

Nobody's Children?

(written after reading a book called "Nobody's Child" by a British journalist named Kate Adie)

In the natural course of events, every child who comes into the world has two parents. Everyone is someone's child. Becoming a parent is an enormous responsibility. For some, it is a welcome event and for others, sadly, it is not. The outcome of this is that sometimes children are raised, not by their parents, but by others.

In the past, some parents were persuaded that it would be of considerable advantage to their children, if they allowed them to be raised by others. In these cases, a formal adoption took place. The details were legally recorded and the responsibilities of parenting were transferred to people who were usually strangers to the child. In other cases, parents, overcome by shame and fear, concealed the births of their children and then deserted them. Such children who were found and cared for by others have traditionally been known as *foundlings*. In recent times, thankfully, few babies are adopted and few are abandoned, as there is now more understanding of the long term outcomes of adoption and also more support for parenting.

Clearly, the abandonment of a child, especially a helpless, newborn child, is morally wrong. Immediately after birth, babies are totally dependent on their mothers for both nourishment and protection. Separating such children from their mothers puts them at serious risk of physical and emotional deprivation. In most jurisdictions, therefore, any parent who abandons their child is committing a crime. This is because governments have a moral responsibility to protect their vulnerable citizens and to apprehend those who deliberately expose them to potential harm.

Recently, I became aware that, in Germany, abandonment of babies has virtually been legalised. A procedure has been created by which babies can be anonymously and legally abandoned. A so-called 'baby hatch' allows for someone (usually the mother) to place a baby in the hatch, surrender all responsibility and walk away without providing any information. The child is collected from the hatch and placed for adoption. The person who leaves the child need not fear prosecution.

Apparently, this process was devised in response to the problem of children being abandoned. However, it has been reported that the numbers of children being abandoned in Germany has *not* decreased since these 'baby hatches' were introduced in 2000. In fact, babies are being placed in baby-hatches *in addition to* the children who are being abandoned in other ways. If the purpose of this legalised desertion of children was to reduce the numbers being abandoned and this has not occurred, then it is reasonable to ask why this system continues to be utilised. Is there perhaps a hidden agenda? Are these 'baby hatches' conveniently supplying newborn infants to satisfy a demand from local adoption agencies?

If abandonment of children is considered to be a problem, then legalising this behaviour is certainly no 'solution' to that problem. Domestic abuse is a problem in many societies, but I have yet to hear anyone suggest that the 'solution' would be to legalise domestic abuse. In fact, apprehending those responsible, whether in cases of child abandonment or domestic abuse, can give them the opportunity to access appropriate support services to help them to address the issues which led to their socially unacceptable behaviour in the first instance.

There is also the danger that introducing this 'baby hatch' procedure allows legislators to claim that they are addressing the problem of children being abandoned. In fact, not only have they avoided addressing the issues of social injustice which have led to such abandonment in the first place, but they have also created additional problems for the parents and children involved in this legal form of desertion.

Education and support, on the other hand, could perhaps eventually eliminate the abandonment of babies. Governments can serve their citizens in a more moral and effective manner by allocating resources to these areas, rather than encouraging the separation of children from their families without any opportunity for reconciliation.

These modern-day foundlings will never have the opportunity to access information about their origins. Sadly, this situation may appeal to some misguided prospective adopters. However, it constitutes a clear breach of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the*

Child, which states that all children have the right to know their identity. Hopefully, a case will be brought before the United Nations in the very near future, which will put an end to this horrendous practice.

Research shows that those who have been adopted, whether they were abandoned or not, experience long term consequences related to the separation from their families. They can benefit from knowing about their origins and from being given the opportunity of being reunited with their relatives. The long-term well-being of children adopted with no hope of discovering their original identities, therefore, is severely compromised. By allowing these children to be abandoned in this way, the German government is not fulfilling its moral responsibility to protect them.

What of the desperate mother, who is encouraged to abandon her baby in this brutal, lonely manner? Is she being assisted, or is she being exploited, at a time when she is extremely vulnerable? We know from experience that it will be difficult for her to manage the grief which results from this separation from her child. Her grieving will be further complicated because, after the adoption, it will be impossible for her ever to have any information about her child's new identity, owing to the anonymous abandonment. Anyone with a genuine understanding of the loss and grief associated with adoption separation must condemn this barbaric adoption 'conveyor-belt'.

© Evelyn Robinson, April, 2006

This article is protected by copyright. It may be reproduced for non-profit, educational purposes, providing that it is reproduced in its entirety, without alteration.

Evelyn Robinson, who is a counsellor, educator and author of

Adoption and Loss – The Hidden Grief

Adoption and Recovery – Solving the mystery of reunion

Adoption Reunion – Ecstasy or Agony?

Adoption Separation – Then and now

welcomes contact from interested readers.

Postal address: Clova Publications
PO Box 328
Christies Beach
South Australia 5165

E-mail: erobinson@clovapublications.com

For further information about Evelyn and her work, please visit her web site:

Web site: www.clovapublications.com