Victoria's story

When I was first told by my parents at 15 years of age that I had been adopted out when I was 3, the first thing that came to mind was that I was the only one that hadn't been aware of this!!

The rest of our family had known all my life and managed to keep it a corporate secret! 15 years of family Christmas's, weddings, birthdays with their secret remaining intact .A silent conspiracy kept in place for my benefit.
I felt betrayed by the very people I'd put my trust into.

I had always felt different from the others in my family, without understanding why. For one, I was an only child, so the concept of siblings and long lines of cousins and relatives was quite foreign to me. People told me I looked like my father and I never questioned it.

I grew up quite lonely as a child and in my teenage years suffered badly from anxiety and depression, never feeling I was good enough and fearing rejection at the slightest negative response.

My mother was very affectionate, but also inconsistent in her discipline...hitting me with a leather belt for something I hadn't perceived as wrong, and then rewarding me for wagging school, as she wanted my company at home, even going to the extent of writing a 'sick letter' for me. (She suffered a lot of health issues, including depression and anxiety, mainly stemming from losing her only daughter herself, to adoption.)

I would be anxious when they would go out to the RSL as my mother loved the poker machines and if she lost badly, she would take it out on me when they returned, both physically and verbally.

I am still connected to my adopted mothers' side – she was actually my Aunt. My Birth Father,(who I understood to be my alcoholic uncle, who I never liked as a child) was her brother, so there were still blood connections.

My Adoptive father, as I grew older, began to confide in me about his relationship difficulties with mum. They both started to confide in me and I felt as if I needed to be the 'adult' trying to keep things on an even keel. When I was 13 years old, my Adoptive Dad made sexual advances towards me, saying that mum didn't understand him and that he was 'in love' with me! Very distressing at that point in my life.

I felt I couldn't go too close to him after this, even though he didn't follow through with anything but fondling. I realise now how much this 'boundary violation' affected and can still affect my relationship with men. As a young woman I found it difficult to draw the line where I wanted it to be. I believe that as an Adoptee, I was anxious to please others so I would avoid any further rejections. This was also my role with my parents, which I'm sure added to my already anxious nature.

One day another bomb was waiting to hit... I answered the phone at my workplace, and my Adopted mum told me that her long lost daughter had contacted her, after 30 odd years. I had known about this 'unknown daughter' who mum had given birth to out of wedlock, and knew some of the pain it had caused her to not know what had become of her, having been forced herself, to give this child up for adoption.

The confronting thing was, that she wanted me to be with her when they met.! The very thought of this threw me into a spin! The real daughter has come back – the one mum has longed for all these years was here, and was wanting to reconnect. Where did I fit in to this? Wasn't I the 'fill in' while there was no- one else? I felt like the imposter who had no where to go and no identity. I muttered something in the affirmative, but inside I felt my world had caved in. This seemed to have a greater impact on me that anything else had.

Finally meeting my Birth Mother when I was 27 was also not the most positive experience. She had contact details of my Birth Father with whom she had separated from years ago, and made contact with him 2 weeks before my first wedding. My Adoptive Mum had at this point been diagnosed with cancer, so the timing was not great! It added to the stress of organising my own wedding, with my Adoptive Mum being too ill to help. It opened a Pandora's Box for me, with relatives coming 'out of the closet', so to speak, at this crucial time in my life.

Yet, despite this, I realise it was fundamentally important to be able to meet her and the others and see where I fit in to the larger scheme of things. It also helped me to understand that she had loved me and felt she'd had little choice in relinquishing her role as my mother. It was good to meet others who resembled me with whom I was connected genetically, and who could tell me something of my family history.

I wasn't just different from anyone… I had a grandmother who was an artist…my mother loved dancing and swimming! I had the same hands that she had, as did my half sister. It's amazing to realise this connectedness that so many Non Adoptees can take for granted.

After the initial meeting, I slowly came to realise that I still had a place with mum – the history we shared that this daughter had missed out on. Nothing could replace that. Mum's birth daughter was a stranger, despite the strong genetic connections they shared, they could never really bridge the 30 years that had gone by. Still, they began to build a tentative friendship, and bit by bit, I put the pieces back together inside to reassemble a place for myself in the picture. Mum wanted us daughters to stay in touch, but it was a painful thing for both of us, and we eventually took different paths.

Even with my own half sister, it has been difficult to build a strong sisterly bond, without having those years of memories together. We have also been strangers, brought together from different backgrounds and even cultures…trying to suddenly 'play' families. It seems to be quite artificial to me.

So now in my 50's I find I have very little 'family' left, with most of my Adoptive Mother's family dead now. I am thankful to have had a second chance of life, married to a wonderful husband, who has supported me through these emotional struggles and helped me rear a family of four. (Three Step children and a daughter from my first marriage.)

However, I have found that being a step Parent has challenged my own rejection issues and made the job more difficult because of my own adoption.
I have been recently blessed to discover I have another half sister who was also adopted out after myself, after receiving a letter she wrote to me out of the blue! She told me she was born 3 years after me and was adopted out as a baby .We have missed out on all these years together and find we have much in common and regret the time we have not shared as siblings.

Adoption has left a heavy legacy in my own life, and the lives of my children in some ways, mainly through the complications of relationship, the loss of a sense of place and identity and the stability of having a family history. I have found much healing over the years through God's work in my life, but still believe these practices should never be repeated or perpetuated in any way for future generations.
My prayer is that we learn and gain insight from the sufferings of the past to offer better options for our children's children.