

Meseret

Realities of Older Age Adoption

Text: Meseret adopted from Ethiopia at 14 years old

I'm originally from Ethiopia. I was adopted at 14 years old, along with my two sisters and a brother. We came here when I was 14 and my youngest was seven years old and we migrated into a small town in the Southwest of WA, called Dunsborough.

Being adopted at 14 years old, meant that I had a lot of memories from back home. So, I remember my biological parents, they passed away when I was nine years old, within a month difference. So, growing up in a village, a lot of my early childhood memories were with them. Also from the age of nine until I was adopted out, I was in the orphanage along with my siblings. So, a lot of my memories of early teenager-hood was in the orphanage and yeah, just school and life as an orphan.

Living among 150 or so orphans from the age of a couple of days, until 16 years old, it was huge like in a sense, it felt at home being altogether, knowing that all the kids are in the same boat, but in other sense, it was like a jungle. I'd describe it as, you just see power plays and you've got friends, but there's also, yeah, a lot of kids that are forming their identities. And teenagers at the same time, you're learning to be responsible for the younger ones that aren't coming along. So, I remember at, I think around 12, I was in charge of the room and that had about 20 girls. And part of my role was making sure that the girls were ready for school and the hair was done, which was like every Saturday. So, yeah, we just had to help out, make sure that we're looking after each other, but at the same time, it was like, you're all in it together.

Being in the orphanage, I found that a lot of kids were getting adopted out into the Western countries primarily to America. So, we had a lot of kids who were attending with their families. So, they told us a little bit about what life is like in terms of having a better education and opportunities were the main themes. But it was like a saving element, I guess it's like when you get adopted out life will suddenly be better. And so we hoped and waited for that moment where our situation and circumstances will be changed through adoption.

So for me, I was adopted out to Australia and initially, I actually had two of my friends who were adopted a few months prior to that. Unfortunately, their negative experience, which was their adoptive mom left them in a hotel. So the kids came back to the orphanage and that was kind of early view of Australians for me. So, I was quite hesitant when my opportunity came to be adopted to Australia.

When we arrived in Perth, I remember I was three weeks after my 14th birthday and everybody was very excited walking out of the airport. We had all these people at the time, they were extended families and friends of our parents, I reckon around 40 people there. It was very cold and yeah, very exhausting night. I remember, I guess in the orphanage, you learn to do life on your own and look out for yourself. And then when you suddenly have adoptive parents or carers that are assigned to you, I find that it was a very hard transition for me, because that meant that I had to now give control and allow them to take care of me.

For me, for the biggest part of the struggle, was trying to, I guess wanted to see them connect with me. So, and actually earn my trust and given the circumstances or the life situations, that wasn't possible. So, early stage of my adoption, I really struggled to find that trusting them and actually allowing them to take care of me or even my siblings, because growing up I was the oldest. So, I had to really look out for my sisters and my youngest one was two when my mom died. So, I was like the mother of the, yeah, my siblings. I think as a teenager, for me, I felt like I've had all this other life. Like I had to grow up too quick. So, it's like, I can't even be a normal teenager, even though I'm feeling all these emotions.