

James

The Impact of Adoption on My Colombian Mother and I

Text: James adopted from Colombia at 1 year old

I was adopted from Colombia and brought over to live with a white Australian family. I was actually adopted from Cali in Colombia when I was one year old. I was very lucky to have a very loving family, and when I was about five, my parents also adopted another child. He was also of African descent, so we were able to bond over that a lot. And my family has always been very loving, they were always accepting, even my cousins and my aunts. I was never really treated any differently. They loved me all the same.

So I was very lucky to have a lot of opportunities here. And I really loved growing up in Australia and I wouldn't change it for the world. And it's only been once I've gotten a bit older, into my late twenties, that you kind of recognize it as great, the opportunities that I've had. As my story as an adoptee, I've been very lucky. There is still an inherent trauma in adoption. My journey now, which is really unpacking that trauma and what it means to be an adoptee and what I can do to provide some representation for other adoptees. So that if this process continues, they can have a smoother transition and it can be a bit easier for them.

Do I think adoption is a good thing? I would respond to that by saying I think it can be a good thing, but only when the right procedures, reviews and education into the process have been conducted. And I think that's very important, not only for the welfare of the child, but also the welfare of the adoptive parents, in terms of their relations to that child and the things they need to know, and especially even more so for the biological family. Because if adoption's not done correctly, or it's done in a way where there are illegal adoptions or coerced adoptions, that causes an amount of damage to that biological family that can't really be put into numbers or words.

My biological mother had a lot of love for me, but unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond her control, she wasn't able to take care of me properly. I would say that it is something that fundamentally probably changed her life for the worst, because she was 19 years old. I was with her for nine months in her belly, I was with her for a few weeks, a few months after I was born. She held me. She probably tickled my nose, did all those things that you see in movies that moms do when they're bonding with their child for the first time. And then suddenly one day someone snapped their fingers, and she no longer had that. And it was just taken from her, no answer was given, no reason was given, no opportunity for her to find me was given. And I think when you look at the primal injury and the primal wound that causes, it's utterly devastating. And when I talked to her for the first time, she cried for 20 minutes just saying, "I'm sorry, James, I'm sorry, James. I could have done more, I could have done this. Every day since that day, I prayed to God." And to think that someone had to carry that around for 27 years of their life, and you think of the ramifications of that for them, that's huge. And how I know this is one of my brothers, not the immediate brother after me, but the one after that, he has the same name as I do. And I think that might have been her way of trying to fill that void.

For most of my life, I probably felt like 70% of a person, that you always wonder, "What was my other family like? What are our histories, what are our stories? What are our legends, what are our religions? What are our cultural practices?" I felt that that was always something I needed to know, so I was 70% of a person. Then once I began that journey and I was very, very blessed and lucky to find her, I feel that added maybe another 15%. So now that I'm 85% of a person and that was great, because for a first time in a long time, I had peace of mind. And even when I just call her and speak to her and look at her face, and it's a face that looks so similar to mine, and I look at the faces of my brothers and sisters, I feel at peace. And in a weird way, I feel validated that, yes, I am a proud Afro Colombian man. And no one can take that from me just because I don't speak Spanish or just because my salsa isn't great. Or any a number of cultural things that people want to say.

Finding my mom, even though I knew academically, I never needed that validation, emotionally, that validation did give me that extra 15%. And I think the rest of the percentage to make it a

hundred, I truly believe that's going to come when I go to Colombia and I get to meet my mother and I learn Spanish and I learn salsa and I engage with my culture. And then a bit further still, I think I'll get to that hundred percent when I get to go even further and go all the way back to West Africa, where our people are originally from, and learn about our traditions and cultures and tribe, and our history. I think that's when I will feel a hundred percent, but as definitely finding my mother did validate me on a deep, emotional level.