

Daniel Harrison

I am a New Zealand born poet living in Adelaide. I am currently working on two non-fiction books about my life as a person who has been adopted. They form a heart-felt political response to a very personal issue and as such, resist the legislative imperative of the adoption discourse that tried to frame/freeze my identity within an academic framework that excludes my lived experience. Book one is called "The Adoption Notebook: Notes From the Underground" and deals with my life before finding my birth family on my mother's side. Below are three chapters from this book. I like to call these short chapters an emotional history of my adoption. The second book is called "The Adoption Notebook: Notes From Above Ground". It is about the aftermath of my reunion with my birth family and my journey towards understanding how being adopted has shaped my life.

Going to Bermuda

To misquote the Dead Kennedys, I was up for "a holiday in Bermuda, it's tough, kid, but its life". By Bermuda I mean the Bermuda adoption triangle where strange things happen. Mothers disappear, fathers disappear, ancestral trees disappear and are in due course replaced with a new triangle and a new ancestral tree that has no bearing at all to reality.

Your mother is no longer your mother; instead she is replaced on your birth certificate with the name of a woman that you have never met. Are you lacking a father with a suitable occupation that makes you look squeaky clean and legit? Never mind, he too will appear from out of the sky. The stigma of your illegitimacy will be airbrushed away. Your original Birth Certificate will be placed in a safe location with a red "Given up for Adoption" stamped down its side. There will be documents in brown manila folders, lots of them. One with the Department of Child Welfare and one with the Courts explaining the situation and what your mother said, along with the names of all those people who were involved in this magical process: the family lawyer, your future adoptive parents and the interviews with your mother. There will also be a folder at the hospital with information about your birth, about what a bonny baby you were and about who cared for you. You are now the property of the State; the State is your parent and will endeavour to find the right people to fill in the blanks on the new Birth Certificate. Yes, the State was my mother and father for six weeks whilst I was in the State functionaries care. These people toiled within the Department of Child Welfare and at the hospital. I do not remember these people but they were important to me because they set my life off on its current journey.

It is odd, is it not, that as my journey into the Bermuda adoption triangle is primed and set I suddenly start writing as if I am not there anymore. I am reduced to a cipher, commenting about a process from a great distance away. It is as if I have exited the building. As the boat is prepared to leave my old foundation behind, I am to journey far from my origins into a new ocean. A new ocean that denies everything that happened in the first six weeks of my life.

What did happen? I have struggled to put the pieces together. Who welded the stamp on my original Birth Certificate? What was the name of that person who interviewed my soon-to-be adopted father and wrote the fateful words "this man seems psychotic and not fit to raise children because he is so very angry"? How did my adoptive father come to find me floating on that great ocean of loss? What happened? Did my adoptive parents just walk into the hospital and peer through the glass and go "they are the ones"? How did they know that "we were the ones?" Or were they told that twins were hard to adopt so if you want to adopt a boy, well "twins are your best chance". What then? Did they go to an office and have a cup of tea with some officials, sign some papers and then like Christmas presents have us handed over to them? I do know that they spent a lot of time with their family lawyer, a sign of their new found middle class status. In fact, my new father was so proud of his lawyer that he sent his own daughters to the same private school that his lawyer's daughters went to.

Out of all the thousands of children waiting in hospitals for adoption my brother and I were selected. How did they find us? Did my adopted mother feel like she was making up for the daughter that she had adopted out before she reached the middle class? Only married couples with the right credentials could bring these illegitimate children of wayward woman home. Did they know that my adopted mother had once been one of them? Did they care? My adopted father cared because reaching the middle class had presented him with the perfect solution to all his personal problems. He told his shocked brother that we boys, through our achievements in life, were going to make up for the acute sense of personal failure he had felt from his parents towards him.

My twin brother, who had been too sick to leave the hospital with me, arrived later in the race. He was simply dumped at my adoptive grandparent's house by Child Welfare without pomp or ceremony. They simply handed him over to my Uncle and Aunt who happened to be there at the time. His first hours outside the hospital were spent on a sofa. I do not know where my adoptive parents, their two daughters and I were at the time. It was an inauspicious beginning for my brother who was to remain an outsider in the family, much like his adoptive father had felt in that very house which was his original family home. The roles were being set. My brother would become like my adoptive father, the bad boy. I, on the other hand, was to become the hated golden boy who would continually remind my father that he had failed when compared to his lovable brother, my Uncle, whom I love dearly to this day.

I have a photo of our first landing in the Bermuda adoption triangle. Two boys, swaddled in white with startled eyes, cradled in the confused arms of my adoptive parent's biological daughters. They are kneeling on the floor holding us with a look of wonder, as if to say "where on earth did these two come from?" Yes, where did we come from? They falsified the paperwork but the feelings remained. That poisoned ocean lay within me like a malevolent seed of unease. I was in the unknown. Indeed I had been floating for weeks and trying to navigate as best I could the strange terrifying waters that had led to this shore. I looked like a normal baby on the outside but the eyes have it. I was terrified, frozen inside, feeling weak in my bones, in my stomach, in my heart. My skin crawled. I was hot and anxious.

How do I know this? I know this because I live it now, every day. I struggle with feelings of powerlessness. The world seems like a hostile sea and I am far from home. I feel sick to the stomach, weak, not sure what is going to happen next. I feel tightness around my throat and in my stomach. I feel a scream, a silent scream rise. I feel panicked and helpless. I feel totally unable to do anything about how I feel and I do not know where all these overwhelming feelings are coming from. And so I float into the new world totally disconnected from my mind, body and soul. My eyes start to fail. I do not want to see this new world and it is too hard to feel.

In Bermuda, the feelings did not disappear. They were buried in the too hard basket but you can't drain an ocean of pain through an ocean of lies. Looking back on my life, I can see how I set myself up as a perpetual victim. The pain, the guilt, the reasons why my mother left were not available to me, nor were they given to me by society or my family and so I blamed myself. This set me up for a life built around self guilt and shame. My whole life now revolved around pleasing other people at any cost in order to gain love. My- self became invisible, hidden completely from view. This was made worse by the pain of my mother leaving was too big for me to face and digest. In order to make sense of it I quite simply assumed that it was my fault. No one told me any different because this was a closed adoption. Being adopted so young was supposed to mean I remembered nothing at all and thus became a member of my new family without a problem. This was of course a lie.

Why else would a boy spend so long sitting in corners away from his peers because he felt inadequate and unlovable? The facts of my life do not lie and believe me; no stone has been left unturned. In Bermuda, a monumental tide of self loathing, of self hate, of self annihilation grew. That ocean gave rise to a life that was solely dedicated to dealing with this pain inside through self denial. Deny all the good things in life, sacrifice, succeed and win love at all costs because without it you will be back in that cot where you felt were going to die due to the absence of her love. This resulting mountain of pain has dictated every step of my life, every waking moment. How could it not? It dictated all my actions and tipped me into having to cope with the unknown, with strangers, with overwhelming emotions and loneliness from the moment I was born. There was a sickness inside me, a soul sickness that nobody told me about but it was there and it drove me, ever onwards, as I struggled to deal with the unmentionable fact; the death of my mother. Well she may as well have been dead given the fact that nobody talked about her. It felt like a death and it was meant to be a death according to the ideology of closed adoption. My mother was dead to me through the ages once the deathly, ghostly veil of adoption had fallen. What they did not say but what did happen, is that, I felt like I had died inside because I could not handle this grief. I still can't. It cripples me with tears, sadness and a loss in my bones. I am also crippled with grief over a society that marginalises me and refuses to listen to how I feel.

My mother went crazy over our loss too. Unable to deal with or face her guilt over giving up her children she too became a victim. She became crippled by shame, by self hatred and over the years her other children have been driven away by her constant talk about her pain. She, like me, is so locked in her pain that she struggles to comprehend and reach out to others. It is as if she is living behind a

glass window, looking out at life but unable to reach anyone else as she talks endlessly about her problems to others, briefly stopping to ask how one is going, before beginning again.

After adopting us out, my mother's new marriage did not last. How could it last given her crippling grief? Upon hearing that her husband had been having an affair she packed up her four children and headed for Australia (just as my grandmother had done to my mother, taking her and one brother but adopting another brother out). My youngest brother was five at the time and recounts a childhood spent in poverty and in an endless chain of church families as my mother struggled to cope with three boys and a girl. That girl would at a young age die of a brain tumour. It was another grief, another blow that my mother coped with by attending church after church, walking under a hot sun with her children in search of answers and sometimes in search of food. We all want to return to paradise, to the womb, but in actuality the land that I longed to return to was no paradise at all.

Oh grief, sweet blessed grief and anger, sweet confusion and sadness. You have been my companions for so long now that it is so hard to give you away, to walk away when you have been there by my side always. Self hate, I see that you have packed your bags in readiness to keep walking with me. You smile and give me your hand; you old devil you, as if to say "Can there be any other way to live than this?" Oh what adventures, what suffering we have endured. Why would you trust a God, a Universe, a life or yourself when all that you have known has been blown away and taken time and time again by the dust of ages. When all your riches, all your dreams were taken the moment you came into this life, surely, self hatred whispers "You must be the problem and I must be your answer. Look at the fine towers we have built as a monument to your self-hatred. Look at your degrees, your perpetual feeling of guilt. What a motivating force; what an adventure. Look at your identity. Without me who would you be?"

I have spent a lot of my life away from people; climbing into attics, digging into the soft earth in search of treasure, stumbling through the cemetery, and sitting watching the dragonflies fly over the lily pads in the summer sun, lying in the long grass catching insects, riding through the cemetery on my bike. On the whole these have not been times of peace. Instead I am perpetually restless. I am the sad boy with clenched fists, downward mouthed, dazed and confused, caught in a nightmare, trying to figure out why I feel like I feel inside. Nothing is taken for granted. There can be no living in the moment. I am searching the faces of others for clues. I am searching for ways to obtain love. I am trying to find a way to belong. I am the little boy wrapped up in bed as the rain pelts down pretending, with great sadness, that I am about to be shipwrecked. I am the one reading about the Bermuda Triangle, about strange disappearances, about loneliness, about being shipwrecked upon deserted islands. Because I am shipwrecked. Here I am, as a child, hammer and nails in hand desperately trying to build a boat as a means of escape. Yes, my life is a melodrama in search of a story and I must say that "James and the Giant Peach" by Roald Dahl fitted the bill perfectly. The giant peach rolls over the wicked Aunts and as a result James is rescued from his sad orphan life.

In my life there were plenty of peaches and fruit on the branches of my adopted parent's fruit trees and in the gardens of the surrounding houses but there was to be no Roald Dahl type rescue. Once those documents were signed, sealed and delivered I was supposed to be the property of my adopted parents and become part of the family for life. Well at least that was the theory. But something was wrong and I was spending a lot of time trying to figure out exactly what was wrong. At first I just tuned out and dropped into the corners of life, becoming invisible from others, refusing to learn as my new mother spent hours with wooden blocks trying to interest us in the world. Even they were suspicious. The children they had signed up for were rather different to what they had been told to expect. On top of that my mother now had four children under the age of five to take care of. Needless to say, she did not have the resources or the self knowledge necessary to deal with us and at the same time my adopted father was working away a lot.

And as for the Department of Child, Youth and Family, they washed their hands of us once the last one had been dumped on the sofa. Twins were hard to adopt out, especially boys and they had succeeded. We were no longer the property and therefore problem of the State. Instead we were now the property of my adoptive parents and their problem and the problems over time were only going to get bigger, much like the peach that rolled down the hill in Roald Dahl's book. We of course were to be blamed and became scapegoats for this sad state of affairs when the adoption failed to work out. We were after all defective goods from a no good mother, we were from bad genetic stock. It had nothing to do with the first six weeks we had spent in the hospital. It had nothing to do with the ocean of grief that was created by our being separated from our mother, or so they said.

Do You Still Believe in Atlantis?

Oh, little boy, do you still believe in something, in anything? Do you remember? Do you remember at all who you were, who you are, the sea change, the journey to Bermuda? Do you still believe in her, in her love? Do you still remember her, buried deep within your heart? Do you still remember swimming inside her sea? Do you remember her smell, her scent, her herness? Do you still remember everything?

Little boy, why is it that in every photo your hands are crossed across your chest as you stand there with your downcast lips and eyes, looking so lost and confused? What are you remembering as you stare into the camera lens? There you are, standing in front of the friendly Uncle and your cousins. Your brother and sisters are there along with your parents, but where are you as your father looks defiantly to the side.

When I wrote about the break, that fateful break, that fateful trip to Bermuda I suddenly realised how much had been left behind. I felt sick to the stomach. Now I knew what I had lost: I had lost my heart, my soul, my will to be who I was, to live as who I was. I had lost my self to the waves of outrageous fortune. I had been hollowed like a seashell that you hold to your ear with its hollow sea sound in order to remember the sea from whence it came. I had been taken to Bermuda but I had not forgotten where I came from. I was an iceberg floating darkly, in a dark and lonely sea, cold, always cold. I have always hated the cold. What you got was not all of me because so much of me lay hidden beneath the dark, dark sea.

Oh, if only I could put into words what has happened to me. My loneliness. I am so alone in this sea, so abandoned, floating, distended. If only you could look at my face, at my eyes, that far away expression. I was holding onto the sides of the boat in desperation, so afraid, so alone. I had entered hostile territory. Please understand. I did what I had to in order to survive. Please do not hate me for who I am, for who I became, for betraying myself, for leaving myself so far behind. I did what was needed. I battened down the hatches. I became a stone. I rolled up the walls around my heart. I went silent. I withdrew within my tears, my ocean. Oh blessed sadness, you are all that I have known, and how that adopted father of mine mocked my sadness. How he threatened me, my core, my hurt, my only reminder of Atlantis, of her. No, no he could never possess my heart, never, ever would he possess who I was, no!

But he did. He frightened me into submission. I became a marionette, determined to do whatever he wanted, that they wanted. I became a victim of circumstance, a cracked actor, an in-between boy, a prostitute for love. I became trapped in my own play, in my own sadness. Oh damn! Why do I keep trying to explain myself to you, to me, to everyone? My whole life has become an explanation, a question mark. Words, always words flying like feathers on the breeze as I try to excuse the monster that I am. As I try to explain that it was not my fault. It was never my fault. No, nothing is ever my fault yet everything is my fault and that is why she left.

I have been such a good boy all my life, but what has it gained me? Nothing but tears gathered into this ocean of loss over all these years. Oh stop complaining! Stop whining. Be hard. Life is like this...he is back again....and then there is my brother. Life is cruel. Life is violent. Life is fists. Life is drugs. Life is prison. You have to be hard. You have to get on with it. But brother, life is not all like that. There is beauty in a flower, in a poem, in a tree, in love, in branches, in the touch of a lover's skin, in a raindrop falling out of the sky onto your skin, just like that-a miracle has landed.

You are too soft. You will never make money out of art, out of following your heart. If you are who you are, love will leave you. There is no loving God, there is only a God that is hating you, punishing you, that has given you an unlovable self, a self that cannot be followed because if you are who you are you will be exposed and nothing will come. You have to lie, you have to please others, you have to do what they want, you have to put your needs aside and you have to keep explaining. You can never be wild and free. You must keep it all hidden. You have to toe the line. Life is nasty. You have to do what you don't want to do in order to survive. Trust no one, live in constant anxiety, that stalking assassin that taps you on the shoulder as soon as you wake, whispering in your ear "you are alone, there is no one here to hold you, to rock you, to let you know that everything will be alright". When in bed alone,

anxiety, like a constant old friend, returns. The world is a foe. It will not provide, you must do what is demanded of you. You are powerless. And so I protest: the world is beautiful, look at the sun that is given for free, that lovely old sun. Look at the leaves on the tree filtering sunlight outside my window. Listen to the birds, how I love them dancing in the branches. Look! So much life, so much adventure! But I always lose this argument to Mr Anxiety.

Still I explain, unearthing, always digging. Yes I was always digging for lost treasure in the soft earth, and always in attics and always under the house, always searching, searching, never knowing what I was searching for but something was not right. My life was the cinema of unease.

What am avoiding? Why do I have to keep digging, round and round in spirals? What the hell am I searching for? Tell me? Maybe I am addicted to pain, to being lonely, to anxiety. What would a life lived without feeling anxiety, without the threat of abandonment feel like? Do all other people gallop round and live in the present? How do they do that? How powerful that must be. But I am a young boy at heart; there is a young hurt baby at the centre of me. Is it possible to just live? Would that mean the death of my identity? What would it mean? Once again I am going around in circles; I am the master of avoidance.

Yes the master of avoidance. I buried myself deep in Atlantis but Atlantis still ran me. Oh how I miss and long to go back there, to be one with my mother, to be one with the sea, such a lovely place to be. No it wasn't. She was in turmoil, pregnant, alone, confused and anxious. There is no El Dorado on this earth. Oh how I long for peace, for shelter, for home, but there is no home. I just feel alone, even in a crowded room. Even when I am loved by many and happily married, I still feel so alone at heart, so lost in the middle of the world, in the middle of a storm.

My twin brother, well he was showing on the outside what I was shoving down within. There he is running around the table chased by his teacher and our mother. I am always in the background, ignored, watching the troubled one. My troubles are buried deep under the water. His are all over the place. Years later I am talking to my adopted father and he tells me that my brother got all the kids in the special classroom to gather firewood. They carried it underneath the classroom where he was waiting with a box of matches. The teacher found him just in time. On another occasion he stole money, loads of it and his teachers wondered why all the kids had chocolates. I have the image of my adopted father burning my brother's arms with matches as he perches on top of the letterbox at the end of the driveway with the cars whizzing by because he has been caught trying to burn the house down. Oh I can go on and on about that little attention seeker who always took the focus from me. He knew about electricity from our father and wanted to test it. So he lined up the special kids and got each of them to touch the fuse box: zapppppppp! You could call that a science lesson. Then there was the incident for which he was expelled from the special school. It involved him hiding all the kids in the racecourse underneath the trees. Helicopters flew overhead but could not find them. Whilst his teacher had a nervous breakdown he watched the commotion from up in the grand stand.

My father told me about these incidents and that my brother's behaviour confirmed that he was mentally deficient at birth and as such his behaviour was not as I argued due his adoption. I on the other hand felt that my brother's behaviour showed that he was a bloody genius when it came to signposting his needs in a manner that could not be ignored by my adopted parents. He knew how to get attention and should have gone into marketing or become a politician. Instead after the last incident at the school he went straight into Welfare and then later in life into prison. His brain, not the impact of adoption, was deemed the problem.

I had a strange trip to my adopted parent's house at the age of twenty two. My then partner could not believe that I grew up with these people. I can. I am so adept at hiding the past, at hiding who I am, at making sure that the unlovable details of my adoption disappear into the ether so that I can be loved as a person who is not adopted. I must be lovable and this entails hiding my adoption at all costs even if it is killing me. It also entailed being in a relationship with a so called normal person who was, at the time, killing my mental wellbeing. Here come the photos of the uncomfortable past, proffered in, well, I would not call them loving hands. This is proof that we were not abused. Look at your clothes. They are shiny and new, they are not from the opportunity shop. Yes, we took you to America. Would an abusive family do that? And where is my mother during the duration of our visit? She has left to play

tennis, leaving me to bond with my father after all these years. Perched on the sofa I examine the scrawled writing of my sister, the illiterate poorly educated one, on the opening page of the album “when we used to be a family”. A lump rises in my throat. This is the sister, the pretty skinny one nicknamed bones, who spent her time during my entire childhood terrorizing me with cutting remarks and sending me on errands to buy her sweets. Her standing at the door sneering at my Christian phase, which must have been pretty hard going, always defending her parents because, well, they were her biological parents and as such she could do as she pleased. Her room could always be a mess, she was never hit, and she had free access to food. Yes we lived in a class system, a caste system, a hierarchy, my brother in exile, their two daughters at the top of the tree and me, desperately trying to fit in.

But I still believed in Atlantis. I still believed in sadness. I still believed in my family, the one that had been taken, that I felt in my bones, in my soul and so I sat in attics, in the cemetery, in the long grass, anywhere I could trying to figure what was happening. I did not know how to be, what to be or who to be and every time I felt Atlantis, every time I felt my soul, my sadness, my spirit, my heart, my tears, my sensitivity, I had my father terrifying me, sending who I was deep underground. How could I be me when I was being terrified by violence in word and deed from the very beginning? Paradoxically I wanted to be me, yet I did not want to be me. I was caught in an existential trap.

I am always trying to find a way out of this existential trap, of finding a way to be me, to be myself, to reclaim Atlantis, but how can I? What am I trying to reclaim? I can't taste it or touch it. Perhaps I can feel it? I am trying to go home; maybe we are all trying to go home. I am confused. I am a fragment. I am floating in this strange, strange ocean. Too long I have been silent, overshadowed. Indeed I have become used to disappointment, of my needs not being met, never expecting anything, always accommodating others, always overlooking myself, to well, just expecting life not to be kind. Yet, in spite of my belief that I am unlovable, that life does not love me, life keeps infuriating me time and time again by providing for my needs thereby upending my beliefs.

Here he comes again with that voice “stop feeling sorry for yourself, it's a tough life kid, not only in Bermuda, but everywhere. No one will help you so you better lock that sensitive self away.” Are all people like this? Are all people struggling to find themselves? Do some people just go for it, stand up and be themselves, live in the now, and just enjoy creating a life right here? How can they? I have spent so many years searching for answers in books, so many books. Yes books were a lifeline, an out. Once I started to read I could escape, yes escape into another world. There I am sitting in my room staring at pictures, sinking into stories, dreaming of being at sea, an angry boy, always angry at myself for what had become of me.

Oh disembodied me, where is your heart, your soul? Where are you young boy? What lies beneath the ocean deep? Where have you disappeared with your crossed arms and hands turned into fists? Who are you trying to keep at bay? Why are you so sad and will the sadness ever end? Once again I am going around in black and white circles. I lost so much, so long ago and I do not know how to reclaim it. So many paths, so many journeys that have led to this place.

The Island of Disbelief

Strange things happen; strange things disappear on your way to the Island of Disbelief As a child I was fascinated by the concept of being shipwrecked and ending up on a tropical island, I would lie under the sheets and pull the covers over my head nice and tight whilst listening to the thunder on stormy nights. In the centre of my minds eyes was a storm. I would be clinging on to the mast for dear life while the sails flapped in the breeze and ripped above me. I even had my favourite books, Treasure Island by Robert Louis Stevenson and another called Coral Island where a bunch of good clean Christian boys battle the wilderness and savages, it was a book of its time. There was the sadness of the boy in a book called Cay who, like me, had eyes that suffered and then there was the Disney classic about the orphan Peter Pan who never grows up and meets his friends in Never Never Land.

I was living on a strange deserted island also. A Never Never Land where my sisters had real parents and my twin and I had artificially created parents. In this strange fantasy Island where dreams come true nothing was as it seemed. I spent my time wandering round in a disembodied fantasy state feeling sad, lonely, shipwrecked and not knowing what the hell was going on all of the time. From the very beginning this world did not seem right, I did not believe in it. I did not believe in what I had

been given. I was like a restless ocean wave constantly coming and going on the shores of the Island of Disbelief.

Before I was told that I did not belong to this island I did my best to fit in spite of this strange sickness in my bones. I did my best to wipe the sadness from my face and from my faith but something was not right. Something was hiding in the forest and amongst the palms and beauty there was a deadly stillness. I did not feel safe. I spent a lot of time digging for lost treasure, digging for answers with spade in hand and a determined look on my face, I was going to get to the truth, to my core, to what was wrong, to why I did not feel right even if it killed me. In the long grass I found signs of a life that was not me. I found crests from the Royal New Zealand Navy, in the office I found red shotgun cartridges with shiny gold metal caps and a shotgun whose double barrels and trigger were black as soot just like the darkness that surrounded me, its brown wooden butt filled with tree rings that led back though an unknown history much like the hidden ancestral tree that I kept bumping into.

In darkness I crawled alone through the attic and underneath the house poring over sixties artefacts, old mowers, lights, trinkets covered in dust, a door into the barbeque area that had long ago been bricked over, broken bottles and collections of wood all piled on brown clay that was the colour of the soil in the cemetery across the road. In the garage I would peer at the light globes on a blackboard that were designed to look like a river and at the deer's head mounted on a board. I would troll through the old electrical equipment in search of something, in search of nothing. Outside I would hide in the long grass, catch grasshoppers and wonder what was wrong; all this wonderful life around me but inside I was scared, frightened, and alone. I was blaming myself for how I felt and that feeling was an underground river of powerlessness, desertion, a feeling of complete aloneness, that I had been abandoned, that the saddest thing in the world had happened to me and as a result I had ended up shipwrecked in the middle of a strange adventure in which I was strangely absent.

Story times at school were all too real; any story that featured the abduction or abandonment of children resonated with me. Strange beings dressed in black hooded cloaks carrying medieval axes abducted children and took them back to their castle. I was terrified; it was all too familiar. The fairytale Hansel and Gretel terrified me, the witch, being lost, bread crumbs. Once I lost the path following my father and his friends. I wound up terrified, and alone on a long dirt track. Some elderly people found me and took me back to their home. Even though they had rescued me, the feeling of terror, of utter abandonment felt all too real, felt all too unbearable.

Being told that I was adopted at the age of eight by my mother in an argument simply confirmed what I felt. I was not one of them. I belonged to Never Never Land. This is the land that I have always lived in, aloof, connected yet not quite there, on my own private island floating, not knowing how to feel loved or how to belong. This feeling constructed my life but this feeling in turn was the result of a law enacted by a Government that instructed all of society to lie to me about my origins, about my ancestry. This law created my Island of Disbelief. The policy decreed that my mother had to leave the stage as soon as I was born. They of course argued that this would have no effect upon me, but looking back at my life now this claim becomes patently ridiculous. From the moment my mother left I was free floating as if I was full of helium, a balloon floating towards the guillotine that was designed to give me a clean break from my family. The guillotine was operated by social workers and lawyers who quietly and efficiently compiled the documents necessary for my trip to the Island of Disbelief. My passport to the Island of Disbelief was based upon my taking on a new family name, my natural mothers name was removed, they never put a father's name on such a Certificate, and as a result the only thing that remained of any factual consequence whatsoever was my date of birth, at least I believe that it is true.

You cannot in my humble opinion teach an entire society to lie to the child without serious consequences upon the child's mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Now I have heard all about how I supposedly constructed a false self and about my primal wound and its impact upon my behaviour many years after the fact. But consider this: I was born into a lie, a complete and utter lie that the whole of society from the Government downwards participated in with Government approval. I live in a society where official documents are held sacrosanct but in my case they happily forged my antecedents and defended their doing so by saying that a clean break would remove me from my questionable genealogy and hence from my mother. They screwed with my reality, with my headset. They denied that my removal from my mother had any impact on me whatsoever so I had no help in dealing with this loss. Worse than that, they denied that the car crash had ever happened. So here I am at the scene of the car crash, bloody and bruised, a mere child, no, an infant with my wounds being fictitiously papered over.

Trust is built on truth, not lies. How am I to trust anyone ever again when I am living in a society that lied to me about my mother being taken away? How am I to trust a Government that allowed this to happen? We are not talking spilt milk here; we are talking about the deliberate removal and falsification of my ancestral history. This inglorious lie that sent me to the Island of Disbelief and, worse than that as I have discovered, there was a Government sponsored conspiracy of silence that on the basis of no evidence whatsoever claimed that this glorious experiment in human evolution would have no impact on me or my brother. He ended up in jail. I ended up chasing rainbows of imaginary love through academic achievement and other illusions.

When you live a Government sponsored life/lie that actively/wilfully disregards your reality on the basis of ideologically driven prejudice towards illegitimacy and that dresses up your punishment (closed adoption and the bad seed) as your reward what are you supposed to do? As a child I could not have known the truth and as a result I self-blamed and the seed of self-hatred became the man and created the life that I inhabit today. It is a life full of struggles and anger over the fact that I have to deal with the results of this policy over and over again. For example, how could I trust how I felt inside when everyone around me was busily denying it? In the post-war period adoption had been sold as the most wonderful thing since sliced bread and the whole of society bought it and still does. It was seen as the life-giving cure to illegitimacy and I was supposed to be grateful for it. If you cannot trust how you feel then what do you do? Well, you trust everyone else but never yourself and you do everything you can to win the approval of others because the business of being loved, as I discovered, lying in my cot in hospital, is a matter of life or death. And in this life being loved is by no means guaranteed.

So here I sit writing these words, floating above them, observing myself but never quite being able to enter into the heart of the matter because the impact of this policy upon my life has been so horrific. The Island of Disbelief created by the practise of closed adoption led me to abandon ship, to never listen to myself in spite of how I felt inside. You can run but you can never hide or dig your way out of this maze, this terrifying maze of emotions and hurt. My inner compass, my inner bearings, my inner trust was destroyed and at the same time I could not trust the external love of others. Not only did I feel that love was conditional and had to be earned, I also lived in a world that actively lied to me about my being adopted. The Government told its minions to tell society that it was in the child's best interests for its origins to be denied and if the child played up then it was his or her fault, not the fault of the policy.

As a result screeds of academic studies were written with the sole purpose of justifying this policy. Their so-called scientific studies were not troubled by reality. They simply used their heads to invent the result; closed adoption is good, if the child plays up that is a bad seed coming through, the child is bad but there is nothing wrong with this policy. The community lapped up this theory and dished it out by adopting en masse. Indeed, the community at large to this very day continues to believe adoption is a benevolent policy that rescues motherless/fatherless children. Just turn on talk back radio or watch a documentary on adoption. Because I am a bad seed I happen to believe that contrary to popular belief I was not a born orphan, or a born bastard. I had a mother who wanted to keep me but instead I was stolen through the whip of economic compulsion and moral gerrymandering.

I now look back at this strange fantasy world and wonder how many people whispered behind my back about my origins. I also wonder how many people played their part in this charade, in this game of denying a little boy's natural intuitive knowledge that something terrible had happened to him. It takes a village to raise a child and it takes a village to lie to and destroy him. My adopted father used to chide me over my sadness, goad me over it as if it was a character defect, not the result of a calamitous event. This forced my emotions deep underground. My brother on the other hand who dared to reveal how he felt, was booted out and eventually locked up because he had dared to not play the game of self-denial. But even he, years later, admitted that he had not realised the huge impact that adoption had had upon him as a child and as a result upon his life with disastrous consequences for his health and future life direction (addictions and jail).

But how could we stand? How could we empower ourselves in a society that played games with how we felt, games with all too serious consequences that I still suffer from? How am I to heal from this wound, from this sickness, from my feeling of powerlessness? For years I have lived a life whose real visceral reality has been denied. Even now the praises of closed adoption are still sung and society is still singing from the same hymn sheet. When I stand up and talk about what happened I am told that I had a bad adoption but many were good and as such my experience does not count. This conveniently ignores the cost to a child of being removed from one's mother and having one's ancestry falsified. Even if it was an open adoption, the pain would remain and indeed may even be worse given

that the child may feel torn between two families and constantly living in fear of rejection from both of them.

I can, however, only talk about my reality, the one that I lived growing up on the Island of Disbelief. Anyone in my view who is taught to disbelieve what they feel in their bones, in their DNA, in their soul is in for a rough time indeed. I compensated by believing in others, attaching myself to my adopted father's quest for riches, in his wanting me to make up for his childhood trauma through sporting and academic success. Through trying to belong at all costs to various groups, be they academic, political or spiritual. Through trying to please a lover at all costs. Through trying to be normal, middle class whatever that means, and though trying to deny my being adopted in order to fit in. Through being too scared to be me, to follow my dreams and believing that if I did I would be abandoned. Through being and feeling totally powerless because the very thing that would empower me was too scary. My inner feelings and reality had been actively compromised and devalued by society and its members.

I have no easy answers. In life there are no easy answers. There is no magic wand, elixir or potion that can take away the pain of the Island of Disbelief upon which I grew wondering, always wondering who these strangers were that I was living with. Where did they come from? They too had had more than their fair share of hardship and grief. My adopted mother's parents died when she was young. Her father was an alcoholic, and she ended up living with her sister. I only found out years later and had always known her sister as Auntie. My adopted father also grew up in a house of abuse. It was as if my adopted parents' sorrow went looking for two sorrow-filled vulnerable boys on which they could dump their sorrows and unresolved grief whilst their two biological daughters safely watched from the sidelines the dances of trauma unfold.

But it does not matter how much we try to unload our trauma on to others in the hope that they will become the successful sportsperson and scholar or protective son/brother that you always wanted. Sooner or later you have to pay the piper by coming to terms with your own demons. I do hope that my adopted parents manage to do so but it might be too hard. They did not grow up in an era that encouraged you to examine your feelings.

I am trying to find my way out of the Island of Disbelief, but it is difficult, so difficult, living in a society in which I have to spend most of my life justifying, explaining or hiding what I really feel. In my view this is the most damaging part of that innocuously named practise Closed Adoption because it has allowed lies to become the truth in place of my own lived reality.