Margaret Ann Scott

I don't know if I have the emotional energy to tell this story, but my brother thinks it could be a step in the healing process.

I'm a 60 year old woman with a very loving husband of over 40 years and a lovely son. I mention these two men because they have travelled this journey with me, and often suffered with me as I struggled with issues of my adoption. Sometimes I am struck by wonder that I have such a special marriage and the most beautiful caring son. I am an educated woman, with 3 tertiary qualifications. It was my husband who recognised my need for learning and bankrolled my learning. In many ways I feel my husband has been the doll doctor who has worked to make the 'doll' able to function and keeps working to help me find a way to be 'acceptable' in the community.

I was adopted 57 years ago. Yep, there's a gap of 3 years there. During those three years I was uprooted every 3 months or so into another situation. Here's my story.

I was born to an unmarried woman in 1950. She gave birth to me in a home for unmarried mothers. One of the requirements of that institution was that mothers breast fed for the first 3 months - then give up their children. My mother asked why they insisted on this and was told that the mothers had to have some punishment for their sins. It seems that fathers just had a moment of weakness, where for mothers they had committed a major sin.

How my mother became pregnant is a mystery to me. My mother has told me 3 different stories. One was that she was madly in love with my father and that when she found she was pregnant she just departed from his life, and never told him about me, so she wouldn't wreck his life. Another was that it was her 21st birthday party and all the men attending decided to give her a present. This story is untrue because I was born before my mother's 21st birthday so you have to wonder why my mother told me such a story. Perhaps the most likely story is the one that she told me about my father rejecting her when he found out she was pregnant and wanting nothing to do with her and me. I don't know how much of what my mother has told me is truthful, and how much is the result of a creative imagination. She is a wonderful story teller, and her ability to weave a believable story is one I would love to have. She has real story telling skills.

After the first 3 months of being breast fed I was taken to the family who were to adopt me. However, my mother just wouldn't sign the adoption papers and I was returned to her. My mother found it impossible to find work and earn a living with a baby and ended up putting me into Berry Street Orphanage until she found work. Over the next 3 years this was to be the story of my life. I would be with my mum for a short while, then back into care. It must have been very difficult for my mother. She tells me that one day a nun at the orphanage told her, "this child will die if you leave her here - she needs to be touched and she won't get that here."

Finally I was given to a religious family to care for. Obviously there are two stories here. My mother says she was bullied into giving me to them to care for. My adopted father tells a different story. He says that my mother said that the only people, that she would give me up to, were them, and that she begged them to take me. At the time of my adoption, my adopted mother was pregnant with, or had just given birth to, her 3rd child. Their second child, a girl, was just a year older than me. After my adoption we were dressed alike and were often mistaken for twins, although to this day I cannot understand why.

It must have been a very difficult time for the adopting family. The 3rd child was very ill and needed much care. I was a very distressed child who wet and dirtied the bed each night. To teach me that was wrong they used the method they used with the pets if they dirtied in the house, and rubbed my nose in my mess. I can still remember the shame of wetting the bed when I was about 10 years old so it did nothing to cure me.

I needed boots with bars on to correct an orthopaedic problem. I can remember how I used to scream when they put these on me. I had to wear them all night. I think it was during a fight to get these on that I first had my hip broken.

My very first memory I have is: sitting at the kitchen table having breakfast in my new home. I was sitting opposite Dad and had done something wrong. Dad had taken the bread knife and was making me hold out my hand to be hit with the knife. My hand was bleeding and I was being told that the reason I was bleeding was that I was pulling my hand away and that if I held my hand still I wouldn't be cut. This memory has haunted me all my life and still causes me to cry.

My dad was besotted with my adopted sister. He used to sit at the table and talk about how beautiful she was. I quickly learnt that my sister was a child of love and that I was a child of sin. The difference being that my sister was born in wedlock and me out of it.

Somehow over the next few years I started to call my natural mother "Aunty" and forgot she was my mother. She wasn't an aunt to the rest of the family, it was just in those days all adult female friends were called aunt. She visited the house and was certainly part of my life, but I don't know how often it was. I have memories of her being there, and incidents that happened, and she was just a special 'aunty' to me.

At first I loved school. It was a time when I was treated like everyone else, and I was good at it. At the end of the first 6 months of prep they put me into grade 1 and I completed the 2 years in one. Trouble was that put me into the same class as my sister who was really struggling. My parents decided my sister couldn't be humiliated in that way so I, against the advice of the school, spent another year in grade 1 - totally bored and disruptive. By grade 2 I was the class problem.

During my early school years my sister became quite ill and had many surgeries and illnesses. I was a robust little girl, rarely ill and very bright. This created grief for my parents. I was still obviously greatly disturbed. I can remember having dreadful nightmares where my screams would wake the whole house. Over 50 years later I can still remember some of the dreams. Of course this just increased the stress in the household. Over the next few years I was taught that I was everything bad, a product of sin. And in many ways I became bad. Even when I wasn't at fault the assumption was that I had done wrong. This made me angry and I guess I must have been a very strong willed little girl. During one school holidays I spent two weeks standing in a corner in the laundry because I would not admit I had stolen money. To this day I will tell you I didn't steal this money. My adopted parents bought ice-creams and lollies for the other children and got them to eat them in front of me to try to get me to admit my sin. I would have been 7 at the time. Standing in a corner for a day is a long time for a 7 year old. I spent the whole school holidays in that corner.

In spite of those things I felt I had a pretty normal childhood. To help improve my sister's reading ability, she was encouraged to read to us. She was actually a great story reader and I remember some precious times listening to her read Enid Blyton stories. Books were my passion, and I developed a real love of escaping into the fantasy world of books.

By this time there was another girl born into the household. And when she was nearly 2 we moved interstate. It was a difficult time for the family and my adopted mother’s health was declining. She had constant headaches and no one was really listening much to her. I showed my teacher the results of one of the beatings I had been given and she approached the police about it. They advised her not to take it any further because my father’s position in the town would prevent any conviction if the matter went to court. They suggested I would be even more vulnerable if she took action. Thankfully she explained this to her 10 year old student and that helped me a lot. I don't remember the name of this beautiful woman. First term I was 28th in the class. One day she made the comment about parson kids being the worst in the class and said, "Don't your parents hit you enough at home?" Then her eyes fixed on me and she said, "No, perhaps it's because you get too much." She nurtured me during the next term and I came 16th. I was pretty chuffed but my parents weren't impressed. At the end of 3rd term I was glowing as I handed my report to my parents that night. I had come 3rd in the class!!

My father turned to me and said "There's no reason to be proud, with your brains you should always be top of the class!" I remember wanting to spit at him. Couldn't he at least recognise the improvement?

This was the year I "found out" I was adopted. Adopted was a spelling word in year 4. We had to make up a sentence with the word adopted in it. It was like a bell for me. My sentence? "My parents are sorry they adopted me so they're trying to kill me." It seemed to make sense of what was happening for me. My parents knew nothing about this and their story is different.

My parents decided on a date that was the deadline to tell me. 19/8/1960. Ironically it was the week I had 'adopted' as a spelling word. Dad took me down to the woodheap and told me. I smiled. He asked me why I was smiling and I replied because now I know the truth. He asked me to explain and I said "Because that's the reason you are trying to kill me. Because you are sorry you adopted me and it's the only way to get rid of me now."

To emphasise how happy I was to come and live with them he told me a story. "You first came to live with us for a month before you were adopted. When your mother came to the door you said "Go away mummy, I don't want you. I have a mummy and a daddy now." I was shattered even at that young age. How could a child say that to their mother? Immediately I had to find her and tell her I was sorry. The horror of the situation had a profound impact on me. I became even more disturbed and became obsessed with finding my mother.

As I sit here and write and cry something that my parents would say to me flashed through my mind. Whenever I cried they would say, "You had better get a bottle and catch those tears because one day you will run out of tears you cry so much." I guess I must have cried a lot, and yet I wouldn't say I was particularly unhappy as a child.

From grade 5 to grade 7 I occupied a seat in class and did little. The beatings continued and a policeman from the church regularly visited after school. Looking back I think he was keeping an eye on me and I do remember your name. Thanks.

Sometime during this period my mother gave my sister and I the "sex talk". She explained about eggs in woman's body needing to be fertilised by sperm from the male and asked if we knew how it got there. Without even thinking I said "a man puts his bobby into the woman's hole". Shock! Horror! This produced the demand to know how I could possibly know that! I explained that one of the 'hobos' that I had taken a meal over to had wanted to do it to me. From that day I was considered a 'fallen' woman, even though I had laughed at the man and exclaimed that his bobby was far too big to fit in my hole, and he had left it at that. I was five when the 'hobo' approached me.

In year 7, two very significant things happened in my life. Both had about the same impact on the rest of my life, although people might not see them as of the same importance. The first was the 'intelligence test' everyone in year 7 had to take - my husband informs me that we were the first year to do it. My older brother was a teacher at the school at the time and the topic of discussion, in the staff room, was my results. The conversation was then talked about at home. If I thought I couldn't do anything good enough before, it was nothing to what was to come after this test. From then on the only result that was acceptable was 100%.

The second thing was that my adopted mother died. By this time there were 4 girls (including me) and 2 boys in the family. The baby was 18 months old and the eldest a teacher at the school I attended. Although my mother was not always the abuser, when she died the abuse stopped. It seems that they used to try and outdo each other and goad each other to hurt me. In fact, most of the particular instances of abuse that I remember were my father hurting me. At the end of this year we moved to another area.

High school was interesting and the amount of homework allowed me to spend time reading. Not that it was the homework I was doing, but I always claimed it was. In 3 years I read through the entire school library. One day, the teacher in charge of the library asked me about the book I had returned

and asked if dad knew how much I read. When I said no he asked me how I did it. I explained that when the moon was up I could read by moonlight and when I it wasn't I used a torch. He told me to never stop reading and that it would never hurt me. Within weeks I had been moved from the room that got the moonlight to the other side of the house. Over the next two years he often picked out books for me to read and always questioned me afterwards about the content. He was amazed at the speed which I would read, rarely having a book more than a couple of days, even the classics.

I hadn't stopped doing what I could to find out who my mother was. There was no way dad was going to tell me, and grandma just said "I've told him he should tell you." During this time I became quite close to my grandma and she told me some of the stories that were in the family closet. She often told me to stop trying to be a 'surname' and be myself. She would tell me that the 'surnames' weren't so great, and that I was ok just the way I was. That I should just be me.

Dad got remarried and again I was a problem. I wouldn't call her 'mum' as I had had enough mums to last me a lifetime. I hadn't become any less strong willed. I never have called her mum even though we have quite a lot of respect for each other.

During this time dad decided that I needed psychological help. He told me he would send me to a psychiatrist but they try to get rid of guilt. That's not the Christian way. Christians have to accept guilt and ask God to forgive them. He got a book by Clyde Naramore or some such name and I had to read a chapter then have a session with dad. At one stage he was saying I had to admit guilt and I wondered what I had done that made him constantly nag me about admitting guilt. I decided he wanted me to feel guilty for being illegitimate, it being the only difference I could see between me and my siblings. I decided that wasn't fair.

I left to go nursing with 2 dresses and $10 - not enough to buy a pair of nursing shoes and pay my first week's board. One day I was talking to one of my friends about my step mother and why I didn't call her anything. She suggested I write dad a letter explaining it wasn't out of lack of respect for my step mother that I wouldn't call her mum, but more that the word mum had become tainted in my life. I wrote the letter and got a reply to say that he wanted no more to do with me. My friend was quite wise and said 'pretend you never got it'. Towards the end of the year I wrote and asked if I could come home to spend Christmas with them and got a reply that they would be too busy as they were moving again. My friend suggested I go home anyway and be busy with them. It was good advice, and I think they realised that they were stuck with me.

I asked dad again if he would tell me who my mother was. He told me to wait until I was married and see if I still wanted to know then. I accepted that, thinking that he would tell me after I was married. So I spent the next few years man hunting.

I found a gem and we married. After we came back from the honeymoon I wrote to dad to find out who my mother was. He wrote back to say once again I was showing my rejection of him by wanting to know who my mother was. He informed me that he would never have anything to do with me again as my letter was proof I wouldn't ever be grateful for what they had done for me.

My new husband nursed me though a pretty bad time. I had heard that my mother was my 'aunt' through the church grapevine so I decided to write to her and ask her if she knew who my mother was. As you can see I was pretty obsessed and didn't think of the impact this would have on her or her family.

My natural mother rang my adopted father and asked permission to break her promise not to tell me. He refused. She said that she would not tell a lie and to not reply would just be another rejection for me. Later in the week I got a letter telling me how selfish I was in not considering the woman or her family. A couple of days later I got a letter from my mother saying yes she was my mother and enclosing the only photo she had ever had of me: a small photo taken the week before my adoption.

A couple of weeks later she flew up to see me. I was panicking as I couldn't see her get off the plane. My hubby said "She's there, that woman in red." That woman in red looked smart and was slim. She

was nothing like my memory of Aunty, but hubby said it was obviously my mother. We had a weekend together in our one bedroom flat. Hubby would go away at night and come back in the morning. We made heaps of stupid promises and I listened in raptures to her wonderful stories.

I floated on cloud nine while my mother quietly went back home and had a nervous breakdown. During the next twenty years or so the relationship sadly went downhill. I would listen in raptures to another story and then away from her realise that there were discrepancies. Some of these I understood were related to how she was feeling about herself at the time, how our relationship was faring and who else was about. Some I couldn't understand.

For my mother, every time she sees me she seems so filled with guilt that the adoption turned out so badly. For me the most loving thing she did was to give me up. Even though I have told her she did the right thing, and perhaps the only thing she could have done at the time, it fills her with guilt and sorrow. The thing that adoption did was give me a stable home for the first time. She didn't know how sick my adopted mother was and how this would affect her behaviour. As I have watched my grandchild through her first 3 years I realise that those first 3 years are vital to the development of so many skills. My constant abandonment and lack of one person constantly in my life severely retarded that development. Burns, cuts, bruises and broken bones can all heal. I can't seem to catch up on those early development skills though. I'm hopeless at non verbal stuff. I can't tell when someone is telling me a lie. I miss cues that make me vulnerable by accepting at face value what people tell me.

It can have some good points. Every day my hubby tells me he loves me. I believe him.

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Well, I wrote that story yesterday and there are some other things that I should talk about because I believe any conversation about me and adoption should include those things. Perhaps it will be just one bit at a time.

The first issue is health. I'm not even going to touch on the mental health except to say that while I have never formally been diagnosed with a mental illness I believe have been mentally ill most of my life. I'm always stressed.

I think that my physical health has also suffered the impacts of my adoption. Right from early in my adoption I wore these boots at night with bars to keep my toes pointing in the opposite directions. I always thought that I wore them to fix up a hip deformity. When I was in my 40's or 50's my dad was shocked to hear me say that and told me I wore the boots because I had club feet. Perhaps it was an off the cuff remark as I complained about pain in my hip and was told the boots would fix them?

In the 1980's, an orthopaedic surgeon was quite insistent in his questioning of my past history and kept going back and looking at my hip x-rays. Luckily my hubby was attending the consultation with me and realised why the surgeon was taking the line of questioning he did. He turned to the surgeon and said "Would it help you if you knew she was a very battered and abused child. Physically quite violent." The surgeon explained that he thought he could see evidence of two fractures which were not the same accident. He told us that it looked like I had broken a bone which seemed not to have been attended to. He thought there was a second break some years later where my body had made some compensation for the first break but again it obviously hadn't been attended to. He asked me to go back and ask my siblings if they could remember what happened as he was sure we were all old enough to remember the second break.

I decided to ring the eldest 3 siblings and ask them. My eldest brother said, "What a lot of rot. That couldn't have happened, even that time you could hardly walk for 3 weeks couldn't have been a break, after all, you continued to go to school." My older sister told me it was impossible and without prompting mentioned the same incident - explaining that my adopted mother had thrown me down the stairs by my hair. I asked the brother who was born about the time of my adoption and was struck by the fact that he brought up the same incident. I think one of the most disturbing things about it was

that it was like they were talking about someone else. I have no memory of this incident. I have tried to bring it forward but it's just not there. Was this the second break?

It might sound incredible that a 10 or 11 year old could keep going to school with an unattended broken bone. To me it isn't beyond the realms of possibility. I was a battered child. In my case I learnt early to hide anything that was serious damage. If my parents discovered they had actually physically damaged me I got a second lot from an even more out of control parent. My very survival demanded strategies. The more serious the damage was, the more controlled I had to be in keeping the damage from them.

For example, I hid how bad an inflicted burn was. When it became infected I hid it from my parents, until I became so ill with the infection that I was put in hospital. I remember the doctor reaching towards the burn and quickly hiding it, hoping he hadn't seen it. He promised not to tell anyone if I told him how I did it. I wonder if he expected me to tell him my mother had done it to me.

The offshoot of hiding injury from everyone is that I had to develop my own method of handling pain and to not look like I was in pain to others. My method seemed to be to put it out of my mind - literally. A few years ago, following more orthopaedic surgery, I had a small glimpse into how I handle pain. I have no concept that what I am experiencing is pain until I am out of control. No, it's not that I don't feel pain - I know there is something wrong and become quite stressed. It's just that my mind does not compute that I am in pain. Several times while I was in hospital one of the staff decided I was in pain and gave me painkillers when I became stressed. It was only after the painkillers kicked in that I realised I had been in pain. It's the story of my life actually.

When I came home from hospital my daughter in law cared for me while my son took my husband for a days' walking - hubby's way of relieving stress. About 8pm that night I was feral. Hubby turned me and asked me when I was due to take pain killers. Bingo! I hadn't thought to take them all day and had gone nearly 24 hours without pain killers. In the end my doctor put me on slow release pain killers and it was only then that I started to get control of my pain. I tend to go until I drop. By the time I realise that I am in pain I am almost out of control.

I have had osteoarthritis since I was 22. An old person's disease. I was still in my 30's when I had my first artificial hip. Yet it was 12 years before I could get a doctor to take my problem seriously. I don't act like I am in pain. A couple of months ago, I had shingles and afterwards the doctor said all the signs were there except it didn't seem that I was in pain and 'shingles is quite painful you know'.

Ok, these examples could be the result of being a battered child. But there seems to be something else which I find it hard to grasp and document. If I tell a doctor I am in pain I am not assertive. I tend to try not to be too much of a bother, try not to make a fuss. And then I get hurt when people make light of what's happening to me. My gut tells me this is more about abandonment than about abuse. As I re-read this I thought - I bet they told me to be good and not to make a fuss each time I went to a new place. I guess other people can decide if any of this section has relevance to adoption.

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Being adopted has invaded every aspect of my life.

At first it was that I was "a child born of sin". How could good come of sin?

As I reached early adulthood it was obvious that I was going to be oversexed and morally corrupt, after all I was my mother's child. How would I be able to sustain a marriage? And when I became a parent how would I be able to be a better parent than my mother had been? Some of these things were verbalised, others just assumed by the people around me. It was the world view of the people round me. While my adopting father, a clergyman, preached that God could change people, he didn't really believe it. Surely it was unlikely that God would change the nature of a child born of sin. While mentally I had rejected the notion of being a child of sin, it is still buried deep within me.

While watching television last night, adoption again invaded my life. Hastings commented to Hercule Poirot "He is my cousin you know." Hercule Poirot responded "Not so, Hastings, I believe you told me your cousin was adopted." My husband didn't pick it up, but I did. Adoption was the curse, the flaw in the person. So being adopted prevents you from being a proper sister, daughter, cousin, wife and mother. You are none of those things - you are "adopted".

All last night I kept on waking up and thinking about what could be written here. How could I explain what an influence this thing of being 'adopted' had on my life. I've said I will talk about the influence on me being a wife, mother and grandmother, and also that I would talk about my natural father and culture. I'm not really sure how to start or how to link these aspects, so I'll just write.

I was 16 when I met my husband. My future father in law took me home to meet his family. There was an instant and chemical attraction between us. We've been married over 40 years and it's still there. This is one of the things that has held our marriage together through the tough times. But the thing that is probably even stronger is my fear of abandonment. For the first time in my life I had someone who loved me for what I was. This was the most precious gift anyone had ever given to me. I have never taken it lightly and often wonder how such a good man, as he is, could love me, even when he knew what I was.

We had both rejected the religion of our very religious families, so that helped to bond us. Being sinful was something we could do together, and our strong sexual attraction for each other helped us enjoy something shared, private, outrageous and fun. Our moments together were electric. When I saw him coming my heart would, and still does, sing, and he wanted me only to himself. In a discussion with my mother in law one day, she told me that the unforgivable sin of Adam and Eve was sex. I guess it was a pretty widely held world view in the circles of my childhood and youth.

From the first month of my marriage, my husband has nursed me through some very black periods, yet there was something stronger than the black between us. His nurturing and encouragement gave me life and strength. We needed nothing else, just each other.

But I did need something else, I needed a baby. After 18 months of marriage I discovered that I was pregnant. That really threw a spanner in the works. Hubby was upset that I had 'got myself pregnant'. He seemed to have the notion that once a woman had a baby she would not want her husband any more. I, on the other hand, was on cloud nine. Now I would have someone of my flesh to love and cherish, someone that was 'mine'. The birth was traumatic and the post natal depression overwhelming. This child was a 'child of a child of sin', how could it be good? How could I be a good mother?

I discovered I had very poor coping skills. I was afraid of the frustration that would well up in me when I couldn't cope. I worked hard at trying to prove I could be a good mother, but this child was a child of me, and I was far too critical of all he did. To make matters worse he was a small child and I was constantly being harassed by child health nurses that he was under weight. I was told I should give up breast feeding and put him on the bottle. Breast feeding was the one thing that made me feel like a mother. In desperation one day I rang my adopted father's new wife, who was an ex-child health nurse, for advice. How much underweight was he? Working it out on his birth weight she told me he was on the lower end of normal range. I stopped taking him to the clinic.

The next challenge was his lack of speech. My son didn't talk until he was 27 months old. I was constantly being told that he was mentally retarded. I didn't think he was, he seemed a bright little boy to me, but was I being blind to the evidence? These frustrations were of great importance to a very insecure woman trying her best to be a good mum while believing the odds made it impossible for her to do so. My constant mantra was "I will try harder". Motherhood was hard work and boy did I work hard at it.

My husband, on the other hand, took to parenthood like a duck to water. He grew to love the little baby, and nurtured him and delighted in his development and every move. His gentleness modified my harshness. He advocated for my son, where my actions were unreasonable. He had endless

patience. In many ways he became the nurturer, the mother figure, while I became the more distant figure, the father figure. About this time some of the people we came in contact with started to suggest my husband was homosexual. It didn't take long before we heard that I was lesbian and that our marriage was just one of convenience. It was a great amusement to both my husband and me given our relationship, but I guess it showed there was something people couldn't fathom about our relationship and that it was a topic of conversation.

My son was about two when I first started having the stabbing pain in my hip that would sometimes make me fall to the ground. I became afraid to carry my son in case I fell with him in my arms. Over the next twelve years the pain levels increased until I was in almost constant crippling pain. When ever I went to the doctor I would mention my painful hip, but my words seemed to fall on deaf ears. This increased my stress levels and my lack of coping skills made me afraid of having any more children. What if I was violent? While I tended to keep my anger under some level of control I was terribly frightened one day I would crack and my son would be harmed. I couldn't take that risk, I was determined not to treat any child in the way I had been treated, so decided one child was all I could risk.

Over the years of primary and then high school I did what I could to help my son. I was involved in school and scouts. I was involved in community work. Some of my friends suggested I was a "too involved" mother. One of my friends warned me that I would fall apart when my son left home.

By the time my son started university I was using a wheelchair to move about. A couple of years earlier I had started a university degree myself. As more and more physical things became impossible I was looking for activities to stimulate my mind. I will always be grateful for this time when my son and I were both at uni, on the same campus. He was focused and worked very hard. His hard work paid off in an overseas scholarship being awarded to him by the university. Ironically this solved the "leaving home" problem. He never actually left home, but just went overseas to study on a scholarship for some time. By the time he came back home we had adjusted to life without him. In the mean time I had some surgery, regained my mobility and returned to the workforce.

My son has been given the opportunity to give some critical feedback about my parenting for this story. He has been very kind and says that while he was aware that I was stressed he feels I was a good mother. I was involved, interested and respectful of him and his needs. Perhaps it is too difficult to engage a son in a real dialogue with his mother about her parenting style. When I watch him as a parent I find myself relaxing more and forgiving myself for my shortcomings. He is a wonderful father and I am really proud of the way he parents his daughter. I guess I must have done some things right. My granddaughter is such a delight and I find it easier to love and enjoy her, but other grandmothers tell me they find the same. With your children you have an overwhelming responsibility, but with your grandchildren you can stop and enjoy.

My birth mother married a clergyman and even became a missionary for some time. When my mother's husband first met me, he commented on my strange nose. He looked at me and asked me if I had had it broken at some stage. Not understanding his focus I replied, "Quite probably, I have had many things broken in my life."

While my son was at high school my mother rang me. She informed me that my father was indigenous and that she felt it was important to let me know. She obviously wasn't getting the reaction she expected from me and just before she hung up she asked, "What will hubby think about this?" I said that I didn't know. There seemed to be a veiled threat when she said that I had better ask him. I spent the next week dissolving into tears for no reason and unable to communicate with my hubby and son. What would hubby think about this? I was afraid to approach him, and afraid not to. After nearly a week I decided to ring my adopted father to see what he knew about the situation. First of all he asked me who told me such a story. When I said that my birth mother had told me his reply was: "That's not where you got your brains from. Nothing good's ever come out of a boong!"

I approached hubby when the house was quiet, my son doing his homework in his bedroom and hubby and I doing the dishes together. "Hubby, what would you say if you knew my father was an Aboriginal?" He turned and said, "Oh, that's what this is all about! I love you, not an aboriginal or a non aboriginal. Don't you get it, your father could be an axe murderer and it wouldn't matter. I'm married to you and I love you. I love you for what you are. What ever it is that has made you you!" Next thing my son comes flying out of the bedroom so excited. "That means I'm aboriginal too doesn't it? That makes us really special, doesn't it mum? I'm glad we're aboriginal." Whew!

The following year I studied Aboriginal history at university. This study, rather than teach me the story of the Aboriginals, helped me understand how the Aboriginal was depicted in history and also to understand the different reactions of the three men in my life. I think it was also the start of trying to really accept people for who they were and what had made them the way they were. I found myself a little more forgiving of others.

I have thought about trying to find my father many times. But there are many issues. I don't want to make the same mistakes I made with my obsession with finding my mother. I know that I contributed to her mental health problems. What is the story of my father? Does he know I exist? What is his story? Over the years my mother has told me many conflicting stories about my father. That she didn't know who my father was. That she has never heard from him again. That my father never knew I existed. That his sister visited me in the orphanage and later was determined to find me and restore me to my father. That my father was an alcoholic. That my father worked for a big newspaper in an important job. That my father lived on the streets. One part of me desperately wants to find my father, the other part is afraid to open such a potentially dangerous box. It could be healing for both of us, or could blow us both apart and destroy each of us, and the people we love.

I'm curious about my heritage. If I'm Aboriginal I would like to know more. It's something that 'feels right' to me. Aboriginal people who I meet in my professional life often ask me "Where did you come from?" or "What's your country?". The Aboriginal community has learnt that some don't know of their Aboriginal heritage, and the legacy of the stolen generation needs sensitivity when talking to people you don't know. One of the local elders knows a little of my story and swears I am indigenous. He says He is quite sure that the only way I can be fully healed is to go through some indigenous ceremonies. He also thinks I need to go back to my land, where ever that is.

While I was still at uni I did make some steps to start to find my father. The government was allowing people access to identifying information about their parentage. I gained my original birth certificate with no father recorded, and a copy of records from the orphanage that showed my father's name, occupation and his income. My father would be at least 80 now I imagine. An indigenous man of 80 would be very old indeed. I'm guessing time has run out for me. Does my father's family know about me? Could they be looking for me?