

## From the Editor's Desk



My last column celebrated the nomination of Senator Joe Lieberman as the first Jew high upon a national ticket.

I hoped this column would congratulate him for his victory, or, for his good effort in a losing cause.

Can't tell yet.

As I write this, three days after the election, Governor Bush now leads Vice President Gore by 327 votes in Florida – and I am not too sure when this will be resolved.

So at least, congrats Joe on being re-elected to your Senate seat.

By the time you read this, the breathless anticipation of the election will have given way to the breathless anticipation of opening of Hanukah presents. Here is hoping that you got what you wanted, especially those of you awaiting little packages of joy into your families. And may the glow of the candles of the menorah light your way into a wonderful 2001.

On a different and sadder note, I regret to announce the passing of Central Jersey (NJ) Chapter's Bill Schwartz. I had the opportunity to speak with Bill a few times in my early days as Editor of STAR TRACKS and he was a very nice man who will be missed by friends, family and colleagues.

B'Shalom

## International Adoption News



### HERITAGE TOURS OF CHINA ENRICH EXPERIENCES

*By Linda Harowitz, Assistant Editor*

For those who have adopted children born in China, memories of the journey to and through China may be only a blur, overshadowed by the anticipation and excitement of becoming parents and bringing a baby home. Perhaps you have dreamed of a return trip to China with your child in order to supplement your child's understanding of her Jewish heritage with an exploration of China's rich culture and history. The merging of Jewish and Chinese cultures, recently as a result of the rising number of American Jews adopting Chinese infants, is neither unique nor a modern phenomenon. As Joy Katzen-Guthrie, the creator of Jewish Heritage Tours, will tell you, China has welcomed a Jewish presence within its borders since ancient times. This little-known aspect of Chinese history is the focus of Katzen-Guthrie's tours, and the reason her tours have been well-received.

"It is the story of two peoples who have so much in common, and so much that is different," says Katzen-Guthrie of the Chinese-Jewish historical connection. "Most people, even Jews, have no idea of the relationship between the Jews and the Chinese over the past two millennia. It is a story so exotic by Western standards that it is difficult to believe. It is the story of people of totally different cultures who have lived together peacefully, without a known incident of persecution or prejudice for at least a thousand years," explains Katzen-Guthrie. According to Katzen-Guthrie, some historians trace a Jewish migration to China back to approximately 721 BCE, when the ten Jewish tribes fled Assyria upon the destruction of the First Temple. These scholars believe that one or more of



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the lost tribes entered China by way of the "Silk Road," a pathway from the Mediterranean to Central Asia that was later used by traders of silk and other Asian exports. Katzen-Guthrie reports that evidence suggests that these lost tribes, known as Chiang or Chiang-Min, settled in northwest China, near Tibet. The oral history of the tribe describes the Chiang as worshippers of one all-powerful God, and as descendents of their forefather, Abraham. She notes that this oral history is replete with examples of Chiang practices that resemble Jewish customs and practices.

Based on her research, Katzen-Guthrie points out that the Jewish community in the city of Kaifeng, the final destination of the Silk Road, may be the likely descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. Indicative of the long tradition of peaceful coexistence of the Jews and the Chinese is the inscription appearing on a fifteenth century synagogue stone concerning the establishment of Kaifeng's first synagogue in 1163 upon the Chinese Emperor's order to "keep and follow the customs of your forefathers and settle at [Kaifeng]." Katzen-Guthrie notes that China continued to welcome Jewish immigration during some of the darkest periods of Jewish persecution in Europe, including the influx of eastern European Jews escaping the pogroms in czarist lands, and Jewish settlement in Shanghai's Hongkou District (also known as "Little Vienna") during the Second World War. A fascinating and detailed historical account of the Jewish

presence in China appears on Katzen-Guthrie's website at [www.joyfulnoise.net/JoyChina2.html](http://www.joyfulnoise.net/JoyChina2.html).

Although not a historian by trade, Joy Katzen-Guthrie has proven to be a woman of many talents. She is a critically acclaimed singer, spiritual songwriter, and recording artist, and serves as a cantorial soloist for Florida synagogues. The celebration of life reflected in her music is also apparent in her relatively new role as a travel consultant and tour leader for Regent China Tours. Approached by one of Regent's marketing directors about creating Jewish-themed tours of China, Katzen-Guthrie extensively researched the history of Jews in China and created tours which appear to blend history with Jewish spirituality - where else can one share wine and challah at the Great Wall of China or attend Shabbat services with the Beijing Reconstructionists or the Shanghai Lubavitch community? Katzen-Guthrie and Regent offered their first Heritage Tour in June 2000. A retrospective of the tour, accompanied by photographic selections from Katzen-Guthrie's 91 rolls of film, appear on her website at [www.joyfulnoise.net/JoyChina7.html](http://www.joyfulnoise.net/JoyChina7.html) and is a must-see for anyone who may be interested in the Jewish Heritage Tours of China.

Katzen-Guthrie and Regent currently have two Jewish heritage tours scheduled for 2001. The first, an eighteen-day Chai Heritage Tour from April 25th to May 12th, 2001, features travel to Beijing, Kaifeng, Luoyang, Shanghai and a Yangtze River Cruise. A fourteen-day Signature Heritage Tour highlights Beijing, Xi'an, Guilin, and Shanghai. Detailed itineraries appear at [www.joyfulnoise.net/JoyChina1.html](http://www.joyfulnoise.net/JoyChina1.html). Katzen-Guthrie says that she looks forward to seeing more and more areas of [China] and introducing people to the incredible Jewish connection to the Chinese. To book a tour or to receive more information, call Joy Katzen-Guthrie at 1-800-354-1302 or 727-785-4568 (Tampa area), or e-mail her at [joyfulnoise@earthlink.net](mailto:joyfulnoise@earthlink.net).

## UPDATE ON RUSSIAN ADOPTIONS

By Linda Perilstein  
Executive Director  
Cradle of Hope Adoption Center  
Silver Spring, Maryland

The past six months have been a time of change in Russian adoptions. In April, Russia implemented a law passed in 1998 that requires foreign adoption agencies to be accredited by Russian authorities. This seems reasonable, as any government might want to approve

foreign organizations that are placing their children. However the accreditation process has moved very slowly for most agencies, with a resulting slowdown in the number of children being placed and a new requirement that families travel to Russia twice to complete the adoption.

In September, the Russian Ministry of Education approved four U.S. adoption agencies, and a few more were approved in October. The current list of accredited agencies is:

Commonwealth Adoptions International	AZ
Cradle of Hope Adoption Center	MD
Frank Adoption Center	NC
International Assistance Group	PA
Adopt-A-Child, Inc.	PA
Children's Hope International	MO

It is expected that families adopting through accredited agencies will need to travel to Russia only once to complete their adoption. In some regions, accredited agencies may be able to assist families who have started adoptions with other agencies or independently.



## KESHET—THE RAINBOW INTERRACIAL FAMILIES AND JEWS OF COLOR

By Dorothy Heller

How do Jews and Asians connect? Many of our Jewish children were born in China, South Korea, or Vietnam or China. American Jews have a love affair with Chinese food. What else connects our children's heritage with Judaism?

### Chinese and Jewish: A Contradiction?

Dr. Patricia Lin recently asked a San Francisco audience, "What do you think of when you think of Jewish culture? What does a Jewish person look like? What does an Asian person look like? Did any one think it's the same person?"

Dr. Lin, a Fullbright scholar, Ph.D. in History, and lecturer at UC Berkeley knows from personal experience about the "complexity of being "double-hyphenated"—Asian American—and Jewish.

"Most people see this as a contradiction in terms—either you're not really Chinese, or you're not really Jewish, or you have abandoned one culture for the other," says Lin.

A recent demographic study stated that there were so few Asian-American Jews that the number "was not statistically significant." In fact, Dr. Lin states, there are Jewish Asian-Americans in every stream of Judaism from Reform to Orthodox—the children of interracial marriages, adult Jews by choice, and Asian children who came to their Jewish families through adoption.

Jewish and Asian cultures have important traits in common, she notes—both are family-oriented, place great value on education and industriousness, and have a cultural emphasis on food. Asian Americans also share the experience of living in a Diaspora community. Dr. Lin's hope is that both of her communities — Chinese-American and Jewish - learn how much Asian-American Jews can contribute.

### An Historical and Spiritual Journey to Judaism

Dr. Lin's journey to Judaism was both scholarly and deeply personal. As an historian she has studied the long history of Chinese Jews; as an individual she found that Judaism enabled her to connect with God while strengthening her connection to her Chinese roots and culture.

### 18 Centuries of Chinese Jewish History

Dr. Lin found that the history of the Chinese Jews began as long ago as 200 BCE, when Persian Jews came to settle and trade in China. By the eighth century, there were well-established communities in southern China; by the ninth century there were Jewish communities all over China.

In 1163, the Jewish community of Kaifeng was granted the right to build a synagogue. At the time, Kaifeng was a major cultural and economic center and one of the largest cities in the world—far larger than any cities in Europe. The Kaifeng Jewish community rebuilt their synagogue more than twelve times and repaired or replaced many Torah scrolls, after wars, fires and catastrophes, such as the deliberate flooding of the Yellow River by rival warlords that killed more than 300,000 people.

### Typically Chinese, Typically Jewish

On the outside, the Kaifeng synagogue looked like a typical Chinese building, surrounded by elaborate gates and courtyards. On the inside, congregational life had some amazing similarities to other Jewish communities. One panel from 1489 had inscriptions about the importance of tzedakah, Yom Kippur, the belief in "one God alone," and even the names of major donors to the building fund!

Although the sound of jade chimes called the congregants to prayer, services and celebrations preserved traditional Persian Judaism—prayers three times daily, Shabbat, Passover, Shavuot, Hanukah, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Rosh Chodesh. Men immersed themselves in the mikvah next door before entering the temple and wore tallit-like garments. Men and women worshipped separately without instrumental music. As in Persia, their Torah was divided into 53 parashot instead of 54. Chinese Jews burned incense in memory of their ancestors, but did not bow down to images of them as did Confucian and Buddhist Chinese. Their food was strictly kosher. It was typical for Jewish men to marry non-Jewish Chinese women who then converted to Judaism. Many Chinese Jewish men took on the Chinese custom of multiple marriages. Over time, the Chinese Jewish community in Kaifeng became divided into seven clans: the Ai clan, the Li clan, and the Chang, Chao, Shin, and Shih clans, which retained their identities for centuries.

A memorial book, written in Hebrew and Chinese, describes Jewish congregational life in Kaifeng from 1660-1670. The records include 112 women converts and two male converts; many Chinese babes named Joseph, Judah, Moses, Lea, Esther and Pnina; and more than 95 rabbis. Jewish women did not marry out—they would then belong to their Chinese husband's family and be lost to the community. Jewish women did bind their feet, however, as was the Chinese custom for middle and upper class women.

Clan members looked typically Chinese and spoke the same languages and dialects of the region of China where they settled. Their pronunciation of Hebrew reflected the influence of the Chinese language: the “r” or “resh” sound turned into a “L” or lamed sound. Physicians, Scholars, Civil Service Like Jews in other countries, Chinese Jews excelled as physicians and scholars. Many Jews also excelled in the extremely demanding civil service exams and went on to civil service, judicial and military careers. Chao Cheng, known as “Moses the Physician,” was honored by imperial decree, did medical research, was a colonel in the constabulary, and was a major donor to his synagogue's building fund. Chao Yin Chung, another brilliant physician, also excelled in his civil and judicial careers. During one posting as an Assistant Judge, he was personally responsible for starting schools to educate the common people. Chinese Jews served all over the Empire, many in demanding and highly prestigious positions.

Chinese Jewish communities thrived for hundreds of years. By the mid-1800's, however, their population and resources were in decline—perhaps because of isolation from the West; assimilation; and the Chinese government's policy of sending its representatives to postings far from their original communities.

A few Westerners attempted to help, including the Chief Rabbi of England and a major donor named Cohen, who was also one of the founders of Congregation Sherith Israel in San Francisco. The American Civil War scuttled their attempts; further rescue efforts were hampered by the growing hostility towards foreigners in China and diverted by the pressing needs of the Eastern European and immigrants to America and the beleaguered Sephardic communities in Northern Africa.

Descendants of the clans still live in China. They no longer practice Judaism, but they still don't eat pork.

#### Chinese and Jewish Americans: Common Ground

Dr. Lin grew up in a suburb of Boston, where she made close Jewish friends, ate matzos during Passover, and attended many bat mitzvahs. Her parents loved sweet Manischewitz wine (and drank it voluntarily), even making special trips to Canada to buy cases tax-free!

Similar to many Jewish American families, Lin's parents wanted to pass on their culture to their children without a religious or spiritual foundation. They celebrated all the Chinese holidays, as well as Christmas, and made trips to Chinatown to eat special foods. Like many of the Jewish children reluctantly attending Hebrew and Sunday School, in resented having to attend Chinese after-school classes and felt alienated from their attempts to strengthen her Chinese identity. Parallel with many Jewish adolescents, she tried to escape her conflicts and an often-troubled home environment, by “numbing” her spiritual needs with high grades, achievements, diets, and exercise. To please her parents, she planned a career in engineering.

The feeling persisted that none of the achievements or activities was really fulfilling. Something important was missing. “Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity didn't feel right. “I felt a sense of God, but no formal religion. I wanted to pray, but had no framework.”

A Jewish mentor reminded her of “the importance of the balanced life.” Lin switched her major from Engineering to History. She lived with a Jewish family during her Fulbright studies in England. Her lifelong

interest in Judaism continued and grew. She began the process of conversion. “It was a long process, challenging and rewarding, with lots of doubt and soul searching. As an appropriate weaving together of cultures, I celebrated my conversion at a kosher Chinese restaurant!”

**Chinese American and Jewish: Coming Home** Lin’s conversion to Judaism was the bridge to reconnecting with her Asian heritage. “My Jewishness actually connects me to my family.” Lin learned Mandarin as well as Hebrew and wrote essays about Judaism and Chinese culture as part of her conversion process. She learned more about Buddhism and Taoism, and found many connections between Judaism and ancient Confucianism, such as the belief in one God, education, and a Confucian equivalent to the concept of tikkun olam.

Becoming a Jew sparked the urge to know more about her ancestors and to understand her own family history. During a conference on the Holocaust, Lin began to see striking similarities with her parents’ beliefs and behavior. She discovered for the first time that her parents were indeed survivors—not of Hitler, but of years of fear and trauma.

Growing up under a brutal military dictatorship, they had experienced their own share of horrors. As a young child, Lin’s father saw one of his neighbors being beheaded. They were surrounded by disappearances, murders, and house searches in the night, eerily reminiscent of the Gestapo. Her mother feared for her husband’s life many years after they came to the United States because of he was blacklisted by the dictatorship. Lins’ parents had wanted to hide their experiences from their children and bury the past. Instead, their nightmares and anxieties were translated into behavior their children could not understand.

“I still struggle with God and the Torah. Becoming a Jew has given me a larger community and a family in the broadest sense of the word, connected by both joy and difficulties. Judaism and the prayers and visits of members from my congregation helped me to survive and recover from many hospitalizations. God and community were all critical to my healing.” Her father now asks for her prayers; Lin’s rabbi counseled her mother during her struggle with cancer.

As an Asian American Jew, Dr. Lin still faces personal challenges. She still gets stares and remarks when she enters a synagogue or a Jewish bookstore. An Israeli guide tried to prevent her from praying at the Kotel,

because “it wasn’t for tourists.” She still faces conflicts when honoring her family as a Jew. When her grandmother was buried in a Buddhist ceremony, she faced the issue of “to bow or not to bow.” She is sometimes torn between kashrut and respect for Chinese celebrations. Lin hopes to see Chinese parsley on seder plates and more interactions between Asian and African American Jews.

How did her family react to her choosing to become a Jew? “Much better than their reaction to leaving engineering to become an historian.”

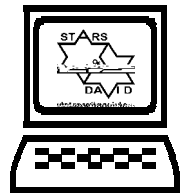


The Adopted Orphans Citizenship Act (HR2883) was signed into law by President Clinton on 10/30/00. It goes into effect 120 days later, i.e. 2/27/01. It confers US citizenship to all children adopted abroad (even if it was years ago) so long as the child is under 18 and one parent was a citizen at the time of adoption

## ADOPTION DISCUSSION GROUP FORMED ONLINE

*By Linda Harowitz, Assistant Editor*

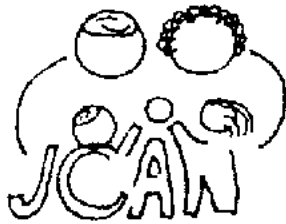
Stars of David members may now share information among themselves with ease by joining our new e-group, “SDI\_Discussion.” The service is free to members who register with the group, and allows members to exchange information by posting messages. Registration is quick and easy. Simply visit the SDI\_Discussion website at [http://www.egroups.com/group/SDI\\_Discussion](http://www.egroups.com/group/SDI_Discussion). Indicate that you are a new user and fill out the registration form that appears on the screen. After you complete the form, the system immediately sends a verification e-mail to your personal e-mail address. Review that e-mail to locate a registration confirmation number, and then return to the SDI\_Discussion website and enter the confirmation number where prompted. You will then be asked to enter your e-mail receipt preferences, including the frequency and formatting of e-mails that you receive from the discussion group membership. Once you have registered, you may post messages to the group by sending an e-mail with your desired



message to [SDI\\_Discussion@egroups.com](mailto:SDI_Discussion@egroups.com). To contact the moderator of the group, send an e-mail to [SDI\\_Discussion-owner@egroups.com](mailto:SDI_Discussion-owner@egroups.com). If you choose to unsubscribe from the group, you may do so by sending an e-mail to [SDI\\_Discussion-unsubscribe@egroups.com](mailto:SDI_Discussion-unsubscribe@egroups.com). Thanks to SDI member Val Lipow for setting up the new e-group.

## FAMILIES SOUGHT FOR DOWN SYNDROME BABIES

The Jewish Children's Adoption Network (JCAN), a Denver-based non-profit adoption exchange, seeks loving Jewish families to adopt Jewish infants with Down Syndrome. According to JCAN's president, Steve Krausz, the organization has identified such infants available for adoption at a rate of one per week, on average, in recent months. At this pace, Krausz observes, JCAN's supply of identified Jewish adoptive families will soon be exhausted.



Krausz, himself an adoptive father of two children with Down Syndrome, says that he has found his parenting experience rewarding. Describing his seven-year-old son and five-year-old daughter as “sweet, loving and lovable,” Krausz says he believes that his children have adapted to their surroundings and made lots of friends. Seeming to beam with pride as he shares the academic accomplishments of his children, Krausz's message is a reassuring one to prospective adoptive parents of children with Down Syndrome. “My almost eight-year-old is in a regular classroom at our local Jewish Day School and is learning his aleph-bet, knows most of his brachot, has learned most of his ABC's and is doing some simple addition, says Krausz. Of his five-year-old, Krausz adds that she “is in a regular kindergarten, knows her ABC's, can count to ten or so, and should be in a regular first grade next year.”

JCAN encourages anyone interested in learning more about adopting children with Down Syndrome to contact the organization at [jcan@uswest.net](mailto:jcan@uswest.net) or by phoning (303) 573-8113. Additional information is available on the JCAN website, found at [www.users.uswest.net/~jcan](http://www.users.uswest.net/~jcan). In addition to families willing to open their homes and lives to children with Down Syndrome, JCAN is also seeking Jewish families

interested in adopting older Jewish children who have been victims of abuse or neglect. Similarly, interested parties may contact JCAN for further information on how they can provide caring and supportive homes for these children.

JCAN is not an adoption agency and charges no fees for its many and varied services. The organization is an adoption information exchange and acts as a facilitator in matching Jewish children, many of whom have special needs, with Jewish adoptive families.

## Jewish Adoption With a Queer Twist

*By Arlene (Ari) Istar Lev CSW-R, CASAC*

The adoption of every child represents a miracle of sorts for the adoptive family. For lesbian and gay people becoming parents it is an extra special kind of miracle. In a world that has often deemed gay people as unfit to be parents, the rise of lesbian and gay families — through pregnancy, surrogacy, adoption and fostering — heralds in the beginning of a new era.

Lesbian and gay people choose adoption for the same reasons as do other potential parents. For many people adoption is their first choice in becoming parents, and for others adoption follows years of infertility treatments. Adoption is commonly a path to parenthood for gay men, especially those unable to afford a surrogacy arrangement or are unwilling or unable to find a co-parenting arrangement with a woman willing to carry a child. Lesbians are choosing adoption as a means to parenthood in increasing numbers. Since many gay and lesbian people do not begin to their families till they are older, infertility issues often impede plans to have biological children.

Adoption is a viable and exciting way for lesbian and gay people to bring children into their lives. Many people believe that it is not “possible” for lesbians and gays to adopt, but there are many agencies and policies that are very supportive to gay and lesbian people adopting. In 1988 The Child Welfare League of America developed a policy statement that clearly stated “Gay/lesbian adoptive applicants should be assessed the same as any other adoptive applicants. It should be recognized that sexual orientation and the capacity to nurture a child are separate issues.”

While there are states that actively ban gays and lesbians from adopting or having foster children, there are also states that have actively pursued gay and

lesbian placements for gay youth, as well as states that have made explicit statements the secure gays and lesbians the right to pursue parenthood. More and more states are recognizing the existence of gay and lesbian families, and due to the advent of domestic partnership rulings, and same-sex second-parent adoptions, gay and lesbian families are beginning to receive legal protections. These issues are continually re-visited in courtrooms around the country, but the ability to pursue adoption as out gay people increases all the time, as does the potential to secure our families through second-parent adoption, and judicial decisions that recognize “psychological parenting” and the “intention” to parent together. Laws protecting gay and lesbian families remain a major focus of all civil rights organizing at the beginning of the 21st century.

When examining the issues involved in single gay and lesbian adoption issues, there are two situations that need to be examined.

The first involves the gay or lesbian person who is single and seeking an adoption. In many ways, being single alleviates many of the obstacles that lesbian and gay couples pursuing adoption are faced with. Although there are of course hurdles that all single men and women must confront in the adoption system, rarely does the nature of ones sexual orientation become an issue during a homestudy process. Single lesbian and gay people are often simply assumed to be single heterosexuals. Of course invisibility has a price of its own, but if a single gay man or lesbian wanted to remain private about their sexual orientation during a homestudy and adoptive process, it could prove easy to accomplish.

However, the expression “single parent” is often a euphemism used by a gay or lesbian couple who are seeking adoption, but cannot risk being out about their relationship. Due to the nature of homophobia, and the lack of recognition of gay and lesbian “marriages,” many children adopted by “single” parents are actually being adopted by gay and lesbian couples whose relationships are not legally recognized. Many states explicitly bar gays and lesbians from adopting so that many couples choose to present as single men and women. The price of being closeted, and the daily fears of being found out, while awaiting the finalization of an adoption can bring enormous stress onto the family.

Whether a gay person is actually single or partnered but needing to present as single, surviving the adoption process with one’s sanity intact can be a challenge. The adoption system is a bit of a quagmire, and

certainly no more easily negotiated for gays and lesbians than other parents.

There are many avenues available when pursuing adoption, including domestic and international choices, private or public agencies and infant or older child adoptions. Whatever path is chosen, the adoption process hinges on a homestudy. Probably there is nothing more important for anyone pursuing an adoption that having a homestudy completed. There is certainly nothing more important to the homestudy process than having it completed by a competent social worker who has experience working with gay and lesbian families.

Sadly, this may be difficult to find. The question every gay or lesbian person pursuing adoption will have to ask him or herself is how “out” to be during the homestudy. Unless you are living in state with repressive policies towards gays, or working within the social service system that is known to be homophobic, you will be able to find a social worker and an agency who will be comfortable with your sexual orientation. Being out with a social worker, however, does not mean that one should be out on their homestudy.

Depending on the kind of adoption being pursued, being out can be detrimental to the adoption process. Gay and lesbians are completely restricted from adopting internationally, so a homestudy that presents a “single parent” is a necessity. A skilled social worker should be able to write and present your homestudy in a way that will serve your family. However, lying on legal documents could be used to terminate an adoption in process, so one must be cautious about information revealed and how it is presented in the paperwork. One should never lie about their lives, although certain facts might be omitted.

Any lesbian or gay person desiring to parent a child through adoption should be prepared to do extensive research on different adoption and fostering opportunities as well as agency policies. Research and conversations with others who have adopted will help you identify which agencies and social workers are “gay-friendly.” It is important to realize that even agencies that are gay-friendly, may not have the information and skills necessary to know how to write up a homestudy presenting a gay family in the best manner.

For instance, the social worker that wrote our second homestudy, who was a supportive and experienced adoption specialist, wrote an extensive amount of

information on our early coming out experiences, as well as our sexual histories. When we questioned her on the need for this, she was able to quickly confer that it really was not necessary. In her effort to be thorough, she was giving more information than was necessary, and this information could have been used in a negative manner, although this was certainly not her intention. This was a learning opportunity for her also, and she was grateful to be given guidance in this process.

The homestudy process by its nature is invasive. It usually takes a number of visits, is expensive and involves someone who is coming to your home to “inspect” it as well as examine your family for its appropriateness to become a parent. Often gay and lesbian people worry about whether they will be rejected because they have “gay” books, or explicit art, however this is not what social workers are looking for. Social workers should be looking for signs of addiction, mental illness, tendencies towards abusive or criminal behaviors, unhealthy or dangerous habits as red flags regarding prospective parents. Social workers are (or should be) accustomed to meeting many different kinds of people, and “lifestyle” issues such as religious observance, cultural influences, artistic tastes or reading material should not impact on one’s ability to become a parent.

Due to the nature of homophobia, most gays and lesbians go overboard trying to appear wholesome to the social worker. Sometimes potentially adoptive parents prepare a nursery for a child, redecorate their home, or spend days cleaning in preparation for a social work visit. Part of the homestudy process, however, is to find out from the social worker what provisions is necessary to have your family approved for adoption. No social worker would expect a childless family to be completely childproofed at the beginning of a homestudy process. Although it is certainly a good idea to clean your home, an immaculate house will not impress a social worker, who is generally more interested in your personality, coping skills and plans for parenthood.

If the social worker is anxious, judgmental, dismissive or negative about your chances to successfully adopt a child, you should consider finding someone else to work with. Some workers will be open to being educated, but remember that this is your money and time, and they should be actively working for you to help you bring a child home. You are hiring the social worker to assist you, and although it is her or his job to assess you, they should be supporting you in this process not making it more difficult for you.

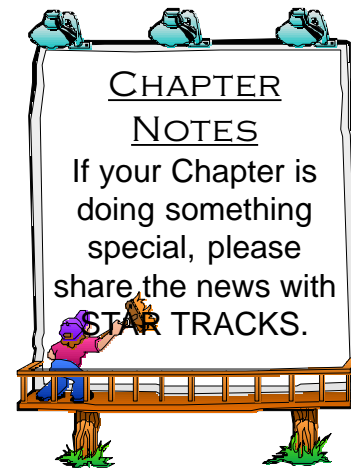
Arlene (Ari) Istar Lev CSW-R, CASAC is a social worker and family therapist who specializes in working with the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities. She is also a lesbian transracially adoptive mom to Shaiyah Ben and Eliezer Ranon. She can be reached at Choices Counseling and Consulting, 321 Washington Ave., Albany New York, 12206, or at [istarlev@aol.com](mailto:istarlev@aol.com) or [www.choicesconsulting.com](http://www.choicesconsulting.com). Ari has an advice column for Alternative Family Magazine and you can access her article on Lesbian and Gay Parenting at <http://www.altfammag.com/lev.htm>. She is also a columnist for [www.lesbianation.com](http://www.lesbianation.com)

## STUDY VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

The San Francisco-based Jewish Research Council has launched a nationwide study of Jews of color. Gary and Diane Tobin, adoptive parents of an African-American son, have identified four distinct groups with different needs and perspectives:

- Sephardic/Mizrahi Jews
- Jewish Adoptive Families
- Jews of choice
- Jews in interracial marriages and their biracial children

To share your experiences and information call (415) 386-2604 or [diane@jewishresearch.org](mailto:diane@jewishresearch.org)



Welcome to our newest chapter:

### *Phoenix, Arizona*

c/o The Shalom Center / Temple Chai  
4645 E. Marilyn Rd.  
Phoenix AZ 85032  
602-971-1234, 602-721-8132  
[craig-maron@acentre.com](mailto:craig-maron@acentre.com)

### *Central Jersey Chapter*

We are sad to report that the Central Jersey Chapter, which was founded in April of 1991, has folded after these many years. Past leader Stephanie Safdieh had

passed the leadership to Bill Schwartz due to health problems with herself and her son. Stephanie called the other day to let us know that Bill recently died leaving the chapter without the necessary leadership to go on. We are saddened to learn of this loss. May his memory be a blessing.

If there are any area members who wish to take over the chapter, our new National Chapter Coordinator, Debra Berger, will be happy to help get it going. Please contact Debra at StarsChvrn@aol.com or 856-384-2764

## THE YOUNG ADOPTEE IN SCHOOL - PART III

*by Nancy Golden*

This is the third in a series of articles that addresses the special issues of the adoptee in his school environment. Previous articles focused on ways to get your child off to a good start in school, and the question of whether or not to share your status as an adoptive family with school personnel. This month's article will describe ways to educate school staff about adoption related issues.

If you have decided to share information about your family's adoptive status, set up a time to meet with your child's teacher at the beginning of the school year. The goal of this meeting is not to convince the teacher that being adopted is a problem, or that your child, as an adoptee, will present classroom problems for the teacher. Rather, it is a chance to share with the teacher some of possible issues that may come up within the classroom setting that could be uncomfortable for your child. Remember, each of us, adults as well as children, have special needs or vulnerabilities, which in the best of all circumstances, would be taken into account by those around us. That's what you are suggesting to your child's teacher, no more and no less.

It is important that you do not assume that the teacher has any special training or knowledge about adoption related issues. Lacking this understanding, teachers are truly unable to anticipate possible curricular pitfalls that await the young adoptee. I encourage you to take this one-on-one opportunity to educate your child's teacher so that he can use what he learns from you to provide the best learning experience for your child.

Talk with the school librarian and find out what kinds of books relating to different kinds of families that are already part of the school library. Ask permission to come to school and look over the materials available. Offer to donate a book or books about adoption to the library. Explore with the proper school personnel other resources available to teachers and students. Find out if there is a committee that gives input regarding curriculum planning. Would the school be interested in a donation of an adoption kit which would provide comprehensive information for students and teachers?

Another way to share information is to volunteer in the classroom, offering to read on a weekly basis. Occasionally include books on different kinds of families, including adoptive families.

Volunteer to give a talk about adoptive families in your child's classroom. Before volunteering, remember to consider your child's feelings. Ask him what he thinks of the idea. Often times what we think sounds like a great idea has a very different ring to our children. The child doesn't necessarily have to have the final decision in the matter, but you do want to get his input. Perhaps he would like to choose which parent comes to speak to the class or he may want to be included in the little talk. On the other hand, he may be opposed to a parent speaking, but a family friend or someone else who is knowledgeable about adoption could provide the needed information with the spotlight being off the child.

It is also very important to share adoption related information outside your child's classroom. Perhaps you feel comfortable preparing a talk about adoption for the teachers in your child's grade. Another forum to share this vital information is through your school district's social workers regular meetings. If you do not feel ready or able to present this material yourself, identify an adoption professional in the community and explore his or her interest or availability. I have met with teachers and social workers at many local schools, sharing adoption related information, answering school staff's questions, and providing suggestions for the future. If you do not have a professional in your community, call my office and talk with me or other Midwest staff about setting something up in your child's school. School personnel typically welcome the opportunity to learn about adoption.



Generally, adoptee's school experiences are the same as their peers who joined their families through birth. On the other hand, in some ways, adoptive families are different, and adoptive children are different, too.. According to Randy Severson, and I would concur, adoptive parents should take pride in that difference and demand that it be cherished. You, as the parent, can and should let the school know that you expect what every parent and child needs and deserves: respect and understanding for the unique situation of every child.

Future articles will offer suggestions about what kind of material to share with school personnel and specific alternatives to typical assignments that your child may find problematic.

## LETTERS

*[The following letter was received by Dorothy Heller in response to her column in STAR TRACKS]*

My son, Alec, was adopted at 6½ months of age from Seoul, South Korea in December of 1982. He arrived on the last night of Chanukah! He is half black, half Korean, and all Jewish! At the time my husband (ex-husband now) and I were living in Charleston, SC - not a good place for an interracial family. Even the Jewish community was not open to this baby. One week after Alec arrived, we went to Shabbat services. The first person to see us told us that of course he could never attend the Jewish day school! Not that they were happy that a nice couple had adopted a baby, or that a baby had found a nice home. Of course some people, especially the rabbi and cantor of our congregation, were thrilled for us. But as I look back on the experience, the community as a whole was not welcoming.

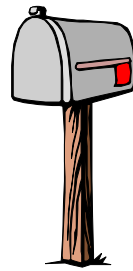
We convinced the local *mohel* to circumcise the baby, although we had to "prove" that we were committed and practicing Jews. He would not circumcise simply for conversion. So at 11 months of age, Alec was circumcised in an operating room, under general anesthesia, with the mohel, a bet din, and a urologist present (to apply stitches after the circumcision). Once the circumcision was healed, we took our son to the mikvah and later had a naming and conversion ceremony at the synagogue with proud family and friends in from all over the country.

Just before Alec turned 2, I left his adoptive-father and

moved back to South Bend, IN where my parents, aunts and uncles, and grandfather lived. The South was not for us, and I couldn't stand it that my family wasn't getting to know this wonderful toddler, and vice versa. While people do double-takes when they see us together, no one is outwardly rude about our family in my presence.

Alec has suffered prejudice on a daily basis. He wears his Judaism, his adoptive status, and his heart on his sleeve, and they all get hurt. When Alec was 4, an older child at day care sat on him until he cried because he didn't believe in Santa Claus. It goes on from there; but somehow we've managed to deal with it over the years. Just Alec and me, a tough single mom, a professional mom, probably spending too much time and worry on the details.

Alec attended religious school starting at age 4. While there are no other black Koreans in our Jewish community, he somehow managed to fit in and charm everyone. His biggest problem with Sunday School, very interestingly, came each year when Martin Luther King's birthday was celebrated. The religious school children would gather for an all-school assembly, something relevant to the national observance. But as the only black child in the building, even in the community, Alec felt singled out. Each year when I picked him up on that Sunday, he came out of religious school in tears - even as a teenager! And yet Alec is definitely proud of his Judaism - he celebrated his bar mitzvah, attended religious school through confirmation, visited Israel with other Jewish teens, and volunteered to be an assistant teacher in religious school through high school graduation!



In August of this year Alec went off to college. He chose to come home for Rosh Hashanah, which made me very proud. He's at a university that has some Jews and a Hillel, but not a large Jewish presence. He continues to socialize with everyone; race and religion are continual topics of conversation, but he gets along with everyone. I don't know what the future will hold, but the road so far has been very interesting, to say the least.

As challenging as our lives have been, I have never regretted for one minute that I adopted this child, and he has never said to me, "you're not my real mom." In fact on the way back to school after Rosh Hashanah, he turned to me and said, "I love you, Mom."



## COMPUTER RESOURCES

### INTERNET RESOURCES ON ADOPTION

#### - PART I

By Valerie Lipow

If I were starting the adoption process today, the World Wide Web is the first place I'd go for information. Why? Logging on to the Internet and looking for information lets you become better informed about the issues surrounding adoption, as well as the kinds of resources that are available.

- You'll realize you're not alone. Whether you are a parent, an adoptee, a birth parent, or anyone who is interested in adoption, there are people out there with experience and expertise to share, and those with similar feelings and questions.
- As you learn more and identify resources to help you, you'll (hopefully) feel more comfortable and in control. At the same time, surfing the Web lets you be alone with your thoughts and feelings.
- You can remain fairly anonymous for as long as you want to. The Internet offers thousands of web pages on adoption. You can review laws governing adoption, and locate adoption-related special interest groups. You can find pro-adoption sites, and anti-adoption sites. There are sites for all participants in the adoption triad (adoptive families, adopted persons, and birth families), as well as for adoption professionals.

I've catalogued a number of sites that prospective and current adoptive parents might find useful. When you review these sites, remember, I am not an adoption site rating service. Evaluate their benefit to your needs on your own.

About these sites: They are active as of October 27, 2000. They are organized by type, but many sites contain information, or links to information, pertinent to one or more other category I've used.

#### General Adoption Resources

<http://adoption.about.com/parenting/adoption/>  
Comprehensive site; links to other sites

<http://www.gallaudet.edu/~11tbell/adopt/glossary.htm>  
Glossary of terms used in adoption

<http://yellowpages.msn.com/yellowpages/simplesearch?KWD=adoption+agencies>  
Search for adoption agencies by location

[http://www.absnw.com/right\\_to\\_know/lawlib.html](http://www.absnw.com/right_to_know/lawlib.html)  
Adoption Law Library

<http://www.webcom.com/kmc/adoption/adoption.html>  
Adoption Law and Reforms

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/adoption.html>  
Health information, adoptive- and prospective-adoptive parents needs, links to adoption-related information

<http://www.ncfa-usa.org/home.html>  
National Council for Adoption site. Provides news, agency and attorney lists, guidance on selecting an adoption attorney.

<http://www.adopt-usa.com/rootsandwings/links.html>  
Links from Roots & Wings online adoption magazine

<http://www.raisingadoptedchildren.com/>  
Information from a adoption expert, Lois Melina

<http://www.calib.com/naic/>  
National Adoption Information Clearinghouse. A Unites States government site. Adoption publications, databases, information on Federal and State legislation.

#### Jewish Adoption Resources

[http://www.starsofdavid.org/jew\\_resources.html](http://www.starsofdavid.org/jew_resources.html)  
Comprehensive site; links to other sites

<http://www.users.qwest.net/~jcan/>  
Site for Jewish Children's Adoption Network.

<http://www.jewish.com/search/Family/Adoption/>  
Jewish Community Online's Internet Adoption Resources

#### Post-Adoption Resources

<http://momsonline.oxygen.com/asafamily/issues/list.asp?key=archadop>  
Information specifically for adoptive parents.

<http://www.familyhelper.net/pa/pa.html>  
Information about post-adoption issues, resources for adoptive families in the United States and Canada.

### International Adoption Resources

<http://travel.state.gov/adopt.html>  
U. S. State Department information about adopting children from abroad.

<http://www.frua.org/>  
Families for Russian and Ukrainian Adoption site.

<http://www.adopt-intl.org>  
International adoption agency site.links to resources of interest to families adopting children from a variety of countries.

<http://www.adoptiontravel.com/>  
Information and resources for adoptive parents traveling abroad to adopt.

<http://www.adoptionagencies.org/>  
Cooperative site of international agencies. Shows photos and medical profiles of waiting children.

### Transracial/Cross-Cultural Adoption Resources

[http://www.lycos.cs.cmu.edu/wguide/wire/wire\\_94046225\\_93056\\_3\\_1.html](http://www.lycos.cs.cmu.edu/wguide/wire/wire_94046225_93056_3_1.html)  
Lycos Family Guide on Transracial Adoption)

[http://www.tapestrybooks.com/catalog/text/b\\_trans.html](http://www.tapestrybooks.com/catalog/text/b_trans.html)  
A catalog of books especially for children adopted from abroad.

### Special Needs Adoption Resources

<http://www.adopting.com/special.html>  
Links to resources for families who have adopted children with special needs.

<http://www.adopt.org/adopt/nac/nac.html>  
Promotes adoption of waiting children with special needs.

<http://www.aask.org/>  
Matches special needs children with adoptive families.

### Support Forums

Listservs and newsgroups are email message groups. Chats are real-time, live online discussions. Message boards are online bulletin boards.

<http://www.adopting.com/ mailing.html>  
A directory of all types of adoption-related support forums.

<http://www.adopting.org/boards.html>  
Message boards.

<http://www.adopt.org/edirectory/>  
Search for chat rooms, mailing lists and newsgroups

<http://maelstrom.stjohns.edu/archives/gay-aparent.html>  
Gay-Lesbian adoptive parent listserv.

<http://www.comeunity.com/adoption/listservs.html>  
Annotated directory of listservs for adoptive families



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**CHAPTERS**

**AZ** PHOENIX CHAPTER, Craig Maron, The Shalom Center, Phoenix, (602) 971-1234; craig-maron@acentre.com  
**CA** EAST BAY CHAPTER, Ellen Geisler, Walnut Creek, (925) 932-3078; MikeREllen@aol.com.  
**CA** LOS ANGELES/SAN FERNANDO VALLEY CHAPTER, Curtis & Myrna Miller, Northridge, (818) 368-0737; MyrnaM3@aol.com  
**CA** ORANGE COUNTY CHAPTER, Marcia Marsinko, JFS, Orange, (714) 445-4950  
**CA** SAN DIEGO, Bonnie Baron, 619-291-0473; Fax 619-291-2419, jfs-sd@msn.com  
**CA** NORTHERN CALIFORNIA PENINSULA/SOUTH BAY CHAPTER, Dorothy and David Heller, Sunnyvale, (408) 832-1825; dorothyheller@hotmail.com  
**CT** S. CONNECTICUT CHAPTER, Joel & Debbie Sachs, Hamden, (203) 389-5400 (H)/(203) 288-7771 (O); debkasa@aol.com  
**DC** METRO DC CHAPTER, Mark Eckman, 703-242-8800, FAX 703-242-8804; datz@patriot.net  
**FL** SOUTH FLORIDA CHAPTER, Mark Cherny, JFS, Boca Raton, 561-852-3333  
**FL** TAMPA CHAPTER, Patricia Leib Lerner, Tampa, (813) 276-1776 W)  
**GA** ATLANTA CHAPTER, Judith Golden, JFS, (770) 955-8550, Jalleh Treadwell (770) 971-1119  
**HI** SHALOHA CHAPTER, Jana Wolff, Honolulu, 808-988-6789; FAX 808-988-1989; janawolff@lava.net  
**IL** CHICAGO AREA CHAPTER, Susan M. Katz, Northbrook, (847) 509-9929, starsdavid@aol.com  
**KA** KANSAS CITY CHAPTER, Lisa Gibson, Kansas City, 816-361-2787, KCMOGIB@aol.com  
**MD** CENTRAL MARYLAND REGION CHAPTER, Gail Lipsitz, JFS Baltimore, (410) 466-9200 ext. 234  
**MI** METRO DETROIT CHAPTER, Rosa Schindler, (248) 661-3978 and Judi Shapiro (248) 626-2716, West Bloomfield, JFS, Diane St. Peter, (248) 559-1500  
**MO** ST. LOUIS CHAPTER, Terry Abrams, Chesterfield, (314) 207-6682.  
**NE** OMAHA CHAPTER, Jenny Meyerson, JFS, (402) 330-2024  
**NJ** BRUNSWICK AREA CHAPTER, Joy Willinger, Dayton (732-329-8043; willinge@rci.rutgers.edu  
**NJ** CENTRAL JERSEY CHAPTER, Bill Schwartz, (732) 450-1576  
**NJ** DELAWARE VALLEY CHAPTER, Pam & Tom Austin, (609) 779-2672 or Sandy & Mark Miller, (609) 753-1753  
**NJ** NORTH JERSEY CHAPTER, Cindy Ratner, Wayne, (973) 694-1691  
**NJ** CHAVERIM CHAPTER, Debra Berger, (856) 384-2764, StarsChvrn@aol.com; Marlyn Kress, Mt. Laurel, NJ 856-866-0055, email: markkress@aol.com  
**NY** BUFFALO & ERIE COUNTY, Elizabeth Lance, JFS Buffalo & Erie County, (716) 883-1914  
**NY** NEW YORK CITY CHAPTER, Stars of David Coordinator, Jewish Child Care Association, New York, (212) 303-4722; JCCANAP@aol.com  
**NY** ROCHESTER CHAPTER, Miriam Rudnick, Rochester, (716) 473-2035  
**NY** ROCKLAND COUNTY CHAPTER, Bonnie Raab, JFS New City, (914) 354-2121  
**NY** SYRACUSE CHAPTER, JFCS, Judy Friedman, 315-445-0820  
**NC** TRIANGLE CHAPTER, Melissa Segal, Durham, 919-489-5335; FAX 919-489-5788, jfeddch@mindspring.com; Ann Hess, JFS Raleigh, (916) 676-2200, Ann\_Hess@wcjf.org  
**OH** COLUMBUS CHAPTER, Beth Gerber, JFS, Columbus, (614) 421-7709  
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**RI** RHODE ISLAND CHAPTER, Roberta Schneider, (401) 431-0728; LJS3@aol.com  
**TX** HOUSTON CHAPTER, Deborah Cohen, Houston, (713) 667-8552  
**VA** NORTHERN VIRGINIA CHAPTER, Stanton Phillips, Arlington, (703) 522-8800, adoptlawr@aol.com  
**WI** MILWAUKEE CHAPTER, Judy Berkowitz, (414) 390-3800

**CONTACTS - in order by state/city names**

**AL** Birmingham, Esther Schuster, JFS, (205) 879-3438  
**CA** Irvine, Ellen Simpson, (714) 857-1986; elsimpso@uci.edu  
**CA** Sacramento, Tim Prince, JFS, (916) 921-1921  
**CA** San Francisco, Lynn Fingerma, JFCS, (415) 202-7494  
**CA** Santa Barbara, Laurel Rose, JFS, (805) 962-0770  
**CO** Denver, Milly Nadler, Denver, (303) 922-3037; mnadler@ecentral.com  
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**OH** Beachwood, Paula Reshotko, (216) 831-0700  
**OH** Dayton, Marilyn Lustig, JFS, (513) 854-2944; jfs@jfgd.net  
**PA** Allentown, Adoption Coordinator, JFS, (610) 821-8722  
**PA** Harrisburg, Ellen Rabin, JFS, (717) 233-1681  
**PA** Philadelphia, Shelley Sanders, JFS, (215) 698-9950; adoption@voicenet.com  
**PA** Philadelphia, also see CHAVERIM CHAPTER, Debra Berger, (609) 384-2764, snjstars@aol.com  
**PA** Scranton, Sheila Nudelman, JFS, (717) 344-1186  
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**SC** Greenwood, Michael Ritter & Sara Paulin, 864-388-0784, phoenix2@greenwood.net  
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**VT** Burlington, Anita Cohn, (802) 864-9136; ALC VT@aol.com  
**WI** Madison, Barbara Spierer, JFS, (608) 278-1808  
**WI** Middleton, Joanna Berke-Lynch, (608) 831-1596 (H)/(608) 231-3426 (W)

CANADA, BRITISH COLUMBIA, Vancouver, Elsa Weinstein, (604) 876-4543  
 CANADA, ONTARIO, Ottawa, JFS Ottawa/Carleton, (613) 789-1800  
 CANADA, ONTARIO, Susan Brandes, JFCS Toronto, (416) 638-7800  
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