



## Adoption Connection's Website

Finding clear and current information about open adoption doesn't have to be a struggle. Adoption Connection has always had some of the best resources online, and now our agency has upgraded our Web site to make it even easier to navigate and find the information you need. As always, we are committed to providing prospective birth mothers with as much information as possible in a straightforward and non-judgmental way.

### On our Web pages you will find:

- ◆ Loving letters (or parent profiles) written by families ready to adopt.
- ◆ A photo essay showing a real-life family moving through the open adoption process with their birth mother.
- ◆ A message board for birthmothers to post concerns or questions
- ◆ Stories written by real birthmothers and birthfathers.
- ◆ The best links, books and resources on open adoption.

# Connections



## IN HER OWN VOICE

# A Birth Mother Tells Her Story



Birthmother Cassandra enjoys a visit with her birth son, Carson.



When I found out I was pregnant my world began to spin out of control. I had no idea who to turn to or what I was going to do. I was only twenty years old, a full-time student with no time for a job. I concealed my pregnancy from my family and my

*Continued on page 2*



## ADOPTION CONNECTION STAFF

Randie Bencanann, LCSW  
Lynne Fingerman, MSW  
Co-Directors

Cindy Levin  
Administrative Coordinator

Mary Naughton  
International Intake  
Assistant

Debbie Parelskin, MSW  
International Program  
Coordinator

Karin Rice  
Administrative/Intake  
Assistant

Julie Schuchard  
Outreach Assistant &  
Connections Photographer,  
Pages 4-5

Leah Sheldon  
Coordinator of Adoptive  
Parent Services and  
Community Outreach

Nan Toder, LCSW  
Adoption Coordinator

Dana Washington  
International  
Administrative Coordinator

*Social Workers*  
Eddie Arbetman, MFT  
Cate Greene, LCSW  
Martha Lavin, MSW  
Sheri Merg, MSW  
Tammy Noel, MFT  
Anne O'Quinn, MSW  
Julie Raudebaugh, MFCC  
Melissa Sipolt, MA  
Angela True, MFT  
Gail Jayne Zwetsch, MA

Adoption Connection is a full-service, licensed adoption agency and non-sectarian program affiliated with Jewish Family and Children's Services of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties.

Leah Sheldon  
Connections Writer

San Francisco  
Art Department  
Graphic Design

# A Birth Mother Tells Her Story *Continued from cover*

boyfriend. Only my closest friends knew what I was going through. My friends would ask me when I was going to tell everyone and I would joke and say, "When I'm in labor." But funny enough that's how it happened. My family found out when I was in labor and my boyfriend found out after my daughter was born.

I had considered adoption while I was pregnant, but not seriously. It wasn't until my daughter was born and I started to weigh all my options that my boyfriend, my family and I made the decision to give an adoptive family a gift they had been hoping for, and the life that my daughter deserved.

"I had considered adoption while I was pregnant, but not seriously."

I found out about Adoption Connection while I was in the hospital after I had given birth. A social worker there put me in contact with the agency and I was sent several *Dear Birthmother* letters. Adoption Connection was supportive in my decision and helped me through all of it. The staff answered my questions and eased some of my fears. They helped me through a time where I needed the greatest amount of support.

When I first started to really think



Birthmother Christina poses with the adoptive family.

about an adoption taking place I was nervous and a little scared. I wasn't sure if I was making the right decision or not. But after I began the process, working with the agency, and starting to think about a family for my baby, I knew in my heart I was making the best decision I could for that little girl.

Choosing a family was a tough decision, but after looking over all the letters I finally came to one. The adoptive family joined me in the hospital and we spoke for what seemed like hours. Lisa, the

## Open Adoption

### What does the "open" mean in open adoption?

It means that the birth mother, or birth parents, can choose the adoptive parent or parents of their child and have ongoing contact. Both families can get to know one another before the child is born, and may also have ongoing contact after the child is born. The frequency and type of contact (letters, pictures, phone calls, visits) will depend on the wishes of the two families. Every open adoption is different and depends on the needs and personalities of its participants.

### How do I choose the family who will adopt my baby?

Absolutely. You can look at pictures and letters from our families, talk with them on the telephone and visit with them in person. By getting to know the prospective adoptive parents you'll be able to make the perfect choice for your child.

### Who are the adoptive families you work with?

The couples and individuals we work with are of all ages, religions and ethnic groups.



adoptive parents of Sofia.

adoptive mom, held my daughter for some time. I knew then that I was making the right choice to place my baby with her. I felt a definite sense of relief knowing I was giving this couple such a beautiful gift, something they were unable to obtain on their own. I knew my daughter would have everything she would ever need or want. She would have all the things I couldn't give her. Even though I have all the love in the world for that little girl, and so does her father, we knew we made the right choice.

The advice I would give women who are considering placing a baby for adoption would be to be open with the prospective adoptive parents. Don't be scared to want to know how your child is doing. For me knowing how my daughter is makes me happy and helps me continue to feel that I made the right decision. This advice goes to prospective adoptive families too. Don't be afraid to send pictures and letters. I truly believe a birthmother wants some form of contact and to know how her child is doing. To me it is a source of comfort and happiness.

"Even though I have all the love in the world for that little girl, and so does her father, we knew we made the right choice."



Now that my daughter has been placed I can see in the photographs how happy she is. I know I could not have given my daughter a better gift than bringing her into this world. The smile on her face is enough. I wish for her and her family all the love, joy and happiness in the world. I know they have all of those things and more.

Each family has been through our screening process, and all have attended educational workshops so they can better understand the feelings birthparents and adopted children experience. They all share a great readiness and desire to become parents through adoption.

### **What if I need help with money for medical and living expenses?**

Adoption Connection has families who can assist you with medical care, living expenses and other costs related to pregnancy. Your adoption counselor will also help you apply for any public assistance to which you are entitled.

### **What happens after the baby is born?**

You can choose to have the baby go home from the hospital with his or her adoptive parents. If you like, you can continue to have contact with the baby and adoptive couple through letters, phone calls and visits. We will help you with the hospital arrangements and provide counseling and support both during your stay and after you go home.

Adoption Connection will complete all necessary paperwork for you and the adoptive parents. We will work with you to ensure that all of your needs are met and are available to help in any way we can.

### **If I'm undecided about whether to place my baby for adoption, can I still contact you or come and see you?**

Definitely. At Adoption Connection you never have to worry that you'll be pressured to choose adoption. Our counselors are committed to helping you figure out what's right for you and giving you the support you need to carry out that decision.

### **Do I need to tell the birth father about my adoption plan?**

Birth fathers legally need to know that an adoption is taking place. Adoption Connection can help you work through the difficult process of deciding on adoption while also helping you talk to the birth father about his rights, feelings, and desires. We can contact the birth father for you if needed.



Ardena created a plan before her delivery of birth daughter Sierra. Now she stays in touch with the adoptive family through letters and visits.

### **What is the first step?**

Call us on our toll-free number – **1-800-972-9225** – anytime, day or night, and we will answer your questions and help you get the information you need. You can also find out more on our website **adoptionconnection.org**. If you'd prefer to schedule an appointment, we can arrange for you to meet with one of our counselors. All information is completely confidential. Adoption Connection is here to help you plan the kind of adoption that works best for you and your family.

# Right Here, Right Now *The last-minute adoption plan*

**W**hen Ardena went into labor she knew that afterward she would be placing her baby for adoption. She had been working with an adoptive family for the last few months of her pregnancy. Through phone calls, walks in the park and family dinners she and the adoptive family had gotten to know one another and hammer out the details of their open adoption. Ardena knew she would have support while she was in labor and the hospital had been informed of the pending adoption. “The adoptive parents helped me out through every step. Susie (the adoptive mom) went to my doctor appointments and was my birthing coach. It was so amazing to share that with her,” she says.

But not all adoptions have the kind of pre-planning described above. Crystal had thought about adoption when she was pregnant but didn't really consider it a serious option until she was in the hospital and faced directly with the decision. (See **In Her Own Words** for her full story.) In this type of placement Adoption Connection may get a call from a hospital social worker and be asked to come and meet with a

woman who is in labor, or has just given birth, to create an immediate adoption. Adoption Connection calls this an *immediate hospital placement*.

In an immediate hospital placement everyone involved must work quickly: The hospital social worker needs to call the agency, the birthmother begins to think about what type of family she would like to adopt her baby, and the agency starts gathering adoption paperwork and counseling the birthmother. Meanwhile, the adoptive family needs to prepare themselves for a new baby in their lives. Sometimes this is all done within 24 hours! Randie Bencanann, LCSW, Adoption Connection's co-director, has facilitated many of these last-minute placements and says, “Even though it can be a stressful experience for everyone involved, it can nevertheless result in a solid adoption.”

When Adoption Connection gets the call about a baby's birth and the need for an adoptive family, an agency social worker will go to the hospital to speak with the birthmother and see if she is ready to move forward with her plans. “Even in a last-minute

placement I encourage a birthmother to take part in choosing the adoptive family. She may want to look at Dear Birthmother letters and talk with a few families over the phone,” says Randie. In Crystal's case the adoptive parents were able to meet her in the hospital before she or the baby were discharged. Women who have given birth are going through an emotionally and physically charged time. Randie says, “Women should remember that calling an agency doesn't mean they are committed to placing their baby. They may just need someone knowledgeable to answer their questions about adoption so that they can make the best decision.”

The question that many people ask about this type of last minute-situation is why a birth mother would wait so long to create a

*Continued on back*

**Pictured below: Lynne Fingerman, MSW (Adoption Connection Co-director) and Debra Haber (a hospital social worker) chat and celebrate a new birth. They sometimes work together to help place children with adoptive families.**



## Right Here, Right Now *Continued from page 5*

plan. Randie feels that there are many things that may factor into a mother waiting until after she has given birth. "For starters a birth mom may be keeping her pregnancy a secret from her family or friends... or perhaps she feels like she'll only be sure of her decision after she has had the baby, and exhausted all other options." In Crystal's case it was a combination of the two.

Debra Haber, LCSW, a hospital social worker, supports women when they are in labor and delivery. She has worked with women to create immediate hospital adoption placements as well as with women like Ardena who have planned ahead. She feels that planning will help an adoption run very smoothly. "The birth mom has time to prepare for the feelings she'll have while she is in the hospital," says Debra.

For Debra adoption will come up in her conversation with a woman who has just given birth, "when I see that a new mother is distracted or not bonding with her baby." Debra tries to discuss the woman's feelings about parenting while also letting her know that she thinks that adoption can be a very positive and caring choice. She says, "Being non-judgmental is very important."

Other counseling professionals have similar advice. Making sure that a woman knows that she is safe to talk about her feelings honestly at any point in the process is key. She needs to know that she can discuss her situation and know she won't be judged for feeling overwhelmed by the prospect of parenting, or for considering adoption. Norma Hammons is a pregnancy-testing counselor who works with women

at a private clinic. She makes sure she and her volunteers always make adoption part of their pregnancy counseling. "Some women come in and just say they may be pregnant, while others are almost due and need guidance on where to go from here," says Norma. She uses her own personal experience to open up the adoption conversation. Norma is a proud birth grandparent and talks about her family history of open adoption as a positive example.

Whether a woman decides to create a plan prior to birth or make a last-minute placement after the baby is born, it is good to remember that it is never too late to create an adoption plan.

*Some of the names in this article have been changed for confidentiality.*

We believe that in an adoption, everyone gains when given a chance to learn about one another. **Committed to education, counseling and support**, our goal is to empower both birth and adoptive parents before and after the birth to create the adoption that works best for everyone involved. **Adoption Connection** welcomes couples and individuals of all ages, religions, and ethnic background or sexual orientation.



**Adoption Connection**

1710 Scott Street  
San Francisco, CA 94115  
Toll Free for Birthmothers: 1(800) 972-9225  
Phone: (415) 359-2494 Fax: (415) 359-2490  
families@AdoptionConnection.org  
<http://www.AdoptionConnection.org>

**1(800) 972-9225**

PRSRT STD  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
San Francisco, CA  
Permit No. 5