

I am an adoptee from the forced adoption policy. I was born in Perth in 1972 to a young unwed girl. I was taken from her at birth, she was not permitted to hold or feed me, and was given no emotional support, only harsh judgement. I was adopted into a family in regional WA, where my adoption was a subject of discomfort, rarely spoken of but lingering below the surface.

The easiest way for me to express how my adoption affects me is through poetry.

Degrees of Luckiness

I'm luckier than you, as I was adopted rather than left to grow up in an orphanage.

I'm luckier than you, as my adoptive family was caring and protective.

I'm luckier than you as I traced my birth parents, while yours was vetoed.

I'm luckier than you as I've met my birth mother, while yours has died without reconciliation.

I'm luckier than you as I've met my half siblings, while yours don't know of your existence.

I'm luckier than you as I can piece fragments of my broken lineage together while yours are still scattered to the wind.

But, despite my luckiness, questions are still stuck in my throat,

Too afraid to be asked aloud for fear of the seismic disruption to other people's comfort,

Their falsified lives that have been cemented into place,

Making it hard for this weed to grow amongst the cracks.

I reflect on how we compare ourselves to others, no matter what the circumstance. I ask myself do I now need to feel guilty for my 'luck', of knowing more than other adoptees I have met. We are all in this mess together, from broken, uncelebrated births, hidden in shame, grown in secrecy, haunted by difference, longing to belong, to be the same, to match. Untethered, afloat, adrift, which cannot be mended by searching and finding scraps of our roots. We cannot re-tether, no matter the desire, we cannot fill the years of rupture. We cannot re-live our lives from the beginning, take 2. And the guilt of wondering what if? Of longing to have known the arms of my birth mother, despite the difficulties of her circumstance, of having grown in a family lineage that has history, where I am a part of that line, that ongoing story. Instead I am a torn page, alone. I feel a burden of guilt towards the family who raised me as their own, to dare to want more, to fit.

My adoption has left me with a legacy of disconnection. Cast adrift, solitary, alone. It cut my belonging that reached back into ancient ancestry and forwards into the future, secure and integrated. Despite being raised in a loving family, I was and am forever different. I sit beside, on the edge. I cannot mesh with others, despite wanting to. My mind, my body, my self is different to my adoptive family. As much as I have tried to fold and bend into shape, it is beyond defining, the difference between us. With the best of intentions, we cannot align, understand, comfortably sit. I have grown out of natural shape in my attempt to appease all parties. Second nature is to walk delicately so as not to rock the boat, cause discomfort to others. The discomfort rests within myself.

I am a Patchwork

I am a patchwork of other people's stories

I am the void, the space between their lives

I am this liminal space

With no defined place to sit at the table.

I am a shadow of a time, a place, an action, an emotion

I am the memory of the past

I am a vessel of questions, longings, smothered emotions

My surface floats with guilt, discomfort, needs, dreams, wants that will never be met.

A patch worked, collaged sense of self

With holes, tears, stitches, band aides

Learnt phrases, silenced thoughts and questions

Hidden hurts and shadowed shames.

I search and gently probe to find a name, a lineage, a trace

But I am not on that paper and am not acknowledged by that clan.

Some members reached out but after an initial fascination, dust settles

And I am placed into a drawer, forgotten again.

But not for me.

I remember, and that scrap of lineage is my thread

That darns a hole in my liminal self

Never to be complete, replenished and new

But at least fragmented, a something.

For this, I am told, I should be grateful, that I am lucky.

When speaking with non-adoptees about my adoption, they often reply "but you are lucky, you got a loving family." As if that makes up for the gaping hole in the rest of my existence. That opinion I realise, is a way for society to feel comfortable about an uncomfortable legacy, to be able to turn the page quickly and say no harm's done. But there is harm done. It's just hidden from view. It's below the surface of any adoptee, but many of us are too unsettled to scratch that surface, as it fragilizes our constructed existence. Poking the wound, making it raw. But the other result of that view is that it renders us voiceless, as to want to ask a question, to speak our discomfort makes us come face to face with feelings of guilt and ungratefulness. They took me in.

I would like this enquiry to help add voices to this disturbing history that most people know little about. For many of us it is unsettling to speak up. What will our families think? The weight of

carrying the responsibility for our parents, both birth and adoptive, is too heavy a load and not really our responsibility. We were the one party that had no say in our future. And we have learnt to keep silent, keep our heads down, try to fit. I would like the enquiry to allow other adoptees to feel it's ok to admit to struggling. That despite surviving, we can admit to not thriving. And that others may begin to glimpse and understand this, which for too long has been hidden by shame and discomfort.