

children were adopted because they were very much loved” (186). While this may be true in many cases, it is not true in all cases.

Robinson claims “adopted people cannot grow and develop to their full potential without a connection with their history and heritage.” In fact, many children do grow up not knowing their histories. And, while they may long to know of their pasts, they are able to succeed in the world.

Robinson continues to simplify the complexity of adoption: “while birth is traditionally considered an occasion to celebrate, adoption is *never* a reason for celebration. Every adoption is a tragedy because it means that there has been a family breakdown” (214). Clearly, adoption is much more complicated than Robinson implies. A tragedy for the birth mother can mean great joy for the adoptive parents, and a chance for adequate food, education, and socialization for the child. Adoption triangles are intricate and to describe adoption as tragic is only to describe one part of the experience.

Robinson argues that “adoption is ethically and morally indefensible”; she envisages a society that is supportive of single mothers, and supportive enough of troubled families so they can nurture and educate their children—a society in which adoption is unnecessary. Her argument is based on the false assumption that only biological mothers can adequately mother their children. In fact, her assumption that biological mothers are always preferable to non-biological mothers is not supported by current statistics.

Despite these criticisms, *Adoption and Loss: The Hidden Grief* makes a compelling case for open and honest adoption and the need to change the laws and social customs governing adoption. Robinson may tell but one side of the adoption story, but it is an important story nonetheless.

## **Adoption and Recovery: Solving the Mystery of Reunion**

Evelyn Burns Robinson.

Christies Beach, South Australia: Clova Publications, 2006.

### **Reviewed by Sarah J. Duncan**

*Adoption and Recovery: Solving the Mystery of Reunion* is a companion volume to Evelyn Burns Robinson’s first book, *Adoption and Loss: The Hidden Grief*. The author, trained as a social worker, combines her clinical expertise in grief counseling with her personal story as a mother who gave up her child for adoption more than twenty years ago.

The book is divided into three sections: Personal Recovery, Interpersonal Recovery, and Questions. Robinson conceptually connects the established theory and literature of grief and loss to the feelings experienced at the time of adop-

tion and, later, at reunion. While she acknowledges that reunion is perceived (or rather assumed) to be a joyful event, she rightly pinpoints it as a moment of reckoning for many people and an experience that is bound to elicit strong emotions in both parties, regardless of who initiates the reconnection.

Robinson organizes her work logically. In the first section, she examines the grief and loss of the mother (identified as perhaps the most affected of the parents), from the shame and silence of “illegitimate” pregnancy, through the decision process, and finally the act of adoption. The birth mother or father is consistently referred to as “someone who has lost a child to adoption,” an awkward but politically correct term that may imply blame. The traditional term “gave up” is almost never used; Robinson believes the decision to relinquish a child through adoption is often taken out of the hands of the pregnant mother. She also investigates the personal grief journey of the child who is adopted, giving simple but helpful suggestions for perspective shifting and personal healing. Even for someone not affected by adoption, the information and suggestions seem familiar and potentially useful.

The second section examines the potential for grief, loss, sadness, and conflict in the process of reunion. Here is the key to the subtitle; Robinson queries why such a seemingly happy experience often results in negative reactions. How can a reunion with a birth mother or father, and/or a biological, extended family result in hostility, anger, bitterness, and confusion? Robinson’s answer is grief. In fact, the adoption experience often proves emotionally overwhelming and a myriad of feelings may surface at the time of reunion. Robinson identifies these feelings as steps in the grief journey, from initially recognizing the loss and separation through to acceptance and reconnection. Her hypothesis is convincing, bolstered by references to the established work in grief therapy.

The final section includes three chapters of questions and answers organized by category: birth parents, adopted adults, and others (including questions from adoptive parents). In her conclusion, Robinson addresses three broad issues, also presented in the form of questions and answers: government assistance, community assistance, and individual self-help. Again, her answers focus first on personal recovery and then interpersonal recovery. In fact, the ideas raised here deserve full development in the body of the book.

Evidently, Robinson wrote *Adoption and Recovery* as a form of therapy for herself and her son (Steven, who has a forward of his own in this volume). Unfortunately, her audience is ill defined and her perspective is unfocused. As a result, the reader is left confused and the value of the information she provides—important as it is—is diminished.