

I was born in Melbourne at the RWH in Carlton. One of a pair of identical twins born prematurely to a single mother, [REDACTED] aged 20.

[REDACTED] grew up in Hay, NSW, however on finding herself pregnant she moved away. [REDACTED] had been so ashamed and afraid to tell her parents of the pregnancy she told them she was moving to Melbourne to work in nursing. What she actually did was move into Salvation Army's, The Haven, in Alfred Crescent North Fitzroy, all alone in a state where she knew no one. The Haven was a maternity and children's home, where women who had sinned were able to spend their confinement working like slaves in exchange for their food and accomodation.

[REDACTED] told me she was working as a nanny on [REDACTED] [REDACTED] parents farm in NSW, not far from Hay, when she met [REDACTED] a handsome jackaroo. [REDACTED] told me that they were very much in love and [REDACTED] saved up and came to visit her at the maternity home in Melbourne. She said that they could not afford to raise two babies so adoption was the only option.

I believe we were due in early September but were born at the end of July. The birth was difficult, and there was some time delay between our deliveries. I was told we were in "humidity cribs" in the nursery for a time. I was 3lb 15 and my sister [REDACTED] was 6 lb. [REDACTED] told me that she provided our day to day care and also breast fed us 6 weeks.

[REDACTED] stated that when we were around 6 weeks of age, she fed us, dressed us in the baby clothes she had knitted, handed us to the matron, who handed us directly to an adoptive family. I'm not sure if that was the case, we weren't actually adopted until we were around 9 months? My adoptive mother did love to tell the story that she got us from the children's home because nobody else wanted us. I have a vague memory of her saying we were too much for another family and now I wonder if that meant someone had returned us to the home.

[REDACTED] and I were adopted by [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] who lived in [REDACTED] They were in their 40's when they adopted which technically was over the age for suitable parents. They had a relative who was a friend of the matron at The Haven, so we're approved to adopt. It was clear from an early age that our mother had clearly not dealt with her inability to have her own child and had only agreed to adopt to please our father. He loved us, but he was a quiet man, and [REDACTED] was in charge. He spent any spare time in his shed and so we were at the mercy of our mothers highs and lows.

My sisters adoption experience was very different to mine which sounds odd, but [REDACTED] was born with one leg shorter than the other and epilepsy. I wouldn't hesitate to say that she was given the best medical care, supported and loved by our mother, albeit without cuddles. She had surgeries to correct her leg and saw the top neurologist at the children's hospital regularly for her epilepsy. I, on the other hand was ignored by her and emotionally and physically abused throughout my childhood. Our adopt mother hated the close relationship my sister and I had, and it really bothered her that my sister would always turn to me first.

Our mother was of those parents who would hit first ask questions later, over the simplest things. We were very well behaved kids, and I was afraid of her so such aggression wasn't necessary. Our mother would occassionally strike out at [REDACTED] but [REDACTED] health history mostly saved her. As for me she would beat me with whatever was nearby, fly swat, milk bottle, electric cord, coat hanger and even throw hot water, hit me across the ears and face, which left me with ear problems.

As long as I can remember we were told we weren't wanted, "I wish we'd never got you, I wanted a son, your father wanted girls." Insisting that we had bad blood, and would end up like our mother.

We were always dressed beautifully, and identically. I remember people would often say to her, "The girls are just lovely and they are so like you" she would always reply, "You know they're not mine, they are adopted" and I were too young to know what adopted was, we thought it meant we were "doctored" neutered like the cat. We didn't understand but just always knew there was something wrong with us and we weren't the same as other children.

My sister and I went to primary school. was a year behind me, her frequent grand mal seizures had taken its toll. I loved primary school I felt happy and did well.

I headed to high in for year 7 and followed the year after. That's when the level of abuse really escalated. I believe our adopt mother just couldn't deal with two adolescent girls who were becoming angry and beginning to stand up to her awful abuse. We were good kids, she had nothing to complain about.

One afternoon we arrived home from school, I was year 8 and yr 7, to find a Salvation Army vehicle in the driveway. We could never of imagined why they were there. So the mother had decided it was all too hard and had decided to give us back. It was a shock. We would be separated, with me sent to Winlaton youth justice, and to a girls hostel. We were terrified and there was much talking about what difficult young girls we were. In the end it was agreed that we could stay there but would be placed on a "care and protection application" (now called probation) and directed to have counselling at salvos HQ in Bourke st Melbourne for months. I decided then and there that when I got a job the first thing I would buy was a tape recorder to tape what really went on in that house.

Life continued on and it was that year I had my first boyfriend. had moved from across town and we had become friends. We walked home from school together and saw each other a little on weekends, and in those days it was called "going together" It was innocent and lovely lasted about 6 months.

High School was a nightmare, I was angry, sick of my life, acting out and doing whatever it took to get kicked out of class. I was anxious and had trouble retaining information so wagging and being booted out from class was my way of coping with everything. I spent most nights in detention and many days sitting outside the principals office. Things at home were getting worse and this just fed into my school experience. The mother was forever down at the school complaining about me, and she had no idea what was happening at school thankfully.

At the end of year 10 the principal called me in and told me I was not welcome back the following year. I was told I was a waste of everyone's time and it was highly disruptive to other students. He said he was aware of my home life and how that impacted, but that he couldn't change that. I was so upset, but more terrified of the beating I would receive from my mother.

I said nothing to anyone and the next day I headed to the Commonwealth Employment Service in Moonee Ponds. This would never happen now, but I was able to make up a story that my report wouldn't be available for a couple of weeks when all the younger classes finished. I was offered a job in the office at the Gas and Fuel HQ in Melbourne CBD doing admin work. I went home and told my parents I had decided I to leave school and get a job they didn't object, education for girls was not big on their agenda. Thankfully she never knew the truth and I avoided a beating.

I began work soon after. It was a big adjustment from school, and made worse as things at home with the mother had not improved. At work I not only had to hide my emotions, tears, and bruises but also had lost the ability to run. I couldn't just walk out of the office because I was a mess. It was

hard financially as in those days I earned \$17 week and the mother would take \$10 of that each week.

During this time [REDACTED] and I reconnected. We were now 16. He was the only good thing in my life, and it was becoming very serious. He was now working as an apprentice mechanic in [REDACTED] and we were talking about the future even at that young age.

I spent as little time at home as I could and all my time was spent with [REDACTED]. We were young but so in love. Of course things were moving fast and eventually we had sex. I was so naive I knew nothing about my body or pregnancy. As was my dumb luck I fell pregnant immediately. I told [REDACTED] and he took me to a clinic in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] where it was confirmed. I was given a letter to see the antenatal clinic at Queen Victoria in Melbourne city. I was freaking out but he kept saying everything would be fine. I didn't tell anyone as the last thing I wanted was the mother to find out. I was still living at home.

I had to leave the Gas and Fuel as we got a new team member who happened to be the daughter of a friend of my mothers. Again I was terrified gossip would get out so I needed to change jobs. I began working at the Royal Insurance Company in Collins st.

Soon after there was a huge blow up at home because I was home late from work and held up the serving of dinner. Our mother began hitting me, screaming abuse, the usual crap, she wished she'd never got me, was I out playing up like my real mother, the bad blood running through me, and how I would end up a slut and pregnant like her. I went mental and started screaming back and yelled "well I am pregnant so you were right" she slapped my face and began hitting me then [REDACTED] jumped on her back and screamed for her to let me alone. She walked away and we were sitting out the front away from her. She returned with all of my clothes and threw them on the lawn with a box. She told me to get out. [REDACTED] said "well I'm going with her" and she spat at me saying "if you take [REDACTED] with you I will never speak to you ever again" I was a blubbering mess. [REDACTED] got some things and we left and went to a friends house.

We were able to sleep on her floor and the next morning I got the Age newspaper as they always had a big section for real estate. There was an add for a furnished one bedroom flat in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] for \$21 per week. I phoned them, gave them our details and arranged to meet the agent there. [REDACTED] and I caught two trams, lugging boxes of clothes and met with the agent. We moved in immediately. A young girl from work moved in with us so that helped with the rent, but it was tough. We lived on toast and jam and our big treat was once a week to walk to [REDACTED] market to buy lamb chops and a potato to have chops and mash. To this day I can't look at forequarter lamb chops, it makes me sad.

[REDACTED] would hitch hike over every few nights, but it was hard getting back home so it became less and less. I felt so alone and I was so very afraid. No one ever ever mentioned my pregnancy. I was able to continue work until I was about 8 months pregnant, when my belly couldn't be hidden any longer. In 1970 you were moved on once you were pregnant. I guess the one thing about having so little food it kept me thin. There were also no benefits available from the government at that time so I was really in trouble.

I knew we couldn't stay in our flat. Our friend had left and [REDACTED] had been asked to move in with a work friend and her family. They lived in [REDACTED] and had six kids but wanted to help [REDACTED]. I was glad, as our lives had turned to misery and we were so poor.

I asked a couple of old friends if anyone could help me. The girl that had let us stay that first night, had an older sister who was going out with a guy who was willing to let me stay in his unit for free.

He worked interstate and spent little time there, so I moved to [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. I had no income and no money so I mostly lived off the canned food he had in his cupboards. It was 1971 by now and a stinking hot summer. The unit was a little hotbox and only added to being very pregnant and hot, so I was pretty miserable.

I was becoming increasingly anxious as each day passed, afraid I would have the baby alone. I had no idea what to expect. I had one nightgown, a toothbrush, hair brush and a little cardigan I had knitted, all in a plastic bag in case I went to hospital.

The weeks passed and I was so lonely and just cried all day. Sometimes I would walk to the swimming pool in the heat just to see other people. I would call [REDACTED] at work and cry and the guy the owned the flat I was living in was coming back home, so I would need to move. [REDACTED] suggested he would ask his parents if I could move in for the last couple of weeks of the pregnancy. Surprisingly they agreed, but not without restrictions. I could stay until the baby was born, as long as I agreed never to leave the house and would not bring my baby back there. I was trapped but I had no other choice, I had no one and no where else to go. I moved into [REDACTED] room and he slept on the couch. It was terribly awkward and upsetting. I stayed in the room except to shower and eat. I never spoke unless I had to answer. I just felt beaten, lost, dead inside.

Around 19th April the contractions began. They weren't steady but being so innocent and ill informed I didn't know. [REDACTED] father dropped me in the car park of the hospital. I was taken to a huge labour ward, just a mass of beds surrounded by hospital curtains. There must have been twenty women labouring at once. Women laboured and gave birth with just nursing staff as support in those days. I was put in a bed and the curtains pulled tight around me, and I was left. I was this young 17 year old girl, alone, scared and crying, trying hard to block out the groans and screams from the other women. I learnt later that women of certain nationalities were told the more they screamed the more beautiful their baby would be. I stayed for most of that day but I wanted to run. The contractions were stronger but not unbearable. I told the nursing sister they had gone, she never checked me, so I was told I could leave and go home.

Of course the contractions continued to get stronger and stronger as the day went on. I stayed in the bedroom alone. Eventually I could not endure the pain and was walking down the hall to get help when my water broke. I cried out and [REDACTED] mother came. She explained what was happening and [REDACTED] and his dad helped me to the car to drive to the hospital. Once again I was dumped at the hospital car park, this time in the dark.

I struggled to the doors and went inside, where the nurse took me up to a room. She told me to put the hospital gown on and lay down. The pain was excruciating but she told me I had to have an enema and a full shave. I cannot even verbalise how horrendous the pain was laying there sobbing as she made me lie still to do this. The shave was bad enough but having to be held down while a big tube was inserted and some oily liquid poured into you by hand was unspeakable. I was doubled over in full labour and running to the toilet at the same time. Eventually I was taken back to that horrible labour ward again and locked behind the curtain alone.

I cried and screamed into the pillow until I got an urge to push. I had no idea what was happening and told the nurse I wanted to go to the toilet. She came in, lifted up my gown and laughed at me saying, "Oh God, Get up, you're about to give birth" and told me to walk to the delivery suite. I dragged myself behind her, terrified and in such acute pain. I was told to get up on the bed and two nurses strapped my legs into stirrups and I couldn't move. One of them yelled into the hallway, "Who wants to deliver this baby" even though I was in agony It made me feel like trash, and full of shame. A midwife came rushing in excitedly telling us she would do it, that it was her first delivery.

I was pushing and pushing, wrists held down by the nurses either side of me, and eventually at 3.20 am my baby was born. I cried out to hold my baby but they said no, it says on your file, BFA, babe for adoption. I protested saying no, but no one cared. The midwife picked up my baby and wrapped her in a blanket. She turned her back to me and spoke to the nurses saying, "this is my first baby, I'm going to call her [REDACTED] after my mother in law." I was crying and asking to hold my child, no one cared, no one even looked at me. The midwife left, baby in her arms followed by the nurses. I was hysterical, left alone, distraught and afraid. I don't remember much after that except being told to stop the crying and shaking while the student dr was attempting to sew my tear.

I was sent to a ward. It was daylight and I could see around the ward and once again there were a huge number of women in the one big room, many of them were feeding their babies.

I cried myself to sleep and when I woke up later that morning and [REDACTED] was there beside me. I thought thank God he will help sort this out. I asked had he seen the baby. He said no. Then with tears running down his face he said "I love you, but I don't want to be a dad. I'm only 17." I started to sob, he said sorry and left. I wanted to die.

I was told to shower and change so I did putting on my one white nightgown. I had no pads, no maternity bra or nursing pads as I hadn't known I needed them. I was given some loose pads that just slipped around everywhere and hurt where my stitches were, but given nothing else. I didn't matter.

I was so very depressed, sobbing non stop, so that's when nurses began giving me medication.

It was cruel that I'd been left in the room with all the other mums, all who had their babies brought to them from the nursery to cuddle and feed. They were all so happy and had lots of people coming in to share in their joy. It became one big blur of sadness.

I asked for an appointment with the social worker and was taken to her. I told her I wanted to see my baby and asked could she help me with a bassinet, pram and basic things and I would need and accomodation. She was very cold and rude, and just said no there is none, then handed me a note to take to a nursery a couple of floors up. At the nursery I stood there with my hand pressed to the window and a nurse wheeled out a little crib marked "[REDACTED]". I couldn't see her face, the bunny rug was wrapped tightly around her. I knocked and asked to would I be able to hold my baby, and the nurse flatly refused, I was too scared to argue. I didn't know who to turn to. In my heart I feel like I'm still at that nursery window, with my hand pressed to the glass begging to see my daughter.

My milk had come in and I was leaking all down my nightgown, no one offered help. I had no idea about breastfeeding either. It was all done in private in those days so I knew zero. I don't know how I thought babies fed. One of the staf told me I had so much milk I could feed a nursery. It meant nothing to me. The nurse told me she would put me on a breast pump that would drain my breasts, and the milk would go to feed [REDACTED] and prem babies. I had no idea that the more they pumped the more milk I would make. Still leaking, with much of the front of the nightgown now stained, no one offered me help. I was exhausted, emotionally wrecked, sad, sore and alone. I was such an easy target for them. So naive, so innocent and all alone.

A nurse brought in some paperwork and told me she needed to fill it in to register the baby. She asked me what I would call her. I had decided on [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] in reference to [REDACTED] sister [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] for his mum and other sister, hoping that this might encourage them to see this little baby as their grandchild. The nurse was having problems with the name, her English

wasn't good. Many years later I got my child's birth certificate through FOI, and realised my daughter had a name that meant nothing to me.

My sister came in to the hospital and lay on my bed very sad for me. She asked what she could do. I told her I didn't know, but explained what had been done to me. She told me she wanted to help. She left and I never saw her again for months.

█████ mother and sisters came in so I asked to see the social worker again. She was really not happy but gave me another note to go to the nursery so I could show the baby to █████ family. Without a word spoken we went up to the nursery and once again my little girl was brought to the window. I prayed this would see it all turn around, but they just looked on, no emotion on their faces. █████ little sister said "I don't know how you can do this" I was upset and said nothing, too afraid to ask for help, but no one spoke. █████ mother then said to me "█████ father and I talked about adopting the baby but decided it wouldn't work" They left. In some way I never left that window and to this day I am still standing there with my hand pressed to the window crying for my baby.

I told the nurses I was leaving. I planned to go to █████ house and somehow find help So I could come back for my baby. I caught the tram back to █████ still dazed and unwell. None of the family spoke to me, just brought a meal to me that night. Not a mention of my baby, my health, or the meds I was pumping down. I just slept for a few days, I wasn't well, my breasts were engorged, I had mastitis, an infection, in addition to my depression.

Once I felt a little more well physically, I decided to head to the shopping centre and asked around for work. Coles said they would have some work coming up and I could do a shift soon. I then went looking for a rental or a room in a house. I did a few applications and was feeling confident I would have a home for us soon. I had looked at second hand baby things and was aware how much I would need to buy the basics. I could now phone that cruel social worker █████ and make an appointment to let her know I was getting organised. █████ and I were living under the same roof, I stayed in his room and kept out of the way. █████ and his family never talked to me about any of it, well rarely spoke to me at all.

A couple of weeks had passed now and I was heading to the appointment with the social worker. I had worked a couple of times and had gathered a few bits and pieces. I had promising news about a furnished flat, so I was satisfied the hospital would see me as able to provide for my child. I was still seriously depressed and my anxiety was through the roof wanting this to be over and to be holding my baby.

It was May 3rd when I headed into the city for my appointment with the social worker. Walking into Queen Vic was so hard, I couldn't breathe, I felt all the walls were caving in on me. I don't know how I made my way to █████ office. I was desperately trying to control the panic rising up and taking over me. She came out and waved me into her office. She handed me a papers to sign that she said had been missed when I signed myself out of hospital. I never even looked at them I was so anxious and afraid, just wrote my name. She looked sternly down at me across her desk and asked me why I was here. I just blurted everything out and told her I would need a little more time. She smiled and said "Oh now, now, it's too late dear the baby has gone to her family" I kept saying "what do you mean" She said "Now you know you couldn't have raised her, she has gone to a good family in the best area, with a mother and a father. She will have everything you couldn't give her. You need to go away and get on with your life, and you must never speak about your failings and no one will ever know." I was crying hysterically rocking back and forward. I felt to blame that it had taken too long to organise myself and I'd allowed them to do this to us. Years later, and after years of fighting the adoption laws changed and I received my adoption paper work. I saw May 3 rd was the day I

supposedly signed the adoption papers, the ones I was handed by that social worker. I have always blamed myself for that for not being more aware. Also in that paper work I discovered my baby was still in the nursery on that day, May 3rd. She didn't go to the family for some weeks and wasn't formally adopted until she was two.

Leaving the hospital that day I wandered around in a daze and finally got back to the house. I was in a bad way. I had lost so much, [REDACTED] and now my daughter. I had no one. I just needed to sleep and gulped down the rest of my pills, way too many and ended up in hospital. I was actually sorry I came through it. There was no medical follow up and as always not one person in the house spoke to me about it. I went back to bed and barely moved for a week or more.

It was Mother's Day and all I could think about was my little girl being with another mother. At sometime during the day my adoptive mother turned up. She asked to see me. I came out and she let out a gasp when she saw me, but never asked if I was ok. I guess I looked pretty bad. In an angry voice she said, "your father and I feel like you've been punished enough and we've decided you can go and get your baby and come home." I couldn't believe what she was saying. I simply cried and said it was too late, and walked away.

I went back to my room and once again one day rolled into the next. My sister had turned up some weeks later and she wanted us to find somewhere to live. [REDACTED] family had decided to move away from [REDACTED] and I knew I would need to leave. I would need a job. I phoned my old boss from Royal insurance and he offered me my old job in the office. I was able to start the following week. I had no idea how I would have the physical and emotional strength to get there. I still wasn't strong and the last time I'd been in the office I was pregnant.

My sister and I applied and were successful with a flat and we moved the following weekend. I think it was only that friends of ours were giving us a lift to work each day I had the courage to get out of bed. I made some good friends at work and they were kind to me. One girl started to take me out each night. My drinking was becoming a problem and I remember a guy I worked with, who was a St. John's ambo volunteer, helping me each day with stuff to stop me vomiting every day at work. Although I was on a path to destruction, in another way it helped me, because most nights I would end up with some guy buying me drinks which made me feel wanted, and worthwhile. Pretty stupid really in hindsight.

One night I was out and met up with [REDACTED] who I'd known around [REDACTED] as a teen. He was a good person, decent and treated me well. We were together for around a year when we got engaged, and a year after that married. Oddly enough I received a call from [REDACTED] the night before my wedding telling me how sad and sorry he was, and not to get married. A very unsettling thing to happen and I guess I knew after everything he still had a place in my heart.

I was now working at police headquarters, a job I loved. I was desperate to have babies and even though the marriage had its ups and downs already, I felt we could make it. Soon we began building a house and I found out I was pregnant with [REDACTED]. Then I had several miscarriages and was very depressed. I found out I had an incompetent cervix which I believe was due to the terrible medical care I was given during my very first labour and delivery. A few years later [REDACTED] arrived, then [REDACTED]. They were my life I never let them out of my sight.

My depression and anxiety was still there, hidden under the facade I had developed, no one would ever know. I managed to hide it from everyone except my husband, who was pretty over it, and it caused arguments all the time. I had become heavily involved in the adoption network, Jigsaw and ARMS, forced adoption group. I was working at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] at night, so I didn't have to

leave my children with anyone else. All of this was impacting on my already delicate marriage. We were in trouble, and eventually it fell apart and we split up.

I met [REDACTED] at work and we have now been together 34 years. When we were first together the adoption laws changed which allowed adoptees and parents to meet if they chose to. I was able to meet my birth mother and half siblings. It was hard, she was lovely but we didn't share a history and it's sort of weird. We did keep in touch and I went to spend time with her as she was dying and attended her funeral.

Around the same time my daughter who was now called [REDACTED] decided to meet me. She was 17. I was a wreck by the time she arrived. I don't know that I handled it very well. I had always imagined that we would run to each other and I would hold her in my arms, but that's not how it is. For her, I was a stranger, although we looked alike, we shared no history, and she had a mother. We chatted about basic things I couldn't even think clearly enough to ask her any of the things I wanted to know. It was pleasant and we all got on but I wasn't sure where it would go next.

Whilst I was still shaken after my visit from [REDACTED] my sister called to say [REDACTED] had tracked her down and had wanted to talk about me. He wondered if I wanted to meet so he could apologise for what he did to me. He said he was so sorry, but that he was just a kid when it happened. He told her he was a different person now and hoped I was ok and happy. She said I'd met [REDACTED] and was happy with him and that was the last thing I heard.

It was all happening. [REDACTED] phoned me later that week to say she had a surprise for me, she was going to bring her mother to meet me. It certainly was a surprise but not one I looked forward to. I felt sick but agreed. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] came the following Saturday. [REDACTED] was very different to me, a lot older, totally different colouring and build, a sort of 50's mum, on the other hand [REDACTED] and I were similar build, had our hair coloured and permed the same and were dressed in the same jeans, shoes and pink coloured tops. [REDACTED] obviously felt this too and told me that [REDACTED] and I looked like sisters. She then said that her and [REDACTED] the dad, loved [REDACTED] so much. [REDACTED] said she felt like she'd given birth to [REDACTED] and now she was terrified I would take her away. I tried to explain that was ridiculous but I could feel how insecure she felt. I spoke to [REDACTED] later and she said her mother didn't want us to see each other anymore as she found it upsetting. I knew this was the beginning of the end. That was the last time I heard anything for years.

I had begun a social work course at Monash, whilst continuing to work at night. I was still involved in ARMS, support group. I was busy with my babies who were growing up, and were beautiful, good kids. I still thought of [REDACTED] all the time but no one ever knew as I never talked about it except with friends from ARMS. My other friends, work colleagues, relatives knew nothing about what I'd been through. Even when it got too much for me and I would go to the doctor I would never go into detail it's always vague childhood / adolescent trauma. It was like the prophecy had come true, we had babies that were a secret, we were all told never to tell anyone by everyone we'd dealt with and so never did.

[REDACTED] was 21 and renting with friends when I next got a call out of the blue. It was a little strained but I did find out she had a little girl who was now one. It was hard, each time we connected then she went MIA I would feel like I was losing her all over again. I would get so hurt and even angry and vow that I needed to cut contact, of course I didn't.

A couple of years passed and [REDACTED] phoned to chat. To my horror she was running with a bikie gang, the [REDACTED] and living in [REDACTED] in one of the houses. I said I would come and see her. It was a dump, and when I got inside there was a whole lot of skimpy lingerie sets on hangers. I asked what

they were and she told me she wore them to dance on the bar at the clubhouse. It was like a knife to my heart. I wondered if she was stripping and being handed around for sex but I couldn't bear to ask her. Her child was living with [REDACTED] adoptive parents. I just wanted to put her in the car and take her home. I remember going home, telling [REDACTED] he needed to go and get her. His answer was, "you don't just take someone from the [REDACTED]" I tried to keep in contact to check on her but the number was disconnected.

At the end of that year I got another call this time she was running from the bikies. She asked to meet me at [REDACTED] shopping centre to say goodbye. I drove over and met her she was with an older guy who was going to take her to [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with him. We spent some time together and she left.

Our family moved to [REDACTED] for a new start and I was now working at the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] as coordinator of their young mums program, providing outreach support to young women pregnant and parenting who were homeless and at risk. It was hard sometimes, well a lot of the time, but I felt like I was making a real difference and offered social work with compassion and fairness.

[REDACTED] wrote some time later with photos of her new baby boy. [REDACTED] and I were going on holiday for 2 weeks to [REDACTED] [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] so we would hire a car and drive up to see her. She was still living with the same man and seemed reasonably happy, thank God. She said she would keep in touch.

It was about 7 years later I heard from [REDACTED] and she now had another daughter who was about two. [REDACTED] and her partner, now married and were living in [REDACTED] with the three children. She didn't seem happy in her relationship, but told me she was still there. I hoped to hear from her, but nothing. I would call her phone but nothing.

Three years later the phone rang and it was [REDACTED] telling me she was in hospital and in labour. I talked with her for as long as we could. She had a baby girl. I went out and brought some lovely little outfits and sent up to her, and never heard a word back. I was hurt and found it hard to understand. My husband and kids didn't cope with the way [REDACTED] treated me and would get really cross about it. I understood that it was hard for anyone that hadn't been in that situation to see how I felt.

I had worked at the [REDACTED] for ten years now and had been offered a job at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] in their pregnant young women's program and the high dependency drug unit. I had also been asked to teach VET community services at the local TAFE one day a week. I still had not heard from [REDACTED]

Years passed and nothing.

My girls and I were going on holiday in [REDACTED] to visit my son, their brother. In [REDACTED] my kids were looking at something on Facebook and showing me how it all worked. I asked my son if he could see if [REDACTED] was on it and he was able to find her and asked to be friends with her. We never heard anything for ages then he phoned me one night to say she had answered him. She gave him her mobile and I was able to call her. I had a couple of calls with [REDACTED] and then it went cold again. I told myself that it was the last time I would try to reach out to her as it was heart breaking.

More years flew by I had left the hospital after 8 years and taken up a position at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] as a counsellor, and still did a little teaching. My girls were now married and I had become a grandmother, which was lovely, and my son was moving around the country working. My depression and anxiety was still there, that sadness hiding below the surface bubbling away, and I'd become a pro at putting on a happy face. I still thought about [REDACTED] but more about "the baby" I had lost and

the trauma of the time. I skip around it slightly but I have had a couple of breakdowns, not exactly sure what that means but I was so broken I couldn't function at all.

In 2012 and 2013 the state and national apologies for forced adoption were held. I went to both spring st Melbourne and Parliament House in Canberra for them. Some felt it was liberating. I just felt it was way too late. We needed someone to stand up for us when we were young girls.

I had been working at the TAFE about 7 years when I was diagnosed with cancer and sent off to Cabrini and Peter Mac. It stopped me in my tracks for a long time. I was so very unwell and so busy trying to stay alive I spent little time thinking about [REDACTED]. I resigned from my job as I felt I couldn't be a reliable worker and could offer enough support to the students. I was still not doing well, and having many ongoing surgeries and treatments for a long time

It was toward the end of 2015 when one of my girls phoned me to say she thought [REDACTED] was in trouble, maybe something bad had happened. [REDACTED] son had put a heartfelt post on Facebook about her and it did seem like it may have been court case. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. I couldn't breathe, I was shocked. I was worried about [REDACTED] and her kids. I asked my daughter could she contact [REDACTED] eldest daughter, who was now 23. We were given [REDACTED] mailing address at a prison in [REDACTED]. She was to be held for 6 months, and thankfully had already completed over 3 months of her sentence by that time. I wrote to [REDACTED] and she was writing back. I sent her some money for craft and toiletries.

[REDACTED] was so worried about her younger children as her husband was a FIFO worker and was gone every second week. I asked would she like me to try to help she said she would be so grateful. I was just glad we were communicating. It was school holidays so I flew up to mind the kids. She had asked me not to tell the kids who I was and I agreed thinking they might not know the story. It was stinking hot and so humid you couldn't breathe. [REDACTED] husband picked me up and from the moment I got in the car the kids said how like their mother I was. Apparently the husband had told them I was [REDACTED] biological mother because he felt they had a right to know.

We headed to the house, an old hot weatherboard with no air con. I thought I might physically stop breathing and I still wasn't 100% recovering from ongoing health dramas from cancer. The kids and I spent all of our time in shopping centres so I could deal with the humidity. but also to be fair I had to buy them new clothes as everything was so very small on them by now. I did need to buy them larger size clothes and all of their school supplies before I left. I can still remember contacting books in the heat hands slippery with sweat! I was so very grateful [REDACTED] had given me money to spend on them all which enabled me to help them out.

It was easy with the kids like we'd always known each other, and they called me nana Cinderella as I was their slave. I cleaned and washed everything so it would be nice for them. When the end of my time came the kids were pretty upset and cried at the airport, it was hard.

I talked about it with [REDACTED] and decided as there was still a couple of weeks of summer holidays to go I would go up for a week to help again. I wished I hadn't in the end as the day after I arrived a cyclone hit. It was frightening and I had no idea what to expect. We had no power, little food and since the cyclone the heat and humidity was on a level of its own, so oppressive. I had to lay on the bed as my heart was thumping through my chest trying to breathe. I had little battery left on my phone but spoke to [REDACTED] who said once the planes were up and running he'd get me on the first flight he could. [REDACTED] husband was driving home and was able to take over. After two more days I left for home.

I kept in contact with [REDACTED] husband and the kids and [REDACTED] was coming home soon. The phone rang early one morning and it was her calling from the car. She was so happy to be out of prison and I could hear the kids happily talking as well. She said she could never thank me enough and hoped I would come and visit them all in the next holidays. I was elated and so looking forward to it.

Soon after it was [REDACTED] birthday, the same week as her 10 yr old daughter. I was conflicted, should I send them both a gift or not, as I had one for the little girl. I had a basket of baby things to send to [REDACTED] eldest daughter who was now 25 and pregnant. Then I found myself getting into a tizz, agonising about them all and feeling the youngest girl and [REDACTED] son missing out. I know it's to do with my insecurity and fear of doing something that might be considered as wrong, and losing them all. I decided I would send a nice birthday present to the daughter and [REDACTED] for their birthday and something small for the other two kids to let them know I cared. I saw a "Frozen" singing birthday card and knew the little girl was a fanatic. I hummed and hawed as it said "to a lovely granddaughter." I wasn't sure but thought she would love it. Big mistake!

The kids phoned me to say thanks when their dad came home. I asked if I could speak to [REDACTED] but was told she was out. I phoned a couple of times and in the end her husband who I was good friends with told me that she was angry at me because I was trying to buy the kids affection. I was nothing to her, and certainly not the kids nanna.

I was upset for a long time and thought I might write to the girls as I was too afraid to call. I put a letter in for [REDACTED] trying to explain my side and asking her to not let it come between us all. I heard nothing. Later that year I sent a Xmas card to the girls and a card for [REDACTED] with a short letter. Nothing. I re-sent a copy of the letter a short time later but again I had no response. I had even texted [REDACTED] eldest daughter, as we had got along well when I stayed, I thought. Maybe it was overkill? I was desperate to try and fix it.

The eldest daughter sent me a text telling me she agreed with her mother and she was sorry for what had happened to me as a kid but that they had a family and that they were not just good people they were the best. She said she would have no further contact. The phone rang and it was [REDACTED] she was angry, she said I had no right to tell her kids that I was her biological mother, which I hadn't, and told me to stay out of their lives. She said she had parents, and the kids had grandparents, and to be honest I was nothing to any of them. It was like a shot to the heart. I was totally quiet. She hung up. That was 6 years ago.

So 2020, COVID hit and no doubt it was a shocking time for us all. For me, I need to be busy, continually occupied and buzzing around. I tried to keep it together but more and more my past haunted me. It was there when I woke up, when I went to bed and would wake me during the night. I couldn't understand why our mother had been so cold to me. My youngest daughter had given birth to identical twins the year before and it was a jolt emotionally with being an unloved twin. I was thrown into this scenario of the deepest love for these two little girls in the same way I was totally in love with all my grand babies. I watched the twins totally fascinated and in awe of their cute little ways. I thought how amazing two little babies are and thought what had been wrong with my sister and I? How could our adoptive mother not love us, there was never a cuddle or a kiss. No real affection. I had way too much time to reflect and it made me so sad. Of course in addition I had way too much time to go over and over all of the [REDACTED] stuff. In the end I felt so weak, battered and hopeless I honestly didn't know if I could go on.

I have a very close relationship with my GP, who has saved me several times. I knew it was time I went to see him. I explained that my depression and anxiety had gotten on top of me and I felt

suicidal. He knows I would never do this to my family, however I feel like it's the right thing to tell him if I feel this way. My GP knows I have had so much go on since he has cared for me the last 10 years, but I have never really told him my story. I still skate around it, give bits and pieces and visits are short and I don't want to hold him up. He has referred or tried to refer me to people over time but I'd not interested to go down that path again where I spent so much time in the 70's. I'd rather talk to him. We increased my meds and off I went, vowing to get out of my house more and engage with the community.

██████ eldest son phoned me to say he was engaged which was lovely. He was so very happy. I asked how the family was and he told me that "his crackhead mother had moved out with her drug dealer boyfriend and his younger sisters were living with their dad. I was shocked once again at the lows ██████ life had gone to. Each time I got such news I felt angry that I'd had my child taken from me for the crime of being young and single, and for all this heartache where had it gotten her. I had raised three pretty great kids and felt I could have done a good job with ██████ even at 17.

I will try to keep in touch with ██████ three youngest kids. I have been asked to her sons wedding which absolutely paralyses me with fear, but it was lovely to be asked. I don't believe there is any future for ██████ and I, and what I am concentrating on now is trying to find the truth about my own adoption and trace my biological father.