



# CUB Communicator

DECEMBER 2022 HOLIDAY EDITION

Welcome to the Holiday Edition of the CUB Communicator! We understand that the holidays can be a difficult time for so many in our community, but in the following pages we believe you will find hope, encouragement, and inspiration



as you read the experiences and efforts of others like you who are Birth Parents and Adult Adoptees. You are not alone. United we find a strength and promise for our future!

*Happy Holidays from all of us at CUB!*



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# Ten Strategies To Cope Without Your Child During the Holidays

By: Candace Cahill

The holidays haven't been the same since my son died nine years ago. By holidays, I mean Christmas. But every anniversary or celebration is different now. It's just that Christmas is one of the hardest.

When he was little, I wondered about tiny details: how they styled his hair or what their Christmas tree looked like. Were there piles of presents? Did they wear matching woolen sweaters? I imagined Norman Rockwell-esque scenes staged against a backdrop of hand-strung popcorn garland and neighborhood caroling. A couple of months later, an update would arrive with photographs to fill in those details.



But the first winter after he died, I struggled to reconcile the fact that I was a birth mother who'd never spent a holiday with her child and a grieving parent who would never see her child again. I oscillated between lost opportunities and our stolen future.

**I was angry. I was sad. I was lost. I wanted a way to connect to him but didn't know how.**

I thought about his adoptive family and hoped they were faring better than I was, but then jealousy sidled its ugly nose into the mix, leaving a snotty trail of bitter tears and self-loathing in its wake—they'd had years with him, and I had none.

What could I do? How could I escape the torment in my soul?

I scoured the internet for resources and tools to ease my pain. Some helped, some didn't, but I used what worked and tucked away the lessons for later use.

Since then, I've refined my list and would like to share it with you.

The reason for your child's absence doesn't matter: if you're a birth parent with little or no contact or a grieving parent navigating the new reality that your child will never come home. Nor does it matter if this is your first holiday without your child or the twentieth. If you are grieving, I am sorry. But maybe, something on my list will help you.

## Ten Strategies To Cope Without Your Child During the Holidays

**1. Give yourself a break.** Grieving takes a mental, physical, and spiritual toll. If you can, find ways to nurture yourself. Take a long bubble bath or a nap, or go outside for a walk. If you have other children and can, get a sitter and have some 'me time.'

**2. Take care of your physical health.** Eat right, drink lots of water and get enough sleep. But don't deny yourself small pleasures either. In moderation, a piece of homemade fudge, a glass of eggnog, or a hot toddy can bring a bit of joy to a solemn moment.

**3. Don't let others dictate how you should feel or act.** If you don't want to celebrate or participate in certain activities, let your loved ones know you need a little space and ask for their support.

**4. If you are prone to anxiety attacks, have a plan.** Call a support person who can remind you to breathe and talk you through to the other side. And spend time with people who understand, and avoid those who don't. You deserve support and understanding.

**5. Permit yourself to indulge** in old photos, letters, or videos of your child, and go ahead and cry.

**6. Perhaps you aren't feeling particularly emotional. That's okay too.** There will be times when you feel dull and listless, which is perfectly normal.

**7.** For some, talking about their child is a relief, while it may be too painful for others. **Trust your gut but know that the more you talk about your grief, the easier it is to bear.**

**8. Donate to a charity or, better yet, volunteer.** The physical act of volunteering takes your mind off your grief, boosts mental well-being and happiness, and is a meaningful way to honor your child.

**9.** Journal, paint, write a poem, crochet, play an instrument, or sing. In essence, **find a creative outlet** for your swirling, chaotic, beautiful, and sometimes overwhelming emotions.

**10. Count your blessings.** Begin each day by listing ten things for which you are grateful. Even the smallest things count. Research suggests that just the process of searching for positive aspects produces health benefits and a greater sense of well-being.

I lost my son shortly after we reunited, but before we had a chance to build a relationship, and I still struggle to find peace. These tangible steps have helped me navigate the holidays, and maybe they will help you too.

Your heart may be broken, but it will go on beating, even if sometimes you may not want it to. And I know it's hard, but please know you are not alone.

Reprinted from [candacecahill.com](http://candacecahill.com)



# I Exist:

By: Amy Barker D'Alessandro, LMHC

I tried to brace for the tsunami of emotion that the passing of my Mom (my Adoptive Mother) would surely generate, but no one told me (because no one could predict) that it would hit a few months later when I faced my first birthday without her here on this earth.

A lot of Adoptees know that birthdays are hard. We may feel a desire to celebrate big on our one special day of the year while we may also recognize feelings of loss from having lost our Birth/First Mothers on the day of our birth. My best friend summed up my yearly sadness a very long time ago with, "It's heartbreaking to know that no one danced the day you were born." I call this feeling "Birthday Ambivalence." It's that internal Tasmanian Devil that starts whirling around for me about a month before my birthday. Through the years, I've learned to take really good care of myself when it starts and for however long is needed.

But this one sideswiped me. I guess I should have known because the first birthday after my Adoptive Dad passed away was rough. Neither of my Adoptive Parents were there for the actual day of my birth since they weren't allowed to be a part of the hospital experience back in those days (I was born in 1965), but they took me home with them 14 days later and were both there for my 1st birthday celebration a year later, as well as every year after that by phone or in person, celebrating with me when they could - that is until dementia stole my Dad's cognition, but even then, he knew who I was and loved on me in his quiet, steadfast, special way.

# Birthdays Ambivalence & Holiday Grief

So I knew losing him was going to hurt, hurt a lot, but I expected it to be most painful and difficult around Father's Day, Christmas, and his birthday - which it was and still is at times (he's been gone four years now), but I did not expect it to ignite the old flame of abandonment pain around my own birthday, which of course, makes sense. And it also makes sense that losing my closest mother (I also have a Stepmother and a Mother-in-law), after the initial loss of my Birth/First Mother when I was born, would also trigger the pain of the "primal wound" and feelings of utter aloneness. But still, I didn't see it coming. Maybe it's because I didn't realize how much the loss of my original mother played into the Birthday Ambivalence I've always felt. I knew it was part of it, for sure, but I thought it was tied up in so many other complicated things that I had always underestimated its significance.

But as I'm waking up in the middle of the night right now during the week before my birthday crying uncontrollably and finding myself at times sobbing throughout the day while counting down the days until my birthday with deep

dread, I am incredibly aware of how much this must feel like when I was a newborn and was permanently left by the only Mother I knew. I'm sure I was inconsolable in my grief then as I am now.

I keep wondering what I'm counting down - what will happen in a few days? And why am I so raw and lost? I think it's the deeply rooted knowledge (conscious and unconscious) that as that day comes up and I mark the 57th year after my original life-changing loss of Mother, that this year, the Mother who tried so desperately to take her place is also now gone forever.

My close colleague often says, "Adoption is like a wedding and a funeral all at once." Today I feel that in my core. I want to mark the day of my birth with some kind of celebration that says, "I am still here. I exist." Even though my original birth certificate has a name on it I've never known myself as, even though I do not show up legitimately on anyone's Family Tree, and even though my Birth Mother has rejected any ongoing contact

with me (over political differences, of all things), I want some kind of public, “official” acknowledgment that I have lived a full, legitimate human being’s life despite those hurdles and complications. I want to say that I have been loved well in this life, and I have loved others deeply as well. I want to mark that my birth has had some kind of positive impact on others, and that I have mattered to people who have mattered to me.

But I also want to wear the veil of grief that tells the world that I have suffered tremendous loss from the onset of my life and that this day of my birth isn’t just a celebration. It’s also a painful, annual reminder of all the devastating losses I’ve experienced. First, I lost my Mother; then I lost my own baby when I became a Birth Mother myself. I’ve lost multiple sets of parents, and I still have some to go. This kind of grief is truly unbearable at times, and yet, I must bear it or else I will crawl into the dirt along with those who are freshly being buried. But I refuse to do that. I refuse to give up. I don’t want the pain, but as my Adoptive Mom said often, “It sure beats the alternative.”

She was a very intelligent, creative, and astute woman, but she also had some very significant mental health issues. It has taken many years to untangle the impact I’ve experienced from relinquishment and adoption trauma, the divorce of my first Adoptive Parents (another break in attachment), the violation and abuse by my “second” Adoptive Father (formerly my Stepfather), the confusion and pain created by my Adoptive Mother’s ongoing mental health challenges, and the consequences of all my own maladaptive coping skills.

Many of the Adoptees I work with say they feel so far behind their peers, that they should be much further along in their lives especially when it comes to success, life goals, and achievements, but I remind them that with the kind of trauma we all faced starting “Day 1,” and all the time we’ve spent struggling to survive it and overcome it, as well as all the time it’s taken to piece together the fragments of our identities, a ton of self-compassion is in order. Besides, so many didn’t even make it at all. We’ve lost far too many Adoptees (and Birth Parents too!) to suicide, addictions, prison terms, mental health institutions, and other devastating outcomes. Why has it taken so long for us as a society to understand the adverse impact of relinquishment and adoption? And why do so many people, even in the adoption community, still not understand it at all?!

Thank God I had already been deeply acquainted with the "Grief Monster" long before my Adoptive Mother's passing. Once I finally surrendered to it and stepped off into "the Abyss" and let the long-suppressed, unexpressed, and denied grief have its proper space and run its initial course, so to speak, I learned that it wouldn't consume me. Now, when I experience a loss, I am able to withstand its intensity; it feels more manageable. I truly cannot imagine how I would have survived if I had waited until her death to allow room for grief. I'm sure it would have been too much.

An Adoptee client once said to me, "We grieve with the loss of each (and all) of our parents the fact that the relationship is not what we wanted it to be." I believe they are right. Even in the best of adoptive circumstances and reunion experiences, we will never have that pure, uncomplicated parental love that we originally lost and so deeply long for. Then birthdays, holidays, and deaths are trauma-versaries that bring the depth of this loss front and center.

All three of my Dads are gone now – my first Adoptive Dad, my Stepfather who later became my second Adoptive Dad (after my first Adoptive Father signed away his parental rights), and my Birth Father. They exist only in photos and memories now and also physically in my siblings who are their biological offspring. And now I've lost the first of my Moms (the Mom who raised me), while I see my Stepmom, with whom I have a close relationship, slip away a little more each day with Alzheimer's. There truly is so much loss we must endure and learn to navigate throughout our lifetimes.

I tell my clients, "Time is never on the Adoptee's side." That may be true for everyone, but I think it's why so many Adoptees feel like they are so far behind their counterparts. By the time we understand the impact of our story, start to heal from our losses, uncover and put together the pieces of our secret, withheld histories, and potentially search for and meet our blood relatives (those who may still be alive, anyway), we find that we've missed a lot of opportunities in this life, and we will probably have to face even more grief as a result.

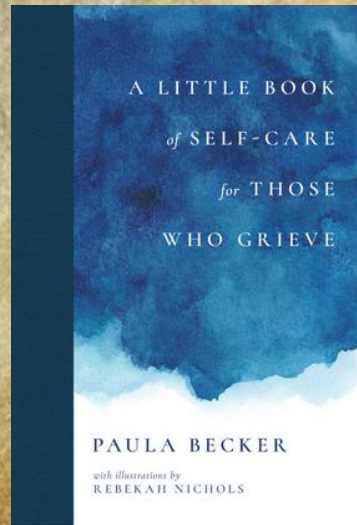
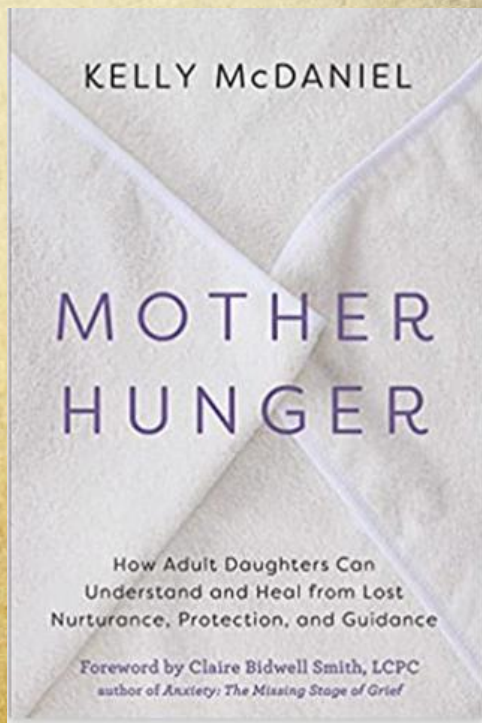
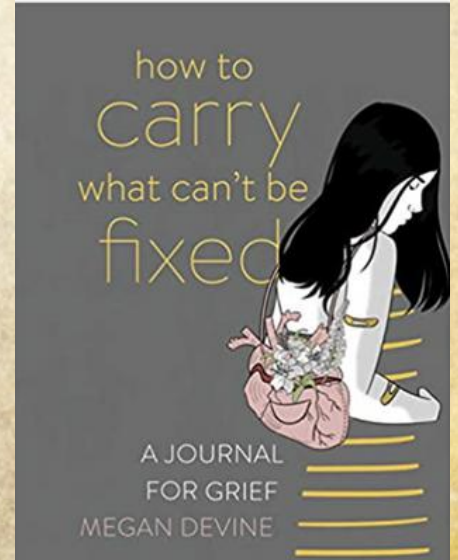
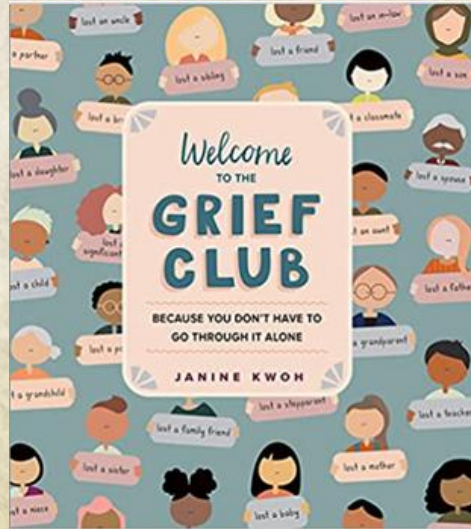
Of course, I'm not the only Adoptee to lose someone this year. As we head into the holidays, in my relatively small group of Adult Adoptees here in Seattle, several of us have lost Adoptive Parents this year while others have lost Birth Parents or initiated searches only to find that a Birth Parent is already deceased, which spurs on more complicated grief. Also, some have been deeply rejected by Birth Parents recently which is a death of its own kind. With so much collective loss, a group member suggested we find a way as a group to participate in a meaningful ritual together to honor those we've lost and ourselves as well while we grieve. After contemplating several ideas, we will most likely embark on a time of memorial together with floating candle lanterns, since my office just happens to be right on a lake. Having a time where we can recognize and remember our losses together is how we heal in community. Whatever we end up doing, I am grateful our group wants to support one another in ways that only we can as fellow Adoptees. It's very similar in our group of Birth/First Mothers where these women love each other fiercely. Knowing one another's stories, experiences, and pain leads to validation, strength, and self-acceptance and continually combats the shame and isolation that many of us lived in for years.

As you yourself come upon another holiday season, charged with all the reminders of the past, I hope you can spend some time in meaningful ritual with your own supportive community remembering those you've lost this year or at any time. Even if you never really knew them, they are still a part of you, and you have the right to miss them, so give yourself permission to honor what they mean to you.

Also, please celebrate that you truly do exist and matter to the world just by being here and by being you. **There's only one you!** So as you enter a new year, honor yourself for the courage, hope, and resilience you've had while braving another year of challenge along this lifelong journey of adoption. **You deserve it! We all do!**



# Recommended Reading & Tools ON GRIEF & MOTHER LOSS





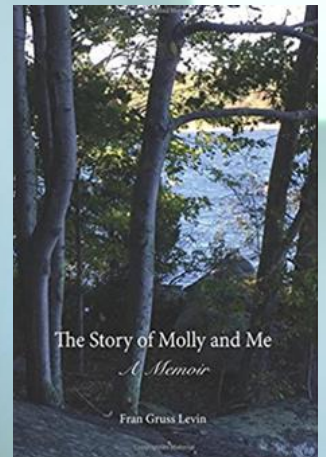
I met Fran in 1992 before it was common to have reunions in adoption, before DNA and the internet. When our dramas manifested at libraries on rainy nights, poking through yearbooks and phone books. When, clutching someone's hand, we made nervous telephone calls from kitchen tables or living room couches (Carol, Jane, Barbara, Pat, Rich!). She was one of the people who comforted, collaborated, schemed, supported, laughed and cried with me through the search for my birth mom. A magical twelve step based group called Adoption Healing met in person at a church in Fairfield, Connecticut in those days. Fran was one of its founding mothers. The group included Fran's pixie-ish 11 year old daughter Lexi, who also helped me to rally when my search revealed that my birth mom had passed from cancer six years prior to finding her. The group, and Fran, gave me the courage to move on to seek out my birth dad four years later. He became my treasured friend and mentor for the next 21 years, until he also passed from cancer in 2017. (fill in the blank, cancer!)

Fran Levin left us way too early. We all wanted her around another 20 years. That little sparkle in her eye and warm smile could have been present for more people,

## Remembering Fran

more searches. She would have loved more time with her family, in particular her grandson, who was born in the last months of her life. Still, Fran left nothing undone. She waged war on the closed adoption system, characterized by loss of identity, separation, shame and perpetual mourning. She fought to change the peculiar, punishing moral codes for women and children that we now look back on with disbelief. Speaking of cancer one more time, you might be familiar with those ideas-- as if women who have sex outside of marriage are not worthy to mother their "out of wedlock" children. As if children could ever be "illegitimate."

Fran wrote and published her book, *The Story of Molly and Me*, about her own beautiful reunion with her eldest daughter. She was an exemplary teacher, counselor, leader, mother, storyteller, wife, sister, daughter, friend, and finally a joyful grandma. Her memorial service was one of the



most moving and uplifting I have ever attended. I marveled at how every speaker confirmed that all the boxes that mattered were ticked, that she left each relationship she had full of love. Life is fragile, the clock is always running. We never have enough time. But if we make our luck following Fran's example, we make the most of every minute.

With love,  
Denise Parent, Adoptee

Our wonderful CUB Board member, Fran Gruss Levin-Vadeboncoeur, passed away in September of 2022. Fran served as our Membership Director for several years, but she was so much more than that. She was our friend and partner in making a difference for those whose lives were touched by adoption. She was always ready to extend a helping hand to the Board or anyone she met with a need. She was a natural born helper with her ready smile and deep sense of empathy. Some of you met Fran at CUB retreats. She usually led birth mother support groups and you could often find her sequestered in a quiet spot talking with an attendee who needed support. She was a gift to us all and we miss her very much. Our hearts and condolences go out to her husband Phil and children Molly, Alexis, Corey and Jay.

- The CUB Board

*In Loving Memory of Fran Gruss Levin-Vadeboncoeur*

Fran was a year ahead of me in school, after she missed a year while she was "sent away". No one knew she was pregnant or that she had given up her baby. I heard from a friend that she attended a high school reunion in 1990 and broadcast from the rooftops that she had found and was reunited with her Molly. So I reached out to her -- the son I had relinquished was 22 at the time, he was an adult, and perhaps it wouldn't be such a betrayal of me signing away my parental rights in 1968. I had no idea if I would find him and if it would make things better or worse for me, but I had nothing at that point and was willing to take the risk.

Fran took me to a meeting of Ties That Bind and within two weeks Jane Servadio found my David in Santa Barbara. The photos I have of the first time we met and bonded include Fran. She became such a special part of my life. David is now 54 and his children call me Grandma. I became very close to his adoptive mother and my entire family embraced her. This is all because of Fran, and I shall be forever grateful.

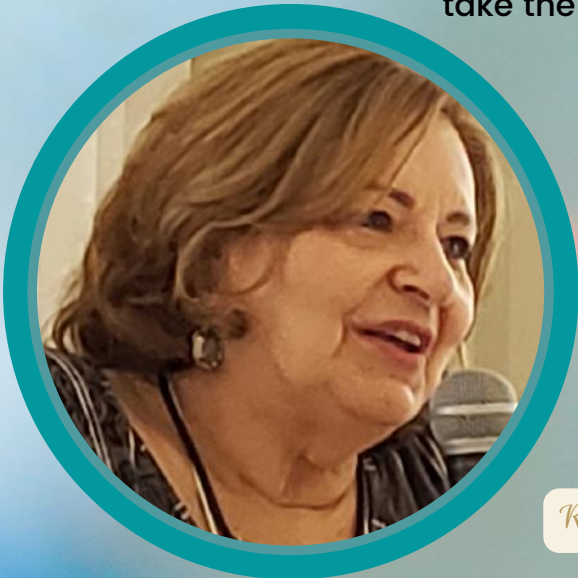
Since that time I have helped to reunite several adoptees with their first mothers, and also a birth father with his son.  
Paying it forward.

Submitted with much love,  
Penny Palmer, Birth Mother - Bethel, CT

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It was Fran's wish for donations in her name be made to CUB. It meant so much to her to be such an integral part of such an amazing and supportive group of birth parents, and I know she was proud of the work you all do. I have attached a link to her obituary for your members.

-Alexis Levin, Fran's younger daughter



*Read Fran's Obituary*

*Donate to CUB in memory of Fran*

## TRAUMA FACTSHEET for Birth/First Mothers

also available at: [transformadoption.com](https://transformadoption.com)

CUB strives to educate everyone on the impact of family separation from adoption.

Several collaborative groups evolved out of the 2021 CUB Retreat of members inspired to create informative tools of truthful content and authentic narratives on life as a Birth/First Mother from lived experience. Busting myths, secrets, and isolation while providing supportive connection and the sacred space for healing our deep wounds has become priority. In collaboration, we have created a **Trauma Factsheet for Birth/First Mothers** to detail the potential impacts of relinquishing a child to adoption.

While everyone's story and situation is unique, family separation causes a magnitude of grief and loss leaving all those involved with the work of learning how to navigate a complicated lifelong journey of recovery. Our hope is that this Trauma Factsheet will help explain some of the things you may be experiencing as a result of relinquishment and adoption trauma that leads you not only to better understanding but also to healing. You may want to explore some of the concepts and terms contained in this factsheet on your own, in support groups, or with a mental health professional, or all of the above. Our goal is to educate and inform everyone including mental health professionals, medical health professionals, educators, law enforcement, and legal and judicial professionals to increase awareness and ethical competency surrounding this kind of trauma. Ultimately, this should lead to fewer unnecessary adoptions, less trauma, better informed decisions, more access to services, and less suffering and pain.

This collaboration with CUB was inspired by Moses Farrow, LMFT.

It is available as well as a **Trauma Factsheet for Adoptees** at [transformadoption.com](https://transformadoption.com)

This Trauma Factsheet was created in 2022 by:

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# ADOPTION TRAUMA FACTSHEET

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*for Birth / First Mothers*

## What is Adoption Trauma for Birth/First Mothers?

Adoption Trauma occurs for birth/first mothers who have voluntarily surrendered or have been separated from their child through a legal process of terminating their parental rights. This includes forced removal, abduction or kidnapping, trafficking operations or other tactics used within the *coercion culture* that views “relinquishment” as an acceptable requisite to the adoption process. Mothers experience trauma in the form of ongoing grief, shame, guilt, emptiness, stigma, emotional paralysis that can impact their nervous system, identity, ability to attach in relationships, and overall health over their lifetime. Internal (thoughts/feelings/memories) and external (interactions/smells/sounds/words) triggers can activate trauma responses of fight, flight, freeze & fawn, which can be repeated in cycles over a mother’s lifetime.

## What are the Causes of Adoption Trauma?

Mothers are actively recruited into the adoption process through community campaigns, religious beliefs, or trafficking operations such as baby farming. The mother and child are forever bonded at the cellular level. The trauma caused by severing it is not acknowledged. Examples of other factors leading to separation include:

- Forced removal of their child due to allegations of abuse or neglect, policies, and legal interventions
- Lack of preparation and other coercion tactics used to have them voluntarily surrender their child
- Lack legal representation to safeguard the rights of the mothers and the children
- Falsifying documents and deception in cases where the child is identified as an orphan
- Confusion regarding how motherhood is identified and defined

## What are the Features of Adoption Trauma?

Features of Adoption Trauma for mothers may include (but not limited to):

- Complicated grief and disenfranchised grief due to the separation which can intensify over time
- “Phantom Pain” – the body remembers giving birth to their child who they have been separated from
- Trauma response behaviors: Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fawn
- Nervous system dysregulation: panic attacks, dissociation, and PTSD symptoms / secondary infertility
- Having to suppress their feelings in order to survive
- Ambiguous loss occurs not having contact with their child and wondering what has become of them

## What are the Risk Factors of Adoption Separation?

Mothers are especially vulnerable to familial, religious, and other systemic pressures to give up their child leading to the inability to adapt to life after the separation and being identified as a “childless mother” then having their identity evolve from a “whore/slut” when pregnant, “hero” when giving up their child, to “villain” as a birth/first mother. There is a loss of trust in themselves and others for failing to protect them and their child from the decision to “give up”.

- High ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) score and the impact of intergenerational trauma
- Limited post placement support to process their grief, birth, multiple losses
- Adoption agency not working in the best interest of the mother, but of their clients adopting her child
- History of addiction, mental illness or other genetic condition from their family of origin
- Repeated invalidation of the maternal bond (gas lighting)
- Lack of involvement from fathers who are also systemically shamed and stigmatized

## How is Adoption Trauma treated or reduced?

Managing Adoption Trauma for mothers may include (but not limited to):

- Education & advocacy to raise the responsibility of the general public to support the mother and child
- Normalizing conversations to prevent lifelong shame & to correct character stereotypes and stigma
- Governmental support for family preservation and have mothers and children remain together
- National standards for adoption-informed education and training amongst all levels of professionals to include mental health, law enforcement, judicial/healthcare/education systems, news & media, and government

More information at: [transformadoption.com](https://transformadoption.com) | [concernedunitedbirthparents.org](https://concernedunitedbirthparents.org) |



# Catholic Mothers Pursuing Apology for Forced Adoptions

By Julia MacDonnell Chang

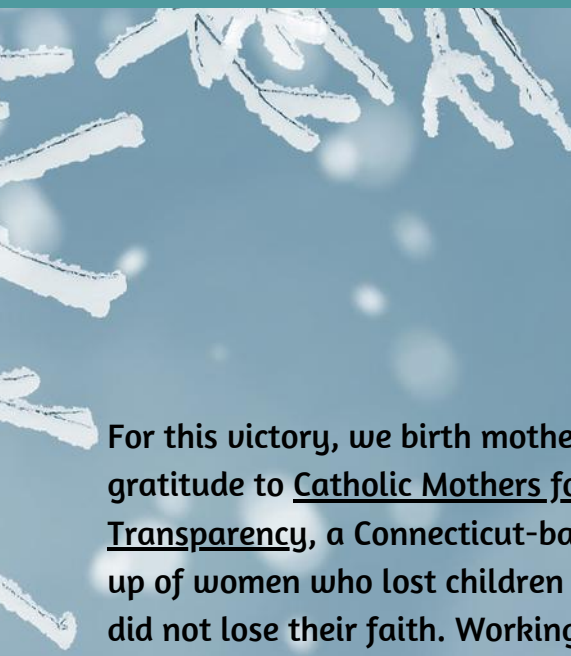
An international ‘synod’ of Catholic bishops wouldn’t ordinarily demand my attention, but the synod Pope Francis called for a year or so ago, to culminate at the Vatican in October 2023, caught my attention for a particular reason: the trauma of unmarried American mothers who lost babies to adoption by Catholic-run organizations “during the forced adoption era” might finally be acknowledged by the Church hierarchy.

That’s because the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has agreed to accept a 10-page ‘sampler,’ of our stories and it has promised to carry this document to the Vatican and share it at the synod.

Nothing may come of this. A Catholic synod, after all, is merely a massive, slow-moving and rule-bound conversation. Moreover, while the bishops will consult with the pope, they have no power to create change.



Yet, for birth mothers like me, and the rest of us in CUB, whose experience of profound loss has never been recognized, this is a monumental victory. It means that the American bishops, for the first time in known history, may be open to the reality that there was, in the United States, an era of coerced adoption in which Catholic clergy and organizations such as Catholic Charities were complicit.



For this victory, we birth mothers owe a debt of gratitude to Catholic Mothers for Truth and Transparency, a Connecticut-based group made up of women who lost children to adoption but did not lose their faith. Working for more than a year through the USCCB's Justice, Peace and Human Development office, they've convinced the bishops that our voices are worth listening to. (Last year the Catholic Mothers were key drivers in the successful effort to change Connecticut's adoption laws so that adult adoptees could obtain their own sealed birth records.)

In a February 2021 public testimony to the Connecticut General Assembly, the Catholic Mothers wrote "... healing from this unspeakable trauma is not easy nor is it swift. The secrecy and shame we carried affected the very essence" of our lives and relationships, "everything, from the way we parented subsequent children to the way we connected with our partners, our aging parents and many other important people in our lives." We were, they argued, "coerced by shame and humiliation to give up our children."

The epoch of which the Catholic Mothers speak, sometimes called the Baby Scoop, lasted roughly from 1943 to 1973, a time during which, though no federal records were maintained, between 1.5 and 4 million unmarried American girls and women relinquished newborns to closed adoption. The Catholic Church was by no means the only religious participant in this phenomenon. The Salvation Army and the Florence Crittendon Mission were among the other major players. Jewish Family Services soon joined the fray.

During those prosperous post-war years, an unholy trinity of family, church and state brokered closed and shame-bound adoptions based on a fairy tale. It was one that the patriarchal culture easily accepted: unmarried mothers were delinquents, almost criminal in their transgressions, and hence unfit to become mothers. They didn't want their babies, anyway, and, silenced by shame, would soon forget about them. As for closed adoption, it was a gift from God, if not

a miracle, for good but infertile married couples who had the means to pay to grow their families. Adoptive families, the mythologizing continued, were identical in every way to biological families. And besides, newborns didn't know the difference between one caregiver and another as long as they were warm and fed. All records pertaining to these transactions were court-sealed to protect the newborn's and its first mother's reputation.



Lived experience has demolished every one of these certitudes. The devastating cost to American birth mothers and their adopted children is still being calculated by such organizations as Concerned United Birth Parents, Bastard Nation and American Adoption Congress, among many others.

Eight years ago, the Australian government issued an apology to all of those impacted by its program of coerced adoption. And just last year, the Irish government and Catholic Church not only apologized for its wretched treatment of unmarried mothers and their lost children but also set aside a \$900 million fund to help compensate them for their suffering. The Scottish and Canadian governments are also said to be moving toward some form of an apology.

The Church bureaucracy, even the U.S. portion of it, remains so intricate and multilayered that it challenges understanding. But through their faith and persistence, the Catholic Mothers breached a gap. Nevertheless, the bishops laid down strict guidelines for what they would accept and what would be 'heard' at the synod. Ten pages, max. The Catholic Mothers put out a call for 175-word stories, so that as many stories as possible could be crammed into the ten pages.



**Here's mine:**

*I gave birth to my son at St. Margaret's Hospital in Boston on January 3, 1967. I lost him a week later when my Catholic Charities caseworker took him away into a closed adoption, and my parents drove me home. I had just turned 19 and I'd been confined to St. Mary's Infant Asylum, run, like the hospital, by the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. My unmarried motherhood and the loss of my first child on the cusp of adulthood very nearly destroyed me.*

*At no point did anyone involved offer me empathy or understanding. I've struggled with the trauma ever since. The Catholic Church, through its clergy and its lay 'adoption professionals,' made every aspect of my experience worse with their moral certainty and sense of superiority. A half-century on, I still struggle to reject what they told me about myself: that I was a trashy sinner, unworthy of love and unfit to become a mother. That my baby would be better off without me. I was reunited with my middle-aged son not long ago. This amazing victory, heartening as it is, has not erased any of the pain I experienced.*

*I hope that my story, included in the packet, will reflect the experiences of some of the countless thousands whose stories will be left out. Also left out are the emotional details that don't fit into a 175-word format. Our little stories won't reveal much about the difficulties of our lives or those of our children. Even so, I hope that they will have an impact. Whatever else happens at the synod, the American bishops have acknowledged that birth mother loss is real. That infant adoption is a fragile and fraught form of church and state-created kinship. That its costs are steep, especially for the birth mothers whose voices have been ignored for so long. I, for one, am deeply gratified.*

# CUB Zoom Support Groups

We are happy to announce that our CUB Zoom Support Groups are really helping our community connect and get much-needed peer support. Our members log in from all over the country, which is especially helpful for those who live in more rural or isolated areas that don't have easy access to connect with other birth/first moms. We have an ongoing training program for our members to learn how to facilitate our support groups, so we can continue to grow while maintaining small safe groups of 12 or less. We thank our members who have joined us in rolling this program out, as we have worked toward making more meaningful support available while fine-tuning this program. Thanks to everyone for your support and patience, and to all our volunteers who have helped make this online space possible. We hope to expand in 2023 to include other adoption constellation groups, as we all work towards learning and healing together. We gain a greater understanding of ourselves and each other while sharing our unique perspectives and experiences of living with the lifelong impact of adoption.

## Get Support, Give Support



### National CUB Zoom Support Group

**Monthly:** 3rd Saturday

**Length:** 1 hr 30 min

**Sign Up [Here](#)**

### SUPPORT CUB THROUGH AMAZONSMILE

AmazonSmile is a simple way (at no cost to you!) for you to support CUB every time you shop. Sign up at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) select "Concerned United Birthparents Inc" Dallas, TX as the recipient (for CUB National choose Dallas NOT Milford, MA). Then place all your orders using [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) where CUB National will receive 0.5% of all your eligible purchases. This is such an easy way to make your shopping dollars benefit CUB!

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Betsey Holt (AZ, CA, HI, NM, NV, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand)

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*Thank you to everyone who participated in our  
recent CUB Board of Directors election!*



# CUB 2022 RETREAT TAMPA, FLORIDA



Our CUB retreat was held in Tampa, Florida last October. It was a huge success, even though it was held a week after a major hurricane!

We had a fantastic line up of speakers. Thank you, Renee Gelin, Kathryn Joyce, Christopher Emanuel, Leslie Mackinnon, Kara Rubenstein Deyerin, Candace Cahill, Cathryn Vogeley, Macy Oosthuizen, and Marcie Keithley. We appreciate your coming and sharing your time and expertise with us. We also enjoyed the film *Daughter of a Lost Bird* on Friday night, followed by a Q & A with reunited mother April Kowalski. If you missed this excellent film, we are told that it can be streamed on PBS. On Saturday night, we were treated to a live performance written and directed by Suzanne Bachner entitled *The Good Adoptee*. We received many rave reviews for this performance. We highly recommend it! We were also able to view a trailer of the new film *All You Have is Love: Demand, Deception, and the Infant Adoption Industry* by Lisa Scott. This film is currently in production and may be available to view in late 2023. We can't tell you how excited we are to see this film in its entirety! It looks amazing and we are all looking forward to its release.

We concluded the retreat with a lovely brunch on the lawn overlooking Tampa Bay. In fact, all our meals were outdoors on the lawn, and we enjoyed this feature of the retreat very much. We are going to try to replicate outdoor dining at future retreats. Our next retreat will be held in Los Angeles in October 2023. The exact date and location will be announced in the spring, so stay tuned for future announcements.

Finally, thank you to all our amazing retreat committee members who worked so hard to put this retreat together: Betsey Holt, Committee Chair, Julia MacDonnell Chang, Patty Collins, Ann Criswell, Pat Glisky, Eileen McQuade, Leslie Mackinnon, and Deborah Myers.

Your hard work made this wonderful retreat possible!

*Thank you!*



Low-pile carpet in a non-descript shade of grey and generic black vinyl stackable chairs are arranged in a circle. The hotel conference room has been cordoned off with an accordion-style divider creating three separate spaces, and in this one, almost two dozen people sit facing each other. Boxes of Kleenex are scattered throughout on the few empty chairs between us.

The woman with the water bottle (*we all have water bottles*) across from me shares that being in this space feels surreal. And the woman with the painted toenails (*we all have painted toenails*) says she felt cornered as a young woman. Heads nod in unison, and someone passes a box of Kleenex to her. Then the woman with the hidden scars (*we all have hidden scars*) voices what we all feel: she feels safe, at home, and accepted in this space.

*I am all these women.*

I find pieces of myself in their stories, their memories, in the ruthless pain of loss and exquisite joy of reunion.

Those who've been here before enter with equanimity and surrender in a way they can only do here, in this protected space. Those new to the experience may be sharing their story for the first time in ten, twenty, or thirty years.

*Or ever.*

Some of us felt shamed and coerced and gaslit into believing we weren't enough. *Never enough.* And some felt we were to blame. *All my fault.* Some are angry and others in shock. There are those who are merely resigned.

Everyone understands.

And for some, for perhaps the first time, they didn't have to take a deep breath and brace themselves before answering the question: do you have children?

*We all know.*

We're flawed and scarred and afraid and bold and beautiful and wish to scream and fear to cry.

What does it mean to go to a CUB retreat?

Solidarity

Comfort

Knowing

There is an unimagined magnitude of relief of stepping into a room where no explanation is needed: where I can skip the formalities and dive into the abyss.

No longer alone.

But together.

*~candace cahill*

# Amazing Presentations!



# Incredible Connections!



# All You Have Is Love: Demand, Deception, and the Infant Adoption Industry

## *A documentary film by Lisa Elaine Scott*

Participants at the 2022 CUB Retreat had the unique opportunity to learn about a new documentary currently in production. Video journalist and Adoptee Lisa Elaine Scott joined via Zoom to share details of the film and preview the trailer-in-progress. **All You Have Is Love** exposes the intentional coercion used by the domestic infant adoption industry to persuade women to relinquish their babies.



Renee Gelin of Saving Our Sisters (SOS) and Katie Burns of The Family Preservation Project, and many CUB members are busy working behind the scenes to propel this important film to completion. Please check out the website to get more information, view new videos, and learn how you can contribute to this very important, exciting, and timely project.

[allyouhaveislove.com](http://allyouhaveislove.com)

### ALL YOU HAVE IS LOVE

Demand, Deception, and  
the Infant Adoption Industry



A Documentary Film by  
Lisa Elaine Scott

**All You Have Is Love** explores the challenges of an unexpected pregnancy and examines how adoption professionals use deceptive tactics to convince women that their children are better off being raised in an adoptive family. Through interviews with birth family members, industry professionals, and reform advocates, this documentary film reveals the adoption process that so often exploits expectant mothers. **All You Have Is Love** identifies the entities involved in the industry, exposes the misconceptions and mistruths of "open" adoption, and presents and evaluates proposed regulations and reforms.

To make a tax deductible contribution, please send a check to

Saving Our Sisters

3834 Morgons Castle Ct.

Land O Lakes, FL 34648

Please put "for film" in the memo

*I kept being told that my daughter was going to have a better life. They said "you don't have anything. All you have is love."*

-Katie Burns, The Family Preservation Project

*Over time – sometimes in as little as a year – the mothers' circumstances improve and they could parent, but guess what, it's too late because legally their rights have been severed.*

-Leslie Pate Mackinnon, L.C.S.W.

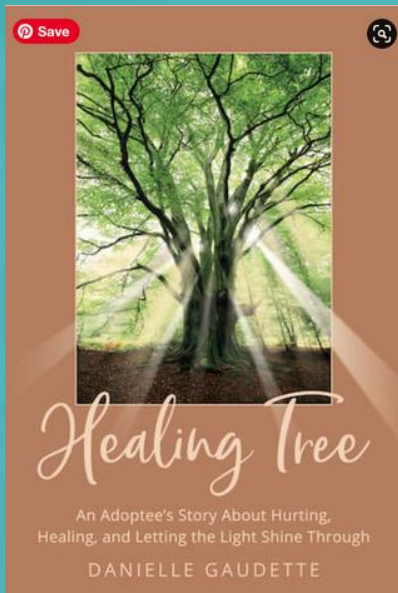
*As I got farther along in my pregnancy, the agency was more invested in me financially because their goal was to leave with an infant to give to someone else.*

-Jasmin Taylor, L.M.T., Business Owner

*Adoption is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.*

-Betsy Holt, Concerned United Birthparents

## Healing Tree: An Adoptee's Story about Hurting, Healing, and Letting the Light Shine Through



At once a heartfelt memoir and a guide to self-awareness, *Healing Tree* offers a passionate exploration of self, family, and what it means to be whole. Rooted in her twenty-year practice in Body & Brain holistic mind/body techniques, Danielle offers an approachable eight-step method for anyone wishing to heal from emotional or psychological wounds. This method invites readers to cultivate a loving relationship with their authentic selves and charts a pathway to inner peace.

For anyone who feels stuck, hurt, or rudderless in the sea of life, for anyone interested in doing the deep work of self-healing, becoming liberated, and realizing the potential to heal beyond themselves, *Healing Tree* is a source of direction, inspiration, and hope.

## Goodbye Again: A Memoir Adoption, Loss, Healing

Candace lost her son. Twice. The first time to adoption and the second not long after reuniting with him. In this heart-wrenching and heart-warming memoir, Candace Cahill offers an intimate view of child relinquishment and child loss, the definition of motherhood, and how two things can be true at one time.

*"This book is utterly generous, completely engaging, and speaks to anyone who has experienced grief of any sort.*

*You don't need to be a parent, an adopted child, or someone who has given up or lost a child to find value in this book. Candace beautifully lays out her story and experiences in the most honest, revealing way and offers everyone an opportunity to heal through empathy and compassion. This is a story of love and forgiveness on many levels. Her story is so unreal you could easily forget that it is nonfiction. I could not put it down once I started."*





# THANK YOU.



## You made a difference!

*"Phenomenal. Astounding. Extraordinary."*

Sharing life experiences can be the hardest thing one can do--especially when we speak on a topic that directly impacts us and goes against the grain of the mainstream or public opinion. On behalf of my sister and me and Against Child Trafficking overseas, I need to tell you how deeply appreciative we are of your willingness to share your adoption experience. We know it can be completely devastating at times, and we hope that you have or can find some peace from all that you have survived. Please know that we have "been there," and we hope that we can be with you --at the very least, in heart and mind while we all process the loss and grief of separation, as well as the hope for reunification and peace. Please know that you've made a difference! Your Life Matters. ~ Janine Vance

*"And most definitely INSPIRING."*



Much appreciation, (middle)  
Rev. Dr. Janine Vance, Philosophy  
Executive Director | ACT USA

Jenette Yamamoto (Vance)  
Boardmember | ACT USA  
Event Planner

Arun Dohle | Executive Director  
Against Child Trafficking | Europe



# WHAT WE DID:



## What People Are Saying:

*"Arun's presentation was amazing."*

*"Nabs talking about volunteer tourism of orphanages fueling the industry."*

*"The loss of cultural identity hit me."*

### What's next:

An Investigative Report into Harry Holt's Adoption Program Korea 1954. The results of this report will help us strengthen fellow activists, our allies and attorneys when fighting for the return of children

### Donate Here:

**(please direct funds to be used for the report)**

<https://usa.againstchildtrafficking.org/donate/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/donate/520874723396261/>

*"I am a birth father, and I have never been in an environment with other people with similar stories."*

*"Loved hearing the stories of adoptees from different countries."*

*"I am aware of the international side, but was moved to hear about how mothers and fathers in the USA are impacted."*

*The symposium was an incredibly liberating experience for me. I no longer feel the loneliness I previously felt in my and my sibling's adoption experience. Previously it seemed there was just something unlucky about us, and that everyone else got wonderful adoptive homes. And I'm soo glad I don't have to feel like the bad guy for NOT being grateful for being adopted."*

*"Attendees described the Adoption Trafficking Awareness Symposium as an event full of hope, healing, connection, fun, amazing people, awareness, meaningful, impactful, power, courage, success in truth, and transparency."*



**We made history together.**



## Adoption Trafficking Awareness Symposium Follow-Up

Hi friends, **Janine Vance** here. I'm the Executive Director of Against Child Trafficking (ACT) in the USA and Program Director of our June event held at the Washington State History Museum. The first thing I need to say is that the summer weekend was phenomenal.

**We at Against Child Trafficking want to thank you, CUB MEMBERS, for participating, attending, and supporting us.**

### Why a Symposium?

I believe an aware and informed community is a protected community. It never ceases to astound me how adoption has impacted and divided families long after the "child placement" occurred. Repair is almost impossible. As an adopted person, I know that I tended to believe whatever I had been most influenced by, which, as you know, were my adoptive parents. The problem is that the adoption lobby and special-interest groups have been speaking for adoptees and mothers since the setup of the intercountry child welfare system. The lobby has claimed that mothers are "drug addicts" or "young and delinquent" and assumed to be "unwilling" to care for their children. Mothers overseas are accused of abandoning their "unwanted" babies on the streets practically by the cartloads. After years of research, we at ACT are repeatedly discovering that such accusations are false. Many parents have been searching for their children for decades. Some children have been kidnapped from their families! But adoptive parents are the ones who have been given the authority to either influence what we say in private or speak for all of us at the highest levels of government. Time for a change. It is absolutely necessary to protect local and global families from the crisis of adoption trafficking. (The panelists are listed at [USA.AgainstChildTrafficking.org](http://USA.AgainstChildTrafficking.org). We thank you!)

### Where Do We Go From Here?

I will also be compiling an investigational report into the activities of Harry Holt's Korean Adoption Program, set up in 1954, while collaborating with Arun Dohle, Executive Director and field investigator of Against Child Trafficking NL, who will provide even more insight into the Perverse Effects of the Hague Adoption Convention. With this material, we will be able to develop additional training on the crisis, strengthen attorneys to better protect children against sale and commercialization, protect families severed by adoption, and even establish laws against adoption trafficking in the US. All are stepping stones to better protecting families and holding traffickers accountable. (You might have already seen the September 30th Register-Guard news announcing the president and CEO of Holt International Children's Services resigned. Many adult adoptees believe the CEO's resignation sends the message that he knows the company has violated children's rights and exploited mothers, fathers, and families worldwide. It is also interesting to note that Bethany Christian Services voluntarily relinquished its accreditation to provide intercountry adoption services, effective February 11, 2022.)

## A Collaboration with Against Child Trafficking in Europe?

I feel very fortunate to have been able to learn about child rights from Arun Dohle since the old yahoo groups of decades past before social media. I've been an advocate for a very long time and it's one of the reasons I invited Arun to give the keynote presentation on the Intersection Between Child Trafficking and Intercountry Adoption at the summer symposium. Arun searched for his Indian mother for 17 years and fought a legal struggle at India's Supreme Court level, resulting in a landmark case in 2010, allowing access to his adoption file and has since reunited more than 75 Indian families. Trafficked by adoption from India to Germany in 1973, Arun understands the psychology of the intercountry adoptee at a very deep level. He is empathetic and has also assisted parents of kidnapped children in India, Ethiopia, and Malawi.

In an effort to protect families, we at ACT USA also believe the voices of mothers from the United States should be heard at the highest levels of government if at all possible. **Wouldn't it be awe-inspiring for a team of US mothers to participate in the second symposium in Brussels, Belgium of Europe, in 2023 or 2024?** We also know that this could be difficult and would require much funding. Let's all cross our fingers that all of us together can make something profound happen!

## Finally, Good News.

**We just got news this week that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will proceed with an investigation!** My sister and I were adopted in 1972 from Seoul, South Korea. It was claimed on our adoption documents that we had been found on a street, similar to numerous others like us from Korea. (Hence the title of my memoir: *Twins Found in a Box*). Although Holt did not provide proof, we accepted what they typed in our adoption file as "fact" with no hesitation throughout our lives. But we began to suspect differently in 2004. A few months ago, a fellow Korean-born adoptee from Denmark submitted a request for an investigation into the adoptions on behalf of more than 300 of us; some adopted via the Holt Adoption Program. Actually, this is great news!

## People I Need to Thank:

I need to thank my sister, Jenette (of *Vance Twins*), for bringing domestic, overseas, and transracial adoptees, parents, and families together from our forum, Adoption Truth and Transparency Worldwide Information Network (*ATTWN*); it was six months of nonstop communication, collaboration and coordination on her part, and the symposium would not have been as successful as it was without her taking the lead as the event planner.

And last but not least, I need to thank **CUB members:** Amy Barker D'Alessandro and Jennifer Joy Phoenix, the moderators of the "Adoptee" and "Parent" panels. They worked with my sister and me consistently for months as the Fab Four, and we can all agree that the discussion results went phenomenal. We at ACT appreciate their dedication to ensure that fellow panelists could comfortably address the unacknowledged life-long burdens many of us in the adoption constellation have been forced to face throughout our lives.

Hope we meet again!

Janine Vance (Myung Ja)

Author of *Adoption: What You Should Know*  
(now on [audiobook](#))

# 2022 Adoptee Rights Round-Up

THREE STATES PASSED ADOPTEE RIGHTS BILLS

## Equality Reached

Louisiana



Massachusetts



Vermont



The 2022 legislative season saw a wonderful sweep of equality in what was the most accelerated year ever on record for adoptee rights bills. In Louisiana and Massachusetts, mothers from the forced adoption era spoke up heavily and were cited as key components to getting both bills across the finish line. With Vermont's success this year and Connecticut's last year, all New England states have officially restored rights to adult adopted persons to receive a copy of their original birth certificates.



2023 State to watch: TEXAS

## Parents' Rights

### Kruithoff v. Catholic Charities West Michigan

We joined a small coalition of adoption nonprofits to file an [amicus brief](#) in the case of Baby Boy Doe (i.e. Kruithoff, Petitioner v Catholic Charities West Michigan et al). The case concerned the Constitutionality of Michigan's Safe Delivery of Newborns Law and was before the United States Supreme Court on Petition for a Writ of Certiorari.

At the heart of the case was a non-surrendering parent who has been fighting for his child for four years. But this case is about more than just one family. This case was about a system of laws that purportedly help birth/first parents in distress by giving them an option for a quicker, easier voluntary release, but fail to note that in doing so, they are waiving Due Process reclamation protections that they would otherwise have. It is about a system of laws that gives overwhelming power to private adoption agencies, the power to whisk a newborn away without any genuine chance for either parent (even the mother) to reclaim their child.

The case was denied by SCOTUS so they will not hear it. However, we commend the petitioner's counsel for organizing the coalition and filing the brief.

The petition and other case information can be found online here:

- [Petition and first appendix](#)
- [Appendix, Volume II](#)
- [Complete docket information](#)

## Episcopal Church Apology Effort

The screenshot shows the 'VIRTUAL BINDER Resolutions' page for 'Resolution D074'. The title is 'D074 Examine the Complicity of The Episcopal Church in Facilitating Forced Adoptions'. The page lists four resolutions:

- Resolved, That the 80th General Convention of The Episcopal Church acknowledges the forced adoption era, which is defined as the time between the end of World War II through 1972 when single pregnant women were sequestered in maternity homes, many of which coerced them to surrender their children for adoption; run by The Episcopal Church; and be it further
- Resolved, that the 80th General Convention of The Episcopal Church acknowledges the emotional and psychological pain caused by these forced adoptions, and the emotional, psychological, and sometimes, physical abuse inflicted on these mothers and their children, most of whom were forcefully isolated from family, friends and society; and be it further
- Resolved, that the 80th General Convention of the Episcopal Church requests the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church appoint a working group to study the historical and current relationship of The Episcopal Church to the forced relinquishment and adoption of infants born to unwed mothers during the years between approximately 1945 to 1975, in order to achieve greater clarity on their respective role, responsibility and authority; and be it further
- Resolved, that this working group investigates The Episcopal Church's complicity, including its

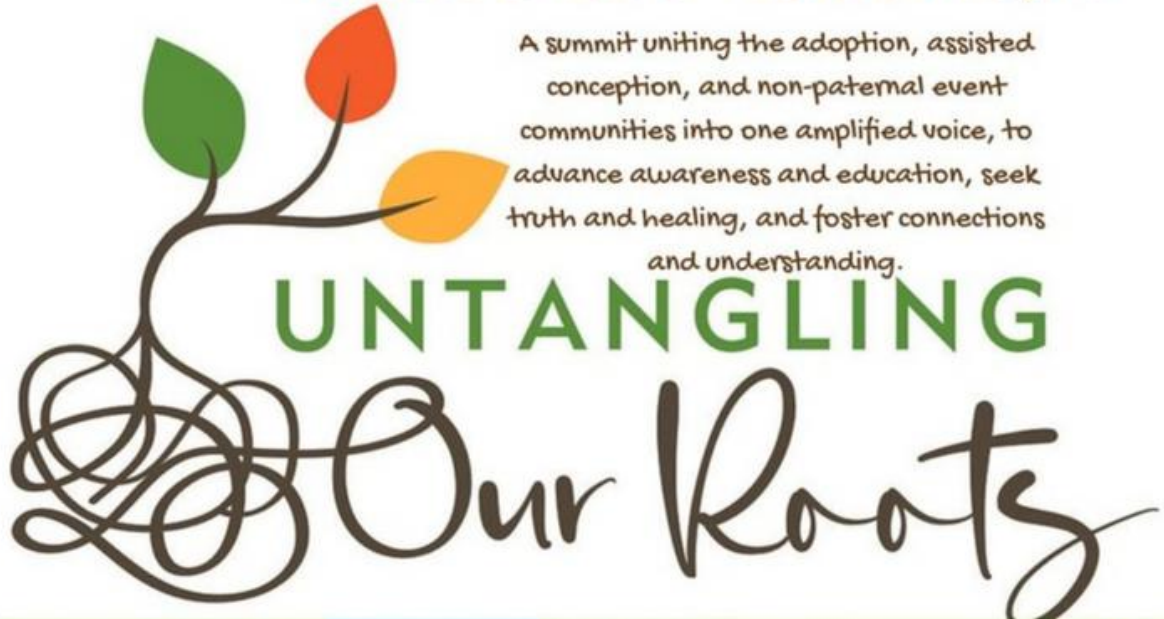
Additional details on the right side of the page include: Final Status: Concurred with Referral to an Interim Body; Current Status: Complete; Latest Committee Recommendation: Concur with Referral to an Interim Body; Latest House Action: Held Awaiting Concurrence with Referral to an Interim Body; Committee: 13 - Committees & Commissions; Proposed by: Mr. Alan Murray; Endorsed by: The Rev. José Rodríguez Sanguino and The Rev. Daniel Robayo.

**UPDATE:** Some of our members have been working hard to get what we hope to be the first American apology to mothers and families separated by forced adoption. The highest governing body at The Episcopal Church is listening! They have passed a formal resolution to examine their complicity in forced adoptions. [Click here to read it in full.](#) By this time next year, they will have formed a truth-telling process for women and families to come forward with their stories. We hope to see a formal apology in the future!

GET INVOLVED!

# March 30 – April 1, 2023 Marriott East – Louisville, KY

A summit uniting the adoption, assisted conception, and non-paternal event communities into one amplified voice, to advance awareness and education, seek truth and healing, and foster connections and understanding.



NAAPUNITED.ORG

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ADOPTEEES & PARENTS  
EDUCATE - ELEVATE - EMPOWER

RIGHT TO KNOW

323-TALK-MPE  
www.RightToKnow.us

**CUB Communicator**  
MAY 2022 SPRING EDITION

**Mother's Day Articles & Poetry:**

- "A Haiku for Mothers" by Jennifer Joy Phoenix
- "Love in Three Parts" by Barbara Bazett & Vicky Graham
- "Tabu" by Patti Sullivan
- "Can I Opt Out?: When Mother's Day is Just Too Much" by Amy Barker D'Alessandro
- "Mother's Day - A Bittersweet Holiday" by Candace Cahill
- "Ireland Pledges \$900 Million to Unmarried Mothers After Mass Grave of Babies Discovered" by Julia MacDonnell Chang
- "Mother's Day" by Tami Hawley
- "Mother Power: We didn't know our own strength" by Eileen McQuade

**News in this Edition:**

- CUB Zoom Support Group

Welcome again to the newly styled newsletter! All you have to do is click to turn the page!

*Honoring All Mothers*

This edition of the newsletter is dedicated to honoring all the mothers in our community. We understand that Birth Mother's Day and Mother's Day can be difficult for so many of us in the Adoption Constellation, but remember, you are not alone! In the pages that follow, you will hear from other mothers who have transformed their deepest grief and pain into beautiful expressions of honor to their motherhood.

**A HAIKU FOR MOTHERS**

*Hand on heart, inhale  
Wild permissions granted now  
Eskale shame this day*

- Jennifer Joy Phoenix



## JOIN THE CUB EDITORIAL TEAM

Harness your passion for advocacy and reform by joining our Editorial Team! We need writers and content creators for all CUB media outlets. If interested, contact Amy at: [editor@concernedunitedbirthparents.org](mailto:editor@concernedunitedbirthparents.org)

## VOICES OF ADOPTION ON TIKTOK

Join journalist, Adoptee, and CUB member, Amanda Kari McHugh, on Voices of Adoption on TikTok where she is "complicating the adoption narrative." Get involved and have your voice be heard!

## CUB 2023 RETREAT SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Don't miss the next amazing CUB Retreat in October 2023 in Southern California. More details to follow on the CUB Facebook page or CUB website, so keep checking in for more info. Hope to see you there!