

Anonymous Storyteller 10

My story begins before the middle of the last century in outback Australia. The men of the family were great horsemen and worked as stockmen, drovers and station hands on large stations in the Australian outback. My Father was a Light Horseman in World War I. The women worked as domestic servants before marriage and seem to have concentrated on raising children and house duties after marriage. The extended families were very large and the individual families often had many children. The lifestyle was harsh and there were few material comforts. I was the fifth child to be born and our family seemed to manage quite well until our Mother became ill and died shortly after I was born. Dad's situation was made more traumatic over the following couple of years when three more of his extended family's lost a partner (accident, illness and suicide). Both of our Grandmothers died two years later and Dad was by then sixty years old and working to provide the basic needs for everyone. My understanding is that four of his children were taken care of adequately but I was eventually taken away possibly due to neglect.

I was roughly two years old by the time I was placed with my adopted family. My adopted parents had suffered two failed pregnancies and were unable to have any more children due to medical problems. They were country people and owned their own farm. I have no recollection of the first two years of my life and it is the life with my adopted parents which remains the framework for my lifestyle to this day. The way I would describe this life is that I was part of a loving family. I grew up as an only child on a farm and we had a comfortable lifestyle. I left school at eighteen and did a twelve month business course. I then worked in an office, travelled and worked overseas for a couple of years and then settled down to have my own family with my husband who is involved in the business world. My life has been an interesting one and I have been surrounded by caring and positive people.

If I am asked what it means to me to be adopted I do not really have an answer. The only family I relate to, as my family, is my adopted family. The facts that have been told to me over the years regarding my genetic family have no feelings attached to them. They remain just stories and so far nothing has happened to change that fact.

When I was around seven years old I had a "tiff" in the schoolyard and the consequence of that altercation was that the playmate remarked "your parents are not your parents anyway". When I spoke to my mother about this she told me the story of my adoption but it was only the bare bones and especially did not reveal that I had older siblings. At the time I was told not to ever speak to anybody about the subject. I did not always keep it a secret but I did not chat freely about the subject. A few times I got into trouble for blabbing.

Over the years the laws have changed regarding adoption and I did eventually find out that I had other siblings. We met and still keep contact but I do not feel part of that family.

The story I have written is just factual and I have purposely eliminated most of the emotional side. This is to ensure that my story remains anonymous. There has been an emotional side which covers a very wide spectrum of emotion from very painful to very beautiful. Many people have been affected by this story and there have been four key factors that have governed the effects which it has had on our lives. These factors are:

- *Law
- *Changes to Law
- *Secrecy
- *Support

The Laws surrounding adoption and their changes gave me the opportunity to have a stable family lifestyle. These laws and their changes also created problems for everybody concerned. For example many people suffered unnecessarily by the laws of secrecy changing. My situation involved much grief surrounding the death of our Mother, the family being split up and insufficient support mechanisms to ensure the family remained together. The 'adoption laws' changes created problems for my adopted parents and for many years they lived with the threat that their family could be intruded (as they saw it). The laws surrounding secrecy have changed dramatically over the years. However, there has been little support available to assist those affected by those changes. By this I mean accessible and 'out there' support. The emotions faced by individuals are dealt with by long arduous processes which often involve quite impersonal communications through government departments. Also much of the problem solving is left to the health system but, without adequate facts to work with, this facility cannot properly address issues. The whole situation feels disempowering and threatening. The individual people in both of my families have displayed much love, commitment, sacrifice as well as anger and resentment. I strongly believe that much of the negative aspects of the adoption process could have been eliminated if more thought was put into how many people are affected by just one adoption and the fact that just one adoption involves a lifespan of around eighty years. The essence of the process ultimately creates at least two sides, the potential for many 'stories' and the inevitability of a lifetime.

A recent change in the law has given me the opportunity 'to apply' for more facts. Perhaps these facts will address some of the differing stories which have evolved or maybe we will have to wait until the law changes again and we are able to access still more facts. It is getting close to a lifespan now and I do resent the fact that the government records possibly hold the information which could reconcile 'the stories' and consequently all the people involved. Adoption laws are essential and changing social values do require adjustment to the laws over the years. However, social health also requires a strong support system and access to facts. In my case, I believe, intelligent long-term thinking could have eliminated much anxiety for myself, my adopted parents, my genetic family and everybody concerned.

My summary of this story is that under the circumstances laid down by the laws and social situation of the time I have definitely benefited from being placed with a loving and strong adopted family. However, I question whether this process helped my genetic family and my place in that family. During my search to find my genetic family I became aware that my Great Grandmother was one of the Irish Famine Orphan Girls. There is a glass wall dedicated to the memory of these girls and the idea behind the wall is that the girls are remembered and then are allowed to fade into history. This was achieved by etching some of the girls' names onto a glass wall which constantly has light passing through it. The effect is that the individual names are often fused into light and are difficult to decipher. In 2010 there are many surviving descendants of these girls. The laws of the country and the social systems have changed but the effects and the genes of the girls live on. I feel a commonality with my Great

Grandmother exists with this story. I carry my Great Grandmother's genes (however my lifestyle is vastly different). She was able to find love and raise a family just as I have. The Laws of the time significantly influenced where and how our lives evolved and the influences our lives have had on other people.

Mistakes have the power to evolve into strong and positive outcomes. With that idea in mind I do question whether those people with power and who are involved with making and passing adoption laws think sufficiently about the long-term outcomes of their actions. My adoption only covers one set of circumstances and I acknowledge that some of the points I have raised may cause anxiety in different circumstances. All of us involved in this issue rely on the system to foster love and respect. I ask 'Could many more of the casualties of the adoption laws be avoided if a tiny baby, or a child was always thought of as a person who will live through to old age and that tiny baby, or a child will have kin who will live to old age?'

Postscript

Since writing the above story I have been able to access more information. The process was lengthy, however, it was made possible by a recent change in the law. This time around I was given phone access to relevant government department staff and they were very helpful. I was also given the option of government funded counselling services to use if I needed more assistance. The information I received confirmed some of the facts that helped to alleviate some of the "stories". The process was much more positive this time around, however, the information has been inaccessible and sitting in government files for many years. That caused trauma. Why was it so?"