

**ACCIDENTAL DISCLOSURE OF ADOPTION; A CHALLENGE TO
PASTORAL CARE**

By

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Introduction

There are two kinds of relationships in life. One type of relationship is genetic, which we share with our relatives through birth: biological children, parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, aunts and uncles. No matter what happens that genetic relationship remains. Nothing can erase the permanency of the biological connection. The other kind is a union that begins with a promise. Marriage is such a union. Adoption is another. The adoption tie, established with a promise and recognised in law, provides loving parents and family for the child whose biological parents are not willing or able to parent. (Schooler and Atwood; 2008:3). This thesis was born out of a lifetime of experiencing the trauma of Adoption on three levels. i) Personal. I was given up for adoption and have personal insight into some of the trauma. ii) Professional. In my work as a Pastor within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, I have been working with people/families that have been faced with the trauma of adoption. iii) Spiritual. The moment that initiated the healing of this trauma began when I heard a message preached on the biblical text, Ephesians 1: 4-5 “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.”

In order to truly live we have to die. 2 Corinthians 4:11 states, “For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.”

It's Biblical. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Theologian and martyr, was right when he said, "When Jesus calls a man, (sic) He bids him to come and

die." All of our experiences, knowledge, training, and everything, which we thought was overly important, lead us down the executioner's path. We need to die in order for God to bring forth life in us. Yes, God blesses beyond our wildest dreams. He gives us abundant life by removing guilt and shame; replacing it with joy and peace. The fleshly will get in the way of this happening. That's why he kills it. More life will flow because of this work.

Galatians 2:20 was Paul's life theme, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me." As Christians we have our life framed by that. We read in the scriptures that we must lose our lives before we can find our life. It is within this context that I found that in death there is grieving. Learning to cope with the grief process ultimately leads to a healthy resurrection. In my search for a methodology, I read Kubler-Ross' model on dealing with grief. I was able to draw many parallels between dealing with the trauma of adoption and the trauma of death and loss.

This thesis is held together by using the Kubler- Ross' model, commonly known as the Five Stages of Grief, a hypothesis first introduced by Elizabeth Kubler Ross in her book *On Death and Dying*, which was inspired by her work with terminally ill patients. I have drawn on Kubler-Ross' findings on Grief, to bring potential healing to all the parties to a place of healing.

I will also use interviews that I conducted, which are real life examples of people's trauma related to adoption. The thesis will reveal that a

comprehensive approach, using pastoral care, will bring about a degree of healing, to those affected by the trauma of adoption.

Declaration

I, Gary Lloyd Rivas, hereby declare that the dissertation which I submit for the degree Masters of Arts in Practical Theology at the University of Pretoria has not previously been by submitted for a degree at this or any other University.

All sources that are used have been indicated and duly acknowledged, by means of complete reference.

Name of Student

Gary Lloyd Rivas

Signature

Date

Name of Supervisor

Prof. Maake Masango

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Date

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the following people who have journeyed with me during the research and writing of this thesis;

Yahweh – My cry is the same as the Psalmist, when he declares, in acknowledgement to who God is, ‘Father to the fatherless, defender of widows – this is God, whose dwelling is holy. God places the lonely in families. That God would love me so much, and prepare a loving family for me.

Jacqui Rivas – My wife for over 20 years. My life has never been the same since you came into my life. You have been an inspiration to me in so many ways. Thank you for shaping me and for choosing me. Thank you too for giving me a loving family.

Rebekah and Daniel – I could never imagine that I could have had such wonderful children as the two of you. I see God’s calling over both of your lives. Thank you for being patient with me, while I did this work.

Ronnie and Ursula Rivas – You chose me, when others rejected me, for that I will be eternally grateful. If it were up to me, I would have chosen

you! Thank you for loving me unconditionally. I have learnt so much about God because of you.

Debbie Harper (nee' Rivas) – Although we had different birth parents, you were always like blood to me. Thank you for being the best sister I could have ever prayed and wished for. I'm still sorry about your Renault.

The Jones'- You accepted me into your family and became adopted parents and sisters to me. You have always included me as one of your own, Thank you.

Diphoe Barotho – In all the years of Apartheid, you worked in our home, with dignity and love. You were like a mother to me in the way you served God and cared for me. The witness of God shone through you and lit up my life. In many ways, you sacrificed your own family, for the sake of our family. Words will never be able to express my gratitude to you.

Gracepoint Church – Our family in God. The leaders and community of Gracepoint have inspired me and encouraged me in so many ways. It has been a gift of immense proportions to be able to serve you. In you, I have seen Christ, and have felt part of His family.

Ursula Cuzzocoli (nee' Minaar) – Although you have passed from this life to the next, I knew you long enough to say thank you for choosing life for me, I know that there were other options available to you.

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Rev Doctor Paul Veryn

I believe it to be a privilege to count Paul as a friend and mentor. His contribution to make the world a better place for every one of God's creations has come at a huge price for him, yet he understands more than anyone I know, the rewards that await him in heaven. He lives Jesus' instruction to us found in Matthew 25:31-46, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me' – Jesus of Nazareth.

Jayne Vine

Jayne worked tirelessly to find my biological parents. Thank you for your tenacity. I owe you so much.

Stilios Nathaniel – As Rebekah said after I met you, you will never know what you’ve missed out on.

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CHAPTER ONE

ACCIDENTAL DISCLOSURE OF ADOPTION: a CHALLENGE TO PASTORAL CARE

Introduction

Anthony Minghella suggests that: “The feeling of not belonging, of not being entirely worthy, of being sometimes hostage to your own sensibilities. Those things speak to me very personally.”

Adoption is personal. I found out that I was adopted when I was 13 years old. I had absolutely no idea, that the people who I was living with for the last 13 years weren't my 'family'. I even looked like them! There was never a hint from my parents who adopted me that I was anything different to them that I was born to another woman. The home that I grew up in was a loving and welcoming home. This made me believe that I was their child. When I was told that I was not born into the family, at first I was confused. All these years I had only known one dad and one mom. How could it be that somewhere out there, there was another dad, and mom?

The author began to wonder as to how many of the people out there are struggling with this same problem? How do I pastorally work with those who discover that they are orphans? The journey of searching for identity began; at times I just wanted to forget. These were some of the questions that came to mind.

A week after my mom told me that I was adopted; I remember consciously making a decision to move on with my life. It was a defining moment in my

life. Do I rebel and make an issue out of my adoption, or do I accept it? In a way, I understand that in not dealing with it properly then, it leads to a longer period of trauma in my life. It is my hope that this thesis will help offer a level of care to those who find themselves in a similar position. The discovery made me wrestle and I began searching for a pastoral way of dealing with this issue.

Wimberley asks; “What does it mean to be persons of worth and value in our temporary culture?” (Wimberley 2003:15). I began asking questions about my worth? Who would simply give another human being away? A defenseless child who had not chosen to come to life, except by parents who you thought loved you?

Wimberly answers the question by stating, “Whatever the answers, the fact that we perennially raise questions such as this suggests that we humans are always interested in constructing meaning.” (Wimberley 2003:15). I realized that some of my restlessness was caused by seeking for identity.

In their book, Parenting, Donaldson and Dobson, quote statistics that are frightening to read. They state that today, in America:

“2795 teenagers will get pregnant

1106 teenagers will have abortions

372 teenagers will have miscarriages

1027 babies will be born to mothers who are addicted to cocaine

67 babies will die before they are 30 days old

105 babies will die before they are a year old

211 will be arrested for drug abuse
437 children will be arrested for drunken driving
10 children will die from gunshot wounds
30 children will be wounded by gunshot fire
135000 children will take guns to school
1512 children will drop out of school
1849 children will be abused or neglected
6 teenagers will commit suicide
3288 children will run away from home
1629 are in adult jails
7742 teens will become sexually active
623 teenagers will contract gonorrhea or syphilis
Tomorrow in America it all starts again...” (Donaldson and Dobson 1993:20).¹

The above statistics left a shockwave as I could imagine. For many of the children quoted in the above statistics, you will find that they come from dysfunctional families. I was fortunate, in that my parents who adopted me had shown me nothing but love. They sacrificed so much for me. They loved each other dearly. It was a happy home. I asked my parents if one day, I wanted to, could I contact my ‘birth mother’? They agreed to it. The agreement was that when I turned 18, they would give me the file on my adoption and support me in any way. This answer assured me of their support in searching for my own identity. The reader will now understand

¹ Children’s Defense Fund. Figures are daily averages based on annual figures. Some statistics are from 1988 census data. Other figures are derived from annual crime reports and other information dating from 1985 to 1988.

my restlessness in this journey. The journey was like a roller coaster. One moment you are up (don't care, the other time you want to know).

Knowing that I was adopted from the age of 13; made me feel at times, lonely and confused.

So the journey begins. What seems to be a lifetime now, the highs and lows of what it means to be adopted have been revealed to me. The trauma of adoption begins at different stages. There are so many permutations to this trauma, that for the sake of this thesis, the author will use his own examples and traumatic encounters to form a framework with which to work. This base will help me to enter into the life of those who are adopted. As I researched I realized that: "When issues that normally occur within the framework of adoption arise, parents (and children), can experience a wide range of unsettling reactions: guilt, failure, inadequacy, fear or helplessness. (Atwood, 2008:213). These are some of the problems facing those who are adopted. They are traumatized, especially when they discover that they are not children of the family they lived with. One has to consider e.g., in the western world, adoption is easily made, especially when a mother is not married. The child is adopted as soon as he or she is delivered. The African's have a different way of adoption. It is normally done within the family, with no legal papers. The child is called "*Ngwana wa ko lapeng*" which means a child born within the family. I will not elaborate on this concept, since I am working on the western concept of adoption.

Consider the trauma associated with:

- Finding out that you are pregnant within restrictive circumstances. A

- strict religious and moral environment. An unhappy relationship. Poverty. Violence. Rejection.
- Telling the father that you are pregnant, only to find out that he wants nothing to do with you or the pregnancy.
 - Rejection from families.
 - Carrying the child for 9 months. Bonding with the child within you.
 - Receiving no support during this time.
 - Rejection from your community, family, friends and church.
 - The pain of childbirth, and then giving the child away, without being able to look at the child, or touch the child.
 - The child finding out that they were 'given away,' rejected, not wanted.
 - The adoptive parents having to tell their child that they are 'not theirs'.
 - The child having to figure out what family means. The child trying to understand what 'belonging' means.
 - The child telling the adoptive parents that they want to find their birth parents.
 - The trauma of finding your birth parents.
 - Their possible rejection of the child again.
 - The author will research what pastoral way can be created in order to care for the adopted child.
 - The rejection of the birth parents by their child.

The above became concepts that I thought of when I discover that I was adopted, what more of those who are in the same place.

One begins to understand the trauma related to adoption when we begin to unpack the dramatic effects of any adoption.

This thesis will look at some form of response to some of the trauma associated with the act of adoption.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The background of the study is set against the last 3 decades of my life and my interaction with families that have lived through adoptions. I will draw on my personal experiences as well as case studies of families and individuals that have faced the trauma of adoption. This issue is problematic in the white families.

There will be some interviews with people that have been adopted. The main aim is to trace the trauma that occurs in their lives. The author will create a methodology of caring based on the five stages of grief by Kubler Ross.

It will also offer a response to the trauma of adoption and offer some form of pastoral response. It is also set in the context of a country that is facing the collateral damage of HIV and Aids. Not the area of my research. One wonders as to how many are abandoned due to the sickness of HIV/AIDS?

A country where thousands of children are being brought up in child headed homes, because of their parents having succumbed to the tragedy of HIV and Aids. There are others who are forced to give a child up for adoption

because of circumstances beyond their control.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The trauma associated within the umbrella of adoption is widespread in our country and the rest of the world. Trauma takes place on many levels; rejection, isolation, abandonment, self-worth/image and relationship difficulties. The contextual understanding of adoption is very skewed. The understanding of adoption varies from culture to culture. Within the backdrop of child-headed homes (as a result of HIV and Aids), it is critical to prepare for a nationwide push for adoptions. Then once this happens, we need to be prepared for the trauma associated with Adoption. Adoption is seen, within the context of South Africa in two ways. There is the traditional ‘white’ view that your nuclear family is made up of parents and their children. It is seen to be isolated from the broader family.

The traditional ‘black’ view is that the family extends past the parents/children. Uncles and Aunts, Grandmothers and Grandfathers, cousins, all make up the nuclear family. There is an African saying, ‘It takes a village to bring up a child.’ (Mbiti 2012:239)

(The source of this proverb is unclear, despite me researching it. The most common thought seems to be “Nigeria” in *My Soul Looks Back, ‘Less I Forget; A collection of quotes by people of Color* (Dorothy Winbush Riley, ed).1997

The author will be exploring many views of those who have been effected by the trauma of Adoption.

The author will also look at the specific trauma faced by:

- The Biological Father
- The Adoptive Father
- The Biological Mother
- The Adoptive Mother
- The Adopted Child
- The Broader Family/Community

AIMS/OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

This study will seek to identify the trauma associated with not only those who give their children up for adoption, but also the trauma associated with being given up for adoption. I will research what pastoral way can be created to care for the adopted child.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

As stated before, the trauma of adoption is something that has to be looked at and understood, as we believe adoption will become a very real social issue within the context of South Africa.

It is the only real answer to building secure families in a country where the family unit is being eroded.

RESEARCH GAP

After doing extensive research, it was noted that there are a few papers that have been written on the subject of adoption. There are a number of papers that include trauma as part of the broader aspect of adoption, but there is no research as a thesis that only deals with the trauma of adoption as its main theme. As far as I can tell, the link between pastoral care, a biblical perspective and healing has not been researched.

METHODOLOGY

The primary methodology that I will be using is Elizabeth Keebler – Ross’ Five stages of grief. Primarily, a classic study of death, dying and grief. Kubler – Ross’ study of the five stages related to death and grieving can be paralleled with the process of those experiencing the trauma of adoption.

The thesis will include real life stories of people who have experienced the trauma of adoption and have gone through the stages of grief. Kubler – Ross’ five stages of grief are as follows:

- **Denial**
- **Anger**
- **Bargaining**
- **Depression**
- **Acceptance**

The above stages will help me journey with those who have been adopted. The aim is to create a methodology of caring for them. I will concentrate on

how healing can take place. These stages are important in helping adoptees to move from one stage to the other, as we therapeutically work in their space.

Chapters

Chapter 1

Introduction

Problem Statement

Aims and Objectives

Significance of the Study

Research Gap

Preliminary Conclusion

Chapter 2

The Five Stages of Grief - Kubler-Ross' methodology of working with grief.

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance

Chapter 3

The Traumatic Experience of adoption - The Author's Story

Chapter 4

The chapter concentrates on Adoption, especially in the context of South African people.

Chapter 5

The Adoption Process in the South African context

Chapter 6

The chapter will share some of the stories, and pain undergone by adoptees, and Co – Researchers will high lite the issues of trauma that affect them in the process of adoption,

Chapter 7

1. A Biblical Perspective
2. Healing through the Scriptures
3. The Doctrine of Adoption, its implications on adopted children.

Chapter 7

Concluding Remarks

Is there a solution? – The role of the adoptive parents in creating a healthy home. I will also share some findings and recommendations.

Preliminary Conclusion

Having submitted the thesis structure, I will now move on to submit the methodology that will be pursued in addressing the subject matter.

Chapter 2 – Methodology

There were many methods that I could have used in finding a pastoral response to the Trauma associated with adoption. I however chose to use The Five Stages of Grief - Kubler-Ross' methodology of working with grief.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' 'On Death and Dying' changed the way people talk about the end of life, or loss of someone.

'On Death and Dying' taught us the five stages of death – denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. In this chapter, the writer will attempt to apply these stages to the trauma and grief of adoption.

When the writer speaks of adoption, he includes the following:

The person given up for adoption

- The Birth Mother
- The Birth Father
- The Adoptive Father
- The Adoptive Mother.

Naturally, there are potentially more people affected by adoption, for example, grandparents and siblings. They will be dealt with at a later stage. The five stages are part of the framework that makes up our learning to live with or without the one we lost. They are tools to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling. However, they are not stops on some linear timeline in grief. Not everyone goes through all of them or goes in a prescribed order. (On Grief and Grieving, Kubler – Ross and Kessler 2007:7).

1. Denial

Denial, in the case of adoption takes on different forms. It often starts with

the adoptive parents hearing that they can't have children, in the way that had always imagined. For many families, when they are told that they are not able to conceive children, it comes as a terrible shock. Denial is one of the first emotions that they encounter. Very few people accept this first hand and so the process of investigation begins. They begin by asking for second and third opinions. Fertility treatments have become a multi - million rand business. In my work as a Pastor, I have counseled many couples that need guidance in navigating the way back from being told that they are not able to have any biological children of their own. According to Kubler-Ross, the first stage of grieving helps us to survive the loss.

Denial functions as a buffer after unexpected shocking news, allows the person to collect themselves, and, with time, mobilize other, less radical defenses (Kubler-Ross, 1997:51). In this stage, the world becomes meaningless and overwhelming. Life makes no sense. We are in a state of shock and denial. We go numb. We wonder how we can go on, if we can go on, why we should go on. We try and simply get through each day. Denial and shock help us to cope and make survival possible. Denial helps us to pace our feelings of grief. There is grace in denial. Its nature's way of letting us know how much we can handle. (On Grief and Grieving, Kubler-Ross and Kessler, 2007:10).

When it comes to the person having to give up a child for adoption, the trauma associated with it varies. Often the circumstances are far from ideal, hence the decision to have to give the child up for adoption. In my interviews with people who were part of the adoption process, not one of the people forced to give their child up for adoption saw it as a life-giving

experience. Every one of them was traumatized by the process. It started with the news when they found out that they were pregnant. The experiences ranged from being very young (16 years old), to being raped. According to those I interviewed, when they found out they were pregnant; they went straight into a period of denial. Interestingly enough, once they faced up to the realization that they were in fact pregnant, and they told their parents or caregivers, then *they* went into denial. ‘Not our daughter’, it’s impossible! What did we do wrong?’

Once again, denial forms part of the process of dealing with the trauma. For the child given up for adoption, the denial stage comes into effect when they are told that they are adopted. The depth of the feeling of denial is often dependent on when the child is told that they are adopted. For some children, the feelings of denial are hardly felt at all. This is often found in the case where the children were told at a very early age. Some of the people interviewed couldn’t even remember a specific time they were told that they were adopted. They grew up knowing that they were adopted.

There is a definite difference in those children who were told later on in life. In my case, I was told when I was thirteen years old. My immediate reaction was that it was impossible for me to be adopted. I even looked like my adoptive parents. All of a sudden, it made me feel like I didn’t belong. I wasn’t really part of the family.

I was embarrassed, what were people going to say? Part of the denial lies in the fact that you see that you were living a lie. If you accept the fact that you are adopted, then it means that your life has been a lie up until that

moment. Every time they called you their child, was a lie, every time you called them mom and dad, it was a lie. I understand that as the reader, it may seem a bit excessive, but in the formative years and in the years when you are searching for identity, this can be very traumatic and the natural response to this ‘loss’ is denial. It didn’t help, when some of kids at school found out that I was adopted, that I was every now and again referred to as a ‘Bastard’.

Denial is usually a temporary defense and will soon be replaced by partial acceptance. (Kubler-Ross 1969:52). Of all the people that I interviewed, I sensed that there was a general sense of acceptance, but every now and again, a few of the interviewees, slipped into denial. Even those who have carried the reality of their adoption for many years.

2. Anger

If our first reaction to catastrophic news is, “No, it’s not true, no, it cannot involve me, “this has to give way to a new reaction, when it finally dawns on us: “Oh, yes, it is me, it was not a mistake.”

When the first stage of denial cannot be maintained any longer, it is replaced by feelings of anger, rage, envy, and resentment. (Kubler-Ross 1969:63)

This stage presents itself in many ways; anger at yourself for falling pregnant, anger at your partner for being irresponsible, anger at your birth parents for abandoning you. Anger at your child for wanting to meet their birth parents. Anger does not have to be logical or valid. Anger in fact can sometimes be very illogical. Anger is directed at people without

understanding the context that they found or find themselves. When it comes to the trauma of loss, anger usually increases the more facts you uncover. Adopted children usually display anger towards their adoptive parents, if they delayed telling them that they were adopted. In my experience, the longer you take to tell them that they are adopted, the more anger they experience. Adopted children also experience anger towards their birth parents for giving them up for adoption. In my interviews with people who were affected by adoption, an interesting phenomenon developed. On the first evening, the first six people in the group therapy session spoke about their feelings and story of being adopted. The more they spoke, the more raw emotion became apparent. They all showed some level of anger towards their birthparents for giving them up for adoption.

Then Mary had had a turn to speak. Mary was recently widowed, very committed to the life of the church, a wonderful Christian of quiet demeanor. Mary was 72 years old. When it came to her chance to share with the group, she became very quiet and tearful. She said that she felt that maybe it wasn't quite the right time to share her story. After receiving encouragement from the group, she began her story. She was one of those who the rest of the group had showed hostility and anger. She gave up her child for adoption.

All of a sudden, the 'women' who many of the others had showed anger towards, now had a face...and a name.... and they knew her. 'She' was no longer an anonymous person, faceless and almost ghost like.

Mary had felt the group's anger when they spoke of the person who just gave up their child. She was one of them. As Mary spoke in her hushed

tone, the rest of the group realized that there is more to it than anyone just giving up their child for adoption, but that there was a context to every situation. It was an incredible moment for the group because there came a realization that they could no longer continue with just being angry for the sake of being angry, but that there was possibly a new chapter in their story, and that was to try and understand the context of their birthparents at the time of giving their child up for adoption. Mary was 16 years old when she fell pregnant. She was raised in a very conservative home, when she told her parents that she was pregnant, they were very angry. They pulled her out of school and sent her 600kms away to an adoption home so that she could have the child. Her parents told her that they won't see her until the baby was born and given away. Mary spent 4 months without the support of her family. When her child was born, she had to go to court herself and stand in front of the magistrate and swear that she wouldn't look for her child. On her return, her parents sent her back to school and she had to face the humiliation of being kept a grade back as well as the scorn of having had a child out of wedlock.

The dynamic of the group changed completely. Their anger couldn't be directed at their birthparents any longer. What happens if their story is similar to Mary's? The tragedy is perhaps that we do not think of the reasons for people's anger and take it personally, when it has originally nothing or little to do with the people who become the target of the anger. (Kubler-Ross, 1969:65).

Nevertheless, as stated earlier, anger, according to Kubler-Ross was an important stage to go through when experiencing loss. It helps with the

healing process.

I could not help thinking that this was more than just theory, as I saw what unfolded that night in our group therapy session.

3. Bargaining

Upon the realization that there is nothing that you can do about your situation, the next stage is bargaining. The bargaining process usually involves the calling to a higher power to get you out of your position that you find yourself in. After a loss, bargaining may take the form of a temporary truce. (On Grief and Grieving, pg17, Kubler-Ross and Kessler, 2007). If I promise never to do that again, please take this away from me. “What if” or we become lost in a maze of “if only.” statements. We try and bargain back time, to go to a place before the incident. In the case of the birth parents, they imagine what it would have been if they had made different decisions before conceiving their child, if only...if only.... Guilt is often the bargaining’s companion.

In some ways, bargaining is really an attempt to postpone; it has to include a prize offered ‘for good behavior,’ it also sets a self-imposed “deadline” (e.g., one more performance, the son’s wedding), and it includes an implicit promise that the patient will not ask for more if this one postponement is granted). (Kubler-Ross, 1969:94).

In the case of Mary, she eventually found the son that she had given up for adoption.

His adoption wasn't a very happy one. He faced many challenges growing up with his adopted family. It eventually led to substance abuse and a life that was very challenging. When Mary made contact with him and tried to build a relationship with him, it increased her levels of guilt. She kept on going into the past, vacillating between bargaining and blaming herself for his life. In many cases, people remain in the past, continuously bargaining long after the fact. People often think of the stages as lasting weeks or months. They forget that the stages are responses to feelings that can last for minutes or hours as we flip in and out of one and then another. We do not leave each individual stage in a linear fashion. We may feel one, then another, and then back again to the first one.

Another one of the ladies involved in the group therapy session, Joan², was raped. After finding out that she was pregnant, she decided to keep the child.

From the moment she gave up her child for adoption, she has displayed moments of intense guilt and often goes into the bargaining stage, even though 20 years has passed since the rape.

Sometimes bargaining allows some respite from the pain that is felt, even a distraction from the sad reality. In some cases, bargaining can help our mind move from one stage to another. Bargaining may fill the gaps that our strong emotions generally dominate, which often keep suffering at a distance.

² Not her real name.

It allows us to believe that we can restore order to the chaos that has taken over. As we move through the bargaining process, the mind alters past events while exploring all those “what if” and “if only” statements.

Sadly, the mind inevitably comes to the same conclusion...the fact that there is nothing that will change the reality of the situation.

4. Depression

While bargaining might have kept us in the past, depression moves us into the reality of the present. The stage of depression feels like it will last forever. That is the issue with depression, once you are caught up in depression; it is difficult to see anything past the current situation. It is important to remember that depression isn't a sign of mental illness. It is an appropriate response to any form of loss. It often finds a person withdrawing from life; left in a fog of sadness, wandering if there is any point in continuing alone.

In fact, why go on at all. In the adoption process, one of the biggest struggles goes around identity. The issue around identity can sometimes become acute. One becomes amazed at the profile of our ethnicity. People loosely speak of their culture and identity, when they are sure of their heritage. In South Africa, we have a diverse population made up of many ethnic groups. When one is adopted and you don't know where your heritage originates from, it can easily lead to identity crises, which in turn, can lead to depression.

I remember during the FIFA Soccer World Cup, held in South Africa in 2010, going into the world cup obviously supporting Bafana Bafana³, but when they were eliminated, my default team became Greece, because of my heritage, and seen that they hadn't qualified, it became Spain, ironically, because of my adoptive surname, Rivas, of Spanish origin.

Recently, I attended my brother in law's 50th birthday celebration. It was a double celebration, as his best friend also turned 50. They were both Greeks, and the party turned into a Greek festivity, with Greek music and Greek dancing. As I sat and watched the dancing and other cultural activities, I found myself slipping into a moment of depression, wondering what if? The difficulty about this emotional state is the one easily moves from a state of depression to a state of guilt. I mean my parents who adopted me gave the best possible life? Have they not given sacrificially to make my life a better life, knowing full well, that had I stayed with my birth parents, chances are good that my life would've been a living hell?

When we are grieving, people may wonder about us, and we may even wonder about ourselves. The heavy, dark feelings of depression that come with grief, however normal, are often seen in our society as something to be treated. Of course, clinical depression, untreated, can lead to a worsening of one's mental state. But in grief, depression is a way of nature to keep us protected by shutting down our nervous system so that we can adapt to something we feel we cannot handle. (On Grief and Grieving, Kubler-Ross & David Kessler, June 2007:21).

³ Name given to South Africa's national soccer team – loosely translated into 'the boys'.

5. Acceptance

When a person has had enough time and has been given some help in working through the previously described stages, they will reach a stage during which they are neither depressed nor angry about their ‘fate’. (Kubler-Ross, 1969:123). Acceptance of any traumatic event is very difficult to measure. One could say that by virtue of the fact that one is living through and past the process is enough to say that acceptance has been achieved. We must however never be confused by the fact that once a person has accepted the trauma in their life that everything is fine. This is most definitely not the case. No one ever feels okay after experiencing a traumatic event. The event lives with the person forever. This stage is accepting the reality of what happened to them and there is nothing that can change that. We will never like the reality of our situation, but eventually, we will have to accept it. We learn to live with it. It is the new norm with which we must learn to live.

Within the group session, there was predominantly a sense of acceptance. Even though, they spoke of the anger, disappointment and rejection, by the time the meeting ended and everyone was preparing to leave, they left knowing that there was nothing that they could do to change the past and that they have accepted their place and the trauma that they had gone through. Kubler–Ross reminds us that reaching the stage of acceptance doesn’t mean that we are in a happy stage. It is almost void of all feelings. It is as if the pain had gone, the struggle is over, and there comes a time for a long rest.

Preliminary Conclusion

One can therefore conclude that grief and pain are inherent in every stage of grieving. The kind of struggle one experiences in each of the five stages of grief determines the behavior and conduct of the individual. Having analyzed these stages, we will in the next chapter journey through the author's personal life story.

Chapter Three

The Author's Story.

As I reflect on my adoption, I am aware of the fact that it is possible to receive healing. I believe that as I have experienced the trauma of adoption, it is possible to find healing and wholeness. My primary source of healing has been my family and my faith.

My mother told me that I was adopted when I was 13. The night that she told me is etched in my memory. As often as I may think of it, I still am not sure why she chose to tell me then at that specific moment.

Interestingly enough, the very next evening, my cousin phoned me who happened to overhear his parents speaking about the fact that I was adopted. I still marvel at the timing of the whole thing. I often ask myself what would have happened if the first time I heard that I was adopted, was from my cousin.

I was very fortunate to have been adopted into a very loving home. My adoptive parents loved me right from the beginning and there was never any indication that they thought of me any differently. My parents told me how my adoption came about.

They mentioned that they were not able to have children themselves, and so they opted for adoption. Once they had gone through the process of adopting a child, they were phoned one Saturday morning and told them that

there was a child that had become available. They drove to the children's home and after the necessary paper work was completed, they brought me home.

My birth mother had a very difficult upbringing. When she found out that she was pregnant, she told my birthfather, and he told her he was not interested in her or the child she was carrying.

She had no choice but to give me up for adoption. Well, when I say she had no choice, she opted not to have me aborted. So I, like Steve Jobs (Apple), Malcolm X (civil rights activist), Dave Thomas (founder of Wendy's fast food chain), and Marilyn Monroe (singer), was given a chance to live.

When my mother told me I was adopted, I felt as if I was in a daze. I was really confused. Has everything been a lie? If for 13 years they assumed the role as my parents, yet they weren't really my parents, what does that mean about everything else they've told me? What was the truth? I remember zoning out the next few days. It almost felt that I was having an out of body experience. My parents told me that they would help me if I wanted to find my biological parents. I would have to wait until I was out of school before they would reveal any information about my parents.

When I turned 17, I approached my parents and asked them for details around my biological parents. Of all the possible reactions that I expected, the way my parents reacted was the most difficult. It started with my father crying.

I had, up until then, never seen my father cry. I realized in that moment, they were experiencing their own trauma, which I wasn't anticipating. Unlike, Michael Reagan, adopted son of the late American president Ronald Reagan, who said, 'My adoption was treated as a celebration', mine was seen as something that shouldn't be spoken about. (Twice Adopted, pg 74, Michael Reagan, 2004).

I made a very difficult decision in that moment. I realized that my parents were so traumatized by me wanting to find out about my birthparents, that if I wanted to continue looking for them, I will need to do it behind their backs. In that moment, I realized that I had an overpowering urge to find my birthparents. The dilemma that I faced was to know that my parents had done so much for me, and now I was deciding to go behind their backs in order to satisfy my own desire to find my roots. I mean, it wasn't that I had a bad life. My parents did so much for me. There wasn't a moment that I doubted that they loved for me. I know that they sacrificed so much for me.

Nevertheless, I realized that it was something that I had to do. I also realized, in hindsight, that there were a few contributing factors that caused my parents to be traumatized in this way. One of the factors is that although every care had been taken to match me up to my parents from a physical perspective, emotionally, I was wired differently. I believe that there were times when my parents observed me and realized how in some ways, I was very different to them.

They saw me wanting to look for my biological parents as a rejection of all that they had done for me. They also felt that once I found my birth parents,

I would desert them. This would come back to haunt us at a later stage.

Over the next few years, I continued to search for my birthparents. I had more information on my birth mother. My parents eventually gave me my adoption file. In that file was my birthmother's application form to give me up for adoption as well as the social workers report. Details were very sketchy, but so the journey begins.

15 years later, there was finally a breakthrough; my birthmother's stepsister saw an advert that was taken out looking for my birthmother. In a short time, my wife and I were on a plane to East London to meet my birthmother. It was a very traumatic moment. The feelings that I experienced were very foreign to me. When I met my birthmother in the terminal of the airport, every thought that I had about the romanticism of the moment was dashed. She never looked like I imagined her to look. I am 1.92 meters tall, dark and medium build. She was just over 1.3 meters tall, very overweight, ragged in looks and brightly colored red/pink hair. Emotionally, she was a wreck. She never drove a car, as she was too nervous to drive anymore. She had a 21-year-old son, whom she never let out of her sight. He hadn't bothered to get a license to drive and never had a job. He saw it as his job to stay at home with his mother. We had nothing in common.

Thank goodness we had booked into a hotel and did not stay with them that night. After dinner and a few conversations, my wife and I were able to retreat to our hotel and debrief. After a brief breakfast the next morning, we left back for Johannesburg.

I decided that I couldn't live with the knowledge that I had met my birthmother and keep it as a secret from my parents. Shortly after that, I met with my parents and told them that I found my birthmother. This time, it was my mother that was traumatized. She couldn't stay in the room and continue the conversation. She left the room crying, it was devastating news.

When I spoke with her, she felt that I was going to abandon her and find a new life with my birthmother. I assured her that that was not going to happen. Ironically, the very next week, I received an urgent phone call from my parents saying that they had just been hi-jacked. Armed men made their way into the yard, and tried to steal their car. They never managed to steal the car, but they managed to steal some of my mom's jewelry. I immediately dropped everything, and rushed through to my parent's house to see if they were alright. It was the most natural thing to do, I mean, these were my parents. Little did I know that that would be a healing moment for them? I was never going to desert them.

After helping them through the logistics of the robbery, like reporting it to the police, we were able to reconnect and I was able to re assure them that I was not going to desert them. They made it very clear to me that they did not want to talk about my birthmother, or meet her.

When it came to my relationship with my birthmother, things weren't that easy. She took it as an opportunity to catch up lost time. The trouble started on the first December after I met my birthmother. Her birthday was on the 16th December, the same day as my grandmother. My sister, who was also

adopted, celebrated her birthday on Christmas day. My birthmother wanted to travel up from Port Elizabeth to Johannesburg and stay with us. She saw it as an opportunity to spend her birthday with her 'new' family. In a single moment, she had gained a son, a daughter-in-law and two grandchildren. I, of course already had plans to spend with my family over this time. It was very difficult for me to tell my birthmother that I was not able to spend the time with her. I told her that I couldn't just reject my parents who had done everything for me. The guilt that I experienced was around the fact that I was the one that pursued her. I had to ask myself very tough questions. Was it because she wasn't what I expected? I felt absolutely no connection with her. What was wrong with me? For heaven's sake, I took years and years to find her, now that I've found her; I wasn't interested in a relationship with her. The trauma associated with this had a dramatic effect on my family and me. One can only imagine the levels of trauma.

There was my family's trauma, there was my birthmother's trauma, and then of course, I now had an extended family of 2 stepbrothers and a stepsister. It eventually got to the stage where we never saw much of each other at all. My birthmother eventually moved up from Port Elizabeth to Johannesburg. This didn't really help matters.

Having her so close did enable me to have a better relationship with her, but it never became a relationship that I had wished for.

Is it not amazing how the world works? In 2005 I received a call to say that my birthmother had had a heart attack. She was dead. To put it in perspective, I was born and grew up in Johannesburg. I went to High School

in an area called Bedfordview, at the same time, unbeknown to me; my birthmother lived only a couple of streets away from me. When I eventually met her, she was living in Port Elizabeth, and I was living in Johannesburg North.

When she died, she died in a hospital that was situated less than 2 kilometers from where I was living at the time. The final chapter of our relationship was me burying her. She gave birth to me, I buried her.

After her death, a new chapter began in my life. After many years of wandering and seeking, it was all over. Her husband and son asked me if I wanted to go with them to spread her ashes in the ocean near Port Elizabeth. I knew that if I did, there would be an expectancy of a continued relationship with him and my half-brother. I never went with them and have never heard from them since.

Just when I thought I was over that, years later, rumors of my birth father's existence started surfacing. Apparently he was alive and living in Cyprus.

I made contact with one of his nephews that was living and working in Johannesburg and verified that he knew that someone was looking for him.

My wife, Jacqui made a call to him a few days after meeting his nephew, but he denied everything and said that it must have been one of his brothers that were responsible for me.

A year later, Jacqui and I had to go to Vienna, Austria and we decided that we would go past Cyprus.

After landing in Cyprus, with the little information we had, we began looking for him. By the next morning we made our way to his town. By mid-morning we made contact with him. He agreed to meet with me at a local coffee shop. From the moment he walked in the door, I recognized him to be my biological father. How did I know at that moment? Well, firstly, there was the physical resemblance. It was looking at an ‘older’ me. When he sat down at the table, there were so many things that he did that were similar to me. Jacqui, my wife, who was with me at the time, spoke afterwards of how she stared at him, then stared at me and was amazed at how similar we were. Unfortunately, the feelings weren’t mutual. He acknowledged that there were some similarities and truth in my story, but mentioned that it could’ve been his brother, who had passed away. There was no conclusive proof that he was my biological father, as far as he was concerned. Jacqui left the meeting completely traumatised.

In a sense, what she saw was me being rejected again. Yet for me, I had found my heritage. In one moment, so many questions were answered. Jacqui and I sometimes joke of the time that we first landed at the airport in Cyprus, she look around and rather loudly, exclaimed, ‘look Gary, you look like all the bag handlers.’

Never before, in one place had there been so many people that looked like me. I seemed to fit into the profile of all the people around me. My father, in a way rejecting me again, did me the greatest favor.

It reinforced who I was in God by being adopted into his family. My birth

father, said that he would contact me when he travelled to South Africa in the next year. Since then, I haven't heard from him.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

As I reflect on Kubler-Ross' stages of grief, it becomes evident that, being aware of them, before my journey began would have been helpful in dealing with my trauma. I believe that it can be a helpful tool in coping with the trauma of adoption. These stages proposed by Kubler-Ross, clearly indicate the fears, strengths frustrations and joys that are inherent in the process and journey of adoption; even as clearly indicated in my own story.

In the next chapter we will analyze the pain that accompanies the expectations from all parties. These parties are the adoptee, the adopting parents and the birth parents. It becomes apparent that the discovery of a conduct of the adoptee which is contrary to the one the adopting parents anticipated can be devastating if such is not given the attention it deserves throughout the life stages of the adoptee.

Chapter Four

Understanding Adoption:

In the previous Chapter we analyzed the Author's story. We will now look at understanding the adoption process.

They just cannot understand. The perfect child Mr. & Mrs. Smith adopted 15 years ago is now skipping school, talking back, experimenting with drugs, and is involved in a sexual relationship with her 20-year-old drug addicted boyfriend. Until a year ago she always had good grades and enjoyed spending time with her parents; she was the ideal child. They have sought treatment from a family therapist. Nevertheless, they just cannot seem to get through to her. There have been no new stressors in the household. What could be the problem?

For many years adoption has been viewed as a perfect arrangement for all involved. What has not been taken into account are the emotional effects adoption has on all members involved, most specifically, for the purpose of this paper, the adoptee. These effects, or issues, can be managed as long as they are recognized and acknowledged. Adoptees' psychological issues need to be addressed by mental health professionals in order to recognize and effectively treat symptoms of low self-esteem, lack of trust, and dissociation.

The adoptees' trauma begins the moment she is separated from her birth

mother. Some psychologists believe that an infant is not able to differentiate her mother until at least two months of age. At the same time they believe that the infant does not know she is her own entity (Kaplan, 1978). What do mental health professionals believe the infant thinks for these first two months? They will suggest that she is in some type of limbo, that she does not have the capacity to think or know until two months of age. Yet, she somehow knows to cry when she is uncomfortable and how to ingest her food. Psychologists will call this instinct, but we should also look at the possibility of the newborn instinctively knowing who her mother is. After all, they were connected for 40 weeks.

Since an infant does not see herself as a separate entity, we must believe that she sees herself as part of the person she was physically attached and bonded to for 40 weeks (Verrier, 1993, chap. 2). When separated from the one thing to which she has connected, the infant will feel she has lost part of herself.

Many doctors and psychologists now understand that bonding doesn't begin at birth, but is a continuum of physiological, psychological, and spiritual events which begin in utero and continue throughout the postnatal bonding period. When this natural evolution is interrupted by a postnatal separation from the biological mother, the resultant experience of abandonment and loss is indelibly imprinted upon the unconscious minds of these children, causing that which I call the "primal wound." (Verrier, 1993:1)

When the adoptee is separated from her birth mother, she undergoes extensive trauma. She will not remember this trauma, but it will stay in her subconscious as she lived it (Verrier, 1993). An event from a person's infancy can and will stay with them through life. An example of the

subconscious effect of an early experience would be Marc. Marc was in an orphanage for the first year of his life. Because of the lack of human touch, he would rock himself in his crib. Marc is now 42 years old and still rocks himself whenever he is watching television, listening to music, or sitting on a park bench. He does not remember rocking himself as an infant, but this practice has stayed with him through his subconscious his entire life.

The adoptee will always carry this issue of abandonment with her wherever she goes. It is no different from when a husband leaves a wife. She may remarry to a wonderful man, but will always wonder if her new husband is also going to leave her. She must work through the abandonment issue to regain trust. The abandonment issue has to be acknowledged, before it can be resolved.

Even if the “primal wound” as described above was not a factor in the adoptees’ emotional wellbeing, the knowledge of abandonment will always be there. She may have been told she was “chosen” by the adoptive parents but it will not be long until she figures out she was abandoned by the first set of parents. Julie P. responded to a question on the Adoptees Internet Mailing List (an Internet support group that consists of approximately 1000 members) about the feeling of being adopted, “No, I am not depressed, miserable, angry, or negative...but I have always felt second best. Sure I was told that I was the (chosen) one, but first I was rejected.” Regardless of the circumstances, it will always feel like abandonment to her.

The adoptee is given very little information about her relinquishment. She is expected to leave the past behind and concentrate on her present and future. Out of respect for the adoptive parents, she will often not ask questions or

talk about her adoption if it is an uncomfortable subject in her home. She will wonder about her relinquishment and her birth mother. To attempt to fill in the gaps she will create fantasies of acceptable scenarios of the circumstances of her conception, birth and relinquishment that she can emotionally handle.

As a small child, she will not understand how a mother could give her up, or abandon her. Adoptees may feel they must have been a bad baby or that the birth mother was an uncaring person. Other thoughts will occur, such as she was stolen from the birthmother, either by public authorities or her adoptive parents. Often children will fluctuate in their thoughts and fantasies depending on their perception of the adoptive parents at any given time. (Lifton, 1988 & 1994; Verrier, 1993; Brodzinsky, Schechter & Henig, 1992; Reitz & Watson, 1992; Adopting Resources, 1995) She will generally outgrow believing her fantasies and begin to see them as just that, but a part of her will always wonder.

The “chosen” child story also has negative effects on a child for other reasons. The child may feel that she has to be perfect to live up to her “chosen” status. Her role model adoptees include Superman and Jesus. This is a hard image for the average child to live up to. She may either become the compliant “perfect” child or she may act out and misbehave to test the commitment of the adoptive parents. Either way, often times she is not being herself, but rather acting a part. This acting can be very emotionally draining and confusing, and may last until the early adult years and beyond. When the adoptee cannot live up to her perfect “chosen” status, it will contribute to the feeling of low self-esteem. This will be further exacerbated if the adoptive parents are not aware of the issue and their actions reinforce

the adoptees beliefs, i.e., sending her away for residential treatment or openly wishing her to be more like themselves.

The adoptee is also aware of many ghosts that follow her through life. These ghosts include the person she would have been had she not been adopted, the ghost of the birthmother and birthfather, and the ghost of the adoptive family's child that would have been (Lifton, 1994, chap. 6). She may find herself trying to connect to her ghosts through her actions. Either being her image of her birth family, living her life according to her fantasy birth family, or acting as her vision of the adoptive parent's natural child.

When the adolescent adoptee acts out it may be her way of trying to connect with the image she has of her birth mother or may be that she does not feel worthy of the adoptive parents love. Adolescence is a confusing time for any child, but the adoptee has many more identity issues to deal with. She may also be testing the commitment of the adoptive parents, seeing if they will send her away for being bad.

A great many of these young people are in serious trouble with the law and are drug addicted. The girls show an added history of nymphomania and out-of-wedlock pregnancy, almost as if they were acting out the role of the "whore" mother. In fact, both sexes are experimenting with a series of identities that seem to be related to their fantasies about the biological parents. (Lifton, 1988:45)

As the adoptee begins to become aware of her adoptee status she will notice the differences she has from her peers and other family members. I noticed in my family that I did not have the nose or ears of any of my adoptive

family. This is normal for an adoptee and can make her feel left out or misplaced in her family. A particularly tough time for the adoptee is when first learning about genetics in school. The first lesson in heredity and genetics usually is regarding eye color. If the adoptees' own eyes do not fall into the proper genetic pattern she is left with a distinct feeling of not belonging. There are many instances in growing up when she is again faced with the knowledge that she is different; when asked about family history by a doctor, when asked if she has a sister because the inquirer knows someone who looks just like her, when asked about ethnic background, in regular day to day conversations.

Physical differences are not the only ones that are noticed. A difference in personality or talents may further misplace the adoptee from her family. In talking with other adoptees, I have described this feeling as “feeling like my adoptive family is in a big circle but I am on the outside looking in.”

With the adoptee not having a role model who resembles her physically or psychologically, it is more difficult to define where her life shall lead. She may come from a biologically artistic family, but adopted into a scientific family. She may not only feel the need to follow in her adoptive family's footsteps, attending similar colleges, choosing similar careers, but she did not have the artistic role model to show her that way of life. This further complicates the identity formation of the adoptee. “One's identity begins with the genes and family history...” (Reitz & Watson, 1992:134)

Adoptees also lack the ability to see their physical characteristics as they will present themselves in the future. A natural born daughter would be able to tell how big she is going to be, if she will have a tendency to be

overweight, or if she is going to go grey early in life, but the adoptee is denied this genetic role model and will not know these things until she reaches that stage in life herself. This adds to the curiosity of wanting to know their genetic background.

Rachel says that families are a hall of mirrors, “Everyone but adoptees can look in and see themselves reflected. I didn’t know what it was like to be me. I felt like someone who looks into a mirror and sees no reflection. I felt lonely, not connected to anything, floating, like a ghost.” (Lifton, 1994:68)

The adoptee will feel even more dissociated when conversations regarding other family members or peers births are brought up. She is missing the story of her birth parents meeting, her conception, her birth, and in some instances, sometime after her birth. On the Adoptees Internet Mailing List one member described this feeling as the “floating cosmic blip.” It is often commented that the adoptee feels hatched not born or that they are some type of space alien. Non-adoptees take their own life story for granted, but the adoptee is acutely aware that theirs is missing. So now, not only does the adoptee feel dissociated from her adoptive family, but also from her peers, for she is different.

Adoptees are faced with a feeling of loss and grief that they are not allowed, by society, to actively mourn. “With adoption, the child experiences a loss (like divorce or death) of an unknown person, and doesn’t know why.” (Adopting Resources, 1995) She is aware that family members are lost to her, but is expected to not mourn the loss of this family member she has never known. She will often be chastised when asking questions of her birth family from her adoptive family.

Not all of these issues affect adoptees to the same extent. Some may spend a lifetime dwelling on it; others may not even appear to notice. This would be true of any group of people that lived through trauma, such as Vietnam War Veterans. It should be noted that adoptees are over represented in residential treatment centers.

The number of Adoptees in the adolescent and young-adult clinics and residential treatment centers is strikingly high. Doctors from the Yale Psychiatric Institute and other hospitals that take very sick adolescents have told me they are discovering that from one-quarter to one-third of the patients are adopted. (Lifton, 1988:45)

In recent years there have been more works written on the subject. In 1978 Sorosky, Baran, and Pannor wrote the *Adoption Triangle*. This was one of the first written books that spoke specifically of the psychological issues of adoption. In one reference book written for psychologist by Reitz and Watson (1992) it was noted:

Despite the proliferation in recent decades of the literature on both family therapy and adoption, there has been little focus on the treatment of families involved in adoption. We offer our approach both as one sample of the current state of the practice art and as a way to generate hypotheses. Little, definitive, formal research findings are available, we have cited them; we believe, however, that findings from practice are valid field research. The clinician's skills in observing recurrent themes and patterns resemble those of the formal researcher who looks for patterns in statistical data. Both clinicians and researchers must then interpret their findings.

In the early 1960s Dr. Marshall Schechter, child psychiatrist, was challenged by social workers when he first made the observation that there were a disproportionate number of adoptees in his clinic (as cited in Lifton, 1988, p. 44). He later teamed up with Brodzinsky to research the psychology of adoption and to write various books (1990, 1992) on the subject.

There are many books written by members of the triad (refers to the three sides in adoption; adoptive parents, birth parents, and adoptees) that are geared toward their triad peers. (Lifton, 1988 and 1994; Verrier, 1993). These are an excellent resource for triad members to begin to explore the issues of adoption. Although they are not written with psychologists in mind, they would be a good first step for mental health professionals to begin to also understand adoption.

In researching basic child psychology books, if adoption is mentioned, it is in the following context: “It should be obvious that neither I nor anybody else knows enough about the psychology of adoption to offer any firm advice.” (Church, 1973)

Although there are both more studies and writings on the subject, mental health professionals remain ignorant of adoptees’ issues. Thomas Danner, PhD, a local family counselor, discussed some of his educational experiences and views on adoptees issues (personal communication, May 17, 1996). He stated he had not given the adoptees issues any prior thought. When presented with some of the repercussions of adoption, he was in agreement that these things could play into the emotional well-being of the adoptee. He was open in disclosing that he had little knowledge of adoption issues and was willing to accept the ideas this paper has to present.

Betty Jean Lifton, PhD, Adoption Counselor/Author and adoptee, also commented on the subject (personal communication, May 20, 1996). When asked what lead to her studying adoption issues. Her reply was: ‘Are you an adoptee...then you know.’ This illustrates how most of the research done on adoption issues has been raised by someone who has been touched by adoption. It is easy to understand how someone who has not lived it would not give the subject much thought. Mental health professionals need to be made to give the subject some thought or they will be doing a disservice to their adopted patients.

The first step to communicating the psychological effects of adoption to mental health professionals is to educate the public in general. There have been more recent books, movies, and such on adoption but they fail to acknowledge the special issues. Through accurate media representation, the general population can receive information needed to better understand the adopted person. In turn, the mental health professionals can begin to study the subject and explore alternate treatments for their adopted patients.

College and university professors need to begin teaching the special issues and treatments unique to adoption, just as they teach unique approaches to dealing with sexual abuse, divorce of parents, Attention Deficit Disorder, and the many other problems youth are faced with today. The subject must also be included in the college text books or the students must utilize the reference books written on adoption (Reitz & Watson, 1992; Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990).

Adoptive parents must also be aware of these special issues so they can find a counselor who is trained to deal with them. Too often, counselors of

adopted children are not aware that special issues exist and they attempt to treat the least disturbing problem and thus they fail to get to the core issue of adoption. Parents who called me have taken their child--usually an adolescent adopted at birth--from therapist to therapist, without ever having come upon one who is knowledgeable about adoption. The child now has become what Kirschner calls a “secondhand patient.” Therapists who do not see adoption as a core issue cannot reach the child. The Adoptee remains isolated and continues to act out... (Lifton, 1988:273)

After realizing all the different issues adoption holds for their daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Smith received a referral for an adoption specialist in their area. They are now attending family counseling and making some progress toward their daughter’s recovery through open communication and understanding of the trauma she still experiences.

Preliminary Conclusion

In this chapter we looked at understanding adoption. We realized that the adoptee’s struggle and trauma begins the moment she is separated from parents. This position of a child having to accept the separation creates a kind of limbo.

The trauma of a child parent separation is extensive. We realized that bonding doesn’t begin at birth but that it is a holistic phenomenon beginning in utero. One punitive measure is for the adoptee to have to leave the past behind and concentrate on her present.

We realized the consciousness that develops the minute the adoptee notices

her adoption status. In the next chapter we will analyze the Adoption process detailing the legal process involved.

Chapter 5

The Adoption Process.

Having dealt with the understanding of adoption from the previous chapter; we shall look upon the adoption process in this chapter.

In South Africa, there is only one way to legally adopt a child and that is working through an accredited adoption agency, or with the assistance of an adoption social worker functioning with the statutory accredited adoption system.

When working through an adoption agency, the process usually starts with the prospective adoptive parents submitting an application with the agency. Each agency has its own requirements. All prospective adoptive parents are required to undergo a screening and preparation process. There is time when adoptive agencies are criticized for all the red tape that needs to be waded through, but if one considers all the permutations, it is understandably a long and thorough process. The social worker involved is also making a big decision that will potentially affect the child for the rest of their life. Choosing the right parents who will provide the best possible upbringing is critical to the process.

The screening process usually involved orientation meetings, interviews with social workers, medical examinations, marriage and psychological assessments, home visits, police clearance and references.

The screening process basically allows social workers to get to know prospective adopters as a family, their motivation to adopt, their ability to offer a child a warm, loving and stable home. Once the screening process is complete, applicants are placed on a waiting list for a child.

Applicants have their own ideas and wishes about the child they wish to adopt - they can decide about the age and sex of the baby or the child they would like to adopt and adoption agencies will try and meet those personal expectations.

The official placement of the child with adoptive parents is a legal process, carried out through the children's court. Once the child has been with the new parents for a period of time and the social worker has assessed the adoption to be in the best interests of the child, the adoption is finalized through the Children's Court. The child then becomes the legal child of the adoptive parents as if the child was born to them and has all the rights as a biological child.

Adoption is a process. When dealing with adoption, it is critical that one understands the process in order to understand the trauma associated with adoption. The writer will, in this chapter, look at the many forms of legal adoption in South Africa. This of course implies that there are illegal forms of adoption. This has its own trauma associated with it.

Each of the forms of adoption has their own type of trauma associated with the process. The forms of adoption and the associated trauma are listed below:

Related Adoption: Adoption of a child by a person who is related to the child. This includes stepparent adoptions where there are varying levels of openness between the parties in the adoption. Within the South African context, this is wide spread. Many of the South African culture groups see this as the most natural transition.

It is almost expected that, if for example, a person's sibling passes away; the sibling's children are automatically adopted by relatives. Under the migrant labor system⁴, used by the Apartheid government⁵, parents had to leave their children behind in order to work in larger cities. The wider family was responsible for the wellbeing of many children.

Associated Trauma: A child adopted through this process is often adopted into a family who already has their own biological children. This can lead to difficult sibling relationships. Feelings of not really belonging to that family become evident. Children are sometimes victimized and are reminded, in some cases, that they aren't really part of the family. In the case of some of the cultural adoptions, being brought into the family poses some financial difficulties. Many of these adoptions aren't planned and so the addition of another person/s to the family adds to the financial pressure of that family.

Disclosed Adoption: The identity of the biological parent/s and the identity of the adoptive parent/s are known by both parties. This form of adoption

⁴ Migrant Laborer System

⁵ Apartheid

may include a post-adoption agreement that provides for future contact or the exchange of information.

Associated Trauma: Children adopted through this process often feel that they are torn between two families.

The child then displays high levels of manipulation and plays the one set of parents off against the other. Settling into the rhythm and routine of a specific lifestyle becomes more difficult as the child vacillates between reality and the thoughts/dreams of what life would have been like with the other parent.

Closed Adoption: In such a case, no identifying details are available and/or exchanged between the adoptive parents and biological parent/s.

Associated Trauma: In the case where no identifying details are disclosed, the adoptive parents are left with the decision if whether they should ever tell their child that they are adopted. If so, when? They will also have to deal with the possibility that their child might want to meet their biological parents one day.

National Adoption: A legal adoption facilitated by an accredited adoption social worker and/or organisation where both the adoptive child and parent/s are South African citizens or have permanent residence in South Africa.

Same-race Adoption: The race of the adoptive parent/s and child is the same.

Same - sex Adoption:

LGBT adoption is the adoption of children by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, (LGBT) persons. This may be in the form of a joint adoption by a same-sex couples, adoption by one partner of a same-sex couples of the other's biological child (step-parent adoption), and adoption by a single LGBT person.

Adoption by same-sex couples is legal in 14 countries as well as in the jurisdictions of several more. Adoption by same-sex couples is however prohibited by a majority of countries, although debates in many jurisdictions take place to allow it. The main concern raised by those opposed to LGBT adoption is the question of whether same-sex couples have the ability to be adequate parents. As the matter is often not specified by law (or deemed unconstitutional), legalization often takes place via judicial opinions.

A consensus has developed among the medical, psychological, and social welfare communities that children raised by gay and lesbian parents are just as likely to be well-adjusted as those raised by heterosexual parents. The research supporting this conclusion is accepted beyond serious debate in the field of developmental psychology.⁶

Based on the robust nature of the evidence available in the field, Third District Court of Appeal State of Florida was satisfied in 2010 that the issue is so far beyond dispute that it would be irrational to hold otherwise; the best interests of children are not preserved by prohibiting homosexual adoption.

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South Africa is the only African country to allow joint adoption by same-sex couples. It has been legal since 2002, when the Constitutional Court decided the case of *Du Toit vs Minister of Welfare and Population Development*, amending the Child Care Act, 1983 to allow both joint adoption and stepparent adoption by "permanent same-sex life partners".

The Child Care Act has since been replaced by the Children's Act, 2005, which allows joint adoption by "partners in a permanent domestic life-partnership", whether same- or opposite-sex, and stepparent adoption by a person who is the "permanent domestic life-partner" of the child's current parent. Same - sex marriage has been legal since 2006, and is equivalent to opposite-sex marriage for adoption purposes.

Associated Trauma: The trauma around same-sex adoptions is a relatively new field. At this stage, it is difficult to determine the exact research until more cases of same-sex adoption are studied for a longer period of time.

Inter-race Adoption: The race of the child and adoptive parent/s differ.

Associated Trauma:

It will come as no surprise that we still live in a society that is deeply divided along race lines

Inter-country Adoption: A legal adoption facilitated by an accredited adoption organization where either the child or parents are not South African citizens. South Africa is party to the Hague Convention on Inter-country

Adoptions and this practice is also regulated by Chapter 18 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005.⁷

Preliminary conclusion

We realized in this chapter that there is only one way to legally adopt a child in South Africa; through an accredited adoption agency or through social workers.

We also noted that all prospective adoptive parents are required to undergo a screening and preparation process. Such adoptive placement is a legal process carried out through the children's court.

We noted kinds of adoption such as related adoption; disclosed adoption; closed adoption; national adoption; same sex adoption; inter-race adoption; inter-country adoption and their related trauma. We will in the next chapter analyze the interaction with co-researchers.

⁷ www.adoption.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19&itemid=19

Chapter 6 – Co Researchers

In the previous chapter we analyzed the adoption process. This will be helpful to usher in the co-researcher's interaction. I knew that there were many people that have been affected by the trauma of adoption. I made a call for people who were somehow affected by adoption. I met with many people over a period of time. The meetings were meant to be merely academic, a means to gather data for my thesis. It became apparent that there was a need for people to tell their story. Wimberley, in his chapter in *Images of Pastoral Care*, speaks of 'The Indigenous Storyteller.' In it, he speaks about how the approach of narrative can be a critical component to healing through pastoral care. (Dykstra, 2005:579). I found this to be true as people began to share their stories. Wimberley goes on to say that the goal of the narrative approach in pastoral care is to link people to the unfolding of God's story in the midst of life. I saw this happening amongst the group of people that met to tell their stories. As their stories unfolded, I could see the others in the group beginning to see God at work amongst them.

Gherkin, in the same book, *Images of Pastoral Care*, says that Pastoral Counselors are more than anything else, listeners to and interpreters of stories. (Dykstra, 2005:112). This too became evident as I listened to every one's story over the nights. Gherkin goes on to say that a pastoral counselor is not only a listener to stories; he or she is also a bearer of stories and a story. The pastoral counselor doesn't come empty handed to the task of understanding the other's story and offering the possibility of a new interpretation. (Dykstra, 2005:116).

I found it helpful to be able to share part of my story with those who participated in the research. In this way, I sensed myself reaching a place of renewed healing.

Henri Nouwen, speaks of the clergy being wounded healers. (Nouwen 1979:82); and that out of our woundedness, we become healers. There is no doubt that I went into the interviews carrying my own wounds. Nouwen describes it as ‘he who proclaims liberation is called not only to care for his own wounds and the wounds of others, but also to make his wounds into a major source of his healing power. (Nouwen, 1979:85). I realized that my wounds are loneliness, fear of rejection, brokenness and acceptance. So, as I prepared to begin the interviews, the last thing I was prepared for was me finding healing in those evenings. As I and everyone else unpacked their life stories around their adoption, I became aware of the fact that I had to share out of my own woundedness, in order for me to help others heal. It was helpful for me to understand Nouwen’s veiled warning, that ‘when we want to put our wounded selves in the service of others, we must consider the relationship between our professional and personal lives.’ (Dykstra, 2005, 268/269).

Many of the people being interviewed were part of my local congregation and I realized that I would be revealing parts of my personal life, (and that of my wife and children’s). Parts that up until now I had kept to myself. I knew that I would be stepping over a boundary that would be difficult to reverse. This then is the story of some of the people I interviewed. I have literally cut and pasted them, so that you get the real essence of their life stories.

I have treated their life stories like a precious jewel, so please may I ask you to ‘handle with care:’

Mary - My story began at the age of 16 when I eventually plucked up the courage, with the help of my best friend, to visit a doctor and tell my parents that I was 7 months pregnant. My mother was very upset, as I was sort of the ink spot on a clean piece of blotting paper being the youngest of seven children, five of whom were safely married. My one sister and brother-in-law, a Methodist minister, took me to their home (I lived in Bloemfontein) in Three Rivers and through another colleague; I went to stay at the Princess Alice Adoption Home. I was there for 2 very happy months and gave birth to a baby boy at the Queen Vic. At that time, you had to stay in hospital for 10 days and I had no contact with the baby except at night, sometimes, when the night staff would allow me to see him. My eldest brother and sister-in-law were living in Johannesburg and were very supportive especially my brother who visited daily and accompanied me to Court where I had to take an Oath to never try to find the baby or parents. My mother insisted that I go back to school and so I returned, again with the help of my best friend, to complete my Matric. Two extremely difficult years. A year later, Rowley and I started dating, and a year later we were married, we were married for 44 years and had three children, Amanda, Belinda and Christopher.

In 1992 I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and after extensive surgery, had a series of chemotherapy and radiation. Amanda was away from home that year with the WOW team and during this down period I often prayed and begged God to let me have contact with the child I had given up for adoption.

In 1993 I received a letter from Child Welfare requesting me to contact them which I did and the welfare worker told me that the child, now married with 2 children, was looking for me. Through one of the ministers at our church, we were living in Durban at the time, and whom had just a few months previously, at the age of 50, found out that he had been adopted; a meeting between us was arranged at the church office. It was a very happy occasion and all went so well but I then had the most difficult task in my life to do - go home and tell my children my story. Rowley had known all but it was just something that we never talked about. The reaction was extremely varied, Christopher being still quite young, there was a 12 year gap between him and Belinda, was overjoyed at hearing he had an older brother, Amanda actually said something very profound to me, but try as I may, I cannot recall it exactly anymore, but what I do remember is that I knew she was fine with it, Belinda on the other hand, cried bitterly and said that she had never heard anything so sad, which made me feel like a real worm. The reunion of the two families went well on several occasions but deteriorated during the next year with his divorce and further problems. I had not met his adoptive parents, Rowley had the opportunity of visiting them and I wrote a letter and received one back with some childhood photographs. They were quite elderly and had no other children.

There were further problems with him and his adoptive dad laid full blame on me, telling me that I had given him away like a piece of raw meat, which lead me to much soul searching about asking God for something which should rather have just been left in His hands.

In 2000 we all tried again, as he remarried and I met his adoptive parents at the wedding. The marriage didn't last, he has apparently married again but I have not had contact now for 9 years.

Glynis - My name is Glynis, maiden name, Barton. In 1967 at the tender age of fifteen, I gave birth to a little girl, who was removed immediately. I only saw her as she was being born. It was very distressing and traumatic. She was adopted and in those days no information was given about the adopting parents. In Rhodesia those days, she disappeared into the universe. As an adult with two other children both girls, now adults themselves. Over the years.... I did try some research not easy in Zimbabwe. Nothing is easy. St Claire's, the home for unwed mothers in Bulawayo did not exist nor any records. There must be hundreds of people trying to find biological parents and children. I am now sixty years old and have never thought about her as she was growing up. That pain of not knowing has been with me my whole life. She is always included in my prayers; so I do have a certain peace. "You" magazine have a column "Desperately Seeking." You must know how many people from Zimbabwe are searching. Anyhow, I don't give up. It would give me great joy to meet her one-day.

Amanda -

HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU WERE ADOPTED?

I was 10 months old. This is a late stage to be adopted, not sure why? (my adoptive father said I had feeding problems <doubt it>)!

HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU FOUND OUT ABOUT YOUR ADOPTION?

My parents told me that I was adopted long before I even understood what the word ‘adopted’ meant. I used to run around telling everyone “I am ‘adoctored’ ”.

WHAT IN YOUR VIEW IS THE BEST WAY AND AGE TO TELL A CHILD THEY ARE ADOPTED?

Tell them they are adopted long before they even understand the word, so when an explanation is required, nothing sounds unfamiliar.

DID YOU EVER LONG TO, OR MEET YOUR BIRTH PARENTS?

Yes, I did try 25 years ago through the Princess Alice Adoption Home where I was adopted from, but the Social Workers put me off this search. So I have never met my birth parents.

WHAT IN YOUR VIEW IS THE MOST CHALLENGING ASPECT OF ADOPTION?

Accepting the REJECTION! My ‘mother’ gave me away. Coming to terms with the fact that my adopted mother actually physically and emotionally abused me, and sent me to boarding school at the age of 12 – was a rejection once more by a ‘mother’!

HAS YOUR VIEW OF SELF BEEN IMPACTED BY YOUR ADOPTION?

Yes, I have become a ‘peace-maker’ in my society; I believe I am a very forgiving person, who cannot handle ‘conflict.’ I like to please everyone, therefore, in the hope of not being affected by rejection again.

WHAT ADVISE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE SEEKING TO ADOPT?

Be sure you REALLY want this child; this child will be yours FOREVER, and is not to be taken light-hearted!

HOW DO YOU BELIEVE SOUTH AFRICA SHOULD DEAL WITH OUR MILLIONS OF ORPHANS?

Million Dollar question! Perhaps we should make more effort in educating the Nation about ‘birth control’ to start off with.

HAS ADOPTION AFFECTED YOUR FAITH AS A CHRISTIAN?

No, I am still a child of God, no matter who ever made me, and who ever brought me up!

DO YOU HAVE A VIEW ON PRIVATE AND OPEN ADOPTIONS? IF SO PLEASE ARTICULATE IT!

With Open Adoption, I think it could be positive on certain levels, family health history, knowledge of origins of parents, etc.

With Private Adoption, I would imagine this to be more ‘emotional’.

WOULD YOU HAVE ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENT TO MAKE?

I would still like to ‘see’ my birth mother, from a distance, simply for observation.

I am very blessed to have my Dad; he is my idol, my strength and my biggest support in life. I thank him every day, for choosing me!!!

My abusive mother passed away 30 years ago on 4th April 2012; on Easter Sunday she committed suicide, leaving a note and a rumor that I was to blame! Makes me wonder why she even entertained my adoption. My adoptive parents have one natural child, 4 years my senior, he is 50 now. I have a younger brother who is 42 now, also adopted, who was treated in a respectful matter. I’ve heard of ‘mothers’ being jealous over their daughters (in a step-mother relationship). ??? Confused???

I was left in the state of confusion as I interviewed her. The next interviewee was Talia.

Talia –

How old were you when you were adopted?

My adoption took place through a private adoption. My parents were found before I was born, and they first saw me when I was three days old.

How old were you when you found out about your adoption?

My parents constantly told me that I was adopted. They used to read me children's stories when I was younger about adoption. I grew up always knowing it. However, my mom tells me that I only fully started to grasp the idea of it when I was about 5 years old.

What, in your view, is the best way and age to tell a child they are adopted?

I believe that the best way to tell a child they are adopted is the way my parents did – through stories and by constantly telling them about it. I think it's best this way because the child then grows up accepting this from an early age, instead of the adoption being treated like something big and abnormal by sitting the child down and telling them at an earlier age.

Did you ever long to meet your birth parents?

I was always curious about my birth parents, particularly about why they gave me up and what they looked like. I have always been very intrigued by genetics, and I didn't like the idea that I didn't have anything that I could refer my looks to. As I got older, the reason why they gave me up wasn't as important to me as where I got my features. When I did eventually meet them, both of their stories as to why they gave me up were very different,

which didn't bother me. I'm glad that I got over needing to know the reason why, because I felt very satisfied at being able to see them and place some of my features.

What, in your view, is the most challenging aspect of adoption?

I think the most challenging thing is how society views adoption. I grew up in a very loving and supportive family who didn't treat me any different to the rest of my family.

However, it was very difficult when there were some people outside of my family who didn't understand the concept of adoption. This resulted in them asking difficult questions, or making hurtful remarks.

Has your view of self been impacted by adoption?

As much as I always believed that I had worked through my adoption, I see now that I take rejection from friends and others quite badly. Sometimes, I misinterpret other actions as rejection. I don't know, however, if this is a direct link to adoption, or if it is just my personality.

When I was younger, I used to think that adoption was something to be ashamed of. This was mainly due to the reaction of some of my school peers to my adoption when I was younger. It made me feel self-conscious and embarrassed. However, as I grew up, I discovered that the majority of people don't actually mind if one is adopted or not. I managed to work through the negative feelings I associated with adoption, and I no longer feel ashamed when I think about it. In fact, sometimes I forget that I'm adopted, or feel like I'm joking when I speak to others about it. The memories of

when I was younger still hurt sometimes when I think back, but my being adopted today does not upset me.

What advice would you give to someone seeking to adopt?

I think the most important thing is to ensure that you do not treat any of your children differently, whether they are adopted or not. The best thing you can do for a child is make them feel accepted, especially as a parent.

I think it's a very bad idea to hide the adoption from the child, because if they find out on their own then they won't understand that it's all right to be adopted, and they may feel ashamed about it.

I also think it's very important to be open and supportive about the adoption with the child. Try and answer as many questions as you can that the adopted child asks, and don't get angry or upset by them. When a child asks about his/her past, it's not because they want to leave and go find their birth parents to go and live with them. S/He is merely curious, and getting upset when they ask just makes them feel bad and guilty about wanting to know more about their past.

How do you believe South Africa should deal with our millions of orphans?

I believe that not allowing children to be adopted and taken out of the country is wrong. There are plenty of people who would adopt children from South Africa, and when we don't allow this to happen then we are preventing a child from having a home.

Has adoption affected your faith as a Christian?

I think many experiences I have had in life have affected my faith as a Christian. I wouldn't pin adoption as the only thing. However, I believe that the effect adoption played on my faith was fairly small. I was never angry at God for it, because I was placed in an amazing family so I didn't have anything to be angry for.

To be honest, I never really considered my relationship with God with being adopted. To me, that's like considering my relationship with God for being a girl. It's just a part of who I am, and I've accepted it.

The one thing I can say, however, is that I believe that I was made for my family, and the fact that I didn't come from my mom's womb just shows me how special it was that I made it here. There could have been so many other circumstances that could have resulted in me being with another family. I believe that God played a role in that, and I'm so thankful for it.

Do you have a view on private and open adoptions? If so, please articulate it:

I think that private adoptions are much better than open adoptions. I think it is important for a child to grow up with their family and without the confusion of a birth parent in their lives. I think it also takes stress off the adopting family, as there is no stress that the child will develop a stronger bond with the birth parents than the adoptive parents. I believe that it is a good idea for the adopted child to find and meet their birth parents later on in life – preferably after school. I think it is fulfilling for the child and gives them some closure.

Would you have any additional comments to make?

1. I have met both my birth parents, and got a lot of closure out of it. I still keep in touch with them; however, they both understand that I am not looking for a relationship that I have with my parents, and they are not trying to replace my parents, which is a big relief.
2. Adoption is the reason for my strong view against abortion. I am not resentful towards my birth parents. I am, in fact, very grateful to them. I would not be around today if it wasn't for them. These days, abortion seems like the easy way out and it makes me so angry that there are couples desperate to have children and give a child an amazing life while people are aborting fetuses out of fear or as a result of carelessness.
3. If I couldn't have children, I would definitely adopt. I am forever grateful of the amazing life that my parents have provided me with, and I would love to be able to give that to a child who needs it.

Anonymous -

Although I was not directly involved in either being given up for adoption or adopting a child I was abandoned by my father when I was 4, he went to work one day and did not come home. I actually have no recollection of him at all.

I grew up with my mother, aunt, grandmother and sister in 1 house.

I do not recollect much of my childhood up until the age of about 13 (I am sure I have blocked a lot of it out) other than some specific memories related to holidays and certain events where I was recognised for achieving something noteworthy.

I was always driven to achieve, like I had something to prove and had single-minded focus, which I still have today although I have managed to mellow over time.

While I was growing up I had asked my mom on some occasions about what had happened to my dad and she had always given me the truth saying he left and never tried to contact us again. When I was a bit older and pushed a bit further she told me that he had skipped to South Africa (from Zimbabwe) to avoid maintenance and when she tracked him down in SA he then skipped to Australia for the same reason so he has never paid maintenance for either of us and also never tried to get in contact with us. Understandably I was not very happy about this.

When I was 9 I took up boxing and by the time I was 18 my trainer was pushing me to become professional, so I was certainly able to take care of myself. At that point in my life I was an “agro” teenager and my state of mind (which I voiced) was that if I ever bumped into him I would “kick his butt.” I could not believe, and still cannot believe that someone can willingly leave their children and not ever be involved in their lives in any way.

When I was 21 one of my mates from work and I decided to go to Australia and visit his sister in Perth for a couple of weeks. I knew that my old man

lived there as my sister had made contact with him. When I told another friend's dad that I was going there he asked if I was going to be visiting him or not. I told him that I would not and left it at that. One day I was visiting he asked me to sit with him and chat about it. I was not too keen as I was still in my original frame of mind. After a long discussion about it I found out that he had gone to school with my dad and had played in a band with him. During the discussion he convinced me that it would be the “bigger” thing to do to be the one to be man enough to make the contact. After toying with it for some time I finally agreed that I would do it and got in touch with him to tell him I was coming over to Perth.

He was working on a contract in Melbourne so I arranged flights to go there and see him for a period of 10 days. I would not say I was excited to be doing this due to my previous thoughts about him and what I knew about the facts that had been given to me by my mom but I still followed through with what I agreed to do. I had some time to think about what it would be like and built myself a little bit of a picture of what would happen and what I would talk to him about. From this I did have an expectation of how things would be and I also had a bunch of things that I would like to ask him about what had happened as I knew then that there were always 2 sides to the story.

When I arrived we got through the pleasantries and things were a little strained for a couple of days.

He was working so we only got a little time to talk in the mornings and evenings, the rest of the time I was left to my own devices and so did some exploring in Melbourne on my own.

After a couple of days I decided it was time to get some answers from him and when he got back one evening I said that we needed to talk. I started asking him questions about what happened and why he left and never tried to contact us again?

To my surprise he refused to answer any of my questions. Obviously this was extremely frustrating as I had taken the time and spent the extra money to go to Melbourne to visit him after being convinced by my friend's dad that it was the right thing to do. Looking at him, he was the same size as me and at that point I seriously contemplated knocking the crap out of him in an effort to get some answers out of him, which I believed I was entitled to after so many years.

I am now 46, the age he was when I went to see him, and I look at myself and the way that I am, and think about how I would have handled it and realize that, I am the way that I am due to the fact that he was not around and I thank God that there is a plan for me and that he knew what I needed, to become the person I am today. I have no respect for a man that cannot take responsibility for his actions and one that runs away from life. The lesson that I have taken from this is to be a man and take responsibility for your actions and always know that you have the ability within you (your God given strength) to handle any situation that comes your way.

I know that God will never give you more that you can handle and that the lessons he sends are there to teach you about yourself so you can become the best you, you can.

I left after the 10 days with my expectations blown out of the water and have not been in contact with him since, as I have nothing more to say to him and

no more questions to ask. It was something that I did that proved to me that there are greater forces in me than my own. It was this that started me on the path of self-improvement, which path I am still on today and will continue on for the rest of my life.

Today I am divorced and have 2 kids from that marriage. I have a relationship with my son (10) but unfortunately do not have one with my daughter (12). It was I that left the marriage after 2 seriously bad years. We did attend marriage counseling and it was at that point that I knew I could no longer continue in the relationship, it was detrimental to me, my ex-wife and both of my kids. My decision was to leave and to file for divorce. She refused and it took me 2 years to actually get the divorce and during that time she unfortunately spent her time turning the kids against me. I have at all times explained to my kids what is happening and why, as this was a luxury that I was not afforded and I believe that if they had the basic knowledge then it would have better equipped them for their future.

My ex-wife constantly throws in my face that I am exactly like my father and have done the same as him, to which I respond – there is no comparison as I provide for my kids and pay the maintenance that is due as well as try to ring them every evening (this I have been doing for over 3 years). I have a good relationship with my son and he is part of my new family. I know there is a lesson in the fact that my daughter does not speak to me or want me in her life, but have not worked out what it is yet.

I am sure it will become apparent in the future and I look forward to learning it so we can both move on.

Denise –

Giving up my daughter for Adoption

When I was 16 - my parents decided to leave Zimbabwe & move to South Africa once I had finished my O'Levels. It was unfortunate that our papers took so long for clearance to leave. So for four months I spent majority of my time in Bulawayo (we lived on a mining town called Shabanie Mine). I would go visit my best friend Michelle & her mom. Michelle & I would often go out over the weekends to a nightclub called "Catch- 22." They had a resident band "Special FX" playing. The keyboard player was a Teacher at my school & the drummer we knew through family & friends.

My last weekend with Michelle was 1st April 1988 (Easter Weekend). I needed a lift back to Shabanie on Monday 4th. After finding out if anyone was going past Shabanie I found a lift with the drummer from the band - he was a rep, so going on his country trip.

Monday came and we left around 8am. The trip was going well - it was a two-hour trip home. Well it was until he turned off the main road and onto a dirt road.... It was there that he raped me. It turned into the longest hour home. I was totally mortified and shocked that it happened after knowing him. My parents weren't home. He just dropped me off and left. I jumped into the shower. I never said anything to my Mom & Dad as was I too scared with what they would think. I blamed myself as I got the lift back with him and the fact that I knew him, so I thought.

We crossed the border on the 22nd April 2008. We stayed with my aunt and uncle till August when my dad got a job and we found a house. I told my mom in September when she got a job - I couldn't face her so I had to tell her over the phone. By then it was too late to press charges.

After a lot of consideration it was decided that I give the baby up for adoption. The doctor gave me the Princess Alice Adoption Home. It was there that I stayed until the baby was born on January 3rd 1989. My stay at the home went by as a blur - I was in hiding from family so would only go home if the coast was clear.

I had my first Christmas in SA there; my parents went to stay with my sister in Mmabatho. Rene' was with me during the delivery as Mom didn't want to be there. I was whisked to the general ward after giving birth. I found out then that it was a girl and had dark hair. I never saw her. I had a horrid birth and lost a lot of blood that I had to have a few pints put back into me. Not easy being 'O' negative back then. Everything after that was like nothing had happened - I had to sign papers in the court - I named her Antoinette Lynn.

I turned to drink after that - I never went for counseling or chatted to any one - my parents and sister never brought anything up. All I know that on her birthday every year after that, I would have my moment in remembering & wondering where she is & if she was okay & looked after etc. I prayed & hoped that nothing bad happened to her like it did to me. It was in 2002 that I found God & never looked back - I went for counseling & has forgiven him for what happened. I even had to forgive my Mom as I only found out after a conversation that she mentioned she has the blood group that can be given to a

ny other group.... I was so angry with her for not coming forth & giving me some instead of lying in hospital white as snow waiting for blood to arrive. To my surprise she didn't even know that I was rushed back into theatre due to loss of blood.

In 2007 I was working at Bless You Books as accountant & over the Christmas holidays I was walking into the mall & the drummer was walking out past me.... I froze & burst out crying. Well today 8th April 2012 I was sitting having breakfast at Europa in Fourways Mall and there he walks past again.... It was a totally different feeling - a part of me was hoping he saw me, the other part actually felt sorry for him. I have been so blessed with my two children I have now & know God has given me this path to walk.

I often think of my daughter who is now 23 - and how she is and what her life has been like. I would love to know where she is & meet her but the other part is to leave her as be & let her find me when & if she is wanting to. I don't want to upset her adoptive parents, as I know they have brought her up & love her just as much as any biological parent would. My one prayer is that I pray she has not turned to drugs or alcohol like there are so many youngsters today are doing.

When I had my second baby - a girl - my doctor told us the delivery date.... 3rd January 2012....for me this was a second blessing from God & I know He orchestrates our paths. Today seeing the father just confirmed there is a reason - I just got to find that one. He found me on Facebook & requested being a friend - it has been there since last year already.... today I see it differently.

When we had the meeting with you Gary, there was a lady that arrived late, I think her name is was Tina & she adopted twin boys.

Well she mentioned out of the blue that she went for a pedicure & the young lady doing the pedicure just blurted out that she was adopted & that her adoptive mother did not want her to look for her biological mom. She mentioned that she ended up counseling her etc. and then she mentioned her age...22/23. I had such a hot feeling it was Incredible. I said to Colin was that God telling me something, was He opening doors, I do not know. Do I ask Tina for her name etc. or do I leave it. I know she did mention to the young lady that it is her right to look and old enough but she replied saying she didn't want to hurt her adoptive mother - which is so understandable. But I do wonder & then to see her father today---- just everything happening all at once.

Preliminary Conclusion

In this chapter we looked at the co-researcher's story. I strongly considered that there were many people affected by adoption. I conducted numerous meetings which were meant to be only academic.

On the contrary it became apparent that people had stories to tell. Groups started to see God at work in their lives as stories unfolded. I could feel renewed healing as I shared my own story and listening to other people's stories.

I could see my own wounds as a reflection of loneliness. The stories raised emotions and clearly indicated the pain people go through in the adoption process.

cess. I asked the co-researchers very probing questions which reflected the different views people upheld with regard to adoption. In the next chapter we will dwell on the Biblical Perspective and how to find healing through the Bible.

Chapter 7 – A Biblical Perspective

Finding healing through the bible

The doctrine of adoption

We looked at the stories of the co-researchers in the previous chapter. It is critical to draw everything that is written in this thesis to a Biblical understanding. My adoption was put into perspective when I came to an understanding of Gods plan for my life. When Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, his introduction gave us an understanding of this plan.

‘In love, He predestined us to be adopted as His children through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will.’ (Ephesians 1:5). Paul uses the illustration of adoption on more than one occasion. In his letter to the church in Rome, he writes, ‘Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as children, the redemption of our bodies,’ (Romans 8:23). In writing to the church in Galatia, again he says, ‘But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a women, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons (children). Because you are sons (children) God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “*Abba, Father.*” So you are no longer a slave, but a son (child); God has also made you an heir. (Galatians 4:4-5).

Right from the beginning, God made it clear that he was on the side of the orphans, widows and fatherless. Although Paul referred to this later on in

the Canons of Scripture, God made it clear right from the very beginning that orphans were to be cared for and those who went defied this command, went against God Himself.

Exodus 22:22-23 - Never take advantage of any widow or orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, you can be sure that I will hear their cry.

Deuteronomy 10:17-18 - He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing.

Deuteronomy 24:19 When you are harvesting your crops and forget to bring in a bundle of grain from your field, don't go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. Then the LORD your God will bless you in all you do.

Job 29:12 - Because I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him.

Psalms 10:14,17-18 - You are the helper of the fatherless. LORD, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will prepare their heart; You will cause Your ear to hear, To do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, That the man of the earth may oppress no more.

Psalms 10:18 - Defending the fatherless and the oppressed, in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more.

Psalms 68:5-6 - Father to the fatherless, defender of widows — this is God, whose dwelling is holy. God places the lonely in families.

Psalms 82:3-4 - Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

Proverbs 31:8-9 - Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice.

Isaiah 1:17 - Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows.

Hosea 14:3 - In you the orphan finds mercy.

Matthew 18:5 - And anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf is welcoming me.

Romans 8:14-16 - For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

James 1:27 - Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.

Galatians 4:4-6 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

All Christians have been adopted as children of God and freed from the law. To adopt a child is to follow the lead of God who has adopted so many. There are several examples of adoption in the Bible including Moses.

What is the Doctrine of Adoption and what do reformed theologians say about it? What happens to those not adopted by God according to the Bible?

Not All People Are God's Children Says Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ, theologian of all theologians emphatically states some people are not God's children. It may be a shocking fact for many, as today's culture tends to go by feelings or traditions instead of by the Word of God. But what does the Bible teach?

When Jesus was confronted by the Jewish men of his day, as recorded in John 8, they claimed they were children of the Father in Heaven.

Jesus opposed them, saying, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me." (John 8.42) Then Jesus goes on to say: "You are of your father the devil." (John 8.44)

The Doctrine of Adoption Defined

Membership into God's family is what makes one a "son of God" whether male or female. The Bible makes no distinction between male and female when it comes to becoming one of his children.

Adoption is not a chosen act of the believer, but of the one who does the adopting. Just as justification is by the one who does the justifying,

adoption must be from God, not an act of the will of man. The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines it for us:

Q. 34. What is adoption?

A. Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges, of the sons of God.

Reformed Theologians Say Adoption is the Greatest Blessing

Wayne Grudem, General Editor of the ESV Study Bible, in his audio version of his Systematic Theology states, "there are a lot of reasons to think this [adoption by God] is a greater blessing than forgiveness of sins or being born again." Grudem explains the great benefits of being a child of God in his teaching.

Similarly, one of the most well-known theologians of all time, J.I. Packer, says of adoption in his book, *Knowing God*, "Our first point of adoption is that it is the highest privilege that the gospel offers: higher even than justification."

Being legally declared right before God (the doctrine of justification) is wonderful - without it, all sinners would perish in Hell. Being able to call God "Father" is even greater because the closeness of that relationship, the love shared, makes Christians not afraid, but joyful even during the worst of times. They know they are cared for and are "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ," as the Apostle Paul says in Romans 8.17.

How a Person Becomes a Child of God

How does one become a child of God? Through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is having confidence in Christ instead of self. The Bible says of those who will inherit eternal life: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2.8, 9)

No one deserves salvation nor earns it by obeying God's Laws, being baptized, being a good person, going to church, or any other human means. The one who trusts Christ who obeyed all of God's Laws and spilled his blood upon the cross, died, and was resurrected, this is a sinner who is born again and adopted into God's family.

The apostle John records in John 1.12, 13: "but to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

When a person understands they are enemies of God, not born as his children, but disobedient to his Laws (see the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20), this person will turn to Christ as Savior. God will not accept the proud; only the humble. They become a new person because God grants them repentance. When God gives this faith and repentance, by grace, God forgives all their sins and places them into His family for all eternity.

As Christians we want the Scriptures to confirm everything we do. You may find yourself asking "What does the Bible have to say about adoption?"

As we examine the Scriptures for specific examples and general truths relating to adoption, we can construct a biblical view of adoption.

Adoption embodies the biblical theme of the covenant.

More than Legal

Adoption in strict terms is a legal process. But it's important to see that adoption is more than a legal contract-it is a relationship of promise.

The adoption process goes through the courts and is made legal, but as in all parent/child relationships it becomes much more than that. Law and promise are different in principle, the one pivoting on reward or punishment for conduct, the other on acceptance of an unconditional gift.

God's Covenant Family

Paul described how Christians were adopted into God's family, a privilege originally bestowed exclusively on Israel but made available by the new covenant to all who have faith in Christ. Interestingly, according to a Roman-Syrian law book, a man might be able to disown his biological son if he had good reason, but he could never disown his adopted son.

This is not to say that children adopted into families today have greater standing than biological children. But this should clarify any misconception in the other direction-that somehow adopted children are second-best, or not really a member of the family.

Adoption upholds marriage as the building block for parenting.

God Designed Marriage!

Adam's aloneness is the only thing that God finds "not good" before the fall. God ordained marriage between a man and a woman to remedy this situation. It is no coincidence that it takes both a man and a woman to create a child.

God's intent was for that unique combination to stay intact in a covenant relationship to raise the child.

When this does not take place, for whatever reason, adoption can and should be considered because it upholds God's original intent for two parents.

Families are an extension of the Marriage Covenant. The husband and wife relationship, centered in Christ, builds a "tent" that not only shelters the couple, but means physical, emotional and spiritual security and shelter for their children. God's plan for children is that they experience life in the midst of this covenantal relationship between a mother and a father.

A marriage firmly rooted and grounded in Christ is the strongest possible foundation for family building, whether through birth or adoption. Many birth parents realize the stability of a Christian family and make that quality a priority when making their adoption plan.

Adoption upholds the scriptural emphasis on the role of the father.

Separate and Distinct

Although we have seen the importance of two parents, the father's role as illustrated in the Scriptures is separate and distinct from the mother's. The Bible speaks of the father as a man of compassion, a teacher at home, and a man to be honored by his children. Proverbs especially elaborates on these important roles a father can and should play in the lives of his children.

God purposefully chose to relate to us as a Father. Our earthly fathers are important in modeling or being images of God as Father.

It is important to note that many women choose adoption because they see the father as a person vital for their child.

Joseph Adopted Jesus

Perhaps the most profound example of adoption in the Scriptures is Joseph's adoption of Jesus. Joseph assumed the role of Jesus' father for all intents and purposes. It should not surprise us that God desired for Jesus to have an earthly father, consistent with His plan for marriage and parenthood.

Biblical examples show how God has used adoption to provide for children and to further His purposes and kingdom.

Pharaoh's Daughter and Moses

We can summarize Moses' adoption by seeing it in the context of two loving mothers whose first concern was a child-Jochebed, who parted with her child knowing that his life was at stake if he remained with her; and Pharaoh's daughter, who felt compassion on a child she knew by edict, was

to be killed. God used these two women to save Moses' life and provide him with a safe and secure childhood.

Jochebed's decision is a great example of a birth mother's love for her child. Her godly example sets straight the misconception that birth parents don't love their children. Her love for Moses prompted her to make the adoption plan.

Here are some other examples that are sometimes mentioned as types of adoption: Esther and Mordecai (Esther); Jacob's adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48); Abram and Eliazar (Genesis 15); and Eli and Samuel (1Samuel 1).

The overarching theme in the examples above, as it continues to be today, is that adoptions take place for the well-being of the child and with his best interest at heart.

Adoption is a scriptural metaphor that emphasizes the permanence of our relationship with God, the rights we have as His children and His redemption of us.

Many Similarities

The adoption metaphor is a compelling illustration of God's covenant love for His people and His desire to see us as part of His family. Adoptive families can experience a small piece of that in the permanence of the family God forms in their midst, and birth parents can know that they set an enduring plan into motion for their child, just as God, sacrificially through

Christ, put our salvation in place. The miracle of that transfer and grafting of the child into his new permanent family, so carefully planned and desired by both families, is a wonderful image of our permanent place in God's family.

Together on the Child's Behalf

Birth parents plan for permanence, the full rights of an heir, and love lavished on the child in his new family, just as God lavished the riches of His grace on us.

An adopted child knows that love daily from his family, and as he grows, he gains an understanding of the love of his birth parents who planned that permanence for him. Understanding this simple truth can break down the myth that adopted children will always experience rejection.

It can also break the myth of some sort of animosity between birth and adoptive families, knowing that they have worked together in the life of a child in a way they could not have worked independently.

Adoption is an outpouring of God's grace on all involved.

Grace in the time of Need

A crisis pregnancy can cause intense struggle for a young woman. Whatever the situation, she is experiencing emotional pain and a feeling of helplessness as she may have never felt before.

She is in the midst of a great time of need-the need for a resolution, the need for compassion, the need for support.

In a different set of circumstances, but feeling similar emotions, is the couple facing infertility. The inability to conceive or carry a pregnancy to term is one of the most difficult obstacles a family-oriented couple can face. Couples dealing with infertility experience a grieving process that can be debilitating and alienating. For both the young woman and the couple, life seems to be “on hold” and hopeless.

Grace breaks through.

In the midst of these seemingly hopeless struggles we have a loving God who gives us gracious answers.

Hebrews 4:14-16 tells us; “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses...Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”.

Adoption is for Children

The child also experiences God’s grace through an adoption plan. Adopted children can feel comfort and love, knowing that their birth parents and adoptive parents planned a future for them that was in their best interest. As children grow older this can be palpable evidence of God’s direction and sovereignty in their lives. Adoption can also be a sign of God’s grace for

children without parents or children whose parents cannot care for them, children in the foster care system and children from other countries.

An adoption plan, as it progresses and after it is in place, can be a powerful example of God's working circumstances for good for all those involved.

God uses adoption, just as He can any human relationship, to further His purposes and to bring about wholeness and healing.

I. Biblical usages of "adoption"

A. Greek word, *huiothesia*. From *huis* = "son," and *tithemi* = "to put or place"

B. New Testament references: Romans 8:15 - "you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" Romans 8:23 - "we groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of the body." Romans 9:4 - "Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants..." Galatians 4:5 - "redeem those under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"

Ephesians 1:5 - "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself."

II. Physical adoption.

A. *Hebrew culture.*

1. No mention of adoption in Old Testament Law.

2. Possible occasions of such. All outside of Palestine. a. Moses - Exodus 2:10; Acts 7:21; Hebrews 11:24 b. Genubath - I Kings 11:20 c. Esther - Esther 2:7,15 d. cf. II Samuel 7:14; Ezra 10:44

B. Roman culture.

1. Usually a man without natural offspring would adopt male as son. Seldom an infant.

2. Young men sometimes adopted out of slavery; redeemed from such into privilege of son.

3. Natural father sometimes "sold" a son to an adoptive father.

4. Paternal authority under Roman law was often severe.

5. Adopted son became legal son with all legal rights and responsibilities.

6. Some allege Roman adoption irrevocable. Use as basis for "once saved, always saved"

7. Some allege Roman adoption was rite of manhood for placement as "adult son."

C. Modern Western culture.

1. Means of having children other than by natural generation. Usually at infancy. Alternative to abortion.

2. Increasing objection to such in U.S.A.

a. Alleged psychological effects of "rejection."

b. Alleged harm of cross-racial adoption; "cultural genocide;" "no parents, better than white parents."

c. Under attack by pro-abortionists. "If baby can't grow up in care of natural mother, better off dead." "If put child up for adoption, never know if being mistreated, abused; always fearful, wondering, worried, anxious."

d. Christian objections. "Sins of birth parents will pop out in child." "If God does not give you natural children, then not meant to have any."

III. **Figurative adoption.**

A. Pauline metaphor.

1. Metaphor of filial relationship with God - Romans 9:4
2. Metaphor of spiritual relationship - Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5
3. Metaphor of consummated and glorified relationship with God - Romans 9:23

4. Not to be pressed as allegory.

B. Theological interpretations.

1. Filial and familial relationship of Christians with God. "The action of God by which people are brought into filial relationship with Him and conferred with privileges thereof" (ISBE). Not in conflict with birth metaphor of regeneration, but simply connotes additional idea of kinship relationship. New relationship with God as Father; the apex of privilege as part of God's family.

2. Some reject former interpretation and interpret "adoption" only of future relationship with God occurring at the "rapture" or in heaven. Point to early questionable Roman practice of natural father "setting a goal" for his son, who then could reach that goal at age 14, 18 or 21 and be "placed as an adult son" into manhood.

They emphasize that "adoption" is not the "making of a son," but the "placing of a son." God, the Father's, "longed-for goal" for Christians is that we be "conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29).

Presently Christians are alleged to have only the "first-fruits" of the "Spirit of adoption," being but the down payment for a future adoption yet to be received when we have final "placement" with God. This interpretation lacks documentary background and Biblical support. The pre-millennial eschatological "grid" creates necessity for this interpretation.

Preliminary Conclusion

Adoption is deemed as a subject that has different interpretations, understanding and connotations. It is important to adopt a particular trend of reasoning when dealing with the subject of adoption. It is important to have a specific stance one aligns him/herself with when handling the notion of adoption. This becomes a tangible tool to measure whether one's own practice falls within acceptable parameters of adoption. We will now unfold the subject in the next chapter.

We delved on the Biblical Perspective in this chapter. We looked at the various notions such as: not all people are God's children. I defined the doctrine of adoption. I also indicated how grace breaks through. I touched on the importance of God's covenant family, and elaborated on the adoption of Moses by Pharaoh's daughter and Jesus by Joseph.

We will now look at supporting work in chapter 8. We will look at aspects such as single parent's adoption, gay rights adoption as well as abortion among other subjects.

Chapter 8 – Supporting Work

Adoption is a complex topic. There are many other issues that form a buttress around the topic. In this chapter, I will seek to address some of these issues. The previous chapter provided enough ground work in terms of the biblical perspective regarding adoption.

8.1 Adoption and Identity Formation

There has been an enormous amount of research conducted about adoptees and their problems with identity formation. Many of the researchers agree on some of the causes of identity formation problems in adolescent adoptees, while other researchers conclude that there is no significant difference in identity formation in adoptees and birth children. I will attempt to discuss some of the research which has been conducted and will attempt to answer the following questions: Do adoptees have identity formation difficulties during adolescence? If so, what are some of the causes of these vicissitudes? Is there a significant difference between identity formation of adoptees and non-adoptees?

The National Adoption Center (USA), reports that fifty-two percent of adoptable children have attachment disorder symptoms. It was also found that the older the child when adopted, the higher the risk of social maladjustment (Benson et al., 1998). This is to say that a child who is adopted at one-week of age will have a better chance of “normal” adjustment than a child who is adopted at the age of ten. This may be due in part to the probability that an infant will learn how to trust, whereas a ten-

year-old may have more difficulty with this task, depending on his history. Eric Erickson, a developmental theorist, discusses trust issues in his theory of development. The first of Erickson's stages of development is Trust v. Mistrust. A child who experiences neglect or abuse can have this stage of development severely damaged. An adopted infant may have the opportunity to fully learn trust, whereas an older child may have been shuffled from foster home to group home as an infant, thereby never learning trust. Even though Trust v. Mistrust is a major stage of development, "the greatest psychological risk for adopted children occurs during the middle childhood and adolescent years" (McRoy et al., 1990). As children grow and change into adolescents, they begin to search for an identity by finding anchoring points with which to relate. Unfortunately, adopted children do not have a biological example to which to turn (Horner & Rosenberg, 1991), unless they had an open adoption in which they were able to form a relationship with their biological families as well as their adoptive ones. Also key to the development of trust is the ability to bond with adoptive parents. The absence of a biological bond between the adoptee and adoptive parents may cause trust issues in the adoptee (Wegar, 1995). Baran (1975) stated, "Late adolescence ... is the period of intensified identity concerns and is a time when the feelings about adoption become more intense and questions about the past increase." Unless the adopted child has the answers to these arising questions, identity formation can be altered and somewhat halted. McRoy et al. (1990) agree with this point: "Adolescence is a period when young people seek an integrated and stable ego identity. This occurs as they seek to link their current self-perceptions with their 'self-perceptions from earlier periods and with their cultural and biological heritage'" (Brodzindky, 1987:37). Adopted children sometimes

have difficulty with this task because they often do not have the necessary information from the past to begin to develop a stable sense of who they are. They often have incomplete knowledge about why they were relinquished and what their birth parents were like, and they may grieve not only for the loss of their birth parents but for the loss of part of themselves.

In essence, it seems that the adolescent's identity formation is impaired because he holds the knowledge that his "roots" or his "essence" have been severed and remains on the unknown side of the adoption barrier.

The identity struggles of the adolescent are "part of a human need to connect with their natural clan and failure to do so may precipitate psychopathology" (Wegar, 1995). Also in agreement with Wegar, McRoy, and Baran is Frisk. Baran et al. (1975) wrote, "Frisk conceptualized that the lack of family background knowledge in the adoptee prevents the development of a healthy 'genetic ego'" In most of the studies surveyed, the researchers are in agreement about one fact. Vital to the adopted adolescent's identity development is the knowledge of the birth family and the circumstances surrounding the adoption. Without this information, the adolescent has difficulty deciding which family (birth or adopted) he resembles.

During the search for an identity in adolescence, the child may face an array of problems including "hostility toward the adoptive parents, rejection of anger toward the birth parents, self-hatred, transracial adoption concerns, feeling of rootlessness" (McRoy et al., 1990).

While searching for an identity, adolescent adoptees sometimes are involved

in a behavior which psychologists term ‘family romance.’ This is not a romance in a sexual manner, but rather a romance in the sense of fantasizing about birth parents and their personal qualities. Horner and Rosenberg (1991) stated that “the adopted child may develop a family romance in order to defend against painful facts.” Often times, adoptees wonder why they were adopted, and because closed-adoptions are common, the adoptee is left with many unanswered questions about the circumstances of the adoption. The adoptee may have a tendency to harbor negative feelings about himself, feeling like he was unwanted, bad, or rejected by the birth parent. These feelings can be quite powerful, so the adoptee will engage in this family romancing behavior in order to offset the negative feelings and try to reconcile his identity crisis. This point is stressed by Horner and Rosenberg (1991) when they write, “The painful reality to be confronted by adoptees is that their biological parents did not want, or were unable, to find a way of keeping and rearing their own child. The children feel that they were either ‘not meant to be’ or ‘intolerable’”

Finding an identity, while considering both sets of parents is a difficult task for the adolescent. The adoptee does not want to hurt or offend his adoptive parents, and he also does not want to ignore what is known about his biological roots. Horner and Rosenberg (1991) write:

Adoptive status may represent a developmental interference for children during adolescence. Instead of the usual struggles over separation and the establishment of a cohesive sense of self and identity, the adopted child must struggle with the competing and conflictual issues of good and bad parents, good and bad self, and separation from both adoptive parents and images of

biological parents.

If all adoptions were open, the adoptee would have the ability to know about the traits of each family. He would have an easier task of forming an identity for himself, rather than struggling with the issues of to whom he can relate. If the adolescent has some information about his birth parents, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and religion, Horner and Rosenberg (1991) believe that the following can happen: “From the bits of fact that they possess, adopted children develop and elaborate explanations of their adoptions. At the same time, they begin to explain themselves, and they struggle to develop a cohesive and realistic sense of who they are and who they can become.” It appears that if the adoptee has even a minimal amount of information about his birth parents and adoption, he will have an easier time with identity formation than an adoptee who has no information about his adoption.

The adoptive parents can also play a key role in aiding in identity formation of the adopted adolescent. Much of the research I surveyed at least touched upon the role of the adoptive parents. “Kornitzer stated that the more mysterious the adoptive parents make things for the child the more he will resort to fantasy” (Baran et al., 1975). This is yet another argument for open adoptions. Again, if the child knows the circumstances of his adoption and other pertinent information about his biological roots, he will have an easier time forming an identity in adolescence. It is also noted that, “... young adoptees are vulnerable to feeling ‘different’ or ‘bad’ due to the comments and actions of others” (Wegar, 1995). This is to say that the child will feel more accepted, and that his adoption is not a stigma if his adoptive parents have the conviction that being adopted does not make the family ‘bad’, and

it does not mean that the adoptive parents are failures because they could not have biological children. Sometimes the negativity of adoptive parents about the circumstances of the adoption can be sensed by the adoptee, thus causing the adoptee to believe that there is something wrong with being adopted. Once again, this can cause identity formation problems, especially if the adolescent believes that he is inferior or bad because he is adopted and not raised in his biological family.

“The literature on adopted children has long documented particular and sometimes intense struggles around identity formation, and suggests that in many ways adopted children follow a different developmental course from children who are raised by their biological parents” (Horner and Rosenberg, 1991).

While most of the studies I read found that adoptees have difficulty in identity formation during adolescence, I did find an article which refutes this point.

Kelly et al. (1998) write: Developing a separate, autonomous, mature sense of self is widely recognized as a particularly complex task for adoptees. While many scholars have concluded that identity formation is inherently more difficult for adoptees some recent comparisons of adopted and non-adopted youth have found no differences in adequacy of identity formation, and a study by Stein and Hoopes (1985) revealed higher ego identity scores for adoptees. Goebel and Lott (1986) found that such factors as subjects' age, sex, personality variables, family characteristics, and motivation to search for birth parents accounted more for quality of identity formation than

did adoptive status.

In conclusion, it is difficult to say who is right in their beliefs about adoptees and identity formation. The research I have reviewed has mostly shown that adoptees do have quite a bit a difficulty forming an identity during adolescence, and that this difficulty can be due to a number of factors. Negative parental attitudes about adoption can have a negative effect on the adoptee. The issue of open versus closed adoptions will forever be a debate, but the research does show that the more an adoptee knows about his birth family and the circumstances surrounding his adoption, the easier it will be for him to form an identity during adolescence. Most of the researchers who wrote about the family romance seemed to do so in a negative manner, when in fact I believe that the ability to fantasize about the birth family may be a healthy option for the adolescent who is the victim of a closed adoption.

It allows him to construct a view of what his birth family is like, and it also allows him to relieve himself of some of the internal pain which is caused by closed adoptions. Overall, most of the literature supported the notion that adoptees do indeed have identity formation problems.

8.2 Single Parent Adoption.

As an increasing number of children are living in foster care, on the streets, and waiting at childcare agencies, an increasing number of unmarried adults are choosing to become parents through adoption. Though single parents have the potential to give otherwise parentless children the nurturing they need and fulfill their personal desire to share with a family, they still face many difficulties and discrimination in applying for adoption. (Single

Adoptive Parents)

Singles looking to adopt face many obstacles. Thirty years ago single-parent adoption simply wasn't done in many places. Certain states in the U.S.A. even had laws against it (Liptak 78). The traditional view of parenting that requires a mother and a father for healthy growth and development of the child may seem unfair to many singles, and is also unfair to some children for whom this ideal may not be possible. Today, adoption agencies handle single applicants in a variety of ways. They may still simply deny the applicant immediately, or they may overlook the application while children are placed with couples, request a more rigorous home study than usual, or end up offering the applicant "special needs" children who may be older, have disabilities, or be interracial. Family and friends may also provide hurdles. They may not understand why a person would want to take on the responsibility of parenting without a partner (Prowler). By demonstrating to agencies, family, and friends that they have thought their decision through and are stable, and by being confident and persistent, singles looking to adopt can achieve their goals (Gardner).

The simple fact that there are kids without parents and that there are single people willing to adopt is the first good reason to let down the barriers of discrimination to single parents. With increasing numbers of children in foster care needing adoption services, single parents are stepping in to provide homes. Single parents have made up a third of adoptions from foster care in the past and their numbers are rising (Single Adoptive Parents). Children need love, nurturing, and stability to be well-balanced, productive adults and the desire to provide these things is what drives singles and couples alike to adopt children. Also alike is the natural ability

to parent. Many single people have the talent and skills to raise children; they simply don't have a spouse (Prowler).

While it is arguable that "two parents are better than one," children show that they can thrive in all different kinds of family structures. As long as there is love, adequate supervision, structure, and consistency a child raised by a single parent can grow to be just as successful and healthy as any other. Friends, relatives, money and sheer effort can help substitute for the missing spouse (Kantrowitz and Wingert). Generally, singles looking to adopt have all these things. They are well educated and financially stable (Austin), have high levels of emotional maturity and a high capacity for frustration, and are independent, but connected to a support network of family and friends (Single Adoptive Parents). The supportive network of family and friends can provide the opposite gender role model needed for a child's healthy psychological development and to calm the instinctive desire of a two-parent ideal (Kantrowitz and Wingert).

There is even evidence to suggest that children in single-parent homes may be better off than many raised by two parents. Researchers Groze and Rosenthal conducted a study that compared the responses of adoptive parents. In their comparison of two-parent homes to single-parent homes, they found that children in single-parent families experienced fewer problems, and that the single-parent families were more likely to evaluate the adoption's impact as being very positive (Single Adoptive Parents).

With fifty percent of marriages ending in divorce, many children are facing severe emotional trauma in their family lives. When parents split up,

children may feel abandoned or even responsible. Some single adoptive parents are children of divorce who desire a family, but don't want to put their own offspring through the pain of seeing a parent leave (Kantrowitz and Wingert). Other single parents feel that the absence of negotiating between spouses on parenting matters is beneficial to the children. According to one single adoptive mother, "When there's a question about discipline issues, a curfew for example, I am the ultimate decision-maker. I don't have to negotiate it with her father. [She] cannot go to the other parent and try to get what she wants from him if I won't give it to her. There's consistency" (Klein, 28).

The adoption scene has been adjusting to the growing numbers of singles interested in adoption, but the barriers of prejudice and discriminating policies still exist. While single parents can offer loving, stable homes for otherwise parentless children, they face many obstacles in obtaining an adopted family. By broadening the view of the family and relaxing adoption policies regarding single parent applicants, children at adoption agencies, in foster care, and on the streets can be given loving homes.

8.3 Gay Rights and Adoption

One of the leading political debates today is the call for a change in adoption laws with regard to same-sex couples. Changing the law would allow same-sex couples to offer loving homes to the approximately 100,000 children in the United States waiting in failing, substandard foster care system. This law would also give the millions of others whom are already being raised in same-sex homes the legal benefits and recognition of the non-custodial

parent. While both sides of this debate give compelling reasons as the pros and cons of their beliefs, studies give proven data in relation to both sides of traditional and non-traditional familial roles.

On the traditional side, Tom Adkins, believes homosexuals are using children as political prizes in the fight for change in our adoption laws. Mr. Adkins implies their relationships are shorter than that of a traditional relationship and therefore less suitable for raising children. He feels the same-sex home environment fosters homosexual behavior, sexual promiscuity and confused gender roles that may cause serious psychological problems later in a child's life. Mr. Adkins also points out that although there is little or no real evidence in support of his statements, he favors the "sure thing: a responsible mother and father. This does not include grandpa, same-sex parents or single mothers, who he feels is the single most highly correlated poverty factor for children (Adkins, 2002:598)."

On the non-traditional side, Becky BIRTHA, writer, lesbian adoptive parent and adoption consultant feels that twenty years of studies on this controversial subject hold truth. She agrees that a "parents' sexual orientation alone does not predict their ability to be good parents (BIRTHA, 2002:601)." These studies were based upon children whom were already living in a same-sex home. Change in adoption laws would not give a child another parent but give the non-custodial parent legal recognition and obligation to the child they are already raising. Ms. BIRTHA feels that children "should grow up in families in which parents are protective, caring, loving, and regardless of sexual orientation, recognized as parents by the law (BIRTHA, 2002:603)."

She also feels changing the laws isn't a concern of "whether gays have the right to parent children; it's whether children of gays have the right to have parents (Birtha, 2002:602)".

Originating from a fight to change adoption laws, both articles were persuasive in their perspective opinions which holds the needs of children in the highest regard. Working to protect them from any undue harm this major change would effectively cause, each article presents clinical studies that would negate the opposite view.

Mr. Adkins would stop adoption by any homosexual to include those currently raising a child of their own. By his own admittance, there is no contrary hard evidence to support his opposing stance on the subject. Ms. Birtha fights for equal rights for any homosexual to be legally recognized as the parent they already are. This would also open up the opportunity to adopt the foster children they are currently caring for as their own. She cites several long-term studies and is clearly backed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, which cares for millions of children of all backgrounds on a regular basis.

Mr. Adkins presents his theory as though the gay community is conspiring to damage the children they are involved with. He attacks their relationships as short term and non-committal although since the 1999 decision of the Vermont Supreme Court ruled that same-sex couples could enter into civil unions; over four thousand couples have registered there. He reflects back to analyst Robert Lerner's statement that "the studies were fatally flawed in methodology, technique, and analysis. Some didn't even have control

groups (Adkins, 2002:597)." He feels there are problems with the data and a more consensus of the best choice is needed.

Ms. BIRTHA takes the stance of a proven history of children being raised in same-sex homes and the factual data based on years of study. Her fight is to give children a stable home whether it is with heterosexual or homosexual in nature. As stated by one of Ms. BIRTHA's friends, "There will be gay adults in the next generation, just as there have been gay people in every generation of history (BIRTHA, 2002:602)".

While both sides give great arguments, I feel Becky BIRTHA's stance to be based upon proven data. The American Academy of Pediatrics, whom deals with children of all walks of life, states the health risks involved with the laws today, although AAP author, Ellen Perrin, admits, "We need more longitudinal research to see the effects of different kinds of family structures (Adkins, 2002:597)."

These articles are clear cut and each holds its own level of merit. The American Academy of Pediatrics standing strong against the backlash of conventional thought brings strength to the stance of changing current adoption laws. There should be further, controlled studies on the subject based strictly on facts. Opposition of the law will always stand strong but for those who are living with the economic and legal problems there is a definite need for action.

References

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8.4 Adoption or Abortion

There has long existed a standing debate about whether women should have an abortion or put their children up for adoption. The people who argue against abortions say that the procedure represents the intentional murder of an unborn child. In their eyes, you take away the rights of that person by eliminating them before they even have a chance at life. The other side states that some men and women will not make good parents. They feel that if the mother and father of the child think that they will harm the child in some way because they cannot take care of it or if they feel that the mother cannot survive childbirth, then those parents have the authority to say that they don't want to have the child. In short, they say that they have the authority to decide what happens to the child whether it has reached birth or not. These people feel that abortions are right, because it provides an easy way out of parenthood and the attached responsibility.

Personally, I view abortions as being completely unnecessary and furthermore, inhumane. I think that every child should have a chance at life, no matter how short it may turn out. Some people say that there will always be cases where a child doesn't have a chance because some cruel twist of

fate prevents them from surviving until birth. Well, being aware of that, I don't think that people should play God and make the conscious decision to kill a baby. A person should become responsible, mature, and emotionally stable before they even consider putting themselves in a position where parenthood could potentially become an issue. When a person becomes a parent, whether a mother or father, that begins at the moment of conception. I believe at that moment, a person becomes responsible for the wellbeing of the child or children as such. That means taking care of the child with every action that you make. It certainly does not include deciding that abortion provides the easy way out of a difficult situation.

Our criminal justice system puts people away in jail for life if we kill another human being. That being the case, how can anyone justify killing a completely defenseless child, which defines abortion perfectly. Every person in the world deserves a chance at life; I know that every day I appreciate the fact that my mother chose life for me.

The majority of the argument over abortion comes into play with the question of when life begins. Pro-life people suggest that life begins at the moment of conception, when the fetus begins its development in the womb of its mother. Pro-choice people choose to believe that life doesn't actually begin until the exact moment of birth, thereby giving parents the opportunity to kill their unwanted children.

Many couples all over the world would dearly love to adopt a baby, because they are unable to conceive a child themselves for whatever reason. Infertility and sterility prevent some people who would love to become

loving parents from ever knowing that joy.

Before I close the argument, let me leave you with something that a friend of mine once told me. Answer this question: If you knew a pregnant woman who had eight children already, three of whom were deaf, two of whom were blind, one mentally retarded, and the woman herself had Syphilis, would you try to convince her to have an abortion? Please think carefully and make your decision before reading on. If you said no, then you may consider yourself a humane person. However, if you said yes, then you just prevented the famous composer, Beethoven, from having a chance at life.

8.5 Closed versus Open Adoptions

Many people look into adoption each year. Some of the people looking into it are looking to become parents, while the others are looking for parents to place their unborn child with. With adoption comes education. It is important for both parties to look into and understand different aspects of adoption. To educate oneself on all aspects of adoption may give each person involved the understanding of the emotions they may go through and the professional help they may want to seek. Psychologists are looking into the benefits and draw backs to open adoption as well as closed adoption, something everyone should be educated on if pursuing an adoption journey.

Perspective adoptive parents should educate themselves or get legal definitions of both closed and open adoption. It is important to know and understand the choices one may have as an adoptive parent. Adoptive or perspective adoptive parents need to understand the types of adoptions and

understand how it may affect their family as a whole including the adoptee.

“In closed adoption, the birth mother, birth father and you (the adopting family) are anonymous. (Adopting Family Resource, n.d.). It is also explained by Adopting Family Resource, (n.d.) that in an open adoption all parties involved exchange identifying information and after the placement you may or may not have ongoing contact with each other.

Perspective birth parents should also educate themselves on both closed and open adoptions. It is important for birth parents to know their options and explore what emotions may come along with each option they have. Lawyers of Gillespie, Shields & associates, (2008), state that since the purpose of an adoption is to terminate the parental rights of the birth parents and sever their ties with the child, most states do not have laws addressing open adoptions. It is important to know these things. Birth parents should know that even if they choose an open adoption it does not always guarantee the openness that they may be promised. With my personal experience with being an adopted child, I feel the need to stress the importance of this. The fact that mine was a closed adoption meant that I spent many years looking for my parents. Many years, in a sense wasted.

No matter what happens, it is important that the whole process is thought out. The full impact of a closed or open adoption needs to be understood. The birth parent(s) need to undergo extensive counseling in preparation for that which they are prepared to do.

Axness , (n.d), explains that Quality counseling for the birth mother (or birth

parents), includes:

- (1) An exploration of the dizzying gamut of her feelings;
- (2) An evolving understanding of what adoption would mean for her, her child, and the parents she chooses for her child;
- (3) Help in realizing that while she may make plans beforehand, she will not be in a position to make a fully-informed decision regarding the adoption until after her baby is born;
- (4) Preparation for the fact that she will naturally experience feelings of loss and grief if she does choose to relinquish her child for adoption, even if the choice is the correct one for her, and even though she will have contact with her child and her child's parents, and
- (5) Ambivalence. This last point is one of the land mines of poorly-done open adoption: when an uncounseled birthmother, with no post-placement counseling, is blindsided by her stormy emotions after the separation from her baby, a natural thought is, "I made a mistake. I've got to get my baby back," even if her decision to relinquish her child was a sound one and a right one. You see, we as a society aren't good with ambivalence-we're conditioned to think that if something is right, it feels good, and if it feels bad or is difficult, it must be wrong.

Axness, (n.d), also explains that Quality counseling for prospective adoptive parents includes:

- (1) Exploring their own profound losses, of infertility or the death or miscarriage of a child or children;
- (2) Examining their reasons for adopting a child;
- (3) Really understanding that a prospective birth mother will not be in a position to make a decision about relinquishing her child until after the baby

has been born;

(3) Understanding that they will be witnessing close-up the very real grief of their child's birthmother, and that this is a normal part of open adoption;

(4) Embarking on an inner journey to confront the most destructive force in adoption-personal insecurities and fears. "Every adoption is a foray into terror," writes Jim Gritter, Child Welfare Supervisor, Catholic Human Services in Traverse City, MI, and author of *The Spirit of Open Adoption*. This shows you how important it is to seek counseling and understand different processes birth parents and adoptive parents may have to go through such as the grief process.

After explaining the difference of both open adoptions and closed adoptions it is important to look at the effects caused by both types of adoptions. It is important for the birth parents as well as the adoptive parents to learn the positive and negative effects that may be caused by both open and closed adoptions. As written in *The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child*, Verrier, (1993), "Many doctors and psychologists now understand that bonding doesn't begin at birth, but is a continuum of physiological, psychological, and spiritual events which begin in utero and continue throughout the postnatal bonding period. When this natural evolution is interrupted by a postnatal separation from the biological mother, the resultant experience of abandonment and loss is indelibly imprinted upon the unconscious minds of these children, causing that which I call the primal wound.'" This is important to know because if a parent wants the best for their child they will give their child time to grieve.

Whether a birth parent or adoptive parent it should be known as to what is

best for the child involved, with that being said, it is important to become educated about things believed from both sides.

It is believed by open adoption advocates that closed adoption is traumatizing for the adoptee. They believe that the secrecy of a closed adoption causes problems for the adoptee emotionally. They believe that to be emotionally sound it is needed by the adoptee to know where they come from more than just their nationality or history of health.

It is believed by closed adoption advocates that open adoption may make it harder for the child and adoptive family to bond well. They also believe that adoptees that do not search for their birth families have greater self-concept than adoptees that do search for their birth families.

Open adoption for the birth parents is something that can help with the grieving process. It lets the birth parents involved in an open adoption know where their child is and does not have to worry or create fantasies about their relinquished child or children.

Anyone can see that adoption is a long process. Not many people realize that there is a lot of information they need to know and understand before the adoption process should begin. It is important to understand that the birth parents as well as the adoptive parents go through emotional turmoil. It is also important to know that each person involved should seek counseling prior to and after the adoption process. Finally, it is good to know the ins and outs of open and closed adoptions. Adoption may be a

long emotional process but it is an amazing, loving way to bring families together.

8.6 International Adoption

Nyla was just two or three days old, no one really knows for sure, when she was found abandoned in the middle of a field in Rwanda. She was "black and blue," says her adoptive mother, Karen Brown. Her umbilical cord was still attached.

One year later, Nyla lives in a high-rise building in Hong Kong with American parents and a four-year-old sister who is Chinese. She just started walking and has "seven-and-a-half" teeth, though she's too shy to show them.

The bright-eyed baby is one of more than 35,000 children sent from Africa in a surge of adoptions in the last eight years, according to adoption expert Peter Selman from Newcastle University in the UK.

During that time, figures have risen three-fold at the same time as international adoptions from all countries have slumped to a 15-year low, Selman said.

A new report from The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) entitled "Africa: The New Frontier for Inter-country Adoption," says the trend indicates that receiving countries are turning "*en masse*" to Africa to meet demand for adoptive children as other options close. It's a trend, they say, that needs to stop.

"It must at all costs be discouraged. It should be a last resort and an exception rather than the normal recourse to solving the situation of children in difficult circumstances, as it seems to have now become," said David Mugawe, executive director of the ACPF in a press statement.

The group says that the lack of regulation combined with the promise of money from abroad had turned children into "commodities in the graying and increasingly amoral world of inter-country adoption."

"Due to the illegal nature of these acts, it has been difficult to properly document them, but it is known that there have been cases of children sold by their parents, and children abducted and later trafficked or even placed for adoption because wrongly considered orphans," said Najat M'jid Maalla, U.N. Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

Children's rights advocates recently met in Ethiopia to consider what needs to be done to protect the continent's children at the Fifth International Policy Conference on the African Child (IPC).

The ACPF is urging African leaders to seek family-based, national solutions to care for the estimated 58 million children on the continent who have been orphaned by war, famine and disease.

"Every child should have an inalienable right to be nurtured and reared in the country and culture in which they are born," Mugawe said.

In the eight years from 2003 to 2010, more than half of the children adopted

from Africa came from Ethiopia (22,282), followed by South Africa (1,871), Liberia (1,355) and Madagascar (1,331) and Nigeria (1,118), according to Selman.

Of those, only South Africa and Madagascar have ratified the 1993 Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-country Adoption.

Compliance with the Convention typically leads to a fall in adoption from those countries as they work to satisfy demands for greater transparency, the ACPF said.

However, sharp increases in adoption rates from non-Hague Convention countries exposed a "deeply troubling" trend of shifting demand, according to a second report released by the group Tuesday, "Inter-country Adoption: An African Perspective."

"Demand transfers to other countries where Hague protections do not exist and where, all too often, the authorities are totally unprepared to cope with the sudden influx of applications and are unable to apply basic child protection safeguards," the report said.

Among other safeguards, the Convention dictates that a Central Authority must ensure that adoption is in the best interests of the child. Only 13 -- or less than one third of -- African countries have signed the Convention, according to the ACPF.

The majority of children adopted from Africa go to the United States or

France, two of the world's biggest receiving countries, according to Selman.

They're also the two countries that have experienced the greatest falls in international adoption rates in the past year, mostly due to a drop in adoptions from Haiti after the 2010 earthquake.

"The general agreement is it's an issue of supply rather than demand. In other words, it's not that people don't want to adopt from abroad. It means that countries are less willing to send or we decide that they are operating so poorly that we don't want to receive them," he said.

Any further reduction from Africa would put further pressure on countries still open to adoptions and create longer waiting lists for potential parents.

"There are many frustrated singles and couples who have been approved for adoptions and are waiting longer than they expected and some are feeling as though they will never get a child," Selman said.

Nyla's parents Karen and Charlie Brown have just embarked on what they know will be a long campaign to adopt a third child. It has taken the couple seven years to adopt two children and as the number of adopting countries shrinks, so do their options.

It is known that there have been cases of children sold by their parents, and children abducted and later trafficked.

Rwanda, Nyla's birthplace, has temporarily suspended new adoptions while it works to implement the Hague Convention.

Brown said she knows a lot of people who want to adopt who are now looking to Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Both have recorded sharp jumps in international adoption rates in recent years, according to Selman. Neither has ratified the Hague Convention.

Brown is not sure if Nyla would have survived had she remained in the Rwandan orphanage. She was five months old and malnourished when they gained custody.

"She had antibiotic-resistant salmonella poisoning in her entire body. Her head was covered in ring worm. She brought home other health issues, a lot of which we've been able to eradicate. She's a healthy little girl... now," she said.

As to the suggestion that the doors should be all but closed to international adoptions from Africa, Brown said it shouldn't matter where adoptive parents live.

"If there's a mum and dad and everybody knows your name and you have plenty of food and you get a great education and you're loved, I personally don't think it matters what country you're in," she said.

8.7 A Mothers View on Adoption that's worth noting.

In my research, I stumbled across a mother's view that I thought was compelling and that had to be heard in the context of this Thesis.

29 Things I Wish I Knew Before Adoption Entered my Life

By Claudia Corrigan D'Arcy | September 18, 2009 | Adoption Truth, Before Making an Adoption Plan, Relinquishment

This Grown in My Heart Adoption Carnival Topic was supposed to be “10 Things I Wish I Knew Before I Was Touched By Adoption”, but I can’t use the feel good wording of “touched.” I was not **touched by adoption**, it’s more like **torched, trampled, traumatized, terrorized, tortured and torn apart** by adoption.

Overall, I feel like I allowed the destructive force of adoption into my life.

Adoption was almost more like a crack that happened in my soul. A crack that I thought and was encouraged to believe that would be temporary or always below the surface.

So that gives me number one on my list; the rest is really easy and I can, also quite easily go on and on, but this carnival only called for the ten things we wish we could have known.. I think I just have to go over.

I wish I knew that relinquishing my child to adoption was not a onetime event that I would recover from by the most major life altering “decision” that would alter the very course of my existence for the rest of my life.

I wish I knew that adoption would not be a decision made entirely by me and affect *only* me, but would have life altering implications across the entire berth of my family. I thought nothing of how it would affect my mother, my

brother, and of course my children, both the one that I relinquished and the children I had later on.

I wish I had known what I really was giving up when I relinquished my Max. I understood the concept of a baby, but I had no clue what it really meant to be a mother. I could decide to give up something that I never had to begin with or something that I never let myself have a chance to really experience.

I wish I had known that public assistance, social services, paternity, child support and all manners of help in general was nothing to be ashamed of, to be afraid of asking for or receiving or something that made me less of a person. I still think about my adoption counselor explaining to me rather briefly how I “could” keep my baby and go on welfare and how very horrified I was of that thought and I never even attempted to consider it.

I wish I had known how it would feel to know for the rest of my life that I had assisted in denying a man the right to have a relationship with his *only* child. Had I thought through the ethically complications and moral obligation to the truth and this man’s rights, then I would not have to live with the knowledge of how I horribly and inexcusably wronged another human being.

I wish I had known that I was strong and capable and worthy of being the mother that I was meant to be. The normal self-doubts of a young person basically untried by life were not bolstered in the face of adversity, but rather exasperated and exploited.

I wish I had known that it was not my job, nor obligation to make another couples' "dreams of a family" come true. I wish I had known that I should not have taken pride nor comfort or some sick sense of self satisfaction by allowing other people's needs to go before my own, not that I have an issue about giving of one's self. I donate my knowledge, I give my time, I volunteer; but a child is not giving of oneself, an adoption is giving of another... a child. I had no right to do that.

I wish I had known that my son's parents would not be quite as grateful and thankful to me as I had expected, hoped or been lead to believe.

I wish I was not quite as disappointed that they just won't speak to me and I have the distinct feeling that they really would just like me to go back away. I wish that didn't hurt.

I wish I had known that children really aren't interchangeable. Just because one party wants something and another party isn't so sure, doesn't mean that we can switch things about and pretend we are God and it will work out OK.

I wish I had known that my son had basic rights to his family, his truth, his heritage, his father, his siblings, and me; more than I ever gave us credit for. To think that I could have thought so little of myself, my family and all the individual traits and histories that make us unique and THAT could have been replaced with a one paragraph bio and a few pictures is so insulting to every ancestor that breathed before me.

I wish I had known that you cannot re-write life as it comes to you. That we

can't cheat it and pretend that things happened differently than we would have liked. And sometimes, most times, given time what seemed to be a disaster is actually part of making things work out exactly as they should, but we just don't know it yet. I wish I had learned to just accept things as they come and live the hand that was dealt to me even if it meant being a mother at 19, because I *was* a mother at 19!

I wish I had known that it was very possible to love most fiercely and deeply someone that you haven't ever really met. I wish I had known that I would *know* my son without before I got to meet him again. That I would know his face and it would be so familiar to me. That I would know his smell and I would need it to breath. That I would know and understand how he felt, thought and would react just because I *knew*...way before I ever knew.

I wish I had known how much it would suck to hear my other kids say things like "I forget what Max looks like", or "I don't feel like I have another brother," or "If we got real poor would you have to give us away, too?"

I wish I had known that adoption, which was supposed to preserve my teenage way of life, turned out to be something that completely changed my entire life and here I am, over 20 years later and adoption is still a major factor in my daily existence, my thoughts, my dreams and, even worse, is also a factor in my whole family's lives as well.

I wish I had known that genetics really play a huge portion of who we are and that things like our mutual love of pirates, combat boots, Mohawks and dyed hair, alternative music, god in the woods, being buried in plain pine

boxes, Dr. Pepper, Boston cream donuts, thunderstorms, reading, and writing with these darn dots.... was all part of who he was before he was born. I wish I knew that my genes had carried more than the color of his skin and the familiar look of our feet and it was something irreplaceable.

I wish I had known that not every adoptee thinks that being placed for adoption was the best thing since sliced bread, are not grateful, are not happier to have a bigger house, and sometimes, can be quite adversely affected by the whole experience. It was really hard to accept that the thing that I thought was “best” could have actually been much worse.

I wish I had known that there is no real “ready” to become a mother and that the mythology of motherhood as our society has crafted is a vicious losing situation. I wish I had known how easy it is for us to turn on each other and judge our fellow sisters because we are all so concerned about getting it wrong and not being the best super mom on the block.

I wish I had known that it was going to be crazy and hard *this* way, being a birthmother, and that all the pain and sacrifices and sleeplessness would be coming to me anyway, but without the joys and pleasures of being with my child. I wish I had known that I would have *wanted* to make it work, that it would have been worth it to give up the fun.

I wish I had known that Fear is never a good basis to make a decision on.

I wish I would have known that the “scandal” was all in my head and that within six months no one would have cared much less remembered. I wish I

had realized that my family would not have thought that I was a piece of poop forever but would have loved and adored my baby, as I would have.

I wish I had known that having a baby at 19 would not have “ruined my life”, that being a mother at 19 would not have “ruined my life” and that adoption, well it pretty much ruined my life; or at least got closer to ruining my life as anything else ever did.

I wish I had known that school could have been put off a few years, but my motherhood was happening now.

I wish I had known that I was being exploited and enabled and I walked right into it.

I wish I had known that adoption was not glamorous or romantic, but that life being a birthmother pretty much sucks.

I wish I had known that the adoption agency really didn't have my best interest at heart and they weren't my best friends and I shouldn't have worried about making them proud by being the “best darn birthmother” and following all the rules.

I wish I had known that putting everyone else's' wants and needs before mine for almost 20 years did not make me better, nor stronger, nor noble, nor brave and didn't get me a key to heaven.

I wish I had known that a piece of paper would not make me an un-mother.

I wish I had known how much it would really hurt and how, really, even after reunion, there is no normal and it is never over.

And then one final wish that I still have now; of all the things in my life and all the mistakes and bad decision I have made, with all the missteps and situations that came to me, whether by my own hand or been done wrong by someone else; I wish there was a way to change the past and make just this one thing all go away.

I wish I had never let adoption into my life.

8.8 Adoption in South Africa Today

Since 2008 there has been no real increase in adoptions to help the country's estimated two million orphans.

National Adoption Coalition spokesperson Pam Wilson said that South Africa faced an adoption crisis.

She was speaking at the Princess Alice Home in Westcliff, Johannesburg, at the start of a national advertising campaign, on the eve of Child Protection Week (27 May to 2 June).

The campaign was intended to renew awareness of adoption and encourage people to become parents to one of the growing number of orphans in the country. She said only about 2 000 children were adopted annually.

"There is a great need for adoptive parents and it is just getting bigger and bigger. We have to take drastic steps to encourage people to help our nation's children and take care of them," Wilson said.

According to a report from the University of Cape Town's actuarial research unit the country would have five million orphans by 2015. The report cited two of the main reasons for this as teenage pregnancy and parental deaths from HIV/Aids.

According to the 2009/2010 annual survey for ordinary schools (ASS) KwaZulu-Natal had 187 225 double orphans (children without both parents) followed by the Eastern Cape with 92 973.

Statistics showed there were 481 739 double orphans in South Africa, over a million pupils without fathers and 591 865 without mothers.

Provincial spokesperson for the SA Social Security Agency, Vusimuzi Mahaye, confirmed that KwaZulu-Natal had the highest number of orphans.

Mahaye said foster care grants were one form of assistance offered to orphans.

KwaZulu-Natal education department spokesperson Muzi Mahlambi said there were programmes to assist orphans and vulnerable children, such as nutrition programmes and no-fee schools.

8.9 A Counter Argument

Joe Scoll, an adoptee, spoke on one of the chapters of his book, Adoption

Healing, at the Adoption Connection Annual Conference. In his address, he spoke passionately about the psychological effect adoption has on every child.

The Respect We Never Got

by Joe Scoll, CSW

Adoption Connection Annual Conference,

September 18, 1999, Andover, MA

(Chapter 26 of "Adoption Healing ... A Path to Recovery")

Without blaming anyone, I suggest we take a look at respect. To start with, we need to look at the beginning. The beginning was birth and separation for the mother and child. For the adoptive parents, the beginning was the discovery of being infertile or being unable to bring a child into the family any other way.

It was like a big plane crash in a field. All the mothers and babies lying there crying and the rescuers came and carried them off in different directions. When they got to the Emergency Room, they dusted them off, told them they were fine and sent them on their way. The mothers went home and the babies went to new homes. All were told they were fine. The most sacred relationship in the world has now gone up in smoke. They were told that there wasn't any accident, no crash, forget about it, just get on with your life. The new parents of the babies were told the babies were fine and they should treat all the babies as if they were their own. As If. That's a great little phrase. As If.

As if it is sort of like treating my cat as if she is the German Shepherd dog I really wanted. But I get so frustrated. She won't fetch, she doesn't bark at the door and she won't get my slippers. I love her, but I get so angry she doesn't behave the way I want her to. As IF just doesn't work.

So what really happened to each of those mothers and babies from the plane crash? As I see it, there is no substantial difference between the experience of losing a child to death and losing a child to adoption except:

If there was a real death of a child shortly after birth, the mother's family and friends would have gathered around and said to her I am so sorry your baby died. You must be sad, let me comfort you, I know you hurt, let me ease your pain. I know you must be angry, let me help you. There would be a funeral and grieving and acknowledgment of what really happened, and there would be a grave to go to and there would be validation and healing. This mother would be given respect.

Instead, the mother who loses her child to adoption experiences the psychological death of her child. But instead of comfort, she gets told she did a brave and noble, unselfish, loving thing and she must forget about it, go on with her life. No one wants to help her talk about it, acknowledge it, cry about it, or mourn the loss of her child. So the loss becomes almost irresolvable. The grief stays stuck in her body and keeping pain in is destructive. She has to go into a kind of shock to survive, hit the pause button on her life and she goes numb. Life is forever changed. You can't really live that way, but you can exist. She gets no respect.

If there was a real death of a mother shortly after birth, at some point, the child's father would tell the child that mommy died and it is so sad that this

happened to you and you must hurt, let me comfort you and ease your pain and I know you must be angry, let me help you....and there would be pictures and stories and a grave to visit, and grieving and eventually the child would find out that mommy didn't die on purpose. This child would be given respect.

Instead for the child whose mother gives her up for adoption, the child suffers the psychological death of her mother. But she is told that she is special and chosen and lucky. She is supposed to forget that there was another mother. Make believe this is your only family; make believe that all is well. As IF it is your own. The message is that it is a good thing your mother is not there for you, is dead for you. You are not allowed to be sad about it, acknowledge the pain, anger or sadness, perhaps even to yourself. You are not allowed to mourn the loss of your own mother. The grief gets stuck in your body and keeping in pain is destructive.

(So is keeping in anger and sadness). The child has to go into a kind of shock and to numb. You can't really live that way, but you can pretend. And we adoptees are great pretenders. This child gets no respect.

What would happen if one of your mothers's died today and you were told you couldn't cry, you couldn't go to the funeral and to make believe she never existed? What would happen to you? Take a moment and think about it. Isn't that what happened to most of us, in some way?

It occurs to me that if we really had respect for the mother and the child we would do all we could to preserve the sanctity of that relationship and not

separate them at all.

If the mother and child could not possibly stay together, then giving her respect when she lost her child, the mother's family and friends would have gathered around and said to her I am so sorry you couldn't keep your baby. You must be sad, let me comfort you, I know you hurt, let me ease your pain. I know you must be angry, let me help you. And there would be grieving and acknowledgment of what really happened.

If the mother and child could not possibly stay together, then giving the adoptee respect when she lost her mother, the new family would say you must be sad you lost your first family, it's okay to cry about. I'm sad too, you must hurt, let me comfort you, you must be angry, let me help you, be with you and hold you.

If adoptive parents got respect, they would have gotten complete information on their adopted child and the truth about the effects on their child of losing the first family. The Adoption Agency and others would have acknowledged the sadness of infertility or inability to have a child on one's own. Their pain and anger would have been acknowledged and they would have been encouraged to grieve the child they couldn't have on their own.

Ignoring the realities of adoption increases the pain and hurt. How can anyone function well if they're told that what is true isn't and what isn't true is? For example, what if I lose my leg in an accident right after birth? And they tell me I didn't lose my leg right after I was born, I was mistaken.

But it hurts, mommy, and yet it still feels like something is missing. And I keep stumbling around as if I had only one leg (they wouldn't lie about that would they?) and I don't know why I'm having trouble managing as a two legged person...

Our society doesn't want to acknowledge what has happened to all of us, to give us respect. And truth be told, I lost more than a leg, I lost my mother. But wait, I got prosthesis, a new mother, a substitute. Why doesn't it work just as well? Why does it still hurt? Of course our mothers lost a baby... but they got no replacement, no substitute. Respect is truth, no secrets, absolute honesty. We can all deal with the truth. Have we in adoption had our eyes wide shut? Isn't it time they were wide open?

Well, how can we give ourselves the respect we never got? Is it by learning to experience our feelings or by learning to make statements about our experience? By learning to say I feel sad because, I feel angry because, I hurt because. And when we say these things out loud for the first time and get validated for the first time, the feelings become real in a way they can never be if unexpressed. And once the feelings become real, we can start to understand why we feel what we feel and once we understand why we feel what we feel, we can start to change the way our experience affects us today.

We can respect ourselves by expressing our anger at what happened to us. Having anger about something that happened to us and expressing it does not make us angry people. We need to express it. If we don't talk our anger out, we will surely act it out or act it in, in either case, it is destructive. It is

poison and will poison our lives and relationships unless we release it.

We can respect ourselves by expressing our sadness. Feeling sad about something sad that happened does not make us crybabies or wimps. We need to express it. Keeping our pain in is destructive. It is poison and it will poison our lives and our relationships unless we release it.

The only way that I know to be truly happy is to give ourselves the respect of feeling all of our feelings. If we don't feel the bad ones, we cannot feel the good ones.

Those around us often try to minimize our losses, our experience. We must not buy into that. We can respect ourselves by acknowledging the true extent of the effects on us of the events at the beginning. If we don't acknowledge the full extent of our wounds, we cannot heal. Only by acknowledging the truth can we begin to heal from our wounds.

If I am in an accident and go to the ER and they don't examine my wounds, don't clean the depths of my wounds and get the dirt or poison out, I will get an infection, the wound may heal superficially, but the infection is there nevertheless and I will pay a price. Only when I respect myself and take the risk of opening that wound again and clean it out will I be able to truly heal.

Healing involves a lot of pain, but the alternative. I guess we have all lived it. We need to give ourselves the respect to climb the mountain of pain that leads to healing. The mountain is steep, but climbable. There are many crevices on the way up, but each crevice still puts you closer to the top. And

we are all here in this adoptive family to help each other, nurture each other, support each other, share with each other and learn from each other on this road to respect and healing.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes, who wrote *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, has said that those who have been “abandoned” and face it and work it through can become the strongest people on the face of the earth. Don’t doubt it for a second. Only the Brave do this work, come to conferences and support groups and work it through.

The alternative to doing the work: Well, we can continue to bury our heads like an ostrich, but if we do, we will likely get kicked in the behind and not see it coming.

Or to put it another way, if we continue to swim in Denial we will likely get bitten by a crocodile.

8.10 - CHARTER OF ADOPTEE RIGHTS -

Whereas ARTICLE 1 of the UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS states, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

Whereas ARTICLE 2 of the UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS states, "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion,

national or social origin, property, birth or other status."

Whereas ARTICLE 3 of the UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS states, "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person."

Whereas ARTICLE 4 of the UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS states, "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms."

Whereas ARTICLE 6 of the UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS states, "Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law."

Whereas ARTICLE 7 of the UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS states, "All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination."

Whereas all Citizens - both adopted and non-adopted - are equal before the Law, International Adoption Association.

WE THE UNDERSIGNED, recognize that,

(1) All persons have the right to know whether or not they have been adopted. Furthermore, no-one has the right to withhold such information from another person.

(2) All persons have the right to an identity, and to know what their identities were at all stages of their lives. Pursuant to this, all adults have the right to obtain and possess all government documents that pertain to their historical, genetic, and legal identities, including:

a) Their legal names at all times during their lives, both before and after any adoptions have taken place; b) Their place and date of birth; c) The identities of their natural parents; d) The identities of natural siblings, grandparents, and other family members; e) All birth records pertaining to them;

That pertain to times in their lives both before and after any adoptions take place.

(3) As all persons have the right to freedom of association, adults who have been separated from their families through adoption have a right to establish communication with their original families, respecting any contact preference requests made by individual members.

(4) As all persons have the right to liberty and freedom from slavery, all adults have the right to build loving family relationships with any other adult, without being limited by feelings of obligation, guilt, or loyalty.

(5) Just as two consenting adults have the right to form a legally-recognized marital relationship through marriage, thus two consenting adults have the same right to establish a legally-recognized parent/child (filial) relationship with each other through adult adoption.

(6) Just as two consenting adults have the right to dissolve a marital relationship through divorce or annulment, thus adults have the same right to annul any legally-recognized parent/child (filial) relationship they have with a parent, either by birth or adoption.

Preliminary Conclusion

In this chapter we analyzed the subject of adoption and identity formation; single parent's adoption and gay rights and adoption.

I also recorded a mother's view on adoption that is worth noting. We looked at adoption in South Africa today and analyzed the counter argument to adoption. The Charter of Adoption rights was highlighted.

We will now move to the concluding chapter which will indicate the parent's importance to explore their motivation and expectations for adoption in a healthy and transparent manner and that they should be in agreement.

Chapter 9 – Concluding Remarks

We detailed the supporting work in the previous chapter. In this chapter I would love to indicate that God created human beings for relationship with God and with one another. God continues in relationship with creation by hearing us, remembering us, and bringing us into relationship with one another. Human care and community are possible because of being held in God's memory; therefore, as members of caring communities we express our caring analogically with the caring of God by also hearing and remembering (Patton 1993:7). The writing of this thesis has brought healing for me. I feel that I have been heard. Every time I sat down and worked on this thesis, it was as if a community of people listening to me surrounded me. And, when I did this, it was also as if my audience remembered where I was coming from and the trauma I had faced. This meant that every time I sat down to do the work, I felt cared for. I am more convinced than ever before that the Bible holds the final authority for the ministry of Pastoral Care. In all the areas of healing that I have researched doing this thesis; I come back to the fact that I find my healing in and through Christ.

I have also come to realize through my research and interviews that there are some factors that go a long way in making an adoption a healthy experience. The main contributing factor is the role of the parents. Here then are some of my thoughts when it comes to a healthy adoption:

- i) *Parents must explore their motivations and expectations for adoption in a healthy and transparent manner and be in agreement.*

There are many different reasons as to why parents would want to adopt a child. I realize that those reasons are subjective, but at the same time, expectations, transparency and agreement are critical to a healthy adoption. Motivations for wanting to adopt a child can become quite complex. These range from people not being able to have their own children because of a medical reason, to wanting to ‘give back’ to society. In their book, *The Whole Life Adoption Book*, the Authors write of three roles that parents play when it comes to expectation, transparency and agreement. (Schooler and Atwood; 2008:78). They are;

Dynamic-Dormant Parent Roles

This happens when one of the parents is more sold on the idea of adoption than the other. The one parent plays a dominant role in making the adoption a reality, while the other parent plays a dormant role or passive role. If the adoption becomes a reality, this role will become an obstacle to forming a healthy family. As I write this thesis, I have been asked to get involved in a pastoral role between a husband and a wife who are busy adopting a teenager. The couple is very wealthy and has the means to support another child. It all started off with the man buying school clothes and paying for the education of the child. It has since developed into a very difficult situation. The wife feels that he has gone too far and that he is building an unhealthy relationship with the child.

They are now in a very difficult position in that the wife is very unhappy with the situation and is against the adoptions. The husband feels that he has gone too far down the road and has promised all sorts of things and doesn’t

want to renege on the promises he has made. The levels of trauma on all fronts have reached astronomical proportions. Either way, every one of them is traumatized in some form or fashion. If the adoption goes ahead, it is going to lead to a very unhealthy family. A problem arising in this adoption triad (mom, dad and child) is that once the child comes a dormant partner tends to retreat from developing a parenting relationship with the newest family member (Schooler and Atwood; 2008:78).

Active – Antagonistic Parent Roles

This scenario plays itself out when one of the parents is completely for the adoption, and the other parent is completely against it, but doesn't draw a firm line and say that they are definitely against it. One is for it; the other is against it. But they try and keep the tension a secret from others outside the family.

Energetic – Energetic Parent Roles

This is obviously the ideal when it comes to motivations and expectations of parents wanting to adopt a child. The energetic-energetic parent style promises a strong foundation for beginning adoptive parenting (Schooler and Atwood; 2008:80).

My adoptive parents were prime examples when it comes to parents who explore their motivations and expectations when it comes to adopting children. They were both in agreement and had open and healthy conversations about their desire to adopt. It all started when they went to see

a doctor, because my mom couldn't fall pregnant. Eventually, both of them went for tests to try and figure out what the problem was. The doctor called them in after numerous tests and told them that there was no way that my mother could fall pregnant and that they would have to investigate other methods in order for her to fall pregnant. The doctor was about to proceed and tell them which one of them had the 'problem.' They interrupted the doctor and told him that they had made a decision not to find out which of them was in need of treatment. They said that they would rather not know, so that if ever they faced a difficult time around not being able to be anyone's biological parent, they would not be in a place to blame each other.

This set the scene for an open and honest conversation around my adoption.

ii) Healthy Parents demonstrate stability and quality in their interpersonal relationships.

In a two parent family, as the marriage goes, so the rest of the family goes (Schooler and Atwood; 2008:81). This means a strong marital relationship, being able to resolve conflicts and problems, family members having the ability to be honest about their feelings and very importantly, a strong supportive system.

iii) Parents must demonstrate flexibility and openness in the family system.

This means that parents must be able to accept and deal with change. The entire family system shifts when a person enters into the system.

New relationships form, stresses are introduced into existing relationships and some fundamental views are challenged. A healthy adoptive family understands and prepares for change; they give each other space to be able to figure out the new ‘normal.’

The parents will need to manage boundaries and be flexible. For a while you will need to be quite vulnerable, as social workers and the like come into your home and ask questions about your preparedness, to be parents. Parents will need to value differences. Everyone is aware that all children are different. This means for biological as well as adoptive children. Parents might well say that their biological children are so different, well; there is another whole dimension when it comes to an adoptive child. Depending on the type of adoption, there are many variances that are in play, the most obvious being physical appearance. As the child grows, there may be more differences that emerge: Mannerisms, interests, habits, performance ability, to name but a few. It is important to note that healthy adoptive parents value these differences. Not only value them, but also celebrate them.

iv) Healthy parents know the importance of creating a family environment that openly acknowledges and communicates about adoption.

This isn't really about when parents tell the child that they are adopted, or even the context of the adoption. This is about a general openness about adoption in general. ‘Openness in adoption refers, first and foremost, to a state of mind and heart...It reflects the general attitudes, beliefs,

expectations, emotions, and behavioral inclination that people have in relation to adoption....Its emphasis is on the adoption communication process, both informational and emotional, within the individual, between adoptive family members, and for those involved in a structurally open arrangement, between members of the two family systems. (Brodzinsky, D.M., 2005:149-150).

The openness of heart and mind within all spheres of an adopted family requires willingness on the part of everyone to do the following;

- Acknowledge and discuss the role of adoption in their lives
- Accept and trust the adoptive family
- Explore, in age appropriate ways, adoption-related questions that arise as the child grows and understands more about how he/she is a member of the family.
- Acknowledge the child's biological connection to his or her original family and accept and support the child in whatever level of interest they may have in their birth family.
- Acknowledge and seek support for any challenges the child may present due to abuse, neglect or conditioning experience prior to adoption.

Open communication about adoption isn't the easy choice. Families may find it easier not to even tell the child that they are adopted, but that will lead to difficulty later on in the adopted person's life, if it should ever come out.

- v) *Healthy Parents understand the core issues of adoption that may affect their child and the triggers that may create crisis.*

There is some duplication of my methodology in this section, in that it in some way relates to Kubler-Ross' Grief Process. Nevertheless, it is important, that in the context of growing healthy families that this work is covered.

As you may have seen, in the interviews that I conducted, and certainly within my own life, adopted children carry scars of their adoption. It is important to note what some of the things Parents can expect when adopting a child and also what some of the triggers are that can lead into a meltdown.

Some adopted parents may not encounter these issues, but others feel them deeply. Recognizing the possibility of these core issues in adoption is one of the ways parents can be proactive in the healing of children that are adopted. This then is a brief description of the core issues.

- *Grief and Loss*

When children have been separated from significant attachment figures, their emotional response can sometimes be one of grief and mourning. Even children adopted as infants may at some point in life experience the loss of the fantasy or dream parent they have never met and of 'what may have been.' Children adopted at an older age, or who are told of their adoption at an older age may grieve the loss of important attachment figures in birth, extended, or foster families.

○ *Loyalty*

Learning to live with up to four parents can sometimes create conflict for children. This can happen even if the birth parents are known or not. It is not uncommon for children to defend their birthparents even though they don't know them.

Children may also feel that they are allowed to love only their adoptive parents and that closeness with and love for birthparents is an act of disloyalty toward the parents who are raising them. As mentioned earlier in this Thesis, this became apparent to me when I told my parents that I wanted to find my birthparents.

Although they never said as much, it became very apparent in their response to me. You could see the pain in their eyes and they became very emotional. This was repeated when I told them possibly fifteen years later that I had found my birth mom. Because of this experience, I have not told them that I have found my birthfather. I live with the guilt of this secret and a deep sense of disloyalty.

○ *Control*

Children who have experienced significant and traumatic losses may feel that they have no control over decision-making power in their own lives. This can generate feelings of frustration and helplessness. In order to try and take control again and to get to a place of independence, one or more of the following can be behavioral indicators:

- Chemical dependence
- Depression
- Overeating
- Excessive control issues related to siblings and peers
- Compulsive need to manage their world: extremely organized; always planning (and worrying) ahead.

- *Shame and Guilt*

The word bastard is used often enough in today's world as a swear word or curse word. Every time it is used, even if it is not directed specifically at you, there does pass through your mind that yes, you are one.

A sense of shame or the ongoing belief that one is the result of something that was bad, causing a child or person feeling that you are unworthy or not valid as a human being. Why is it that some people who are adopted experience different levels of shame?

According to Lewis Smedes in his book *Shame and Grace: Healing the Shame We Don't Deserve*, the most devastating way for a parent to create shame within a child is to turn his or her back upon them, or to fail to take responsibility for them. There is also another level of shame that is felt amongst children that are adopted in that they feel that they don't turn out to be what the parents expected or hoped for. Guilt is also associated with the fact that in some instances, the child feels that they are the reason for their

biological parents' break up and therefore they are the reason that their biological family broke up in the first place.

○ *Identity*

In my case, I had absolutely no idea where my biological family came from. So, as I indicated earlier in my writing, it leads to identity confusion. My saving grace was that my adoptive parents had a Spanish surname and because of my dark complexion, I was able to tell people that I was of Spanish origin. Nevertheless, my real sense of identity always intrigued me.

○ *Triggers*

A trigger may be something that creates an emotional reaction. For children who are adopted, some of the core issues discussed can resurface around some of the following events:

- Mother or Father's Day
- A child's birthday
- Movies with adoption themed
- Parent's divorce
- Being rejected in any relationship
- And many other emotional permutations.

The more adoptive parents are aware of the emotional response, the better they will be prepared to manage any crisis that might arise.

- vi) *Healthy parents understand that adoption is a lifetime commitment and maintain that commitment through difficult times.*

You will hardly ever hear of biological parents dissolving their relationship with their children when the going gets tough. The one common factor that exists between biological and adoptive parents is that they have no idea what their children are going to turn out like.

Adoptive parents should do everything to honor their promise to look after the children they have adopted. Unfortunately, there are many reports of adoptive children being abandoned by their parents when they realize that their children may not have turned out the way they expected them to.

Conclusion

We looked at the supporting work in the previous chapter. In this chapter we concluded by indicating that health parents needed to demonstrate stability and quality in their interpersonal relationship.

There is also a need for health parents to understand that adoption is a lifetime commitment and maintain that commitment through difficult times. The thesis was a journey of self-discovery, healing and a phenomenal illumination.

The ultimate recommendation that emerged throughout the thesis is that Adoptive parents have a great responsibility towards their adopted children. They should do everything to honor their promise and treat them as though

they were their own biological children. Above it all, they should look after them.

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Annexure 'A'

HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU WERE ADOPTED?

HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU FOUND OUT ABOUT YOUR ADOPTION?

WHAT IN YOUR VIEW IS THE BEST WAY AND AGE TO TELL A CHILD THEY ARE ADOPTED?

DID YOU EVER LONG TO, OR MEET YOUR BIRTH PARENTS?

WHAT IN YOUR VIEW IS THE MOST CHALLENGING ASPECT OF ADOPTION?

HAS YOUR VIEW OF SELF BEEN IMPACTED BY YOUR ADOPTION?

WHAT ADVISE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE SEEKING TO ADOPT?

HOW DO YOU BELIEVE SOUTH AFRICA SHOULD DEAL WITH OUR MILLIONS OF ORPHANS?

HAS ADOPTION AFFECTED YOUR FAITH AS A CHRISTIAN?

DO YOU HAVE A VIEW ON PRIVATE AND OPEN ADOPTIONS? IF SO PLEASE ARTICULATE IT!

WOULD YOU HAVE ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS TO MAKE?