

**SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO RESPONSES TO HISTORICAL
FORCED ADOPTIONS IN VICTORIA**

INTERVIEWER:

MICHELE HUTCHINS

INTERVIEWEE:

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TUESDAY, 30 MARCH 2021

MS HUTCHINS: Okay. Well, [REDACTED] I will just introduce who we are and what we're up to. So today is Tuesday, 30 March 2021 and I will just get you to say your full name, [REDACTED]

MS [REDACTED] My name is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I was born [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and adopted and became [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

MS HUTCHINS: Lovely. Thank you very much, and I'm just going to state that we're doing your submission today for the inquiry into responses to historical and forced, I'm sorry, historical forced adoptions in Victoria.

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: And we may do one, more than one recording but we will stick to about an hour and a half today and we may pause at some point. I might also say at the beginning of the recording a couple of other things. We need to clarify your submission, whether you would like it to be treated in one of three ways. So this may have been discussed with you before but it can be either a public, a confidential or a name withheld submission. Has anyone spoken to you before about this?

MS [REDACTED] Probably just a name withheld submission.

MS HUTCHINS: So what would happen at that point is the content of the submission will be made public probably in the website or the report but your name would be redacted.

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay. That's fine. Thank you.

MS [REDACTED] You know, I think that if you hide too much it makes it, you know, there's other people out there that have been through the same experiences that need to actually have access to that so that they know that they're not alone. That's the thing that has been so important to me is having access to other adoptees. All of our stories are different but our experiences are shared. I help admin an online support group of 600 people. In that group there will always be somebody who has experienced a particular experience, you know. It's amazing and it just really is very helpful.

MS HUTCHINS: Yes. Yes, to know you're not alone.

MS [REDACTED] And don't feel like you're a deficit because you feel this way.

MS HUTCHINS: Yes. Yes, I understand. Okay, and I will just say also at

the beginning of our recording that you have made some notes for me that you are, through the interview you would probably refer to your mother as "J".

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: Your adoptive mother you would call "N" and your adopted father you would usually call Dad.

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: And that - - -

MS [REDACTED] And he's "K".

MS HUTCHINS: "K". Okay.

MS [REDACTED] And I very – I don't think I ever used that actually.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay.

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: I will just say that your husband's name is "F" and your son's name is "S".

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay. So we have those details now for the people transcribing and this is your interview so off you go.

MS [REDACTED] Well, that makes it hard.

MS HUTCHINS: Well, I can – it does. I agree. Anyway, have you got a place that you would like to start with your interview.

MS [REDACTED] Well, maybe I will just tell my story.

MS HUTCHINS: Yes.

MS [REDACTED] Yes. You know, my mum was 20 when I was born but at the age of 13 she was actually in the care of my adoptive parents. There had been a court case and, you know, it's very hard to get the actual information but I was told that she was awarded by the courts to my parents to care for. Then she went off and she started her nursing and one thing and another and got pregnant.

She went to a home for unmarried mothers and I'm not quite sure what that home was. I don't have much details of that and you would swear that I was a virgin birth. The amount of information my mother would share about my birth was none. You know, at times I used to think "Is she really my mother?" You know, she could give me no information about my birth.

Interesting that she says I was born on the 20th. My adoptive father always would act as if my birthday was the 20th but my birth certificate says the 21st. So I don't know if it has been changed or not. As we know often things were changed.

Anyway, she went to the home for unmarried mothers afterwards. They used to stay there, she says, for three months and then the child would be adopted and they would be sent out. Well, when it came time to sign the papers for me to be adopted she said wouldn't sign them and so she then took me home.

Now, I have only got two documents, two bits of paper about my life in that time and one is my original birth certificate and the other is one line from a register for boarding out infants.

MS HUTCHINS: I'm sorry, [REDACTED] a register for?

MS [REDACTED] Boarding out infants.

MS HUTCHINS: Boarding out infants, yes.

MS [REDACTED] Yes, and it shows that I entered Berry Street and then in August 1951 I was given back to "J" – now, I was born towards the end of September and it seems to me that late September to the week before Christmas would be three months. It looks like I went home, was at home for two weeks and then I was put in Berry Street and I stayed there then until August. I have got the exit date but I don't – I can't prove the entry date. "J" tells me that when I left Berry Street I couldn't roll over, I couldn't sit up and I hadn't spoken a word - at 11 months of age.

MS HUTCHINS: So, [REDACTED] may I interject. "J" is your birth mother?

MS [REDACTED] Yes, my birth mother.

MS HUTCHINS: And how, how did she know that information? So she must have - - -

MS [REDACTED] She went and got me out of the orphanage.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay.

MS [REDACTED] So what "J" tells me is that the person in charge of the Berry Street, where I was, actually wrote her a letter and told her that if she didn't come and get me out I would die, that I was the kind of child that just could not exist in an institutional setting.

MS HUTCHINS: Wow.

MS [REDACTED] So that's why she says she came and got me out, but she also has another story - I'm sorry, but "J" was very creative with the truth. She really, really was, but maybe just with me. It's interesting that my birth sister says that she's the most honest person she has ever known, but with me she was not. She told me what suited at the time.

She also told me that my Aunt P used to keep on going to the orphanage, and my Aunt P was my father's sister, and that she was scared that P was going to steal me out of the orphanage. She was determined that my birth father's side of my family (The "WFamily") were not going to have me, which is interesting because you wonder did they want me.

MS HUTCHINS: All right.

MS [REDACTED] Okay.

MS HUTCHINS: So, [REDACTED] have you got an Aboriginal background then?

MS [REDACTED] No.

MS HUTCHINS: I'm sorry, I thought you said, the "WFamily" would have me." Is that what you said?

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: And the "Wfamily" being?

MS [REDACTED] The "WFamily" are my birth father's family.

MS HUTCHINS: Is it the surname?

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: I beg your pardon.

MS [REDACTED] That's all right. That's all right, because that's another story

that "J" told me one day.

MS HUTCHINS: I see.

MS [REDACTED] It was that my father was Aboriginal and that was not true. That was just another one of her stories.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay.

MS [REDACTED] And, you know, it's always been very difficult for me to work out when she's telling – well, no, I always believe it until I get caught out, to be quite honest. You know, you listen to her and I believe it and then something will happen and I will think, "She's telling me lies again."

MS HUTCHINS: All right. Yes. Yes, memory, over a long period of time also, you know, you don't know, do you, what's going on?

MS [REDACTED] She's given me three different stories about my conception, you know, and more outrageous according to the time. It's not about memory, maybe about self protection or maybe something else.

MS HUTCHINS: And, [REDACTED] can I just backtrack for one second. Did you know, growing up, that you were adopted?

MS [REDACTED] I didn't know until I was 10.

MS HUTCHINS: You didn't know until you were 10. Okay, and when did you find your family? How old were you?

MS [REDACTED] 20.

MS HUTCHINS: 20?

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: When you found your mother?

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay.

MS [REDACTED] And I have to explain that a little bit.

MS HUTCHINS: Yes, certainly.

MS [REDACTED] I was adopted. The adoption papers say I was 33 months old.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay.

MS [REDACTED] But I would have been with the Adoptive family earlier than that. I somehow forgot that I was adopted. They always presumed that I knew, and I did but I didn't, if you know what I mean.

My adoptive mother was very violent to me and I kept on saying to my sister, who was less than 12 months older than me, that I was adopted, "They adopted me and they can't get rid of me now and so they're trying to kill me. That's the only way they have got left to get rid of me," and one day she said to me, "If you say you're adopted one more time I am going to tell Mum," and so I said, "I'm adopted. I'm adopted. I'm adopted," you know, and within a couple of days Dad was telling me I was adopted, and I can even tell you the date but not the year. It was 19 August that my father told me because it was my adoptive mother's birthday. So they must have set that as the deadline - - -

MS HUTCHINS: Okay.

MS [REDACTED] - - - that I had to be told.

MS HUTCHINS: And that was when - - -

MS [REDACTED] I'm sorry?

MS HUTCHINS: That was when you were 10?

MS [REDACTED] Yes, and I don't know whether that was just as I was turning 10, because August and my birthday was in September, or whether it was just before my 11th birthday.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay.

MS [REDACTED] With Dad all these kinds of conversations were had at the wood heap and with Dad with an axe in his hand. I think about it now and I think that's really interesting, anyway Dad said, "Why are you smiling?" and I said, "Because at last you have told me the truth. I knew you were trying to kill me and now I know why." He just looked at me, you know, and then went to great effort to tell me stories about how happy I was to come and live with them and one of the things that he said to me was this story – I lived with them for a month and my mother was to come back and check how I was before she signed the papers. She came to the door and they let me answer it, and I said to her, "Go away, Mummy. I don't want you now. I've got a mummy and a daddy now," and as soon as he told me that I felt like absolute garbage. You

know, how could you do that to your mother and that's why I wanted to find my mother.

MS HUTCHINS: All right.

MS [REDACTED] And, you know, that, more than anything else, was the drive for me, that I was such a wicked person that I had done this to my mother. When I think about it now, I think a three-year-old, and I would have been under three, you know, two and a half or something like that, doesn't do that. I had been groomed, I'm sure, you know.

MS HUTCHINS: And did your mother corroborate the story, your birth mother?

MS [REDACTED] No, she says it never happened.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay. Yes.

MS [REDACTED] All right, but that's what he said and to be quite honest, out of the two people my father was more honest. And to be honest even if it was untrue it formed such an important part of my story.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay.

MS [REDACTED] Yes, he would omit, you know, he would lie by omission but he wouldn't outright lie, so if he said that I believe it happened.

MS HUTCHINS: And irrespective of that the reality is for you it happened, didn't it?

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: That's just what you have been told and you have got that reaction. So, again, just to backtrack a little bit, [REDACTED] Tell me what do you know about the actual circumstances around your mother giving you up for adoption. Can you speak a little bit about that?

MS [REDACTED] There's gossip. There's innuendo and very little information for me. I had been told there was a court case where – my father, in 1952, applied to become a clergyman. His minister and my birth mother's minister was the same person. Apparently in the Methodist Church when a person comes up for ordination they ask if any of the ministers have got objections and the minister said, yes, he did, because of the way that they had manipulated "J" to get me off of her. The minister ended up leaving the church over it and my parents, who were intending to be missionaries, all of a sudden found out that

their name was so tainted that they were not going to be missionaries.

MS HUTCHINS: So, [REDACTED] are you saying that the minister felt that your adoptive parents manipulated the system to take you from "J"?

MS [REDACTED] Yes. It was a private adoption I think.

MS HUTCHINS: I see.

MS [REDACTED] In the last conversation I had with my brother, before he died, he told me that the minister was really angry that they made Dad a minister of religion when he had manipulated "J" in the way he had. He felt that dad wasn't the right kind of person to become a clergyman.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay.

MS [REDACTED] And they were doing their fundraising round to become missionaries. They had to raise their trip back before they were allowed to go and all of a sudden their name was poison and nobody would give them money, and they couldn't go.

Then "J" married a very high, Clergyman who founded a church in Australia. One day he announced that they were going to go as missionaries to New Guinea and they started the process to become missionaries. In 1960 we left to go to Queensland and in 1962, on their way to New Guinea, they dropped in to see us. It was in Queensland that I became physically very unsafe. I think it was "N" was very angry that I had stopped them becoming missionaries, and here they were, you know, they're looking after "J"'s little bastard while she goes and becomes a missionary. I think it was just more than she could bear. She would lose her temper with me very often, and then if she saw that she had damaged me, she would lose her temper again, and so I would get another lot. I learnt to hide injuries.

When I had my first hip done, in 1990, the orthopedic surgeon said that he could see that it had been broken twice. He said when I had the first one, I was possibly quite young, but the second one he said I would have been nine or 10 and he could see how the second break had mended compensating for the first one. He said, "Your family must have known." He said, "You go back and ask your siblings," so I did and I started from the older ones, because "KJ" and "MF" were older than me and "C" was a couple of years younger than me, so I went back to those 3 and asked them. Each one of them said it was a whole lot of rubbish. It couldn't have happened, even if it happened at the time when she threw me down the stairs. Apparently I couldn't walk for about three weeks, that they remember, they used to have to get me to school and get me home.

MS HUTCHINS: So roughly how old were you?

MS [REDACTED] Nine or 10.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay, when that happened?

MS [REDACTED] Yes. It was in Queensland. Yes. I don't remember the event.

MS HUTCHINS: So that would have been the second time that it had potentially been broken?

MS [REDACTED] Yes. I don't remember it though. I have got no memory and I just found it interesting that the three of them all said it couldn't have happened but all remember that event.

MS HUTCHINS: All right.

MS [REDACTED] So I would say that's when the second break happened. I used to have calipers and I remember in Raywood days, which is before I was five, that they were putting on the calipers one day and I was saying about my hip hurting and they said, you know, "Put on the calipers. That's to fix it," When I was an adult I said something to Dad about the calipers for my hip and he said, "It wasn't to do with your hip. You had clubfeet," and I think, maybe that was the first time.

MS HUTCHINS: So how old were you then? Do you remember?

MS [REDACTED] Well, I would have been under five - - -

MS HUTCHINS: Yes.

MS [REDACTED] - - - because I started school in the next town, yes. But, you know, I have got no proof. In fact the orthopaedic surgeon, when I was getting my first hip done, he kept on asking me questions like did I play football. Did I have brothers that were rough with me. He kept on asking all of these questions and I would go, "No, no, no," and my husband was there with me and he looked at the doctor and he said, "Look, doc, how about I tell you, explain something that it might help you understand." Then my hubby said, "She had a very violent upbringing and she was very badly physically abused," and that's when he told us about the two breaks of my hip that hadn't been attended to. Up until then I hadn't known, but often if I go and a new part of my body is being examined they will find damage. You know, I have had a few breaks.

MS HUTCHINS: That must have been very hard to hear.

MS [REDACTED] Do you know what, it was validating, because often the Adoptive family would say that I was lying about stuff. The people who adopted me.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay, so that's "N" and your father?

MS [REDACTED] Yes. They would say I was lying and I had no proof I wasn't. I had no proof that this happened and when it's an adult's word against you, and Dad used to say that I just hated "N" so much that I made up the things, but in my heart I don't hate "N" because "N" was very unwell. She had terrible headaches that nobody would listen to her about these headaches, and she died when I was 12 of a cerebral hemorrhage. They said that she had had a clot that must have given her terrible headaches. Well, you know what you're like when you have got a really bad headache and you have got a kid that you really don't like.

MS HUTCHINS: Well, and also what was – yes. Anyway, you don't know what was going on.

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: How the headaches were actually affecting, you know, potentially the mind.

MS [REDACTED] And, you know, my mother "J" was living her dream while "N" looked after me. If she wasn't looking after me "J" wouldn't have been living her dream. "N" wasn't terribly happy in Queensland. She was away from her family. She wasn't liked at church and I have since found out that a lot of the church people really didn't like the way in which she treated her children.

My girlfriend has been my girlfriend ever since school. I remember her mum coming to our house once and her mum never came back to the house. My girlfriend told me that the reason she never came back was that she said she would never go back into that house where they treated children that way. And the reason I remember it is because of the way I was treated while my friend's mother was there. But because he was religious, you know, everybody treats it as, you know, I was lucky and I have got to this good religious household.

My younger brother, "C", who is their bio, he says we were brought up in a cult, which was of one family, that the way in which things were done – and he is a social worker – he says that it has all the elements of a cult, and yes. It's hard. He's trying to recreate his mum and at the moment it's difficult for him to listen to anything I say.

Recently I was participating in some research that was talking about the feelings of adoptees and always I had thought I was so lucky she died when she did because she would have killed me. But as I'm talking to this researcher all of a sudden something struck me. That I was really, really lucky she died because what if I had have killed her, you know. She had this aneurism growing. It wouldn't have needed much of a knock on the head or an increase in blood pressure and, before you know it she could have been dead. I wouldn't have even had to touch her, but who would have believed me?

I was getting to a stage where I was getting bigger and maybe I would have hit back. I never did and I never thought to hit back, but if I had have, and I had have killed her, that would have been a worse situation. It would have been much better for me to have been killed, than for me to kill her. That would have – no, but you think about the way people think about adoptees. An adoptee being murdered by their adoptive parents - well, you never know what you get, bad blood, you know, all kinds of excuses. Whereas an adoptee murdering an adoptive parent - after all they had done for that child.

I just thought wasn't I lucky. I was so lucky and the violence stopped once she died. It used to be a bit of a game with them. She used to play Dad off. So while Dad was still part of the violence, she used to goad him into it and when she died it stopped.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay. So it wasn't just your mother? It was your father as well?

MS [REDACTED] Yes. My first memory is in Raywood sitting at the table and Dad hitting me with a knife and cutting my hand because I had been naughty. "J" – and, again, I can't guarantee that this is a true story because "J" made up things – but "J" said the first time that she went back after she had signed the papers I had burns on all my fingers and she asked "N" about it and "N" said that she had found me playing with matches so she burnt each one of my fingers to teach me not to play with matches! "J" said she knew she had done the wrong thing. There was nothing she could do.

MS HUTCHINS: So your mother, "J", visited you across your childhood, did she?

MS [REDACTED] Yes. I can't understand how I forgot she was my mother. She was in our house often as a child, you know, and I get a bit angry sometimes that, she could keep tabs on me. She knew what was happening to me but I didn't – I was only the child I suppose. You know, adoption isn't about children. It's about adults fixing up what adults want. The children are just collateral damage.

MS HUTCHINS: Has "J" ever spoken about – I mean she wasn't able to take you from that environment no matter what she was seeing. Has there ever been a dialogue around that? Is that question clear? If she has visited across your childhood and seen something of what you were experiencing at that point she wouldn't have been able to remove you from that environment.

MS [REDACTED] She said that's why she didn't come as much. They used to have young women in their home all the time and there was another "J" and I talked to her because she used to often come. The two "J"s were nurses and they would come together and I went around and saw her one day when I was about 22 or 23 and she said that it was very difficult for "J", every time she came, just to see what was happening to me.

"J" somehow divorced herself from being my mother too. I went down to "J" for the handing down of the Senate report. You know, people said to me, "Are you going to Canberra?" and I said, "No. I think I will go down to "J", you know, and be with her," and we watched it on TV together.

She was in an aged care establishment and the head staff member came in and she introduced me to this staff member and explained that she had lost me to adoption and, you know, and the nurse turned around and said to her, "How many children did you have, "J"?" She said, "Two." After me, she had had a boy and a girl, so I said, "Only two?" She replied, "I forgot about "R", but "R" is a stepchild.

She wasn't doing it to be mean. It just wasn't in her head and yet she had just introduced me to this woman. You know, this woman looked at me and she shrugged her shoulders and she mouthed, "Sorry," to me, so she knew exactly what had happened, but "J" was totally unaware of what she had done. She's got two children.

MS HUTCHINS: Yes.

MS [REDACTED] And there may be another one around because near the end she had a bit of dementia and one day I was talking to her on the phone and she said, "I do want to know what's happened to my baby." I was wondering what that was about. She said a boys name and I said, he was fine. She said, "No, I mean the one I gave up for adoption." I said, "'J', I'm the one you gave up for adoption." She said, "I don't mean you. I mean 'boys name', I left in South Australia."

MS HUTCHINS: Another mystery.

MS [REDACTED] Well, I have asked my siblings and they think I'm troppo and

I must admit I thought about doing DNA just in case there's somebody out there looking but I'm a bit scared too to know. I don't know whether I, emotionally, could handle that. I know a lot of adoptees find out they're not the only one that's been given up. "J" was 20 by time she had me. My sister knows that the only person she ever loved is in South Australia and was before me.

MS HUTCHINS: So there is a chance that there's something there to be found, yes.

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: So, [REDACTED] how did "J" know your parents initially?

MS [REDACTED] They lived in the same suburb in Melbourne and went to the same church. "J" got in trouble with the law and she was put in their care.

MS HUTCHINS: So your mother was put into the care of your adoptive parents at what age?

MS [REDACTED] At 13.

MS HUTCHINS: And they were a married couple at that stage?

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: How long was she with them?

MS [REDACTED] I don't know.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay, and at what age did she get pregnant with you?

MS [REDACTED] Well, she was 20 when she gave birth to me.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay. All right, and this was, this was a Methodist Church?

MS [REDACTED] Well, Dad only became a clergyman after I was born. He worked for the railways in Victoria.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay. So, so that's interesting, isn't it? She was a young child in their care - - -

MS [REDACTED] Mm.

MS HUTCHINS: - - - and then she - - -

MS [REDACTED] At one stage I wondered, because she would never tell me anything about my father. I wondered if actually "K" was my father because he was quite good to me when "N" wasn't round. But I'm not.

MS HUTCHINS: You investigated that?

MS [REDACTED] Well, when I met my father's daughters and, just so you understand, the register for boarding out infants had my father's name, occupation, wage and address.

MS HUTCHINS: I see.

MS [REDACTED] I'm more inclined to believe that than I am "J" actually.

MS HUTCHINS: So you have not found your biological father?

MS [REDACTED] Yes, but in a grave. He was alive when I got his name but by the time I found him he had died. I met my two sisters but my brother refuses to meet me. My older sister took me to meet my younger sister. We were going to meet in a restaurant and she says, "That's the restaurant over there." I'm kind of looking and out of the corner of my eye I saw my youngest sister and I thought, "Gee." It was like looking at me.

MS HUTCHINS: So the oldest of your sisters took you to a restaurant?

MS [REDACTED] To see the youngest of my sisters.

So you saw your youngest sister and recognised yourself and - - -

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: Wow.

MS [REDACTED] At the lunch my husband and I sat either side of her. Hubby said, "I just kept on marvelling." You know, she had the same hair texture, which is very fine hair that I have got, he kept on going through things like expressions and mannerisms. Yes, I had seen photos and it didn't mean anything, but when I saw her in the flesh and expressions and that. Now, we never ever had any contact, but those expressions and hand movements blew me away.

MS HUTCHINS: So how did that feel for you having a mirror like that?

MS [REDACTED] Well, I have only seen her twice in my life.

MS HUTCHINS: You have only seen her twice in your life but she felt like a genetic mirror. Yes, and how did that feel?

MS [REDACTED] It really helped me calm, you know. My husband says that I'm a lot more settled in myself since I found that. It was like all of a sudden I knew myself. You know everything I did or was as a child was bad. I had bad hair. It won't hold a perm. All right. You know, a lot of the stuff I realise now she didn't know what to do with, because it didn't react in the way that it did for her kids. Our genetics were different. I don't know if you know, that I was one adoptee amongst six bio kids.

MS HUTCHINS: How does that work? I thought you had Boy and girl who were older than you, and boy who was younger.

MS [REDACTED] And then girl and another girl and youngest boy.

MS HUTCHINS: Gosh. What a big family. Okay. So, for you, you were surrounded by these biologically similar characters.

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: And then there was you?

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: Is that how it felt?

MS [REDACTED] Yes, I was always the odd one out. I recently found a photo of my father's 50th birthday and all of the bio's have sticking out ears and I don't. You know, I knew that my big brother had sticking out ears, but there was Dad with big sticking out ears and all of them, the girls and the boys all had sticking out ears and I thought, yes, right. It was as obvious as anything that I didn't belong in that family.

MS HUTCHINS: Yes.

MS [REDACTED] And I knew then that Dad wasn't my father. But meeting my youngest paternal sister, that really cemented it, you know, because she was just so much like me.

Another thing that I find really interesting is that they talk about adoptees getting a better life. All of the girls that are my bio sisters have higher degrees except me

But my adoptive family, I'm the most educated girl in the family because I have an undergraduate degree that my husband paid for me to go and do after I was married.

MS HUTCHINS: And what is that degree?

MS [REDACTED] Just an arts degree. Yes, for me it's just, you know, the adoptive family weren't very bright. None of the girls went to university. One of the girls finished high school. I probably would have got a better start if I had have been in my bio family.

MS HUTCHINS: Yes. So, yes.

MS [REDACTED] It was – and I will tell you another bit of funny ha-ha. Both my sister from my birth mother and my sister from my birth father both were lecturing at the one university.

MS HUTCHINS: When?

MS [REDACTED] Both of them were lecturers at the same university in 2018.

MS HUTCHINS: Did they know each other?

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: Did they learn the situation?

MS [REDACTED] I let them know.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay.

MS [REDACTED] But they have never commented so I don't know whether they have had a conversation or not.

MS HUTCHINS: Yes.

MS [REDACTED] I just let it go.

MS HUTCHINS: Yes. Okay. [REDACTED] we're coming towards an hour and I'm wondering whether you would like to either have a break or even, you know, finish for the day and consider the things that you would prefer to cover before we consider it finished, and I also, I don't know if now is the right time to ask whether you would prefer not to sort of head towards the end on this, but I am wondering if you can speak more about those very early months, what

you have learned about your very beginning in life.

MS [REDACTED] About?

MS HUTCHINS: The time that you spent in care before the adoption. It sounds like you have had quite a journey to try and make sense of that and learn about that.

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: Is today the right time to talk about that or would you like to talk about that further?

MS [REDACTED] Yes. I could, yes. You know, and part of it I get a bit worried, because part of it is "J"'s story and, you know, I have had to revise things quite often with "J" because she has told me things that I then find out are not right. In fact, my uncle asked me to ring him. We found each other on Facebook and he asked me to ring him, and he said "J" was the world's expert at taking some current affairs or event and weaving it into a story where she was there and he said, you know, "Don't take a lot of what "J" says as truth."

MS HUTCHINS: And that's her brother?

MS [REDACTED] Yes, and I must admit that "K" said the same to me. That she would make up things, and that she was such a good storyteller you would be suckered right in and then you would find out that it was just something she had made up for effect. I'm not quite sure whether I have told you this today or another time, she said that when I left the orphanage I couldn't roll over, I couldn't sit up, and I hadn't spoken a word. The matron said that I would die. Then she tells me that she took me with her. First of all, she got a job as a nurse, a housekeeper with a doctor and she told the doctor she was a widow and when the doctor found out that she wasn't a widow he made her go because it didn't look good for him.

You know, she told me a number of stories about places where she worked during the time when she was looking after me, that she then went to a TB hospital and was working in the TB hospital and took me along, and then she was a shearer's cook, but her brother says she never left the family home during that time. All the time from when she took me out of the orphanage to when she gave me up she stayed at her mother's place. So I don't know.

MS HUTCHINS: So very difficult to piece together what happened but there are some facts that you, that you have proof of. So could you say again? As a baby you went in to the orphanage, you're not sure but you think at?

MS [REDACTED] I think it was on 8 January or something like that. It seems that that was from the numbering.

MS HUTCHINS: And so you were how old at that point?

MS [REDACTED] I would have been three and a half months.

MS HUTCHINS: So for the first three and a half months you think your mother had you with her?

MS [REDACTED] Well, no. For the first three months I was in the mother and baby home - - -

MS HUTCHINS: I see.

MS [REDACTED] - - - where they used to lock the babies in the nursery and march the mothers in to feed them once every four hours and change them.

MS HUTCHINS: All right, and you have learned that - - -

MS [REDACTED] Unfortunately just from "J" about the mother and baby home. Then she wouldn't sign the papers so they sent her home with me and I calculate that that would have been just before Christmas, and basically just after New Year I go into the orphanage.

MS HUTCHINS: And there you stayed until you were - - -

MS [REDACTED] Until August.

MS HUTCHINS: All right, and that's when your mother says that she saw you and there was no, you weren't meeting those milestones?

MS [REDACTED] She said that the matron from the baby home actually wrote to her and told her that I either had to be adopted or she had to take me out, that I would not survive the institution, that I was making no milestones and that I was just totally depressed and would die.

MS HUTCHINS: That must be so hard to hear, [REDACTED]

MS [REDACTED] You know, you have to wonder whether that's part of the reason as well why I have so much problems with my joints and things because, you know, a baby shouldn't be like that, but then part of me thinks what if she's lying. I'm sorry, but - - -

MS HUTCHINS: Yes, certainly, but you do have the papers that you know

you were in there?

MS [REDACTED] I know I was in there for that time.

MS HUTCHINS: Yes, so there's that feeling of never, never being able to find out what really happened?

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: Yes.

MS [REDACTED] And that's why I'm actually going to get VANISH to get my file because until I actually joined the Facebook groups I didn't know that I could get access to more. You know, when I applied I asked for my original birth certificate and any document that would give me any information about my father. So I got two pieces of paper. What I say to people in the groups is "Ask for all of your file," because I didn't know to ask.

Yes, so I don't know what happened. "J" had me and if my Uncle is right, I stayed at my mother's place and my grandmother's place, and "J" did tell me that my grandmother's last words were that she was going to find me so, you know, whether "J" told me that for a story, I don't know. So if Uncle is right, I stayed with Grandma.

MS HUTCHINS: And is that the period of time that you're saying your mother has said that she worked at these various places or was it - - -

MS [REDACTED] Yes. Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay, and that's, that's a lot of different things she was doing over a very short period of time.

MS [REDACTED] Yes. Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: Yes.

MS [REDACTED] Graphic stories about it, like the fires. I actually went online and found that, yes, there were fires around that time and could have fitted in with her stories and I put something on my Facebook. That's when Uncle contacted me and said, "Please ring me."

MS HUTCHINS: Okay.

MS [REDACTED] He said she was just a lovely liar. So then, again two different stories. She says that she went off one day with me and went up

to the Raywood and left me with the "adoptive parents" and went back. She said when they said, "Where's the baby?" she said, "I gave her up for adoption."

MS HUTCHINS: So, [REDACTED] are we talking after August now when she received you back from - - -

MS [REDACTED] This is a long time after that. This is probably the next year.

MS HUTCHINS: Can I just, I'm sorry to, but can I clarify with you, so your mother came to get you in August - - -

MS [REDACTED] Mm.

MS HUTCHINS: - - - after you had been in the home for many months and now we're moving to that period of time? So she had you for quite a while. Do we know how long?

MS [REDACTED] No, I don't. All I know is that I was 33 months old when I was legally adopted, when the court case was, but that means that it couldn't have been after that time but how much before I don't know. The time I was living with "J" and grandma and my uncle would have been from the time I was 11 months old and when ever I was handed over to the "Adoptive parents".

MS HUTCHINS: Okay.

MS [REDACTED] Do you understand?

MS HUTCHINS: I think so. So, you were born in 1950?

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: Which month?

MS [REDACTED] I was born in September 1950. I stayed in the home for unmarried mothers until the end of 1950. In January 1951 I was put in an orphanage, Berry Street, and I was left there until August.

MS HUTCHINS: So at this stage you're not a year old yet?

MS [REDACTED] I was 11 months old when I left Berry Street.

MS HUTCHINS: 11 months old. Good. Thank you.

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay, and then (indistinct)

MS [REDACTED] Her brother says that I spent the next time, up to when I was adopted at Grandma's place with "J" and Grandma.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay.

MS [REDACTED] Her brother was 16 so whether he remembers everything right, I don't know.

MS HUTCHINS: So and then coming back to what you were saying earlier, your mother went off to see the Adoptive parents and came back and she had left you with them?

MS [REDACTED] This is what she says, that she went off to the adoptive parents and she used to go and visit them and that when she came back they said, "Where's [REDACTED] and she said, "I have had her adopted." "J" said that Grandma didn't know where I was. When I said to Uncle about that he said, "She always knew that they had stolen you".

MS HUTCHINS: Okay. The perception was that they had stolen you?

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: All right.

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: Is there anything you can say about that?

MS [REDACTED] Well, it makes "J"'s story about my Grandma saying about going to find me a bit odd because maybe she did know where I was. I don't know.

MS HUTCHINS: What do you know of the dynamic between your mother as a young mother with a three-month-old baby, you know, a 33-month-old or somewhere under that child, visiting the adoptive parents? Do you know anything about the - - -

MS [REDACTED] Well, "K" says that, she just wasn't capable of looking after me and that I was neglected. If you go back to what I was saying about the family being a cult of one family and remember that she was part of that family for a while you will realise they had considerable power over her.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay.

MS [REDACTED] Yes, the kind of person she was, I actually don't think she would have neglected a child.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay.

MS [REDACTED] You know? Yes, she was, she was very caring with children. From my experience she actually didn't have a bad grip on working with children. I would have felt safe leaving my son with her any time where I would not have left him with my "adoptive parents"

MS HUTCHINS: And she was in her early 20s by then, wasn't she?

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: She wasn't really, really young?

MS [REDACTED] No.

MS HUTCHINS: She just happened to be a single mother? Yes?

MS [REDACTED] Yes, and I had wondered at times if she actually put me in to Berry Street so that she could finish her nursing training because she did finish her nursing training and became, at one stage, a matron of a hospital, and she loved babies.

MS HUTCHINS: All right. Okay. So it's been a long journey to find out all of this.

MS [REDACTED] And you never know. You think you have got it all straight and then something will bring it all down like a pack of cards . Okay. Like when I had done the research about that Walwa fire, in East Gippsland, I thought, okay, maybe she's telling the truth about this and then my uncle rings me and he says, "No. No, you were never there."

MS HUTCHINS: All right. Okay.

MS [REDACTED] And yet I do have a subliminal memory, because if I smell cyprus burning I panic, and "J" tells me in that fire that we stayed in she had blankets that we wet and we were in the creek with the blankets over us while the fire went over and I can believe that because a couple of times I have smelt cyprus burning and I have got really agitated with it. I said to my husband about this recently and he had a different thought. He said every time we went

out to Chinchilla we used to smell the cyprus burning because they had a sawmill that milled cyprus and Chinchilla was where I lived where I was unsafe. So was it then?

MS HUTCHINS: Yes.

MS [REDACTED] - - - or was it from a much earlier memory? I don't know.

MS HUTCHINS: A lot of disorientation and misinformation. Yes, I feel your confusion. You know something is there but you're not sure what.

MS [REDACTED] I am so lucky. I haven't told many people how I found out that "J" was my mother. When I was 13 or 12. Yes, the year my mother died, so I might have still been, yes, I probably was still 12 going on to 13. We had a girl come and stay with church people and be in my class at school and her father was a Methodist minister and she was adopted. So you could imagine us. We got to talking. You know, because we could talk. In that generation, in 1963, you didn't talk about being adopted because that meant that you were saying you were a bastard. So we got to talking and her name was the same as mine. She was staying with people from the church and they had told her that my mother was a missionary and straightaway I was on the alert.

MS HUTCHINS: I see. So that's when you realised. Is that what you're saying? That's when you realised that "J" was your mother?

MS [REDACTED] I asked Dad was "J" by mother.

MS HUTCHINS: All right.

MS [REDACTED] And he informed me, in no uncertain terms, that he would never let me know who my mother was and that if I wasn't so evil I wouldn't ask.

MS HUTCHINS: I see.

MS [REDACTED] So I let it go and every now and again I would ask, and then one day he said to me, he said, "Look, wait until you're married and see if you still feel the same way." I thought that meant that he would tell me after I was married, so I set about manhunting.

On my honeymoon I wrote a letter to Dad asking and he said, "Leave sleeping dogs lie." So then I wrote to "J" and asked her if she was my mother. When I think about it, you know, it's a pretty awful thing to do, but you know, I did it.

MS HUTCHINS: Why is it an awful thing to do to write to your mother and

ask her if she's your mother?

MS [REDACTED] Yes, but, I didn't know whether her husband knew. You know, I didn't know any of this. Anyway, I wrote to "J". "J" says she rang Dad the day she got it and said, "I have to tell her," and Dad said, "No," and she rang him every day until he agreed. He agreed but said that he wanted to write to me first.

So he wrote to me and told me that I had taken action without regard for other people and that by doing that I had made my choice. That I had made a choice that I was not his child and that he never wanted to see me again, and that I would be getting a letter in a few days' time. A couple of days later I got a letter from "J".

You know, when you think about it, "J" had a lot of guts with that. Within a month she had come up to see me. You know, she was married to the head of a Bible college, the founder of the church, you know, and a lot of people wouldn't have done that. I think that she showed tremendous guts in accepting me, and even though, I realise now, she controlled me very well as to who I had access to. I don't blame her for that, because I probably would have done the same thing. You know, in her position she had a lot to lose. Her husband had a lot to lose. You know, I can understand that.

Anyway, Dad told me he didn't want anything more to do with me. I ignored this. Whenever there was something happening I turned up, I turned up like a bad penny, as if I hadn't been told. He has done it a few times where he has told me that, you know, and it's all about him and me needing to be grateful. You know, they find it very hard to put themselves in our position, that as an adoptee, you know, knowing where you come from, knowing where you got this hair from, is important you know.

MS HUTCHINS: There's a deep need to know?

MS [REDACTED] My voice, I used to get into trouble because I was putting on the airs with my family, and I don't know how many times I got into trouble for trying to be snobby, I was told. I would get so confused because I wasn't doing anything deliberately and didn't know what I was doing wrong.

The first person I talked to from my birth father's family was my cousin. When I talked to him he said, "My God, you even talk like one of us, you know." He just couldn't get over that I had the same expressions and the same way of forming words and at the end of the conversation he said to me, "Welcome home, M "Family name"." You know, he accepted straightaway and the only thing he had was my voice.

His mum was the Aunty that "J" had said was going to steal me from the orphanage. She was still alive so I got to meet her. She had advanced Alzheimer's. We went to the pub for lunch and when we turned up she just welcomed me and she said, "It's so nice to have the family back together again." "You know, it's nice to have the family together," and she just kept on saying that and my cousin said that after I went home she kept on saying, "Poor "J". Poor "J". Poor "J"," because "J" and her were best mates. So I didn't bother about doing DNA or anything after that. You know, I just thought, okay, I think we know where it comes now.

MS HUTCHINS: Yes, and it sounds like you had a wonderful sense of belonging in that experience.

MS [REDACTED] Yes, and I was so lucky too – "J" gave me a love of my Aunt. You know, "J" said my Aunt used to come and see me in the orphanage. "J" was scared was going to steal me. When I said that to my cousin he said, "Yes, that was my mum." You know, he said, "I could imagine that." She just had a real love for people, and, yes, that was really, really special.

I had, I think, three years before she died. It might have been more. I went down for her 90th birthday and when she died I, I went down for the funeral. I was going to just slip in the back and one of my cousins came up to me and said, "Aunty's son says you're to come down and sit beside him."

MS HUTCHINS: How wonderful.

MS [REDACTED] They were just lovely. You know, they were just lovely. I have been very lucky, you know, in some ways.

MS HUTCHINS: Yes.

MS [REDACTED] I have still got a brother that won't meet me and, in my gut I feel like when I do meet him it's going to be special. I don't know why. I know nothing about this guy except that he's gay. He doesn't want to meet me and he refused to work with the adoption service on anything. He said, "Tell her her father is dead, that's the end of the story." All right. Yes, he refused to have anything to do with me.

MS HUTCHINS: That's (indistinct)

MS [REDACTED] Something inside me says if I ever get to meet him it will be special. I don't know. Yes, I would like to meet him.

MS HUTCHINS: Do you think that the children of the biological parents, they have not experienced what you have experienced and they don't

necessarily understand that need?

MS [REDACTED] Are we talking about my biological siblings?

MS HUTCHINS: Yes, your brother that won't meet you.

MS [REDACTED] He has no idea.

MS HUTCHINS: He has no idea of what you have been through and why it matters to you?

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: Yes. A disconnect there?

MS [REDACTED] Yes. I don't think – you know, everybody can identify with a birth mum but I don't think many people at all can identify with adoptees because you have to experience it. You have to experience being raised in a family where none of the cousins, none of the aunts, the uncles, the grandparents have anything in common with you and, you know, even if you're separated from a family through family difficulties, at least you have that there that somebody will say, "God, you're like your mother doing that," or, something like that. We have none of that and I don't think people can understand you know, just when I met my youngest sister that first time it was, "Okay." You know, it sounds crazy but it was a real calming thing for me. I knew where I came from. I had a connection to someone.

MS HUTCHINS: Was it like a sense of coming home, to yourself?

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: Yes. We are coming to the end of the hour and a half and I'm mindful of making sure that you don't overdo it today so we will soon finish. I am going to ask you just a couple of questions to sort of finish on. One of those questions is, you know, what support you needed along the way and what support that you have had. This could be a question for next time if you feel like you would like to talk about it in a fuller way. Yes, and maybe some comments about the redress and how you would like to see that go. Shall we pick it up next time?

MS [REDACTED] Yes, I think so - - -

MS HUTCHINS: I think that's - - -

MS [REDACTED] - - - because this is big stuff.

MS HUTCHINS: It is.

MS [REDACTED] And, you know, what I have got now is enough and isn't enough.

MS HUTCHINS: Yes.

MS [REDACTED] What I'm finding is the older I get the more isolated I feel. You know, I feel like adoptees are a fair weather family. When everything is going fine you're welcome in that family, but never expect either family, either the birth family or the adoptive family, to have your back if something is going badly. That's when you realise that you are totally alone and the impact that that has on my son and my grandchildren and that – and, and, as my sister and I were talking this morning, she said the impact on her. The ghosts in the nursery. The impacts on her because of her mother, yes, was really quite strong and those are the kinds of things that people need to be aware of.

MS HUTCHINS: And, [REDACTED] just which sister are you referring to?

MS [REDACTED] I'm talking about my maternal birth sister.

MS HUTCHINS: And that's not your youngest sister? That's the older one, is it?

MS [REDACTED] No, this is my mother's daughter.

MS HUTCHINS: No, I'm still not clear. Is this "J"'s daughter or is this - - -

MS [REDACTED] Yes, "J"'s daughter, and would you believe that she lectured in maternal and child health.

MS HUTCHINS: She's "J"'s daughter that's younger than you?

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: And there's "M". Is that right?

MS [REDACTED] "M" is my father's daughter.

MS HUTCHINS: I'm so sorry.

MS [REDACTED] (indistinct)

MS HUTCHINS: Good. Okay.

MS [REDACTED] So "J" had a boy and then girl.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay, and so the girl is a support system for you?

MS [REDACTED] She is the one I'm the closest to.

MS HUTCHINS: Of all of your biological family?

MS [REDACTED] Of anyone.

MS HUTCHINS: All right.

MS [REDACTED] You know, any of my siblings.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay.

MS [REDACTED] Closer than any of the adoptive siblings, yes.

MS HUTCHINS: And with her knowledge of early childhood development she's able to really understand?

MS [REDACTED] Yes. Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay.

MS [REDACTED] And I'm not sure but I suspect, because I have known her since she was, well, she was six weeks old when they were going to New Guinea and dropped in on us, but that was 62 and it was 1970 that we first went down as "J"'s daughter. I went down to the family as "J"'s daughter.

MS HUTCHINS: You stayed with your biological family?

MS [REDACTED] Yes, in 1970.

MS HUTCHINS: But not realising they were your biological family?

MS [REDACTED] No, I did. That was after I got married.

MS HUTCHINS: I'm so sorry. Okay. All right.

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: Okay. So you were married by 18?

MS [REDACTED] No, I was born in 1950.

MS HUTCHINS: Yes, that's right. I'm sorry.

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: They popped in to visit you in 62?

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: All right. I have got it.

MS [REDACTED] My husband was 18 when we got married .

MS HUTCHINS: All right. Okay. Well, look, I think we will leave it there today, if you're comfortable to, and we will pick it up. We can, we can talk about making another appointment with this and we will just talk about what we will cover in the next session, but part of that will be this issue of support
- - -

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: - - - and redress. All right. Are you happy with that?

MS [REDACTED] Okay. Thank you.

MS HUTCHINS: I will phone you in the next few days to make, or tomorrow perhaps, to make a time, and thank you so much for trusting me with your story.

MS [REDACTED] That's all right. I'm really glad that – you know, I just don't have the emotional energy to put it all down.

MS HUTCHINS: I understand.

MS [REDACTED] And somebody who can bring me back on the topic helps. I tend to wander a bit.

MS HUTCHINS: Yes.

MS [REDACTED] Yes.

MS HUTCHINS: It's been, it's been an absolute honour. So I look forward to

talking to you in another week or two.

MS [REDACTED] Thank you.

MS HUTCHINS: All right. You're welcome.

MS [REDACTED] You take care.

MS HUTCHINS: You too.

MS [REDACTED] Be gentle on yourself.

MS HUTCHINS: Thank you very much. Take care. Bye-bye.

MS [REDACTED] Bye.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED

Instead of the second interview we decided to go with something I had written for the interviewer and rewrote it for my submission.

I was brought up taught that I was A CHILD OF SIN verses a child born of love. I can remember my a/father on at least one occasion referring to me that way. The inference being that as a child of sin I was bad and always would be. Deuteronomy 23:2 "A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the Lord." was quoted to me. My adoptive parents never told me this, but people from my father's church were quite vocal. I was no good because I was a bastard, and my children and grandchildren were no good either, because I was a bastard.

Maybe that is one reason I worked so hard doing 'good'.

For 20 years I ran a community centre for people over 60 years of age. I believe that clients are the best determinators of their own needs and how to address them so I worked with older people to find ways to best work in the community. I want to tell you 2 adoption stories from my professional role as community worker working with people over 60.

When a new community worker came into the community they would be taken around the other agencies to give them an idea of what was in the community and the people involved in running those agencies. One day the old mental health service worker brought round the new worker who was replacing her. It was the new worker's first week in the job. We chatted for a bit and I asked the old mental health worker how many adoptees she had as clients. She looked

shocked at the question and informed me she didn't know of any. The new health worker turned to me and started listing the ones she knew, emphasising that she hadn't met all the clients yet. The old mental health worker just sat there with her jaw dropping. The new mental health worker was an adoptee, so she noticed. You don't know if you don't look, and with adoption in Australia no one seems to be looking at what is happening or gives recognition to the impact adoption has on our lives. It just never comes up. When we tell people they push it to one side, it's not important. It happened a long time ago. "You wouldn't remember that so it could have no impact." (The last was a direct quote from a General Practitioner, when I told her I was struggling after finding my father's family.) This is not good enough!

In my community work I published a newsletter. During the Senate Inquiry and apology time I did an item in the newsletter about adoption, mainly because I anticipated some press around it and wanted people to be prepared. My funding body required stats of various things. So for my stats, about one on one time spent with clients in my office, I used to add a one word notation for the topic of discussion as a way of flagging possible topics needed for the newsletter. The month after the article I had 40 with 'adoption'. I had never had that before. From then until I retired people continued to come in and look for help around adoption. One of those cases was a woman who lost a child when she was raped at 15. In later life she decided she wanted to find him and did, in a grave, because he had suicided. I was the first person she had told about it. She was so relieved to have someone to talk to about it.

Adoption is hidden, not spoken about, our great shame. Being adopted is still a bit like being gay was in the 70's. I had the old Sixth Schedule birth certificate. Every time I started a new job I had to explain away my dodgy birth certificate. I can remember the reactions of the people I had to present it to. Some were quite insulting to me. How many adoptees don't know they can get it replaced? It needs to be fixed.

I took a client, a birth mother, to an open adoption support meeting (for anyone affected by adoption) and they gave out a document similar to what can be found on Vanish's page here: <https://vanish.org.au/media/17323/lifelong-issues-in-adoption-by-silverstein-and-kaplan.pdf>. I told my husband he was free to read it as I walked out the door to attend to other matters. He was blown away with how much it explained what he had observed in me in our 40 years of marriage. All of a sudden he got it.

For the last nearly 10 years I have helped admin support groups for adoptees on Facebook. I am grateful for the other adoptees who share their experiences with me. All our stories are different, but the themes are the same and with nearly every experience we have had, we can find someone who has experienced a similar thing. It is very validating. So what have I learnt from

the groups?

- 1) Adoption support need gets greater as you get older. And of course that is less recognised in the community.
- 2) We have been bought up with a sense of shame at our existence. As bastard children our parents shame became our shame. When parents do something 'wrong' to them, children can't blame parents, so children take on the feeling that it is all their own fault these things are happening.
- 3) We were encouraged to hide our shame in-case society rejects us, but the reality is that society had already rejected us. Our families reject (or fail) us, and this continues. We are not on their radar, they do not reach out to us.
- 4) I seem to be unusual among adoptees because I have a long and comfortable marriage. Relationships can be difficult for adoptees to establish and maintain.
- 5) I am not unusual that I have a difficult relationship with my only child. I feel guilty that my child also has to wear the impacts of adoption and even his children are wearing the impacts. Again relationships can be difficult for adoptees. It all adds to the shame adoptees feel as if everything that happened to us was our fault.
- 6) a lot of adoptees are in the 'helping professions'.
- 7) as you get older you understand more and more the damage that has been done to you and you find yourself questioning what your adoptive parents and society have told you about being rescued and advantaged by adoption. You start to see the cost of your adoption.

Support groups are important. Online peer support groups provide some support and greater flexibility, however face to face support groups are better.

I have attended support groups in both Victoria and Queensland. Unfortunately I cannot attend these days because they are not held in accessible premises and I cannot do stairs. It's sad that the more we need the support group the less accessible it is to us. I would like to see a requirement that all adoptee support groups are accessible.

I also need free access to adoption aware counseling. I coasted along pretty OK, most of the time, until I became a grandmother, when adoption stuff crashed in on me. All of a sudden I kept thinking of what would happen to my grandchild if the things that happened to me happened to her. It made me realise how much of this had influenced my in securities and life long loneliness, that I hid by just working harder. Of course this was a silly thing to

do.

When I compare myself with my husband we live very differently. One day my husband explained how he saw what was happening. He said that for day to day living he uses about 30% of his energy. When a crisis comes up he might use another 30 or even 40 % of his energy, but when it is all over he still has reserves so he can recover. He said I use 70% of my energy for day to day living. When a crisis comes up I don't have much in the energy bank and may use the very last of my energy dealing with the crisis. The problem is that I then have no energy left to heal and recover.

I have no family. By that I mean that I don't have anyone who, if you asked them about their family, would think to include me in what they said. They don't place me in the family unless specifically asked about me. My step mother was a lovely lady, but I don't know how many times she told me about a family gathering or happening as if I was a close family friend. One day she was telling me about an event where "they had all the family up on stage". My hubby kept on kicking me under the table and mouthing "shut up". She didn't mean to be cruel, it is just how she thought about my place in the family. I was interested in the family, but outside of the family.

I have only one child, who I have a difficult relationship with. He refuses to have a conversation about end of life stuff at all. My husband says he is really scared he will be totally alone when we die. Hubbies family will give my son some support, but no one from my 'families' includes him in the family. His wife is a migrant, who had a fractured childhood too, so support from her family won't be much either. That makes me cry. And the reality is that it also means that the trauma will continue through the generations. How can we end it?

At the moment I seldom leave my home. I mean this literally. I have left this house no more than 10 times in the last 2 years. The only people that come to my home are my husband (nearly 70), who is still in full time employment, and my girlfriend who is 75. Since the pandemic started they are the only people I see.

I'm lonely and alone. Part of the problem is that I no longer cope with being with strangers. I'm difficult in a group. Recently my friend and I listened to Judy Lucy being interviewed by Richard Fidler. My friend kept saying 'she has no filter'. I suggested it might be because she was an adoptee and sick of filtering everything for others. I tend not to have a filter these days either.

I'm really scared that at the end of my life, like at the beginning, I will have governments allowing people to make bad decisions for me because it is the easiest for them. That my best interests once again will not be a factor. I

would rather be dead than in that situation. How do I find someone to look after my interests?

People ask me about redress. I have lost so much that I doubt any amount of money would be enough. Although I didn't think the apologies were going to give anything either. But.....

All my life I have had a couple of reoccurring nightmares which I would have about once a week. Hubby learnt to lie across me and restrain me was the easiest way to get me to settle, and sometimes I didn't even remember I had had the nightmare next day. For the month after the apology every time I fell asleep I would wake up screaming. And that happened even when I was so tired I fell asleep at my desk. Slowly they started reducing and by 6 months they had stopped. Since they stopped I have had 3 and each time I knew what the trigger was and it was always strongly adoption related.

It is nice not to have those nightmares.

Finally I want to thank the commission for giving me someone to help me work on this submission. I tried many times to put it all together and would just give up. It takes a huge amount of emotional energy to put something together for strangers. For most of my life any criticism of adoption was seen as being ungrateful and the only people who seemed to understand were other adoptees. Other adoptees have told me I am brave to tell you my story and said that they can't tell theirs. I wish you could hear their stories.

Thank you for not only supporting me to do this, but giving me another adoptee to tell my story to. It allowed me to be more open about my life as an adoptee.

I had intended to get this off today but during the night I thought I had missed one important thing. That is about the health of adoptees. You will obviously have people much more qualified to talk about medical issues with adoptees but I would like to put on record my experiences.

During my life I have had some very bad medical care. Some of it, I believe, is to do with issues created by my adoption.

When I was 18 I had my appendix removed. The surgeon told me the next day that the reason I was in theatre so long was that he couldn't find my appendix. He told me it was right up under the liver. It wasn't the first time doctors couldn't find my organs and I also have a retroverted uterus. At 63 I found out that I have a sister and a brother with Dextrocardia,. Looking back I laugh, because once again I was in hospital with a misdiagnosis at the time I found out. Perhaps it wasn't doctor incompetence, that was the problem, but that my

organs were not quite in the right place. I am pretty sure my heart is in the right place though.

When I was in my 30's I was told I had Haemochromatosis. One day I saw a different doctor in the practice and he said he didn't think I had haemochromatosis and got me tested for the gene. I didn't have the gene. From then on I was constantly told to stop drinking because the damage it was doing to my liver was going to kill me. The next time I went to the doctor, I got my husband to go with me to explain that I was a non drinker. I could tell by the look on his face that he didn't believe hubby either. At 63 I learnt that my father was an alcoholic and it set me wondering if I was born that way. If I was an alcoholic, but just a non drinking one because I had been raised by Methodist clergy.

I first got arthritis when I was 22. While some of it might have been from injury I don't believe it all is. I have what I call "attacks of arthritis". I have a constant itchy scalp problem. When I was in my 60's I discovered my mother and sister have psoriasis. At the time I found out this both my mother and sister were being diagnosed as having psoriatic arthritis. I had never linked loosing the skin on my elbows, under my arms or in my groin during an "attack of arthritis" to being part of my arthritis. I just thought it was stress related.

Again, in my 60's, I was put in an ambulance after taking one tablet of Oxycontin. When I told my brother about it he was horrified. Hadn't anyone told me it had put him, my mother and my sister into ambulances? No, no one had told me.

One final thing about my medical treatment. Often when I tell a doctor that I am adopted I see them mentally check out. With no medical history to help them I am not worth the effort. My needs are once again thrown away. I am thrown away.