

# Mothers in Action

The Newsletter  
of Origins-USA

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2      SPRING 2008

## CONFERENCE BRIEF: THE BARKER FOUNDATION



**Bernadette Wright**

On March 15, Mirah Riben and I attended the Barker Foundation's annual conference in Bethesda, Maryland.

Prior to the conference, we had written a letter to Barker saying that, because the conference was billed as being "presented by birth parents," we were a bit surprised and disappointed to see that only three of the eight breakout sessions were being presented by parents who lost children to adoption, and the plenary was to be presented by adoptees. We encouraged them to continue and expand their efforts to have the voices of parents who have surrendered be heard at future conferences and offered to assist them in attaining that goal.

Our letter also called attention to the fact that the term "birthmother," used many times in the conference program, is currently in disfavor and considered offensive by many. Barker responded very politely, but said they were not going to change the brochure.

The session I found most interesting was the panel of three mothers talking about their experiences. All expressed grief over the separation from their children, yet all said they thought they had made the right decision. I was disturbed to hear one of the younger mothers express the unrealistic view that the people who had adopted her child were "perfect." Another thing the mothers on the panel had in common was participation in support groups run by Barker staff. It seemed that those support groups had encouraged these beliefs.

After one of the plenary sessions, we walked to the front of the room and introduced ourselves to the speaker. The woman, a

mother who had lost a child to adoption several decades ago, mentioned that she considered Barker to be a particularly ethical adoption agency. We informed her we had previously printed out and read the Barker's entire website and found its advice to mothers to be highly biased in favor of surrendering over raising one's own child. She then said she was from Canada and was not familiar with Barker. I had to wonder why she was telling people they were so ethical if she knew nothing about them.

We gave her an Origins-USA brochure and invited her to join. She said she was hesitant to join and asked if Origins-USA was "anti-adoption." I replied that we do not promote forcing anyone to keep and raise their child if they truly did not want their child. Mirah added that we also do not support leaving any child in a situation that is harmful. We believe that family separation should be a last resort.

*- continued on page 7*

### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *Annual Board Meeting to be held Sunday, August 17th, 2008*
- *Origins-USA Launches H.U.G.S. Program*
- *Mothers encouraged to submit their stories to the Mothers Stories Project.*
- *Origins-USA Represented at several East Coast Conferences*

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Sheila Ganz, MA, is writer, producer, director, and editor. To contact Sheila, writer to her at:

Sheila Ganz, Producer/Director, Pandora's Box Productions, 1546 Great Highway, Suite 44, San Francisco, CA 94122.

## MOMS LIVING CLEAN

The documentary MOMS LIVING CLEAN by Origins-USA member and filmmaker, Sheila Ganz chronicles the two year journey of six moms in a women and children's residential substance abuse treatment program as they transform their lives and re-enter the community. Their stories unfold against the myth that they are untreatable, and America's war on drugs, which has sent record numbers of women to prison and their children into an overburdened foster care system.

The film reveals the women's childhood exposure to drugs, alcohol and domestic violence. These intimate portraits explore the challenges of addiction and recovery, economic hardship and motherhood. Through group work, writing assignments and the rehab program's 20 concepts for living, the moms gain confidence, pride and

integrity, develop parenting skills and become self-sufficient. This groundbreaking film makes the case for whole-family treatment, where mother and children stay together, as an alternative to incarceration and breaking family ties. There are less than 40 programs like this in the U.S. today. That's not even one per state.

Sheila's goal is "to combat the stereotypes and stigma surrounding mothers with substance abuse issues, promote more whole-family residential treatment programs, and inspire women and men in recovery."

Upon viewing the rough cut, Malika Saada Saar, Executive Director, The Rebecca Project for Human Rights, said "I am moved by the deeply personal and engaging stories of vulnerable mothers powerfully committed to their sobriety and to their families. The film shines the

light on effective interventions for parental addiction. MOMS LIVING CLEAN will help turn the tide of stigma and punitive laws by generating community support through education and understanding about the real lives of mothers in recovery. Public opinion is critical to influencing funding of programs for family-oriented treatment, as an alternative to sentencing mothers to prison and their children to foster care."

You can be a part of this important family preservation project by helping secure \$30,000 to complete editing and prepare the film for public television broadcast. For a donation of \$100 your name will appear in the credits of the film. Donations can be made on the film's website at [www.filmarts.org](http://www.filmarts.org).



Mark your calendars to attend the Origins-USA annual meeting on August 17th.

## NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of members of Origins-USA will be held Sunday, August 17, 2008. The meeting will be conducted by conference call. Members will receive the telephone number before the meeting.

Key dates are as follows:

*Date you must have been a member by to be eligible to run*

*for the Board of Directors:*  
December 17, 2007

*Date you must have been a member by to be eligible to vote:*  
June 17, 2008.

*Deadline for Emailing Declaration of Candidacy:*  
July 26, 2008

*Voting Period:*  
August 3 to August 10, 2008.

*Day Directors take office:*  
August 16, 2008

*Annual Meeting:*  
August 17, 2008 PM Eastern

If you have questions, contact Jane Edwards via email at [jedwards@origins-usa](mailto:jedwards@origins-usa) or via phone at 503-297-6765.

## WELCOME 100<sup>TH</sup> MEMBER!

On May 1st Cassi Ward became Origins-USA's 100th dues paying member!

Cassi lost her first son to adoption twenty years ago. She says: "The coercion and manipulation in my own experience drove me to stand up and speak out for changes in the adoption industry."

Cassi has been reunited about a year and a half.

"As for how I heard about

Origins - I can't even begin to give a definite answer. In my own healing process I've come across mention of Origins and the work it does through books, blogs and support groups." says Cassi.

Cassi has volunteered to help with PR and the newsletter!

She is a resident of Colorado. You can find her contact details in our member directory online.

Welcome Cassi! Origins is pleased to welcome you as our 100th member!

We look forward to a long mutually rewarding relationship.

## DVD REVIEW: BROKEN TIES & LOST AND FOUND

Debra Baker skillfully and professionally tells the story of loss of her son and their reunion in this two-part videography.

Broken Ties incorporates her sister and mother's perceptions of the events that led to Debra's loss in 1968. Her mother openly shares her immense regrets in having done what she believed was in her daughter's best interest – to "erase" the "shame" of her "indiscretion".

The intimate exploration of a family's loss and secret keeping is enhanced and put into the social landscape by including the comments of a social worker who worked in adoption during that time period.

Lost and Found picks up the story with Debra deciding to locate her now thirty-year-old son and being – it appears

– quite readily successful in that endeavor.

Debra's son, Matthew, shares his emotions from indifference, to surprise, to what he describes as a friendship with ongoing visits as he gets to know many members of his original extended family at a Thanksgiving dinner. It includes his two daughters enjoying the love of an additional new "grandma", aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.

Matthew's adoptive mother is shown graciously taking photos from Matt's photo albums and very generously sharing them with Debra as the two women form a unique bond...not unlike a mother and daughter-in-law who both share the love of the same son/man.

The set provides a unique educational tool, allowing a



HER MOTHER  
OPENLY SHARES  
HER IMMENSE  
REGRETS IN  
HAVING DONE  
WHAT SHE BELIEVED  
WAS IN HER  
DAUGHTER'S BEST  
INTEREST – TO  
"ERASE" THE  
"SHAME" OF HER  
"INDISCRETION".

harmony of voices of the many family members affected – each in his or her own way - by society's mores that created such a loss.

To purchase DVD and Videos by Debra Baker visit:  
[debrabakerfilms.com](http://debrabakerfilms.com)



Suz Bednarz

Origins-USA Member Suz Bednarz surrendered her first born child to adoption in 1986 and found her in 2005.

## WITH TEARFUL PRIDE

My daughter, born and lost to adoption in 1986, graduated college a few weeks ago.

I did not attend.

I watched it online. Her college streamed the graduation proceedings and I watched my baby girl receive her diploma.

I watched it.

I cried.

I captured a print screen of her getting her diploma. It was blurry but it is likely the only graduation picture I will see of my daughter.

During the ceremony, I intermittently felt like I might pass out, vomit or worse. I was unable to stop tears from falling. A mixture of pride and overwhelming sadness overcame me.

I wasn't there. I watched it.

Why do we do this to mothers? Why do we ever tell any expectant mother that it will ever be a good thing to abandon their child to strangers?

My baby girl graduated college.

College was one of the primary reasons she was surrendered. Was it worth it?

Was it really true she could never have gone to college if I raised her?? Of course it is not, but I did not know that then.

When you have doctors, agency workers, parents,

priests, and those poor infertile people waiting to take your child, you tend to believe them. When they remind you of the awful thing you did by having sex with a man you loved, you become confused. When they tell you that "good white catholic girls can't go on social welfare" you feel further confused (I thought I was a bad girl by having sex now you tell me I am a good girl that cannot get welfare?).

When they tell you that a child can only succeed with two parents, you doubt yourself. When they tell you that it is best and you will get over it, you question if that is true. You ignore that love in your heart for your child, that primal connection, that milk made by your breasts just for your child and you sign. When they remind you of that promissory note your parents signed and throw around threats of law suits, you become scared. How will you feed a child and fight a law suit? You cave to the pressure and you believe those that seem to know better than you. They don't.

To all the mothers in this situation, don't believe them. They don't have your best interests in mind. Rather, they have their own wallets, their own egos, their own religious beliefs, and their own barren ovaries to consider. If they cared about you, they would help you to parent, give you more time to

decide to surrender and if you change your mind, they would honor revocation periods.

They don't.

They are not thinking of you.

Think twice, three times, four times before you abandon your child to strangers. Take her home. Feed her. Play with her. Sleep next to her. Count her toes and smell the scent of your breast milk as she exhales. Notice how she looks like your mother, or your Uncle Hal. Dream about her future and all the amazing things she will do. Take her for a walk through a grocery store and show her off to all the old ladies that stop by. Dream and believe. Believe that the best gift you can ever give your child is yourself. Mommies are not replaceable.

You can abandon your baby at any time. One week, two weeks, three weeks. Trust me, there will be some excited third party all too happy to take your child, change her name and dismiss you.

Take that time. Think. Dream. Believe.

If you do, you will likely see your child graduate to college. — and it wont be remote via the web.—Suz Bednarz

## HUGGERS WANTED

Origins-USA is proud to announce H.U.G.S. (Helping You Get Support and Helping You Get Stronger).

Do you remember the first person who told you that were “not alone” in having lost a child to adoption?

We rarely forget those who have “been there” to guide us, mentor us, offer a shoulder to lean on – or even cry on. Some of our best and most enduring friendships were

formed that way.

We are now offering you an opportunity to give back and be that one-on-one support person for someone else! Be the voice on the phone or the response to an email that says: “You’re not alone!” Whether you are the first other mother they have spoken to or they’ve been involved for years and are looking for a new source of support.

The “job” requires no special

skills but it is very important and the rewards are huge!

If you are interested in participating, please contact us at [info@origins-usa.org](mailto:info@origins-usa.org) and references HUGS in your subject line. One of our members will get back to you with program details.



Hugging is good medicine. The nicest thing about a hug is that you usually can't give one without getting one.

## UNIVERSALISTS TEST THEIR ADOPTION I.Q.

On May 2-3 Origins-USA had a table at the Unitarian Universalists Annual Metro NY Regional Conference. The conference was attended by approximately 200-250 people from NY, NJ and CT.

A tri-fold poster was set up with a sign that read “Test Your Adoption I.Q.” Under the sign was a wheel that people could spin and guess the answers to any of the six questions. Nearly all who played along guessed incorrectly to all questions.

One question was: “Which country both imports and exports babies for adoption?” The most commonly guessed answer was China, followed by Russia. Most people were very surprised to learn it was the U.S. and wanted to know why. This question opened the dialog to the fact that adoption is a huge moneyed industry with the bottom line



taking precedent over the best interest of any of the parties.

Another question: “How many children in orphanages worldwide are orphans?” had most people guessing 50%. The correct answer is that according to the UN, 80% are NOT orphans. Again, surprise. This question led to conversations about coercion and exploitation of mothers.

It was a very worthwhile tool and one definitely worth

reusing. The crowd was very receptive. Many said it made them sad but gave them insight into something they hadn’t thought about before and even those who had adopted said they found it “enlightening” and “eye opening.”

### DO YOU KNOW?

Which country both imports and exports babies for adoption?



*"They are projecting the wants of others, onto us. This must stop. Those who do this are in effect telling the world that we would "reject" our children a second time, when this was not the truth the first time around or the second" writes Origins-USA member, Mary Rigotti.*

## RESPONSE TO NEW JERSEY CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

The New Jersey Catholic Conference (NJCC) came out against a bill to allow adoptees access to the original birth certificate (OBC). The Conference used the alleged protection of mothers' rights as their reason. They, however, solicited responses from mothers who have lost children to adoption. Origins Member, Mary Rigotti sent the following in response.

*As a mother who lost my son to adoption, I'd like to thank you for giving us an opportunity to speak for ourselves. I surrendered a child in 1979 after nine months of directive counseling provided by my mother, her priest, Catholic Charities and others who said that it was in the best interest of my child to go to a two-parent home. It was never asked what I wanted, which would have been to keep my child and trust that God would provide. In the end I didn't surrender through Catholic Charities, but through my doctor instead, as I couldn't bear the thought of total anonymity. It felt as though I'd be sending my child into a black hole where I would know nothing about where he was going or whom he would be with, and they would know nothing about me. With the doctor, there would be a mutual contact; this way they (or as an adult, my son,) could contact me if they/ he ever needed anything. Many parents did not have this opportunity and consequently live with this black hole.*

*As most parents in this situation, I have always welcomed future*

*contact with my son. I told my future husband about him before we married and in accepting this, he was accepting my son as a part of me.*

*It is deeply grievous to me that those who would promote the continuation of sealed records, such as powerful lobbyists like the National Council for Adoption who represent many adoption agencies and adoptive parents, not natural parents, do so under the guise of "Birth Mother Privacy." They are projecting the wants of others, onto us. This must stop. Those who do this are in effect telling the world that we would "reject" our children a second time, when this was not the truth the first time around or the second. Is this in an adoptee's best interest? I know it is not. In Proverbs chapter 6, it is written that it is an abomination unto God to sow discord among brethren (family).*

*There are many enlightened adoptive parents today who believe their adult children should have the same right as anyone else to walk into vital statistics and obtain their unaltered OBC's, and that anything short of this makes them feel like second-class citizens.*

*These adoptive parents are not living in fear: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."*

*Do you know that not one surrender document has ever been produced evidencing any promises of privacy? Birth certificates are*

*sealed only upon the adoption decree. The original birth certificates of those who were never adopted, remain unsealed and available to them. It is therefore grossly unjust to deny adoptees in New Jersey their vital records based on this premise.*

*There is a small minority of members of an adoptees original family who have kept the matter hidden due to the deep shame and condemnation put upon them years ago, when no mercy was shown.*

*Restoring adoptee access to their original birth certificates, for those who wish to contact their birth parents as not all adoptees will, will be for many, an opportunity for openness, honesty and resolution, rather than a perpetuation of secrets poisonous to the spirit, health and mind. Help give these women a chance to be freed from this prison, by unlocking the original OBC's for adoptees.*

*Luke 12:2 For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.*

*Isa 49:15 Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?*

*I appeal to the NJCC to promote truth and fairness in supporting unconditional access to original birth certificates for ALL adoptees, leaving no one behind. Thank you for being willing to hear from real mothers.—Mary Rigotti*

## TELL YOUR STORY

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).

TO SHARE YOUR  
STORY, PLEASE  
COMPLETE THE  
WEB FORM  
FOUND ON OUR  
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ORIGINS-  
USA.ORG.

## BARKER FOUNDATION ADOPTION CONFERENCE

*- continued from front page*

Why this mother was so quick to assume the best about an adoption agency and assume the worst about a mothers' advocacy organization I do not know, but it was frustrating to hear.

Eventually, I found myself feeling emotionally drained from the day. I decided to

skip the last session and calm down.

Overall, it was an emotionally tiring day, but I felt more informed having had the opportunity to hear what others are saying about adoption issues.

I also felt good about having met a few people, made our voices heard, and perhaps

even opened some eyes a bit.

If you are interested in attending a Barker Foundation event and speaking on behalf of mothers, visit their website at [barkerfoundation.org](http://barkerfoundation.org) for information on upcoming events. - Bernadette Wright



In her biting and painful memoir, Jane Jeong Trenka, tells a story of cross-cultural adoption.

## BOOK REVIEW: THE LANGUAGE OF BLOOD

Jeanne Marie Laskas likened her adoption of a Chinese baby, Anna, to her pet goat's nursing a new-born lamb rejected by its mother:

"In a way, it was the most natural adoption in the world. Here was a baby lamb who desperately needed a mom, and here was a mama goat with plenty of mothering to give. They belonged together – just like Anna and me...." (In "The Heart of a Mother" Ladies' Home Journal, Dec. 2003),

In her biting and painful memoir, Jane Jeong Trenka, tells a different story of cross-cultural adoption. At age six months, Trenka and her four-year-old sister, Carol, were adopted from Korea by a Lutheran couple in rural Minnesota. Jeong Kyong-Ah born on January 24, 1972 became Jane Marie Brauer, recreated in September 26, 1972. Trenka's impoverished mother placed Trenka and her sister for adoption to protect them from their violent father. Although it is often said that children adopted from abroad were unwanted and abandoned, I have never seen this to be true in memoirs by and documentaries about those who have been internationally adopted. What is true is that "adoption is rarely about mothers' choices; it is, instead, about the abject choicelessness of some resourceless women" (Rickie Solinger, Beggars and

Choosers, 2001).

Trenka describes sitting on her adoptive mother's lap examining a picture of herself.

"I hold the picture by its frame, and then it occurs to me to look at my face more closely, to see if what Carol had told me was true; that we were given-away because I was too ugly. ... I think I don't look that bad. ... There must be a different reason why we were given away. But why would anyone give away her children? Don't all mommies love their babies?...."

"Why did she give us away?" I ask my mommy....

"She stands up swiftly, like a reflex, shedding me from her lap."

Trenka is a replacement child. She and her sister Carol were:

"...haunted by the birth child who was never conceived, this pink-skinned boy who had pretty blue eyes like his mother and a funny smile like his father. We would be haunted by this shadow and by ghosts of our own dead twins, whom we had simply replaced one day by changing clothes: Kyong-Ah, who lived to the age of six months, and Mi-Ja, who died at four years of age when she became Carol."

When Trenka is a junior in high school, she receives a letter from her Umma -- her

Korean mother. Six years later, Trenka goes to Korea on a "Motherland" tour. "When I finally went to Korea, I would take my outer journey and my inner journey at the same time."

Trenka's visit to Korea is wonderful and stressful. In time she becomes accustomed to the language, the informalities (Umma gives her a bath); the tastes and smells (her brother raises puppies for food). In time she becomes a child of both mothers and both countries.

When Umma becomes ill, Trenka is at her bedside. "I have never felt so wanted or loved, and this will be my deep well of strength, beginning at this moment – here, now, with her."

Trenka answers the question that few adoptees dare ask:

"Would I rather have not been adopted?"

"I wish my adoption was a one-hundred-percent-positive-thing, that people ... did not see the color of skin, that having grown to be the tallest of my siblings was a sign not only of good childhood nutrition but of spiritual abundance as well. How do I explain ... that my seemingly flawless assimilation into America has yielded anything but joy and gratitude? How do I explain my ambivalence? Yet I do have mixed feelings.

- continued on page 9

## BOOK REVIEW: LANGUAGE OF BLOOD

- continued from page 8

I feel ashamed and unworthy of the gifts that have been given to me; ashamed for not being a better daughter – both a grateful American one and a forgiving Korean one, guided by filial piety; ashamed for opening my mouth, despite everything people have tried to do for me, in what they thought were my best interests.

What an unworthy, spoiled, ungrateful, whining, American brat.

“Would I rather have not been adopted? *I don't know.* ... How can I weigh the loss of my language and

culture against the freedom that America has to offer, the opportunity to have the same rights as a man? How can a person exiled as a child, without a choice, possibly fathom how he would have ‘turned out’ had he stayed in Korea? How many educational opportunities must I mark on my tally sheet before I can say it was worth losing my mother?”

“How can an adoptee weigh her terrible loss against the burden of gratitude she feels for her adoptive country and parents?”

*Language* was published by Borealis Books in 2003. It is available in hardback from Amazon.com for \$16.77. Please enter Amazon through the Origins-USA website booklist at [Origins-USA.org](http://Origins-USA.org).—Jane Edwards



Jane Edwards is a reunited mother and Infrastructure Chair of Origins-USA.

## HELP ALWAYS WANTED

Marian Wright Edelman, an activist for the rights of children, said “We must not, in trying to think about how we can make a big difference, ignore the small daily differences we can make which, over time, add up to big differences that we often cannot foresee.” Origins-USA, activists for the rights of mothers and children, completely agrees. Furthermore, we are confident we are making a difference and with your help we can do even more!

There are many ways you can assist.



Origins-USA is currently looking for:

- Legislative Committee Members
- Mothers' Stories Coordinator
- Forum Moderators
- Grant Writers
- Website Committee Members

- Public Relations Committee Members
- Help Building an Attorney Directory
- Speakers Bureau Coordinator
- Research Committee
- Individuals to write articles for our newsletter or myspace page.

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).



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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.](#)

Regular membership is \$20 with reduced fee for those on limited income (\$1-\$19).

\$50 – One year membership and an Origins-USA pin

\$100 – One year membership, a pin and an autographed copy of *The Stork Market; America's Multi-Billion Dollar Unregulated Industry* by Mirah Riben

\$500 Charter Lifetime membership, a pin, an autographed book, a certificate of appreciation, and your name on the web page.

**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.