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Adopting a Child

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HONORS PROJECT
ON
ADOPTING A CHILD

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ADOPTING A CHILD

Thesis: The joys of being an adoptive parent are no less than if one had given birth to his own child.

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ADOPTING A CHILD

Adoption is the method through which people become parents legally rather than biologically. Yet, the joys of being an adoptive parent are no less than if one had given birth to his own child.¹

Adoption is serious and for that reason most child care experts feel that the best way to adopt a child is through a licensed child placement agency. The social worker with a licensed agency takes time to assist both the natural and adoptive parents in reaching their decisions. The child's and parent's best interests are considered.²

Training, experience and a great deal of careful investigation are required to match babies and homes successfully, to select the families that can give the children the most love and security, to save the real mother from a lifetime of feeling guilty for having given up her baby and to protect the adoptive parents from the threat of having her haunt or snatch away the child they have grown to love.³

There is a baby shortage for the white parents who are going to agencies seeking a Caucasain baby. Today for the first time, a growing number of agencies have simply stopped accepting applications for normal white infants. Adoption workers point to three social changes as reasons for the current acute shortage of white infants: 1) Every year more and more couples have been turning to adoption agencies. 2) The prevalence of birth control and the availability of abortion have cut down the numbers of white children who might have come up for adoption. 3) There is a very marked trend for unwed mothers to keep their babies.⁴

The most worrisome aspect of the current white-baby shortage is the possibility that the black market will pick up again. The black market involves a procurer who pays for an unmarried mother's expenses and also pays her a fee for her baby. He then contacts his "waiting

couple". They pay the agreed price. Finally, if all goes well, the couple adopts the baby through the courts.

Other couples who are unable to find a child of their choice through an agency may turn to the "gray" market.⁵ This procedure was formerly known as independent adoption and is usually arranged by a well-meaning doctor, lawyer, clergyman, or someone else in a position to bring together families and babies. There are no placement checks or counseling involved. There are many risks unforeseen in these arrangements. Among these risks are physical and mental defects which may not show up in a child at birth. Agencies believe the infants should be under medical and psychological observation for at least three months before they are considered adoptable. But such precautions rarely trouble the gray marketeers who bring together a "healthy normal baby" and a "kind family" with no more apprehension than as if they were introducing friends.

However, it is not only to assure adoptive parents of getting healthy normal children that agencies frown upon virtually snatching infants from the delivery room. They feel that no unmarried mother shortly after childbirth is in any condition to be sure what is best for her child or even what she really wants to do. There must be time for her to regain her strength, to work through her emotional problems, to talk alternate plans over with a skilled sympathetic counselor.⁶

Since a properly arranged adoption can be made as safe and fruitful as it is possible for anything to be in this world, why do people take chances and patronize the gray market? One reason is ignorance, another is impatience. But the main reason the gray market is so well patronized is that agencies are so besieged with applications and so short of babies. One agency that placed only a hundred and seventy-five babies last year has a thousand applications in its file.⁷

The shortage of babies, however, is as much an effect of gray marketing as a cause. The more babies that pass through the gray market the fewer there are for agencies. The gray market-- secret, permeated with amiability and kindly intentions, unmercenary-- is the root of most adoption evils.⁸

~~Recognized~~ agencies are not infallible; no human agency is infallible. But chances of failure are lessened if the goal is clear and if every possible precaution is taken.⁹ By writing the State Department of Public Welfare a list of licensed or approved agencies may be obtained. These are very reliable agencies.¹⁰

The recognized agency has only one purpose. It may be stated abstractly as the purpose of lessening human unhappiness. It may be stated concretely as the purpose of bringing together, under the most nearly ideal conditions possible, the homeless child and the childless adults. It may be stated as the purpose of creating new homes out of the failure of old ones.¹¹

There are three types of adoptive family situations. The first is the ideal American family consisting of an adopting couple searching for a child to look like them.¹² This is the most common situation. The child is matched to his adoptive parents by careful comparisons of mental capacity, race, age, and religion. The second form is when prospective parents look for a child that is totally different from themselves. During periods of war or a major catastrophe this occurs frequently. Both of these adoptions emphasize the parental choice of a child.¹³

The third type of adoptive family situations emphasized the child's need for a home. Most people believe that "one parent is better than none." The ideal family certainly includes both mother and father, but even with natural parents there is no guarantee that both will live to see the child educated. In many instances the natural parent is not

to see the child educated. In many instances the natural parent is not a fit parent or may not put the child's welfare first. Therefore, one parent, married or single, who is really interested and concerned would be better than none.¹⁴ The central consideration is provision of a home for a child who would otherwise have none. For many children, any home where they are welcome and can hope for understanding of their lives-- with a single woman, aging or less than ideal parents, adult brother or sister-- offers a kind of security that they may never otherwise have been fortunate enough to receive.¹⁵

Though single-parent adoption is better than no parent at all, it takes a very special person, male or female, to succeed emotionally, physically, and monetarily. Each case has to be studied from the viewpoint of both the child and the prospective parent. And, as with everything else new, those who are first will have a harder time than those who follow.¹⁶

The qualifications for adoption are the same for single women as for a married couple with two additional requirements. Assuming that the single woman will be working in order to support herself and the child, she must have a good plan for child care. Secondly, agencies look for a close relationship between the single woman and her family. This way the child will grow up knowing aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. A warm family relationship with relatives close by can be the most important deciding factor in whether or not a single woman can adopt a child.

Interracial adoption is also possible, but the motivation of the adoptive parent is closely scrutinized. You must have had contact and experience with other races before, be mature enough and strong to withstand pressure that will be put on you from your family and society. And most of all you must be sure of the reasons why you want to adopt

a child of another race.

Motivation of a single adult for any type of adoption is suspect. Many agencies feel that single women adopt out of loneliness and not out of love. If by chance a single woman decides to get married before the adoption of a child is final, the whole process is halted and starts all over again.

Procedure followed for adoption is similar at all adoption agencies. After the initial contact, the agency prepares a home study report on the prospective parent. This usually consists of three interviews; one in the agency office and two at home. These interviews are to determine motivation, maturity, sensitivity, flexibility, and sense of responsibility of the prospective parent. Also required is a physical examination. The home study report takes about three months. If you are approved now comes the ~~short or long~~ waiting period-- depending on what type of child you want, the availability of the child, and how the agency matches you and the child.

The fee for adoption varies from agency to agency.

After being matched with a child and given permission to take the child to your home for a trial adoptive period of at least six months, the time comes for the adoption to be finalized. A lawyer is necessary to go to court (approximate cost is from \$250-\$500) so you can obtain permanent custody.¹⁷

During the past few years, most American adoption agencies have been working especially with the hard-to-place children-- the unwanted grade-school-age youngsters, the black or interracial babies, the infants with correctible handicaps, or with severe disabilities.¹⁸

It is estimated that as many as 287,000 children are living away from their homes in the foster homes that replaced old-fashioned orphanages, and perhaps 40,000 of these are labeled "unlikely to be ad-

opted."¹⁹ These are children who something wrong with them. They are either mentally retarded, emotionally unstable, or have a physical handicap. In most cases deformed or diseased children are not placed for adoption.²⁰

For the children available for adoption, the foster homes are not used only for children who will return to their parents in time, but also as a halfway house by the adoption agencies where the children stay until they go to their permanent adoption homes. While they are in the boarding homes they can be observed, their emotional reactions noted, and bad habits can often be eliminated. This way the agency knows before the child is offered for adoption just what this individual is like and what kind of home he needs.²¹

The foster home is a private home where there is always a mother and generally a father. These boarding parents often give the children their first taste of what it means to live in an affectionate home. Children need the warmest and gentlest care when they have just lost their own homes.²²

These foster homes must be clean, have lots of room, and there can not be more than six children in the home. The foster child must be treated as a family member. The mother cannot have a job outside of the home. This is to provide the foster mother with time for helping and caring for her child.²³

As the age of the child increases, his chance for adoption decreases. Most people want a baby. Yet, the demand for babies far exceeds the number available for adoption. The largest number of adoptable children available are between two and six years old.²⁴

It is harder when adopting an older child because he may have acquired a strong feeling of insecurity and may sense, if not actually realize, that he has been rejected and cast off.²⁵ It is always a

problem for a child to be subjected to excessive criticism and unjustified disapproval. The possibility that such problems might arise are diminished when a child is adopted. The adoption makes him socially and legally a family member, with all the "rights and privileges." The knowledge that he is a member of a socially acceptable family is reassuring to any child.²⁶

An agency never lets natural and adoptive parents know each other's identity or whereabouts, much less meet. This may seem a cruel injustice to the real mother. But actually it is the kindest solution, the only one which leaves her free to make a clean break with her past and reorganize her life and emotions constructively and afresh. For the adoptive family too it means security and peace.²⁷

The adoptive parents do not get any information about their child's personality, health, or mental capacity. The information about the child is kept at the State Welfare office and is accessible to the child at any time.²⁸

Before applying for a child the parents must be at least twenty-one years old. The agency then plans at least four interviews with the couple. Also during this period of interrogation, the workers make sure that the prospective parents plan to tell the child that he is adopted.²⁹ It is generally agreed that it is unlikely that an adopted child can grow up without finding out he is adopted.

Adoptive parents tend to think that if the child is aware that he is adopted he will never have the same love for them as he would have for his natural parents. This is an error based on the fallacy that there is some magic that binds parent and child together irrespective of everything else.³⁰

There is no such thing as "natural love." Love comes from proximity and as a return for love. The child has no love for parents

in the abstract. The love given to a child by its adoptive parents will call forth as real a response as any ties of blood could do. The feeling between an adopted child and his adoptive parents will be what the parents make it. The future is up to them.³¹

It may take time and effort to build up a happy relationship; it will not happen in a few days or a few weeks. Both parent and child need to get acquainted, to grow close to one another in understanding and affection. Patience is always required of those who want children. Perhaps it is necessary for those who would attain anything rare and valuable, and special.³²

No adoption, in private or otherwise, is completed until six months after the child has been placed for trial adoption. It is during this time that the child and parents try to function as a whole to see if it would work out on a permanent basis. The child lives in the home and acts as a family member during this period.³³

After the parents have decided on the child, the adoptive family employs a lawyer of their selection who draws up a petition to the court for adoption. If the child is obtained through the State Welfare agency the only fee paid during the proceedings will be approximately \$300 to the lawyer. The parents and child must appear in court before the judge. The judge does not need to question them at great length because the information on the adoptive home is supplied by the agency.³⁴

No child is forced to live with a family. The purpose of an adoption agency is to find a home for a child, not a child for a home. Yet, children are seldom removed from homes they have been placed in, and then only if very serious situations arise.³⁵

Formal legal adoption is usually concluded in court about six months to one year after the child has been with his new parents. With

legal adoption he becomes an own child in the eyes of the law, has the inheritance and other rights of an own child and the adopting parents assume all responsibility for him. The adoptive agency discontinues all services for the child in a formal sense, and it is up to the adopting parents to give the child a loving home and that kind of understanding which will help him to become a responsible member of society.³⁶

Love, understanding, sensitivity, emotional health, sense of responsibility, maturity, and financial stability are necessities when raising a child. Since adopted children are deprived of their own families they deserve every advantage the selection can give them, especially as there are so many more people wanting to adopt a child than children available for adoption. And similarly, since adoptive parents miss out on some of the joys of natural parenthood, at least they should be spared some of the natural risks.³⁷

FOOTNOTES

¹Every Child Needs a Home, Adoptive Services, Oklahoma Department of Institutions, Social and Rehabilitative Services (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 5.

²When You Adopt a Child, Children's Bureau, folder number 13-1965 (Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office, 1969), p. 5.

³Edith M. Stern, "Gray-Market Babies", Reprint of an article in Woman's Home Companion (Little Rock: Arkansas Child Welfare Division), p. 1.

⁴Mary Smith, "Adoption Shortage Called Acute," McCalls, Vol. 98 (September, 1971), 41.

⁵Ibid., p. 42.

⁶Stern, op. cit., p. 3.

⁷Ibid., p. 5.

⁸Ibid., p. 6.

⁹Francis Lockridge, Adopting a Child (New York: Greenberg, 1948), p. 9.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 3.

¹¹Ibid., p. 9.

¹²"Single Women Permitted to Adopt," Red Book, 131 (January 1968), 37.

¹³Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁴Florence Rondell and Ruth Michaels, The Adopted Family (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1965), p. 15.

¹⁵"Single Women Permitted to Adopt," op. cit., p. 37.

¹⁶Rondell and Michaels, op. cit., p. 16.

¹⁷Lucy Koster, "Some Things You Should Know About Adopting a Child if you are Single," Mademoiselle, Vol. 76 (December, 1972), 136.

¹⁸Smith, op. cit., p. 42.

¹⁹Betty Dunn, "A Family of His Own," Life (December 17, 1971), 140.

²⁰Michael Aronson, "Child Adoption," The American Peoples Encyclopedia, 1953 ed., V, 298-299.

²¹Lockridge, op. cit., p. 26.

²²Ibid., p. 25.

23 Virginia, Franklin, Interview at the State Adoptive Service in Tulsa, Oklahoma, March, 1972.

24 Koster, op. cit., p. 137.

25 Lockridge, op. cit., p. 79.

26 Rondell and Michaels, op. cit., p. 79.

27 Stern, op. cit., p. 5.

28 Franklin, op. cit., p. 5.

29 Ibid.

30 Lockridge, op. cit., p. 154.

31 Ibid., p. 48.

32 Ibid., p. 49.

33 Franklin, op. cit.

34 Ibid., op. cit.

35 Ibid.

36 Lockridge, op. cit., p. 118.

37 Koster, op. cit., p. 137.

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