

Barry John Ford

In 1992 I was at Concord Hospital, with my wife, sitting in a chair next to my mother who was dying. She had Alzheimer's for some time and just before she died she asked me why was I sitting with her? I replied that she was my mother, who I loved, so where else would I be.

Her response was that I was not her son but the son of a younger woman who had other children and that I was adopted, I was 46 years old at that time. I told mum that she was the only mum I had ever known and as such I was not interested in the other woman. Mum died that night.

Mum's confession did not come as a surprise as she had told my wife that she had some 15 miscarriages before she had me; I was raised as an only child. Mum's brother married dad's sister and they had 5 children, you cannot get closer blood cousins, as such I should have been at least a bit like one of them, which I was not.

I never particularly liked any of my Aunts and Uncles nor the majority of my cousins and when I got upset I used to say to mum, "they are your relatives not mine". I never knew why it upset her so much, but as it turned out it was true. As a young adult I did not drink beer, smoke, know what horse/dog won the last race and did not have a great deal of interest in football, all of which made me a bit of an outsider at any family function.

Dad would never let me go to the "pub" with him because he knew I would order either a glass of red wine or a rum, wine was for "queers and rum was for alcoholics", according to his beliefs, as such I would be an embarrassment in front of his friends.

I have been with my wife since she was 16 and I was 17, married at 20 and my mother-in-law told my wife, very early in the piece that she thought I was adopted.

Mum and Dad were both working class, dad a council worker and mum a shop assistant. It was unusual for the time but mum worked full time and I had a front door key from the time I could reach the lock. We lived in a block of 3 flats in Summer Hill.

Materially I wanted for nothing as a child; we would go on a driving holiday each year. One time we drove to Surfers Paradise before the Pacific Highway was fully sealed and there were still a number of punts in operation.

I was allowed close to total freedom, as long as I was home before dark, if I was not then I would "cop it".

Education did not play a big part in their thoughts, after year six at Summer Hill Public School I was supposed to go to a selective high school but when I found out that none of my friends were going to that school I declined and went to a technical high school. In retrospect it was a decision that should not have been left in the hands of a 12 year old child. Especially when I consider my lack of skills in woodwork, tech drawing and metal work. One good thing was that I was told in year 9 that I was not considered good material for a trade and as such I should consider office work so I walked out of school at 15 and joined the Bank of New South Wales, where I stayed for some 34 years, until retrenched and then to a solicitor's office for 11 years then to retirement at age 60.

The Bank paid for me to do a 12 months university course and as such I became only the second person in the family to walk into a university, my daughter was 1st and my son 3rd.

In late 1999 I decided, after a long discussion with my wife, that for our own family's sake it was time to try to establish just who I was. I had put it off for so long as I did not wish to dishonour the memory of my parents.

I was born Ronald George Smith, my mother D was 15 and my father R 24, they were married in June and I was born in November. At the time of obtaining my birth certificate I was asked did I wish to leave my records open, in case someone was looking for me, I agreed and to this day I am very happy that I did.

I decided to then undertake a family history project and ascertain that R's family were weavers who came from Calais France but were expelled in one of the revolutions, as they were English from Nottingham.

The English authorities shipped them to either South Australia or New South Wales, my lot came to Morpeth and ended up at Warialda.

My wife and I travelled there to look up headstones and later called at the council office to enquire as to the location of a certain property, when asked why, we explained we were doing a family history, within hours we were taken around a number of homes to meet aunties and uncles as it seemed I was related to many in the town.

I sought information regarding my birth parents and was taken to meet a very old uncle, five minutes later we were both crying, it seems that he had lived with my parents and he nursed me regularly, but he had worked away from home for a fortnight and when he returned I was gone. It seems that R's mother came down from Warialda, had me put up for adoption, I was about six months old, and took R home. I asked him where they lived in Sydney and what sort of work they did.

He advised that they lived in a street in Mascot, now absorbed into Sydney Airport, D worked in a spinning mill and R worked with race horses. He was very surprised that I knew about the street until I told him that my adopted mother's sister lived on the corner and her husband also worked with race horses, further that my aunt and adopted mother both worked in a spinning mill. It would seem that it was a private arrangement between D and my adopted mother, with R's mother and aunt acting as middlemen. The adoption was formalized when I was 12 months old.

D's family I have traced back to 1788, in Australia, but have been unable to locate any to speak with. I know D was alive in 1983 as I obtained a copy of a death notice she placed for her mother. NSW BDM has been most unhelpful as I tried to obtain a copy of the grandmother's death certificate, to ascertain what surname D was now using.

In 2000 I received a letter from L asking if I was Ronald now Barry as he thought I may be his half brother, his mother was D. I confirmed I was and we very quickly entered into both telephone and written correspondence. He and his family live on the far north coast and when the Olympics were on my wife and I drove up to meet them and have established a warm relationship. We talk every week and visit a least once a year. This year we attended his daughter's wedding in Exmouth WA.

At 17 D had a daughter G and at 19 a son L, both G & L were placed in an orphanage in Ballina in about 1952, L had a very difficult time there until he left at aged 17.

A few years ago I attended the funeral of my father's sister and asked my eldest cousin if she was aware of my adoption, she replied that everybody in the family knew but me, I was not impressed.

My adopted parents did at all times what they consider to be the best for me. My mother was a loving woman, my father was a bit more reserved, however he was very proud when his son became a bank manager and he grew to accept that red wine and rum were not strange drinks (as a PS, L drinks both red wine and rum) Mum controlled dad's money and mine, I was given enough for transport to work, lunch and enough to take my future wife out one day each weekend, she had to pay for Sunday. When we married, at 20, mum showed that I had saved over \$3000, enough for a 25% deposit on our home, where we still live. My wife worked at the Commonwealth Bank and had to resign when we married but was then reemployed when it was deemed by them that I was acceptable as the husband of a Commonwealth Bank employee. She then had to resign a few months later, when she became pregnant.

My only complaint about my adopted parents is that they both drank too much, then argued, and they both smoked. All in all, very little to complain about.

My biggest regret is that for some 54 years I believed I was an only child only to find that I have both a half sister and brother (G does not want to know L unless he is willing to give her more money, so I have not tried to contact her). I missed out on growing up with them, but by the same token I would most likely not have had the upbringing and benefits I have enjoyed and could have ended up in the orphanage with them. From the grandmother's death notice I would not be surprised if D had other children later in life.

I understand that G was offered by D to my adopted mother but she declined, I would assume that as we live in a two bedroom flat they were unwilling to move to obtain a three bedroom property. Also I do not think my father would have been willing to accept another child, which was not his.