

Although I had been warned about kitchen-table hacks, my father found a real doctor who did abortions on the side. Late one night, I hurried into a darkened medical office, accompanied by my father and his new wife. I hated having her along, but he insisted we might need a woman in case there were complications. There were no complications.

These memories came flooding back last December, when a friend stunned me with the news that she'd just heard from the child she gave up for adoption 32 years ago. I know this woman's 28-year-old son, but I never knew about the secret daughter, the one who got born because a bogus abortionist took an unsuspecting young woman's money and left her pregnant. Now the baby she last saw in the delivery room was coming for Christmas with *her* baby.

"I'm excited to be a grandmother," my friend told me, "but I feel such regret, loss and guilt about my daughter that it overpowers all my other feelings."

I hope my friend's reunion story ends well. All I know is what it aroused in me. Relief. Waves of God-grateful relief. Had I not been able to terminate that pregnancy in 1958, I might now have a 32-year-old daughter (or son) looking for *me*, and surely I would be a very different me for having carried the misery that burdened my friend all these years.

It's never simple. That's why public policy on abortion and adoption must be filtered through the experiences of women like us. When adoption is heralded as the answer to unwanted pregnancy, the targets of concern are infertile parents, not the woman, her feelings, her body and her future—or the future feelings of the child she must give away.

I was grateful I never had to leave a child of mine with strangers or unwittingly pass a legacy of rejection to an infant at birth. If such a child existed today, no matter how happy our reunion, I would forever mourn the 32 lost years.

The fact that I was able to choose abortion made possible the life that was and is. Above all, the child-who-wasn't made possible the three wanted children who are my family today.

Topics for Discussion and Writing

1. In paragraph 10, Pogrebin writes: "With single parenthood and adoption out of the question, abortion was my choice, my only choice." How has she attempted to persuade us, up to this point in the essay, that single parenthood and adoption were "out of the question"?

2. How does her account of her mother in paragraph 8, her father in paragraphs 11 and 12, and the abortion in paragraph 13, further attempt to persuade? What further issue begins to appear in paragraph 15?
3. Although the essay is largely a personal narrative, it is also an argument. Which arguments are stated and which are implied? Overall, which arguments do you find most persuasive and which least? Try to explain why.
4. What arguments for or against abortion has she not touched on in this essay? Should she have?
5. Paragraph 14 consists of a single sentence. What is the effect? Notice also the fragment that concludes paragraph 6. Can you justify the use of a fragment here?
6. Pogrebin seems to assume that an adopted child retains a "legacy of rejection" (paragraph 19). Do you find this a valid assumption? Why or why not?
7. To what does the essay's title refer? Write a paragraph in which you explain the title to someone who has not read the essay.
8. Compare Pogrebin and Trefethen (pages 120–22) on their characterization and depiction of "birth mothers" and their attitudes toward the search by adopted children for their birth parents.

Elizabeth Joseph

Elizabeth Joseph, a lawyer, lives in Utah. This essay appeared in The New York Times in 1991.

My Husband's Nine Wives

BIG WATER, Utah

I married a married man. In fact, he had six wives when I married him 17 years ago. Today, he has nine.

In March, the Utah Supreme Court struck down a trial court's ruling that a polygamist couple could not adopt a child because of their marital style. Last month, the national board of the American Civil Liberties Union, in response to a request from its Utah chapter, adopted a new policy calling for the legalization of polygamy.

Polygamy, or plural marriage, as practiced by my family is a paradox. At first blush, it sounds like the ideal situation for the man and an oppressive one for the women. For me, the opposite is true.

While polygamists believe that the Old Testament mandates the practice of plural marriage, compelling social reasons make the life style attractive to the modern career woman.

Pick up any women's magazine and you will find article after article about the problems of successfully juggling career, motherhood and marriage. It is a complex act that many women struggle to manage daily; their frustrations fill up the pages of those magazines and consume the hours of afternoon talk shows.

In a monogamous context, the only solutions are compromises. The kids need to learn to fix their own breakfast, your husband needs to get used to occasional microwave dinners, you need to divert more of your income to insure that your pre-schooler is in a good day care environment.

I am sure that in the challenge of working through these compromises, satisfaction and success can be realized. But why must women only embrace a marital arrangement that requires so many trade-offs?

When I leave for the 60-mile commute to court at 7 A.M., my 8 two-year-old daughter, London, is happily asleep in the bed of my husband's wife, Diane. London adores Diane. When London awakes, about the time I'm arriving at the courthouse, she is surrounded by family members who are as familiar to her as the toys in her nursery.

My husband Alex, who writes at night, gets up much later. While most of his wives are already at work, pursuing their careers, he can almost always find one who's willing to chat over coffee.

I share a home with Delinda, another wife, who works in town government. Most nights, we agree we'll just have a simple dinner with our three kids. We'd rather relax and commiserate over the pressures of our work day than chew up our energy cooking and doing a ton of dishes.

Mondays, however, are different. That's the night Alex eats with us. The kids, excited that their father is coming to dinner, are on their best behavior. We often invite another wife or one of his children. It's a special event because it only happens once a week.

Tuesday night, it's back to simplicity for us. But for Alex and the household he's dining with that night, it's their special time.

The same system with some variation governs our private time with him. While spontaneity is by no means ruled out, we basically use an appointment system. If I want to spend Friday evening at his house, I make an appointment. If he's already "booked," I either request another night or if my schedule is inflexible, I talk to the

other wife and we work out an arrangement. One thing we've all learned is that there's always another night.

Most evenings, with the demands of career and the literal chasing after the needs of a toddler, all I want to do is collapse into bed and sleep. But there is also the longing for intimacy and comfort that only he can provide, and when those feelings surface, I ask to be with him.

Plural marriage is not for everyone. But it is the life style for me. It offers men the chance to escape from the traditional, confining roles that often isolate them from the surrounding world. More important, it enables women, who live in a society full of obstacles, to fully meet their career, mothering and marriage obligations. Polygamy provides a whole solution. I believe American women would have invented it if it didn't already exist.

Topics for Discussion and Writing

1. In her fourth paragraph Joseph suggests that "compelling social reasons" make polygamy "the life style attractive to the modern career woman." How does she support this assertion? Do you think that she adequately supports it? Why, or why not?
2. Try to imagine advantages that Joseph does not discuss for women in polygamy, for example for women who are divorced or widowed. Whether or not you support polygamy, make the strongest arguments for these advantages that you can (and then, if you wish, answer them).
3. Joseph does not suggest or discuss any problems in polygamous marriages. What problems occur to you? Why should she or should she not have discussed them?
4. Many societies have practiced (and continue to practice) plural marriage, but it is illegal in the United States. Do you think that plural marriage should be a legal option? Why, or why not?
5. Does Joseph's article provide an answer to Brady's "Why I Want a Wife"? Read the article (104-06), imagine you are Brady, and answer this question. Or, imitating Joseph, write an article supporting polyandry (the practice of having more than one husband at a time).