

Coming full circle

On a beautiful, sunny morning in Sydney three years ago, I suddenly had a flash of longing to be with my birth-mother. It came from nowhere, a forlorn feeling that the outside beauty of sky and water did not match the sadness I was experiencing. I do not know much about my birth family, except that my mother had hearing and speech impairments, making it necessary for her to give me up. I have no knowledge of my father but for some reason this does not seem to matter so much. The yearning has always been for my mother. My adoptive parents love me as their own and my life has been filled with many blessings. However, in my late thirties, a yearning to know more about my first two years of life started to grow. An internal journey began eight years ago, to face these early losses. This article is about how I have come to accept my adoption, without perhaps the possibility of ever finding my birth family.

I was born to Chinese parents, fostered briefly, then adopted by a Malay family, in Malaysia. My first inkling that I was adopted came around the age of seven, when I started school. I asked my parents then if I was adopted and was told that I was too young to know the details. Over the years, my parents did not say much about my early life because they thought it would bring up too much pain. On my part, it made me feel lost in secrets that I could never uncover. However, I brushed this off by enjoying the freedom of youth, including a heady student life in England. In my university and working life abroad, I did not have any thoughts about my adoption. Then with the birth of my children came the awesome realisation that instead of being alone, I was now genetically linked to people close to me and with this came a sense of responsibility to share the deeper core of myself with them. When they were seven and five, wanting to know more about their family history, I was suddenly faced with an identity crisis. I did not have a clue as to who I was.

This crisis forced me to confront the emptiness within. In the hole, were fragments of self requiring to be put together again. Each fragment represented my self-rejected and unremembered past and losses. My first step was to reach out for help. The first six years involved intensive on and off therapies, workshops and courses of various kinds - you name it, I have probably done it. Memories of my past would come out unexpectedly. One in particular led me to ask my parents of how I got to be adopted. They told me about my birth-mother's condition and it coincided with the memory I had unearthed. This knowledge helped me to understand that it was not my fault that I was given up. Finally, those early secrets have been revealed.

It surprised me that it took so long to resolve my grief. When I thought the last fragment had been uncovered, another would surface. I also kept having frequent thoughts about my birth-mother, missing her and wishing that she was here with me. The longing I described above was triggered in the early months of moving to Sydney from Singapore. There were other triggers, such as being asked about my medical history, or the approach of my birthday each year.

It would take another two years post-therapy before I could honestly say that I have come to an acceptance of my past. My best healing came through the use of

expressive modalities such as art, writing, drama, dance and music. By expressing my thoughts and feelings through these channels, I unearthed all my pent-up rage, sadness and other deeply embedded emotions. Much to my surprise, there was also an unblocking of creativity that got buried with all the bad stuff.

Having support was immensely important to see me through those intense years of self-discovery. They came in various forms. A family that loves me, friends who genuinely care and have stood by me, a mentor who understands. Most importantly I have clung on to a spiritual faith to see me through the bad patches. This early flickering light has gradually grown stronger over the years. It has helped me to see my experiences from a broader perspective. This is that from separation, there is the potential for building a self that can pick up the pieces to make up a whole again. I have also learnt that forgiveness, most especially forgiveness of self, heals many wounds and is the gateway to compassion. That love comes in many forms; my mother wanted a good life for me out of love, even if this meant she had to give me up.

A few months ago, I wrote a letter to my adoptive parents thanking them for their unconditional love and for standing by me, as I went through the emotional turmoil of coming to accept my adoption. In doing so, I broke down a barrier of protection I had put up a long time ago. Now I am a stronger person, with fewer anxieties and hang-ups about the past and future. I am sure now that my birth-parents wanted the best for me, even though they could not be part of my life. In many ways though, I feel that I was with my mother long enough for me to hold her in my heart. She is alive in me, even though I do not even know what she looks like. In retracing my steps into the past, I have found out that she has been with me all along. It was only the denial of this early loss that kept me from seeing this.

Although this journey has not been easy, I am grateful to have persevered to reach this point. There will always be triggers to remind me of those early losses but running away to avoid facing them was only a band-aid that prevented healing from happening. My hope is that in writing this story it will help others in the same predicament.

An Adoptee