

# Anonymous Storyteller 5

If adoption is a "good" thing then why was I never allowed to talk about it?

As a child I was told that I was adopted and then it was never mentioned again. This seems pretty much the standard approach in the 70's. It's kind of like pretending that we were not keeping something secret. From my mid 20's to late 30's I often wondered if there was something wrong with me, and now is one of those times. I have always resisted medication, I'm not exactly sure why. I guess I have heard bad things and wonder if it will dull my awareness even more.

I think all this grief and depression is to do with my birth mother (by the way I met her 20 years ago). I emotionally experience her in such a fragmented and compartmentalised way. Intellectually I think like everyone else "reunion is no big deal, after all I was so young when I saw her last" but the emotions are something else! And tonight I remembered many adoptees that I have met who have had breakdowns or significant depression and emotional problems, and really I think this is basically overwhelming grief and lack of acceptance or support.

In my generation it was rare to have anything about adoption validated or normalised, anything that related to my deeper feelings anyway. It was all pushed away, not spoken about, the message from my family and society is 'lets pretend that you are not adopted', which means shutting down all feelings about what and whom has been lost. Not only did I lose my origins but in the process of the secrecy, pretending to not be adopted, and to not acknowledge my birth mother, I lost myself. I lost the ability to hold my own feelings, to feel that it is OK to feel anything other than happiness. I can't even describe how insurmountable the other feelings are ... a few short phrases come to mind ... falling down a black hole ... experiencing an internal earthquake ... all in silence and separate from the rest of the world. I don't look like anyone else around me, I'm not reflected anywhere except in my birth family, and I can't express to anyone how I feel. Even as I write this, I cringe as I know there will be those sending the message to 'put it away,' 'be silent and feel shame,' 'not all adoptees are affected,' just focus on the 'good' side, adoption is supposed to be a good thing. If it is supposed to be a good thing, then why have I never been allowed to talk about it? Why do I feel so much shame and so much grief? All people ever say is "Aren't you lucky!"

There are good aspects to adoption. I love my family, even though I can't be open with them. They were sold a fantasy when they adopted me, they didn't know that there was anything complex about it; like thousands of families, they wanted a child and thought it was as simple as that. If it was true that adoption is no different then I would be fine, but this is not so. I have two mothers and this is a different experience than having one mother. I don't understand why people want to portray adoption 'as no different'. To me this sends the message that it is shameful to acknowledge it for what it is. I wish that I could find acknowledgment for my feelings. When people have never been validated, how can anything feel tolerable or normal. It's all just a floating, jumbled, chaotic feeling where you feel out of control and crazy and don't know why.

It's midnight now, I needed to write this and I have stopped crying as a result. Over the past 20 years slowly I have realised that the few months around my birthday and Mothers' Day (which occur in the same week) are a difficult time and much grief and depression surfaces. At first I thought I was crazy but these feelings come at the same time every year, it's just that since reunion they are even more raw. The emotions remain raw until they are given attention and acceptance. The feeling of abandonment that I can feel in my late 30's is most likely the same feeling that I experienced as a baby. When things are not going well with my birth mother, it is these old feelings that get triggered. How else can the intensity be explained? Even when things are going well, a real loss is there and it is a significant loss. I didn't feel this way as a child quite as much but I do now. I think I was able to block it out when I was young. As a teenager this time of year was hard, but I didn't know why and then my birth mother found me and it got harder and harder to deal with the feelings.

Being told that not all adoptees are affected is not a helpful response and neither is minimising the pain. Those who have not experienced it cannot understand it and there is usually nothing in the media portrayals of adoption to help. I wish people would change from the short-term view of adoption as 'rescue' and think about what it is like to be expected to feel nothing towards the mother you lost at birth, to know she is out there, or to have met her and to suddenly have the emotional impact of that hit you, no-one can imagine the force behind it. For those who are ignorant I can see why they could think some adoptees are pathological. The force of the emotions doesn't match the general conceptualisations of what adoption actually is, its impact is ignored thus making the emotional impact even harder to deal with. I wish I could have a funeral service every birthday, but no-one would understand.