Abandon all Hope...Profit Reigns Supreme

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by Mirah Riben

Imagine your local church eliminating prayer services to concentrate its efforts on more profitable Bingo games. Imagine a marketing executive deciding that the Girls Scouts could make a great deal more profit selling pin-up pictures of the scouts than selling cookies. This is how I felt upon reading the winter 1996 Hopeline entitled, “Hope Cottage Adopts New Business Plan.” As a birthmother who trusted the institution of adoption with the life of my child, I was incensed. As an advocate for human rights, particularly children’s rights, I was filled with righteous indignation. Anyone concerned about child welfare, I am sure, would be likewise concerned and angry.

Hope Cottage once sought out bright, caring, progressive staffs, to sensitively offer hope to families in need of adoption services — before, during and after making difficult, life-long decisions. Hope Cottage also used to publish a fine journal called Adoption Therapist, whose purpose was to “enlighten the professionals about adoption.” I first came to know about and admire Hope Cottage through this publication, which shared ideas to improve adoption practices with those personally and professionally touched by it. I was honored when some of my articles were included alongside those of Reverend Ronald Nydam, Father Tom Brosnan and others concerned with humanizing adoption. I was honored, and I was filled with hope that my contributions might be of help.

Hope Cottage has now found that focusing on ancillary services, such as post-adoption and education, are not cost-effective for its bottom line. The caring workers who sought to help clients cope with challenging decisions were seen as frivolous bleeding-heart liberals. After valiantly attempting to save the essence of what they believed were their and the agencies goals, these clogs in the wheel of profit were removed or left in disgust. Practices such as open adoption, which they now call evangelistic, have been dismissed as being unpopular and counter-productive in that it limits their “donor” base.

Why bother with something as difficult and time consuming as open adoption, even if it is widely accepted by all child welfare and family-systems professionals to be preferable than closed, secretive adoptions? What’s best for birthmothers, adoptive parents and adoptees is apparently far less important than making a fast buck.

The only remnant of the old Hope Cottage remaining in this chilling new “business plan” is the slogan “Building Families Through Adoption.” This last vestige of hope which was left in tact now seems as oddly out of place as a pack of cigarettes that would bear the slogan “We Bring Good Things to Life.” A slogan more fitting of the Cottage’s new approach would be: “Fattening Our Pockets Through Adoption” or “Your Loss Is Our Gain.” Yet, we really must applaud Hope Cottage for being more honest and direct about their approach and their goals than most. They are making no bones about the fact that they are more interested in profit than people. Looking at adoption as a business, not a service, they blatantly and unashamedly admit that they’ve instituted an “aggressive marketing strategy” to recruit potential birthmothers.

The sad fact is that the problem is not limited to this one small agency in Dallas, Texas. Hope Cottage’s business plan exemplifies an ugly trend in adoption which exploits and commercializes those it purports to help. The problem represents a negative trend which exceeds not only this agency but is widespread throughout the practice of adoption. It is a reflection of a time in our culture when capitalism is running amuck and widening the gap between the haves and the have nots. A time in which CEO’s whose salaries double and triple as a result of laying
off thousands of workers to corporate downsizing are not thought of as Scrooge's but are applauded by their stock holders. A time in which and we openly allow and accept and agree with philosophies such as shame and stigma which were once shunned as being related to radical fringe hate groups.

In a nation which purports to be pro-child and is shocked when we read about companies that exploit women and children in sweat shops to increase their profits, how can we condone the open admission of an “adoption industry” (their words). If this “industry” were marketing an inanimate object such as a widget (or perhaps Albee's bumbles) it would be a shame if they were more concerned about churning products — more interested in quantity than quality — than customer satisfaction or safety. More shocking and sadder still is that the products that the adoption industry is selling are human beings, a practice which was supposed to have been outlawed after the civil war.

When birthmothers, such as myself, speak out about adoption injustices and practices which exploit us and which exploits us and treats our children as commodities, we are told “that was then.” When innocent children, such as mine, who were promised a “better life” through adoption are instead destroyed by possessiveness and greed-driven policies, we are told “things have changed.” The question is, have they changed for the better or the worse? The question is, is there any hope in (the business of) adoption?

Adoption is a social service, not a business and needs to be handled by trained social workers, not attorneys, salesman or marketing professionals. Adoptions, whether they are arranged by private, religious or state agencies need to be government funded so that pleasing “donors” or stock holders, or fee paying clients does not dictate policies which may be contrary to the best interests of the children whom adoption was intended to serve.

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*Every time you find a piece of your life you come closer to finding peace in your life.*

Jerry Springer