

# Anonymous Storyteller 17

## My Adoption Story

I was born on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 1946 at Crown Street Women's Hospital in Sydney. Three years later I was adopted by my adoptive parents, a typical Australian husband and wife and their biological daughter. But I knew none of this at the time, and in fact it was not until I was about 13-14 years of age, that I found out accidentally that I was adopted.

Prior to finding out about my adoption, and looking back with hindsight (which may be blurred), life with my adoptive family was reasonably good – noting that I was never told anything about being adopted – I never lacked for the material comforts of life, and overall the family, and extended family, offered much. Two things seemed to spoil this – an adopted father who was prone to violence, and a feeling that I was 'on the wrong planet' – my interests, sense of humour, everything just didn't seem to fit in with my adopted family. I am not sure if this is clouded by hindsight, but I have distinct memories of 'not fitting in' and not 'knowing why'.

Anyways, at about 13, and in combination with 'very basic sex education at school – including the 9 months period of pregnancy, and the knowledge that my adopted sister was 6 months younger than myself, I began questioning how this was possible. One day on our way home from school, my sister told me the truth – 'I was adopted'. This was in no way my sister's fault – but there was high drama in the house that night. I vaguely remember my adopted mother telling me and asking me if there was anything I wanted to know, but I was too 'embarrassed' and just wanted to crawl away and hide.

Over the coming years, my adoption was rarely mentioned, apart from being told that "I was special, I was chosen". I never believed this due to feelings of being so different from my adopted family (why would they 'choose' someone who is different), and later on in life realised that the words 'chosen' are very inappropriate. Two comments from my adoptive mother that stand strongly in my memory were that 'my birth mother' was a woman of low morals, and one day advised me that I new my grandmother as a family friend and that she had recently died, and did I want to know who she was – no, no I remember saying in alarm – yes, inside I did want to know who she was, but this seemed to me as being so disloyal to my adoptive mum. As my adoptive mum has since died, I still do not know to this day who my grandmother was.

I spent many hours daydreaming about my mother – and why she had given me up – and why at 3 years of age instead of the usual at birth. I really wanted to know all about her and the adoption, but could not ask my family, as it seemed both a 'taboo' topic and also seemed 'disloyal' to me. Interestingly I never really thought too much about my natural father – not in the strong way that I felt about my birth mother. As I was interested in ships and the sea from a young age, I fantasied that my father was a seaman, or somehow involved with ships and the sea. To this day I know nothing about my father – but this is not a 'red button' issue for me.

From this time on, ie after finding out I was adopted, until about 28 years of age was a tumultuous time for me. I don't blame it all on finding out about being adopted, as I was probably headed on a rebellious path anyways, but I became involved in petty crime (underage drinking, stealing milk money), and then in the heady days of the sixties became heavily involved in illegal drug taking, and spent much time in both Psychiatric Hospitals for addiction/depression/attempted suicide and self harming, and three short periods in prison for stealing and drug offences.

During this period (at about 18) my girlfriend and I managed to 'fall pregnant' resulting in a hasty marriage. In retrospect this was a 'tragedy waiting to happen'. We were both far too 'immature' and not prepared to settle down to a family life. After a rocky few years, we finally broke up – our baby son was taken by my ex-wife, and whilst I did try to get access for visits via the courts, her families opposition, well paid lawyers and my own 'self defeating' behaviours, resulted in access being denied. As with so many men, I tried to resolve this by taking more drugs and behaving in ways that I can now see are self defeating.

Anyways, all the midadventures finally started to minimise – with the help of some excellent drug rehabilitation centres, and many ups and down, I finally got my act together. At this time I met my current wife, who was pregnant at the time, and after some rocky ups and downs, and the birth of a daughter and a son, we are now still together in a 'deep and meaningful' relationship.

Across this time period, I always thought many times about my adoption and who my mother was – but did not really do anything about it as my adoptive mother was still alive. It seemed to be very disloyal to actually do anything concrete about finding out about my birth mother and adoption. For most of this period anyway, the laws did not allow access to adoption information.

Finally, in about 1995, and following the NSW 1990 Adoption Information Act, I started a long, long search for my 'life'. I first obtained my original birth certificate – this gave me my birth mother's name, age, address etc. But the booklet I was provided re the adoption search advised that it was 'not on' to just burst in on birth parents and say "Hi, it's me!". This was another example, and there are many others, of where an adopted person's life story, details etc are kept from the adoptee – and the adoptee is not supposed to go around upsetting other people – but it's okay for the adoptee to wander around 'life' not knowing their real self, their identity, their birth family, who they are, their identity – everyone else knows (adoptive family, extended family, family friends, church minister, teachers, everyone – except the adoptee).

Anyways, the next document I obtained was the marriage info of my birth mother. I found out, after much searching, via phone books, internet etc, the details of my birth mothers married name and address – the address I had found out via sending letters to every person with her surname in the Sydney area, and hearing back from a person who was her brother. He was supportive of my search and I sent him a letter, which he forwarded to my birth mother, who then wrote back to me. Basically, she was very upset that I had found out this information and she had been promised that, in 1949, that such details would never be given out. However as stated previously, the Adoption Information laws had changed this.

My birth mother's position was that she couldn't look after me (why?, and that she was not interested at all with meeting with me or corresponding with me about the issue. I can understand her point, but and in no way moralising or judging, but I feel that as a fellow human that it would nice of her to meet with me – whether I could go through with it, is another thing. There is so much anxiety within me about this. I know it is an irrational thought, but I still ask myself 'why my mother gave me up', did she just not like me, did she know I was going to be a problem child', and then I do

judge her in thinking that contrary to the statue I have put her on, that she is not all that nice as "what mother would not agree to meet her child" – and then I think, that whilst I think I am an ok person, maybe as I am from my mum, that maybe I am not such a nice a person as I think. The thinking that can come from unresolved adoption issues is unbelievable at times.

Just once, and to my birth mother's credit, she did ring up to have one off talk with me, but I could not get myself to talk to her – I so wanted to, but my anxiety just took over – and so I missed the chance. Maybe I was scared that just the one phone call would promise so much, but (as she had shown previously) would deliver so little.

In an effort to contact my birth mother, I have sent cards to her address (written in such a way that only she would know who it was from), looking at her address on google earth a million times, searched the internet for information on her or her family, and have even gone to the extent of starting two Facebook pages – one in her name and one in my original birth name – with the aim of finding out more etc etc.

My biggest fear now is that my birth mother (now in her late 80's), or myself (64), will pass on – and then the whole story will be lost forever. I still believe it is not right for me to just burst in on her, but this leaves me up in the air.

Apologies for the lack of flow and full details in the above story, but it is still a very emotive issue within myself, and seems to have coloured my life in many ways. It is impossible to know whether 'adoption/abandonment per se, has been behind many aspects of my life, but I feel it is a strong component.

Across my life I have had addiction problems (both legal and illegal), depression, anxiety, panic attacks, a sense of not knowing my real identity, a huge fear of being abandoned by lovers or friends (to the extent of choosing a level of loniliness), and I also wonder why some adoptees travel such a rough road, whereas others can be torn apart by it?

To conclude, I think that one of the worst aspects is that everybody else knows the whys and the wherefores, but I dont – and I get angry at times that information that should be mine is not shared with me – adoption seems to be a huge secretive affair, with everyone knowing except the adoptee. I can understand that human nature has led society down this path, but it is so destructive of some adoptees and some birth mothers, and there must be a better way.

I would be more than willing to share or expand on the above – if required.

Thanks for listening.....