

Adoption agencies . . .

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The director of the institution said no: "It's our policy that children here not own anything."

Joey's story may be more poignant than most, but those who have looked at child care say it is not wildly atypical.

Couples or individuals who are interested in adopting children often run into barriers erected — always in "the best interest of the child" — by public agencies. A couple may be too old, too fat, or disabled, or of the wrong race or religion.

Agencies frequently wait passively for natural parents to relinquish their long-since-abandoned children instead of moving aggressively to clear the children for adoption.

Private or grass-roots organizations that could help find homes for many of these children often are not enlisted or even informed as to their availability — in Woodson's description, the counterpart of the real-estate industry's multiple listings.

Do agencies assume a proprietary interest in the children in their charge? It is possible that some agencies cling to adoptable children to justify their own continued existence?

"I don't think it happens like that," says one man who has studied the problem. "I don't think any agency director says, 'Let's keep these 40 kids so we can keep our staff busy,' or anything like that," says Bob Piasecki of Philadelphia.

"What happens is that once a kid gets into a group home, there often is no real thought of getting him into a family situation again. Institutions don't want to make mistakes by placing children in adoptive situations that turn out badly, so they stick with foster care arrangements over which they retain control."

Whatever the validity of the explanations, the result is that children who need permanent homes and families willing, even eager, to provide that permanence, frequently don't learn about each other.

And after several years of institutionalization, many of the children become, as a psychologist described Joey, "unable to live in a family."

That's the truly hideous cost. The less important cost is in mere dollars. Woodson estimated it costs \$100,000 mostly in federal funds, to "keep Joey from being part of a family."

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letters to the editor

Column trivializes defense spending issue

If it's true that reading bad journalism kills brain cells, I'd be terminally comatose from reading Casey McCabe's August 31 article addressing excessive defense spending.

Our national defense has been sadly neglected for over a decade. If the author of the article understood international relations, he would also understand there is one factor that keeps us from nuclear confrontation: our precarious balance of power with China and Russia.

History has shown time and time again

that war occurs when the balance of power in an international setting becomes unbalanced. The issue of defense spending is indeed a pressing one; however, the manner in which the column was written simply trivializes the issue.

What I object to most is the author's apparent apathy and disinterest in the motivation for the defense directives which he addresses.

Christian Thompson, senior Broadcasting

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