

Is JDL tied to black market baby rings?

by Ira Liebowitz

On Nov. 2, neighbors summoned New York police in Greenwich Village to investigate child abuse at the 14 W. 10th Street home of Joel Steinberg, a former New York City Child Welfare Agency lawyer involved in a "black market" adoptions racket with Dr. Michael Warren Bergman of the Beekman-Downtown Hospital in Greenwich Village. Prices reportedly ran as high as \$50,000 per child. Previously investigated for child abuse by Child Welfare, this time Steinberg had allegedly beaten to death his six-year-old "unregistered adopted" daughter, Lisa.

Investigations spun off the case have drawn attention to the widespread practice of "private black market adoptions" in the New York area—operations often undocumented with state authorities and therefore illegal. As a result, light is being shed on the little known interface between the Jewish Defense League (JDL) and several proselytizing Hassidic Jewish sects.

Now under scrutiny by two state agencies are several cases involving a network of foster care homes run by religious communities and called Ohel, which is headquartered in the JDL-stronghold Brooklyn neighborhoods of Crown Heights and Boro Park. It runs a large network of foster care homes in the United States and Israel.

It is hypothesized by some that Ohel, or a network working in it, may be running "private adoptions" for up to \$30,000 for children placed in its care, and other questionable activities. Fees are believed to be paid in the form of "donations" to Ohel and some of the Hassidic and Orthodox Jewish communities that run it. In addition it is said that the JDL works within a private ambulance agency, Hotzolah, which contracts for Ohel. It is also suspected that the Ohel-connected Brooklyn Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (BSPCC), directed by Ann Bindman, may be used to facilitate acquisition of weapons permits for JDL members.

JDL ties to Ohel also came to light in August 1986 when Brooklyn District Attorney Elizabeth Holtzman prosecuted a woman named Marlene Wagshall for shooting her JDL husband, Joshua. It is said he and his family were also involved in Ohel.

Steinberg and his common-law wife, Hedda Nussbaum, were indicted for murder by a grand jury convened by Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau following the

Nov. 5 death of daughter Lisa. The case has triggered press and popular outcry for a return to normal forms of family life, even in New York City.

Stories of children lost to Ohel were aired on Fox TV by Dr. Amy Neustein, the daughter of an Orthodox Rabbi in Brooklyn, and in the *New York Post* by Mrs. Marlene Hazan. They are part of a group of Jewish mothers who are battling ultra-Orthodox groups and Hassidic sects that run the foster agency. Dr. Neustein's daughter was taken from her by BSPCC and placed in Ohel's Boro Park home in 1986, after she divorced her mentally aberrant husband, a JDL member named Azeal Gutterman. This case involved Brooklyn Family Court Judge Jeffrey Gallet, an Orthodox psychiatrist with BSPCC named Isador Schmuckler, and BSPCC's lawyer, Harvey Jacobs.

Gallet, who was replaced in Brooklyn by Judge Leon Deutch, is now the judge in Manhattan Family Court who is handling the custody case of Joel Steinberg's second black-market child, Mitchell. Oddly, Gallet at first placed this boy with Ohel after Lisa was murdered, despite the fact that Nicole Smigiel, the boy's natural mother (who was later awarded custody), is a Catholic.

Dr. Neustein believes Ohel and the BSPCC are close to awarding custody of her six-year-old daughter Sherry to her JDL ex-husband, although it is on court record that he sexually molested the child in 1986, and has continued to do so since the girl was placed in Ohel foster care. Gutterman is a medical doctor who was a JDL member active in the Baltimore area as of 1980, when he lived in the Lubovitchers' "Chabad House" in Richmond, Virginia. Reportedly he changed his name to Azzie Orbach after an incident in Richmond in which he suddenly killed a dog and began to believe that he was Gen. George Patton and other people.

Jewish mothers against Ohel

Neustein and the other mothers believe that the rationale of the Orthodox and Hassidic Jews, and the Family Courts and psychiatrists working with them, is that a divorced or single Jewish mother must lose her children to adoption because she is ipso facto unfit to raise a child, according to their understanding of Jewish law. It is suspected that unregistered and kidnaped children may be taken out of the country, to be raised in Hassidic centers in Israel, centered on the Ohel Chava House in Jerusalem.

These charges are reminiscent of a case that agitated Israel in 1963, when Prime Minister David Ben Gurion personally oversaw a Mossad hunt for a child named Jossele Schumacher, who had been kidnaped from Jewish parents and taken to France by members of the Neturi Karta Hassidic sect.

Led by Rebbe Menachem Schneerson and Rebbe Butman, the Lubovitchers run a worldwide proselytizing campaign in connection with Chabad Houses, and are known to work closely with the violent Rabbi Meir Kahane and his JDL and Kach Party in Israel and the United States.