

# Maree Thorpe

I was born in 1949, grew up in a loving family – married in 1970, had a son in 1975, he was born developmentally disabled. Years followed with specialists, physio, genetics clinics. No syndrome was ever diagnosed. Another son was born in 1985, he had no medical problems, only asthma periodically. Mum was diagnosed with an eye condition which rendered her visually impaired, so my eye specialist was vigilant in my eye examinations.

Mum died 1994, and in November 1995 Dad moved into Aged Care, my brother (who was 13yrs older and the biological child of my adoptive parents) and I were cleaning out Dad's garage where we laughed at old pay dockets, newspapers etc. I came across adoption papers dated 1950 I thought Mum had tried to adopt a child after I'd been born. Wrong – they were my papers!

I was in shock, my brother just held me – after, he told me he'd had to promise never to tell me of my adoption. My mind was in a daze, later thinking of how, when getting married I was asked where I was born, I'd said a local hospital, Mum had said no they were on a Sunday drive and I was born in a town 30kms away, in an ambulance (we'd laughed about that for years). My husband and I were the only ones who didn't know of my adoption. I found the kids I'd gone to school with had heard rumours, my nieces/nephews knew, it was general knowledge in my neighbourhood-- amazing someone didn't say something to me, thinking I knew. Here I was aged 46, not knowing who I was – I felt like an actor who'd played a role for a long time, and then when the play had finishes can't work out whether they're the role that they've played or Joe Blow the actor, and of course now I had no medical history and the "history" I'd given the genetics clinics was useless.

January 1996 I received my original birth certificate, it had that I had 2 older brothers A, born 1944, and B, 1946 (deceased). I checked the electoral roles for A – found him and rang, I was lucky the call went well. He rang back several days later after verifying with one of his aunts the story of me being born in the ambulance, and other information. We spoke several more times before meeting; he lived about 2 hours away. He told me of the story as much as he knew. My birth Mum had become pregnant with me, knowing I wasn't his, A's father signed the adoption papers anyway. Their marriage eventually broke up, and she placed A in various Boys Homes through these years (we managed to track some of his records from these years). He explained to me there were brothers and sisters born after me, who he'd grown up with. He remembered his favourite Aunt telling him "there are more kids than you realize".

A explained my birth Mum had 10-11 kids that they knew of. In March 1996 I received from the Department paperwork telling me of a child C born after me in 1951 this child too was adopted out. I found him living 20 mins away. C & I had several phone calls before A, me and C met. It was interesting as A had asked my birth Mum for information on C – she'd said to him C's dad was a Fijian sailor she'd met in Sydney. I wrote my birth Mum a letter telling her of my good life growing up, explaining I didn't want to intrude on her life but would like medical info and gave her the option of phoning me or giving the info to A. She rang, I told her I'd contacted C to me she told a story of how she fell pregnant with him – she'd gotten drunk in a sly grog shop, in Brisbane, and had a night with a guy she met there and fell pregnant. Totally different to the Fijian sailor story! The phone call from her didn't deliver any medical info, except she & A had asthma. Most of what she also said I knew were lies, or wasn't relevant but I did thank her for ringing. When A, C & I met, C & I were so alike – tall, dark haired, facial features similar, and same largeish ears. A showed his Aunt photos of me and she knew who my birth dad was – her husband. C & I were full brother/sister. My birth Mum had an affair with him through many years, and we 'are so like him (he died years ago). We were "living proof" of the affair. All of birth Mum's other kids are short and fair/auburn. The Aunt asked that her 5 daughters never be told the truth regarding who our birth dad is – and although this lady is now passed away I respect her wish in that regard. So I have as siblings A, B (dec), C, D 1953, E 1956, F 1958, G 1964, H 1969, I 1971, (from birth mum) & the 5 daughters of birth dad. Also found he'd been married previously and had a son from that marriage – no-one knew of that marriage till I found the record.

I have some records/information on birth Dad – interesting reading. His life wasn't great and his story isn't pretty I've read records of – arrests, prison, escapes, also I've heard of some amazing escapades of his from one of his old mates – but I have learnt that is where I get my determination and tenacity from, and various other traits-- and I thank him for that. I have come to accept him for what he was and times were very different then. I visit his grave from time to time. I found he had Aboriginal Heritage and strangely that didn't surprise me at all, somewhere deep inside I always sort of knew that (sounds odd, I know).

Birth Mum passed away last year, I didn't meet her- that was my choice and I'm not sorry I made it. I also chose not to meet 2 of her daughters for a similar reason, but have met the other kids of birth Mum. C and his family I have regular contact with, we are very special to each other. Many of birth Mum's other kids wish they too had been adopted out and maybe had a better life. There are 4 -5 birth fathers between birth Mums kids, she married one of them in 1980's. She herself was eldest of 14, so I guess life had been hard for her from an early age. She had told Medicos that she'd had at least 11 kids, I've tried to find the 11<sup>th</sup>, but as she's used various surnames, it is difficult, and sometimes just too hard to explain. Possibilities include a birth in Queensland, she's given the child away, or maybe sold it (as she'd attempted to sell a grandchild of hers 25 years ago, till the baby's Mum changed her mind).

I'm so lucky to have been adopted out and given the opportunity of a better and happier life (which I certainly had). I know of some cases where the adoptee didn't have a good experience of adoption, but in my case all I can say is "Thank You" for what you've done for me