

# Jill Roz

The year is 1968; I am away from my childhood home, doing my nursing training and enjoying freedom from parental control. This includes lots of drinking and partying, where I meet an older Canadian man (I am 19) and become pregnant. I have to tell my parents eventually, am suspended from my training, and my letter to Canada comes back "address unknown" though the envelope has been opened.

My father is disgusted with me and soon I am on my way to Newcastle and a government-run home for unmarried mothers. My parents were determined to keep my pregnancy a secret and told my siblings, relatives and friends that I had a job there. They supplied me with money through family friends the C-s in Newcastle, and I filled my days with bus trips, movies, and waiting for the birth. At 19 I was one of the older girls at the hostel, several 12-14 year olds and a few older women; one had come from Canada to preserve the secret of her pregnancy. We were actively discouraged from talking about our babies; there was a strict adoption-only policy, and no-one returned to the home after giving birth in the Royal Newcastle hospital. Eventually my waters broke and I was taken by ambulance to hospital. Labour started and became strong; but my cervix remained undilated. For 48 hours I was in severe pain, receiving no sympathy from the nurses, and being prodded occasionally by doctors and med students, until I was told 'if you haven't had it by midnight we'll do a caesarean'. So at midnight I was being wheeled, crying, to theatre when an accompanying nurse told me to be quiet, you shouldn't have gotten into this position; and you're not the first person in the world to have a baby.

After the operation I was taken to an otherwise empty 6-bed ward to recuperate, and there I spent a nightmare 3 weeks. I developed the conviction that my parents had arranged with the doctors that I would never leave the hospital; this started after I noticed a golf-ball size lump in the wound, which was an abscess, pus was oozing down my stomach. Why hadn't the nurses been checking my wound?

There was one night nurse who was kind, but I didn't dare tell her about my fears in case she was part of the conspiracy. It all sounds quite mad now, but it was very real and frightening at the time. I would look out the window, in complete despair, a visiting preacher would come in and blather to me, one night I got out of bed, looking for a nurse, and one young one came and told me "your baby looks just like you, we call him P\_\_".

Eventually the abscess healed and I was discharged; I went to the C-s house to recover. Severely constipated, I was too shy to tell anyone and suffered for weeks, then one day Mrs C took me to the hospital to sign the adoption papers. I had already given information about my upbringing.

After the signing, I returned to my home and my parents. Dad had sent me a letter telling me we would all just pretend it never happened and get on with my life, and they had arranged a late admission to university for me. Everything seemed surreal, like it was happening to someone else, and this persisted through several years. 17 months after the adoption, I gave birth to another child, and married, despite initial opposition from the fathers' father, and my parents trying to make me surrender the child for adoption. To the point that they sent me interstate again, to Tasmania this time, to another home, where several elderly women still lived on; one was 84, and had been sent there as a pregnant 16 year-old. This place ran a laundry, mainly doing boys' boarding schools; it was compulsory to work fairly long days, and it was very tiring for girls in advanced pregnancy. The rules for me were relaxed a lot after my baby's father ran away from home and came to Tasmania. The Salvos let him stay in the VIP suite at the home, and he would do errands for the other girls, and we would go for long walks and talk about the future. He wasn't keen to keep the baby, he just wanted to get married. Of course I hadn't told him about the first baby. This was a horrible shame to me, and still was until recently.

The adoption-only policy was not strict, and in due course, after having my baby, I brought him back to the home for 7 weeks till my marriage. A social worker at the hospital had really tried to make me sign papers, but I was 21 now and was completely resolved to keep him no matter what, but marriage made it a lot easier. Mum came over for the registry wedding, and next day we set off by bus for the mining town where my new husband had landed a teaching job.

My marriage did not last, he was a violent drunk, and after my daughter was born I left him. This was 7 years after the adoption, and I still hadn't told anyone except my husband. His comment had been "what a whore; no wonder your parents wanted me to marry you".

I moved with the children to a country area and got a part-time job in a community centre, where I could have my baby girl with me. One morning there was something about adoption on the radio, and I started to cry. Once I started for that first time, I could not stop. A friend came in during this avalanche of tears and I told her about the adoption. To my surprise she didn't look at me with disgust but compassion and love.

I'll skip over the next 16 years of failed relationships, alcohol abuse, heavy marijuana use and horrible resentment against my parents. Then in 1992 I began to look for my son. To my surprise Jigsaw found him without trouble, but he had been given the same name as my second son (not P\_\_). I was able to speak to him on the phone, and soon went to Sydney where he was about to take final exams in his engineering degree (strangely, his Canadian father was an engineer).

On the way into the city that day, I cried uncontrollably on the train; I just could not believe this long-awaited day had arrived. For years I had celebrated his birthday by feeling miserable and getting drunk, and wondering what had happened to him. Any young man named P\_\_ was a possible; if the age was wrong I would fantasize that it was a deliberate cover-up.

At 11 am outside MacDonald's I saw him, stood up and we shook hands. I couldn't take my eyes off him; we went to have a coffee and the waitress commented that we must be mother and son, we looked so much alike. He asked me about the medical history of my family. Then we got on a ferry to Manly. He told me how he looked more like his Amother's side of the family. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Wasn't I his biological mother? I guess he was letting me know he was sticking with his adoptive parents. He had allocated 3 hours, so we went back on the ferry and I felt horribly upset that after nearly 23 years of longing and hurt, our time was nearly over.

The reunion was so distressing, it actually was worse than the adoption experience. When I got back home I went into hiding for a week or so, I didn't want to have to tell people how awful it had been, when I had had such high expectations.

I haven't seen him again, though I met his adoptive parents a few years ago. His Amother said that he reported about our reunion only that "you cried all the time". But they aren't the ones I'd like relationship with. I don't expect anything from him now, and that's what I get. We email

occasionally. Since I stopped drinking 12 years ago, I've come to terms with many parts of my past, but the adoption scar is always there, in my mind and on my body. I used to long for my 3 kids to meet, but only my daughter is interested in that idea. My first son just doesn't want anything to do with me, and doesn't seem very happy. He has never been in a relationship according to his Amother. This makes me feel sad.

I also am not in a relationship, and have considerable trouble in getting close, trusting anyone, though I do have a few close friends. Until Mum died recently, I had got closer to my parents, but don't talk about the adoption under any circumstances. I even took them out for dinner on P's 40th birthday; though I didn't tell them what the occasion was.

Now he has turned 41, and I would really like some closure; but how do I achieve that?