

Mothers in Action

The newsletter of
Origins-USA

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JUSTICE FOR THE MAGDALENES

BY JEANINE BIOICIC

From Wikipedia: (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magdalene_asylum) "Magdalene asylums grew out of the Evangelical rescue movement in the United Kingdom during the 19th century, which had as its formal goal the rehabilitation of women who had worked as prostitutes. In Ireland, the institutions were nicknamed for St. Mary Magdalene, who, according to Roman Catholic tradition, had been a prostitute but repented her sins and became one of Jesus' closest followers...."

As the phenomenon became more widespread, it extended beyond prostitution, to unmarried mothers, developmentally challenged women and abused girls. Even young girls who were considered too promiscuous and flirtatious, or too beautiful, were sent to an asylum....

The women were typically admitted to these institutions at the request of family members (mostly men), priests and doctors. Without a family member on the outside who would vouch for them, some penitents would stay in the asylums for the rest of their lives, many of them taking religious vows.

Given Ireland's historically conservative sexual values, Magdalene asylums were a generally accepted social institution until well into the second half of the 20th century. They disappeared with the changes in sexual mores – or, as [one writer] suggests, as they ceased to be profitable: "Possibly the advent of the washing machine has been as instrumental in closing these laundries as have changing attitudes."

From Justice for Magdalenes (<http://www.magdalene-laundries.com/about.htm>) "Justice for Magdalenes seeks

to promote and represent the interests of the Magdalene women, to respectfully promote equality and seek justice for the women formerly incarcerated in Magdalene Laundries and to seek the establishment and improvements of support as well as advisory and re-integration services provided for survivors."



The Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) project received support on November 09, 2010, from the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC) when an assessment they issued called on the Irish State to immediately establish a statutory inquiry into the treatment of women and girls (referring to children under 18 years of age) in the Magdalene Laundries.

The IHRC responded to a request made by JFM in June 2010, calling for recognition of, and redress for human rights violations it alleges were experienced by women

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

CANDLE PAINTINGS

My name is Carlynn Hershberger and I'm a mom who surrendered a daughter in 1980. I've recently met a group of other moms on Facebook (the page is "You Know You're a Firstmother When...") and through them heard of Origins-USA. I joined and submitted my story for the Mothers Stories project.

I'm also an artist and have recently begun a series of paintings based on the topic of adoption from the first mother's perspective. One of the pieces I did is of birthday candles. I had mothers submit their names and their child's DOB to be included on the painting. I got a good response from the other mothers so after doing this I had the idea of doing a small candle painting to post on my blog and other sites to raise funds for OriginsUSA. This mini version of the candle is 8x8 in size, will sell for \$30 and I will donate half to Origins. I will personalize each one with the mother's name and their child's date of birth if they wish. They can also choose the candle color.

The journey through this series has been an emotional one. I've gotten great responses from first mothers - 10 of them wanted to be included on this canvas so their names and baby's date of birth is up there. My daughter's birth date is at the bottom with my signature. I really wanted this to have the feel of people writing all over this canvas so there are no perfect lines or letters anywhere.

I'm working on a series of paintings about adoption from the birth/first mother perspective, particularly during the time that is now known as the Baby Scoop Era - between 1945 and 1973. Although my daughter was born in 1980, the treatment of women still hadn't changed. Many women are now coming out of the closet and learning to heal. This series is about us.

These paintings are very meaningful, especially for mothers who have not been able to reunite with their children. While other mothers can display photos of their children on their walls, this would be a powerful reminder - and celebration - of their lost child.



My blog address is <http://her-shbergerhuff.blogspot.com/>
I have a new blog devoted to adoption issues: www.oneoptionnochoice.blogspot.com

Testimonial from Jesse Jordan, Origins-USA board-member:

I lost my daughter to adoption in 1958. When I learned that when she turned 18 I could not have contact with her as I was promised, I spent the next 30 years searching for her. Three years ago, I found her and wrote her the most difficult letter of my life. I held my breath for a week, hoping for a letter back, a phone call or email. What I received was a letter from the State of Tennessee threatening criminal or civil action if I ever contacted her again. I was devastated, especially since she could not even bring herself to tell me that directly. It was like losing her all over again. But as difficult as this has been, I still think of her every day and her birthday is particularly hard. When I saw Carlynn's birthday painting, I contacted her. I received my birthday candle painting in a few short weeks with my name and my daughter's birthdate next to the candle. It is hanging by my computer and brings me enormous comfort. Since I can't acknowledge her birth with her, I now do it many times a day every time I look at my birthday candle painting. And when friends come over and ask about it, I have another opportunity to acknowledge my loss and my love for her. I'm sure there are other birthmothers out there who are not able to celebrate their lost child's birthday, for many reasons. This has been a great comfort to me and I would encourage others to take advantage of Carlynn's talent and vision in these beautiful paintings. And the fact that half of the \$30 I paid goes to Origins was another bonus, since Origins operates on such a small budget.

READ MOTHERS' STORIES AT:

<http://www.origins-usa.org/MothersStories>

JUSTICE FOR THE MAGDALENES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and girls who entered the Magdalene Laundries since the foundation of the Irish State in 1922. The IHRC decided they would consider the request a priority in its scheduling due to the seriousness of the allegations and the advanced age of some of the survivors. It's a 38-page assessment that includes 30 pages supporting 12 conclusions.

This assessment is internal to IHRC and based on the conclusions, its statutory powers and resources, IHRC decided not to conduct an inquiry, rather it called on the State to take action and address the serious human rights issues that were raised. And serious they are.

Two conclusions reached by the IHRC stand out.

Conclusion 2: The available public records are poor and incomplete.

IHRC repeatedly points out that the records of names of those incarcerated, dates of entry and exit, in the instances where that happened, death records, birth of children, death of those children, adoption, dispatch to industrial schools or workhouses, etc., are assumed to be held by the churches involved in running the laundries. If those records exist the churches aren't saying anything and they are not bound to release them.

Conclusion 10: The adult biological children of women and girls who subsequently entered the laundries had and still have limited facilities to trace their biological parents and establish their identity, including through the Adoption Act 2010. This situation contrasts with that in Northern Ireland.

Ireland's first legislation providing for legal adoption was introduced in 1952. The first welfare support for single mothers was introduced in 1973, making it practically impossible for unwed women to keep their children and that's not taking into account the mores of the time. Many unwed mothers were forced into laundries because there was literally no other choice, or their families had them incarcerated in the laundries.

Prior to 1952 children born to unwed mothers were

often informally or illegally adopted. Even after adoption was legalized it's known that many births were registered in the name of the adopters effectively extinguishing all records of the natural parents. In 1996 Ireland acknowledged that there had been traffic in children born to unwed mothers in Ireland leading them to the United States and other countries, seemingly beginning around 1948 and continuing until the early-1970s. Aside from records kept by the Department of Foreign Affairs related to applications for passports, it's assumed they had passports, there are no State records of these adoptions. The assumption is that records are "possibly" being maintained by private adoption agencies that assisted in organizing the transport of these children.

The assessment is clear that children of women incarcerated in the laundries may encounter significant difficulty accessing any identifying information about their natural parents. There is a defined practice related to obtaining this information and tracing services but application of that practice is left in the hands of the adoption agencies, mostly church run.*
(see footnote on page 4)

Troubling as those two conclusions are, there are several things in the IHRC assessment that bring tears of sadness and anger to my eyes. The most difficult for me is that of mass graves of women and girls at the site of a former Magdalene Laundry found in 1993, and while the IHRC was compiling its assessment the BBC reported that unmarked graves, this time more than 200 infants and children, were found at the Bethany Home .

In 1993, a mass grave at a Magdalene Laundry was found and over 150 women and girls believed to have been residents of the laundry, or penitents as they were known, were exhumed. In the age of DNA, rather than work to identify these women and girls, many of them known to have been mothers, their remains were removed and cremated. It's believed that the unmarked graves of the more than 200 infants and children found at the Bethany Home in September 2010, died in the years 1922-1949, making DNA matching almost impossible.

Not only did these women, girls and children lead lives of servitude, many were stripped of their given

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

JUSTICE FOR THE MAGDALENES

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and surnames and made to use one “religious name,” others had no recorded name. The women and girls were abandoned by their families, exploited and abused in every possible way, made to live lives of shame, servitude and isolation and in the final indignity, were buried in mass and unmarked graves forever lost but for the legacy of the horror they endured.

The JFM reports that survivors of the laundries face a particular sexual stigma that, in part, contributes to their unwillingness to come forward and speak about their past. For women of a certain generation this stigma is deeply felt. And, the Church and State know this to be the case. In fact, it feeds the “lie ‘til they die” position the Catholic Church, Church of Ireland and Ireland have assumed.

Prime Minister Brian Cowen, the Most Reverend Dr. John Neill, Archbishop of the Church of Ireland and His Eminence Cardinal Sean Brady, Primate of all Ireland of the Catholic Church, represent entities, communities if you will, that were directly connected to the Magdalene Laundries. Whether or not their predecessors had direct knowledge of the atrocities that took place in the laundries on a daily basis is irrelevant. The Irish society at the time, which was theocratic to its core, knew of the laundries; accepted the laundries’ place in society; did business with the laundries; sent penitents to the laundries; incarcerated their daughters and sisters in the laundries; illegally and legally placed children born in the laundries for adoption; sent children born in the laundries to industrial schools and workhouses; and otherwise ignored the plight of all who entered the laundries, in which so many died and were buried, most without even a death certificate.

Instead of the denials and three stooges finger pointing that each of the communities is guilty of, these leaders must rise and demonstrate to the world that a very important part of being a human being is accepting responsibility and making amends. Let them put aside fears or concerns that that acknowledgement might cost them money for retribution of the harm done to penitents and their children. Let

their apology be the beginning of some semblance of peace the Magdalenes and their families might come to know.

*The Bethany Home is known to have been affiliated with the Church of Ireland, although they deny responsibility for the home and anything that went on within it. This is contrary to documents linking the Church to the home and survivor accounts. The Bethany Home was a combined maternity home, children’s home and place of detention for women. It’s known to be one of the church-run facilities that trafficked children to the U.S. and other countries.

Jeanine Biocic surrendered her son for adoption in Chicago, Illinois in 1971. They were reunited in 1996. She is deeply impressed by the effects the adoption experience has on mothers, including her, and would like to see adoption reform within her lifetime.

Editor’s Note: If you haven’t seen the movie, “The Magdalene Sisters” (2002), look for it to rent. Summary and trailers at: <http://www.imdb.com/>

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ORIGINS NEEDS A TREASURER!

Origins is in need of a Treasurer immediately. The Treasurer’s duties take about 10 hours a month. Additionally, the Treasurer serves on the Board. If you have experience in maintaining financial records, Origins needs you!!!

Call Jeanine Biocic, 703.486.2852 or email her at jmbiocic@yahoo.com

REFORMING OREGON'S ADOPTION LAWS

BY JANE EDWARDS

Three Mothers

Ashley: When Leticia learned her 15-year-old daughter, Ashley, was pregnant, she went to her pastor for advice. He referred her to his wife's adoption agency. Over the next several months, Leticia and Ashley met with a social worker and a couple interested in adopting Ashley's child. Ashley never committed to giving up her baby. On June 16, 2010, she gave birth to a daughter, Caileen, via caesarian section. Five days later, physically and emotionally exhausted and under pressure from family, friends, church members, the prospective adoptive parents, and the agency social worker, Ashley signed an irrevocable surrender. The next day Leticia contacted the social worker to revoke Ashley's consent but the worker would not accept the revocation.

Ashley sought help from an attorney who filed a lawsuit in Multnomah County to revoke her consent. The attorney for the adoptive parents filed an adoption petition in Washington County the next day, forcing Ashley to pursue legal actions in two counties. Although Ashley's family has little money, they have been fortunate to find an attorney who has agreed to accept payment over a period of time.

Janette: Janette gave birth to a son Gabriel on June 3, 2005. Two days later she signed an irrevocable surrender to an adoption agency which placed Gabriel with adoptive parents the same day. According to Janette, the adoptive parents were with her during her hospital stay and made her feel guilty if she didn't go ahead with the "adoption plan." The agency representative told her she had to sign the papers before she left the hospital or there could be no adoption. The day after she left the hospital, she called the adoption agency, begging to have her son back. She was told to get over it and stop calling. Although Janette had an open adoption agreement, the adoptive parents limited Janette's visits with her son, telling her that the promised visits would not work.

It took Janette several months to find an attorney.

Eleven months after she signed the surrender and eight months after the judgment of adoption was entered, her attorney filed an action to set aside the adoption based on fraud and duress. The judge dismissed her case and she appealed. The Oregon Court of Appeals upheld the dismissal, ruling that the delay, during which the "adoptive parents bonded with Gabriel," was unreasonable. The Court reached this result in spite of an Oregon statute which set a year after an adoption judgment is entered as the outside limit for contesting an adoption.

Heidi: Heidi gave birth October 8, 1995, three weeks prematurely. The next day she signed an irrevocable surrender to an adoption agency which failed to explain the irrevocability provision as required by statute. The agency placed Heidi's child with prospective adoptive parents the next day. Nine days later, Heidi handed the agency a document revoking her consent which it refused to accept. She hired an attorney who filed an objection to the adoption in Lane County where the child was born. The judge dismissed the case because the adoption was not pending there. The attorney tried Deschutes County where the prospective adoptive parents lived. No luck. Finally Heidi's attorney learned that the adoption was pending in Multnomah County where the adoption agency had its headquarters. The Multnomah County judge dismissed Heidi's case on procedural grounds. The Oregon Court of Appeals reversed, sending the case back to the trial court. By this time, the child was two-and-a-half years old. Upon remand, the trial court dismissed Heidi's lawsuit, saying any misrepresentations did not provide a basis for overturning the adoption.

How Oregon Laws Failed These Mothers

None of these mothers received counseling or legal advice that would have helped them to make an informed decision.

None of these mothers had sufficient time to decide. Oregon allows mothers to irrevocably sign consents

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

REFORMING OREGON'S ADOPTION LAWS

CONTINUED

upon leaving the delivery room. Consents may be set aside only upon a showing of coercion or fraud.

All of these mothers encountered barriers to bringing their cases to court. They did not have copies of the papers they signed and had no information about the status of the adoption proceedings. Because they had little money, they had difficulty obtaining legal representation. Once in court, confusing and conflicting procedures consumed time and money. These delays resulted in Janette and Heidi losing their children.

Oregon Origins members, adoptive parents, adoptees, and others formed a Coalition to reform Oregon laws to allow mothers to make informed decisions regarding the adoption of their children.

The Coalition's Legislation Requires:

Counseling covering the grief and loss inherent in adoption, resources which would enable mothers to nurture their children, the desirability of keeping children in the original family if mothers are unable to care for them, and the benefits of continuing contact between mothers and children.

A minimum of 192 hours after birth before mothers may consent to adoption and 30 days to revoke consent.

An independent attorney to advise mothers of their legal rights before they consent to adoption.

Clear procedures including a one year time limit to file an action contesting an adoption.

These provisions are based on recommendations of adoption experts: the Child Welfare League of America, the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, and Anne Babb, author of *Ethics in American Adoption*.

Why it Matters

The adoption industry and the legal system surrounding it fails to protect vulnerable mothers and mothers-to-be, thrusting too many children into the adoption mill when they need not be. The adoption experts agree that the natural family constitutes the

preferred means of providing family life for children. The United States Supreme Court has held repeatedly that the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution protects "the fundamental liberty interest of natural parents in the care, custody, and management of their child," *Troxel v. Granville* (2000).

Jane Edwards, J. D. is a reunited birthmother and former Origins-USA board member. She writes for First Mother Forum, www.firstmotherforum.com. The Coalition to Reform Oregon's Adoption Laws is an ad hoc group of birthparents, adoptees, adoptive parents, and others supporting reform. If you're interested in becoming a supporter or learning more, you can reach Jane at jane_edwards@comcast.net.

"HEAR OUR VOICES" VIDEO AVAILABLE

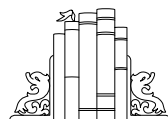
Origins-USA's compelling video "Hear Our Voices" is available now!

Award winning filmmaker Sara Aderhold graciously donated her time to produce Origins-USA's promotional video featuring mothers telling their stories of surrender, loss, and reunion, as well as presenting facts and statistics about adoption today. The video serves as a tool to educate the public, change societal attitudes about adoption and mothers, and inform new mothers of options.

Watch it at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f78PxIMgdkw> or click on the link on Origins' website, www.origins-usa.org. You may also purchase the DVD by sending a \$5 check to Origins-USA at 7327 SW Barnes Rd, #400, Portland, OR 97225-6119.

CHECK OUT ORIGINS-USA'S BOOK, MOVIE & MUSIC LIST:

<http://www.origins-usa.org/Books>



CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS REPORT: “THE ADOPTION OPTION”

The Center for American Progress (CAP), a progressive think tank, issued “The Adoption Option: Adoption Won’t Reduce Abortion but it Will Expand Women’s Choices.” Read the full report at: http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/10/adoption_report.html

Remarkably, they report that adoption is a reproductive option. We disagree. No matter how it’s dressed-up, adoption severs families. As long as the adoption industry continues to prey on young, pregnant women to fill the demand for babies, adoption cannot seriously be considered a choice. And we say so in our response to CAP. If you feel like we did after reading their report, perhaps you’ll take a moment to let the CEO, Mr. John Podesta, and the author, Ms. Jessica Arons, know what it’s like to surrender a child. Contact CAP at: <http://www.americanprogress.org/aboutus/contact.html>

The report did have some important points that we agree with like reforms that are needed regarding extending the time to decide on adoption; independent legal counsel for mothers; accurate information from an undirected source and nationwide laws that govern adoption.

Here is Origins-USA’s response:

*Center for American Progress
John D. Podesta, President and
Chief Executive Officer
Jessica Arons, Director of Women’s Health
and Rights Program
1333 H St. NW, 10th Floor
Washington D.C. 20005*

*Re: The Adoption Option: Adoption Won’t Reduce
Abortion but it Will Expand Women’s Choices*

Dear Mr. Podesta and Ms. Arons:

*After reading The Adoption Option: Adoption Won’t
Reduce Abortion but it Will Expand Women’s Choices,
I am compelled to comment on behalf of Origins-USA.*

There are several points with which Origins-USA not only agrees with the Center for American Progress (CAP) but works towards achieving. They include: extending the time to decide on relinquishment; assuring that mothers and expectant mothers receive accurate, undirected information to make informed decisions about nurturing their child; assuring that mothers have independent legal counsel; and granting mothers a cause of action, within a reasonable amount of time, to nullify the adoption, have their child returned and recover legal costs if their rights are violated.

Origins-USA supports the recommendation that expectant mothers receive undirected professional counseling, however we believe this counseling should address not only all reproductive options but the emotional toll of losing one’s child. The cost of this counseling, both pre- and post-adoption, should be borne by the state and not the adoption agency, which has the appearance of a conflict favoring the position of the agency. Post-adoption counseling should be available to mothers throughout their lifetime. Making a decision to relinquish a child is multifaceted and feelings surrounding that decision change as one’s life progresses and as the child becomes an adult.

We also support the position that laws regulating and governing adoption be consistent throughout the United States. The adoption industry moving expectant mothers to states more favorable to prospective adopters, separating them from their family and support system, is a reality and abhorrent.

We question CAP’s statement that adoption is a choice when considering the outcome of a pregnancy and are interested in knowing the nascence of this matter-of-fact conclusion.

We strongly object to the use of the term “unwanted pregnancy.” Use of this term leads the reader or listener to assume the child is also unwanted and further supports prospective adopters in fortifying their desire to provide a good home for a child, ostensibly because their

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

CAP REPORT: "THE ADOPTION OPTION"
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mother, father or kin does not want them. Unplanned or unintended pregnancy are more appropriate terms and hold less stigma for mother and child, whatever the circumstances are.

When considering the impact this report might have across the adoption world, we believe that, the aforementioned content notwithstanding, it is premature. Research and education must begin with examining the demand and not how to fill that demand, particularly when the demand is for a human being. Proceeding otherwise contributes to the ongoing oversimplification of the lifelong effects of adoption for mothers and their children along with the ongoing glorification of prospective adopters and adopters.

The statement that a federally-funded public education campaign be undertaken to accurately inform the public about adoption and its potential benefits is astonishing. We question exactly who or what is on the receiving end of those potential benefits. Federal funds expended related to adoption should be directed to mothers in need providing them with stop-gap services that will allow them firm footing to parent their child.

The insinuation that relinquishing a child is a benefit that gives mothers a chance at continuing their education, earning a higher income, making a better life for themselves, is insulting. Certainly pregnancy is not the only time in a woman's life when she will face financial strains or life-changing circumstances. Relinquishing a child to adoption is a long-term solution to a short-term condition leading to a lifetime of grief, sorrow and never forgetting, a situation that, with appropriate guidance, support and resources can lead to mothers lovingly nurturing their children.

We question the assumption that mothers do not choose adoption because they do not know about it. The University of Oregon's Adoption History Project, June 2003, updated in July 2007, reports that, although there are no concrete data, a conservative estimate suggests that five million Americans alive today are adopted. Add in birth families and adopters and the number of people affected by adoption triples, at least. Adoption is a well-known industry in this country.

The report notes that the demand for babies available for adoption in the US far exceeds the supply. This is evident by the growth in the adoption industry that works to supply the demand. A simple Google search for adopt child, using this criterion to filter out highways and pets, brought 20,400,000 results in 0.20 seconds.

A second Google search for the cost of adopting a child in the U.S. brought 417,000 results in 0.19 seconds. The US Department of Health and Human Service's Child Welfare Information Gateway cites the cost for adopting a child at \$5,000-\$40,000. This does not include the federal tax credits or military adoption benefits that may be gained with a completed adoption.

Before delegating these substantial sums towards procuring someone else's child, we believe that that money is better spent by straight and same sex couples, and individuals considering adopting, by undertaking psychotherapy with an independent doctoral-level clinical psychologist. The psychotherapy should focus on coming to terms with the reality of infertility, if that is the case, examining why they see themselves as a better choice to raise the child than the natural mother, father or kin and their desire to adopt rather than choosing to foster a child in need. These points are but a start for every prospective adopter to seriously explore before contacting the adoption industry.

There are literally dozens of adoption and adoption facilitation websites that walk the line between offering adoption services and child trafficking. A woman who is young, pregnant, single and white is extremely vulnerable to the pressure tactics used by the adoption industry, whose base commodity is white infants. The focus is most frequently on doing the right thing for the baby, placing guilt on the mother for her most natural feelings: i.e., loving and wanting her child. Telling her that she may not yet be ready for motherhood can lead her to believe she is unworthy or worse, unfit to nurture her child, when the implication is that she does not have the income that prospective adopters have. Telling her that her child's life and hers will be much better off if she gives her child the opportunity for a better life, meaning that she should relinquish her child to more financially secure people. This type of guilt and pressure are unconscionable and is apparent on adoption in-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

CAP REPORT: "THE ADOPTION OPTION

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dustry websites across the country. Furthermore, telling confused, stressed, concerned mothers that relinquishing their child is a "selfless choice" is insulting. Sadly, young mothers are vulnerable to these tactics routinely used by the adoption industry.

Certainly financial security can offer physical comforts, however there are no data to suggest that it provides happiness, sense of self worth, love or emotional and physical wellbeing and security. In 2005, the Office of the Surgeon General conducted a workshop on Making the Prevention of Child Maltreatment a National Priority. It remains a national priority today. There was no recognition during the workshop that adopters are exempt from maltreating children, nor was there an indication when discussing child well treatment education and early skill-building for parents that adopters are model parents and, therefore, should be exempt from skill-building. This is certainly not to disparage adopters. The point is that adopters love, hate, work, lie, practice a religion, drink, gamble, eat, enjoy movies and otherwise live life at the same rate as the rest of the population. To insinuate otherwise falsely represents adopters to mothers and the community at large.

The report briefly mentions gamete harvest as it relates to surrogacy. We do not endorse the practice of exploiting the fertility of young women so that women beyond the age of fertility, or otherwise infertile, be given the opportunity to bear children. We decry the practice of paying women for their ovum in an effort to minimize its significance and long-term effects of that harvest and make it seem like a stipend for their time and trouble rather than what it is: a means for those seeking to earn much greater sums than they pay out catering to those who are infertile. Women need to receive independent, undirected counseling before having their ovum harvested. Understanding exactly what ovum harvesting means for today and the future is essential since the ovum carry genetic traits. It is also essential that a nationwide, mandatory gamete registry be established to provide offspring with a connection to their family of origin and to account for the number of gamete harvests taking place, which is unknown at this time, adding transparency to a growing, unregulated industry

that severs families of origin.

Accurate data of the number of domestic, unrelated adoptions; intercountry adoptions; and known, or kinship, adoptions need to be mandatorily collected at the national level so that an accurate toll is available to all Americans. The University of Oregon's Adoption History Project (referenced on page 3) reports that accurate statistics about twentieth-century adoption are impossible to locate. This is also true for the twenty-first century. Transparency in adoption, including the adoption industry, is essential before adoption can seriously be considered a reproductive choice.

To be sure, there are ethical adoption agencies that do provide facts to expectant mothers along with ongoing counseling to families and adopters. These agencies experience low child placement rates in relation to the number of mothers who contact them seeking information. Still, we firmly believe that adoption cannot be considered a choice until the adoption industry is regulated at the national level and prospective adopters answer for themselves the questions of why they believe they are better suited to raise someone else's child instead of the natural mother, father or kin.

On this subject CAP had an opportunity to reach out and learn from organizations such as Origins-USA, Bastard Nation and Concerned United Birthparents before reporting that adoption expands women's choices. Discussions with these organizations may have brought insight into the very complicated issue of adoption and its lifelong effects.

Enclosed please find a reading list that, while by no means wholly inclusive, is required reading for researchers and anyone considering entering the adoption arena.

*Sincerely,
Jeanine M. Biocic,
President
ORIGINS-USA*

ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH OUSA'S POSITIONS ON ADOPTION ISSUES?

Visit — <http://www.origins-usa.org/PositionPapers>

Western Australia Apology to Mothers Affected by Adoption

By JEANINE BIOCIC

On October 19, 2010, the State of Western Australia (WA) issued a parliamentary apology for the State's role in separating mothers and their children. Approximately 160 people went to Parliament House in Perth for the event and they filled the public gallery.

Adoptions in Australia were handled through and by the State governments. This is still the case although adoptions are rare. From 2008–2009 there were 68 domestic adoptions, compared to 1970–1971 when there were just under 10,000 domestic adoptions. These figures are maintained by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Things were, and are, different in the U.S. where most adoptions are handled by agencies and attorneys. Although I, and the other Origins-USA Board members, agree that an apology is certainly due mothers separated from their children through adoption, we also agree that we will focus Origins-USA's resources on legislative changes that will protect women from the vast powers of the adoption industry in this country.

We understand that not focusing on obtaining an apology and redress is a position that is not supported by some mothers. Particularly so, given the well-documented history of emotional abuse, exploitation and lies many of us experienced at the hands of some of the most notorious adoption agencies in the country, like the Florence Crittenden Home, Catholic Charities and the Edna Gladney Home.

I would be on the next flight to Chicago to hear the Sisters of Mercy of the Misericordia Home apologize for the exploitation, emotional abuse, withholding the facts about my legal rights, etc., while they looked me in the eye. Alas, this is an unrealistic prospect and my energy is better spent working to change the adoption system.

Back to Western Australia.

The apology took place about one hour into the afternoon session and lasted just over an hour. I read the transcript. There was an absolute majority supporting the apology. Ten parliamentarians spoke offering apologies, recognition of the deep pain mothers experienced as a result of their treatment and loss of the children. Many spoke of the affects of adoption within their families.

Whereas I was touched by the sentiment of the words on the page, I realized I wanted more.

I went to the Parliament's website and downloaded video of the Parliamentary session and sat, transfixed, but for wiping away my tears, for one hour while parliamentarian after parliamentarian rose, looked up and addressed their apology. They stated their recognition of the indignities suffered, the lifelong pain caused by the loss of a child, the State's role and their own family's experience with adoption, some crying as they did so, to the mothers and their families seated in the gallery.

Kim Hames, MBBS, Minister of Health, gave background on how the momentum for an apology began and his questioning the need for the government to apologize. He had the opportunity to meet mothers and gained a greater understanding of their treatment and the need for and benefits of an apology. He stated, "One of the mothers whom I met explained to me that while the apology could not heal the hurt that she had suffered for so long, it would make all those involved in the process understand that she had not given up her child because she didn't want it, but because the process that led to the adoption was so flawed that the option of choice was effectively removed."

Those words are still true in this country today.

Dr. Hames went on to read snippets of letters and missives he received supporting the apology. He noted that he had also received letters from adoptees and adopters opposed to the apology, believing that

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

WESTERN AUSTRALIA APOLOGY CONTINUED

an apology would reflect negatively on their actions. To which he responded, "It is totally dedicated to the mothers who gave up their children and the processes in place that affected them so badly." Bravo, Dr. Hames.

I was not surprised by the number of parliamentarians whose families were touched by adoption. Those of us who surrendered our children know that they didn't just lose us. They lost fathers, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, siblings, nieces and nephews, and so on. What did surprise me was the candor of their statements, their recognition of the generational affects of adoption.

The last parliamentarian to speak, Mr. Mark McGowan, spoke about his grandmother, who in 1920 surrendered her daughter and how her anguish was apparent until her death in 1979. How the loss of his aunt still affects the family today, in 2010. He closed with "I will finish by reiterating: you have safety in numbers. There are so many of you who endured what took place. It was not your fault. You have many friends, both among ourselves and among the descendants of people who experienced what you experienced."

Catholic Charities could take a lesson.

Thanks to the noted adoption author and speaker, Ms. Evelyn Robinson for providing notice of the WA apology and related websites.

HONORING BETTY JEAN LIFTON

Betty Jean Lifton, Ph.D., author, lecturer, counselor and activist, passed away on November 19, 2010. B.J. was a tireless advocate for truth in adoption and adoption reform. She captured the support, admiration and respect of the adoption community. Her loss is deeply felt.

A Memorial Service for B.J. will be held on Saturday, January 29, 2011, at 2:30 p.m. in the Radcliffe Gymnasium at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.



AMERICAN ADOPTION CONGRESS NATIONAL CONFERENCE

The American Adoption Congress's National Conference, "Many Faces of Adoption," will be held in Orlando, FL, April 14-17, 2011. For more information, visit: www.americanadoptioncongress.org

NEW JERSEY NEEDS YOUR HELP

Excerpted from firstmotherforum.com:

After more than three decades, as a less-than-perfect adoptee rights bill (A1046) is making its way to possible passage in New Jersey, a pretty terrible bill (A3672) is being touted as an alternative. This measure would keep adopted individuals from obtaining rights equal to the rest of us non-adopted folks by giving, once again, the few birth/first mothers in the closet (and first fathers) the right to smash their childrens' right to self-knowledge.

A3672 would set up an intermediary system, like those already in place in Michigan, Wisconsin, Maryland and elsewhere — a clumsy system that requires a state-appointed confidential intermediary to locate and contact first parents to request consent for adult adoptees to access their original birth certificate.

Many powers that be are lined up against adopted people in New Jersey — the Bar Association, the Catholic Conference of Bishops, NJ American Civil Liberties Union, and the Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministry — are all invested in protecting their clients, the adoptive parents from dealing with the reality that their children were born to other people, carry other people's DNA, look like they belong in another family. But instead of admitting that is at the heart of their objections to giving adopted persons their civil right to own their own identities, they hide behind the skirts of first mothers.

But A1046, the one promoted by the people who have been on the ground in New Jersey, does not involve an outside party, an intermediary whose cost will be born by the adoptee, and after twelve months, first parents would no longer be able to legally object to the release of their names on copy of the original birth certificates given adoptees who ask for them. All first parents (past, present and future) retain the right to file a "contact preference" form at any time, and change it as they wish, as they do in Alabama, New Hampshire, Oregon and Maine.

Though we have reservations about this bill, we believe that in the larger scope of human rights, this bill ought to be passed, since it appears it is best the

New Jersey lawmakers are capable of after decades of lobbying. Some people simply cannot understand that an individual's right to know who he is, who he was at birth, should be an absolute right and anything less than that is unjust.

Visit <http://www.nj-care.org/> for how to make a difference. We will win this war, one state at a time. But not without your support.

ORIGINS WELCOMES YOUR SUBMISSIONS

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

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

Content must accomplish one or more of the following:

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

DON'T LET THIS BE YOUR LAST NEWSLETTER...

Join Origins to continue to receive the newsletter. Just go to "Join" on the website and fill out the form. Dues are \$25 per year.



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

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

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

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

JOIN TODAY

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

Dues are just \$25 a year. Give more if you can, less if you can't.
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Give \$100 or more and receive an autographed copy of
The Stork Market:

America's multi-million dollar unregulated adoption industry,
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Go to www.Origins-USA.org and click on "Join."
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ORIGINS-USA'S MISSION & VISION

Mission

Every mother deserves accurate information and sufficient time to decide to make an informed decision about nurturing her child. Therefore, Origins-USA supports legislative changes that assure a mother's consent to the adoption of her child is informed.

Vision

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