

Submission to the: Inquiry into past forced adoptive policies and practices.

1. Understand the lived experiences of those affected by historical forced adoption practices

I am a 54-year-old woman who was adopted into a family as a few week old baby. I grew up being told I was special, I was wanted.... but as an adopted child I always felt like something was missing. I wasn't necessarily treated at times by my adopted mother as special or wanted. I never fitted in to the family or felt like I belonged. I didn't look like anyone. There was never the 'you have your mum's eyes'. In fact, everyone thought my parents were my grandparents due to their age (40 years) when they adopted me. As a child, adolescent and adult I always felt like I had to be good, and not to disappoint. Perhaps there was the underlying fear that I would be "given back" if I wasn't good or disappointed someone. On my 21st birthday my mother said to me "I wish I'd never laid eyes on you". Can you imagine the devastation of a mother saying that to her child? That as I had been adopted, she had the opportunity to even say these words. I was lucky that my adopted father was a beautiful, kind and gentle man. I had been told by my adopted mother that there were twin boys at the time of my adoption also 'available' that she would have preferred. My father however wanted a girl. So, I was purchased for around 6000 pounds apparently. Payment to the GP and the lawyer presumably, as a private adoption / transaction. I cost the same as the family home, as did my adopted brother.

I spent my life walking on eggshells, pleasing everyone. I was a very timid and shy child. Scared to do anything wrong. As an adult I now know that this was due to the fact I was adopted, taken away, a commodity. Never fitting in or belonging. Like a stray puppy, hoping this family won't grow tired of me. I didn't know this at the time of course, it is something I have realised as I have grown into an adult.

I didn't investigate my origins in the early days, as I didn't want to upset anyone. I was a secret that others kept, that I felt was not my secret to be broken. On one occasion when I told my adopted mother I wanted to know more about where I came from, she became very distressed and made me feel guilty. She said it meant I didn't love her, and she would lose me. She showed me the letters that my biological mother had written to me and that she (my adopted mother) had withheld from me. She told me about a woman who had rung her repeatedly (her name was [REDACTED])

██████████ from Jigsaw) begging her to let my biological mother ██████████ meet me. I felt betrayed that this had all happened behind my back. Yet more secrets kept from me, about me. I chose not to rock the boat, to continue to appease everyone else and not do what I wanted, and what my heart longed for- to find out where in the world I fitted and where I came from.

Do you have any idea what it is like to be asked by medical professionals "what is your medical history?" and when the answer "I'm adopted, I don't know" is given, they just move on as if the original question didn't matter? It does matter! I am a health professional and the frustration of not knowing my health history, or what the risks there may be in my genetics, choices I could or should make based on knowledge is a right others have that I and my children have been denied. Do you also know what it is like when there are health issues evident in my children, to have people say, "that must be your side of the family" and not be able to defend myself? That every undesirable attribute must be from my side of the family? It may be said in jest, however it is yet another constant reminder that I am aimlessly existing in this world with no knowledge as to where I fit in or belong. It is a very lonely existence.

Once my adopted parents passed, I felt that I could start investigating. Only now in my 50's I realise I am NO ONE'S secret to keep. I have the right to tell people that I exist. Yet I still feel guilt that I may upset others in my biological families and have not contacted my biological half-brothers for this reason, despite my mantra that "I am not someone else's secret to keep". I am my own hypocrite.

I have had so many lies told to me during my life. When I asked my biological mother about the letters she sent to my adopted mother about me, she denied writing them. I have the letters, and they are in her handwriting. She then told me ██████████ made her write them when I challenged her.

When I tried to access my adoption records from the lawyer's office (I was a private paid for / sold / forced adoption), I was told my records were burnt in a fire. Did they ever exist? I doubt it. A greedy transaction that others benefitted from, either by means of payment in cash or a baby.

I have in the past asked for my birth certificate- but there is no such thing for me. I only have an extract which is not accepted as formal identification. My original birth certificate with my birth name is labelled as a superseded document, so is just a piece of useless paper.

I was told there was a contact veto against me contacting my biological father so I respected this and didn't contact him fearing I would upset his family. I have since found out this was a lie, told to me by my biological mother for her own agenda. When I finally decided to reach out, he said he never knew I had been adopted and there was no contact veto in place. I do have adoption court paperwork with his signature on however. So here are more lies...

When I contacted King Edward Memorial Hospital for documents into my adoption, I was sent more lies, a cute letter written by [REDACTED], the Social Worker in Post Adoption Services. She wrote explaining that my parents were very much in love, and wanted to marry but my father's parents wouldn't let them. My biological parents were not keen to relinquish me for adoption but had to. I have since been told his parents didn't even know I exist / existed. I do not what the truth is here.

I have since been told my biological was drugged on Valium and taken to Hensman Road clinic and told she was signing "naming papers". This was not the case she unknowingly signed adoption papers. When she was discharged, she asked where her baby was, and was told she had given her baby away. I have worked with Mothercraft nurses who confirm this practice. They saw many a young mother crying and begging at the nursery window in KEMH, after being told they had given their baby away. I have cared for babies in the same nursery where I would have been kept and have even worked with a Mothercraft nurse [REDACTED] who believes she worked in the nursery in the days my mother came and begged at the window. As I was born on Easter Sunday and was very small (most likely some weeks premature) she has recollection of 'the little Easter baby' who was taken away.

In recent times I have done my AncestryDNA, and what a skeleton in the wardrobe I am! So many 'do' these ancestry tests for a bit of fun, not expecting to find anything. In my case, I have had people reach out to ask me whether I know how we are related. People may think these reconnections are a fairy tale, but they are far from it. Some embrace with open arms, others shy away and want nothing to do with you. Even though we are matched and connect, there is no real emotional connection. Despite now meeting my biological family, I am not 'fixed',

still feeling a stranger in their world. They have a life of memories that I do not share and am not a part of.

I have met a cousin on my father's side, and she was the one who encouraged me to meet [REDACTED], my father as she did not believe he would have a contact veto against me. She was correct, he did not. I have not had any further relationship with her despite very much enjoying her company when we met.

In meeting my father for the first and only time, he asked me why it took me 50 years to connect with him. I do not recall who initially told me about the contact veto, but it was obviously a ploy to stop me contacting him. He believed that my biological mother had moved over East and was raising me. I do not know if this is true.

His suspicious wife privately told me that none of the older ones in the family would ever know of my existence. All said under her breath whilst she sent my father off to buy me an unwanted drink. When he returned, she quickly changed the topic and her tone. He was none the wiser. She constantly quizzed me over dinner, trying to catch me out in a lie, thinking I was making things up about my adoption. I note my father has recently completed an AncestryDNA test and matched as my father- perhaps as she didn't believe I was his, or due to his own curiosity. Needless to say, he and I do not (and I imagine are not allowed) to have a relationship. He occasionally sends me messages asking how I am and that is about it. I would like to get to know him better but there are many barriers in place preventing this.

My biological mother has mental health issues, so much trauma and distress that she is unable to have a relationship with me and has chosen not to speak to me. She is so threatened by the fact that I have connected with others in my biological family, particularly my father who she claims tried to abort me using a screwdriver (apparently by my father, his brother and his cousin). She also says the GP, [REDACTED], gave her abortion pills but they did not work. I do not know how she knows this. I now believe she has told me these stories to turn me away from wanting me to meet my biological father. Perhaps it is her truth, a story to help her come to terms with what occurred.

I have met some of my maternal biological family side, and they are lovely people, who have welcomed and embraced me. One lovely side story is one of my newfound relatives is the mother of a long-term childhood friend, whose house I stayed at many a weekend whilst I was growing up.

Not knowing I was her (? second cousin) she remembers me as a little girl who was always smiling. I always felt loved when I was at her house, a warmth was extended to me that I didn't feel from my own mother. Thankfully I felt love from my adopted father, who I lost many years ago. Isn't this funny? Perhaps there was a nature connection here, unbeknownst to any of us that we were biologically connected.

I am a successful and resilient woman. I am however insecure, and my self-esteem takes a lot of work as I am desperate to fit in and scared of upsetting people. I tell my life story in 5 minutes of meeting someone, and I am guilty of oversharing. I know I do this as I want people to find me interesting, so I fit in. I am jealous of friends who have loving families, big Christmases and family gatherings. It makes me sad I feel this way.

I love my children unconditionally and have tried to be the mother that I did not have. I feel sad and sorry for my children that they did not have the same celebrations and connections with families that others have.

After my father died, there was an argument over his will and my [REDACTED] [REDACTED] said I was not entitled to anything as I was adopted. I have recently been welcomed back into the adopted paternal family, which is very special however there are still so many years of abandonment that impacts me emotionally. There remains however the feeling of not belonging, and not being a part of the family. Only a few of the maternal family speak to me following the death of my adopted mother, this just confirmed my beliefs that I never really belonged.

I hope I can come to terms with what was forced upon me, a life I had no control over, that this Inquiry into past forced adoptive policies and practices provides closure. I am unsure it will, as a lifetime of feeling abandoned, not belonging and resentful that I was placed in this position will not go away with an apology.

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