

children. "Building Character and Optimism" offers ways to teach empathy, courage, humour, and other qualities that instill an essential inner sense of power. Another chapter considers ways to create balance in the electronic age.

The book's strength is not in mining any one area but in covering a wide territory. Each chapter offers insight, advice, and resources for further exploration. As a whole, the book is an effective catalyst as well as a reference guide for busy parents who themselves need more time to pause and reflect. This brings me to another desire: for help with my own balance. Perhaps I need to turn to Wilson's previous book *Restoring Balance to a Mother's Busy Life*. One of Wilson's greatest gifts is her focus on mothers as well as children. She knows that creating lifestyles that support today's families involves everyone.

Wilson's voice is compassionate and realistic. Speaking from experience as well as observation, she knows that motherhood is not easy. She understands the challenges of raising a spirited child and the desire to help one's child excel in a competitive world. But she is wise to question a path that disregards the need for rest and rejuvenation and offers a model of parenting that attends to our instincts rather than societal pressures.

Reunion: A Year in Letters Between a Birthmother and the Daughter She Couldn't Keep

Katie Hern and Ellen McGarry Carlson
Seattle: Seal Press, 1999

Reviewed by Amy Cuomo

Reunion is a moving account of a relationship between two women who are biologically mother and daughter, yet complete strangers. Linked by their joy in writing, as well as their biology, the women reveal themselves to one another as they begin a process of discovery. Katie Hern and Ellen McGarry Carlson are writers whose love of craft is apparent in their letters. Their correspondence is humorous, occasionally painful, and uncompromisingly honest. The book reads like a finely crafted epistolary novel and gives its audience the furtive pleasure of reading another's mail. *Reunion* encapsulates the year in which Katie and her birthmother Ellen first make contact after a separation of twenty-six years. The letters and emails, which constitute the book, provide the reader with extraordinary insight into adoption and tell of their remarkable journey. The book is arranged chronologically and begins with Katie's letter of introduction to her birthmother. The letters are intimate and revealing. The early letters are particularly provocative and raise the question, "What do we choose to

reveal when we wish to tell another who we really are?” Katie tells Ellen about her family, her relationship with her lover Cara, and her participation in the “Lesbian Avengers.” Questions of identity, inexorably linked with adoption, recur in Katie’s dialogue. Over the course of the year, Katie comes to realize the profound impact that being adopted has had on her life. Ellen’s early letters tell the story of Katie’s birth and how she came to give up her daughter for adoption. Ellen provides a personal glimpse into the history of adoption in the U.S. in the late 1960s. She articulates the shame associated with becoming pregnant out of wedlock; her lack of control; and the pain she felt when sent away from her family.

Ellen and Katie’s letters, emails, and phone calls eventually lead to a meeting. The book’s climax takes place offstage as details of their meeting are revealed only in letters. Pictures of Katie and Ellen together signify their reunion. The second half of the book shows the difficulties in reunions between birthmothers and their children. Overwhelmed, Katie withdraws from Ellen to sort out her feelings. Eventually, she and Ellen are able to establish a solid friendship and arrange for subsequent meetings. Their discussion about adoption continues, however, since Katie’s brother Matt is also searching for his birthmother. Matt’s search for his birthmother, which results in rejection, provides a much-needed counterpart to Katie and Ellen’s success story. In an afterward to the letters, the women assess their relationship and their journey. Katie reveals that her adoptive mother has been terribly hurt by Katie’s search and subsequent relationship with Ellen.

This book is an absolute must for anyone seeking a birthmother and for readers concerned with mother-daughter relationships. *Reunion*, makes clear that the process of uniting a birthmother with her child can come with a tremendous price— a price which many are willing and eager to pay. To paraphrase Katie Hern, I too have become aware that, in addition to all the good, adoption involves a tremendous loss.

Raising Up Queens: Loving Our Daughters Loud and Strong

Esther Davis-Thompson
Philadelphia: Innisfree Press, 2000

Reviewed by Erika Horwitz

In *Raising Up Queens*, Esther Davis-Thompson takes on the difficult task of voicing the experience of raising daughters. She speaks to black women of their struggles as mothers and women in North America. Davis-Thompson talks