

What do I want?

Recently I attended an interview with Isabel to discuss my wishes prior to her contacting my birth mother. She raised a number of issues that I hadn't considered and in recent weeks I've been thinking further about my hopes, dreams and expectations. Initially I said that I was searching because I want medical information. One of my kids has been diagnosed with ADD (attention deficit disorder), it's not on his father's side so I wonder about my side. Is there this history of boys struggling with school, and if so, how did it progress – did they grow out of it. And of course I have normal curiosity – what does she look like, what talents does she have. Will she be musical like me, will she hate sport – like me. But really it's a lot more than that.

When I began this process and told friends I got a variety of responses, most people said – I would be curious too, good luck etc. One friend said 'I couldn't do that to my parents, how are they coping'. As if I didn't already feel uncomfortable, her question made it sound like I was betraying them. I told her they will always be my parents; I wasn't looking to replace them, just to get information. But I do feel guilty. Isn't that bizarre, my birth parents create and then relinquish me, my adoptive parents choose to adopt me – and I who had no choice in anything, feel guilty about finding out who I am.

One other friend served me a curve ball when she said that in my place she would be too scared to search, because 'what if you find out your mum is loopy'? Political correctness aside, I thought it a good question, indeed 'what if she is loopy', how would I really feel. I don't know, but I think I would be sad, because it might mean we couldn't really have an adult relationship. And I would be scared because what would it mean about my mental health or my kids mental health. And what of any subsequent kids she had, would they be 'normal'. It's easy to run away with fear and what ifs, so I decided to discard thinking about this any longer. If she's loopy I'll just have to deal with it.

Whilst 'medical reasons' are the starting point, I know they are only the surface reasons. Really I want to search so I don't have to live with 'what if' scenarios; I don't have to live with the fantasy. Mind you some of the fantasies are pleasant, one is that my mother is this talented, attractive, gorgeous (in all senses of the word) woman and that we will be soul mates (and she will be rich and want to help me travel the world). That I will look at her and see an older, wiser version of myself, that just by looking at me she will know what I feel and think and her really knowing me, will make me feel warm, grounded and peaceful.

But the problem with fantasies is that others come up unbidden. When I'm feeling a bit insecure I see her as this 'mouse' who tries to please everyone and who runs around doing much and achieving little. Or if I'm feeling fat and ugly there's another fantasy woman, this one is loud, fat and not very bright and has had five other kids who are on drugs and/or welfare, and they will expect me to help them. I almost blush to write this as it is so politically incorrect, but fantasies and emotions are like that – often they are not pc.

So, the 'why' of my search is evident, when I use my head I realise my mother is probably an ordinary lady with her share of ups and downs. But when my imagination or anxiety takes control, I worry about all sorts of things and wonder if I am somehow doomed by my genes.

All my life I have skimmed on the surface, I get on reasonably well with most people but I don't feel great bonds. My family love me and I them but somehow it feels like their should be more. When I say 'I love them' I am not even sure what I mean, I think so differently to my parents that it is the proverbial 'square peg in a round hole'. Sometimes I think it is just the generation gap – for they were forty and forty-two when they adopted me and so it's almost two generations.

But I think it more than that, they are good people and I wish only kind things for them, but... there is always a but. We share a history and we share a life but we don't share 'a soul'. And I think that is what I am looking for. I want to find someone, preferably my birth mother but really just some one, who feels like me, who thinks like me, who gets what I am saying because he or she thinks the same, not because they've learnt to read me. I don't know how realistic this is, I've asked my friends in ordinary families, some feel that connection with their family really strongly, but some said things like – I don't have that either, I look like my family but we are really different and I've moved to Perth because I am not close to my family.

So maybe its not just adoption, maybe it's about all sorts of things that create human ties. Maybe some of it is the fact that my adoptive mum and dad are not particularly close to their parents. Maybe they did not really know how to get close to me when I was little and now it's too late. Or maybe it's my ultimate fear – that I am not lovable enough.

The saving grace for me is my children, I am certain I love them; I think that part of that love is that I understand at least parts of them. I can see the gears in their brain matching at least some of the gears in my brain. I love being able to see 'my eyes', their fathers chin, their aunts swimming talent. I love the connections, the fact that they are themselves but also like their cousins in some ways. It's so new to me, to see how they fit in this world. I want to feel the same about ME. My kids will often put their hand against mine to see how they are growing, when they are going to catch up to me. I want to put my hand against someone's and find they are the same. I want someone to say – I did the same thing when I was your age, or your aunt also loves the piano. I want to be in the 'real world, not a fantasy world.

A changing point for me was when I received my non-id, I knew I wanted to search and find out who I looked like etc but hadn't yet really given it much thought. Then I discovered that my mother and my grandmother were hairdressers. I've always loved fiddling with hair and I thought my decision to be a hairdresser was all my own.

I loved the idea of belonging to a generation of woman that are creative and love hair. I was blown away, something happened in my heart, I really can't explain it, I just felt 'something' new. Somehow it did change my sense of self; there is a solidness that comes from this knowledge. I guess it is like the rituals in family, like celebrating special events as a family, as I look at my photos I can see a history of us as a family. But that history ends with my arrival, there is no 'before' for me, and now at last it's begun to change. Before there was me, there was a mother and a grandmother and already we are connected through our work.

As I've written this I've more and more realised that I really do want something from a reunion. Certainly information, a photo, medical history – those tangible things. But more than that, I want to create a picture of myself in a wider family, I want to see lines connecting me backwards and sideways. I want to see my name on a family tree with branches in all directions, including branches for my adoptive family.

I want to look in the mirror and say – thank you God for giving me xxx eyes or I can blame xxx for going grey early. I've had enough of fantasy. And if the truth hurts I will deal with it. After all dealing with 'not knowing' hurts and I am pretty experienced at that. I've survived everything life has so far thrown me, and I will survive the truth, whatever it may be.

So, I am waiting, waiting, waiting, hoping, hoping, hoping. I am anxious, I am scared and I am proud that I am facing my fears. At least there's a silver lining – I've lost 3 kilos, all the anxiety has taken my appetite away.

Alicia.