

# Mothers in Action

The Newsletter  
of Origins-USA

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 3

SUMMER/FALL 2008

## YES! YES YOU CAN! (KEEP YOUR BABY)

In late 1960, a single 18-year-old white girl, college freshman Stanley Ann Dunham, became pregnant with a black man's baby.

The couple considered marriage, but he had a wife and daughter halfway across the world. Even if he were to get divorced and marry Ann, the situation did not look promising. He hoped to pursue a graduate degree and attend a college thousands of miles away. He would not be able to afford to take a wife and baby along.

Undoubtedly many counseled Ann to give the baby up for adoption and "get on with her life." Bearing a black man's child would mark her: no decent man would want to marry her; employers wouldn't hire her. With a young baby and no income she would have to go on welfare and her dreams of traveling the world and earning a doctorate would never be realized. Growing up with white people, her child would always feel different. Adoption by a black family — his own kind — would be the best for all.

Fortunately for Ann, her parents were supportive. She married her child's father and had a son whom she named after his father. Within a year,

the couple broke up; Ann and her son survived with the help of food stamps. She eventually remarried, traveled the world, and obtained a Ph. D. in Anthropology. Her son's name is Barack Obama, Jr.

Recently, 17-year-old Bristol Palin told her parents, Sarah and Todd, that she is pregnant. The family are members of a conservative evangelical church which emphasizes chastity before marriage and opposes abortion.

Bristol's parents have four other children including an infant son with Down syndrome. Both parents work outside the home: Todd's job takes him far from home for long periods of time, Sarah holds a demanding, high profile job, and has recently applied for an even more demanding job. Bristol's older brother is in the Army destined for a tour in Iraq.

Bristol's parents could have insisted she place the baby for adoption — in a "loving, two-parent, stable home."

Adoption might save them from the embarrassment of their daughter's shame. Although Bristol and the baby's father, 18-year-old Levi, want to marry, he is unsettled. The marriage might well fail. Bristol's parents would likely have to care for

the baby, causing additional stress on the family and the financial burden of having another infant. Further, some would argue, with the demand for healthy white infants from well-to-do childless couples, it would be selfish to keep the baby in an already strapped household.

However, instead of hiding their daughter and coercing her to give up her child, Bristol's parents declared: "Our beautiful daughter Bristol came to us with news that as parents we knew would make her grow up faster than we had ever planned. We're proud of Bristol's decision to have her baby and even prouder to become grandparents. As Bristol faces the responsibilities of adulthood, she knows she has our unconditional love and support."

Ann's son is a candidate for president of the United States and Bristol's mom a candidate for vice president.

These are only two of the countless stories of teen pregnancy that confirm that children should not be deprived of their families simply because their mothers are teenagers.

—Contributed by  
Jane Edwards

## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *Origins-USA Sponsors RegDay 2008—Join us in Burke, VA*
- *Mirah Riben and Suz Bednarz selected to present at American Adoption Congress in April of 2009.*
- *Look for our special annual report issue to arrive in your email box this winter.*

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## ACTIVISM & COMPASSIONATE ADVOCACY

*“Based on the dictionary definitions, Origins-USA is clearly an advocacy organization and not an activist one (despite our extreme “radical” reputation).” says Riben.*

I’ve been an activist all of my adult life: civil rights and peace. For myself, standing up to “right” a social injustice is American, patriotic, noble, and good. I have always done so with pride, and recall being encouraged to identify myself as a peace activist rather than a pacifist.

It is not so for all, however. Others see it as a negative – a dirty word, like feminism is to some. Some identify the word activism with terrorism, radicalism, bra-burners, protesters. An Origins-USA board member recently revealed that her concept of activism was: “marching and protesting vigorously... violent, like the riots in the streets during the Vietnam War and the sit-ins in the 60s.”

A look in the dictionary supports my fellow board member’s take. Activism is defined as:

“The doctrine or practice of vigorous action or involvement as a means of achieving political or other goals, sometimes by demonstrations, protests, etc.”  
Dictionary.com

“The use of direct, often confrontational action, such as a demonstration or strike, in opposition to or support of a cause.” American Heritage Dictionary

“A policy of taking direct and militant action to achieve a political or social goal.”  
WordNet

Indeed, the word “activism” is often used synonymously with protest or dissent, but activism can stem from any number of political orientations and take a wide range of forms, from writing letters to newspapers or politicians, to political

campaigning. This action is in support of, or opposition to, one side of an often-controversial issue.

Radical “extremists” exist within most social movements. Malcom X was a radical civil rights activist. Yet, Martin Luther King, Jr., who preached peaceful non-violent solutions was no less an activist for social justice. Perhaps he and people like Mohandas Gandhi can be best defined as compassionate activists.

How do we define Rosa Parks, a woman who had no plan prior to being asked to vacate her seat on a bus? Is feminist poet Maya Angelou less an agent for social change even though she does so through her words alone, than Gloria Steinem or Susan B. Anthony? Are the mothers who started MADD, a national organization dedicated to stopping drunk driving, supporting the victims of this violent crime and preventing underage drinking, crazed, angry radicals or are they mothers who determined the loss of their children should not be in vain and work to prevent such unnecessary losses from perpetuating?

Activism, by definition, simply means taking action, standing up for our beliefs and helping to spread the word. Activism is a logical outlet for a sense of outrage and a sense of compassion. Activism is an intentional action to bring about social or political change – a desire to make a difference in the world.

### Activism in Adoption

Within our midst are mothers, adoptees and others who see no harm in adoption and believe it is

“for the best” or at the very least “inevitable” and unavoidable. Many believe that all activism in adoption is synonymous with anti-adoption and both are “dirty words” – almost heretical. Many classify individuals and organizations as “anti-adoption” as if to favor helping mothers and babies was a flag-burning offense; as if to want adoption to remain a “last option” as the United Nations suggests is evil.

Activism in adoption is not however, limited to – or ever primarily in the realm of – those who support family preservation. In fact, adoption “reformers,” who seek nothing more than “open records” for adult adoptees, have for decades organized and participated in marches and demonstrations and thus fit the definition of activist far more than, for instance, family preservation organizations like Origins-USA ever has.

Based on the dictionary definitions, Origins-USA is clearly an advocacy organization and not an activist one (despite our extreme “radical” reputation).

### Personal Choices

We each deal differently with our pain and trauma of our loss. Some spend various amounts of time “asleep” or in denial, others not. Some consciously and patiently wait to be found while others initiate search and reunion. We each have different situations to deal with: good reunions, bad reunions, no reunion make quite a bit of difference in our perspective, not to mention our own individual strengths and weaknesses. All of this affects our ability to heal and to what extent that is possible. I was recently astonished, however, by

## ACTIVISM VS. ADVOCACY—CONTINUED

a reunited mother I “met” on an online list for mothers who has lost children to adoption. “Lucinda” told me that spending time on “painful past issues is a sad way to choose to be” despite her obvious desire to maintain friendships and ongoing contact with other mothers who lost children to adoption. Whatever works to help us toward healing is likewise going to vary. I am happy for Lucinda and for all who have found their path to healing. I dislike, however, judgment of others’ chosen path.

Thus I was greatly taken aback by Lucinda’s stated belief that activism “is based in victimization, resentment, fear and anger.” This is a total reversal of my experience, and that of many others for whom working to prevent others from suffering the unnecessary losses we did is the converse of remaining a victim.

For many nothing is more empowering, uplifting and healing as giving back, helping others and making changes – no matter how tiny! The basic principal upon which all self-help groups have been built and survived for generations is that there is a time to receive support and an expectation to rise beyond victim to survivor and for some a desire to give back and help others. This applies to all areas of self-help – be it surviving a trauma such as incest, or a condition or chronic illness such as alcoholism or fibromyalgia.

Nothing helps me heal the self-doubt and feelings of incompetence placed on me by social mores and those who wanted my child; nothing replaces those negative messages with a sense of accomplishment

and pride, more than speaking out to prevent others from being likewise coerced. Advocacy and activism have been my greatest sources of healing from otherwise unbearable loss.

Nothing is more focused on the present and future, and not the past, as advocacy and activism. Nothing brings me more joy and fulfillment than wiping another’s tear, holding another’s hand, letting someone know that they are not “the only one.”

Is the driving force of any advocate’s or activist’s (as Lucinda states) anger at a social condition? Certainly. Focused and channeled, well-deserved righteous indignation are what created this country in the first place, and kept it free of slavery and other abhorrent practices.

With war raging on endlessly and the economy plunging, many believe: If you are not outraged, you’re not paying attention! Likewise, with President Bush signing new incentives to encourage and promote all adoption, we each have personal choices to make.

### Advocacy

Advocacy is defined as:

“the act of pleading for, supporting, or recommending; active espousal: He was known for his advocacy of states’ rights” Dictionary.com

“The act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy; active support.” American Heritage

Advocacy and activism thus vary in degree and type of action with a mutual desire to affect social change generally of a perceived injustice, particularly on behalf of populations or groups that have been disadvantaged,

disempowered, exploited or discriminated against.

Advocating change often occurs one on one. It occurs through letter-writing and any form of education that changes social paradigms, such as those that extol all adoptions as a win-win way of providing a home for an otherwise “unwanted” child.

Origins-USA welcomes those who choose to stand for families and against their separation. Origins-USA recognizes that despite all efforts to support families some will not ever be able to provide a safe, stable home. We do not advocate “forcing” mothers to keep their children! However, when such an alternative is the only option, it should be done with respect for the original family connections. There is never any need to issue falsified birth certificates or eradicate one’s origins.

If you agree, join us! We are David fighting Goliath and there is strength in numbers. If being an activist is foreign or scary to you, think of yourself as a compassionate activist or advocate – or someone who wants no one else to suffer the unnecessary loss of a child to adoption. Still too much? Become a HUGS volunteer and simply use your hand-holding ability to help mothers know they are “not the only one.”

—Contributed by Mirah Riben



## A STORY OF LATE DISCOVERY

In late 2006 it all started simply enough, as I requested my birth certificate from my mother. I bugged her for weeks to send it to me. She kept saying she'd look for it, and that she was not sure she had it anymore. In reality, she knew where it was; locked in my sister's safe! I was 41 years old then, and needed my birth certificate for a US Passport application. I have a close friend, my college buddy Kevin, who lives in Canada. I visit him as often as I can. However, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security planned new passport requirements at that time that were to take effect by 2008 (now). Either I get the required paperwork; or Ontario, Canada would no longer be my personal retreat.

Eventually, after weeks of requesting my paperwork, Mom called Mary Anne (my wife) at work. It was in Spring 2007, a few days before my 42nd birthday. Mom is in tears, and spills her guts about my adoption story. Mary Anne comes home from work early to tell me. Turns out, Mom did a lot of calling before she told Mary Anne. Mom called my Aunt Ethel, my in-laws, my sister Cindy, and my brother Denny for advice. Aunt Ethel, who was the best aunt in the world, told her that, "Jeff's a lot smarter than you've ever given him credit for, and surely Jeff probably figured it out long before now."

I had, sort of, but was denied the truth when I asked. Time to time from my teen years through college I'd occasionally suggest it to them, or joke about how "I must be adopted because...." Finally, when I confronted them

seriously, my dad blew up at me, and my mom was speechless. This occurred during the summer of 1986. I was away at college at the time. Both parents denied it, dad told me I should speak to a pastor or a counselor because obviously I "had gone off the deep end." They made it very clear to me that I was their son and that I never should bring this up again. Mom also made it clear that I had hurt them very much by questioning our relationship.

However, there was a lifetime of evidence to support my belief. Kids at school, on the bus, and at church who teased and bullied me and called me "foster child", lack of a quilt from my paternal grandmother (she handmade one for each of her grandchildren \*except\* me), the exclusion of my name from the Hancock family Bible (a Bible over 200 years old with detailed names and relation), and finally a faded Polaroid snapshot that said "Jeff, our foster child" on the back. When I mentioned the photograph, mom was quick to defend it by saying, "it says 'faster' because you grew so much faster than Cindy or Denny." Dad separately offered the explanation, "That's Karen's handwriting, and she probably meant it because you liked hanging around her when you were a toddler." Karen was my brother's first wife who died in 1981. In all honesty, I didn't know her that well. I doubt I hung around her at all, as my brother and his family were overseas at the time that picture of me, a Polaroid, was taken.

I had no choice but take my folks at their word. Dad died in 1990 of cancer. He took the secret to

his grave. He wanted for me to never know. It was his way of protecting me. He never wanted for me to feel not-a-part of his life or family, even though other family members never fully have accepted me.

Mom was very upset upon having to reveal this deeply buried family secret. We drove for 2 hours for a visit so that she could give me my birth certificate and adoption paperwork. I could tell how upset she was. I was in a state of shock. I couldn't talk about it all with her then. Now several months later, I still cannot speak to her about my adoption. I did make an honest attempt to communicate with my mom through a letter, to sooth her for being upset over revealing my adoption. Before I knew it the entire family was at my throat. At a time when I had a need for understanding and support of my adoptive family, and at a time when I felt my mother needed to hear that things were okay, they put me in my place for being a bad son.

I simply explained that I felt as though I never fit in, and that I was nothing like either sibling. I mentioned Cindy's alcohol abuse and Denny's extreme Christian fundamentalism (he's an Evangelical pastor). I mentioned how I've never felt a desire or need for alcohol, nor have I ever felt comfortable in such an extremely Evangelical environment as my brother is a pastor within. I in no way criticized either of them, I only mentioned I have always felt different from my siblings; a feeling that I never really belonged.

## LATE DISCOVERY—CONTINUED

My sister opened up the letter before Mom could, and read its contents. Both she and mom immediately became infuriated with me. The letter was taken completely out of context, and thrown back into my face. My sister was convinced I wrote it to get back at them for the decades of lies or for the hardships her drinking brought upon our family. She in turn convinced mom that was my intent. They stopped speaking to me for weeks. I went from having one family, to learning I have two, but ending up with none.

Everyone else I shared the letter with thought it was beautiful and should have made mom realize how much she is loved by me. Surprisingly, my brother stepped up to the plate, and told them they were wrong. Although he didn't read the letter, he felt it was wrong for our sister to have and that clearly I was only attempting to nurture. He also admitted to never taking any steps to have a relationship with me due to the 20-year age difference between us, and that now he feels a bit guilty. Not guilty enough to ever call or send a birthday card, but at least he knows through Mom that I'm still alive.

It wasn't until Christmas 2007 that my sister spoke to me again. Before Mom's revelation she used to call us two or three times a week just to talk. Over the past year I have had a million thoughts race through my head. Sometimes I feel grief, as if someone died, yet I don't know who. I get angry sometimes, other times I'm depressed. Part of me wishes I'd been adopted by someone else, even though I miss my dad, and appreciate at

least having a home as a child.

I don't feel as though I know who I am anymore. I am so different from everyone else in my family. I'm always wondering if there is anyone out there anywhere who may be anything at all like me. I fear my birth family won't want to know me, or they may be dead, or I may be a product of incest or rape. Sometimes I feel like a total idiot. Everyone in my home town knew of my adoption except me. I feel betrayed, lied to, and taken for granted. I'm a very different person post-discovery. I was happy with the person I was before mom's revelation. I have no legitimate way to describe who I am sitting here over one year later.

At the same time, so many more things make sense to me now. Odd little experiences over the years that now appear crystal clear. I understand comments made to me by the mean children at school and on the bus so many years ago. Comments, questions, and peculiar things said to me at church, family picnics, and around town. Also, why I was never accepted or included in family plans, or invited to join clubs or groups in school or especially at church; I was raised in a very strict and Evangelical faith. I know now why during my childhood and teen years I felt people were always watching me, waiting for me to make some terrible life decision. It was because they really were expecting me to!

Before one year ago I never understood the stigma of adopted children in an Evangelical culture. How many of them look upon us as bastards produced through sin. How

we're destined to go the same path as those alleged "sinners" who produced us. I had no reason at the time to suspect anything, as I knew I \*wasn't\* adopted because my folks said so! At the same time my inner soul did not agree with their preaching. Now as an adult, people I long ago left behind in my Mom's church are stunned that I am not a druggie, alcoholic, father to countless unplanned pregnancies, or convicted criminal in spite of a) being adopted, and b) abandoning the Evangelical/Fundamentalist way of worship some 20+years ago.

I began my search within an hour of discovery. Fifteen months have passed, and I have no more idea now than I did then as to who I am. My non-id is non-existent so I've been told by those in authority. While my search is stalled, I have put my energies into assisting others search and into the lobby for unsealed records.

It's more than a year since my discovery. I am grateful for the friends I can share stories and experiences with on MySpace and Facebook. I am grateful to my wife, her family, and our kids for their understanding. I'm grateful to my support group in Rochester, NY. I'm also grateful to that nameless, faceless person who gave me away in 1965, for whatever her reason in signing me away. I think of her everyday. I hope to find her, meet her, and thank her someday face-to-face.

—Contributed by Jeffrey A. Hancock; Late-Discovery-Adoptee, Born 4-18-1965 somewhere in Buffalo, New York

*"I'm also grateful to that nameless, faceless person who gave me away in 1965, for whatever her reason in signing me away.*

*I think of her everyday.*

*I hope to find her, meet her, and thank her someday face-to-face."*

## 2008 ANNUAL MEETING & ELECTION RESULTS

For more information regarding our Annual Meeting and upcoming plans, please watch for the next special edition issue of this newsletter dedicated entirely to our Annual Report.

Origins-USA August elections results in the following board members being sworn in to uphold the mission and goals of Origins-USA for the upcoming year:

- Bernadette Wright, President
- Jane Edwards, Vice President
- Mirah Riben, Vice President, Communications
- Donna Stefanov, Secretary
- Kathy Aderhold, Treasurer
- Suz Bednarz, Webmaster

Profiles of current officers, the board members and committee chairs can be viewed by clicking "About Origins-USA" then "Board Members and Committee Chairs" on our website: [http://](http://www.Origins-USA.org)

[www.Origins-USA.org](http://www.Origins-USA.org)

The annual meeting included a report of our current focus and our upcoming plans. The meeting concluded after a lively Town Hall meeting in which members discussed our voting program, praised our video, suggested we encourage members to share the link to the video with their respective email lists and friends.

Members who missed the meeting should feel free to visit on our online discussion forum

Members can access the forum by logging on via our website. You can also receive daily digests sent right into your email inbox with convenient hyperlinks to topics. To set your preferences, click "View Profile" directly above the log on button and then "Edit Profile."

For more information regarding our Annual Meeting and upcoming plans, please watch for the next special edition issue of this newsletter dedicated entirely to our Annual Report.

## SUBMIT TO MOTHERS IN ACTION

### Correction:

Contact information listed in the Spring 2008 issue of Mothers in Action for Sheila Ganz's family preservation film project was incorrect. You can obtain info about the film and make a donation at: [www.momslivingclean.org](http://www.momslivingclean.org), or email Sheila directly at:

Mothers in Action, the quarterly newsletter of Origins-USA seeks original articles, poems, book and movie reviews, cartoons, interviews that fit the mission and goals of Origins-USA.

Great works of literature not required; heartfelt and/or powerful are.

Read past issues and be familiar with our mission and goals. Preference is given to:

- material written by members,
- pieces which reflect mothers' & fathers' rights,
- content that discusses advocacy or activism,



- thoughts on family preservation,
- submissions that describe a necessary change, or display mothers taking control and action.

We will also print memorials and anniversaries of the passing of the person you have lost through adoption.

Submissions should be no more than 1000 words or two single spaced pages and are subject to editing and may be sent at any

time to: [Newsletter@Origins-USA.org](mailto:Newsletter@Origins-USA.org) with "Newsletter Submission" in the subject.

## THERE IS STILL TIME TO TELL

Origins-USA launched the Mothers' Stories project to gather stories of mothers who lost children to adoption. If you are a mother who lost a child to adoption or had her parental rights terminated, we invite you to share your story!

The stories will be posted on the Origins-USA website, and may be disseminated in a book, video, or other format. The project will help other mothers know they are not alone as well as help the public to understand how the loss of a child affects women and why we need alternatives to adoption. We will also use it to build our database of mothers from around the country who are willing to be contacted by journalists and share their stories in the media.

Help us get the word out for



mothers to share their stories.

Tell your friends and post on your blog, MySpace page, email lists, website, etc!

Mothers' Stories project is seeking the stories of mothers who lost children to adoption or had their parental rights terminated. Mothers living outside the United States are also encouraged to share their stories!

To share your story, please

complete the web form found on our website.

Your story will be posted online and be used to raise awareness of the circumstances surrounding losing a child to adoption, and how losing a child to adoption has affected mothers' lives.

You will be given the opportunity to review and approve or disapprove any edits to your story.

If you have any questions, contact us at [info@origins-usa.org](mailto:info@origins-usa.org).

## THE "U" IN ORIGINS-USA!

If you are reading this newsletter, you are either a member or in some way interested in the issues of Origins-USA.

Our mission is simple. We advocate for mothers rights and keeping natural families together.

In order to accomplish this we need more than agreement and wishful thinking. We are an advocacy organization and that means we need action from each and everyone of you reading this. A board of seven, or eight, or nine mothers cannot do it all! We need YOU.

We have been very delighted at the response to our Mothers

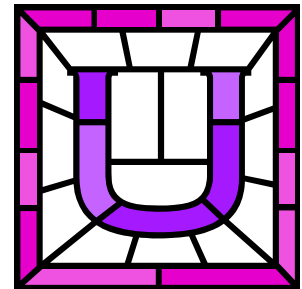
Stories Project and also to those eagerly agreeing to be H.U.G.S. volunteers. And yet, we need still more. We are currently looking for:

- Legislative Committee Members
- Forum Moderators
- Grant Writers
- Website Committee Members
- Public Relations Committee Members
- Speakers Bureau Coordinator
- Research Committee

- Individuals to write articles for our newsletter or myspace page.
- And more!

If you are interested in any of these positions or would like more information, please contact us at [info@origins-usa.org](mailto:info@origins-usa.org).

### WE NEED





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WE ARE ON THE WEB!  
VISIT US AT  
ORIGINS-USA.ORG.

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MOTHERHOOD IS FOREVER.

Origins-USA is a national 501(c)(3) non-profit organization working to advocate for mothers' rights, to keep natural families together, end corruption and exploitation in adoption, promote healing for people separated by adoption, and seek justice for those injured by illegal and unscrupulous adoption practices.

Our activities include educating the public and policy makers, conducting research, referring people to attorneys, and providing in-person and online support for people harmed by adoption.

We are a non-profit organization supported solely by members and donors.

[Join today.](#)

Friend of Origins-USA (Free) / Email list only

Subsidized/financial need \$5.00 (USD) / Year

Student/Senior \$10.00 (USD) / Year

Regular Dues \$20.00 (USD) / Year

Charter Member \$500.00 (USD) / lifetime membership

**MEMBERS:** Register and log-in to the Members Only area and enter your profile! If you have any questions or problems with logging in contact [info@origins-usa.org](mailto:info@origins-usa.org)

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Submission guidelines can be found at [Origins-USA.org](http://Origins-USA.org) homepage.