



The official voice of OriginsUSA, Inc.

Mothers in Action

Volume 1, Issue 2

October, 2007

OriginsUSA, Inc.

We have our Non Profit Status!!

Over the past few months there have been many changes in OUSA, and the board of directors are rightfully proud of the direction the organization is taking. We have become a force to be considered, with the formation of the support groups in three states, the arrival of our first, of many we hope, intern, Emily, and the updated website. However, the biggest change of all, and one we have waited for for a very long time, is the official arrival of our 501 c 3, non profit status. This allows our donors to deduct their donations from their taxes, gives us the ability to apply for government and private grants, and opens many more doors for available resources. We have a lot of ideas that we would love to implement, and the ability to seek funding gives us one more resource to achieving our lofty goals of ending coercive adoption, seeking justice for the crimes of the past, and healing the damage of adoption loss, as stated in our mission.

We will keep you apprised of any changes, let you know about the NFP Status, and let you know about

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OriginsUSA Goes to Conferences

Several members of OriginsUSA will be traveling to Crystal City, Virginia this week for Ethica and The Evan B. Donaldson Institute, **Ethics & Accountability In Adoption Conference**.

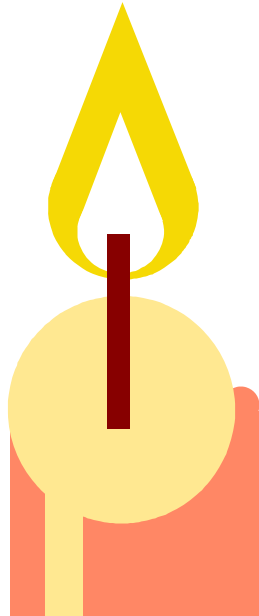
By invitation, Mirah Riben will be presenting on a panel, the topic, "Alternatives to Permanency; is Adoption the Best Choice?" She has done hours and hours of work on her presentation for the conference, and will be a strong voice for reason and for OriginsUSA. Thank you, Mirah

Mirah, Suz Bednarz and Claudia Corrigan-D'Arcy will be participating in the Monday evening "Meet the Bloggers" event, again by invitation, which will introduce some of those who have spoken out against the current practices of coercive and exploitive surrender and adoption consistently on their blogs, and will put a face to some of the leading bloggers in the Natural Family Preservation Community. Congratulations to these women of OriginsUSA.

Also attending this very important conference will be OriginsUSA president, Bernadette Wright and our new intern, Emily Ryan. All things considered, Origins will have a very strong presence at this conference. This conference and others like it all over the country will put a face to the new OriginsUSA, will be an opportunity for OriginsUSA to build relationships with others who are interested in natural family preservation and will go a long way toward announcing that Origins will no longer allow others to speak on behalf of the mothers of loss and their children...that we are perfectly capable of speaking for ourselves. *(continued on page 3)*

the tax deductions. Please keep checking the message board and the website for announcements.

We are seeking your comments, we need your input, we are always eager to hear from you, either on the message board or via emails. To contact the directors, you can email bod@originsusa.org



**OriginsUSA
for our
Sisters in
Need.**

Please light a candle and send energy to our sisters who are in crisis at this time. There are many, and some of them are experiencing very serious difficulties. Know that our thoughts are with you, Dear Sisters. We care. We are here.

The Other

Many generations
Span four score and more
Great Grandmother
Grandmother
Mother
Daughter
Each one is the other

Oldest to the youngest
Eighty-four to four
Wisdom comes with age
A trickster was among us
We should have run away
Daughter, mother, grandmother
Each one is the other

The oldest asked the questions
The youngest was afraid
Mother/daughter in the middle
Were ripped by harsh rebuff
Too soon we had enough
Mother, daughter, granddaughter
We stood alone together

Each one is the other
This day she lost the future
Again she spurns her daughter
Rejects her granddaughter too
So the great one can't exist
Each one is the other
The oldest gone astray

Three generations
Try to endure the day
Silent in our sadness
Pride whisks us on our way
Is there tomorrow or only yesterday
Each one is the other
Two mothers are lost today

Four generations are left
But the oldest stands alone
Arms are open widely
Loneliness is around her
A mother lost a daughter
A daughter lost a mother
Each one is the other

Jeanne Atkinson Gartland

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



Ethica Conference

Place Crystal City, Virginia
Time October 15, 15th, 2007

Adoption Knowledge Affiliates 15th Annual Conference

Place Austin, TX
TIME NOVEMBER 2, 3RD, 2007

Support Group Chat

PLACE ORIGINSUSA.ORG CHAT ROOM
TIME EVERY OTHER SUNDAY FROM 3-4:00 EASTERN TIME

REG DAY

PLACE ALL OVER THE COUNTRY
TIME NOVEMBER 10, 1007

Conference: Who is My Mother, Who is My Father, Who Am I?

Place New York Psychoanalytic Society
247 East 82nd Street
New York, NY 10028
Sponsored by COWAP, a Division of the IPA

"CAAA "Adoption & Other Permanency Options for Older Youth & Siblings" Conference

SANTA CLARA MARRIOTT
SANTA CLARA, CALIFORNIA
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2007

AND
SAN GABRIEL HILTON
SAN GABRIEL, CALIFORNIA
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2007

PRESENTED BY CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF ADOPTION
AGENCIES (CAAA)

Also, next month, Sandy Young and Donna Stefanov will be manning a booth at the 15th Annual Adoption Knowledge Affiliates Conference in Austin, TX. Keynote speaker will again be Adam Pertman of the Evan B. Donaldson Institute for Adoption . Mr. Pertman sure seems to get around, doesn't he? Let's hope that some of the women at these conferences can get some time with Mr. Pertman, so that he can see that we no longer need him to be the voice of mothers.

Who Am I?

At first I was a baby
A family's cherished daughter
And someone's sister too
Tears roll down my cheek
I am a soulful little child
Just looking for a friend

And now I am a teenager
A pain in someone's neck
Yet needing someone's closeness
I stray upon the path
So sadly an unwed mother
But lose my rights at that

Then I became a shadow
Darting around in life
I'm looking for my way
When from the shadows
Comes a new name
Birthmother! What is that?

Am I someone good at last
No, I've still a secret
A shame for life to bear
As more names come to get me
One day someone's girlfriend
The next an old maid aunt

Until I get a new name
And I become a wife
I meet society's approval
But still I have my secret
Standing in the darkness
Alone to face the night

One day I hear a new name
First mother!
This can't be me
Yet soon the secret's lifted
I'm filling with the spirit
Of joy and sorrowful memories

With acceptance in my power
As my daughter came to me
I come out of silent darkness
And learn I'm someone's mother
With joy in happy wholeness
A bright new shining day.

Jeanne Atkinsons Gartland

MEET OUR NEW INTERN

EMILY RYAN

We are very excited to introduce to you, Emily Ryan, OriginsUSA's new intern. Emily is a student at George Mason University. She speaks 3 languages, and is majoring in Anthropology with an anticipated graduation date of the spring of 2008.

Emily has studied at the University of Hawaii, and has studied language abroad in Tokyo and Seoul. She enjoys the flexibility of working with OriginsUSA and will be meeting with some of the board of directors while they are at the conference in Virginia. She has met with Bernadette Wright on several occasions, and had a telephone conference with Bernadette Wright and Sandy Young.

Emily is a Korean Adoptee, adopted through Holt International Children's Service in 1982. She has made several trips to the land of her birth, including a trip to the home from which she was adopted.

We look forward to a mutually beneficial arrangement with Emily and hope that she will be the first of many such internships in the future.

Welcome, Emily. Glad to have you with us!

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: Are my membership dues tax deductible?

A: Yes. Since we received notice that our approval for the 501 (c) (3) status was approved in February of 2007, all the membership dues and donations are now tax deductible on your 2007 Income Tax!

Q: What can I do to help?

A: There are many areas in which your help is needed. We are still looking for volunteers in many areas. Look over the committee section on our website and see which area fits your interest. There is plenty of work to be done, and the more hands, the lighter the work for all of us. Volunteer to do as much or as little as you can. All help is appreciated.



Book Reviews

STORK MARKET

By Mirah Riben

Telling It Like It Is, August 1, 2007

By Jane Edwards (Portland, Oregon)

"The Stork Market" is a must read for those considering adoption or surrendering a child for adoption; and for public policy makers.

Adoption is usually thought of as a positive event - finding a family for an unwanted child; helping a woman go on with her life without a burden she cannot bear.

In fact, adoption has become a total distortion of the intended purpose of finding homes for orphaned children. It is a multi-billion dollar unregulated business which exploits mothers and commodifies children.

The demand for adoptable children - particularly healthy white infants -- far exceeds the supply. Couples and singles desperate to be parents pay thousands of dollars for the babies that become available. Meanwhile American children who need homes are languishing in foster care.

"The Stork Market" leads us through the seamy side of adoption: Trusting couples desiring a child scammed of thousands of dollars. Women convinced to travel across country to deliver a child in a state "friendly" to adoption. Women required to pay thousands of dollars because they did not turn over the "goods." Men denied their paternal rights by convoluted laws requiring them to sign up on "putative father registries." Poor children in Asia, Eastern Europe, and South America kidnapped and smuggled into the United States.

And its not just prospective adoptive parents and natural parents who suffer. Adoption cuts children off from blood relatives and denies them the right to know their origins. Unscrupulous adoption practitioners place children with anyone who can pay their fees. Sadistic adopters abuse - even murder - children entrusted to them.

Riben not only exposes the problems but offers common-sense solutions. Mothers should be made aware of their options. They should have sufficient time to consider and re-consider their decision. Fathers should have actual notice of the birth of their child and the pending adoption so that they can assert their rights. International adoption should be curtailed and resources made available to poor women to allow them to raise their children. Adoption agencies should be licensed and regulated. Private adoptions conducted by "facilitators," attorneys, doctors, and others should be outlawed.

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A MOTHER'S PAIN AND CHARGE AGAINST SOCIETY AND THE CHURCH

By Judy Jones, originally posted on Adoptese
(Used with permission)

I have thought about writing this for years, but have hesitated and backed away from it because of fears and heavy emotional issues. My heart has been heavy to the point of breaking for so long now, and the weight of it has taken a toll on my soul and spirit. I know that God is there to comfort and help carry this burden, but still I have to live with the emotional stress and grief that never goes away. It seems so easy for others to look on my situation and tell me what they think, yet they do not see the toll this has taken and continues to take on me. Yet there are thousands and millions of mothers like myself who have born the same pain that I have.

Well-meaning Christians have told me how noble and wonderful an act of love I did many years ago—that of giving my baby up for adoption—yet the older I get, the more I believe they were wrong for saying those things to me. They judged me and my situation and imposed their standards, thoughts, and beliefs on me, making me feel condemned if I did not go along with their beliefs. These same Christians feel that I made a wonderful decision that helped my child have something she could never have with me. What a sentence to place on another human!

Judgment—I was judged, not by God, but by people. Further weight was added to my burden when I was told by a social worker and other Christians that I was responsible for another couple's happiness. These Christians once again judged that I was misfit and that someone else had more right to my child than I did. Was that my responsibility...to give up my precious flesh and blood to make someone else's life complete? Why do not these well-meaning Christians give these couples one of their own children if it is such a wonderful thing to do for someone else? How would these Christians feel about that? These people who judged me and said I was doing such a noble thing for another do not live with the constant grief and pain, and they do not even acknowledge that I am created by God to respond and feel the way I do as a mother who has lost her child.

How deep the grief and pain from losing a child, and how deep the hurt that others impose when they do not acknowledge the mother's constant pain and grief, or the prison of separation from her child that has been

(Continued from page 4)

Finally Riben recommends that adoption - cutting off all legal ties between the child and his original family -- be replaced with guardianship-like arrangement. Adoptive parents would have custody but the child would retain a relationship with the original family.

Purchase *The Stork Market* at Advocate Publications, mention Origins and get an autographed copy.

Unlearning Adoption: A Guide to Family Preservation and Protection

Jess Del Balzo

"This book is a 'MUST READ' for all Americans, especially social work and counseling students, who hold enormous power to bring about change in adoption law and practice. DelBalzo challenges the machinery that drives the multi-billion dollar adoption industry, and the media frenzy that fuels it, creating a supply to meet a fabricated demand. She unravels and reframes the deceitful language of adoption that made the unpalatable palatable – especially for those of you who may have preferred to remain unknowing. She exposes the myth of 'open' adoption as a false promise not supported in law, and explains, step by step, how the industry and its workers psychologically disable mothers in order to force them to surrender their babies. This truly is a 'journey of unlearning' – all the spin, all the lies that the adoption industry does not want you to question. If you want to know the truth about North American adoption, read this book. And then begin to ask those questions you will be sure to have."

- Joss Shawyer, author of *Death by Adoption*.

Help Wanted

Are you looking for a way to contribute to helping to correct what is wrong with adoption, leave a mark on the industry, make things right for your families torn apart by adoption? Join OriginsUSA, a non-profit organization dedicated to natural family preservation, educating the public about the effects of loss on children and mothers, and seeking justice for the wrongs of the past.

go to the OriginsUSA website www.originsusa.org, and click on "Get Involved" to join, donate, volunteer, or join a committee.

Thank you for wanting to make a difference!

imposed upon her for the rest of her life. God created mothers to always love, cherish, desire to hold their child, see their child, care where their children are at all times, show them how to grow up to be loving people, and to hold their grandchildren. How can a mother lay aside and decide not to be what God made her to be? Yet, people think this is possible and tell her to go on with her life as if she never was a mother and never will be the mother to the child she bore again. Christians in their self righteous thinking have judged this mother. How can this be?

God created the life of the child within the womb and sovereignly chose the mother to bear the child. The mother and father *may* have made a mistake but did God make a mistake? Was He not in control? Does He really intend that the mother and child that He joined and knitted together be separated at birth? Is the mother really supposed to believe that she should not have a right to the child that God, Himself created in her womb? Is she really supposed to believe that she will never be good enough to mother the child God created in her womb, and that her child was really meant by God for someone else--that she was just the surrogate mother?

The Bible is used so often to validate this process of giving up a child to adoption, yet the very Scripture used actually condemns the circumstances and the people that forced the situation. God ultimately turned these circumstances that people meant for selfish gain for the ultimate good of many people, but at a price to the perpetrators....

1) Moses was adopted by the Pharaoh's daughter, yet it was the Pharaoh who made it impossible for the mother of Moses to keep Moses. Pharaoh was like the modern day state that imposes inhumane standards and burdens on natural parents and children. Pharaoh was judged by God in the end and his household destroyed, and Moses left that household under God's direction.

2) Abraham sought a son and Sarah devised a plan to adopt another woman's child to fulfill her desire, yet God did not approve of this way of getting a child. God's preference was for Abraham and Sarah to have a child together.

3) Samuel -- the long-prayed for child--was left by Hannah and Elkannah with Eli the priest, but Eli proved to be an unfit mentor of Samuel, was judged and killed by God along with his sons in the end.

Adoption in the Bible was not what the modern government implements. Adoption was usually of older children who did not have living parents. God blessed this process and it was a blessing to children who had no inheritance and no parents to take care of them. In today's adoption practices the State rules and decrees that parents who are still living are no longer parents; these parents become "non-entities"; "birth" certificates are in a sense forged to bear the name of non-birth parents—the original parents are wiped out as if they never existed. The child is taken from the original parents and is expected to never know them or be acknowledged as parents. The State justifies this action and Christian leaders encourage this scenario as the State takes babies away from living mothers and fathers in order to give them to those who society and Christians deems are *more* fit and deserving people. Where is this principal of total separation of mother and child found and sanctified in Scripture? Where is the justification for this action? Christians have justified, spiritualized, and Christianized this process without Scriptural grounds.

Perhaps it would be more Scriptural if Christians called this process a legal "stoning" as described in the Bible for women caught in adultery. Both the woman and the child conceived were condemned and stoned to death by the community. The woman never got to mother her child and her child never got to know her. The difference is that in modern society, the fruit of the mother's womb is deemed a highly desirable commodity and is confiscated and given to someone else—the natural mother and father are essentially discarded, and their God-created relationship is dissolved by man. Death is pronounced on the relationship between the mother and child as the bond and relationship are legally aborted.

Society and Christians justify this kind of "abortion," yet, as a whole, they deny and do not acknowledge the consequential lifetime of grief and pain that are imposed on mother and child by society as a result of this traumatic separation. Both the child and mother live with the consequences of this traumatic separation the rest of their lives. The mother and child are expected to go on living in a state of denial as if the other person does not exist. This

mother who was told she was doing the “most loving thing” is prevented by the rules of society from showing her child her love and her child is prevented from receiving her love.

What kind of twisted “noble” love is this? Who is looking out for whose interests here? Can love be denied or prevented by others with God’s approval? Children of adoption acknowledge the sting of this death and separation, yet they are supposed to be the grateful ones. When they do not get to experience this love of their natural mothers and fathers, the children of adoption look for it in the adoptive parents and bond with them. Many children of adoption have attachment issues. As a result, many adoptees feel a need to find that part of themselves that is missing and look for their original parents. Not being able to know and receive the love of this mother who supposedly loved them so much seems very conflicting and dynamically opposed to many adopted people, no matter how they try to stay bonded and loyal to their adoptive parents. Society tried to explain to them how grateful and loyal they are supposed to feel to their adoptive families while they still have these desires for their original parents. The adopted person is often torn between two sets of parents and sometimes retreats from the emotional strain.

Sadly, emerging statistics show that these mothers and their children have higher incidences of substance abuse, cancer, early death, and suicide than the rest of their peers in society. Consider some mothers who have endured years of life in this constant “condition of death”—some of these mothers have suggested that “stoning” in the biblical sense seems to be a swifter yet more merciful action. Some mothers who are confessed Christians have considered the shame that other Christians imposed on them and the lifelong trauma of losing their babies and have said they would have considered or chosen abortion over this kind of pain. Consider those children who cannot forget the mothers who bore them and who are prevented by society from knowing them—some adoptees sadly feel that if they never knew his pain and were aborted that it would have seemed more merciful. Both mother and child have displayed feelings of hopelessness and despair.

What kind of system of society can call itself “considering the well-being of the child” and what Christian community can condone this process as good and wonderful, yet make those involved in the process (those who have had to make the sacrifices) feel that facing physical death would have been better than the living Hell they have had to face?

Are these feelings and this suffering ultimately caused only by the mother’s sin, or does society and the Christian Church bear much of the responsibility for its judgments, self-righteous reaction, and imposed sanctions on the lives of this mother and her child?

God help those of us who have been permanently damaged by this human practice. God, please, heal the broken places of our lives, and restore what was taken away.

Origins Update

In the past several months, we have been very busy. On our website, <http://www.originsusa.memberlodge.org/Default.aspx?pageId=24324>, it is continually updated, but here are some highlights:

- * February 2007, Incorporation was obtained
- * February 2007, received 501 c 3 status
- * Filed 13 press releases
- * Filed 8 Position Papers, with at least an equal number coming
- * Acquired an intern
- * Formed in-person support groups in 3 states, with 3 more states coming soon. Put training and support in place to assist

Support Group facilitators

- * Have organized 5 Reg Day locations
- * Facilitated in the reunion of a mother with her 2 lost sons
- * Are in the process of facilitating another reunion of a mother and son
- * Rewrite, with the assistance of an attorney, of bylaws to be in accordance with VA laws
- * Created a growing database of resources for mothers in crisis
- * Created a growing database of attorneys who will take these cases
- * Created a growing database of Media Contacts so that we have people to send our information to rather than a generic email account
- * Assisted in the organization of a Teen Mother*s Conference to show high school age students that they CAN continue their education, even with a baby
- * 5 members attending the Ethica Conference, one of whom is presenting, and 3 will be on the Meet the Blogger Panel
- * Scheduled a manned table at the AKA Affiliates 15th annual conference on adoption
- * Presented at the KAAN Conference
- * Established a Speaker*s Bureau as a resource for groups and organizations looking for a presenter or speaker.
- * Trademark filed as OriginsUSA, Inc.

We feel that action is more important than words, and we have a many projects pending, all of which are directed at stopping adoption, seeking justice for past crimes, preserving natural families, and supporting mothers who are in danger of losing their children.

Our new motto is *Motherhood is Forever* and on our website, on the page where we announce the new logo, mission, and vision we also make our statement on the use of the word *Mother* so our position on the b word should be clear. We do not espouse its use, but neither do we hover over the board looking for someone to accidentally slip into it.

There is currently a discussion on our public board about a mother on our board of directors who just resigned a position in another organization because they insisted she include an article on that topic. Anyone can read it. The link is

http://originsusa.org/forums/index.php*topic=1110.msg5553;topicseen#msg5553

It is an interesting link.

OriginsUSA is an activist group. That, by necessity, indicates action. We all need support, and we all need others who know our pain. However, we also need to DO things to back up our words. In addition to the things I have bulleted above, we also have many other things in the works. I will bullet some of those things also:

- * We are working with the Reg Day organization to form partnerships with some of the major bookstore chains to make it easier to find a location for the Reg Day event.
- * Working with a Service-Learning Department to create a prototype project to include Service-Learning with Mothers to encourage family preservation and higher education
- * Working with several deans of Psychiatry to update and make relevant our Support Group Handbook and other materials for our face to face groups
- * Working to promote our Adoption Bewareness Month culminating in our National Strange and Mournful Day, including approaching Paul Simon to obtain permission to use the song, *Mother and Child Reunion* as our theme song.
- * Continuing to improve our website and forum, and are searching ways to make communication to and among our members more user-friendly.
- * Liaised with community activist groups to network for more exposure in the activist community, locally, nationally, and internationally.

We also see our forum and organization as a place to empower mothers and adoptees. It is difficult to imagine a fragile mother or adoptee testifying before Congress, presenting to a hostile audience, being interviewed on television or the radio, or even arguing their own case in a letter. We want to encourage our members by empowering them, encouraging their growth and helping them to heal themselves by helping others. The cliché statement that actions speak louder than words is very true. We believe in the membership and their basic ability to speak out against what they find objectionable. We trust that they are grown up and able to evaluate statements and consider the context and the intent of what they read.

We believe in the power of our membership to affect changes. The group, <http://www.wemakechange.org/change/> has stated, "Community organizing is the process through which individuals come together to build power among themselves. This power is the ability to create solutions to issues we are facing. Often, people feel like there is nothing they can do to change *the way things are,* or that their opinion is not important, but through coming together into a community of individuals who are dissatisfied and working together, change happens. This is the strength of community organizing. This style of activism has another important

attribute: it empowers those who have been denied a voice. Once in a strong, organized community, individual disempowerment, and resultant silence, disappears”. OriginsUSA intends to fulfill that for our members.

WHY REUNIONS GO WRONG: WHAT MEMOIRS OF ADOPTED DAUGHTERS TELL BIRTHMOTHERS

By Jane Elizabeth Edwards (used with permission)

Introduction

Almost ten years ago, I received the call I had been waiting for since the day the social worker took my baby. My daughter wanted to meet me! We emailed daily for two months. I was obsessed, euphoric. After we met, she began to pull away. What went wrong? To find the answers I poured over the memoirs of women who had been adopted. I hoped for happy endings – the daughters would return to their birthmothers and leave that other family, in my mind, the faux family. This did not happen.

What I learned from reading the memoirs of Betty Jean Lifton, Amy Dean, Jean Strauss, A. M. Homes, Zara Phillips, Sarah Saffian, and Katie Hern¹ was not what I hoped for. Although they desire information about themselves, they do not wish to reclaim a mother as I had hoped to reclaim a daughter. In time, however, most of the daughters and their mothers form a lasting and positive relationship.

The memoirs also told me that it is not our fault if our daughters distance themselves or refuse to have a relationship altogether. These behaviors come from the daughters' struggles to make sense of the world in which they find themselves. Although these women's backgrounds and life experiences are vastly different from each other; their reunion experiences are remarkably similar. The daughters fantasize about their mothers. They dream of a strong, vibrant protector. They fear their mothers will reject them. At the same time, they claim they want to reunite with their mothers solely for information.

The daughters are so focused on their own feelings that they can not grasp the effect that surrender and reunion has on their mothers. The mothers are overwhelmed when they meet their daughters. They become the vulnerable young women who surrendered their first born child. Their grief, kept within for decades, explodes. The pain of losing their child and the fear of losing her again make these strong women appear weak and self-pitying.

The daughters do not empathize with their mothers' sorrow. Their mothers' expression of love and fidelity come across as overbearing and demanding; their regret for surrendering their daughters as an attack on the adoptive family. The daughters find fault with their mothers – a tacky greeting card, a careless remark, a bad hair do, anything -- to assure themselves their adoption was right, that it was meant to be.

The daughters view themselves as victims and turn to their adoptive families for security. They feel guilty for what they see as a betrayal of their adoptive family. They insist that their adoptive family is their only family and at the same time regret being strangers in their natural families.

The reunion forces the daughters to confront their greatest terror – that they should have been someone else.

Varied backgrounds

Betty Jean Lifton's memoir, *Twice Born: Memories of An Adopted Daughter*, (1975) is the earliest work. Adopted in the 1920's in New York, Lifton spent her first two and a half years in The Home for Hebrew Infants. Lifton commenced her search for her

mother, Rae, in the 1950's.

The other adoptees, Dean, Strauss, Homes, Phillips, Saffian, and Hern, born a generation after Lifton, were adopted as infants:²

Dean's mother, Ruth, was 18 when Dean was born, a product of rape. Dean's adoptive mother was an alcoholic who adopted Dean thinking that having a child would erase the pain of infertility and help her stop drinking. It did not. Dean was placed in a foster home and her adoptive parents divorced. When her father re-married, Dean went to live with him and his new wife. She never accepted her step-mother. Dean began searching for her birthmother, Ruth, when she was 31 and found her three months later.

Strauss was adopted by a warm, nurturing couple and raised in rural California. She was especially close to her adoptive mother. Both her adoptive parents died before she began her search for her mother, Lenore, who herself was an adoptee.

Homes, a successful New York writer was found by her mother, Helene. Her biological father was married to another woman when Homes was born and she refers to herself as "the mistress's daughter." Homes had a close relationship with her adoptive family. Phillips, born and raised in a London suburb, had a tumultuous adolescence, abusing drugs and alcohol. She found her mother, Pat, when she was 24. After her reunion, she moved to Los Angeles and became a successful singer.

Saffian was found by her parents, Hannah and Adam, just before her 24th birthday. They married after her birth and had three more children. Saffian was adopted by an affluent Jewish couple and raised in New York. Her adoptive mother died when she was six. She was very close to her adoptive father.

Hern was raised in Massachusetts. She moved to San Francisco as a young woman and became a writer and performer. She was gay, something her strict Irish Catholic adoptive parents could not accept. Hern and her mother, Ellen, connected through Catholic Charities' registry when Hern was 26.

Fantasy Mother

Before reunion, the daughters imagine a loving natural mother whose only mistake, in the words of *Annie*, was "giving up me."

Homes:

"In my dreams, my birth mother has always been a goddess – the queen of queens, the C.E.O., the C.F.O., and the C.O.O. Movie-star beautiful, extraordinarily competent, she can take care of anyone and anything. She has made a fabulous life for herself as ruler of the world, except for one missing link – *me*."³

Dean:

"I've always dreamed of having—
...a kindly woman with a sweet, smiling face who gently washes away the dirt from my scraped knees and elbows and who chases away my tears;
...a tireless woman who provides me with soft, clean clothing that smells a little like her and a little like the fresh outdoors;
...a caring woman who does many things with me, who talks with me and shows an interest in my life;
...a nurturing woman who makes the house smell as scrumptious as a homebaked cookie and who never lets me know what hunger feels like;
...an angelic woman who makes me feel safe as she takes me in her arms, places my head gently upon her soft, full bosom and rocks me to sleep each night."⁴

Phillips:

"I fantasized a lot about my birthmother. I looked for her constantly on the streets.

...

"I spent much of my time daydreaming and never really feeling connected with anyone. But secretly I was always waiting for the day that my birthmother would

show up on my doorstep, apologizing and telling me there had been a terrible mistake.”⁵

Desire for Information

The adoptees describe their interest in their mothers as a quest for information. Dean writes:

“It’s not so much the *person* I want to find as the *answers* to my questions. I want to find my roots. I want to know where I came from. I want to know my medical history. I want to know my nationality. I want to know why I was placed for adoption.”⁶

Strauss echoes:

“Why did I feel I had to search? If I was so comfortable with my parents and my childhood, why would I pursue such a quest? The reality for me was that I was never looking for parents. I was looking for answers. There was an empty chamber in my mind full of question marks. My curiosity changed as I grew older, until I no longer just *wanted* to know about my origins, I had to and *needed* to find answers.”⁷

When Homes learns that her mother is searching for her she says she wants: “information: where she grew up, how educated she is, what she does for a living, what the family medical history is, and what were the circumstances of my adoption were.”⁸

Unconditional Acceptance, Universal Regret

The daughters are unprepared for the unconditional acceptance they encounter. Dean writes in her diary: “I’ve been so worried about how you [her mother] might reject me if/when I find you. But I’ve never even considered how I’d feel if you welcomed me with open arms.”⁹

All the mothers regret surrendering their daughters. Lifton’s mother, Rae, tells her: “When you were two, you had to have a mastoid operation. They told me you would die if you did not get a family of your own. They encouraged me to let you go for adoption if I really loved you. I was afraid you would die or I would never have done it.”¹⁰

Dean’s mother, Ruth, says in their first conversation:

“Amy, even though I was raped – and *that* is a painful memory to me, even after all these years, ... *you* weren’t a painful memory to me. I never wanted to give you up. But I had to.”¹¹

Strauss tells her mother, Lenore:

“You know, you did the right thing when you gave me up.’

“Her answer burst my hallucination. ‘I’ll never believe that. I should never have let you go. I wish I had taken you and run. I looked for you in every one of my children.’”¹²

Helene (Homes’ mother):

“As I left the hospital with the lady who was picking up the little girl, I can still see myself in the taxi and her asking me to give her the baby. I did not want to give her the child, however I did realize, I did not have the wherewithal to take care of her myself. Yes, I have always loved this little girl and been tortured every December of my life from the day she was born that I did not have her with me.”¹³

Pat (Phillips’ mother):

“It’s always been my deepest regret that I could not keep you, but I was a very immature seventeen-year-old, and without the support of my parents I would never have managed.

“I adore my children but there’s always been something missing in my life. No

child can replace another.”¹⁴

Hannah (Saffian’s mother):

“My heart breaks at the thought of all we missed out on – that I didn’t get to raise you, to hold you..., to watch you grow, that I was unable to take on the incredible responsibility of having a child in 1969. ... I am so sorry about so many things, but I have never been sorry that I had you.”¹⁵

Ellen (Hern’s mother):

“Your birth was joyous to me.....

“I coped, as I had from the beginning, by convincing myself that you were going to be raised by the two loving parents of my fantasy. That you would want for nothing ... It made it bearable, just barely.”¹⁶

Anxiety and Guilt, Not Joy

The reunions provide the daughters with the desired answers but also cause anxiety and guilt, not joy. The mothers become looming wraiths, not guardian angels. The daughters describe their mothers variously as weak, dishonest, slovenly, demanding, unsophisticated, insensitive, and threatening women who send inappropriate greeting cards. Not surprisingly, they reject similarities between themselves and their mothers. “I am horrified at the way I see myself in her.” (Homes)¹⁷ “I refuse to acknowledge any similarity between us.” (Strauss)¹⁸

Lifton says about Rae:

“She was not the big, strong, all-powerful mother ready to take the frightened child in her arms and dispel the demons. She, too, was riddled with demons.”...¹⁹ “I had been disappointed in my mother. I had not expected to find a queen, but at least a vibrant creative woman. Someone less defeated; someone who had willed herself to be strong just as I had done throughout my youth. ... She had been more nurturing as the ghostly mother of my fantasy than as a reality in life.”²⁰

Lifton suspends their relationship for 10 years after Rae sends her a commercial Mother’s Day card. “She should have known there were no Hallmark Cards for a relationship such as ours.”²¹

Ruth’s transgressions are enormous. When Ruth tells Dean she loves her, Dean protests: “How could you say that you loved me? You don’t even know me – you don’t know *anything* about me.” ²²

At their first meeting in Ruth’s home, Dean saw “cluttered counters and dishes piled in the sink.”²³ Ruth cleans her house before a subsequent meeting but to no avail. “In your letter, you also commented that you had spent hours cleaning the house and making sure everything was just right for me. You were then distressed when I didn’t even take off my coat....

“Ruth, I didn’t want to make my visit a big deal. ...

“I wish you could understand how pressured you make me feel at times, which makes it uncomfortable for me to be around you.”²⁴

Pat’s criticism of Phillips’ emotional outburst during a family celebration leaves Phillips devastated. “[F]or me, the relationship was never the same again.”²⁵ She rages when Pat signs a birthday card for one of her children “‘Grandma.’ I think, *What right does she have to that title? She lost that privilege!*”²⁶

Lifton’s, Dean’s, and Phillips’ mothers’ reluctance to provide information about their fathers exacerbates their strained relationships.

Strauss too is upset when Lenore tells her she loves her. “A knee-jerk reaction inside me, like a baby kicking. She loved me? She doesn’t even *know* me. This emotion I am feeling – is this what rage feels like?”²⁷

Strauss also feels pressured:

"The initial fireworks excitement I felt dissolves into awkward feelings. Yet, it doesn't make sense, my unforgiving attitude, my desire for distance. After all, I am the one who searched for her....

"I just want to clutch you to my breast,' she says, 'and make these awful feelings disappear.'

"Her words are too intimate, too needy. I cannot be the baby she gave away."28

Lenore sends Strauss's son a Valentine and signs it "'With love from Grandma Lenore.'" Strauss throws it in the trash.29

After Saffian's parents contact her, she is plagued with anxiety.

"As the weeks wore on, I became increasingly paranoid about [Hannah and Adam]. Despite their promises to lay low, I would look around every time I left my building for someone who resembled me lurking on the corner or across the street, afraid of being ambushed...."30

She writes to Hannah and Adam: "I am not your long-lost daughter."31

Homes is vicious in describing Helene. She "wants everything all at once. ..."32 Her lack of sophistication leaves me unsure whether she's of limited intelligence or simply shockingly naïve."33

Everything about Helene is wrong: Her hair, her clothing "She looks like someone from another decade – a woman who believes in glamour, who listens to Burt Bacharach and Dinah Shore...."34 The restaurant she picks for their first meeting, (the Oyster Bar at the Plaza Hotel), the cocktail she orders (Harveys Bristol Cream), the food she orders (lobster), her table manners. Helene sends Homes a birthday card which is "a putrid pale—pink with roses, the color of femininity, of a box of sanitary napkins."35

Only Hern writes positively of her mother. "...It's especially great to replace those distorted visions with well-balanced and funny you. It's a massive relief to dispel those lurking anxieties."36

Betrayal of the Adoptive Families

The daughters fear betraying their adoptive families. Lifton never tells her adoptive mother of her reunion: "By destroying her myth I would destroy what was most meaningful in her life."37

Strauss remains loyal to her adoptive parents even though they are dead. Strauss learns that Lenore told a reporter that Lenore was elated because she could tell people the truth, she had eight children, not seven. Strauss writes:

"...It does not make me feel elated. It makes me feel like I am cheating on my mother. If Lenore now has 'eight' children, where does that leave my mom?....

"...I retrieve Mom's wedding ring from my jewelry box, and slip it on my ring finger beside my own wedding ring. It will tell everyone: I am married to her. No one will ever replace my mother in my life."38

Phillips waits years before telling her adoptive family about her reunion. She does not invite her mother to her wedding: "Part of me wished that my birth family could have been there too, but it would have been too hard for my parents...."39

Hern writes:

"To this day, part of me still feels like a traitor to my parents, to my adoptive mom in particular.40

"I've made several trips to [Massachusetts where her adoptive parents and birthmother live] without even telling my parents I was in the state. I am having a clandestine affair with my birthfamily."41

The daughters struggle with the concept of having two families. Strauss:

"Denial was a strong emotion I experienced in the early stages of my reunion: denial of the profound relationship that in reality *does* exist. I spent over three decades ignoring my birthmother's role in my life. To acknowledge it was as threatening as anything I've ever faced. The concept of having two mothers

seemed as sacrilegious to me as there being two Gods. To alter my belief system felt like denouncing everything I hold dear.”⁴²

Hern:

“The goal in Catholic Charities’s closed-adoption system was to replace one set of parents with another and erase all traces of the first set. And for me, it worked. Complete erasure. I don’t think I really understood that I had another set of parents [until the reunion]. There was no way to conceptualize two sets—two mothers, two fathers. It was an either/or thing.”⁴³

Saffian writes to her birthparents: “I have a father, mother, brother and sister, and I feel very much related to them, that they are my family. I don’t need another one.”⁴⁴

Helene comes to a signing for Homes’ recently-published book:

“You’re not behaving,’ I say. The store is packed with people who don’t know what ghost has risen up. ...

“In the distance, another shadow emerges. My [adoptive] mother and a friend of hers are coming toward me. I imagine the two mothers meeting, colliding. This is something that can’t happen. It is entirely against the rules. No one person can have two mothers in the same room at the same time.”⁴⁵

Paradoxically, reuniting with their mothers improves the daughters’ relationship with their adoptive families. Phillips writes: “...[T]he paradox is that finding my birth family has made me feel more a part of my adoptive family than ever before. ... Our relationship today is better than it has ever been.”⁴⁶ Dean tells her adoptive father: “Finding Ruth has made me more appreciative of what I have, not what I have not.”⁴⁷

Strangers in Their Own Families

At the same time, daughters regret being strangers to their birth families.

Lifton:

“I was not as devastated that my mother could not acknowledge me openly as I had been after our two meetings years before. ...

“After all, I was the one who was always telling others that we do not belong to one another in this life by legality or blood, but rather by a bond of the heart, by mutual caring and compassion, by ‘elective affinities,’ by a spiritual tie that was formed somewhere out in the stars in a time we no longer remember.

“Yes, I could console myself in innumerable ways, but it was just that: a consolation prize.”⁴⁸

Phillips:

“I felt the sadness of all the years of not knowing my birth mother, the pure loss, the lack of connection to either of my families, the sorrow of missing my brother and sister, the pain of sitting together finally and them being strangers to me.”⁴⁹

Hern:

“Until maybe four months ago, I believed my own story: ‘I’m adopted. Big deal. It’s not like an after school special or anything.’ But that story was actually a fallout shelter I had sealed myself into. It protected me from what I couldn’t acknowledge: that my mother gave me away. Even now that’s a sentence I can barely bring myself to write.”⁵⁰

“Back in San Francisco, as my feelings started surfacing, one of the first to arise was grief that I am a stranger to the people I now consider family.”⁵¹

Who Might I Have Been?

In reunion, the daughters confront not only where they came from but who they might have been; knowledge that is terrifying. They are, as Lifton writes, “the changeling, the imposter, the double.”⁵²

Strauss:

“Since the third grade, I have believed if I could just meet my birth family, everything would become clear. But on this first day with my original family, I am

more confused than ever. Who am I? Am I supposed to be someone different?"⁵³
"What if Lenore *had* come back for me after she and Lou married? How different would I have been?"⁵⁴

Hern:

"Along with the feeling that I was being disloyal to my parents by contacting you [her birthmother] was the feeling that Katie Hern, the person I'd spent twenty-six years becoming, was suddenly in jeopardy. ...

"The feeling was most triggered by learning my original name. The name represented for me a whole other life I almost led, and a whole other person I might have become, a possibility that terrified me."⁵⁵

Homes writes: "The more Helene and I talk, the happier I am that she gave me up. I can't imagine having grown up with her. I would not have survived."⁵⁶ Ironically, Homes also wants Helene "to see how well I turned out, to be proud of me."⁵⁷

Integrating their Mother into their Lives

Strauss, Hern, and Saffian eventually integrate their mothers into their lives.

After Strauss and Lenore find Lenore's natural mother, Mary, Strauss writes:

"This reunion is so different than mine with Lenore. It doesn't seem sacrilegious to have another grandmother. It feels perfect and natural. Yet my comfort with Mary demands that I examine anew the arms-length relationship I have with the woman who gave birth to me, the other mother I have never fully embraced. My grandmother forces me to see how I have held my adoptive family in one hand, like a ball of blue clay, and my birth family in another, like a ball of red, interpreting them as unrelated parts of myself. But they are not separate. They are the same. They belong together. Grandma reshapes my view of my family. She helps me make purple."⁵⁸

Hern:

"One of the things that has become clear to me ... is how I dealt with being adopted growing up. Until about a year ago, I denied that being adopted was in any way significant. ...

"I used only certain language – thought of myself as 'adopted,' never as having been 'given up for adoption'; thought of my parents as my *parents*, my real parents, my only parents, not as my 'adoptive parents.' If someone were foolish enough to ask if I wanted to meet my 'real parents,' every muscle in my face would harden and I would inform them, with a shivering calm, that I knew my real parents. ...

"One the rare occasions when I ... [thought about my other set of parents], the phrase was 'biological parents': impersonal, scientific, mechanical. And I would become furious when people would use emotional words like 'roots' or 'original,' 'family' or 'mother' to describe the 'biological' side. I hated the significance these words gave to what I was so intent on shutting out."⁵⁹

"[After visiting with her birthfamily], I've let myself acknowledge my connection to you and the rest of the family, let myself think of you as my mother and Gus and Jack as my brothers."⁶⁰

Saffian:

"Thus the odyssey is an all-encompassing continuum, reunion a form of *readoption* – of that original child, family, self, which had previously existed in shadow.

...I was finally coming to terms with an idea clear to many – that we are not born entirely formed, like so much clay waiting to be molded by our environments into people with identities. ...

Who we are, in the larger sense – our likes and our dislikes, what makes us sad and what brings us joy, how we relate to others and how we reflect in moments alone, how we exist both in the world and in our heads and hearts – can be partially inherited, as well. ...

In transit on the road between the Leyders and the Saffians, I thought that perhaps just as one can have many children, one can, in varying degrees, also

have many parents, many families – and even many selves, or discrete but complementary parts that make up the whole.”⁶¹

Phillips takes tentative steps towards developing a mature relationship with her mother. “Pat recently called me about a TV show ... about daughters reuniting with their fathers. ... She asked me whether she ought to write in to the show to see if they could help me locate my birth father. I said ‘Yes!’ Even though it’s a long shot, anything is worth a try. That was the first time in the sixteen years of our reunion that Pat has offered to help me with my search. That willingness was what I wanted so much at the beginning of our reunion. But I have learned that healing takes time, and that gives me hope at the beginning that all our relationships can continue to grow.”⁶²

For Lifton, Dean, and Homes, it is too late.

Twenty years after *Twice Born* was published, Lifton writes in an Afterword: “I came to understand how the necessity to live that double life, so as not to hurt my adoptive parents, had the effect of cutting off honest communication with them. How my internalized guilt and fear of betrayal of those parents, who were also victims of the system, so overwhelmed me after my awakening and search for Rae, that I fell back into the Great Sleep for over a decade. And, most incredible, I realized that it was I who had cut Rae off after our initial meetings, not she who had rejected me. The trauma of losing me again, after I had failed to contact her for so long, was the reason for her retreat to a place where she could not be hurt once more. Mother and daughter, lost and found, could not hold on to each other in a natural way.”⁶³

Dean:

“In the fall of 1989, I started to work on issues related to my adoption with a therapist. ...

“During that time, I contacted my birthmother to reopen a door to her, to let her know that I was willing to explore a renewed relationship with her. She informed me that she was going through a painful and abusive divorce and felt that it was best that she place her emotional energy in getting through it. But she said she was happy I had contacted her, still thought of me, and loved me.

“In March 1990, I contacted the hospital where I was born to find out how I could obtain information in my birth records about my birthfather. They informed that I could go to probate court to have my birthmother authorize opening the records. “My birthmother vehemently refused my request to open my birth records for this information. She told me that I had no right to open *her* records and that I should “be satisfied” with the information she had already given me about my birthfather.

“Even though I tried to impress upon her that the birth records were my records, too ... she wouldn’t budge.

“March 19, 1990 was the last time I spoke with my birthmother.”⁶⁴

Homes:

“I am talking to my mother when her call waiting beeps. She is gone a long time. ‘Hold on to your hat,’ she says coming back onto the line. ‘Helene is dead.’... ”

“I drive to Atlantic City with no idea what to expect. Helene wanted a Jewish funeral. Instead, she gets a rent-a-minister in gray polyester pants presiding over a grave in the cheap part of an Atlantic City cemetery.... ”

“After the funeral, I ... drive around Atlantic City, going to each of the addresses on Helene’s letters in chronological order. It is a downward spiral, ending in a prefabricated, semi-detached town house. At each location, I take photographs – I collect information, images to organize, to comfort myself. ... ”

“A week later, Helene’s lawyer and executor ... agrees to let me into her house and tells me I can take whatever I want. ... The place is filled with stuff, cheap stuff....⁶⁵

“In her bedroom, her pants are hanging over a chair---black jeans, not unlike the

ones I often wear. ... I put my hand in the pocket. There is a wad of money, loose bills. This is exactly the way I keep my money. It's the one thing my mother is always on me about: No one keeps their money like that. ... The wad is thick, jammed deep into the bottom of the pocket. It creeps me out, this indescribable subtlety of biology."⁶⁶

Lessons for Mothers

Natural mothers are a defining presence for their daughters.

Mothers must not fault themselves if their daughters pull away or cut off contact altogether. This is their way of coping with intense emotional conflicts.

Mothers should delay talking to their daughters about their grief at the loss of their child until they and their daughters are comfortable with each other.

Mothers should let their daughters know they are there for them but should not pressure them to assume the role of daughter.

Mothers should not accept rude behavior.

In sum, mothers must be what they are, the competent, attractive person their daughter can respect.

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1 Betty Jean Lifton (*Twice Born, Memoirs of an Adopted Daughter*, St. Martin's 1975); Amy Dean (*Letters to My Birthmother: An Adoptee's Diary of Her Search for Her Identity*, Pharos Books, 1991); Jean Strauss (*Birthright: The Guide to Search and Reunion for Adoptees, Birthparents, and Adoptive Parents*, Penguin Books, 1994 and *Beneath a Tall Tree: A Story About Us*, Arete Publishing Company of America, 2001); A. M. Homes ("The Mistress's Daughter," *New Yorker*, 2004); Zara Phillips, (*Chasing Away the Shadows: An Adoptee's Journey to Motherhood*, Gateway Press, 2004); Sarah Saffian (*Ithaca: A Daughter's Memoir of Being Found*, Dell Publishing, 1998); and Katie Hern and Ellen McGarry Carlson (*Reunion: A Year in Letters Between a Birthmother and the Daughter She Couldn't Keep*, Seal Press, 1999)

2 Dean in 1953, Strauss in 1955, Homes in 1961, Phillips in 1964, and Saffian and Hern in 1969.

3 Homes, p. 69.

4 Dean, pp. 75,76.

5 Phillips p. 25.

6 Dean, p. 42.

7 Strauss, *Birthright*, p. 8.

8 Homes, p. 69.

9 Dean, p. 60.

10 Lifton, p. 124.

11 Dean, p. 87

12 Strauss, *Birthright*, p. 130.

13 Homes, p. 70.

14 Phillips, p. 78.

15 Saffian, p. 18.

16 Hern, p. 42.

17 Homes, p. 74.

18 Strauss, *Beneath a Tall Tree*, p. 141.

19 Lifton, p. 122.

20 Lifton, pp. 138, 139.

21 Lifton. P. 139.

22 Dean. P. 91.

23 Dean. P. 100.

24 Dean. P. 119.

25 Phillips, pp. 89, 90.

26 Phillips, p. 150.

27 Strauss, *Beneath a Tall Tree*, pp. 124, 125.

28 Strauss, *Beneath a Tall Tree*, pp. 125, 126.

29 Strauss, *Beneath a Tall Tree*, p. 136.

30 Saffian, p. 59.

31 Saffian, p. 61.

32 Homes, p. 72.
33 Homes, p. 72.
34 Homes, p. 106.
35 Homes, p. 107.
36 Hern, p. 19.
37 Lifton, p. 143.
38 Strauss, *Beneath a Tall Tree*, p. 128
39 Phillips, p. 106.
40 Hern, p. 272.
41 Hern, p. 273.
42 Strauss, Birthright, p. 320
Why Reunions Go Wrong, page 14 3-21-07
43 Hern, p. 91.
44 Saffian, p. 61.
45 Homes, pp. 75, 76
46 Phillips, p. 167
47 Dean, p. 111.
48 Lifton, p. 232.
49 Phillips, p. 89.
50 Hern, pp. 163, 164.
51 Hern, p. 166.
52 Lifton, p. 4.
53 Strauss, *Beneath a Tall Tree*, p. 131.
54 Strauss, *Beneath a Tall Tree*, p.133.
55 Hern, p. 93.
56 Homes, p. 74.
57 Homes, p. 106.
58 Strauss, *Beneath a Tall Tree*, p. 201.
59 Hern, pp 162, 163.
60 Hern, p. 165.
61 Saffian, p. 302.
62 Phillips, p. 167.
63 Lifton, p. 267.
64 Dean, pp. 125, 126.
65 Homes, p. 108.
66 Homes p. 109.