

Alison Wright

I was three weeks old when I was adopted from the Ballarat Children's Home and taken to live in Melbourne with my new parents and an older brother who was also adopted. My new parents gave me every opportunity to experience life and the best of everything possible. I was told I was adopted from a very early age however the reality of this information did not sink in until I was 11.

I can remember being totally confused, angry and upset. So many questions and no answers. As I grew into my teenage years the need to know my 'real' mother became more and more intense. I realised that as far as my adoptive parents were concerned I was 'second best' – after all, if they had been able to have their own children, there would have been no interest in adopting any child.

Teenage years can be difficult as we all try to search for our own identity. When you have been adopted, that identity is even harder to establish. Questions I asked myself were 'why was I given up', what is my cultural background', 'who do I look like' – the list goes on.

Just prior to turning 16 I wrote a promise to myself that I would find my 'real' mother by the time I was 18, or I would leave home. I hid this note behind a picture in my bedroom. Over the next few days I felt more and more guilty about being disloyal to my parents and went to retrieve the note but to my horror the note had gone. This incident was never spoken of and I became increasingly nervous, believing I would be thrown out of home for showing my disloyalty but this never happened.

When I was 16 I became pregnant. My parents shipped me off to Adelaide to a couple who took in unwed pregnant girls to help with the domestic chores and look after their children. My boyfriend wasn't 'going to ruin his life' just because I was pregnant. As an adoptee, I was terrified of being abandoned and rejected and this experience confirmed my worst nightmares. I believed, as an adoptee, that I didn't deserve the best – if I had been good enough, I wouldn't have been given away. My parents blamed my birthmother for my sin – I came from 'bad blood'.

I spent the next 6 months feeling nothing but numbness. I knew I couldn't keep my baby – that's not how things are done. It seemed completely normal to me to give my baby away; after all I had been given away too.

The birth was induced due to the fact that my parent's wanted me home for Christmas so my absence didn't have to be explained. I was completely naïve regarding the birth procedure but as it turned out, it didn't matter anyway as I was drugged from beginning to end. The only thing I knew was that I had given birth to a boy and that he was healthy. I never saw him and I never asked to see him. I didn't believe I deserved to ask any questions.

I returned home to Melbourne and life went on. I started working, married the father of my child because I didn't think anyone else would want me. We went on to have two daughters but the marriage failed and my ex-husband fought for custody of the girls. Again, I simply gave them away because that's what you do. They were eight and eleven years old at the time. I didn't even cry when they left, much to the shock of my friends who expected me to be distraught but I done it before, and knew how to cope by simply becoming numb and blocking out any emotions.

The need to find my birth family was still great and when the Victorian Adoption Act (1984) became legislation I joined the queue of thousands wanting their records. I waited 4 years for my number to come up. When I am asked what is the best day in my life, my immediate reply is 'the day I received my birth records'. I was euphoric. I don't think I stopped smiling for days. What blew me away was the fact that I had been given a name. I hadn't named my son. No one told me I could. It took me a week to trace my natural family but I was devastated when I discovered that my birthmother had passed away in 1974 – the year of my youngest daughter's birth. But then the sorrow turned to joy as I discovered I had two sisters, one older and one younger and they wanted to meet me. This relationship is still continuing. I am a full member of the family, attend Christmas's, birthdays, weddings, anniversaries and sadly, funerals. Although we are separated by distance, we talk on the phone constantly. My older sister said 'my only regret is that we missed out on knowing you for 40 years'.

In the same year I reunited with my birth family my adoptive brother passed away from bone cancer. I then felt the need to find my son. I wanted to give him the chance to meet his birthmother while I was still alive, to let him know the circumstances of his adoption and to find out if he was well and happy.

I applied for the birth records from the South Australian Government Department but chose not to begin searching at that time. I was too busy trying to assimilate my new family into my life and grieving for the loss of my brother. It wasn't until 1996, after the death of my adoptive father at the age of 92, that I began the search. As luck would have it, my son, James, is a computer freak, and so it took a quick search on Google to find him. I wrote an outreach letter to him and had a positive reply back within two days. I arranged to fly to Adelaide for the weekend to meet him for the first time. I was absolutely terrified at the prospect of having to explain to him why I had given him away. At our first meeting he reached out to me to give me a hug – I couldn't respond and so I inadvertently pushed him away. We spent the weekend together but the strain this put on both of us was huge and it was a relief for us both to say goodbye at the airport.

On arriving back in Melbourne I couldn't stop crying. I cried for 5 days. All that grief that I had never allowed myself to feel came out and I didn't have the strength to stop it. I eventually sought help and spent the next two years having intensive counselling. I was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. James and I corresponded by email but after a few months I realised that he didn't want contact. He stated that he had agreed to meet with me purely to satisfy his curiosity and having done that, he wanted nothing more from me. Yet again I felt rejected however I accepted his decision and let him know if he changed his mind, I would welcome him.

Thirteen years passed and then one day, while I was on a Mediterranean cruise, my daughter received a message on Facebook from Jenny, James's wife. She thought James was now ready for a relationship. Needless to say, I was extremely wary as I knew I couldn't go through the heartbreak again. To cut a long story short, James and I are now slowly building trust between one another. He now lives in Arizona, USA so distance stops us from a face to face meeting but I am hopeful he and his family will return to Australia one day. I have a beautiful granddaughter who I have yet to contact but I'm patient – I can wait.

Reunion with my son put the smile back on my dial and I now feel content. All the loose family ends have been tied together and while we all have our own lives and are separated by distance, we are connected for life. It's been a long, hard road with many lessons to be learned along the way

but the end result has led to feelings of inner peace – feelings I treasure and will hold on to for as long as possible.