

Adoption Story Andrea Fewster (Jeanette Murray)

I was born 26 of March 1966 along with my twin brother in the morning at Hillcrest Fremantle. We arrived 6 weeks early apparently not sure about this, weighing 3lbs my twin brother John was born shortly after dying 12 hours later of cerebral haemorrhage.

My name give to me at the time of birth was Jeanette it was changed officially in July later that year in accordance with my adoption papers. I do not know anything else. I do not know how long I was alone in hospital before I was given away.

I knew I was adopted at an early age, probably from the constant chatter from adults around me of explanation of my place in this family. By the time I was officially told at about 5 years of age I commented by saying I already knew. When I was around 9 or 10 it was casually mentioned across the lunch table that I had been a twin and that he had died. There was no preamble or preparation for this new knowledge and certainly no further discussion. I can't tell you how I felt at that moment or after, but I do recall feeling excited that I once had a sibling that was apart of me and sad for never knowing him past the womb. Years later when I found his unmarked grave where he was buried in an unmarked community grave with other newborns who had died, I cried. Later on, my half sister and I placed a small sculpture on his unmarked grave acknowledging him and the other unknown babies.

Growing up was difficult in a family who is not your own ,you are constantly reminded you are not like them I freckled fair skinned and chubby. My adoptive siblings where lean and blonde not a freckle in sight. My adoptive father has some physical traits that were similar but my face was not his. Apart from the obvious physical differences there were many personality differences. My adoptive brothers and sister were intelligent active, outgoing and carefree. I on the other hand was

introvert and shy with learning delays due partly to being born left-handed and having my early school years having my hand tied behind my back to make write right-handed, I was also a worrier I had the world on my shoulders at an early age and often became the caregiver and responsible person for my siblings while my adoptee parents were busy supporting their religious flock. I was artistic, (*later on in life I would go on to sign my artwork with only one name Andrea as I was not my adoptive or birth families name I didn't belong to any of them*) I also had a love of country and animals none of these interests existed in my adoptive family but they were paramount to me. Later when I did find my mother these were inherent in their family; they were country people, who shared my love of nature horses and animals. My adoptive mother describes me as a difficult child and even more difficult adult she didn't get me never has.

My adoptees I remember when introducing their family; here are my 3 children and then there was me this is our special chosen child. (a dialogue that they were told to say by those proposing the adoptions to explain their adopted child place in their world). I was often offered up as their adopted child like it was their badge of honour to take in this unwanted child their Christian duty and good deed. This meant I felt isolated and not part of the family it hurt it I didn't feel special it was the opposite I felt ashamed.. At times I would take on this rhetoric like a badge I was different especially when I did not wish to align to the behaviours of my adopted siblings. I swung the arrow backwards and exclaimed I am not like them!. All time pretending not to be sad I was not one of them and pretend to be happy that they took me in after all I had to be loyal!

Looking for Mother

As a child I had an innate connection to my biological family I thought about them all my life not just curiosity but a need to

know . No one recognises the importance of this fundamental need as a human to have that connection it just there it exists. belongingness?

My journey started early on from the moment I understood what adoption was. From when I was a small child, I would look at people in the shopping centre trying to see someone who might look like me or be from my family. No one teaches you as a child that you will want or need to look for your mother it is innate, it's quite the opposite its denied, it is squashed it is not talked about this part of your life has now been erased and you best forget.

Whenever I heard anything about adoption via the news or others, I would soak it up. I found out when I was 18 thereabouts the eighties I could get non – identifying information regarding my adoption but this would require mandatory counselling. I was on a trip to Perth back from living in Canada working for a year I was 22 so I made a special trip to Perth to obtain this information. This visit with the counsellor was short as I found out it was a private adoption so there was very little that they could tell me; the woman told me the time I was born and the name of the lawyers and my mothers and father's age. That was it. Ironically some time later I figured I could apply for my deceased brother's death certificate as his records had not been sealed due to him not ever making it to the adoption process. I did get his certificate and I now had my mother's name and how John had died and where I could find where he was buried.

Later on, not long after when the laws had changed again, and you could search for your family I contacted jigsaw who would do the search for me. I informed my adoptive parents with great trepidation that I was in the process of doing this. My adoptive mother reacted in the way that I found so hurtful and shocking, she said why? She didn't want you. This summed up exactly how my adoptive mother viewed adoption and my feelings it was about her not me. They didn't exist and they weren't important.

She failed to see that I wasn't a puppy or a kitten that could be taken and put with another family and just become them. The question is what separates us from the animals? Many things but genetics emotions connections to our tribes. if it wasn't important why are there some many websites on finding ancestry and DNA discoveries and testing.

The first contact with my birth mother came via a letter I remember it well. I had just come back from a staff Melbourne Cup luncheon went to the letterbox found this letter and opened it. A photo dropped out before I read the letter and I picked it up and looked and thought who is sending me a photo of me? I looked closer and realised it wasn't me. OMG its my mother this is the first time I had seen anyone that looked like me. I can't describe adequately the importance of this moment. Only that you may understand when you think about when you first see you own children how they reflect your own image particularly as they grow and develop.

I eventually arranged to meet my mother and her family in Fremantle WA. I went with a friend and met at the hotel I was staying at I remember being nervous would she like me would I meet her expectations. I'm sure she would have been to. She arrived with her sister, and it was strange and strained there was no great outpouring of love or conversation sating my need to know about everything. I was too scared to ask, and she was probably to scared to say. I later learnt just recently from a relative that she had said at the time that it was the happiest day of her life when I found her. This also surprised me as she doesn't express anything like that to me re her feelings towards me. I thought in finding my mother and family that would be the end of it I would settle into their life and me into theirs. This doesn't happen. There are many connections that are made like physical appearance characteristics and interests that are similar over time, but the separation continually creates a divide. I haven't celebrated birthdays, important family events I don't have memories of holidays, Christmas, first days at school, your mother comforting you when you are sad etc these memories and life experiences are part of being in a family. Even over 30

plus years later they have been few and far between memories made. I am the outsider I am not the eldest sister who you ring for advice or cry on my shoulder or talk for hours to because I know you back to front. I was a novelty for a while, but I didn't fit in I am acknowledged but abandoned again. I cause no waves make no judgements and always supportive cause I've known that I would be cut off if I did make things difficult my relationship was that tenuous. Recently this did happen and that's exactly what happen I was put in my place, and they withdrew. I still have contact with my birth mother, but it is strained I don't know my father or his side of his family. My adoptive family I do not have contact with any except my sister whom I'm on good terms with we have a history we know each other well. I am expendable to the families I am connected to I belong to no one expect to the children whom I gave birth to they are my only true family.

Impacts on my life

The trauma I have experienced over the years has been immense and complex. I have had a sense all my life a lot of what I was feeling and going through was related to this one event but couldn't figure out how it had made this impact. And certainly, there was no support for adopted children and adults to understand and unpack the feelings that we were going through. Adopted children and mothers were silenced in their grief and expected to get on with it ...we were lucky to have found a family who wanted us, and single mothers could now get on with their fortunate life without the burden of an unwanted child. As a child and as an adult one of the most marked triggers has been around my birthday. I cannot celebrate it no matter how hard I try. I didn't realise growing up what it was all about , why did I become upset why did not enjoy it why was it always a disappointment. As an adult it was the same and I did come to

recognise I was going through grief it was the time that I lost my mother and brother simultaneously it was not a celebration. Recently I had a mental breakdown around my birthday due to the cycle that I would fall into days before leading up to it and a fight with my birthmother and my daughter. It sent me over the edge I wanted to die. I couldn't take the pain anymore. As I have found out recently that this is common among adoptees birthdays are fraught with grief and despair.

I was a quite caring child always trying to please and help a role that my adoptive family praised me for and encouraged oh but when I was upset or angry, I was unapproachable distant and full of rage. Looking back, I realise I was reacting to triggers a term not recognised till recently in my vocab. These triggers often involved rejection I would be aggressive in my frustration it didn't happen often but when it did, I was explosive. On the other hand, I would become withdrawn and sullen, and I could be like this for some time. I was unable to maintain many friendships due to taking rejection so hard and what I thought was betrayal. I did not have any boyfriends; I was too scared, and I was frozen I wanted to be loved but the thought of being abandoned rejected I was not willing to face that kind of reality. My personal belief was that was I unlovable and ugly. The first man that I met in my late 30s and who dared to love me became my partner and father of my children, he was not a good choice and, in my desperation, to be loved and have a family of my own it created further trauma as he had his own issues and was abusive.

As I have said I believed meeting my birth mother would solve a lot of my personal issues, but it didn't. It helped but my trauma remained and was not dealt with it spiralled out of control. Over the years I have self-medicated with alcohol to numb the pain until it no longer served its initial purpose and then becomes a problem in itself.

After my last major meltdown, which was probably the most severe, I have ever had. I was in shock I had hurt my daughter in a way I never thought I would and she me. Then something happened I was lying in bed watching TV trying to distract myself from my negative thoughts and mood, I was watching GWN news, and a news story came on about forced adoption. I listened with keen interest and was surprised to realise that the woman that was speaking was an old work mate of mine Jen Mc Crae. I looked her up on face book the very next day and PM her. What happen after that was life changing profound; I was not alone, and I was not a shitty person but a survivor who has experienced great loss without help without recognition. I know had a group that belonged to me who validated my feelings and experience. I also had found out there is so much more for me discover about my past and the trauma inflicted on me and others. The research is there, the books are there the people are there. But I did not know this I did know how to find this support. How many others are suffering because they don't have this knowledge? Knowledge, recognition and validation is so powerful it changes lives. I am now on a journey of self-discovery and as I have realised it is not an easy one there are plenty of roadblocks and hurdles to cross.

Finding Information or lack there of

I had my original birth certificate and my brother's death certificate, my birth fathers name and had met my birth mother. That's all I had and all I thought to the story. I have grown up always having problems with having two identities. When I was applying for a passport in my early 20s my extract from birth was not sufficient and I had to go through the process of getting my identity certified by a judge. When you went to the Drs the question was then asked what the diseases in your family history are. I could never answer that even today with knowing my mother's side I don't know my father's side. Both my twin daughters have acquired autoimmune diseases and we don't

know if they are genetically related, but they are not in my mother's side of the family. There is also the question of whether my birth mother was prescribed 'DES' (Diethylstilboestrol (DES) was a medication commonly prescribed to prevent lactation in birth mothers of those giving up their child between 1946 and 1971 in Australia. If your mother took DES while she was **pregnant** with you, then you are a DES daughter or DES son. We now know that DES exposure in the womb can cause a range of reproductive changes (cancers) and **fertility** problems later in life). It also can affect the birth mother's grand children but not enough research has been done in this regard it is called the silent Thalidomide. The affected from this treatment require specialist care and screening yet most don't even know if they are affected or not. So adoptees are not only the Silent Stolen generation we are also possibly have the repercussions of a unknown diseases added to the layers of complex trauma.)

I am now aware that I can apply for my medical and care records from different institutions as well as my brothers. The problem is that there is several places to apply and different requirements in application and wait times can be very long. How, do I know if all information is being disseminated or is the secrecy of past upheld to protect the government and people of the institutions of today?

- I have applied to salvation army re Hillcrest records apparently, they are kept in Victoria and awaiting reply
- I have applied to KEMH while the process is not straight forward the wait time is less. I am required to send in a form with ID for myself. But unable to obtain anything about my brother without my birth mother's consent. I find this frustrating and upsetting. I am apart from my mother his only living sibling... I was there when he was born, he is my other half. What if my mother denies me this information? What do I do then? I have also been told that I allow the retraction or blacking out of names of medical staff the process will be quicker
- I have applied to post adoption services and the wait time is 8/9 months
- I have contacted genealogy support at WA state library to research my father whereabouts and history.
- I have done a DNA test and have not had any significant results due to lack of family info i.e. fathers birth date

Conclusion:

Adoptees experience complex mental and health issues. Mental health issues such as substance abuse, suicidal thoughts, triggers from PTSD, anxieties, and depression. We are overrepresented in counselling sessions for the above.

Mentally we have more chance of suicide anxiety and depression.... Yet we have no supports. Physically we are in danger of from what was done to our mother in utero apart from what we don't know about our family medical history

I thought I was just a 'fucked up' person no idea the impact of separation as a neonate and left in hospital would have lifelong effect. The common belief system that society believes there is no impact or consequence of the removal of a newborn from their mother has been so damaging and still is.

Getting int touch with Jen Mc Rae and doing further research has enabled me to understand what has been happening to me. Paul Sunderland and his lecture on adoption Recalled but not Remembered was eye opening; It was all about me, and pieces started to fall in to place. I was not alone and there is reason for my fractured mind, emotions, and life. I know that I can address it and start the healing process.

Just like the Australian Indigenous children who were stolen so was I and my identity was replaced with another that didn't fit, As a child the book 'are you my mother was a favourite of mine as it was my story I read over and over again. I questioned myself would I ever know my mother do I have brother and sisters. Will I ever see someone who looks like me?

As child I knew I was different I didn't want to be different I wanted to belong in to be loved I would people please particularly my adopted mother whom no matter what I did she and I didn't have that connection.to. I knew you couldn't make people love you, so I gave up expecting any kind of love.

My safe place was taken away the moment I was separated from my mother and twin and all my life I have suffered from this.

My PTSD in my mind has no safe place to recall like Paul Sunderland said as an example

You go down a highway many times and then one day you have a car accident and suffer PTSD from the trauma so now when you go down that same highway it triggers a involuntary response but in back of your mind you can rationalise that because previously it has been safe. A neonate has a major trauma from the moment of birth she or he does not recognise that previously there had been a place of safety so therefore can not rationalise that there are places that are safe. My safe place over time has become my isolation and the disconnect from people allows me to be safe I cant be rejected or abandoned once again

Today I have little family I'm on the cusp I am never really in or out. I belong to only two my daughters, thank God for the gift of them! My daughter was once told by her adult cousin that we aren't really related because we aren't blood. This reconfirms that society believes blood and identity is so important yet when adopted this is denied and supressed. My daughters are second generation and the rejection hurt isolation and disconnection still happens and they aren't the primary victims.

Going forward I wish for healing and joy in my life and for those others that are affected by this practice of Forced adoption. I want a spotlight on the issues recognition and validation for those who have survived from this practice. I want centres developed providing medical, mental health, genealogy, and family support. This service needs to be able to connect with all adoptees and birth mothers' fathers and extended families. It must be delivered nationally and by experienced Practioners in the area of adoption and trauma. If we don't address this now and learn from the past before the information is lost the repercussions unknown on our new children who lack

identity from IVF, surrogacy, international adoptions and fostering. What will be their story and their cry for help?

The apology by Prime Minister Gillard in 2013 was a start, the government accepted responsibility but what happened in the 10 years since? How has the government addressed this issue? We now have this parliamentary enquiry in WA but I lament that it will not bring results. It may just be like many other enquiries protracted with a lot of recommendations, with little outcomes. This inquiry requires on the committee a champion of our collective voice, someone who has understood and researched the complexities of forced adoption. Someone who is vested in the outcomes who can advise through this process not a bunch of parliamentarians who may or may not care about forced adoption. It has to be an adoptee; my recommendation is Jen MC Crae who has fought tirelessly to support us and get traction on these issues.

What adoptees were and are experiencing was/is buried in the most unhealthy and detrimental way that it has been profound and long lasting. It has to be addressed and readdressed in a significant and valuable way with purposeful and identifiable outcomes.

Andrea Fewster
30th May 2023

My Daughters Story how adoption impacted her 3rd generation

My name is Tahlia, I'm 18 turning 19 soon alongside my Twin sister, we were raised in the country side in a small town, I am currently doing my diploma of visual arts up in the city.

My mother is Andrea who has written about her experiences of being adopted, I'm contributing to the conversation as the second generation affected by forced adoption in wa.

Growing up I definitely felt something wasn't quite right, like finishing a whole jigsaw puzzle and missing that one piece, and you just can't find it, it's irritating but you just live with it, that's exactly what I did growing up, I used to go to school as a young girl and hear about all these stories of families like how aunts were second moms and cousins were like siblings, and I thought it was so strange, because I knew my family but we weren't that close, I certainly loved them, but being where we were, my dependence fell on my mother and my twin for company and support, not so much my father because he was very absent and when he was around he was abusive, so I stayed with mum mostly.

I'm not saying my family and I didn't go to family events, no, we had quite a few, mum always pushed for it, but I remember despite the fun we'd had, again, something was in the way... something that separated us, it was us and then it was them.

So as a kid, I was very baffled by this and tried going above and beyond to connect with them, doing everything I could to please them, but why did I have to fight for my approval whereas my cousins or other family members didn't? They naturally got it. What made me less?

So anyway as time went on I soon discovered my mother was adopted, she never kept it a secret from my sister and I, but I just didn't understand it till I got older, soon I realised that was the reason why we didn't connect as naturally as everyone else did. Didn't help that we were isolated in our small town either.

Questions began to arise in me, I'd ask questions to my adult family about mum and what had happened, why was she adopted? Why were there so many ugly disputes? I didn't understand, mum had a very troubled relationship with her adoptive mother, (now that I'm older I see why and accept it)

It left me in high school searching for that connection among my peers, and when I thought I found it, I'd do everything I could in my power to please them, even if it meant not putting myself first, or letting people hurt me just so I could feel that sense of belonging, left me more alone and with more people disliking me, after all I'd eventually break down and ask why they did the things they did to me. Duh, I'd let them.

I Barely knew my biological side of the family besides my dads and they are a whole different discussion as to why I didn't fit it, especially when my parents marriage fell apart.

Didn't help that when he left, mum also had no support after dealing with abuse let alone the separation, she fell hard, hitting one of her most traumatic times of her already very traumatically effected life, she found support in liquor, seeing as no one else would support her, my sister and I certainly tried but we were kids, barely had understanding of the earth under our feet, let alone complex emotions that ourselves were feeling, for a time we felt disconnected with mum, who was crying out for help, it put a barrier between us, it was our darkest time, a true loneliness that only very few in this world will ever feel. We paid the price for my mums unhappiness and our isolation that we too suffer from mental health issues. My sister and I felt this at a very young age, mum had felt it her whole life. If family support had truly been there for us we wouldn't have suffered so much.

Mums adoptive family were the only family I grew up with, but comments were made especially in greetings they'd first say we were there grandchildren, cousins etc but then if details came in too play oh boy, no better way to say to someone we care about you but your are not us, you'll never be us, they would say "their not our blood".

So after many years I thought I'd find connection with my mums biological family, surely there's no reason to treat us like outsiders hey? After all, we are blood, damn was I wrong. The more I hung around with "my blood" the more I realised just how much time there was, that I didn't exist to them.

Family events were the best and the worst, cause there was certainly connection in behaviours or lifestyles but god when they started talking about their history and events from the past, my sister, my mum and I, naturally we would fall silent. We couldn't contribute. We weren't there.

Awkwardness would come, and again, the conversation of what happened with mum and how she was adopted would follow, again, reminding us we are not them either. We are no one but ourselves our tiny little family.

Fast forward, I barely talk to many family members, having indisputable grudges with some, the only true connection I've come across was with my dad's first born children, my older brother and sister.

I don't talk to anyone on mums biological side of the family besides very few.

I do talk to mums adoptive side but in intervals of a few months give or take.

I barely see them but when I do it doesn't change, stays the same, same comments, same introductions, same disconnect. I won't say there is absolutely no love there, it's just conditional like everything else.

Medical:

I'm type one diabetic, and I've only been so for about 2 years, very rare to get diagnosed that later on, it's usually children who do. My twin also has an autoimmune disease is this also genetic?

When I was diagnosed the diabetes they thought it was type 2 at first and asked me is there anyone in you family that has it? I said yes cause I knew a few but I said that I don't know my mums dad side of the family so I wouldn't know if there were anymore, it was only a little later on I was diagnosed with type 1 and the question was asked again, "is there a family history of this medical disease? Do you know anyone else who has it?" This time I really couldn't answer, not one person in my family had it, or they didn't tell me they did, my sister, mum and myself were definitely kept out of the loop at time, and I couldn't speak on behalf of mums biological dads side of the family, didn't know him, and didn't know a single other person from his line. Anyways, to this day I don't know if my diabetes is hereditary or not.

I've learned to live with the missing piece of the jigsaw puzzle, cause in some way I relate more to that missing piece than I do with the whole jigsaw.

I'm not part of that pretty picture, but I am part of something, and that is my twin, my mother, and my small town home with all its nature and animals, they understand me better than anything else on this planet.

I wouldn't trade it for anything.

This is how mum being adopted in the way she was, has affected me and my sense of belonging, I am the third generation impacted by forced adoption in WA, I am and many others proof that the impact and trauma doesn't go away with the first initial adoptees.

Tahlia June 2023



Me today with twin daughters 2022