

Group helps adoptees' search

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WHEN HE WAS just eight days old, John Lietzau was separated from his parents. He would not see his mother again until he was 31.

John was adopted by a suburban family and lived a normal, happy life. As an adult, he became a social worker for the Illinois Department of Mental Health.

But at age 26, John felt a need to find his birth parents and also some answers to the many questions surrounding his genealogy. The search for his mother lasted five years.

With the help of Yesterday's Children, a national organization based in Evanston, John was reunited with his mother last June.

Yesterday's Children, 828 Davis, Evanston, assists adult adoptees in locating their birth parents for legislation which would give adoptees access to their birth certificates and records.

FOUNDED IN 1974 by Donna Cullom, a North Side adoptee, Yesterday's Children is the largest organization of its type in the world. Currently boasting a national membership of over 14,000 adoptees, the group has successfully completed over 1,700 searches similar to that of Lietzau.

"I was determined that my civil liberties weren't going to be denied me," says Cullom, "and I thought surely other adoptees felt the same."

In addition to their primary purpose, the group also participates in discussions and lectures all over the country. On Oct. 30, Cullom joined Lietzau and Durie Mulso for a presentation at Northeastern Illinois university, 5500 N. St. Louis.

Lietzau and Mulso are staff members of Yesterday's Children and students at UNI, whose psychology department's adulthood study program sponsored the presentation. Cullom discussed the group and its advantages; Mulso spoke of the psychological pressures and frustrations adoptees must endure and Lietzau told how he searched out his mother with the help of Yesterday's Children. Following the speeches, the three joined together for an hour-long question and answer period with the audience.

CULLOM SAID THERE are many more adult adoptees seeking out their birth parents today than there were 10 years ago. "People now have come out of the closet, and they know they can talk about being adopted. Before it was something people didn't talk about. Now people talk about everything—abortion, alcoholism, homosexuality—so why not adoption?"

According to the Child Welfare League of America, there

have been 9 million adoptions completed in the U.S. since 1920.

Cullom says there are about 200 other groups like Yesterday's Children nationally with a total membership of 100,000. "It's something that's here to stay," she declared.

So far the group's efforts in Springfield have been fruitless. Recently, two House bills and one Senate bill calling for open records for adult adoptees were defeated. The last submitted draft of the bill called for an "intermediary exchange" with the adoptee, birth parents and adoptive parents represented in court before any contacts are made.

Some adoptees may never find their birth parents. But Yesterday's Children is there to see that, like John Lietzau, they at least get a chance.



TOM CARTER award, named for the person who successfully challenged federal regulations opening telephone terminal equipment to competition, is given to Ronney Harlow (left), president of Private Tele-Communications Inc., 1300 Belmont, by Richard Long, president of North American Telephone association. Harlow, founder of the association, is a West Rogers Park resident.