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A Salute to Fierce Women Who Protect Children

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Kim de Blecourt, Katie Jay-Gordon and Elizabeth Bartholet

My wife Amy was taking me to the airport the other day so I could fly out to an adoption conference. I was scheduled to present with two women who had both experienced extreme difficulties with children "stuck" in adoptions that wouldn't move forward. Amy knew [Kim's story](#), about being stuck in Ukraine, where she lived for a year while trying to get her new son out. My wife didn't know Katie's story, so she asked me about her.

Katie is an attorney who has contributed much to the Children in Families First (CHIFF) adoption legislation, introduced by U.S. [Senator Mary Landrieu \(D\) Louisiana](#), but with significant support from both parties. To me, though, when I think of Katie, it's because she has a daughter that she adopted from the Democratic Republic of Congo over a year ago. She has not been able to bring her daughter home and is required to pay child support to keep her in the Congolese orphanage (which she gladly does). Last summer, [Katie went to the DRC](#) to help her daughter gain back her health after surviving malaria, a disease the little girl never would have contracted had she been allowed to go home once the adoption was finalized.

As I talked with Amy about these women, tears came to her eyes. "I love these fierce women," my wife said as tears rolled down her face. With my wife's words, I didn't picture terrifying savages ruthlessly brutalizing people or animals. I didn't picture yelling and screaming, or women who belittle and shame others for not sharing their views. Instead, I pictured lionesses fiercely protecting their cubs and their pride from all who would harm them. I pictured mothers who were docile and motherly most of the time, while fierce in defense of those whom they love.

Adoption is undergoing a huge evolution, even as we speak. Much of this is thanks to other fierce women with whom I often disagree. Some adults who have experienced bad adoptions and also first mothers (my preferred term for birth mothers, but only when a descriptive beyond "mother" is needed) have helped us to see the huge mistakes that have been made in historical adoption practices. Their cries for ethics and laws to protect children and mothers who give birth to them have garnered respect even among those who disagree with their tactics and delivery most vehemently. For instance, it is difficult to disagree with the logic of adoptees having access to original birth certificates if honesty is used in the equation. If we say that we made a promise to not divulge information and it would be wrong to break that promise, we must then answer why it was acceptable to lie in the first place; when original parent names were replaced with adoptive parent names on birth certificates. **My grandpa used to tell me** I couldn't have my cake and eat it, too.

Evangelicals, in general, have been accused by some as using adoption primarily as a method to convert rather than a way to provide for the practical needs of children. Kathryn Joyce, in her book, **The Child Catchers**, pulled no punches when going after Evangelical pastors like Russell Moore, Dan Cruver, and Jed Medefind. That's why I was very surprised to hear Dan Cruver's opening remarks at this year's **Together for Adoption Conference**, an institution that Mr. Cruver co-founded. His words were a complete realignment of what my interpretation of the Evangelical message of adoption was.

I was one of several non-Evangelicals that were asked to present at this year's Together for Adoption conference. (I believe that is a first...) Cruver spoke of the primary responsibility of Christians being to *reunify* original families whenever possible. In fact, he even used Bible passages and Christian rhetoric to form a basis that adoption *means* reunification rather than replacement.

My point is that fierce women (and perhaps a few men) are engaging and listening to both sides in order to improve adoption laws and ethics. The baby scooping era is over, as it should be.

Dr. Elizabeth Bartholet, Harvard Law Professor, was one of the non-Evangelicals who spoke at Together for Adoption. She is another fierce woman who has been a great proponent of international children's rights and has presented and promoted the idea that it is a basic human (and legal) right of all children, everywhere, to have a family. She is one of CHIFF's strongest proponents and allies. She proposes that we deal with illegal and unethical infractions individually, while moving forward with giving children from all countries families. She also makes a very strong point that there are degrees to wrong-doing. For instance, sloppy paperwork is wrong, but should not have the same consequences as selling children. She referenced the fact that there is no human institution where there is not imperfection, error, and even corruption. In that light, she argues, international adoption should continue in tandem with policing, enforcing and evolving adoption law.

I must agree. We don't shut down the institution of religion when some of its leaders are involved in horrific scandals. We don't shut down government when we catch a politician with his hand in the coffers (or other places that it doesn't belong). We don't close our schools when teachers are convicted of child abuse. We punish offenders and often remove them from positions where they can continue to harm. The **results of children growing up without families are far too severe** to apply overreaching stoppages to domestic or inter-

country adoption. And there is **no place for bigotry** when it comes to providing children with their own families.

While I won't downplay the part that men play in the fight for children and the rights of them and *all* of their mothers, I firmly believe that we are led by fierce women and that the world will be a better place for children and families because of the reasonable thought leaders on both sides of the adoption fence.

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