

Open adoption programs growing in popularity

By Tammy Batey
Emerald Associate Editor

Eugene resident Eileen Ballman cried when she first saw her son Jake in the delivery room of Portland's University Hospital. She said she did all the "silly" things new mothers do, like screaming "It's a baby!"

At the birth of her baby, however, Ballman was just an observer. She watched as 19-year-old Kendra, the baby's biological mother, suffered the labor pains and pushed the baby into the world.

Ballman said she her husband Dave decided to adopt in April 1990 after trying unsuccessfully to have a child for 12 years. Open adoption was the best choice for them.

"It always would have been uncomfortable for me to wonder if his parents were out there looking for him and just going to pop into his life," she said. "That's taken care of from the beginning. They are a part of his life."

An open adoption is simply a process where there is an openness of information, said Susan Cox, Holt International Children's Services' director of development. However, the birth mother chooses how open she wants the adoption to be.

"There's a risk to adoptions that are open," she said. "Adoptive parents get much more emotionally attached to the mothers and much more involved in the person's life."

Holt offers both open and closed adoptions, said Colleen Mayberry, director of social services. Only about three birth mothers of the past 20 the agency worked with chose closed adoption.

"If you mean openness where the people share names, addresses and phone numbers, the numbers would be low," Mayberry said. "But if you mean where they meet each other and exchange first names, then it would be very high."

Shari Levine, the regional director of Open Adoptions and Family Services Inc., said she considers open adoption the "most humane approach" to adoption. The non-profit, state-licensed agency has completed 400 adoptions since 1985, when it opened.

At the open adoption agency, birth mothers choose the family they want to adopt their child by looking through a notebook containing pictures and letters from prospective parents.

After the birth mother selects a family, she and the adoptive parents negotiate the number of visits and let-



Photo by David Natt

Eileen and Dave Ballman hold their son, Jake, whom they received by open adoption. The Ballmans said they are comfortable with Jake's biological mother being part of his life. The couple tried to conceive unsuccessfully for 12 years. They are currently planning to adopt another baby through the open adoption program.

ters that will be exchanged.

Levine said she disagrees with people who believe open adoptions are confusing for the child.

"In cases where parents divorce, the part children understand is that they have a mom and a step-mom," she said. "The part they don't understand is all of the adults fighting over them."

Open adoption gives adoptive parents the chance to learn the medical history of the child's family, and it provides children who have a "natural curiosity" about their biological parents with answers to questions such as why they were put up for adoption.

When University senior Gwenn Smith was 18 years old, she became pregnant and knew she couldn't financially support her baby. She said she considered abortion and closed adoption before choosing open adoption.

Smith, 21, visits her two-year-old daughter Sarah about every six months and receives letters from Sarah's new parents about her.

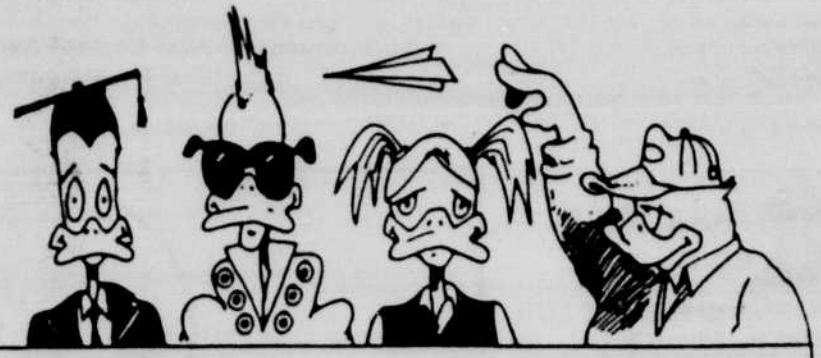
"It's a great sense of security," she said. "With closed adoption, I wouldn't know where she was or even if she was alive. It's like hitting a wall, and you can't go beyond the wall."

Exercise your brain with

COLLEGE BOWL



THE MALLARD MAULERS



THE SODA QUACKERS

If you know four students (or if you are four students), sign up now to compete with other wild and crazy adventurers in **College Bowl**, the *varsity sport of the mind*! It's an exciting game that tests your knowledge in everything from literature to science, from music to film. Two teams with four players each square off in fast-paced rounds dedicated to making you look either extremely intelligent or extremely embarrassed. You might end up representing the University of Oregon regionally and even nationally! So get a team up (name it anything you want - the wilder the better) and exercise your brain!

Register: November 2 - 6. All dormitory residents please sign up with your RA, everyone else at the EMU Recreation Center, or call 346-3711.

Games Start: 6:30 p.m., Wednesday, November 11

Finals: November 18.

Cost: \$3 per person or \$12 per team.