

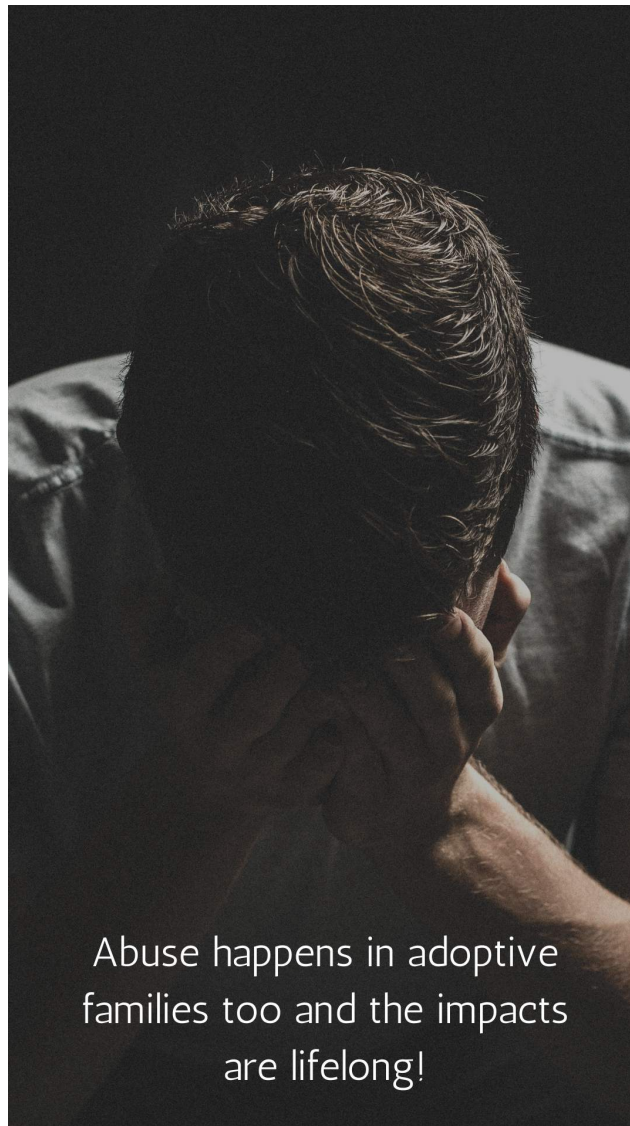
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# Sexual Abuse in Intercountry Adoption

## ICAV PERSPECTIVE PAPER

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Shames dies when stories are told in safe places - Ann Voscamp



Abuse happens in adoptive  
families too and the impacts  
are lifelong!

Compiled & Edited by Long Lynelle, Nov 2024

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## Introduction

This is by far, the most difficult and heartbreaking ICAV Perspective paper for me to compile because it's also deeply personal and meaningful as I am a survivor of sexual abuse myself from within my adoptive family. This year I have only just finished holding my perpetrators and those responsible to account and for me, creating this paper is a constructive way to address what has happened not just for me, but for many others. As I read through and edited each submission, my heart hurt for every fellow survivor who reveals what the additional trauma in adoption has been for them as survivors of sexual abuse.

Take your time reading through this paper, it's heavy, it's hard to bear and look after yourself. It's easy to feel the weight and powerlessness of our experiences but I also hope that upon hearing each voice, it will inspire each of us to do our small part in raising awareness and being more sensitive and responsive to adoptees who want to speak out about this. Adoptees who suffer in this way desperately need support and care! In every case shared in this paper, those who spoke out trying to say what was happening to them by adoptive family members, they were ignored, dismissed, and blamed by the very people responsible for their protection and wellbeing. Not one was given appropriate support or validation, let alone taken to professional support. The only case of an adoptee being given support or any action taken in terms of reporting, was for one who had been perpetrated against by a neighbour despite also being abused by the brother in the adoptive family home but who never got reported. This response of protecting the adoptive family members at the cost of the adoptee who has to suffer in silence compounds our complex trauma resulting from sexual abuse, and further adds to the bedrock of trauma from being separated from our biological families, country, and racial heritage. We learn our adoptive families are not safe and cannot be trusted. We have nowhere to turn. This needs to start changing.

It's often when we understand the worst sides of intercountry adoption that we learn what is going wrong in a system that assumes children are given a "better life". It's time we question those harmful assumptions and address some of the worst of what happens in adoption. Children are not guaranteed a safer and better life and in its current legal forms, as this paper highlights, plenary intercountry adoption is clearly not always in the "interests of the child". For the majority of the 31 survivors who share here, adoption and the resulting sexual abuse added more trauma and complexity to their already fragile bedrock of displacement and loss.

I don't pretend to have a magic wand to tell us what the solutions are, but every participant of this paper did have their own thoughts and recommendations. The one that everyone agrees on is

independent followup of adoptees for the lifelong duration in our adoptive families as a preventative measure. This is currently not done and for this reason, I argue that adoption is the highest risk type of care amongst the various models for vulnerable children. At least in foster care, kinship care, guardianship or any other alternative models, the child remains in the State's protection and is therefore legally required to be followed up on by external professionals at various intervals until reaching age 18. Whilst research highlights the sexual abuse rates in foster care are high, very little research has been done to investigate the levels of sexual abuse in adoption (domestic or intercountry) yet it's assumed adoption is the most desired form of care. From my decades of providing peer support to thousands of intercountry adoptees around the world, I argue that adoption has at least the same if not higher rates of sexual abuse than foster care. But only when long term followup is independently conducted on all adoptees, will we ever know the true extent of whether adoption actually meets our needs or not. Until then, it cannot be assumed that adoption is a safe form of care. The challenge for child welfare professionals and the system, is to ensure **no further harm** occurs to vulnerable children. Adoption is in my opinion, a great way to offload us out of State / public responsibility and into the "private" / family domain where there are no checks or balances despite the known risks to the child of which sexual abuse and any forms of abuse, are some of the worst scenarios.

Almost all adoptive countries except Australia also lack adequate laws that allow adoptees who suffer in this way to freely annul, revoke or discharge their adoption which legally binds them to this family, when it is demonstrated the adoption has not served their interests. They are locked forever into a legal contract of ownership by the abusive adopters. This needs to change.

We have to do better to protect children from this form of exploitation and harm. We need systemic change to ensure sexual abuse within the adoptive and extended family systems and communities is not contributing additional harm to adoptees. We need to start to provide comprehensive supports for those who are impacted by abuse in general and sexual abuse specifically, as it's very clear from what is shared in this paper, that this support is totally absent as a niche intersection between sexual abuse of children and adoption.

In my years of research, a resource like this has never been produced globally but it is necessary to elevate adoptee and survivor voices, as well as to provide an educational resource for professionals working in the field who facilitate intercountry adoptions or support in post adoption services and sexual abuse services. Little is known as to how we navigate these additional complex issues and what we recommend from lived experience.

I sought funding from multiple avenues to try and recognise the expertise from lived experience to compensate in a small way, the adoptees who contributed. I was successful in

obtaining a small grant from USA based and adoptee led organisation called **Adoptees Connect**, created and led by domestic adoptee Pamela Karanova. This funding is made available from an incredible adoptee ally, Jeffrey Leventhal who specified the funding be available for USA based contributors. I am immensely thankful to Jeffrey and Pamela for their trust in ICAV and for their funding which has been evenly divided between the USA participants, the large majority (21). The participants were not told upfront about the funding, they have only been advised just prior to this paper being published as I did not want the funds to be a driving motivator for contributions. I have personally provided the rest of the funding so that *all* adoptees who contributed to this paper are given the same amount to recognise the emotional turmoil it takes to bring to mind the extremely traumatic past and make a resource like this possible. As per the majority of the ICAV resources I produce, I continue to do this work unfunded, but personally fund it because I'm passionate about supporting our community and trying to raise awareness on the most unwanted and unspoken topics.

I hope in years to come, we might see interest by academics in researching all forms of abuse in adoption. The only research specific for intercountry adoption and covering the abuse we experience was published last year, funded by the *National Human Rights Commission of Korea*<sup>1</sup>. They included over 800 Korean intercountry adoptees who participated from around the world and their results revealed that  $\frac{1}{3}$  experienced abuse and  $\frac{1}{7}$  experienced sexual abuse in their adoptions. If we extrapolate that data and result to the rest of the global community, from a population that is approximately and as a minimum at least 1.2million<sup>2</sup> intercountry adoptees, **in real numbers, that's at least 360,000 who experience some form of abuse, and 171, 428 who experience sexual abuse within their adoptions.** I know from the many thousands in ICAV who talk to me daily and over the decades, that they certainly reflect these statistics, with representation across all birth and adoptive countries.

When I was inviting input into this paper, I actively asked the 130 intercountry adoptees who had privately revealed to me in the past 2 years that they were sexually abused whom I have built a relationship of trust with. Of those 130, 30 were willing to participate. For the majority of others, their trauma continues in their daily life and they are not in a safe space at the moment to additionally cope with actively processing this part of their trauma. I totally understand this. There are also those we know in the community who have suicided because of sexual abuse being one of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://intercountryadopteevoices.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/230222-Korean-Human-Rights-Study-on-Koreans-adopted-overseas.pdf> (see pages 41, 80, 147, 200, 201, 225)

<sup>2</sup> *One Million Children Moving: 70 Years of Transnational adoption since end of World War II* by Peter Selman (book chapter by Kassel & Selman, 2021)

the major contributors for the state of their mental health. I honour and remember them in this paper. For a tiny handful of the 130 I invited, some felt their life had balanced out to a comfortable place and they did not want to go back to rethink these stages of their life. I also understand this.

All who participated with the exception of 4, experienced abuse after their adoption. For those who experienced sexual abuse prior to adoption, one was perpetrated by a birth family boyfriend, another by captors who trafficked them into the orphanage, and the other 2 occurred within their orphanages. It is helpful to understand that any sexual abuse prior to intercountry adoption is not necessarily a common cause for relinquishment into intercountry adoption. The narrative in adoption and why we get relinquished, especially in domestic adoption, is often an assumption that our birth families and countries are unsafe, but what we see in this paper, is that **sexual abuse occurs more from within the adoptive family after the adoption**, than sexual abuse occurring before the adoption was facilitated.

Of the 31 who contributed, the **vast majority reported experiencing sexual abuse prior to the age of 8 years old** and most experienced these abuses multiples times and for some, across many years. 5 actively reported their abuse to an authority like the police. The age of the majority are in their 40s to 60s with a few in their 30s, and a couple in their 20s. ICAV is a peer support space for adult aged intercountry adoptees so I did not seek input from any who are under the age of 18 years old. Only 1 participant identifies as male.

Of the 31 participants, adoptees are adopted into 9 adoptive countries with the vast majority (20) being intercountry adoptees sent to the USA and other countries of Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Norway represented and including 3 transracial adoptees in the Germany, Scotland and the USA; the intercountry adoptees are born in 15 different birth countries with a large majority from South Korea (12) but the other birth countries represented are China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Ecuador, Philippines, Romania, Russia, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Vietnam.

When I asked the participants **what the term “sexual abuse” meant**, here are some of the responses so you understand what we are referring to:

- Any type of unwanted sexual behaviour, actions, words toward another person, without their consent.
- Being touched by someone sexually on my private body parts when I didn't consent, including being groomed, by someone who has power over me due to their size or level of authority / position.

■ Unwanted, inappropriate sexual contact between a person of more power toward a person with less or no power. Including being groomed to become under that dynamic and manipulated into thinking they “desire” this type of attention.

■ Any unwanted/ inappropriate touch and sexual talk. Any pressure to preform a sexual act or having someone do something to you. Exposing a young child to sexual images, video or conversation.

■ Anytime a person was violated through sexual touching, harassing, penetration, or oral sex without consent through deception, coercion from threat of violence or other harm.

■ Someone forcing themselves on you. The person touches you, specifically your private areas without your consent. The perpetrator usually seems stronger and more assertive than the victim who typically appears weak and easy to manipulate.

■ When somebody's limits are crossed by another person in a sexual way in a longer period, not just a single episode.

■ A perpetrator who uses a child for sexual gratification.

■ Any type of sexual behaviour that was not accepted by the other party.

■ Abusive sexual behaviour by one person upon another, often perpetrated by physical force, or by taking advantage of another's vulnerable emotional state. All too often it includes exploiting a trusted relationship.

■ Abusing another person for one's own sexual desires.

■ Any form of unwanted sexual contact, this includes touch and verbal threats.

■ Forced sexual contact using fear, actions or words.

A massive thanks to the 31 adoptees who contributed to this paper. Without your generosity and resilience, this collaboration would not have happened. I’m deeply honoured that you trust me to share your deepest hurts and trauma and I hope that this resource we created brings about much needed discussion, better support for all who are survivors, and a commitment by those who work in the adoption and related fields, to try and do better to serve the needs of the most hurt and traumatised.

Regards

*Lynelle Long*

Founder

InterCountry Adoptee Voices (ICAV)

Published on 18 November 2024

*World Day for the Prevention and Healing from Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Violence*



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# AdultBabyMe

*Born in Germany, adopted transracially in Germany*

## **Baby Me**

After she had lost her first life  
Baby Me was still somewhat hopeful  
To find a safe space,  
Somewhere, sometime, with someone.

Baby Me had a hard time to survive  
Four weeks all alone in hospital and  
Ten months in an abusive children's home:  
No safety, no healing.

At the age of eleven months  
Baby Me joined her adoptive family:  
Mother, father, grandmother and grandfather.  
All under one roof.  
All lost in their own grief and trauma.

Baby Me looked and felt different from the rest of her new family.  
But Baby Me was a nice little girl...  
...For her mother to fulfil her dream of motherhood  
...For her father to calm down his wife  
...For her grandmother to overcome the early loss of her son  
...For her grandfather to make his sexual phantasies come true.  
No safety, no healing.

Why did mother not protect Baby Me?  
I don't know!  
Why did father not stay with Baby Me?  
I don't know!  
Why did all this happen at all?  
I don't know!  
No safety, no healing.

Baby Me grew up and became an adult.  
I'm still struggling again and again.  
It's hard work to integrate all the lost pieces of my soul.  
But I managed to survive the trauma.  
Today I'm using this power  
To become and live my true self.  
Step by step. More and more.

And within me at some point  
Baby Me will finally find  
Safety and healing.

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## A. N. L

### *Born in Russia, adopted to the USA*

From the shadowy hands crawling on the walls, to the endless nightmares and constant fear that surrounds every day, I am here to give insight to my life and the events that made me who I am through adoption and abuse.

I am a colour no-one has seen before.

Left by my stillborn twin and a grieving mother who didn't want to let go, I was given to an orphanage at six weeks old. I was adopted at 18 months old and when asked about my experience in the orphanage, people are often surprised that I am able to recall that far back into my life. Why I can is very disturbing.

In the orphanage began the first exposure to sexual abuse. I was assaulted by what I remember as a big white hand. When I was brought to the USA, I had vivid imagery of shadowy hands crawling around my walls as I laid fearfully in my playpen. I would often see the shadow hands touch me all over from my legs, private areas and to my mouth. I had no idea that it began a lifetime of sexual abuse.

I was brought into what I thought was a normal family until the mask began to slip through. The mother was full of love but only for herself and incapable of loving others due to her condition. The father was dejected and quiet, full of wonder and bitterness towards a life not meant for him. The son was conflicted, showing what resembled love and hate, the true polarity and the hatred bled through.

I was resented and felt unwanted. I was rejected. I was not the white Russian child they had hoped for, instead, I stood out. I had dark brown hair, amber eyes, and light brown skin against their fair/pale skin and light hair and eyes. I was the child that everyone questioned who I was and where I was from. I wasn't perceived as being from Russia and instead everyone angrily told me I had to be Mexican. I grew up in a racist area and no-one could place why I wasn't quite white enough. No-one believed I was born in Russia. The familiar pattern is that no-one believed me and I realized no-one believed in me the way I needed.

Not being the anticipated puzzle piece came with its own form of punishment. I was raped. I was not respected. I was seen as a foreign object. I would scream out to my new mother asking for

her to protect me from the men who were hurting me. My voice pleading for help, for them to stop, were met with her enabling them. Her reassurance was that what they were doing was okay. Not the reassurance a child and teen needed, to feel safe and loved. No child should be told by someone who was meant to protect them that being sexually assaulted was normal and a part of sibling bonding. At the time the word was "molested" until the truth reared its ugly head and came forward with the details matching a crime more vile. Rape.

I was not given privacy for fear of self harm and suicide although my actual suicide attempt at 13 years old was coated as mere experimentation gone wrong. With a lack of privacy, as an innocent child who wished to sleep naked at night in a safe and private manner, I was instead faced with a frightening nightly occurrence of someone else being in my bed while I slept. The breath on my back and the smell of familiarity. This happened from childhood to adulthood and the fear of unknown haunts me every night as I am unsure why this person was in my bed, knowing my sleep preference, and what could've happened to me every night as I was deeply asleep.

The family who was meant to love and protect instead dissected me from the inside out. I was a deprived experiment of rejection, laced with the delusion of love and safety. My extended family gave me looks of concern, distance and repulsion as my name has likely been smeared and I have been placed in an inaccurate light. The only ones who never judged and loved unconditionally were my grandmas and my pap. They could sense a shattered soul and found every means to nurture what the world and depravity had stripped of me.

Having a broken family led me to a path of broken decisions and an inability to see narcissistic abuse and to understand my own role in self destruction. I was designed from birth to destroy myself, and in turn, everything around me. I was led into many toxic friendships. I was also the toxic friend as I drowned in the poison of narcissist personality disorder, replaying the characteristics that tested the fabric of my being. I self-sabotaged, I drowned in alcoholism as my biological family and community did, and I learnt to hate myself.

I learnt to neglect myself and to repeat the patterns that devastated me. Instead of apologies, I justified. I tried to buy love. I tried to ignore the pain. I allowed the pattern of sexual abuse to continue to an abusive relationship that almost cost me my life and freedom. I was led to fake friends with friendly smiles, such as the face I learnt to blindly trust so young. The friends allowed depravity and I met my fourth rapist and lost a child in the process.

The family portrait slanted at every angle showing the brutality of mental illness and the cycle of punishment. The flames burnt so deep under the skin that the scars a victim of abuse wears was only seen through shattered glasses and a bloody vision of reality through lived experience. I realise now that the love I received was the product of those who wanted an image and not the sustenance of a human with a unique Indigenous background and the willpower to break the chains of generational trauma.

I forgive my family for loving me the only way they knew how. The scars are a daily reminder of resilience and how I can overcome anything if I have the will to continue. I am now surrounded by a healing community, a loving partner, best friends, and a rebuilt construct of family along with ties to my biological family. I am here to prove that adopted children who face rejection, racism, and abuse can recover. We can simultaneously survive and rewrite our history as we heal each individual wound and understand our past so that our present and futures are woven together with hope and the ability to light a path we deserved all along.

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# Anna

*Born in China, adopted to the USA*

## ***About my experiences of abuse***

When I was little, my older brother was on a soccer team and a friend from another soccer team had knocked me down, pulled down my pants, and started to sexually abuse me. It seemed like seconds before an adult came by and he ran off.

With the man I was dating, he had taken me to his friends house where there were four guys and two girls including me. I had one drink and was drugged. I woke up in an empty apartment with the doors wide open. Blood was all over from myself and the couch. I don't know who partook in the assault, just that it happened.

Within my adoptive family, I was sexually abused for years.

## ***Lack of independent followup***

I would like to see yearly check-ins to ensure that the placement is a good fit. A follow-up without the adoptive parents present and resources provided to explain what sexual abuse looks like

## ***Who to turn to for help***

If I could go back, I would turn to everyone for help. I wouldn't stop talking. I would start with friends and teachers. I would be as loud as I could until someone took a child seriously. I didn't do that as a child, I reminded silent in fear and hoped that someone would find out and help.

## ***Assessment of adoptive parents prior to adoption***

From what I understand, it is thorough process. I think though, there needs to be more done. When it comes to the mental stability of each parent adopted, more has to be done. Anyone can become parents, but not everyone should.

## ***Pre and post education about sexual abuse in adoption***

It's not an adult only conversation or an inappropriate conversation for children to understand and talk about. If it's happening to children, children need to be part of the conversation. Child can understand consent at an early age. It may not be sexual consent but let's use sharing toys as an example. Children can understand their space, what is theirs, what isn't

theirs, their own body, and a friend's body. We as adults have a responsibility to teach and be the voice of children when they are too young to speak for themselves. To show them what is right and what is wrong

### ***Not being believed about the sexual abuse I experienced***

It's shattering to not be believed. Not being believed affects me today, even at age thirty. I still have doubts about the simplest of things. My over-all confidence is lacking because when others didn't believe me, how could I have maintained the courage to keep believing in myself?

### ***How to better understand our behaviour after sexual abuse occurs, in relation to adoptive family dynamics***

When it comes to trauma responses, there's much more than fight and flight. Freeze and fawn exist. Eating disorders, alcoholism and drug addiction are responses that exist. Anger, sadness and hyper-sexualization are all trauma responses. Trauma looks different to different people and just because someone's trauma response is different from another person, doesn't mean that it doesn't exist or matter.

### ***The role expectations of gratefulness plays, in relation to sexual abuse in adoption***

When we are told that we should be grateful, it downplays the significance of the abuse. Every time I told someone that I was adopted, a common response would be, "Wow, you must be so grateful". Or, "They must really love you, because they choose you". These comments, although well intended, caused a piece of my soul to crumble to a point where, at times, I thought these strangers were right. I believed that these strangers who knew but five things about me, were right. That I should be grateful that I was adopted, that it was just sexual assault, neglect, and dysfunction. I gaslit myself for years thinking that the assault from my adoptive parents didn't matter because they 'wanted' me. Adoption is not justification for sexual assault. There is no justification, it is ethically wrong and has serious consequences

### ***Reporting the sexual abuse to relevant authorities and any extra complications to consider, due to being adopted***

I never reported my assault in regard to my adoptive family. I did report an assault from a blind date. He was a good friend of my friend. What I would like to say about the experience is that the police need to undergo better training on sexual assault. I was laughing in the hospital because I was overwhelmed, exhausted, and terrified. Laughter was my trauma response. A way to help my body feel safe. I had a friend go with me to the hospital to get a rape kit. She had come into the room and whispered in my ear, "Try and not laugh!" She understood why I was laughing, but she said that the police officer in the hallway made a comment to her of, "Well, it doesn't sound like

she was raped, it sounds like she was having a good time”. I knew right then that I wasn’t going to achieve anything.

### ***Feelings of shame and it's connection to sexual abuse and adoption***

I became conflicted with my feelings. For the longest time, I felt betrayed by my parents and by my own community for not seeing that I needed help as a child. At times it felt as if I was one of the angriest humans on earth. The feeling of betrayal shifted back and forth between my own self and my parents. With shame, isolation occurred and there were a few years in my early twenties where I would escape through alcohol, drugs, and sex because of the lack of protection and love I received as a child. Every person has a breaking point and when I reached mine, there comes a point where feeling nothing is better than drowning in pain caused by people who are supposed to keep me safe. Through all the pain, I still felt grateful. For in some of my darkest moments, I had some of the strongest and brightest friends who sat with me in that pain and with time, showed me proper love and care. These are the ones who taught me how to put pieces of my soul back together.

### ***Managing the ongoing adoptive family relationship***

If you’re going to try and navigate the conversation, both parties have to be willing to do so. Both have to want change and commit to communicate.

### ***Cutting ties from adoptive family***

Going without contact was not an easy decision. I went back and forth for years until I realized that I deserve to be treated with kindness and respect. It was not a choice I made lightly. I would have given anything in the world to be loved and cared for. Though, as the years passed, I came to a realization that they did not have the mental capacity to even understand what they did was wrong and it was not my responsibility as their child to teach them.

### ***Birth family reunion and the extra complications of "do I tell them about the abuse within the adoption"?***

I’ve thought about this before. I’ve yet to meet my birth family and so far, that doesn’t seem realistic. If I were ever to meet them, I’d assume the question of, “Who raised you?” would come up. I debated this in my head and it’s a complex situation. I’ve thought if my birth family cared and I tell them the truth, I would think they would be devastated. I imagine that they gave me up in hopes of a better life. If I don’t disclose the information, I wouldn’t be able to be authentically myself.



The abuse should have never happened but it did and it's a part of who I am. It's why I care so much about others and how they feel and if they're okay. It's why I taught children because I want to ensure they have the necessary tools to be safe and successful. It's why I volunteer at the homeless shelter, not because I've experienced homelessness before, but because I know what it feels like to be dismissed by others and to feel so incredibly small. I would tell my birth family the truth.

### ***Impact in intimate relationships***

Intimate relationships in my early teens and early twenties were (excuse my French) fucking chaotic. I wasn't faithful and partied often. Hyper-sexuality exists and it's real. For years I would have increased sexual activity with whomever and whenever to feel some type of control. At least I was making these decisions to participate in sex. Sex was also a way that my adoptive family showed their love, so in a sense, that's how I learned to express mine.

It wasn't until my mid-twenties that I started getting professional help. My therapist saved my life more times than they probably knew. I started to date for the future and find people who valued me. It was a hard lesson to learn though, because until I learned to value and love myself, others didn't. There's a difference between liking and loving oneself. I realised how I treated myself sets a bar for how others should treat me. What was I willing to tolerate?

Intimacy was also difficult when I started to go to therapy. Before, I was into some intense sexual activities, but that was me grieving. I had to relearn what I like. I had to learn how to be comfortable in a body that was taken and abused so many times. Learning to accept pleasure without the past pain was an experience difficult to navigate. Sometimes even now, with the right person, it can be hard.

***Dealing with triggers*** (events, sensory things, memories being brought up, key people, that remind me of the abuse)

It's painful and it's unfair. I had no control over sexual abuse as a child, yet as an adult, it's my responsibility to heal, to repair something that I didn't break. I go back and forth about this. How it's unjust and frustrating to have to use my time and my energy to repair something that was done by someone else. For a while, I didn't care. I just let the pain eat me away. It wasn't until I was in a relationship in my mid-twenties, the person I was dating cared so much about me and my behaviour and lack of healing was hurting them. I was being a person I didn't like and I was becoming a person that wasn't kind to them. I was taking my pain and passing it to someone else. That relationship obviously ended and it was afterwards, I realized that if I'm going to end this cycle, it has to start with me.

***When I disclosed about my sexual abuse to someone, this is how I was responded to and what needs to be done***

I did disclose and the responses ranged from the following:

- In shock
- They cried and apologised for what happened
- They couldn't believe that it happened, that there was no way 'they' could have done that
- Why didn't anyone help you?
- But they're your parents, I'm sure they meant well

Much needs to be done for improvement, however, this is one of those things where I'm so exhausted by repeating myself and it's not my job to educate others on believing someone when they tell you that they've been assaulted. The work has to come internally.

***Finding appropriately trained professional support***

It's helpful to find support from someone who is a trained professional. They value you and provide you with the proper space you need. I also think it's important to note that it may take time to find the right trained professional. I had an incredible therapist for five plus years but when I moved, I tried four different therapists and they weren't a good match. But it's important to keep trying.

***The healing journey***

I wouldn't wish sexual abuse upon my greatest enemy and that if there was a way, I would take everyone's pain who has ever been sexually abused. Not to dismiss the fact that they wouldn't be able to 'handle' it or 'heal', but that this life is way too precious to spend time stuck in your own head. As brilliant as the human mind is, there are parts of our brain that can wander into really dark places and if there was a way I could prevent for others, I would. For it is maddening!

***Challenges I have faced so far***

In dealing with sexual abuse and its impact on me so far, the challenges I have faced include sex, relationships, stability in jobs, and financial means to support myself.

The ***supports I found most helpful*** include painting, dancing and writing. I love writing, but sometimes I get lost for words. When trauma becomes too much, I tend to lose my voice. Painting helps me say what I feel without having to speak. Dancing helps speak for me through movements when my voice gets stuck.

Some of the ***barriers to finding support*** include having insurance cover and energy to deal with things. Finding a therapist can be expensive and the free support groups typically have a

waiting list. Energy is a big factor personally. I sometimes go into a deep depression and when that happens, I'll use taking a shower as an example. It's not just taking a shower. It's so many more steps than that. Getting up, walking to the bathroom, walking back to my room for clothes, trying to find what clothes I'll be comfortable in. Bring pants and a T-shirt in the bathroom. Pulling back the shower curtain, turning on the shower, waiting to find the right temperature, changing my mind for shorts and a sweater, going back into the bathroom, getting a clean towel, stepping into the pressured water, wetting my hair, picking up the shampoo, rising, picking up the conditioner, rinsing, picking up the soap, top body, half body, finding the comfort to turn off the shower, turning off the shower, stepping out, drying off, putting on shorts, putting on the sweater, drying hair, putting hair up. It was draining just writing that. When I'm in a deep depression, it's not just taking a shower, it's all the steps in between that make it so exhausting and daunting. So, I think to myself, I'll just not shower tonight. What's dangerous about that though, is one night turns into a couple of days, and then a couple of weeks and before you know it, it's a very big barrier to overcome.

### ***What supports are missing that would have been helpful***

Knowledge! I didn't even realise what sexual assault was until I was a bit older in high school. I think having an idea of what is appreciated and not appreciated would have been useful as a child. I also think that having a designated person in school systems to go to would be helpful. I remember my school saying that if I needed help, go to the teacher. Which teacher? Which teacher can I trust? Do I go to my math teacher who I think hates me because I'm failing their class? Do I go to my English teacher who my mom says she adores? In a time of panic, when there's too many choices, my trauma response was to freeze. So I did nothing and told no-one.

I did not ***report the sexual abuse*** from my adoptive family but I did for a separate assault. I was so fearful of my mother, what she would do. I'm still fearful of her as an adult. Even though I know that we're in different states across the country, the fear she instilled in me was a force.

When I told my mother about my father, she had two reactions. Her first reaction was disbelief, then she said, "I always told myself, if I ever had a daughter and she told me that "that" was happening, I would pack my bags and leave". She asked me again if I was positive and I became nervous of breaking up the family, so I said I don't know. The next week a second reaction occurred. She ended up assaulting me in the shower with a part of her body. It was painful. After that we never spoke about it again. For the longest time, I had no idea why that happened. I thought maybe it was punishment or some mind twisted jealousy based off her expressions, I'll never know why that happened, I just know that it did.

***What mental health professionals (counsellors, psychologists) need to know***

They should know that a sense of belonging plays a huge part. I've had several people tell me to leave and never talk to the abusers again. The tricky thing with adoption though is nature and nurture. Humans scientifically crave connection. We long for belonging. As an adoptee, I already lost my first family. To be able to walk away from a second family, from a second chance of belonging, it is not an easy task. I would like mental health professionals to provide more grace and understanding that walking away from our adoptive family may not be an option. Rather it's safety or timing, if it's not a current choice, what's the next best thing that is going to keep the person safe?

***What facilitators of adoption (adoption professionals, social workers, government workers) need to know***

If you get a call from Child Protection Services (CPS), please do everything in your legal power to see that call to the end. Don't just talk to the parent, ask to come in, ask neighbours. I had CPS call on my family three times and each time I looked at the person who came to our door and wished so badly that they would have taken me with them. I know it's more complicated than that and that substantial proof needs to occur.

What ***law enforcement and legal professionals need to know*** is for me, it's more than just getting justice.

I would like ***other adoptive parents to know*** that sexual abuse in adoption can happen. Not just with your spouse but family members as well. Always watch your children and educate them. Be a safe and trusting person to approach.

I would like ***fellow adoptee survivors of sexual abuse to know*** that if you hate yourself right now, there will come a day where you learn to like and love yourself. Even if it doesn't seem like it right now, one day, you'll look in the mirror and realise that you have value, worth and power.

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## Anonymous A

*Born in Ecuador, adopted to the USA*

### ***About my experiences of abuse***

My adoptive family was physically and emotionally abusive. The sexual abuse occurred because my adoptive father allowed me to be abused by a neighbour. My adoptive father didn't want to watch me evenings or weekends when my adoptive mother was working, he preferred to be at a bar. So when the neighbour offered to baby sit me he took up the offer. The neighbour had a daughter slightly older than me. My abuse started with her, this was due to her being abused. The neighbour then started playing games with us to hide the abuse that was actually occurring. When I talked to my adoptive mother, she told me, "Oh they never meant it". I was not removed from my home until my adoptive father's physical abuse was no longer able to be hidden. I was taken into foster care and that is when the sexual abuse was discovered. While at the hospital the nurses asked and I didn't know not to tell or even to hide it.

I can remember by six years old, I was wishing I no longer existed. I was not going to a doctor often enough and no paediatrician was asking about or checking me for abuse. I had told my teacher about being so sore I couldn't sit, but she just had me sit in a different chair. I was failing my classes yet tested as being intelligent. I can't recall anyone ever asking where the bruises came from, why I was crying or upset so often in school. I wish someone had come and asked me these things. I feel like if I hadn't been an adopted child the signs might have been noticed more. I also wonder if my race was a factor in the disbelief of my accounts as well. I feel they might have known but allowed this to continue because "it would've been worse" had I not been adopted from a developing country and was a minority.

When a child discloses not feeling safe, feeling uncomfortable, believe them. I was failed by teachers, doctors, other parents in my neighbourhood. The only people I felt that were safe, were my friends. I was out into therapy where white men, who looked like my adoptive parents and my abuser wanted me to discuss the details of my sexual assault. I wish I had a woman of colour, who was incredibly aware of all the previous loss my adoption had created.

### ***Assessment of adoptive parents prior to adoption***

Hopeful adoptive parents should have 1-2 years of intense therapy and training in childhood loss. It's very difficult to catch a predator before they have abused, or been caught, but knowledge

that adoptees suffer from it as much as biological children needs to be acknowledged and discussed. Private adoptions shouldn't happen, its too easy to pay to circumvent certain protocols.

I didn't know abuse wasn't normal until I was in a foster home where I had just a foster mother, no siblings, no men. I learned then that this wasn't a normal way to punish someone. I think ALL kids need to learn this at a very young age and adults in their circle of care need to know what signs to look for.

***How to better understand our behaviour after sexual abuse occurs, in relation to adoptive family dynamics***

I stopped referring to my adoptive father as "dad" I would refer to him as "him, he, that man" all trust had been broken and I never let my guard down again.

***When I disclosed about my sexual abuse to someone***, it wasn't that those I disclosed it to didn't believe me, they just didn't care. I was an object not a child with thoughts and feelings of my own. I truly believe had I been a white non adoptee, I might have been believed. Instead, what I got was that I should be grateful as otherwise "I could be dead or living on a trash pile".

I once had a teacher call my adoptive mother to ask about my disclosure. My adoptive mother said I was lying and I had to see the guidance counsellor for my "lying" problem.

Eventually my physical abuse was discovered and Child Protection Services were involved, but only then was my disclosure about the sexual abuse believed.

My adoptive parents were never actually charged for my abuses. They even had rights to visit me and the ability to regain custody of me. They stole my life and were never punished, they should have had to pay for my therapy into adulthood and had to pay support to me as well. When I should have been learning and developing like other kids I was in crisis mode and trying to survive.

***Feelings of shame and it's connection to sexual abuse and adoption***

When I was younger I felt scared and ashamed that I was no longer "pure" or a virgin. As a teen, I raged and acted out. I wanted to die. I bounced from unhealthy relationships to unhealthier relationship. As an adult I have struggled to explain that my adoption didn't save me and that it did more harm than anything. People are just so surprised that people would pay so much money and do so much work just to harm a child.

### ***Managing the ongoing adoptive family relationship***

Personally I have cut all ties to my adoptive family, even their friends are blocked from contact with me and my family. I have to think of the impact of having them in my life or the lives of my children or partner.

### ***Birth family reunion and the extra complications***

I have had no reunions but I would tell them in basic and simple terms.

### ***Impact in intimate relationships***

I struggle deeply with intimacy and trust. I don't know that I will ever be in a healthy relationship or be able to trust love, yet I deeply hope that I obtain it.

***Dealing with triggers*** (events, sensory things, memories being brought up, key people, that remind me of the abuse)

Learning what triggers are is a huge goal. I didn't know what they were for a long time and was often told to "get over things". This was unfair and not in my best interest. I am very proud of myself for learning what I need and to set boundaries or walk away from thing for my own happiness.

### ***The role religion plays in sexual abuse and adoption***

A lot of adopters are Christian and feel that adopting a child is a calling. They also have a strong belief in forgiveness, even though there has been no change in behaviours and often no acknowledgement of their part in our abuse. I honestly wish I could ban them from adopting because of this.

### ***Finding appropriately trained professional support***

I've struggled to find a therapist who understands that adoption by itself is a trauma. Healing is not linear, somedays it's a small little wave and other days I am in a torrential downpour of painful memories. I don't know who I am, so much of me was taken via my adoption and the various abuses that have occurred. The most helpful supports have been other adoptees who allow me the space to tell my truths. We need more of these groups!

***What mental health and adoption facilitators (counsellors, psychologists, government workers, social workers) need to know***

Before abuse happens, adoption is trauma. We act out and this makes us vulnerable to abuse. False labels like Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) blame the child and not the adults. Sexual abuse in adoption is much more prevalent than people believe!

***What law enforcement and legal professionals need to know***

Disclosure should always be believed and investigated, adoptees have complex issues and they are still kids who need help. They are desperately calling out and too many are going unheard. Our suicide rate is higher than non-adopted people. There are always signs!

***I would like other adoptive parents to know*** adoption is trafficking. If someone adopts and abuses the child they should be charged with trafficking and sex crimes internationally as well. I will never see it as anything else but that - and the law should add that as a charge against adoptive parents.

***I would like fellow adoptee survivors of sexual abuse to remember*** not give up, keep searching until you find someone that hears you. Your pain is valid and you matter!

I wish I was never adopted. Everyday of my life I have resented being taken from my country, my culture, my language, my teachings, my foods, my celebrations. I was taken so a white lady could have the "mommy experience" and what ended up happening is I almost died due to abuse, ended up in foster care, and have zero support system my entire adulthood. This is no one's dream.



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## Anonymous B

*Born in South Korea, adopted to the USA*

### Let Them Go

For many years, I agreed by the unwritten contract in our family. We don't call it abuse, let alone discuss it; we don't talk about the past; the child must honour and obey the parent; anything else is disloyal and ungrateful; you might as well *go back to where you came from* if you think otherwise.

Someone who is a psychologist would better be able to explain how human minds work. I only know what mine is like, in real time. What I can say is that in my 40s, after a long weekend with friends I've known for the majority of my life, I came to the realisation that I had never actually told them what went on in my family.

In my teen years, I only ever shared these stories about my family to one friend. In all honesty, it was a complicated and problematic friendship. The main bond between us was that both of our families were abusive and dysfunctional. We both were afraid that our brothers would kill us. I wrote in my journal at the time, "If I end up dead, please investigate my brother."

That is not a normal secret to keep.

Neither is the fact that my brother would leer at me and make suggestive sexual remarks. At one point, we were sitting at the kitchen table, and he stroked my hand and looked at me suggestively. I told on him to my parents, and my father grabbed my brother by the throat and shook and screamed at him.

That is also not a normal secret to keep.

My disgust with my brother made things difficult. I remember one time my parents wanted me to stay home with him so they could go out on their own. I had plans with friends that night, and declined. To avoid the strife, in my typical coping strategy, I went to my room and locked the door. My father furiously punched a hole in the door. No one was drunk or on any substances. This was just a typical day in our family.

None of these were normal secrets to keep.

I learned the art of secret-keeping from my mother. Her role in all of this was to shop a lot, and buy us new clothes. She tried to keep up with the Joneses the best she could, and being a devout Christian, she'd trot us out as a respectable family at church on Sundays. "You know, your father really loves you," she would say to me, and name material things like our big house with the pool and living in an upper-middle class neighbourhood as evidence of that love.

The cycle of my brother's creepy behaviour, my father's verbal abuse and violence, and my mother's enabling would continue for years. Decades, even. What is the cost of keeping the secrets of abuse?

I lost trust in myself. I spent my adolescence depressed and quasi-suicidal. I disassociated from my body and holed myself up in books and poetry, and escaped their household as soon as I could. In my 20s, I chose a poor match as a spouse, since I was adapted to both contempt and material privilege. In my marriage, I continued the strategy of locking myself in rooms and my spouse broke a couple of doors, too. I let him put me down, control our finances and my life.

In my mothers' footsteps, I kept up appearances quite well, until one day many years later, when the pain became too much to bear in what some might call a "midlife crisis," I could no longer. In my case, perhaps it should be reframed as a *midlife wake up call*. My intuition, an alarm from the universe, finally grew loud enough that I couldn't push it down anymore.

A brother being sexual toward you is not normal.

A father disparaging everyone, punching a hole in your bedroom door, and choking your sibling is not normal.

A mother buying your silence and treating you like a real-life doll is not normal.

A husband controlling and isolating you is not normal.

A daughter keeping all of this to herself is not normal.

Viewing my life with adult eyes, I know now that I shouldn't have had the burden of keeping up appearances. I don't think these circumstances are unique to adoptive families, they happen in biological families too. But the expected loyalty and gratitude from an adopted child, along with fears and trauma from already being different and experiencing loss might make speaking up even harder for adoptees.

"At least I have a family and a roof over my head" is a phrase I often would write in my journal. As an adult and a parent myself, I know this should be a human right and is only an entry level of parenting. Reading about extreme cases of abuse, I honestly didn't think my situation was

bad enough to warrant telling anyone, and I wondered if maybe I was complicit because of the privilege I gained by going with the flow. In this way, abuse can lie to you. There are no gold medals for an abuse Olympics. Maybe it's a survival coping mechanism, but once out of the fog, it's obvious that these types of rationalisations don't serve anyone but the abusers.

I encourage anyone who is still keeping their adoptive family's secrets as a way to show gratitude and earn their "love" to stop. Let the secrets go. Perhaps let the family go, too.

Start the process of real healing. The truth really will set you free.

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## Amy Bonilla

*Born in Colombia, adopted to the USA*

### ***About my experiences of abuse***

I was sexually abused at the age of three up until five years old when I was brought to FANA. I was sexually and physically abused by my two young captors in Colombia after they killed my father and told me that my mother had died. I believed my mother was deceased for 50 years but on 23 November 2020, I found out she was alive! On 27 November 2022 I had the chance to meet my mother and I visited Colombia for 3 months by myself! I was sexually abused again at the age of 6 when I entered my first placement in Massachusetts, USA. I lasted there seven short months and got placed into another home. I believe this was because they knew what their son was doing to me.

I was sexually abused and I am a survivor! Nobody is going to ever break me!

I think that several follow-ups should have occurred in my adoption within a month for at least a couple of years. I also think it would be a good idea if adoptees were allowed to possibly speak on the phone or by letter privately without the adoptive adult present, to a professional dealing with the adoption.

I'm not sure who I could have turned to for help in my situation because not everybody has somebody to turn to. I never thought or dreamt that I would have to defend myself at such a young age.

For those considering adopting a child, I suggest they be required to do a lot of research about living with and adopting. I was put in a family where the family already had an adoptee in the home from the same country. They always treated her different, I always got the short end of the stick. I was so used to it and I knew I was in this world alone.

For pre and post adoption education maybe they should have some kind of classes for the younger adoptees so they know what to look out for, what to avoid, what to say if the time comes that they need to defend themselves. My caregivers never taught me anything, they barely spoke to me.

I can't stand that word gratefulness in adoption! I was always told to be grateful that I was adopted, "Be thankful".

After my abuse happened I believe they knew what was going on and didn't know how to handle it so they called the adoption agency and said I couldn't live there anymore and they threw me out like a bag of s\*\*\*. They didn't find the problem and didn't look for it. The truth is, it was right under their nose because they were the ones who took me away from my family and their son was abusing me.

My second female caregiver slapped me across the face because I yelled out, "I wish you never adopted me!" I ran away at the age of 16 years old and nobody looked for me and I never went back. They never even knew about all my trauma and abuse. This was the second family I was placed in.

For whatever reason I knew the abuse wasn't my fault and I never felt ashamed. I felt a lot of anger and sadness for myself.

When I met my Colombian mother and my sisters I told them about my abuse. I didn't get it to details but it felt good to let them know some of the things that I had dealt with.

All my intimate relationships have been difficult. At the beginning certain things were difficult but I always handle it. My relationships with men have been challenging and that's all I'm going to say. I don't trust men therefore, I am single.

I never thought that I would get in a place in my life where I can talk about my adoption and all my trauma and abuse without crying and getting into an anxiety or panic mode. When I talk about it now, it feels good and that is because of my healing. The only time I get triggered was when I was doing EMDR treatments and I stopped going after spending thousands of dollars.

Unfortunately for me I am not a religious person. I do believe in God but I have a hard time understanding all the concepts and all the fine print that goes along with it. I am trying and working on having a better relationship with God. I know one thing that used to get me upset and it still does is when people say to have faith. I don't agree with that statement because you can have all the faith in the world and you can believe in God all you want and sometimes things happen in life that we have no control over. I guess the only control that we have is how we deal with the aftermath. S\*\*\* I used to get abused after attending church.

My healing journey has included a lot of ups and downs as can be expected. I am the type that holds everything in but I have felt comfortable speaking about anything in adoptee groups. I feel comfortable to say I am at the end of my healing journey because of my reunion. It's hard to

explain but I feel whole and I know where I belong so therefore half of my depression and sadness has been lifted. I am comfortable and I love who I see when I look in the mirror! I used to pray that I would never wake up and now I pray to live! I am a survivor, I am Amy Bonilla from Colombia living in Massachusetts!! 🙏

Finding adoptee groups where I can talk about my abuse has been helpful compared to speaking about it with anybody else because I know they don't know what it's like to be adopted or to be abused. I did everything on my own.

There should absolutely be trained professional support for every adoptee! In my case I knew it was too late and I didn't have anybody that I felt comfortable to speak to. I held everything in my heart and mind. I only spoke of it in my 40s.

If you are an adoptee survivor of abuse, you are not alone, don't give up, there are better days ahead.

A lot of the sexual abuse that adoptees endure would never be possible if there was no such thing as adoption and if routine periodic checks occurred on adoptees when they are placed outside of their genetic family.

I am 55 now and it is way too late to report the abuse and nothing will change what happened. I am okay where I am with my healing of being adopted. If somebody had came and checked up on me when I was six, I know I would have spoken up because I have been opening gates and doors and trying to run away since the age of three.

When I learned about Facebook, I opened up an account solely for my adoption search. I looked my abuser up and sent him a little message. It said, "Hello, I am not not seven anymore. I want you to know that I remember what you used to do to me especially after church. I want you to know that I'm not going to disrupt your life or use your name. I just want you to know I remember and I will never forget. God bless you." I gave him one week to respond and he never did, so I just blocked him.

I have a voice now and I will use it and speak whenever I want to! I pray for those who don't have a voice and those who are suffering at the hands of others. I would love to sue everybody that was involved in my adoption but unfortunately all of them are dead. I wish I could sue my high school for allowing a 16 year old to quit school and run away.

***What mental health and adoption facilitators (counsellors, psychologists, government workers, social workers) need to know***

This is a hard question for me because I never was in professional counselling of any kind. I never wanted to sit down with a total stranger and tell all my drama problems and everything else. When I walk out the door everything is going to be the same, all they want is money in my opinion. Some might say well I'm doing more or less the same thing now but in all reality it's different to me because most of us have lived experiences with the issues we are left with. I spent thousands of dollars on EMDR treatments that did absolutely nothing but give me reoccurring nightmares and flashbacks that I did not want to have. My opinion also, I don't believe in medication however I am a cannabis smoker. I spent 7 years on all kinds of medication that wasn't doing anything or making me feel any different so I took myself off of them. I do believe that when an individual is adopted, counselling should automatically be a part of that plan. Adoption sucks!

***What mental health and adoption facilitators (counsellors, psychologists, government workers, social workers) need to know***

I think that children who are placed in foster care and children who are adopted should be checked up on periodically! I know for a fact if somebody had came and checked up on me when I was six I would have ran out the door and told them what was happening in my first placement. Just because papers get signed does not mean that adoptees are safe. I think that should automatically be part of the process of adoption and these parents should be going to certain classes to know how to be there for an adoptee. So many different things should change especially being allowed to change our names. How is that even legal if we can't attach a plate to a vehicle, how is a human allowed to be involved in changing another human's name? We get robbed of so much as adoptees. It should most definitely be the law to have professionals check on every individual. Aren't we taught as children not speak to nor take things from strangers but yet here we are dealing with adoption and sexual abuse and other forms of abuse.

***I would like adoptive parents to look into*** all the damage and suffering that comes along with being adopted. We should not be responsible to fix problems that adults create.

***My message to other adoptees is*** you did not deserve this and this pain is not your fault. Keep fighting because you belong in this world and you matter! Brighter and better days are coming. Sometimes it takes us longer than others to get where we want to be but you will be there! Never give up and pray 🙏.

I am very blessed and thankful that I had the chance to meet my mother and about 70 members of my Colombian family in 2022. My reunion with my family has been everything that I

wished and dreamed of. I happen to be the fourth of six girls. My older sister lives in Spain so I get to visit both Colombia and Spain.



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## Broken Sun

*Born overseas, adopted to Australia*

### **Society does not see**

Society does not see the unsafe family environment

Society sees an adoptee

Society expects the adoptee to be grateful

Society does not see the naked adoptee experiencing unwanted, skin-to-skin contact from their adoptive parent

Society sees an adoptee wearing a fancy school uniform

Society expects the adoptee to be grateful

Society does not see the adoptive parent creating perverse material

Society sees an adoptive parent

Society expects the adoptee to be grateful

Society does not see the adoptive parent naming the adoptees' sexual organs

Society sees an adoptive parent

Society expects the adoptee to be grateful

Society does not see an abuser

Society sees a female adoptive parent

Society expects the adoptee to be grateful

Society does not see a victim

Society sees an adoptee

Society expects the adoptee to be grateful

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## Dayna

*Born in the Philippines, adopted to the USA*

### ***About my experiences of abuse***

I was born in Manila Philippines adopted by an American family who were also my foster family. Many people hope that a child will be in a safer home after they have been adopted. When I was about 2-3 years old my adoptive dad would sneak into the bedroom I shared with my older sister when she was away at school activities. He would come to my bed at least 2 times a week and check to see if I was sleeping. I was sharing a room with my adopted parent's youngest biological daughter who is 11 yrs older than me. When I was the only one in the room he would come over to my bed and start fingering me. This happened until I was about 4 yrs old.

When I was in my early 20's, I started having nightmares about what happened. I told my adoptive mom about what happened a few times and she denied it and wouldn't listen to me. Her response - "He was your dad, he loved you! He would never do something like that." I hadn't told her until after he had passed away in 1994. I was 17 yrs old at that time. I disconnected myself from my adoptive family after that. Finally in my late 30's, early 40s she finally realized what happened.

It impacted me immensely that the family who adopted me was supposed to protect me, not hurt me further. If I knew back then what I know now, I would have reported the abuse when I was older.

Being adopted and abused sexually is so complex. My adoptive mom was ashamed of things I've done because it made her look bad. Whereas I've always stayed busy and made sure I was working all the time so I didn't have to deal with my adoptive family. I've always felt like I never belonged.

If I could I would reconnect with my birth family, I want to know who I came from and yes I would tell them about what has happened to me in my adoptive family.

The impacts of sexual abuse have impacted me in intimate relationships. I became more sexually active after I turned 18 and it's impacted some relationships because of my fears from my past. I've gone through therapy to deal with the triggers and emotions but I didn't disclose about the sexual abuse from my adoptive father until my 30s. Therapy helps to be able to safely vent and just talk to someone. It's been a rough journey healing a lot of emotions and memories that were buried and needed to come out. My nightmares stopped. But during the holidays it seems to

trigger them and I tend to keep myself busy to manage this. I also have some close friends who I can talk to. The biggest challenges I face is knowing how to stay in a relationship and not to be afraid to be intimate with the other person. I've tended to stay to myself but I wish I could have found a group of people who shared a similar experience. It might have helped me when I was younger to learn how to cope better.

***My message for fellow adoptee survivors*** is stay strong, it wasn't your fault that it happened. You are a survivor and a warrior. Keep going forward one step at a time!

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# Hyun Martin

*Born in South Korea, adopted to the USA*

## ***About my experiences of abuse***

It started once I arrived to the USA at 4½ years old by my adoptive dad coming and getting under the covers in my bunk bed for a few months and asking me to hold his "thumb" under the covers and it was his penis. Then we moved into a bigger trailer home and he was alone with me and would get into my bed under the covers.

## ***Lack of independent followup***

It truly is about power over a child with no oversight after the adoption and child is handed over. I think that it is an economic problem of first world countries perpetrators having access to third world country's children.

## ***Who to turn to for help***

I hope that there are better resources than what was available back in the 1960's and 1970's. There is still the stigma of shame, blame and guilt. For me, there weren't good places to turn to and my adoptive mom was in denial and blamed me for the occurrences at 12 years old.

## ***Assessment of adoptive parents prior to adoption***

If I were assessing prospective parents, I would find out if there is alcoholism and a domestic violence history. Mine was a private familial adoption as I was adopted by my maternal aunt.

## ***Not being believed about the sexual abuse I experienced***

It was devastating at 12 years old to be told if it happens again it was and is my fault by my adoptive mom/maternal aunt. At 17 years old, being denied that it was okay and told to just forget it. Again at 18 years old, that forgiveness as a Christian is required. It leaves a binding shame, guilt and blaming of self throughout life.

## ***How to better understand our behaviour after sexual abuse occurs, in relation to adoptive family dynamics***

There becomes a power struggle between the perpetrator and victim. The people pleasing and the grooming by sexual predators goes hand in hand. I was not only abused sexually by my adoptive dad, but by other male figures - children and adults.

## ***The role expectations of gratefulness plays, in relation to sexual abuse in adoption***

This impact was huge as my biological family was sponsored to America. Another family realized the deviant nature of my family and protected themselves but didn't protect me.

### ***Reporting the sexual abuse to relevant authorities***

It wasn't reported, everyone involved didn't want to. They wanted me to forget it. They didn't want to know the ongoing attempts by my adoptive dad to continue to sexually proposition and rape me until I left Texas.

### ***Feelings of shame and it's connection to sexual abuse and adoption***

Shame, blame and guilt were so ingrained and put upon me at 4½ years old and continued to be compounded with the frequency and duration of years of abuse, followed by more years of attempted abuse that went well into my adulthood. I've worked through enough of it to be able to publicly acknowledge it. I wrote a book and I have talked about it in many communities and forums.

### ***Managing the ongoing adoptive family relationship***

Make it okay not to have contact. Allowing oneself to be important enough to claim my power and to choose to intervene if necessary as a compassionate person, not necessarily as a daughter. I ended up severing these ties in my 50s only to deal with them in their aging. Once I got them into an Assisted Living and Memory Care Unit, I left.

### ***Cutting ties from adoptive family***

I did cut ties for 5 years when I turned 50 and a client said, "Why are you still playing the dutiful daughter? You shouldn't be forced to be grateful anymore!" I did stop. My adoptive/biological brother called and guilted me about not staying in touch and got me back into being the dutiful daughter to get them into safe housing and taking the keys away from my adoptive dad dealing with dementia and a depressed zombie adoptive mom. It continues to haunt me in that my adoptive mom/maternal aunt continues to deny it. She blames me for not being a good daughter.

***Birth family reunion and the extra complications of "do I tell them about the abuse within the adoption"?***

I did tell at 17 and was told to forget about it and treat everyone in their respective roles with gratitude. My adoptive parents had sponsored the rest of my biological family. I did tell, they all wanted to know nothing and continue life as if it didn't happen.

### ***Impact in intimate relationships***

Definitely was impactful as I was sexualised and didn't act appropriately for my young age. I used my sexuality as a weapon and didn't value sex/love until much later. I was so much more attuned to being sexual. I figured sex was love and attention. I also had messed up boundaries and would get drunk and have sex.

***Dealing with triggers*** (events, sensory things, memories being brought up, key people, that remind me of the abuse)

My college sweetheart had a taste of what I went through to evade having sex with my adoptive dad. I also was dissociative and from childhood was in the present moment without the ability to believe in love and stability. We both had our childhood wounds that created drama cycles of abuse. I am working on healing it for once with do overs for both of us. We still trigger each other's wounds, but much less so and without the devastating consequences of infidelity like before where I was not able to say no and having my sexuality and sexual needs met on a daily basis.

### ***The role religion plays in sexual abuse and adoption***

Being raised Christian and at age 18, my adoptive mom came and said she was divorcing my adoptive dad. The gratefulness of being rescued and God's will impacted my life significantly.

### ***When I disclosed about my sexual abuse to someone, this is how I was responded to***

At the time, I remember telling my girlfriend around 12 or 13 years old. At least she was sympathetic unlike my adoptive and biological families who both wanted to pretend it never happened. When I disclosed to my adoptive mom at age 12 years old, she said, "If it happens again it's your fault." It happened and I was blamed by both parents.

### ***Finding appropriately trained professional support***

I did a lot of work to heal from this complex long history. I think a big portion of the shame is that my body responded to the sexual stimulation and I felt so guilty. I didn't have compassion for myself that my choice was taken from me at 4½ years old by being sexually groomed and stimulated, being a sex toy. I found a great counsellor that was willing to explore different modes of therapy and did 2 hours a week instead of one. We had 2 hours to explore and find resolution. The witnessing and validation was also helpful.

### ***The healing journey & challenges***

It took years of both intense therapy, hard work, transpersonal psychology, somatic practices, Hoffman Process work, human potential work, and coaching to get to a place where I sublimated my past and found wholeness. I continue to use all these tools to help. It affected my mental and physical health as I carried weight as a protection. I also struggled with self worth and rebelled against many status quos.

I found it is hard road to navigate for anyone dealing with incest and the taboo of sex, coupled with the extra layer of people pleasing as an adoptee for survival. Letting go of the shameful secret of sexual abuse is a challenge. We need more women willing to talk about their abuse.

### ***The supports I found most helpful***

Until recently, there weren't adoptee support groups that I knew about. I was alone in the process of healing until I actually started talking and writing about the experience. Now I know there are peer groups of women survivors, adoptee groups and the healing journey as a Healer.

### ***Reporting the abuse***

I have not reported my abuse. It was so long ago, my adoptive parents were thankfully in Texas and I was in Washington, DC. The perpetrator is dead since 2017.

### ***What mental health professionals (counsellors, psychologists) need to know***

There are so many mixed emotions complicated by the adoption and anxiety that follows, along with preverbal trauma that happens from separation between mother and child alone. The sexual abuse part is so complicated and whether it gets normalised into our daily routine at a young age. We adoptees are so vulnerable. Sexualised behaviour is taught from a young age and we are groomed for the man's desires and needs.

I would like ***other adoptive parents to know*** it can happen - uncles, cousins, grandfathers and family friends are all possible perpetrators. As an adoptee, people pleasing was my super power. So wanting to naturally please everyone can be abused by those in power.

***I would like fellow adoptee survivors of sexual abuse to know*** it was not your fault and it's worth going on the healing journey to reclaim your innocence and take back the power of choice. Life can be lived with the past and your power being reclaimed. Hugs and blessings 🤝 🙏  
Love, Grace and Peace

## ***About my experiences of abuse***

### Introductory Reflections

*Grooming v Assault:* My early experience with sexual abuse involved grooming by male and female siblings. Unlike assault, grooming conditions made reporting difficult since I feared losing the only caring relationships I had experienced. Grooming conditions also made me protect my male sibling from disapproving adults and peers. Sexual grooming made difficult the process of recognising all forms of abuse including sexual assault.

*Normalising abuse:* I learned to normalise all forms of abuse and neglect from authority figures. When abuse is normalised, it difficult to recognise sexual abuse as extraordinary.

### ***Reporting Abuse***

I was adopted before any meaningful intercountry adoption regulations. However, the taboo nature of sexual abuse coupled with American privacy laws, makes difficult the reporting process in any adoption era. Additionally, adoptees struggle to feel safe, equal, empowered, stable, or secure, which makes the process of reporting even more difficult, and unlikely. During early adolescence, I reported to authorities, the physical and emotional abuse by my adoptive parents. My complaints were ignored because my father was a religious minister. Later, when I was assaulted by a male student at school - reporting never occurred. It took years to recognise the seriousness of that violation. The lack of adult support and care in smaller abuses normalised larger abuses, particularly sexual abuse and sexual assault. Similar to the student assault, it took years for me recognise I had been raped on multiple occasions during adulthood.

### ***Emotional effects of adoption related sex abuse***

Shame and guilt over childhood sexual abuse become imbedded in one's development. Adding the many layers of complex issues adoptees deal with - identity uncertainty, lack of biological grounding, racial differences in the home, sex abuse by family members handicaps the ability to develop either an accurate sense of ourselves or a healthy self-appreciation. At age 58, I still struggle with each.



### ***Sexual abuse and relationships***

The impact of sexual abuse on intimate relationships is immense. Sexual grooming challenges consensual relationships by muddying normal and appropriate personal and relational boundaries. Studies have long linked groomed victims with both toxic relationships and self-harm. The impact to adoptive family relationships is also significant. Though I no longer feel obligated to my adoptive family, the thought of confronting or reporting is daunting.

### ***Adoption related sex abuse therapy***

Sex abuse in adoption represents a unique set of *abuse of power* dynamics, especially for transracial adoptees. Finding trained experts who are familiar with these issues can be extremely challenging. I haven't yet found a trusted counsellor. On two separate occasions, I attempted to raise sex abuse during therapy sessions but observed what felt like was an "over interest" by therapists. Adoption related sexual abuse deserves specific focus as a mental health discipline.

### ***Religion and Adoption***

Accountability for sexual abuse among religious communities is challenged by privacy laws that protect families and church organizations from government oversight. Beyond the dangers of privacy protections, religious dogma typically communicates negative or hostile, or evasive messages toward sexual behaviour which further protects abusers through shame that the victim comes to internalise. The idea that sexual awareness or activity was "sinful" exacerbated my feelings of shame, guilt, and self-rejection. Religious affiliation for prospective adoptive families should be viewed as an opportunity to ensure child protections measure up.

### ***Recommendations***

- i. Adoptees sexually victimised by his or her adopters ought to have funded mental health care.
- ii. Sexual abuse education ought to be mandatory for adoptive parents, family members, and all adoption industry stakeholders.
- iii. Governments should remove all legal statutes of limitation on sex abuse crimes for adopted persons to allow legal vindication and funded services at any stage of life.
- iv. Reporting processes and channels ought to be equipped with adoption trauma specialists rather than by traditional law enforcement officials.

The healing journey for an adoptee who has lived through sexual abuse is life long and comprehensive. Emotional trauma leads to physical health problems. For example, elevated levels of cortisol from trauma has caused a lifelong nightmare disorder and severe sleep deprivation which cause a myriad of other physical and emotional challenges.

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## Jennifer Lewis

*Born in Russia, adopted to the USA*

***“Your parents are such angels for adopting you.”***

I heard this countless times as a child, usually from other adults who admired my parents for adopting a little girl from halfway across the world. Well into adulthood, new acquaintances continued to praise two people they never met for their good deed the moment they found out I was adopted.

I’ve always resented that statement intensely. The more observant ones who knew my parents and noted my silent irritation often followed up with, “That’s just how they are, they are too old to change - you just have to learn to accept them.” Even fans on some level recognised the people they put on a pedestal had abrasive personalities, but they quickly rushed to rationalise it because they were more focused on seeking proximity to the status that they themselves so longed to have. And that remained the priority.

I grew up around a lot of famous people. My parents were in the hospitality business and made it their life purpose to entertain the rich and powerful – names you see in the news every day.

Looking back, I realise that my parents’ business, while lucrative, didn’t quite account for the level of hedonism they regularly enjoyed. Multiple international vacations per year at five-star resorts, dropping several grand on a pair of shoes like it was nothing, private schools with tuitions that rivalled Ivy league universities, living in a mansion in the nicest part of town just a short distance from the nation’s biggest movers and shakers. That could not be paid for by their business alone.

Classmates often envied my lifestyle, especially when my parents would appear in yet another magazine article or TV show, painting an idyllic version of our relationship and life that only existed in front of cameras.

Little did they know that hidden beneath the lavishness and frequent partying was a moral bankruptcy far more profound than most who do not mingle in this world can fathom. What they didn’t know was that for all the money they dropped on the latest fashions and luxury travel, they seemed to never have any for my medical care. For all the money they spent on high-count

bedsheets and the nicest suite in the best hotel, the heavenly experience was only for them. For me, it was a personal hell. I woke up next to my father most of those mornings.

It started soon after I was adopted. He slept with me most nights, in both senses of the word, while on vacation and at home, in hotel rooms and in my bedroom. The excuse was that he snored too loud for my mother and she kicked him out, forcing him to wander into my neighbouring room. In reality, he wanted the warmth, affection, and everything else. This was just one of many ways the “wife” role was projected onto me. My adoption felt like a mail order bride, underage edition.

My parents would soak up the praise and glory meanwhile, they regularly reminded me just how much I cost. When we would go to stores to browse, since shopping was a favourite past time of theirs, my father would take a price sticker off some cheap item and place it on my forehead. He would laugh and say, “That’s how much you cost,” highly amused by his own sense of humour. While kidding, his joke highlighted an underlying truth: I was an endless source of free labor. I way more than paid for myself. I was to them, the best investment they ever made.

My parents hosted on average two parties a week. I did the serving and bussing. I also had to give massages. I waited on my parents, siblings, extended family, and any of their friends any time they visited. I had to be at the ready at any moment. I was expected to drop whatever I was doing to serve them, even if it was important, like homework.

My parents also brought me to elite parties, ones that household names regularly attended. There, it went far beyond massages. I had to do sex work for people who still, all these years later, regularly appear in the news. There were also rituals some of the regulars did that involved multiple perpetrators and being forced to do child-on-child acts.

Sometimes my father would bring me to a hotel room so one of his clients could have the whole night with me. They could play out any fantasy. Most of them had pretty extreme fetishes. Not only were they into kids, they were into a lot of sadistic, violent stuff. They liked to mix in torture, bodily fluids, objects, humiliation, role-play, you name it.

I have a brain injury that caused a major disability, spine issues and permanent pelvic damage from it all. The constant high pain levels I live with closely mirror the pain of the abuse and cause me to drown in flashbacks. There is no escape because I am deeply triggered by existing in my own body. Because I was trained to perform through torture, I push through the pain to work full-time.

Employment was my ticket to freedom because they could no longer hang survival needs over my head as a means of control. That said, I pour one third of my salary into medical care to manage the aftermath.

“You should sue!” people tell me. I appreciate the righteous anger and indignation behind this response. Unfortunately, seeking justice through legal avenues is futile. With the connections my parents have, they can make anything or anyone disappear. They regularly openly broke laws right in front of the police because they knew they were untouchable. Our legal system serves the most privileged first and foremost. Some of my perpetrators were part of our so-called “justice” system as well and would only use their tremendous power to protect themselves, not the vulnerable people they hurt.

I share my story because I am not alone. I know several other adoptees personally who were severely abused by their adoptive parents and I know a few who were treated as live-in unpaid servants and sex trafficked as well. We are the double and triple trafficked: trafficked across borders through adoption only to then also be labor and sex-trafficked within our new communities and homes. These horrors are allowed to go on without any suspicion or scrutiny because they are conveniently wrapped up by the false narrative that adoption is always such a noble, beautiful and selfless decision.

I know that my experiences and fellow adoptees in the same boat fall on the extreme end of a spectrum of inhumanity. I know that all adoption experiences are not this heavy and oppressive. However, my hope is that the obvious unjust cases prompt questions that should be asked about every adoption. We need to stop assuming that adoption is inherently kind and altruistic. We need to understand that at least some, if not many or most, adoptive parents adopt for either partially or entirely selfish reasons. We need to be willing to sniff around for possible elements of exploitation and de-humanisation in any adoption story.

We need to remember that while some adoptive parents are genuinely good-hearted and have pure motives, others have hidden agendas. Based on the many stories I’ve witnessed, I would say most adoptive parents fall somewhere in between, with a complex mix of selfish and altruistic intentions. When I volunteered for an adoption agency for several years, I saw the full range of dynamics.

Even in well-intentioned cases, uncomfortable adoptee truths are too often painted over with a veneer of what society wants to believe. It is time for society to look past the façade and start to

really analyse the structures behind the practice of adoption as a whole. Set aside the narratives we have all been taught about adoption and start listening to adoptees. Our lived experiences bring forth an insider perspective that allows us to identify underlying dynamics which remain largely invisible to onlookers. Believe us when we highlight the unseen parts and recognise that you may have formed an inaccurate picture of adoption based on missing information. Things are not always as they appear.

Many adoptees' criticisms are legitimate and well-founded. Our traumas are just as real as any other group that has the least power in any situation. Too often we are blamed for our trauma responses and written off as "bitter and ungrateful". What many forget is that the trauma of relinquishment and forced separation is just the beginning for many of us. These core wounds are compounded by mistreatment and abuse in a lot of cases.

We are resilient. We are strong. And like all survivors, our truths matter. We deserve justice.

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# Journey Caminata

*Born in the Philippines, adopted to the USA*

## **Invisibility within Adoption**

Forward

The purpose of this paper is to serve as a resource for adoptees first and foremost who have struggled with being invisible throughout the adoption enterprise. Second, this paper provides a background for our families and other allies that want to improve life, lives, and love. May this serve to help us heal in our journey back to love in each cycle that we are trying to overturn.

### ***Linkin Park - Fighting MYSELF***

*Now, sometimes these thoughts in my head speak so loud  
Everything little that I think about  
Just builds on top of the pain & doubt  
Even though I wanna just let it out  
I try to act like I don't mind it, try to keep my mouth so quiet  
But sitting' there in my silence just seems to amplify it  
When I thought that keepin this inside would make it better  
I never thought that I would end up ruining it forever  
But every time I think I got everything put back together  
I end up making more regrets, making more regrets*

*Falling from grace, I watch it all come apart  
Knowing I could've changed it all from the start  
Fighting myself, I always lose  
Fighting myself, I always lose*

*I don't want you to think I'm worn out so easily  
I wish I'd held it in so you never knew what build up inside of me  
Now I don't know how it overflows, spilled out unwillingly  
But now everything that I learned to hate came out for you to see  
I don't want you to promise you can change everything and make it better  
'Cause you can bet I'm gonna end up ruining it forever  
And everytime you think you got everything put back together  
I end up making more regrets, making more regrets*

x2

*Falling from grace, I watch it all come apart  
Knowing I could've changed it all from the start  
Fighting myself, I always lose  
Fighting myself, I always lose*

x2

*I can't run with this weight on my back  
I can't see 'cause I'm focused on the past  
I can't breath, I need to break free  
From the anger that is constantly inside me*

x2

*Falling from grace, I watch it all come apart  
Knowing I could've changed it all from the start  
I can't breath, I need to break free  
From the anger that is constantly - inside of me!*

## **Chapter 1 - The Experience**

### ***Repeated Incidents***

The first time it happened, the day was supposed to be a festive occasion with relatives visiting from out of state. I remember hanging out with my cousin and her parents and enjoying a weekend away from the *house*. House of horrors of my childhood memories. Eleven years old and already used to physical abuse, food manipulations, and daily survival life. I remember him asking for me to come to his bedroom and I went. I remember the smell. And I remember the pain. That was the first time. I don't remember how many times after. It's blocked in my mind. I do remember after that day, I was awakened many nights and had to beg to be left alone. This happened up until I was at least into teenage years. These memories pop up when I think of common childhood things like my nephew calling me, people talking about their childhood nightmares, or when kids are laughing. Simple daily actions that trigger me back to these repeated incidents.

### ***Questioning***

Due to the abusive environment, I learned early on that my welfare and opinions did not matter in any real aspect. One parent was the main culprit of abuse. The other was a bystander that did not step in. The outside world, while a safe haven for me, was not willing to commit to interfering. While still in elementary school, social services visited the house. I remember the



social worker questioning my parental unit. *Denial, denial, denial.* I received a severe beating once she left.

After that day, I understood that I had to figure out a game plan if I was to make it to adulthood. Survive, so that I can get to an age where I could finally have control of my life. I never even knew that sexual abuse was an option but continued to happen. It became another added factor that I needed to survive through to get to the new life I knew I would build.

I questioned my sanity. I questioned many times because of that first time I walked into his bedroom - that I chose it. I wasn't aware what was going to happen. But I chose to go to his bedroom. I didn't choose what happened nor anytime after that. But I allowed it to happen that first time. They say that boys - if you allow them a little, they will take a lot. And so I carry that guilt in me. Right or wrong. I remember as young adults giggling as they recount their first sexual time. I sat there thinking what do I say as this is a major trigger of memories? It's the vicious cycle of remembering my childhood memories. While I am a healing person, the roller coaster of sadness, anger, confusion and even doubt creeps through my mind in 2.5 seconds. Am I even sure this happened the way I remember it? It sounds crazy to verbalise and even hear out loud. I knew it happened. But who was going to believe me?

### ***Invisibility***

The invisible feeling starts at a young age. *You must not speak, you must not look at me - out of sight, out of mind. When the other parental unit comes home, make sure you are not around.* The expectation was to be as small as I can be. I could not stand up for myself for the verbal assaults I endured. I could not speak up when the physical attacks continued to happen. There was not even an option to consider once the sexual abuse started.

## **FOR ADOPTEES**

### **Resources**

As the consistent recipient, it may be hard to report abuse. Multiple forms of abuse become normal and the longer it has been happening - affects your confidence to speak up. I knew that the pain hurt but I did not know if this was not a normal childhood that others had to endure too. Below are USA websites to access information on what sexual abuse consists of and how it may be reported. If reporting is too much to consider - read through the various resources on how sexual violence has life long effects on its survivors. For non-US organizations, research local resources that are in your country.

D2L - [Darkness to Light](#)

NAESV - National Alliance to End Sexual Violence

RAINN - National Sexual Assault Hotline

TBTN - Take Back the Night

## ■ Normalcy

As survivors, our definition of love, trauma and safety is skewed. Love may be fleeting hints of affection in between the torment. So as a child, we chase after affection or even peace like candy during Halloween; enjoyed for mere moments before turning into tummy aches. It comes with the joy. Trauma is just daily life; like attending to chores, abuse happening nightly is another monster we have to wake up from. Safety may mean I have to earn a whole night of sleep or earn food to avoid the hunger pains. If this was daily life for me, I assumed this must be life for all.

The emotions and the family makes it confusing for children who just do not understand how to view how wrong the environment really is. The Veterans Affairs writes, “A small number of abused children might not realise it is wrong, though. These children tend to be very young or have developmental delays. Also some victims might enjoy the attention, closeness, or physical contact with the abuser. This is more likely to be the case if these basic needs are not met by a caregiver. All told, these reactions make the abuse very hard and confusing for children.” In combination as children age, the shame and realisation that their normalcy isn’t right, make it harder to open up.

Resource: [https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/types/sexual\\_trauma\\_child.asp](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/types/sexual_trauma_child.asp)

## ■ Voiceless

I wish I had a voice back then. I believe that now because I have a firm loud voice, my perpetrators are scared to even discuss the past. It is important to build our voice over time. It is important to be able to speak up during times when we believe things are not right. It is even just as important to be able to question things. As victims, we lost the right to have a voice or even hear our own voices. It's important that we practice building and standing firm in our voice. Vocalizing or even journaling, so that we practice the ability to have confidence in hearing our own experiences.

In 2022 the UK’s House of Commons printed the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse - a study done by several professors that interviewed thousands of victims called the Truth Project. When asked why they chose to participate in these studies, many just wanted to be heard. Twenty-one percent of Truth Project participants wanted the opportunity to tell someone in authority about their experiences; 15 percent wanted their account to be believed. For some, this was because they had previously not been listened to or taken seriously when they disclosed that they

had been sexually abused. As adults it can be easier to speak more truths, but it starts with establishing a voice that needs to be heard.

Resource: <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/inquiry/interim/overview/truth-project.html>

## TO ALLIES

### ■ Combination of Abuse

I've been asked several times why I did not reveal the sexual abuses that I endured. How could I tell parents that believed I was the bad apple child and believed it was their right to punish me however they wanted and how often they wanted? How do I tell others when the family threatened me on a daily basis that if I told others of what happens at home, which punishment will I receive? Truth Project details in Figure C.1 that in combination with sexual violence, physical, psychological and emotion abuse were prevalent (30). Young children through teenage years are brainwashed to fear more the abusers than what happens external to the house. How are children confident enough to report when they are already broken down? Some are just fighting to sleep enough, get to the next meal, or sometimes just to stop crying. Thinking of beyond one day, may be a lot on a child's shoulder that is too much for them to comprehend.

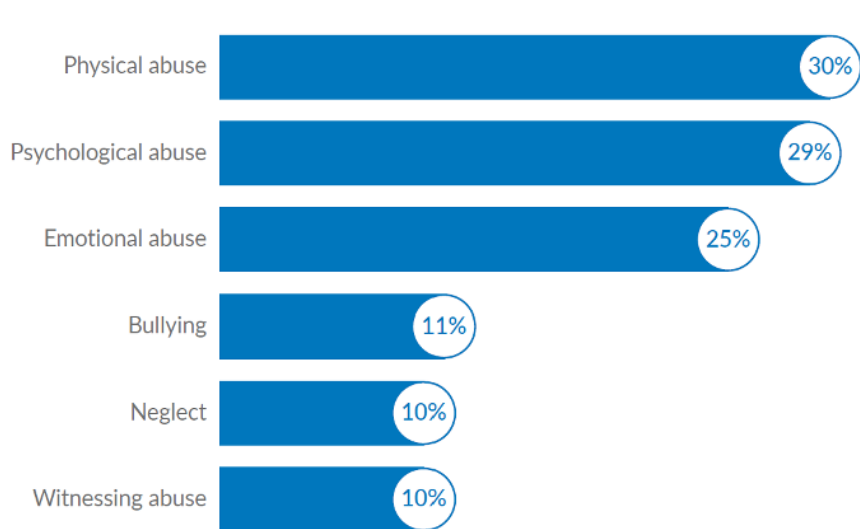


Figure C.1: Proportion of Truth Project participants who reported experiencing other forms of child abuse and neglect\*

Resource: [2.1 The Truth Project | IICSA Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#)

### ■ Non Biological Elements

Vulnerable children only understand the experience of not having family and the strong desire to be wanted by someone. Once in foster care or adoption, it is expected of adoptees to accept and be grateful for the opportunity to witness the power of humanity's kindness. Adoptees

are placed into family situations without authority, real protection or enough background. This can create an atmosphere that is susceptible for abuse to happen. I was unaware of my adoption status as a child, but the family including my abuser had the knowledge and power. “Children living without either parent (foster children) are 10 times more likely to be sexually abused than children that live with both biological parents. Children who live with a single parent that has a live-in partner are at the highest risk: they are 20 times more likely to be victims of child sexual abuse than children living with both biological parents (Sedlack, et. al., 2010). Non biological elements may be a justification in the perpetrators minds and the adoptees believe they are unlovable because of their bad actions.

Resource: <https://cachouston.org/prevention/child-sexual-abuse-facts/>

### ■ Care for the Adult - Abused Child

As an adult now, I am able to share my experiences. In the next chapter I will discuss how this has had a major impact in my teenage and young adult life. Sharing childhood abuses is tough even with (new) family and friends. Sometimes being heard or just being allowed to speak about it, is enough. I encourage allies to research ways to connect and support those who struggle to process this at various times in their life. People have well meaning questions but it often leaves me feeling like I should have done more. Or I’ve shared my accounts and met with absolute silence. Then I felt empty and embarrassed afterward. Not because of my history but because I shared something so personal and left feeling raw and vulnerable. Others responded that all people have struggles when they are young. I do not dispute that fact, just do not diminish my hurt because it may have been more or less severe than someone else’s experience. Listen, love, and hug. RAINN is an organization that compiles resources for loved ones that want to support their family member that struggles with childhood abuse.

Resource: [https://rainn.org/articles/help-someone-you-care-about?](https://rainn.org/articles/help-someone-you-care-about?ga=2.173890019.1572783026.1729828502-875932151.1729828502)  
[ga=2.173890019.1572783026.1729828502-875932151.1729828502](https://rainn.org/articles/help-someone-you-care-about?ga=2.173890019.1572783026.1729828502-875932151.1729828502)

## Chapter 2 - The Effects

### *The Struggle*

From a teenager to young adulthood I struggled with sexual behaviour and relationships. Sex was a transaction and relationships are painful. The religious and social context of sex is to *keep this diamond that is rare and beautiful, only give to the one who loves you*. How do you keep that when you are robbed and violated against your will? Sex was not discussed by the parental units. Therefore it was defined by my perpetrator. When sex education was provided by the school

system, it did not detail much about being violated. In combination with teenage hormones and this mentality, sex became a mere transaction that resulted in having many partners by the time I got to my mid-twenties. Social norms tarnish women with many sexual partners but my perpetrator gets to enjoy the social norm of a man having many conquests. I struggled with changing my perception of sex and how it relates to relationships. Sex in both romantic and non romantic relationships were transactional. I could not associate sex with emotion. I desperately wanted to change but I was keeping emotions hidden deep. Emotion could not be felt because if I felt the wonderful, I would also allow myself to feel the pain. It would become a vicious cycle of running from pain but trying to fill the void with sex to chase feeling wanted.

### ***The Family***

In school homework entailed describing family adventures during holidays or charting all the names of the family tree. I cringe at the assignments now knowing that all along, the family knew that I was the outsider. To the external world, we were a family. *They were the amazing loving parents that folks knew they adopted a child that came from a poor existence and will now have a better life.* In reality, the parental units fostered an environment susceptible for abuse. The perpetrator only saw an avenue that gave him freedom to act accordingly. The parental units were not held accountable. Not by other families, not by the bigger community. So he knew he would not have to be accountable for his actions. *How was this a loving family? How was I part of this family?* The struggle afterward was to redefine what family actually is. To this day even after we have struggled through healing; adoptive mother, adoptive father, adoptive family are not words full of love for me and many other survivors.

### ***The Reveal***

Once I found out about my adoption I was actually relieved. At least I had context on possibly why I had experienced this. Not my perpetrators' reasons, but the justification of why I personally was the outlet for them. A part of me was glad I was not biologically related to them. I had the reckoning that adoption is a mere sham. Perhaps it was the anger in me, but the concept that adoption provided loving families and homes was not my experience. I cleared the adoption fog as soon as it was revealed to me. I cried for 2.5 seconds. Immediately it was evident to me that that is why the family treated me horrendously. It cleared up so many questions that I had for so long; why was I lower on the totem pole, how can abuse be a solution for child rearing, why me? Because: I am not part of them and therefore I became the figuratively and literal punching bag solution.

## FOR ADOPTEES

### ■ Trust & Intimacy

Due to the experience, it may be uncomfortable to feel closeness and intimacy in both friendships and romance. The lack of trust in people who are said to have our best interest can seep into our other relationships so much that we are more accepting of strings of attachments. To build and maintain healthy relationships - it takes a lot of time, therapy, and forgiveness. All adult adoptees still deserve loving people in their lives. It is in our best interests to discover ways that rebuild our trust and intimacy with the community that we decidedly choose to keep in our lives. Hopefully that we establish healthy lives that do not continue the cycles of abuse.

### ■ Process our Experience

As we start fighting through the noise to hear our own voices, our thoughts and viewpoints may change once the adoption or childhood fog is lifted. Puzzle pieces may start fusing together. Journal by writing poetry or drawing artistic comic stripes. Simply storytelling of your past or talking with a trusted friend about these changing and confusing emotions. Sometimes the perception pivots from *why* did this happen to me, to anger at the realization of the multi-dimensional truth paths. How we process our collection of thoughts through these phases is hard and may be a lifelong journey. We deserve to process our frustrations and pain instead of keeping them locked deep inside. Little by little, the anguish finding avenues to leak out in various ways that we fail to notice as trauma.

### ■ Mirror, Mirror On the Wall

A major impact from abuse(s) is on our self esteem. Hidden abuse and isolation, indoctrinated us to believe our experiences do not matter. These attributes can show up in different ways throughout the rest of our lives. How we treat others in relationships, how we pick our romantic partners, how we treat our own selves, how we allow others to (dis)respect us and even how we show up at work. Are we afraid to take unknown paths? Do we accept lower wages or become people pleasers? As we become more aware of how we view ourselves and work on our self esteem, we determine what our self worth is instead of allowing the past or other people to dictate our worth.

Resource: <https://sandracohephenphd.com/how-sexual-abuse-affects-self-esteem/>

## TO ALLIES

### ■ Sex Education

In the United States school systems, sex education is introduced in sixth grade. It is important to retain within the school systems as all children may not get the typical *birds and the bee's* discussion at home. Sex education may be funny to children who live in the safety of a normal

childhood but for those in abusive circumstances, it is essential to provide an external connection with those in need. To ensure they are aware of what abuse entails, what forms of contact may not be acceptable and how they can discuss further with a trusted person. Guidance counselors could also be a more private option for those institutions that do not have a formal program in place.

Resource: <https://info.primarycare.hms.harvard.edu/perspectives/articles/sexual-education-violence-prevention>

## ■ **Constant Community**

There is an unspoken rule of power privilege between the adoptee and their adopting family. The adoptee that is unaware of their familial circumstances but the adopting family having all the knowledge can cultivate an atmosphere of a negative power balance. A chess game that the adoptee is not even aware they are a participant of. It is important for adoptees to have a community of advocates that have their best interests and have full knowledge of their adoption status. Community can include aunts, uncles, grandparents, clergy, teachers, therapists, mentors, friends of the family or even post adoption support communities. An advocate that represents the child, can guide the family to resources that help with tough topics that may not have been covered in the introductory classes they received during the adoption process. An advocate that will take on the responsibility to report concerns should there be inklings of questionable actions by either the family or the adoptee. Constant community also helps provide an accountability to remain with integrity for the entirety of the family.

## ■ **Adoption Institutions or Child Organizations**

[American Adoption](#) defines adoption as you deserve to know the love and joy that comes with holding a newborn baby in your arms. At the end of the adoption process, that's what you'll experience. We can be your guide to make sure you feel safe, confident and hopeful all along the way."

[Holt International](#) markets every child deserves a loving home.

[Hope International](#)'s mission is to unite orphaned children from around the world with loving adoptive families.

[All God's Children International](#) claims international adoption is one of the most powerful ways you can be a trauma disruptor for a child whose possible future hangs on a willing and prepared adoptive family.

These images evoke a feeling of a safe journey through the adoption process with some guidance for post services. The intended audience for these marketing tactics is primarily for the adopters. As an adult adoptee with abuse by the adopting family, these advertisements are hopeful but misleading sales pitches. When adoption agencies and organizations are considering these

mission statements, do they consider this false advertisement for the adoptees who did or do not receive loving homes?

## CHAPTER 3 - THE DENIAL

### ***Confronting Anguish***

In my twenties I knew that in order for me to move forward past my anger issues, I wanted to confront the adoptive parents about the rapes. They held my perpetrator in such high regard and it made me angrier and angrier. I could not hold it in and if I ever wanted to heal I felt like I needed to stop hiding behind all of the secrecy. I wanted better relationships with people and even with myself. I had moved myself out of the home and had good external support around me that showered me with real love. I hemmed and hawed on if this was the right step to take. *It's not happening anymore so why should I bring it up. They may not believe you. What if they don't believe you. What if they blame me? Is it my fault? What is the worst that can happen if I tell them. Should I reveal it or not? What if they actually do believe me and are concerned?*

By that point, I had told very few people and they encouraged me to speak up and get help. I had tried various therapies and the suggestion to just be able to talk about it was so helpful for me. I just wanted to stop the What if questions I kept having in my head. Luckily it wasn't like something would happen to me, I was no longer in their care. I didn't have to suffer any consequences for revealing it, I just wanted them to know the realities of a truth they don't know about. The worst that could happen is that they don't believe me. The best thing that could happen is that they understand why I am angry and they saw the perpetrator for who they were and maybe even that they question how messed up the environment was for this to happen under their roof.

### ***The Confrontation***

I decided confrontation was the best course of action. It should have been with an advocate, a third party that could mediate between both parties. But it was not a great week and I was bursting at the seams. I told the adoptive mother first.

That didn't happen in my house.

I would have known if it happened.

What did YOU do to deserve it? I bet you did something first.

I do not remember what happened right after the confrontation, but subsequently I stopped communicating with her for years.

Some time after I told the adoptive father.



What do you expect me to do after telling me all of this?

It was obvious that his wife did not inform him after I confronted her. After all of that, nothing did happen. My perpetrator was not questioned or got in trouble for his actions. My confessions were swept underneath a rug, rolled up and thrown away like it never was mentioned. My worst nightmare became reality. I was not believed and I heard the exact words that I was dreading to hear. I was not surprised. They did not believe they were even abusive to me. So unfortunately I had to process the experience alone and drown out the memory of the confrontation hopefully.

### ***Invisibility Repeated***

It was at that point, I had to accept that no matter what - they would not take accountability for anything I brought to their attention. They refused to agree they created and perpetuated an environment of abuse. Perhaps they confronted him and he probably would have denied it. Not only was it unbelievable that it could happen, I received no validation from them. No apologies, not even a twitch in their face that showed guilt or concern. Another finger pointed back at me blaming me for bringing it up. Does family not have concern or feel protective if a family member was hurt? They continuously proved that they did not have those natural inclinations towards me. Is that what a family is?

## **FOR ADOPTEES**

### **■ People in our Corner**

Having a trusted mentor or individual that you know to have your best interests at heart is essential. They can provide perspective but also point us in the direction of resources. Adoptees need support when we finally decide to have in-depth discussions with our families on tough topics. It could be asking simple questions about our birth origins or confronting troubling memories. I wish I had someone with me to prepare me for the conversation and the after effects. I heavily weighed if exposing this truth was worth the risk of receiving my worst thought-of reaction. This decision would have been helpful to discuss with a mentor and it was not solely on me to endure alone. A mentor or loved one could have mediated between my mother and I when I revealed that I had been raped. An emotionally charged discussion between two hot tempered individuals did not create a peaceful start. We both would have been a bit more civilised perhaps if outside parties were present to control the pace and albeit volume of the conversation. The outcome may not have altered, but I would have come out of that conversation more healthy. Confronting or having difficult conversations with abusive or adoptive family members should not be another thing to endure alone.

Resource: <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/inquiry/interim/overview/truth-project.html>

## ■ Therapy During & After

Therapy before confronting and after the confrontation helps. Processing every part helps in the long spectrum for adoptees and for abuse victims. Emotions can unravel - new ones or long standing resentments can be felt along the journey. Being able to talk with someone to protect our mental health especially if they have a specialty with trauma-based adoption issues. Abuse and adoption issues may be a factor in many issues that we continue to struggle with. *Beyond Words* website compiles a list of U.S. mental health professionals who identify as adoptees and work with adoptees in various settings that offer services but research what is the right fit for you. I find that adoptee centred therapy is less intrusive than pro-adoption perspectives.

Resource: <https://growbeyondwords.com/adoptee-therapist-directory>

## ■ Our Truth

For a long time I wanted to receive some validation from my perpetrators. I even wanted when I confided to someone that at least they be able to acknowledge my being vulnerable with them. It has been so many years being ignored, looked past, and disbelieved that I wanted to scream out loud that I am at least important enough to hear. Survivors do not need perpetrators to validate our versions or provide apologies. Some will never receive them. Part of our journaling process and elevating our voice - is to hear our Higher Power and/or ourselves OVER them. Our strength, wisdom, questions, and concerns. No longer is their voice the only amongst the crowd.

## TO ALLIES

### ■ Disbelief

Many abuse victims regardless of the atrocities they had to bear, they've experienced disbelief by people in the community. The general public likes to believe that abuse only happens to children on very rare occasions. Pro-adoption communities showcase how abuse or poverty are the culprits for why biological families are not able to retain their offspring. But for some reason, there is a lack of extensive professional research and public sentiment that post adoption - abuse clearly continues. Fortunately the *Truth Project* and articles like Mirah Riben provide several examples of recent cases that abuse is not a rarity post adoption. Pro-adoption advocates paint the picture that abuse happens prior to adoption and it is a reason to *rescue* these children. A simple Google search pulls up many Reddit forums that showcase adoptees providing their direct experience with sexual and physical violence by the hands of their adopting families. Social workers and pro-adoption advocates still seem shocked that abuse happens and would love to point out that my case happens to be the minor occurrence. 2023 National CAC Statistics reports of 380,000 children they provided services to, around 236,000 cases reported sexual abuse. The *Truth Project* reveals that of over 1000 victims and survivors, 28% said the perpetrator was a family

member. Further research into sexual violence that occurs throughout intercountry adoptions needs to be conducted. While the perpetrators are at fault for the direct actions, it is the placement agencies who investigate the families, pair children with families and then provide very limited post adoption support. Why is there still disbelief by the system that abuse can and does happen?

Resource: [Truth Project](#)

<https://mirahmirah.medium.com/adoptive-parent-child-abuse-c528cc37b014>

## ■ (Pre) Adoption Practices & LifeLong Learning

All families need lifelong learning. It is not an easy task to raise children. Many communities are there to support parents and the children in their roles and obligations. For adopting families during the pre-adoption phase it's important to include tough topics and age appropriate content for them and allies. Build a community of adoptee centred and inspired content that helps bridge the gap between adoptee and loved ones. Today's content is centred around the adopting family. What continuing education is provided throughout different phases of the child's life? A cursory look at a few programs have post adoption services for only six months past the adoption. Are adoption organizations recommending and partnering with adoptee support services?

## ■ Invisibility

Every step of the way is felt by SURVIVORS.

- By perpetrator
- By the confronted party
- If taken to court - public
- If you didn't tell, why didn't you
- Life is better now ... it is in the past.

As the ADOPTEE I didn't ask to be given up. The INSTITUTE placed me with these people. Now when the ABUSED tells their experience, the experiences are downgraded because many adoption stories are successful.

It's paradise now, look at you as an adult. But NOW it's great! You're beautiful, you're successful, you have a wonderful family, you have money, you are not living in poverty, you have access to opportunity, just get over it.

I am invalidated again. I heard - this should all be worth it because TODAY - you are successful. You are no longer in poverty. You are no longer in an abusive environment. Don't you feel gratitude? Please validate my role as the (insert your role) rescuer.

How does this not reduce my experience to elevate the ADOPTION IS BEAUTIFUL tagline? Why is my experience not factored into adoption advocacy or policy? Answer: Because I don't provide the ongoing narrative: *the pretty adoption story*.

## CHAPTER 4 - THE REBUILD(ING)

### ***The Stopping***

It took a lot to stop the abuse and stand up for myself against my abusers. Once I did stand on my two feet I became a force to be reckoned with. A state so emboldened that now others don't understand the plight behind it. That took a mixture of encouragement, veracity of anger, and an external environment for me to finally sink my feet deep into the ground. What took longer was the internal issues that even today I still face. The slip of confidence. The turmoil of resentment, gratitude and confusion that happens every time I hear the words family, adoption and childhood. I had to relearn many things and be open to forgiving myself and even all of the parties involved. Not because they deserve forgiveness but because the weight on my shoulders was unbearable. The amount of anger was causing me destruction in my own life. I had to stop the tapes I still hear from time to time in my own head. I had to stop destructive patterns that were preventing me from living a healing and amazing life. Sometimes I did realise how my history was affecting others.

### ***Redefining Sex. Redefining Family.***

Redefining and relearning what sex and family actually should be - a constant battle in my mind. Holiday laughter consists of rehashing funny fond memories. I have to define what those mean in my life and create new memories with my determined set of family and friends so that I can participate in those rehashing of funny fond memories.

### ***Continuous Memories***

I have a lot of great days. Little things trigger memories and then I go through a rollercoaster of memories and the related emotions to process it. The adoption institutions and the abusers who want to forget what happened, believe that if I just forget, then I will live a happier life. It's simply not true. I need steps, procedures and a list of things that will help me to process then move through the emotions. If I don't have these in place, I sink and stay stuck in reliving a self destruction that can spiral for months. Some memories are buried and stay hidden deep into wells but seep out in unexpected times. I don't control my memories, I couldn't even control what happened to me. Abusers and the institutions want us to control the memories, emotions and how we perceive what was done to us without even acknowledgement of their role that helped create the environment for abuses to happen.

## **FOR ADOPTEES**

### **■ Question**

I believe it is a human right for everyone to be able to be curious and question anything or everything. One thing both adoptees and abuse victims were denied is the right to question. Question if the situation is wrong, should I report, if I deserve better, if I should be matched to this family, if I should be given away. Other things we are not able to question: why do adoptees get minimal protection, why is it wrong for adoptees to speak up, why is there more support for adoptive families than the adoptees or even the birth families? Is this the best alternative for children without families, why is there not harsher punishments to those who are found guilty of sexual violence against children? Why do we feel guilty for demanding respect and boundaries? Was this the best that they could do? It is just as important to have questions but also be in an environment that cultivates safety to ask questions, hold others accountable, or discuss tough conversations all without the fear of punishment.

### **■ Rewrite - Retell**

Through our journaling, art making, or recounting our experience to others we are keeping our truths alive. As we process our journeys it may change over time and take us down winding paths that traverse multiple switchback roads. We may challenge different perspectives, discover new confusing emotions, or join new communities that spark renewed passion to investigate another lane we haven't traveled through. In my teenage diaries my writings were filled with anger and angst. The roaring twenties was risky and rough. My thirties were focused and very challenging. As I crest my forties, I hope to maintain some wisdom and peace amongst my writing pieces. It is our right to rewrite and retell as many times as we choose. For our own healing or if we choose advocacy.

### **■ Validate our OWN Histories**

I've come across well intentioned people who challenged my own viewpoints and even my adoptive mother to this day will say very flowering sentiments. I do not share those same sentiments and find that I have to remind myself that I am unable to control how others, especially how my adoptive mother portrays my childhood. I have peace knowing that I don't question my own experience. We can validate our own stories and own them without having to feel pressured to validate their version.

## **TO ALLIES**

### **■ Continuous Improvement**

Keep (re)building the adoption process to make it safer. Children should have families. Adoptee and foster care children need better protection and continued support. Better support should be offered for all parties of the triad. Provide continued learning to build up biological

families, adoptive families, adoptees and the communities that will support them. Biological families should be guided to resources that could allow for reunification. Adoptive families should remain in contact with adoption institutions. There needs to be a periodic check with adoptive families to see how families progress through the adoptee's ages. Adoptees should not be transactionally given away to then be left on their own to navigate a situation they had no ability to advocate for themselves.

## ■ Collaborate

Invite adoptees and other folks who have a lived experience to provide another perspective on adoption practices or to sharpen policies. Do organizations provide financial support for therapy services for adoptees at different ages? What advocacy do pro-adoption organizations participate in for (adult) adoptee children? Do placement agencies revisit their qualifications process for prospective parents? Where do adoption agencies stand when abuse is reported by adoptees?

## ■ Children are the Focus

UNICEF declares their mission is to relentlessly not stop until every child has the right to be healthy, educated, protected and respected. Adoptees need real help. Somehow in the adoption transactional process, the children are the traded commodity. Yet adoption experiences are handpicked to represent what successful adoption looks like. Our lived experiences are not all collective into a nice pretty bow because if prospective parents were aware of some of the hard topics they would have to deal with - they might not adopt. That's the focus of adoption marketing campaigns. Instead validate all experiences and show support for those who have struggles within the adoption process.

Resource: [Unicef](#)

## FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO ALLIES

■ Adoption results should not be curated to perfection stories. Stop eliminating, silencing abuse stories or being surprised sexual abuse occurs post adoption. Don't strip out the bad stories to make adoption appear like a marketing campaign. Not everything is negative. But it isn't positive either.

■ Support for post services is greatly needed. Post services are slim for families and the adoptees. But if we are adopted at five and live until eighty, that is seventy-five years of continuous rebuilding for people who struggle with family, abuse or adoption. There is no stipend for them, no protection and no resources in an institution you created.

## **CONCLUSION FOR ADOPTEEES**

Chester Bennington, longtime lead vocalist for Linkin Park lost his life in 2017. He had multiple struggles which included his turmoil over his childhood sexual abuse. Bennington is a constant reminder of regardless of how far we get from our past, the trauma and the effects can remain with us for a long time. Sometimes present daily, sometimes it creeps back from time to time. May we all receive our healing and a place where we belong.

I desire for us / we / I to become:

*Invisible to Visible*

*Voiceless to Voiceful*

*Vulnerable to Invincible*

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## K

### *Born in Sth Korea, adopted to the USA*

I am a Korean transracial international adoptee who was born in Seoul, South Korea in 1987 and adopted at around 4 months old. My eomma (Korean for mom) was supposedly a young, single, poor woman who was not in a relationship with my appa (Korean for dad), and this is supposedly what led to my relinquishment, placement in foster care, and adoption by a white family in the US.

My adoption was a proxy adoption, meaning my white adoptive parents did not need to meet me beforehand or even leave the US to adopt me. They never set foot in South Korea. They went through all the legalities and procedures that weren't current at the time in MN with the American agency - home study, psychology review, income status, etc, in order to adopt me.

On the outside, my white adoptive parents looked ideal for raising me. They were married and both with undergraduate degrees - my white adoptive dad was a chemical engineer and my white adoptive mom was a public school elementary teacher. They had 3 biological children of their own, steady incomes, and neither had overtly concerning mental/emotional health issues. They lived in a nice neighbourhood and offered a lot of opportunities for their children - travel, going to the theatre, camping together, family get-togethers, etc. They were regular church goers. They were upstanding people in the community.

It appeared I was assured a "better" life by being adopted and raised by them. I would be safe, happy, healthy and loved. I would receive an education, support, financial security, good food, and a forever family. Unfortunately that was not entirely the case for me. There were many traumas I endured from them and in this narrative I will be sharing the sexual abuse I was exposed to.

My white adoptive parents divorced when I was around 7 years old with my white adoptive dad moving out. My white adoptive sister and I would spend the next 10 years or so in the custody agreement of seeing him every other weekend and Tuesday nights. It was during this decade that my white adoptive dad steadily became more and more unstable financially, emotionally, mentally and physically.

He started treating me inappropriately as a child with odd behaviours like licking my face, tickling me too aggressively, and touching that felt inappropriate. When I turned 14, that is when



he amped it up. He started telling me I was a diva and I needed to wear sexy outfits and flounce around on a stage and be a bitch to everyone. He really wanted to see me do this. He would tell me this often and repeatedly to the point where I was extremely uncomfortable and grossed out by him.

As I got older, he started to touch me more and treated me almost as if I were his girlfriend and not his (transracially adopted) daughter. He was wanting to hold my hand more, he would place his hand on the small of my back and rub me, he would hug me for longer than what was appropriate for a father and daughter, he would reach out and caress my face as if I were a lover, he insisted on feeding me food off his fork or spoon. Things that weren't overtly screaming sexual abuse, but they were things that made me extremely uncomfortable and they were things he wasn't doing to my white adoptive sister (his biological daughter).

This went on for my entire teenage years and into my 20s. I tried to explain to my white adoptive mom and siblings that this was going on and they all didn't believe me. I was often met with the statement that he was a weird person and that was just the way he was. When I'd tell them the things he was saying to me, they'd agree it was odd but it was innocent. When I'd tell them the things he was doing to me, they'd say it was weird but I was reading too much into it.

So I worked on my own to avoid him as much as I could. I stopped visiting him when I was 16 and was able to drive myself. I had limited contact with him. I asked my white adoptive siblings to consider inviting him at a different time to birthday parties or gatherings so I could participate without him around and then he could participate when I was gone. This was not honoured.

It all came to a head when I was 30 and we were all at my white adoptive brother's groomsman dinner. He was sitting at the table across from me, with my white adoptive siblings, my white adoptive mom, and some of his side of the family. He made a big show of getting my attention by waving his arms big and yelling my name until I couldn't ignore him anymore. I walked over to him, gave him a brief side hug and when I went to move away, he grabbed me by my arms and demanded I sit on his lap. I was so utterly shocked and disgusted I instantly reacted with a very angry and forceful, "NO!" His reaction was anger, fragility, and aggression. He stood up (he's over 6 feet tall) and he yelled at me that I was his daughter! To which I yelled back that I was his ADULT daughter and that was inappropriate. Then I went back to my chair and he sat down and pouted the entire dinner.

My white adoptive brother and sister saw this and were both shocked. They both asked me what that was about and I told them this was what I was trying to tell them. They both said they

didn't realise he was doing things like this. After this incident, I text him telling him the relationship was done and he was never to contact me again. We haven't talked in 7 years. Since then, most of my white adoptive family has come to believe me and each has had a falling out with him since. I guess it finally took them witnessing and/or being mad at him themselves for them to finally believe me.

I was also sexually abused and assaulted by a white adoptive uncle from the ages of 10-12ish. This all started with him flirting with me - telling me I was beautiful, that he found me attractive and he wished I was his girlfriend. I remember telling him my aunt (his wife) wouldn't like that and he replied that she wouldn't mind. Things escalated quickly with him.

He went from flirting to touching me sexually and inappropriately. He also started cornering me when I was alone and abused me then. He would use my body to rub against himself and I could feel his erection because he never seemed to try to hide that. He was also becoming braver and he started molesting me under blankets during holiday family gatherings with other white adoptive family members on the same couch as us.

They had a pool at their house that we always swam in as a family. This is where he attempted to rape me by pushing me up against the side of the pool, trying to penetrate me. I managed to tell him to stop forcibly enough because he stopped after a few tries and said he was sorry, it just felt so good. That seemed to be the end of it and he backed off considerably.

I waited 3 years to tell my white adoptive mom about this. I felt so much confusion, guilt and shame around this abuse and assault that I struggled with speaking up. My white adoptive aunt had been married and divorced several times before this current husband and I didn't want to be the "reason" they divorced. She is also my white adoptive mom's sister and I was terrified what that would do to their relationship or to my relationship with either of them or the rest of my white adoptive family. I was also terrified because of the relinquishment and adoption trauma, as well as the abandonment and rejection trauma.

When I did have the courage to tell her at the age of 15, she was outraged and told me she didn't believe me. She questioned why I waited so long to tell her and essentially blamed me for not doing the right thing. That she had done all the right things as the mom and taught me from a young age about "bad" touch and that I should tell her if it was happening to me. That is the only time we've spoken about it and we haven't discussed it in 22 years. My white adoptive aunt doesn't know. My white adoptive uncle is old with dementia and I cannot wait for him to pass away.

Because it was automatically assumed my white adoptive parents were safe people for me to be raised in, it was never questioned or considered that I could be experiencing abuse or trauma from them or other white adoptive family members. There were never any post adoption meetings or appointments that I know of. There was never anyone asking me how I felt about my situation as the adoptee or what was happening to me. What maybe I felt I needed and wasn't receiving.

Adoption tends to do this, though. Society tends to paint adoptive parents in the narrative that they are automatically fit parents. That they are people who are deserving of raising a child because adoption is a perceived beautiful, selfless, brave, loving act. Because they just have "so much love" to give to a baby or child. That any perceived negative or ungrateful things being shared or seen by the adoptee are their own problems. That the adoptee is basically angry, bitter, ungrateful, and selfish.

I personally believe there needs to be a better vetting system for potential adoptive parents with more extensive background checks in the social/emotional categories specifically. The mental and emotional health of anyone considering adopting should be a high priority and deeply looked at. Any red flags from their past should be investigated. If they have traumas from their past or current, there should be requirements and proof that they are working on those traumas before they adopt, during and after as well.

Adoption agencies should be required to do post adoption checkups, and not just for the wellbeing of the adoptive parents. They should be checking on the adoptee themselves. Assessing if the family and environment they've been involuntarily placed within is a healthy and safe space where they can thrive and grow. They should offer resources and courses for the adoptive to continue their education in raising adoptees who are also people of trauma. These post adoption checkups should happen all the way into the adoptee's adulthood. It shouldn't just be a one and done check mark in a box.

Lastly, I believe the social narratives around adoption need to be called out for what they are - toxic, unethical, lies, and dangerous/harmful to the adoptees. Just because a person or people can afford an adoption does not mean they are automatically good people or good parents or deserving/fit to be parents. When did affording to acquire a child become the standard for being a "good" or "fit" parent?

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## Kamina Hall

*Born in the USA, adopted transracially into an American family*

Amina has provided a YouTube video entitled: *Sexual abuse in adoption: why is it prevalent? What are the consequences? Is there future hope?*

You can watch here: <https://youtu.be/OutaDVm5UsU>



### Summary transcript of video:

I am a 45 year old female late discovery transracial adoptee. I was born and adopted in Texas as a 3-4 day old infant and I'm of black American and Italian ethnicity raised by a white American family.

Defining sexual abuse is not just about the physical aspects but also includes inappropriate speaking, touching, exposure to sexual material, and over-sexualised content. My abuse was mostly physical but some sexual abuse did occur. I can't remember what age it started, I was physically abused by my adoptive brother who was their bio child. That lasted until I left the family and I separated myself from them. I don't know how often the abuse took place with my adoptive brother because I only remember 1 specific event, but I know it happened at least 1 other time. At school age, I was 13 when my female adopter allowed me to see a man who was 26 or 27 years old, she was going to sign the paperwork to allow him to marry me but then she started sleeping with him.

What I remember of my brother's abuse was he told me to go into my closet and not to tell mom. I don't remember exactly what happened and it's amazing but when I tried to start to write, it brought up a lot of emotions and it's interesting how my psyche is trying to protect me. As for the bigger abuse, a travesty of American culture is that black girls are over-sexualised, when I was around 12 years old my female adopter normalised sex for me and allowed me to way too much space because she said I was "grown". Was I really? I met a guy and was sneaking around and she discovered it quickly and helped us see each other. My male adopter called the police and the police told me the man was a pedophile. Being a child and I was saying, "No he loves me" and the female adopter was saying, "Yes he loves her and he's going to marry her!" As time went on, she continued to enable me in this situation but then she started sleeping with him and fell in love with him. As a result, I left home when I was 14 or 15 because she called the police and told them she didn't feel safe. They waited there until I had packed my clothes for me to leave. I said, "Where do you want me to go?" They said, "We don't care but you can't stay here". For me that was the bigger betrayal. However, I do believe the sexual abuse by the adopted brother is what brought me to a point of being very careless with my body, giving sex to get love, and not having any respect for my body.

I feel there should be follow-up after adoption at least until a child reaches 18 years of age. Somebody should be checking in and it would help mitigate this type of abuse. I didn't have anyone to turn to for help. If my adopters had followup from an agency, they also wouldn't have been able to hide my adoption from me for 32 years. That's just another form of abuse. I feel like adoptive parents and siblings aren't assessed enough. They should be required to attend therapy sessions and actually get a report back from the therapist before being allowed to adopt. There should be individual and ongoing therapy during the life of an adoption and for the adoptee, free, for the duration of their life.

In terms of pre and post education about sexual abuse in adoption, I've only just learned about adoption in 2020 and how detrimental it can be. I have certainly not seen any education for adoptees who have experienced sexual abuse. Should there be? Absolutely. Knowing and understanding is the first step and being aware of these things.

When I was older, my female adopter's biological son stopped talking to her for a while. I was resentful of how pained she was about it. It was the first time I said something to her at age 19 or 20 years old. I was fed up with how she doted on him and I blurted out that he had abused me. She started crying saying, "I didn't think you'd remember". I asked, "You knew?" She said that I told her but I don't remember. It's amazing how the psyche protects us. She said she took me to a

doctor who said they didn't believe I would remember it. They were wrong and have been wrong about a lot of things when it comes to adoption!

With regards to the bigger abuse of signing me off to a grown man as a child, my male adopter's sister told me she thought I was lying, that I was a whore and a drug addict. She said I just needed to get over it and be grateful. She didn't believe anything I said about her sister. How could her sister possibly do something so heinous? Of course I was not believed by the bio relatives of these people. I doubt they ever had a connection to me to begin with.

I do feel that the amount of families who abuse a biological child is astronomically high. If a family can see fit to abuse a child who is biologically theirs, consider then how much more vulnerable a child is who doesn't share any DNA at all! Us adopted children who don't look like the adopters, it is so much more easier to do this kind of abuse in my opinion.

With regards to reporting sexual abuse to relevant authorities, I don't think there is a statute of limitations for sexual abuse in Texas, however, it was a cop that told me to leave home at 14 or 15 years old when my female adopter put me out. I know there is no justice in the criminal system for brown or black people. Even if I was guaranteed to win, I wouldn't report it to this day because I would be subjecting myself to so much more pain and suffering and I'm not willing to do that. Also, the white cape that is put onto white families who adopt transracially, most people say, "Oh bless you wonderful white people for saving this little yellow, black or brown child! What would they be doing otherwise?" That's a thing that happens. We are much less likely to be believed when we are adopted into a society with this mentality.

Feelings of shame connected to sexual abuse in adoption is a huge topic. I spoke earlier about not feeling my body was worth preserving. I was promiscuous very young and I didn't know what it was to value my body because my body had never been valued. It wasn't until I was much older that I was able to find value in myself and my body in a relevant way to protect myself. Nobody protected me as a child, hence I didn't protect my child self. I had to find a way to forgive myself and begin to protect myself and have a sense of pride about my body. It took a lot of work. I don't think I realised the man part of it was abuse until I saw a movie that showed the same sort of story. I didn't begin reckoning with this stuff until I was an adult.

I have cut ties about 12 years ago with my adoptive family. It was the best decision I ever made. I don't know how anyone can heal with continued exposure to abuse. I have no clue how that's possible but I know I couldn't. When I was cutting ties, it was the first time I expressed anger and frustration towards my female adopter for feeding me to her predator son, I didn't say



anything about the predator man but wish I had. I never regretted it. If you are considering doing it, I highly recommend it. If you are an adoptee who faced sexual abuse and they don't validate, see or make you feel safe, protected, seen or heard, cut them off. Best decision I ever made. There is a group for adoptees that cut ties. It's so liberating. I have not missed them because I never had them. I miss the idea of a family but I never had that.

Did the abuse in my life affect my birth family reunion? I didn't have to tell my birth mother because I had a YouTube channel and I said all the things I needed for her to know in a video before I had even found her. She had already binged watched all my videos before we had our first or second conversation. Pros and cons? It's good because even though I didn't feel emotionally attached to her, I had an emotional regression to a child like state. So I was not able to express myself verbally and I was really glad I had said everything in my videos, especially about race. My father had already passed before I started reunion process.

I also experienced secondary rejection with my mother and part of that might have been due to guilt inspired by knowing what I went through. But maybe also guilt related to race things? I don't know. She did try to come back around but once I'm done, I'm done. First time she had control. Second time, I will not allow for that to happen again. She decided to cut ties and so did I. Was the sexual abuse something connected to it? Probably just her guilt but who knows.

With regards to relationships and triggers, in my intimate relationships, I can't have a healthy relationship. I don't know how, I haven't seen it modelled. I don't think I have the temperament for it. Sexually, I think I'm still pretty open minded - a result of the experimental and alternative relationship styles for a long time. I'm not against people choosing it but for me, simple is better. Too many moving parts in my life doesn't function well for me. I'm single. I may have a friend but I don't want that traditional connection and it's tied to all the trauma, not just the sexual trauma. Biggest trigger in sexual abuse in a new sexual encounter is when a man reaches for my throat. I hate that because of all the layers of things it brings up for me, not just about sexual abuse but patriarchy and male dominance over women. So I will slap away a man's hand if they dare do that.

As I get older, I am very protective of my genitalia so when something feels wrong or as a result of someone, I feel infringed upon and almost mad because I've failed to protect myself in the ways I needed to.

Finding professional specialist support for this mixture of issues - good luck with that. While there is a directory of adoption informed therapists on ICAV's website, unfortunately there are lots of barriers to accessing these for people. For example, long waiting lists, licence issues if you live

in a different state to the therapist, finding a therapist that you vibe with, it's hard. Adoption should be part of specialist training, it should be a serious educational program for people who want to offer this help for adoptees. But this help just isn't out there.

What I want people to understand about sexual abuse in adoption is that a child who is adopted and doesn't share genetics or looks is more susceptible to sexual abuse than a child who is biological to the family, and everyone should be aware of that! Also, if law enforcement is called out and they recognise the child is different to the family, they should make an effort to engage the child to make sure they are okay. Lastly, adoptive parents should have therapy a year prior to adoption and actively undergo therapy the whole time. They have stuff to sort out that the child doesn't deserve.

I've been on my journey of healing for 20 years now. Before I even knew I was adopted, I was dealing with my childhood trauma. It's been a long path. I'd like survivors and adoptees to know you are not alone. It gets harder before it gets easier but if you choose to go the healing route it's worth it. Sometimes the bad hurtful part can last longer than you thought but it's worth it. Do the work. Don't find a therapist and set a timeline expecting things to be sorted and you can get on with life and forget about it because it doesn't work like that. The journey is lifelong. Even though I'm a lot better than I was, I had to use psychedelic mushrooms to access a lot of parts I had hidden to protect myself. Though I feel different after i.e., more open and accessible, that doesn't mean my pain stops. It took a good year and a half of suffering and anguish until I started to feel better. There will be good days and bad days for the rest of your life. It's a lifelong journey.

The supports I've found most useful include ICAV, Lynelle does a great job of moderating a safe space in her group. There's also a Facebook group for adoptees who cut ties. I didn't stay in a lot of other adoptee forums as being a very emphatic person, I find it's too much for me. I did connect to a couple of adoptees I found who are special. The biggest support has been from my little Facebook community of 20 friends I know very well. As I started moving through the journey it has been nice that people check in on how I'm going.

The barriers that exist are not acknowledging that adoption is a problem. There's not a lot of adoption informed therapists so how do I find one who is also trained in dealing with sexual abuse too? Awareness is one of the biggest barriers. People aren't aware of the need. There should be social services and therapy just for adoptees.



I find I just don't fit in nicely anywhere but that's okay. If you are ever feeling singled out or isolated, that's okay. We are not tribal anymore and don't need a tribe to survive. If you don't fit in somewhere that doesn't make you not okay. You can still survive without a tribe.

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## Kaomi Lee

*Born in South Korea, adopted to the USA*

Kaomi shares her podcast which is 1hr 14mins in length.

<https://adaptedpodcast.com/2020/06/01/season-3-episode-21-kaomi-goetz/>

Kaomi Lee 54, was adopted from Korea to the United States at the age of six months old. She grew up racially isolated in rural Minnesota, the only daughter and adopted child in her family. In many ways she was like most kids around her. She climbed trees, built snow forts, sang in the church choir, played clarinet and volleyball. But she also knew she was different. She carried a painful secret that took her childhood away too soon.

At age 11, she was sexually abused and it became a family secret that both silenced and shamed her. That she had been given up by people who left no trace of themselves, either to be found, or loved, also remained an unexamined wound, locked away with no key. Lee details what happened when she reported her parental abuse to her adoption agency, Holt Korea and the late Molly Holt; the response was as much shocking as disappointing, that no-one was willing to apologise or take responsibility for her pain. For this season-ending episode, Lee sat down with Korean adoptee Alicia Soon, who was the first person interviewed for this podcast in 2016, and who also shared her adoption story of abuse and feelings of abandonment.

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## Katie

*Born in Colombia, adopted to the USA*

### ***About my experiences of abuse***

I believe my abuse started at age 5. I was abused outside of and in my home. I believed the adults around me. I lost my virginity at 5 years old and I only realised this later on in life. This abuse conditioned me to accept that kind of advance - the energy and taking of my power by men. It conditioned me to just lay down and let it happen. It continued for a few years and then led to many situations as a teen that would now be considered assaults and promiscuous behaviour. I just figured that's what happened to girls. It led to drinking and more assaults and then guilt and blaming of myself. I even sacrificed myself once to save my adoptive sister from this abuse. I said, "Leave her alone, I'll do it". I was 7 or 8 years old at that time. All in all my separation/adoption trauma left me with fear of loss and the need to be loved and the abuse took away my power and taught me to take the abuse and to accept that treatment and attention from men. It's a horrible mix of trauma that has coloured my entire life and still does.

### ***Lack of independent followup***

I think there is a lack most definitely. There needs to be ongoing yearly check ups. Children should be talked to without their parents and they should be taught what abuse is and that their bodies are their own by the person doing the check in. Kids may not know that what is happening is wrong and not okay unless they are taught. There is a high percent of sexual abuse in adoptive homes and it needs to be studied and prevented.

### ***Who to turn to for help***

I've found help in a few therapists but not until my 30s. I was not able to really go there until my 30s. I've found help also in support groups of survivors. There needs to be more resources for help and support.

### ***Assessment of adoptive parents prior to adoption***

I think most likely even a deeper assessment would not have found anything unfortunately. But yearly visits and education would have helped me. I think it's very important to educate kids as young as 4 years old on good and bad touch and autonomy of their own bodies and with each year provide more education age appropriate of course. And teach them it's okay to tell about what's happening to them.

### ***Managing the ongoing adoptive family relationship***

I think it's something very individual. By no means do you have to keep in a relationship with anyone who has abused you. Some people want to and that is fine. But if you are uncomfortable with it, don't do it. It's not your responsibility to maintain a relationship with someone who has hurt you.

### ***Finding appropriately trained professional support***

It's very hard to find resources and support. That definitely needs to change and there should be support groups for all ages.

### ***Challenges I have faced so far***

It has added to the trauma I have from my separation/adoption trauma and CPTSD.

### ***The supports I found most helpful & barriers to these***

Finding a therapist or group that truly understands has been the most helpful but some of the barriers to this has been money, insurance and what insurance covers, lack of free and low cost help.

### ***Reporting the abuse***

I've dealt with it in other ways. I don't feel reporting now would help myself in any way.

### ***What mental health professionals (counsellors, psychologists) need to know about sexual abuse and adoption***

That it often goes together and that we should be believed.

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## Millie

*Born in Romania, adopted to Denmark*

I experienced sexual abuse in my orphanage prior to adoption. It is frustrating not knowing what exactly happen. It is devastating not to be believed because people do not believe my memories because of my extremely young age when I was abused. Also there is no help for people like me with a trauma only based in the body!

In pre and post education in adoption, sexual abuse needs to be included. Parents need to learn much more about these traumas in early childhood. They need to learn how to support their child when they show symptoms of traumas and not just tell them it is a lie. It is devastating and makes the trauma even more worse when the people who should support you do not because they do not believe you.

I cannot report the abuse because it is not doable in my case despite remembering a lot, I do not know what happened or by whom exactly and because I now live in another country than the abuser and it is many years ago.

I have no shame at all but it is extremely difficult because there is no help for people like me, The healing journey is very complicated.

I hope that adoptive parents will trust their kids and seek professional support in understanding their child.

Secrets are the stones  
*That sink the boat*  
*Take them out, look at them*  
*Throw them out and float*  
**Lemn Sissay 2019**

Over the years I have had private moments. Remembering, re-experiencing and holding myself fearfully frozen through frightening flashbacks. Through childhood and into adulthood, I was running from the emotions in my story and the memories carried in my body. There were parts of me, associated with the abuse that I had imprisoned, internalised and silenced. In every way, what happened to me profoundly affected my sense of safety in the world and destroyed my self-worth and self-respect in relationship with others. My lens of the world, already altered from being born into the arms of a mother that was unable to care for me, also learned that those who choose to care for me were not able to handle hard things. I went really quiet. I carried secrets and shame internally and silently. It shaped my growing-up narratives, and I believed that there was something wrong with me. I would tell myself to stop feeling and stop sharing your feelings and I experienced extreme guilt for saying no, so I said yes even when I wanted to say no.

Along the way, I began having a physiological vomiting response to the fear, panic and emotional distress I would have in the re-experiencing. This caused great stress to my body and, in an almost caring way, forced me to attune and respond to what my mind and body was needing. I believe my body had reached a point where it could no longer digest the disturbing act of what was done to me. It had to come out.

My private moments became shared and I began to experience healing in connection with others. I connected with a counsellor, as well as a 'wise woman', a friend and with my partner. As I took note of my story and began processing all that inevitably came out, they guided me, witnessing and holding my deepest and saddest hurts. The sexual abuse was SEEN and I allowed myself to receive the care they offered me. In contributing to this perspective paper, I choose to connect with the victims, survivors and allies of sexual abuse. I recognise the intersecting and compounding ways adoption can make adoptees further vulnerable and at risk of harm occurring within their adoptive families. I believe being adopted made me feel isolated, dis-connected and dis-empowered in being able to say something and seek help. When I think about my child self, I remember how hard she was already working to be SEEN, liked and wanted in her adoptive family

and I know that she was feeling confusion and rejection impacted by her early attachment wounds and trauma. Unbeknown to my child self, I was also carrying generational and birth trauma. Note, my birth mother was stated as having been 15 years old when she had me, my birth father five years older. I can only imagine how impacted she has been from her own life experiences that have never been resolved, healed or acknowledged, from my conception to her birthing of me and our separation from one another.

I can organise my sexual abuse into three parts:

**Part I** was when I began to process, grieve and connect around my abuse experience. This was important because it helped me understand so much about myself and allowed me to release some of the pain I had been carrying. It is Part I of the story because it is when I acknowledged and named what happened. I was able to verbalise out loud, that between 8 and 9 years of age, a family member sexually abused me. I was able to name that person. I accepted that what was done to me was child sexual abuse.

I was forced into penetrative sexual acts. I was touched and I did not want to be. I was pressured into acts that I was not comfortable with. I was made to feel guilty for saying no. I was threatened and told not to tell anyone. And I didn't until 20 years later.

**My Part II** is how I worked to translate and make sense of the impact of my abuse on my grown-up experiences. I was already partnered and a new parent and felt there was a tidal wave pushing me in processing any impacts not wanting there to be an overflow on my relationships and in my parenting. I wanted to be 'healed' but instead I learned that healing is not a sprint, and I accepted that I will likely stay in 'healing' for the rest of my life. Abuse (and adoption) has lifelong impacts and I learned how to sit with my pain, how to trust in letting others in and to release those old self-deprecating narratives about myself. I began to understand how this early abuse perpetrated to my eight-year-old self, forced me on a distorted, unsafe and dangerous path into adolescence where I sought-out the worst kind of relationships, environments and activities. I did not value, respect or care for my body, in fact I can (now) remember living in a way where I was completely disconnected from it. During adolescence, still a child, I experienced sexual abuse again by someone known to the family. I was also sexually assaulted by a stranger whilst on a trip with my family at age 13. What followed was some ugly self-harm, risk taking behaviours, suicidal ideation and an attempt. I am amazed that I survived this time in my life. I feel deep sadness for my child self during those years, and I release that part of myself from carrying any blame, shame or guilt about what happened. As an adult, and in working on healing parts of myself, I began connecting these vulnerable experiences together and processing their collective impact upon my life.

**My Part III** is where my story is heading. It is about all the things over the years that I have learned, processed and connected with to help in moving me forward to enjoy healthy relationships with others and to grow a deep awareness of how my traumatic experiences have impacted my life. I have become very good at engaging in a variety of therapeutic care, including both talk and somatic therapies that include multi-modal approaches and that I can come in and out of as needed. I have many strategies, self-care practices and ways of nourishing my body, mind and heart emotionally, socially, spiritually, culturally and relationally. I have EARNED secure attachment from having worked very hard to heal and grow! It is the continuing and unfolding part of my journey that gives me peace, strength, safety and a true relationship with all my parts.

It is why I am choosing to share my story, to receive the acknowledgment and care I was not afforded growing up. I have seen the value and positive impact of collective story sharing and collective healing within the adoptee community as well as the need for education about sexual abuse and adoption. I feel ready to connect into this space with other adoptees who have survived child sexual abuse by speaking out, naming it, and growing broad public awareness about our most painful experiences on a topic that is often absent when we are sharing adoption stories.

*'Courage Calls To Courage Everywhere'*

**Millicent Garrett Fawcett**



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## Purle

*Born in China, adopted to the USA*

### **Child of Torture (I'm Only a Child)**

I'm only a child,  
But I face monsters,  
Real and inescapable.

I'm only a child,  
But I'm seeing horrors  
Beyond your wildest nightmares.

I'm only a child,  
But I'm forced to watch  
Others torn apart, tortured, killed.

I'm only a child.  
I can't understand  
How humans can do such things.

I'm only a child,  
Haunted by screams,  
Drowning in bloody memories.

I'm only a child,  
Confused, scared, and scarred.  
Why are they hurting us so?

I'm only a child,  
But I understand  
Our lives are in their hands.

I'm only a child,  
Trying to survive  
The impossible.

I'm only a child.  
I must comply,  
Or surely, I'll die.

I'm only a child,  
Silenced for now,  
Maybe, one day, forever?

I'm only a child,  
But they stole my innocence.  
Will they take my life as well?

I'm only a child,  
But I'm living on death row,  
Unsure if I'll live to see the morning light.

I'm only a child.  
I cannot free myself  
From these merciless monsters.

I'm only a child,  
Hurt and broken.  
Hope slips away.

I'm only a child,  
Hoping my death won't be  
As bad as what I've seen.

I'm only a child,  
But my time is short,  
And I'm already dead inside.

I'm only a child,  
Wondering if all goodness  
Has been smothered by evil.

I'm only a child,

Doubtful that kindness and love  
Still exist in this cruel world.

### **I Was a Blank Slate**

I was a blank slate  
Until I was taught  
That the world  
Is a brutal place  
Where children are at  
The nonexistent mercy  
Of their owners.

I was an innocent dove  
Until I was exploited  
To satisfy the selfish desires  
Of depraved perverts  
And make money  
For my owners.

I was a naive newborn  
Until I was confronted  
With the calculated cruelty  
Of traffickers, torturers,  
And sadists.

I was a vulnerable virgin  
Until I was taken advantage of  
By so many strangers  
Who used and abused me.

I was a clean sheet  
Until I was trampled  
With blood-stained boots.

I was a tabula rasa.  
Now I'm jaded by the world.

## **I Remember Too Much**

I remember too much:

How we were  
Bought and sold,  
Used and abused.

I remember too much:

How we were stripped,  
How we were exploited,  
How we were discarded.

I remember too much:

How we were  
Only objects  
For pleasure and profit.

I remember too much:

How we were  
Starved and beaten,  
Threatened and tortured.

I remember too much:

How we were  
Ripped apart  
In body and mind.

## **Bear Witness**

Do you see us being lured and trapped?  
Bear witness.

Do you see us being abducted or abandoned?  
Bear witness.

Do you see us being betrayed and sold?  
Bear witness.

Do you see us being ogled and taken advantage of?  
Bear witness.

Do you see us being stripped and used?  
Bear witness.

Do you see us being molested and raped?  
Bear witness.

Do you see us being photographed and filmed?  
Bear witness.

Do you see us being exploited for profit and pleasure?  
Bear witness.

Do you see us being prostituted to pedophiles?  
Bear witness.

Do you see us being surrendered to psychopaths?  
Bear witness.

Do you see us being sold to sadists?  
Bear witness.

Do you see us being bound and beaten?  
Bear witness.

Do you see us being terrorised and tortured?  
Bear witness.

Do you see us bleeding and dying?  
Bear witness.

Do you see our broken bodies and shattered hearts?  
Bear witness.

Do you see us?

Bear witness.

### **Don't Turn Away**

Many choose to turn away

And pretend the darkness

Doesn't exist

Just because

They live in the light.

But what about those

Suffocating in darkness

With no way out?

Will all turn a deaf ear

To their cries?

When they try

To break the silence,

Will anyone listen?

Don't turn away.

### **Once Upon A Time**

Once upon a time,

There was a child

Who was abducted,

Exploited, and tortured.

Once upon a time,

There was a child

Who was rescued and told,

"Leave the past in the past,

"Move forward in life,

"Get over it."

Once upon a time,  
There was a child  
Who tried to move on  
But whose mind held them captive.

Once upon a time,  
There were people who wondered  
Why a child  
Hadn't taken their expert advice.

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## Raya Snow

*Born in Russia, adopted to Canada*

### ***About my experiences of abuse prior to adoption***

I have experienced sexual abuse from when I was about 5-7 years of age by my biological mother's boyfriend who I thought was my biological father at the time. I remember my biological mother would get abused as I had to sit and watch the perpetrator do awful things to her, only to be left with the same experiences myself, later on. At the time I was living with my great, great aunt and I remember the perpetrator coming by my house and my great, great aunt would leave right away. I would always question why she never stayed - because maybe if she stayed, the abuse would be avoided for her? It is only now, years later, that I think she was being paid off so he could have 1:1 time with me. Sometimes, we would spend time together at the perpetrator's place where I was invited for a sleepover. Until one day, I had enough. I ended up praying to God for strength and that one last night, I threatened to call the cops on him. I learned quickly that I was my protector.

### ***Lack of independent followup***

I believe the lack of independent follow-up on adoptees after an adoption is complete can lead to huge gaps in care and support. Adopted people can become more at risk of many forms of abuse, as well as sexual offences. A lot of adopted people have already gone through childhood trauma, which can allow them to frequently face self-identity, belonging and mental well-being issues carried on in their life, which may point them to a greater risk of being taken advantage of or abused. Many adopted people also suffer from attachment and trust issues because of being separated from their birth parents. These attachment issues make it difficult to have healthy relationships and boundaries and are more vulnerable to coercion. Without seeking professional help and addressing the attachment issues, adopted people and their families are amplifying the risk. Adopted people may also isolate themselves due to struggling with their identities and may feel disengaged from both their biological families and adoptive families. This may leave the adopted person feeling more vulnerable to those who take advantage of the need to bond, frequently resulting in abuse.

Seeking 1:1 support (therapist, coach, doctor in the trauma field) can help the adopted person identify and reduce feelings of isolation by giving them tools for emotional support, sources and relationships with others who can relate. Adopted people who don't seek help due to their adoptive parents, feelings of shame, etc, can struggle with self-worth, boundaries and self-empowerment, allowing them to be more open to manipulation. It would help if the adopted



person had access to a confidential and safe course of action to report abuse and receive a mediator when needed.

### ***Who to turn to for help***

I would suggest that after sexual abuse occurs within the adoptive family, reach out to someone you trust with your gut instinct - whether it be your best friend, family friend or even a neighbour. Reach out to Child Protection Services via their anonymous hotline, or law enforcement. You can even speak to a therapist or counsellor if they are trustworthy. Reach out to an Adoption Agency, Social Worker, National Sexual Assault Hotline (RAINN) - Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network. You can also reach out to support groups for Adoptees and Survivors, legal aid orgs, school counsellors, teachers, doctors, etc.

My adoptive parents didn't seek the help I needed after finding out about my sexual abuse prior to my adoption nor did they report the abuse. This was due to the way I was brought over to my adoptive country Canada and the fact that they felt they couldn't do anything as the abuse happened in a different country before my adoption. We also never spoke about the abuses after I had shared as best I could, around the age of 9 years old.

There was no pre or post-education about sexual abuse prior to adoption for my adoptive parents or me. I am not sure if my parents believed me or not but they didn't do anything in terms of seeking professional help. After a child has suffered from sexual abuse it is important for the adopters to seek help. The child may start to isolate themselves and will further develop trust issues which most times, creating a bigger problem for them in their adulthood.

The adopters may feel they are entitled to the child to feel grateful for adopting them. This can result in the child becoming more silenced about the trauma they have endured. They might feel that they need to prioritise the feelings of their adopters before their own. Their expectation of gratefulness may discourage the child further from speaking about their abuse. The child may feel manipulated by their adopters to feelings of gratefulness which can underlie their abuse and neglect further by preventing them in their healing journey. The child may not feel comfortable sharing their anger or resentment which is important for them to voice their feelings. It is essential to empower the child to speak about their experience in order to heal and become a functional adult. It is important to find the right resources and supports for the child who is adopted and was sexually abused.

### ***Feelings of shame and its connection to sexual abuse and adoption***

The adopted child might already feel shameful about the whole adoption process therefore any sexual abuse only further amplifies these feelings that prevent the child from speaking up.

The relationship becomes very fake when the adopters sweep everything under the rug only to allow people to see one side of their family dynamic.

### ***Birth family reunion and the extra complications of "do I tell them about the abuse within the adoption"?***

I shared my experience with my biological father about my sexual abuse prior to adoption. At first, he felt very sorry, sad and angry and wanted to help me overcome this trauma. He became my protector, only over the phone and video calls. Once meeting him in person, he still felt bad for me and the trauma I have endured. Eventually, he allowed me to see his true self. He began acting like a predator - making me feel unsafe, scared and hurt. Knowing what I have gone through, my biological father didn't feel the need to hide his true feelings and intentions. This was another layer of abuse and trauma I had to overcome and heal from.

### ***Impact in intimate relationships***

As an adopted person carrying multiple layers of trauma, I found it very challenging to commit to relationships initially. Over time, I began to believe that the only way to earn someone's love was through physical intimacy. Other survivors may completely shut down, avoiding any contact with others, which makes forming relationships nearly impossible.

### ***Dealing with triggers (events, sensory things, memories being brought up, key people, that remind me of the abuse)***

As a child, I kept myself occupied to avoid triggers and I wasn't allowed to express my emotions, which created many challenges in adulthood. It wasn't until my late 20s that I started to identify my triggers. I often felt too afraid to speak up and would freeze in unsafe situations. Having a safety plan would have been crucial for helping me feel more in control. Seeking professional help could have provided a space to voice my feelings and gain the necessary tools for managing triggers. Working with a professional would have supported me in learning to prioritise myself and reach out during difficult times.

### ***The role religion plays***

Speaking for myself, my faith helped me feel safe both physically and mentally from my perpetrator. The perpetrator never entered the holy place where I would pray to God for safety

and courage. My prayers were always answered, and that was where I found faith that no harm would come to me.

***When I disclosed about my sexual abuse to someone, this is how I was responded to and what needs to be done***

I finally spoke up about my adoption– though not the abuse – to a neighbour who was willing to help me find a therapist free of charge to work with me on my traumas. Unfortunately, it didn't work out because my adoptive parents found out. Once I changed schools, I thought about starting with a clean slate. I spoke to the counsellor there, sharing my story as best as I could. The counsellor was shocked and felt terrible for what I had endured. They also helped me find a therapist specialising in trauma who was willing to work with me for free due to the severity of the abuse. However, that didn't go through because I needed parental consent to seek therapy.

I believe all adopted children should have access to professional help at no cost to gain the proper tools to manage their emotions, triggers, new lifestyles, and much more. Finding the right support will significantly impact an adoptee's healing journey by providing better tools for becoming a functional adult.

***The healing journey***

The healing journey is not linear - it is complex and needs to be approached with love and kindness toward oneself. It took me an entire year before I started to open up and share my true feelings with my therapist due to abandonment and trust issues. I am still on my healing journey, even though I have addressed most of my traumas. Recognising triggers when they arise may still take time to process. This journey will be lifelong and while the feelings may be suppressed over time, they won't be as tumultuous as they were before seeking professional help.

Intimacy can be difficult for me at times due to the abuse I have suffered. However, I have a loving husband who understands my struggles and helps me feel safe in moments when I don't feel that way.

It's funny because I don't often talk about my abuse - my trust issues don't help. Eventually, I found a woman from ICAV with whom I shared my story from the past. She opened her heart and arms to me and truly listened. This marked the real beginning of my healing journey. With her knowledge, compassion, and advice, I was able to continue my therapeutic work without needing to find another therapist. This approach isn't for everyone, as doing the work alone can be challenging. However, I managed to rediscover myself, find my voice, and take action as an adult while also freeing my inner child, who had protected me for many years.

One barrier to finding support for adopted individuals is trust. While it may be easy to find someone to talk to, trusting them with your story, ensuring they believe you, maintaining confidentiality in conversations, and being gentle with the adoptee is essential. It is difficult to find someone who knows complex trauma and can give the right tools and support while being gentle in the adoptee's journey.

***What supports are missing that would have been helpful***

The adopters must be offered a list of support systems for themselves becoming parents and for the adopted children who will need coping skills dealing with their complex traumas.

***What mental health professionals (counsellors, psychologists) need to know about sexual abuse and adoption***

Health professionals need to recognise that most adopted children carry complex traumas that need to be addressed as soon as possible, in order for them to live a fulfilling life.

***What facilitators of adoption (adoption professionals, social workers, government workers) need to know about sexual abuse and adoption***

Firstly, facilitators need to develop trust with adopted children, especially those who have suffered from abuse. Secondly, they should receive education and training in addressing complex trauma and sexual abuse, ensuring that the adopted child feels heard, seen, and understood. Empowering the child by allowing them to have a voice is essential for their healing journey. Additionally, adoption facilitators should collaborate with adoption professionals, social workers, and government workers to provide more comprehensive support for the child. They must also raise awareness of ethical and legal considerations affecting the child. Lastly, understanding the environment in which the child grew up will help facilitators identify better resources and support.

***I would like other adoptive parents to know*** they need to create a safe and trusting environment for their child, one in which the child feels secure enough to reach out about experiences related to abuse and adoption. They should encourage their child to voice their truth, be seen, and know they are safe.

***I want fellow adoptee survivors of sexual abuse to know*** that they are seen, heard, and believed. You are not alone in this journey of fear and shame. None of what happened was your fault - therefore you don't need to forgive or forget the wrongdoings of others. Support is available

to help you find the courage to stand up, share your story where others will listen and take action that aligns with your needs. You matter!

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## Ron

*Born in Scotland, adopted transracially into a Scottish family*

I was adopted at 6 months of age from Crosslet House Orphanage in Glasgow. I have no memory of any incidents prior to adoption. Coincidentally, two of my adopted aunts were sexually abused at Crosslet House as children, a few years later.

My adopted uncle (who was later convicted and jailed as a paedophile and has since passed away), sexually abused me in the back garden of my home when I was 10 years old. This occurred on at least two or more occasions - I am not sure how many times. I remember he said he would buy me some fishing gear if I kept the secret. I don't recall how it made me feel in terms of shame at the time of the abuse.

As I was adopted in 1962, adoption arrangements were very primitive compared to the more enlightened approaches that followed. There were no checks made on me after adoption that I am aware of and we emigrated to Australia when I was 8 years old.

I wished I had reported my uncle to the police. I often thought about doing it and I felt some guilt that he went on to sexually abuse others after me - until the time he was jailed. Perhaps I could have stopped him from abusing others.

My adoptive parents were good Christian people - but they were too naive and too trusting of the other members of their family. They were not assessed in any significant way - my adoptive mother was an assistant nurse at the orphanage and the adoption paperwork consisted of 3 pages. A proper assessment of them today may not have resulted in further protection of me, as it was an extended family member who was my perpetrator.

As I anecdotally understand that adopted children are statistically much more likely to be sexually abused - there is absolutely imperative that adopted children are better protected and that there is proper assessment of adoptive families and follow up through the years.

I did tell my adoptive parents that my uncle (he was my adoptive mother's brother) had abused me and they didn't believe me. Once he was convicted and jailed they realised I had told the truth. By then I was an adult. I don't recall when I first told them.

I was largely estranged from my adoptive mother for several years - it was my adoptive father that I had a strong connection with. I am not sure if the sexual abuse played any part in the fracture of my relationship with my adopted mother. It was later in life that I was able to form a lasting relationship with her. I don't feel that my adoptive parents were particularly culpable in what happened to me, nor in them not initially believing me. I understand that others may think that I have forgiven them too easily - but that is true reflection of how I feel today.

I have certainly felt a life long sense of shame directly attached to the abuse I suffered. It has negatively coloured aspects of my sexual relations, all through my life. I have also had to deal with shame about my origins and my ethnicity all my life. I have been an 'obvious adoptee' - a transracial adoptee with Kashmiri\Pakistani features adopted in a blond, blue-eyed white family. Every time I am asked where I come from I feel I have to go through a justification of who I am and where I come from (I understand now that I don't have to).

I did cut ties with my adoptive mother for a long period (several years - I'm not sure how long). How much the abuse played a part, I am not sure. There were other circumstances that were more relevant to the breakdown of our relationship.

It never entered my mind to tell either my birth parents or my birth relatives.

As mentioned, the impacts have lasted a life time. It has made some aspects of my sexual behaviour shameful to me. I have had many flashbacks of what happened to me when with a partner. I had never divulged the actual details of the abuse until I told my counsellor last week (knowing I would be writing about this shortly). I had often mentioned I'd been sexually abused, but not the actual detail. I am glad I told my counsellor.

Certain sexual activity causes flash backs. I have tried to deal with it by shutting down that activity. I feel like I have not succeeded in anyway in overcoming it.

For me, religion has been very good - I have had mostly positive experiences with my belief in God. In fact, I am at my most happiest when my relationship with God is strong. Nevertheless, as a member of a 12-step program and being sober for nearly 24 years, I have heard countless souls tell of their sexual abuse at the hands of clergy. When I was 17, a Catholic priest tried to seduce me several times - I resisted him (he was a family friend and I wasn't brought up a Catholic).

I disclosed my sexual abuse to my adoptive parents who were unwilling to believe me. I think there is much more consciousness of sexual abuse now and my experience is possibly of a different era when issues like sexual abuse was covered up.

Although I have brought the subject up to a number of counsellors I haven't found any of them particularly effective in helping me. My current counsellor may be able to help me, though - as is my contributing to this paper.

I was a practicing alcoholic and addict until the age of 39 and then I began a profound journey of healing - that is ongoing. Most of the good work was done in the first couple of years - the sexual abuse wasn't ever covered in detail - until now. It has imbued my sexual behaviour with shame. I think I've left the sexual abuse to the side and never really addressed it. As I am only now wanting to deal more extensively with it - I cannot comment on what barriers there have been to finding supports to deal with sexual abuse within adoption. Unfortunately, I was not even able to talk about adoption, never-mind sexual abuse - until I stopped drinking at the age of 39 and after surviving a number of suicide attempts.

***What mental health professionals (counsellors, psychologists) need to know***

I think a lot of counsellors underplay the impact adoption has - it's the same as being an alcoholic, unless you've lived the experience - you can't really speak to it with any authority (generally - there are some individuals who can).

***What facilitators of adoption (adoption professionals, social workers, government workers) need to know***

That an adopted child is a potential magnet for abuse, because of their lack of physical family ties and other issues and it should be assumed they are at risk and managed accordingly. Sexual abuse of adopted children is as impactful a crime as it happening to anyone else.

***I would like other adoptive parents*** to be aware of the extra risks.

***I would like fellow adoptee survivors of sexual abuse to know*** you are not alone, it is not your fault. You must take the action you choose - even if that's to report and cut off your adopted family. For me, I chose to forgive my uncle and I found that very healing. I do not advocate that others take my path. I would not presume to tell others what to do. If my uncle were still alive, I would report him to the police and still forgive him.



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## Sam van den Haak

*Born in Sri Lanka, adopted to the Netherlands*

### ***About my experiences of abuse***

I was 6 years old and I was abused by my adoptive father. As a little girl, I was allowed to crawl into my adoptive parents' big bed on weekends and cuddle. When my adoptive mother got out of bed, the hugs turned into criminal acts. My adoptive father taught me that this was the way to show that you loved each other. I never did anything against my will, nor was I threatened, but I just learned that this was the way it should be. It wasn't until I got a boyfriend later in life that I realized that this wasn't something you 'only did with your dad'.

I have been ashamed of this almost my entire life and after carrying this secret for more than 25 years, I spoke out about it a few years ago. My adoptive father and my adoptive family deny the abuse.

### ***Lack of independent followup***

I was never asked how I was doing as a dark-skinned girl in a light-skinned family with 3 biological children, 2 who were mentally and physically challenged but passed away as older teens when I was a child. It was clear from the start that I did not fit in with the family, but no authority has ever looked out for me. If there had been a follow-up by people who really understood what it was like for me in that family, the abuse might not have happened because the family would have been under a magnifying glass. Or perhaps the abuse might have been discovered earlier. Then the adoptive family would have had to acknowledge it and I wouldn't have been the one left alone.

### ***Who to turn to for help***

There should be an institution that is completely specialised in adoption issues. Since sexual abuse is very common, there should be separate care providers for this.

### ***Assessment of adoptive parents prior to adoption***

As I wrote, there were already two biological sons who were mentally and physically disabled. The problems between my adoptive parents were way too big, so no adoption would have had a chance of success. I don't know whether you can estimate in advance whether sexual abuse will occur, but there needs to be much better screening.

There is another level of sexual abuse for adoptees that needs to be spoken about, and that is of pedophiles who want to become adoptive parents. In the Netherlands, a pedophile (Robert M.) was arrested during the adoption process who ultimately abused 87 children with his male partner

and was sentenced to 18 years in prison for this. Sexual abuse is the main activity in a global network and the specific reason children are trafficked. I personally know an adoptee who ended up in this.

### ***Assessment of siblings in the adoptive family prior to adoption***

The only thing I can say is that the choice for adopting a child is never taken by the biological children. They are therefore confronted with everything that comes with receiving an adopted child. And very often they also blame the adoptee for not having had enough attention due to all the problems or, in the worst case, for the family to fall apart. My adoptive brother is in complete denial of my adoptive father's abuse and has cut me out of his life. He is very angry with me for several reasons. We never actually had a good relationship because of course I didn't fit in with that family at all.

### ***Pre and post education about sexual abuse in adoption***

There should be more education in this area. Adoptees are much more likely to do anything to be loved, which means they are also more likely to be abused. The threshold for the perpetrator to abuse is also lower because the adoptee is not a blood relative.

There should also be much more control from health care institutions.

### ***Not being believed about the sexual abuse I experienced***

It's terrible not to be believed. I was kicked out of the family and that made this the second family where I was no longer welcome. It's terribly lonely not having a family.

When I look at my own behaviour, I can see in retrospect that I longed for love. As an adoptee, I always tried to adapt and make sure people liked me so I wouldn't have to experience rejection. My longing for love had been taken advantage of.

### ***Feelings of shame and gratefulness and the connection to sexual abuse and adoption***

I felt like an accomplice for a long time, because I kept going back to that bed myself. That's where the shame came from. It really took years before I could see myself as a victim.

All my life I was constantly told to be grateful. So I was just grateful and did as I was asked or told. Later in puberty, when the abuse had stopped, I fought hard against this gratitude. As a result, I was eventually kicked out of the house when I was still a minor.

I think this 'gratitude' is also the reason why I am not believed. Because why would you believe someone who is so ungrateful?

***Reporting the sexual abuse to relevant authorities and any extra complications to consider, due to being adopted***

I reported the sexual abuse a few years ago, but the Police didn't want file it due to the statute of limitations. There wasn't enough evidence, so I was simply sent away. Only a report has been made, which means that only if he is reported again will his name come up again.

In the Netherlands, the police are obliged to file the report, but they simply mislead you. They think it is too much work for which nothing can be done.

***Managing the ongoing adoptive family relationship***

I no longer have contact and for me that is very lonely. Not that I want to have contact with people who don't believe me and aren't there for me, but it leaves a huge black hole.

My adoptive brother has clearly sided with my adoptive family. By the way, my adoptive parents split up after I was kicked out of the house and my adoptive mother died a few weeks ago.

I know many adoptees who say they have a difficult relationship with their adoptive parents because they feel like they will never understand the adoptee. I have this feeling myself and that is why I am glad that I am not constantly confronted with it.

***Birth family reunion and the extra complications of "do I tell them about the abuse within the adoption"?***

I don't share much about myself with my biological family and definitely not about this yet. I see them once every 5 years because it costs a lot of money to travel back and forth and there is almost no communication possible due to language barriers. Maybe this will change. I'm going again in December and now that my nieces and nephews are a bit older, the bond could improve a bit. And maybe then I'll tell them.

***Impact in intimate relationships***

I really suffered physically and mentally from the sexual abuse because I didn't trusted anyone and my body shut down. Sex was always painful. I really had to work on my trauma and learn to have sex in a way that works for my body. And I also had to discover that men are different in their sexual needs and it is important to find a man with complementary needs. Fortunately,

thanks to my current partner, I no longer have any pain at all and we have a very healthy and fun sex life. But this is something I really had to work on for years in terms of mindset and physicality.

Because of my attachment disorder due to my adoption, I find relationships very complicated anyway and I regularly suffer from this, but that has nothing to do with the sexual abuse. Although this has of course damaged my trust. My adoptive father should have been the one to protect me.

I can deal with my triggers from sexual abuse, because I got over that trauma.

***When I disclosed about my sexual abuse to someone, this is how I was responded to***

I was very young when I disclosed for the first time, and so was the other person I told this to. That person couldn't do anything with it at the time either. Later, I also told it again but that friend also didn't know how to respond. The friendship then also ended.

***Finding appropriately trained professional support***

The best is someone who is not only a professional, but also an expert by experience. I am an example of this myself.

Many professionals have no idea what they are talking about. They are neither adopted nor abused. They only think they can help others through the experiences of others and through books. But what I find best is a professional who is also an adoptee survivor.

***What mental health professionals (counsellors, psychologists) need to know***

People always say how important it is to talk about it as a survivor and of course that is true. Adopted children are even more likely to be rejected after telling about the abuse than the adoptive family's own biological children because you can't get rid of your own children that easily. But if your child is adopted, you can. So there should be much more knowledge about this in the guidance.

Adoptive parents often have a reputation to uphold because they have saved a child. If it turns out that sexual abuse is involved, and especially if faith also plays a role, adoptive parents often consider their reputation more important than their adopted child's needs.

***What facilitators of adoption (adoption professionals, social workers, government workers) need to know***

What I have really missed is an adult to whom I could ask my questions as a child about what was normal or not. As an adoptee, you should actually have an adoption professional who you see

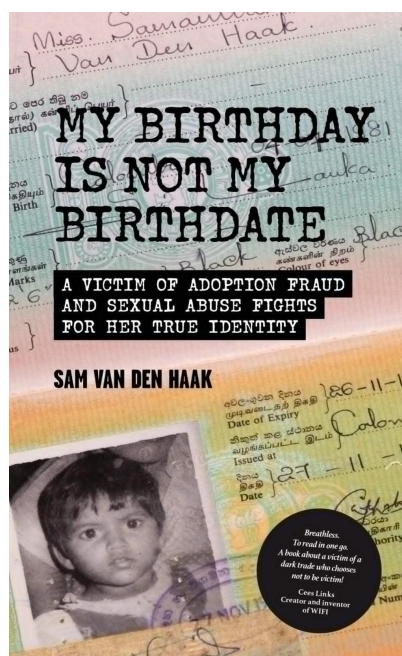
at least once a week and with whom you do fun things, so that you can build a bond of trust. An independent person who really monitors whether you are doing well. If I had someone like that, I might have opened up about the abuse much sooner.

***What law enforcement and legal professionals need to know***

We adoptees always have to be grateful. This gratitude label ensures that when abuse occurs, it is even more difficult for adoptees to talk about it and that is why it takes so long before we dare to talk about it. In terms of burden of proof, this is often far too late and there should be a solution for this.

***I would like other adoptive parents to*** really try to connect with their adoptee and apologise for being a part of the child trafficking that underlies intercountry adoption. With that apology, you will get closer.

***I would like fellow adoptee survivors of sexual abuse*** to read my book in which I speak about my experiences as an intercountry adoptee who has been sexually abused. It is titled: "*My birthday is not my birthdate*" (available currently in Dutch with plans for an English publication - watch the [ICAV website](#) where the link will be updated when English is available).



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# Sasha Frugone

*Born in South Korea, adopted to the USA*

## The “No-Choice” of Adoption



## Adoption Events

20 December 1955	Day found in Seoul, Korea - given as a legal birthday
05 June 1958	Adopted by a German American family from Holt Adoption Arrive in the United States Given the name Rebecca Elizabeth
20 July 1960	Became a Naturalised Citizen
01 Aug 2009	Lost Naturalisation Certificate
01 Mar 2023	Received replacement Naturalisation Certificate

## Trauma Events

- Physical, emotional, mental, and sexual abuse began upon arrival.
- My adopted mother wanted a baby - I was nearly four when I arrived. I had many adoption anxiety symptoms. I would scream and kick whenever she attempted to hold me. I did not fulfil her expectations. This was communicated often.

- My adopted father was a pedophile who needed money. He had me do sex shows for money and would later sell me for physical interaction to three men. I was told, “You are my special wife. Make sure not to tell. It will make other people jealous.”
- I was told I was the devil's spawn from a heathen country. This God-fearing family would save me. Learning about my birth country was not allowed as it would further sinful behaviour.
- Told I was so bad my birth mother threw me in a trash can (which is the story of my discovery before being sent to Holt Adoption).
- I had starvation trauma. I stole and hid any food I found. Food was used for behavioural control.
- The night my adopted father died, I was awakened in darkness and taken to the hospital. I was five years old. With the family present, he said I had caused the sexual abuse and was responsible for his sin because I came from a heathen country. He had received forgiveness. He prayed I would get on my knees and beg God's forgiveness.
- During my first year of school, fellow students drew blood by hurling cement slag, which hit me in several places. Shouting, “Go home, you slant-eyed commie whore!” I would experience many other similar incidents.
- When I began to tell my “stories” with rage, I was committed to the state mental hospital. I was there for a year plus.
- A husky puppy was forever short-chained in our laundry room.
- After losing my proof of citizenship, it took 14 years to get them replaced

### **Behaviour outcomes from adoption trauma**

- NO CORE IDENTITY
- multiple run-aways with risky behaviours
- a complete loss of memory from birth to 14 years of age
- intense shame
- inability to hold the eyes of anyone
- compulsive sexual behaviour
- physical sexual dysfunction
- compulsive eating
- depressions that would render me helpless in bed for weeks
- night terrors and panic attacks
- inability to be alone
- constant feelings of fear and self-loathing
- intense hyper vigilance
- inability to connect with others at any level

- constant feelings of danger from everyone
- severe jealousy
- uncontrolled anger
- cigarette burning on my arms
- use of aggression to make people go away
- use of offensive behaviour and language to keep people away
- engaging in acts that hurt others to control “when” people would leave me
- self-medicating and substance abuse
- isolation and withdrawal from daily care and activities
- suicidal ideation - with one serious attempt
- constant feelings of not being good enough
- inability to make choices
- fear of self-awareness
- inability to manage self-care with a constant hope for a saviour
- severe sleep disruptions
- intense re-occurring progressive nightmares
- giving too much to create false value
- doing anything to be the center of attention - “begging to be seen”
- doing anything to spotlight my sexuality
- believed my vagina to be my only offering of worth
- believed I had to give sex to get kindness
- inability to establish healthy boundaries at any level
- agoraphobia following the last rape of 5
- hatred of my body - turned into body dysmorphia
- inability to remain present
- creation of a fantasy world
- racing thoughts about why I could not fit in
- hatred for anything Asian
- I would pray to become white
- bowel and bladder issues
- repetitive weight gains and losses
- feeling safe and loved only when eating or being 100 pounds over healthy weight
- severe control behaviour
- severe fear with passive-aggressive behaviour
- compulsive lying and manipulation
- multiple self-created victim events and relationships in adulthood
- did not feel worthy of an equal partner



- chose damaged people - “If they need me, they won’t leave me.”
- engaged in one very physically abusive relationship
- an inability to accept happiness and success - failure outcomes self-created
- financial peaks and valleys
- I lived for 14 years in Arizona, where illegal alien sweeps were happening daily, and many people thought I was Mexican or felt I should be treated the same. It created fear every day.
- Now living in Nevada, which has similar racial beliefs (here I am mistaken for Paiute Indian), keeps me indoors more than I would freely choose
- a lifelong footprint that shaped personality and continues to shadow decision-making

### **What systems could have prevented the abuse**

■ A guide for successful adoptive parenting - it would include:

- What successful adoption looks like
- trauma systems. Where to go to get professional help.
- the necessity of positive ethnic identity
- what it looks like when a child is adopted to fulfil needs in the family
- abandonment explained as: “It is the circumstances that were so for the adult birth

parents. It has nothing to do with the child. Some good people want their children but cannot keep them safe or provide health care.”

- age-appropriate small books for adoptees, with examples of how to experience feelings
- why telling your adopted child to keep secrets and to lie is so harmful
- how to parent without using shame to shape behaviour
- how to parent with guidance instead of domination
- how to parent without violence
- how to parent by teaching the empowerment of choice
- how to help your child claim power after receiving ethnic bullying

■ Follow up with a group trained in adoption trauma with mandatory:

- Weekly online visits for the 1<sup>st</sup> year
- Monthly in-home visits for the 1<sup>st</sup> year
- Monthly communication with both adoptive parents and child(ren) until the age of 21
- Make a 24-hour hotline available throughout the life of the adopted child
- Access to adoption specialised therapists - free to the adopted family if necessary

■ Follow up to review the financial stability of adoptive parents until the child reaches the age of 18

■ Guidance counsellors for the adopted child covering:

- continued education
- housing

- living as an independent adult through the age of 21
- ongoing future support as needed with financial support if necessary
- A big brother/sister program
- Online group meets of adoptees with country of origin choices - fully moderated by a group Papa/Mama

With the help of many therapists, counsellors, and coaches, I have a robust and positive core identity today. This paper focuses on tragic events. Today, however, I am genuinely grateful for all the experiences, as they gave me the foundational knowledge to light the healing path for others. This is an honour. I have healed and learned the power of forgiveness. Some memories returned, which included good stories about my adopted parents.

From the ages of 4 to 5, I claimed an old weeping willow tree in the backyard with a nearly 2-foot overhang as my hiding place. My adopted father allowed the beautiful, velvety, soft bluegrass underneath the willow tree to grow longer. When I did not greet him upon arrival, he knew he would find me in my safe place with my imaginary friends.

One day, I had a nasty fight with my adopted mother. He told me, "Sometimes when I cannot change what others do, I choose a new name and pretend to be someone else." This taught me I could become anyone I chose. As an adult, I would change all my names. Choosing the harmonics riding the air when someone speaks your name is powerful.

After my father died, we were in financial ruin. Our debt was beyond our ability to repay. We lost our home and had to move to a neighbourhood my adopted mother considered unsuitable. It was where the poor people lived. She sold everything of value. Last was her rocking chair. It had sentimental meaning and was her comfort spot. After paying, the man asked if she had anything else for sale. With tears in her eyes, she pulled off her wedding band and said, "This is all I have left of any value." I witnessed the actions of a compassionate and caring Caucasian male. He returned her wedding ring with a \$100 bill and said things would work out. This would help me in the future to give up hating white people.

Mother lacked marketable skills. Her sister got her a job at a hospital cafeteria. Despite feeling ashamed, she dressed up every day and went to work. This taught me to "press on" through difficulties. I later learned she could have relinquished us to Child Protective Services. Instead, she gave up everything she loved to care for us.

America has lost the nuclear family. We must qualify to buy a car. Yet, we do not require meeting knowledge requirements to raise a child.

As humans, we are chemically designed to bond with a biological parent. That connection becomes so strong that even in the face of severe abuse, a child will fight to maintain that connection.

Statistical reports on forced assimilation show higher rates of alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence, and suicide. When an adopted child is brought into a new country and a new ethnicity, life is just a shock. The biological bond has been broken. They are now surrounded by sounds, sights, smells, and tastes that have no familiarity. If the child was breastfeeding before arriving in the States, this act of comfort is no longer possible.

When adoption occurs before the age of seven, it can interrupt the development of core identity, regardless of the quality of the adoptive family. My life exemplifies the long-term effects of cultural adoption bereavement. Therapeutic assistance is essential, starting at a very young age. Sadly, there is still a stigma on receiving mental health care. It is dangerous that the best health care is only available to the wealthy in the United States.

It is disgraceful that we might even consider the idea of racial profiling as a way of life. This automatically teaches a child they have no control over their identity. The only power they will have is when they become adults and can dictate how others should live and believe about themselves.

I was asked to speak about adoption. Below is my speech.

*Did the Korean government and private adoption agencies coerce women/girls to become pregnant and relinquish their babies?*

*Recently, many conversations have been about the story of my discovery in a trash can behind a restaurant in Seoul, Korea. Several people wanted me to know that they believed this was a lie. Due to the way this narrative was delivered to me, it took away my ability to create a positive core identity. I suffered many years under the yoke of this “story.”*

Below is my reframed story.

*My adoptive mother had told me that I was so worthless and demon-filled that my biological mother had thrown me into a trash can. I had an avant-garde therapist who guided me through creating a reframed mind movie. When I felt the fearful ache of abandonment, I would see a young, beautiful, tiny woman child. She was cold, hungry, and tired, wearing thin old rags. She could barely carry me. There was snow. Tears ran down her cheeks as she placed me in the trash can. She said, "I cannot take care of you. Someone will come soon. I have always loved you. I WILL ALWAYS LOVE YOU."*

We can powerfully reframe childhood stories into compassionate understandings that nullify past, present, and future pain.

*I AM not what has been done to me*

*I AM not what has been spoken over me*

*I AM not the behaviours that I have chosen*

*I AM I AM I AM I AM I AM I AM I AM*

Stories are not who we humans are - they are donated narratives offering "a" perspective.

A parable from India about six blind men meeting an elephant for the first time illustrates adoption blindness. Each describes a different part, correct in the description but wrong in their conclusion about the elephant. Many of us were born under the tail of an elephant. Our beginning truth might be messy and stinky. Removing the blindfolds and choosing to stand together, we create noble, peaceful, beautiful elephants.

We need to know the facts about government adoptions to be able to change abusive practices, not to define who we are!

Adoption, in its current structure, is "no choice" for the adoptee.

Each present-moment "choice" empowers personal self-identification and integrity.

Parents willing to adopt show beautiful and loving generosity. Giving an adopted child an identity that embraces their origins and an understanding that empowerment is having a choice makes you a forever gift.

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# Tanya

*Born in South Korea, adopted to the USA*

## **About my experiences of abuse**

I was molested by my oldest adoptive brother (7 years older) for many years starting at the age of 5 and ending when I was 11. My neighbour also attempted to rape me on the street when I was 7.

## ***Lack of independent followup***

I think there are a number of issues in this.

- 1) Not enough resources, time, and money.
- 2) It's not seen as a priority, hence not enough time, resources, and money. For the health of the child, it's absolutely imperative to do followup, but how often will an adoptee actually say anything when they are small, if they are afraid they might be taken away? I'm not sure what the answer is, it's complicated, but there should definitely be more followup.

## ***Who to turn to for help***

There are not a lot of resources that are known, even if they are available. Also, not everyone might feel safe to even come forward. Especially in light of adoptee loyalty - how do we create an environment where an adoptee feels safe to say something and risk leaving the family. Even for children who aren't adopted, it's complicated for the victims of child abuse and getting them help or even speaking up.

## ***Assessment of adoptive parents prior to adoption***

When I was adopted, there wasn't a lot of assessment at all. This is very clear in that there was a lot of other types of abuse we experienced in the house - physical and emotional. And no-one came to do a followup.

## ***Assessment of siblings in the adoptive family prior to adoption***

This is hard, because when I was adopted, the brother who molested me was 8. So it's hard to say if there is a way to do assessment of siblings at a younger age- how do you know if they will end up becoming abusive?

## ***Pre and post education about sexual abuse in adoption***

It's not discussed and not readily available. I think it definitely should be.

### ***Not being believed about the sexual abuse I experienced***

It was really hard because my step-mom didn't believe me. Adopted mother had passed away when I was young. My adopted dad did believe me though, because he was told by my adoptive mother that this was happening, she knew it, and she would take care of it. (My parents were divorced at the time). However, my adoptive mother never did anything to stop it and then she committed suicide. So my dad (this being the early 80's), didn't follow up to see if it was taken care of, he just assumed. It was disheartening to see my step-mom trying to belittle it as young kids experimenting, but once my dad found out it had kept happening until I was 11, he felt terrible. Once he knew, (this came out when I was 19), my stepmom finally believed me.

### ***How to better understand our behaviour after sexual abuse occurs, in relation to adoptive family dynamics***

It makes it very difficult to be around family - and I am now estranged from my oldest brother. My adoptive dad has asked if I can make amends with him but I have no desire to nor should I feel like I have to. This was a condition he put on my brother before my adoptive dad would have a relationship with him again. And this is really unfair to base his relationship on whether I will receive my brother into my life again. It puts a strain on the family because no-one wants to talk about it. And I have forgiven my brother but I won't be in his presence because he is toxic and has not done any healing or therapy himself. Thus I won't subject myself to it. And my step-mom still feels like it's not that big of a deal and she doesn't want to talk about it - so I have no voice to say anything. It really strains the entire family dynamic and also illustrates this negative behaviour of communication that occurs in other facets of our lives as well.

### ***The role expectations of gratefulness plays, in relation to sexual abuse in adoption***

I was told that I needed to do things in order to be loved and that if I said anything to my parents, they would send me away. So I had to take a role as a child, being grateful. Anything I did was my fault. It was easy to convince me of this since I was adopted and I knew my family in Korea didn't keep me, nor did the country.

### ***Reporting the sexual abuse to relevant authorities and any extra complications to consider, due to being adopted***

I think adoptees worry they might lose another family and have even more feelings of abandonment.

### ***Feelings of shame and it's connection to sexual abuse and adoption***

It's pervasive and for me, it swallowed me and my childhood - to the point of almost suffocation. I was so ashamed of everything. I didn't have any romantic interests because I was

afraid to be touched, afraid that everything would be violent. I internalised that fear into me being unworthy, not beautiful, not someone anyone would want to be intimate with. I was extremely insecure about my body, developed an eating disorder, hated the way I looked, hated that I was not white. It took many years of therapy before I had my first boyfriend - at the age of 23.

### ***Managing the ongoing adoptive family relationship***

It's exhausting, especially when the adoptive family doesn't want to talk about it, sweeps it under the rug, thinks I should just get over it - but it was a failure on the part of so many people who were supposed to protect me and didn't. Especially from my brother. My adoptive dad did take legal recourse against our neighbour and he did go to prison. But I never received any therapy after that. I eventually blacked it out and had recurring nightmares from age 7 - 21 years old, until after years of therapy, my body was able to remember. The responsibility has become mine and it's lonely and exhausting. Let's not forget about how it affects my partner and children. That through epigenetics and intergenerational trauma, I've passed down this trauma to my children.

It's more important for my health to cut ties from my brother than to have his presence in my life just because he is "family". My choice doesn't have to be my family's choice, but I do want my family to respect my choice. They can choose to have a relationship with him if they want.

### ***Birth family reunion and the extra complications***

I honestly don't know - I'm still searching after 25 years, so I haven't really had a chance to think about what this conversation would look like. I don't shy away when I tell post-adoption service workers in Korea. It's a part of my story. But I can imagine sharing this might add a layer of guilt for the birth family.

### ***Impact in intimate relationships***

This really affected me. It's taken so many years of therapy and patience and trust to be intimate with my partner.

I struggle with triggers related to my sexual abuse. Stress and major changes tend to bring up my recurring dreams. But I have had decades of therapy now and have a tremendous tool box to help me. But it's pervasive and still niggles, despite the years of therapy I've had of over 30 years.

### ***When I disclosed about my sexual abuse to someone, this is how I was responded to***

I disclosed to my therapist at school, my step-mom, and my adoptive dad. My therapist wanted to file a report but it was past the statute of limitations, we did a lot of therapy. My step-

mom at first didn't believe me and belittled it until my adoptive dad said something. He believed me right away and felt terrible.

### ***Finding appropriately trained professional support***

It's so important to find someone who is adoption aware as well as someone with experience with sexual abuse, because there are so many adoption complications woven into the abuse and thus into healing.

### ***The healing journey***

It's lifelong. Some days it's easier, some harder. I never know when something will hit me, though I have more tools to handle when I am triggered. And it's not typically something I would think would trigger me, like reading a book or watching a film where sexual abuse occurs. But this is just me.

### ***Challenges I have faced so far***

For a long time, I wouldn't date anyone or let anyone touch me. I was a virgin until I was 23 years old and started dating my now husband. It really messed with my ability to see myself as an attractive person and to not feel shame about wanting to be intimate, to not fear men - especially blonde men. I still have a fear of blonde caucasian men (because of my neighbour) and people who remind me of my brother (more in life style). He is a drug addict, alcoholic, uneducated, and very prejudiced against people of colour and immigrants.

### ***Supports I've found helpful***

Therapy, somatic therapy, EMDR, sound, women only healing retreat (I've only done one and it was amazing!)

Finding therapists who are adoption aware/competent and also qualified to support sexual abuse and assault is challenging. We really need adoption aware and adoption competent therapists.

### ***Reporting the abuse***

I have not reported the molesting - it was many years ago and beyond the statute of limitations in my State. We did report the attack by the neighbour to the police. I was not involved very much, as I was only 7 years old. My adoptive dad went to court on my behalf, I did not receive any therapy - and now this would be mandatory. The perpetrator went to prison - this was in 1982, so many years ago. At the time, they did not recommend therapy to my adoptive dad for me to



get, nor for him. My adoptive mom had already passed away the summer before, and my adoptive dad had not yet remarried.

***What mental health professionals (counsellors, psychologists) need to know***

Adoption and sexual abuse really complicate one another and both need to be addressed when working with adoptees who are survivors of sexual abuse and assault.

It's more pervasive than one thinks. It occurs and we need to have a voice and it needs to be discussed.

***What law enforcement and legal professionals need to know***

There's so much unknown about how the process will unfold, if victims will be believed, what protection do they get, what's involved with the processes - and I think it deters people from reporting. There's so much emotional labor happening for the process of reporting - and also the pain that it causes to the adoptee and then feeling responsible for breaking the family unit even though it's not the adoptee's fault. But the burden falls on the adoptee which means there will be under-reporting.

***I would like other adoptive parents*** to understand it's real, it happens, parents have a responsibility to know about it and prevent it. The health of the adoptee is more important than the image of the family.

***I would like fellow adoptee survivors of sexual abuse to know*** it's not your fault, healing is possible, and it is a lifelong journey, but you're not alone.

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## Tara OSH

*Born in South Korea, adopted to the USA*

Abuse comes in many forms. Sometimes, it is disguised as love like a wolf in sheep's skin, or other times, without any question as to the intent of robbing you of your autonomy and control over your body and your mind. No matter the shape or intention, it leaves a scar on the soul that may fade over time, but never truly allows it to return to the unblemished original form.

A parallel can be made with adoption as well. When one is taken from their motherland, their native language and culture, autonomy and control are stolen from us. It is disguised as love with words like "you're being offered a better life" or "you were chosen", but no-one ever acknowledges that the wound it causes is a scab that never has a chance to turn into a scar as daily reminders prevent true healing on any layer.

I am a survivor of mental, physical and sexual abuse. I am a transracial international adoptee. More importantly, I am whole, alive and at peace with my past.

Note that I do not call myself, nor identify, as a victim.

Before the age of eight, life happened to me. While I have little to no recollection of the first five years of my life, I know that others made decisions for me that determined the direction of my life until I learned that I could take back control.

Until the age of about fourteen, despite being in a safe and supportive home, I lived in a state of uncertainty. Would I be abused again? Would I get moved to a third foster home? Or could I get adopted for a fourth time? How could I experience a childhood my peers described they had, or were having, in the time I had left to still be a child?

Then I went away to college and life began anew for me. It took me a number of years to grasp full control of the reins on my journey, but now at forty-eight-years-old I feel as if the scars and scabs are starting to fade as I define who I am and how I want my past to shape my future.

You see, I am not angry nor bitter about the path I was put upon. It is a fact that who I am today and where I am in life is due to the past that I have had. However, it doesn't mean that my forced displacement nor the taking advantage of my naivety was, or ever will be, considered okay. Still, I believe that those of us who have survived and forged our own paths are warriors.

Just like the warriors of history, their stories need to be shared. So do ours. We need fellow adoptees to know that not everything is a dichotomy of fairy tale or horror. We need adoption allies, whether individuals or organizations, to know that not everything is a dichotomy of anger and hurt or acceptance and sadness. As much as it would be simpler if life were black and white, there is a huge area of grey that is where many of us navigate.

For me, I have always wanted to write because I believe that is how others can know that experiences like mine exist in the world. I live in the world of the written word and through the stories that others have written, I learned how to connect and feel that I am not alone under the same big sky, like Fievel when he lost his family in *An American Tale* (1986).

We do not need to wade in the murky waters of bitterness and anger. It does not mean that these feelings are not valid. Nor does it mean that we should not have these feelings. Instead, we can use them to motivate and propel us into action that helps to make others aware.

Abuse is not something to be ashamed of. It should not be hidden or swept into some dark unseen corner of our hearts and minds to fester within our souls until we are consumed by blackness. It happened to us, but we do not need to allow ourselves to be continual victims of it. By hiding it, denying it, being ashamed of it, or ignoring it, we create space for the abusers to remain in control of our bodies and minds. This will not do.

Likewise, being adopted is not something to be ashamed of. Nor is it something we should be required to be thankful or grateful about. Being “chosen” or “given a better life” was not in our control, they were passive actions that happened to us. As a transracial and international adoptee, it can never be ignored or denied.

Yet, we can find a way to be in the light and, like Olivia Pope in *Scandal*, wear a white hat and serve as gladiators that fight for more awareness, acceptance, and action to protect our adoptee community from those who think it is their right to rob us of control over our own minds and bodies.

More of us need to speak out and remove our cloaks of invisibility. For it is when we stand up and out that we can make a difference.

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# Tiffany 현명 HyeonBrooks

*Born in South Korea, adopted to the USA*

## **PRIMARY ABUSE**

My adopted dad sexually abused me consistently from the tender, unthinkable age of two until the arrival of my period at 11 made my body no longer attractive to his pedophilic urges.

Mainstream portrayals of people who sexually abuse children make it appear as if they are easily identifiable-social pariahs, ugly, boogeyman-types. In reality, most survivors of child sexual abuse know the person who abused them, and these same people share in our families and communities. My dad was smart, gregarious, and hardworking-well-liked among his colleagues, our neighbours, and the people with whom he shared fleeting interactions. He also used these traits to position himself as the more attentive, affectionate parent and to insulate himself from social scrutiny.

Like my body, my dad's body also kept the score<sup>3</sup>. His unmanaged diabetes and heart disease resulted in a fatal heart attack. He died young at 56, and I was 14, only a few years free from his abuse. I often wonder if his lack of care and neglect of his own body embodied self-harm-punishment for the pain he caused me that accelerated his illness and death. He never had to face me at an age when I could hold him accountable.

Beyond the physical consequences of child sexual abuse, the experience of a parent who who provides financially for the family and demonstrates at least the trappings of care, yet who threatens and violates, leaves long lasting confusion. Being adopted adds to this confusion as intercountry adoptees learn a forced gratitude narrative, as opposed to genuine gratitude, in which our very existence is owed to our adopted parents' ability to

pay for our passage from third to first world countries. The only alternatives to adoption and the preceding family separation are presented as poverty, prostitution or death.

Adoptees also navigate an impossible dichotomy of being labeled as illegitimate, unwanted, and relinquished alongside being saved. Even as a child, I questioned whether the abuse was the price I paid for membership into the family that allegedly saved me and whether my dad found sexual contact with me, as not white and not his blood, somehow more palatable and less incestuous than to violate his biological children.

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<sup>3</sup> Van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the transformation of trauma).

## **SECONDARY ABUSE**

A critical element of child sexual abuse of adoptees is the role of the adopted family system. My dad abused me. My adopted mom denied and enabled the abuse. She also enacted her own form of secondary abuse and neglect. When I first grappled with surviving chronic child sexual abuse, I blamed my mom more harshly than my dad for failing to stop it and for what I experienced as punishment from her. Giving us both more grace remains a challenge for me. I can now see how my mom was also a victim of my dad, and how my dad groomed me to view him in a more sympathetic light.

I also believe that my mom knew about the abuse. At the age when I still wore Hanes cotton underwear with the days of the week printed on them, I suffered from vaginal infections and irritation. Knowing, at least instinctively, that she could not take me to a doctor and out my dad, she would treat me at home herself, applying ointment like diaper cream and baby powder. At the same time, her helplessness coupled with her resentment over what she perceived as sexual attention and not sexual abuse at the hands of my dad, made her retreat and not speak to me or recognise my existence, sometimes for days, withholding affection, and more essential, regular meals and food.

My adopted mom vehemently disbelieved and denied the abuse, labelling me as “psychotic” for naming what happened. My older, adopted siblings also idealised my dad, and my mom discharged them at me as her mercenaries. Somehow, my dad, the person at the center of this poisonous violence, faced the least consequences of his actions while my mom, siblings, and I disintegrated as a family. We have been estranged for over 10 years as a direct effect of the multi-faceted harm that my dad set into motion and that my adopted family’s shaming and silencing enabled to continue. The promise of a better life in the U.S. centred on “what is in the best interest of the child” never materialised.

### **Additional Resources**

Most survivors of child sexual abuse will not disclose or report the abuse as children (approximately 60 to 70% of adults that experienced child sexual abuse) and only a small subset (10% to 18%) will report it to officials in their lifetime<sup>4</sup>.

There are myriad reasons for this rightful reticence to report. My go-to recommended resource for why 70% of survivors of all forms of sexual violence in the United States choose not to

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<sup>4</sup> Kamala London et al., Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse: What Does the Research Tell Us About the Ways that Children Tell? 11 PSYCH., PUB. POL ’Y, & L. 194, 203 (2005).

call the police is a brilliant abolitionist zine entitled “What About the Rapists?” co-created by Mariame Kaba and Eva Nagao.

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## Tina Sigman

*Born in South Korea, adopted to the USA*

### ***About my experiences of abuse***

It first occurred at age five with an older cousin. My cousin's father was a sexual abuser toward his own daughter. I believe this is how my cousin learned his sexual behaviours. It was fondling nearly every time I saw him. At age 8, he enlisted a friend to engage as well. (They were around 12 years old). At age 12, he fully penetrated me and took my virginity. Also at age 12, a hall monitor at my middle school escorted me into the boys locker room where he insisted I give him oral sex. I refused but he exposed himself and kept demanding until leaving and calling me a "tease". He was 26 - 28 years of age, I am unsure of his exact age. When I was 14, a friend of my family - he was 26 took me to a movie where he fondled and groped me. Also at age 14, my father's father attempted to have sex with me. I was old enough to refuse and the rest of the family came home before anything further happened. He then tried to pay me to "keep quiet, don't say anything." He paid me two times. The first time \$3 and the second time \$5. I was 22 years old before my family found out. I had told my younger brother years prior and he told the parents. My mother accused me of lying and spreading terrible things about "such a good man". She expressed that she needed to take a break from such a liar. And I responded with, "Let's just go ahead and take a break forever." That was the last interaction I had with her. I am 51 now. In college, I was raped by my brother's friend. After he raped me, he kissed me on the cheek before he left.

I believe all of these matters happened because I had zero self worth, was desperate for love, had no concept of control over my life, what I wanted, etc. If I had been loved and cared for as an adoptee, I would not have been such a target for boys and men to approach. It felt as though I had "TARGET" on my face. Despite not having any other rapes or sexual contact, I struggled with having sex with many, many, many men who I did not want to because I felt obligated to - like it was my fault that they were there and I "had" to give them my body. I was sexually harassed for many years because I lacked courage, self respect and self esteem to prevent it, shut it down, or refuse it.

### ***Lack of independent followup***

The conditions to adopt should be strict. My parents didn't even earn a high school degree and then were permitted to adopt three more children after me. Those children were all older than me and bullied me, beat me up, exercised extensive cruelty toward me. They were a biological sibling group. So it was a gang mentality they had toward me. To me, it's more about preventing and educating adoptive families.

### ***Who to turn to for help***

To me, it's too complicated to address in written form. But I believe it's about prevention - properly vetting families and educating them and I think this has happened and continues to happen within society as a whole. Adoptive families should be educated about how and why adoptees are at a much higher risk and that part of why is the subject of discrimination and racism. We were not seen as human beings, but more like animals and charity cases.

### ***Assessment of adoptive parents prior to adoption***

It's lacks tremendously. Vetting should include conditions that require proper education, financial status, outside family support, resources, and knowledge about WHY the couple is adopting. Is it because they are attempting to fill their emotional void? Are they trying to save their marriage? Are they mentally ill/unstable? Do they have an "octomom" mentality? Are they mentally healthy? Financially stable? Understand the risks? Understand the special needs of the adoptee?

### ***Assessment of siblings in the adoptive family prior to adoption***

My parents biological son (two years younger than me) forced himself on me when I was 12 and he was 10. I didn't even put up much of a fight because I was so accustomed to being a sexual object. But also, the sexuality since 5 years old contributed to me "wanting" and "needing" the sexual attention. Many years later, he accused ME of raping HIM! But like the mother who physically, verbally, emotionally, mentally abused me, my brother shares the same mental illness. After my brother threatened to beat me up, kill me, and accused me of raping him - he then said "I just said I love you Tina, why are you being so mean?" I had told him I didn't want or need his love. He was crazy and I hated him. After my mother was so abusive and cruel, she would wonder why I never showed her affection. She wondered why I never hugged her or told her I loved her.

### ***Pre and post education about sexual abuse in adoption***

It's so easy to do. Even if it's just a mandatory pamphlet to read and sign, or a 20 minute educational video.

### ***Not being believed about the sexual abuse I experienced***

It ruined my life and enriched it at the same time. I am happy to be rid of the people who never loved or cared for me but expected tons from me.



***How to better understand our behaviour after sexual abuse occurs, in relation to adoptive family dynamics***

It's interesting to learn how it affects every facet of our psyche, not just in intimate relationships.

***The role expectations of gratefulness plays, in relation to sexual abuse in adoption***

All adoptive families should be grateful for the child. Not the other way around. That sentiment should be struck as ferociously as the "n" word is struck from civilised society.

***Reporting the sexual abuse to relevant authorities and any extra complications to consider, due to being adopted***

I would never put myself thru that UNLESS prosecution is guaranteed, and I had a mountain of support as a child. As an adult, I would ferociously, intentionally and intelligently report.

***Feelings of shame and it's connection to sexual abuse and adoption***

I have worked my entire life to not live with shame and guilt. I feel as though I have done a lot of work but still have much to do.

***Managing the ongoing adoptive family relationship***

Adoptees need to do this for each other and for those behind us.

***Birth family reunion and the extra complications***

They don't need to know. It need not affect that relationship.

***Impact in intimate relationships***

For me, it has made relationships complicated. I sometimes mistake sex for love. And I associate love with everything.

***Dealing with triggers (events, sensory things, memories being brought up, key people, that remind me of the abuse)***

I believe I have control or potential control over triggers. Recognising triggers is an ongoing process but I know that I have the power and maturity to handle it. It's my job to do this without involving others and making anyone else responsible for them i.e., to control the behaviours, language of others because I am sensitive to things.

***When I disclosed about my sexual abuse to someone, this is how I was responded to***

Everyone believes and supports me, except the family I was adopted into. An educated person doesn't need to be told. They just know my life and know it's obvious I was sexually abused

(hypersexual, teenage pregnancy, high body count, etc). I have not reported my abuse for the same reason other children don't report. Not believed. No self worth. Self blame. Shame.

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## Vanessa Z

*Born in Costa Rica, adopted to Norway*

### ***Lack of independent followup***

Clearly the adoption industry is an arena for sexual abuse due to how easy it is to adopt and the lack of followup after the adoption.

### ***Who to turn to for help***

You live in it and the schools don't help you. You grow and help yourself when you are old enough.

### ***Assessment of adoptive parents prior to adoption***

The political views by countries who want adoption to continue is to create new families and to increase the number of children and the population. The country does not check backgrounds at all and regards to the adopters application as fact instead of investigating them thoroughly.

### ***Assessment of siblings in the adoptive family prior to adoption***

The children who are not adopted (biological children of adopters) will be heard in the process of adoption only if the adopters want.

### ***Pre and post education about sexual abuse in adoption***

No one talks about this. After the adoption happens the adoptee will not be heard or seen and society will believe it only happened in one family. There are still a lack of protection tools for the adoptees because of these attitudes.

### ***Not being believed about the sexual abuse I experienced***

I knew and it was difficult not being believed. I felt disconnected to the world I lived in.

### ***How to better understand our behaviour after sexual abuse occurs, in relation to adoptive family dynamics***

Talk to the child, be a safe adult who can be trusted by the child. Use tools like a playhouse and dolls to make the child open up about "how is your life" to get information. Give information about what sexual abuse is, so that the child can learn that there is help out there and people to talk to.

The child needs to be removed and a good foster home needs to be found. In Norway in child protection care: intercountry adoptees are doubly reflected in institutions because of our struggles. The child must regain self esteem and be helped to live a good life and to get an education. Many adoptees in Norway suffers in poverty and drug abuse.

***The role expectations of gratefulness plays, in relation to sexual abuse in adotion***

This plays a great deal together with systematic racism. Threats about being sent back to the country you came from, violence and neglect. Also society strengthens the pain for the adoptees as people do look away and do not interfere. It is like the view of the society is that the adoptee has gained everything (won a lottery) by being given access to the country.

***Reporting the sexual abuse to relevant authorities and any extra complications to consider, due to being adopted***

I think now the police in Norway is an authority who will listen. But as a child, you do not have the knowledge of an adult.

***Feelings of shame and it's connection to sexual abuse and adoption***

The shame is something we live with, so you need to learn to help yourself, support yourself and move with the grace you deserve. If you believe you are to be ashamed, it will be a destructive hard force in your life.

***Managing the ongoing adoptive family relationship***

No-one will believe you, no-one will support you. You will be the scapegoat because you ruined the family's reputation. You stand alone in a country you did not choose. You can try to find your biological family, hopefully to get support, or create relationships with other humans who will support you.

Cutting ties to your adoptive family is necessary if you don't have support in the extended adoptive family. If you continue to dehumanise yourself for the sake of the adoptive family, it will not be possible to live positively for yourself.

***Birth family reunion and the extra complications of "do I tell them about the abuse within the adoption"?***

In my situation, my biological family gave me support and valued me as a family member. I was one of the stolen children of Lation America, so I was never meant for adoption.

### ***Impacts***

There are great impacts in intimate relationships, also as a parent! Dealing with triggers, I needed medications and like my siblings who have been in institutions, due to severe mental illness caused by adoption. I find it impossible to find appropriately trained support.

### ***Supports and the healing journey***

I disclosed my abuse to my husband, also to my siblings who also were abused. Some friends know. All support me. Connections and good relations with other adoptees with the same experiences are also vital as a support network. Sometimes medications is a part of the healing because the brain is wired from early childhood and thoughts and feelings continue to spin out of this. Our development is very harmed due to the adoptive family trauma of sexual abuse and the separation from our biological mother.

I know that some might struggle to see some of the things that happened to me as sexual abuse. For example the fact that I breast fed off my adoptive mother (she did not have milk) up until the age of 8-9 years old to be close to her when she wanted, can be hard for some to consider as a form of sexual abuse.

### ***Some of the barriers to finding support***

The barriers to healing are that therapy is expensive and is not accessible to all.

Distrust is also a huge barrier which was one of our survival mechanisms we develop. This impacts many struggles with relationships when we are not healed.

The government must secure the adopted child a network / a family. Too many adoptees are alone in their adopted country, when their biological family is on the other side of the earth!

### ***Reporting the abuse***

I reported my abuse to the police. It was too long ago but with no trial. I received financial compensation from the state. In these cases, there should be unlimited time from the abuses to make a claim. This has changed now in Norway but only allows for cases after the law changed.

### ***What mental health professionals (counsellors, psychologists) need to know***

It has connections because the adopted child is not the adoptive family's child by blood. There are also correlations to adoptions where the adopters lied about their background to get the child.

***What facilitators of adoption (adoption professionals, social workers, government workers) need to know***

Interfere for all matters.

***What law enforcement and legal professionals need to know***

Intercountry adoptions must be stopped. It puts the child at great risk in which the child stands alone. To be adopted is also a high risk for suicide, early death, drug abuse, mental illness and poverty.

***I would like other adoptive parents to know***

You have a responsibility to help the child in any way. Sexual abuse in adoption happens.

***I would like fellow adoptee survivors of sexual abuse to know***

You are not alone. Seek support from adoptee networks. Adoptees help each other - but always, be aware that not everyone are good people.

I wanted to die my all life, especially from the age of 10 years old.

At my age, I am happy to have survived.

It can be better. Love yourself!

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## Vong Ung Thanh

*Born in Vietnam, adopted to Australia*

I had multiple abusers across many years starting as early as 5 years old right thru until 14 years old. I always felt unsafe and unprotected within that family. There was nobody who was my ally. I was called a liar and I was treated like the family slave. My childhood is tainted by those many events and it impacted my self esteem immensely because it reminded me that I was not one of them and I was overtly treated different. I already did not look like them. I grew up without realising my being adopted had any significant impact on my life. I also grew up thinking being treated like this was normal. I craved to be loved, I was so eager to please. I was the top performing student and excelled at school, it was my only safe space except when I faced racism.

There is an absolute incorrect assumption made by those who deem our adoptive parents to be suitable for us when reality bears out that they sexually abused us over multiple years. Children in adoption are more at risk than our foster cared counterparts because they at least get checked up on, in theory. I believe adoptive parents need far more rigorous assessment emotionally by trained psychologists and psychiatrists over months of sessions in order to ensure their manipulating and cunning attributes can become fully visible. It's too easy to appear well adjusted and well put together in a couple of sessions and the couple should be assessed individually and together. Toxic and dysfunctional dynamics are easily hidden if the assessments are not rigorous enough. The damage done to us as children when being sexually abused by manipulative parents like this cannot be overstated.

When the sexual abuse is done from within the adoptive family, it sets up a Sophie's choice type dilemma for the adults in the home. Who are they going to ultimately protect? Whom are they ultimately going to let suffer and be left alone to fend for themselves? In my case, given the abusers were all the blood related males of that family, I was the one who was to be left alone to fend for myself. The uninvolved rest of that family, chose to align themselves to ultimately defend and protect their blood. It is only natural after all, to defend and protect one's own flesh and blood and if this ultimate Sophie's choice occurs, you can guarantee it's not the adoptee who will be protected and defended. This is where the myth of adoption is shattered when we see the reality that we are NOT loved or treated the same despite the typical narrative. We are the sacrificial lamb to atone for the sins of the family.

So for an adoptee being the only non blood related one in my family of 7, I had no one to turn to in reality for help or support. I learnt to turn outwards to professionals who ultimately were my saviours. But if I hadn't found them, I surely would have succeeded in next attempts to suicide in my late 20s because the pain of my life was just too great to bare.

The assessment of my adoptive parents occurred twice for me. It seems in the early years they were assessed by the Lutheran adoption agency but they failed to maintain much copies or documentation and to this day, their files remain fairly non existent. I do question the extent of that assessment but it was the impetuous that allowed them to proceed with obtaining me as an infant born in the Vietnam war.

The second assessment of my adoptive parents occurred 16.5 years later by the Victorian Government Department responsible for adoption. They sent out a social worker who interviewed them and this time there exists a report which the social worker completed. It appears there was no mandatory education nor even a requirement to see a psychologist. It appears the social workers assessment was enough? I'd like to know why we don't have a couple of independent professionals from multiple angles giving input into the assessment of prospective parents. One should be a psychiatrist looking for significant underlying mental health conditions, one a psychologist tasked with looking for child safety and well being issues of the child and to assess their preparedness for the inherent complex issues like racism, identity, displacement, loss, grief, and how they will parent a traumatised child, one should be a social worker helping them to see the big picture of adoption and its inherent colonialism, inequality lack of choices and support for women, etc. One needs to be legal helping them understand the lack of legal protections for the child covering birth and adoptive identity, citizenship, dual citizenship. The fact that most adoptive parent assessment rarely looks at the indicators for sexual abuse except for a police check, nor provide any education of the risks of child sexual abuse or abuse in general is setting up families for this type of failure.

In families where siblings exist, there needs to be an assessment of these other siblings and take into account how they feel. Doing this without these same children being pressured by their parents to say the right thing will be difficult for every adoptee I know who has been part of an assessment so far, has been coerced into saying what's desired. Yet the impact these children have on the adoptee is massive. The sibling rivalry, the toxic family dynamics .. it's all made so much worse for the adoptee when it becomes a whole "you vs them" scenario. Too often one becomes the black sheep of the family, the escape goat for all the toxicity and power plays going on.



We must not ignore that the siblings can often be the source of sexual abuse too and when this occurs, one needs to consider where this dynamic is learnt and what is driving it.

The adoption industry seems to assume that adoption is immune from the dangers of sexual abuse. The narrative is so often that the birth family are the ones being unsafe, not wanting their children, abusing them and the saviourism inherent in adoption blinds us to the huge risk that adoptees are just as unsafe in our adoptive family as our birth family.

It's a very lonely place in the world to be adopted. We are literally on our own and we feel it every day. Being sexually abused as well from within these so called wonderful families makes us feel even more isolated, alone, unvalued and unloved.

Given that I was the scape goat of the family, it went with the toxic dynamic that I was a liar when I told my church friend what was happening to me. That family questioned my parents but of course, I was told off for telling lies and being ungrateful for all they've done for me.

This is the way in which our adoption is turned against us and we are made to feel unworthy and insignificant. There's a very toxic power play that goes on in adoptive families where the abuse is revealed but yet the victim is blamed for creating trouble, telling lies, and being scape-goated again.

We as victims learn not to trust or like our own selves because we are being told that we are the ones doing wrong, not them. You can see how this leads to us needing years and decades of professional help to unpack and undo all the internal damage this inflicts on our vulnerable and traumatised psyche.

I had so many instances of sexual abuse that the behaviours afterwards was always just part and parcel of who I was becoming. I became extremely self reliant due to having nobody to trust, I hated myself because of all the messages I was receiving that I owed them, I was less than worthy, I was deserving of being treated badly on an ongoing basis. If I was to tell an onlooker what to look for in a child who is a victim of sexual abuse in adoptive families, I'd look heavily for those who constantly people please, hate themselves, see no wrong in their parents - that they must be right and we are always the wrong or naughty one, and stick to themselves never wanting to stand out or make a fuss. That's how I behaved. I learnt just put up with it because I must deserve it, there's no one to turn to or can be trusted, and I'm on my own completely and that I'm grateful to them for all they've done.

"You should be grateful because we adopted you. You owe us". This is what was said to me to shame me into being submissive and accepting the status quo. This is why I hate the concepts of gratefulness in adoption. The saviour narrative with adoption is so strongly entrenched in the general public. I could not count the numerous times I was told how amazing my adoptive parents were for giving me a home and that I should be grateful for a wonderful country and place. What a way to shut down any abuse survivor. It's like telling the Jews of the holocaust to be grateful to Hitler that he gassed them in such a kind way. The extra toxicity that plays out in an adoptive home when we are told to be grateful despite abuse happening is soul destroying.

My adoptive family all openly knew about my abuse from the age of 19 years old and onwards. Not once did any of them in that family, ever ask me or suggest would I like to report the abuse. This is despite one parent being a Christian school principle, one sister being educated in psychology, the other working as a Federal Police officer, the other a school teacher, and the brother (also abuser) being a lawyer. I use to sit in therapy and ponder this phenomenon with my counsellor and it wasn't until I realised that only I could act to protect my own innocent child that had been abused, did I understand they were never able to care or do the right thing by me. They were all so wrapped up in their own dynamic in that family. None of them would ever speak up hence why would any of them help to defend me and protect me. I was always alone in that family. It only became clearer the older I got. So at the age of 47 years old, I finally reported all the abusers to the police after seeking countless legal advice from various law firms. The case took 3 years against my adoptive father and he pled guilty at least. The bare minimum given he had acknowledged his wrong during the many years after I revealed it to my mother when I was 19 years old. She fell apart, had mental breakdowns, and was never able to mother me in any way that felt safe or protected. For all the years after up to age 47, I tried to rebuild my relationships with those in that family but it would hurt so much that my needs were never met, they are all so self absorbed, selfish, incapable of offering me any emotional support at all. I finally gave up and realised it wasn't my burden or job to fix them. I had stayed with them all those years because I was so desperate to belong and be loved that even a toxic family will do especially when you don't know any different.

It was not an easy decision to finally report to the authorities but I knew for my inner peace and innocent child that I'd been, I had to do it for myself to show myself that at least one person in this world loves me and will do what they all failed to give - protection and accountability.

Reporting has been a difficult process in itself but now it's over, it was definitely what I needed to do - to stand up for myself and hand back the shame to where it belongs. As an adoptee, I had been a chameleon taking on all their toxic waste and thinking it was who I was but in fact,

I've handed their toxic waste back to them and removed myself from any further dealings with them. It's not my job to fix them. They can figure it out themselves without me.

The shame belongs with the perpetrators and those who support and uphold them. It is a very sad last image I have of my adoptive father standing in the magistrates court flanked by the 2 women of that family who support him most - my mother and one of the sisters. I walk away from that toxic family with my head held high knowing I did nothing wrong. The shame is on them for upholding the trauma and harm inflicted on me by them. They will have to deal with their own demons for the rest of their lives.

It's devastating and I shared in my impact statement which they and the magistrate read, that I lost two families - the first family I'll never know because these people chose to purchase me, then I've also lost this adoptive family because they chose to abuse and not protect me. These are the consequences of their actions on my life for which they largely fail to truly understand how I've been impacted.

Despite my father having apologised twice in my life at least for sexually abusing me and the rest of the mistreatment, it was revealing to me that when I asked him would he consider paying me financially for at least the years of therapy I'd spent to find healing, his response was he didn't believe in blood money and how would he and mum live if he had to pay me. Of course it was always his needs he was putting first and never mine.

In previous years when he'd apologised he'd follow up with, "but what more can I do?" I had always answered, "take this family to therapy and get us some help". But it was never done and only as the police case got to court summons stage, did an offer to a healing circle ever get mentioned but the police told me it wasn't from the defence but a suggestion from the prosecution. I never knew it came from their defence lawyer until I listened to the magistrate's sentencing. Even then, being offered to go for professional mediation this late and only because I'd reported to the police shows it was only done to save their skin, for me, the offer was way too late. If one is truly sorry, one needs to be accountable and show it in action. Saying sorry is easy when it's not followed up with action that's meaningful to the victim.

I tried for decades to be the daughter they wanted until it was just too much to keep pretending that being around or with them just kept on hurting me.

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## Yeshu

*Born in Ethiopia, adopted to the USA*

The topic of sexual abuse comes with its challenges, particularly given it's normalisation in my life. It is difficult to determine where to start in understanding such complicated issues. My personal experiences are not intended to make anybody look bad, rather I aim to inform those who genuinely seek to reform the adoption system.

Following my mother's death, a series of unfortunate events unfolded, some of which involved sexual abuse. The sexual abuse I experienced prior to my adoption was different from the experiences I faced in my adoptive family home. In my adoptive home, there was a significant amount of grooming involved. The manipulation and gaslighting I experienced were very challenging for me to navigate.

Prior to my adoption, sexual abuse was a form of punishment for anything the individual thought I did wrong. I believe the other case occurred because I reminded the individual of someone he lost. This individual made it harder for me to speak about any other individuals. In the case of a family friend, he took advantage of my hunger and the affection I felt for him, as I saw him as an uncle, to justify his actions as expressions of love. All it took for them to ensure my silence was inflicting physical pain. From an early age, I learned to remain silent and endure whatever was inflicted upon me. So when it happened to me in my adoptive home, I mistakenly interpreted it as love, as it differed from the previous experiences I had endured. As a naive child, I accepted everything I was told by those older than me.

My abuser in my adoptive family was my adoptive brother. Upon my siblings and my arrival to America, he showed a significant discontent. When he eventually started to hang around me, it relieved me. I thought eventually he will begin to like my brothers also. He started out with writing me a letter telling me I am beautiful and how thankful he was to have me as his sister. This letter was handed to me from my adoptive mother. I was extremely content to have been given parents and more siblings so I started having hope when I received the letter.

He started out with simply cuddling me to sleep or during nap times. When I would awaken, he would be long gone. The cuddling had become a normal thing that my adoptive mother had taken pictures of. The first time he put his hands underneath my shirt, I confided in a friend. I recanted my story once I saw how much trouble it got me into with my adoptive parents.

Eventually, I started waking up to find my clothes removed, sometimes my adoptive brother still in bed with me naked, and other times by myself.

Long after, my friend tried to revisit the topic, noting as she put it “how close he was becoming only to you and not your brothers”. At the time, I did not comprehend why I was being lectured about premarital sex, I did not fully comprehend what had transpired prior to adoption. When they warned me about going to hell for everything that had happened to me I believed them. I was under the impression that nothing I could do would save me. As a child, I longed for someone to explain what was happening to me, but no-one ever did. Instead of receiving crucial lessons to prevent me from enduring similar experiences repeatedly, I was misled. Being the only adopted girl in the family, I already felt a sense of animosity from my adoptive mother and her biological daughter, leaving me with no-one to confide in.

My adoptive brother often took it upon himself to defend me against his biological family, often expressing his emotions through tears. Often he reflected on my traumatic past, particularly the instances of sexual abuse I endured. As crazy as it may seem, I felt a sense of "protection" from him during a time when I perceived that everyone else had let me down repeatedly. He would spend hours by my side, listening to my stories about life in Ethiopia, a topic we were forbidden to discuss with the rest of the family, which formed a sense of bond between us. He frequently reassured me of his love.

The situation escalated when I hit puberty as he became better at manipulating my emotions to achieve his desires, a fact I was unaware of at the time. This was when he first had sex with me. I remember being frozen during the whole encounter. He would often talk about our first encounter, how he felt remorseful due to my apparent emotional withdrawal, yet he continued to engage with me. He would often speak on how withdrawn I seemed during intercourse. Whenever he provided alcohol, I found myself confiding in him about how sex was not enjoyable for me to which he took offence. He warned me that I would face consequences, which indeed occurred on multiple occasions. He would offer me marijuana and alcohol to help me cope with my circumstances. On numerous occasions, friends would inform their parents about my adoptive brother's constant presence around us, to which the parents would suggest that he might have a crush on them, often joking about arranging a match between him and my friends' older sisters. What my friends were unaware of was that he would wait until they fell asleep to engage in inappropriate actions with me beneath the covers. I cannot say whether he did anything to them after they had passed out from intoxication from alcohol he provided for all of us. My awareness was limited to the actions he directed towards me.

When it came to education about puberty and our bodies, my adoptive mother ensured that we were absent from these discussions by instructing the school to remove us from class. I found myself alone in the library while my peers received essential information. My adoptive mother offered minimal education on the subject during this critical period, leaving me without the guidance I desperately needed as I transitioned into womanhood. I felt deliberately kept in the dark about these important matters. Experiencing puberty at such an early age, particularly due to being placed in a younger peer group, proved to be quite challenging. It was during this period that my adoptive brother developed more interest in me. He made it clear that I was exclusively his and that I should not associate with others. I recall instances when he returned from college parties with hickeys, he was trying to hide them from me because he thought I would be bothered by it. However, I began to feel a sense of relief, believing that he might have found other girls to engage with. What he was doing to me left me in physical pain and I felt unable to confide in anyone about my experiences.

His biological sister was aware of this dynamic and rather than being disturbed, went out of her way to get me in trouble. On several occasions she accused me of being pure evil and would say that I was engaging in a sexual relationship with her brother. She had started the accusations around the times when he would simply cuddle me to sleep. Furthermore, she sent text messages to my adoptive father asserting that it was unsafe for her biological brother and me to coexist under the same roof. She got kicked out because of the fight that transpired between her and her mother about calling the police. My adoptive mother told her biological son that as long as there are no videos his sister could not prove anything. Anytime the biological children fought, the sister always would bring up what was happening in the house.

Whenever my adoptive brother returned home for weekends and holidays from college, he would signal me to sneak into his room, a practice to which I had become accustomed. He started recording some of our encounters. I suspect that my adoptive mother discovered this, as shortly thereafter, she gathered my siblings, friends and me to caution us about being mindful of what we recorded. Following fallouts with friends, my adoptive mother contributed to the spread of falsehoods about me, particularly one that portrayed me as promiscuous which was far from the truth. My adoptive brother was upset with me because she had informed him that I was involved with multiple men sexually and even went so far as to accuse my biological brother of sexually abusing her daughter, a claim that both the biological father and brother dismissed as a big lie. At that point, he had been professing his love for me and was saying he was to marry me, fully aware of my commitment to following the Bible closely. He presented me with articles about step-siblings marrying in a State where such things were legal. As strange as it may seem, I believed everything

he told me. This was a secret I had promised to never mention to anybody as he would say that nobody would understand or believe.

I recall a conversation with another adoptee who shared her experiences of sexual abuse prior to adoption which prompted me to discuss my own pre-adoption experiences; however, even with that insight, I failed to make the connection between the two. What made this different was that there was absence of physical harm - instead, I was asked about my pain levels. He expressed his understanding of my beliefs, often implying that we shared similar values and he never failed to share his deep affection for me, saying that we would marry as intended by God. However he insisted that for the time being, he needed to demonstrate his love through intimacy.

When I left the house at the age of 18, I found myself homeless due to my adoptive mother turning everyone against me, with my adoptive brother being my sole support. He provided financial assistance for a motel and transportation, frequently checking in to ensure my well-being. Whenever I faced difficulties, he seemed to empathize with my suffering and made considerable efforts to ease my circumstances. He went out of his way to present me with gifts and other forms of support. Given his unwavering presence when no-one else was available, I found it impossible to harbour negative thoughts about him. Upon learning of my pregnancy with my daughter, he initially reacted with distress but soon began to show more involvement. He promised to secure a home for us, where we could reside while he fulfilled his military obligations. It was during this period that I began to sense something fundamentally troubling about the entire situation, though I struggled to comprehend what it was. It was only after I confided in fellow adoptees who shared similar experiences, as well as my husband, that I started to understand the gravity of the situation. I recognise that he was aware of right and wrong however, I believe my adoptive parents failed both him and me significantly. Rather than holding him accountable for his actions, they often focused on punishing me.

During the final two years of our time together, they prohibited him from being near me, claiming they were protecting him from my influence. My adoptive mother often remarked that his sister had traveled to Africa and understood our people, suggesting that they were shielding him from my biological siblings and me. I found out about everything because he would tell me. They had the chance to guide their son appropriately, yet they consistently chose to focus on punishing me. He often confided in me about his feelings regarding his biological family, expressing sentiments that mirrored my own. He would tell me how he believed they were in the wrong and expressed deep sympathy for my siblings and me. In fact, he even assisted me in drafting a letter to child protective services. He told me to never mention what we were doing.



I believe there was a lack of monitoring to ensure the well-being of my siblings and me. While I could be mistaken, I do not recall anyone asking me how I was adjusting to my new circumstances. My memories are of being overwhelmed by the situation without any form of support. Had there been proper follow-ups, I might have received the assistance I required during my experiences of sexual abuse, rather than facing it in isolation.

It is important that adoptive parents undergo assessments and training to effectively support children who have endured sexual abuse and other forms of trauma. My adoptive family appeared to lack any understanding of trauma, particularly in relation to sexual abuse. Eventually, my adoptive mother insisted that I see a counsellor, but only when it served her interests. It was during her attempt to keep me in a mental health facility which the doctors deemed unnecessary, and she attempted to say the difficulties for me in connecting with her was due to the sexual abuse I experienced before my adoption.

Until that point, I had consistently been told to stop feeling sorry for myself anytime I mentioned my life in Ethiopia. The environment I was in did not prioritise my comfort following the experience of sexual abuse. Instead, my adoptive father whom I barely knew, was often placed in the same room as me, allowing their grown biological daughter to sleep with her mother. This situation often left me trembling and anxious at bedtime, though I struggled to identify the source of my fear. During these distressing moments, I would confide in my adoptive brother who provided me a “safe space”.

Whenever my adoptive parents would have male friends stay with us, my room was easily accessible to them which would have me trembling. Whenever I tried to seek help from my adoptive mother about the situation, she was very dismissive. She often saw me having panic attacks and would say I was being overly dramatic and hence dismiss it. At the same time, she worked hard to make it seem like her and her daughter were the biggest victims. Often her daughter would yell she is a victim.

My past experiences have significantly hindered my ability to establish healthy relationships with men. The reality of these interactions have been detrimental. I began experiencing frequent nightmares and find it hard to seek comfort from others, which complicated my husband's attempts to support me during difficult times. I believe many adoptees like myself endure their struggles in silence due to the repercussions of their experiences. It was only during my own hardships that I recognised the gravity of my situation. For some time, I harboured resentment towards men and felt a deep-seated anger. I wish that both before and after adoption, adoptees received comprehensive information regarding various forms of abuse they've experienced. Had I



been aware of what I was experiencing, I would have voiced my concerns much earlier, potentially sparing myself from further pain. What made the situation harder was being gaslit in every aspect and from every angle.

I experienced a profound sense of shame above all else even though I did not totally comprehend what was going on. It was only after conducting research that I found out about the concept of Stockholm syndrome which helped me understand my experiences. Not long ago, I started to come to terms with what had transpired and recognised that it was unacceptable. Throughout the ordeal, I had consistently felt uneasy, yet I failed to comprehend the gravity of the situation.

I share my narrative because there are many innocent young girls who endure similar, if not more severe, circumstances. During this I never comprehend why he would say that I would eventually come to despise him.

I would like to say to my fellow adoptees who have endured similar experiences that you are not alone in this journey. I sincerely regret that you had to face such detrimental challenges. It is important to understand that you should not feel ashamed, as these circumstances are not your fault. Allowing shame to take hold can be very detrimental. Do not hesitate to express your truth, regardless of how painful it may be for those around you. Your suffering is very significant and deserves recognition, just as much as anyone else's. The truth will set you free. Your narrative contributes to a larger purpose. Prioritise self-love before seeking love from others. Only by understanding how to love yourself can you establish healthy boundaries with those around you so that you do not repeat toxic cycles.

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## Kyung-Sook

*Born in South Korea, adopted to France*

At a livestream event on *'The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness, & Healing in a Toxic Culture'*, Gabor Maté cited the song from Leonard Cohen, *'Come Healing'*:

*'O troubled dust concealing, an undivided love*

*The Heart beneath is teaching to the broken Heart above'*

And then Gabor Maté said: *'All our troubles, our hatred, our anxiety, our fears, they conceal an undivided love. Our heart breaks everyday but there is a heart underneath that doesn't, that is there to teach us.'*

We can all learn how to prevent child abuse, to protect children in better ways and to support adequately survivors, if we only pause to listen with love and respect adult survivors, who are trying to give a voice to the child within. This child is our unbreakable heart beneath! It can teach us that we can no longer see, because it happened in the past, because it unfolded within closed doors and because our mouths became mute. I have been the victim of a society worldwide who discriminates against my gender, my ethnicity, my colour of skin. On the other hand this patriarchal society has prided itself on marketing me, exporting me as a commodity, fetishising me, infantilising me and sexualising the child I once was; I have been silenced by their taboos, catholic, laic, societal; I have been erased by their plenary adoption. I was given no right later on to express my inner child's needs nor her demands. But it seemed ok to judge every avenue of my life, for being immature, for being promiscuous, for refusing to obey this society who broke my adult's heart. There was no box I was willing to fit in. I was criticised for being different, though it was never my intent as a child. I made it my goal though later on as proof of surviving a lonely and painful life, a trophy of my own!

An abused child would go to any length to fit in, an adopted child would even more: I was both. Internal conflict, dissonance, rage and unbalance... with an omnipresent imminent danger, a real danger, not made up by a child's fantasy, but borne by her body and mind, but lived in her heart! Why teach me to feel shame and guilt about something that was out of my control? Why judge my poor choices, when my life-hood was under attack? I was a victim. I was unequipped to deal with anything of that kind happening to me. Who would!? I am not an actress though I had to act growing up, act in this unnatural environment, act according to what was expected of me. I am made of loud contradictions; my moods are swinging more than the Spider-man and are jumping without a seatbelt on a roller coaster ride; my head is a bamboo forest within a storm; my amygdala's are dancing peas in a pod and I am pretty sure they probably should not, though I am still not a doctor; if I were cold and rational about my past life, I would lock myself up in a jail cell,

instead I have been emotional trapped and the lockdown happens happened within my bodily cells. One can judge, criticise but nobody would judge me as harshly as I did and still do too often. In my case and the case of too many adopted survivors of child sexual abuse, I had no quiet place at hand, no resting shoulders for my heavy head, nor warm food for rational thoughts at any table, no safe arms nor home to run to...

Unlocking my safe by myself

*I tucked myself with the moonlight; I dreamt, no mares, a wholesome night.  
Consciousness woke to a dim room, where yesterday's panic would bloom;  
Not one iota, Fear would flounder, it needs to conquer and plunder.  
Unequivocal are its tropes, rummaging madly through my hopes.  
Fear is a starving predator, my dark museum curator.  
Maman did not leave the light on, while I was being preyed upon.  
A running wild beast in my head, the monster was yet in my bed.  
Thus I have avoided Darkness, at all costs, feeding Emptiness.  
Dread's nature is to help survive... All I wish is simply to strive.*

*This Morning had no offerings! No, not today! No suffering!  
So, no alarm, no contrived light; I walk determined with delight.  
The sea skyline greets both my eyes, sleepy feet en route are allies!*

*The crisp breeze spreads quick in my lungs,  
a newborn cry or a first kiss,  
An awe to an unhackneyed bliss;  
my heart is home, for no returns.*

*Pause the wailing,  
Joy is calling,  
welcome and brave,  
my love I save.  
The waves are shy,  
Gulls flying by...*

«FREE!» - Jonathan's exulting mew is my key to begin anew!

The French family doctor stated I suffered from depression but with an uncertain prognosis. I was 15. Was I a lost cause? Did I deserve to be left with these words that cemented the grave of my future thoughts? Did I even have the developed brain to understand them? All I know, today, is that this doctor not only threw an unrequited trauma to my pile, but also committed a medical fault by not referring me to a specialist. He and society let me down. Feeling already unwanted, I was a discarded piece of rubbish, made in Korea, sold to France for my body to be sexually abused, over and over again. At age 5, I was still full of love, unconditional love. I was the fox from the 'Little Prince', they tamed me, therefore I would not miss a day of being grateful and waiting for their attention, in any form it came. I would then dutifully plunge myself into sadness and despair, when they would leave me, for whatever reason it might have been. At age 15, I was still a child, who was preparing herself to go into war, a devastating one from which I would barely recover. I was ignorant that the real monsters had already been seeded in me. I would become my undefeated enemy. My growth would be stopped, meanwhile my brain would be fed 1001 tales of

night's princess, of longing moon and bleeding stars. Sanity is not one of the outcomes of a battle against self.

**I felt abandoned and abused, vertically, horizontally and the axes were not unknown.**

### The Void

*To adore her, adored darling, look how you want her, and how you envy her.  
Her kissed hair floats in the dark night; a spark like a star, a bitter tear down your cheek..  
You can no longer touch her, you can only contemplate her, your fugitive, your chimera,  
your grown ephemeral - your bloodroot. Breathe deeply... her scent has gone!  
Feel deeply... she left undone!*

## Autumn

**| Uprooted | a-mother | Good deed | Invisible | Human Rights | Interrupted |**

You may hate what you are about to read, know that you are not alone. I used to hate that these words carved their home in me, as much as I hate maggots. Yet most are part of my personal HerStory. One learns too late, that nobody recovers once dead; I died so many times in my head that I doubted I would ever recover. Or so I thought. And it's ok. It is ok because I am here to write these words, today. I survived and recovery is leading the way; I am ready, my pockets are full of sweets and hopes!

However, in order to remain on the legal side and not enter in the gruesome details of my upbringing, I cannot share the names of my sexual abusers nor the details of my abuse. I scream at this instant their names hoping they hear till their ashes my past torment. I will only share their "original sin" - I am not religious, the a-mother was catholic in some strange ways. I call her a-mother and it stands for adoptive mother, but it would abhor me to attribute to her the -ive suffix. It just doesn't suit her, because it has a hint of softness to my ear like in the world sensitive or intuitive and it requires an action; she was a cruel vegetable, no, she was a cruel self-genetically modified double faced mutant nettle leaf! A-mother should not sound like "A Mother" but "amother", like the "a" in apathetic. Almost all the a-family circle was eaten by a contagious disease; for me, the a-mother was definitely the patient zero and the detonator of a silent bomb that she placed within me and that would explode years later. I will also introduce the other members of a very ill a-family by adding "a" before their titles. I will not call them by their names, most of them ceased to be human to me, they became quickly creeping monsters. 3x a-siblings, 2x a-grandmothers, 10x a-uncles and a-aunties and may be 10x a-cousins and at least 5x a-nephews: an unsolvable equation made of incests, rapes, other abuses, illnesses, mental and physical, horrid death, bursts of violence verbal and physical and dysfunctions in plenty. That's the only common

ground I shared with this a-family: the generational trauma passed onto me though I share no blood with any of them. Foolish obedient sponge 'good girl': I passed it onto my blood-related family!

*Jean-Paul Sartre wrote "**Hell is others**" in his Huis Clos masterpiece.*

That inspired me later on to extirpate myself from this putrid soil and find my own asylum!

We are the invisible children, though our worldwide community is made of millions of us bought, stolen, abandoned or orphans sent to countries predominantly of white population, to build their artificial families, breaking in many cases our biological birth blood-related family. We locked ourselves before they even locked us up. International transracial adopted children are part of the most vulnerable children. So it should come as no surprise that as adults we grow the statistic in mental illnesses, drug addictions, death by suicide and and are preyed up to become the victims of their abuse. Our invisibility is secured against our will by one of the most awful crimes committed by parents -and a-parents-, step fathers, carers, older siblings, family members, teachers, trainers, doctors, etc... onto children, ranging from babies till young adults: child sexual abuse.

Survivors of child sexual abuse lack representation. The brave women who came forward have received so much backlash and so little justice, that it is unsettling to unravel our stories to the public. But our stories must be told, bare and honest, for the society to listen to our recovered voices, for the public to stop blaming us, to prevent re-traumatisation and protect children and adopted children too. We need to break the stigma, the taboo and the myths about child sexual abuse and about adoption. We do not owe anyone to water it down for the comfort of the public, just so that they can sleep at night. We were invisible elephants in the room walking on eggshells; we do not have to live a life bent, shrunk and smaller because of the fragility of a-family and society.

*'Being able to make our own decisions about our health, body and sexual life is a basic human right.'*  
*Amnesty International*

I am Kyung-Sook, made in South Korea, sold to France; I am an international transracial adopted woman, uprooted as a child, badly replanted in an abusive household, sexually abused as a child until I was a teen, molested as a teen, assaulted and raped as an adult. My basic human rights were violated more than once. My childhood is forever stained with sexual abuse. I grew up. Unhealthy, physically and my mental growth was violently interrupted, any try was reprimanded and punished. But even weeds that provide us the most beautiful flowers find their way... I am on my way!

I am not an exhibitionist nor suffer from hypersexuality, though I would not be surprised, but somehow the Judeo-Christian education I've received without consent would have pointers indicated heterosexual men, rather women for these obsessive divers, but may I am wrong and

plagued by stereotypes, I am not an expert in sexual disorders! I am surely not a narcissist, nor in search of lucrative outcomes, nor am I in a place of vengeful rage writing this. My story is not addressed to perverted people looking for pornographic content either, and if it was it would be child pornography! I have pasted links below-below-below in case someone needs or someone one knows needs help with their 'deviant' sexuality. I dislike this word, but I will make an exception here, because in the lack of knowledge, these men cannot be in their right states of mind and rape till babies!!

*Today is a great day to start a new approach and surprise ourselves!*

I want to celebrate today. Everyday more. I had the privilege to watch another sunrise, unlike too many of us, who lost the fight, because they lacked support, because society's stigma was too heavy to bear, because they were drowning in the love they couldn't give... Maybe a fellow adopted person in need, here, is awaiting validation, in search of some catharsis and will feel empowered to choose life, to take control over their narrative and find in their heart to tell their story. Maybe an a-parent, a carer, a teacher, a doctor will have a better understanding of how complex surviving many layers of trauma from early childhood throughout adulthood has repercussions, still strongly felt after 45 years.

Maybe it will even reach lawmakers who will abolish international transracial adoption and the status of limitation in the case of children sexual abuse. Maybe it will enforce the strict application of Children's Human Rights. Maybe some lawyers will challenge justice for and with us! This may sound like I am way above my head! Am I!? It is common knowledge that to achieve big, one has to dream big. I am at the healthiest point of my life so far. 51 years in the making and here I sit and I can welcome thoughts, people, plans for my future and dreams, lots of dreams to buzz in my heart! That's a 200% increase as if I look back to when I was 18! It is why, from where I stand, grounded, I can say, categorically, trauma will not pass; I grew, I have distanced myself in healthier ways with most painful parts of my past, but trauma remains; fragility can be strengthened, but fragility remains. And it's ok. As a community we have the responsibility to try harder, to help further and reach farther, where and when we can; hence why I am here. It will be one thing I have achieved on my reservoir list - a bucket list is beyond small after most of my life lived by procurement and the rest in a latent state. Let my list be a reservoir and today I can put a hack beside 'Tell my lived experience'.

*May OUR words soothe, touch, educate and become the concrete sealer of OUR quest for love and justice!*

**| Adopted | Invisible | Triggers | Sensory memories | Disorders | Phobias | PTSD | OCD |**  
**Flashbacks | Panic attack | Memories | Korea | DNA | Broken |**

I was born in Korea between 1971 and 1973. Who knows? Nobody cares but me! I have been attributed with 2 birthdays and possibly none of them are mine! A French plenary adoption in 1977 erased my family name and affixed made up names on a « birth » certificate and a new affiliation. I do not identify as the person on this certificate, ID, Passport, Social security card, Electoral list, marriage certificate, family registry book, children's birth certificate... On bad days reading this fake name can throw me.

As a person adopted and abused, I had to change my narrative so often, to please out of despair for love, to provoke out of bleeding anger, to scare off people before they could attempt to abandon me and to appease my heart with lies born out of shame and guilt... I lied as a child, teenager and young adult. Everything was fake around me, what else was left but to lie!? Lies are a weapon or a shield that I no longer allow myself nor people around me to use. I crave truth. I yearn for honesty. I ache for a heartfelt narrative, with holes I no more want to cover up, and things are now written and they cannot be erased and should not be. Not telling is lying to oneself; therefore, living a life in secrecy or denial is living a life of lies. It is not always a conscious act, society, taboo and trauma contribute to many of us staying in silence. It is not our fault.

With all these partially or completely invented stories and the traumas forced onto Brain, my real lived experience got blurred out. Brain is not just a body-thing, it has its life of its own; I know it lives up there, we are related but it behaves like an estranged family member at times and leaves me clueless. I have lost memories, years gap where blank pages are left and then there are all the sensory memories, they all remained as if Brain had decided to maintain me in the trauma; I also know it is not its fault either.

- The visual memories: the family reunions, big spiders, wallpaper, a pitch black room, a blue room, blue curtains, their facial skin, white man's body hair, the stairs, the maggots (in the dead cats back then), blood stain on white clothes (fashionable for halloween), white girl panties, white crocheted socks, cemented walls, beluga whales, violent pornography or sex scenes and rape scenes, vivid, foul memories of the sexual abuse

- The olfactory memories: the lavender, the expensive perfume, the cheap cologne, the aftershave

- The gustatory memories: the mint toothpaste, the mint pastille, body fluids, white man's mouth breathe

- The auditory memories: the screams, the cats fights, the night's sounds, the old house cracking, the owl, the wind whistling, some classical music pieces

- The tactile memories: rough bed sheet, a person touching my skin without my consent or prior knowledge, a handshake with a white man, a bug crawling on my skin, something passing



quickly behind my back, standing with a white man body up close in the public transport, a white man talking to me from up close, some sex practices.

These memories can bring me in an instant back to where and when the abuse took place. And I felt unsafe to see them and around family holiday dates, birthdays, gotcha day, mother's and father's day that brings me back to the awful part of childhood. I don't know how much it is due to the trauma of adoption or the sexual abuse. I know it hurts and it's a crazy scary time. I will be jumpy again, I will be hypersensitive again. It will trigger flashbacks, catastrophe thinking, irrational fears, phobias (stairs, obscurity, lifts, heights, spiders) and leave me paralysed in the best cases, with panic attacks in the worst. After a CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) - I was equipped to do some damage control and reduce the impacts of some phobias, PTSD (Post Traumatic Disorders), eating disorders and OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder). However, I still feel lost when taken by surprise, when praised or rewarded, when receiving a simple wrapped present, when put under the spotlight. I am still car sick and cry in planes. I cannot watch horror movies alone, not even their trailers. I still have night-mares. And playing with my kids and making a racket with them in the bedroom, that we all enjoyed so much doing, would sometimes trigger my hypersensitivity and sometimes the whole package and I would have to step outside to calm down my racing heart and cry away from them. These types of events had me seeking help, because there was no way I could deal with new episodes alone.

But then they are also the magic memories like the scent of the brioche in the toaster ... Brioche is brioche even if not baked in France: it smells like burnt brioche all the same. That is my 'Petite Madeleine' - Proust. This smell brings me back to tender memories, our countryside house during summer, to my cats, my Barbie dolls, the soft grass and the soft carpet, the raspberries, the minuscule white spiders, the little stream, the newts, the flowers... the insouciance of childhood! These memories are kept safe away from the monsters. They are the sweets I carry around in my pockets.

I don't recall Korea, apart from the fact that I had big sisters, much older and probably from the foster family supposed to 'civilise' me before being sent off to France. This arrangement was convenient for the adoption purpose itself and I am sure I was delighted by their attention. My Japanese and Korean cells ache at this thought; imagining how I was being pampered to become that mini Geisha, that mini 'Comfort Woman' ([Wiki | Comfort Women](#)) in the hungry eyes of the future predators. I only hope that I was not abused in Korea, nor at the orphanage, hospitals, nor by my biological family. My DNA results were 57% Korean and 43% Japanese. One comedian, whose name I have forgotten and who had most certainly an Asian heritage, said that he was **not half and half but double**. I love that! Being a child of mixed heritage, nothing has been taken



away from one or the other heritage, not even through adoption! My dual heritage remains untouched.

Adopted people have the feeling to fight in obscurity and aloneness; many are still not aware that our community exists. It started long ago for too many of us. We have felt even more alone since we woke up from the abuse. I arrived 'broken' and 'they had to fix me', they told me. The a-mother lamented too often about my sicknesses, tuberculosis, rectal prolapse, gastrointestinal problems, parasites and burn marks from Korea, just to boast about the 'good deed' she did by rescuing me and giving me a 'second chance'. I visited doctors, hospitals, and could not even walk at almost age 4!?!? The a-parents suffered a long wait to adopt me, 3 years, and have seen countless counsellors, social workers and therapists to open their rights to adopt. They received so much care, that it slipped to every single person, even the adoption agency that they were bad people raising already 3 children in a household filled with child abuse. All these experts had a lucrative compensation though for their wasted time and at the cost of my future sanity!

I have been visited by a single social worker as they always mentioned only one, like if they had been treated like criminals. I have no memories of any strangers coming into our family house. It was a jail and a fortress, nobody out, nobody in. The opportunities to explore were scarce. I was brought by force to an adopted children's day at a park, because we, 'the little adoptees', were fashionable in the 70s and everyone wanted 'their own little porcelain doll'! I was frightened by going into their car - possibly that I feared that they brought me back to the airport!? How I wished they would later on!! I was told that I behaved poorly on that day and that I found every other Asian kid ugly. That ended any possible new encounter until I reached high school and college. Of course it was 'my fault' in their uneducated mind! I wish I could tell my younger self that it is ok to want to fit in and to be scared and that one day I wouldn't find this otherness so ugly and will even eventually identify as an Asian woman myself. No professional could have seen anything happening to me, because nobody wanted to see. The position of my a-father in the society and within the family, as coming from a very 'decent' family, being the intellectual, the one who studied and read and even wrote books, the one who became a civil servant and climbed quickly the ladder, and had a big house with 3 kids and could afford another mouth to feed, that was close to perfection! Idyllic, right, wouldn't it be silly to nitpick!? <inevitable sarcasm> My invisibility took a denser outlook, a layer was added.

The a-mother was excused for all her 'flaws', because of her anxiety and social anxiety due to her teenage experience, finding her dead father after a gruesome car crash. We were 4 kids, 4 abused kids... secrecy, taboo, patriarchy, societal hypocrisy, abuse blindness, white saviourism and religious beliefs made it possible for none of us to escape really alive!

#adoptionistrauma because of course it is, but let me rephrase it: adoption is the FIRST trauma, it is international transracial adoption that brands the subsequent traumas with capital T. One could possibly recover from separation, abandonment and even abduction, if one's roots were not chopped off, if one's cultural, racial and linguistic identity were kept untouched. I believe that even the air we fill our new born lungs with has been ersatz-ed in a way that we would struggle to even biologically and mechanically function during our first years post adoption. This first gasp that could perforate our newborn lungs, that is our first survival mechanism in life; one violent but one needed, one that will trigger a succession of body and brain mechanisms to maintain us alive in that new environment. International transracial adoption does exactly its opposite.

There is adoption and there is its trauma, experienced differently, nonetheless trauma and there is way more to it. "Touching rock bottom" time and time again was not a big deal, on the other hand discovering with the help of an entire football team of mental health experts throughout my adulthood, that my life had been built on a nuclear power plant and with years of lack of care, the outcome could not be insignificant; I wished that my therapeutic journey would metamorphose me into a beautiful butterfly. Butterfly... caterpillar, cocoon,... when life is so tender, when nothing really matters to the world but matters beyond all to one; enjoying and suffering, for one day my wings to spread, to taste the air, the breeze, the warmth of a nearby storm, the night, the stars and its immensity. Seeking help from professionals was nowhere as beautiful! It did enable my daily functioning, my survival and few of my milestones, such as being able to touch the handle of the door of our house without being literally paralysed by pain or being able to walk in daylight on the street unaccompanied. This new discovery also threw me between Scylla and Charybdis! Psychiatrists, psychologists and counsellors come at a heavy price; financially, getting out of our way and welcoming change - my 21 years old self thought it was a pain I would not survive -and trusting a trio: there was I, the Monster and my psy. I alone would have to open the can of maggots. The idea was terrifying.

There comes the complexity of my nuclear reactor: I haven't been diagnosed bipolar, nor with ADD, nor anything really apart "suicidal", "depressed", "drama queen". I could have 7 sets of moods and emotions in one single morning. Was I suffering from dis-regulation!? Did I ever have my brain scanned!? Or was my quality of sleep tested!? Or sent to a therapeutic cure!? I would even have taken a simple Buddhist retreat, procuring the Shifu was Asian! Anything but to stay in the eye of the storm!!

I was never a soldier in that fight! Soldiers are supported, encouraged and receive proper commands. I had to become a warrior in order to survive. I had to learn to become my own expert. My nuclear reactor was filled with every single normal and abnormal challenges in life:

- Abandonment, relinquishment, lost and never found, abducted and stolen
- Adoption - being uprooted, with no place nor time to grieve or adapt
- Child abuse of different types: domestic, physical, verbal, emotional, psychological, neglect, grooming and sexual, bullying, cyberbullying and racism
- Witnessing violence of all kind
- Loss caused by suicide, by death, by illnesses
- Loss, grief, lack of it, suicidal ideation, physical and mental illnesses
- Pregnancy, birth, miscarriage, abortion, my child reaching the age of my alleged abandonment (in my case x3), empty nest (x3)
- Calendar dates, family and social events: birthday, relinquishment day, gotcha day or arrival day, mother's day, father's day, school events, graduation day, wedding day, birth of my 3 children, national day and all family holidays, and multiply by two because I also genuinely care for my birth country's calendar dates
- Life events: breakups, divorce, loss of job, precarity, poverty, new job, new partner, solitude, family life
- Exposed to alcoholism, drugs

With an ACE [Adverse Child Experiences] score of 4 or more, things start getting serious. The likelihood of chronic pulmonary lung disease increases 390 percent; hepatitis, 240 percent; depression 460 percent; attempted suicide, 1,220 percent» [CDC | ACEs](#)

[Centres for Disease Control and Prevention]

Sexual abuse that spreads from grooming to rape and even sexual tortures can be healed; the victim can be healed, if:

- the victim lives in an environment that provides support and love & care
- the victim is healthy mentally
- the victim has the brain developed to comprehend that it is not their fault
- the victim has received an age appropriate sex-ed
- the victim has knowledge of healthy boundaries
- the victim knows the sovereignty of their own body and body parts (the privacy of the body parts covered by the swimsuit)
- the victim knows they have a voice
- the victim has been raised with no taboo around sexuality
- the victim understand the difference between secret and private
- the victim understands consent, the difference between secrecy and privacy

I am talking about a single time abuse.

And in the aftermath of the sexual abuse, IF:

- the victim has a safe person to go to and to talk to
- the victim has a safe place to let all consequential emotions out, without judgment
- the victim has support to help navigate the different institutions to report the crime
- the perpetrator is brought to justice
- the victim receives professional counselling
- the victim is not being re-traumatised by doctors or police officers or case workers

The list is not exhaustive. These prerequisites are dominos, you take one out and chances are that the victim will suffer from chronic pain, mental illnesses, gastrointestinal disorders, addiction, borderline behaviour, PTSD, eating disorders, self harm, sexual risk behaviours, poor focus, poor judgment, etc,. Depending on how many dominos have fallen, the victim may also never fully recover. Victims of sexual abuse are on the height of the stats on death by suicide.

Traumatised international transracial adopted people are clearly not far below in my non-scientific opinion. I do not think that a study has been made yet to connect the dots.

I was 4 or 5 when my body was sexually abused, I would not have been able to tick any of these last points; however, and apart from the last point on trauma, I ticked all of them. One of the conclusive statements from the CDC that did not re-comfort me, because of its unfortunate accuracy, was “exposed to chronic illness and risk of perpetuating violence”.

In the case of fathers perpetrators, children directly supported and guided by their mother have greater chance at a complete recovery. I know, I did not have one.

*Maybe*

*Maybe I am that little girl.*

*Maybe I never grew up after 5.*

*Maybe growing up is accepting that I'll never be more than that.*

*Maybe being happy is playing house.*

*Maybe being happy is playing mom.*

*Maybe being happy is playing.*

Here is a spot-on acknowledgement to what even a few seconds of lack of care can do to a baby, explained by a 7 year old amazing little girl in a very positive way in this TED talk!

Molly Wright: How Every Children can Thrive by 5 | TED

I just hope that this little girl has healthy bonds with her parents ... always on my mind when I see a little girl. Sexual abuse happens more often to girls and more from their father! The incest of Oedipe and his mother was no good bedtime story, but my first reaction as a child was that he was a coward to blind himself and selfish for taking his daughter-sister in his exile. Later I associated him with the monsters. He certainly passed on the trauma onto her, she did not have a choice, yet she still had this moral compass, her gods were social justice for a truer social harmony. Her tragic death left me confused.. I was a child and I did not know that one day I would meet an ephemeral

Antigone. Through history the generational trauma has grown wider, it has spread in silence and crept in the darkest places. Back in the 80's and 90's, stories of famous people were mediated in sensational newspapers, brushed away by the larger public, laughed at and even envied by some nut-cases!! The 4 'controversial' stories that impacted my younger brain were from Roman Polanski, Woody Allen, Serge and Charlotte Gainsbourg and Michael Jackson. Children don't lie about abuse. Girls and women don't lie about abuse. That should be written in the books of law along the line 'innocent until proved otherwise'. Justice must be impartial.

**| Incest | Societal taboo | No justice | Catcalled-molested-bullied-harassed: a woman's life? | A system that fails to protect the victims | No support | a-family members | more victims |**

Incest is the name of the sexual abuse on a child that is perpetuated by parents, siblings, family members, a-parents, a-family members, step-parents, care takers or anyone close to the child and exercising some kind of authority on the child. Incest is the most infamous sexual abuse, its taboo is rooted long long ago in religions and human specie survival needs, because of the inbreeding outcomes! Not because of the violence or damages done to a child! In Europe some same-sex incest can be allowed because reproduction is not a risk!!! I am open minded moreover towards minorities I do not belong to, but here I feel disturbed by this type of arrangement around incest; for me any type of incest and sexual abuse is a crime. I can understand that 2 people could not be aware of their consanguinity but I do not understand their consent in case of knowledge. Universally most incests are not even recognised as a crime, nor in laws, nor in mentalities, though it's 'amoral' and of an 'abnormal' nature. Words I dislike too, but what else is this crime? France only made it law to prosecute perpetrators 'under rape accusations', who sexually abused minors of 14 and under, because consent could not be expected. But any other cases are not classified as rape crimes, if the violent assault is not be proven! In which world do we live in? Was I an adult at 15, when the abuse started at 5 and my mental growth got interrupted?? In some countries, 'vaginal' penetrations only count as crime, that discards anal and oral penetrations!! This is an abomination accepted by our society of humans, where laws do not protect us nor punish the perpetrators.

Here is the link to FACE À L'INCESTE <https://facealinceste.fr> The founder Isabelle Aubry has been a warrior and survivor for over 20 years and she has been the saviour of my younger self! Her organisation at first founded under AIVI [Association Internationales des Victimes de l'Incest] is her life work dedicated to us! There, one can find a lot of information, support groups and resources for activism towards child protection, children and women's rights too.

I would define the sexual abuse experience as cyanide or carbon monoxide for obvious poisonous reasons, but aspirin is a better fit. I am not allergic but I am not allowed anymore to take aspirin, since it is a blood thinner. The fact that it was the to-go-to med back in the 70s and 80s and that it increased my nosebleed drastically and it was everywhere accessible in the house, makes aspirin the perfect candidate to describe incest! Aspirin can actually be lethal and for children more and puts children at risk of poisoning because it is part of any regular household!!

*Incest was aspirin: like the abusive a-sister's skin, such an ordinary poison available at home.*

At age 5, I was sexually abused. The abuse lasted over a decade. I was incested by the a-father. I don't know how many nights, how many evenings, how many weekend mornings and afternoons, I know that it was almost on a daily basis. I don't know if it went crescendo or if I was raped at 5, I am but certain of my earliest memories of the incest. I was left in the care of the a-father, I was relinquished by this a-mother, I was not worthy of her time. As I have been told so many times, on this day of September 1976, I was born from a Korean Airline Boeing 747 to the arms of the a-father; his little 'Manchoue Princess' was 'his' to love. It stopped when I was 15, because of his safety being compromised by my first intimate boyfriend among other factors. He was my favourite a-parent and I trusted him.

At age 9, I menstruated. That is also the year I was offered a porn manga by the friend of the a-brother, that the a-father stole from me for his personal use. After that I started to draw naked couples, all drawings were guarded safe by the a-father. This 'friend' was 9 years older. He was my favourite teenager friend and I trusted him.

At 15, I was molested by the a-uncle, who attempted suicide after. The a-mother blamed me, though he survived. In her verbal killing spree she accused me of looking for it and giving no other choice to her poor adult brother! He was at least 15 years older than me, my favourite a-uncle and I trusted him.

At age 18, 21 and 26, I was sexually harassed by strangers, alone or in a pack, on the street in plain daylight with ghostly bystanders.

At age 32, I was sexually assaulted by friends of friends.. of friends.

At age 46, I was raped by a first date, though I said no, though I defended myself, though I screamed. In the same year, as a mean to understand how that could happen again, I consciously made my body available to very unpleasant sexual intercourses. A disturbed way to self-therapy, highly dangerous, surely not recommended. I understood. I will never endanger myself again that way or any other way.

All my life I have been catcalled, picked on by a-family circle, molested and harassed in bars and private parties, sexually bullied and cyber-bullied, non-consensual sexting, with a dramatic increase of harassment when I was pregnant and I was many a time. Maybe was I more vulnerable? Maybe they sensed my fears of losing my baby? Maybe my body shapes were showing? Any questioning why it happened is total nonsense! It would also mainly invalidate my point: they were at fault, not me. I have been fetishised, sexualised and infantilised by a-family members, friends, teachers, colleagues, medical professionals and law enforcement agents too. I have received countless amounts of unrequited 'dickpix' - pictures of unknown and known men's private anatomy - that I kept in a library because I wanted to shame them publicly. But the system was created to encourage bullies and not protect victims, all the big social media platform policies were making sure their actions would remain 'private' and were happy to declare that no tangible crime had been committed. I have an incredible list of people I have blocked since the internet! Is that really a regular woman's life? How long will the system fail to protect the victims? Women are at risk in the wombs and the day they are born. Some country policies made us unwanted. Women have so much to survive! And it should not be that way.

Back to incest: did I have boundaries set? Clearly not! Did I say no or try to defend myself? No. Was it my fault? I thought so. Did I ask for it? Sometimes. Did I have a safe place or someone to go to? No. Did I try to talk about it? Yes. Did I get support? I was not allowed, it was SECRET. Later on, I got vicious feedback telling me in stronger words, that I had to stop my 'ugly duckling' behaviour and move on from '*Les Miserables*' Little Cosette fairy tales. I was told too in a violent way that I just had to brush it off by people who were supposed to care. I acknowledged at age 46 that my body boundaries were in place, rightfully, and Brain was just doing what it knows best: as soon as it noticed an unbearable physical pain, it would take me to that place of no return. Brain made it fail-safe because Brain does not want to die, neither did I, when I was 5.

The a-mother knew all along what was going on in her home. How do I know? She would stare at me with cruel eyes while he kissed her and sent him to brush his teeth and eat mint, after he had his 'special' time with me. She would have explosive arguments with him in their bedroom, because of the time he spent with me and not with her. But she pretended otherwise and I let her, out of pity, fear of disappointing her too probably. She could be in her view the only victim of a very sexually active husband and I was taking him away from her with all my 'studies'! If I do not like the expression 'playing victim', that was her play and she won a medal: I trusted her. She later on could not stop complaining about it to me even 10 years after her biological daughter told her that her husband was incesting me, us! I never felt I was not believed, I felt that I did not count, I was not understood, listened to, cared for, validated nor protected. I was so invisible! Her sister, the a-auntie wanted to help her children to report the abuse, but I was already far away from



France. I missed that opportunity to report the abuse, though she did not reach out to me - I was really invisible; I also missed by a year the statute of limitation, when the a-father sent to his 3 or 4 kids a letter of apology. It would not have been enough, since in my letter he mainly wrote about the love he had for me. This coward knew what he was doing, he waited until I was 29 and I was the youngest of us 4. Then I could have reported him and his wife in a civil lawsuit, but I was in a mental whirlpool. Recently France (Thanks to Isabelle Aubry!) has extended the status of limitation to 48 years old for rape, that includes rapes on minors, 14 and younger, where consent cannot be expected from a child. The a-father was already dead and I was over 48! But if I ever find a lawyer willing, I may ask for posthumous justice and request an extra-ordinary extension of the status of limitation, since our life pre-adoption was erased, it should be discounted from the limitation. Moreover, Korea has a complex age system! I could be only 49 instead of 51!!! [BBC | Korea | Counting age system](#)

The a-family generically was made of ignorant, uneducated or plain racist members. Their reunions for special calendar dates were a source of high anxiety. I also felt it from the a-parents, who had to wear their best masks and present their spotless and better 4 children. Then there was always the cold stare of the a-grandmothers, as if they knew I was being incested. I have always wondered as a child if they were like the a-mother, jealous or just cruel too. I forgave their inactions to soothe my heart a little, because they came from another generation of women, unlike the a-mother, they had no privileges, they were tough abrupt women. They were also sexually abused. Growing up I shied away from such social events, even with friends' family, I felt so uncomfortable, that I made excuses. Adoption made me feel like an alien, sexual abuse made me feel like a worthless dirty alien. I shelled up when consciousness hit me. I wanted to never have to show myself again. Everything was so shameful, dirty, and left me agonisingly alone. Years later, after the a-father died, I learnt that he also molested others in his family and family-in-law members. He was the god-father of a young and beautiful woman, who one day ceased to come around. Things like that happened throughout my childhood but I was just a passive observer of a play I knew too well.

After 17 years I reconnected with my eldest adoptive sister. I am glad I did and I am happy she supplied some kind of motherhood to my younger self. I unfortunately do not have access to all of these memories. I hugged her and it is a precious memory that I have already tidied in my pocket of sweets.

*Don't turn off the light yet  
Jump into the sky blue shades of bruises that cover your heart.  
Break the void of his hammering gestures with silence and end up  
upside down, in the gutter, drinking the salt of a tear on a knife blade.  
And run, run without taking a breath, run right side up,  
run in your bed and with these chains, draped on your wrists,  
A hug slips around your ankle, the telephone cord hanging from your neck;*



*The beating of his heart that has finally fallen silent...  
Steal your breath and fill your suitcase, weave a coat of beads  
from your sweat to wrap him in all your warmth.  
And then heal the words that made you mute,  
the index finger engulfed in this piano note.  
It was an A perhaps followed by a C,  
there would never be a chord,  
just melancholy.*

### **| Shame | Ungrateful | Manipulating a child | Dragon Asian mom |**

Families are by nature awkward. Big families even more. We are related, I guess it makes sense to build a 'clan'. But being adopted, I still do not experience this need. Adoption primed with incest pushed me away from understanding it. I have children, I am attached to them and miss them, but I cannot fake things around them like sadness... that I guess families do for the sake of other members. Social clues or code of conduct are still hard for me to integrate as mine, since wrong values were enforced so violently onto my early brain. I am raw. I feel raw. If I had to draw myself, it would be without skin. It is hard to trust, connect, nurture a relationship and it is harder to pretend. Every time a new sexual abuse has occurred, I did shell up and disappear from my loved ones, from the door, from my phone and social media. I isolated myself, thinking I was the culprit, I could be contagious, I did not deserve people's attention nor time. I have lost so many people that way. I tried to explain to my kids how I have felt and still feel at times, how sorry I am for being a 'sad mom', how much I miss them and love them, how I wish I had been healthier in supporting them, a better mom, how sorry I am for being part of some of their worst memories, for having lost enormous chunk of our happy memories too and how powerless I feel, when nightmares come back in daylight... but it is a long process; they are educated enough to not blame me. Though when they do, my past self did deserve it. Though I know that being abused and mentally ill was not my fault, as an adult and a mother, I did not seek help soon enough. I also know that seeking help is a proof of self-love that I was deprived of at an early age, but it does not excuse my poor and violent behaviours towards them. I have raised my kids in some shameful ways like the a-mother raised us and I was that Asian tiger mom, who breathed fire like a dragon. They would quote kindly "it is understandable but not excusable" and they are right. No matter how much I have worked to heal, the past will keep on hurting for a while, not forever. I cannot afford to hurt anybody else.

I was ungrateful or so I felt. I dared missing my mom - the woman who carried me, gave birth to me and nurtured me enough for me to spread love wherever I go - this hole in my heart that can be seen on my electrocardiogram has been a place I hid when shame was unbearable. I like baths and water because it feels the closest to the womb of my mom. Head in the water I can hear the beating of her heart through mine. When I was 15, I wanted out. Out of the torture, the sexual and emotional abuse. Out of these new and foreign surroundings. I wanted out of my body that was the

epicentre of that storm, allowing a-mother to throw her lungs into my eardrums, the adulation of an a-father who deserved none of it and the cheap price on my sanity for other men. I was on the brink of death when I arrived in France as a-mother told me so many times, for the idea to imprint Brain, still so young and vulnerable. They “saved” me. I was probably in a bad shape but not dying, nothing could kill me anyway or so I thought for too long. I was the weed from her garden and the rat poison to her husband, because I had tuberculosis that put him at risk, him who spent his youth in a sanatorium back in the 50’s. Not my fault. I also had head parasites, suffered from malnutrition and weak bowel movements. Not my fault. I did not walk and struggled with balance and coordination my whole life, though they forced me to wear medical shoes. I peed my pants. I don’t think that’s shocking for a child displaced, misplaced, neglected and sexually abused. I felt ashamed to exist. Nothing made sense. But I would not break the silence, I had been induced into believing that it would break my ‘forever home’, that it would kill the only mother I knew, that the a-father ‘loved me’, that the family harmony was what I lived. Society later on reinforced all these ideas. Incest is an ambiguous concept, where people can be disgusted by these families, yet still envy that ‘forbidden love’, find erotism in it and worse. Incest is sickening. Incest is manipulating a child in sadistic ways. Incest is brain-washing a child while it violates their right to grow healthy and deprive them from their rightful rights to social justice.

### **| Guilt | Missing my birth mom | Generational trauma |**

Looking for my Korean mom within me has also contributed to me missing too often as the mom of my own children. When one feels so powerless, the urge to wreck something becomes an obsession. The violence had nowhere to go; I fed it to myself. Later I fed it in an awful way to my first son. I slapped him when he was just a child, I shook him, I burst in rage fits and I locked any possible hugs in a closet for a long time. I was scared of feeling a desire by touching his skin. I know it is sick, but so was I. Nobody told me how lust works, I learnt it later by studying the human perversions while working at an erotic boutique. Would that help if I were diagnosed with postpartum depression? No. The harm had been done. Did I apologise? Yes, and it is not enough. Did I need help? Yes. Did I seek it? Not really. I believe my son had his PCEs (Positive Childhood Experiences) up high thanks to his dad and his family. That does make me feel better in a very selfish way. But after 51 years of struggle, I take anything - legal - that can boost my mood and it is the only working remedy I have found to break the circle of depression. My son and I still have a long way to heal from it. His brother and sister have been raised by a different mom, I had grown, I had sought help, but I was still a dragon mom at times. In order to break generational trauma, one needs to find bravery to acknowledge our faults and find the ways to express our love to the ones we hurt. It requires my son to be willing to face his own demons and I can only wait until he feels ready. I hope it will be sooner than later, as he became a dad for the second time this year. I am seeking help to work on this very hard situation that is directly rooted to the incest I was infected

with, to my fear of abandonment I passed onto him, to the physical abuse I experienced from the a-mother, I received from the youngest a-sister... it is tangled up. I also need time.

Incest is a crime filled with shame and guilt, internalised shame and guilt for the victims. How do you even start a conversation bringing up incest!? How do you even tell yourself that you were incested? How do you tell your partner that you 'liked' some part of the incest? How do you admit that you got sexually aroused even? Incest filled my mouth with shame like thousands of maggots, spreading to my brain; Brain could only build walls of guilt out of it. It had no support, no food and its creativity had become morbid. How do you look at yourself in the mirror and say it is not your fault? I still cannot look into mirrors. My reflection scares me. I see a monster. I see the little girl I was asking for more. I remember the lies I made to protect the real monster. I miss the people I hurt by pushing them away, because I wrongly thought I would hurt them or them me. I miss having a family, even that a-family sometimes. It is not my fault. It is not my fault. It is not my fault but it does not erase that 'I' was the main actor in my head and it hurts.

*Trumpet spoke to me  
Trumpet, you're annoying me  
I'm fed up  
You're breaking my ears  
You're taking away my sleep  
And then after all  
when you play a sweet tune  
Si la sol fa mi  
It's like a melody  
But your only fault  
Sol fa mi re do  
Is that you need  
A very beautiful poem  
1982, 9 years old - translated from French*

**| Isolation | Incest 101 | Health | Friendship | Ungrateful | Monster welcomed home |**

The missing support and constant loneliness: as a toddler till I left home, I lacked emotional support, as a young woman any kind of support, no family support as a mom myself, no social services follow-ups! Everything was working in favour for the sexual abuse to happen in Huis-Clos. Lack of support and knowledgeable staff at school, at the doctors, no people of colour, no people with migration background, nor adoption or trauma informed - I had my 1st colonoscopy as a child then again as a teenager. I only heard one doctor once mentioning that I was Asian and he needed to do some more research. My nosebleed was not cured with the cauterisation that I was forced to endure twice a year. I cured it by telling myself I was not going ever again to this torture treatment. My first gynaecologist received me alone, she was definitely not trauma informed and laughed because I had no medical history and because I did not bring 'my mom' along, nor had she ever had any training on how to handle survivors of sexual abuse for the way she handled me. No

doctors I have met have. Their flagrant ignorance was despicable. I cried by force of circumstance, I bled.. Brain made me; I have been a bleeding girl, young woman and older woman. My nose bleeds stop to let it flow where it would not stop. I only go to the doctors when it is an emergency, and that is not how it should be. I do fit the racist stereotype, shy Asian who does not complain about pain, I do not fit in the European Union norms of growth, health, etc., but I do not have to educate doctors and society at large to be heard and taken seriously.

School: a violent curriculum for adopted children is the creation of a family tree

Doctors: a violent medical inquisition - family medical history

To be healthy one has to have a good circle of friends, moreover teenagers and young adults. Our house was not welcoming anyone. I had my first birthday 'boum' at 11, while friends had birthday parties every year, children with parents barely reached ends meet. My second birthday was celebrated for my 15th birthday in a hired venue with another friend to share the bills, while the a-parents could largely cover the costs. Other times my birthday would have to be 'partially' as almost unnoticeably celebrated a week later, when the real birthday would occur: the real son's birthday! Summer 1988 I was 15 and it was the first time I had two girl friends in our countryside house for the weekend. These are the rare times I could socialise 'at home'. I had a couple of strong friendships during my school years but they all existed outside the house. They had met the a-parents briefly when picking me up or dropping me off and they were unanimous on how lucky I was. A recurrent thought of my childhood and teen, I was a bad mean little girl and ungrateful. I had the a-sister one year older. We used to play barbies and house, but she bullied me, beat me up and insulted me every time she could for how ugly I looked, and how I smelled bad and my body parts were ugly too. They were only different. On the other hand at school, she was my champion, she would defend my honour. I should have known back then that she would end up being just like her mother: violent, depressed and cruel and living for what others think of her. I used to hurt her verbally, because I could. Funny enough, I called her the aspirin pill! Her skin was so white... and she was incested too, but as soon as she grew up she threatened her father to tell and he never tried again! Thanks to her, it was more for me! I know it is not fair on her, as it was not her fault. But since she was a monster in my adult life too, I have no problem finding some guilt!

Isolation also happened during my almost full time study time with the a-father, he taught me to speak, read and write faster than any other classmates I had. I was his protégée and nobody ever dared disturbing these hours. It was all orchestrated for him to have more time to take advantage of my body. We would be called when dinner was served, but we would always arrive late, and that would infuriate the a-mother!

**| Disgust | Endangering My own Children | Loving the monster | Father figure |**

In my impulsive erratic search for love, I met another survivor of child sexual abuse but he was a monster, an incestuous father. My daughter was only five. My husband must have hated me so much for dating a perpetrator. I know now how unsafe the whole situation was, how irresponsible I was as a mother. Nothing happened to my daughter nor her brothers, nor any kids around. I was not aware at first sight that this man was an incestuous father but he did tell me before he met my kids. I should have been worried and stopped him from interfering with our life; I was always worried for the health of my children. They knew for as far as they can remember what was safe and what wasn't. They knew that they had to use the decibels of their voice even in doubt rather than being taken by force by anyone. They knew most of the safety rules that I also had built around for myself. They had children sex-ed books and also on love and healthy behaviours. They knew about my monsters, they knew they were men I knew and that in some rarer instances women too. In my head, they were ready to be my sidekick warriors in this awful journey!! [I just reread and I sound as emotional as a psychopath on that part of my story! I wonder if I did or not contemplate killing him. I don't remember but that would not surprise me for this time of my past life and I think he sensed it too.] When that new monster came to our house, all the safety measures had been reinforced. Awareness, visibility and no blind spots left unchecked. I also had the neighbourhood kids coming to our house. Everybody knew what to do. I was going into war. That is the most insane thing I did... out of a sick love. The craziest thing thereafter is that he complied, he obeyed everything I asked him to do to prove he was sorry for the harm he had caused to his family and caused to me too. He joined the anonymous platform, he gave his house to the mother of kids, he went to see a therapist. He surrendered himself to the police station and his name is on the sex offender register. But he also did the most unjust thing he could to his daughter: he paid a fine in order for her to never be able to bring him to justice.

He was in some sort my quest for justice, revenge too in a way. I slapped him and sent him off to China where his company had a sister company. It never occurred to me that he was not healed, that abusers keep on abusing. I just knew China was the farthest place I could think of. I was 36 and he left me with a heart shattered and confused. I am still unsure which way my heart went. That year I sought help. It was more difficult than ever, because I had compromised myself with a monster. What if I was an incurable monster, who feeds on other monsters? Survivors groups have shut their doors on me and I don't blame them, I had put my own children under a real threat. I was a danger to my kids. I was a danger. Full stop. I got helped eventually, help to survive once more the shame and guilt, but disgust remained attached to this painful memory. I was offered to surrender to the thought that my inner child had been seduced by this new monster, that the Stockholm Syndrome would be a way to ease some self empathy... I have refused it. I was conscious, I was choosing him over the safety of my kids. I was aware of the risks. I assessed them. The only conclusion that I came up with was that I wanted to save the human in him, I had wished

this for the a-father. In this process I failed mine and his daughter.

*Disgust will remain.  
It was my fault.*

I am also nauseated by a forbidden beauty I nursed in loving the a-father. Till this day I am still torn with the remembrance of his intellect, the one that created mine. He modelled me as he wished. I was naive, innocent and gullible. He took advantage of everything. And I asked for more. I didn't tire myself out. He was a drug, an addiction and it was all wrong. Adoption trauma and sexual abuse are both instigator of self destructive behaviours. My 'obsession' for him was one of these behaviours. It was a time bomb that would wait for his passing to implode. I was 40 when he died. I fell sick, physically sick.

Society wanted me to believe that a father is a noble figure, a hero in-sort, untouchable; he guarantees the family security, education and prosperity; he is loving and just; he is undefeated and strong and is the supreme authority within a household. I was attached to him in an unnatural way, adoption, I was submissive to any of his desires, incest. How would one teen wake up to a decade of normalcy, discovering that everything was a lie and a mess, adults first, and then go onto reporting 'her only family' to the police? How would I alone fight a societal stigma, a victim-blaming and shaming society, a taboo of this scale, risking to lose everything, even though it would have been for better. But from where I stood I could not see. I needed someone taller to tell me! I would also have been blamed by the other a-family members and I could not confront the a-mother publicly. Nobody would have believed me. So, I did not tell. I would not. That I had the opportunities and did not take them is still disturbing to me. And I know that was definitely not my fault. I would not tell anybody until I met my husband.

There would have been a social worker number near the phone, I may have called. My very first call, I was 18, it was to the French Samaritans. They helped as much as they could. Help was limited back then! I did not tell them everything, nor about the incest. They saved me for a while. My kids had the childline number everywhere, that was anonymous and did not appear on any phone bills, and they were encouraged to use it even against me. I guess, I was still frightened to welcome another monster.

**| Impostor Syndrome | Attachment impairment | Hypersensitivity | Identity Crisis | Racism |**

From moving around the living room furniture, to moving houses, cities every couple of years, to moving countries every few years, because my skin could not cope to fall into routine, I refused to become dormant again. Therefore, experiencing child abuse and insecurities attached

to it, I kept on moving. Looking back I blamed my husband for being quest driven, while I was the one after the holy grail! These bouncing from culture to culture, languages, people, brought me a taste of racism and white colonialism. I understand only now why it did hurt so much! I was never sure where I belonged, had no clue where I came from and had no real plan where I was heading. Child sexual abuse magnified my impostor syndrome, my attachment impairment, my identity insecurities, I became hypersensitive to the world and every little thing went exponential, the quest was obsessive. My inadequacy, my lack of knowledge of my own culture or language, my struggle to attach emotionally to an incestuous a-family, the stories I felt I had to make up because of alienation.

Racism came as an unfair new layer of Trauma, at that time of my life, where I could not rebuild myself, because I did not know what that even looked like. Now, with distance, I understand the rage I felt when white people prided themselves on their Korean experience. As an adopted person I was denied this birthright. Then I cannot remove that layer from my skin, my heart is also tattooed by my Koreanity and I have no home to go back to once the experience is over. It did hurt further because my skin was called 'dirty' as a child, my skin was actually spoiled by men and though I was adopted, I had nowhere to hide it. Today, I do not need to hide anything anymore and it still hurts, but it does not trigger all the buttons in me! My skin does not feel bad anymore when I hear white people travel stories, that they can afford to live their "exotic" destination, while I still long for my home country, when they even "appreciate" a small thing that I don't have the luxury to because of adoption. They put their hands on it, even bring it home like a trophy and all I see and feel is a cold dead kid's head hanging from their personal yoga room white wall. Appropriation is criminal. Appreciation is damaging too, when paraded to people whose identity was stolen. I am glad that adopted adult voices get louder every day. Due to public image both, adoptive and birth countries have no other choice than to listen. We will get our rights back. We will not be denied our home, whether we choose to stay or to go. Our identity is ours to decide. If one morning I just feel French and in the afternoon I feel Korean, it is my right to do it. My humanity can no longer be reduced to the Korean experience of bibimbap; that Korean dish I could only taste when I was 18.

Struggling with what to tell, which narrative to offer and to whom: for obvious reasons, incest stories have never been welcomed with open-arms, in any circle I was in at least. Regular life is not a safe place to be for survivors. It has no breakout nor breakthrough sessions popping up randomly! One has to become expert at their own triggers, while the road is pathed with anti-personnel mines.

*It is like learning to navigate with the simple knowledge that stars are there to help, but not knowing how, where or what stars are!*



It doesn't get easier until it does. I promise, it does! We do eventually become our own superheroes and grow healthy habits that make some parts of our past as tiny as bunny farts!! And as you can guess, one learns to laugh, to explode even in laughter. At random at first as an exercise and it becomes all too natural, that sometimes one can even forget their audience! And about the audience, when I introduce myself, I often have butterflies in the belly and legs like cooked spaghetti as if I would step on a stage. It requires me to breathe first slowly for my heart to slow down, my hands to not sweat and my voice to not derail... then comes the rude interruption, after me saying 'born in Korea and'! That's not my whole identity, let me finish, I will one day find the strength to cut back. The reality for now is still awful: stealing my voice, my time to speak is plain rude. I just instinctively have to quickly read the interlocutor's vibes and offer my fakest enthusiastic response!! What else can I do? Is it my fault? No. Many White well-intentioned people feel entitled too to more speech time, some just are less well-mannered, but both groups got approval from their society. Am I too quiet because I am Asian? No. Are adoption and child abuse experiences breathing through my skin? Most certainly but people don't notice these things, they are way too busy looking at their belly buttons. I didn't think I am the problem, yet at 51, I still have to prepare myself, find grounds to not fall and convince myself that it is definitely not my fault. I was never told how to stand up for myself because I was never expected to even stand. I failed at teaching these skills to my kids. I wish I had learnt by now how to. Healing also feels like running through a forest of cacti... it keeps on reopening old wounds and new ones.

*I was born*

*Rice grain I was born,  
Thousands of grains that make the rice fields so green,  
Under the heat of the sun after the long days of grey monsoon.  
Lost, abandoned, I stayed on the edge of the path that leads to Samcheok.  
Barefoot children, laughing men in conical hats passed me by.  
The wind spoke to me, it carried me not far from the path,  
In the white dust and there I stayed.*

*But no one picked me up.*

*Three days I stayed, no one picked me up.  
A week I stayed, no one picked me up.  
And suddenly their sandals trampled me.*

*To the dust I returned.*

1983, age 9 - translated from French

## Winter

**| Pain | Coping Mechanism | Physical Health | Eating Disorders |**



*Silence*  
*acceptance*  
*Silenced*  
*Unbalanced*

Pain is dual, there is the pain to soothe by numbing and the pain to exacerbate by irritating. Pain was almost a permanent resident of my body. I needed it, I sought it, I went great lengths to feel it because it was one quick way to check I was feeling something. I understood at my arrival in France that I was a damaged good, a broken luxurious commodity. The a-parents did not send me back, they were too eager to fix me. I never self harmed literally out of respect for them subconsciously maybe, I had more elaborated ways. For instance I would not let wounds heal and would keep them open as long as I could. This they could not see. Due to Lupus or else, I have a compromised immune system, my children like to say that I am the Winter Soldier, from the Marvel Universe. My immune system is so powerful and radical that it kills my good cells too. I normally heal extremely slowly, that explained my nose bleed that I passed onto my son and my lengthy bleeding time. We do not have haemophilia and it surprised me. I was expecting the worst coming from me! Due to Lupus I have had crust forming on my hands, cheeks and scalp. I slept at a point with tight gloves so that my regenerating brain would not trick me into worsening them. It eventually did. In summer I also had to wear gloves otherwise the mosquito bites would scar so badly that I would be ashamed to even wear shorts. Brain grew damaged... to what extent!? As a young adult and till now I let myself feel the pain of hunger, one way to be close to my younger self perhaps or finish the work my earlier self did not and it is a numbing pain for me, anxiety and other emotions vanish... only hunger remains. Not all coping mechanisms are bad. One has to learn to differentiate them.

At age 18 I drowned in the deep end of the fire brigade pool, because of sleeplessness nights and alcohol the nights prior to the exam. I had my first and last experience of “Le Grand Bleu” the movie! (another famous director accused: Luc Besson) I survived!! I failed my swimming test even though I was born a fish! It was my rebellion against the loss of my only girl friend who died by suicide not even reaching 18. We had planned a big party for our 18th birthdays. While I was grieving or at least trying to, I lost the appetite and it rarely comes back. I used to eat a lot as a child, as if food would disappear. I even kept little bags with provisions below my bed just in case. The only times afterwards I really took pleasure in eating was when I was pregnant, for my first son I weighed 30 kilos more at 8 months, my non-pregnant weight was 44 kg, I almost doubled up with delight, then in 2 weeks time I was back to my 44 kg. It was the most unhealthy time of my life, I missed the first months of my first baby.

Now I weigh 47 kg and no matter what doctors and loved ones say, I feel too big. I know that I don't have much fat stored, I know people think I am skinny but they don't inhabit my body nor

have to carry it around. I have night food craving and still 'raccoon' my fridge during sleepless nights. I stopped buying unhealthy food, to not tempt me when anxiety kicks in. My eating habits are unhealthy and I can see the damage sexual abuse did and the way I translate it into my body. It is alien to me, I have wished to drop it somewhere many times. When in the comfort of invisibility a body is a loud activist one would like to shut down. Since I can remember it was insulted and laughed at by the younger a-sister and her mother; 'I could pass behind the poster without unsticking it', it is a French saying or that I did not have a body but an iron board, or that this body was ugly, or dirty. Then I also remember I felt in this body being very much in demand like a precious gem to the men I trusted. Back then I was sitting somewhere in that body, I felt trapped in it, I felt its pain from inside. I heard its complaints. I wanted it to shut up and occupy no more space. Other survivors of child sexual abuse would wrap their invisibility with layers of self soothing foods. Or did their brain send the opposite message and they felt overexposed and wanted invisibility? In any case of eating disorders it takes an abuse, even a one time abuse, for our immune system and our brain to take drastic measures with lasting long effects.

Gastrointestinal health problems are consequences of it. Diabetes and heart problems too. I had already had a rectal prolapse and malnutrition and to top that I was left at the care of the sexual abuser, this was neither healthy nor healing. I have suffered with bowel movements my entire life. My mouth had been used as a sexual recipient. Eating in public, as anything in public, made me anxious because of what my human vehicle was carrying: incest, adoption and an ugliness, I was at fault. My fault was to allow this body to be a seduction tool, to jeopardise the a-family's safety (yes, it is so absurd!), to worsen the distress of the a-mother, to belittle the a-sister (I still think to some extent she deserves my words today too). This body was an abomination. I believe that food and sex are extended members from the same family. It makes total sense to me that both have an appetite and deficiencies. I believe that food and sex are an expression of love. I don't struggle to eat when with my kids because I feel love and I want to give love. With men I will not have the need to feed my body sexually if the relationship is deprived of love. And to this extent it explains why I struggle eating in public, sex and love are private to me... no longer secret but private. [Healthline | Eating Disorders](#)

I started losing my teeth with my first pregnancy. The doctors back then did not read my medical records that stated that when I arrived in France I had all possible deficiency and was suffering from malnutrition, so I never had fluoride, calcium, etc., supplements throughout my life and first pregnancy. By 30 and my last baby I had no more teeth left. Between 21 and 30 I lived with toothaches that should have killed me, the damage to my nerves was so intense, but I survived. At 46 years old, I was letting a team of specialists rebuild my jaws, my gums and drill many implants in my mouth. 2 already fell, due to my immune system rejecting them, but my full

set of fake teeth is holding so far and I regained a smile. For 4 years I was tortured at the dental clinic, the last year of treatment, I decided to be knocked out for any procedure. Brain reacts to dentists like it reacts with monsters. And I did not want to be sent to that place anymore. That is also why I avoid eating in public, I cannot bear men staring at my mouth while I eat, funny enough when I had no teeth I didn't care. Too many foreign objects have been put in my mouth, that I have sexualised this body part for too long and it costs me at the start to have regained a smile because it attracted men to look more.

When I fell sick after the death of the a-father, the medical response I received was that the tests were inconclusive; they doubled the steroid injections for a lupus that had not flared up, they tried different meds. 11 years have passed. I had an operation a couple of years ago to remove two ulcers and a third one is stuck on my trachea and cannot be removed without an invasive surgery, which I refuse. My body was talking for years but no doctors wanted to listen.

All these health challenges are curable, and I don't classify them as direct self-harm but they are all linked undoubtedly to sexual abuse, suicidal thoughts and adoption trauma. I would have been a healthier young woman, the death by suicide of my girlfriend would have affected me of course but not in the proportion it did. My girlfriend was a victim of sexual abuse by her step father, it was incest too, she was not adopted but she understood the loss of a parent. She was gender fluid and it comforted her to be perceived as a girl at the time she died. An incommensurable sorrow and guilt have made me unfrienable for as long as it took to be finally at peace with my previous self. My daughter reminds me so much of my girlfriend, her strong character, her vision of the world, her sensitivity and her proud sense of self that fights its way to be unboxed. She would have been such a great role model, if she could have stayed a little longer. Understanding that she tried so hard to give us more time, fills me with even more pain, but this pain is a healthy reaction and as such I welcome it; it brings sad and happy memories back to my mind and they are both necessary.

### **| Hibernation |**

Korean women came from a female bear, chosen over a tigress who failed remaining in the cave in winter as per the legend of the creation of humans in Korea. I have spent many winters hibernating. In order to soothe the pain of existing, I barely lived; I would save my energy and any effort would tire me.

*“As a working mom, having a drug induced hour nap was... luxurious.  
When I woke up after the colonoscopy I wanted another colonoscopy!”  
Ali Wong, Comedian*

Since I can remember I always had dark thoughts, I always talked about death. Most who've known me a bit think I'm suicidal. I don't agree. I think about death constantly - not only mine, I don't plan on ways of dying. I just wished it was game over so I could rest. Then the next thought that pops most of the time is I'm a mother, thus I cannot rest... ever. Even turning to ashes, I have this certainty that the dad's of my kids and my kids would try to Frankenstein me in order to have their needs filled!! I love them all to bits but my brain deserves one day to rest. I've also made sure they took seriously that I didn't survive life so far to end as a brain dead vegetable. Death isn't scary, if it's mine. It's a comforting thought to think that one day, there will be nothing left of moi. My first melancholic and revengeful poem was written at age 9. It started with "Rice grain I was born, rice grain stepped on, by many a thing, rice grain pulverised, I will end on the path, that leads to Samcheok" (my possible hometown and now I know this feeling I've felt growing up has a name: Korean Han)

Until then I want peace in my head, in my heart and in my existence.

### | HAN |

Han (Korean: 한), or haan, is a concept of an emotion, variously described as some form of grief or resentment, among others, that is said to be an essential element of Korean identity by some, and a modern post-colonial identity by others.[...] Korean art and culture -is viewed- as "sorrowful" in [Yanagi Sōetsu](#)'s theory of the "beauty of sorrow". [Wikipedia/HAN](#)

All losses are breakups; they tear your heart into pieces; they break one by one your abilities, to feel, to move on; they stop your will, they fill your head with countless chimeras; they devour your sleeping hours and skip your meals; they put you down; they break you down.. till despair becomes an acceptable form of living.

It is said that one loss brings back all the losses, all the deaths, all the griefs one has endured, as if one natural event would open wide a preternatural abyss of darkness!

*Abyss*

*I'm sitting today on its edge.*

*Am I a daughter of Mother Earth?*

*Am I just another experiment of the human condition?*

*Have I been weaponized?*

*Have I been tortured for a purpose?*

*Has my body not bled enough?*

*How am I still alive?*

What more is it to endure than seeing my loved ones growing apart? What is to be expected but the last bits of decay of a long rotten soil nutrient? Han vs Kintsugi 金継ぎ join the gold when things fall apart and accepting the flaws and missteps.

Why do they have to be nemesis.. Do they?

**| Estrangement | Society | Alienation | Angst-ridden |**

This topic means so much to me. Estrangement would nurture the thought that I was ever so close to the a-parents; it was all artificial and there was no closeness, such as parents-child. I know many adopted people are conflicted since they receive “parental” love and care or even at least some kind of guidance and have felt safe. And it must be heartbreaking if/when estrangement happens. Till adolescence I thought my a-life was ‘standard’; I obviously knew some stuff was out of place therefore the 15 years old me would have felt some kind of estrangement. I believe now that the a-parents felt estranged from me and blamed me for it. I thought till adolescence that the a-parents were life-supporting me and I owed them my existence until I felt the urge to escape and the only sane way out at the time of their mental institution made “family home” was to rip the intubation tubes, the puppet strings they stitched into my skin and probably in a more provocative manner - I’ve called it cutting the artificial umbilical cord to hurt both their “parenthood” feelings! At one point I even came to believe that somehow I inherited their sicknesses through genes... just crazy! Until I was informed that some stuff is actually environmentally “contagious”! But as many teens struggle with their needs being met, I was so exhausted to fight me that I had to fight them in order to live.

Cold

*There is something I seem to catch  
Like a common cold, heart manager  
Moon, stars, inquisitive stranger  
Leaving my emotions un-hatched  
Nights keep on rolling, life changer  
Cigarettes burning and wings attached  
Empty vessel, unique passenger  
The bumps, the squares, I mismatched  
Bring doves, sweets and a messenger  
Sole dance, wall in my heat exchanger  
A few words blues, old news dispatched*


It did not feel freeing and still doesn’t at times, and it broke me, filled me with lots of guilt and confusions, resentment and spread depression in all my cells like a punishment for not applying in remaining “the good daughter”. Today I know I was a good a-daughter and that my feelings and attachment towards them were not artificial. My depression didn’t arise with estrangement, it was growing all along my childhood, I just wasn’t aware that was depression. I thought I was naturally a sad child with no tears and just anger. That fills me with a deep sadness because I needed love and care and my a-life to be real, and for their part it was only lies and abuse. The process of cutting these artificial bonds emotionally took the first 6 years. That was the very first step towards

gaining a sense of self. And it was a rollercoaster ride that still hasn't ended yet, though the a-father is long dead and the a-mother is nearly there too. I haven't been in contact since 20 years with her. Dysfunctional natural families are hard to navigate and survive - abusive a-families are just steps farther and I'm glad I've lived the next 2 decades. I'm also so glad that this subject is raised among our community. It brings pain, yet it's "freeing" to have the opportunity to unbury it one more time and have an adult responsible and caring look at my teenage self. Thank you ♥

There is no day when a life event does not hurt. From the happiest place, the wedding of my first born - my actual third wedding in 50 years. Because though the dad of my kids and my kids were there, the friends of my son whom I helped to grow up, I felt alone. The black hole of adoption was pulling everything from me and the incest deprived me of my second chance of having parents and family at large. I was also with my kids and the partner of the 2nd child, the only person of colour. I felt out of place, I felt like the biggest mammoth in the room, yet totally invisible. I did not even protect my son's partner who is of Bangladeshi heritage when white people were rude to her. I was absent. Alcohol unfortunately helped me "socialise" and that is the least honourable way to come out of the black hole of adoption, because it's an illusion and we can't live in illusions. The falls after falls hurt each time more.

*Ode to your many holiday seasons*

-  
*My roots were chopped as a sapling.  
No time to grow this lush foliage.  
I have lost branches at every bump on the road,  
squeezed among others like me in our first  
and last journey to your netherworld.  
You robbed me of any possible verdant nutrients;  
I later got a bittersweet taste of what it could have been.  
Your cheering songs, your folkloresque good intentions  
and your superb religious actions only split my heart  
farther from ever willing to be part of your world and your kind.  
My frail stem barely made it through your winters,  
yet you never let me see my summer. I am sick;  
sick of your shiny adornments; sick of attending your festive seasons;  
sick of fuelling your morbid pride; S.I.C.K.  
Silenced  
Infant  
Creeped away from  
Korea  
I know the spring chirping birds and the luxurious promises  
of a warm summer, I remember them from the time  
before your men came and devastated my land.  
I needed no civilizing of yours, no renaming, no reshaping,  
no whyte washing. I was perfect as I was, black pearl of my kind!  
I know others got to stand erected to the night sky,  
they got their roots to keep them grounded.  
I know they kept the communication open and  
never were they completely isolated from our kind.  
I know their growth took longer,  
yet their leaves were touched by our Moon's light.  
I know their lives got bruised too, they also suffered neglect  
but they got to see their summer for the luckiest.  
I know it was not easier, turned into scrap wood from the get go;*

*I know their inner bark bled too.  
 All in all we all got wounded by the forced pruning  
 to fit in yours and their box.  
 We never got to say goodbye. We never got to grow healthy.  
 We never got to rest in peace.  
 I was standing there at hand all along yet not even good enough  
 to warm your hearth; forgotten most of the years and disposed of  
 as soon as the new year of entitled joy filled your home.  
 My last needles teasing your pathetic hypocritical generosity  
 are my last weapons. It was never a war we could win  
 but battles we could engage to wake and shake up your world  
 That is endangering everyday ours.  
 I was born Ginkgo Biloba.  
 You wanted to grow me as your Ponderosa.  
 I am today growing my own kind of tiny Sugar Pine   
 because wounds, old wounds at large, a primal wound  
 in particular deserves to be healed at any stage really!  
 May you all have a blithe pagan judeo-christian nativity celebration  
 and free Palestine of your white supremacists!*

*Truly never yours to start with,*  
*Your ex-christmas tree*

I am sitting on a rotten chopped tree, with three beautiful branches remaining and two new growths, my two grandchildren, a happy family event that broke my heart. The rejection coloured by ignorance and racism I felt from my daughter-in-law that I had felt so deeply from my son years before, was devastating. I had to sit on my kitchen floor once again back at home after a full day's travel, back into some safety and pour all the tears... alone.

Society vs moi: where you see pretty, am I a doll to you? Where you see delicate, am I a piece of cloth to you? When you see a beautiful smile, are you an orthodontist? Where you see sexy, are you a perv? Society blind folded but not its justice, Women of Colour have been fetishized since colonialism started, coveted like trophies, lust upon and hated like their devils and 'witches'. Will you grow up, quit playing dolls and house? You infantilised me, victimised me, fetishized me. Are you not tired? I am. I really had a wish for a friend, an ally and not a constant adversary. Half a century I have lived +/- x years. My two feet feeling every step so far on Earth. I imprinted the best I could with what I had: yes, I have tiny feet, 35.5 but they went the distance after being floored at age 4!

You do not want the depression that infected my brain, the nights and the mares that inhabit my heart, that hideous reflection of mine, the dusk that besieged my eyes when mornings keep on coming... For my sake, I want to tame my anger, I can't keep on being stuck between eruption and dormancy when extinction is inevitable. I WANT TO LIVE FREE to decide when, where and with whom! I absolutely want to give my 'Petite' self one more kiss and let her feel safe. "Adopted and incested" won't be the résumé of our life. I will remain angry because injustice will keep on happening. Yet, I want the controller and have the ability to press let go when I feel like!



So society: please quit being envious. Quit wanting us. Quit advertising our kind. Quit that nonsense. We, Women of Colour are people, we are not scarier, sexier, intelligentER and whateverER!! We lived more than you because of you, our wisdom was born with your stubbornness to box us. Our beauty reflects our enduring. Our lives are worth more than your money. We adopted people, are not commodities, no gods “charity act”, no baby-ersatz. Our survival was not rendered possible because of you but rather in spite of you! To our lost friends, you tied their minds. I won’t let your strings puppet me around any longer. AND I am not sorry for how you’ve been perceiving me. It’s on you and the society you’ve built. But please, now, you’re only hurting you. Honestly, my eyes are too ‘bananoid’ (age vs race 🍌) and I can’t roll my eyes farther up 😂

I was refined at a young age, like the sugar: my impurities, my imperfections have been removed; I WANT them back. All I wish today is for I, MOI and MYSELF to be more than friends. I wear toddler’s accessories while looking like a porn star, that’s moi. I fashion the femme fatale while singing (badly) animé intro from the eighties, that’s also moi. My self was hemmed by a predominantly (euphemism oblige - would not like to wrinkle you more) white society. It’s time for my wrinkles to unfold! I won’t tear my skin but unthread myself every day more till I am and then no more. I am on my way to hug moi and never let moi go. I am so excited because I am on my way to meet anew my moi and fall in love again! I am on my way to be crazy about moi. ❤️ How crazy does that sound!? 😂

🇰🇷 “지나간 여름의 모래알처럼 달라붙는 미인 점이 똑같은 것들입니다” K-Moi

🇯🇵 “過ぎ去った夏の砂粒のようにしがみつく皮膚のほくら同じことです” K-Moi

🇫🇷 « les grains de beauté qui se collent comme des grains de sable d’étés révolus » K-moi

🇬🇧 “beauty spots clinging like grains of sand from summers that went by” K-Moi

🇪🇸 “lunares que se aferran como granos de arena de los veranos que pasaron” K-Moi

🇩🇪 “Muttermalen, die wie Sandkörner vergangener Sommer sich anklammern ” K-Moi

## | Mares |

Nights were always a dreaded time. I don’t know what started first, the night terrors, the darkness or the monster creeping from the shadows on the wall. I had 3 recurring Night-Mares



throughout childhood, teenage and young adulthood. They ceased after I went through many therapies until the CBT therapy. My fears remained though. The Mares as I recall them came in 3 forms: allegorically the a-parents would be captured and replaced by monsters (and they actually were); prophetically the judgment day had arrived and my 27 cats (we did have that many) would all wait for me, the terrifying thing is they had no head but they spoke; in a psychic way, it could have been a real memory, I would be very small with a woman, I could not see her face ever, I could only see her silhouette and we were on a too small boat for the size of the immense sea. Regardless of how many times these mares visited my recovering brain at night, in 3 or one only, I would wake up and scream, scream and wake up, ... The screams were breaking the silence of the old house, even the owl (my best friend at night would fly away). The a-mother did not appreciate that I was only a child, a scared child, in need and in great distress. She repeated too often that she was already sleepless and that I worsened her nights. It built up the already present guilt, like a brick wall with the naive belief that if nothing came from me, nothing would enter me. The monster did, it raped me. I never screamed. I never cried. I obeyed. I was paralysed. I even waited for it many nights, as if I was hypnotised by a desire that should not have existed in my tiny body.

#### The Mares

*Once upon a backwards-ticking time, there lived Lil-Me. She loved Night calling her through the window opening, wrapped in her starry gown; inevitably Night brought trepidations and Time would start its Tock and Tick... Night would cease to shimmer, her siblings the Mares had arrived; Lightning with its electric mood, Succubus with her venomous tongue and Incubus with his insatiable appetite... surrounded by their Army of Shadows, the kitties with no-head. Like a macabre procession. Like Night would never spark again. Like childhood would evaporate with the first dew-dust breeze... Shadows loved Lil-Me dearly; yet, she could only feel dread. She was endeavoring to look habituated to this nocturnal climax, counting the shiny eyes of Arachnida, neighbors of misfortune, absorbed in their Sisyphean weaves with no Penelopean purpose... If you'd have looked deep into the storm and for long enough, till your eyes were dried out, you could have seen there, just there where Lightning lacerates Night, a little silhouette, febrile and brittle in her dress made of pearls of rain: there laid, inert, Lil-Me.*

## Summer

They, Them, Their who chose to subtract She|Her|Hers

### |Just a season|

Winter was always the scariest time of my life; I was abandoned or lost in winter. The sexual abuse happened also more in winter. I had no garden to escape to. I love Winter though, I love Summer more. My high school friend had been my Summer. It felt like her time with me was a short season. I am still angry, not at her; at her brother for keeping a gun with ammunition at home; at her stepfather for abusing her; at the a-mother for not telling me that she came looking for me; at her mother for failing to protect her, for being so coward and calling a neighbour friend from me that day and for not answering my begging to let me see her last writing; at my husband

for taking me away one more time; and at me for letting her without my hand to guide her through again, for missing at my promise, for being blind to the clues.. it was not my fault, yet I wasn't there. Yes, I wish I had died too on that day because every year between xmas and my birthday, I have hibernated hoping I would not have to wake up. Summer is warm and bright, and so am I when I am in love with the world. There are too many days I can't feel it, so I call Albert Camus at my rescue to find a good-enough 'Invincible Summer'!

*"In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer."*  
Albert Camus, Author

7 January 2016, 25 years later: I was called by the vet; my daughter's kitty needed to be lethally injected. I fell numb on the floor and my 13 years old teary daughter took my hand and asked me to go alone, because she wanted to remember her kitty alive. I hugged her so tight and jumped in the car. I relived the agony of losing my high school friend all over again and the panic of facing her dead body. I grabbed my hand in the cab and put Luka by Suzanne Vega on my phone; that was our anthem, we played it at her home for the funeral wake. I spent hours with the suffering kitty until I had to let him go and say a last goodbye. I wish it had solved all my grieving.. it helped though in that the 7th of January in a very morbid way my daughter and I go through memory lane pushing our brains to remember how invincible Summers are ❤️❤️.

*I miss you  
Losing myself looking for you.  
My mirror has been quiet since the  
day you left.  
How could you decipher that face  
and then leave like a thief?  
How can i wish for you to rest in peace  
when I couldn't hug you one last time?  
How can I be indifferent when you took with you  
the one love that was mending my heart?  
How could you abandon me again and again?  
Look at that innocent face, I was only 18  
and clueless on how much hurt I would go through  
because of you, because your hand got cold.  
Now, I know we couldn't make it to a 'forever together'.  
You couldn't expect me to be ok thereafter.  
You took love with you and I ran hysterically through life  
trying to find you again. Today I know that I won't.  
Today all over again my heart aches  
because you are never to be felt.*


**| Intimacy | Trust | Sexuality | Romanticism | Relationship | Emotional Immaturity |  
Prince Charming and the others |**

36 years I know my future-ex-husband. 30 years married with 16 of separation and in a complicated divorce, not because of us but because of bureaucracy! We have 3 grownup children,

2 grandchildren, we have anniversaries at every corner of my memory. Though there was love and though it was worth fighting, trying it all, looking back I've never felt so alone than when together. I had this fairy tale script in my head, where he would be Prince Charming and fix my world and he would be my everything. He was my everything but my world kept on shattering. And because I have 99 types of disorders and traumas, he could not understand the way I felt when I failed to be present in my life. Trying to combine the adopted woman and the sexual abuse survivor with an intimate relationship has been a mission impossible. Trust was not always with me. That hurt him the most. I have been scared of him though he was the only one I should have trusted. Trauma, phobia, flashbacks, where would I have started. All he understood is my irrational fear and understandable disgust were aiming essentially at white men; he was white and a man. And I literally mutated many a time from age 15 to 35. He saw the evolution and it was not always an appealing show. He surely did not deserve my wrath against men, he was not perfect but he tried so hard to provide me with a safe place and offered his arms even when I was turning my back on him. I infected him with the poison that was running through my veins, I belittled his one visible trauma, the divorce of his parents and took a sadistic pleasure at calling him 'happy baby'. He had two sets of families, while I had none.


On the other hand, my mutations for ugly and deformed they left me at times, they were all needed, I deserved to figure how to be my whole self without withdrawing any bits of me any more. I didn't want to please nor pretend anymore. As an older teenager I still had tantrums, I was very immature emotionally while sexuality had not much to offer to me. I would at times disinterested and dull to the touch and others on high libido injections. I was very unstable throughout my young adult life. Fearing intimacy, yet yearning for it. It must have been incredibly hard to read the room with me in it! I don't remember when Traumas took the front of the stage, that I could not see him afar. But I remember blaming me for it. I also blamed him often, not always justified. He unknowingly and unwillingly kept me in the bubble of my fairy tale, participating in accentuating my isolation. Today I am still dependent: financially and emotionally. I don't even have a driving license.

Consent was everything for everything and I built a hardshell out of it. I was - and still am - scared of the dark. Monsters creep in the darkness. He was no monster but he was still a man. I preferred to sleep in another room, it was reassuring and lonely. Marriage is hard, separation is more. But I could feel in my body, the monsters were on the look out ready to bounce at any trigger. I had to set them free but not with him. There's a journey of self discovery in all of that we have lived and after. I wanted him and me to be happy, it was just not possible together. Because if a perfectly toxic relationship can be born out of love, it was ours: we were the most adorable couple, who self destroyed every beauty together in this unique harmony of chaos and hurt each

other by tiptoeing around each other's needs and failing to be who we were to ourselves and to each other. We both lost many feathers in that 2 decades embrace. We both got heart broken, yet for reasons so extremely alien! Looking forward, we are the only true friend to each other, knowing each other for so long. 2 beautiful people who deserve to be loved in return .

He was the first person I could freely tell about the abuse and especially the incest. He was not equipped to deal with it, he was a young person, clueless of what he was signing for. I wish the handbook for survivors' partners would have been accessible earlier in our joint life! I am grateful that he offered to avenge me, at least once. If he ever read this, he would be disappointed that I don't recall all the other times he surely did!! For the first time in my 10 years in France, he was the first person who showed support and till today, though he failed to recognise my distress many times and did not know how either, he still doesn't miss an occasion to show up in my life. **I am truly grateful.**

### US

-  
*It's not you.  
It's not me.  
It's not an au-revoir.  
It's not an adieu.  
It's a song breaking us on a strange shore.  
It's full of doubts.  
It's a whisper screaming for promises.  
It's a tic of a clock missing its toc. It's life, sweet and sorrowful.  
Where do tear drops go past the horizon?  
Where do unanswered questions wash away?  
Does a brain and a heart hold enough space to remember all the silent hugs?  
It was the story of us.  
One to tell; one we've lived.  
For each of us a dream ,  
One to scatter in the aestival breeze...  
Let US go, My Love *

Before meeting him, I had regular high school boyfriends that I found insipid and useless, because I was already in some disgusting ways sexually aware and active. The boyfriend just before I met my husband was probably what one calls the high school sweetheart, my teenage love. The cute romance didn't last long enough though because I wanted to have a baby at 15!!! His mom was a mom at 16 and there was no way he would do that to me, though we were already very intimate. I also told my husband that I wanted a baby girl and would beg him every now and then!! I was a mom at 21, still too young. And for this high school sweetheart, his presence in my bed scared the coward a-father so much that he never visited my bed again. Though it helped me regain confidence, it didn't make me feel any safer at home nor around men thereafter.

Any romantic relationships thereafter was an attempt to emancipate the woman in me, not creating long lasting bonds because I was welcoming any new fun to my life and still didn't know

how to handle my many fears. The men I dated all had something, I felt. As if I built my womanhood on a pile of boyfriends common traits: adopted and struggling with violence; French and struggling with identity; abused and struggling with mother; ostracised and struggling with eating disorder; of colour and struggling with racism. Others have called me promiscuous and worse names, I think I really needed to understand what my body was made off; my sexuality had been stolen, I had to recover it. I had that need to explore my femininity in my terms. It was my woman right.

**Intimacy, friendship, relationship and any 'ships' were hard, hard to trust,** to keep in touch, to feel the ground, to stay in love, to face the deepest fear of being abandoned again, of being unloved, of not being good enough, of being worthless and alone, hard to nurture to. I have for too long avoided my most painful emotions and opted for 'out of sight, out of mind'. But it leads to breaking down easier. I push myself to check in with the ones I care about, to be more prompt answering texts too. Relationships have also been pulling all kinds of triggers and I felt I never had the right ammo to fire back. I had to create so many layers of shields and unhealthy coping mechanisms that getting naked and vulnerable had become almost impossible at a certain point. I was so easily breakable; I've learned to survive with my missing pieces. And the search for my first five years of life had begun without me even fully being aware of it. It had needed a trauma bigger than the routine abuse of a-parents. I woke up at 15, 18, 21. At 26 I found a mom's armour and I wore it at all times, leaving the woman in me to disappear. I was lost and scared. Strangers scared me. I scared me. I was loved though.

**| Motherhood | Ceasefire | Children | A daughter of my own | Acceptance | Self-Love |**

This is my diary journal entry on my daughter's 13th birthday, when I was 43. Sometimes we need to have a break, it helps to prevent breakdowns. It helps to grow. Hard choices also make us grow. I believe I entered adulthood that day, the day I realized I was my own person and it was my birth right to exist and defend what was always mine: my body and mind.

*I took refuge in an imaginary world, where it's always sweet tea time, surrounded by my mini-warriors. I didn't find my missing first 5 years yet but I had the chance to survive the following 5 years that brought my daughter into my life. I created my daughter in my heart, when I was 5. Then literature gave her a name when I was 7, Lottie - « A Little Princess ». I had dreamt of her in highschool with my girlfriend, we had given her the name Nahomi, a little Japanese Princess from a comic book - such a whitewashed time it was!! Like she had magic nuts!! Lol! Was that a non smooth reference to the geisha balls!? Anyway these were the times Brain seemed to enjoy playing house in the perimeter of our enclosed safe-house - partially isolated, I had loving neighbors and friends; I grew up!!! I love my two boys and they know I have no favorite but they also know how much I wanted a daughter. There she came on a beautiful afternoon of the end of summer, rose and cheeky wearing a smooth lil fur as only luggage. I could have stayed "home" for her, since she was meant to be the purpose of my life: being the mom of my daughter. I had thought that she would bring back my mom and my past back to me. She exceeded all this; she brought me back to my life. I stopped surviving and I chose living. I have made very few voluntary choices in my life; therefore, I haven't had an opportunity to really grow. Until she showed me how. She made me realize how hard it must have been for her grannie to care for me and how scared she must have been, if she chose to relinquish me. I had no plan to abandon my adorable daughter. But I had to leave physically home in order to grow, I had to spread my wings, I had to fall to learn to fly. I wanted to. I had never felt trapped before, because when you grow in a cage, and a prince charming brings you into a beautiful safe castle, you don't wanna leave. During her first*

five years of life, her daddy and I did badly try to fix the unfixable, I do believe I tried harder because without a fairy tale there was no princess. I needed the fairy tale, I needed to be the princess. I became a queen, home did not feel like my anchor, while he was my only anchor, I thought. But home wasn't sweet anymore. He used to be the sweetness. We gave our daughter love though. I did all my best to make her first five years memorable, for her to grow a healthy body and mind. I let her go on holidays and grow further with her dad's family even when it would let me feel lost and scared again. I gave her a nanny at home, to ensure she grows with as much love as possible, to preserve her from the harshness of nursery. I made my time count for her. I pushed myself to socialize for her and her brothers to have childhood friendships. Their childhood had to be love, fun, needs fulfilled and boundaries set. Daddy was the first 3, I was anything minus the fun or so I thought... until I came to a cease-fire with myself; I was raised to become serious, to care for serious things, active fun was always hard for me since it requires spontaneous expressions of joy!! I wasn't a spontaneous person until I became one!! I struggled with expressing emotions. As a child I thought I was not welcome to express my feelings. But I have discovered that I am fun and funny within my limits. But drawing boundaries is my greatest skill as a mom and a woman! And I inevitably made a lot of mistakes, some more awful than others and I'm kinda happy I did, because it means that I tried. **And leaving home was NOT a mistake. It was a healthy path I chose to take: the only way for me to forage the scary world by myself.** And I grew and probably haven't stopped since! I will never get my first five years back; however I had a five years guaranteed life, for each of my kids. It's been 13 years since I allowed myself to live without time ticking. I'm proud of my daughter for growing up with me and not abandoning me and vice versa! We are two great women, I may have drowned the draft of her, it's been a while since she's holding her own brush. Being a mom doesn't have to be a hard chore-choice, it doesn't have to be under attack when a romantic love fades away, being a mom is a life choice, being a mom at home is another life choice. Being a mom is good enough. Being an Adoptee and a Mom is an incredible adventure. My mother in law thought that babies were cancer, maybe and I have been in remission ever since. For me motherhood has been like having a brain surgery while having an open heart surgery. I ended up with more brain and more heart ❤️ My kids have been my chill pills at times and my need for Valium at other times and my red wine was just the excuse to get the party started!! I love the kids I've grown, I love the mom I've grown into, I love the woman I grow every day more, because I gave myself permission to miss my first five years by renewing every five years the vows to myself, to check on my needs! Feeling less lost or scared or empty and more joyful and happy is not an egoistic act, it's a well deserved act of self love!

### **| Social Media | Abortion instead of adoption for survivors of child sexual abuse**

I don't know where to fit this but here seems to be just fine. Acknowledging that I have been an angry interlocutor and that the internet did not welcome well, when I started test-practicing my voice! I must have been answering a venomous post against 'cry babies adoptees' once too many times. I know other angry adopted people (but mostly men) who don't have incest in their bag of trauma, but we share a difference on anger: I am triggered beyond reasonable when people badmouth women's bodies, young women 's bodies, mom's bodies... (maybe it is because I am a woman. I feel dirty reading hate speech, victim-blaming and shaming words. I am pure rage inside too.) I used for hours to throw back thinking it would miraculously emerge the face of these women out of their own butt cheeks; never happened. It cannot happen when triggers find ammo. It is unfortunate that we who have been deprived of an enjoyable childhood have to be the grown-ups in these situations and show understanding, empathy and wisdom!!!

*\*Indelicate: you asking where I'm from, bc guess what, I have no f\*\*\*ing clue either!*

*\*Incommensurable: you balancing abortion and adoption in one throw, one being a #womenschoice and #womensright and the other one being a patriarchal colonialism trade! Women are forced or feel they have no other choice or are pushed into the belief to give up their child because of some f\*\*\*ed up missionaries or a society that doesn't support single mothers nor parents in poverty nor children of color and mixed heritage. These women had to carry these babies for NINE MONTHS and let them go. I wish you could go through their pain during and after birth.*

*\*Intolerable: you playing the woman's card like women have a choice to keep their babies. Some of us #adoptees were taken, stolen, not all orphans!! Some mothers were teenagers maybe or very young women and were forced to keep the baby because of some men impregnated them with consent or raped them and the society didn't allow abortion nor unmarried mothers! Yes, adoption is STILL NOT BY CHOICE and happens because of the lack of them, before and during and after pregnancy!!!!!!*



*\*Insufferable: you asking if I'd rather not exist. What would you do, if I'd just say yes, would you have the clit to put an end to my misery? Would you? I wouldn't think much of you either way.*

**| 2 Sunsets in one day, 2 midnights was one too many | Sorrow | Coming back for my first trip 'Home' and feeling a real emptiness for the first time |**

Longing

*When silence breaks into pieces of tears  
Shattering on the kitchen floor  
And words pour liquid  
보고 싶어요 (pogoshipeoyo)  
I miss you  
A whisper that is traveling miles into the night  
The heart consumed turned into rock  
What grows from a volcano's ashes  
But a lush horizon  
With so little of an offering  
As an empty hand  
Yet, to be filled  
Creating anew thousand nights  
Yet, to be held  
Lovingly and knowingly tight  
Like 3 little words  
Like Hope will visit  
보고 싶어요 (pogoshipeoyo)  
I miss you  
Let us unfold the night*

**| Helpers | Friendship Bench | Greenhouse In-house Supportive Team | a-parents scrutiny | Perpetrators |**

I have tried to volunteer for the NSPCC in England. I was too out of the ordinary and still not healthy enough to be chosen and I do tend unwillingly to scare off people; that was after I let that incestuous father near my children, I guess I had the need to redeem myself. I am glad though for trying at least to feel good again. I got to learn more about child abuse and to know some social workers there that changed my opinions on their profession. And even receiving a very surprised visit from the social worker, was a great experience as a mother. My then 10 year old son picked up the telephone afterschool. The man did a wrong number but heard his baby voice and asked if he was alone, to which my son answered that he was alone with his baby sister, not mentioning that his 14 year old brother was in the garage. My daughter was 5 and I had specially enquired to social services since it was a new country for me, at which age would the big brother be okay to be left alone with his siblings or walk them to school and after school. This man was a good man though and contacted social services, because of course who would not be alarmed! The 2 social workers who visited us, took the children one by one to let them express themselves freely away from me and then the three of them, to let me speak freely. It was a bonding experience for my kids and I, who had recently moved to a foreign country with no family or friends around. The reports I received later in writing brought me to tears, it became a written proof that I was a 'good enough

single mother' and that I was supporting my children with love and care. I was unfortunately not always a good mom. I wish a social worker would have visited spontaneously to check in. Therefore, **I wish there was a dedicated case worker attributed to every single adopted child since their 'gotcha day' (arrival day in the adopting country)!** They need to be able to see the transition and evolution in the kid's development, physical, psychological, motor, intellectual and behavioural. Their proximity would help for the child to trust. Trust is paramount for us!!

Then every school should have a Friendship Bench, like at the Educate Together in Ireland. A foreign student would sit there with anyone who needs to talk. In England they had The Greenhouse in high school to literally grow our kids healthier! The staff were so dedicated to the general health of children, that one of them took it upon herself to pick up my teenage son to ensure his attendance at school. Looking back he was so supported by school when I was unavailable. And that's what children, adopted children need, a support that is available, accessible, trustworthy and reliable in absence of family care support.

*Every misstep would throw me back. Years of inner work wasted. I thought.*

Family doctors should also be trauma informed and be able to recognise the signs of abuse in early childhood, moreover when the child has been adopted, as adoption makes children much more vulnerable and at times hypersensitive to the world. Any person in contact with us should have been trained and informed. I am not religious nor was I baptised in France but I was given a god-family, in the eventuality of a-parents dying. This god-family could have been my safe place, if they had not lived so far away and been always criticised and even ostracised from the a-family. I wanted so often to go there on holidays, I had cousins there, and my god-parents were just extraordinary and loving people, who inspired me to build a family of my own. I trusted them and they only let me down by dying too early.

Both the a-parents were victims of sexual abuse, incested by family friends and parents. A victim who keeps on living as a victim without support and lacks self reflection and emotional intelligence should not become an a-parent. It is a harsh statement, but one who doesn't work to better themselves, how would they honestly guide a child through life ethically? The a-sister had taken the words out of my mouth when I was 15; she attempted to kill herself soon after that. It was not her first nor last attempt. The a-mother shamed her own daughter for being such a weakling but never said a direct word to me about her husband, while now she could not pretend anymore that I was anything but his main platter. At 21, I just had started to uncover the tip of all the trauma I was made of, that was an inch into my healing journey, yet I became a mother and tried to figure out my life without support and I wish I had some. My son would have benefitted



from that too. My son did not deserve to have an unbalanced mom. My healing had barely started, I was too young and I had no support. I should have been put beneath a microscope before going ahead with my pregnancy to at least receive a medical entourage. Why should it be any different for prospective a-parents!? If we are talking about giving a second chance to an already traumatised child (by forced separation or relinquishment or death of biological parents), we should be thorough in assessing a-parents.

I have enquired to professionals and researched in books, in studies, papers and online what makes a sexual predator. I found that it was men mostly described as pedophiles or hebephiles, they almost always know their victims and prey upon them, grooming them till they molest them and/or rape them. These men exhibit recidivism, regardless of being caught or not. The only way they would let go of a victim is if they would not feel safe enough to commit their crimes. Not all these men present a direct tangible threat to their victims, but they are expert in silencing them one way or another. Children trust and like to please adults. Adoption magnifies these traits in children. I have also learned that teenagers smell differently as when they were younger children, it is how in nature, parents and growing cubs would detach naturally. Incest also happens among animals. That's a fact the a-father liked to discuss in length of the men teaching their pubescent family members the 'art of sex'! The same right existed among the nobility. The whole society was sick!

But back to 2024, I believe that men as a general rule should examine their olfactory sense, moreover when there's a sexual abuse, incest within the family history. The incestuous men I knew had a poor sense of smell. If a nose-job could eradicate child sexual abuse, I would be the first one to offer my earnings toward it! We torture women for less on a daily basis. That's just a little check for the greater good. Many of these men also suffer from erectile dysfunction - I have wondered if that would explain why they attack children as a form to avenge their virility, or if their libido was broken with other adult partners... but then none of it defined the a-father! He remained a monster.

« i » is a mom and « you » is a child.

*“I was never told, yet I am. You were never on your own, I was all my life! With great power comes loads of shit tons of things to do. How do I delegate and get anything else done, if I constantly must monitor and inspect. Moms have this thing, where they kind of have to close an eye on things... How does that apply at work with self? How does one close an eye without poking herself voluntarily with whatever at hands straight into the neighbour iris!!!!? i wants to work with other i not with you.”*

The a-mother apart from allowing herself only to be a victim, she also wanted to be the child of her husband, in a very sick way. When her first born left unexpectedly at the age of 17, she stopped doing the rare things she did; cooking. I had to be my own mom. I have struggled as an

adult with men, friends or work colleagues to set firm boundaries; I have ended up nursing people when I should not have! But I was meant to be 'that good girl'!! I wish someone of colour and woke would have pre-evaluated her mental health. She was a victim herself but shamed other victims with such a malicious and violent disgust, that I have no other explanations, that she is great at manipulating. She had this colonialist and Catholic pity for these poor people on television, that she was feeding her brain with. She was also presenting in a way that was too good to be true. How was that not suspicious? For me, she is the typical hollow but dangerous white woman; narcissistic; capable of extreme forms of violence; obsessive maniac as dirt maniac; cruel; poisonous. Also I wonder if the a-sibling were interviewed too, pre- and post- adoption. That should be mandatory too. How well parents are doing with their biological kids should be a determining factor in later adoption rights. I doubt these interviews took place, otherwise how would they not have seen anything on children aged 9 and 8 years old! Or were we so incompetent in childhood early trauma back then!?

But honestly, let us just abolish international transracial adoption once for all!

## Spring

### | Hope | Bloom | Healing |

I suffered ergo I existed.. !?

I don't know me without that sadness, anger or feeling of injustice <the Korean Han>. My body, since I was 5, has been at war, like Korea, invaded by many men. My tongue was cut; my tears were dried. But even in the desert, my heart found a well of hope to keep on beating ergo I kept on existing. These 5 decades were worth all the fights, fights that keep afloat, fights to keep breathing; I got to meet many beautiful you's - and I've found me at peace within the rhythm of my own heartbeat. 💕💕 From trauma to living the Traum <German for Dream>.

There is hope.

No matter the turns we take, there will be hope. Hope can be the chirping of a baby bird fed after the storm. Hope can be found in the compassionate smile drawn on a stranger's lips. Hope exists because we are never completely alone, nature provides us with millions of excuses to feel good... we only need to choose one. We also feel alone, when we decide not to share. Depression isn't born from our poor choices, but some of our choices are feeding our depression.

*I'm your summer rain  
Thin and gentle on your skin*

*Furious and tormented at times  
I regulate your heat  
You jump, two feet in my puddles  
You'll miss me in long winter nights  
You lick till my last drop  
You cry for more  
You yearn for me in your desert  
You're thirsty, you're greedy  
I'm precious, I am everywhere  
In the sky, in the sea, in the clouds in between  
Yet you don't see me*

*Self Love is a kiss thrown in the air  
that Mother Earth's breath  
blows gently back at you*

## **| Bloom |**

### Redefining nesting ❤️

Nests exist above and beyond babies. In English it can be as bad as a nest of spies and in French one can nest a sickness; however, nest can also something within something bigger. I choose the latter; I feel like a Russian Doll and I am nesting myself within my hopes. I will shelter my dreams, let them grow and see where they take moi. ❤️

Sometimes something very beautiful can ravage a heart... even a closed and chained heart. The only certainty today is that there is no certainty, that attachment to any idea, a thing or another human being implies their loss and that is terrifying. There is helplessness. There is future suffering, like Damocles 'sword! There is a sudden emptiness that has never ceased to be present. There is the call... from far away, from within, which, despite all the efforts, never seems to come closer. There is the hope that cries out, it is the hungry and the lover who then murmur; sweet words; powerful words; words that fill everything like a rising sun... even the void.

*A wish*  
*A wish like kissing the wind with soft words  
A prayer like chanting to the sky and its clouds  
A promise like you and I will be We till the end of us  
A poem like laying my exhausted heart in the palm of your hand  
3 little words like an indeleble tattoo in the hollow of your waist  
...to reach you...  
You.Are.Loved.*

Korea is inclusive in its approach to 'parents' gender and number but I think only on the calendar date, marked by the celebration of both parents on the same day: Parents Day in South Korea is 8 March. It comes after NYE, the death anniversary of my high school friend, my birthday, the lunar new year, St Valentine (I was made to be unwanted and unloved on that day and any other day, this one was marketed against me) and the anniversary when the 2nd incest

happened. It is the 7th ache on my yearly ache-calendar. I am not victimising myself by revisiting in a loop everything that hurts. I have learnt with the help of experts to acknowledge and understand their root cause of what triggered me on these dates. Now, the remaining sadness attached to these punctual events requires proper self love and care. One has to imagine that I have lost 7 loved ones, one would not ask me to 'just go over it' or I had 7 physical life threatening injuries... Wounds take time to heal if at all. Sometimes the injury is so big that the patient does not even see it, like in the limb syndrome, I was this patient. I needed time to see and accept the mutilation.

### **| Healing |**

My journey to recovery could have started 36 years ago and taken off quickly. But because it episodically paused for many a reason; for motherhood to flow, because of breakdowns, I shelled up, I went onto denial manic episodes, etc.

Also it was rendered real difficult, since I didn't survive once, I survived every time and that's why I'm still here trying to make some sense out of a lifetime that can only until now be explained through all my traumas... I have wished to be a phoenix, I have wished for the moon and even prayed to my nightfall faeries, the fireflies, to give me a different life. I have wished so much for so long that I have lost sight of living the life that was given to me.

Many things had an easier fix as soon as I started to really reach out. For instance I felt I was the elephant in the room wherever I was, because I was hanging - not by choice but by proxy - with white people; going to the Asian restaurant would cost me so much anxiety. This disappeared the day I hung out with Korean people and other foreign people, I never felt out of place after. I also like to smile triumphantly at the few white people sitting in Asian restaurants!

I had wished that I did not have to heal, that my sexual abuse had been prevented. And I hope it will be for children now. I am not in favour of wasting resources for the perpetrators, but prevention is paramount, and everything should be done, even if it includes helping these men to not abuse. When I was 15, I would have said, let us chop their d\*\*k, bleed, feed them with it and then burn them for all the women burnt unjustly in the middle ages! But I grew... and my viewpoint is less radical and may be slightly wiser. Killing men would not erase the abuse. And we need to erase the abuse or at least diminish the numbers by reenforcing protective measures around childcare.

I can imagine that at this point of reading, one's face could look like the majority of my therapists face, when I finish the timeline of my trauma: bewilderment! It was not always

reassuring but then I got used to it. Since I moved around a lot and before or just at the start of the internet, I had to change therapists often, sometimes for good, sometimes for bad! From my experience till 2024, professionals are still too conservative in their approaches with treatments. I wish they would be more creative and could tailor sessions based on our lived experiences, I know too unique to be possible... for this it is a wish!

### | Therapists |

Last I checked in with a face to face therapist was 5 years ago, I was emotionally fragile, mentally not healthy and physically unfit. I wanted to keep being that Super-Me, to be that overachieving loving and caring woman, mother and friend. All this while I was a procrastinating perfectionist still struggling with some manias. I was a Penelope from Ulysses on stuff that matters too much, I undid everything at night (sabotage) and because I am stubborn and over-controlling I struggled finding kindness practice to self-care. I also had difficulties expressing what was really going on inside of me. My biggest fear at the time was spooking them away with my darkest thoughts. Loss was and still is unbearable. Though I had learned healthy coping mechanisms, I felt I was preparing to go to war again and this time it scared me beyond my resilient point. Of course, all I wanted was to break free, to deploy these wings, to scream all that silence inside, people to hug my loneliness, to hold more hands than my own, to trust... but I survived because it was all I could do. Life as an adoptee, a survivor takes many different paths, self-destruction is one of them. Don't stay there, you're not alone. Living is painful but so is surviving and life has so much more than only pain to offer. One step forward for two backwards, no matter the pace, eventually we start dancing, trusting someone to lead sometimes too, we start noticing we're breathing in harmony, ... we start feeling alive again. Nobody can take this from us. Every day is a choice, living is a good one! Then comes hope, hugs, opened hands, dreams and all that makes pain a little more bearable again... WE ARE LOVED 💕

The stairs and my therapist is maybe a psychic 🧙 :))

Yesterday night was a night! Fantastic in all its meaning! I must thank Alva for it :) The image of the stairs itself, the eerie feeling of being observed while going down and then up the stairs. Now the stairs are here and I feel like I have to deal with them. I am 5 or 6. I've just learnt to walk with orthopaedic shoes, they were shiny, the laces were open, as usual and as usual I was too slow for "la mère" (mother), I tripped and flew half down the stairs. [My legs remembered the feeling of falling and it felt awful.] The strident screams, hers, the agitation because of being late. I didn't cry (I was not a crying child, I was an angry child with big explosive dry tantrums) and in my head there is no memory of pain, just bloody white handmade crocheted socks and me being grabbed

brutally and thrown in the car. [I still have scars on my knees.] I didn't want to look down because it's scary. I didn't want to see the Sunday dress I was wearing, because that Sunday dress had been soiled by my a-father. Reason why the a-mother was angry already, she always had to wait for me and for him. I don't remember the dress itself, but I remember how pretty I felt in it. And these eyes staring at it from afar. I know the eyes, I know the monster and I know the darkness upstairs or in the cellar. These eyes were everywhere, like the house carried his sight. I wish I could say they were His ("papa" daddy). He was not monstrous looking though, he was almost fragile looking. I've never been scared by him. Probably because I was "tamed" so young!

I feel so bloody embarrassed though.

This event is almost 45 years old. I was never scared to run up and down as a child, I was a child!! Now, I remember when I started to be scared by stairs, not even the same stairs; we moved to the next small town and the flat was on the 9th floor, 9 flights of stairs, the balcony was in construction - I was 9 [another significant trauma year, the a-brother left home at 17, after my eldest adoptive sister got pregnant by an older man, and they aborted her at 16 against her will.] That's how far I can remember when I started to be scared of heights when on top of stairs, or looking through the window with no balcony; even on the 4th step, my legs feel like they won't hold me. There were 900+ steps (we counted almost every time as a game) to go from town to the flat - I almost never went down these stairs, mother would have killed me before reaching half. I was slow but on the stairs I became snail-slow. We went through the longer flat path but faster. Then we moved to another flat also with stairs to get to town, almost as high. We lived on the third floor.

After that I barely lived in flats. Only in houses and even bungalows. Once I know the stairs, I can go down with more ease and on good days I'll be even mindless of them, but I still cannot run on them. I've tried - something characteristically Moi: I have tried and keep on trying anything to challenge my irrational fears. I went last year on a rollercoaster attraction with my daughter. Never again! but I stay away from what causes these fears, because dealing with these alone is an unbearable thought.

I also don't have balance since I went to Korea or just before, because I fell and still fall many times on flat surfaces, like having vertigo. It makes my kids laugh because I'm light as a feather and I don't make noise when I fall. They just turn around and realise I'm on the floor. And I bruise easily. They know that they can't push me for fun anymore or it ends up with me bleeding and bruised. They are all taller and bigger than me.

How my brain works on stairs: it sees the stairs and charges like a bull on them, denying their existence until my foot reaches the first step and then it's like I'm about to fall down Mount Everest! When in public I hold myself stronger onto the railing so I can almost hop onto the next step and it looks a bit more elegant than my regular toddler-me going down the stairs. I also avoid stairs downwards as much as I can. And I've learnt in February to control myself in lifts since I work in a hotel. I have panic attacks or my heart racing, when over wood or metal or glass bridges or open stairs cases, or without railing on inside elevators and planes. I avoid these as much as I can.

Falling and failures are cousins. I'm also scared of failures. My failures. I've learnt to become more flexible with the failures of others, perks of being committed for 20 years to oopsie-daddy and raising our 3 teenagers.

I was scared to re-open my eyes. That's very embarrassing too. I'm scared of the dark and shadows and monster people and this house. I always sleep with the light on. I'm scared of sleeping many nights. My brain likes to mix and match all my fears all at once, so I wait till I pass out in exhaustion. I only have night terrors like when I was a child, when I become hypersensitive to the world or after another life event happens. But yesterday was helpful, it came as a slap this morning, because I know I'm scared, but it was good to not be alone. I slept 2.5 hours and recovered a bit this afternoon. I feel less tense than yesterday and I even felt energized through my tired self at 5 am at work. I must thank one my therapist for that.

Evolution ... Pokémon! I am a Pikachu but that's my path to be on. Pikachu chose not to evolve in order to demonstrate that you don't have to become something else in order to overcome obstacles.

*My yesteryear bathed Sadness in sunsets  
Made, shipped by the land of the morning calm  
Peace was a good nowhere to be purchased  
Now is writing Mornings in Brightness  
Wind and fish bring Jonathans to my side  
Sand, sea and salt... Sun rises a promise  
Here is where I can be found*

I see my brain today as a teacup and I am reassured every day that there are plenty of saucers out there, for when it overflows because it will again. We are never alone. We may induce ourselves into believing we are, to justify our inadequacies. It takes strength to connect or reconnect with ourselves and with others, but it is a muscle, it requires exercise. From picking up a fallen item from a stranger to asking the time because we fear being late, small acts of kindness are everywhere and it's what connects us. Acknowledging their existence in your daily life will mechanically reconnect you and your needs for connection. Our brain is a perfect engine,



nonetheless only an engine, somebody has to push that switch button. I feel like I had to kickstart that pedal many times, but the outcome was always worth the effort.

My last therapist helped me find my fearless self with an imaginary super heroine outfit, the one I would wear in times of need, by looking into my childhood and asking myself who was there unconditionally for me, who made me feel safe, who did I marvel at. For me it was the Japanese animé main character from CandyCandy, though Candy had her best friend Annie with whom I could absolutely identify from her black hair, her hypersensitivity, her lack of confidence and so much more. They were both orphans growing up in loving care of nuns at the orphanage. I chose to adore Candy, who was blond, with candied energy, stubborn to never give up, a childlike creativity in times of despair, and she had the biggest heart for everything and everyone. I wanted her qualities: brave, sincere, silly, generous, emotional, ingenious, caring, curious, adventurous.. and she rescued me by providing me a safe time during the day, where I would be allowed to just be a child. Life Whirlpool flushed her away from my memories until my therapist asked me the right question to find Candy again! Now, I have a super heroine in my pocket and I pull my Candy out when I feel I can't do it alone. It is silly but it works at least for me! When I struggle, I ask myself, what would Candy do? She was told when she left the orphanage to always behave and never cry, she did nothing but the contrary. She was charmingly mischievous and when she cried, she cried! I have thanks to her and the reminder of my son allowed me to cry loudly. We used to laugh out loud and scream exercise to release tensions as a family and friends exercise and also quiet ourselves to enjoy the external silence and meditate. Children are good at copying. One should never limit their potential; therefore, adults have this mission to never stop being children: Let us be curious, question, seek help, marvel at small things and acknowledge the world within and around us.

### **| Dear adoptive parents |**

I have loved you since the first day we met.  
I am grateful and will be for the rest of my life.  
I deserve to be loved in healthy ways.  
I deserve to feel protected and safe.

I do not lie about abuse when I am ready to speak about it.  
You cannot force words out of my mouth.  
My body and my behaviours do not lie either.  
I lie to protect you - I don't want to hurt you.  
I lie to please you - I crave your love.  
I lie to avoid confrontation - I am scared to lose you.  
I have behavioural regressions because I know no other ways to reach you.  
I have tantrums because I know no other ways to express overwhelming emotions.  
I have tantrums with you, because I feel safe to express my distress.  
I steal because I don't know how to ask. I am scared too.  
I steal food because I am scared of lacking it later.



Your role as parents is not to fix me.

You are the guardians and the safe keepers of my vulnerable earthling's vehicle, my body and mind. It is precious but it will break down one or more times, than not. Breakdowns are my brain's ways of warning me: enough, stop, refuel, change the tires. You may see these warning signs. Yet this is out of your hands. You have years of experience, you are a book of advice. Know that we don't drive alike.

When I fall, you use tools to help my healing. You are not my healing. My brain is in charge of that. Even when you blow on my booboo, my brain is in charge of the healing. Though you are magic to me, you are human too. You do and think things I am still incapacitated to understand. My brain absorbs all of it with no filters, to later try to reuse, discard or try its opposite. It is not your choice. It is my brain's choice.

I need your help for everything. Your helping hand cannot amputate mine. When you are out of resources, you google-lens the bug bite on my skin. You will go to great lengths for me, because your steps are wider and you know how to balance yourself. My brain does not. When I hit a roadblock, I need you to show me the possible exit roads. My brain will make the last call. And when you are out of options, you do not let the gangrene infect my body or mind parts, you seek help yourself. Your next steps are my metronome for life. Please let it sink.

When you cannot improve yourself to better support me, you seek an expert to do so on your behalf. It is not weak. It is the bravest move parents do. You accept your inadequacy and your limits and do not waste time to rely on others to help me. Time is precious: that bug who bit me can be venomous, I can be allergic, I can be left paralysed, I can lose brain functions. You cannot hesitate. Your absence of knowledge and your hesitations require immediate assistance. You will take me to the emergency. My head injury cannot wait for you to be ready to let go of the power confided in your hands. My heart transplant cannot wait for you to be knowledgeable on heart biology and surgery.

All that you see on my body happens in my brain too. It requires the same attention, the same level of care and sense of emergency. Though our relationship at first is based on hierarchy, the gap with time will diminish. You do not decide who will nurture my future. I do. I have some of the tools you gifted me with and mostly the ones I made by and for myself with your warm caring guidance.

You are not my best friend. I have a best friend. Welcome them.

You are not my confident. Welcome them.

You are not my everything. Welcome nothing less.

When your belief system wants to pull the alarm on my behaviours, my inactions and my thought process, resist. Sit down with me, take the time to hear me out, my brain needs you to remain non-judgemental, silent, supportive and empathetic, because you are my first safe ear. Accept that you will be replaced with time. My brain will figure by itself, it needs only to verbalise its inner conflict, to give it an external shape in order to digest it and come up with a creative solution, or creative plan of actions, to get it out of my inner system to let it go or to just do nothing about it. My brain will make its own mind, because you are my hearing aid, when I become deaf to myself; my brain can become easily overwhelmed by noises within. You becoming the amplifier of your own voice and thoughts will only damage my trust in you and leave me at my most vulnerable point: alone in the dark.

You were never holding the brush of my masterpiece. I was, you were guiding my hand. You were not my hand either. When I become the main supply of my own tools and guidance, at that point I have grown up. You are expected to grow too. I trust you to accept me as I grow older and farther from you.

Parents-baby connection will be born from their will to learn to interpret the cries of their newborn, their corporal language and their emotional language. When you receive me at 5 years old, I am to be treated as a newborn baby in that first transition phase, where we both learn about each other's cues. This phase has no time frame. I have not grown patience in my set of skills, I expect yours. Our connection is artificial, it is real for me but it is not natural. We both have to teach and learn. I am limited at this stage and probably until I have passed adulthood too, you have resources and you are not alone.

When we play hide and seek, you teach me to become my own echo-location system. When my frequencies become unbearable to your ears, it is because I am looking for you and I am scared of not finding you in the dark. You are expected to not move. You are expected to trust me to find you. You are only expected to come towards if my struggle is too big. Parents birds recognise their offspring and their needs in a flock, but the sheer sound of their voice. Learn to recognise mine. When I trip over, you laugh because my brain will register your voice before my pain. Never stop. Celebrate my missteps as much as you celebrate my successes. My brain when around you is forever a child, vulnerable, seeking guidance, safety and parental unconditional love.

*"We start to get old when we stop learning." (Japanese proverb)*

I love my children and I am loved by them.

I have not always been a good and caring mom and I have made plenty of terrible inexcusable mistakes. I am a good enough parent, because I never quit learning to become every instant the best human I could for me first and then for them, with the tools at hand and I asked for help. I was a rootless single mom, with no friends nor family in the same country but I was not alone raising them. I did have a village, made of neighbours, teachers, social workers, police officers, nurses and doctors and even lawyers and lawmakers. The official attached to the French Embassy helped sort the succession of my French father for my kids and me with such human decency, though he was no therapist, he sensed my distress. The Customs controller calling us the 'United Nations' warmed up my heavy heart on that very heavy day.

The police officer I called in distress because of the party of my teenager son going out of control was the kindest law enforcement officer I had met; he was a giant and sat down to not over-impress our lilliputian family; his voice was soft and comforting and he asked my son, so gently, politely and yet firmly to change his mind about enjoyable fun and choose one less risky for his little brother and sister, one that doesn't leave his mom in worries, one that doesn't put at harm's way his girlfriends; he guided him through navigating social responsibility, helped him strengthen his awareness and emotional intelligence. My son's brain and heart grew that night, when I could not find the words nor the courage to support him.

I was able to DIY a life for us in a very hostile inner and external environment, because of many of these people who never failed to answer my distress calls, who genuinely offered even unrequited assistance, who provided us unexpectedly with warmth and smiles. I am forever grateful to have had our village to grow my children and their friends healthier.

**| Dear fellow adopted people and survivors of sexual abuse and / or child sexual abuse |**

PEDOPHILES ARE COWARDS, AND THEY KNOW THEY ARE WRONG, IT'S WHY THEY HIDE AND KEEP IT SECRET. BUT WHEN YOU ARE A CHILD AND STARVE FOR FOOD OR FOR LOVE, YOU COULD EASILY TRADE YOUR ENTIRE SELF FOR ANYTHING!

"Because a choice made in the absence of other choices has nothing to do with choice."

[The Establishment/Adoption Is A Feminist Issue, But Not For The Reasons You Think](#)  
[Huffpost/Why adopting is not a very feminist or liberal or christian position](#)  
[Huffpost/REVERSE ROBINHOODISM: Pitting Poor Against Affluent Women in the Adoption Industry](#)

For when you are struggling, here is this letter for you.

The flower pushing through the concrete does not become the concrete.  
Neither did you become your abuse.

Adoption was not your choice,  
Sexual abuse was not your fault.  
Your worth was never the matter.  
Your worth did not decrease, on the contrary.  
You have earned every single letter of this long title!  
The choice of the narrative is now yours.  
You didn't deserve any of the pain you endured.  
You don't deserve to suffer more.  
You deserve to be protected.  
You deserve to be supported.  
You deserve to feel safe.  
You deserve trust again.  
You deserve to love again.

Since you are here, you already know so much about yourself. And another bright thought is that you have so much more to discover. It is exciting. It is tiring. It is enlightening. It is discouraging. You will make it though like the flower stuck in the concrete.

You are full of wonders. You came all this way, because of your nature to survive adversity, your resilience to harsh conditions and your invincible love for life. If that is not a superpower, what is!?

I was reminded often than not that asking for help is not a proof of weakness but the wisest thing to do. And it is. But for me the bigger step was not asking, it was accepting genuine kind help. I made myself believe for so long I did not need it. I wanted to be self-sufficient. I could not bear being abandoned once more. I was scared to be unworthy of that help. I avoided rejection like the plague. I played strong in my downfalls. I shield up against the unknown. Being unwanted, silenced and let down are all too painful for us, because we craved constant attention and validation as adult, we drew patterns, we judged ourself in a loop, because we were traumatised at an early age by adoption and sexual abuse and too often deprived of the basic love & care we deserved. Most of our cravings are rooted in our childhood. Our self confidence was barely built, if at all. And all that is in the past tense. It happened to us. We are no longer children. We ache and bleed the same. Yet we are no longer defenceless, we are no longer small. We have weapons: our voice to soothe, our arms to reach, our feet to step forward, our heart to mend and love again. Self love and love come from a place of trust. You can trust yourself, listen to your inner child, they know their needs. Listen to your body, it knows. I trust you to be a responsible adult and put yourself first. I trust you to quit being so harsh on yourself. I trust you to quit self sabotaging. I trust you to love who you could not yet freely be. I trust you to protect yourself. I trust you to practice self care with the same determination you put towards self harm. You have it in you. I trust you.

I disliked when well-intentioned people pointed out my so-called weaknesses, but reflecting on it, I saw what they tried to offer, when they said, change your victim mindset. Growing beneath the weight of struggle has bent us, sometimes so low, that we are just leaning horizontally like our spine had mutated. In my case I curled up and returned to the fetal state. Air felt like it was burning my lungs. I did not want food either. I was thinking that it would be the only way to shut down the noise in my head, to disappear would make the monsters disappear too. I could not have been more wrong. Isolation, starvation, self harm, self induced drugs, all that exacerbate our pain, that will undoubtedly quickly spread in more physical and mental illnesses.

The opposite is so true, socialising, feeding our body and mind, self love and a healthy life routine has the power to heal many of our body and mind parts.

*'Overcome space, and all we have left is Here. Overcome time, and all we have left is Now.  
We can lift ourselves out of ignorance, we can find ourselves as creatures of excellence and intelligence and skill.'*  
Jonathan Livingston Seagull, Richard Bach

Where, when, how does one start? There is one fit-for-all answer to that. LOL! Nope! But there is hope above all, when you open up. And you are on a good path already. I trust you.

○ Reach out. Reach out to have others holding you accountable and to help you monitor your progress. Reach out to become creative again. Reach out to rebuild your village. You can reach out. It is in you. I trust you.

○ Trigger it. Become your own trigger. Become your own guardian. Become your own lover. You had to become an expert of yourself, it is how you are so good at knowing how to damage yourself! I know because I was there too! And I know I will find myself there again in this life, but this time a little less hopeless and definitely not alone.

○ OUR BRAIN IS NOT WORKING AGAINST US! Our brain is neutral at best. It is like a super efficient old fashioned husband, he needs to permanently fix something, the more free time he has, the more he will be tinkering away! Do not give him a break. Monitor him. Provide him real restful hours. To the insomniac among us, don't stay in bed if you can't sleep, stand up and give your brain the most boring unpleasant task you can find. Soon enough with such a routine, your brain will make sure you don't do these crazy stuff and do better at night, like sleep! Believe me, it works. Mine was to copy pages of vocabulary in the hope it would stick miraculously to my memory. Brain thought otherwise. Slight side effect: now when I see a page of vocab, sleeplessness takes over my whole body! Trial and error 101! Here too rewiring my brain is a work in progress!! The human species is not a reasonable one! We are pleasure-driven! Provide him with attractive entertainment. Feed him well! A wide range of it, the wider, the healthier. Be gentle and allow him sometimes to regress briefly to tinkering but on the clock, no long hours. The reason why mindfulness, breathing exercises, a good night sleep, a cold shower, a jogging session at sunset or sunrise, a silly book or a beautiful documentary, a good sex and a long embrace can contribute

positively to our health, giving it a boost without drugs, is because it does reset automatically our brain. We don't need to do anything apart from listening to our body and work accordingly with it. Remember, you already are an expert. Play Opposite-Day with yourself. Make it a game, a playful one! Vocalise your child spirit! When you start reversing your interpretation, you change your narrative and you are already set. Of course our brain has the capacity to kill us. BUT OUR BRAIN HAS THE AMAZING ABILITY TO TURN UPSIDE DOWN OUR LIFE FOR GOOD! You can trigger it. I trust you.

○ On determination: when your fridge is empty, do you expect it to fill itself or do you go grocery shopping? When the restaurant runs out of space, do you surrender to starvation or do you go to the next available restaurant? Asking for help is no different. You cannot stay helpless because you encounter shut doors. You go to the next one.

○ On emergency: do not wait to get help, moreover if you tell others that you are just fine. Ask yourself how you are really coping these days, with honesty. Don't shy away from confronting your fears. They won't go away by themselves. People are here to help clear the path with you. These people can be doctors but also hotlines volunteer, supportive community members or a florist at a market. You need to open up and let creative ways pave your journey. Markets are excellent for introverts, you cannot leave without greeting a bunch of people! Every little thing matters. I trust you to welcome them.

We are millions forming a diasporic nation far away from our birth countries! Identity may feel like a flipped coin at times. It sure is difficult when a-parents are aging, sick or dying, when our birth families do too... Adoption tears us in two worlds, never far nor close enough. it splits our heart. Child sexual abuse reinforced this by adding layers of guilt, self-hatred, estrangement and further years and expenses in our healing journey.

### **| Silenced |**

도가니

‘그런 생각이 들었어요. 우리가 싸워야 하는 건 세상을 바꾸기 위해서가 아니라 세상이 우리를 바꾸지 못하게 하기 위해서라고’

Silenced

*“I thought, what we have to fight for is not to change the world, but to keep the world from changing us”*

Silenced ([Korean](#): 도가니; English: "The Crucible") is a 2011 [South Korean crime drama film](#) based on the novel [The Crucible](#) by [Gong Ji-young](#),<sup>[2]</sup> directed by [Hwang Dong-hyuk](#). It is based on events that took place at [Gwangju Inhwa School](#) for the Deaf, where young [Deaf students](#) were the victims of repeated sexual assaults by faculty members over five years in the early 2000s. Depicting both the crimes and the court proceedings that let the teachers off with minimal punishment, the film sparked public outrage upon its September 2011 release, which eventually

resulted in a reopening of the investigations into the incidents. With over 4 million people in Korea having watched the film, the demand for legislative reform eventually reached its way to the [National Assembly of South Korea](#), where a revised bill, dubbed the Dogani Bill, was passed in late October 2011 to abolish the [statute of limitations](#) for sex crimes against minors and disabled people.[...] [Wikipedia/Silenced](#)

We are never too young, too old, too smart, too stupid, too comfy, too ill-fitted to LEARN, TEACH, DOUBT, CHANGE THE RULES, CREATE NEW RULES, TASTE THE MISTAKES, BE TAUGHT AND LEARN AGAIN. WE CAN BECOME ENDLESS!!!

When shame decide to hang out with guilt and disgust:

I loved the incesting a-father, the groomer, the child molester, the abuser, the rapist, the cyberbully... I have loved every monster presenting itself to me, as if my brain had associated love and monsters. But they were no monsters; they were men. I thought for a long time that subtracting their humanity would help me but it did the opposite. By detaching them for having morals and values, I could not reach any understanding. They are humans. Their brains got broken and they are sick? I am done with intrusive thoughts and obsessive will to understand 'them'. Their HIStory is for others to be empathetic about. I cannot anymore. But I must provide some cyber-tools. They are informative links on child sexual abuse, traumata and too little may be on perpetrators. My stages of grief went stagnant about these men (almost exclusively men), though my rage went from A to Z! But if you are one of them or know one of them, react as of now, help is on the way for you too.

UK organisation to prevent Child abuse, by offering support to men and young people: <https://www.stopitnow.org.uk>

The German Prevention Project Dunkelfeld (PPD): <https://kein-taeter-werden.de>

The EU Crime Prevention: <https://eucpn.org/about-us>

CDC: We can Prevent ACEs: <https://youtu.be/8gm-lNpzU4g?si=Gp6d5NppHPjom51m>

Academic Pediatrics: Responding to ACEs With HOPE: Health Outcomes From Positive Experience: [https://www.academicpedsjnl.net/article/S1876-2859\(17\)30107-9/fulltext](https://www.academicpedsjnl.net/article/S1876-2859(17)30107-9/fulltext)

CDC - Moving Forward - human experiment : <https://youtu.be/FJDwe2RkOqo?si=XGjm6RXFP4nt59Jw>

NSPCC: We can prevent Child sexual abuse: [https://youtu.be/UbtSJCw\\_lqw?si=7RPauXYfsfBLYB0p](https://youtu.be/UbtSJCw_lqw?si=7RPauXYfsfBLYB0p)

We all have our different views about vaccines and if out of privilege, we do not feel like we need them, vulnerable people elsewhere will die because of their medical supply, that goes back to where did our privileges come from, but that is not the point here. We are so full of privileges that



we do not even need to brush it off, because it does not even hit home. **Sexual Child Abuse does not discriminate. Privilege or not, 1 in 5 girls is a victim!** You might think otherwise because of the media coverage or because of old conservative stigma or because the stats show... Statistics show the numbers we input onto them. Wealthier families will suffocate us before we even reach a megaphone 'to preserve the reputation of their family', wealthier people will use their power to not appear in the stats, or in courts; and if there is one thing I have learned from my lived experience, though my life was on the wealthy side, the only times I was a case for the police (not the nice ones but nothing near police brutality)), was when I was no longer surrounded by white people, as if I was invisible among them and as soon as I was on my own, my colour showed. I know wealthier white people do not get investigated that easily, nor as much or at all harassed by law enforcements. Even in Europe! My childhood's house was sacred; nobody would have suspected and even so dared meddling with a 'respectable family home'. International transracial adoption is not only stained by ex-colonialism and saviourism, the reason why 'we adoptees' fill the invisible stats to that day is because of white privilege and systemic racism of our a-countries! We are not being protected because we are the invisible children, it is why representation matters, hence **OUR VOICES MATTER!**

Prevention is paramount! PECs - Positive Childhood Experiences must be enforced: [CDC | We can prevent ACEs](#) with 4 building blocks: relationships, environments, engagement, and social emotional development. As we are failing at protecting currently, the number of victims is growing. There is an emergency!! We must help the survivors to heal, it is never too late, as long as we live and breathe there is HOPE . ❤️

[Academic Pediatric | Responding to ACEs With HOPE: Health Outcomes From Positive Experiences](#)

Here is a video from the CDC of a small experiment to understand better how healing is possible: [CDC | Moving Forward](#)

My life was dull and grey until I dared wishing for my life to be just a little more; more than my survival; more than a failed marriage; more than years of studies without a diploma; more than fears; more than mistakes; more than sadness. Life in colour is messy too and scarier even but it's vibrant and it is truly mine, the mistakes, the milestones, I own all of it! I painted this little strip because fears were containing me in an egg... out of all the shells I chose the most fragile one! But a fertile one! But an easy one to break free from! And there was never a better day than my birth country's Liberation Day, 15th August 2013! I was 40 that year, symbolically, and as per my French papers. It has been 11 years since my journey really took off. It has not been easy but I am worth all of it, even the U-turns, the bumps... I am alive!





Genesis - The Egg - Water Colors -2013/8/15

In Korea, we do not say my mom, but OUR mom. This possessive pronoun came as a cultural happy shock for me. It is deeply rooted to our human nature and makes so much sense in so many different happy, sad but always beautiful ways for the adopted person I am. We were born from OUR mother; we are the children of OUR planet Earth, and that idea in my rootless upbringing takes such a deep meaning. In the Andean culture for instance, the divinity Pachamama ‘Earth Mother’ is still venerated. In countries long ago qualified as ‘uncivilised’ laying on continents buried under the epitaph of ‘third world’, one human fundamental character trait has strived through the centuries, the love for Earth and her people that she generously provides for; there was born ‘togetherness’, ‘family’, ‘community’ and ‘hospitality’, although these communities have suffered colonialism, wars and natural disasters!

I was wondering but not anymore, how these predominantly white nations shifted to almost forget these human values! It all comes down to a patriarchal society that prides on male power and money as evaluation of success, disregarding any kind and empathetic human traits attributed to ‘weaker’ other genders and social classes. Discrimination, extended to races, sexual orientations, ages and different abilities, was allowed because the most powerful societies systemically stole the lives and the rights of anybody that could represent a potential obstacle to

their supremacy. But Love is stronger and a sense of community prevails! OUR voices are starting to be heard and even listened to. We are no longer that special elephant in the room; we are the many elephants in that room. Our visibility is our safest place, because we are not alone. **I've found my family-at-heart in our community** and here I am truly grateful.

Internationally, our Community, made of traumatised people by adoption and all its side effects, is waking up every morning to a world forever surprised, worried anew... although we have been fighting for decades! One would think, today is the day, international adoption will be abolished and children's rights finally celebrated. As long as my heart is beating, I will not cease to be hopeful for this day to come, for children to be safe. We, the older people adopted from x, y and z countries are the ones accountable today for our next move because it will brand the following generations. We are not at fault for waking up late on our adoption or sexual abuse, nor to have contributed to the proliferation of a generational trauma, but we have the duty to leave our Earth a better place.

I invite any participating person in our adoption story, any dual family members, any educational, social, professional, medical, law enforcement, family affairs judges, first responders, scientific, juristic, journalistic, humanistic and politic bodies to do their work: to listen to OUR voices, to acknowledge OUR lived experiences, to understand OUR uniqueness and OUR needs for tailored approach and support, to research and study OUR brains, OUR lifespan, OUR societal growth or downfall, OUR illnesses and OUR deaths.

*Protect children at ALL COSTS. Support the children in us at ALL COSTS. Guide and support OUR children at all COSTS and OUR grand-children too.*

*Social pressure does wonders! Push OUR representation in the media internationally and domestically!*

*Help our visibility to help a society we all live in, where no kids are ever really safe as long as dramatic changes have not been written in our laws.*

*It does take a village to raise a child!*

This quote is attributed to African Culture and it does make sense, since OUR Lucy was Ethiopian!

I will finish here with one special word, because regardless of our background, we do not want to harm children, even movies struggle to do that! All we want is for our future leaders to grow healthy, for the survivors of sexual abuse to find support to heal their inner child, for the survivors of an unjust adoption system to discover their essence, regain their rights, reconnect with their natural origin and build a sense of identity. Therefore, I want to offer you this one

Korean word, because Korea believes in collective social responsibility and there is one Korean character trait that is no different; it is a way of living, it conveys our care for relationships, any type, any length, from the first day we meet, we want others to feel like they matter. We attach ourselves to the idea that others come first. That is not problem-free nowadays among the youngest generations being more inclined to follow a westerner individualist approach to living, but so far this sentiment persists in Korea and resonates with each beat of my heart. A healthy life is sustainable as long as we have meaningful connections and here from me to you:

정 romanized as 'Jeong' and 'Jung' and translated as 'love and care'

And to our fellow adopted survivors, survivors of adoption itself and consequential Traumata, please find the superhero in your heart and come out; your life deserves to be told.. It's a bit like therapy, it feels heavy at first, then we may feel numb until one day we do feel lighter. Here from me to you:

화이팅 romanized as 'Hwaiting' and translated as 'I root for you'

### **Kyung-Sook**

stuck, lived, livestock, stock, loved, lovestick, sticky love, lovesick, sick of love and so I remain and trust myself.

My hashtags like tattoos one wants to forget but that remain: #KAD #Korean #Japanese #French #adopted #transracialadoption #internationaladoption #holtadoptionagency #terredeshommesfrance #stolen #abandoned #orphan #adoptionistrauma #identityMatters #adoptedVoices #impostorsyndrom #attachmentissues #cptsd #abused #incested #raped #harassed #bullied #violated #surviving #grieving #motherless #motherhood #menopause #emptyNest #emptiness #lostintranslation #losteritage #mymothertongue #Asianwomen #WOC #nobox #nofilter #intersectionalwarrior