. In Alabama, for instance, adult adoptees had unrestricted access to their original birth certificates until 1990. In Massachusetts they had access until 1974. In Pennsylvania, until 1985. All persons adopted earlier in these states were entitled to access to their records when they reached the age of majority; their birth parents knew or should have known it when they surrendered their children. There is no legitimate argument for continuing to deny these adult adoptees access to their records in those states.¹

The second group of adoptees are those whose adoptions were finalized after the adoption law in a particular state was amended to deny adoptees access to their own records, and before the adoption law in that state will be reformed to restore access. It is only as to those persons adopted in this middle period that any argument can be made (however fallaciously) that a few of their birth parents expected that their identities would be kept secret from their children. It is only as to this middle group of adoptees that any compromise measures, such as contact or disclosure vetoes, should be considered.

The third group of adoptees are those who are adopted after the law is reformed to restore adoptees’ access to their records. For such adoptees, there is no reason to accept compromise measures such as contact or disclosure vetoes. Indeed, accepting any such compromises with respect to future adoptions creates the danger that someone will later argue that the birth parents in such adoptions had a “vested right” to a contact veto or disclosure veto. Such arguments are unlikely to prevail, but it could take another three years of litigation to defeat them.

In short, compromises such as disclosure vetoes and contact vetoes should be limited to adoptions that took place after adoptees were denied access to their records and before such access is restored.

**In Congress**

In the year 2000 the big fight over access to records will be in Congress. The forces of secrecy have recognized that they are losing in the states, and they are attempting a counteroffensive on the federal level. This involves no small hypocrisy on their part; in the past they regularly argued that adoption was a matter for the states alone. That position lasted only until they started losing in the states.

The major battle in Congress is over the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, and particularly the statute that will be needed to implement it if it is ratified. The Hague Convention is a proposed treaty which sets up requirements for intercountry adoption that apply to both the country from which the adoptee emigrates (the “country of origin”) and the country to which the adoptee immigrates (the “receiving country”). The Hague Convention has already been ratified by some countries such as Romania, from which many children have been adopted into the United States. Many adoption agencies that arrange international adoptions, such as Holt, fear that if the United States does not ratify the Hague Convention, they will be unable to continue to arrange these adoptions. Consequently they are lobbying intensely for ratification of the Hague Convention. Pierce, NCFA and their allies are trying to use the Hague Convention to set a federal precedent for secrecy of adoption records. Pierce was a member of the U. S. delegation which participated in the drafting of the Hague Convention, and he attempted unsuccessfully to have secrecy written into the Convention. Fortunately he failed, and the Convention now provides that adoptees should have access to their records “in so far as is permitted by the law of” the receiving country. Pierce, NCFA, and their allies in Congress are seeking to take advantage of the quoted phrase and of the eagerness of Holt and other adoption agencies for ratification of the Hague Convention, to include in the implementing statutes provisions which will impose secrecy on intercountry adoptees.

NCFA’s congressional allies include Representatives Tom Billey of Virginia, Christopher Smith of New Jersey and James Oberstar of Minnesota. Rep. Billey is chairman of the Commerce Committee, Rep. Smith is one of the ranking Republicans on the International Relations Committee and Rep. Oberstar is the ranking minority member.
What We’ve Accomplished and What Lies Ahead—Greenman
(continued from previous page)
of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
(which approves road projects in every district). All three
wield a great deal of power in Congress. Rep. Billey, in
particular, has demanded that the implementing legisla-
tion for the Hague Convention include secrecy provisions,
and the adoption agencies (including Holt, the Child
Welfare League, and the Joint Council on Intercountry
Services) have knuckled under to him. In effect, he is hold-
ing hostage several thousand foreign children and the U.S.
residents seeking to adopt them. It has remained for AAC,
Bastard Nation, Adopt America Advocates, the Adoptive
Parents Committee of New York, and the American Acad-
emy of Pediatrics to oppose this power play.

Rep. Billey has testified that he is only trying to prevent
us from setting a federal precedent in favor of openness.
This is a smokescreen. AAC has pointed out in testimony
that federal legislation allowing intercountry adoptees
access to their adoption records will set no precedent for
domestic adoptions because the birth parents live abroad;
any expectations they may have about secrecy depend on
their own countries’ laws, and the Hague Convention
tself requires those countries to delete identifying informa-
tion from the adoption records forwarded to the United
States, if those countries’ laws impose such secrecy
requirements. This has not satisfied Rep. Billey and his confeder-
ates, however. Clearly they are trying to set a federal prece-
dent for secrecy. Unless they are stopped, they will undo
a great deal of the good that we have accomplished in Ten-
nessee, Delaware and Oregon.

For this reason, AAC is urging all its members to con-
tact their federal representatives and senators and express
their concern that any legislation implementing the Hague
Convention should allow adult adoptees full access to their
adoption records. The best form of contact is a personal
meeting at your representative’s or senator’s home office in
your own state. The second best is a letter (preferably
handwritten) or a telephone call. The least effective is
e-mail; many congressmen give e-mail little or no atten-
tion, because they get so much of it.

The Senate bill implementing the Hague Convention is
S. 682, sponsored by Senators Helms and Landrieu. The
House bill is H.R. 2909, sponsored by Representative
Gilman and over thirty other representatives (including
Representatives Billey, Oberstar and Smith). Both bills, as
presently drafted, would deny intercountry adoptees access
to their own records. They must be amended to allow access.

The AAC’s statement urging amendment of H.R. 2909
is posted on our website (http://www.american-adoption-
cong.org). I hope that all of you who have so well sup-
ported TENOR will read our statement and then contact
your representatives and senators, urging them to support
openness and honesty in intercountry adoption. That is
the next battle and one which we must win.

Footnote:
1 Indeed, the laws that retroactively sealed adoption
records may well be unconstitutional because they ret-
roactively (or “retrospectively”) denied adoptees a vested
right. However, as the Tennessee and Oregon lawsuits
demonstrate, the law concerning retrospective legisla-
tion and vested rights is anything but clear. Before any-
one rushes to start such a lawsuit, I hope they will con-
sult with me. As I hope I have demonstrated above, and
as Brother Pierce and his friends have learned over the
last three years, constitutional litigation is a two-edged
sword and you can lose very big.

Fred Greenman is a New York attorney who holds a B.A., an L.L.B.,
and an L.L.M. from Harvard. He served in the U.S. Army and was
an assistant U.S. attorney, S.D.N.Y. He has been with Deutsch
Klugbrun & Blasband since 1969. Their practice is commercial
litigation, primarily related to music and literary publishing
and copyrights. His daughter was born out of wedlock in July 1959.
She was surrendered for adoption in 1960, and they were reunited in
1991. He is active now in adoption reform and helped win the
federal and state cases defending Tennessee’s new law.

Birth parents: Were you falsely promised that you could
contact your child, or that your child could contact
you or learn your identity, when he or she reached
adulthood?

Adoptive parents: Were you falsely promised that your
child could get his/her records or contact birth par-
ents when he or she reached adulthood?

If so, please contact AAC Legislation Director
Carolyn Hoard as soon as possible at choard@herc.com
or phone her at 302-325-2903. Please include the state
and year of surrender, and a phone number. None of
this information will be released without your consent
and it will be used only as described below.

We need a database listing birth parents and adoptive parents
who were told that their children could learn the birth parents’ identities
when the children reached majority. The purpose is to be able to
submit these parents’ statements in subsequent lawsuits or lobbying,
in order to counter the usual argument about promises of secrecy. We
will need to be able to extract the relevant names from the database
and contact them quickly when lawsuits begin or lobbying is needed,
in order to obtain permissions and further information. We will there-
fore need to have on file the names, telephone numbers or e-mail
addresses (preferably both), and state and year of surrender for each of
these misled parents. Carolyn has offered to maintain this database.
The modern history of intercountry adoption began from Korea in the mid 1950s. Since then, approximately two hundred thousand children have been adopted internationally with families in Europe and the United States. More than one hundred and forty thousand of those adoptions have been from Korea. The first generation of Korean adoptees are now in mid-life and the second generation has come into their own as adults.

In September 1999 in Washington, D.C., nearly four hundred Korean adoptees and their spouses and partners participated in the International Gathering of the First Generation of Korean Adoptees. The event was sponsored by also-known-as, inc., the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, The Korea Society, and Holt International Children's Services. Our ages ranged from twenty-one to forty-seven and we came from Canada, Denmark, England, Germany, The Netherlands, Norway, South Korea, Switzerland, Sweden, and thirty-four U.S. states.

When children from Korea were first placed with adoptive families in the United States and Europe, many considered it a crazy "social experiment." Some said, "They're cute babies and delightful toddlers, but what will happen to them when they grow up? Who will give them jobs? Who will marry them?" Those first adoptees and their families pioneered intercountry adoption without the benefit of previous experience or information.

Adoption practices in general during the 1950s were secretive, judgmental, and obscure. Those early Korean adoptions split wide open the issues of acknowledgment. These adoptions could not be secret and were observed by some with doubt and suspicion. There was no prior history, no road map to follow, but it worked. It wasn't always easy, and there certainly have been lessons learned along the way, but today, intercountry adoption is an accepted global institution.

Those "cute babies and delightful toddlers" of the first generation have grown up. We are parents, grandparents, mature adults, world citizens. International adoptees of the last twenty years have benefited from what was learned in the first twenty years: attention to issues of loss, grief and connecting with the individual personal histories that children bring to their adoptive families. It is not possible to change the adoption experience for the first generation of Korean adoptees, but the deep and profound gift of connecting with one another was long overdue. It was the simple desire of connecting within our unique community that was the genesis for the Gathering.

While there have been other events for international adoptees, the Gathering was unique for several reasons. The primary difference was that it was designed for a very narrow population—adult Korean adoptees and their spouses and partners. It included adoptees with a global perspective. By far, the largest participant group was from the U.S., but great effort was made to include adoptees living in Europe, as well as adult Korean adoptees who are now living in South Korea. We very much wanted as broad a view as possible to be represented. The planning committee also felt strongly that it would greatly benefit the spouses and partners of adoptees to attend. Although it would be unavoidable that their perspective would be lost somewhat in the more prominent perspective of the adoptee, it was anticipated that for adoptees to have the opportunity to share this experience with the person whom they shared their life could be deeply meaningful and significant.

Since there had never been a similar Gathering or event, it was determined that the centerpiece of this Gathering would be the adoptees themselves. It was not a conference of political or ideological agendas, and was not intended to highlight individuals or individual accomplishments. Rather, it was a gathering together of Korean adoptees who share the common life experience of intercountry adoption. Limiting the participation to the "first generation" brought the historical perspective to the forefront. As individual human beings, we are marvelously unique, and each of us has been further formed by our individual life experiences. The Gathering was intended to honor, respect and celebrate those differences. It was also a time to celebrate that which we all shared.

Prior to the Gathering, the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute developed and distributed a survey which provided some insights about this first generation of Korean adoptees. The survey itself was developed over the fall and winter of 1998-99 using Korean adoptee focus groups who guided the data to be included in the survey. The average age of the respondents was thirty-one, eighty-two percent female and eighteen percent male. Six percent lived in the U.S. and four percent lived in Europe. Forty-seven percent had never married, forty-four percent were married and nine percent were divorced. Thirty percent had children. The survey determined that seventy percent were college graduates, twenty-four percent held graduate degrees, and fifteen percent were still students. Three fifths had lived in orphanages and half were adopted by families who adopted other Korean children. The majority of us grew up in rural communities and seventy percent grew up in Caucasian neighborhoods.

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International Gathering of First Generation of Korean Adoptees—Cox

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Some adoptees, particularly those adoptees now in their thirties and forties, expressed feelings of isolation as they were growing up as the “only Korean” in their town or community. Our own ethnic identity as Koreans evolved as we grew older. As children and adolescents, we primarily viewed ourselves as American or European, depending on the ethnic heritage of our adopted families. However, as we became adults and went out into the world, those views shifted. Seventy-four percent reported that they had explored their Korean heritage as adults.

Issues of race and identity resonated deeply with the adoptees at the Gathering. Race was cited more often as the basis for discrimination than was adoption. Some adoptees shared that, at times, they still continue to struggle with the balance of racial identity in their lives. For many, it was this struggle for ethnic identity that led to their desire to search for their birth family. Twenty-two percent have searched or are in the process of searching. Thirty-four percent were interested in searching, fifteen percent were undecided in their interest to search, and twenty-nine percent were not interested in searching.

Regarding search, a uniqueness for international adoptees is the issue of search and reunion—not only of birth family, but of birth culture and heritage. For some participants at the Gathering, this was their first step over the threshold of this quest for racial and ethnic identity. Knowing that others had made this journey before them was not only illuminating, but reassuring.

As part of the Gathering, Yeong and Yeong Book Company of Minneapolis published an anthology called Voices from Another Place, a collection of works from a generation born in Korea and adopted to other countries. The book includes authors and artists from Europe and the U.S. It tells our story—we who were first. It exposes the thoughts, feelings, and reality of our life experiences.

For adoptees, both domestic and international, we are usually identified and defined as children. That we mature, grow up and come into our own wisdom is often not acknowledged. The Gathering was an opportunity for those international “voices” to come together and more fully discover what their voices can say—both individually and collectively. As international adoption comes of age, international adoptees can benefit from the “lessons learned” by domestic adoptees. Together, we can merge and unite our voices and our commitment to help others better understand and acknowledge what our lives and experiences have taught us.

Susan Soon-Keum Cox has worked with international adoption and child welfare issues for more than twenty years. Adopted from Korea in 1956, Cox has been involved with Heritage Camps for international adoptees and directed tours to Korea for adult adoptees, adoptive families, and adopted couples. She has participated in conferences and training for government officials on the national and international levels, and was designing by the Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare as the U.S. spokesperson for Korean adoption during the 1988 Olympic Games. A nationally-recognized presenter on international adoption who has participated in numerous television and press commentaries, Cox is also a board member of several organizations, including the North American Council on Adoptable Children. You may visit the “Virtual Gathering” and order Voices from Another Place at www.holtintl.org.

News from the Regions

Conferences

A series of regional conferences has concluded with the Southwest Regional Conference held in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on January 13 through January 15, 2000. AAC and Operation Identity were cosponsors. This followed the 1999 Mid-South/Midwest Regional Conference, A Tale of Two Cities, which took place in Kansas City, Missouri, in October; and the Northwest Regional Conference in Boise, Idaho, in November. The only AAC-sponsored conference in 2000 will be the national conference in Nashville, Tennessee, in April. Regional conferences will not resume until 2001, at the earliest.

Northwest/New England

Northwest Regional Director Delores Teller has been quoted in a number of articles and media reports about giving Oregon adoptees access to their birth records, and co-authored an op-ed piece in USA Today with Legislative Committee Chair Carolyn Hoard. The piece appeared on January 10 in response to an editorial opposing Measure 58, the initiative giving adoptees access to their birth records. Delores and Carolyn represented the views of birthmothers who want their relinquished children to have access to identifying information.

In the New England region, Interim Regional Director Joe Soll was a luncheon speaker at the Adoption Connection’s annual conference in Massachusetts in September. Jane Nast was a keynote panel member, and Dave Nast, Sr., participated in a panel on the male perspective in adoption. AAC Legal Counsel Fred Greenman recently spoke at a breakfast for legislators in Massachusetts, an event organized by State Rep Susan Gaspard. Also presenting were Joyce Pavao and Penny Partridge.
TENOR Still Needs Your Help

Your faithful commitment to TENOR, the TENnessee Open Records fund, has covered $135,000 of the $150,000 debt for legal expenses incurred by AAC to bring justice for those adopted in Tennessee.

During the three years of court battles in this case, we have always emphasized that the final decision handed down in Tennessee would set legal precedent for future adoption reform legislation in ALL states. This has already happened. The Oregon Court of Appeals, in upholding the new adoption law, quoted the Tennessee case in this statement:

"Adoption necessarily involves a child that already has been born, and a birth is, and historically has been, essentially a public event. In Doe v. Sundquist, 106 F.3d, 702, 705 (6th Cir.), cert den 522 US 810 (1997), the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, in rejecting a similar challenge to a Tennessee law that permits adoptees access to birth records noted:

"A birth is simultaneously an intimate occasion and a public event—the government has long kept records of when, where and by whom babies are born. Such records have myriad purposes, such as furthering the interest of children in knowing the circumstances of their birth. The Tennessee legislature has resolved a conflict between that interest and the competing interest of some parents in concealing the circumstances of a birth."

We are almost to the finish line...but a $15,000 debt remains. Can you help mark it "paid in full"...by the time we get to Nashville?

Can you write that check...now? Make payable to AAC/TENOR and mail in the attached postpaid envelope (credit cards accepted also) or send to: Pat Dennett, TENOR Coordinator, 9954 Heritage Drive, Flagstaff, AZ 86004-8217

News from the Regions (continued)

Mid-South
Are you an AAC member living in either Oklahoma or Arkansas? Would you like to become more involved with adoption search/support groups or legislation issues within your state? Do you have ideas or suggestions for increasing membership in your state? If so, Marilyn Waugh, Mid South Regional Director, would like to talk with you. Please contact her at 785-235-6122 or Waugh5@aol.com.

Midwest Region Welcomes New Representatives by Douglas B. Henderson, Regional Director
The Midwest Region welcomes three new State Representatives: Melisha Mitchell in Illinois, Leah Weber in Iowa, and Ron Nydam in Michigan. Many of you will have heard of Ron, recently transplanted from Colorado, a minister and currently a faculty member at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids. Ron worked for many years with triad members in Colorado and his new book, Adoptees Come of Age, was published in 1999. (See review, page 13.) I read much of it late in December while I was proctoring my final examinations, and I'm sure some of my students wondered what I was reading that left me alternately laughing and in tears. Ron has spoken at several regional and national conferences in the last year, and will be speaking in Nashville about "Wise Boundaries in the Adoption Triad." Leah Weber is an adoptee who recently (December of 1999) found her birth mother, and is still working through the reunion process. Leah is a social worker for the Iowa Department of Health and Social Services, working as an adoption specialist. She is developing a program to promote open adoptions in Iowa. Melisha Mitchell is a reunited birth mother who works as the Deputy Executive Director of the Family Tree Initiative in Chicago. She has been an adoption activist for several years and currently also serves the AAC as Managing and Feature Editor of the Decree. I am happy to have these three very different and diversely talented people on the Regional team.

Speaking of the team, we are still in need of State Representatives from Indiana, Nebraska, and Wisconsin. I would like to again ask for assistance in completing our slate of State Reps. If you are willing to serve in this capacity, or if you know of someone you think would be a good candidate, please contact me at the address listed elsewhere in this Decree.

This report would not be complete without mentioning the wonderful joint Mid-South/Midwest Regional conference put on in Kansas City, Missouri, this fall by Mid-South Regional Director Marilyn Waugh and a hard-working conference committee, of which I was a member in name only. The keynote presentations by Tom Bouchard and Ron Nydam were worth the price of admission by themselves. The workshops were top-notch, the hotel excellent, and the company and chances to network were great.
April 13–16, 2000
DoubleTree Hotel • Nashville, TN
70 Workshops!

American Adoption Congress
Nashville! 2000

Millennium Victories & Visions
A Celebration of Accomplishments
A Confirmation of Purpose
A Challenge to Continue

Presenters
Ann K.Y. Adornetto • Bob Andersen, MD • Teri Bach, MFT • Julie Jarrell Bailey • Debra Baker • Annette Baran, LCSW • Bill Berzen, LMSW, ACSW • William S. Bossert, M.Div. • Father Tom Brosnan • Gail Canon, MA • M. J. Carr • Robert J. Chastang • Barbara Cohen • Bill Cordray • Christina Crawford • Pat Dennen • Patricia M. Dorner, MA, LPC, LMFT • Caprice East • Sherrie Eldridge • Catherine Elias, MA • Christopher Esmurdoc, M.Div. • Betsy Forrest, MA, LSW • Lynn C. Franklin • Madelyn Freundlich, MSW, JD • Judy Frey • Lynn N. Giddens, MA, Ph.D. • Denny Glad • Frederick F. Greenman, Jr. • Sandie Gutcher, Ph.D. • Jane Gutman, D.C. • Nicole Hamilton • Sheila Hansen • Jane Hart, MS • Pam Hasegawa • Douglas Henderson, Ph.D. • Carolyn Hoard • Prof. Rene Hoksbergen • Sharon Faith Horton, MFCC • Betty Jean Lifton, Ph.D. • Susan L. Love, MA • Abigail Lovett • Dianne Mathes, CSW • Katalina McGlone, MSEPH • Barbara Molino, MSW, BCD • Jane Nast, MEd • Betsie Norris, RN, CNM • Ron Nydam, Ph.D., Prof. • Donna Oberholzer, MA • Penny C. Partridge, MSW • Joyce M. Pavao, Ed.D. • Evelyn Perl • Kris Probasco, LCSW, BCD • Ellen Rardin, LCSW • Miriam Reitz, Ph.D. • Ellen Roseman • Paul Sacco, LCSW • Julie Sandine • Daniel Sass • Carol Schaefer • Nancy Sidun, Psy. D., ATR • Rickie Solinger, Ph.D. • Joe Soll, CSW • Delores Teller • Rhonda Tucker • Robert D. Tuke • Nancy N. Verrier, MA • Ken Watson, MSW, LCSW, ACSW • Jeanna Webster • Lorraine Wheeler, CS, MSN • Ken Wheeler, MBA

Special Events
Luncheon—Authentic Self/Authentic Organization—Christina Crawford, MA, adoptee and author of Mommie Dearest, will discuss this topic.

Tennessee Children's Home Society Reunion—All conference attendees who were adopted by a Tennessee Children's Home Society adoptive parents (whether as an adoptee, birth parent, birth sibling, adoptive parent, or other related family member) are invited to a special meet-and-chat "TCHS Reunion" reception in their honor. This reception will be hosted by the Tennessee Coalition for Adoption Reform. Other conference attendees wishing to join in saluting this particular group of people are cordially welcome.

Plus: support groups for triad members • special support groups for mental health professionals • AAC regional meetings • Hospitality Suite parties • banquet with entertainment and dancing • town meeting & continental breakfast • book room

Keynote Sessions
Adoption Is a Life-Long Experience—by Patricia Martinez Dorner, MA, LPC, LMFT, psychotherapist, adoptive parent. The externalization of adoption issues offers pathways for validation, support, enlightenment and challenging, yet profound, growth opportunities.

From Victim to Self-Through Identity and Responsibility—by Nancy Newton Verrier, MA, psychotherapist, adoptive mother, author of The Primal Wound. Understanding the trauma of separation is important to the healing process of both birth mother and adoptee. Each was a victim in some way, the mother of society's moral climate, and the adoptee of the mother's subsequent decision. To become mature adults with personal power, one has both to establish an authentic Self and make that Self responsible for how one acts in the world. Nancy will suggest ways of reconstituting with the authentic Self who can have genuine relationships, and who can then acknowledge and take responsibility for the impact one has on others.

Home Is Where the Heart Is—by Joyce Maguire Pavao, Ed.D., adoptee, author, psychologist, family therapist, educator/trainer. What Home means to various people. About the homelessness of feeling disconnected that many people who live in adoption experience and how we can heal our hearts by being inclusive.

Millennium Victories and Visions—by Caprice East, adoptee, adoption reform lobbyist; Denny Glad, AAC State Representative; attorneys Frederick F. Greenman, Jr., Julie Sandine, and Robert D. Tuke; and Betty Jean Lifton, Ph.D., adoptee, author, psychotherapist. Caprice, Denny, Fred, Julie, Bob and Betty Jean will discuss how open records were accomplished in Tennessee and their visions of how this will impact the adoption reform movement nationwide.

Three Perspectives on Adoption—by Annette Baran, LCSW, psychotherapist, co-author of The Adoption Triangle; Carol Schaefer, birth mother, author of The Other Mother; and Rickie Solinger, Ph.D., historian, author of Wake Up Little Susie. An agency social worker, a birth mother and a historian discuss their perspectives on the treatment of birth mothers in our society.

AAC's Only Conference in 2000!

AAC will not be conducting regional conferences in 2000. Many support groups hold excellent seminars and conferences on a regional level, and look for those listings in future issues of the Decree. However, don't miss the excitement of attending the AAC's official national conference this April. Enjoy nationally-known speakers, 70 workshops, five keynote events and a special luncheon with Christina Crawford.
Implementing LegislationViolates Intent of
the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption
by Maureen Hogan, Executive Director, Adopt America Advocates

Earlier this year I wrote on these pages about the desperate need for the United States to institute more effective regulation of adoption. My article detailed abuses ranging from fraud and bribery of foreign officials to the extortion of birth mothers and the outright abduction of their children. Since the article was published in Spring 1999, the horror stories and documentation of serious abuses have continued. While the need for regulation of domestic adoption remains an issue, nowhere is the need to protect the interests of adopted children more compelling than in intercountry adoption.

Historically, Congress has been unwilling to take on the issue of adoption regulation. However reticent they are to take up this issue, the need to ratify an international treaty on adoption has forced their hand to deal with numerous issues of practice and procedure. That treaty is the Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption ("Hague Convention"），completed in 1993 by the Hague Conference on Private International Law. The Hague Convention requires documentation that a child is free for adoption; prohibits the charging of excessive fees; requires the preservation of adoption records; requires the production of adoption records at the request of the adult adoptee; requires accreditation or licensing of adoption providers; and permits the sending country to oversee the post-adoption condition of the adoptee. All of these safeguards were won over the opposition of fee-charging agencies who were represented in the Hague negotiations by Bill Pierce of the National Council for Adoption (NCFA) and others.

A number of bills have been introduced in the current Congress to implement the Hague Convention. The two best known in the adoption community are S. 682, co-sponsored by Senators Jesse Helms (R-NC) and Mary Landrieu (D-LA), and H.R. 2909, cosponsored by Representatives Dave Camp (R-MI) and Bill Delahunt (D-MA). The bills raise serious questions with respect to providing genuine protection for the human rights of adopted children and instituting true accountability for incompetent or unethical adoption providers.

The most obvious flaw in both bills is the language regarding access to birth records. S. 682, as introduced, prevents access to birth records for other than medical purposes. H.R. 2909 goes further and makes access to records practically impossible, even for medical purposes. The bills violate both the express terms and the intent of the Hague Convention. In the case of adoptees from countries with open or partially open records who are adopted into a closed records state, both bills would violate the principle that records, once public, may not be sealed. Those fee-charging agencies represented by NCFA adamantly oppose giving intercountry adoptees access to their birth records, however. Their opposition is grounded both in fear that a precedent would be set for U.S. domestic adoptions, and in the desire to foreclose wrongful adoption suits in international adoptions. Another serious flaw is the absence of provisions that would make agencies accountable for the fees they charge or responsible for even minimal follow-up to assure the stability of intercountry placements.

It comes as no surprise to adoption reform activists that the fee-charging agencies represented by NCFA have supported implementing legislation that violates the letter and spirit of the Hague Convention. Unfortunately, NCFA has been joined in its anti-regulation campaign by groups like the Joint Council on International Children's Services (JCICS) and the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA). CWLA has actually endorsed the more egregious of the two bills, H.R. 2909. While the interests of the adoption industry (and others) have been preserved as deals have been made, the interests of adoptees and their families have been sold out by virtually everyone. In the negotiations leading up to the introduction of S. 682 and H.R. 2909, for example, NCFA insisted on the insertion of language prohibiting single parent adoption or the disclosure of any records, including medical records. The prohibition against single parent adoption was a cynical and ultimately successful ploy to force gay activists to agree to closed records in exchange for removal of the single parent prohibition.

Some international agencies have declared that they will block any implementing legislation that requires agencies to account for the fees they receive. The agencies argue that they cannot disclose the amounts they pay to foreign government officials, because those officials fear prosecution in their own countries. The agencies hope Congress will ignore their implicit admission that the payments violate international law, as well as the laws of the foreign countries.

A particularly troubling issue that has arisen in the discussion of the Hague Convention relates to the growing exportation of American children to be adopted in other countries. This trend is especially bizarre as the U.S. is the receiving country for 80% of children placed for adoption worldwide, and because there are lengthy waiting lists all over the country. While the Hague Convention requires reciprocity between sending and receiving countries, many (continued on next page)
UAA Introduced in Wisconsin

The Uniform Adoption Act (UAA) has been proposed in Wisconsin as AB 526. Midwest Regional Director Doug Henderson and Mary Williamson, an adoptee and birth mother who requested the introduction of AB 526 and rewrote much of the UAA for it, were two of the 18 who testified at a hearing held on the bill on January 6. Henderson noted concerns with the bill’s provisions regarding the time and form of relinquishment, potential penalties for searching, and other sections. Of the 18 witnesses who testified at the hearing, only one was unequivocally in favor of AB 526; 7 were opposed, and 5 said they could support it only with amendments. The others either supported the original UAA or were speaking for information only.

Although there is continued support and sponsorship for the bill, there is also support for significant amendments that would address some of the witnesses’ concerns. The bill already includes provisions regarding access to identifying information that reflect more appreciation of adoptee and birth parent issues than the UAA’s restrictive registry provisions. For more information, contact Doug Henderson (see page 15 for contact information).

Missouri

In Missouri, a bill giving adult adoptees access to their original birth certificates at age 18 has been introduced in the House of Representatives as HB 1216. It has been assigned to the Children, Youth and Families Committee, chaired by Representative Patrick Dougherty of the St. Louis area. For information contact Regional Director Marilyn Waugh (see page 15).

Rhode Island

A bill granting adult adoptees access to their adoption records was introduced in January as H. 6746. For information, contact Legislation Chair Carolyn Hoard (see page 15).

New Zealand

Kees Sprengers, an adoptive father and reform activist in New Zealand, writes that information on an interim review of New Zealand adoption legislation is available over the web:

“The New Zealand Law Commission has just published their interim report on a review of NZ Adoption legislation. Although I have some reservations, it is actually quite good. It doesn’t propose solutions, it asks questions and gives options.

“It is available on their website (readable with Adobe Acrobat): http://www.lawcom.govt.nz/pub_index.html

“The name of the paper is ‘preliminary paper # 38.’

“I think that, in spite of some obvious flaws, it is a good model of consultation. But it is early, and submissions from the public may yet change some of the content.

“I shall keep you posted on the next stages, the final report, and hopefully in a while, a proposed new law.”

Implementing Legislation Violates Intent of the Hague Convention

(continued from previous page)

Americans feel there is no real need to send American children abroad. There is money to be made in Europe, however, where birth rates have fallen to below replacement levels and there are no infants to adopt. A growing concern also exists that some public child agencies are realizing an enormous budget savings by sending older children to foreign jurisdictions, where they are no longer entitled to state-paid health care. Both CWLA and JICICS have campaigned hard to lift the minimal restrictions both bills place on moving American children out of the United States.

Supporters of the House bill intended to launch a major campaign when Congress returned on January 24. Neither the Senate Foreign Relations Committee nor the House International Relations Committee has had a formal mark up of statutory language. Senator Helms has indicated that changes will be made in the Senate bill before it is marked up. The Democratic sponsor of the House bill has pledged to amend the House version as well. Strong resistance is expected from the agencies supporting the House version. Only a strong turnout by reformers will achieve passage of legislation with meaningful protections for children and their families.

The message of adoption reformers must be to preserve the intent of the Hague Convention. We will continue to push for financial disclosure by agencies, legal liability for the costs of disrupted adoptions, disclosure of disruption rates by agency, prior disclosure of medical and other risks, access to medical and other records, and greater penalties for black market baby selling. What we ultimately achieve is up to each of us.

In addition to raising two daughters by birth, Maureen Hogan and her husband are foster and adoptive parents. Hogan is the Executive Director of Adopt America Advocates. She was instrumental in the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 and is a policy advisor to the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. She chairs the District of Columbia Adoption Council for Mayor Anthony Williams (who is an adoptee) and also serves on several other boards.
Adoptees Come of Age  •  Solomon’s Sword  •  Together Again

Adoptees Come of Age

Adoptees Come of Age examines the lifelong impact of adoption through the lens of a pastoral counselor. The book is part of a Counseling and Pastoral Theology Series designed to address counseling issues that arise in populations that have been neglected or omitted in counseling texts. Given that pedigree, it is surprisingly readable and accessible; one needs no divinity or psychology degree to appreciate the author’s insights, although one hopes that many with those degrees will add it to their libraries.

Sometimes an author’s greatest accomplishment is to make a point so simple, so obvious, that it seems the point must have been there all along. One of the most helpful things about Adoptees Come of Age is the author’s immediate distinction between relinquishment and adoption as two separate, life-long processes. “I hate my relinquishment; I love my adoption!” proclaims an adoptee in the first chapter. So much adoption literature focuses on the process of adoption that we have not developed a vocabulary to talk about the process of relinquishment. We talk about the pain and loss involved in adoption, when often we are referring to the emotions involved in dealing with the fact that a child was “given up,” or “given away,” or “placed,” or any of the other unsatisfactory terms used for “relinquished.” This book is about relinquishment, not adoption: it “listen[s] for the heartbeat of adoptees as they relate to the parents who gave them history and genetic lines and birth.”

Our silence about the adoptee’s separation from his or her original parents, writes Nydam, is like ignoring that the adoptee has two arms. “Bringing the ‘arm’ of relinquishment back into view and affirming it as part of an adoptee’s story,” he writes, “allows for new understandings for some of the struggles that adoptees report.” These struggles include what he calls “relinquishment sensitivity,” or the special fear of rejection that many adoptees experience; the struggle to deal with the legacy of shame inherent in closed adoptions; and the feeling of never quite being an adult. Separate chapters, illustrated with case studies, expand on the issues of identity, intimacy, and imagination.

Religious references are sparing in the first several chapters, but theology takes a more central role in a chapter on “Keeping Hope Alive.” Adoptees, Nydam points out, are people who hope. They hope a birth parent is alive; they hope they will someday know someone who looks like them; they hope they will not be rejected each time they risk intimacy. The line between hope and despair is thin, though, and the act of hoping is a challenge “when the hoping itself brings up the pain of the losses.” Nydam draws on the work of a number of Christian writers to describe different images of hope as a force that draws people towards their God. In “Adoptees and God” he elaborates on how the experience of relinquishment may affect an adoptee’s understanding of God, and suggests that some adoptees will need support “to find God to be a good God” in the face of their relinquishment.

A final chapter, “Relinquishment and Belonging,” argues that denying the losses of relinquishment denies several basic Christian values: human responsibility, justice, truth, human dignity, and reconciliation. It concludes with an insight that struck a particular chord for me, although some may find it disturbing: after comparing relinquishment to the expulsion from Eden, Nydam writes, “God is the birth parent who changed his mind and wanted us back.” In my own journey of faith I have often struggled with images of God as an adoptive parent (such as Romans 8:15: For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.). I realized after reading this chapter that part of the problem was that I was not acknowledging my relinquishment “arm.” I can celebrate God-the-Adoptive-Parent without denying the pain of separation or the impact of being claimed from the start as a beloved child.

Solomon’s Sword: Two Families and the Children the State Took Away
by Michael Shapiro (Times Books, 1999)

In Solomon’s Sword, writer Michael Shapiro compares two high-profile cases. In 1991, an unwed Connecticut teenager gave birth to a baby girl and disappeared from the hospital. Four months later, after the baby had been placed with prospective adoptive parents, the birth mother—Gina Pellegrino—succeeded in contacting a social worker for the State of Connecticut and began an attempt to reclaim her daughter. Three years later, in the course of investigating a tip about drug sales, Chicago police found nineteen children living in a filthy apartment with their mothers, five sisters and a friend. Both cases received local and national publicity. Gina’s ultimately successful challenge of the termination of her parental rights caused many to question the weight the law gives biological ties; the situation of the (continued on next page)
Melton sisters and their children called the Chicago child welfare system into question.

Shapiro's thesis is that these cases are "mirror images." Both, he argues, are illustrations of families that society does not value. In Gina's case, the family that should have been valued was the LaFlamme family, the family formed when baby Megan was placed with Cindy and Jerry LaFlamme with assurances that she was a "risk-free" baby. Returning Megan to her birth mother violated their expectation that she was going to stay with them permanently, and needlessly jeopardized Megan's welfare. It does not help, Shapiro argues, that Gina seems now to be an adequate parent; the state's error was returning her to a mother who had not demonstrated any ability to parent merely because she and the child were related by blood.

The Melton sisters, on the other hand, had amply demonstrated an inability to parent or to master the most basic coping skills. An outraged judge found them guilty of neglect pervasive enough to constitute abuse. Eventually, the sisters' parental rights were terminated, some with consent. Most of their children were eventually adopted or placed in long-term care with relatives. However, Shapiro questions whether the state served the children's interest by severing their ties with mothers they loved, even though the mothers were incapable of providing the daily care the children required.

It is not hard to share some of Shapiro's sympathy for the LaFlammes, who genuinely loved Megan and cooperated in allowing visitation with Gina while the case dragged on. And he frankly admits that the relationship between Gina and her daughter is beyond his comprehension. It is this failure of comprehension, though, that creates a frustrating double standard in the book: he is willing to grant some measure of respect to the bonds that existed between the Melton sisters and their children, but grants nothing at all to the relationship between Gina and her daughter. When Gina began her attempt to regain custody of Megan, Megan was four months old and had spent a month in foster care before going to live with the LaFlammes. In his view, the LaFlammes' expectations that she would stay with them created a relationship that did not exist, apparently, between Megan and either her birth mother or her first foster parents. Although he describes the state's failure as a failure to take the child's view into account, his own view denies the possibility that Megan had any bond or attachment to the adults in her life, including Gina, before the LaFlammes brought her home.

Still, Solomon's Sword is compelling reading. It is perhaps most insightful when describing alternatives to the traditional delivery of child welfare services. Asking whether a mother is "worthy" is the wrong question, Shapiro suggests, because it reflects a desire to "rescue" the child. Although a child can be "helped," he adds, a child cannot be delivered over to "a new life in which his parents are made to disappear."

Together Again: True Stories of Birth Parents and Adopted Children Reunited
by Carolyn Campbell (Berkley Books, 1999)
Published by arrangement with International Locator, Inc., the well-known search organization, Together Again is actually three different search stories. The first story revolves around "Patsy," an adoptee encouraged to begin a search by her ailing adoptive father. The second and third stories center around birth mothers "Allison" and "Laura." After many setbacks, both are able to make contact with adult sons and daughters. The stories describe the steps each woman took before contacting the search organization, and give vivid descriptions of the circumstances leading to the relinquishments. Although the book does not examine any post-reunion relationships, it presents the search process in a positive light, and is written in a clear, engaging narrative style.

Amazon.com® and AAC

AAC has always strived to review and recommend a wide variety of books on adoption issues. In order to make ordering those books more convenient for our members, AAC has joined the Amazon.com® Associates Program, the leading selling program on the Internet, with more than 260,000 members.

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Join the AAC or Renew Your Membership

Your membership in the AAC makes a difference. By becoming a part of the AAC you raise your voice with thousands of individuals and organizations who are committed to achieving open, honest, humane adoptions and reforming archaic laws that keep adoption records closed. Your membership is welcome at any level. All members receive our quarterly journal, the Decree, discounts to AAC sponsored conferences, and referrals to search and support groups (upon request).

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Audio Tapes of Mid-South/Midwest Conference Available

Did you miss the October 29th and 30th AAC Mid-South/Midwest conference in Kansas City? Are you jealous that your friends and colleagues are still commenting how GREAT the speakers were that weekend? EGAMI has available audio recordings of every session with topics ranging from Cybersearching, Loyalties Twice Divided, Special Issues for Male Adoptees, Twins and Adoptees, Grief and Loss Issues in Adoption, and Open Missouri 2000. Tapes are available for only $7 each from EGAMI, 6052 Hillglen Drive, Watauga, TX 76148, 1-800-735-1446, or EGAMITAPES@AOL.COM. A listing of all 21 sessions is also available from Mid-South Regional Director Marilyn Waugh at Waugh5@aol.com.

Plan to March for Civil Rights in Adoption

Sponsored by AAC, Adoption Crossroads and Adoption Triad Outreach

11th March on Washington for Civil Rights in Adoption
Saturday, July 15, 2000
For further info, call: 914-268-0283
E-mail: cera@idt.net
web site: www.adoptioncrossroads.org/poster.shtml

We need you there on Saturday, July 15, 2000. You can find details on our web site. Click on March on Washington or What's New.—Joe Soll, CSW, Director

May 11–13, 2000
NYCCC Annual Conference
The annual conference of the New York Citizen’s Coalition for Children will be held at the Albany Marriott Hotel.

May 2–4, 2000
Jazzing Up Adoption in New Orleans
Sponsored by the Louisiana Adoption Advisory Board
The conference chair is Linda Woods, AAC State Rep. Presenters will include Susan Cox, Madelyn Freundlich, Jane Nast, Joyce Pavao, and Jayne Schooler.