

## Michelle

### Living Multiple Losses is Trauma

Text: Michelle adopted from South Korea at 4 months old

My name is Michelle. I'm 35 years old, And I was adopted from South Korea to Australia when I was about four and a half months old. And I'm a single mother to a 10 year old.

So being adopted at four and a half months is a really young age, and I think that being adopted that young has an effect on that child that no one really realizes and even the adoptee themselves doesn't seem to realize until they hit their adult years. It creates incredibly significant identity issues and trauma that is just not recognized at all. And from the photos that I do have of myself of me before I was adopted, and I was in the care of my foster family, it's actually quite devastating to see the photos and to see the fear in my eyes as a child, as a baby.

I was adopted into a family with an older adoptee, Korean as well, sister, so she's about 24 months older than me, and it was just the two of us. We were adopted into a family in Newcastle and especially about 25 years ago, that was a very, very all-white community.

At about, I think when I was about five, our parents split up, by the time I was seven, they were divorced. My relationship with my mother is fantastic. She's one of the best women that I know. And she did an amazing job with us. It's a very complicated situation with my adoptive father. I don't talk to him anymore.

Once my parents divorced, being told, you get told you got put up for adoption 'cause your mother was single and she couldn't afford to raise you, or she didn't want you to face prejudices and that sort of thing. But in reality, that's the exact life that I grew up with here in Australia, so that was quite hard to take.

So I started to look for my mother in 2018 and was told about a year later that she'd passed away. So a few months later in 2019, I went to Korea and started, I guess, a search on the ground there. It was my first trip, back to Korea. I went to Mapo police station where they asked me why I was taking the DNA test, and I informed them that I'd been told my mother was dead. They then came back and told me that there was no record of my mother's death. I then had an appointment straight after that with Eastern Social Welfare. And I let them know what the police had told me, even though they had told me several times, they'd already sent all the paperwork, told me everything there was to know. After I told them what the police had told me that there was no record of her death, they then came back and told me, well, we have a date of her death.

To not know whether your mother's dead or alive when you've searched is incredibly devastating. And it's very taxing because if you knew either way, it's something you could put to rest, but not knowing is, it's a really... It's almost impossible to heal from because how do you heal something where part of you is going, yes, you need to let this go, and the other part is, is saying no, hold onto hope.

While there's definitely been obviously environmental factors that have contributed to my suicide attempts and self harm, adoption has been, or is the core, at the core of it all. I started self-harming when I was 12 years old in year six. And I didn't even know why, it was just this pure hatred for myself and the world. And as I've gotten older, it was... I guess, looking back and reading through some of my writing, I was so angry at the way I looked and of being forced to live in a country that didn't accept me, being in a society of people that looked down on me and made fun of me. And I guess I really became really resentful and bitter towards that. And even now, living in Australia as an adult, it is my home, but being adopted means I never actually feel at home here. It's being caught between two worlds. And that loss of permanency or belonging anywhere leaves you feeling stuck in limbo essentially.

Never having a sense of belonging is one of my, I guess, core issues of when I do self harm. It's that feeling of complete and utter aloneness and just not belonging anywhere in the world.

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