

Forming Families

Adoption In Westchester

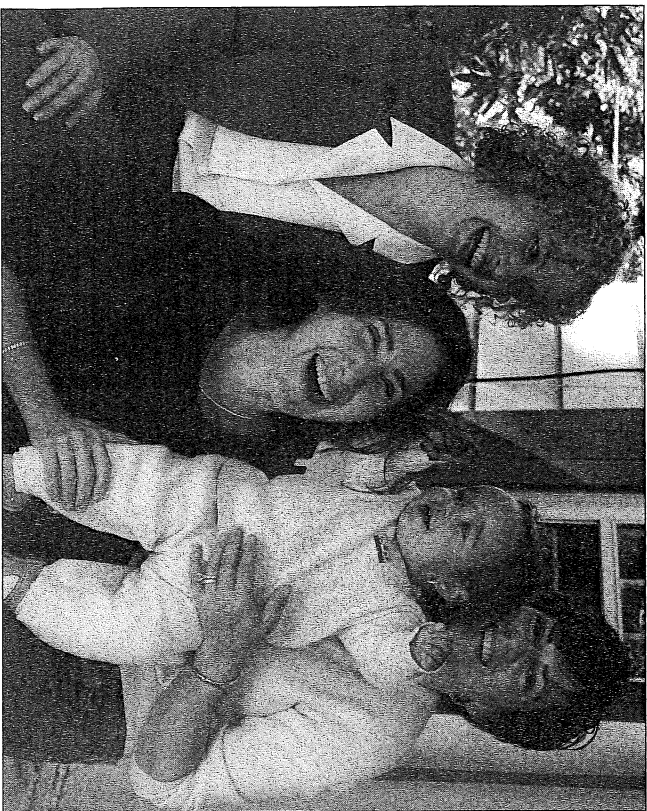
On Sunday, November 13, Iona College in New Rochelle will be home to the nation's largest

adoption conference, appropriately in the middle of National Adoption Month. Speakers discussing a wide range of topics from the "How to's" of starting the domestic or international adoption process to attachment concerns after bringing home your child will be featured in more than 100 workshops. Among the speakers will be several of the county's prominent adoption attorneys, including Michael Goldstein, Nina Rumbold and Denise Seidelman.

"The conference is a place where people come starved for personal information," says Goldstein, who will give two presentations and make a cameo appearance in one of two more workshops led by his wife Joy, a licensed social worker.

"There's a lot of information on the Internet, but this is first-hand information from real people," adds Goldstein, also noting the significance of the hand-holding and support that is an integral part of an experience as emotionally charged as adopting a child.

The organization behind the annual daylong conference, The Adoptive Parents Committee (APC), is an all-volunteer support group from which Michael and Joy sought both guidance and support more than 20 years ago. "We were living in Queens at the time, so we went to an APC meeting on Long Island," explains Goldstein, who is now a board member of the Hudson Chapter of the tri-state organization. "We had been through several miscarriages and I was upset to see so many kids running around at the meeting," adds Michael, who recalls Joy nudging him and responding, "They're all adopted, you dummy!" And so it began for the Goldsteins, a journey of 24 years, in which they



Adoption attorneys Nina Rumbold, Denise Seidelman and one of their clients, Carmela Slansky with her baby Marthele Iris Slansky, from left to right, Jasko De Witte and Jos van Leeuwen, from the Netherlands, adopted Atrven Irma Christine

adopted three sons and helped thousands of couples and singles, bring children into their homes and their hearts.

Goldstein, who was ironically practicing "labor" law during the years of infertility, was drawn to adoption law after they adopted their first son. "I was approached by a couple of people at the law firm at which I was working and asked if I could help with their adoptions," explains Goldstein, who eventually left the firm to start his own practice in the mid-1980s. Settling in Rye Brook, it started as a small practice out of the Goldstein household. After adopting two more sons, it was time to branch out. "I would see these three part of tiny little fingers reaching under my office door and I knew it was time to get an office," says Goldstein, who became an active volunteer in

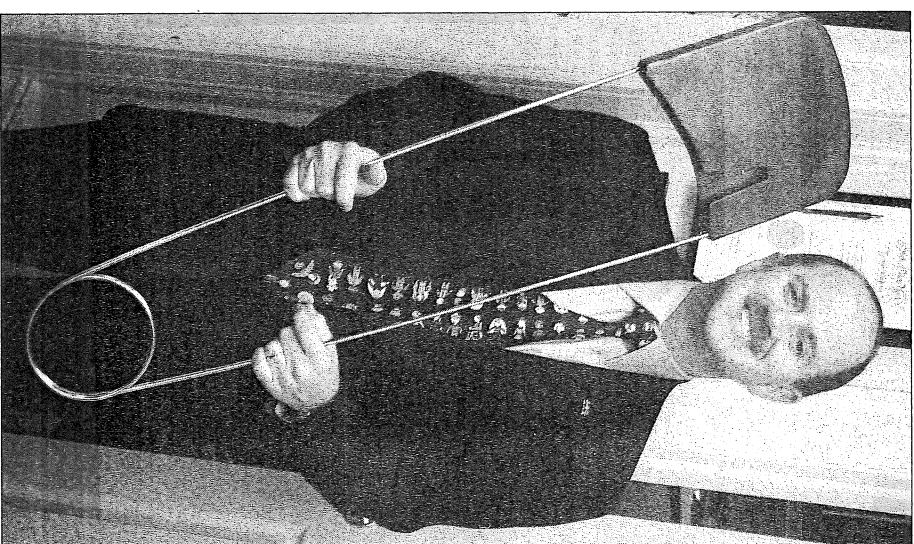
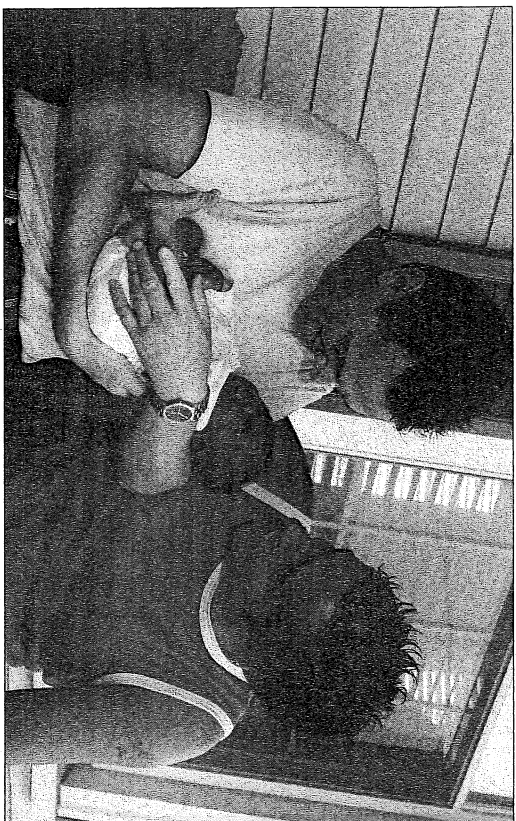
APC as a way of giving something back to the organization that helped them form their family.

Today, more than 20 years later, the practice sees anywhere from 70 to 100 adoptions annually, primarily independent private placement domestic adoptions. "We also do some international and stepparent adoptions as well as some adoptions in conjunction with the foster care agencies," explains Goldstein, who works along with Joy, plus a paralegal and two legal assistants, comprise one of the busiest adoption practices in all of New York state.

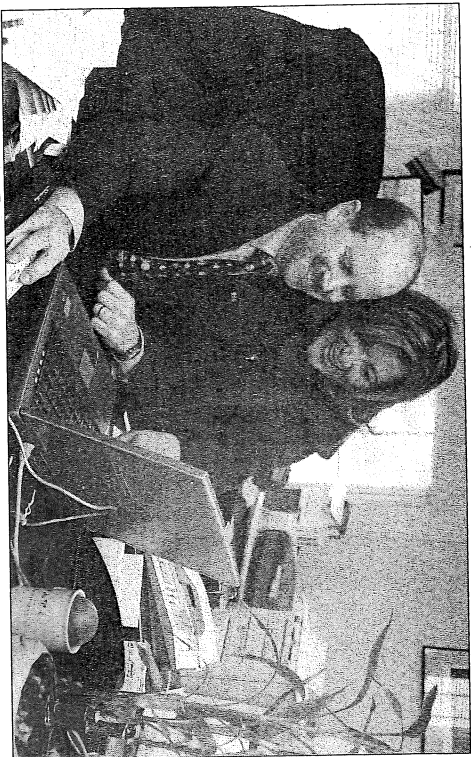
One of the earmarks of Goldstein's success is maintaining the view that adoption is open to everyone. His "Adoption and the Non-Traditional Family" workshop will discuss the broad definition of adoptive families. "Older couples, Gays and lesbians, singles, they all adopt...it's not that difficult. I tell them there are some

little hurdles along the way, but they can certainly adopt," explains Goldstein, noting that so many people are scared of adoption and the impact upon their life. "It's just one small aspect of your life," says Goldstein. "I just dropped my oldest son off at college, and his biggest concern was whether or not he'll get along with his roommate. Life isn't all about having been adopted," he adds, "that's just a part of it."

Also appearing as two among the 70 speakers at the upcoming APC Conference will be the Westchester team of adoption attorneys, Nina Rumbold and Denise Seidelman. "I'm always amazed at how large



Michael Goldstein



Michael Goldstein with wife Joy.

the conference is every year," says Seidelman, who along with her partner will be presenting three workshops, one on deciding between independent placement and domestic agency adoption, another on the re-adoption process and a third which will give an overview of domestic independent placement. "I'm not sure we'll have time, but I'd like to hear some of the other speakers," adds Seidelman. "There's always a lot to learn, even for us professionals."

The charismatic pair have known each other for more than 25 years, and their friendship, coupled with their respect for each



other, led them to form their prominent practice in 1996. "Our husbands are friends and even our kids are friends," says Nina, adding that they each have two boys and one girl. In fact, they each have a dog, a black Labrador Retriever. "It's solely coincidental," says Nina with a laugh.

It was back in 1979 when they met as criminal defense attorneys. However, they both opted to make the switch from dealing with criminals to the joy of helping form families. A Mount Kisco-based

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 Written by RICH MINTZER
 Photographed by SUSAN WOOD-WAGNER

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plan with a birth mother, both Rumbold and Seidelman coach clients through the process, providing advice on how to handle the awkwardly tense conversations with birth parents. "We stay very involved in every aspect of the process," explains Seidelman. The photos around the office of children successfully adopted, and a closet full of toys for when they visit are a testament to their success.

Thanks to the efforts of adoption attorneys as well as the many adoption agencies licensed to practice in New York State and the New York Department of Social Services, which oversees Foster Parent adoptions, the adoption community continues to grow throughout Westchester County. Teachers and school personnel are seeing an increase in openness regarding the subject from many of their students

adoption attorney, Gertrude Schwartz, was the inspiration to head into the field of adoption. When she pulled back from her practice in 1996, Rumbold and Seidelman took over, and in nine years have finalized over 400 adoptions and counseled scored of other prospective adoptive parents.

"In our practice, we are interchangeable," says Nina, with Denise adding, "We always cover for each other." Finishing each other's sentences is part and parcel to the dynamic duo who run their

who were adopted. Goldstein, Rumbold and Seidelman all agree that through their years in the field, adoption has emerged as a very mainstream topic. ♦

For more information on Michael Goldstein, you can contact his office at 939-1111.

For more information on Nina Rumbold and Denise Seidelman, you can contact them at 962-3001. To hear them speak, along with 67 other adoption professionals, on pre-adopt and/or post-adopt topics, or to get CEU Social Worker Credits, you can attend APC's Adoption Conference on November 13 at Iona College in New Rochelle, starting at 9 am. For more information call 997-7839.

Rich Mintzer is an author, journalist and adoptive father.

