

Submission to the Inquiry into Social Isolation and Loneliness in Queensland.

I am adopted. Being adopted is a lonely life as adoption is a life long burden that gets heavier the older we get. As an adoptee I have to carry adoption alone.

For the last nearly 10 years I have helped admin support groups for adoptees on Facebook. I am grateful to the other adoptees who share their experiences with me. All our stories are different, but the themes are the same and with nearly every experience we have had, we can find someone who has experienced a similar thing. It is very validating. So what have I learnt from the groups?

1) Adoption support need gets greater as you get older. And of course that is less recognised in the general community.

2) We have been bought up with a sense of shame at our existence. As bastard children our parent's shame became our shame. When parents do something 'wrong' to children, the children can't blame parents, so the children take on the feeling that it is all their own fault these things are happening.

3) We were encouraged to hide our shame in-case society rejects us, but the reality is that society had already rejected us. All our families reject (or fail) us, and this continues our whole lives. We are not on their radar, they do not reach out to us. We have no cousins, no uncles or aunts. We are isolated aliens in all our families.

4) I seem to be unusual among adoptees because I have a long and comfortable marriage. Relationships can be difficult for adoptees to establish and maintain.

5) I am not unusual that I have a difficult relationship with my only child. I feel guilty that my child also has to wear the impacts of adoption and even his children are wearing the impacts. Again relationships can be difficult for adoptees. It all adds to the shame adoptees feel, as if everything that happened to us was our fault.

6) a lot of adoptees are in the 'helping professions' as we know what it is like to feel unsupported.

7) as you get older you understand more and more the damage that has been done to you and you find yourself questioning what your adoptive parents and society have told you about being rescued and advantaged by adoption. You start to see the cost of your adoption. It made me feel less a part of society.

Support groups are important. Online peer support groups provide some support and greater flexibility, however face to face support groups are better. I have

attended support groups in both Victoria and Queensland. Unfortunately I cannot attend these days because they are not held in accessible premises and I cannot do stairs. It's sad that the more we need the support group the less accessible it is to us. I would like to see a requirement that all adoptee support groups are accessible.

I have 19 'brothers and sisters', yet I have no family. By that I mean that I don't have anyone who, if you asked them about their family, would think to include me in what they said. They don't place me in the family unless specifically asked about me, and then they would say "Oh, but she is adopted". My step mother was a lovely lady, but I don't know how many times she told me about a family gathering or happening as if I was a close family friend. One day she was telling me about an event where "they had all the family up on stage". My hubby kept on kicking me under the table and mouthing "shut up". She didn't mean to be cruel, it is just how she thought about my place in the family. I was interested in the family, but outside of the family, it wasn't my family.

My birth mother was in an aged care establishment so I went down to be with her when the senate report into forced adoption was handed down. The head staff member came in and she introduced me to this staff member and explained that she had lost me to adoption. The nurse turned around and said to her, "How many children did you have?" She said, "Two." After me, my mother had had a boy and a girl, so I said, "Only two?" She replied, "I forgot about "R"," but "R" is a stepchild." She wasn't doing it to be mean. It just wasn't in her head that I was one of her children and yet she had just introduced me to the staff member and I was with her about half the time from my birth until I was adopted just before my third birthday. You know, the woman looked at me and she shrugged her shoulders and she mouthed, "Sorry," to me. She knew exactly what had happened, but my mother was totally unaware of what she had done. She's got two children and I was not one of them.

I have only one child, who I have a difficult relationship with. It means that I don't get to see my grandchildren. His daughter in law is a migrant, who had a fractured childhood too, so support from her family won't be much either. That makes me cry. And the reality is that it also means that the trauma and loneliness will continue through the generations. How can we end it? How can we ensure that adoptees and their families have a stabilizing connection and don't just feel like aliens dropped to earth?

At the moment I seldom leave my home. I mean this quite literally. I have left this house no more than 10 times in the last 2 years. The only people that come to my home are my husband (nearly 70), who is still in full time employment, and my girlfriend who is 75. Since the pandemic started they are the only people I see.

I'm lonely and alone. Part of the problem is that I no longer cope with being with strangers. I'm difficult in a group. Recently my friend and I listened to Judy Lucy being interviewed by Richard Fidler. My friend kept saying 'she has no filter'. I suggested it might be because she was an adoptee and sick of filtering everything for others. I tend not to have a filter these days either.

As I said, I volunteer by helping admin a support group for adoptees. The online interaction with other people and the face to face interaction with my hubby and friend are the only personal interactions I have. The radio provides my company.

When I compare myself with my husband we live very differently. One day my husband explained how he saw what was happening. He said that for day to day living he uses about 30% of his energy. When a crisis comes up he might use another 30 or even 40 % of his energy, but when it is all over he still has reserves so he can recover. He said I use 70% of my energy for day to day living. When a crisis comes up I don't have much in the energy bank and may use the very last of my energy dealing with the crisis. The problem is that I then have no energy left to heal and recover.

In many ways it is a relief to live the way I am at the moment. I don't have to wear the adoptee mask of pretending that I am ok and use the emotional energy that it takes to wear the mask. Hubby has noted that I am more relaxed than I have been in the nearly 60 years he has known me. But I find myself withdrawing more and more into myself and I am not sure it is sustainable if my friend or hubby dies.

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