

# Anonymous Storyteller 19

A month before my daughter was born, our second child, I finally met my birth mother. I was 38 years old and had just undergone an incredible emotional roller coaster ride that had lasted since May of that year. It took me 3 leading up from when I filled in the application form to acquire information about my adoption until the day my birth mother rang me, telling me I no longer had to keep searching for her, my letter I wrote to her, introducing myself, had arrived at her mothers address and she just happened to be visiting her mother (my real grandmother) several hours after it's arrival.

Here is the letter I sent before I knew my real mum's actual address, in the hope my grandmother would know where my real mum was and more importantly pass it on to her;

Dear M....,

I decided earlier this year to look into how I could access information about my adoption and hopefully learn a little about you. I really thought the process of obtaining this paperwork would be more difficult than it was, especially living in Queensland, and the records were in Victoria.

As you know, I was born on July 11<sup>th</sup> 1971, in Chelsea Bush Nursing Hospital in Edithvale, I have so many questions for you about that time, but I hope to ask them of you later.

I was adopted by ..... in late August of 1971, who were looking to adopt as it was suggested by medical experts to them that it would not be advisable for them to have their own children. .... had lost a son before I was born, I believe due to .....*being an insulin dependent diabetic since she was a teenager.* ..... adopted a 2<sup>nd</sup> child, a girl, late in 1973 whose name .....

I feel compelled to write this letter now, today, as I am experiencing an emotional stage after receiving the paperwork relevant to my adoption. I have discovered a lot of information I was unaware about just a few months ago, and I am glad I made the decision to finally enquire about the connection between you and me and wish I had done it long before now. The reason I hadn't, was because I have always been concerned I may put you in an uncomfortable situation should I send you a letter like this, it still does concern me, but I feel it important that you hear from me, and to let you know that I am doing OK, and my life right now has turned out fantastic. I hope you can say the same.

In 1991, (*my real father,.....*) enquired about my adoption through the relevant Victorian agencies and you did speak of him to the social worker back when I was a baby, saying he was 6'1, Australian, 25 years old, had dark brown hair, hazel eyes, fair complexion and slim. He was in the navy since 15, and I have discovered since on the internet, he toured Vietnam on HMAS Brisbane on its first deployment as an Electrical Mechanic of Weapons Radar, I have even found a photo of him on the internet while he was onboard, taken in July 1969... He has a few features that I can say are similar to mine, such as his hands and nose, though it is a black and white photo.

..... registered with Community Services Victoria in 1991 and attended a S87 interview in 1993 where he received little to no identifying information about me. .... in that interview stated he always wondered about me, he was a farmer and he wanted to register in the event I ever wanted to search for him. .... today has two other sons and is married, is still a farmer and living in Tasmania.

*(The Victorian adoption agency that handled my adoption after my birth ..... wrote a letter to ..... for me, a few weeks ago, letting him know I had accessed my adoption records and that I may wish to make contact with him. .... responded to ....., who have advised me it would be appropriate for me to write ..... a letter, I have done this a week ago, and expect ..... will write a letter back soon. I am looking forward to his response.*

I'm sure you must wonder from time to time about my life, and the path I have ventured down to get me where I am right now. I know I have often thought about where you are and how you are getting on, I have my entire life. Especially on my birthday, and times I have been really happy or sad, and sometimes just out of the blue.

From what I can interpret from my adoption records, my instincts of you being a caring, loving, wonderful person have been confirmed a little more. It is obvious you truly cared for my future back in 1971, that care reinforced in your willingness to divulge so much about yourself, your family and about ..... I am sure your decision back then was not made lightly.

M....., there is something that has concerned me for many, many years and I truly hope I can say this in the right way. For a long time now I have not attempted to contact you because as I said earlier, I never want to put you in an uncomfortable situation. I have no idea of the current circumstances of your life today, however, one of the main reasons I have taken the steps I have, to gather information about my adoption and write this letter, is this fear in me that I have so much love and respect for you and always have, and not tell you, and this has been enhanced even further by finding out more about the reasons and circumstances of my adoption. Inside of me, my entire life has been an emotional connection to you that I just can't express in words. I would very much like you to know, you made the right decision. I have never thought of you as a bad person or someone I would never want to meet, in my mind, you are the strongest hero imaginable, and I can't begin to comprehend the emotional rollercoaster you must have been on in 1971, from events and circumstances far out of your knowledge and control. You did everything right for my best interests. Your thoughtful actions are something I admire in you.

What concerns me though is as I read about adoption reunions of others, one of the greatest misconceptions birth mothers have with their adopted children is birth mothers commonly believe they have done something wrong in relinquishing a child, many feel guilty for many years, some their whole lives, this is one of the main reasons birth mothers don't tend to want to make contact again with their adopted child. Many birth mothers do not want to have to experience the pain of their adopted adult child negatively questioning why they were given up, stirring old emotions and putting them in a position of embarrassment. Yet most adoptees feel the same way I do, with a greater appreciation and connection with the person that gave birth to them than she could ever imagine. One of the greatest regrets of my life would be for you to not know I am grateful you showed so much love and courage in anticipation of my life. I love and thank you so much for that.

I guess you must be curious about what I have been doing all these years, the kind of things I have experienced and learned? I'm not sure of the proper protocol of writing to a birth mother as an adopted son, as I have never done it before, but I think you would like to know a little about

my life, and I think it appropriate to tell you a little about it in this letter.

When I left Hospital on July 19<sup>th</sup>, I was taken by your social worker to St. Josephs Founding Hospital in Broadmeadows, where as I said earlier, I was taken for the intent of adoption about 5 weeks later by..... I have often wondered the reason why you chose the name you did for me on my original birth certificate.

I don't remember anything about my life before I was about three years old. About the time I went to kindergarten I loved little else but building things with the blocks, I was not greatly interested in finger-painting, or singing, which is interesting, cause as I got older I become quite artistic and very much enjoy music, though I don't play any particular instrument. I still very much enjoy constructing things and love working with tools ..... I guess I was quite shy as a child, I was slim and small for my age, but made some good friends in primary school and enjoyed my time there as a bit of a rebel. From Grade 6 I attended .....where I excelled in all things sport and athletic, I was a very average student academically, which both ..... struggled to accept.

I don't believe I had a good childhood, I was abused both physically and emotionally by ....., and when I look back as an adult now, I feel many of their actions were grossly inappropriate from a couple that had taken the steps and actions they did to adopt 2 children. At times I was belittled by them for being adopted, at times I was kicked, punched, slapped, scratched had things thrown at me, told I was hated and assured I would be kicked out of home as soon as I reached 18. I know this is something that may be hurtful for you to hear, and I certainly don't believe you are in any way responsible for what has happened throughout my upbringing, but I am telling you these things so as you can get an understanding of how I grew up and became the responsible, caring adult and parent that I am today, I think and hope you would be proud.

I had a tough time as you could imagine in my early teen years, I changed schools part way through grade 9 and just completed grade 10, before deciding to leave school and finding a job. As I fully expected I would be kicked out of home in just over 18 months, I had grave concerns about being able to support myself financially and in a hurry. After a few months I managed to get my first job in a service station in North Melbourne, The pay I suppose when I look back now was terrible, but at the time it seemed OK, and it's not like you get paid for going to school. I had a few other jobs in that first year out of school, and finally secured an apprenticeship as a signwriter, I pretty much rang every sign company in the Yellow Pages until I found one that was considering putting on an apprentice. I did a 6 months pre-apprenticeship course that was school based and unpaid, while also working part time at KFC.

I had 2 part time and 1 full time jobs by the time I was 18, and was kicked out of home at 18 and a half, for sleeping in, instead of mowing the lawn.

I did return back to living with ..... a few weeks later, but moved out on my own some months after that with a number of work colleagues. This was a great time of new found freedom and independence, I jumped in and out of different jobs and unemployment over the next few years, and I never did complete my apprenticeship, but have been employed as a signwriter predominantly over my working life.

A few months after turning 21, I really had had enough of Melbourne, with so many disappointments where I just could not see my life getting any better doing what I was doing, I needed a change, a big one, one where I could start afresh and I was prepared to do just about anything to make my life something worthwhile. On October 8<sup>th</sup> 1992, I moved to Cairns. I knew absolutely no one in Cairns at the time and that made it all the more exciting. I did have a job to go to on arrival to this new city, as a signwriter, it was so exciting. The warm air, the kind, generous people and the prospect of knowing I no longer have to worry about others controlling my happiness, if it is to be, it's up to me.

After a little while in Cairns I met a girl, we were together a few months when .....fell pregnant. On October 29<sup>th</sup> of 1993, .....gave birth to a gorgeous, healthy boy, ..... Now, looking at my adoption papers recently *this is some uncanny coincidence, I'm sure you know what I am talking about. (edited note: M.....'s fathers name was .....)* was much younger than me and did not cope well at all with a new baby, ..... suffered post natal depression and we decided soon after to put ..... up for adoption. We were fortunate in I worked with a girl at the time who knew a couple in Cairns, that had been on IVF without success, and who had just about given up ever having children of their own. .... and I went to meet this couple and decided to adopt ..... to them. We had to go to court and there were some conditions to this adoption and luckily I have been able, and I have, kept in contact with ..... since he has been a baby. He turns 16 in a few months from now, is 6'4" or 6'5" tall, has left school, unfortunately, but is pursuing a career in horticulture whereby he has recently completed a certificate in. He is maturing quickly and I expect him to do well in his endeavours over the coming years. .... and I broke up not long after giving ..... up.

Over the next few years I guess my life was pretty normal and enjoyable, I was focused on working and living, I had some great relationships with other girls, I moved to Brisbane for 6 months, but don't really think I am a big city kind of guy, I really love Cairns. I started my own business in 1999, in signage production, I gained employment at the same time at the ..... in electronic gaming, my duties were paying out pokie jackpots, repairing equipment faults, working in the customer service front desk and selling Keno. I was single at the time and earning what I thought, pretty good money, with the freedom to work the hours I wanted. Later that same year I was selling Keno out in the lobby of the Casino, where I met ....., who was working in the lobby bar. .... was a trainee, completing a Diploma in hospitality. I wasn't selling much Keno that night, so ..... and I talked about different things, and a few nights later I asked her out. .... and I have been together now nearly 10 years, and we have been married for 3. We have the most beautiful, sweet and adorable boy who was born on January 5<sup>th</sup> 2008 and ..... and I are expecting a little girl in November this year.

..... and I bought the house we are living in now back in 2005, I have lived in this house on and off since I first moved to Cairns. The previous owner, ..., is now travelling around Australia and has been since the sale. .... was a bachelor in his 50's and did not care too much for housekeeping and maintenance of his house. .... and I are slowly renovating this house back to its former glory and our own tastes. We were lucky to buy this house at a really good price just before the housing price boom that occurred a few years ago.

I have been working for ..... for nearly 5 years now, initially as their signwriter and have been promoted to a foreman position where I manage 18 people for the last 4 years. I think this is a fairly well paying job, although it certainly does have its challenges. My role oversees.....

My life right now is amazing and I feel I have achieved more than I thought I ever was capable of. It is for this reason I guess and particularly having children of my own, that I have been greatly curious about you and the connections from our past. .... has known I was adopted from very early on in our relationship and I personally have worked through a number of feelings over the years to finally gather the courage to look deeper into that connection. It has never been because I was ever mad at you for the decisions you made as to why I haven't taken these steps earlier, if fact, I have spoken highly of you my entire life, even when others didn't. I have absolutely no idea what outcome may arise from taking the steps I have in obtaining my adoption records and writing to you, I just hope I can hear back from you. Whatever the next step is, it's up to you. If you are ready to begin a relationship with me, now or in the future, please rest assured it will be at your pace and on your conditions. Of course I don't know if those close to you today are even aware I exist, or if it is something you would be comfortable sharing with them, but

whatever the outcome, whatever your response, I just really would like to hear from you.

By the way\_, (.....my adoptive mother\_) did die a number of years ago, from mental and physical health issues that apparently intensified throughout many of her final years related to diabetes, this may explain to some extent the cruelty I had experienced throughout my childhood, especially the later part, ..... and I spoke very few words in her final 8 years. (..... *my adoptive father*) is an alcoholic and as you may have gathered, has been for many, many years. .... is currently attempting to sell his house and is getting remarried later this month. I really hope this will help get his life back on track. .... and I have seen each other one or two times a year for the last several years, which I still find a little uncomfortable, yet important, and I will be attending his wedding in a few weeks time in Melbourne. I haven't spoken to ..... about accessing my adoption records yet.

Up until now in my life, I think I have done so many things, I've travelled to 4 of the worlds 7 continents as an adult, I've bungee jumped, travelled to all states of Australia except Western Australia and Tasmania, I've spoken in front of large groups of people, devoted my spare time to being President of a local charity organization, I have abseiled off cliff faces, saved a child from drowning, I've solved Rubik's cube a number of times and I can juggle 3 balls, I have received an award for innovative thinking and won 1<sup>st</sup> place trophies in a few different sports. I have watched the sun rise on a New Year's morning and wished on a falling star, I have snow skied in Finland and ordered lunch in Singapore from a person who didn't understand or speak English, I have bought a brand new car in my life and I've climbed Ayers Rock, I have been to Disneyland with 5 close friends from a winning prize on a radio station, A bank actually agreed to give me a mortgage, I have witnessed the birth of both my children, I have been so fortunate to have experienced exceptional good health throughout my life, and I know how to forgive, because I have learned no one knows just exactly what led any of us to any given moment in our lives, I always want to get better and not bitter and hopefully be a beacon of light, through good example to my children and forever a caring and loving husband to .....

Sometimes I feel you must have said a prayer, or made a wish for me when I was very young, to help me along throughout my life, rest assured... it came true!

One other thing, for a very long time I have taken comfort in knowing I can keep control of my emotions, as most boys do, in fact, ..... has commented from time to time when I have been passionately excited about different things, she has asked me to lower my voice because ..... doesn't see this raw enthusiasm in me often, I just think I was showing passion in trying to demonstrate that happiness and excitement. Yet through this journey that began May this year when I began getting my adoption records, I'm not sure what has happened, but a whole array of different, long forgotten and new emotions has surfaced from I'm not sure where. I have been blown away by the generosity and kindness of complete strangers who have done so much more than just show common courtesy in my attempts to find that elusive address of yours and those that have helped assist me with information. I have woken up in the middle of the night and had a little cry, simply because someone that day had done more than just their job in offering advice to me, or I have imagined how hard it was for you when I was a little baby, or that night after C... at ..... rang me to go through my adoption papers. I hadn't cried since I lived in Melbourne, but I do remember now it starts as an ache at the base of my sternum. If you find all of a sudden, that out of nowhere, these strong, strange feelings also come to the surface in you, I think it is important to remember they are normal and OK to feel. I can say this now because what I found on the other side of those emotions is the elation, the joy and the butterflies. It does get better the closer I get and it was worth the inner self discovery for me. You may experience the same, and if so, you might find comfort in knowing I have too.

I have included with this letter a digital photo frame for you with some photos on it of me, ... and ....., just plug it into power. There is also a CD with one song on it, The Promise by Tracy Chapman. I have tried to make this introduction special, as you are so special to me.  
I look forward to hearing from you very soon.

Fondest Regards

C.....

I find it difficult to share my adoption experience with others and am sure there are others affected by adoption who treat the matter very privately and personally. I share this story now, in the hope another person affected by adoption, particularly another adoptee, can take from it something to help them on their life journey.

I feel a little let down by the adoption system and unsupported on so many different levels. I had great difficulty getting professional support from my adoption agency, specifically my biological father registered with them many, many years prior to me beginning my search, but because he was not named on my original birth certificate, was given practically no information about me. When I became aware he did have an interest in contacting me, the adoption agency did a search on my behalf, they sent a letter on my behalf to the wrong person. The adoption agency notified me of this and did not believe there were many other avenues they could pursue for a successful contact with my real father. In that same phone conversation I explained to the social worker from my life experiences farmers rarely move far from the area they establish themselves and because I knew the full name of my father, identified the address and phone number of ..... in under 2 minutes from White Pages online, The social worker sent a letter to this address and my real father contacted them a short time after.

In my search the adoption agency I was dealing with for just 3 months went through 3 different social workers, I guess adoption is a difficult matter and as a result social workers don't tend to stay too long at any one place.

This same adoption agency would not assist at all with the search for my mother, due to the fact she never registered with them in search of me. This was frustrating as I had not previous experience in locating people, I am not a private detective and stumbled through the process by trial and error. A step by step template on how to do this would have been very helpful.

I felt often dealing with various departments and people I needed in my search had little regard for my feelings and was embarrassed at times having to ask how to do things, the experience is not overly empowering and really can't be done in a discreet and caring manner with the assistance of others.

I am fearful many stories, of other adoptees, won't be shared with the greater population, because it is, for all of us, such a personal part of our lives. A part we keep very close to our hearts and feel very vulnerable to share with others. We learn throughout our lives, very few people understand the emotions of adoption, or how to respond when those emotions and discussions come up. It is not a logical process, it's purely emotional. I am yet to meet anyone who genuinely can discuss adoption with me, past how interesting and fascinating the experience must be.

I have had professional counselling for a handful of sessions, to try and work through new feelings that have surfaced after locating both my birth parents, who I might add are amazing people. I love it when the phone rings and it is one of them, it is great getting to know them over the last 18 months or so.

Child abuse unfortunately was a part of my life and dealing with the emotions of that abuse after meeting my birth parents is something I have struggled with greatly. I feel let down by Child Services that organised my adoption as a baby not properly assessing potential adoptive couples, or following up after the adoption court order how things are going. I felt on my own throughout my childhood, often gripped by fear, unable to imagine my life after 18 except as a total fantasy and I believed living past that age was a 50/50 chance if I could control my emotions enough to not endure serious physical injuries from my adoptive parents. I felt one day I would do something so bad that the beating could probably kill me. I remember being threatened from time to time to be belted black and blue if I didn't do as I was told, I have had nightmare of this occurring and for a young child it is difficult to see life past such an event. I have had my adoptive parents punch me in the face, kick me up stairs, scratched their fingernails down my face, kicked up stairs, had scolding dinners tipped over me, been punched with every syllable of a sentence as I was being told off. I have remember at about 7-8 years old having a babysitter look after my adoptive sister and me as my adoptive parents went on a holiday somewhere, I snuck out of the house one day for about 15 minutes and went up the road. The baby sitter was angry when I returned and smacked me hard on the bum, I remember feeling happy on such a mild punishment, but respected her greatly for her restrained actions.

I have attempted to discuss and hopefully resolve the child abuse of my childhood with my adoptive father over the last year, but without success. He feels all his actions were warranted and has referred to what I would consider mild beating on him when he was a child, beatings he explains he fully deserved. All I really would like from him at this stage of both our lives is just to accept there were times he went to far and to say sorry for those occasions. This unfortunately is something he is not prepared to do.

What I find greatly fascinating is how my past, my origins, has come to the surface most, after having our own children, to connect to mine and ultimately their genealogy. To give birth to a child and see them grow and to share time on this Earth, finally, with someone that looks like me is amazing. I am sure this is something most people just take for granted, I don't for a second.

Having children ..... and I care for, are responsible for, and who we love dearly, definitely prompted me to begin in my late 30's to search for my birth mother. It was like a wound had reopened, one that I really thought had healed over a long time ago. My whole life I had felt something was missing inside of me, same I guess like losing a finger or a toe, I just never could define just what, I felt a lot like an outsider in a foreign country, even though I was born in Australia and grew as a child in the same city as my birth.

I, as a child, felt incredibly vulnerable, and fearful not complying to parental wants and needs, regardless of what they may be, would mean I would be left to somehow bring myself up on my own.

I have spent time with both my original parents twice each over the last 18 months, and ..... came to Melbourne to see me for the 1st time when I was down there for my adoptive fathers wedding. .... came to Cairns to see me a couple of months after reading my letter to her. The relationship with both of them is that of any adult relationship between friends and not at all like a relationship between parents and their adult child. Which I think is a good thing. .... did not have any other children after me, while ..... has had 2 more sons several years after I was born with his wife he was separated from when I was conceived. I really notice the difference between the two insofar as there mannerism in liaising with, and sensitivity, talking with their son. I guess it is the practical understanding of raising other children of their own that makes a massive difference.

I get frustrated when I hear the needs of the child is always the number one priority in adoption, I feel those needs come last, especially in my experiences. If I could suggest changes to adoption and its practise in Australia, I would suggest the following;

- Adoption should always be 100% in the best interests of the child, they are the most vulnerable in the deal and are totally reliant on adults to do the best possible actions for their future. Too often adoptive parents have their own issues first to resolve, issues usually caused by the loss of a child of their own or the learning they are incapable of having their own children, adopting a child does not suddenly resolve by default of replacement these psychological issues. Counselling or other means needs to so as adoptive parents are in the best possible position to give their best once they do adopt.
- Birth mothers should always be treated with the utmost respect and never lied to regarding their potential relinquishment, their wishes at this time should always be met with honesty and integrity.
- I am not convinced agencies funded by the government via grants is the correct process in handling the adoption, their interests and motivation is not entirely for the child.
- A thorough process needs to be in place to ensure professional screening of potential adoptive parents, this is not a job interview, this is some child's future. Take the time to as far as possible ensure the child has a decent upbringing, he will need more from his parents that a non adopted child, to overcome his primal wound.
- An 18 year old adopted person should own entirely all information related to their adoption, all relevant information should be documented and become available entirely to the adoptee if they request it. There shouldn't be hoops to jump through to obtain your own information.
- Counselling should be free of charge to anyone affected by adoption via persons who have real life experiences relevant to adoption, a free call number would be a good start.
- The Dept of Births, Deaths and Marriages should be the first contact for an adoptee chasing information, a section in this department exclusively for Adoption should have the power to assist adoptees and birth parents in their searches, even across states. This department should be the mediator in potential contacts between children and parents.

I have discovered the child within me has surfaced from the time I filled out my form to access my adoption records, I have struggled greatly overcoming my thoughts and negative feelings related to my upbringing and adoption, feelings I didn't really experience as an adult until beginning my search. I know I will overcome these feelings with time. I sometimes feel I started something I didn't fully understand, adoption, but at the same time do not regret meeting my real mum and dad. I feel a bit ripped off by the system, I feel let down by the entire adoption process, my expectations I guess are a couple that adopts would offer love, understanding and forgiveness more than a couple who have their own child. After all, adoptive parents sign a legal form convincing others they are more than capable of providing the best possible upbringing to their adoptive child. I was adopted by an eccentric, who progressed to being an alcoholic and a diabetic with mental health issues. There is more to raising children than just to cloth, feed and shelter, an adopted child deserves much more. I was adopted to fill the needs of my adoptive parents

to look normal, ie: to have a family like most other married couples, rather than a desire to help a baby in need of finding a caring, loving family. I understand this more now, because I have kids of my own. I remember as a child of about 9 now feeling love for anyone and wondering what that feeling is like. That probably sounds strange to some people, but truly didn't feel love as a child towards others. I do understand love now towards my own children , because when they hurt, I hurt.

Having children of my own brings back memories of my own childhood, I believe my challenge is to help them be happy, caring responsible adults one day, they are individuals and my role is to guide them down the right path and not control them along that path.

With so few Australian adoptions nowadays, a study into the affects of adoption is probably a little late, but with the development of IVF and inter-country adoption, I'm sure there will be long term benefits for the children still to grow up and face what being adoption is.

With those adult adoptees still on their life journey, no matter what stage, understand the past cannot be changed, but your determined future can. We can't change what happens to us, only how we react. Forgiveness is the key to happiness.