

I know now that my 16 year old mother travelled alone over 1000km from her country town to a 'home for unwed mothers' where she stayed for 5 months until I was born. And I think she stayed there for a few weeks after I was born. She named me [REDACTED].

I was earmarked for adoption before I was born. The day after I was born a 'Report on Child Available for Adoption' was created. I believe the law at the time was that the mother had 30 days to resume custody. But at 21 days of age my file was stamped:

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CUSTODY TAKEN

I was adopted at 3 weeks old. I don't know where I was for those first 3 weeks of my life. Or if my mother held me or fed me. I don't know if she was given des to dry her milk and if I carry the health effects of that and passed it on to my own children. I don't know if I required medical intervention. If I fed well. If anyone held me. If I cried. If I stopped crying. I think, probably, for those precious weeks, that no one cared about me at all.

I was adopted into a stable home. That's what I told my mother when we were reunited, briefly, many many years later. She has suffered a lifetime of depression and anxiety from the events surrounding my birth. Health problems. Alcoholism. But managed to successfully raise three amazing children and has a close knit and loving family.

When I was very little my adoptive mother once shared her disappointment at the fact I was blonde. She was 'promised a dark haired daughter', but instead got me - a blonde haired, strong willed stranger. She felt she was owed a daughter that I could never be. As an adult I can comprehend that she had never had the help she needed to come to terms with her infertility and the death of her

imagined daughter. But as a child...I just knew other mothers loved their daughters differently to how mine loved me. Mine tried to shape me through bullying and ridiculing and shaming. And I resisted. Because while she had her 'dream daughter', I had my 'dream mother'.

My earliest memories are all tarnished with deep feelings of loss and rejection that I was unable to understand. I was totally disempowered regarding my true identity. So I assumed the problem was me and the feelings turned to shame. I hid them to the best of my ability. But honestly, no one really looked that hard anyway. Why could I never just enjoy my birthday like other kids? Why, in the middle of a big Christmas gathering, would I become overwhelmed with feelings of such deep loneliness that all I could think was 'nobody loves me'.

Maybe if just someone had acknowledged my loss and trauma. If I had been allowed to ask questions life might have flowed more easily for me.

I always had to be the absolute best I could be. Average was never ok. Best at school. Best at sport. Best child. Best help. Until one day I just couldn't anymore.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I tried to tell my a-mum as a child but she brushed it off. Apparently I was a liar. I learnt to protect myself as best I could. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. From my own feelings and thoughts. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Surviving was hard work. And I got tired. I tried to hide with drugs and risk taking and eventually with a very serious suicide attempt. In hindsight, escapism has been my constant companion.

[REDACTED]

So I walked away. And lost another family. That's two families gone.

I sometimes worry that severing relationships is encoded into my brain. Do I make it happen, or does it happen to me?

Then came my family. With all my heart I hope that this family can stay whole. The relationship with my children's father broke down while they were still small so I have raised them as a proud single parent.

The love and joy I felt at the arrival of each of my children was life changing. For the first time I gazed at a face that reflected my own. Finally that genetic mirror I had craved for so long. I never have been able to picture my own face, but I recognised my babies faces from somewhere deep within. Every day they make me feel proud and connected.

It was along with the joy of the birth of my first child I started to understand what I had lost.

Adoption pain rears its ugly head at every step and stage of life. Like twin opposing entities - what I had gained was momentous, but showed me what I'd lost. The unconditional love of the mother child bond was something I'd never known as a child. And it could never be replaced with a stranger.

The fog began to lift.

I'd always felt that something was wrong with adoption but the pro adoption indoctrination is strong. I started to understand some of my childhood pain and to openly reject adoption ideology. A great injustice was done to me. And I pay the price over and over again.

It was so important to me that I be the best mother I could be. Hyper vigilant. No one would hurt my child. My child would always feel loved and wanted and nurtured and special and enough. These were promises I'd made to myself as a child. So I was by and large a stay at home mum. I'd work while they were at school but did not develop a career. I treasure that time with my kids. And we have strong healthy bonds. But I see now that they're adults that my hyper vigilance maybe did have an unintended impact on them. I kept them as safe as I could, but did I teach them how to live life to the fullest? I also see the impact of them having no extended family. No grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins. ...

I didn't even recognise my own anxiety for all those years (my whole life) because it was always a part of my world. From day 1. Maybe even in utero. Always planning how to stay safe, having a plan b and a plan c. Worrying has consumed far too much of my time and energy. But I can't seem to stop. The inter generational trauma pains me. And of course, financially, being a stay at home mum did me no favours and my savings and superannuation have paid a heavy price.

I've had a number of health issues for many years now which have been difficult to manage adequately. Recently I received some family medical history which finally explained some of my issues and now, knowing they're inherited conditions my drs have been able to manage them much better. But that's a couple of decades too late. And the information is far from complete.

Trying to build relationships with family members after long years of

estrangement is hard. And there's very little help or guidance available for them or for me. From the limited interactions I've had with my natural mother I think the 'help' she's had for her depression and anxiety has largely been through the church (the same church that encouraged adoption) and hasn't fostered reconnection. I'm glad she has found some peace but wish she'd had help to overcome the shame and guilt forced upon her when she was so young and vulnerable and been supported to reconnect with me. I'm pretty sure she 'drank the cool aid' and thinks adoption was in my best interest. But I don't really know because she won't talk about it and would prefer not to acknowledge my existence. I've made costly mistakes along the way. And feel scared all the time that I will say or do something wrong and have to face another rejection. I'm never sure that I will survive another rejection..

I feel really hurt, upset and discouraged when I hear adoption being glorified. It's not a beautiful thing. It's lifelong trauma. The effects of adoption have plagued every step of my life.

The pro adoption groups are often cruel and dismissive of our lived experiences and the knowledge we have to share on the negative impacts of adoption.

Seeing government support for surrogacy and donor conceived children is very upsetting. PLEASE LEARN from past mistakes.

Changing a child's birth certificate is a human rights violation. We need integrated birth certificates at no financial cost to ourselves.

Understanding my own adoption trauma has taken 50 years and is still unfolding. There cannot be a statute of limitations on this issue.

Adoptees and their offspring need access to specialised adoption informed

counselling and expanded health testing and access to medical care with no financial or geographical barriers.

It feels like everything was stolen from us the day we were born. Our genetic knowledge, our safety, the mother child dyad was severed and we live the lifelong consequences with no real recognition from government or society of our losses, heartache, trauma, and struggles. Our society is based on a family structure that involves history and ancestors and ours was taken from us. Hidden from us. And even now since the acknowledgment and apology for past practices there is no real advance for the needs of adoptees.

Saying sorry is not enough. It must be backed by action to be meaningful.

Accessing our own information and identity is tedious and re-traumatizing.

There's no organised system to access the information. You put yourself through the anguish of requesting a piece of the information, waiting months, even years, for the information to arrive. And then realise that's just part of the story. Another agency holds another part - so back to the beginning to ask for more. We're starving for this information and have it handed to us in dribs and drabs. Redacted and incomplete. Lost in endless floods and fires. It's exhausting.

We need the permission of our natural mothers to find out if we were exposed to the multigenerational carcinogen stilboestrol in utero. If she declines we may never know even though the health impacts can be devastating.

Every new doctor we see we are subjected to the dreaded family medical history question. Then, even worse, the dismissal of the importance of the lack of said history.

The recurring trauma reminds me of my recurring nightmares as a child.

The dreaded family tree at primary school, and then high school, and then again with each child of the next generation. I really hope that by the third generation I will be able to give real and knowledgeable answers to my grandchildren. To feel supported by the government and society that played a cruel experiment with my life.

Adoption feels like navigating life without a roadmap. When there's no picture of the past, it's hard to predict the future.

There is an opportunity now to make the future brighter. To redress the wrongs of past practices. Please help. We need action now.

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