

My name is Martin Rayner and the following is an account of my experience and ongoing struggle with being adopted.

I was adopted several weeks after birth into a family that already had one other adopted child who was several years older than myself. My adopted family were very loving and supportive of me in all my endeavours. We went on many family holidays and I was sent to one of Victoria's most elite private schools. Looking back on my childhood, I consider myself to be extremely fortunate and have countless happy memories.

However behind my smiles and appreciation for all that I had, was a tremendous feeling of loss, fear, guilt and anguish believing that I was unwanted, or as had been told to me, a "*Second-hand child*". Unbelievably my first negative experience with my adoption came at the hands on my Grade 2 teacher and continued weekly in Grade 3 and 4 as she became the school librarian. She frequently referred to me as the "*bastard child*" and made me sit outside during library class and I wasn't allowed to borrow books.

My struggles escalated during my teens, as like all teenagers I sought to find my identity and place in the world. This search is extremely hard when you don't have a starting point. I watched with some jealousy my friends interact with their parents and how as they grew older there seemed to be a strengthening bond based on their genetic connection. This appeared in many forms such as; academic, sports, humour and most importantly an unspoken connection that produced harmony in their family.

I felt like an actor playing my role of the good son, whilst masking a void that I couldn't see nor quite fathom. This secret part of my life was rapidly compounding into a trauma as I had no outlet to properly release my pain and was the only aspect of my life that I had almost completely shut off from my family and friends. This trauma escalated to an extreme level after losing a close friend and then my Grandfather in the space of a few weeks.

After many months of spiralling into an isolated depression I decided that my only escape was to take my own life. At the time I felt that I was beyond repair and was ready to go, fortunately (however unfortunately as I felt at the time) the firing pin jammed and I simply walked back home as though nothing had happened. In a strange way this event provided me with a massive release from my pain and I felt mentally reset.

When I was twenty, I finally gained the courage with the support of my wife to commence the formal search for my birth parents. The process was unlike how I'd prepared for, after a lengthy discussion with the social worker I was handed a thick file of my original documents and she got up and asked me if I wanted her to go and call my biological parents to let them know that I'd collected my birth records. I was shocked and yet filled with an overwhelming sense of love that they'd been waiting for me all this time. I had value.

It has been just over twenty years since I was reunited with my biological family (my parents married and had four more children) and throughout the ups and downs neither side gave up hope. The past 12 months has seen a tremendous amount of healing and a deeper connection to both parents and my siblings.

The key message that I want to pass on to the Inquiry is that the impact of adoption on my life has been significant and emotionally destructive. Whilst I was placed with the perfect family and loved, it didn't stop the yearning for and deep sense of loss for my other family. The presumption that adoption

provides individuals a better life by placing them in a more stable environment, is only materialistic in reality.

I understand that in today's environment, it's likely that my adoption wouldn't have occurred based on the overwhelming support now provided by various Government agencies for Mothers. It does make me feel sad and hurt that I was forced to be an unwilling participant in the process of human collateral damage, in order for the Government to recognise that unmarried Mothers needed to be helped, not shamed.

Moving forward I'd like better support for Adoptees in the form of increased accessibility to psychological assistance. At present professionals trained and experienced in Adoption are heavily concentrated in inner city locations, which isn't practical for someone in my location. In addition I'd like more psychologists trained in Adoption related grief and loss. The small number of psychologists that I have seen, I felt like I was providing them with more of an interesting test case than receiving any constructive benefit for myself.

With hope and kindness,

Martin