

What Is The Process Of Attachment And Loss That  
A Birth Mother Goes Through When She Feels  
Pressured To Relinquish Her Infant



Gaye Wein-Shepard





WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF ATTACHMENT AND SEPARATION  
THAT A BIRTH MOTHER GOES THROUGH  
WHEN SHE FEELS PRESSURED TO RELINQUISH HER INFANT

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CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE FOR CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK  
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by

Gaye Wein-Shepard

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WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF ATTACHMENT AND LOSS  
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## ABSTRACT

WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF ATTACHMENT AND LOSS THAT A BIRTH MOTHER GOES THROUGH WHEN SHE FEELS PRESSURED TO RELINQUISH HER INFANT. THIS STUDY EXPLORED THE BIRTH MOTHER'S SELF REFLECTIONS BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER RELINQUISHMENT. THE FOCUS WAS ON HER FEELINGS OF ATTACHMENT AND LOSS TO HER INFANT AND TO HER MOTHER.

by

Gaye Wein-Shepard

This retrospective, exploratory and qualitative study explored the birth mother's feelings about herself from the time prior to pregnancy up to the present in an effort to understand her process of attachment and separation, what may have helped or hindered her post relinquishment adjustment, and the effects relinquishment has had on her feelings about herself.

Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted with four selected birth mothers who had relinquished their infants over 20 years ago.

Three main implications came out of my study. 1) The birth mother's difficulties in separation from the relinquished child seem to be related to her level of independence at the time of relinquishment, which in turn may be related to her difficulties in separation from her own mother. 2) The birth mother's perception of her relationship with her own mother may be a determining factor in

how the birth mother handled the overall relinquishment process. 3) <sup>2</sup>

An enduring tie can be formed in the womb.

The results of this study clearly indicate that relinquishment is an event of life-long significance and that the personal meaning of the event is determined by each woman's own unique perspective.

This study can serve to heighten psychotherapist's awareness that the process for relinquishing birth mothers must take into account the individuality of each birth mother and the complexity of the factors, especially her working models formed by early attachment figures, that shape her pre-, as well as post-relinquishment feelings and functioning.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a profound experience to have finished my dissertation and to sit back and reflect on the many who have influenced this rite of passage. At this moment, I feel the glorious freedom of not having to conform to a set of guidelines, the necessity to do a scholarly work, as I offer thanks to the many who have supported my professional work and thus my personal growth.

My study would not have been undertaken except for my interest in the adoption arena and my beloved children, Amy and Mark Shepard. My gratitude to the four birth mothers who opened up their hearts to me as they shared their life experiences with an openness that profoundly touched me.

My ideas were able to bare fruit due to the dedication of my chair, Alexis Selwood, M.S.W., Ph.D., who endured many hours when I floundered, always with consistent good will and a belief that the task could be accomplished in an orderly manner. She was a responsive teacher who helped me to conceptualize my work within the structure needed for our task. I believe that what emerged from our mutual work together was the dissertation, the idea I gave birth to, and the one we brought into maturity.

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The support I received reminds me of baking a cake. When I entered the school I could only bake a cake using a cake mix. There might be two or at the most three ingredients to mix. I never knew what was in the mix or why it worked. The dissertation was a similar and yet a different process. I now know what went into the mix as there were no short cuts. I provided the flour and the water. The school had the list of the ingredients needing to be added. The bowl was provided by my chair so that the work could be contained and nothing would be lost. She provided a wooden spoon and said to mix the ingredients over and over until it tasted right so it could be baked. She provided the oven to bake it in and I put it into the oven. While it cooked my friends helped me to patiently wait until it was done. Sometimes I took it out pre-maturely and it had to be put back in. Finally, the mix was right, and the cake came out perfectly. I was left with the task of letting it cool off until I could provide

the icing at my orals. There, my colleagues and friends could sample the finished product. It tasted real good. I was a proud baker.

It takes a village to raise a child and a community, such as the California Institute of Clinical Social Work, to raise a PhD. The school provided a nurturing and supportive environment for my personal and professional growth that has sustained me for over six years.

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## CHAPTER ONE: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

### Introduction

QUESTION: What is the process of attachment and loss that a birth mother goes through when she feels pressured to relinquish her infant? This study explored the birth mother's self reflections from the time before, during and after the relinquishment up to the present time. The focus was on her feelings of attachment and loss to her infant and to her mother.

### Statement of the Problem

Twenty years ago an unwed mother was encouraged to relinquish her infant for adoption. Little thought was given to the needs, feelings, and experience of the birth mother. Adoption was viewed as a way for the infertile couple to raise their own child and to provide for a homeless child. Studies have showed that many birth mothers, however, continue to suffer from symptoms, such as depression, psychosomatic complaints, anxiety, relationship difficulties, guilt, and low self-esteem up to 10 or more years after they had given up their infants (Pannor, Baran & Sorosky 1978; Burnell and Norfleet, 1979; Ryearson, 1982; Wrinkle & Van Keppel

1984; Rosenberg, Millen & Roll, 1985; Condon, 1986; Randon, 1986; Klauss 1988; Wrinkle, 1988).

Twenty years ago many birth mothers were shamed for becoming pregnant out of wedlock and strongly encouraged, at times almost coerced, into relinquishing their infants. They were told that relinquishing the child would be a simple solution to the problems that an unwed mother faced upon keeping the child, although we now know that the consequences of that relinquishment are in themselves complex problems. Recent research indicates that many birth mothers did not make a satisfactory post-relinquishment adjustment to losing infants (Pannor, Baran & Sorosky, 1978; Clapp, Roab, Lynes, 1980; Rosen, 1980; Rynearson, 1982; Mullen & Roll, 1985; Rosenberg, Millen & Roll 1985; Rando, 1986; Klauss, 1988; Wrinkle, 1988; Deykin, Campbell & Patti, 1984; Wrinkler & Keppel, 1988; Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990; Brown & Gediman, 1991).

More specifically, there is a sizable group of women who continue to experience psychological difficulties related to the fact they gave up their firstborn children (Sorosky, Baran, Pannor 1978 Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990; Brown & Gediman, 1991; Stiffler, 1992). In recent years birth mothers have publicly disclosed their private anguish. A growing body of research data supports the claim that relinquishment is a profound loss which many birth mothers have been unable adequately to resolve. These lasting negative effects of giving up their child for adoption have been documented by Rynearson (1982), Deykin et al. (1984), and Millen and Roll (1985). Still other studies document intense and enduring grief reactions manifested by depression and worry about the welfare of the

children with whom these mothers lost contact forever (Bowers & Fleck, 1976; Sorosky et al., 1978; Phipps-Yonas, 1980; Rynearson, 1983; Silverman, 1981; Deykin, Campbell, Patti, 1984; Swigar, Wrinkler & Van Keppel, 1984; and Condon, 1986). Today it is known from these studies that relinquishment has been a traumatic experience from which many women find it difficult to recover.

Relinquishment interrupts the process of attachment of the mother to the child which normally begins during pregnancy. The bond that forms between mother and child is for the mother a powerful concern and affection for the child she carried during pregnancy and cared for after its birth until she gave it up (Bowlby, 1979).

Motherhood for most women represents an intense personal experience and an intense personal investment of deep-seated emotions. When the birth mother loses her child, whether by death or separation (as in time of war) or through abortion or adoption, grieving must occur for emotional stasis to be re-established. In the case of birth mothers, grieving that leads to resolution is normally not achieved.

Studies indicate that maladaptive or simply incomplete grieving was common among birth mothers (Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1978; Wrinkler, Brown Keppel & Blanchard, 1981). Grieving, is especially difficult if the birth mother is burdened by guilt, feeling that because she decided to or agreed to relinquish her child, the consequences are her fault. These issues of resolution or its failure, and of the circumstances affecting resolution in each instance, are of great current interest, particularly because many

birth mothers suffer from burdensome consequences of separation many years later (Rynearson, 1982; Deykin, Campbell & Patti, 1984; Wrinkler, 1988). Despite this interest there has been very little research on how the disruption of the bond between the relinquishing mother and her firstborn child impacts the mother's behavior in relationships with others. This research investigated, in depth, the feelings, behavior and fantasies of the birth mother who was separated from her baby and now reflects on how this relinquishment has impacted her life.

### Significance of the Study

The problem is current and important in large measure because many women are burdened with problems that appear to stem from giving up their first children for adoption, problems that appear clearly related to imperfect or incomplete grieving processes. Many birth mothers in this situation have been found to suffer from mild to severe problems in establishing close relationships with others and to suffer from a constellation of difficulties which often continue for a number of years (Lewis 1971; Sorosky, Baran & Panor 1978; Roan 1988; and Rynearson 1982).

We know relinquishment is a problem for many birth mothers. Our work as clinicians, specifically in analytically oriented psychotherapy, aims at recovering memories and associating them with affect. When affect is repressed even when memories are accessible, or when affect is troublesome in the absence of memory, unwanted psychological consequences ensue. Where relinquishment

triggered the constellation of symptoms referred to above, but where the memory of the event has been deprived of the affect that engendered the subsequent problems, we must focus on the importance of that trauma in our efforts to help the birth mothers work through their sense of loss, accomplish the needed grief work, and express and hopefully resolve feelings of guilt associated with the trauma. We will be able to help people better and to help more of them by understanding the role of relinquishment trauma in the etiology of the psychological consequences. As our knowledge is improved and our insight deepened many patients will be better served.

In order to enrich our knowledge the life stories of the women in this study will give us more information and guide us to what is important to these women to help or hinder resolution. To this end, the study will be of significance to the clinical training of therapists to understand a loss - any loss. For example, our findings may have relevance to instances in which an irremediable loss, the loss of a limb, a breast or other body parts, may occur with similar consequences and without the needed grief work. Because of this investigation, birth mothers may be earlier identified as needing help and be given therapeutic consideration. The clinician or counselor with more information and insight will then be able to offer accurate information to the client pertaining to relinquishment. Unless the therapist realizes that relinquishment is a traumatic turning point for many young women, with consequences extending over years and even decades and gives the matter the

weight it deserves, the etiology of the presenting problems of the patient who has already relinquished her infant may remain unclear for an unnecessarily extended period. We often see pathologies stemming from unresolved grieving, and the role of relinquishment as a causative agent must not be neglected or diminished. The therapist may be aided in making the necessary diagnosis by referring to the findings of this study.

In order fully to appreciate this process for the birth mother her experience needs to be understood. The anecdotal findings should significantly enrich our insights into relinquishment-related trauma while providing us with valuable clinical information.

### Focus of the Study

This study covered the period from the beginning of the pregnancy to the present time. The mother's experiences are divided into five periods, to explore the feelings, unmet needs and experiences of the birth mother at five different stages of management of attachment and loss. The first period explored her reflections on the time she became pregnant and particularly on the degree of attachment to her family. The second period looked at the pregnancy and the giving up of the child; the building of attachment and the beginning of the separation from the baby as she prepared for relinquishment was explored. The third period was immediately after relinquishment; our focus will be on separation

from the infant and grieving the loss. The fourth period was from 5-to-10 years later, up to the present time noting how the loss continued to be experienced by the birth mother and impacts the attachment process. The fifth period was the period of involvement in the study, focusing on the birth mother's present day reflections on the overall relinquishment process, what has helped or hindered resolution and her way of organizing the relinquishment experience and the personal meaning this event had for her.

## CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby, a British psychologist, combines both ethology and cognitive psychology with psychoanalytic thought (Bowlby, 1975). The theory offers a comprehensive understanding of the building of, the maintenance of, and the disruption of the relational bonds that are the focus of my study. No other form of behavior is accompanied by stronger feeling than is attachment behavior (Bowlby, 1958). Bowlby's work explores the making and breaking of affectional bonds, the building of a secure base and grief work that is relevant to the birth mother population. Although his theory relates primarily to children I will apply it to birth mothers. This section will cover Bowlby's theory including definitions, attachment and loss behaviors, healthy and pathological development.

### Definition of Terms

#### Affectional Bond

An affectional bond is that attraction that one individual has for another individual. Its essential feature is that the two partners tend to remain in close proximity to one another. In terms of subjective experience, "the formation of a bond is described as falling in love, maintaining a bond as loving someone, and losing a partner as grieving over someone" (Bowlby, 1979, p. 130).

### Attachment

Bowlby's concept of attachment is defined as the bond that forms between a mother and a child over time and in response to familiarity and caretaking (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment is an affectional tie with "some other differentiated and preferred individual who is usually conceived as stronger and/or wiser" (Bowlby, 1977, p. 203). He believes that an enduring attachment, or attachment bond is confined to very few.

### Attachment Behavior

Attachment behavior is any form of conduct that results in attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980, 1988). Knowing the attachment figure is available and responsive gives him or her a strong and pervasive feeling of security. The biological function attributed to it is that of protection. Attachment behavior may in different circumstances be directed to a variety of individuals.

### Attachment Figure

The attachment figure is the person trusted (Bowlby 1969).

### Bonding

Bonding is a one-way flow of concern and affection for a child for whom the mother has cared during pregnancy and the first months and years of life.

### Grieving

Grieving is the sequence of subjective states that follow loss and accompany mourning.

### Loss

Loss implies that the subject's attachment figure is permanently inaccessible.

### Mourning

Mourning is the psychological process which is set in motion by the loss of a loved object and that commonly leads to the relinquishment of the object.

### Object

Object can be referring either to a person or to a mental representation of a person.

### Secure base

A secure base is a place from which one explores and to which one can return, especially if tired or frightened.

### Separation

Separation is defined as temporary inaccessibility of the attachment figure to the subject.

### Separation Anxiety

Separation anxiety is the usual response to a threat of losing, or becoming separated from someone loved. Whether a child or adult is in a state of security, anxiety, or distress is determined in large part by the accessibility and responsiveness of his other principal attachment figure.

## Attachment Theory

Bowlby defined attachment theory as "a way to conceptualize the propensity of human beings to make strong affectional bonds to particular others, and of explaining the many forms of emotional distress and personality disturbance, including anxiety, anger, depression, and emotional detachment, to which unwilling separation and loss give rise" (Bowlby, 1979, p. 127). Bowlby views the prototype of attachment behavior in most species as the mother/child relationship for the purpose of protection and security. Attachment behavior derives from a distinct biological motivational system (like an instinct), just as does feeding or sex, or any other biologically rooted behavior (Klein, 1987; Lichtenberg, 1989). In the human species these behavioral systems are less well developed at birth and the child is extremely dependent on the caretaker for a long period of time. The behavior includes crying, following, clinging, and so on, and is likely to elicit a caring response. Sucking and crying are two behavioral systems mediating attachment that are in operation at birth, and with maturation, there is development of smiling, clinging, and, later calling for mother (Bowlby, 1969, 1982).

Initially these behaviors are a fixed action pattern as they are not goal-corrected. When a mother-figure responds, learning ensues. To this end, these behaviors tend to get repeated, refined, and ultimately elaborated and goal-corrected. These systems have become integrated, established and goal-corrected toward a preferred person by the end of the first year. The child has now achieved a basic repertoire of attachment behavior. This behavior

provides a great deal of satisfaction for both mother and child and is intensely emotional.

Equally important, and alternating with the behavioral system of attachment, is the individuation system, or the system of self-reliance (Bowlby, 1969). This system permits the child to explore the environment and diminishes his or her dependence on the attachment figure. In a large part its functioning depends upon the quality of the attachment system. The stronger the attachment the easier it is for the child to leave the secure base and to explore the environment.

The main variable to which Bowlby (1979) draws attention is the extent to which a child's parents provide a secure base and encourage exploration from it. If the attachment figure is available and responsive and can provide protection, aid, and comfort, the child is able to develop a strong and pervasive sense of security. Bowlby (1988) defines Mary Ainsworth's (1954) secure base as the base from which a child or adolescent can make sorties into the outside world and to which he can return knowing that he will be welcomed when he gets there.

The encouragement to safely explore from a secure base is the process that enables children to develop the emotional, psychological, and cognitive skills necessary to acquire mastery and resilience in order to deal effectively with the hazards and risks of the world. The key point for Bowlby is the strong causal relationship between an individual's experiences with his or her parents and his or her later capacity to make affectional bonds.

If the young child's experiences with attachment figures have been consistently satisfying and rewarding and increase the child's adaptation to the environment, the individuation system tends to operate more often and plays an increasingly important role in adaptation to the environment providing a great deal of reward and satisfaction to both the attachment figure and the child.

During the course of the child's development, periodic disruptions of the attachment relationship are inevitable. Typically, such disruptions are infrequent and short-lived. Children between the ages of seven months and three years of age suffer intense emotional reactions and a subsequent increase in attachment behavior even to very limited separations (Bowlby, 1973). Psychological development of the child is strongly affected by the consistent availability and responsiveness of the attachment figure, as well as the number and types of disruptive experiences the child encounters in the course of development.

If the child's experience with attachment figures has been disrupting and unsatisfying, the balance of attachment and individuation systems may become altered, usually resulting in either excessive attachment behavior or excessive self-reliant behavior. Deviations in the development of attachment behaviors are related to "distortions in the patterns of mothering that a child had received or is receiving" (Bowlby, 1969, p. 357). As the infant attempts to restore proximity both anxiety and anger develop. Bowlby presents convincing evidence that repeated or long-term separations from attachment figures can have long-lasting and devastating psychological consequences for the child. These

difficulties are manifested in a number of ways. There can be a tendency to make excessive demands on others and to be anxious and angry when they are not met, such as is present in dependent and hysterical personalities; and, on the other, a blockage in the capacity to make deep relationships, such as is present in affectionless and psychopathic personalities (Bowlby, 1969).

Anxious attachment is Bowlby's term for his assertion of a child's perception that the caretaker (mother) might abandon him or her and therefore leave him or her in a helpless situation. Anxious attachment is usually the outcome of repeated separations, threats of separations or continuous unavailability of the caretaker (1973). According to Bowlby, the child begins to build a model of the attachment figure and expects from past experience that she will be unavailable in the future. The more unpredictable the parent's unavailability and responsiveness to the child become, the more fraught with anxiety is the attachment process. Anxious attachment is characterized by chronic anger and anxiety. The child's behavior becomes both clinging and rejecting as the child begins to develop a cognitive framework compatible with his/her experience.

The child sees attachment figures as unreliable and unavailable and continues to remain watchful and ready for separation instead of developing internal representations of attachment figures as accessible. This child doubts the existence of a secure base and therefore no longer acts to restore proximity. In the child the intense anxiety and anger, in conjunction with the elicited attachment behavior, set up a pathological conflict. There is a conflict between the child's desire for attachment and the

anxiety and fear of separation from the attachment figure. The increased anxiety and fear that the attachment figure may be inaccessible, in turn produces anger. This vicious circle leads to dysfunctional behavior and tends to weaken, rather than strengthen, the attachment bonding process in both childhood and later adult relationships (Bowlby, 1973).

Anxious attachment derives from the individuals' repeated experiences of inconsistent caretaking that undermine the sense of a secure base in relationships with others. As a result, they lack the confidence that attachment figures will be responsive and accessible. These individuals have adopted certain strategies to ensure proximity, and may be hampered in exploring the world and also in coping with stressful situations. When confronted with separation or loss, people who are anxiously attached are more prone than others to respond with intense distress (Bowlby, 1973,1982).

Compulsive self-reliance is another maladaptive pattern of attachment behavior that is overtly the opposite of anxious attachment (Parkes, 1973). Individuals who exhibit this pattern insist on keeping a stiff upper lip and doing everything for themselves and are unable to seek the love and care of others. Under stress, these people are likely to present with psychosomatic symptoms.

Another personality development that results from a severe disruption of, or absence of affectional bonds involves the emotionally detached individual who is incapable of maintaining a stable affectional bond with anyone. Attachment behavior is absent, replaced by an "aloof, noncommittal" attitude (Bowlby, 1973).

Bowlby (1988) states that if a system controlling such crucial behavior as attachment can be temporarily or permanently inactivated, and if with it the whole range of feeling and desire that normally accompanies it is rendered incapable of being aroused then one could shut down. One might despair of ever having a secure and loving relationship with anyone. The signals arising from both inside and outside the person that would activate attachment behavior and that would enable them him or her to love and to experience being loved would be repressed.

Over a prolonged period of time when the attachment figure continues to be inaccessible, the child goes through periods of mourning and despair and subsequently becomes detached from the attachment figure. This detaching behavior is a defensive reaction that creates "compulsive independence," an inability on the part of the child to form close relationships with either the primary attachment figure or other individuals. The detached person develops "a persistently hostile attitude not only toward his/her parents, but to other parental figures" (Bowlby, 1975, p. 301). Furthermore, this person is now handicapped in developing any relationships throughout his/her life, and remains constantly "pseudo-independent." Compulsive independence is based on fear and distrust and is in contrast with the self-reliant behavior that develops following an adequate development of attachment (Bowlby, 1975).

Young children when separated from their mother show their distress in the following sequence of protest, despair and finally lose interest in the mother and become emotionally detached from

her (Bowlby, 1988). Sometimes a loss leads to an apparently lasting inability to make any new relationship in which another person could become an important attachment figure.

Researchers before Bowlby made inferences about earlier phases of psychological development from older emotionally disturbed subjects. Deutsch's (1937) held that, due to inadequate psychic development, children are unable to mourn, whereas Klein (1940) felt children could mourn "the lost breast". Bowlby and Robertson (1952) described the sequence of responses seen in young children during temporary separation from mother as one of protest, despair, and attachment. As Robertson studied the mourning of healthy adults he found that it lasted longer than six months as previously thought and that healthy mourning included anger directed at third parties, the self, and sometimes at the person lost; disbelief that the loss has occurred; and a tendency to search for the lost person in the hope of reunion. He found this similar to the responses observed in childhood.

Bowlby delineated three basic phases that he had observed to occur throughout the course of mourning. C. Murray Parkes (1972) nine years later recommended that an antecedent phase be added to Bowlby's original formulation. The resulting Four Phase construct has been widely accepted. The phases of mourning are differentiated in the following manner:

First Phase: A phase of Numbness usually lasts from a few hours to a week and may be interrupted by outbursts of extremely intense distress and/or anger and fearfulness.

Second Phase: There is a Phase of Yearning - during which the urge to recover the lost object predominates and "searching" takes place. In this phase it is the permanence of the loss that is disregarded. Separation anxiety seems to prevail.

Third Phase: In the Phase of Despair and disorganization, the permanence of loss is accepted and attempts to recover the lost object are given up. Despair, depression and behavioral disorganization ensue.

Fourth Phase: In the Phase of Reorganization of Behavior the loss is gradually accommodated to, and a new psychosocial adaptation is attained.

Bowlby believes parenting is in some degree pre-programmed and therefore ready to develop along certain lines when conditions elicit it. He believes that parenting behavior has strong biological roots accompanied by strong emotions but the detailed form that the behavior takes turns on one's own experiences during childhood, adolescence, before and after marriage and experiences with each individual child. Bowlby agrees with Ainsworth (1978) that the pattern of attachment a normal infant develops with his mother is the product of how his mother has treated him.

His approach describes the behavior patterns comprising parenting, the conditions that activate and terminate each one, the change of the patterns as a child grows, the varying ways that parenting behavior becomes organized in different individuals, and the myriad experiences that influence how it develops in any one person (1988).

The central feature of Bowlby's conception of parenting is that both parents provide a secure base for the child and later the adolescent as he or she ventures further from base and for increasing spans of time. This is done with confidence by the child or adolescent as they take for granted that the base is secure and their parents will be ready to respond if needed.

Bowlby observes that attachment behavior is not limited to the mother-child relationship. As the child develops into adolescence and then adulthood, attachment relationships are formed with siblings, friends, other adults, a spouse, and so on. When this begins to occur, the intensity of the attachments to members of the original family is lessened.

Bowlby (1979) suggested that it is difficult for the individual to assimilate any new person because of the "representational" or "working" models of attachment figures and of self he or she builds during childhood and adolescence. These are formed out of the "real-life" experience. Bowlby (1980) stated that individuals construe every day life situations in terms of the working models they have of the world around them. Earlier, he noted that whatever working models an individual builds during his or her early years of development "tend to persist relatively unchanged into and throughout adult life" (Bowlby, 1979, p. 141).

Bowlby's work focuses upon the major role that interpersonal connectedness plays throughout development. He demonstrated that the nature of our early bond with our parents plays a crucial role throughout our lives. The capacity of the individual to make a bond with main attachment figures is fundamental to emotional security.

All later relationships are based on a generalization of this early mother-child bond (Ainsworth, 1972).

Attachment needs are a life-long process. It seems that the way attachments are formed and maintained in childhood has a powerful influence on the individual's future capacity to make affectional bonds. Deviations in the development of attachment behavior or in its failure lead to many forms of personality disorders. People who suffer from personality disturbances display a disturbed capacity for making of affectional bonds and often suffer repeated disruptions of bonds once made (Bowlby, 1951; Ainsworth, 1962).

Bowlby adds to the enormous work by others on the adverse effect on children of maternal deprivation and on the increased likelihood for someone who has had one adverse experience to have another. He cites Rutter's (1979) work that people brought up in unhappy homes are more likely to have illegitimate children, to become teenage mothers, or to make unhappy marriages and to divorce. Bowlby (1988) believes that an adverse childhood experience makes an individual more vulnerable to later adverse experiences that come from those disturbances of personality to which the earlier experiences have given rise. He cites an example of a mother who, due to adverse experiences during childhood, grows anxiously attached to and prone to seek care, from her own child and thus may lead this child to become anxious.

The attachment behavior system that is characteristic of one's early years persists into and throughout adulthood. Certain specific conditions in adult life such as illness, distress, or danger activate

attachment behavior. The stability of attachment behavior has two sources: families tend to maintain similar interaction patterns over time (Bowlby, 1973), and individuals tend, once their models of the interpersonal world are formed, to seek out experiences consistent with their internal conceptions.

Bowlby speaks of mother-infant interaction beginning after birth, but even before the birth the mother has physical feelings and fantasies. She has attached to another body growing within her body. There is a physical and psychological bonding that continues when the infant leaves the womb.

My research is about what happens when the natural attachment process is interrupted. The mother loses a part of her body that is within her body. What is the psychological effect on her? Has the relinquishment changed her and if so how? Did she detach from this loss? What are her previous experiences of loss? Can she attach again? What are her working models of attachment figures before the pregnancy? Does the working model change with this loss? How? What was the quality of her attachment with her own mother? Did the quality of this relationship influence her ability to relinquish and impact her subsequent attachments? Can the attachment behavior be reactivated in all its intensity or does some other form replace it? How does the mother re-group? What happens to her own self development? Did it change? How did she cope with this loss? Did she feel different and in what ways?

My study used the theoretical base presented by John Bowlby to increase my understanding of the process of attachment and

separation that a birth mother goes through when she relinquishes her infant.

## CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF THE EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

### Introduction

Since the early 1900s, a variety of human service agencies have been the facilitators and guardians of most adoption proceedings. There was an assumption that these agencies would work to meet the needs of all three groups assigned to their care: birth mothers, birth babies and adoptive parents. In reality there was a greater commitment to providing the adoptive couple with a baby than to enabling the birth mother to keep her baby.

Society's view of adoption from colonial times until 1930 reflected Puritan, Victorian, and religious influences. The unwed mother and her child were seen as deviant members of the lower-class community. In the 1940s, "illegitimacy" was frequently described as an accepted pattern of life in certain subcultures; but middle and upper class white unmarried women were stigmatized for being pregnant.

In the 1940s and 1950s psychological theories of behavior began to influence social and professional attitudes about unplanned pregnancy. The unplanned pregnancy was understood to be a form of sexual acting-out of unconscious needs and as such was seen as an expression of unresolved parent-child conflicts.

In the late 1950s and 1960s society's attitudes about single parenthood began to change. There was a large increase in the percentage of births occurring to unmarried women in the United

States from 5 percent in 1960 to 14 percent by 1976. Many women now choose to keep their babies. In 1970, 80 percent of unmarried mothers placed their babies for adoption as compared to 4 percent in 1983 (Adoption Life Cycle, 1988). Society had changed. It no longer viewed children born out of wedlock as illegitimate and as something to be ashamed of and therefore to be stigmatized or given away. Due to circumstances such as divorce, death, and illness, more children did not have two parents. In the 80's an unwed mother now had a choice to keep and raise her child.

Twenty years ago, at the time when the women in this study were giving up their babies, children born out of wedlock were still considered illegitimate. Society did not approve of children born out of wedlock. The birth mother was considered a bad girl; her pregnancy was shameful and was shielded in secrecy. She was often sent away so that her family and friends were protected from the shameful consequences of what was considered her disgraceful sexual behavior.

Twenty years ago, the focus of adoptions was getting the child away from the unwed mother and placing it with a married couple. Even social workers felt it was best that the child be given to two parents. Very little attention was paid to the depth and intensity of the attachment between mother and child or to the impact the disruption of this bond might have on the mother. Teenage mothers were told that it was better for the child to be given up for adoption. In order to facilitate the adoption process the birth mother was often prevented from holding her infant, knowing where her child was or being given information about the adoptive family. She

was told that if she forgot about the relinquishment and got on with her life, the pain would go away. She never forgot this major event. The sadness or depression over this major loss of a part of herself did not go away. She appeared to be stuck and unable to get on with her life.

Today, adoption is viewed very differently. Society has re-defined the family structure and often there is acceptance and support for the unwed mother. One quarter of U.S. babies are born to single women, but only two percent of those are given up for adoption (Korte, 1994). That's a turnaround from several decades ago when 9 out of 10 babies of unmarried mothers were given up for adoption.

Fewer unmarried women give up their babies today for adoption because single motherhood has lost much of its "sinful" stigma, and welfare payments make it possible for some to survive financially. A single woman who is financially secure may choose to get pregnant and rear a child on her own. In the case of an unplanned pregnancy, she has a choice to have an abortion, keep her baby or decide to have her baby adopted. In any case, society is less judgmental and more easily accepts and supports her decision.

Traditionally, adoption was based on absolute secrecy. Today a biologic mother who gives up her baby often makes more demands of the adopting couple. If she chooses an open adoption she has choices on who adopts her child and the possibility of having future contact with her child. The loss of her child no longer needs to be permanent as we understand that one of life's saddest and deepest

losses is the loss of a child whether through death or relinquishment.

Women who relinquished their babies a generation ago are no longer silent. They loudly grieve the inequity of what was done to them in contrast to the choices a birth mother has today. There is a significant number of women who, although they relinquished their first born child 20 years ago, still suffer from problems related to coerced relinquishment, secrecy, lack of social support and loss of the mother-child bond.

In the past, research has focused on the child and the adoptive parents. It is only recently that some attention has been given to the relinquishing mother's experiences of loss, grief, and bereavement, and to the searching for her child that sometimes grows out of this (Deykin, Campbell, & Patt, 1984; Millen & Roll, 1985; Rynearson, 1982; Brodzinsky and Schechter, 1990; Jones, 1993). The literature review will be divided into the following sections: reasons for illegitimate pregnancy, the building of attachment during pregnancy, reasons for relinquishment, dealing with the loss, the long term impact of relinquishment, and what helped and what hindered resolution.

### Reasons for Illegitimate Pregnancy

There does not seem to be a single motivation for illegitimate pregnancy. There are many reasons a young woman gets pregnant before she is able to keep her child. This section will explore this

first period from the perspective of dynamic reasons, client reasons and developmental issues.

### Psychodynamic Theories

There are a number of theories that try to account for why adolescents get pregnant. They offer a range of reasons from impulsive, need-satisfying behavior that secondarily produces a pregnancy to sexual behavior that is a culmination of a deep psychological need for a pregnancy or a baby itself (Rosenberg 1984). Unhealthy yearnings for closeness aroused by an anxious sense of separateness and aloneness are thought to be the primary motivational forces for adolescent pregnancy (Amer.J. Orthopsychiatry, 56 (3), July 1986, Buchholz and Gol). There may be motivation to get out of the parental home, repetition of some family pattern, a wish to have someone of one's own or to prove one's sexuality (G. Shah, 1975).

It is possible that one of the main reasons for pregnancy is that the adolescent is looking for the attachment that she did not have within her own family. Because her attachment needs were not met, she may feel a need to feel close through sexual intimacy and/or she may want to have something of her own. She may feel that a baby will bring her closer to her own mother, or she may need the baby to be able to separate and individuate from her own family.

Early psychodynamic interpretations of adolescent pregnancy emphasized developmental failure, especially in identity formation

and inability to attain separation-individuation. They characterized the pregnant girl as reenacting a regressive symbiotic union with the preoedipal mother or attempting an oedipal resolution that is ultimately successful (Barglow, PET AL. 1968; Amer. J. Orth. 38:672-687; Deutsch, 1945). In this way she stays connected with her mother. She may wish to create an ideal family, to fulfill loneliness or from self-punishment. Other explanations of adolescent pregnancy include a wish to compete or to compete with the mother or to give her a child (Phipps-Yonas, 1980).

Depressed adolescents may feel a need to be pregnant. An early study found that some women reacted to the experience of separation or death with a depression and that the pregnancy which followed was dynamically linked to the depression (Heiman and Levitt, 1960). The severe depression was kept in abeyance by the pregnancy and reappeared when the baby was surrendered.

The pregnancy of a girl unconsciously may be a way of improving relationships with her mother and identifying with her mother through her baby. Less severely disturbed girls may see the pregnancy and baby as a means of gaining rapprochement with their mothers, an attempt which is often successful (Heiman and Levitt, 1960). Bressler found that for girls in whom an object loss activates earlier separation anxiety, pregnancy plays into the wished-for fusion between the girl and her mother either by considering the baby, unconsciously, the incorporated mother, or by identification with the baby. She transforms the mother, over whom she does not have control, into the baby, over whom she does have

control. If she gives up the baby, she faces a depression. Because in these instances the motivation for the pregnancy is to find a replacement for a lost love object, either to ward off a depression or to counteract a depression.

In summary, the literature suggests a wide range of conscious and unconscious factors contributing to the occurrence of the pregnancy. An important point is that these needs can be felt by any person. The difference is that a birth mother who was single was unacceptable in the culture 20 years ago and was considered unable and unfit to rear a child.

#### Failure to Use Contraceptives

A common experience of relinquishing parents is a failure to manage birth control effectively (Deykin, 1984; Resnick, 1984). Numerous studies have explored adolescent sexuality and pregnancy. The literature cites a number of reasons for such mismanagement. Deykin and Resnick state that fewer than one in five birth mothers use contraception, and many others believe that they cannot become pregnant. George Shah (1975) found that about one-quarter of all pregnant teens intended to become pregnant. There may be difficulties with procuring contraceptives. It must also be remembered that the use of contraceptives 20 years ago did not have the acceptance or availability of today.

### Chance

Recent studies have demonstrated that psychological problems are not always the cause of pregnancy. There are studies of teenagers in long committed relationships and first pregnancies attributed to chance (Sorosky, Baran, Pannor, 1978, 1984) as adolescents girls often believe pregnancy won't happen to them. In addition, they believe their children's fathers would come to their rescue and marry them (Riben, 1988). Unwed mothers may not be that different from other women in our society and their pregnancies may not necessarily be pathological (Bernstein and Herzog, 1963).

### Positive Reasons

Youthful pregnancy has been viewed in much of the research in a pessimistic light. There are studies that find that adolescent girls achieve a sense of mastery and a new integration of personality through motherhood (Schaffer and Pine, 1972). They may be ready for a healthy attachment. This viewpoint takes issue with the idea that adolescent mothers as a group are sick or disturbed (Buchholz and Gol, 1986). They believe that adolescent pregnancy must be considered in the context of family, social, cultural, and developmental factors (Buchholz and Gol, 1986).

In 1984 Resnick asserted that single mothers should no longer be considered deviant because the reality in 1981 was that single parents constituted 21% of the nation's 30.6 million families

with children. His conclusion was that pregnant adolescents are at risk because most are going to have a child before they are developmentally ready to make the choices and decisions required of parents.

It is important to remember that what is or is not deviant needs to be considered in the context of societal norms and values that continue to change in relation to adolescent sexuality, pregnancy, and parenting choices. In more recent studies that have placed adolescents' sexual decision making and outcomes within the context of normal adolescent development and behavior it is no longer viewed as deviant (Blum and Resnick, 1980; Phipps-Yonas, 1980; Chillman, 1979).

#### Adolescent Level of Development

The developmental tasks for adolescence are directly related to the process of attachment and separation. These tasks include the consolidation of sexual identity and role, the formation of an independent self-identity and the capacity for lasting relationships (Buchholz and Gol, 1986).

Adolescent thought processes typically do not follow mature patterns (Hanson, 1990; Rosenberg, 1984). Add to that the notion of adolescence as a period of normal psychosis; there is no other time in life with such intense awareness of crisis and change (Pittman, 1987). The decision of an adolescent to become a parent or to prevent becoming a parent reflects many of these cognitive and emotional limitations (Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990; Hansen, 1990).

In my survey of the literature the birthmother's cognitive development is a variable that is rarely considered in the birthmother's decision. Resnick (1984) believes that most of the literature has not placed the understanding of adolescents' decision-making within the context of their growing cognitive awareness and that it is essential to include the parameters of normal psychological development for adolescents sexual decisions. The literature is sparse on understanding how pregnant teens deal with the decision-making process of becoming a parent and how it is influenced while under the physical and emotional stress of pregnancy, versus their final choice after delivery (M. Weinman, M. Robinson, J. Simmons, N. Schreiber, B. Stafford, 1989).

#### The Building of Attachment During Pregnancy

There is evidence that the bond with the baby begins during pregnancy (Klaus and Kendall, 1982; Millen and Roll, 1985; Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1978; Wrinkler & Keppel, 1988). The symbiotic wholeness of the pregnant mother and her baby is a union of two living as one (Stiffler, 1992). The baby receives all nourishment from the mother, and the mother is affected by the attachment.

In some women, affectional relationships to their infants will begin or accelerate with the development of fetal movement or quickening. By the end of the second trimester, even women who initially rejected the pregnancy have often accepted it. At this time, she dreams about her baby and attributes human personality

characteristics to him or her. The baby is alive and real inside of her.

For the mother who is deciding on relinquishment, the whole pregnancy is fraught with issues of attachment and loss. During pregnancy, some mothers decide to enjoy the attachment until the baby is gone, whereas, other mothers try to deny any emotional attachment in an attempt to protect themselves from future loss. In between are those who experience attaching to the fetus and grieving its loss at the same time (Rosenberg, 1992).

Mothers and their children are linked in at least three ways: physiologically during pregnancy, psychologically, and genetically. Prenatal studies of fetal hearing and breathing indicate that the child has been sensitized to the mother's breathing rhythms and in separation can feel this breakup of physical attunement (McKenna, 1987; Stiffler, 1992). The baby is still in primal relationship to his or her mother. The mother at that stage is actually the child's "self" (Neumann, 1973).

In a study by Rynearson (1982) of 20 women drawn from a population of psychiatric outpatients who were experiencing an "accidental" pregnancy, all had agreed to relinquish their children at birth. Despite this, 19 of them developed a covert maternal identification with the fetus that indicates a growing attachment. In the Rynearson study all of these subjects perceived relinquishment as an externally enforced decision that overwhelmed their internal wish for continued attachment to the baby

(Brodzinsky and Schechter, 1990). It appears that even if one cognitively decides on relinquishment that emotionally the attachment is formed and lost. Since the study was on psychiatric patients one could wonder about their previous attachment needs.

### Reasons for Relinquishment

A birth mother's decision to relinquish her child seems to be motivated by a combination of concern for her baby, personal desires, parental and societal pressures and a lack of social support (Pannor, Baran & Sorosky, 1977).

In most cases, the mother relinquishes her baby to assure him or her of love, care, and security from two parents in a normal home situation that she cannot provide (Smith, 1963). In the in-depth study by Pannor, Baran & Sorosky (1977) of 38 birth parents the most frequent reasons given for relinquishing by the mothers were the following reasons: the mother was unmarried and wanted the child to be raised in a family (68%); the mother wanted to finish school (26%); the mother was pressured by others (15%); the father of the baby was not interested in marriage (13%); the mother never considered keeping the baby (8%); the mother did not believe in abortion (8%); the mother's marriage was breaking up (5%); the father of the child was a married man, he raped her, or her parents disapproved of him (3%).

Birth mothers were often influenced, perhaps even pressured, by their mothers to relinquish. In the research by Clapp and Raab (1978) and Rosen (1980) it was found that the most influential

person on the adolescent regarding pregnancy resolution was the mother of the adolescent. Smith (1963) found that young women who placed their children for adoption had relationships with their own parents that satisfied more of their needs than did those who kept their babies. A number of clinical and psychosocial studies have concluded that the unwed mother who parents her baby is more emotionally unstable than the mother who places her child for adoption (Hertz, 1977; Leynes, 1980).

One of the major factors influencing birth mothers to relinquish has always been the judgements of others, not only their own mothers but also society as a whole. Until recently it was felt that unwed adolescents who were pregnant or were mothers constitute a socially deviant or emotionally maladapted group (Chilman, 1979). These young mothers were often sent away during pregnancy. This became another traumatic experience as they were separated from family and friends in what could be a hostile environment. Even if their families were supportive, they often encountered loss of respect and harsh attitudes from society during the pregnancies. When they returned home after the delivery and relinquishment, their emotional needs were overlooked.

Birth mothers were often pressured to relinquish by the lack of social support, as well as by parental and cultural pressures. Often the birth mother did not have a supportive system to help her manage the physical, financial and emotional burden of keeping her baby.

### Dealing with the Loss

After the relinquishment the birth mother hoped to reenter society and to feel normal again. She was unprepared for the emotional impact relinquishment would have on her as she became a mother without a baby. The decision to relinquish was often made by others. Most of the time it appeared to be the only choice. The attention the birth mother received as she made the "right decision" to relinquish changed after the adoption. Now the birthmother was perceived by others not only as a bad person for having sex and getting pregnant, but now after relinquishing the baby as the most unnatural of women, a rejecting mother.

Twenty years ago it was generally expected that the woman who had relinquished, had also severed any emotional bond that had developed with that child and had gladly resumed her interrupted life. The birth mother found that the decision to place the baby for adoption did not in itself achieve the emotional relinquishment of parental feelings, especially for those who had experienced a physical and emotional attachment to the fetus for nine months. Even mothers who keep their babies sometimes have a postpartum depression with the physical separation through birth. Many birth mothers, especially those who had formed an attachment during pregnancy, experienced intense grief and mourning which had to be suppressed and hidden because of societal judgement and lack of support.

Grief following the death of a newborn is not the same as that following the loss of a beloved adult relative (Furman, 1978; Klaus & Kendall, 1982). It is a much more difficult process involving the loss of part of the self before the infant emotionally becomes a separate person. In fact, whether it is a death or a relinquishment there is no separate person to have a separate relationship with after the birth. The mother mourns the loss of a part of herself, a process analogous to grieving for an amputation of a limb or a loss of function of the mother's body. The mother must accept that she will never again have that part of herself. The feelings that accompany this loss are extreme helplessness, sadness, guilt, anger, horror and emptiness. She will experience deep mourning whether the loss is voluntary or involuntary.

The following studies reflect the feelings, the distorted mourning, and the symptoms experienced by the birthmother after relinquishment. Parkes and his colleagues have delineated the following features of the normal grief reaction: 1) a process of realization; 2) an alarm reaction; 3) an urge to search for and to find the lost person; 4) anger and guilt; 5) feelings of internal loss of self or of mutilation; 6) identification phenomena. In a normal grief reaction the bereaved moves from denial of the loss to acceptance. To come to terms with a loss, the individual must accept the loss as permanent.

There appears to be distorted grieving by birth mothers after relinquishment. The mother who has given up her child may deny the

permanence of her loss through a persisting experience of the child's presence in thought and fantasy. Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (1978) in their research involving 38 birth parents who had relinquished their children 10 to 33 years ago, found that 50% continued to have feelings of loss, pain, and mourning over the child they relinquished and 82% of the biological mothers they interviewed were interested in a reunion with their relinquished children. In reality the child continues to exist. In these interviews many patients reported repeated dreams of reunions with their children. They were unable to accept the loss as permanent.

Millen and Roll (1985) in a study of pathological bereavement in women relinquishing their children for adoption, found that the maternal experience for these women did not end with the signing of the surrender papers. The bond these mothers experienced was of such enduring intensity that time and physical separation did not at all weaken the affinity of these mothers for their children. These women reported not understanding their intense attachment feelings for a child whom they knew only as a memory or a fantasy. The psychological symbiosis of pregnancy seemed to have increased these women's feelings of importance in the world, increased their identity as women, and created a bond with an infant that they found difficult to sever.

In the Rhynearson study the women signed the papers while in the hospital. Eighteen of the women were not allowed to see their babies after delivery. All found the event traumatic and eight of the women were amnesic for it. They reported a feeling of numbness

and dissociation during hospitalization and a virtual absence of mourning.

In "Solomon's Mothers: A Special Case of Pathological Bereavement," Millen and Roll (1984) illustrate ways in which the bereavement process was distorted and delayed in 22 women seen in psychotherapy who had earlier given up a child. They note a number of factors that delayed or suppressed the grief process in their clinical sample due to the social stigma of the loss and the birthmother's need to suppress the unsupported grief and the absence of rituals to identify and acknowledge the loss.

Millen & Roll (1985) found that giving up a child for adoption presents a serious emotional and psychological challenge for the mother. Their paper illustrates ways the bereavement process was distorted with observations made during clinical interviews with 22 mothers who had surrendered a child for adoption and who had been in psychotherapy for three months to two years. Only two came with issues around relinquishment. In these interviews they found that distorted mourning reactions are a part of the experience of all mothers who relinquish a child for adoption. They found enduring anguish common among the clinical sample as these mothers continued to have repeated dreams of reunion with their children as a way of denying the permanence of the loss, they began to withdraw emotionally. They were unable to use appropriate anger at feeling pressured to relinquish as they see the child's absence as a result of their own actions and therefore cannot justify anger. They might

express feelings of emptiness and destruction through mutilation and loss of self.

Grief is a normal, healthy, spontaneous, and necessary response to loss. Grief work is painful and difficult. Research has shown that grieving is a social event; that is, it requires interaction and validation from others (Klass, 1988; Rando, 1986). The alternative, unaddressed grief that has no resolution, can have powerful, negative and damaging consequences. The birth mothers loss was unrecognized and not sanctioned by society. Therefore it is kept secret. It is not shared by the community and therefore cannot be mourned. If society does not sanction the loss, it prevents the mother from expressing her anger and using it in a productive manner. Keeping the loss secret prevents the mother from making an effort to find her child or to relieve her anxiety about the placement. It is agreed that those who have not experienced profound grief are still in denial, and this can last years until their grief will inevitably erupt in some pathological variant of grief (Jones, 1993).

Two major reasons that loss through adoption has not been acknowledged or sanctioned by society are; the social stigma attached to out -of-wedlock births and teenage pregnancy; and the traditional view that adoption simultaneously meets the needs of all three parties involved in the adoption. Birth mothers were told they would forget, would just get on with their lives, and could have other children later on. To acknowledge and encourage the grief

reaction might jeopardize the signing of the adoption papers. It was assumed that adoption was the best plan.

Pannor, Baran & Sorosky (1978) found that women who relinquished their children may have felt they were failures and had a sense of guilt and worthlessness. Agencies encouraged birth mothers to give up their babies. Often the birth mother did not see her baby which was suppose to be one way of helping her deal with this loss. She was not prepared psychologically for the enormity of this loss. In reviewing letters sent by birth parents, two areas continued to cause most unwed mothers pain: (1) there was the concern that the child would not understand the reason for the relinquishment and grow up feeling rejected and abandoned; (2) there was a worry that the child would think poorly of them and never know what they had done with the rest of their lives. The authors stated that "in all situations the intensity of feeling and involvement is clearly there."

The research points to the fact that most of these women are adolescents. There can be a profound effect upon subsequent personality formation that occurs as a result of unsatisfactory resolution of childhood loss. John Bowlby identified symptom patterns which seemed to be present in those adults who had unresolved grief reactions stemming from childhood. These adults remained fixated at the developmental stage at which the loss had occurred. We have already pointed out the distinct developmental needs of adolescents. Therefore, it is possible that the inability to mourn would bring to a halt the processes involved in normal

developmental progression and the young mother would be stuck at the relinquishment period in a phase of adolescence. This phase is developmentally considered to have a goal of separating and individuating from the parents. The relinquishing adolescent is prematurely thrust into the adult stage on one hand and yet could emotionally stay stuck in the adolescent stage.

This grief continues for the birth mother as she has lost a physical and emotional sense of herself. From the time of the early postpartum separation, she has experienced her loss as an emptiness, a freezing, a wound that never stops bleeding, as arms eternally aching to hold the lost baby, or as a limb loss similar to that felt by families of soldiers missing in action (Anderson, 1987). Much of her energy will be spent in keeping her secret and needing to repress her feelings. Bowlby identified four characteristic patterns of adaptation which he found in the adult adjustment to loss. He described these four characteristic patterns as follows: 1) a propensity to anxiety and depression; (2) unneutralized expression of aggression toward the self or others; (3) absorption in the care of others and (4) denial of the loss through splitting mechanisms.

Adaptive grieving was compromised in women who have surrendered infants for adoption. Most women who have relinquished a baby for adoption have not been provided with a safe place following the event. There was an absence of a caring and supportive network of people who, because they could comprehend the meaning of the loss, gathered around the mother to protect her

from those who did not. Trust became an issue for them as their grief did not subside.

It is possible that birth mothers who had previous unresolved losses had more difficulty with relinquishment than those who did not have previous unresolved losses. The basic tenets of psychoanalytic thinking, as well as the significant contributions of Bowlby, support the notion that an individual's adaptation to loss is dependent on how well or how poorly they have been able to negotiate changes and deal with loss in the past. Volkan (1970) suggested that failure to work through prior experiences with separation and death predisposes the bereaved to pathological grief reactions. Bowlby also speaks of the building of adverse experiences that happens when one is vulnerable from an earlier loss. Bowlby cites Rutner (1979) that those brought up in unhappy homes are more likely to have illegitimate children.

### The Long Term Impact of Relinquishment

As noted earlier, grief and mourning are normal responses to loss, but when they become extended over a long period of time, they become pathological. This section discusses the long term consequences of relinquishment. The studies cited below document the current functioning of birth mothers who relinquished their infants up to 20 or more years ago. First I will discuss the impact of relinquishment on current functioning, than on coping, parenting and marriage.

### The Impact of Relinquishment on Current Functioning

Birth mothers, a long time after relinquishment, were continuing to suffer from depression and other psychological impairments. It was a traumatic experience that remained with them throughout their lives. For some, physical symptoms became a way of releasing tension.

In studies by Sorosky and colleagues (1978) who interviewed 38 birth parents, 50 % of the birth parents expressed continuing feelings of loss, pain and grief associated with their decision to surrender the child. In 1979 Burnell and Norfleet also found a high incidence of depression, reported by 40% of the women interviewed after 3 years. Jones (1993) in her research on 70 birthmothers used questionnaires and in-depth interviews that lasted up to eight hours. The women interviewed reported recurring depression and anger. Although it was a relatively small and nonrandom sample, none had found peace after relinquishment.

Birth mothers experienced a number of physical complaints as they tried to adapt to the loss. Studies cite symptoms of social anxiety, agoraphobia, chemical dependency, digestive disturbances, headaches, eating disorders or other anxiety/phobic states (Millen & Roll, 1985, Wrinkle, 1988, Ryneerson, 1982).

The daily lives of birth mothers interviewed were often riddled with recurring nightmares, dreams, flashbacks, preoccupations, premonitions, and anxieties that were linked to

relinquishment (Jones, 1993). Their nightmares were about losing babies and finding them harmed. Powerlessness and control were dominant themes, and the post relinquishment nightmares focused on loss. Others experienced flashbacks, phobias and unexplained fears. Jones (1993) compared the symptoms to those of post traumatic stress disorder.

Condon (1986) studied a group of 20 Australian women with almost all reporting that they had dealt with their distress primarily by withdrawing and by bottling up their feelings and that this was due primarily to the absence of social and professional support. The results of the psychological assessment indicated that the relinquishing mothers had significantly higher scores on depression, psychosomatic symptoms, and chronic psychological disability than did age-matched controls from the same geographical areas. This study was similar to that of Winkler and Van Keppel (1984) in that a control group was used so a comparison could be made noting differences. It also clearly indicates a need for a more comprehensive clinical understanding by therapists.

In the study by Rynearson (1982), it was found that after some initial relief, many of those mothers continued to experience persistent fantasies of their children's presences, along with a sense of loss of self and with feelings of mutilation, emptiness, or destruction. These women turned their anger inward for having agreed to the relinquishment and continued to experience guilt, both for having the child and for relinquishing it. They did experience an impulse to search for the child and an identification with the lost or

abandoned child. It appears that the relinquishing parents lose a real child who is replaced by fantasies that cannot be corrected by exposure to the light of reality. They are unable to advance through Bowlby's last phase of the mourning process that leads to the reality of the relinquishment of an object. The child still lives. Not knowing what happened to the child she gave away keeps the hurt alive (Wrinkle, 1988).

### The Impact of Relinquishment on Coping

The birth mother develops ways of trying to cope with her pain over relinquishment. Her defenses are usually very primitive ones of denial, fantasy, and repression (Rynearson, 1982). Some withdrew and isolated themselves. Others became amnesic and repressed the event. Many went into abusive relationships and/or married immediately. Some had many children immediately, and others had none. Many avoided intimate relationships or devoted themselves to their careers. Their thinking became more absolute. They tried to be perfect.

In the nightmares and dreams, it was found that some birth mothers dreamed of alternate outcomes to their unwanted pregnancies that could bring comfort. Some dreams were comforting because they offered solace, others because they brought a sense of empowerment (Jones, 1993). Others experienced psychic numbness without any dreams.

In the Roan (1988) study, the amnesia appears to have been a defense against the terrible pain and loss which they had

experienced and a means by which they could tolerate such pain and loss. Many of the birthmothers dealt with their pain with repression, suppression, and amnesia.

Another way of trying to cope was to keep their pregnancy and adoption history a secret throughout the years. It was a socially sanctioned denial, but this way of coping interfered with the resolution of guilt and intensified the birth parents' belief that what they did was so heinous that it must forever be concealed (Brown & Gediman, 1991).

Roan (1988) studied birth mothers searching for their now adolescent children. The subjects of the study found their surrenders to be traumatic events followed by continuing psychic pain that they endeavored to ameliorate by seeking out their surrendered children. Those who had less power in making the decision were apt to search more.

#### The Impact of Relinquishment on Parenting

Mothers who cannot keep their infants have a sense of worthlessness and considerable feelings of guilt (Lewis, 1971). It appears likely that if their own secure base as a respected person is lost they will be unable to provide a secure feeling in other relationships or a secure base for their other children. For most birth mothers resolution is not accomplished. They remain stuck in the psychological space they inhabited, functioning below their potential and unable to advance (Brown & Gediman, 1991).

The birth mothers lived with a grief they were not allowed to express. Their grief made anything to do with children difficult, and they found that the births of their subsequent children did not ameliorate the loss of the surrendered child. This was a loss with grief that grew rather than waned.

It is a traumatic disruptive experience for the still developing young person to lose her first child. Parents who have relinquished a child may have damaged their ability to attach in other relationships especially with another child. Parenting practice is affected in 81% of birth mothers as she may feel she is unfit to be a mother, or may be perfectionistic, possessive, and over-protective (Wrinkler, 1981).

Lee Campbell (1980) in a study of postadoption experience addresses the issue of subsequent fertility. In her survey of 334 members of Concerned United Birthparents, Inc. indicates those birth parents have a disproportionately high rate of secondary infertility as compared to the general populace (Riben, 1988). Eliminating the 17% who chose not to have subsequent children, the rate of secondary infertility among this sample is 16.2%. This rate is statistically significantly higher than the 6% general-population rate of secondary infertility among couples who have one child and desire another. The rate is also higher than the 15% rate of primary infertility for the U.S. This research indicates that, for some individuals, the experience of relinquishing a child to adoption has a prolonged effect on subsequent life functioning. The estimated 17%

excess of secondary infertility found in the survey by Campbell (1977) in the sample is sizable, and should be studied further.

Many women who surrender a child to adoption have been unsuccessful in subsequent attempts to conceive or to carry another pregnancy to term. Others have never married, while still others have had to have hysterectomies for medical reasons after surrendering their only child to adoption. All of these have been left childless mothers (Riben, 1988).

The organization called Concerned United Birthparents, Inc. (CUB) breaks into two groups. Half the members have had no other children because the pain of relinquishment is so great. The other group has had one child after another so they could replace the child surrendered. Replacement does not work.

We can acknowledge that giving up a baby can have an impact on the birthmother and her ability to parent subsequent children as relinquishment influences subsequent mother-infant bonding (Rynearson, 1982). The earlier surrender of a child exerted a powerful impact on their subsequent parenting attitudes. Deykin, Campbell, and Patti, (1984) in their study of 219 subjects found that overprotectiveness, compulsive worry about the children's health, and difficulty in accepting children's independence were the most frequent negative features cited.

There is a realization by the birth mother that the relinquished child has not been replaced--cannot be replaced--and is gone, apparently, forever. Other birthmothers may experience

considerable difficulty in forming strong attachments to their child (children) in fear of losing them also; alternatively, they may be possessive and overprotective. Some birth mothers decide never to have other children; this may be because of the lingering fear of the emotional trauma of the relinquishment, or a fear that other children will diminish the importance of the relinquished child in their lives.

In a study by Ryneason (1982) of 10 patients who had relinquished a child, he found that the women's fantasies and behavior related to the act of relinquishment could be viewed as compensatory, allowing a sustained internalized attachment and maternal identification in spite of the external interruption. The use of relatively immature defenses of denial, fantasy, and repression appear to have been used and it was found that symptoms of mourning diminished with time. Roan (1988) also found that a few birthmothers did not feel negatively affected by their surrender experience and did not need to search. In most cases, however, Roles (1988) found that separation from subsequent children may be an issue.

#### The Impact of Relinquishment on Marriage

In the study by Pannor, Baran, Sorosky (1978), it was found that about three-quarters of the birth mothers have been married at least once following relinquishment of the child, and about one-quarter had never married. Furthermore, 63% of the sample had children, 37% did not.

The Jones study (1993) found that 9 out of 10 women married after relinquishment and most marriages ended in divorce. These women all believed their marital troubles were linked to relinquishment. One in six married the birthfathers and one-third married the first man who asked them. They often married without love and even if suffering tried to avoid divorce. These women appeared to be stuck in the same patterns of absolute thinking and living by extremes that they established soon after relinquishing. They married right away or not at all. They had children immediately or not at all. They became perfect wives and mothers or punished themselves by being in abusive relationships. Due to the impact of this loss and their feelings about themselves, 1 in 10 tried to end their lives, 1 in 5 abandoned their earlier goals and more than 1 in 5 became involved in abusive relationships. They appeared stuck at the point of relinquishment. It was found in this study that the relationships of those who have not grieved often reflected the phase at which they has stopped. Even if their men tried to be understanding of them, they were unable to accept their help. Some of these birthmothers found rewards in their lives but others found additional losses. Regardless, it appeared that nothing could rescue them from their own minds. In this survey a third were happily married but still felt the repercussion of relinquishment and continued to have problems with intimacy and trust.

### Resolution: What Helped and What Hindered

The existing clinical and research data strongly suggest that birth mothers who relinquished 20 or more years ago are not making the kind of post-surrender adjustment previously hoped for. In this section I will first review four factors that appear to help resolution, mourning, searching, group support and individual psychotherapy; and then three factors that inhibit resolution, failure to grieve, suppression, and coerced decision making.

#### Mourning

It appears that a bereaved person who is unable to mourn will continue to live in the past. If we view the birth mother as unable to come to terms with her past, we can begin to understand and respect the feelings that continue to block her. If support and understanding are given to her expression of yearning for the relinquished child, her anger at adoption agencies, parents, social workers, and others, and against her own guilty self for this decision, the need to search for her child may help her to unlock the feelings that could complete the grieving. This freeing of yearning and anger will help her to proceed with the remaining work of mourning.

In uncomplicated situations the treatment objectives can be accomplished in a relatively short time. Volkan (1969) observed that "people who suffer from pathological grief reactions are either

caught in the struggle of loss and restitution without coming to a solution or have achieved restitution which is symptomatic."

Millen and Roll (1985) recommended facilitating a healthy mourning process for the relinquishing mother. Their work supports the findings of the few professionals and researchers who in recent years have started paying attention to these women as a unique group of individuals having undergone a unique experience and validates the continued dysfunction of these women that had previously been discounted or ignored.

### Searching

CUB has formed a supportive and emotional organization that seems to help birthmothers through the process of grief and in their search for their lost children. In the Roan (1988) exploratory study of birth mothers who searched for their children, some felt a degree of resolution to their experience. As they came to the decision to search, the subjects felt a greater sense of self and power and gained the ability to deal on a better basis with authority. The subjects moved from states of amnesia and lack of involvement, to awareness and a commitment to activity. They had to settle the pains of the past before they could be free to be in the here and now. As they turned anger and guilt outward toward those who were instrumental in their decision to surrender, they felt less helpless and more active. With this particular group the search for and re-union enabled them to go on with the other aspects of their lives.

### Group Support

A support group is productive for birth mothers. Through it they are able to share a common experience and to find the needed support. It allows them to work through the surrender and to feel more comfortable with themselves. The mothers in the Roan (1988) study repressed their feelings until they were safe and in a position to have memories and to deal with the consequences. These memories were a stimulus to their searches and emotional healing. It was also found that until they encountered other birthmothers and support groups where the discussion of their experience was allowed and validated, no resource for either therapy or search was available to them.

CUB, a large organization that provides groups for birthmothers, and related organizations have been instrumental in calling attention to the emotional plight of birth mothers and, in so doing, stimulating increased concern for the mental health needs of this group among both clinicians and researchers.

### Individual Psychotherapy

Professionals who work with women who have relinquished their children suggests that the emotional bond they develop with the lost child must not be denied, overlooked, or demeaned. It is crucial that professionals recognize grief and respond to it appropriately to validate and normalize the experience as traumatic for families. The break must be recognized and mourned.

Although working models of a child's principal attachment figure influence the way the person construes his experience and hence how he behaves, they may act as self-fulfilling prophecies and hence are difficult to alter once established (Bowlby, 1980). Bowlby (1977) acknowledges, they can change with changing experiences. His fundamental principle of therapy is that the therapist becomes an attachment figure to the patient, building a secure base through trust, so that he can re-examine his working models of attachment figures and of self, reevaluate them in the light of subsequent experience and revise them if they are no longer pertinent to his present circumstances (Bowlby 1977,1979).

Wrinkler (1988) suggest that he helping professions have an understanding of the surrender experience. He says there are certain events in the lives of birth parents that tend to trigger an emotional upheaval which is directly or indirectly related to their relinquishment experience. The common trigger events are: the relinquished child's birthday, the anniversary of the relinquishment, the formation of new relationships, the birth of subsequent children, the death of the parents of birth parents and the element of publicity without shame.

Winkler (1988) suggests the following guiding principles for therapy with the birth parent. The central focus of therapy is the relinquishment experience. Reconstruct the birth parent's story in detail, from prior to the relinquishment to the present. Take the birth parents through their experience with compassion and interest.

Work at the pace set by the birth parent. It may be necessary to reconsider the story of the relinquishment, or parts of it, on subsequent occasions. Assess the level of the birth parent's self-esteem.

The grief work, according to Winkler, is to validate the birth parent's experiences and needs by providing information about the experiences of other birth parents and about the nature of grief; to ascertain the nature of unconditional support available to the birth parent; to reconstruct the entire relinquishment experience to facilitate the expression of much feeling, in particular, sadness, anger, and shame; and to reexamine the birthparent's decision to relinquish the child. Focus on the relinquished child in considerable detail, find positive associations and come to a resolution that may involve active searching or comfort with the decision not to search.

#### Failure of the Grieving Process

Research has demonstrated that the inability to mourn blocks the necessary bereavement process toward resolution. In the clinical example by Rosenberg (1992) the factors that delayed or suppressed the grief process were the social stigma, prevention of expression of feelings of loss, uncertainty as to whether there was an actual loss, absence of mourning at the time and the lack of rituals.

### Suppression

Suppression of painful events without resolution is not a healthy or helping process. Suppression is a dangerous way to deal with a painful event. Birth mothers were told to suppress their experience, keep secrets and, if need be, lie.

### Coerced Decision Making

In the Roan (1988) study the subjects of this study felt coerced into giving up their child. This speaks to the birth mother being given options and making her own decision. It appears from the research by Wrinkle (1988) that birth mothers suffer from low self-esteem due to the rejection by significant people in their lives. They regret having succumbed to the pressures of others for transgressing society's moral codes about sexual behavior and parenthood. Added to this is the feeling by others that they should have gotten over their loss, and yet they continue to experience unresolved grief.

In summary, there is compelling clinical and research data that strongly suggest that many birthmothers who gave up their children 20 years ago are not making a healthy postsurrender adjustment. But the reasons for this are still not clear.

This study explored the birth mother's feelings about herself from the time prior to pregnancy up to the present in an effort to understand better both what may have helped or hindered her post

relinquishment adjustment and the effects the relinquishing of her child has had on her feelings about herself.

## CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This retrospective, exploratory, and qualitative study gathered data on the birth mother's process of attachment and loss. It covered the period from the time prior to pregnancy til the present time. I was particularly interested in exploring the birth mother's perception of the impact this loss has had on her life and how she has integrated the meaning of this experience. Strauss & Corbin (1990) explain qualitative research as an attempt to uncover the nature of persons' experiences. Narrative analysis, according to Riessman (1993), takes as its object of investigation the story itself. The purpose was to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives. One of the goals of this research was to lay the groundwork for future empirical and descriptive studies.

### Sampling Procedures

My sample is a sample of convenience referred by Annette Baron, MSW, who has an international reputation in adoption-related matters. Respondents were selected for their ability to articulate their feelings on this sensitive subject. All of the women have given

up their children approximately twenty years ago. My final sample had four subjects. Each subject represented a different example, such as a birthmother who has married and has children, a birthmother married without children, a birthmother who has not married without additional children and a single birth mother with additional children. Three interviews were tape recorded in the respondents' home and one in my office for two separate sessions with an approximate time of 1 1/2 hours for each session.

Recruitment was initiated by a contact by Annette Baron. This was followed up by a phone call from me confirming the participant's agreement to participate in this study and setting up the time of our first meeting.

Due to the emotional sensitivity of the material the confidentiality of the women in the studies was protected, and their names were not used. They were carefully selected by Annette Baron, who knew the history of the subjects and their comfort and emotional security with the interview process. The sample was determined to be "not at risk" according to the guidelines of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare Policy on Protection of Human Subjects, as adopted by the California Institute for Clinical Social Work.

The sampling method is considered exemplary due to the respondents being selected for their ability to articulate their feelings of the experience for research purposes. Community resources and counseling referrals, such as Concerned United Birthparents (CUB) in Los Angeles and Parenting Resources in Tustin were available as needed. The interviews concluded with

suggestions of ways to obtain help for further resolution of any remaining difficulties if the subject so desires.

Because it is a small sample and not random the data can't be generalized, but the anecdotal findings should significantly enrich our insights into an understanding of the process of relinquishment.

## The Interview Guide

### Overview

Some of the interview questions were influenced by the Adult Attachment Interview by Carol George, Nancy Kaplan and Mary Main (1985) and the Adult History Interview by Kessler & Pottharst (1983). Other questions were based on my own particular reading of attachment theory and of the research literature on birth mothers. I used a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions in order to maximize expression of each participant's perceptions, thoughts, feelings and beliefs about the way she experienced the relinquishment process. The Interview Guide provided some structure for the respondent but left the interviewer the freedom to follow up on any pathway the respondent should take.

The interview addressed five periods corresponding with the five sections in my literature review. The first period included questions about the birth mother's life before the pregnancy to understand her earlier attachments and goals. The second group of questions focused on the pregnancy because the research indicates that the mother-child bond begins prenatally. The focus was on her feelings during the decision to relinquish. Questions dealing with

the third period focused on the time after the delivery to understand how this separation was handled. The fourth period questions were aimed at the interval beginning about five years after relinquishment and extending to the present time. The purpose was to understand the birth mother's feelings and the impact she believes relinquishment had on her psychological states and relevant social experiences during this time. Questions relating to the fifth period attempted to distinguish where she stands at the present time in the process toward resolution and to explore what has helped or hindered this process. The concluding questions were to obtain data on how she has organized, integrated and made meaning of this experience into her life narrative.

I started the interview by reading the following statements to each subject.

"I am going to be asking questions about the relinquishment from when you became pregnant to the present time. I am interested in your perception of the impact this relinquishment has had on your life."

I informed the subjects that the interviews were divided into two time periods. The first interview would cover before and including relinquishment. The second interview would cover the time period after the relinquishment up to the present time. I reminded them that they could stop the interview at any time.

I then began the interview by asking the subject the following question: "What was going on in your life at the time you got pregnant?" The rest of the interview was less structured. I had in

the back of my mind the framework and would prompt them or ask them to expand. I thought it was important to let them talk freely and had my questions in mind and listened for what they talked about which is where my themes came from. It was important not only what they would talk about but how they would talk about it, their affect, expressions, and non-verbal language. After the first interview I reviewed the material in case I needed to ask a question or clarify an answer in the second and last interview. At the beginning of the second interview, I asked if they had any thoughts or questions about the first interview. At the end of each interview I made sure we both had ample time to emotionally recover before I left.

### Questions

Following are the questions I had in mind when I went through the interviews. In each time category I was interested in the feelings about the self, family, friends, separations, goals, hopes, and aspirations.

I was concerned with what was going on in her life before pregnancy. What was her relationship like with her parents. How did she feel about herself. What were her friendships like. What separations had she experienced and how had they impacted her. What were her goals, hopes and aspirations previous to the pregnancy.

During the time of her pregnancy, I was interested in how her parents reacted to and handled her being pregnant. How and when the decision was made to relinquish and how she felt about the decision.

I wondered if there was a change in the relationship with her parents at this time. I was concerned with how she felt and thought about herself when she was pregnant and how it felt to give up the baby. I was interested in what her attachment was like with the baby during the pregnancy and how it evolved as she got closer to the birth.

Immediately after relinquishment, I was concerned with how it felt to separate from her baby and her feelings about herself. I wondered if the relationship with her parents changed. I was interested in her friendships and if they changed when she returned to the "normal" world. I was concerned with how she dealt with this loss, whether she was able to grieve, and what helped or made it worse.

In the time period five years after relinquishment to the present time, I was concerned with what her life was now like, whether she felt she had recovered from the loss of her baby and what had helped or hindered her adjustment. I was interested in her relationships with her parents and if they had changed over time and whether they talked about the baby. In the area of relationships, I was interested in her female and male relationship patterns over time. If she had other children I was interested in what the experience was like to keep the child, her connection with her child and whether they knew about the relinquished child. I asked about her goals and whether she had accomplished her goals. I asked about her feelings about her relinquishment and how resolved it was for her. I was concerned with how she handled the search and re-union with her child and her thoughts and feelings about the outcome.

In the ending, after we had talked fully about the relinquishment experience, I was concerned with how she felt the relinquishment process went and whether it felt resolved or she needed more help at this time. I was particularly interested in how she felt about herself and if this loss had never occurred how she would imagine that she and her life might have been different.

### Data Collection

Data for this study was collected through two individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with birth mothers. In qualitative designs the instrument of data generation is the data gatherer (Polkinghorne, 1991). Qualitative research attempts to uncover the nature of persons' experiences and to understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is known (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In order to accomplish this, the data collection was open-ended, in-depth interviews so that information could be elicited that represented each respondent's subjective experience. The Interview Guide provided broad themes during different time periods, so that the focus remained on the process of attachment and loss, and loose enough so the interviewer could continue to probe and to question the respondent so as to maximize a wide range of possible responses that may reveal new phenomena. The interview was tape recorded and later transcribed and coded.

After the interviews were transcribed I made copies in different colors to represent each subject. I went through each subject and how she responded to each category. There was so much

material that in order to compare the responses to the categories I placed each category in a separate envelope and put the subjects material under each category. Then I compared the categories. Fully immersed in my material I went back over it many times until I saw the themes emerged. I color coded each interview, cut it up, and divided it in different ways until I could find a structure that worked.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DATA AND FINDINGS

In this chapter I will first present the descriptive analysis of the categories. It will be followed by the comparative analysis of the categories. The final part will be the analysis of the themes. The major findings of this study are grouped according to categories which arose out of the topic areas in the interview guide and from which on-going themes and sub themes emerged.

### Descriptive Analysis of Categories

The purpose of this study is to better understand the process of attachment and loss that a birth mother goes through when she feels pressured to relinquish her infant. The study explores the birth mother's self reflections on the process of relinquishment from before pregnancy to the present time. The studies cited in the literature review (Pannor, Baran & Sorosky 1978; Ryearson, 1982; Millen & Roll, 1985; Wrinkle, 1988) indicates many birth mothers did not make a satisfactory post-relinquishment adjustment to losing their infants and continued to suffer from symptoms.

The categories come from the interview guide. After each subject described their life experiences, these experiences were loosely organized by the interview guide and placed into categories, so they could be compared with the experiences of the other subjects. Emerging from the organization of categories, I was able to begin to see many differences in the actual experiences

of their life, especially pre-relinquishment that included their family life and the meaning the family life and actual relinquishment had for each of them and how it fit into their life story.

Included in this section is my reflection on the first phone contact, the interviews, and impact they had on me.

### Subject A.

#### Identifying Data

A. is a trim pleasant looking and attractive 67 year old Caucasian female raised in the East who relinquished her child 42 years ago when she was 27. She has been married and divorced and has a 36 year old mentally ill son. She comes from a middle class family and has completed high school. A. owns her own home in an upper middle class neighborhood and has been employed in a satisfactory career for many years. I found her to be pleasant, intelligent and articulate.

#### First Contact

A. was my first subject and the only one not suggested by Annette Baron. On the initial phone call A. expressed interest in being a part of my research but was uncertain whether I could use her due to her age and the time constraints in her life. She was in her late 60's and the birth and relinquishment happened over 30 years ago. She thought that she had blocked out this whole section of her life although she has good memories of the experience. On the phone she seemed agreeable and interested in doing the interview.

### Early Life

A. described her early life as one of inadequate parenting and ignorance on practical matters. She was the eldest of five children. She said, "My parents never talked about birth control and what we were suppose to do so we wouldn't get pregnant. My mother never even told me about deodorant." Her parents were divorced when she was 17. She and her siblings had to go to court and take sides. She and two siblings chose to live with their father and their mother took the youngest children. Her parents had terrible fights and as the oldest she had to call the police. After the divorce her parents lived in the same house and the court sent notices of who was assigned to whom. When her father would take his children to dinner he would turn off the gas so her mother would have no way to cook for herself and her children. She said that she did not find this out for many years but when she did she was not sure she was ever able to forgive them. Three of her siblings remain emotionally disturbed.

### Relationship with Parents

A. reported that she did not have a good relationship with either of her parents, especially her mother. She said:

I was never able to get along with my mother. Nothing was ever right with my mother. She never even told me about deodorant. You can see why I dislike my mother and my father both and the kind of background I came from. She could never talk about sex. She couldn't talk about menstruation. . . . My mother was flaky.

She also did not have a good relationship with her father. She described her father as follows:

My father was diabetic at the age of 30 and had a short fuse. He idolized me and there was no way for a man to get past him. He planned for me to stay home and to take care of him. I told my father 'I'm not ever going to get married as long as you're alive.' I always think I was uncomfortable thinking about being married as I did not know how one was supposed to act.

I always felt the whole time I was growing up that I was only there to make them look good. I wasn't here to have a life or to do what I wanted to do, to enjoy myself, that did not exist for me because I was not allowed to speak. I did not feel there were any options. I didn't want to sit home and cook and dust. I was at odds to what my parents thought I was on this planet for.

He was very mean to my littlest sister. Terrible. She was the fifth and he picked on her unmercifully. She was the scapegoat. Consequently, she wet her bed until she was 14. She's a mess my little sister. And so out of 5 children I'm probable the most well adjusted because I had the benefit of the first 10 or 12 years of their marriage before things went sour and it goes right down the line. My brother who is now 61 is completely banana's. He is not in an institution but practically. He's just a very sick mentally ill man. I think he's a schizophrenia. He's the middle child and my father was glad to have a boy that he spoiled him and couldn't control him. The next one down is a lesbian and for many years she couldn't keep a job. The little one we never hear from. She's just unable to cope at all.

I was glad to get away from my family. I came away from there not knowing how a person was supposed to act as a married woman and not having any notion about sex or anything. Only knowing you were not suppose to sleep with somebody until you were married. Only knowing that when you had blood coming out of you it was called a curse. Only knowing nothing and having a terrible family situation. Being happy that I got

rescued by my grandmother. My father believed I did not need an education as my husband would take care of me. He would tell me that I was too stupid to go to college. Later he allowed me to go to a good secretarial school in case my husband should die and you need to support yourself. So I bought into that like a dummy. I wanted to go to college and didn't get to go. . . I went to the best secretarial school there was.

When I pointed out the fact that he let her sister go to college. She answered "that's right." I remarked that she can't hold on to that thought. She said:

No, I can't. It was because who I was. Where I was in the family structure and what he expected me to be there for and that was for him because he knew he wouldn't always stay with this women [his wife] and I would be his salvation which I turned out not to be after a while.

#### Self-esteem Issues

In addition to a severe beating when she was 13 (her father found some dirty jokes she and a girl friend had written and hidden in her room) she believed that she always had low self-esteem. She had forgotten the beating by her father and was surprised not only that she remembered it but how emotional she still was over this single beating. She said it was after that beating that her grandmother, her mother's mother asked her if she wanted to go away to school. She jumped at the chance to get away. She has retained good memories of the school. She seems to be able to recall the good things that happened to her to balance the bad that she was able to forget. She reports that her roommate from high school remembers her as having very low self esteem. She said:

I think I've always have had. I never felt I could be a person in my own right. I had to be what my parents wanted me to be. What they expected me to be. I really didn't know why I was here on this planet. I always thought I'm only here because I'm supposed to obey them. So therefore I grew up not knowing what me was supposed to be.

### Getting Pregnant

When talking about getting pregnant A. related the following:

I use to drink a lot when I went out socially. Starting back when I was even living at home when I was in high school. I never knew how to act. Finally I moved to Florida to be with my sister who went to college and became a teacher. I wanted to see Florida and being footloose and fancy free and coming from the family situation we did I just didn't want to be around either of my parents. I'm 25 and still a virgin. I'm still trying to be this good girl my father wanted us to be. I had lots of boyfriends but never had any sex at all.

In Florida I had several boyfriends. I loved to dance. I was not a virgin but not promiscuous. One time I had a fight with my boyfriend and went looking for him. At the bar this good looking man came in. Ultimately we had drinks and went off and had a wonderful night that I'll never forget. We had the most fabulous time and the next day we are driving along and I say I am pregnant. I could feel my insides were different and something was there that wasn't there before. I only slept with him once. It was fabulous. The most incredible thing.

### During Pregnancy

#### Secrecy.

A. kept her pregnancy a secret from everybody except the birth father and later her sister. She said:

I decided to go to California and found a ride with another girl and waited until she was ready to go. No one knew I was pregnant and when I arrived there [in California] my father died and I returned back east. None of my family knew that I was pregnant. I finally told my sister.

In response to my question of how did my sister respond she said "she was always into herself and I don't remember how she responded."

In response to my question of whether her parents ever knew about this she said:

I never would have told them or think they deserved to know about my life. I was never going to give them another chance to put me down or find fault with me or say how could you have done such a thing. I feared it was partly their fault anyway because they never taught me anything about how to have an abortion or how to handle yourself. I wouldn't want my mother to know about this. I wouldn't want to give her the satisfaction of knowing. My father died 2 months after I got pregnant.

#### Living arrangements.

A. talked glowingly about where she stayed during her pregnancy. She said:

The doctor recommended the Florence Criterion home. It was a wonderful haven for me and I was so thrilled the day I arrived there. I was five months pregnant. I was one of the oldest ones. I felt I had gone to heaven. They were so wonderful to me and everyone else was in the same boat. I felt so happy this place existed.

I had some money. You had options. Were you going to keep your child or give it up. If you kept your baby you

moved up to the top floor where the nurses helped you learn how to take care of this child otherwise the child was taken away at some point.

The home was fabulous. We never left there. We were hidden away. It was your choice to be hidden out. No one knew your last name. I had to have a job and worked in the new born nursery and loved it. I felt very protected and happy there. I was happy to be safe. There were two older nurses working there and they were tremendous people to me. I had some money. You had options or whether you were going to keep your child or give it up.

### Shame

Although A. described the living arrangements in glowing terms, she later would speak about different times of feeling humiliated - during the abortion attempt, in hiding from the family as she waited to go to California and in the home hiding from visitors in case they would know her. The way she would talk to herself was to put herself down. She would say to herself "it's my personality to say 'you stupid idiot.' You got yourself in this mess and you will have to deal with it." She recalls that she even moved out of the room she shared with a friend as she waited to go to California. Her friend never knew why she left. She did not want the birth father to know where she was. She shared the following:

I was very ashamed of myself. I then rented a room from some lady for a month and then I was leaving. He never knew where I was and I was in agony and miserable.

Although she remembers Florence Criterion home as a positive experience in response to my question of why she went to her room when visitors came she said:

I was afraid that someone would know me. I felt bad about myself. I didn't think it occurred to me it was anybody else's fault except mine. My own stupidity.

On one hand she described the joy she felt in the home and yet under further questioning, she would also describe feelings of shame, self blame and humiliation.

#### Pre-natal attachment

In response to my question of whether she related to the baby in the womb, she stated that she knew there was a baby there but had no fantasies or thoughts about it. She felt she got all of her fantasies out by taking care of all the other babies in the home and that was a real release for her. She said:

I could take care of these babies and it didn't matter. I could relate to all of them as babies. I didn't have any particular feelings about mine. Another baby that somebody was going to be thrilled to have. I was like a cog in the process. I think that was a big help to me to work in the delivery room and observe the whole thing. I thought it was fabulous. I fit well into that scene. I liked what I was doing.

#### Relinquishment

##### Decision to relinquish.

When talking about her decision to relinquish A. said:

He [birth father] did not vanish when I told him I was pregnant. We went to a doctor for an abortion. It did not work. Finally we saw another doctor and there was no option except to have the baby. The man [birth father] told me he was getting married so was not able to see me anymore and like a dummy why didn't I go after him?

Even now she seems surprised at this. After thinking about it she said:

It never would occur to me. It's not my personality to do that. I just wanted to vanish into the night. I would not go through that [the abortion] again. It's my personality to say 'you stupid idiot you got yourself in this mess and you will have to deal with it.' I don't know if he gave me some money. All I know I was devastated, of course.

I knew there was something different inside me. I immediately knew I was giving her away. I had done this dumb thing. This child deserved to have two parents. She didn't deserve to be in my crazy family with my nutsy mother. I had lost my father then. I was not in a position to want to be a mother - to be stable enough to take care of somebody - to live somewhere, to know how to earn my living.

My sister tried to talk me into keeping her. She said she did. I don't recall. She said to tell a story that your husband got killed. I couldn't do that. I can't live a lie. Never could. I couldn't buy into it. I was adamant in the beginning and never wavered from that. Never thought about changing it. I thought I had to do what I had to do and it was the right thing to do. I didn't think I could think about myself. The concern had to be for this child. What was best for this child? Not what was best for me. Unselfish, I suppose. I never thought about it until now but I was [A. said this as if she had never thought about the possibility that this could be viewed as an unselfish act].

I never felt sorry for my self and wishing a husband or that I could have a family because my exposure to marriage was ghastly. I didn't know how I was supposed to behave as a married woman. I always thought I didn't fit into that mold. . . Having a baby didn't fit into the picture I had of myself. I couldn't be directed in my life before that because my father wouldn't let me be what I wanted to be.

#### Actual relinquishment.

In response to my question of what it was like when she took care of her daughter she related the following:

I took care of my daughter for a week. That week was terribly hard. I chose to do it. The day I knew they were coming to get her I went into the room into the ward and they gave me pills. Nothing knocked me out. That was the worse and I wanted it to be over.

#### Sadness and Loss

When we first began to speak she said there was not much sadness regarding the relinquishment, although as we talked about it she remembered years of crying. She said:

The week I took care of her was terribly hard in the end. I cried. A friend wanted to marry me. I remember crying all the way there and back when I went to sign the papers. I knew I couldn't get beyond this whole thing until I got it over with so I could go on with my life without being a brick. I still know I was doing the right thing. You take the loss and you can't ever get it back again.

I cried all the time the first 5 years or 10 years. Forty years is a life time but I use to cry all the time on her birthday. After I got over that I use to cry at night at first because it was a very big loss. I never cried because I had done the wrong thing. Never, never. I

always felt like I had given her something. It was almost like she did not have to know these terrible parents of mine. I never told them or think they deserved to know about my life. I was never going to give them another chance to put me down or find fault with me or say how could you have done such a thing.

A. expressed sadness as she spoke currently of her birth daughter and waiting for phone calls to spend time with her. In my remark that it seemed to me that there is more sadness now than in the intervening years, she acknowledged the following:

That's right because now that I know her I want to see her more. Again I know I have to face the fact that she doesn't want to hurt her mother. She is living with her mother. She can't get too involved with me without hurting her mother.

### Relationships

She maintained she had close friends but never a successful relationship with a man. She said:

After I relinquished my daughter I dated a lot. . . I don't know what I felt. I could never have intimate relationships with men. I was always afraid to. I was always afraid of them knowing the real me. I guess that's part of my low self-esteem. I thought they wouldn't like me if they really knew me. I have maintained many close relationships with friends over the years.

Four years after she relinquished her baby she married and had another baby immediately. She said:

I must have wanted to have another child but I wanted to have it legitimately. I wanted to be married. I knew that

someday I'd have to have another child after what had happened to me but I knew I'd have to do it as a married person. I supposed to make up for the one I lost. I don't know if I really consciously thought about it. He was mentally ill [the spouse]. It was horrible and I divorced him immediately.

### Re-union

She did not attempt a reunion as felt it was up to her daughter and she had no right to search. She attended meetings with birth mothers and adoptees and they encouraged her to search. Her daughter had received permission from her parents to search seven years before A. put her name down in the registry to find her daughter. She said:

Eventually I signed up with the registry and quickly had a response and a re-union with my child. I was reluctant to meet with her. I was afraid that she might be mentally ill like my son. The first thing I said to her was 'Are you all right?' When I talked to her that day it was like I had lived with 20 pounds of weight on my shoulders and it was instantly gone. I became so light. I had that weight, weighted down by that knowledge but most people didn't know about it. I didn't tell people. I didn't realize I had it until I was without it. The weight of wondering where she was. Not wondering why I did what I did. Never. I never thought I had done the wrong thing. I thought I had done the right thing. I wouldn't have made a very good mother. I just think the way it was not knowing that over the years the weight got heavier and heavier because the older I got I just wanted to find out.

I felt like a new person. I always said if I just knew where she was and if she was all right and what she looked like and if that is all I got out of this search it would be all right even if I could never be friendly with

her. If I just knew what had happened to her and if she was happy than that would make me happy.

When I had a re-union with my daughter she described the room exactly where I took care of her for a week. Weird isn't it? She [my daughter] likes having two mothers and says "one can't have too many mothers."

I think all of these reunions go well for a while and than fall apart for one reason or another. I don't know why.

The researcher remarked that perhaps it is the urge to find and see and touch and know. A. said:

That is the strongest one and after you do get those answers and then so what you can go on with your life and forget about it. I don't know. I think it takes both parties to continue it. I don't think mine will ever fade away. She may with me. I will never. I would send a card. I find cards in the store, not easy, appropriate and when I go through periods of not hearing from her I send the cards that fit us. I think of all the things she says to me and writes to me that I'll never lose her again or that she will wander away from me. I don't think she wants to. I think she feels more attached to me than the family who raised her. She is very loyal to them. I'm very glad. I wouldn't want her not to be loyal to these people.

After the phone call from me she told her birth daughter about my research and she [the daughter] said she would like to be involved if I studied adoptees.

#### The Impact of Relinquishment on her Life

In response to what impact this pregnancy and relinquishment had on her life she responded:

I feel I have come full circle now that I have her back. It's like I didn't really give her away kind of. It's like she had a good upbringing which she wouldn't have had with me and I'm glad she had that. I don't ever permit myself to feel sorry for myself for what could have been. I don't think of what could have been or how different it could have been. I don't think I would have made a happy marriage ever. I don't think I am capable of this.

When I asked if this was due to her background? She said, "Due to whatever including my background." She felt the relinquishment was her choice and seems only a small part of her difficult history.

In response to my question of how her life might have been if she hadn't had the baby she responded:

That's so hard to tell. I don't think I punished myself for having that happen to me. I don't feel like it was such a terrible thing I did. I feel like it made me a stronger person. In a way it was a positive experience. I don't think I ever would have married with my parents alive and could have lived through their attitudes toward me, toward me as a married woman, toward me with children of mine. I couldn't have tolerated those two people, either one of them because they doted on me so and my mother was a flake. She was inconsistent and they never trusted me. They never let me be what I wanted to be. You see when I got away from my family, I left much of the influence they had on me. When I finally got away from them, from him, I got pregnant.

#### The Impact of Family on her Life

In response to my question of the impact her family had on her she shared the following:

It was probable the most powerful thing that ever happened to me was that family situation and not being able to go to college and being told I was too dumb to go

to college. It was like what's in it for me this whole life. What am I supposed to be doing here? I don't get to do what I want to do. I don't get to say what I want to say. I don't get to express an opinion.

As noted above she talked about getting away from her family as the best thing that ever happened to her.

### Resolution

In response to my question of whether the relinquishment felt resolved she said "yes". When I said to her many birth mothers feel it is unresolvable she said, "No, it's not unresolvable and it feels resolved." She further added, "... in a sense I don't feel she [my daughter] will ever stop seeing me or I will stop seeing her. Never."

Although she felt it was resolved she had great difficulty and did not want to be around adoptees who blamed birth mothers for causing major problems for them by relinquishing. She said:

I was uncomfortable with the active adoptees who wanted to open records. One adoptee said when birth mothers knew they were going to give them away, the baby could sense that and you gave them a primal wound before they were out of the womb. I don't buy that myself that the child is tainted. . . I felt weird because all the things they talked about were depressing for me. Adoptees have to talk about it. Fine, but not when a birth mother is there. . . it is their answer to everything that doesn't go right for them.

### Current Assessment of her Life

In response to how she reflects back on her life and views it she conveyed the following thoughts:

I'm pretty strong to have come through what I came through in my whole life. At 68 I have had such a time and got over it. I think I got beyond all of that though I know it effected me very much. In my life I met a lot of women who look up to me. I never can figure out why. Look at all you have done with your life. You bought a house. You were on your own. These are people who know about my daughter and people who have led boring lives. They just don't do anything. Considering I've never gone to Europe or traveled a lot, those kinds of things, but I feel I was rescued by my grandmother and sent to a private school. I think it was the Quaker school that saved me. The Quakers teach that the individual person is important. I was introduced to classical music and I learned how to use deodorants. I don't think I could have made it in this world unless I had gotten away from my family. In this school I was told that I was special. That we all are special. We have important things about each one of us. I was with some fabulous girls and they are all still my friends.

Her current feeling is that the impact of relinquishment has been a positive force in her life and felt resolved. She believed she had come full circle with her re-union with her birth child who is now a part of her life.

### My Reflections

The family has been the most important and traumatic relationship in her life. She disconnected early on from her feelings due to not having adequate parents who could provide a secure home base for her. She was able to break out of the cycle of abuse and deprivation from her parents by her grandmother sending her away from the family after the physical abuse by her father and later by the trauma of an unwanted pregnancy. This time she was

able to remove herself far from her family into a satisfying place of security and joy for her where again she felt safe, protected and could grow from the experience. Each bad experience was followed by a good experience as it brought more freedom for her from her family. Each trauma was eventually growth producing for her.

At the beginning of the second interview I asked for her reflections on the first interview. She said she had not been able to think or to feel about it. She had been concerned about her son as he has having problems. I think this is a normal reaction for her. Her coping style is of getting on with life and putting bad things out of her mind. She is a person who does not look back but accepts what happens in life and makes the best of it. Denial of feelings has been a positive way for her to get on in life. She is able to put away the bad experiences and savor and appreciate the good things that happened to her because of these experiences.

She talked unemotionally about her life. However, her eyes watered most of this second session. Whenever I brought it to her attention she was surprised. Later she said she had not allowed herself to think about her life. After the last interview as we were saying good-bye at the car she couldn't stop talking. She said that what was amazing to her was how she cried at this time, with the sorrow of her father beating her. What an impact that had left and all those others she couldn't remember [before]. She had been in therapy although that hadn't been uncovered. It seems that now she is getting in touch with some of her needs in connection with her daughter, especially when her daughter stays away from her. She is able to feel needy for her daughter. She remains a care giver with a

dependent son. I said, "That the heartbreak of your son is not over yet and is something you live with." She said "It's forever, it's forever. That's right it is forever." I responded, "Whereas, with your daughter it feels more resolved with her." A. said "Yes, it is. She say's I'm finished. There is a resolve about my daughter and myself." Her daughter is now part of her life and it is painful for her to think of a life without her again. I said, "In a way this is the more hopeful relationship between the children. She is a person you can have a relationship with. Your son can't. A. said, "I do....very limited. " This child she gave up at birth has more of a child-parent and two adult relationship possibility. The birth and relinquishment of this child has less trauma in it than the raising of her mentally ill son. I imagine these relationships feel bittersweet, carrying both joy and sorrow with them.

A. was able to disconnect from her parents. She was able to disconnect her emotions from her daughter as she relinquished her. She was able to have long-term relationships with friends but not intimate ones with men. She chose to stay disconnected from her parents and to re-connect with her daughter. She feels attached to both her children. She has found satisfaction in finding her own strength through life's challenges.

#### Subject M.

#### Identifying Data

M. is a slim and attractive young looking 40 year old woman who relinquished her child over 20 years ago when she was 16. She

comes from a middle class family. She has never married or had more children. She works in her art store and is considering returning to school and making a career change to the mental health field. I found her to be intelligent and very thoughtful as she articulated her feelings and thoughts in very emotional and profoundly moving interviews.

### First Contact

M. was the second subject I contacted. On the initial phone call M. seemed reluctant to be a part of a research project due to confidentiality and any possibility of jeopardizing her current re-union with her son. She interviewed me extensively on the phone about my position as an adoptive mother. She was still angry at the loss of her birth child and feeling she had no choice at that time to keep her baby. She continued to tell her story on the phone and made a request that if we meet we would have open ended time. She asked me many questions about my adoptive children and views on re-union and birth mothers. We spent close to one hour on the phone until I had to close it down due to the richness of the material. She was eager to talk once she trusted my understanding of her pain. Although she was initially reluctant she now felt at ease and comfortable with the idea. I felt a strong bond with her. She was the first one I felt drained with afterwards, feeling emotionally overwhelmed with her experience and the enormity of her perception of her loss.

### Early Life

In response to my statements of the areas we would cover from before she was pregnant to the present time M. said, "There are definite links to all of it and that it was hard to separate out."

M. described her early life as one of deprivation and lack of support. She said:

I came from a surface middle class family. I have an older sister and a younger brother. My parents were divorced when I was in the fourth or fifth grade. My father traveled and was gone a lot and a lot of fighting in between and he lived in a hotel during the separation and divorce. My mother remarried and there were two sets of rules in the house, one for us and one for my three stepbrothers. My stepfather wanted no responsibility for the kids. His kids lived at home, had college paid for and financial support. We kids got nothing and we were all out by 17 or 18. My birth father wasn't around. I found him two years ago after 22 years or so. When we moved with my stepfather my sister stayed and finished high school. My sister's escape route was to bury her head and she did it in ways that were applauded in various ways society sanctioned as good girl. She buried her head. She hid in academia. She had her PhD when she was 21. She took the biggest scholarship the furthest away.

### Relationship with Parents

M. stated that she did not have a good relationship with either parents. She said:

It was very bad with my mother and still isn't great. My sister said there were daily humiliations. My mother was not a healthy camper and would act out a lot and would confuse things for my sister and brother. We grew up isolated from each other to a great extent. We were

scrambling for survival first and yet in a pinch we would be there for each other and I'm protector of my little brother.

There was a narcissistic quality about my mother. When she heard I was hard of hearing her first reaction was to be pleased, to be happy, as she was hard of hearing and I would understand her more. I think she loved us in her way but in some ways wasn't there for her children because she needed to be a child. In later years she would say 'I don't know what you girls make a big deal about, I had 2 abortions and they were right in the house.' She also forced my sister to have an abortion although she was in a serious relationship and they were going to be married.

M. often used the word collapse regarding her family. In response to my question of the meaning of collapse she said:

Well, I view my real father as a very collapsed person with a lot of depression. He was not around in the early years nor a real active father in those later years. There was nobody there to protect us. I view my mother as not a healthy person. Collapsed in her way. a lot more energy than my father and in some way we got fed. Much more active and angry. You never knew what to count on. You never knew who was going to greet you. My therapist said she sounded like an ambulatory schizophrenic still functioning.

My parents were divorced and prior to the divorce it got very violent and prior to that he wasn't around. He had a soft-spoken weaker personality and my mother would push him away and getting divorced he was like someone who didn't have control and it was like a last desperate act and he would force sex on her. The first time she was in the room next to me and I woke up and heard it. She was yelling at me to save her and I went in and started hitting my father to let go of my mother. And the second time it happened my mother was in the twin bed next to me and he was raping her. For a long time I did

not acknowledge what I really saw. He had a bloody lip. My mother pulled me into bed with her and said 'you saved me' and I couldn't stand being touched by her. None of us kids can stand to be touched by my mother. Even the social worker at the home who I later found remembered my mother. She said you know you see these families and you see anger and emotion and all this different stuff and you saw love also and your mother was so cold to you.

### Self-esteem Issues

M. thought her self-esteem issues tied in with her inability to say no due to her neediness. She said:

I really think a lot of times there are reasons some people get pregnant and some people don't, even if both are teenagers in high school and things like that and sometimes it's not how to work this - the act of sex itself, whether the boyfriend was serious or not but the loneliness, the need for something combined with low self-esteem or boundaries that were violated where you are not comfortable or ready because the neediness or fear or rejection of saying no to the boyfriend because your need to have someone is so great that you don't take care of yourself because you don't know how and the need overrides the other inner feelings...

As she continued to explain this concept, she added that:

There is no intent and no conscious desire to get pregnant but just in their dealings with the boyfriend can't say no. More like you are just kind of floating and you kind of take what comes your way and the neediness for somebody and you settle for other things rather than real closeness or someone is pushing you for sex you won't say no for fear they will go away. And you won't go after - say you are a teenage kid and you go after two guys and one is pursuing you and one is not and maybe the one that is not pursuing you maybe you like better but you are going to settle for the one pursuing you because

your center, your confidence, or however you want to word it isn't grounded enough. You kind of almost accept in a fatalistic way of what comes along and I think those really for myself were a factor.

### Getting Pregnant

M. tied in her feelings about self-esteem and pregnancy. She said:

I got pregnant the first time we had sex. He started seeing somebody else while I was in the hospital who he eventually married. There was still a lot of back and forth with the same boyfriend. Not saying no when I wanted to say no. Why I was so needy for a boyfriend. I didn't say no to him for anything including cutting school, things like that prior to getting pregnant. And he was older. He was already out of high school.

### During Pregnancy

#### Secrecy

In response to my question of whether her siblings or friends in school knew about the baby, M. shared the following:

Yes. there were a lot of rumors. They even called me at that place. Some knew and some didn't. I don't know. My stepbrother even started spreading rumors and he didn't know if it was true. He was just doing it to be mean.

I was told not to tell people and I told my brothers and sisters. My sister's first reaction when I told her I was pregnant was not to tell anybody and everytime I told anybody it was viewed as a big betrayal.

### Living Arrangements

M. spoke about the decisions her parents made about her living arrangements: She said:

My parents would not let me stay at home so they sent me to the salvation army and they contacted J.C.B., Jewish Children's Bureau who was the adoption agency. At the time I was pregnant I believed that they would not let me back in the home. And it may have been true. I don't know if they would have let me but I believed it. I stayed at home for four months and went in on my fifth month. I liked the Salvation army and wished me and the baby could just stay there indefinitely.

When I asked if they informed her about the options she replied:

No, but neither did they pressure you to give up or to keep. They were actually pretty non-judgmental. We had jobs to do. People came in. You went to hi school but were not allowed out of the building. You went walking 2 to 4 as there were certain hours you could go out.

In response to my question of why they were limited, she replied:

To keep us bad girls out of trouble I guess, or from running away because we were underage. They were responsible for you. Sometimes I think you were somewhere between slightly nuts and physically informed. There were good steady three meals a day. I loved meal time.

At some level it must have been as much as people may feel sorry for you for going to the salvation army, it was nice to be away from the violence. It was nice to look at those girls and think of them as nice instead of monsters.

### Shame

When M. spoke of shame it was only regarding the relinquishment. She said:

Where the shame comes from for me isn't on getting pregnant, isn't on having sex, isn't on having a baby. Where the shame comes in for me is the fact that we weren't together. That I relinquished him and that's where the shame comes for me. To me it is the relinquishment and that's been, I don't know how to word it, it wasn't the whole thing. It was the thing that broke me in those areas.

### Pre-natal attachment

M. spoke of her early attachment and involvement with her baby. She said:

I wasn't happy when I realized I was pregnant but I became very quickly attached to the pregnancy as well as the baby and really got into the books and the pictures and his development. I would wait for him at night. If he was quiet at night I couldn't go to sleep until he started stretching and thumbing [turning] over. He liked to stretch his little legs out and I use to worry that his toes are that little and my ribs feel like this and it [his toes] pushes back and can it [his toes] get pinched and get stuck in my ribs and go to a tighter place. There was another world I went to at night.

I really loved being pregnant. I talked to my stomach. I got funny food cravings. I loved potato chips in one hand and a snicker bar in the other. A few bites of crunchy and salty. I would talk to him all the time and make jokes to him. I called him Little Toe for Tony. I read all these life books and such that showed development and you know I knew even at three months what everything was looking like and for the most part got along well with the girls.

When I remarked about the joy she felt she said:

Yes and I think the fact that I was able to have that joy and slip into the joy probably also accentuated for me the pain and the loss because I didn't have the sense to detach if I knew what it was. I had something to love and floated away with it.

### Relinquishment

This part of the interview was very difficult for M. as she was often overcome with tears, sobbing and silences when she could not talk.

### Decision to relinquish.

M. made a bargain with her parents to give up the baby.

She said:

I was going into my fifth month when there were attempted illegal abortion on me. The first one I sabotaged, the second one my mother took me for and at that point I said I just want us to live and if you touch us I'll call the police and that's when they contacted the Jewish Children's Bureau and the Salvation Army and all that stuff. At that point I made what I feel like now is a bargain with the devil. I said I'll give him up if you will leave us alone.

She felt controlled by society and her family. She said:

Well.....it was for me absolutely devastating to lose my child. There is a lot of talk given and I think it applies and plays a large part of my feelings of shame and anger at the parents who - my parents who forced me to do it

essentially because they put me in the salvation army and they called the adoption agency. Drowning nightmares, quality of having no control over what happens... feelings of having an inner voice but the train of that inner voice for what you are told is best or should be. There is all that stuff but underneath that a very basic devastation at losing a child and having no control over it.

I've met other birth mothers who were in their twenties and it was a little more of a conscious choice and whether it is the culture or the family we live in that stacks the deck and makes it impossible we also take it in the context of the time frame of 20 years ago but there is also your family. No support and they would rather break your heart rather than lose face or take on an extra load. Basically it was also the society as that was what the society said was best and deemed correct. Social workers quote in the position of knowledge or authority said it was best and they made you feel like you would ruin your child's life if you kept him and loved him because what could you provide.

And then you get to the family or the collapse of the family. The family says you can provide all these things because we are behind you, a home and so forth and your family essentially says fuck you and how could you do this and you are too young to do this and that support is gone too and so within the customs and mores of your culture as well as your family you're helpless so that even when you have your inner voice and you're whole body weeps, your eyes cry, your bleeding, your breasts continue, your aching on a very primal basic level and you ignore and try and push away those voices that are telling you that because everything around you makes sure that is impossible. They said it was the best for the child. And you may be the only one that knows that for a long long time.

To other people you are a fallen girl and not only did you get pregnant but what kind of person would give up a child. I've had adopted parents tell me I just don't understand....I don't hold anything against you...I just don't

understand how anyone could give up a child we just wanted one so badly. And I want to scream.

It's like you are put in a position whether it's true or not and then you believe it. It doesn't come down to altruistic reasons. I didn't want to bestow on this lovely couple a wonderful baby. I never wanted to grow up to be a breeder for other people. There were no reasons of generosity. For me it came down to what I believed at the time---survival. I believed that I would have no home and I didn't know how to provide one all by myself.

There was no way you can keep your baby. If you want to you will drown on the street. If you give him up your son will have two loving parents and this ideal family. It's fine to say we are not forcing you to give up your baby but if there is no provision nor any route to be able to do it and keep him alive it is a survival thing. I was not willing, as they led me to believe, to risk his life for anything.

I kept trying to find ways to keep my son in a more manipulative sort of way while somehow still trying to keep the social worker happy so he could have a good home in case I couldn't find a way. This is a 16 year old mind like maybe the boy will change his mind and marry me or if the child is born a boy and has dark hair maybe my mother will let me keep him because she said she always wanted a Tony which to her meant - to her I was suppose to be an Anthony and at the same time did not open up to the social worker either because I felt I had to please her and they may have abandoned me also and I wouldn't have a home for him. You are talking about a very naive 16 year old.

#### Actual relinquishment.

M. described the following experiences of joy and pain in the five day time period between delivery and relinquishment. She said:

It was a very easy delivery. I was very strong, young and athletic. I woke up - went to bed and a hour later woke up and feeling pains and pushed and water was everywhere. I must have slept through or not paid much attention to earlier stages. I was a tough kid. When I woke up the pains were already five minutes apart. I had dilated and the water bag broke and I went down to the hospital floor and I had towels on me like a diaper.

I was smiling and laughing. I was going to meet him and they thought I was loopy. With all of this we focused on the pain but there were moments of real joy. They told me to stay 'n bed. I ran out of the delivery room to the window saying "it's a boy" to my friends in the parking lot. I felt like passing out I was so dizzy and just seeing him....I just burst out laughing I had been waiting so long and he had all his fingers and toes and in my mind was terrified that the attempted abortions might have done something horrible. I didn't understand anything so there were a lot of fears too.

I just laughed, just pure joy when I saw him and than later in five days I was in pure agony when that woman walked away with him and I knew it was over. I believed I'd never see him again. How do you accept the unacceptable. Things were so upside down sometimes that what would be deemed healthy [was not] if you were not a teenager being pregnant in 1968. You don't have the look of labor because I was smiling. I was so excited and then the reality of scrambling because I had five days before they were going to take him unless I could manage something and right away they are shoving papers in my face.

They put him in a nursery and the mothers would sit outside the mirrors with the drapes drawn and you were allowed to visit him through the window once a day. You could hold him once on the day they would take him away. I was manipulative and managed to see him twice a day.

And I got to hold him at the end of the day they took him away. And I got L. in (the father) hoping at the last moment but I didn't realize that since I had signed the papers they would have taken him away. We held him for 20 min. After 5 or 10 min. they kept coming in and saying it was time and I just kept holding him and they took him away and I was walking out the back and I saw a case worker walking across the parking lot with him through the big windows and I just started collapsing and sobbing at the windows seeing him being taken away. I just collapsed and just cried. I had lost - it even said on the report I just cried and said it was all over. It's over and I think at that point I didn't give a shit.

### Sadness and Loss

M. tearfully spoke about the continual sadness she has felt over the loss. She said:

I don't think I realized, I know I didn't realize how devastating to lose a child. I kept thinking about him for ever. I hated going to sleep at night. I just cried every night for months and months and then I hated waking up each day. I went to school and people would tease me and I'd pretend it didn't happen and I would hide someplace and cry and then I would go home.

I was attached. It was not like you go into a room one person and come out two. It was like you already were starting to be two and after you come out you are still kind of one. You are not separated as two. That is how it felt emotionally. I wasn't prepared for the devastation.

I think I felt at the time was just keep this alive. I want it to live and I don't want anybody touching me anymore. I don't want to be hit anymore. I don't want an abortion. This was in the days of the illegal abortions. It wasn't like it was today. I knew I would be taken out of school most likely. I knew people would talk about me. And I could stand up to that. I didn't realize the immediate devastation of losing him and I certainly did not understand the life long impact on both. And I

comforted myself for many years thinking no matter what I am going through he has this happy ideal life. I didn't understand the price the child has to pay as well. I believed the social workers. I tried very hard to believe what the social workers told me.

### After Relinquishment

I don't think I was home four or six months before I was running away. I was devastated. I don't know another word. It felt like a society sanctioned kidnapping. It felt like an enormous loss, devastation, violation. A violation of my psyche, my body, like somehow my body was detached and could be no more than an incubator or something."

In response to my question of whether it was talked about at home, M. said:

No. The only thing [they said] was to cover up if I wore a bathing suit or anything that showed any stretch marks and just because it happened once [the pregnancy] doesn't mean you have to let people touch you again and strange comments, such as my mother saying 'it is Suchi birthday on that day, too' which was my mother's dog. Which was her way. I think she thought she was being the understanding one. You sort of get on with your life and when you can't 'your defective, what's the matter with you?' In order to please people you would function at school with some level of denial or betrayal of who I was in my most honest feelings. I did. I hurt. They took my child.

It's a healthy reaction. Let's say a mom - a married couple has their first baby and the mother never thinks about the baby and gets on with their life. That woman would be viewed as off the beam and yet that was exactly what was asked of us so the most primal basic instincts were then viewed as sick. Things would then turn upside down.

When I asked her "What did you think your family meant when they asked you to move on"? She said:

It wasn't so much viewed as move on as I didn't have any clue to what move on was but just life should be as it was before as if it never happened. It was more as if it didn't happen. As if he didn't exist as if my feelings didn't exist is what it felt like. But it's like it is over and it's done with. That's it.

In response to my question about her parents motivation, she responded:

I think to a small extent they didn't want me to hurt and I think to the larger extent it was very inconvenient for them. They didn't want to think about it. They didn't want their lives upset period and they didn't want to think about it. I don't think being forced to relinquish had any thing to do with protecting me. I really don't. I think she personally felt "O my first grandson look what you have done." You know because in the past she would say "it was my first grandchild." Yes it was. It was all about her to her.

### Relationships

When I asked "Do you think as the pain with him lessens it will open you up to another relationship?" She replied:

Possible. I think as I am able to become more open, less duplicity where the M. that greets the outside world and the one inside becomes more integrated. When I feel stronger...it's gradual...I feel stronger now than last year and I felt stronger last year than the year before. Where I can be like this is who I am. This is my history. I love my son. If you are going to start like my family and say forget about him or don't talk about him you are not the

right person for me as I become more grounded in who I am and more able to embrace my own history. Than I won't feel fraudulent. So if somebody is caring about me I'm more likely to believe in them when I feel they are caring about me but they don't know me. So in that sense - yeah.

M. speaks of her difficulty with intimacy and her relationship with Paul. She said:

I met Paul when I was traveling....We were getting amorous and I just burst out crying. He is not the only man I've done this with but he didn't shrink away. He didn't understand it but just let me cry and held me and with the intimacy, the veneer got thinner, the whole balloon collapsed and I was sobbing and saying 'I miss my baby' and he just let me cry and I was devoted to him ever after that.

Mainly we didn't get together and marry because he was so happy for me when I started doing the art and finding myself. He became Christian and I was not and raising children that was an issue too. I wasn't sure I believed in God. I wasn't sure I believed in the soul. I felt soulless. The last time I talked to Paul was about two years ago, married and with children and I told him I had searched for my son and found him and that I felt like my insides was growing and the connection and the love with Paul was the same after all those years and on the phone it still felt warm and than maybe a year ago I just felt like a stone and was crying and I'm too damaged and I don't know what love is and fell asleep crying and had a dream about Peter and felt so much warmth and felt that's what love is. Not a sexual crush. But you know what love is therefore it come come again. A huge comfort.

We are talking 20 years later and I think Paul may have kept that crack open in me. I think I was getting close to real trouble and totally shutting down. I didn't know what boundaries were. I put myself in sexually bad

situations. When I get scared I think what are people worst fears but losing their children. You see your mother raped, what else can happen to you? What else? What have you got to fear? I've said that a lot lately because I'm thinking of leaving the business and trying new things. You face some people's worst nightmares and you walk with a limp. You are damaged but you are still walking and you do what you can.

If I can be more open and people can accept it I can trust it more. I trust myself more. I think intimacy and relationships felt very threatening to me because it always ended up including abuse or violations. My mother psychologically violating me because of her own illness. My father to my mother. L. to me. He was not the ideal boyfriend. Losing a child.

It is very threatening to turn myself over in love. I would tend to fluctuate between wanting to be clingy and things get exaggerated because it's not really what happened but it's a feeling of panic. Or I could be very cold when seeing a guy crying and telling me that he loves me. It's like the more they would cry, the more I would withdraw and feel not contempt but cold like it was threatening. A lot of that is changing.

I don't feel close to somebody unless I can be open and I feel uncomfortable about being open about all of this whether it is feeling judged or feeling shamed, feeling a lot of shame around it. That's a biggie. Trust is a biggie. I don't tend to trust people that way. I think the devastation of the loss. Sometimes when people start getting close I almost feel claustrophobic that something bad is going to happen. That a major loss is than possible. Like being out of control, losing control. It certainly enters into things sexually and it is compounded with other things.

As this researcher encouraged her to speak about what might have been if she hadn't gotten pregnant, M. said:

I don't know what might have been. It was my first relationship so I don't know how to gauge how I would be if that didn't happen. There are certainly other things to have to deal with. I told you a bit about my past. The family dysfunctions.

Being violated, sexually violated...that a guy could poke you and then move around and then you still have to deal with everything. Not that that is true about all men but I think there is that feeling. I went through a period of just not holding my boundaries. Sort of being promiscuous. But not by chasing but by being and allowing things to happen that were not right for me to sort of all catching up with me and it better be my idea or you are going to get a real cold reception.

M. talks about whether she wants marriage and children. She said:

I did but in my head like I am continually sabotaging. And as a single parent whenever I would think about it I would get scared. The whole thing devastates what little self-confidence you may have had. So much of it is so much more resolved now. Just panic at the thought of it at the same time wanting it very much but also knowing the problems compounded. I would never allow a relationship to get to that point. Certainly when I met my son a lot of things about being a single parent or pregnancy or insemination or any of that became almost instantaneously resolved for me and I would never get pregnant through artificial insemination. I would never sleep with someone and trick them. I feel like I would be stealing them. I would be doing something related to what was done to me and it is wrong. It became very clear for me, if I ever do have a child it will be with somebody. I would never get pregnant on purpose to have a child by myself at this point. I essentially couldn't have more for the emotional reasons and problems.

It really meant something to me when I saw him and could see L. in him. It became....it hit a spiritual ethical point in my self that it does matter. It does matter you have a child by somebody you want to have a child with. That it does matter that the child can be connected to both parents. That the father is a part of it, an important part in it - not as important as the mother.

I've always been able to visualize my self having children. To this day I can't visualize myself with a husband. So even while I pursued it with Paul and I probably would have gone ahead and married him if it wasn't because of his resistance. He felt religion and I didn't.

There were times I felt bad and there were even times I contemplated adoption, like in a real denial or attempted denial of sort of a feeling that I couldn't take care of mine so I'll take care of somebody else to sort of even things out. It's hard to answer because sometimes I think or talk that way I was never able to picture myself married.

When the researcher asks M. about her own nurturing needs she states the following:

I have two dogs. I nurture with friends. I get on well with kids. They say you must have kids and I kind of freeze. I don't know what to answer because I don't want to tell them the whole story because I hardly know them.

And I am still open. I would happily house a birth mother and kid until she got on the road. I would take in a foster kid. I would be an extended family. I feel very strongly about not doing it under any false pretense, not pretending I'm anything other what I am. Not pretending I'm the sole mother. Not denigrating where somebody came from. I don't think there is anything wrong with being an extended family or an important bonded adults to these children or like my friend's son.

## Reunion

The adoptive family was not open to the re-union and it became a very traumatic experience for her and one she prefers I don't describe here. His birthday is a very sad time for her. She waits for a call that doesn't come. Our interview was on his birthday and she found talking about him rather than shutting down or going numb helped her through this period.

M. tearfully shares in profoundly moving terms her needs for her child. She said:

I still would like my child with me. I would still like him to be a part of my life, very much so. Even as a friend but more than a friend. Obviously I can't raise him. If I could put him back in my stomach and start over I would and do it right this time but I still very much want him in my life. I still want that connection. He is out there. I'm out here.

It's also blood. He is part of me, part of my blood, part of my family. You can look at the emotional or the bond part and it's a part of you. If I saw somebody without legs, yes, I'd have a lot of compassion, but would I cut off my leg and give him one because he didn't have one? NO. It feels the same way with a child. He is a physical part of me. Somebody tried to cut and yet there is still a connection. When you meet him years later as a young adult, and I've hear so many stories so I know I'm not the only one, and you see similarity in humor, the same interests that were not from the environment. The nurturing from the environment has enabled him to pursue those interests but so much is from the base. It was not just five days and it was not just one year. He is recognizable family. He is still connected and a part.

One of the dreams I had we were standing on some sort of platform or stage or something and we looked across

at each other and there was a recognition and we walked across the stage and took hands and stood like this and both started crying. We were both older and we have made it. Somehow we had made it and we are both still alive. In other dreams there are other meetings of walking through an old village or town that is kind of maze like and we will link up and be walking through the mazes together and doing things and then have to split and feel horrible and then run into each other later in the maze and be walking through the maze again through cobble streets or talking and showing...a feeling of connection use to go on, certainly a hope that one day I'll see him but I also feel like I have to accept that he may not choose that but I'll still feel...there are things you can't control.

And if he did show up I'd be frightened also. I think because of my own feelings and my feelings toward him and my heart would, you know the door is always open and be welcoming and if he - the fear comes from when we had three months of getting to know each other by phone and stuff and was going to visit and right before going to visit it got cut off. That he would come into my life and maybe get what he needs and cut off again and I would have to go through it again is threatening to me.

He seems so much like me and L. [his father] in some ways and in other ways a lot like my brother and being like my brother makes it easier almost an immediate feeling of understanding, even meeting him after not seeing him since he was five days old I did not feel like I was meeting a stranger.

When I went through it again and searched I had to re-face the stuff. It was nothing like the crying you saw. I'd get bloody noses, throw up, it was so painful to go back and really face some of this stuff. And I had never thought of myself as in denial because I would always tell people... like my close friends always knew about it. You know, I hadn't realized the implications and it was....I think we are both, I honestly and sincerely believe that both my son and I are better off for the searching come

what may. At least he knows, even if he rejects it, at least he knows that there was caring.

### Relinquishment Impact on her Life

M. spoke of her collapse and change due to the relinquishment.

She said:

I absolutely collapsed. I was never the same. I think without the experience of the relinquishment I would have been a very different person... and a healthier person without it. I needed someone to fight for. That bond was special and wonderful to me. There were times I had very conflicting emotions. I was so proud when he was born. He was so beautiful. I know I was suppose to feel ashamed but I just didn't. That I relinquished him... that's where the shame comes in. To me it is the relinquishment, and that's been, I don't know how to word this for you, maybe the straw that broke the camel's back, but it wasn't the whole thing. It was the thing that broke me. Those other issues may have had a heavy hand in why I ended up pregnant in the first place.

I do occasionally have dreams about him where we are walking and talking and joking around and I don't know how accurate they are or whether there is a connection or reason why I'm always dreaming about him. Sometimes he was a baby and it was about the loss but I've had dreams about him as an adult.

I hurt. I cried for years later and I never knew what it was connected to and afterwards I would be awake 10 or 15 min. I would be crying 'I want my baby, I want my baby' and yet the thoughts before I went to sleep didn't seem to have anything to do with him and I never felt that way and I still don't feel that way.

One of the ways M. has to cope with this pain is by going numb. She said:

I tend to not grieve as much on birthdays. I go numb or I just shut down to get through it sometimes or I forget about it and then, not recently, but back in the earlier years I wouldn't be aware of what day it was and then just wake up crying. I'd realize afterwards but not even know the date on the calendar.

In response to my question of whether this numbness happens in any other part of her life, M responded:

Yes, when I have to go through the paces of working, basic survival stuff, I'll shut down and go on auto pilot and do whatever I have to do and then come home and cry and deal with it. When you see something as serious as separation from a mother and child happening for serious real reasons rather than something frivolous. Even taking a harder look at our society at the times. To me it makes more sense than pretending everything is fine. If everything was so fine why would someone just relinquish her child.

#### Family Impact on her Life

In response to my question of whether she had ever pictured herself married as a young girl she responded:

I grew up in the 50's and husband's were sketchy. My parents were divorced and prior to the divorce it got very violent and even prior to that for a long time my father wasn't around that much because not only was he working he was a traveling salesman and it could be days and I wouldn't notice if he was home or going to be home so I didn't have much to make a picture with. There wasn't a strong male in the family. I also didn't know any of my real grandfathers.

#### Resolution

When talking about recovery from relinquishment, A. said:

The whole experience and the devastation of losing a child has been really the one thing I haven't been able to get over. I don't believe you get over it. I believe you incorporate and I believe you amputate. It's the one thing that has had a long lasting profound effect and the straw that broke the camels back.

I don't think there is recovery. I think you could incorporate and walk but you always have a limp. So often people say 'recovery' and that means get over it almost like it didn't happen. There is no way and there is too much knowledge gained from it --there is too much-- a major part of your history. You can't amputate like that and still be whole. You're almost more whole with the limp.

M. spoke of ways that she believed the process of relinquishment might be eased by family support, society support, groups, therapy, understanding and acceptance and relationship with the child. In spite of the fact that the re-union was traumatic, it still helped. It wasn't until recent years she knew about re-union. She said:

I didn't know all this stuff was going on with search and reunion. I wasn't aware of Annette's [Baran, M.S.W.] book on Lost and Found, and all that stuff. My therapist gave me her book and I went to see her once. Two months later I called her back and said 'I'm falling apart. Can I come see you?' I had no one who understood that I could talk to. Most of the people I tried to talk to had a vested interest in not hearing. Not wanting it stirred up. To be not working at prime level and how dare you fall apart now.

I saw Annette for about a year. I had isolated myself and subconsciously kept myself isolated until I began to see my therapist. I know when I saw Annette there were a lot of things we did not talk about but all kept

gravitating toward the adoption stuff and a lot of other stuff didn't get touched on too much but sometimes it was just because I was so on my own between the work situation and the family situation that just going in once a week to get a re-grounding and be cared about goes a tremendous long way. I owe a huge debt to Annette. She let me pay whatever I could pay. She was just extremely generous. I had spent all my savings on finding where my son was. If she hadn't been that generous.... It was a real fortunate gift.

What would help? To be allowed to see him [her son] on weekends - co-parenting. It's horrible not knowing where he is. You don't get to see him growing. You don't get to know if he is safe. You don't know if he is alive. That may be more of the climate of today but in the climate of those times it wasn't. Maybe it could be eased a bit as I said the Salvation Army was pretty good. My family could have been nicer. But the devastation of the loss is the stuff that really hurts. It would still have been the same. These still hurt and happened but I've been in therapy and able to deal with the stuff.

When I tell you the history of my mother and stuff I don't feel devastating pain and helpless any more or like a victim any more but there is still left the devastation of the loss, and what could have changed that unless I was allowed to somehow share or keep posted, like maybe he was adopted by open loving people who didn't view me as a threat and had the generosity to share and send me pictures and let me see him once a month or even once a year.

It would have been real painful because it would be like wanting more all the time but maybe something like a guardianship, like co-parenting, where you were not like an outsider or visitor to the picture once a year or just postcards, but a part of the picture. I don't think most of the adoptive parents would go for that but want a kid of their own.

Or even temporary or extended family like in the old days. A group home until you were at a stage where you

could move out on your own and be a single parent or married parent. If the Salvation Army could continue for a few years where I could get my education and in a position to learn what to do. If I was thrown out in the world on my own as a single parent at 16 or 17 I might have collapsed. If I had help for a couple of years that's what I needed. I needed help and if I had help for a few years it would be as different as night and day instead of a lifelong amputation, night and day.

When I think it would have depended on the amount of contact it would have eased a certain amount of the separation as there wouldn't be as much separation like an amputation. If you see a child once a month every month a relationship is going to be there. Let them know the information maybe why the mother couldn't keep them.

They [adoptive parents] are not going to understand you necessarily unless they make a big effort and most of them are not going to make a big effort because they are not feeling their own loss more. Some will and some won't but most people wanted, especially at that time, to believe it was just like having their own. They don't want to understand what you are feeling. Might not understand the connection if they haven't been pregnant. I mean full term because the bonding continues and the birth and everything. So here is somebody [adoptive parents] who has never been pregnant, has not wanted to look. It's not that I caused the problem, it's more like they came and I stood them back up. She is not going to understand if she spent a lot of years not understanding in order to make herself feel okay. The friends of mine who have children or had children, they understand much more. It's not that the other people are unsympathetic, it's just that it's in the past.

When I asked M. if in the group they would talk the way we are talking ---a sharing in the same way? M. responded:

Some evenings, some evenings not. It tends to not be as good as this because there is too much cross talking and

a lot of time someone goes through their search. There were meetings when there were primarily adoptees and their anger at the birth parents and at the secrecy and the system and hearing them saying 'you all act so wounded and I'm tired of hearing birth moms whine. You know there wouldn't be so many adoptions if you didn't give them up.' Sometimes it seems not to promote understanding because. I'm grateful for it because it became hard for me to get on with my life and still keep going when my own reunion wasn't progressing.

Acceptance meant a lot to me, a lot. It would like be a huge validation. I wasn't prepared to be feared and hated. My god, they got the biggest gift anyone could give. And in terms of fearing me it was a surprise because to me I felt what do you have to fear of me? I'm not here to denigrate your position or to take anything away from you. In fact you have always had a part of me growing up in your household. I never did not exist.

I think an effort has to be made to separate the birth and the relinquishment. He is an adult, a young man now, and some of those wounds or pains are mine and not his, and he is going to have his own issues. I think in some ways, not real comfortable for me, but in some ways the re-connection alone is something that is needed. I think it also gives a validation of sorts. It's not just a validation of my self but I think there is a part that needs a validation of the connection.

In response to my question to M. inquiring what the interview experience was like for her, she said:

Interesting timing with my son's birthday. It feels good to talk even when I think I've said, if anything has been enlightening, will be help for anybody down the road. You know I sincerely hope it's not just your curiosity but I'd be thrilled if something got done with it that promoted and helped anybody. I hope something is done with it. It's also been good for me. I always like it when I can meet an adoptive parent [the researcher is an adoptive parent] that I like because it helps, really

helps. So hurtful they [her son's parents] wouldn't even meet me. Maybe it's being in a support group of adoptive parents haven't liked as people.

It's also been cathartic at this time of year instead of withdrawing and staying quiet, it's given me talking about him before his birthday and now after his birthday and I do feel happier today. But I do feel closer to him when I'm comfortable talking about him. It is connection. And I think that connection has also made it hard for me to let go of the pain because I'd rather feel the pain than feel no connection.

When asked by the researcher how this relinquishment impacts her life, M. states:

"It's a changing thing. I hope for the better. I'm able to connect more not in pain with him now."

#### Current Assessment of her Life

M. remains uncertain about the future. She said:

What will happen in the future I don't know. I have some real issues I'd like to work out and face a little bit. I sort of know it and where it is coming from but it just seems to stay in the same place. I'm completely heterosexual. I like men's company. I feel irritated at them. Kind of like when you always want a dog but get a cat and you are irritated at the cat for not being a dog. I sort of feel that way about men.

I was very innocent with L. and the pregnancy and afterwards but in the 60's I went through my phase of being out there and stuff and the thought of having sex with somebody seems violating something like not one more time...no one is going in. Or when I flirt and it is my idea and we are hugging and kissing with a boyfriend it escalates and it's my idea and it's okay. The only way I see it changing is establishing friendship and a lot of

trust and yet I'm not doing it at all. Sex feels a violation. So what triggers is a guy who is not competent and pleads so I want it both to be a strong confident male but I want it to be my idea and I don't want him to ask politely. That is not a fair situation.

### My Reflections

The phone conversations and interviews with M. were emotionally draining for both of us. She was tearful during the interviews and this had an impact on me. She cried through the interview as she described this devastating experience that she has never recovered from. She was very articulate and descriptive of her feelings and thoughts. I often felt guilty being an adoptive mother and yet felt well connected and comfortable with her. She was surprised that her emotions were still so fresh.

The second interview was very long (approximately 3 1/2 hours). I seemed unable to end and so did she. We did not start right off but talked awhile about careers, etc. I felt she needed this after the emotional discharge from the first interview. I also was feeling very guilty being an adoptive mother and taking a baby from a birth mother. M. questioned me thoroughly about my feelings and thoughts on birth mothers. I answered her questions as honestly as I could. I believe that during these interviews I had my first understanding of the enormity of the loss for a birth mother.

M. had a difficult beginning in an abusive family. She has not been able to recover from the relinquishment. She still appears to be grieving that loss and her life has not been able to move forward especially in love relationships.

### Subject F.

#### Identifying Data

F. is a slim and attractive 52 year old woman who relinquished her child over 20 years ago when she was 24 years old. She comes from a middle class family and was a nurse at the time of her pregnancy. She has not remarried although she has a second child that she raised. She lives at the beach and has continued on with her career as a nurse. She remains very angry over the relinquishment.

#### First Contact

F. was the third person contacted by phone. She was distant on the phone and I sensed more anger from her and yet she was willing to be interviewed. During this phone call I felt guilty over being an adoptive mother. It was an emotionally painful phone call and I was unable to find my notes after the call. Later the microphone was turned off and we had to retape part of the first interview during the second interview time.

#### Early Life

F. described her early family life as a normal and typical family of the time. She said:

I think I came from a healthy environment. My parents were married and there were four female children. They were church [Catholic] going people, very culture oriented. My parents were from Ireland and I lived in a big Irish community in growing up.

I was the captive of the house. I was the youngest one and my mother's focus of attention. The others were only the focus of her attention for two years and then another one came along. By the time I came along the oldest was four years old. They were on a different level of development. They could be in the playground and she had me to watch and I sure had all her attention but it was not positive.

It was a typical family at that time. It wasn't an alcoholic family. At parties there was drinking but never at any other times. It was dogmatic, religious and in the religious order so when I say eyes were on me they were no matter what I would do. If you go to hang out at a friend's house, that was too far away.

### Relationship with Parents

When asked about her relationship with her mother, F. responded:

I have two ways to answer that, one as I thought it was then and now as I look back on it retrospectively. My mom is a good person, keeps house, never worked, matriarch of the nucleus of all the extended family. Very strong outspoken person.

I really never had arms about me, not a touching, loving family and I was always aware of that missing in my life. I always had a sense of pain about that in growing up. I'd love my mom to have held me once in a while. She wasn't able to - the culture. They had a very deprived upbringing themselves. Came out of poor Ireland. They were happy to have any food some days in growing up. She was doing the best she could with her make up.

I always knew as a child what I was missing and just wanted tenderness instead of....I used the wrong words, there was caring from her, definitely an involvement in my health and well-being. She could not and still does not touch on the emotional. That's where she was. They come from a very hard life and I understood that. Even so, I thought we are living in America so why can't they be a little more like Americans. I just want to be held once in a while.

You see I had a younger sister 11 years later and I saw the same way with her so there was verification for me that there was no difference in individuals. You just want to be comforted. My mom would give great consoling thoughts but the emotional attachment wasn't....I needed more as an individual.

I have a few memories. It was distant. It was clean. All the food was there, but not the tenderness. The jobs had to get done and that's the part I didn't realize as a child. If my hair was being brushed why was it being brushed so roughly? Why did I always have to hurt? Not that I was not understanding of her past ...and I still say that she was functioning the best as she could and that was how she got through life.

My dad was not a close person, very quiet, unless he...no he wasn't close no matter how you try to get close to him, not the touching and that's the way his whole family is. I could see it in him. As a child I didn't realize that about my father. As a child I remember trying to get close to him but all encounters were painful. This child did not get what she wanted. She did not get tenderness.

In response to my question about whether she had friends, teachers, mentors, F. said:

No. I thought her eyes reached everywhere. It was a Catholic community and her eyes did reach everywhere. I

did not feel safe at all. My cousin, always walking to school with him and I did feel safe there"

In response to my asking what she meant by safe, F. said:

"Not safe means always being told something isn't...always being judged walking too slow, you are walking too fast, why did you tell D. on the way to school? Your work isn't good. No, my mother would not say my work isn't good as she wasn't a student but did you get your work done? They say your work isn't good. Always taking others statements rather than mine. If I ever said, although I'm sure I didn't say this, that I lost it. If that was a fact I wouldn't be believed. You just didn't do it. They said you didn't hand it in, you didn't hand it in. It would always be judged by someone else whose story would be understood. Always outside of me.

I could see her giving caring to other people. In retrospect, I could see she couldn't give it to anyone that close to her kids, grandkids, that was too threatening to her...that was her survival technique. Other people outside loved her and cared for her but I would get the harsh word or the quickness. And I thought about it later. My sisters thought I was the lucky one. They were very jealous of me and thought I got all the attention. Well I wish they had.

The tenderness was missing, the intimacy. My mom cannot function on that level. I can see that. And my dad...I mean my mom was the whole thing in that family. She did all the work and my father was the breadwinner and that's really essentially what he did.

It was always control - total control of me. When I looked back I knew my mother totally controlled me, when I went to bed, when I got up, whether I wanted to get up or not she had total control on me. But there was one element missing and that was I didn't have a voice back to her. She doesn't hear my needs, only my physical needs, my nutritional needs, religious and spiritual needs, schooling needs but not the person. Whatever society dictated and that is the society she came from.

### Self-esteem Issues

Previously to getting pregnant F. was contented with her life and described herself as a whole and healthy individual. F. felt she had low self-esteem after the pregnancy.

### Getting Pregnant

When I asked F. what was going on at the time she got pregnant, F. said:

I was 24. I was a professional registered nurse with excellent positions living at home which was our culture which was not unusual in the 60's. I was into athletics. I was living life at the time, athletics, religious life, family life, professional and literally very rounded. I had friends but I had lost one friend that had just gotten married so I had lost that relationship, but I had other friends. One of my closest friends. It was another loss.

She decided to be a nurse due to the choices allowed during that era. She said:

At that time you were either a secretary, teacher or a nurse or get married. I went on for the academics and became a nurse. I didn't want to be a secretary. You get married when you have a relationship.

F. stated that her career was most important at that time. When asked about her views on marriage she said:

Marriage comes with the relationship and you have to think of relationships. You think of relationships not

necessarily marriage because all relationships do not lead to marriage.

In response to my question about future goals for herself when she was 24 she responded:

I never do that. I still don't do that. I'm still very much in the present taking care of it now and where it might lead to.

When this researcher asked about getting pregnant, she replied:

I was just dating this fellow. I was a virgin. I did a lot of dating and was still a virgin. That was intentional on my part, a religious belief about intimacy. Sexual intimacy occurred in marriage. The only time it was a topic or concern was when you were out with men and they were being pushy men. Even if you wanted to sleep around you don't.

It was hard because you cared for the individual. I was definitely human and very people oriented. It created difficulty in that you loved to have arms around you and feel close to somebody and suddenly say 'got to go now' and have to go separate ways. Then again I dated Christian boys so they knew what I was saying. Many tried to be men and get their way but that was a normal thing then. We all knew we could push them away. That's what all boys were doing, trying to have sex with whoever they were going out with. But they were respectful, eventually of who we were.

You know. I had my heart broken, lost a few boy's, relationships did not work out and you have to get over that. But even those boy's I'd love to live a life with - sex was not a part of it. Intercourse was not part of it before marriage and that was the way we all were.

In response to my question of whether she had long relationships, F. answered:

Yes, what everybody was doing. I wouldn't say years. They did not go on for two years. I'd have to think back. It was a normal interaction. I wasn't into getting married. A lot of people were getting married. I just wasn't that way. Actually you hear about it later on and the marriage did not last too long. I was into honesty, truth, love, caring, and fun but people did get married just for the sake of marriage.

When questioned by this researcher: why did she choose this man to get pregnant with? She replied:

I have no idea. The whole thing was a shock to me because it wasn't going to bed as a sexual act. I do say I was saying no and we had been drinking and I'm sure my guard was down. Later as I thought of life I realized I am attractive and give in to emotions a lot easier around my menstrual cycle and in fact that is exactly what it would have to be done to get pregnant that time. There is only a window a woman can become pregnant we know now. He should have known better. He was six years older than me.

I was trusting of him. That must have something to do with his age and a well established person and I said no and he was really missing his responsibility in that and I guess I gave him too much. You know, I may not have been as forceful as I would have been with my own peer age group that I was always going out with, but I know I was saying no.

It was too late and I was pregnant. I missed a period. I was a medical person and went to the doctor. Had to find a doctor. Pap smears were not big in that day. You did not go to a gynecologist until you were married and I wasn't even married. How could I go there? That was a

horrendous bridge to cross because as soon as I went to that door everybody knew. I was a scarlet person. Whether that was true or not that was my belief. I don't know who the other people there were.

### During Pregnancy

#### Secrecy

F. explains why she could not tell anyone except a best friend. She said:

I couldn't talk to my family. There was no dialogue for that. There was no dialogue for problems. There was no platform. You have already tried it in different areas of life and if it didn't succeed anywhere else this certainly was not going to. This was an affront to everything life was about.

Why would I tell somebody if I had to give up my child. Why would I ostracize myself as there was no avenue for keeping my baby. If there was an avenue for keeping my baby I could tell somebody as I wouldn't mind being ostracized as I had the end result. If the end result was to be ostracized without any benefits why would I tell anybody who was going to think badly of me and I couldn't keep my baby and yet my mind was working on how could I keep it.

When asked who she talked to, F. said:

My girlfriend. She was somebody who listened but I still had to come up with my own answers. She and her husband. I didn't feel dirty in their presence. They were a sounding board and I had to come up with my decisions and one of the big obstacles was religion, so the first place to go was to the church and I didn't get any help. ...well, even before that I went to the fellow I was dating and he rejected me. He didn't take me out anymore and I asked him to marry me just so I could have the child and

we could get divorced afterward. This was not a thing a woman would do, absolutely prohibited.

### Living arrangements

F. speaks of making her own arrangements for the birth of her baby. She tearfully recalls this time and said:

When I realized nothing was going to happen in that community I decided to go traveling. Which is what I did. I got in my car and traveled cross country. That way I could grow and nobody could see me. I took care of myself. I've always taken care of my self emotionally. This priest told me about a community in California. I did not want a city. It had to be a long way off so nobody could visit me and far enough away so I could justify not coming back. He told me about Redding, California. A mountainous area away from the city. I had a cousin go across country with me. She got as far as Las Vegas and her money ran out and she had to fly home.

I got a job at the hospital. I wore a ring. I don't know if anybody knew I was a single mother because I would never get into that conversation. But they knew I was here living by myself so they would be suspicious that something was wrong in my life. And I let them think that because the war was going on in Vietnam. I would mislead them but I wouldn't lie to anybody. But I was working and connected through work to a woman who rented out rooms in her house. The woman in the house wasn't a warm person but there was another girl who was renting a room and she and I were very friendly.

I made contact with social workers at the adoption agency. I was going to counseling at the Childrens Home Society. The doctors all knew. I guess that's where I heard about Children's Home Society because I didn't know about that. No one in the community knew that I wasn't married.

I sure wish somebody could have helped me. The doctors and the social workers knew about my situation. I reached out as much as I could. I needed somebody in my situation and we could have got angry or something together, maybe. There was nothing.

### Shame

F. speaks of the enormity of the shame she felt being pregnant and not married. This was unacceptable in that era by society, family and by her own standards and beliefs. She said:

Of course, pregnancy was confirmed and it wasn't right in my mind because I wasn't married. Now you ask what was my goal in life and it was certainly not this position. I could answer that. This was not my goal. This was not my place in life. That one I knew real clearly. A very upside down world. I wasn't supposed to be in that position and suddenly...I knew this would not be accepted by my society. Shame. Shame. I felt shame. I didn't feel shame in my life before this. This was shame. Then they put on you that you were a nurse and should have known better. More shame. Shame compounded. How old are you? Another shame. I could build up shame. So many suitcases loaded with it. That was where I was then, a very shameful person. Yet the sun would go down and the sun would rise and you had to live every day

### Pre-natal Attachment:

F. speaks of her strong attachment to the growing baby inside her. In response to my wondering if she could make contact with the baby even knowing she was giving it up I saw the first smile from her. When I remarked on this smile, she became tearful and told me how it felt for her. She said:

It's so painful how can you smile when you don't have your baby. It's terrible. Terrible. Smile and think of

that beautiful thing and know...The only joy you have is with the baby in that pregnancy because you couldn't share it with anyone. I couldn't. There is joy to be sharing and there is no joy at the end of that road and you knew that. Who were you kidding. It's a horrible, horrible, place to be. You are dealing with life and dealing with death at the exact same moment. It is really the most crazy making situation.

I was doing everything for this baby. It was the death of my baby. I didn't feel it was right. I knew I'd be putting terrible things on her if I gave her up. She would have difficulty in assimilating who she was and why she was given up. Nobody allowed you to have contact with that child. They forced this confidentiality on you, under the guise that it was what you wanted. It was not what I wanted and can't we change the paper around. I knew I was putting a lot of pain on this child. I knew that was wrong. I knew I was best for that child and yet I was so connected to my society that she would be feeling that stigma.

In those days they still put a big stamp across the birth certificate - illegitimate. I don't think any human being is illegitimate. Life is not illegitimate and they even use that term in the 90's. I felt death for such an innocent pure thing.

I took my baby to the Grand Canyon. I'd give her a world before she was born. She was in uterus. I took her to her first trip to San Francisco and told her when we were crossing the Golden Gate Bridge. I could feel the baby inside me by three months. Attachment, attachment, as the child moves around in you and kicks, attachment, eating well and doing the right exercise. I think everybody is attached. Very few would not. That would be a pathological process going on. Everybody is attached. Even these people that I would meet who were drug abusers or alcoholics, they are attached. There is other denial. A lot of other stuff. Attachment. Attachment. That baby is there with you.

Separation is horrible. Separation is death itself. Only you live the death. My uncle just died. He is in the ground. Everybody will go on. Not with birth mothers. Even a mother of a new born infant that dies lost their child and they have a body to grieve and a community to acknowledge them. I had nothing. Even the mothers that came from maternity homes don't ever talk about it and are told to get on with their life. We are counseled so much. As much as I always knew things better. It turns out I am an intuitive person who should go that way more often. Intuitive is dangerous. You think I need a reality check every now and then. I should go more with myself. But I didn't know then.

### Relinquishment

F. was angry with the statement to be signed that this researcher used in the release paper. The statement was the following: "I'm aware there is little potential risk for emotional discomfort for participating in the study." The wording was later changed due to her discomfort to acknowledge the risk for emotional discomfort. She said:

You put that in there so you wouldn't have to do more. Likewise when we signed our relinquishment papers we had no control on what was stated. That is the same sense. People are going to pick up this paper and just go ahead and sign it. The same thing happened in our relinquishment. We did not write that paper up. We did not design that paper. We did not want confidentiality. We did not want a lot of things. We signed that paper and they hold it up to us today.

Well, that's what you wanted. It is an example of this. You know at that time how could we question anything. At a young age and at birth time there is documented evidence that your I.Q. is less at this time, than pre-pregnancy. Documented evidence today, okay? Aside from all the hormones running around in you and all those

disturbances taking place I'll bet that there are even some people that might sit for these interviews and be involved in participating and go on and not read this.

She was very emotional and angry about the loss of her child. She said:

Where is our power? That is the issue of relinquishment. Where is the woman's self-esteem, power, identity? What am I? That to me is the process of why women lost their children. Females lost their child. It wasn't a man's issue. So this line is similar when you sign those other papers, to lose your child.

You're single, you're not entitled to a child regardless of how you got pregnant. That isn't even the issue. You're not entitled. To explore that....I'm aware that my child will have a healthy home and that she is going to a good family. People are protected and yet it is a society problem. Society is everybody at that time. How do we design these things?

I never should have lost that child. Do you know how unnatural that was? I knew that was the road. I knew I had no other road just from living in society and not something I was told. Society, that my parents were a part of, was at fault. You never thought you were going to become pregnant at some time. You would never suspect it. It was not a right or wrong thought. It wasn't a thought. You are alone and this happened.

#### Decision to Relinquish:

This was a very tearful time for F. as she told me about trying to get help to keep her baby and not finding it. She said:

I should have kept my daughter. The only thing against me was society. Well society as much as I knew there was a lot of people in society and even though I believe they are wrong, who do I really think I am and that I know better than society. You know the question keeps

coming back to you and when I reached out to doctors and different people and nobody got through to me and I'd never seen another walk of life. I'd never seen anybody in this situation. I was up there working once again. I didn't even know about welfare. I didn't know any of this stuff because that's not the ethic we have.

I reached anywhere I could reach. The only options for a person at that time was to be married and have a family or if you were pregnant to be married or you were not to have that child. Not to have that child means you didn't keep it. Abortion was not a word to be used. It was not in my religion. It was not in my thought process. The choice was to be married and have the child or to give the child away. It was how that would be resolved. Your child and marriage or you gave the child away.

My world was upside down. There was no other way. And as each moment was going on you knew your physical condition was changing and it wasn't because you were eating too much. How long can you handle this tornado that is swirling around you. That was what it was, an inner tornado swirling inside of you? Yet the sun was coming up each day and it would be going down and you were living your life and you were alone with lots of people around you.

That [relinquishment] changes a person for the rest of your life. That changes birth mothers for the rest of their life. The whole world there and no one there to help you. That affects us for the rest of our life. When we were in our moment of need no life jacket was thrown to us and maybe that is why we can't trust people. And I don't know in our moment of need if there is a bigger moment of need because that is life and death. I equate all of that to death. That was awful. You know. And they might not be aware of that on a conscious level. I think of all these people who had gone on and don't even know what sad lives they are having, drug abused. Look at all the people who have never married and don't have any children. That is it. It was our hour of need and no life jacket thrown to us. I would keep reaching out in the ways I could. I'd see a priest. He didn't help me.

In response to my question of what F. was asking for at that time she replied:

I was asking for a miracle. To have my society accept me. To have my family accept me. To have my parents accept me. To have my uncles and aunts accept me and there was no way I could see them accepting me. There was no way. The miracle. I remember asking for God's intervention. I was concerned he didn't intervene.

### Actual Relinquishment

F. in great emotional pain speaks of the relinquishment and hope to see her child again. She said:

I had natural child birth so as not to give drugs to the child. I believe in all natural things. As a person I always have. I've never put that together but that is really what I am. She was nine pounds. She was absolutely beautiful. The most beautiful child I had every seen even if she was mine. And not to feel proud. I never wanted to lose that even when I lost C. I said this is not good-bye [to the child], we'll see each other again.

### Sadness and Loss

F. spoke about the sadness when she finally gave up hope of keeping her child. When asked by this researcher if it damaged her relationship with her parents., F. replied:

No. I had to admit there was no relationship with my father. You see after my daughter was three days old I thought what if I am wrong and there is a way of keeping her. What if my parents won't die. I thought they would die. My mother definitely would die. Just die. Now I've killed two people. I called my father the third day before

they came to take her away. What if I'm wrong and I didn't make this phone call. Now if I make the phone call he will know what a terrible person I am. But if I don't I can lose my baby so I reached out and made the phone call. He confirmed all of my beliefs. I was never to come home if I kept the baby. Never communicate with my mother and it would kill her. Could never, ever. It was a brief conversation. There was just nothing there and it confirmed my belief and that ended my relationship with him but I'm such a nice person I never ended it. I came home. I didn't want to talk to him. I'd put on my face. I knew this was my father. There is no support. It is so superficial. This is not where I want to be. I will not participate. I am not a hypercritical person. Certainly not in a circle of intimacy am I a hypocrite. My mother I avoided and subsequently had another child. Just God. And God did not come through for me. I didn't lose the belief. He didn't come through for me. I haven't lost a belief in God. He didn't come through for me. I got parents and they didn't come through for me. I haven't lost my parents.

#### After Relinquishment

F. keep up the relationship with her family for her child to have later when they are re-united. She said:

When I said good bye to her, it was I'll see you later. I really wanted her to know her grandmother. So even then I didn't want to break that bridge and I was still under the assumption that my mother did not know. My father did. I had a close relationship with my mother over all of these years. She could stay three months here and my second daughter and her have a close relationship.

It's awful to lose your baby. That is a death. It's absolutely awful. A basket case. I'm surprised I didn't have accidents on the freeway. I'm so surprised I wasn't killed or didn't kill somebody on the freeway,. That's a fact. God. ....In the meantime I've always worked taking care of other people. So here I am a nurse and taking

care of others and nobody could care about me and I wasn't there to care for my baby. I had low self-esteem. It couldn't get any lower. And something was wrong with this world or me. I lost my baby and she would suffer more being ostracized and they say everybody who adopts loves the babies and that's what I believed....You don't lose a baby for you. You lose it for the baby and the love of that child. What that does to that woman. There was no one there for me.

In response to this researcher's question about the decision to have another child F. explained:

I was a basket case. It was a year and a half later and nine months of that is spent being pregnant and nine months after I lost my baby and the first three months you are recovering wherever you are and so for six months I was walking around in the eyes of the world a total basket case.

And I'm a young person just getting started in this world. I was down here and I met somebody at a social and we were just going out - people through work. And this guy I met he was so funny. It was the first time I laughed. So funny, so poetic, so full of life and I was so dead. You wouldn't see it on the outside of me as I'd always be smiling, I was so dead and this guy was like, I was still a practicing Catholic and didn't believe in sex outside of marriage.

My whole life is so private. Nobody comes into my life. They [her children] are the only ones that do. They are only a year and a half apart. I cried every day of my life until C. was 13 years old. Every day I cried. I can remember it. And suddenly I stopped. I thought about it 'you didn't cry'. And there has to be a magical thing about it of "I guess she is on her feet." For 13 years I cried every day. Nothing makes up for it. It's a whole part of your body. A whole part of your existence. It's a person who maybe talks with your hands and then your

hands aren't there. How can you talk? It's so a part of you.

### Relationships

F. spoke of her need for nurturing at a time when she was very needy. Even the re-telling was very emotional and painful for her. She said:

But I did it. I did have a relationship with him. That was for the arms around me. It was always to have arms around me. I mean here was somebody who was holding their arms around me, it was an extension, it wasn't for sex. It was for those arms. Just to be loved and caressed. That is what I wanted all my life from my mother or father. And I was a basket case. I was in tears even during sex as it was against my religion. What the hell, I already lost the child. He knew. Nobody else knew. I certainly did not fit the profile. As it turns out he is not a stable person. But what I got there was just arms, just to love, somebody in this world who cared for me. And he was an absolutely great guy but totally unstable which I found out too late.

F. speaks about her choices at this time. She said:

Well this time I considered abortion because now I'm living out here in Venice and I know a lot of things as I've been through the mill. Abortion is not my religious belief so I'm left with two alternatives to get married, and so I asked him and he said no, or to give the child up for adoption and I knew I couldn't go that route. There was one more route to take, just to kill myself. That would of been okay as that wasn't hurting nobody. But I didn't go through with it.

I just told the family we went to Vegas to get married. I say that so lightly I told the family. You see, that is not

accepted marriage in my religion but as far as having a child it is. And since I was already living out here and knew I no longer was really going to be involved with them as they were hypocrites. Here I was stuck again. Things escalated. So I said I got married and we went to Vegas and my family even sent out marriage announcements. Couldn't leave well enough alone. So I just told them we got married in Vegas. I don't even know how those words came out of my mouth. I knew she wasn't going to be adopted by somebody else. That I knew. I knew that hypercritical world that I knew things were not right. I met other people by this time. Even him. A completely different world by now. I did not care to be pregnant. I couldn't believe it. I could not believe I was pregnant. But I was.

You asked me what my goals were and did I ever think of marriage. My life was so upside down and I had no chance of anything. This man did not stand beside me. I lost. I didn't trust people. I'm the only one that is there for me. That's a real sadness I feel and I feel it is unfair as I stand outside myself and say wow you really are a person who works caring for people. You are such a giver. I don't understand how any of this happens to me except it does and when life is not perfect a life raft or jacket should be around for a person and there just wasn't. So this time I knew it was all in my court so we got married. and the baby was born.

We never got married but I say this, and I live this whole life and go by this other name. My family sent out announcements to everybody. It just proved how ingrained they were to society and I started getting wedding gifts. I wanted to vomit. O my God. There is still no getting away from it all these thousand miles away. I kept my daughter. Women were there for you but they had their own hardships. Fortunately I had seen people raising children. It exists. Women were there to support me. I feel unworthy to be around them because so many things I had more than them. I had education and work. My emotional need was so great. I'm so sad about it. I just didn't get it fulfilled as a child. And these women did have somebody there. They did feel hugged.

I kept that child and raised her beautifully. I knew when I had my first child I could raise her. There wasn't a question in my mind. Society. It was a whole other issue. You are wrong. Everything is saying you are wrong.

When this researcher remarks on the contrast in her decision regarding her two children she said:

I was geographically different. I was down here. Unfortunately I went directly up to Redding and got work and housing through the administration and I was still protected, another Catholic hospital. I just stayed in that society and in that whole thing.

### Re-union

F. speaks of the relationship with her birth child. She found her daughter when she was 22 years old. She said:

We have been re-united for six years. Unfortunately she found me too quickly. We were re-united through the waiver system. So when her 18 birthday came by I had the waiver. On her 22nd birthday she and her parents agreed to open the records. It needed to be a three party agreement. As soon as they found my waiver, they communicated this to her. We were united within a week of that. It was too quick for her. She should have hungered. And that is a terrible thing I say about adoptees, because I think their hunger is lifetime, but I think she should have had a little more hunger.

She comes from a wealthy family. They gave her \$200,000 dollars when she was 11 years old. Now what do you think that does to a person? It really makes them indebted to their family. I have my indebtedness to my family without getting all this big inheritance and this is true for all of them so she has such a battle of loyalties. And they are nice people. I met them. I don't

like the mother. She doesn't have an open heart. To have taken my daughter from her life. This is uncalled for. She is a controlling women. She will fit nicely into my family. All of this pressure that she [her birth daughter] was getting and all this money.

When I met her she was a baby in my mind and I called her baby in my mind and then she was two in my mind. She progressed. You have to go through these stages with them. The other daughter is two years older so basically the same age. I am fortunate and bring this experience to birth mothers who do not have children and don't know the rejection quota they get. I'm getting it from my other daughter I raised. This is a natural phenomenon along with the adoption things. We have to be careful what comes at us because of adoption and what are growth issues in life.

My youngest daughter was 25 both of them were fully grown now and now I can begin to do some of the maternal separation. It is interesting to have my other daughter who is very, very healthy, wonderful and powerful person. Wonderful. She was free. I was no longer that cord and could be severed some more. They can stand on their own and if they get into trouble they can work their way out of it. Very interesting because I was having the same problems with both kids.

When asked what her second child's feelings were about the relinquishment, F. replied:

My youngest daughter never knew about it. Only when we were reunited. I couldn't bear the conversation of talking about my daughter and not knowing where she was. It would be different if I knew where she was. It's like having a star out in space or know there is a star up there but it is one of those nights when you can't see the star. Where is it? I couldn't have stood it, but once I found out she was alive and well. You don't even know if your child is alive or if your child is well. You don't

know anything and as life goes on you realize how this adoption is wrong and a lot of these adoptions are wrong. One of the biggest thing of adoption being wrong is not knowing. All these closed records. Not to know. No update. Even in the animal world we can track down genetics, where they are living and how they are doing. Race horses can be tracked from owner to owner. That's the worse for all of us. And then when you find out where they are you know they are alive and well. Always on your shoulders, always on your head, always in your soul.

#### Relinquishment Impact on her Life

This researcher asked if F. could consider the possibility that she was turning away from her mother so that her mother could experience the pain of losing her as she [F.] experienced the pain of relinquishing her daughter. F. replied:

You are on the right track. It is being replayed here. There is a whole part of me that is so sad about this whole thing [relationship with her mother] that it can't be resolved in some other way. On the other hand she [mother] is beginning to feel what this is like as I'm a big loss to her. She said something to me once that broke it up. Everything is now in place [the relationship between her birth child and her mother] and the bridges are in place.

This researcher than asked F. if she had been able to tell her mother how she hurt her. She replied:

She doesn't know this. I tried but I suspect she doesn't. Once she hurt me and I asked her and she said yes she knew what she did to me. I hate to make her out the bad guy but she is.

In response to my inquiry to what she imagined would have been different if she had not had the early pregnancy she responded:

If pregnancy hadn't happened and my life went on, I would have traveled. As a young child I wanted to live 1000 miles away and then I would be me. Nobody would travel that far.

The researcher then asked how it would have been if she had not relinquished that baby. She responded:

I would have lived out here and I would have addressed what I was addressing now in my 20's or 30's and there would have been discord for awhile. All my life the same career and same person. I would not have that anger toward everyone who is going to die. In other words I would have gone through it living and then come out the other end. If I had kept my child and my father telling me not to go home, I would have been out here and my mother would have worked it through to confront her pain and that's where the issues would have come, just like if divorce is taking place in their family to their child, they would have to confront it, and divorce is not permitted in our family.

The researcher then asked how she would have been different if the relinquishment had not happened. She cried as she said:

I probably would not have closed off. That's for sure. That's the secret. I'm closed off. People can not reach me. And that's sad. Now I don't have control of it. That would have not occurred because the life raft would have appeared somewhere and I would have stayed and not closed off. And I'm closing off further from my family and that's a terrible sadness. I feel both sides of it and there is nothing I can do about it except go through it. My youngest daughter knows I'm going through it and thinks

it's sad. She has worked through me not talking to my mother. I can see how you work through things as I haven't lost my daughter. Yes, I would have work through and not closed off. No man rejecting me for pregnancy.

### Family Impact on her Life

F. speaks of her thoughts regarding the importance of family. She said:

To me family is very important, grandparents are very important, especially my mother is very important. I think she is a great person to know even though I did not feel I was mothered. I was cared for. Grandparents are the great equalizer of the world. You can see where you came from and they can see a higher hierarchy than you because children think their parents are God and I think it's important for children to see there is a higher one and possible to see there is higher and higher. And I didn't realize it at the time but that thought concept means you can think outside, think other things, which I never did think other things.

I had Gods in the house. Yet there were Gods all around me. Everyone had eyes to see and correct me and know better. It was very important for me to have the children interact with their grandparents whether they are good people and not good people just to see where we all came from. The continuity of family and to see the reasoning on it. I think it is very important and I have always felt that way and my mother is very important.

I recently, finally broke the ties with my mother when I was 50, 49. She's not there for me and through therapy I realized this. I keep reaching out for this and I finally had to accept that she is not capable of giving to me what I need and I have to find it somewhere else. Most people break their ties when they get married and they have their own family. I never got into my own family. I'm just doing this now.

The researcher was interested in asking F. to further explain about what breaking the ties meant. In tears she responded:

For me, it was as if she died. My mother is a funny, good person. She is not there for me. She is there for physically caring. She can't give even to this day. If she did she would have a breakdown of whatever she is protecting from her childhood, whatever awful happened to them. This is a rough life. For me it is a death. I've mourned the death for years. Now that I've allowed this to come up the anger I've had is incredible. I know if I had said it to her and yet my mother is 90 and it is kind of sad to be doing this. Yes, and yet I have to start thinking of me with society and everybody else. Got to take care of me.

She will say, 'You saying I don't love you?' She doesn't understand what that is. She said so many insensitive things. She is my first daughter's grandmother. She is involved. They all are. Before I did this breaking off of my mother I did years of developing a relationship with my daughter, my lost daughter, of creating a history so she can have this connection and know her family before I could think of me. She [mother] is so insensitive. She can't deal with the love. That is really the whole issue with her when I say insensitive. She will cry by herself somewhere over the loss of me. She feels the loss of me tremendously. I don't like my family. I feel so sad.

My uncle, her brother just died the other day. I didn't talk to her. I don't want to talk to her. There is so much anger involved. If it wasn't for all of them I would have my baby. That's where I am. I give myself permission to feel that way because it is real and I'm finally acknowledging me. I hurt. And they are going to die anyway. I'm not going to save them. Yet my children have to be healthy and I have to be healthy and if this is the consequence it's too bad this all didn't happen 28 years ago and it would have been over and done with.

My mother says insensitive things to me and I have come to realize she is always coming from her perspective, that's how she takes care of it, it's not directed toward me. Well, I'm sorry, I'm a real entity here and have consequences by what you say. My problem is I really can't say these things clearly to her because she doesn't hear them. She manages the entire world around her and she gets her way and I don't play triangles with other people and bring others in as a mediator. Unless she was going to come here and do therapy, but she is 90 years old. There is only so much. She is a powerful lady. I realize there is great stress on her and she is suddenly getting old with it, and I know it's the stress that is making her older. I feel terrible as I'm not all that powerful there is only so much I can do.

When she gives the adoptive parents more consideration than me. We are all re-united for six years. She [birth child] is back in the family. She [my mother] did not die with the knowledge. She told me that my father told her about it two years later. I thought of all those times my mother could have been woman to woman to me. Although I would not have been able to handle it because I did not know where my daughter was but my mother had the opportunity to say something to me woman to woman. It's okay.

When we got re-united and years went by and we were getting some groceries she would still give more acknowledgment to the adoptive parents over me and my mother should not have done this to her daughter. In that context I was still hoping. My mother's insensitive comment she should not have done. Someone else could of said it. A neighbor could have. That is where she was insensitive 'Well if you had C. you probably wouldn't have had my second daughter' who is my mother's pride and joy. They all are. That is insensitive. So how long am I going on before I face these issues.

So I started facing them when I was about 49 and then I wrote a letter and really let her know how I felt over some of her comments that caused nausea and made me want to vomit. I was being truthful and in print. I have

never heard a response from her and I understand she can't but I've given her so many chances and I'm not strong enough to say will you respond? I have a weakness in this relationship. I could call her up. I could call her up today and say are we ever going to talk straight? I really might kill her if I do too much of this. She is a vulnerable person. She keeps proving it to me and I think this is eating her worse. I don't have the strength for the next stage in talking. It's something that we didn't have and it is very hard for me to do.

I was totally depressed and finally separated from my mother. Now I have anger. It was all coming up. Yet, I wouldn't give it back to her. Now if she calls I can talk to her. We are very close. and I can talk to her. She doesn't know I have cut off with her. My sister lives with her. My mother says you might feel this way about me but I don't want you to take this out on your sister. You have contact. You are talking about emotionally and internally cutting off but externally you have contact with her. I did this in 91. I wrote a letter toward the end. I didn't want to hear her voice. It was awful. Now I'm less angry. I don't do anything obvious. There is no communication anymore.

My mother is very smart even though she has had no schooling. I wish she did have schooling. They live a very cultural life. Before I did the cut off I had every letter my mother wrote to this house. Nothing there as far as English but everything is in these letters. I only open it in case someone has died and then it goes into the trash. Now I have passed over the anger a little because I got acknowledgment from her by not calling her. I've not talked to my mother about her brother dying although I have talked to my sister twice. I have no energy to give her. They did this to me. My child. Someday they will be dying. At least I have my self-respect back. That is what I have and that has hurt me recently. I'm not so angry.

It's so sad this loss. Every night I pick up the phone to see if I got a message from my sister that she is dead. What a way to go through life. I keep addressing how

am I going to feel when she is dead? I am going to feel relieved. I felt relieved when my father died. My mother has never called me aside. My mother initiates everything. I don't call there. I'm not the only powerful person. My mother is a powerful person. Anyone can speak up. I don't have the powers to change it. I wish I could be more communicative but I am missing that.

Once I asked her you never told me that you loved me. She said 'You know I do. Haven't I cared for you?' After that she would say in letters I love you. Never the words [out loud]. Such a struggle for me to get acknowledgment.

### Resolution

F. speaks of where she is at this time in her life.

I have my children settled. It is my turn. I now have the power. They say you have to find love someplace else to fill the void and it is not coming. I'm the one that is hurting. When am I going to live my life? I haven't up to now. I said to my daughter, we may be described as a functional family, without a father but we are the healthiest people in our family as you can approach me and address me. It's sad. Now in my power. Maybe today is the day to talk to her as she lost her brother. I was afraid to talk to her in her 60's and she is still alive. I'm so sad. I don't talk to her. So sad.

Separation is an interesting word. What is the process of attachment and separation that a birth mother goes through when she feels pressured to relinquish her infant that I see here on this paper. Look at the separation from my primary family that I am going through now that I have avoided doing for all of those years.

At this time the researcher remarked on the different ways of separating from a person than the cutting off from her mother that she was doing. She replied:

I really am. I'm cut under all of that back there. I live in the sunshine. Look how beautiful it is here [at the beach]. I'm so sad that I don't have happiness inside. There is something wrong there.

My sisters are married and have developed another network. They all have their problems. I saw as a kid how she [my sister] closed off. She was rude to my mother. My soft fleshed mother. She wasn't being rude, she had closed off. All of us in our own way did something. My other sister, who is beautiful, married in three months and he is awful to her. A dysfunctional family. My mother is still there. Now I am separated. I did my cut off. I can't see things when I am emotionally connected to her but can when I cut off.

My siblings say I was her favorite child. I was her captive. Not doing what you and I are doing, this communication. I am cutting off more. I am letting my children know. I told my youngest one and when I do that I have given her permission. She won't hear anything negative about her grandparents and the other day she heard me for the first time as she allowed the conversation to go on. We didn't have a closeness in our family and it is understandable why my sisters were this way and why this is taking place. My daughter has been affected recently by this and now she is married. I am a friend to her and not just mothering her.

I'm smart enough to know there are a few blocks missing and I don't know what shape and color they are and I'm going on in years. Something is askew and I can't find out. Other than therapy and support groups. Even with me talking to you very openly, it is very interesting for me. I took care of my children and my back was to the wall. Where was it beforehand? Even with a therapist it is such a long haul, and I think my separation with my mother might be helpful and maybe a resolution. Maybe with my mother there will not be a resolution.

#### Current Assessment of her Life

F. continues to talk about her strengths and deficits. She said:

I don't know how I have survived except for my inner strength and my family genetics and all they had to survive for centuries. I don't go out on dates. I have good value systems but something happens to me when it comes to men.

My lost daughter is a whole person is how I look to her. She has not done her own work and may not because she has such a huge inheritance. It's sad to let her go because that is what she is going to do. I'm okay because I haven't lost her like the first time. I can pick up the phone. She has her work cut out. She is 28 but in my eyes has chosen not to do the work yet. She is standing on her own feet, is working, roof over her head, and that is life. I no longer feel responsible for her just like my other daughter. I feel they are where I was then. If they want a life raft they can get it from me which I never had.

I think it is learning to trust. My eldest daughter has a long way to go. I had society [against me] and everyone has her own way. Each step I feel healthier. I don't know if it is the separation from my mother. I have to be in this non-communicative mode I put myself into. What about the other party?

This researcher asked her how she was going to come out of this feeling okay about herself. She replied:

I don't know if I ever will. My secret thoughts are I never will. I'm a participant of the world but in some ways I'm not. I keep to myself too much. I don't know there is a way to overcome this except finding somebody who is trustworthy and I haven't found it. I think of the females in my life and they are supportive until men come into the picture. The problem is my choice. I don't socialize. I don't date. Something is wrong.

At least I have developed my identity. I have gotten a sense of respect from her [mother]. Not that she has been disrespectful. She has taken notice and someone had to point that out to me. She is getting older and here I am doing it and she hasn't died and she will age anyhow. I don't know how to get through it.

This researcher asked her to consider what she wants from her mother before she dies and F. said:

I do this daily. I wish she could love me openly. Yes and I know she can't as it would open up all of her childhood pain. Yet, she is powerful. I think she is capable of more. Yes and today is the day to do it as she is facing her brother's death. I am not a therapist and I am damaged and when she rejects me, I take it to a certain place and then she rejects me. She is a strong woman.

The researcher asks if she told her mother she loved her and F. responded:

Not now. Honestly, I don't know. I'm sure I had. I refuse to give anymore. I've given out. She has acknowledged me. Whatever I say, they are all fed up with her over 90 years. She is powerful. I don't know how. I can't do it all. I couldn't do it as a young child. You are a 1000 miles away and can lead your own life. But you can't because you have so much baggage. I am today here where I was before I was pregnant with my second child. I have my whole chance to start over. It's there but so much you can't do. You don't know how. If I try to change something I am reminded of another hurt, another man who rejected me, reminded and reminded.

### My Reflections

I had some difficulty with the first interview. She seemed up tight and angry and it took longer to make her comfortable. Then she

was upset over the wording of my release form. This was an important issue for her and caused a lot of difficulty between us as we spent a large portion of the first session about the signing of the release form. After the interview I found out that I had turned the mike over and except for the first part regarding the discussion over the signing the rest of the interview was not taped. We went back over it for a much longer second time.

There was some unease with her. She seemed very distant at first. There was so much anger with the mother that even when I directed a question about the daughter or tried to get back there she would answer as if it pertained to her mother. She had withdrawn from the world and put her mother in the center of the blame. When I left she was excited about the thought of calling her mother and trying again. She walked out with me and made kind comments about my being an adoptive mother she liked and could feel close to. A very moving interview and emotionally exhausting.

She was often in distress and used a mixture of tearfulness and heart breaking sobbing and also some hostility to me and my alleged thoughtlessness as an adoptive mother who was ignorant of what was being done to the birth mother on the other side. I felt emotionally drained and somewhat attacked although I think that was from my own dynamics as she was struggling to incorporate my ignorance with her pain and wanting me to understand her struggle.

At the end she told me about her feelings about marriage. She said, "If it happens, it happens, as God's will", a belief system she has that what happens is meant to happen. I asked her how that fit into the loss of her baby with this belief system and she said she

had not put that together. For a professional and intelligent woman I felt on this topic I was in the presence of a younger person who was stuck and couldn't use her intelligence to apply this to a belief system that would not fit this issue. In the interviews, she was filled with contradictions. She was able to put some things together in the session for the first time and could think and remark about it. The interviews were filled with contradictions. Again, I felt her thinking had stopped at an earlier point and by staying in her pain had not allowed herself the freedom to freely think about the loss and to move on.

#### Subject G.

##### Identifying Data

G. is an attractive 51 year old woman who relinquished her child in Europe approximately 30 years ago at the age of 21. She comes from a middle class family. She became pregnant again after the relinquishment and had an abortion. She was married for three years and divorced and does not have any other children.

##### First Contact

This was an easier conversation than usual. She had some information on me that I was a social worker in a PhD program, analytic, and wanted certain types of birth mothers to fit different categories. She was glad to participate. She is a new social worker and works in adoption. Since we were located near-by I gave her the choice of my place or hers. She choose to meet in my office (the

only birth mother offered this choice). I felt at ease and did not hear any anger in her voice.

### Early Life

G. explains her early history of her life with her mother, adoptive step-father and the confusion with her father. She said:

My mother married my father when she was 17 and I was born when she was 19. It was war time. My father was in the navy. They divorced when I was two. She married Mr. B. when I was three. Mr. B. had three children and we all lived together. He adopted me. A step-parent adoption. That was my family so far as I knew. Until I was seven and they divorced and they fell off the face of the earth sort of. In that family I had two sisters and a brother. The brother and one sister completely disappeared. I didn't know it at the time but they went to live with their mother. The eldest sister and the father stayed in my life for some time.

My mother and I moved in with her parents who lived in Venice [California] at the time. Their two youngest children were still in the home. I always had a lot of family. It was a very close family. I ended up living with my grandparents until I was 16. My father, Mr. B. and his eldest daughter lived in the neighborhood. She was almost through with high school and she ended up marrying a cousin of my mothers so she stayed in contact for awhile. I was very close to her. Mr. B. moved out of town. I didn't really see him again for many, many years.

When asked about her goals as a young person growing up, G. responded:

I wanted to be Jo March in Little Women. I've spent a long time talking about Jo in therapy through the years. To the point I think I wanted a bright intelligent older

man with an accent in my life. I looked for professor Beard as well. I was a great kid. I was strong. I was a leader. I was compassionate. I was independent. I was a lot of those things. I was popular until a certain point. I was a good student.

I can't answer the question about goals because I don't think I had any. Except for the ordinary ways that little girls growing up in the 50's thought or just assumed that you would have a husband and children and a picket fence. I had that but as I got older into high school and so on I never had the goal of marrying. I had much more wanderlust and a sense of adventure and learning. My going to Israel satisfied a lot of that. I didn't need money to do it. All I needed was my passage. While I was there I worked four hours on the Kibbutz and studied four hours and got an allowance there. It didn't cost any money. I loved studying foreign languages. I loved folk dancing. I loved doing spirited things.

I was never very political but my heart was always in the right place. I've done my share of marching and things like that. Love was important to me. Love and relationships. I almost always had a serious relationship in my life. I wasn't a dater. I either wanted to be with someone or didn't. I didn't date very much in high school. I fell in love in the ninth grade and he had my heart for a long, long time. We went together for about a year and then he went to Scandinavia as our foreign exchange student [before I went there]. I only went out with buddies after that to parties and events and never really had a boyfriend and everybody knew it. I ended up in Denmark. I was going to meet him and we were going to take a trip to Finland and I got pregnant. So that's in there.

My goals. I have no memory of wanting to be a doctor, nurse, or a teacher. My college years were very choppy. It took about eight years for me to finish my bachelor's degree. Now I somehow always believed that I would do that and go to college although no one else in my family had. I did. I finally finished in Berkeley at the end of the 60's. I was very restless. If I wanted to stop school and

go live in N.Y. for a year, because I had never lived in New York, I would do that. I would pick up my studies. I'm only now beginning to carve out some goals. And I mean that. Only now.

I was fairly reflective as a girl. I had a serious side. I was very funny but I had a serious side. As I got into my mid to later adolescence I read poetry, and it was the time of the beat generation. I loved reading poetry by candlelight with girlfriends. I had a very regular life. I was in student government. I did this and that. I went to Fairfax high school. Everybody went to college. I was impatient at the end of high school. There was another part of me coming up that was a little bit eccentric and curious about other things. I was very conservative sexually in that I didn't ...I didn't have girl friends, to my knowledge who were having intercourse at that point. It wasn't quite happening yet in my age group. No. I didn't have goals.

### Relationship with Parents

G. speaks of her abandonment issues with her mother and confusion about her father. She said:

When I was about eight my mother picked up an old dream and became a singer. She went on the road. I stayed with my grandparents. I had a lot of my own abandonment issues. And a lot of very difficult issues with my mother based on my separations from her so that when the time came for me to discuss woman to woman things with her, not that any mother and daughter have an easy time of it, we had it in spades. We had a lot of stuff to challenge good communications. I can say that. And I always had it up my sleeve to accuse her of not being there for me and how dare she try to guide me or educate me or suggest anything to me at anytime and that and a lot of the stuff that came up between us in Denmark.

However, I never doubted she was my mother and it was suggested to me many years later in therapy when I was

trying to make sense of how I could have done such a thing as give my child away without very clear understanding and unknowing what I knew about myself how could I have not stood up to anything that would have challenged that. The therapist suggested to me, and I believe him to this day, that I probably would have done anything to keep my mother's love. In all of the confusion of love-hate stuff and approach-avoidance stuff with my mother that anything that might have promised the security of her love I would have done."

When asked if she knew about her own adoption, she said:

I didn't know that until I walked into a 5 and 10 cent store in the neighborhood and one day an older man came up and hugged me and said he was my grandfather. I said no I live with my grandfather. He said I'm your father's father. I said my father doesn't have a father. He said he is not your real father, blab, blab, etc. Well I was always a pretty adult little kid but this was pretty upsetting so I ran home. That was the day that it was explained to me.

Now when I lived with the Brown family there was this very funny man use to come to visit some time. I would always sit on his lap and play with his face and twist his nose and ears and so on and he was a friend of the family. That was my father. People were not telling the truth to kids in those days so I didn't know that. That day that my mother was explaining that she said that funny man who use to come, he is your father. What ever I was told I accepted and knew and understood on that day. But I didn't see him.

### Self-esteem Issues

G. believed she felt good about herself while she was growing up. She said:

I was a great kid. I was strong. I was a leader. I was compassionate. I was independent. I was a lot of those things. I was popular until a certain point. I was a good student.

After her relinquishment and abortion she would say:

I was just the scum of the earth. Now mind you I was a very good girl. I was president of my graduating class. I was this nice middle-class Jewish girl. I was a virgin until I was 18. It was like boom, boom, boom. Very rough.

### Getting Pregnant

G. begins to talk about her life in Israel and Denmark from age 19 to 21. She said:

I did not get pregnant and deliver in this country and I'm saying that because I don't know if the relinquishment process as it is imposed by agencies is a little different therefore. I was 19 and I was living on a Kibbutz in Israel. I had been living there for many months when a Danish hitchhiker was picked up by one of my Kibbutz members and brought back to the Kibbutz for lunch and he ended up working and staying. We fell in love. Now, as my mother would say. I'm probably the only person that went to Israel and did not fall in love with a Jew. Then several months later we hitch hiked from Israel to Denmark where he was going to resume school and that's where I got pregnant. Where and by whom.

My plan when my commitment on the Kibbutz ended, I really didn't know what I was going to do. I wasn't quite ready to come back to the States. I had one year of college. I was restless. I wanted to do my thing, something. And my thing was getting away, learning another language and exploring what this Kibbutz system was all about. It was the early to mid 60's and it was the spirit of the times.

So when Hans came into my life and was returning to this other far away place it was very inviting. So we hitch hiked back. Hans had been married and had a child and he left Scandinavia and traveled because his heart was a little bit broken from his divorce that was on-going at that time. He was in the process. So we met under those circumstances. We arrived in Denmark while he had some unfinished business to take care of with his ex wife and a lot of things.

So I came back to the states for a visit and told my mother, and I believed it, that I was going to return to Denmark and go to an international school. I did believe it but I really wanted to be with Hans again. So I came back to the States for about a month and then returned to Copenhagen and got pregnant. So that's the set-up for the pregnancy.

When questioned by this researcher on her previous sexual experience, G. replied:

My first sexual experience was my first year in college with a much older man. He must have been 22 at the time. He was a graduate student. I was crazy about him and I think we had very little sex together actually. I had a relationship with a man on the ship going over. I had no relationship with anyone on the Kibbutz until Hans arrived. That was usually as it was, a real kind of free for all there. I lived in a study section. There were 60 of us from all over the world. The men who lived on the Kibbutz were very excited when new young blood arrived. There were a number of boys who made passes and so on. I was in a serious mode at the time. I was serious about my studies until Hans came along.

But I was very taken with Hans. I always believed that Hans could do anything. He could speak seven languages. He could do anything with his hands. He could play the guitar. He was a man with goals. Something about Hans that was very attractive. If I get

very metaphysical I could say what was attractive about Hans is that we were going to bring a child into life together. But that is a little too over the top even for me. He was attractive. He was five years older which felt much older to a 19 year old. There was a lot about his being Scandinavian that I liked. What he could tell me about his country and what his country did and what he believed in. There was a lot that was attractive.

### During Pregnancy

G. speaks of the joy of being pregnant especially in Denmark.

She shares:

I could talk for about seven days, at least, on what it was like to be just be in a country like Denmark, and to be pregnant in a country like Denmark and to be pregnant and unmarried in a country like Denmark which is very different in that Denmark is the land of sun bathing topless and doing sex changes in the 50's and so on and they just don't care about some of the things that we in this country we care about, which had a lot to do with my dilemma during the pregnancy.

So my whole experience was fantastical, romantic and fairy tale. I don't know if you have been to Copenhagen but it very much influenced the experience. A little bit to my detriment as the years went on later after the relinquishment. I was very happy in my pregnancy. I was very happy being pregnant. I was not very happy with the discovery, with the decisions that had to be made, with the lack of support that I had on the other side of the ocean. I was uneducated and unskilled and there I was pregnant. There are blocks.

I loved being pregnant. I loved walking around in the snow and perching my hands on my belly and talking to whoever was in there. It was a very good experience. I was in very good shape. I walked all over. I rode my bike all over, and that part was good.

Secrecy.

G. did not experience the need for secrecy due to the acceptance of the culture in Denmark at that time. However she did not ask questions. She said:

I was a perfect birth mother in that....in those days in closed adoptions, in the secrecy of close adoptions and so on in that I asked nothing and that I would just fall off the face of the earth and never cause anybody any trouble and I would just block it. I was never in the closet about my pregnancy or the relinquishment. I did quite the opposite. It was usually the first thing out of my mouth. Through the years when I dated, it was a part of my story. I presented it usually in the sense of that this is how strong I am, this is what I survived.

Living arrangements.

G. speaks of the living arrangements in Denmark before and during the pregnancy: She described them in the following way:

When Hans and I first got back to the country and he resumed his studies he applied for what amounts to student housing on a long list. We were living in the apartment that his wife got in the settlement. It was one room with the bathroom outside the room with no hot water. It was the equivalent of \$5.00 a month in those days. It was charming and all that but it was a little rough. There was pressure. She was permitting us to stay until the baby was born. In the meantime Hans got accepted to student housing. What was I going to do. This is where it gets a little foggy for me. Either I couldn't go with him or I couldn't go with him pregnant which doesn't make sense or we had already decided something by then.

### Shame.

G. explains that her shame was not in getting pregnant but in giving up the baby. She said:

And it was a weird kind of bi-cultural shame because in this culture the shame probably would have been the pregnancy and in that culture the shame was in the relinquishment. That was sitting on top of layers of shame. It was a real difficulty for me. When Hans mother was sitting on my bed the day that I came home from the clinic she cried and she said I will never understand how you could have done this.

No one in my family shamed me. Not at all. Nobody blackballed me. Nobody did that. But also nobody talked about it. In that nobody knew how and nobody wanted to give me the pain that they imagine it would give. So I sailed through my life for the next 20 years.

### Pre-natal attachment.

A. didn't say much about the pre-natal attachment. However, in response to this researcher's questions about whether she talked to her baby, G. said, "Sometimes. The relationship began early. And then I was alone with it."

### Relinquishment

#### Decision to relinquish

It appears that the decision to relinquish has remained fuzzy in her mind. She does not seem to be clear on what exactly happened. It seems like she went for an abortion and did not get permission to have it. She was fuzzy and unclear about how the baby

was relinquished. She told about the events that lead up to the relinquishment. She said:

I applied to the state for an abortion. I also forgot that for a long time. At some point in the evolution of our thinking I applied for an abortion. I needed to be observed. Although abortion wasn't illegal in Denmark there had to be a reason, which was usually some determinant to mother or fetus in order for that to happen. So I thought I'm certainly emotionally unstable enough.

So I went out to a maternity home in the country about 30 kilometers from Copenhagen. I was supposed to stay for two weeks. I was interviewed every day by some one, a psychiatrist, a social worker, I don't know who she was. She insisted on doing the interview in English and I always thought she got a kick out of that. Now as I was trying to convince her that the relationship wasn't going to work and so on and so forth, I was getting a letter every day from Hans and one day he rode his bicycle in the snow from Copenhagen to visit me. I was so excited to see him. It was one of those Dr. Zhivago snow scenes. We ran into this mad embrace in the middle of the snow and the psychiatrist was up in her office looking down watching us and essentially said that it looked pretty good to her. That was early on. That had to have been at three or four months.

So I went home and we intended to have the baby. I even went to court to quicken the divorce proceeding for him and so on and so forth. I really forgot about a lot of that. And something happened. It's really an enigma because when I ultimately left Copenhagen under distress, which I will get to, Hans and I were very much in love. I was going to come back to the states to make enough money to return and he was going to make enough money to come and get me. We felt like manipulated children in a way. Hans moved into the student housing which he had to do in order to not lose it and I stayed in the apartment.

It was never my intention to relinquish. Hans was a student. We were very poor. Although I ended up learning Danish very well and I was very fluent. My Danish improved as my pregnancy progressed. They are both very time dependent. Hans was in a way under the spell of his first wife in that although we were very attached and in love as young people and so on, her kind of phantom influence had a lot to do what ultimately happened in the terms of the decision to relinquish. I believe that now.

In my youth, my confusion, my fear, that and my sense that maybe Hans would not be there for me was probably influential. I worked at odd jobs. I was a maid. I worked in a factory. I was trying to live a little Danish life. Now, Hans worked very hard also. He was a very conscientious student and he worked before school in the mornings and he worked on weekends and so we really had to pick and choose our joyous times together. We had no money. We really had a good time together. I was necessarily a little child-like in my persona because of language. When ever we went out with other people and spoke Danish I really was relegated a little bit to the role of a child. When we were together we spoke English because his English was much better than my Danish.

Communication with my family here was not punitive. I would say my mother was certainly was not supportive but was not ugly and punitive with me. She was the first person that said in a long distance call the word adoption and I was horrified to hear it and I hated her for suggesting it. It was appalling to me. I think that having her voice in my ear was the other big influence.

Denmark is a social democracy. They had socialized medicine and you were assigned a physician in your neighborhood and I had a very lovely guy around the corner who lived with his wife above his offices. At some point in the middle of the pregnancy he sensed some distress in me I guess. I think I started to cry during a visit and he took me upstairs to his apartment and introduced me to his wife and she made tea and we sat and talked for a long time. And somewhere in there

he began to suggest that there were alternatives to this pregnancy. I don't know what I shared with him. I don't know how bad things were, what was coming out of me at that time. There had to have been something with Hans that I felt very insecure about or it was my mother's voice somewhere in there but as the pregnancy progressed I was feeling less sure, less confident about what was going to happen.

He said that there was someone in the hospital I might like to talk to and this happened to be the chief of pediatrics at the main hospital there, Professor P. and that's how the process toward relinquishment started. Hans and I went to speak to him. He interviewed us and took down information from us. I had to have been in my seventh month by then.

My therapist later said that I would do anything to keep my mother in my life. It was a horrifying thing to hear and to have to process but I think that was a very, very strong influence. I have no better reason. I mean there wasn't anything in my life that was making it easy for me to keep her. Nothing. And believe me no one here said come home and we will assist. That did not happen in the early 60's. Not in my family and not in any family that I knew. Families, mothers who were able, parents who were able to make that offer to their pregnant daughters were really rare, exceptional and unusual. I wasn't strong enough to come back to this country with an infant.

We were living together and there was a level of commitment. I don't know what would have happened in our relationship had we not gotten pregnant. My life might have expanded differently within that culture. Of course, I might have gone to school. I might have gotten a job, but the pregnancy gave me a time frame that drove me. As time went on I got more pregnant and closer and closer to delivery and not pregnant anymore paralleling going toward relinquishment and losing her it was also losing the pregnancy and resuming life and what was that going to be and where it was going to be, and I could play "what if" all day. What if Hans had been

stronger in his conviction and in keeping me there to show we could do something together. I think that finishing school was more important to him.

G. shared that she remembers very little about the talks she had with him. She wasn't sure whether his asking to keep the child was half hearted as a way to try to solve the problem at the time and that she did not really believe him or she thought that there is no way she would let him do that. She said:

I think it was a real all or nothing kind of thing. I was not able to think of alternatives to keep contact, quite different than what is going on now. This was not an extended family kind of thing. If anyone in my family had stepped forward, I don't know. It never even came up. When the decision was made, there was a time in there that Hans said he wanted the child and I wouldn't hear of it. Either I was going to do it or it wasn't going to get done. It took me years to remember that.

#### Actual relinquishment

G. speaks in detail of the delivery leading up to the relinquishment. For her what actually happened was the baby was taken away without her awareness of signing the paper. She said:

One of my best pals from the states was making his European Odyssey which was a popular thing to do in the 60's. When he knew I was pregnant he really switched his plans so he would come to me first. He arrived late on afternoon. And he and Hans and I went out for dinner and he slept on my floor, Hans went back to student housing, and I went into labor that morning about three weeks early. I went into labor about seven. I delivered at about 9:40 and I was back at 2:00. Now, I lived in a poor walk up and I really knew nothing. I didn't know the body cleanses itself naturally and all these things. I just

started waking up and going to the bathroom and the contractions started and I didn't wake Nick. I went down the stairs in my big clods. Hans' brother and sister-in-law lived on the first floor and she was my best pal at the time. I knocked on her door and said I think it is time. In those days nobody had telephones and nobody had cars so she ran out to a phone booth and couldn't find a cab or whatever, so an ambulance came and took me in. Boy, were they nervous that they would have to deliver me right there.

They drove me off to a clinic and I had a midwife that I visited every couple of weeks and after the exam we would sit down and have a glass of port together. And there she was. And suddenly this doctor appeared and I said who is he, what is he doing here. My mid-wife was there and I don't know what they said. I wasn't comfortable with him and he kept putting an ether mask on me and I kept saying I don't want it and he kept saying it's better for you and I said I don't want it. And that was it. He won. And I never knew who he was. He never introduced himself or anything. And I thought I have all these questions I was going to ask the doctor when he came by to see me and he never did.

#### After Relinquishment

G. speaks of after the birth when she left the hospital. The researcher was confused about when the relinquishment happened.

She explained the following:

I went home to Inga's apartment because I couldn't climb the stairs. The ambulance drivers took me back again. And her son was having his second birthday party. So I was kind of hidden. It was a one room apartment and I was sleeping behind a screen and I woke hearing all of these little kids running around. And then Hans' wife came to visit me and brought me roses or something and I hated her. Then my friend came and brought flowers. And then Hans came and brought me a little Amber ring. So that was the birth.

At this point the researcher was confused and asked where the baby was. G. responded:

The baby stayed. The relinquishment was already in place. Whatever papers I signed with that doctor in the hospital, I never saw her. Inga came to the hospital with me and when I woke up I said, 'does she have all her fingers and toes.' It's remarkable. I think the mid-wife told me it was a girl and than Inga came in to see me and we started to cry together and I said did you see her? She said yes briefly and she had black hair. And I cried and that was the only time I cried.

When questioned again about the way the relinquishment was handled and whether G. knew the baby was going, G. responded:

Yes. That's the foggiest part of my recollection. When Hans and I had that first appointment with the pediatrician in the hospital he than made the arrangements. No one sat down with me and said these are the consequences of this, this is what is going to happen, this is where she is going, and so on and so forth.

Now, I called home after she was born to say that it was over, that it had happened. My mother had wanted to come to Copenhagen for the birth and I said no. She visited once when I was about 4 months and it was very uncomfortable for me. She did not belong there. I didn't want her there. I wanted to be Danish, to have my life, and I did not want her to be there and stir anything up for me. I than wrote and said why don't you visit as I had no idea what I was going to do. Maybe we could take a little holiday together. She came. We went to Spain. We had a horrendous time. We fought constantly. I was very postpartum. We fought and fought and fought and than I was ready to go home to Copenhagen and she said well, you are not going back. No, I said why don't you fly back to California from Spain and I will go back to

Copenhagen. She said you are coming home with me. I didn't get that at all. She said I will report to the government that there is an alien living here without any money. Without getting into the whole mess of my family life that really wasn't my mother speaking it was her lawyer husband speaking. She wouldn't know to do that and it was a very unnurturing thing to say. I didn't like her for it at all.

So we flew back to Copenhagen together and checked into a hotel and I ran away and stayed with Hans for three or four days. And then I think I just felt utterly defeated and didn't know what to do. There really was no room for me in his life at that time and I had no life outside of the pregnancy and my life with him. So, in great defeat I went back to the hotel and my mother took me on to a plane and we went back to California. Then I had to deal with how people at home were now going to deal with me. My friends were in college. I was a woman now. I had left a girl and nobody except for my grandmother, whom I was closest to, nobody really wanted to talk about it, nobody knew how to talk about it.

### Sadness and Loss

G said she was "postpartum" but didn't go into detail except to say how it impacted her self-esteem. She said:

I was very postpartum and I got pregnant so God had clearly picked me out to crap on and I was a terrible horrible person deserving of nothing. How could this have happened.

### RELATIONSHIPS:

The first relationship after the relinquishment ended in an abortion. G. speaks positively of the relationships in her life although she usually would end them prematurely. She said:

I was in a relationship at that point that had lasted for three years but I ended up going to Mexico to have an abortion.

I had some wonderful relationships. Wonderful men. Not that separations were not painful but I seem to be able to relinquish a relationship. It's as if I can do that, this is easy. If I could of let her go [relinquished daughter] . I'm sure I am simplifying that and I don't know if it is true but there were a number of relationships. I really let go prematurely, far to easily. I always did the leaving. All of the men I ever had serious relationships were bright, in love with me and caring. I don't know. I really don't know.

When I assumed that G. had never married (and this would have upset my categories of having two married and two unmarried), I was very pleased to hear the following. She said:

I did marry once. I married a lovely man for three years. We stayed in touch for a long time even after he married and had children. He married someone he met through me and as he has said through the years he never stopped loving me.

When further questioned of whether she wanted children, G. responded:

A lot of ironies. I only got pregnant when I wasn't married. Jay had been married before. We were married in medical school in his residency. A very difficult time in anybody's life. He had two small children that he felt he lost in the divorce. We had them on weekends. He did not want to have any more children. He certainly did not want me to be pregnant at that time which happened to be the time we were married. We didn't use any

contraception that I could remember. I never got pregnant. It was a remarkably simple divorce. He now has three subsequent children.

When this researcher asked about any similarities between the men in her life she replied:

Actually I was the one to do the leaving. The graduate student, I found out years later that I was a very significant relationship in his life. I always gave him significance because he deflowered me. Girls remember those things. I also saw him many years later a couple of times. The ship board romance., he was a much older man. He was the host and very smart. He was a wonderful experience in my young life. He was an Israeli. He taught me about Jazz and James Balwin and we would stay up all night talking about books. It was a wonderful adventure. He wanted me to go back to N. Y. to Columbia with him and live together. He wrote to me. He came to visit me in the Kibbutz. It was an important relationship.

### Re-union

The re-union had meaning beyond just finding her child. It was a multi-level search that involved her daughter, her mother and her self. She had to soul search and come to a decision that she could search. She reflected:

I opened those flood gates 10 years ago and decided to look for her and to go back to Europe. We can certainly get to that maybe next time. As I said I was a very good birth mother. It never crossed my mind that I would ever have any right to know anything about her and once it occurred to me that I might I had to search my soul very deeply. I spent a long time thinking about promises and vows and what that meant. Did I really make a promise to anyone. Was it to a government. Was it to her parents. But no it wasn't really. It was this historical thing that

women who give her children away. Which is what [the wording] we used those days. No one used the terms relinquishment and surrender. Those very pretty kinds of words. It was giving your child away or giving your child up. A real ugly phase. I really had to search. Was it a terribly selfish thing to consider?

Well anyway, it was during that time when I got involved with other birth mothers and adult adoptees who were searching. It was a real hard transition for me because I had been very alone in my heart about it. I never knew anyone else with that experience. It did not take very long for me to discover that no one outside of that room or where that support group met knew what I meant or was talking about. It was the first time I had real respect for group work. I'm not a real group person. Not as a participant myself. But I really understood how likeness comforts. Of course, there is a flip side to that that I saw a lot of women through the years get caught up with birth mothers rhetoric and so on that I was uncomfortable with. I'm not a groupie in that way.

Listening to stories month after month after month and the anguish... I met a number of women who came to a meeting and for the very first time were telling anybody they had been pregnant. I mean women who lived in secrecy and shame all these years and some just crying uncontrollably. Birth mothers have chosen different ways to get on with their lives or not. But I tell you very few of them have clarity. They all had memories but very few had clarity. A lot of them were out and out forced. I mean it was the old story of you give up the child or there is no home for you. You are not my daughter anymore. A lot of stories like that.

I didn't have that. Mine was a much more internal thing, the way I felt. First of all I think I became old to myself after the birth. I don't know how to describe to you what it's like to be pregnant for nine months and than just be left with yards of flesh and have your breasts bound down to stop the milk. It isn't the death of the child that must have it's own separate agony...it is a phantom experience and she was with me all the time.

I met my daughter 10 years ago. I went back and re-did everything. Learned the language again. Lived in Copenhagen again. Saw Hans again. Introduced them. Rode my bicycle again. Became 19 again. Judged again. Rough. It was real rough. By everybody. Everybody. Whether I was doing the right thing or the wrong thing. I was evasive. I was disrespectful. I was selfish. I was heroic. I was everything. And it was the second hardest thing I ever had to do. But I did it and then I had a lot of work to do after that. Rough. Very rough thing to do. I had to let go of a lot, not the least of which was the mystery and the fantasy and whatever stories I told myself through the years to soothe myself.

A search is a very serious thing for anybody to do and you damn well better know what you are doing and what you are looking for because you have to stand there and take it. And another thing about the search I discovered very early and continue to believe was that I was looking for both of us, and I mean that literally, and I mean it poetically and psychologically. I was doing the work for both of us. That I was looking for her and for myself in it and that's what was compelling. It was truly a search. A multilevel search.

I did not know that would happen when I first started to look. I had to go through an early process permitting myself to do it. I took it very seriously and this was long before the controversy about search became as public as it is now. Eleven years ago was a long time ago in the adoption movement, the adoption literature. I had certainly not met anyone who had done it or thought about it. I had never met anyone that was forthright about having a birth parent in the family. Everyone knows adoptive parents and everybody knows adoptees but somehow nobody seems to know birth parents. That was the situation. We were clearly the black mark on the triad. I had to sort through a lot of adoption stuff that I took very seriously. I was not angry in the ways that so many other women I met were. I was not angry at the adoptive parents, not until much later, as I was later, let me add. I wasn't angry at the world of adoption. I

learned to be [angry] in terms of what I discovered to be the overall methods of adoption and so on.

Since I didn't go through an adoption here I didn't have a lot of the same issues or complaints that the sisters and the maternity home lied to me so I didn't have that experience. My appreciation for a lot of the awfulness that was done to young girls escalated and my anger came in then but it wasn't a personal anger in that way. My personal anger was very personal. That had to do with my mother, my self, and so on. It was a real inner deal. Once I got to a level of knowing that absolutely this was something I wanted to do that I needed to do and that there was no reason for me not to do it as long as I could maintain myself.

I worked hard on this in my personal therapy and so on. And my therapist was very influential in my, in driving me to do the search. He had never met anyone like me before. I mean therapists that I had seen through the years, I've a real appreciation for how little most therapist know about adoption. Because I would sit down and give the litany of my autobiography and so on, I did this and that, and then I got pregnant and had the child. Virtually every therapist would let me scoot right by that until I finally met someone who said wait a minute, something very significant happened. It amazed me as I learned more myself, as a clinician and as I had a reasonable long therapy with him, what a frightening topic it is for therapist. They just don't want to touch it. Some of that has changed because adoption has changed. It's right out there in your face everytime you turn on the T.V. and open the paper.

I was compelled to do this [the search for her daughter] on many levels. Deeply psychologically, mythically. The fact that I had a daughter out there in the world. Then I began to get involved with what ifs, which is not uncommon, I think. What if she is not okay? O my God. I assumed that she always was. What if she is not alive? What if she is miserable? That was one level of it. And then I would never want to pretend my search was not also selfish in my wanting to heal if I could. I also took

very seriously my judgment and my good taste and my basic sense of curtesy and respect with respect to her life and her parents.

So I did a lot of that internal work for about a year as I was trying to hook up with old people in Denmark on who could help and what could I possibly do and whether if there were any contacts for me there. And I was real nervous. I was very excited. I mean, the 19 year old in me was very excited in going back. And I would never deny that there was an element of adventure. It wasn't the same as finding her address in Encino and driving around the block and looking at her high school annual. This was a very dramatic kind of search in that way for me. It was going back in time and place for me. And it blurred some things. I mean I had to stop my life here. I didn't plan to get on the plane and go and search for two weeks and come back and pick up a job at the phone company or whatever. I stopped my life and went there with a few suitcases. I had no idea when I would be back or what I would do. So that is what compelled me to search. I don't know if that is the word. I think it was too great an interruption to consider resuming, though it was possible, as I got a number of jolts. Twenty years is a long time even for a city like Copenhagen. People change. I certainly caught myself at realizing life had not stopped.

The adoptive father, by the way, was the doctor that came in and put the ether over my face which I did not know until I met T. I hated hearing that because it was just this perfect picture of this lost girl in the clinic waiting for the doctor to come to tell me why my breasts hurt so much and why this and why that and what did she look like and what did her cry sound like and I kept waiting. And he was cradling her off somewhere with his wife. And as I said to T. 'the only good part of that story for me is that you got to go immediately with the people who became your parents.' Other than that it felt male and medically chauvinistic and I was very uncomfortable.

Relinquishment Impact on her Life

G. in a very profound way speaks of the major impact the relinquishment had on her life and in time as the process unfolded the task she had of accepting responsibility for the relinquishment. She said:

It wasn't a consideration for me and I think through the years my having to accept ultimate responsibility for it was one of the hardest tasks. I spent a lot of years being very comfortable blaming. I still can in the grand scheme of things. I can blame the adults in my life for not rallying around and offering support. I can blame my time in social history, I can blame my country. It was easy to do that for a long time. Although that is a piece of it I didn't stay there and raise her and I didn't come home and raise her. I didn't do any creative thinking on how I could do this. Nobody forced me. I wasn't 14 in a gym class being found out. I wasn't sent to Aunt Mary's in shame in the middle of the night. I was living an independent life so there is a lot of confusion and a lot of headache.

I mean the whole history of illegitimacy, which is what it was 30 years ago, how language has influenced our thinking, particularly around this. An unwanted pregnancy, an unplanned pregnancy, an unwed mother, a knocked up girl, an illegitimate birth. It is very, very different. And the way in which professionals could help. I have heard just nightmare stories from other birth mothers of my generation, most of whom got pregnant sooner in their lives than I did and so they were far more vulnerable in that they were far more dependent on their parents, on the school system, on whatever else, and it is also easier for them to blame because they had no choice.

Even women who were my age and older at the time of pregnancy at that time in history struggled tremendously. Very few women knew why they relinquished and were clear about it and very few of

those that were able to say that they made the right decisions. And those were usually in a way a career choice. It's a little early yet for my generation to be caught in that, but women who were maybe five or ten years younger than I am were doing that. So it was very clear, and a lot of those women saw the babies first. There is a whole body of literature on women who see and hold their infant. Some of them even began to nurse. And for those women who had no contact and no sense at all, there was no closure at all.

Certainly many people have asked me through the years. I was asked on a panel last weekend: Do I have any regrets and would I do it differently, which is an almost impossible question. Certainly if it happened now there is no way I would do it as I know what the consequences are. And the consequences are dire in terms of one's own development of the self, and all subsequent relationships. There isn't anything in my life that hasn't been affected by that experience.

In response to this researcher's inquiry about the second pregnancy and the decision to abort, G. said:

The decision to abort I think it was part of....yes it was the aftermath of that and the aftermath of that was this intense self dislike. This was very soon after the loss and I just thought that I was a horrendous irresponsible person. It must be because here I was in that situation again and what does this mean and I am worthless. This is a very strong feeling. I was still almost as young. I was still unmarried. I don't even think those were the considerations and that relationship lasted some time. Lasted a couple of years. There was virtually no discussion. I was very secretive about it as well. Then it was dramatized by the fact I had to steal down to Tijuana. My God, was this what my adult life looks like.

A lot of life for me had stopped 20 years before. There is an article I read a long time ago. I think it was

published maybe ten or fifteen years ago called "when sleeping beauty awakes." And it was an article about adoption. I think about a birth mother. I read it a long time ago. There is an awakening from some kind of a slumber. I can't speak for myself or for women who went on and raised a family. But I certainly can remember a lot of women in my support groups who said no, that there was a part of them, and there is a whole range of words, that died then, that went to sleep then. Even for the women who married the birth fathers and had subsequent children with him.

It is a tremendous loss of a child of your youth, of a significant time of developing ties and bonds and values, I think. I was set apart in my mind ever after. No matter what I did I was older. Old, even at 20. I didn't go hide in a closet. My life may not have looked that different. I always did reasonable responsible things. There was a part of me that was ugly and a part of me that I must have believed was unlovable because of this. And I think I protected myself thinking that I was very strong because I could tell the story. That I wasn't hiding. Almost brazenly so. If I could tell it either it can't hurt that much, or it can't be that deep or so on and so forth, and that was one of my survival tactics that I paid for later. I don't know if that is right. I had to discover that there were some serious fault lines under that strong structure. That is not a bad metaphor and I just made it up. And I think that's what my late 30's and 40's were about feeling that. I also think, possibly, that the loss was so overwhelming that in my case it also affected in a way the credibility of my adult connections. I had a lot of love in my life.

#### Family Impact on her Life

G. continues on to talk about the relationships in her life and how it was permeated by her sense of worthlessness that began in childhood. She said:

I think I had a lot of love in my life. I had a number of love relationships. None of my relationships with men were awful. There is always pain when a relationship ends. There was a sense of unworthiness with me that I would bring with me. Some of it surely has its beginnings in my childhood. I don't dump everything into the experience of having lost a child to adoption. I also acknowledge that some of my sense of worthlessness may have influenced my decision to not keep her in that I wasn't okay enough to do that.

I think that there was a sense that I (and I think now, quite the opposite now), that I would not be able to mother effectively because my mother couldn't. And I needed to stop the whole line. That figures in there somewhere because I remember thinking it. It may have been later. I'm sure it was later. You knew another possibility because I remember being just aghast at her suggestion [to have the child adopted] and I think that I was so angry that she could think that a child could be so disposable, and I think always hurt by my mother in that way. I've never quite thought of it that way before but I think that's a possibility.

Now I'll give you the whole theme of pregnancy irony in my life and what I share with my mother. My mother married her third husband when I was 16. We did not have a good relationship. He is an asshole and by now everybody knows that. I think I knew that early. There was certainly no place for me. He moved in and my grandparents moved out. It was not a good time. I went to Oregon my first year of college primarily to get away. My mother got pregnant on purpose that first year. The baby was born with only one-half a diaphragm and never began to live. It was very painful for me. He called me on the phone and told me and I cried so hard I hung up on him. It was very difficult. I was in Israel when my mother got pregnant again and lost the heart beat in the fourth or fifth month.

There were two remarkable powerful losses for her. Then I got pregnant and I had a healthy baby. Then, when we returned to the states she must of gotten pregnant

that night because nine months after my daughter was born my brother was born. Now, I am experiencing being back in the states again. I re-enrolled in the school, I think night classes as I was working in the day. My stepfather threw me out of the house because he was a jerk. There was nothing wrong with me as a daughter except I was his wife's daughter.

I ended up moving in with old friends who were going to U.C.L.A. or something and feeling really inadequate. Everybody had marched along with their little post adolescent lives dating and goofing around and studying and doing these things and I had a very heavy heart. I missed Hans. I missed Denmark. I had no idea what was going on. Now this jerk throws me out of the house.

G. speaks of the loss again of her mother not standing up for her and choosing career, baby or husband rather than her. She said:

And my mother cried, and my sense was once again not standing up for me in any way. So I went about my business. Than Joshua was born and Joshua will be 30 in a couple of months. My daughter was 30 in the summer, 9 months earlier. She got pregnant the night we got back. This is a story full of irony. The greatest irony and the greatest joy is my brother and I are best friends. We really beat the odds because there was every reason in the world for this sibling relationship not to work and there are lots of places you could go with that. Whether or not I identified myself as his mother or not we could spend days on that, but we lucked out.

However, I left L.A. and I was just the worse person who ever walked the earth. I couldn't understand how that could have happened. A lot of that was, I was naive. I did use a diaphragm both times I got pregnant. I wasn't totally unreasonable. I was unlucky. So I was even more worthless. The abortion was pretty quick. There wasn't much discussion about it. It was while my mother was pregnant. It was like six months after my daughter was

born. Nobody explained how easy it is to get pregnant after a birth. It wouldn't had mattered as I was using protection. I got pregnant anyway.

### Resolution

G. speaks of where she is in the process of understanding herself and her mother. She said:

It's only been in the last few years of my life that I have been able to say I love my mother very much but I've had to say this is the women that she is and the mother that she is and these are the choices that she has made and lets get on with it. But it took me a long time. I suffered in that relationship and believe me I caused her to suffer as the years went on. I dragged her through it as I needed to make peace with this when I started my search and so on. I got to blame my mother for years. Now I'm a mature women. Occasionally I still have to be cautious. But by and large I've taken care of that over the last 10 years.

When this researcher asked if there was healing, she responded:

Yes, there was healing and I think that is the tense to use. I think it really is progressive. It is not a done deal. I will never be healed from that. Not only do you not get over the initial loss but with respect to search in general or adoption I think that when you find a child you don't become a mother. If you are an adoptee you don't find your birth parents and suddenly not be an adoptee anymore. If you are an adoptive parent out of infertility you don't become fertile. Those issues are still there. It is an issue of loss. And all of that stuff is on top of that primary issue, I think, so that for me I lost a child I didn't raise, that I did not parent her. Her parents parented her. They are her real and psychological parents. They know each other. I never had that. I will

never have that with her. And there will always be an niggardly area.

In my case my daughter has never gotten into the ring with me as I know some adoptees have with their parents. Some of it has been really ugly and some has been to some degree beneficial for one or the other. Most people just don't know what to do with birth parents. They just don't fit in to any kind of a kinship thing from my generation of adoptions. Well, there was a lot of healing for me and part of it was....and I was not successful with this for 10 years after the search...I could say this was trying to learn to love myself. This happened in my life and there are all of these other things as well and you damn well better start paying attention to some of the other stuff.

Occasionally I have been sorry I searched. Sometimes sorry for me and sometimes sorry for her. But I'm not. I'm not at all. And I'm still looking forward to some more chapters as we grow older. I am very happy that I know who she is and she knows who I am. We like each other very, very much. If it wasn't the fact that adoption...adoption is what brought us together. It gets very crazy about now. What I said, a couple of her closest friends have come here and lived with me. It's not just because it is California. All of her friends like me very much. They put me through the hoops, I tell you. But they valued me. I wasn't a disappointment. I was a valuable person in my own right. A valuable older woman in their lives which gave T. some conflict, which was another big jolt.

I had to re-arrange my feelings around that. Got more and more into the issues of the adoptee's mentality and the adoptee's dilemma regarding loyalty and the betrayal and so on. I tried to be very respectful of that, and I have been. I never crossed the line that she drew. A couple of times with her in thinking that ....a lot of this was during my time in school and getting more involved with the issue of adoption. Wanting her to confront some issues. Than I backed off. It was ultimately none of my business. Either she would eventually, or she wouldn't.

And if she does it when she is 30 or 40 or 60 or never, she knows what I do. She knows what I study. She knows what I care about. She knows that I am always available to her. She has never been comfortable talking about adoption. She is very protective of her parents.....naturally.

The turn [when I knew there would be more chapters to come] came when I decided to go back to school. I had done a little bit of this and a little of that and I knew like I needed to make one more big change to be able to do work that I wanted to do. I had always been interested in behavior, in families and in clinical issues and that sort of thing. A couple of social workers had been very helpful to me. There was a wonderful woman who was an adoptive mother and social worker who came to my support group meetings. I was crazy about her. She was smart. She really understood a lot about adoption. She was a social worker. She had a very special feeling about birth mothers and adoptees. She had lost one of her adoptive sons to a suicide a couple of years before I met her. I know a couple of women who had. We became friends. Before I started the search, I went to talk to a couple of social workers at Vista Del Mar. I had never talked to anybody. I went to talk to Reuben Pannor [M.S.W.]. I just walked in cold and I had never told my story in that way and I cried and so on, and this guy was asking me questions that could have come out of my own head and I was just amazed. That was before the search.

A couple of years after I came back I looked at M.F.C.C. programs, M.S.W. program, Doctoral programs, that was way over the top as I didn't have the time, energy or anything. I rather quickly applied to U.S.C. and U.C.L.A. and was thinking, of course, they are not going to want me. I spent a long time on my essay, autobiographical essay, and I was accepted both places. I went to U.C.L.A. because I didn't have the money to go to U. S.C. point blank and I didn't like the program. It's possible that I would have been happier at U.S.C. as it may have been more clinical in a way that would have been more

satisfying to me. But that is beside the point. I started in 90 and finished in 92.

Now, I was very self disclosing very early in the program. I mean like the first day of the human behavior class I think I said 'Hi, my name is G., I gave my child away.' I talked to the professor many times about that first hour and I think it was like a recap of all the years. It's like lets get this right out on the table right now. And it haunted me in a way throughout the program. The program was difficult as well. It was a hard program for everyone in its intensity. I had never really studied. I mean studying family systems was fascinating and intriguing but very difficult. It was hard to do. Not difficult in terms of grasping anything but internally. It pulled a lot of things in me and again it was in doing genograms and looking at my family visually and having to do a symbol for T. and disconnect her from my family tree.

There were a lot of things that I did during my graduate program that were with respect to what we are talking about that were hard in that way. It was another level of healing. But it was certainly progress. When I went into the program I was primarily writing. I had about 400 pages of this stuff. And I thought, some day I'll have a private practice for half a day and write the other half a day. That was kind of a long range goal. In the meantime I finished the program.

There were very few jobs that summer right out of school. And I thought D.C.S., so I applied to the adoption division and they said we never hire off the streets. That is the elite of D.C.S. and all transfer in. They said, are you interested in D.C.S. anyway, and of course I said sure. I got a call in a couple of weeks from adoptions and suddenly they lifted the freeze just for adoptions and you had to have a M.S.W. to work there and so that was what I did about two years and four months ago. And then it was another process in the healing and other sores opened. Here were people who really thought birth mothers were sluts and whores and so on and so forth and I got pushed around inside again. As one of my dear

friends in Pasadena likes to say, there I was, the Phoenix rising from the ashes again, and that's what it has kind of been like.

In terms of the healing as a process. Probably in the last couple of years I've spoken on at least a half dozen to ten panels as a birth mother. Some work related. Some I was crisp as fresh laundry. I was really centered and this was terrific. They were to prospective adoptive parents, by the way. Other times I was hostile, I just decompensated out in the parking lot, cried, and I had to get through that, and I made myself get back on the horse every time when somebody asked me to be on their panel.

Do you know what a M.A.P. group is? Model Adoption Parenting programs, that is a national program for special needs, adoptive kids, pretty much public adoption, which is what we do at the county level. And social workers like me are trained very intensively to become certified to train or to lead a group of prospective adoptive parents in a 10 week program. It deals with adoption issues and birth families and with a sense of kinship and with the issues of loss and so on for children and deals with infertility and so on. That was one of my last goals, to accomplish in that job, and I took that training last month and in the ninth week of that program the leader invites a panel of experts. Maybe an attorney, maybe a birth mother, maybe an adult adoptee, other adoptive parents, and they give a little spiel and answer questions.

I had been invited by several co-workers to go to their ninth meeting. Everyone in my agency knows I am a birth mother. Believe me, it was hard in front of co-workers. And nobody in the audience likes you. You are the primary threat. O, my God you are going to come back. My child is going to hate me because blab, blab, blab. And then there is the complete opposite with adoptees saying, I wish you were my mother. I wished you had come and looked for me. It always pulls at me a little bit. But I'm stronger and stronger all the time. And I just did a three day kinship camp with Annette [Baran, M.S.W.]. This time

we did the Kinship camp as the culmination to that program. Again I was on the birth parent panel. I led an adolescent group. Everyone knew who everybody was. There are some people still in the closet. I have some friends who work at my agency who have come up to me very secretly and privately and telling me they are birth mothers and don't know how to deal with coming out in the agency or something. I always say it is a very private thing. You do what you think you can do when you think can do it.

That I've been forthright with my healing in that way. And the times that I was completely off center were very painful for me. Very different. Why am I doing this? I'm never going to expose myself this way again. If people were truthful there will always be people in an audience of adoptive parents who would say 'I wish you were dead. I wish my child had been a foundling. I wish this weren't a popular thing for people to do.' Or, of course, very blaming 'you made your bed, now lie in it.' It's very hard for me to stay clear without seeming defensive or arrogant.

I have to remember that this is my course not theirs. This is the course I'm on. This happened in my life. And this is what I have done as a consequence. I'm sorry if you don't get it or it is not for you or whatever. I've never met T's parents. I've been respectful of her wishes primarily. Believe me there were plenty of times I wanted to knock on her door. But I feel pretty good about my search and re-union behavior. Other than never having done it at all. Meaning of course it caused disruption. That is not a good word as it means something different in adoption, but causing some interruption in people lives. But you see, for me I think it is conflict that needs to be addressed. But again I have to say that's none of my business.

I address the conflict in my life, and if they are choosing not to, there is nothing I can do about it including the fact that she's not my daughter. She is their daughter. She is my daughter in a very private way. She is my connection. And if there had been a way for all of us to

work that out together, which is what a lot of adoption workers and adoptive families are trying to do now and the jury is still out on that, on open adoption and whether or not that will ever make sense. I also thought adoption touched my life and I've worked very hard to understand the ramifications of that in my life and damn you for not doing even a part of that work.

Kids love me. My adoptive and foster parents will say she [the foster child] never goes to anybody. And I'm still thinking what that is about. I don't know. I had fallen into this kind of Auntie mentality. I accept it now. I have a 13 year old kid on my case load. Whenever I see him at school and go some place the director at this school says I've never seen a kid get so excited when a social worker comes. I take that. I have to take all of that and that's part of the healing too, for me too. There were a lot of years that I did not want to be around kids. I didn't care what age they are. So, a lot of that is changing. It happens all the time.

I do a funny thing with T's pictures. At home, I put them up and take them down. I put them up and take them down. It can be a few months, I change the frame. It's like I don't know. Do I need to put her back in the drawer again. Should I take her out because she is part of my life. She is not really a part of my life and back in the drawer.

There will always be adoption. There will always be children raised by people who are not their biological parents. There will always be women who can't raise their children for one reason or another. There will always be people who can't produce their own children. I think it is like a task that nature has given us to learn from it, to solve this problem somehow and we have botched it often. So, that's the end.

#### Current Assessment of her Life

When asked if G. had thoughts at the beginning of the second meeting about our last meeting she responded:

Probably what almost amused me was the realization that my life didn't seem to be interrupted, although it was. But when you said did you have any goals. And I thought, those were my formative years, weren't they? I think that the experience of losing a child to adoption was so overwhelming and so disruptive and so unexpected and so unplanned for, it probably had so much more to do with my level of a very deep level of worthlessness or self loathing set in. It didn't necessarily look like that because I was doing a lot of things. But they were without real commitment, without real devotion, as if something would result in something meaningful, and specifically I think about school slash career and relationship, neither of which ever lasted more than two or three years in my life. It may have happened anyway without the experience of the pregnancy and relinquishment.

There will never be a way for me to know that but I think it had a profound influence. I miss her a lot. I have to scoot around that [G. was unable to further discuss this missing of her daughter]. But I'm going on quite differently from the way I thought about it ten years or five years, or three years ago. I'm just now, as I said last week, I'm just now getting some goals I believe in. I believe it is in addition to the fact that I'm in my 50's and not in my 30's or 40's has an awful lot to do with it. But also I've taken care of a lot of business.

This researcher remarked that G. was unusual in that [taking care of business]. She agreed and said:

I think so. That's it. And it took a huge chunk of time out of my life and everything that means and when people talk about regret I'd like to have a lot of that time back and that's kind of of foolish thinking.

G. continues on to talk about the mourning process. She explains:

Everything we know and respect about mourning is very important in adoption and it is the mourning that usually doesn't happen for a long, long time. I think it kind of starts with the search, for a lot of women. And as with a kind of mourning, you do a lot of healing. Healing is a process, whatever the period is you need to do that. I think you have to actively mourn. I don't like it when people don't have a service after a death. Some kind of memorial. Take a little time. Plant a flower. Have a brunch. Whatever your thing is that you do. And then for a long time you remember and then you need to just stop for a minute and do that. There are a lot of things that will continue to stop me. It is still a little hard for me to go to a baby shower. I didn't do it for a long time. Or I did it and then I needed a long recovery period. It just ripped me apart.

If I speak as a birth mother to adoptive parents I need to know who they are and know something about where they are at, and still at the level of threat because of where they are in accepting their infertility or the loss of a child or whatever it is. I take my responsibilities seriously, and I'll also put someone away if they are saying or asking something moronic or rude and so on. Occasionally someone may ask a very empathic question like 'why didn't you have more children.' These are harder because on the one hand I don't know. And I don't think I am going to sit down and discuss with an audience what I've discussed with you about the depths of ....I don't know...everything we discussed.

I've grown tremendously, I think, in trying to figure out the impact this has had on my life. Some women have done a lot of work and really a lot haven't.

In response to my inquiry of what accounts for this difference,

G. responds:

I think it is a basic nature. I'm curious about how people solve problems. I care a lot about fairness. I think to try to be fair you have to be investigative. If you are talking about dilemma and betrayal and so on. I'm pretty reflective. So I think a lot of it comes with the personality involved and what interests people. A lot of people are not interested in looking as deeply into some things as I am. They just are not. Some want to just know that their child is okay. They may want to just see a picture. They may want to just meet once. There are others who will dig and dig and dig for a meaningful relationship. And the same for adoptees. Not the same, as there are different issues, but they will want different things from their meeting. I think it is a reflection, by and large, a reflection of how a person deals with a lot of issues and how deeply they want to go and how deeply they are affected.

When people ask me if I have children sometimes I say yes and sometimes I say no. I probably won't marry again. I wouldn't mind being taken by surprise sometimes. It would be completely different, but I really seem to be looking at work more than anything else right now and what I am going to do over the next couple of years. It is really important to me and it thrills me to know that. This has been a long birth to have goals.

### My Reflections

G. had obviously done an enormous amount of work on herself and is able to articulate in very moving and thoughtful words the impact of her family and the relinquishment on her life. She had worked with her own process in an impressive manner regardless of her suffering and pain. Her life had gone on. She has been able to experience regret but not stay stuck there. and moved on with her life in a very vital and dynamic way. Developmentally, she was doing what many women do in their 50's, reassessing their lives,

getting in touch with their power and making their own decisions. In other words, taking charge of her life. In this process we see the slow development of G.'s personal responsibility and career goals, which had been impacted by the relinquishment in a very positive manner that seems to fully realize her own potential. I felt a close affinity with her and the choices she has made and the growth that has developed in this process. Her career at this time is in the field of adoptions and this continues to be a healing process for her.

### Comparative Analysis of Categories

Using the same categories I used in the descriptive analysis of each subject, I will now discuss the similarities and differences between each of the subjects within those categories.

I found these birth mothers in my study to be similar in some ways and dissimilar in other ways to the literature findings. Although one can not generalize from my small study of four women to the population as a whole, my study had some very interesting findings because it looked in depth at the women's experiences in the following areas: before pregnancy, with a focus on her relationships, especially with her mother, self-esteem issues, and getting pregnant; during pregnancy with a focus on the areas of secrecy, shame, living arrangements, and prenatal attachment, including why the decision was made to relinquish; after the relinquishment, the birth mothers experiences of sadness and loss, relationships, re-union, and the family and relinquishment impact on their life; and the last period, which focuses on where the birth

mother is in the resolution process, her self reflections, and my reflections on the birth mothers.

What I found was that although the process was different for each of the birth mothers, there were some similarities in common for the two women, A. and G., who were able to made a better post relinquishment adjustment that distinguished them from the other two women, F. and M. In the last interview, as the birth mothers reflected on the impact of the relinquishment and described their adjustment and/or current functioning, two felt that some healing and/or resolution had taken place, whereas the other two birth mothers did not feel any healing or resolution and described themselves using terms such as collapsed, stuck, sad and angry.

#### Identifying Data

The four subjects were chosen to fit different categories of (1) married, (2) unmarried and (3) with and without children to see if these parameters correlated with their post-relinquishment adjustment.

The four subjects who participated in the interviews are intelligent and articulate Caucasian females from middle class families. Relinquishment ages were 16, 21, 24 and 27. Three women were young adults and one a teenager at the time of pregnancy and relinquishment.

A., the eldest, is 67 years old. She married four years after she relinquished her child, became pregnant and divorced the father. M. is 41 years old and the youngest at the time of relinquishment.

She has not married or had more children. She is a part owner of an art store, and considering more schooling and therapy. F. is 52 years old and has continued the nursing career she had begun before her pregnancy. She never married, but had another child. G. is 51 years old. She married for a short time and then divorced and did not have more children. She had an abortion shortly after relinquishing her child. She finished college and recently earned a masters in social work.

Findings: There was a difference between the two groups in marital status. The two women who married and divorced were in the group that was better adjusted. Marriage could be considered the next developmental step for young women and these women took it.

There was no difference found between the groups in age at the time of pregnancy and relinquishment, nor in having subsequent children. This study included only one adolescent, whereas published studies chiefly deal with adolescents, a difference that could have affected the outcome. Moreover, this was a carefully selected group including only middle-class Caucasian women, whereas other studies may reflect not only a larger, but a more random or demographically representative selection.

### First Contact

I am going to use my first impression of the birth mothers in correlating my initial reactions with their concluding self-evaluations.

All subjects were contacted initially on the telephone by this researcher. Three were recommended to me by Annette Baron to fill different categories of married, unmarried and with/without subsequent children. The fourth subject had been suggested by one selected earlier. None were rejected. All were aware that I was an adoptive parent and clinical social worker.

A. was the first one contacted. She was agreeable to participate although she wasn't sure I could use her due to the long period of time since she had relinquished. She had good memories of the experience, but felt she had blocked out a lot. M. was initially reluctant on the phone and interviewed me intensively before she agreed. Her anger over the relinquishment was evident. F. was willing to be interviewed but also sounded very angry on the phone. G. was the easiest one to talk to over the telephone. Like A., I did not hear any anger in her voice. She was the only one interviewed in my office and not in her home.

### Findings

An interesting point is my initial reactions to the affect displayed by the subjects during the first phone conversation. The two women who seemed angry and more reluctant to do the interviews and who therefore needed more time on the phone and

later in the interviews were, not surprisingly, the ones comprising the group of women still, many years later having difficulty with post-relinquishment adjustment. As they talked about the relinquishment in subsequent interviews they displayed considerable painful affect, crying, expressing anger and living in the past. I had difficulty with their sadness and anger on the phone and later, in the interviews, it had a profound effect on me.

The two women who were easy to talk with on the phone represented the group who were able to make a better post-relinquishment adjustment and described themselves in the interviews as not living in the past. They had made a life for themselves and could now reflect upon this experience. They were pleased with what they had done with their lives.

That was how I experienced them. There was a positive correlation between my initial reaction to the birth mothers on the phone, their affect during the interviews, and their self-assessment of their lives on one hand and my experience of them on the other.

### Early Life

In this section I will compare the early life experiences of the subjects, focusing on their sibling position, the marital status of their parents and their own assessment of family functioning.

A. was the eldest of five children of whom three remain emotionally disturbed. M. was the middle child between an older sister and younger brother and later step brothers. F. was the third of four female children with a sister 11 years younger. G. was an

only child, her parents divorced soon after she was born, and seven years later, step siblings were added to the family when her mother married again. Thirty years later her half brother was born.

Three subjects were from divorced families. The parents of A. divorced when she was 17 years old. Her father died when she was two months pregnant. The parents of M. divorced when she was in elementary school and she was raised by her mother and stepfather. The parents of G. divorced when she was two and later her mother divorced her adoptive stepfather. Only F's parents had a long term marriage.

A. and M. had similar descriptions of their early life in a dysfunctional family. A. describes hers as one of inadequate parenting and ignorance on practical matters while M. states that she experienced abuse, deprivation and lack of support. F. and G. described a better family situation. However, G. felt she had retained many abandonment issues deriving from separations from her mother. F. was the only one who described her family as "normal" and typical of the time; dogmatic and religious, but providing a healthy environment.

### Findings

In common, each women expressed difficulties about their early life experiences. Whether parents were married or divorced did not seem to make a difference among the groups. While the literature I read did not consider sibling positions, this study found an effect of sibling position on post-relinquishment adjustment. M. and F., who described themselves as still having

difficulty adjusting to relinquishment, were both middle children, while A. was the eldest and G. the only child for the first seven years of her life. Perhaps A. and G., who described themselves as more resolved, benefitted from more parental attention in their early years, than M. and F.

### Relationship with Parents

A. and M. described difficult relationships with their disturbed and violent parents. A. believed that she had a terrible family situation and poor relationships with both parents. They would fight, she would call the police. She described her mother as flaky and her father as possessive. She was glad to get away from the family. Her grandmother intervened in a positive way in her life. M. also did not have a good relationship with either parent. Her parents were violent and she was exposed to her father raping her mother. She describes her mother as very narcissistic and "not a healthy camper."

F. and G. appeared to have been given better early care than A. and M. as they did not experience overt abuse or physical neglect. F. describes her mother as a good person in retrospect but describes her parents as unable to be emotionally close and to touch and hold her. She always felt she was missing tenderness and intimacy in life and felt her mother had total control of her and did not feel safe in her family. G. had abandonment issues with her mother leaving her with her grandparents as she pursued an interrupted career, and confusion over her father. Although she felt loved by

her mother the many separations made for difficulty in communications in their relationship.

### Findings

All the subjects described themselves as having early difficulties with their parents, especially the mother, and this relationship was often reflected upon as they shared their life stories in the interviews (this relationship will be discussed in greater detail in the section on themes). However, there was a variation in how much they focused on their mother. I found that the two who were having difficulty (M. and F.) adjusting concentrated mainly on the difficulty in the relationship with their mothers. However, there were variations in this focus as F. brought everything back to her mother and M. seemed able at times to forgive her mother's shortcomings. G. and A., who described themselves as moving on in their lives viewed their mothers as a contributing force, but able to accept them as lacking the means to do better for their children. They both had a grandmother who helped them in their early years.

### Self-esteem issues

A. and M. each felt they had long suffered feelings of low self-esteem. A. never felt like a person in her own right and had to be what her parents wanted her to be. M. also felt her low self-esteem issues combined with her boundaries being violated made her very needy and unable to say no to a boy. In contrast, F. and G. described themselves in positive terms as women growing up and being very

involved with school friends and outside activities and feeling good about themselves. They felt they had developed a healthy self-esteem as they were growing up. F's self esteem suffered enormously when she became pregnant and G.'s when she relinquished her baby.

### Findings

All the subjects experienced low self esteem but two of them (A. and M.) had experienced it as young children, not only as a consequence of pregnancy or relinquishment.

### Getting Pregnant

Three of the women became pregnant on the occasion of their first sexual experience. A. was 25, still a virgin, living away from her family with her sister in another state. She did some drinking on dates in order to relax. One night she had a fling, about which she still has wonderful memories, and knew she was pregnant the next day. M. became pregnant at age 16 when she had sex with her boyfriend for the first time. F. was 24 in an established career and living at home. She was a virgin and dating an older (six years) man who she trusted. She was saying no but she was drinking and her guard was down. G. was in a relationship of several months at age 19 and became pregnant. She had two previous sexual relationships, one in college and the other in the ship going to Europe. She had none in Israel until she was in a committed love relationship with Hans and moved with him to Denmark.

## Findings

A. M. and G., became pregnant the first time they had sex. For each of them it was with somebody older whom they trusted, perhaps because they were older. On the other hand, A. and G., were no longer living with their families and had chosen to be sexually active. They had physically separated from their families and were individuating in age appropriate sexual development and developing an independent life of their own before becoming pregnant. The literature review (Heiman and Levitt, 1960, Resnick, 1984, Sorosky, Baran, Pannor, 1978, 1984, Shaw, 1975) addresses the many reasons an adolescent may get pregnant, among them: their own attachment needs, depression, failure to use contraceptives and chance. In my study only one subject used contraceptives and all became pregnant, apparently or at least according to their accounts, by chance. In common, all the subjects spoke of earlier attachment needs not being met. In the literature review (Heiman & Levitt, 1960) there is an interesting point made that some girls can use the baby to replace a lost love object, that such women value their control over the baby when they are unable to control the mother, and such subjects will often suffer depression if they give up their baby. Similar to these findings, F. and M. experienced long term depressions over their loss. They were the two that were still at home and under their mother's control when becoming pregnant.

The literature review (G. Shaw, 1975) also points to the possibility that some adolescents are looking for an attachment they did not have in their own family. All of the subjects spoke of earlier

nurturing needs not being met by their mothers. There was a difference in that F. and M., who remained stuck, mentioned their need to be close and to have arms around them and did not remember the sexual experience as positive. In contrast, the other group did not express this need. They spoke of enjoying their sexuality and having good memories of the experience.

#### During Pregnancy

Three subjects had an initial abortion experience. A. attempted an abortion and M. had an attempted abortion forced on her, whereas G. applied and was turned down for an abortion. F. was the only one who did not try to abort, feeling that her religion foreclosed that option.

#### Findings

There is a difference between the two groups in that A. and G. requested an abortion and were in the group that achieved a more satisfactory post relinquishment adjustment. This observation suggests that seeking a voice in decisions affecting their future may have predisposed these subjects to deal better with relinquishment.

#### Secrecy

Two subjects chose to keep the pregnancy a secret from their parents. A. told the birth father right away and then went into hiding from everyone until she left for California. Later she informed her sister. F. told only her best friend and not her family

during the pregnancy. She also went to California in secret. She saw no reason to tell them as there was no way for her to keep the baby. After she had the baby she told her father, hoping that he would help her to keep it, but he would not allow her to come home with the child.

M. and G. told their parents. M. needed help since, at 16, she could not be expected to fend for herself, although the parents wanted it to remain a secret. G. shared with her parents and her boyfriend's family about the baby. There was acceptance in the Danish culture and she felt accepted at home although her mother initially suggested adoption.

### Findings

In the literature review (Brown & Gediman, 1991) secrecy was the norm. In my study all the subjects told the birth father and two wanted the father to marry them so they could keep the baby. Two subjects kept the pregnancy a secret from their parents and three kept the pregnancy a secret from others. In my study the one subject who did not keep the pregnancy a secret from anybody was the one best able to adjust to the relinquishment.

### Living Arrangements

Two subjects entered a home for unwed mothers. A. spoke glowingly about her stay at the Florence Criterion home and M. at a Salvation army home. Both arrived when they were five months pregnant. A. felt protected, safe and happy there and M. wished she and the baby could stay forever. In contrast, F. and G. lived among

the general population. F. traveled cross country to a small community in California where she did not know anybody and worked at a hospital and lived in a rooming house. She was alone where, she recalls, no one tried to help her. G. had an apartment in Denmark with her boyfriend until he was able to get student housing for himself whereupon she lived alone but had friends and his family nearby.

### Findings

Living arrangements during pregnancy and delivery had no demonstrable correlation on relinquishment adjustment in this study. All the subjects left home, one was sent to a home for unwed mothers, one chose a home for unwed mothers, one lived on her own and one was pregnant and delivered in another country. The two residing in homes felt very well supported and loved the experience as something positive and nurturing and an improvement in their living situation. It seemed that the two on their own felt more alone and less supported.

### Shame

A. felt shame during the abortion attempt, while hiding from her family waiting to go to California and while in the home, worried about visitors recognizing her. She would also put herself down for being so stupid as to have become pregnant in the first place. F. also felt the shame of being pregnant. She felt that it not right, that it was contrary to her sense of values in the unaccepting society of that time, and for being a nurse and older.

On the other hand, M. and G. felt shame not for being pregnant or having sex but for relinquishing the baby. F. and A. felt the shame of getting pregnant especially as they were older and should have known better.

### Findings

Shame was felt by all the subjects, as the literature review also reports (Rynearson, 1982, Karen, 1994). However, it was felt at different times in the process and for different reasons. In the literature review shame was chiefly experienced for getting pregnant, but in my study, shame was felt by two subjects not because of getting pregnant but for relinquishing the baby.

### Pre-natal Attachment

Three subjects felt early and strong attachments to their babies. M., and F. talked the most about pre-natal attachment. M. described how she constantly talked to her baby and was very involved with his pre-natal development. F. would also talk to her baby and even took the baby in utero on trips to the Grand Canyon and San Francisco sharing this experience together. In contrast G. and A. did not speak with the same intensity about the pregnancy and attachment, although G. said she felt it early on. G. mainly spoke of the joy and happiness of being pregnant, especially in Denmark. In contrast, A. was the only one who had no fantasies or thoughts about the baby with no particular feeling that it was hers.

### Findings

There was a strong difference between the groups around the prenatal attachment. The two women who had the most difficulty relinquishing spoke of their continual fantasies and very strong connections with their babies, which began prenatally and continued after relinquishment until the present, in contrast to the other group who did not speak of a strong and on-going prenatal attachment.

### Relinquishment

#### Decision

Two subjects actively tried to keep the baby. M. made a pact with her parents to relinquish if there were no more abortion attempts on her. However, she continued to try to keep the baby. M. finally relinquished because she knew she couldn't survive alone with the baby and without help. F. tried to reach out to the church, to doctors, to various people and eventually asked her father to accept the infant but he turned her down and told her if she kept the baby it would kill her mother and she was never to come home. She felt she had no alternative except to relinquish. G. remained fuzzy about how the relinquishment took place as she did not set out to relinquish. A. told the birth father she was pregnant, but he was getting married so she vanished after the abortion attempt failed. She knew she would give up the baby because it was best for the baby and did not fit into the picture she had of herself.

## Findings

There was a difference between the groups. The two mothers in my study who asked their parents to provide support that would have permitted them to keep the child even without marriage were turned down. They were the two birth mothers that continued to have difficulty adjusting to the loss. The other two birth mothers had decided to relinquish so seemed to accept responsibility for their actions and to be able to move on. They did not ask their parents to keep the child so we do not know if they would have been supportive.

The literature findings (Pannor, Baran & Sorosky, 1977) on reasons for relinquishment were that 68% of the birth mothers wanted the baby to have a two-parent normal home, 15% said that the mother was pressured by others, and 13% of the mothers tried to have the fathers marry them. In my study only one spoke of the two parent normal home as her choice, two spoke of feeling pressured by their parents to relinquish and all wanted to marry the birth fathers. One difference may be that the literature treats chiefly experiences of young adolescent girls mated with adolescent men, whereas in my study the partners were all adult men.

## Actual Relinquishment

All found the actual relinquishment experience painful. Although A. chose to relinquish, she also chose to spend the first week taking care of her baby. She said that the worst time for her was when they came to take the baby away and that even the knock

out pills they gave her did not help ease the pain. M. viewed her baby twice a day through a window and at the end was allowed to hold him for 20 minutes. When she saw him being taken away she started collapsing and sobbing and felt it was all over, as she said, she "no longer gave a shit." F. had natural child birth so as not to give drugs to the child. She also spoke of the pain of the relinquishment and of how beautiful the child was. She did not say good-bye to the child, but assured herself that they would see each other again. G. was taken to the clinic by a male friend and her boyfriend's relatives. Although she had a mid-wife, a doctor took over the treatment and against her will gave her ether. Afterwards she went home to the relatives and it was over.

### Findings

All four subjects recount emotional pain at the time they relinquished their infants but each expressed different ways and degrees in which they experienced it. The subjects, similar to the literature (Rynearson, 1982, Deykin et al. 1984, Millen and Roll 1985) on birth mothers, whether choosing to relinquish or not, found the actual relinquishment very difficult and filled with sadness and pain when the separation occurred.

### Sadness and Loss

All subjects, similar to the literature findings, remember continuing sadness centering on relinquishment. A. had been able to forget the many years of sadness, since it had begun over 40 years ago, until she recalled it in the interviews. Than she

remembered she cried "all the time" the first five or ten years and on her child's birthday. F. remembers crying every day until the child turned 13. M. still cries, especially on his birthday. G. only cried once after the birth when she asked her friend who saw the baby about the baby. However, she said she had a postpartum depression that manifested itself in angry, acting out behavior.

### Findings

All the subjects expressed sadness with the loss. However, there was a difference between the groups in the length of time they continued to grieve. In my study it appears that the two subjects who had most difficulty adjusting were still grieving when we met. They were unable to accept the loss as permanent, continued to blame others for the loss and kept a strong connection with the relinquished child alive through thought and fantasies. Having failed to adequately grieve their loss they were unable to achieve healing and/or resolution. In contrast, the other two subjects seemed to have completed the grieving process, recognized the loss of their baby as final, and continued on with their life even while they were grieving. They were able to talk of respecting their birth children's loyalty to their adoptive families, as their real family, whether they liked it or not.

The literature shows (Sorosky, Baran & Pannor, 1978; Wrinkler, Brown Keppel & Blanchard, 1981) that healthy grieving requires interaction with and validation from others. In my study one birth mother (G.) shared her experience of relinquishment with everybody she could. She is the subject that has been most

successful in the grieving process. The other three subjects kept the fact they had relinquished mainly to themselves. Similar to the literature findings, (Pannor, Baran & Sorosky, 1978; Ryearson, 1982; Mullen & Roll, 1985; Campbell & Patti, 1984; Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990, Brown & Gediman, 1991) none of my subjects were able to forget the relinquishment. Even the woman (A.) who had denied any lasting impact from the relinquishment, realized that a heavy weight seemed lifted from her after she found her (now grown) daughter.

#### After Relinquishment

Subjects handled the relinquishment in different ways. Three subjects spoke of very difficult times fitting back into family and society. Within four years, F. and A. had full term pregnancies and each kept the child. G. had an abortion upon her second pregnancy. Immediately after the relinquishment, M. began running away from home. Relinquishment felt like an enormous loss, devastation and violation. It was not talked about at home. G. took a trip with her mother immediately after the relinquishment that was a disaster. At this time, she said, she was postpartum and very angry and they fought all the time. She ran away to Hans and found she no longer fit in with him. She had a hard time adjusting back into her life when her mother demanded she come home with her to America. Her friends had moved on in their lives and she missed Denmark. Six months later she was pregnant and had an abortion. Nine months after she relinquished, her mother had a baby. At this time her step-father kicked her out of the house and thereafter she was on her own.

M. and G. stayed lost on how to manage their present day life and demands of the future whereas the lives of both F. and A. took a different turn. They each kept the next child. F. states she was a basket case right after the relinquishment and is still surprised that she wasn't killed or didn't kill somebody on the freeway. She became pregnant one and one half years after the relinquishment but this time she told her family she was married and kept the child. She wanted to keep up the relationship with her parents for the child's sake and its future ties with grandparents. A. remains clear that even though it was a tremendous loss and she cried for a long time, she never cried because she had done the wrong thing, knowing she had saved the child from knowing its terrible grandparents. She married an emotionally disturbed man, became pregnant, divorced him and raised a mentally disturbed child on her own.

### Findings

One of the differences between the two groups was in their coping styles and defenses used. The literature speaks of coping styles and primitive defenses among this population of denial, fantasy and repression. This was indicated in my subjects as all used some of these defenses, as does most of the population. It seems that the two who had the most difficulty adjusting (M. and F.) used the primitive defenses of denial and fantasy. They remembered the pain as if it was happening to them currently. They had much to say, and their interviews were the longest. In contrast, the other group used repression as one of their defenses. In the phone calls and interviews they said they did not remember a lot about the

event, but during the interviews they often recalled, with surprise, what had been forgotten. It appears, since these are the two that were able to eventually recover, that repression may have been beneficial for them.

### Relationships

All the subjects spoke of difficulties with relationships but in varying degrees. A. has many long time women friends. She had married and divorced and spoke of being afraid of having a man "know the real me" and that they would not like her if they really knew her. M. never married and spoke of difficulty with intimacy and trusting a man to accept her for who she was and not be judgmental about the relinquishment. Due to her shame, she has found it difficult to be open and she cannot trust somebody unless she is open. She talks about sabotaging male relationships which she would never let progress to the point of marriage. Like A., she appears to have close friends. F., on the other hand, appears to have closed off from people. She never married nor does she date. She believes she has a good value system, but that something happens to this system when it comes to men. She also spoke of the need to learn to trust. Again, she too, mainly spoke of her relationship with her mother. In contrast to this, G. was the only one to speak positively of her relationships with men. She appears to have both men and women friends. However, similar to M's relationships with men, she ends them prematurely though she always does the leaving, whereas M. might sabotage the relationship. G., M., and A.

appear contented with their friends. G.'s main focus is on her career.

### Findings

There was no difference in the capacity for or even the quality of male relationship that separated the groups. In common, all the subjects expressed difficulties with men around the issues of trust that they believed came from the relinquishment experience. Three, G., A. and M. speak of close women friends. F. does not have close male or female friends.

An important finding is that the two women who were married, and subsequently divorced, were able to move on with their lives whereas the other two, even though one had another child, stayed stuck in the relinquishment stage. Marriage could be considered developmentally the next step in one's development and these two women in their 20's moved on in their life in this way. Two of the women had subsequent children but this is not represented in the same group but across groups.

In the research literature (Pannor, Baran, Sorosky, 1978), 75% of birth mothers married once, 63% had children and nine out of ten married after relinquishment, though most marriages ended in divorce. In CUB findings, half had no children and the other half had many replacement children. These findings are not matched in my small study as two married and two had children. On the other hand it is close to the statistics as both ended in divorce. Campbell (1980) in her research found a high infertility rate among birth mothers that was not found in my study in which three subjects

became pregnant again. One had an abortion and the other two had full term pregnancies. The fourth one did not plan to become pregnant again without marriage.

### Re-union

All subjects are in varying stages of re-unions with their children. Each has an unique story to tell. Three were more reluctant to begin the search. F. was the only one to immediately open up her side of the register when her daughter turned 18. Her daughter responded, six years ago when she was 22 years old. F. re-connected her with the rest of her birth family as previously planned.

On the other hand, the others did not begin the search immediately but needed encouragement through groups, therapy, and their own process to begin this undertaking. These subjects found that the group experience was important, as they did not feel so alone and found that likeness comforts.

A. did not attempt a re-union for many years as she felt she did not have that right and that it was up to her daughter in any case. Her daughter had received permission to search seven years before A. put her name down. Not until she had the re-union and found that her daughter was okay did she know what a burden she had carried. After reunion she felt like a new and lighter person. A fascinating moment unfolded when she met her daughter who could accurately describe the room she had been in when her mother took care of her for the week after the birth.

Unlike A. and F., M. and G. had told others about their relinquishment. M. told only close friends, whereas G. told everyone. When M. began to search she had to face the old and hard stuff again. She found it a very painful experience and became physically ill with bloody noses, throwing up, and the like. The re-union did not go smoothly and it was very painful for her. M. continues to feel sad about the lack of interaction between her and her son. She was the only one to speak of many dreams linking and connecting them together.

G., like M., had therapy focused on the loss of relinquishing her baby. M. sought out a therapist who had written about birth mothers and who recognized the pain of her loss. G. finally found a therapist, one out of many, who did not minimize her loss, although her therapist had no prior relinquishment experience. He recognized the significance of her loss and encouraged her to search for her child. She put her life here on hold and went back to Copenhagen, and did everything again as if she were 19 again, and met her daughter 10 years ago. She was the only one to stress the seriousness of a search and how she perceived it to be a search for both of them, as she was looking for herself as well as for her daughter.

A's daughter still lives at home with her adoptive mother and does not have a career yet. M's son is a professional. F's daughter is financially independent and lives on her own. G's daughter has a career in Denmark. All the birth mothers have connections with their children and all the adoptees have close ties with their adoptive families.

## Findings

Similar to the literature (Roan, 1988, Gediman & Brown, 1989; Gediman & Brown, 1989; Stiffler, 1992), each mother felt relief upon re-union with her child and is hopeful for more contact in the future. However, even re-unions exhibit differences in how mothers approached their children and the interaction that developed thereafter. One of the differences noted between the groups is that the group who made a better adjustment spoke of a different belief system regarding their children. Each recognizes the adoptive parents as the real parents because they had raised them and were pleased to be even a limited part of their lives. Neither feels ownership of their adult daughter.

### Relinquishment Impact on her Life

M. spoke of her collapse and change due to relinquishment. She felt that due to relinquishment she was never the same. She would have been a different and healthier person if she had kept her child, although she also believes that giving him up wasn't the whole cause but the final one that broke her down. She believes the pain has not lessened with time and that her relinquished son is still recognizable "family," still connected and still part of her blood. She speaks of the way she copes with this pain by going numb and shutting down just to get through, especially on his birthday. However, she did acknowledge that shutting down is part of her general survival technique and not just related to the relinquishment.

F., like M, still stays centered in the relinquishment pain. She continues to blame her mother, who did not know about the baby until later. She recently cut off contacts with her so that her mother can suffer the loss of her daughter as F. still suffers over the relinquishment of her baby. There is no forgiveness in her. She believes that if she had kept the baby she would have had some discord for awhile with her family but would not have been continually angry with her mother and would have worked it through and not have closed off from people as she has done.

In contrast, A. felt that she had come full circle now that she had her daughter back. She was satisfied with her decision to have had her raised in a better family situation. She saw relinquishment as her choice and only a small part of her difficult history.

G. spoke of the impact of relinquishment and was the only one to really work through the major impact relinquishment had on her life and in this process to accept her responsibility for choosing to relinquish. She began the task by blaming others, such as the adults in her life, the time in social history and in her country. However, she eventually could remind herself that she was living an independent life in a country that accepted and did not recognize illegitimacy in negative terms. However, in her process she also feels the consequences of relinquishment are dire in terms of one's own development of the self and all subsequent relationships. She feels that every aspect of her life has been affected by that experience. She believes that a lot of her life stopped with the relinquishment that set her apart in a significant time of self development, ties and bonds with others and value development.

She felt ugly and unlovable. Her survival tactic was to tell everyone about it and if she could do this it couldn't really hurt. In retrospect, she thinks the loss was so overwhelming that for her it affected her ability to have long term adult male love relationships.

### Findings

There was a difference between the groups as one group felt the relinquishment had negatively impacted their lives and they had so far been unable to recover from feeling this pain whereas G. and A. felt an impact but were able to accept responsibility for the decision and to move on.

### Family Impact on her Life

All subjects closely connected the impact of relinquishment with the impact of their families on their lives. For each of them the family was part of the reason they did not or could not keep the baby. All except A. had difficulty with relinquishment that they felt effected their life in a negative way.

A. believed that her family was the most powerful influence in her life, and that being told she was too dumb prevented her from going to college. She was unable in her family to find a reason for being in this life. For her, going away to school and later to the home where she lived while pregnant gave her a chance to experience a better life. She later realized that she was intelligent and could have been successful in college and in a profession.

A. and G. could see that the decision to relinquish was tied in some way to their family. A. did not want her crazy family

involved with the baby. G. felt that she was inadequate to be a mother due to her mother's inadequacies.

F. speaks continuously about her mother and the importance she has on her life. She feels her mother has always controlled her. In her own therapy she came to believe that her mother is not capable of giving her what she needs. Recently, due to her anger at her over the relinquishment, she has cut off from her as if she has died.

M. acknowledged the impact her family had on her life and that relationships would feel threatening as they had always ended up including abuse or violations.

### Findings

Not unexpectedly, all the subjects felt that the family had a major impact on their lives, especially their mothers, and none of the subjects felt they had good father role models. A difference was found in their relationships with their mothers that separated the groups and within each group was a variation in the degree of acceptance or non acceptance of their mother's limitations. Both A. and G. seemed able at this time to accept their mothers limitations and to move on from that place. A. knew early that her mother was crazy. G. has continued to struggle with the relationship with her mother over a long period.

On the other hand, M. and F. still blamed their mothers and remain in this place. Yet there are variations within this group as F. just cut off from her mother without discussion or resolution, but

M. is still struggling to move on from this position so she could have a better life.

One of the factors that made a difference between the two groups was that G. and A., the two subjects who chose to relinquish, had not felt they would be a good mother at that time due to the limitations imposed by and the relationship they had with their own mothers. In fact, they both were able to recognize a connection between their decision to relinquish and their relationship with their mothers, whereas M. and F. felt they would be good mothers but needed support and seem not to have emotionally separated from their mothers.

### Resolution

According to both their own subjective experiences and my observation, A. and G. have made a better adjustment to relinquishment than M. and F. Because resolution of their relinquishment experience seems so closely connected to resolution of their parental relationship, I will first briefly review the latter.

A., as she was growing up, was clear that her parents were inadequate. Because of this, she was able to separate their problems from hers. M. and G. came to this realization later in their process and continue to have a relationship with their mothers. F's way was to stay angry and then to cut off from her mother seeking emotional separateness but without any resolution.

A. was the only subject who felt her relinquishment was now resolved. G. had felt healing through an active grieving process.

On the other hand, M. felt there wasn't recovery and F. believed it was unresolvable.

M.'s believes that you cannot get over relinquishment, you cannot recover, you can only "incorporate" and "amputate." She also acknowledges, that for her, feeling the pain of relinquishment is better than letting go of the pain and feeling no connection to her son. She believes this is what is changing and that she is able to connect more with him now with less pain than before.

M. expressed the sentiments of the majority of the group that the process of relinquishment might be eased by family support, societal support, support groups, therapy, understanding and acceptance and a relationship with your child. She believes in co-parenting (birth mother with adoptive parents) and the importance of knowing where the child is and if he is safe. Even though she recounted many ways to ease the loss, she said the hurt would have still been there. She believed that acceptance by the adoptive family means a lot. She also felt that even telling her story to me helped especially since I was an adoptive parent.

G. was the only one to recognize the connection between her decision to relinquish and her own mother. She feels in the last few years she had been able to say she loves her mother very much and to accept her for the person she is, and the mother she was. Likewise, she has been better able to accept herself, the choices she made, and the mother she wasn't ever able to be due to the relinquishment. She felt some healing, but not complete healing, because you get over the loss and even when you find your child you don't become a mother, since the parents who raised her are her real parents. G.

looks forward to the future with her daughter. When she knew she would continue to have contact with her daughter, she was able to adopt goals. She decided to go back to school which eventually led to a career in the adoption area. The program and her career became part of the healing and growth process for her.

F. still hurts and feels she has not lived her life. For her to relinquish was wrong and unforgivable. Again, she mainly spoke about her mother's part in it. She believes something is askew or missing inside her and apart from therapy, support groups and even talking with me, she suspects that most helpful thing for her might be to separate from her mother. She sees no other way and cannot approach her mother. Her mother remains large in her mind, as if she were still a young girl.

### Findings

The subjects formed two groups. A. and G. were better adjusted than F. and M. All the subjects had been through a search and re-union, group work and therapy. One group, A. and G., had completed the mourning process and participated in the decision to relinquish. This seemed to promote some healing and resolution. The literature findings that incomplete grieving and a lack of participation in the decision to relinquish hinders resolution is supported by my study. Two subjects, F. and M., failed to complete the grieving process and did not feel involved in the decision to relinquish. This does appear to have limited their ability to move on.

All the subjects spoke of trust as a major issue for them. However, there I found different degrees of their ability to trust.

They all commented on needing validation by others as being important to them, especially by adoptive mothers like myself. The two subjects who seemed to have made a better adjustment (A. and G.) were more trusting initially, and more quickly willing to talk with me, whereas the other two (M. and F.) needed more trust to be established before they would agree to talk with me.

Another difference between the groups is that A. and G. feel that they have recognized, accepted and integrated the limitations of their mothers and that this has helped them make a better adjustment. In contrast, the other group, with some variations, has not yet accepted these limitations. M. has recognized the limitations and is in the beginning of the process of wanting to work toward accepting and integrating them. F. has cognitively recognized there are limitations, all on her mother's side, and continues to be emotionally stuck, remaining unable to accept or integrate them.

#### Current Assessment of her Life

F. feels she has survived through her own inner strength and family genetics. She feels she is okay because she hasn't lost her daughter. However, she believes trust continues to be an issue for her. She feels healthier only as she emotionally cuts off from her mother. On the other hand, she also has not found potential partners to be trustworthy. However, she does believe that she has developed her identity and a sense of respect from her mother by cutting her off. In contrast to her previous statements she feels she is today where she was before she was pregnant with her second

child. She has a chance to start over but can't because she carries so much baggage. If she tries to change anything she is reminded of another hurt, another man who rejected her, reminded and reminded, and then she blames her mother.

M. remains uncertain about the future. She believes she has real issues that need working on, especially in relationships with men. The only way she can see it changing is establishing friendship and a lot of trust with a guy and yet she is not doing it at all. Sex feels to her like a violation, but she feels she is slowing changing and now is looking forward to a career, possibly in mental health.

On the other hand A. presents a positive assessment of her life. She believes she is pretty strong to have come through what she came through in her life. She feels that others look up to her and what she has done on her own. She believes the school is what saved her and gave her a different look at life and a sense of being special. She believes that the impact of relinquishment has been a positive force in her life. She feels "resolved," she is contented that her daughter was raised by others. She feels herself to be back in her life.

G., when asked about her goals, came to the realization that she did not have goals in her formative years, and reflected upon her later unwillingness to set goals as if a very deep sense of worthlessness or self loathing had set in. As she looked back she realized that she did things without real commitment. Her school/career and relationships never lasted longer than two or three years in her life. As she talked with me she realized this may have happened even without the pregnancy and relinquishment and

the revelation that it may not have really interrupted her life. Now she is getting some goals she believes in and feels that she has taken care of a lot of business. She believes she has actively mourned her loss and that healing resulted. She believes that she has grown tremendously through having tried to figure out the impact this has had on her life. She believes she has done this because of her innate curiosity about how people solve problems, her views about fairness and because she is a reflective person. Her life and career are meaningful to her.

### Findings

There was a major difference between the groups with regard to their self assessment. The group that feels they are currently functioning at a better level is represented by A. and G. A. gave a positive assessment of her life which she finds satisfying even though she is missing a college degree. She knows she is intelligent and feels she is respected and has accomplished a lot. G. has struggled through her issues both on a personal level and in her work environment in the adoption arena has found some goals she believes in and she feels she is moving forward in her life with an inner contentment and a focus on a satisfying career.

The literature review (Rynearson, 1982; Deykin et al. 1984; Millen and Roll, 1985) seems to mainly represent women who remain stuck. In my study this was also represented but in varying degrees. At this time F. describes herself as being stuck where she was at the time of relinquishment. On the other hand, even though M. also feels stuck, she feels more hopeful. She describes herself as

wanting more education, more personal therapy, and a new career, so that she can begin to move on with her life.

### My Reflections

My reflections about my subjects began with the first phone call and continued throughout the interviews. Looking back over my notes after all the interviews I see how my reflections correspond with the ways the birth mothers handled the relinquishment process.

A. was more matter of fact and somewhat distant. Her beginnings were difficult and life improved for her. She had a positive attitude throughout her life and felt the relinquishment had little meaning for her. Yet in the interviews, she remembered the amount of crying she had done following relinquishment. She was also unaware during the interviews that her eyes often teared. She would be surprised when I mentioned it. What shocked her was the emotional outburst she had when she remembered her father's one beating of her. She says she copes by putting things out of her mind and getting on with her life. Her life has been hard with a psychotic son, but she puts her energy and time into having a good relationship with him and now, also, with her birth daughter as well. She accepts life as it is. She was very warm with me at the end of the interview and had a hard time letting me leave.

On the other hand the interview with M. was emotionally draining for me from the initial phone call and through the interviews. I had wondered at first if I would be able to interview these women or whether it would be too painful for me. M. suffered and cried throughout the interview with the pain that she related to

relinquishment. At times she could hardly talk. I felt continually guilty over being an adoptive mother. I also wanted to comfort and take care of her as a little girl. She felt very fragile and vulnerable to me. I had a hard time recovering from these interviews as she had touched something deep in me, something I had previously been unaware of. She gave me a present to take home. I felt very attached to her.

F. was angry on the phone and during the interviews. I felt resentment even on the initial phone call. She began the first session by complaining and not wanting to sign the release paper. She expressed anger at me and I let her talk. She decided to sign it and I would not let her do it until I had changed the wording as she requested. I taped the first interview and realized I had turned over the microphone and it had been turned off. I believe I was upset over our beginning and had a difficult time with her as she had a confrontational manner, as if I represented the bad world of adoptive mothers. I became inept and ended up losing tapes and, later, transcripts. In the interviews her thoughts showed that she continues to be angry at the world and especially at her mother. However, I felt satisfaction at the end of the interview, as she expressed good feelings about me. I ended up trying some therapy with her as I could no longer stay quiet and needed to give some advice and try to gain some control of the interview. She was stuck in the relinquishment stage and was not able to use her intelligence to overcome her emotions, especially her anger. She had not moved into the sad or accepting stage of the grieving process. She still externalized her problems, blamed her parents and

society, and did not accept any responsibility for her part in her decision to relinquish.

G. was relaxed during the interviews which took place in my office. She, like A., seemed more matter of fact and distant. However, she also told the story without great emotion, so I wondered if there would be material for two interviews. There was, and it was more like two colleagues working together, very comfortable for both of us. I was impressed with the work she had done. She went through the process of grieving the loss by initially blaming others and eventually accepting responsibility for her actions and moving on. Due to this on-going process of addressing and reflecting on conflicts in her life she has been able to achieve maturity and healthy emotional growth. We spoke of meeting for coffee.

## Analysis of Themes

### Introduction

The themes are different than categories. The categories are what I decided to ask before the interview and the themes came out of talking to these women. No matter what I asked the birth mothers, the theme around their mother came up over and over again. With one subject I would be speaking about the baby and the birth mother would tell me about her mother. This theme appeared to be prominent and central with all the birth mothers and related to the other themes and sub-themes. However, for each subject it was brought into the interviews in different ways. The

other major themes were the focus on the baby, and remembering or not remembering the past.

When I began this study I was focused chiefly upon the attachment the birth mother had to the child she gave up, and wondering if that would be similar to what a child would have in losing a mother. Bowlby (1959) defined attachment as the bond that forms between a mother and a child over time and in response to familiarity and caretaking. One might have expected that the mother's attachment to the surrendered child would be less intense, having little time to develop, and developing under emotionally charged circumstances. Although I did not interview the adoptive children, it seemed from what the birth mothers said that their attachment seemed to go to their adoptive parents.

The bond with her birth child appeared to be something different for each birth mother. Some kept the bond alive in fantasy whereas others assumed the baby was in a better home. Two were able to move on and two were not. However, what I found was that over 20 years later the birth mother's attachment to her own mother remained quite primary and influential and had a profound impact on her decision to keep or relinquish her infant. It was the organizing theme that had an early and continual influence on her life. The loss of the baby had an impact on each of them in varying degrees but all felt the influence of their mother.

The theme of mother was repeated in various forms throughout the interviews, starting with the attachment of the birth mother to her own mother and how separation from her was managed. It seems that this theme of "mother" was related to the

theme of "baby" in the following ways: The attachment bond with the mother impacted subject's attachment bond to the baby. Her relationship with her mother influenced the decision to relinquish the baby.

The degree of attachment and separation the birth mother had with her own mother seemed to be connected to the intensity of attachment felt by the birth mother for her birth child and the anxiety experienced by her when she relinquished it. The birth mother's experience of attachment and separation with her mother reflect the ways in which her separation from and re-union with the birth child played out.

The theme of remembering or not remembering seemed related to the previous theme of baby with its accompanying feelings of pre-natal attachment to the baby and the meaning of relinquishment. It appears that those who remembered felt stuck at the time the baby was relinquished while those who were able to forget felt more positive in their lives and were able to move on. Sub themes came up around power, support, relationships, unmet needs and the decision to relinquish that were related to the main theme centered on the subjects mother.

I am going to discuss each birth mother separately and the themes and sub themes that emerged from the interviews.

#### Subject A.

A' s main theme centered around her difficult family. Her "crazy family" was a major theme that was more important to her than the baby and impacted her decision to relinquish it. When I

asked questions about the different categories the theme of her "crazy parents" would come up. Her family was perceived as the major trauma in her life, a theme which recurred throughout the interviews. When taking a family history, her mother and father came up in different ways. She talked about the control her parents had over her, about not learning about life from her parents. The influence of a mother to whom she did not feel connected came up again when she decided to relinquish the baby because she did not want her child to know her crazy family, especially her mother.

A. had repeated difficulties with male relationships. It's possible, following Bowlby's theory, the quality of early attachments impact later ones, that this failure to connect intimately and let males know who she was in later years is connected with her earlier family circumstances. She says her parents would not let her "be who she was" as she grew up and that this later governed her world view. However, she claims to be comfortable without a relationship with a male friend.

The theme of remembering and forgetting emerged early in her interviews with me. When she began the interviews she said she could not remember a lot about her history. When I asked her at the second interview about her reflections on the first one she said she had not thought about it, as her son was then in crisis. This "not remembering" did not appear to trouble her. In the interviews she merely expressed surprised at what she remembered that she had thought was forgotten.

She spoke objectively and with little affect about past events in her life. However, that she had feelings was evidenced by

occasional tears, but she would be unaware of this affect until I pointed it out. The past, for her, did not remain alive as an active present part of her present experience. It appears that her way of dealing with bad events was just to go on with life, leave the past behind her, and not think about it. She was unaware of any impact relinquishment made on her, yet when she found her child many years later, she felt a large weight had left her shoulders that she did not realize had been there until it was gone. "Not remembering" was a recurring theme for her, but one that seemed positive as it did not cause her any problems. She could forget and later on, remember. She was able to separate the past from the present regarding the relinquishment although the impact of her traumatic family remained central.

#### Subject G.

With G. there seemed to be two main themes that changed over time. These two themes were her mother's abandonments and her ability to be reflective about herself.

She experienced her mother's remarriages and involvement in activities outside the home, especially following a career when she, left her daughter (G.) home to live with her grandmother, as abandonments. The style of her relationship with her mother influenced her ability to easily relinquish her baby because, she felt she would like her mother, be unable properly to mother the child. This seems to be her family's coping style: things happen, one goes on, the past does not haunt the present.

The second theme, quite impressive, was her ability to reflect on how she had evolved throughout her life. She was able to reflect and draw inferences about her mother's abandonments, and the influence this had on her readiness to leave relationships. Her ability and tendency to reflect ran throughout, but seemed most pronounced after she had worked through several issues concerning her mother. She spoke of her early ability to reflect beginning in childhood. Throughout the interview she spoke of her reflective nature and demonstrated it a number of times, including reflections on her evolving reactions to having given up her child.

In earlier years, after the relinquishment, her mother remained a major theme. It was only after she had worked through her relationship with her mother after a number of years was she able to seek re-union with her child. This seems to be connected to her mother's abandonments and later her own relinquishment of her child. Her relationship to her mother, influenced her decision to relinquish, as the re-connection with her mother enabled her to seek and work on re-connecting with her adult birth child, events that enabled her to progress in her own self development.

She was able to respond to questions about the relinquishment but clearly did not live in the past. You could tell feelings were there because she switched the topic or left the room. It seems that she chose to put these feelings into her present work with adoptees.

As we talked she remembered most of the events connected with her pregnancy. For example, she had forgotten, but then recalled, that she applied to the state for an abortion. She was foggy over the relinquishment and how it happened, and could not

remember if she talked about it to the birth father. She was able to let go of the relinquishment. It was a reality and she could view it as part of her past, but it was not central to her subsequent everyday life. Clearly, "not remembering" seemed to contribute to letting go of the past. When she resumed her connection with her child, it was approached as a new relationship and a new reality. It was an event in her life that she believed contributed to but did not define who she is today.

#### Subject F.

F's themes were her mother, needing touching, and remembering. The theme of mother was always present in the interviews, and no matter what I asked she came back to her mother. What was especially important was her continual blame of her mother and "her unfulfilled need for touching." The loss of the baby becomes a sub theme under that of the need for, and blame of, her mother.

The theme around touching came up in different ways and was also connected to her mother. She begins life in her family feeling physically cared for but emotionally deprived, with a strong need for touching and tenderness, but finding all contact painful. She talks about the unfulfilled need for closeness and touching, and her loneliness and pain, and all seem to be connected to her need for her mother. There is an association between love, and emotional and physical pain. She continued throughout the interviews to give examples of the pain her mother caused her during early childhood by being controlling and even by physically hurting her, for example

when she combed her hair. Failing to support her when pregnant, although she knew nothing about it, was a further example. For her there seems to be a connection between the physical contact she longed for and physical pain.

This theme of needing touching from her mother re-emerges in her descriptions of relationships with men. It may have been a leading reason for getting pregnant: she wanted closeness with her mother and when she couldn't get it, she sought it in male relationships. She also found trying to get close to her father to be painful.

In relinquishing her baby she may have felt that she had to choose between her mother and her child. Her father said she could never come home again if she kept her baby. That, she felt, would kill her mother. She makes the choice but blames her mother for the loss of her child even though she did not let her mother know that she had relinquished it.

Power and control were sub-themes that came up especially in her relationship with her mother. She would see all the power residing in her mother, and she generalized this to others having power over her, especially around the relinquishment. Her own power is used in a punishing way in cutting off from her mother and withdrawing from others. This view of her powerful mother continues into adulthood.

F. could remember her history in minute details and with considerable affect. She remembered it as if it were happening today. It seems as if there was never a time when she forgot the wrongs done to her. She continues to respond to them today as if

they had just happened. In the interviews she was flooded with feelings as if the past was also the present. When she talked about the relinquishment, anger went everywhere, even toward me. Her way of coping was to experience the feelings and then withdraw from others in anger, to get away from feelings. The past, especially with her mother and her relinquishment, blended, merged and impacted the present. It defined her present self in terms of who she was at the time of and due to relinquishment trauma without evolving beyond that stage.

#### Subject M.

M's main themes are collapsing and the loss of her child. "Collapsing" is the way she responds to trauma and loss. It is her family's coping style that began early in her life. She used the word "collapse" to describe her father's depression, her mother being emotional unhealthy and the family violence. This theme was further generalized when she would speak of the collapse of society during the time she was forced to relinquish, the collapse of her family for not supporting her in keeping her child, and her final collapse over the loss she felt upon giving her child up. Her life-long pattern of dealing with things is focused on "collapse," a way of coping that seems to have roots in her family's ways of functioning.

A sub theme for M. was her lack of power, allied with feelings of powerlessness and collapse. "Lack of power" began with her experience of family violence, with forced abortions, with delivery when she was tied down. Pressure to relinquish her child,

the power of society toward unmarried mothers and the power of the adoptive parents over her birth child, she sees all in terms of her own perceived powerlessness. She continues to have nightmares in which she is in threatening situations. The only time she can exercise her power is through manipulation for the survival of her baby, and when she would push men away in order to be in control, and when she would try to please others in order to get what she wanted. This theme continued within the family, with the baby and in relationships with men.

M. was consumed with the loss of her baby and cried throughout the interviews. There was a continual and painful connection in her mind with the baby. A sub-theme was the need for closeness with others which was one of the reasons she became pregnant. She spoke of her strong pre-natal connection to the baby and throughout the interviews, her connection to her baby was a recurring theme.

The final collapse came for her when her connection to her baby was physically severed and the baby relinquished. With M. connections continue on. She was still connected with the baby at birth, as one and not yet two. She kept up a connection with her mother, the birth father and her birth child. She spoke of wanting connection to the adoptive family because they are connected through her child. She views the connection to her child as a physical part of her that cannot be cut out and she keeps the connection, transient and long past, alive in her mind. Pain and love seem connected from her earlier experiences and continues so in adulthood.

The themes of collapsing and connection are related to her difficulty in most relationships with men, in being unable to open up or to trust men nor able to be close to them. She recounted an incident where she collapsed in a man's arms, he listened to her talk about the relinquishment rather than shrinking away from her like other men, whereupon she became uncharacteristically devoted to him.

M.'s style now incorporates painfully remembering the details of having relinquished her baby as if it were happening today. She has kept many fantasies alive. She was able to talk about many details and was continually flooded with feelings. Her way of coping was to either be flooded with feelings and re-experience the event, as she did during the interviews with me when she spoke of the relinquishment and the re-union, or she would go numb. For her the past trauma remained in the present and was an on-going theme throughout the interview as she was usually overcome with a flood of feelings in continual pain and sadness. The past was always remembered and seemed affectively merged with the present. She seemed unable to separate present from the past and appeared stuck in the feelings and seemed unable to let go. There did not appear to be distinct time periods, only the past that overwhelmed the present. She talks about the re-union with her child as if time had not moved on and the relinquishment was happening today. There is no distance or space between then and now.

In conclusion: F.'s chief theme continues to focus on blaming her mother; For M., the theme is on her sense of loss and on her family; A.'s family pathology had more impact on her life than the

relinquishment; and G. reviews the span of her life without highlighting any of these or other themes.

In summary, the categories and themes had some similarities and some differences. The categories mainly focused on how the subjects handled the process of attachment and relinquishment of the birth baby. They included the birth mother's relationship with her mother in varying degrees, but mainly centered on the birth child. However, for each subject their own mother, within the family system, was a major theme, often the major theme, throughout the interviews.

## CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Initially, after reading the quantative research literature, I had thought each woman would go through a relatively similar process of attachment and separation and end up feeling the relinquishment was unresolvable. But this was not the case. By looking in depth at each birth mother's self perception of her life, from the time before pregnancy through to the present, it became apparent that each birth mother handled the relinquishment experience in her own unique way. All four women in my study suffered from symptoms described in the research literature about birth mothers (see Chapter Three), however, one cannot say these symptoms were solely caused by the relinquishment. Rather they seemed to also be closely related to early deficits in the birth mother's relationship to her own mother.

It appears that each birth mother handled the relinquishment in a way similar to the way she had handled other traumas in her life. Two subjects, A. and G., continued to struggle and to grow, before and after relinquishment, transforming negative life experiences into ones from which they could derive meaning and from which they could acquire a sense of power over their own lives. But two subjects, F. and M. felt powerless, both before and after the relinquishment, and continue to feel powerless and victimized to this very day. For them relinquishment became a symbol of loss, not only of the infant, but also of a part of

themselves, a loss which has hampered and limited their further growth.

There are a number of factors which made the difference between these two groups, some of which have already been discussed in Chapter Five. First I will briefly review the major points in each of the subject's relinquishment process (see Chapter Five for greater detail), highlighting the differences and similarities between subjects and discussing, where relevant, possible reasons for these differences. Then I will discuss three possible implications of this study: first, that the birth mother's difficulties in separation from the relinquished child, which may be related to her level of independence at the time of relinquishment, which in turn may be related to her difficulties in separation from her own mother; second, that the birth mother's perception of her relationship with her own mother may be a determining factor in how the birth mother handled the overall relinquishment process; and third, that the birth mother's continuing feeling of connection, even 20 years later, with the child she relinquished might be called a genetic connection.

Throughout the following discussion, it must be kept in mind that this study was based on a small, non-random sample, and therefore, generalizations to the overall population of birth mothers cannot be made.

### Overview of the Findings

There were a number of differences found in my study between the two groups that may have contributed to the post-

relinquishment adjustment. The two, F. and M., who evidenced the most difficulty in their adjustment had some things in common. In our first phone contact, they were the two who seemed most angry and more reluctant to do the interviews. Although all the subjects had difficult family relationships, F. and M. focused mainly on blaming their mothers for the relinquishment. At the time of the pregnancy they were both living at home, although F. left to have her baby, in secret, in another state. Each asked their parents for help in keeping the baby and were turned down. Although they had poor mother role models, they felt they would be good mothers. It seemed their low self-esteem began in childhood, but they blamed it on the relinquishment. Neither had married, although one had another child. They used the coping styles of denial and fantasy to keep the connection with their relinquished child alive in their mind. During the interviews, they remembered every detail of the relinquishment with great affect and seemed unable to accept the loss of their child as permanent. They had negative feelings about the adoptive parents. They remained in a painful position of continual grieving without healing and/or resolution and they gave a negative assessment of their lives attributed to relinquishment.

In contrast, G. and A. gave a positive self-assessment of their lives. In the initial phone contact they were comfortable talking with me. Each of them had appropriately forgotten a lot of the details of the relinquishment but were able to recall many of the details as we talked. In their family, they were the eldest and thus the only child for awhile. They were no longer living at home and were enjoying their independence. They had accepted responsibility

in getting pregnant and made the decision to relinquish. They had poor mother role models and did not feel they would be good mothers because of this. They both married and divorced and one had a second child. They attributed many of their problems to their early family life, not only to relinquishment, and had accepted the limitations of their mothers. They had accepted the loss of their child as final and were able to accept their child's adoptive parents as the "real" parents. Their grieving process resulted in healing and/or resolution.

The question, "why did F. and M. seem to form a very early and strong pre-natal attachment with the growing fetus whereas G. and A. commented much less on the pre-natal attachment?" deserves further discussion. Feelings of strong pre-natal attachment seemed, upon reflection, correlated with the strengths of the mother's desire to keep the child. Thus, since F. and M. both wanted to keep their babies and were trying to find ways to make this happen until they felt they had to relinquish because they found themselves without the support, the knowledge or the power to make any other decision. On the other hand, G. and A. initially considered abortion as a choice, but carried to full term and made the decision to relinquish. Thus, it would appear they attached themselves less firmly to the baby they were planning to give up.

Another question came to my mind. F. and M. felt they would be good mothers whereas G. and A. did not believe they could be good mothers. Considering the difficulties in all their backgrounds why did two feel able to mother and two did not? What made the

difference? I thought this might have something to do with being able to be more objective about one's self and a more realistic assessment of the baby's needs.

M. and F., were both very emotional and tearful, thinking of the punitive injustice they felt was done to them by society and family. Physically and emotionally they still felt, years later, the devastation they associated with the taking away of the baby by others. Both spoke of the continual and continuing sense that they had lost a part of themselves. Each was closely attached and connected to her baby prenatally and did not want to relinquish it. They described their sadness as never ending and appeared to be stuck in the past, filled with anger directed toward their family and society; both still feel themselves powerless victims, feelings they ascribed to the time of relinquishment.

#### Level of Independence

There are some factors, other than those already presented in Chapter Five, that I believe may contribute to the differences between the groups. The teens and early twenties in our country are seen developmentally as a time of accomplishing separation from the family of origin and completing processes of individuation. Hopefully and normally, this is the culmination of the processes by which one is able to develop a fully separate identity. Other investigators (Buchholz and Gol; 1986 Resnick, 1984), state that the developmental tasks of adolescents are directly related to the degree to which their early attachment to and subsequent separation from parents is accomplished.

This study did not look in depth at the subject's early attachment to their parents, nor at the level of independence or individuation at the time of pregnancy and relinquishment, so of course, I cannot say anything definitive about the relationship between early attachment and subsequent separation, but picking up on the information I did gather from the subjects, I would like to speculate on this relationship.

Two of the subjects studied here, one of whom was an adolescent at the time of pregnancy and subsequent relinquishment, were both living at home and neither, it appears, had completed the normal process of separation/individuation which would have allowed them to leave home. Both of them spoke during our interviews, now decades later, of feeling themselves to be under their mother's "control". They continue to feel that their mothers had not been able to meet their "needs" when they were younger, especially in childhood, as well as at the time they became pregnant and later, when they gave birth and gave up the child. The "needs" to which I refer are not simple physical requirements for food or shelter or the like, but are the needs provided to the baby, by the mother, in her empathic responsiveness and attunement to her child's needs which endow the neonate and, later, the infant and child, with a lasting framework for life-long emotional reactions and responses. Adequate development may be crippled or long delayed by such deficits during developmentally critical years. Both these women, reporting unresolved feelings and continuing shortcomings in leading fulfilling lives, may have suffered lasting emotional injuries long before pregnancy and relinquishment. It is

possible that their incapacity or unwillingness to separate from their own mothers somehow led to a corresponding incapacity to separate from their baby not only at the time, but ever since. Their difficulties with separation is still evident today.

It is equally important to look at the similarities between G. and A. that enabled them to recover far better from relinquishing and to move on in life. G. and A. felt well loved early in life even though their mothers, according to them, were inadequate. Perhaps by being the only child for awhile they were able to receive more from their mothers than had the other two. Perhaps what contributed to this was, at the time they became pregnant, neither, was living at home. They had already made independent moves of separating themselves physically from their homes and achieved some of the tasks related to the process of attachment and separation that include consolidation of sexual identity, the formation of an independent self-identity and the capacity for lasting relationships before relinquishing their baby.

In our interviews they were more objective and had a more mature perspective on the part their families had played in their difficulties. For A., the family was the major problem in her life and loomed much larger than her relinquishment. G. realized that her mother was also a major reason leading her to relinquish. She realized her decision was more complex than it seemed on the surface both then and now. There were many others influencing their lives, including close relationships with friends. It seems sadness abated more readily for them as they went through a grieving process that ended with healing for G. and resolution for A.

These two subjects, G. and A., seemed to have placed their relinquishment in a more mature perspective. They felt relinquishment played a part in their lives but had not written their whole life story. It was not who they were, it was just a major event in their life. Perhaps they were able to put it in perspective as both were more mature than the other two before relinquishment. This maturity may have helped them take responsibility for getting pregnant, decide to give up their babies and deal with the consequences.

On the other hand, F. and M. continue to see that long past episode as a symbol of their whole life, of being victimized and controlled at the time of relinquishment. But neither was as mature as the other two at the time, and can be said to be less so even now. It seems to me the character and shape of their earlier emotional development influenced how they handled relinquishment. Perhaps F.'s earlier relationship with her mother rendered her unable to become emotional autonomous not only then, but now as well. Even now her mother continues to have a tremendous emotional influence and impact on her. Perhaps for M. it was the trauma of witnessing the rape of her mother by her father and her own physical and emotional abuse as a child before the relinquishment that affected her capacity to deal with the trauma of relinquishment or to escape the need to ascribe her continuing sense of emotional pain to that event. For her, life continued to be out of her control and abusive, as she lost her child while still a child.

### The Birth Mother's Mother

When the theme of the birth mother's mother came up over and over again, I began to wonder if there was a parallel between the relationship of birth mother to her mother and the degree of her difficulty in relinquishing her child. Was there a connection for the birth mother in her attachments with her own mother and those with her child? What was the nature of both relationships, and which was primary? It seemed to me that although the study was intended to shed light on the process set in motion for the birth mother by relinquishing her child, the theme of "mother" began to take precedence and could not be ignored, as it seemed to impact all stages in the birth mothers' lives as these subjects returned to the subject of mother almost compulsively. Again, I must state that this study did not look in depth at the relationship between the birth mother and her own mother, especially during early childhood, but because the theme of mother was such a dominant theme throughout the interviews I would like to speculate on this relationship.

The study's findings are similar to those found in the literature (Gediman & Brown, 1991) which reports birth mothers' relationships with others following relinquishing were compromised, although this finding may not be entirely due to relinquishment. One needs to consider other factors that might contribute to this, such as those found in my study, where early attachment and dependency needs were poorly filled by the parents and family. Whether relationships remained compromised from earlier physical and emotional abandonments and/or losses

unresolved in childhood that made them more vulnerable to the relinquishment experience that was consistent with their internal conceptions, or whether it all developed only from the relinquishment experience was not clear from this study nor from any investigations reported in the literature and could be an area for further research.

It seems on the face of it that the birth mother's attachment to her baby is likely to differ from her sense of attachment to her own mother. Still, as is well known, the parent-child relationship does mirror the child-parent relationship in significant ways. It is not unreasonable to suppose that while relinquishment was a traumatic loss, the earlier relationship with mother was a major determining and enduring factor in the lives of these birth mothers, perhaps more major and more determining than the relinquishment. In order to understand the theme around mother I will be discussing the nature of the relationship between the birth mother and her mother and the implication this might have in the connection with the birth child.

M. and F., as noted above, are still very enmeshed and involved with their mothers, more emotionally needy of their mothers than A. and G. and stuck in that early position. They both remain connected in pain with their mothers. Neither can emotionally separate from them entirely. F.'s emotions are still focused entirely on her mother, perceived as still powerful, as the center of her universe and the source of her pain. She remains unable to communicate that perception to her mother.

M. has accepted the fact that her mother is a disturbed woman and now feels responsible for her. She loves her mother but her feelings remain colored by recollections of abuse and pain. M. has achieved some acceptance of her mother's limitations and would like to move on but is still stuck in the past. M. and F. both find their connection to their mothers to be very painful. Perhaps owing to this association, their understanding of "love" is closely connected with pain.

A. and G., left their mothers home early on, evidence of a strong thrust for independence initiated by each. The connections with their mothers no longer involve pain, and both can accept their mothers as they are, fully separate people to whom they no longer look for their opinions, judgments or directions in life.

### Three Generations

At this point I will be looking at the relationship between the three generations: birth child, birth mother, and birth mother's mother to see if there are any parallels. Bowlby's theory is that working models from early years tend to persist relatively unchanged into and throughout adult life.

It was easy for G. to separate from both her mother and her daughter. G. was able to re-connect with her daughter only after she had re-connected with her mother. A. did not feel connected to her mother nor did she feel connected initially to her baby. She was able to close off her feelings toward her mother and used the same coping style to cut off feelings with her baby. She seemed to subliminate her feelings for her child by being a caregiver for other

babies at the birthing home. Although she had felt her parents controlled her life, she did not attempt to control her child's life. She still does not feel the level of connection to her mother that she does to her daughter.

M.'s connection to her mother and to her son is painful. Due to her history of abuse, she connects love with emotional and physical abuse. M. was unable to separate from her mother and has difficulty viewing her son as a separate person. Currently, it seems that she is able to accept her mother's limitations and is better able to accept some of her own limitations in the relationship with her son.

F. felt connected with her mother and prenatally with her baby. She felt pain in the separation from her baby and with her mother. She was unable to think of her child or mother in terms of being separate. F. wanted to feel connected to both her mother and baby, but she felt that if she kept her child she would lose her mother. She developed her own inner world of self and of connection to mother and child, a fantasy world that seemed to bear little connection to what she experienced externally.

In summary, each subject has a different type of connection with her mother and child. G. has deepened the connection with her mother and has been able to connect with her child without ownership. A. has accepted a lack of connection with her mother but feels connected with her child also without control or ownership. M. is still connected with her mother and with her son in pain though the pain is beginning to lessen. F. is still stuck in the same painful

connection with her mother which overpowers any other relationship.

### Early Working Models

Bowlby views the early relationship with the parents as a beginning pattern for how later relationships are managed. All the birth mothers experienced difficult family relationships characterized by violence or abandonment by parents. Not surprising this theme continued into adulthood. There were a variety of responses to these family situations. M's collapsing and withdrawing which began with her family is still evident today. She continues to be fragile. F's lack of early touching and tenderness within her family, especially on her mother's part, is still a need today. She has a negative view of life reflecting her view of early childhood. The early working models of their world never changed for F. and M. Their assumptions that they were victimized by relinquishment became central to their world view. They have been unable to heal.

In contrast, A. and G. were able to move beyond and to become independent of their families. In both cases, an understanding grandmother was a positive early influence in their lives. A. accepted early on that her parents were crazy. She separated from them emotionally and later physically as soon as she could. G. felt she had a lot of love in her life from her family even though accompanied by feelings of abandonment by her mother. She was able to leave her family and live independently and, after a lengthy struggle, to reach a resolution with her mother.

All the birth mothers acknowledge the impact their families had in their lives, but in differing degrees. A. felt her family was the most traumatic event in her life whereas G., acknowledging some abandonment issues with her mother, mainly dwells on the love she received from her family. M. felt there were problems that began in her family but that relinquishment was the most traumatic life event for her. F. denied family problems and described hers as a "happy family", although her whole focus was on the negative impact of her mother.

Although the family continued to play a major role in their lives, it was a different experience for each of them. Whether they stayed stuck in it or seemed to move beyond it, not only in relinquishment but in all aspects of their lives, family seemed to define and to reflect their world view.

Bowlby believes working models can change over a lifetime, that as adults, attachment relationships are formed with siblings, friends, spouses, adults, and others, that affect continuing psychodynamic change. As this occurs, the intensity of attachments to members of the original family is lessened. G. and A. formed important and strong relationships, first with their siblings, with school friends, and with others in later adulthood. These new experiences changed their working models. F. stayed locked in the intense relationship with her mother and M. with her child and did not form new and important relationships that could have modified their earlier working models. If we apply Bowlby's theory we can understand the differences between the two groups. G. and A. formed new relationships; F. and M. did not.

At the time of relinquishment, F. and M.'s working models of the world were based on the assumption that supportive attachment figures were unavailable. Therefore, they believed no one would be available when help was needed. Bowlby (1973) states that individuals tend to seek out experiences consistent with their internal conceptions. F. and M. would not seek out people who were available whereas the other two did have support at the time of relinquishment and were able to seek help that conformed to internal conviction. M. was able to find some help after relinquishment. Perhaps due to this her working model of the world appears slowly to be changing.

#### Genetic Connection

Perhaps there are two types of connection, that which is described by Bowlby's attachment theory and what might be called a "genetic" connection. The birth mother's feelings toward her child appears to be different from Bowlby's attachment which is based on the development of the relationship over time. The relinquishing birth mother does not have a child to have a relationship with, but she may have a profound, continuing feeling of connection that is not destroyed by physical separation. It is this feeling, which comes from nine months of pregnancy, that I am calling a genetic connection.

On the other hand it appears the birth child's attachment to his/her adoptive mother/parents is far more similar to Bowlby's definition of one that develops over time. Although this study did not explore the birth child's relationships, it appears from what the

birth mothers said that the birth child's attachment was with their adoptive parents not their birth mothers, and that the birth child did not suffer a sense of having lost the birth mother in the way the mother may have experienced loss of her child. This is not unexpectedly, since Bowlby's attachment comes from physical proximity over time and the character of that attachment is shaped by the manner in which the child's developmental needs are met.

There is a parallel that the birth mother and the birth child have in common that supports attachment theory. The birth mother's main attachment is with her mother while the birth child's main attachment is with his/her adoptive mother/parents. Those attachments developed over time to the primary caretaker. It appears that it is the actual relationship and not the biologic connection that is the strongest factor for the birth child. It seems that although, what the birth mother feels toward the child she relinquished is different from Bowlby's attachment, it is a strong and extremely important feeling that needs to be taken into account by both therapists and researchers.

### Summary

This study clearly documents the long lasting impact relinquishment has had on the lives of four women who were pressured to relinquish their first born child more than 20 years ago. The real-life event of relinquishment is traumatic and needs to be mourned and understood within the context of a supportive relationship. As clinicians, we want to be sure we ask about any

relinquishment and explore the meaning this has for the patient. For many there seems to be a genetic tie that must be recognized and discussed in therapy. Equally important, in understanding the process birth mothers often go through, is taking into account the individuality of each birth mother, the complexity of the factors that shaped her pre-, as well as, post-relinquishment feelings and functioning, her ability to adapt and the interpretation and the meaning she brings to major events in her life, including but by no means limited to, relinquishment.

The small sample studied, skewed as it is with respect to the general population of birth mothers, does not afford a basis for statistically significant generalizations. But the in-depth exploration undertaken here, illuminated as it was by trained insights, extensive readings of the applicable literature, and by common sense, points clearly to the fact that, whatever they may have in common, each woman in this study looked at her experience of relinquishment differently. Not unexpectedly, all four subjects felt that giving up the baby from their womb was no ordinary experience. The therapist can reliably expect that nearly all relinquishing birth mothers will report feelings that reflect that perception, whatever its biological or cultural origins may be. But it remains that each subject, uniquely the product of her particular history and her psychodynamic interaction with that history, brought her own interpretations and thus her own meaning to relinquishment. In every case, relinquishment became an event of life-long significance. For some it remained the central, even the defining event of a lifetime, as perceived by the subject.

This study deepens the understanding of the role played by relinquishment in ways that merely statistical accounts of outcomes cannot disclose. The author hopes it may further sensitize therapists both to the potential centrality of this issue in the future lives of birth mothers who relinquish their babies, and to the complexities and importance of collateral issues for which the trauma of relinquishment may serve as a partial screen.

## APPENDIX C

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM

## CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE FOR CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby willingly consent to participate in the exploratory study of the following question: What is the process of attachment and separation that a Birth Mother goes through when she feels pressured to relinquish her infant? the research project of Alexis Selwood, Ph.D. (Dissertation Chairperson) and Gaye Wein-Shepard, L.C.S.W. (Investigator) of the California Institute for Clinical Social Work.

I understand the procedure as follows:

1) There will be two separate interviews. Each interview is to be tape-recorded and approximately one and a half hours long. The interviews will occur in a private, confidential setting to be arranged between myself and the researcher. I understand that I may refuse to answer any questions without penalty, and that I may withdraw from the study at any time also without penalty.

2) I am aware that there is potential risk for emotional discomfort involved in participating in this study. However, if this should happen, I will be able to contact the researcher who will make provisions for me to receive professional help for a reasonable and limited time.

3) I understand that this study may be published and that my anonymity will be protected unless I give written consent to such disclosure. The interviews will be conducted by Gaye Wein-Shepard, L.C.S.W.

4) I have been informed that the interview will be taped for purposes of data analysis. I have also been advised that my name will not appear on the tape and that at the completion of the study, the tape will be erased. I realize that without my consent I will not be identified in any publication nor presentation of information gathered as part of this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D

### INTRODUCTION TO INTERVIEW SESSION

Thank you very much for taking the time to meet with me and assisting me in my research project. I also wish to thank you for giving me this opportunity to meet with you to discuss the relinquishing of your infant and how this was experienced by you throughout your life.

Our first meeting will last for approximately one and a half hours. At this time we will set the time for our second meeting. I will be audio-taping our conversation. The tapes will be for my use only, and will be erased after the study is completed. Before starting I would like you to complete this Informed ConsentForm.

Do you have any questions before we start the interview?

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