

“THE OTHER MOTHER”; *Written by a member of the Local Adoption Support Group Inc (LASG) with two amazing adopted children.*

Being an adoptive parent is not a “Now you’ve got one too” solution to infertility. Once you pass that massive immersion of gratitude and wonder in the early years of parenting you start to really understand that your lot is different to biological families whose sense of entitlement to their children is absolute. You’ve written the letters or posted the finger paintings that you get your child to make for their birth mother (or father or grandparents), and now you are really starting to wonder how you will feel when out of the blue, a letter written by the ‘other mother’ comes flying back to you. Your child is no longer the needy, primordial being that you held close to your chest and is becoming independent, and in that independence you can now sense that they too will have a role to play when that letter lands in your letterbox. As an adoptive parent you know the key issues you need to support your child to navigate along that journey of understanding their heritage, but what about those issues that apply to you. Who will help us manage our fears? Navigate the minefields? Ensure that those of our needs, which can be reasonably met, are met?

Your mind naturally takes a step further, imagining not a letter in your letterbox, but a woman on your doorstep. The ‘other mother’ that you know you must embrace for your child’s sake, but whom you fear (however irrationally) may take their heart away. So many tales of adoption reunions brush over the part that adoptive parents play, as if they have no role in that chapter (or worse, ending) of the story. My heart cringes inside my chest to imagine that after a childhood of love, my role is largely complete. That I was mother for 18 years, or perhaps 20 or 30, and now I must step aside and let the ‘other mother’ catch up on her quota. At my core, the idea is repugnant, yet it is reinforced by the cultural constructs such as calling a television program about adoption “Find my family”.

When I explore this, I am able to challenge these fears. Perhaps it is not that my role is obsolete, but that the tales I have read, or the documentaries that are televised, are stories of the past. A time when well meaning or just downright wrong practices tied adoption in knots of secrecy meaning that only two corners of the adoptive triangle could ever really interact and survive. Maybe the adoption world I have inherited, that my child and his birth family have lived, is a different world? I hope and strive to believe, for all of us impacted by adoption, that this is so.

Contemporary adoption practices mean that information can be accessed, letters or gifts can be exchanged, and in some cases, even relationships beginning in childhood can be maintained. Surely if this is possible then the imbalances inherent in the adoption triangle can shift?

For me, I know adoption was an option that while complex, was a life-changing gift I could not achieve any other way. For my son, adoption was a fate accompli.

He sits now and plays with his adoption box. To our dog he says, “Can you say it, a-dop-tion? Can you say it?” He’s parroting a conversation we had a month ago, and his accuracy is astounding. “It has special things in it, that are very precious.” Papers, letters, toys and tiny baby clothes I never saw him in. I constantly wonder how I am going to do this right. It is not that my husband doesn’t share the dilemma; it is just that as the stay at home mum, I am the one who is most likely to have the dialogue. Already, in helping him understand the word, I have introduced the fact that for once, all knowing, all powerful mum is *not* something. “Yes honey, I’m not your tummy mum.” It’s a phrase used commonly, and one I picked up and tried after hearing it from a foster mum. It was brilliant in explaining the concept. I just hadn’t

realised that it would also deliver my first body blow as an adoptive parent and start this mental gymnastics I am now journeying through.

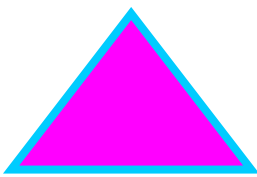
For the 'other mother' I know it was a choice no woman (father, grandparent) should ever have to make. I know this, and yet I live in wonder and joy, because she did. I want to hug her, and run in the opposite direction at the same time. In my son's letters to her, before they truly become his, I try to demonstrate the empathy I feel, hoping it will form the basis of a relationship in the future. A relationship where I am not adjacent or excluded; as popular media and narratives from past practices might lead me to believe, but instead am a part of the total picture. A relationship where my acceptance and understanding has enabled my son to connect with his birth mother/family freely, without any lasting loyalty issues to me or our family.

Can I do this, will she want me too, will her circumstances let her, and what about the rest of her family? These questions, at present, are answerless. It's the one surety of adoption, that there will always be plenty of unknowns. So like many people, I work towards what I do know. That for me it is not ok to accept the status quo, or the role adoptive parents play in stories told of the past. That imagining and informing myself so I am equipped to raise my son for a different ending, in fact, for a new beginning, is the only alternative. I accept that as the one with choices or options (however hard) in this adoption triangle, then I take the lion's share of responsibility and at some time, that will mean taking a backseat. I knowingly took on this mantle and as long as you let me have a voice, and confess my fears occasionally, I will happily shoulder it. Why?

Because without it, I would never have known the joy of being *this* little boy's mother.

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The Adoption Triangle



The adoption triangle or triad is a phase used to illustrate the inter-related and inter-dependant relationship between the three parties impacted by an adoption; birth parents, the adopted child and the adoptive family. Contemporary adoption practices seek to acknowledge this three-way relationship and base adoption practices around the principles; an important objective that is sometimes very challenging to achieve.