

When I grow up

"When I grow up I'm going to live on a farm, have red check curtains in my kitchen, six children who will run barefoot through fields and ride horses".

I can't tell you how many times I said this as a child, from as young as I could remember and every time everyone laughed because this was so far removed from the way I was brought up. Little did I know how this would come back to haunt me forty six years later.

I was adopted at six weeks by a couple unable to have children of their own. We lived in a beautiful house, in a beautiful suburb. I attended private schools from pre-school and did every activity outside school that I took a fancy to, until I got sick of it. My father worked hard and was a kind a loving man, who always saw the good in everyone. My mother was a difficult woman and I found myself trying to please her till the day she died.

Six months after the death of my much loved father, and several years after mum's death, I decided to look for some details of my birth mother. I had always known I was adopted . My parents had all my adoption and court papers, so I knew from a very young age the name I had been given at birth and my birth mother's name.

I did not, when I started my search intend to have a reunion - only get some information and maybe fill in some blanks. I went through the usual channels and before I knew it in front of me was more information than I thought possible. There were few surprises. My birth mother was 19, my father 20, both had jobs but didn't want to marry. My first thought, "good on you, don't get married because you're pregnant". To this day I still think my birth mother did the best thing for me and I would really like to thank her. The news that astounded me was, my birth family came from the country, although she had been sent to Sydney for the pregnancy and birth. I decided I needed to know more and needed the 'country in me' to be satisfied.

I found my birth mother surprisingly quickly. I was devastated however, to find her living in a nice suburb not far away - Why didn't she still live on a farm? I wrote one of the suggested letters DoCS printed in the Blue Guide in the hope that if she had children (I know she has a husband), and they saw my letter, it would be easy to explain my letter on the basis of a family history search, and most importantly - her cover would not be blown.

I posted my letter, overnight mail. Four close girlfriends and I got in the car and drove to 'her' place. We sat out the front. Our hopes were dashed of seeing her because she lives in a very secure town house with two electric gates and internal garage entrance. We sat there discussing 'what if's', we walked around the block - maybe we would catch sight of her from a window - we went to lunch around the corner in the local club where we decided she could have been and sat in the restaurant and picked 'her' out amongst all the 60 somethings eating with us. It started to get ridiculous as we all had different ideas and we didn't find one person who looked like me - we decided I looked like my father. At this point I think I'm going to go mad. My friend wants to get her called over the PA system and we will hide behind the bushes in the foyer and see her. I have to call a halt to the proceeding - I can't stand it. Stalking doesn't seem to be in my nature so we drive home.

The postman has been. A letter for me. " 60 something" writing . It's got to be from 'her'. It is. I can't believe it. I open it and cry. Why did she write such a terrible letter? Why is it so rude? Why is it all about her? Why did I try to find her? How could my birth mother be so like my adoptive mother? I pondered all these questions for 12 months before I decided to find out more about my birth family and maybe my birth father - he would have to be like my adoptive father - surely.

The prescribed information told me my birth grandfather (her father) was deceased when I was born. At Births Deaths and Marriages on the internet I was able to go back from the time I was born in ten years groups until I came across my grandfather's name. I applied for the certificate. This death certificate gave me the most information about the family. It listed all his children and the ages they were when he died. I was then able to work out their birth dates. Although because of privacy laws I was unable to get my birth mother's siblings' birth certificates, I at least had full names and ages. Instead of the 1 sister and 1 brother my birth mother had told the Department, she actually had 3 brothers and 3 sisters all still living when I was born. The death certificate also told me my birth grandmother's maiden name and my birth grandfather's parents' names, along with his mothers maiden name. So started my family history search. I have my birth grandparents' birth certificates and marriage certificate. I have now gone back five generations and still looking. The death certificates give the greatest information.

With the information I had from the certificates, my best friend and I packed the car and headed for the country town mentioned in the death certificate. Our first stop, the cemetery and there was my grandfather, great grandparents, and the list goes on. The town we discovered had a historical society and in we marched, armed with certificates and names and ages of 'her' brothers and sisters. Fortunately all the siblings had unusual names.

We walk into this musty old room at the back of the library and the secretary of the society greets us enthusiastically. We tell her we're tracing family history and don't have much to go on. I produce the death certificate with all the children's names and she informs us straight away that her cousin is married to my eldest aunt. My head starts spinning as she gives us addresses and phone numbers of all relatives living in town and nearby. She knew my grandmother ('her'mother) from church and spent a lot of time with her. She gave us directions to her grave and gave us paper clipping about my grandmother and all the good work she had done in the town. We got a map of the town and went from house to house with all our new addresses and sat and waited to see someone. We didn't, but it felt wonderful. I felt like I belonged. We took photos of graves and houses. It was a fantastic weekend.

Through PARC I decided to write to my eldest aunt. I figured she would have known about my birth as she was already married when I was born and had two children. She had to know of the secret. She wrote a very short note back, saying she couldn't remember my father's name and couldn't give me any family or medical information. She ended her letter with "sorry". At least this was a nice letter. I liked that she wanted to protect her sister and was grateful she acknowledged our letter. We have now sent another letter - thanking her for her letter - there has been no answer. If there is no answer, I will have to leave it for the time being.

I'm not looking for another family - I have my own. I just want someone to acknowledge me as a person from 'her' family. I definitely don't want to meet 'her' - I don't like her, but I am still grateful to her - I have had a wonderful life - but I have no background - only the certificates and photos of graves.

"Take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly, and try another. But by all means, try something" Franklin Delano Roosevelt. A