

Anonymous Storyteller 3

A Life Time of Shame

A few simple facts:

I am a birth parent or the new term - parent separated from their children by adoption

The male child was born in 1972

I was 18 years old (nearly 19)

There was a reunion in 1997, the child came looking for me.

Have not had any recent contact (more than 5 years)

My Story

In 1971 following a one night of unplanned sex with a boy I did not know I became pregnant. I did not know about birth control but did know it was unacceptable to become pregnant if you were not married. For most of the next nine months I was in denial about my pregnancy.

I was one of four children (third girl) and grew up in a very small town in W.A. I was very much a child who was seen but not heard, very scared to speak up for myself, disliked arguments so conformed to my parents every expectation. I left school in 1968 and as there were no jobs in the local area I was allowed to get a job in Perth but this was conditional that I follow the rules set down by my parents. I did not like my office job or places I was made to live. I quit my job and got a position as a governess in the north. This was ok by my mother but not my father and on a term break in Perth I refused to go home for a visit and following release from hospital after over dozing on pills I took off/ran away 'over east'. I had a number of jobs and during this time became pregnant. I didn't know I was considered missing until the police showed up one day (I had been on TV and though only local I was recognized by someone who knew one of my sisters) telling me my parents were looking for me. Once they left I headed north to Darwin. I underwent enormous changes during this time, becoming a "hippie" and the realization that I was indeed pregnant but hoping that if I didn't think about it that it would go away. In hindsight had I known how to get an abortion I would have but I just did not have the resources or know how. At that time I did not discuss my situation with anyone.

I eventually wrote to my family. Returned to Perth visited my parents once then said I couldn't see them for awhile. I never told my parents I was pregnant, however, I did tell my oldest sister who had a small baby at the time; we met once when I was 7 months pregnant. She could see no other option other than adoption for the child.

I couldn't put 'it' off any longer. I visited the antenatal clinic at King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women. I received very cold clinical care. I told the authorities my child would be put up for adoption, I asked no questions and received no advice (alternatives to relinquishing the child), counselling or support of any kind. I felt alone, trapped, depressed and suicidal. During this time I lived on health benefits, just barely feeding myself sharing an unfurnished small house with four other young people. Though they supported me they were unable to make any alternative suggestion to adoption, it was inevitable that I should relinquish the baby. Though we were living in a freer world having a baby outside marriage was still taboo even to us hippies.

I don't remember much about the birth of my child who was born at King Edward memorial hospital in May 1972. I was placed in a ward with women who were in the same position as me or their child had died at birth. Not once did I talk to any other patient during my time in hospital.

During the ten days I was in hospital I had to visit a government agency and sign the adoption papers. I was told I was making the right decision for the child and that I was in no position to raise a child and they stressed there was no other choice. "They" seemed to think that saying the child would go to a "good" home was enough. The rules were I had 30 days to change my mind but once that 30 days had passed I could never have contact with my child again, have any news of their health, know where they would be placed, in short I gave up all legal rights to my child. It would be like I had never had a child. I was told to forget about this child and get on with my life; the "bad" girl had conformed to what society demanded. I did name the child and asked that the child be told about me / that he had been adopted.

My hospital stay was a very difficult time for me. During morning sleep new babies were placed on the verandah beside the ward I was in and I could often hear them cry, this was heart breaking. Eventually I begged to see my child, just once. I held my son for 10 minutes.

I never told my parents about this child before they died but as I was told my life did go, though very much in a haze of drugs for many years to cope with the shame, guilt and pain I experienced daily.

I never married though became pregnant twice more but had these pregnancies terminated.

I went to a birth deaths and marriage registry office to try and get a birth certificate when my child was about nine, a man came out of the office and very nicely told me as I relinquished this child I had no rights to get a birth certificate in either name.

In 1998 I received a letter from the Western Australian adoption group Jigsaw telling me my son was looking for me and would like to make contact.

This came as a huge shock but also one of great excitement as I desperately wanted to see and know my son. I replied saying I also wanted contact. My son wrote and sent photos to me. He was an only child & had not been told he was adopted but accidentally found out when he was about 14.

After a few exchanged letters I sent an open plane ticket which gave him the option of visiting me if he chose. He visited soon after and there was a happy yet hesitant (on my part) reunion. The normal reunion honeymoon period had begun. He insisted I tell my family which I did reluctantly and they welcomed the news. His adopted family did not support the reunion and it is my understanding that there was very little discussion about his adoption or adoption issues more broadly. I researched and read widely on adoption and all the literature was telling me to do what the adoptee wanted. Accordingly I agreed and abided by all his wishes though many made me very uncomfortable. Perhaps I wanted some relief from my guilt and saw this as a way to alleviate at least some of this burden. I took him to meet all of my immediate family members though he did not want me to meet his adoptive family though quite by accident I did meet them very briefly; this meeting really bothered him. He came to stay in my space and would get drunk and tell my work colleagues and friends "his story", I was embarrassed but allowed this behaviour. He was a journalist and had also told his work colleagues who then encouraged him to write his story for the WA newspaper. I was not keen or comfortable about this but once again allowed him to go ahead with his story. This story was published in the state where I was born, raised and where all my family lived (I had not lived in WA for many years) and I knew it would be read by many people who knew me at some time in my life and I just wanted to hide as to me this was a private matter and definitely not for public consumption.

Though I allowed him to set the rules I wanted to include his adoptive family into the picture but he was adamant that they didn't want to know and it would only upset them. I did send them a copy of a book (the Primal Wound) I thought may help them gain some insight into the boy they had raised as their own, this greatly angered the child. I knew very little about his adoptive parents but the child did tell me his father sexually abused him as a child.

Most of these events took place within 18 months and the behaviour and rules set by the child was beginning to weigh very heavy on my overly emotional and guilt ridden state. I did seek counselling but as I lived in the NT (not Darwin) there were no support groups or counselling available. People found the adoption story fascinating and were very curious about events but had absolutely no insight into the pain and suffering I endured. The honeymoon period was definitely over.

During the next few years the child's emotional health stabilized and following encouragement from me he moved to Adelaide. During this time I tried to voice a few of my needs as a biological parent. In Adelaide he met a girl and they had a child but I was only ever known by name never acknowledged as a grandparent.

He wrote an email detailing his wedding and his child's baptism plans and emphatically stating that "you are not invited", I finally snapped experiencing enormous anger. I replied saying he could say/treat me as he liked but he will not treat my/his family in this way. He quickly sent invitations to his biological aunts and cousins. I also told him not to contact me ever again; yes I had rejected him again. He has since emailed me, but I deleted it and I put him on my blocked sender list.

In hindsight I wish oh I wish I had placed a contact veto preventing the child from contacting me, certainly not a reunion. I responded out of guilt and acted far too hastily.

This child I birthed used, abused and manipulated my emotions from the beginning. I have since burnt and destroyed any photos, letters and other material he sent but I can't burn or destroy the (mostly) dark demons and haunting pre and post adoption and reunion memories.

Fortunately my life has moved on and though I live a reclusive lifestyle, I do have energy and passion for my natural resource management work in the bush.