

# A Tragedy In Adoption—The Children In Limbo

Editor's Note: This is the second in a two-part series on adoptions and deals with children who for various reasons are not adopted and spend the first years of their lives in a foster home.

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There are currently more couples waiting to adopt babies than there are babies available in Santa Cruz County.

Lucky babies — those born without defects and quickly released for adoption.

But, then, there are the others.

With cerebral palsy.

Hearing defects.  
Emotionally disturbed.  
The racially mixed child.  
The educable retarded.

And children who should be adopted but who are held in foster homes because their parents refuse to release them.

Traditionally, these children have been the ones left behind.

Where other children pause briefly in foster homes, only weeks old until the paper and medical work is completed then released to their adopted parents, these other children remain in limbo, sometimes for years.

Foster parents are kindly people, carefully selected; but they

are temporary parents and years of attachments can be hard to break.

However, along with the new life-style of the young which has led to more couples adopting with "Zero Population" on their minds and with fewer babies because of abortions and The Pill, there is also an encouraging trend for young couples to take infants with these various defects.

Sharon Dutton, child service worker with the Santa Cruz County Welfare office, is noticing this change.

"Out of the nine couples who currently are approved for receiving children, three families

are willing to take infants with corrective medical problems and one will take a racially mixed or a minority child.

There is a more serious problem involving infants in this category.

These are the children in foster homes who have not yet been released by the mother or parents for adoption.

Mrs. Dutton is working with 15 at the present time, up to 13 years of age.

Children in limbo.

They have been placed in foster homes because of abandonment or neglect by their parents. Or because a mother has been declared unfit or is unable

to care for the child but will belong to the natural parent. who cannot take care of their children but at the same time they can't bring themselves to let the children go.

It becomes a cruel tug-a-war. "Our first obligation," said Mrs. Dutton, "is to attempt to reunite the child and its natural family."

"At the same time, as the infant grows older, and it becomes obvious that it just won't work out, we want the child to have a loving, normal and permanent home and attempt to work for a release so that it can be adopted."

The laws, however, traditionally favor natural parents.

A child who has been made a ward of the court and resides in a foster home still

"We have to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that there has been neglect and abandonment or unfitness. Sometimes a judge will tell the mother that he feels she is unfit to care for the child, then turn to us and says, 'but you haven't proved it.'"

"In the meantime the child suffers the cruel fate of this system," she said.

The natural parents may visit the child periodically.

"Daddy may get drunk and feel guilty and stagger over to the foster home to see the child," she said.

"We do have some mothers

who cannot take care of their children but at the same time they can't bring themselves to let the children go.

"A high school mother may become bugged by her friends to keep the baby, not realizing the tremendous responsibility involved in raising a child."

There are some heartrending cases of real love by a mother who can't raise the child.

"The point is that it's the child who really suffers," said Mrs. Dutton.

She feels that the law is too severe in its decisions to keep children in foster homes.

As a child grows older his emotions become divided. It

knows of its natural parents. It grows to love its foster parents and if eventually adopted, it has to share its love with new parents.

If a child is held in a foster home beyond 12 to 15 years, an attempt is made to get the foster parents to adopt the child, or at least become its legal guardian until it reaches an age where it can go out on its own.

"It think California must re-define its laws regarding child welfare," said Mrs. Dutton.

"It should be more considerate of the child's civil rights and welfare and not just the parents' and society's."