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Who's your Daddy?

The untold adoption stories of South African men

By Deborah Minors

A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of the University of Witwatersrand's Masters by Coursework and Research Report in Journalism Studies.

Johannesburg, August 2015

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts by Coursework and Research Report in the Department of Journalism, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Deborah Jess Minors

Johannesburg

14 August 2015

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My supervisor, Dr Lesley Cowling, for academic expertise, empathy, and endless patience

The men who trusted me with their adoption stories

Patrick Crooke-Shaw* and the Crooke-Shaw* relatives

The late Jessie Iris van Rensburg (née Wood)

The family Arneson

But most of all, this story's for you, Dad.

Dedicated to my father,

Louis Jacobus van Rensburg (1948-1994)

who gave me roots and then gave me wings.

* Names changed

Abstract

This journalism research project was motivated by the author's personal investigation into her late father's adoption. The report comprises two parts: a scholarly introduction, and a long-form journalism piece. Part 1 sets out the social and psychological context in which adoption in South Africa operates and the prevailing narratives and debates. It describes the representation of adoption as a "happily-ever-after" scenario, despite the dynamics of adoptive families differing from those of traditional nuclear families. Research shows that the adoptee, birth family, and adoptive family (the "adoption triad") all experience seven adoption-related issues: loss, rejection, guilt/shame, grief, identity, intimacy/relationships, and mastery/control. These are the mostly untold stories of adoption, and they provide the framework for the personal investigation. Part 2 is the author's personal story, which scaffolds and thematically advances the stories of the male adoptees, birth fathers, and adoptive fathers interviewed. This project reveals that adoption is a profound experience for the triad. The seven issues, innately human and universal, are best revealed through personal investigation and long-form journalism. This project contributes to research about men in adoption in South Africa by sharing their stories and makes the issues of adoption publicly accessible through long-form journalism.

PART 1: SCHOLARLY INTRODUCTION

1. OVERVIEW

This journalism research project was motivated by the author's personal interest in men involved in adoption. The author's late father was adopted; a shocking revelation he discovered aged 35. He died in a motorbike accident in 1994, aged 47, before finding his birth parents. The author's personal search developed into an investigation of the adoption stories of men to understand what her father's experience might have been, and to answer questions regarding her own origins. This personal motivation gave rise to the research questions that ask what the experiences of men involved in adoption are.

i. Aim

This project aimed to narrate, through long-form journalism, the adoption experiences of male adoptees, birth fathers, and adoptive fathers within the context of the seven core adoption issues, so that their stories might shed light on the author's personal investigation to understand what the adoption experience of her late father, an adoptee, might have been.

The personal investigation aimed to confirm the name of the author's father's birth parents (primarily his birth mother) and to understand the circumstances of his adoption in 1948.

ii. Rationale

The scholarly research that forms the first part of this project is in the fields of psychology and social work. The "told" story of adoption often represents it as a "happily-ever-after" scenario. However, the dynamics of this constructed relationship have personal repercussions on the individuals involved. These individuals include, primarily, the adoptee, the adoptive parents, and the birth parents – known collectively as the "adoption triad" (Zamostny, O'Leary Wiley, O'Brien, & Baden, 2003).

Deborah N. Silverstein and Sharon Kaplan Roszia (1982) identified seven core issues in adoption that all members of the triad experience. These issues are loss, rejection, guilt/shame, grief, identity, intimacy and relationships, and mastery/control. The manifestation of these issues is the mostly "untold" stories of adoption.

The author's personal investigation into her late father's adoption was the rationale to interrogate these "untold stories" of adoption through the stories of men involved in adoption, and within the theoretical framework of the seven adoption issues. The transcriptions of these interviews ran to 191 pages, necessitating strategic extraction of the comments that best captured that individual's overall adoption experience, accurately reflected the body of current research into adoption, and advanced the personal story that forms the second part of this research report.

As a research project in journalism, extensive scholarly rigor was required to construct distilled (but substantive), publicly accessible writing in Part 2. This required that decisions be made about what was included and what was excluded from the research. Thus, not everything interrogated in the scholarly introduction necessarily appears in Part 2. Furthermore, the personal investigation, conducted parallel to the scholarly research and interviews, began to yield fascinating insights that lend themselves to compelling journalism.

It became evident that the personal story would be a useful way to both draw the reader in, and structure the long-form piece. The personal story is thus the main structuring mechanism used in Part 2 of this Journalism research report. The personal story as the "spine" became the way through which the reader learns about adoption issues, with the literature and findings "folded in" to that structure. In this way, the personal story ordered the territory of the scholarship.

iii. Research Questions

The *Who's your Daddy?* part of the title refers to the personal investigation through the lens of the seven issues. Male triad members' experience of these issues is the *untold adoption stories of South African men* in the second part of the title. Collectively, the scholarly introduction and the long-form piece provide research that attempts to answer two questions:

- What is the experience of some men involved in adoption in South Africa that could contextualise one male adoptee's personal experience?
- What do the adoption stories of male adoptees, birth fathers, and adoptive fathers reveal about the seven core adoption issues?

The project contributes to the dearth of research in South Africa about men's adoption experiences and contributes towards a more inclusive adoption community that incorporates the paternal.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

i. Legislative Environment

The South African Department of Social Development (DSD) website defines adoption as a legal procedure that creates a parent-child relationship between individuals who are not biologically related, and which confers on the adoptive parents all the rights and responsibilities formerly held by the adoptee's birth parents. Chapter 15 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (as amended) governs adoption in South Africa. The DSD's Annual Report (2006) showed 251 inter-country adoptions and 2,256 domestic adoptions during that year (p. 96). A 2005 report based on the National Adoption Register shows that the number of court-ordered adoptions in South Africa between April 2004 and March 2009 averaged 2,416 per year (Zitha Mokomane & Tamsen Jean Rochat, 2011, p. 348). The authors note this is a "startlingly low" number, considering that there are reportedly 15,590 children in residential care (2011, p. 349).

In a national adoption campaign in 2013, the DSD promoted adoption as preferable to institutionalising children. The Add-Option campaign, in association with Adoption Voice SA (the communications arm of the National Adoption Coalition South Africa, NACSA) encouraged South Africans to consider adoption, as the number of orphans had increased by 29% over four years while the number of adoptions had decreased by 52%. Adoption Voice SA issued a press release indicating that the declining adoption rate placed a strain on alternative care systems that are supposed to be temporary.

The DSD's endorsement in its Annual Report (2006) of adoption as a way of "preserving and strengthening families", and the potential of adoption to impact society, provided a rationale

for research into adoption generally and its untold stories, with a view to advancing the author's personal investigation.

ii. Adoption Psychology: Introduction to the Seven Core Adoption Issues

In 1982 Deborah N. Silverstein and Sharon Kaplan Roszia developed the theory of the seven core issues in adoption. By developing these issues, the authors sought to challenge the misconception that being adopted was the same as growing up in a family of origin. Barbara A. Moe (2007, pg.2) cites Silverstein and Roszia's seven core issues:

1. Loss
2. Rejection
3. Guilt/shame
4. Grief
5. Identity
6. Intimacy and relationships
7. Mastery/control

All members of the adoption triad experience these issues, albeit differently and in varying capacities. The manifestation of each issue in each of the triad members is addressed in the Theoretical Framework section.

iii. Prevailing Adoption Narratives: Biographies & Memoirs

There is extensive material on the topic of adoption, but very little empirical research, particularly in South Africa and specifically focusing on men. It was thus necessary to sift through the literature and assess it as either quantifiable research or as memoir material, which, too, has merit, but which must be defined as such to ensure the validity of this study.

Studies in the fields of psychology and social work provided the theoretical framework that contextualised the "told" alongside the "untold" story of adoption, and which informed the personal investigation.

Male Adoptees

A review of adoption narratives online reveals that memoirs by female adoptees and adoptive mothers dominate[1]. Data in South Africa's National Adoption Register do not reflect a gender preference for adoptees by adoptive parents, although there is a preference in American statistics for girls (Mokomane & Rochat, 2011, p.352). Yet male adoptees exist so their limited narratives beg further investigation.

More men appear to speak up in the USA than South Africa, however. Adoptee Karl Stenske completed his Master's dissertation on *The Hidden Life of an Adopted Child: Understanding the Impact of Adoption*. He is a motivational speaker "helping everyone touched by adoption understand, heal and connect". On his personal website, Stenske reiterates the untold story of adoption in a presentation that confirms, "Relinquishment by one's birth mother is a traumatic experience that has a lasting and expansive impact on an adoptee's life."

[1] An online word-search for "adoption memoirs" using Google and reviews of popular online site, Goodreads elicited the results that revealed a dominance of female writers in this genre.

A selection of memoirs by American male adoptees includes Thomas Brooks' *A Wealth of Family: An Adopted Son's International Quest for Heritage, Reunion, and Enrichment*, Michael Allen Potter's *The Last Invisible Continent: Essays on Adoption and Identity*, and Jaiya John's *Black Baby White Hands: A View from the Crib*.

Although several male adoptees feature in an online blog for poets who are also adoptees, called "poets on adoption", there do not appear to be any published memoirs by male adoptees in South Africa. Thus, the adoption stories of selected male adoptees in South Africa are the first this project sought to narrate, given their relevance to the personal investigation of the author's adoptee father.

Birth Fathers

Theoretically the birth family in the triad would include the birth father. However, the birth father's voice is limited in most adoption narratives and research in South Africa. Here the birth father seems to feature in a limited capacity and only in legislation governing his responsibilities and rights[2].

The South African Department of Justice website indicates that adoption law requires both birth parents to consent to adoption. However, consent is not required (by either parent) if he/she is mentally ill; has abandoned/abused/neglected the child and failed to exercise parental duties for a year; has failed to respond to notice of the proposed adoption within 30 days; or if his/her identity is unknown. The Department of Justice website further states that:

- Birth fathers have the right to be informed of the pregnancy, must be involved and have the opportunity to acknowledge paternity and to come on record and be included in the registration of the child's birth
- The birth father can accept or oppose an adoption and his stance on the adoption must be put on record
- Acknowledging paternity implies accepting some financial responsibility in line with parental rights
- A birth father must be counselled on his options, rights and responsibilities
- A birth father has the right to adopt his child should the birth mother decide to give the child up for adoption, and the birth father is deemed fit to parent.

The Natural Fathers of Children Born out of Wedlock Act of 1997 gives unmarried birth fathers the right to ask for access to or custody/guardianship of their children.

The relative absence of the birth father may be because (a) he didn't know he was a father, (b) he absconded, or (c) he knew but was reluctant or not permitted to participate. Although adoptees generally seek to reconnect with their birth mothers first, their genes are 50% paternal.

The voice of the birth father prevails somewhat in adoption narratives outside South Africa. In the USA, the "stork market" generates billions of dollars in revenue through adoption related services (Riben, 2007). This larger and louder American "marketplace" presumably

[2] An online review using a Google word-search for "birth biological father adoption South Africa" reveals references to the Department of Home Affairs, Department of Justice, legal and tax rights, etc. Birth fathers' narrative stories are limited to occasional mainstream media, e.g. *Destiny Man* articles.

accommodates more voices, and publications such as *Birth fathers: The Forgotten Half of the Story* (Eliza Carney, 2001) and *Out of the Shadows: Birth fathers' Stories* (Mary Martin Mason, 1995) prevail. There are online forums that declare "what birth fathers don't know hurts everyone" and legal cases involving birth fathers activating their rights (Erik Smith, 1996).

The birth father also makes cameo appearances in American adoption narratives and studies. Mary Martin Mason (1995) notes that, "An invisible birth father is no cause for celebration" and the birth father's exclusion can have dramatic legal and emotional consequences. This study of American birth fathers found that relinquishing their children affected these men's adult lives and impacted their marriages, jobs, and relationships. Another study on American birth fathers, by E. Y. Deykin, P. Patti, and J. Ryan (1998), found that birth fathers' relinquishment of their children affected the birth fathers' relationship with the birth mothers.

Birth fathers' under-representation in research may lead to the assumption that relinquishment affects them less than women. However, an accurate assessment of their experience is challenging to make given the paucity of empirical investigation (Amanda L. Baden and Mary O'Leary, 2005, pg. 23).

Of import is that birth fathers in South Africa *have* rights. However, whether they take up these rights, and that the onus is on fathers to acknowledge paternity to activate these rights (possibly unfairly if they aren't informed), is beyond the scope of this project and the immediate objectives of the personal investigation.

The voice of the birth father in South Africa is thus the second untold story of adoption this project aimed to articulate. The birth father's relative absence from adoption narratives necessitated enquiry in the personal investigation as he was entirely unknown to the author's adoptee father.

Adoptive Fathers

The voice of adoptive fathers is also subdued in adoption narratives in South Africa and the USA. Mainly the triad's voices are maternal/female, i.e., the birth mother, adoptive mother, and (female) adoptee. However, adoptive fathers sometimes appear as an accompaniment to the adoptive mother (Laura Beauvais-Godwin & Raymond Godwin, 1997; Brian Carlson & Angie Carlson, 2006, pg.55). This project provided insights into adoptive fathers' role in adoption, their attitudes towards the birth father and paternity generally, and the effects of adoption on their relationships. Thus, this project investigated adoptive fathers' narratives, particularly since an adoptive (and a different) foster father feature in the personal investigation.

iv. "Told" vs. "Untold" Adoption Narratives

"How to…"

The author identified three broad narratives that dominate adoption literature. Firstly, the *how-to* narrative explains the legislation and mechanics of adoption[3]. It provides practical

[3] A Google word-search for "adoption South Africa" provided extensive adoption-related information and websites, e.g., www.adoption.org, most of which reflect the "how to" narrative.

guidelines to the legal process of adoption, or how adoptees might find their birth mothers. This discourse includes the legislative framework within which adoption operates, and the cast of characters includes the DSD, social workers, and adoption service ("search and link") providers. Birth fathers' and adoptive fathers' rights and responsibilities are included[4].

"Happily-ever-after…"

Closely linked to the "how to" narratives are those which *encourage* adoption. It speaks to the childless or benevolent couple and to the birth mother. This narrative generally suggests adoption as a "happily-ever-after" scenario. For example, an orphan gains parents, a childless couple is blessed with a child, then a contented "nuclear family" unit results. This narrative positions adoption as mutually beneficial and coming from a place of love.

The Untold Adoption Stories

The third narrative the author identified is the autobiographical "my story". These are memoirs of (predominantly female) adoptees, for example, *Someone's Daughter*: *She's adopted – but don't tell* (2009) by Aurette Bowes. Thus, the (absent) birth mother juxtaposed with the (present) adoptive mother share the stage. Starring the adoptee, most of these autobiographies narrate how adoption affects the adoptee personally. Some suggest that adoption is experienced as loss, rejection, and abandonment. Many present with questions around identity and origins.

Deborah N. Silverstein and Sharon Kaplan Roszia in *Lifelong issues in Adoption* (1982) write that adoption is created through loss. Adoptees suffer their first loss at the initial separation from their birth mother, and they continue to experience feelings of loss throughout their lives. These experiences are some of the untold stories of adoption that this project narrates, some of which negate the adoption "myth" of "happily-ever-after".

One narrative that explores the adoption "myth" is an American birth mother's blog *Musings of the lame – coz adoption mythology hurts*, published on a website for adoption birthmothers. She seeks to dispel adoption "myths", writing:

> There are enough places online…that talk about the 'beautiful loving glory of adoption'. This is *not* one of them. *Every* adoption is based on a foundation of loss. We cannot say that 'adoption is a beautiful thing' without acknowledging that this beautiful thing should not have happened in the first place.

In South Africa, an online adoption community, Adoption.org, has its own set of "myths" which it replaces with "facts" about adoption. First among these is that "adoption is an act of love. It is not taking someone else's child or giving away your own child."

It is probably true in most cases that adoption is an act of love, but that is not the full story. Adoption is also about loss and traverses the spectrum of human emotional experience. These experiences are the mostly untold stories of adoption. This project seeks to articulate these

[4] For example, the South African Department of Justice website.

untold stories, as the author's motivation is to gain insight into her own adoptee father's "untold story."

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

i. The Seven Core Adoption Issues Framework

Silverstein and Roszia developed the seven core issues in adoption to challenge the misconception that being adopted was no different to growing up in a family of origin (1982). In their paper entitled *Adoptive Families* (1999), the authors outlined manifestation of the seven issues by members of the triad as follows:

	Adoptee	Birth parents	Adoptive parents *
Loss	Fears ultimate abandonment Loss of biological, genetic, and cultural history Issues of holding on and letting go	Ruminates about lost child Initial loss merges with other life events Leads to social isolation Changes in body and self-image Relationship losses	Infertility equates with loss of self and immortality Issues of entitlement lead to fear of loss of child and overprotection
Rejection	Placement for adoption as a personal rejection Can only be "chosen" if first rejected Issues of self-esteem Anticipates rejection Misperceives situations	Rejects self as irresponsible and unworthy because she permitted the adoption Turns these feelings against self as deserving of rejection Comes to expect and cause rejection	Feeling of being ostracized because of procreation difficulties May make partner the scapegoat May expel adopted child to avoid anticipated rejection
Guilt/shame	Feels deserving of misfortune Ashamed of being different May take defensive stance Anger	Party to guilty secret Shame and guilt for placing child Feeling of being judged by others Double bind: Not okay to keep child—not okay to place him	Ashamed of infertility May believe childlessness is a curse or punishment Religious crisis
Grief	Grief overlooked in childhood or blocked by adult leading to depression and acting out May grieve lack of "fit" in adoptive family	Grief acceptable for only a short period Grief may be delayed 10 or 15 years Lacks rituals for mourning Sense of shame blocks grief work	Must grieve loss of "fantasy" child Unresolved grief may block attachment to adopted child May experience adopted child's grief as rejection
Identity	Deficits in information about birth parents, birthplace, origins, may impede integration of identity May seek identity in early pregnancies or extreme behaviours to create a sense of belonging	Child as part of identity goes on without knowledge Diminished sense of self and self-worth May interfere with future parental desires	Experiences a diminished sense of continuity of self "Role Handicap"—I am a parent / I am not a parent
Intimacy and relationships	Fears getting close and risking re-enactment of	Difficulty resolving issues with other birth	Unresolved grief over losses may lead to

	earlier losses Concerns over possible incest (for example, with an unrecognised sibling) Bonding issues may lower capacity for intimacy	parent may interfere with future relationships Intimacy may equate with loss	intimacy and marital problems May avoid closeness with adopted child to avoid loss
Mastery and control	Adoption alters life course Aware of not being a party to initial adoption decisions, in which adults made life-altering choices Haphazard nature of adoption removes cause-and-effect continuum	Relinquishment seen as an out-of-control, disjunctive event Interrupts drive for self-actualization	Adoption experiences lead to "learned helplessness" where sense of mastery is linked to procreation Lack of initiative

* In Silverstein and Roszia's interpretation these issues pertain to adoptive parents who are infertile. However, infertility may not necessarily be the motivation or experience of adoptive parents as this project's investigation into the stories of three adoptive fathers shows.

This framework guided the author's personal investigation and interviews, given that she had witnessed manifestations of some of these issues in her father. The research sought to establish whether, and in what ways, these issues would emerge in the individual stories of the men she interviewed about adoption. These issues thus served as a "dialogue control" during interviews with the adoptees, birth fathers, and adoptive fathers.

ii. Trauma Framework

Dr Daryl Higgins, Deputy Director: Research, at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, notes that although few studies examine the effects of past adoption practices (the focus of her research), two theories have been used to understand the impact of "relinquishment" in adoption. These theories are (i) grief/loss (in comparison to other bereavement experiences), and (ii) as a stressful life event (2010, pg. 12). Higgins found, however, that both theoretical frameworks underestimated the impact of past adoption practices, and that a trauma framework is preferable:

> A trauma framework uses the language and ideas from psychiatry and psychology of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a diagnostic category that emerged from clinicians' experience of working with war veterans who continued to feel the impact of their experiences through symptoms such as flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, physical symptoms, and anxiety-related emotional responses to current events and relationships.
>
> (Higgins, D, 2010, p.12. footnote 9)

Similarly, Amanda L. Baden and Mary O'Leary Wiley proposed the development of research and practice that explicitly uses trauma as a framework for the study of the birth parents' experiences of adoption (2005, pg. 34)**.**

As a child the author witnessed some evidence of trauma in her father and thus drew on this research to locate the personal story. A trauma framework also guided discussion during the interviews and enabled discussion around "impact of their experiences" and "emotional responses to current events and relationships", whether or not these experiences were necessarily traumatic.

iii. The Primal Wound Theory

Nancy Verrier's *The Primal Wound: Understanding the adopted child* (1993) suggests that adoptees either rebel and "act up" in response to their "abandonment" by their birth mothers, or they acquiesce and become "good" children – quiet and even withdrawn. These are adoptees' responses to "a primal wound – a wound that is physical and spiritual, which causes pain so profound as to have been described as cellular."

> …psychologists understand that bonding between mother and child doesn't begin at birth but [in the womb] and continues…When this natural evolution is interrupted by a post-natal separation from the biological mother, the resultant experience of abandonment and loss is indelibly imprinted on the unconscious minds of these children.
>
> (Verrier 1993, in Bowes, 1999, p. 37)

"This primal wound affects the adoptee's sense of self and often manifests in…depression, emotions, and/or behavioural problems and difficulties in relationships with others" (Bowes, 2009, p.38).

Verrier's primal wound theory has drawn some criticism, however. American psychologist Randolph W. Severson of the Post-Adoption Center for Education and Research denounces it as, among others, sexist (2014). The following criticism (one of four) is cited as it addresses paternity, which has bearing on this project:

> Verrier's theory is sexist. To the point of absurdity, it underestimates the paternal role in child rising … One would be hard put to find reference to *paternal* bonding. The father, in Western society, appears consistently in a role subsidiary to that of the mother-child relationship in the unfolding drama of the child's development. Very little time and energy have been expended in discovering the psychological and sociological ramifications of fatherhood.
>
> (Severson, 2014)

Regarding the "primal wound", Australian researcher Daryl Higgins (2010, pg. 10) cautions against representing biography as empirical research in adoption studies (where the personal story is the data). She argues that although Verrier's theory uses academic language and her arguments are based on recognised, psychoanalytic theories, she does not *test* her hypothesis, despite articulating one. She concedes that Verrier's perspective (as an adoptive mother) is valid, and her theory is sound, but it is not empirically tested:

> The basis of quantitative research methods is that a falsifiable hypothesis [where you can test whether the opposite is true] is proposed, and a research study designed to attempt to do so. If the null

> hypothesis is rejected, then the researcher can assume that appropriate conclusions based on the data are defensible.
>
> (Higgins, 2010, pg.10)

iv. Attachment Theory

Attachment refers to the enduring psychological and emotional bonds that human beings have with others. Psychologists John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth advanced attachment theory in the 1940s. They examined war orphans' emotional responses to their caregivers and identified three attachment styles in children: Secure attachment; anxious/ambivalent attachment; and avoidant attachment.

Attachment patterns develop according to how a person's emotional needs were met in childhood. If a person's needs were consistently positively met, he learns that the world is safe, and he grows up secure. If a person is neglected or abused, however, he moderates his response to protect himself and develops anxious, ambivalent or avoidant patterns.

Childhood attachment patterns may alter in adulthood in response to circumstances or trauma. For example, a securely attached child may as an adult develop more avoidant attachment patterns in response to a spouse's death, or divorce. In theory though, attachment patterns established through consistent experience in childhood impact how a person relates to others for the rest of his life.

It has been suggested that children adopted after the age of six months have a higher risk of attachment challenges. Intimacy issues may emerge because of early anxious, ambivalent or avoidant patterns that stem from early separation from the birth mother. These adoptees may struggle to bond with others because they avoid intimacy to avoid re-enacting previous losses. They may never feel close to anyone or they may identify as loners. This may be related to "transmission" of early trauma.

v. Identity, Genealogical Bewilderment, and Family Romance Fantasies

The literature suggests that adoption affects an adoptee's sense of identity, origins, and belonging. These issues stem from adoptees' relinquishment, usually as infants. In this context, the adoptee's inability to mourn the loss of his mother, and feelings of vulnerability caused by the need to guard against future loss, may lead to the creation of a "false self" (Bowes, 2009, p. 38) – an adoptee's persona to protect himself.

Knowing one's origins is a fundamental human need but adoptees ignorant of their origins lack these biological roots. The result is a psychological gap in their sense of self. Their quest to complete this puzzle (and the related psychological angst) recurs frequently in adoption narratives. In 1964, the psychologist H.J Sants referred to the term "genealogical bewilderment" to describe the dilemma experienced by people "who have uncertain, little, or no knowledge of one or both of their natural parents" (pg. 133).

In 1909 psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud advanced the concept of "family romance fantasies." He defined these as "a deep-seated wish, that begins in early childhood, to become part of a highly idealised family, such as a royal family, in preference to being a member of one's own biological family" (Edward Erwin, 2002, pg. 187). These fantasies are a psychological coping mechanism as children mature, encounter challenges in their own families, and become aware

of their parents' fallibility. Adoptees, however, usually *do* have another family. The Adoption History Project at the University of Oregon in the USA interprets Freud's prototypical "family romance" as an adoption scenario, but distinguished by:

> Adoptees that imagined another set of parents were not engaged in benign falsehood. They were facing up to reality…Such painful dilemmas were deeply implicated in the problematic self-images and flawed relationships that some adoptees manifested.
>
> (Ellen Herman, 2012).

Thus, family romance fantasies may be a psychological developmental milestone with which adoptees ignorant of their origins grapple. These adoptees have the challenge of having to unpack what is real and what is not based on a family that exists but is unknown to them.

vi. Late Discovery Adoptees

Late Discovery Adoptees (LDAs) only discover their adoption after the age of 18 years. On average, LDAs are 37 when they learn they're adopted. Research by Helen J. Riley of the Australian Institute of Family Studies (2008) found that, after disclosure, LDAs experience feelings of distance from others, rejection, bitterness and frustration. LDAs in Riley's study continued to express feelings of betrayal, loss of trust, and difficulty forgiving – some for decades afterwards.

The author's adoptee father was an LDA so Riley's study – one of very few of its kind – is particularly relevant to the personal investigation.

4. METHODOLOGY

i. Approaches

Expert Interviews

The author interviewed professionals with expertise in adoption or adoption-related fields. These provided insight into adoption broadly, and guidance in the personal investigation:

- Dr Lily Smith, PhD Social Work: University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 14-10-2014
- Pam Wilson, Child Welfare Johannesburg: Johannesburg, 30-09-2014
- Warren Thompson, social worker and counsellor: Skype interview, 31-10-2014
- Nicki Lawson, psychologist: Johannesburg, 24-10-2014
- Mollie Painter, social worker/counsellor: Johannesburg, 29-10-2014
- Garetha Hanekom, social worker: Cape Town, 02-11-2014

Rainbow Adoption Group Meeting

The author attended a Rainbow Adoption Support Group meeting in Johannesburg on 18 October 2014 hosted by Mary Cruickshank. This is an informal regular forum where adoptive parents meet to share their experiences of raising their adoptees of a different race. A guest

speaker addresses every meeting. Counselling psychologist and adoptive mother, Nikki Lawson spoke at this meeting, on the topic of "emotional behaviour".

Lawson specialises in infant mental health, bonding, and attachment. Her presentation required attendees to pair-up. One partner had to share his/her morning's activities – non-verbally. The other partner had been covertly instructed to ignore the other's efforts to engage. This demonstrated how babies (in this case) experience frustration at their inability to communicate, and how it feels to be misunderstood or ignored.

Attending this meeting supported this research project because it described attachment theory (patterns of relating, which has bearing on the intimacy and relationships issue in adoption), and it demonstrated how the seven adoption issues might manifest cross-culturally.

Qualitative Interviews

Qualitative interviews with selected men involved in adoption were conducted to understand what men involved in adoption experience, so that their stories could shed light on what the adoption experience of the author's father might have been.

The purpose of qualitative interviews is to "yield some sort of measurement, along some dimensions or variable [or] relate several variables to one another" (Mzikazi Nduna, 2014.i). Personal interviews are preferable for in-depth discussions on topics such as adoption because they enable empathy and a deeper understanding of the discussion (Nduna, 2014.iii). In "un-standardised" interviews, such as those conducted, the interviewer is flexible thus enabling respondents to follow their own trains of thought (Nduna, 2014.ii). This approach is particularly useful for journalists as it allows interviewees' stories to unfold naturally.

Personal, in-depth and un-standardised qualitative interviews were conducted with seven men involved in adoption. They included two male adoptees, two birth fathers, and three adoptive fathers.

INTERVIEW DATE	**INTERVIEWEE**	**LOCATION**	**No. of t/script pgs.**
21-04-2014	Adoptee 1	Researcher's home, Orange Grove, JHB	32
25-09-2014	Birth father 1	Via Skype	15
25-09-2014	Adoptive father 1	Interviewee's home, Little Falls, JHB West	17
29-09-2014	Adoptive father 2	Interviewee's workplace, Northcliff, JHB North	14
01-10-2014	Adoptee 2	Interviewee's workplace, Rosettenville, JHB South	21
18-10-2014	Adoptive father 3	Interviewee's home, Parktown, JHB	22
08-11-2014	Birth father 2	Interviewee's home, Florida, JHB South	44

Interviews were conducted informally as follows:

- Interviewees were reminded of the research questions and informed of the interview process (i.e., informal storytelling to be guided by the researcher's questions)

- Interviewees all received copies of a Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix), which outlined the research project, the interviewees' rights (including access to a psychologist if necessary), and the researcher's contact details
- Interviewees signed consent forms (see Appendix) confirming their voluntary participation in the research, the use of their and their relatives names (or not), and consenting to their stories being recorded and published
- The researcher completed a Biographical Information form (see Appendix) for each interviewee, which also served as an icebreaker to begin the interviews.

The seven adoption issues served as inexplicit "dialogue controls" during the interviews. Interviewees were never asked directly if these issues had emerged. Rather, interviewees' use of the words (or allusion to similes) was noted and the interview was steered to further explore that issue.

Sample & Profile of Interviewees

All but one of these seven men was sourced through the author's personal network. The birth father not known to the author volunteered to participate after Child Welfare Johannesburg alerted him to the project.

Interviewee	Age	Race	Home language	Sexual orientation	Religion	Relationship status	Children	Residence
Birth father 1	39	White	English	Hetero	Christian	Married	2 daughters 1 relinquished son	New Zealand
Birth father 2	42	White	English	Hetero	Christian/ Orthodox	Engaged	1 stepdaughter 1 relinquished daughter	SA
Adoptee 1	43	White	English	Hetero	Jewish	Divorced & in a relationship[5]	None	Israel
Adoptee 2	43	White	English	Hetero	Christian/ Orthodox	Divorced & in a relationship[6]	1 biological son 1 biological daughter	SA
Adoptive father 1	47	White	English	Homo	Secular	In a civil partnership	1 adopted son 1 adopted daughter	SA
Adoptive father 2	50	Asian	Mandarin	Hetero	Christian	Married	1 biological son 1 biological daughter 1 adopted son	SA
Adoptive father 3	46	White	English	Hetero	Christian/ orthodox	Married	1 adopted (through marriage) son 1 biological daughter	SA

[5] The adoptee was in a relationship at the time of the interview and had three "stepdaughters". The relationship was subsequently terminated, then rekindled.
[6] The adoptee was in a relationship at the time of the interview and had a stepdaughter. The relationship has since been terminated.

Quantitative Analysis

The interview transcriptions were analysed to estimate how many times each interviewee mentioned (or alluded to) the seven adoption issues. Interviewees' mention of "roots" or "origins", for example, scored a point under identity, and reference to "ridicule", a point under guilt/shame.

Interviewees' inadvertent references to adoption psychology were also noted. For example, allusions to "alcoholism being genetic" scored a point for Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma and Loss. Similarly, references to difficulties in personal relationships scored a point under Attachment Theory.

Most interviewees mentioned words synonymous with all seven adoption issues, although often particular words dominated. This analysis provided an indication of which interviewee's story best illustrated a particular issue. It was these interviewees' stories that served as the case studies to demonstrate that issue, and to contextualise the personal investigation.

Representations of Adoption in Film and Theatre

The author watched adoption-themed films in which men featured strongly, and which explore themes of adoption and paternity. This gave insight into representations of adoption (the "told" vs. "untold stories") and cinematically referenced the seven issues. The films and plays were not explicitly analysed or narrated in the long-form piece, but they deepened the author's perspective in the personal investigation. Films included: *Philomena; Juno; A Shine of Rainbows;* and *Adopting Terror.* Theatre included Gerard Bester's *The Cenotaph of Dan Wa Moriri* (a "monument to fatherhood"), and Philippa Yaa De Villiers's *Original Skin*.

The Personal Investigation

Research into the family history of the author's adoptee father was conducted in association with the author's sister, Karen O'Keeffe (BA Ed 1994, BEd 1998), a mother and foster-mother (the latter role was inspired by her adoptee father's foster and adoption experiences). The personal investigation methodology comprised:

- Journaling the search process over nine months
- Extensive liaison and collaboration between the author and her sister
- Scrutinising family photograph albums, IDs, newspaper articles and mementos
- Recalling and documenting recollections of ad hoc adoption-related conversations and experiences among family members 20 years ago
- Finding and reconnecting through social media with the adoptee father's foster family, including his foster father and two foster sisters
- Informal interviews and written exchanges with the foster family
- Informal interviews and written exchanges with maternal family members, to whom the adoptee was a brother-in-law and uncle
- Extensive correspondence, consultation and engagement with the Registrar of Adoptions
- Consultation with a private investigator to find relatives of the assumed birth mother
- Correspondence and meeting the assumed birth mother's nephew

ii. Discussion & Findings

The Qualitative Interviews

The qualitative interviews and quantitative analysis enabled an empathetic, nuanced understanding of these men's adoption experiences. Their narration lent authenticity and pathos, while the theoretical framework provided credibility and context. Their stories both anchored and directed the personal investigation.

Each interviewee's story could stand alone as a case study to advance the understanding of these men's experience of adoption in South Africa. Thus, an opportunity exists for further research into South African men's adoption experiences more broadly so that this discourse continues.

Limitations of this project are evident in the sample size and representation. Only seven men were interviewed, and their adoption experiences are of course not definitive. The men interviewed are not representative of South Africa's demographics, which may present limitations in the way the seven issues are experienced culturally. However, cross-cultural and cross-racial adoption was not the focus of this research, motivated and contextualised as it was by an investigation into the adoption story of a white, English-speaking South African man, the author's father.

The Personal Investigation

The personal investigation provided the motivation and context for the research. The personal nature of the project enabled empathy for the interviewees that may have been more difficult to capture in the absence of a close relationship with the topic. This methodology served both as a window into the adoption stories of men and a mirror that reflected what the adoption experience of the author's father might have been.

Developing a structure that could integrate adoption psychology, the personal investigation, and the qualitative interviews, proved challenging. Ultimately, the personal investigation served as the "golden thread" for the long-form piece, which enabled an investigation into the author's personal question, *Who's your Daddy?* and of the broader theoretical framework within which to investigate the *untold adoption stories of South African men.*

The disadvantage of the personal investigation approach, however, was that it restricted the men's voices somewhat. All seven interviewees generously shared their stories but the demands of the personal investigation somewhat inhibited full disclosure of their stories in the long-form piece. However, the original motivation and rationale for this research was the personal investigation. It subsequently expanded into an investigation of these men's experiences of adoption.

iii. Ethical Issues

Ethics in adoption, regarding identities and names particularly, are strictly governed by the Registrar of Adoptions. Reckless disclosure of identities has the potential to impact individuals and rupture families. This is why, by law, only registered social workers are permitted to mediate disclosure of information, reunions, etc., for members of the triad.

This is why the personal investigation part of the research fell short. The name of the author's paternal birth grandmother could not, by law, be divulged by the Registrar. The application by a social worker for the adoptee's files was still in process at the date of publication. Should the social worker acquire this information, she is under no obligation to release it to the author. The social worker may, on further investigation into the surviving family of the birth mother, decide that revealing such information would be disruptive to this family – even if the birth mother herself is deceased.

For the personal investigation component of this project, the names of the author's adoptee father's assumed birth family were changed on the recommendation of this family's relative, who cooperated on the project. This relative was found by a private investigator through a surname search similar to the name handwritten in the Bible of the author's adoptee father. The name in the Bible was presumed to be the birth mother's name.

However, this name has not been confirmed as belonging to the birth mother. Publishing this name in the absence of official confirmation (and consent from her surviving relatives who were unaware of any adoption when the relative asked them) would be unethical. The relative in question (presumed to be the birth mother's nephew) was informed that his name had been found by a private investigator.

In the qualitative interviews, all respondents but one consented to the use of their names. A pseudonym was requested by one adoptee because his birth parents are still alive, and his adoption was a result of abuse.

All interviewees shared their adoption stories willingly and generously although the names of all spouses/partners and children were changed in the interests of privacy and protection of the adoption triads involved.

5. CONCLUSION

This research project was motivated by the author's personal investigation into her late father's adoption. This search for origins evolved into narrating the stories of men involved in adoption within the theoretical framework of the seven core adoption issues. These issues manifest as the "untold" adoption stories that are seldom reflected in the "happily-ever-after" narratives of adoption.

At the time of publication in August 2015, the author had not confirmed the name of her adoptee father's birth parents, or the circumstances of his adoption. This project nonetheless begins the conversation for continuing dialogue about other men's experiences in adoption in South Africa.

The personal investigation continues.

6. THE CASE FOR NARRATIVE JOURNALISM

This journalism research project articulates selected men's adoption stories through long-form narrative writing that is informed and contextualised by scholarly research. Adoption is a topic ideally explored through narrative journalism: It is deeply personal and best articulated through storytelling. In this project, narrative journalism allowed the unique

voices of selected men involved in adoption to emerge, while framing these voices within a scholarly context.

The Poynter Institute on its website defines long-form narrative writing (narrative journalism) as non-fiction storytelling using fictional devices. These devices include narration; scene; dialogue; voice; point-of-view; characters; and destination, i.e., theme, purpose, motive. The Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University explains narrative journalism as "telling true stories" (Wendy Call & Mark Kramer, 2007) and as "contactful…the writer contacting the reader. It's journalism that doesn't assume that the reader is a robot." (Kramer, 2005, pg. 7).

Longreads is a US-based narrative journalism blog "dedicated to helping people find and share the best storytelling in the world". The blog features non-fiction and fiction stories of over 1,500 words. Three adoption-themed stories are published on Longreads, two of which were written by men (Michael Kruse, January 2013; John H Tucker, October 2011; and Lisa Millar, September 2011).

Similarly, global media group Reuters has featured an extensive narrative journalism exposé, "Inside America's underground market for adopted children" (Megan Twohey, 2013).

These media and stories demonstrate that adoption is a topic that lends itself to narrative journalism. In South Africa, however, there are a limited number of adoption-themed stories that are strictly narrative journalism (i.e., non-fiction using fictional devices), or that are not autobiographical. An online review of adoption-themed non-fiction and non-academic writing suggests that South African adoption-themed stories are predominantly memoirs by female adoptees and adoptive mothers.

The dearth of narrative journalism adoption stories in this country – specifically of and by men – added impetus to this project. Furthermore, adoption is personally and profoundly experienced and its prevalence necessitates a journalistic investigation in the public interest.

The following long-form journalism, Part 2 of this research report, is such an investigation.

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PART 2: LONG-FORM JOURNALISM PIECE

Who's your Daddy?

The untold adoption stories of South African men

By Deborah Minors

A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of the University of Witwatersrand's Masters by Coursework and Research Report in Journalism Studies.

Johannesburg, August 2015

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts by Coursework and Research Report in the Department of Journalism, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Deborah Jess Minors

Johannesburg

14 August 2015

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Patrick Crooke-Shaw* and the Crooke-Shaw* relatives

The late Jessie Iris van Rensburg (née Wood)

The family Arneson

But most of all, this story's for you, Dad.

Dedicated to my father,

Louis Jacobus van Rensburg (1948-1994)
who gave me roots and then gave me wings.

* Names changed

Prologue

Reluctantly I open the wooden box that my Dad had made. Before it contained all the paraphernalia relating to his death in 1994. I'd inherited this Pandora's Box after my Mom died 13 years after him. I unfurl yellowed newspaper, inhale dust and nostalgia. **Man dies instantly**. *The headline leaps from the page. The article reminds me that a 47-year-old man died in a head-on collision on his motorbike. The man was my Dad, Louis Jacobus van Rensburg. Or that's who he thought he was for 35 years. Now I wonder if something inside my Dad died years earlier; the day he read in his mother's will that she bequeathed her estate to him, her only* ***adopted*** *son. He never knew.*

***

It was a Saturday afternoon in 1983, I think, when my Dad told me his mother had died. I knew that my Gran, Jessie Iris, had been hospitalised for emphysema, but I was just nine, and protected from further disclosure. I remember bouncing into the lounge that afternoon, buoyant after a day's play with friends in their blue plastic porta-pool. My Dad sat slumped on the faux-velvet brown settee. The brown voile curtains were drawn against the dusk. My Dad raised red, puffy eyes: "You'll never see your Granny again," he choked. That's probably when I first witnessed loss – a loss complicated for my Dad who learnt shortly afterwards that his mother had adopted him. No one would tell him who his birth mother was.

I don't remember any explicit announcement about my Dad's adoption. My parents didn't convene a sombre family gathering to reveal this information to my sister, Karen, and I. My Dad's adoption status was just something I grew up knowing – although he scarcely mentioned it and I seldom contemplated it. Years later, in high school, Karen and my Mom talked about it. My Mom told Karen that Dad's birth mother was *Evelyn Crooke-Shaw. Karen later saw the name written in Dad's Bible, in his hand. But that Bible, and with it any "evidence" of the name, is long lost.

Karen and I have children of our own now, and with offspring come questions of origins. In 2013, Karen and I began a search for Dad's birth family. As the journey progressed, I discovered that adoption is more than just a search for a name. It is a tangled tapestry framed as a complete work, which seldom reveals the knots that hold the weave together.

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Although adoption is often presented in popular culture as a "happily-ever-after" scenario, the dynamics of a family constructed through adoption are different to those of traditional families. Psychologists locate adoption within a trauma framework because adoption begins with loss. In 1982, American adoption experts Deborah N. Silverstein and Sharon Kaplan Rozaria proposed seven adoption-related issues that personally affect the individuals involved in adoption, usually for their whole lives. These issues are loss; rejection; guilt/shame; grief; identity; intimacy and relationships; and mastery/control. All individuals involved in adoption – the adoptee, birth parents, and adoptive parents – known collectively as the "adoption triad", experience these. Triad members' experiences of these issues *after* their "happily-ever-after" are the mostly untold stories of adoption.

I think my Dad lived "happily-ever-after", but I still remember his bloodshot green eyes as he slumped on that faux-velvet brown sofa in 1983, mourning the loss of his mother. I have questions of my own now and I resolve to find the answers. My search for my Dad's origins (and my own) became an investigation into how other men experience adoption. I spoke to male adoptees, birth fathers, and adoptive fathers to understand what my Dad's adoption experience might have been. Undoubtedly it began at an adoption agency, so I figure Child Welfare Johannesburg is a good place to start.

*Names changed

CHAPTER 1

Adoption in South Africa – Then and Now

Pam Wilson, Supervisor of Adoptions at Child Welfare Johannesburg, has only ever worked here. "It's my first and only job – I've been in adoptions 32 years," she says.

In the 1980s, in apartheid South Africa, Pam worked predominantly with white birth mothers. They stayed at the agency's Princess Alice Adoption Home during their pregnancies. "Then birth fathers were involved," recalls Pam. "They used to visit the girls, but it was quite frustrating for them because they didn't have a say."

It's different now. The adoptions arranged by Child Welfare are predominantly of black babies. "We haven't done white adoptions for about 15 years, and that's because we don't get any white babies at this agency," explains Pam.

Birth fathers' participation now is less than it was 30 years ago. "We have had a few black birth fathers come in – probably four or five a year," says Pam. "Their babies were given up many years ago and they want to try find them and get them back, because they weren't informed at the time."

The adoption process begins with an orientation meeting. Most adoptive parents are married couples, although there are many single women too (singles, and homosexual couples are permitted to adopt). A big part of the meeting focuses on telling your child he's adopted.

"Child Welfare's philosophy is to tell from the beginning," says Pam. "It's very important. The child is ultimately going to find out and that brings up all sorts of issues."

Pam relates a story of two young men who learned of their adoption at their parents' funeral – "yours is exactly the same situation" she says to me. Amid mourning their parents, these men start asking questions, but no one at home will tell them anything.

"Eventually they end up here and then we've got to tell them they're abandoned or whatever," sighs Pam. "And to see a 40-year-old man sitting here crying, it's very difficult. We tell adoptive parents: Don't do that to your child. If you love your child, do the right thing."

***

Child Welfare distinguishes between soft and hard abandonment. The former refers to babies abandoned in places of relative safety – a crèche, hospital, taxi rank. Hard abandonment refers to babies left naked in the open veld, in refuse bags in dumpsters, in plastic bags on wash-lines.

"We've had experiences where we've had to explain to adoptees that they were found in a ditch, for example," says Pam. "It's very, very hard, and we try to keep it as general as possible. It sounds ridiculous but when we talk about the mother, we say, 'she left you in a place where she knew you'd be found'. You have to be really careful with adoptees. You don't want to totally destroy their self-image, but at the same time they're asking you for facts, so it's a very fine line."

Pam says fewer men approach Child Welfare for "link and search for origins" assistance than women. "Men tend to just accept their adoptions a lot more. They might just be lazy about

doing it, or they're scared of opening up wounds," says Pam. Adoption-related issues are not gender-specific though. "Feelings of abandonment, feelings of rejection, there's a lot of anger," says Pam.

Adoption is the best option, in Pam's opinion. "Obviously biological parents are the first option, but if the child has to go into care, then the permanency of adoption is the best solution for the child."

Pam shows me an article from *City Press* dated 28 September 2014 and headlined *Fathers are parents too*, by Boitshepo Lesetedi. He writes in his capacity as master trainer of the Families Matter programme and he berates a society that undermines the role that fathers could and should play in parenting.

He writes, "Research conducted by the Soul City Institute last year showed that many children who grow up without their fathers envied a poster depicting a father hugging his daughter. They remarked on how lucky the child in the poster was. This research raised the issue of absent fathers and the important role these men could play in their children's lives." I wonder what impact *two* fathers could have.

CHAPTER 2
Gerard, primal wounds and abandonment

Adoptive father Gerard Bester, 47, asks if I'm familiar with the primal wound. "What is that dreadful article? American writer…*The Wound*…?" he asks. I know what he's referring to – the self-published book, which grew out of a decade's research and a master's dissertation, is virtually prescribed reading on Adoption Psychology 101 for anyone in the triad. But it has its critics, and Gerard is one of them.

"I just… I got so depressed," he laments. "I read that right in the beginning of my adoption [of two children] and I thought, I can't actually read this – it's too horrible."

In *The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child* (1993), Nancy Verrier suggests that adoptees suffer a "primal wound" because of early separation from their birth mothers. The separation causes a pain so profound it's at a cellular level. The pain of this primal wound affects an adoptee's sense of self and manifests as psychological, behavioural, and relationship issues. In response to this pain, Verrier argues, adoptees later typically acquiesce and become "well-behaved" and withdrawn, or they rebel and act out. These responses to pain caused by the primal wound set in motion a psychological pattern of recurring losses from which the adoptee seldom recovers, Verrier says.

Gerard's not alone in his aversion to the primal wound theory. Randolph W. Severson (1994), an American psychologist, denounces it as absurdly sexist, because it underestimates the paternal role in child-rearing. He says there's very little research that investigates the psychological and sociological ramifications of fatherhood. He's right – certainly as far as men represented in adoption is concerned, and particularly in South Africa. Here the voices of men in adoption are so scarce they're virtually non-existent. This is why I interview only men in the triad. I hope my search can reveal some of their experiences.
Despite its "*un*happily-ever-after" implication that adoptees are "scarred for life", the primal wound theory has persisted for 20 years. It's enough to undermine the best intentions of birth parents, or adoptive parents like Gerard, and it implies irreparable damage to adoptees

themselves. Undoubtedly this was not Verrier's intention (she's an adoptive and biological mother herself). For parents like Gerard though, the potential for primal wounds in South African society, when rape and unknown paternity combine, is particularly ominous.

Gerard is a theatre director and teaches in Dramatic Arts at Wits University. He and his partner, Richard, adopted *Luanda, eight-years-old, in 2007, and *S'onqoba, four-years-old, in 2010. Gerard also runs a theatre project in Hillbrow. He was appalled to come across a play with a theme that suggests you're cursed if you don't know who your father is. The play is based on a true story of a person born of a gang-rape, and thus allegedly eternally "cursed". Gerard refused to collaborate. He says, "How can you curse my children and how can you curse so many children in South Africa? That's why it's taken so long for black people to adopt – the father has to be known, otherwise you have the curse – it's like the wound," he adds ruefully.

Gerard can't help that his children may have primal wounds and, as a father, that's his objection to Verrier's theory. Neither of Gerard's children knows – nor will they ever know – their birth parents. "That information is simply not available," says Gerard pointedly, glancing purposefully at his daughter playing in the lounge alongside us. Abandonment raises questions for adoptees for which there are simply no answers.

Gerard finds ironic comfort in South Africa's appalling baby abandonment rate; its ubiquity will make things easier to explain to his children when they're older. It's unverified, but Child Welfare Johannesburg estimates over 3,500 babies were abandoned in South Africa in 2010. That's the most current data available on the National Adoption Coalition's May 2014 Fact Sheet on Child Abandonment Research in South Africa.

I'm guiltily relieved that my Dad was relinquished to adoption and not abandoned (although this is an assumption based on the possibility of a birth mother's name, Evelyn Crooke-Shaw). The hard truth is, though, that my Dad still felt unwanted. His foster-sister, Megan, told me that and she thinks he carried that with him all his adult life – like a primal wound that never healed.

CHAPTER 3
Genealogical bewilderment and rebellion

It seems inevitable that adoptees have issues relative to their unique status in a family. Questions about origins and identity persist. People who have limited or zero knowledge of one or both of their birth parents may be beset with "genealogical bewilderment." The psychologist H.J Sants coined the phrase to describe this dilemma, caused by a psychological gap in a person's self-concept. I know my Dad was bewildered when he discovered he was adopted, because his foster-sister, Megan, told me so.

Megan was fostered (later adopted) by the couple who fostered my Dad after his adoptive father, Martinus, died when my Dad was 10. My Dad thought Martinus was his biological father. My Dad's foster parents, Pappa Jack and Aunty Phyllis, would become my godparents. They fostered my Dad when his widowed mother, Jessie Iris, struggled to raise him alone. I learn later that my Dad was a bit of a teenage hell-raiser.

Teenagers tend to rebel as they test boundaries and experiment in their quest to "find themselves." Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson says that between the ages of 13 and 19 years,

teenagers enter an "identity versus role confusion" stage. Adoptees have an additional self-concept challenge if they don't know who their birth parents are. In open adoptions, when the adoptee knows his origins, this challenge is minimised. Not so for adoptees whose relinquishment is shrouded in secrecy – as my Dad's seems to have been.

I imagine my Dad, aged 15. It would have been 1963 in apartheid South Africa. Roy Orbison would dominate the airwaves, and TV wouldn't exist here. My Dad would have been a Ducktail at General Smuts High in Vereeniging, where he and my Mom were sweethearts. He'd be in foster-care with Pappa Jack and his foster-sisters, Megan and Roz. He would have no idea that he was adopted. Considering the risk of bewilderment, a "false self", and psychosis, maybe secrecy was an ironic blessing. I suspect, though, that my Dad felt his "otherness" long before he even knew why.

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My sister, Karen, and I reconnect with Megan and Roz on Facebook. Their response is akin to a joyous family reunion. We exchange 20-year updates, trawl photographs. We all lost touch after Dad, then Mom, died. How curious that Karen and I were bridesmaids at Megan's wedding. I remember thinking how beautiful Megan was with her jet-black hair, and arresting eyes, just like my Dad. "You can see they're brother and sister," my then seven-year-old-self thought authoritatively. But they weren't. Not even close. I'm elated to learn that Pappa Jack, my Dad's foster father, is alive! Eighty-seven-years-old, in a wheelchair, but alive! Megan tells me, "He talks about your Dad a lot, and dreams about him." I arrange to visit.

When I walk into Pappa Jack's cottage on Megan's property in Vereeniging, she and I embrace warmly. Her remarkable sapphire eyes are instantly recognisable. Despite the absence of a bloodline, she resembles my Dad who, too, had pitch black hair, and equally arresting – but green – eyes. Similarly, Pappa Jack's eyes are the first things that strike me when his nurse wheels him in; they're still sharp and corn-flower blue. His once black hair, still full and impeccable, is greying now and his face is gaunt, cheeks hollowed. But his smile, as recognition blossoms across his face as he gazes at me, is beatific. Roz said to me previously, "You look so much like your Dad it brings tears to my eyes." In Pappa Jack's lounge, I see a framed photograph, *circa* 1982, of my Dad, Mom, Karen and me.

Megan says over sausage-rolls, "Your Dad and I had a bond because neither of us were Pappa Jack's biological children – I was adopted, and your Dad was fostered. We stuck together because we were different."

I'm astounded to learn that my Dad's foster family hadn't known either that he was adopted. My heart sinks when Megan says, "We didn't know. When Pappa Jack fostered your Dad, we thought he was Aunty Jess's own son."

I mention the name Evelyn Crooke-Shaw to Megan. "Where did you get that name?" she asks, puzzled. Karen and I think Evelyn is Dad's birth mother, because Karen remembers she saw it written in his Bible. But Megan looks blank.

CHAPTER 4
Attachment, emotional bondage and transmitting trauma

Nicki Dawson is an adoptive mother and counselling psychologist with a Master's in community-based counselling psychology. I'd met her at the Rainbow Adoption Group Meeting for trans-racial adoptive families, which I'd attended with Gerard. Nicki specialises in infant mental health, bonding, and attachment. She delivered a talk on "behavioural communication" and attachment in adoption.

Attachment refers to the enduring psychological and emotional bonds we have with others. Psychologists John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth advanced attachment theory in the 1940s. They examined war orphans' emotional responses to their caregivers and identified three[7] attachment styles in children: Secure attachment; anxious/ambivalent attachment; and avoidant attachment.

Attachment patterns develop according to how our emotional needs were met in childhood. If our needs were consistently positively met, we learn that the world is safe, and we grow up secure. But if we're neglected or abused, we moderate our response to protect ourselves (e.g., keep quiet or cry louder). We develop anxious, ambivalent or avoidant patterns.

Childhood attachment patterns may alter in adulthood in response to circumstances or trauma. For example, a securely attached child may as an adult develop more avoidant attachment patterns in response to a spouse's death, or divorce. Either way, attachment patterns established (through consistent experience) in childhood impact how we relate to others for the rest of our lives.

It has been suggested that children adopted after the age of six months have a higher risk of attachment problems. Intimacy issues may emerge because of early anxious, ambivalent or avoidant patterns that stem from early separation from the birth mother. These adoptees may struggle to bond with others because they avoid intimacy to avoid re-enacting previous losses. They may never feel close to anyone, or they may identify as loners. This may be related to the "transmission" of early trauma.

The Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma and Loss (ITTL) is a growing research field that evolved from Holocaust Syndrome studies in the 1960s. This research explored how psychological trauma is transmitted inter-generationally, like a "cellular imprint" (not genetically) to the *children* of Holocaust survivors. Further research in the 1990s showed that healthy offspring of Holocaust survivors are more likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder after traumatic events and be more vulnerable to psychological distress. ITTL has implications for adoption because it explores how trauma is transmitted in the absence of a bloodline, and because it falls within the broader research realm of attachment theory.

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As a child I perceived my Dad to be very attached to his foster-father, Pappa Jack, and adoptive mother, Jessie Iris, whom we visited monthly and who lived with us before she died. Despite this apparent attachment, my sister remembers my Dad saying he always felt he was "the black sheep" in his adoptive mother's family. I never heard such things from my Dad. I perceived him as an emotional man but not given to heartfelt conversations – at least not with me.

[7] There's also disorganised attachment, but it's so erratic it defies definition.

I recall only one “deep” chat with my Dad. It was after my Mom was diagnosed with cancer. I was about 15. He called me to their bedroom, and I perched awkwardly next to him on the edge of the bed and stared at the blue eiderdown. My Dad slumped forward, hands hanging between his knees. He was bereft at the threat of losing my Mom – “the mother of my children.” I didn’t know if my role was to panic or placate.

I suspect now that my Dad was articulating loss; possibly responding to that “primal wound” that ruptures repeatedly in adoptees with recurring losses. My Dad was fiercely protective of his family and deeply attached to my Mom. She was the steady anchor to his stormy volatility. My parents were personality opposites but their bond was rock-solid. They were married 25 years when my Dad died. Their bond was undeniable. Karen and I were securely attached and seemingly spared the transmission of trauma. We were lucky. Others, like Michael, were not.

CHAPTER 5
Michael and the sins of the fathers

Birth father Michael, 42, lives comfortably opposite Florida Lake, west of Joburg, with his fiancé, *Heather, 38, and her daughter, *Janey, five. But Michael’s path to this idyllic life was wracked with abuse, grief and loss. As a child, Michael was the youngest of seven children. Only Michael and his twin *Martin, and their older brother *Kurt, are still alive.

Michael’s mother was abusive and his father an alcoholic against their psychotic mother. Michael reckons alcohol was his father’s escape from poverty and too many children.

“My father was my hero; he was my everything. He was away from home a lot, which forced my mother to run the household,” says Michael. “I don’t think he wanted as many children as we were. I don’t know whether that was my mother’s idea of holding onto him.”

Michael’s eldest sister, *Victoria, died aged four. She had a cleft-palate and by sheer fluke died of septicaemia from a lodged green bean. When Victoria died, Michael’s brother, *Terrence was about two years old. Then *Richard was born. Then Michael’s father apparently had a vasectomy. But then *Lisa was born, and a year later, the twins. Michael shrugs off the additional progeny despite vasectomy as inadequate surgery in the ‘60s. He grew up constantly reminded by his mother that he should never have been born.

Michael’s parents divorced when he was nine. Their children were in and out of boarding schools in between removals by Child Welfare. Michael’s elder brother, Richard, committed suicide when Michael was 13, as did their brother, Terence. Michael’s father and sister died in 1993, and his mother the following year. He winces at the memory:

“My father died in August and [separately] Lisa in a car accident. I’ll never forget my 21st birthday was the most depressing day of my life, because that’s when they phoned me and said, ‘Sir, you can come fetch your father and your sister’s ashes’.”

Michael says his world came to a standstill when his father died, his grief complicated by the continued existence of his then estranged mother. She died the following May. “The only reason I went to see her where she died in hospital was to make sure she was dead,” says Michael, but concedes: “She wasn’t just evil. I think the abuse was a combination of

frustration, because she had six children, [but] she didn't have my father – he actually left her." Michael's responses to his childhood grief, losses, and evidently the potential transmission of trauma, would be extreme.

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Orphaned and alone, Michael found God, and *Shelley, at the Brakpan Methodist church where they were Sunday school teachers. They began dating. Shelley was 16, in Standard 9, and Michael, 21, was working as an appliance technician. On 27 April 1994, Shelley turned up at Michael's front door, suitcase in hand, desperate to escape her alcoholic mother.

The couple moved to Vanderbijlpark and Michael paid the school fees so Shelley could matriculate. They were engaged but times were tough and a wedding a fantasy. Shelley was unemployed and Michael's wages didn't stretch far.

"We really, really battled. We were literally living on welfare hand-outs. And I kept saying 'once you start working, we will get through this'. But it didn't. We were constantly in poverty. Then she fell pregnant."

Shelley had been pregnant twice before with Michael's children but miscarried. This third pregnancy terrified Michael. "I was petrified because I was scared that I can't be a father. What if I turn out like my mother? What if I treat my child like my mother treated me?" he recalls.

He was equally concerned he'd turn out like his father who, despite being his hero, abandoned the family. He also suspected that Shelley, desperate for children, fell pregnant on purpose. Michael saw his parent's patterns playing out before him and was intent on averting it. "Shelley said, 'let's get married, let's have children'. I said, 'We've first got to figure this out'. I was very hard-headed about it. I said, 'We can't have this child. Either you must abort, or we must give it up for adoption'."

Michael and Shelley made adoption enquiries at the welfare office where they collected their food parcels. They decided to keep the pregnancy a secret – and not only because they weren't going to keep the baby.

"Ridicule," explains Michael. "We got a lot of ridicule when we said we're considering adoption. You know, 'How can you possibly do this? Not even a dog throws their child away!' A lot of people can sit with their smiley hypocritical faces and say 'oh, what a wonderful thing adoption is', but when you are dealing with it first-hand, you get ridiculed. Now you're torn morally. I felt very judged, and that's why I insisted nobody must know."

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Shelley entered Princess Alice Adoption Home where she stayed for her last trimester. Michael visited every weekend. He says they were close despite the circumstances. He loved Shelley and intended a life together, maybe more children when finances improved.

Their daughter, *Beth, whom they named something else, was born in July 1995. She was adopted by a couple whom Michael and Shelley had selected through a series of interviews facilitated by Child Welfare. But Shelley was never entirely committed to the adoption.

“You know, I was driving this thing,” says Michael. “I know now Shelley didn’t want to give the baby up. But I didn’t really give her much of a choice. But we really did love each other. We weren’t going to split up. We were going to get married. And I said to her, ‘We will have other children’. But then we went through this process…”. The pregnancy and adoption took its toll on the young couple. In response to the pain of loss, Michael had a vasectomy after the adoption without first discussing it with Shelley. He was 23.

“You know what, where you’re crying yourself to sleep and we don’t want to talk to each other, now we starting to drift apart. I thought ‘I’m not gonna go through this again’. I spoke to doctors and said, ‘How do I stop a woman from catching me out again?’ I said to Shelley afterwards, ‘If we can afford to reverse my vasectomy, we can afford to have children. And I’m totally convinced of it to this day.”

In the end, Shelley left. She went to the USA, married, had more children, divorced. Michael had four subsequent engagements, and all these fiancés already had children of their own.

“They were long-term, deep relationships. I wasn’t frivolous,” says Michael. “Whenever I’ve gotten serious with a woman, I sit them down and I say to them, ‘there’s a little girl out there that I am the father to. One day I am going to get a telephone call’. If somebody really loves you, they will accept it.”

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Michael got The Call from Child Welfare in March 2014. His daughter, Beth, now 19, had expressed an interest in making contact. Michael says he’d thought about her every single day. “Where is she? What does she look like? Is she fine? Am I going to receive a call ‘Michael, we’ve got some bad news, she’s passed away…’”

Michael and Beth began corresponding on March 18, 2014. There are 25 pages of A4 emails. It is a touching, affectionate, deeply personal, intimate exchange. Three months later Michael and Beth met face-to-face, at Moyo’s Zoo Lake, for the first time in 19 years. It was “very emotional with buckets of tears.”

Michael’s adoption story seems to have ended “happily-ever-after” (at least as far as the birth father and adoptee are concerned). The adoption was open, full disclosure immediate, and culminated in a reunion where birth father and adoptee could lay their cards on the table and reconcile. Not so for my Dad. He didn’t know for 35 years that he was adopted, after which he presumably had only a name.

I remember a road trip in 1983, to Kimberley, where my Dad was born. It was just my Dad, Karen and me on the trip, which was unusual as we seldom accompanied Dad on trips but often vacationed with Mom while Dad stayed home to work on the mine. I remember a hotel room in Kimberley overlooking the Big Hole and being bored. I don’t remember why we were there or anything else actually – aside from the matching t-shirts Karen and I wore. Karen remembers the t-shirts and a dinner with Dad where she felt “grown up”. But otherwise, our memories of this heritage trip are as devoid of details as Kimberley’s cavern. In hindsight, I think my Dad was searching for Evelyn, but I don’t think he found her – or surely he would have made The Call? So, as far as I know, when he died in 1994, aged 47, he still didn’t know who his birth mother was, and why no one had told him. But in that time, he’d been a damn fine father.

CHAPTER 6
On Fathers

It's while I'm dining solo in Rosebank's Europa Café that it occurs to me that my journey is as much about fathers as it is about adoption. I'm quaffing Chardonnay when The Animals' House of the Rising Sun spills seductively from the speakers. Immediately I picture my Dad's copy of the album; orange and black and 1970s and scratchy; me listening to it in the lounge, prostrate on a ghastly brown-mustard-orange swirly carpet that scratched and smelled of dust, resplendent alongside the brown voile curtains. My Dad loved The Animals, and Elvis, and Queen, and all the Springbok Radio chart-toppers. I still have his old vinyl LPs. They're displayed in my 21st century kitchen, which bears not a trace of brown-mustard-orange.

Back in Europa Café, I'm reading a *Mail & Guardian* article by a man who runs a support group for single/teen mums who don't understand why their children's fathers don't pay maintenance. The article says no one's ever told these boys – these sudden, young dads – that there's more to fatherhood than finance. Apparently, absent fathers don't get involved in their offspring's lives because they can't support them financially. The article suggests that young parents (nor society generally I reckon) seem to recognise that just because dads can't cough up, doesn't mean they shouldn't show up.

I think how my Dad was everything a dad should be and more – present, available, financially and emotionally supportive (although not a little bit intimidating). He was a role model and an anchor. My own child's father, whom I never married, has also been everything a dad should be to our daughter since she was born 17 years ago. Our financial arrangements have waxed and waned, but neither I nor our daughter (and she will tell you herself) could have asked for a better father.

Adoptive father Lyon Liang is similarly a paragon of paternity.

CHAPTER 7
"Mental stability and financial security"

Lyon (pronounced Leon) doesn't look close to 50-years-old, but he assures me he is. We're in his shop, Bead World, in Northcliff Mall, Johannesburg. Lyon was born in Shanghai, China and came to South Africa in 1990. "I am South African," he says firmly. "My children were born here." Lyon's English is fluent although accented with the Mandarin he speaks at home. Lyon and his wife, *Lily have three children: *Ming, 17, *Marcus, 14, and *Danny, 20 months.

Danny's birth mother is a 20-year-old Chinese woman whose boyfriend at the time (Danny's birth father) was 19. "The birth parents were young, living in someone's back room, working in a shop," says Lyon. "They were very poor."

Lyon and Lily adopted Danny when he was three days old. He was born in Northwest Province and then taken to the Princess Alice Adoption Home. Here Lyon met the birth mother. "She seemed pleased to meet us. I think it put her at ease to know her baby was with a good family," says Lyon. He shows me photos of Danny with his birth mother. Images of a tiny but chubby Oriental baby and a beaming young Chinese woman slide past on Lyon's smart phone. "When Danny's older, I'll show these to him," says Lyon.

I ask Lyon why he adopted. Clearly fertility isn't the issue. "South Africa is such a fractured society. There is so much abuse, so much suffering," says Lyon earnestly. He's genuinely pained. "We wanted to give one child a chance to at least not grow up a criminal, or a drug addict, or abused."

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Lyon and Lily agreed a long time ago that they would adopt. They began the process in 2012. Lyon remarks, "People would be surprised at the very high level of professionalism and service delivered by the Department of Social Development. They do home checks, interviews – they even interviewed my kids. They did blood tests. They're careful not to place a child with just anyone. What if that parent turns out to be a drug addict or an alcoholic and dies? Then what about the child?"

Lyon shows me the *African Times*, the Mandarin newspaper for the Chinese community. He shows me the advert, written in Mandarin and English, that calls on the birth father to present himself at the Department "in connection with the adoption of your son". I know it's a legal requirement to advertise during the adoption process. It's supposed to give birth fathers the opportunity to invoke their rights (and responsibilities) to paternity of their children born out of wedlock. But if the birth father doesn't appear within a set period, he loses his rights and responsibilities – should he have had any interest in invoking them in the first place. Danny's birth father apparently didn't. Lyon met the birth father once.

"He didn't seem interested," shrugs Lyon, adding, "He asked for money. So did the birth mother. Five – ten thousand rands." But Lyon didn't "pay" for his son though.

"I asked my social worker if I'm supposed to pay them anything and she said I would be in a lot of trouble if I did," says Lyon. "Once the adoption was finalised and all the paperwork was done, and Danny was ours, I gave the birth mother R5000 or so – I said, 'Here. Look after yourself, feed yourself. Go see a doctor. She was poor."

I can see that Lyon is a man of integrity, compassion and stability who wants to provide the very best he can for his family. I ask him what fatherhood means to him. "Mental stability and financial security," he says promptly.

I'm left with the impression of a man who is proud of the citizen he is, the home he can provide for his blood relatives and the opportunity he can provide for his adopted son. I'm struck by a sense of a man trying to the right thing and doing it just fine.

CHAPTER 8
Phantom Fathers: A man called Van and the Rhodesian Solider

Information about my Dad's adoptive father, Martinus "Van" Jansen van Rensburg is scant and my impression of him forged only from memoirs and artefacts. There's a set of rose-gold cufflinks, engraved *MVR*, which my sister has, and I inherited a rose-gold signet ring (enormous; the size of a bottle cap), also engraved. There is a diamond that belonged to Jessie Iris, which my Dad had set in my Mom's wedding ring, and which I now have. There is also a photo album, which I saw for the first time after my Mom died.

The album is slightly larger than A4-landscape orientation. The waffle-weave colour and texture of the hard-cover bears an embedded Chinese motif. Frayed, yellow string attached with 80-year-old-nails binds the album. Inside, sepia and black-and-white photos are glued to thick brown boards of paper. Some photos are captioned in handwritten blue ink. The hairstyles, cars, clothing, and landscape suggest rural South Africa, *circa* 1930s/1940s.

On the front page is a matchbox-sized yellowed newspaper clipping, its headline "Engagements" in Lucida Black Letter font. It announces the imminent marriage of Jessie Wood to Martin van Rensburg. Deep in the album there are photos of faces I don't recognise and of my Gran as a young woman. Here she is at the seaside in 1940s-style trunks and bonnet, and here on a boat on a river, and here in a garden perched on a rock. Later there are photos of a tall, burly Afrikaner, "Van", moustached, smiling, fishing – always a cigarette between his fingers or lips. Here Van has his arms around Jessie and here they pose formally with another couple. Suddenly, here are Jessie and Van in a rickshaw and Jessie is holding a baby. He is wearing a white sailor-suit, a tiny anchor on the little cap, and his eyes squint closed in the sun.

On the inside back cover of the album there are five small photos alongside a gold-leaf sticker that says "Louis." He is about four years old. Here he stands holding a small wheelbarrow, here with a little bicycle. In another, Van squats on his haunches, the toddler between his knees. Van's beefy arms embrace the small boy whose gaze is solemn beneath a mop of dark hair. My Dad is unmistakable.

I have no idea who my Dad's birth father was. I think my Mom mentioned he may have been a "travelling Rhodesian soldier." Now I wonder if this mystery man, possibly traversing South Africa in 1947 in the aftermath of World War II, considered that the paternal path he chose (if he even knew) would have implications a century later, or if he even cared.

CHAPTER 9
The Registrar of Adoptions and the bureaucracy of birth

When I first began to search for my Dad's birth parents, in 2013, I emailed the Registrar of Adoptions in Pretoria. This agency legislates and regulates adoptions in South Africa under the auspices of the National Department of Social Development. Mrs Botha replied to my one-line request for my Dad's file. Adoption is governed by Chapter 15 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005, she wrote. In terms of the Act, adoptees that are 18 years and older can search for their birth parents, with their adoptive parents' permission. All contact must be mediated by registered social workers. Adoption register information may only be released for research purposes (if identities are concealed), or at the Registrar's discretion (although this clause is being amended), or by court order if deemed to be in the best interests of the child.

I argue that, in my case, the "child" is deceased but would today be a 66-year-old-man who lived his adult life denied knowledge of his ancestry and denied again, through death, the opportunity of closure. Although the law protects the birth family and empowers the adoptee, the child of an adoptee may not access the information. To divulge it would be unethical, as my Dad's birth mother or her descendants may not welcome news of his existence, should they learn of it from unofficial sources. My request is declined so I lick my wounds for a year.

A year later my sister and I resume the search. Karen emails a litany of memories from Sydney, Australia, where she's lived since 2000: Dad's adoptive mother was our Granny – Jessie Iris (née Wood). She married Martinus Cornelius Jansen van Rensburg. Karen and I never met him; he died when our Dad was 10. Curiously, Dad's matric certificate records his surname as *Jansen* van Rensburg, but Jansen never appeared on his birth certificate or anywhere else ever afterwards. Now Karen and I are searching for the name of Dad's birth mother.

Again, I ring up Mrs Botha, the Registrar for Adoption. I try the "research" angle. I try the Promotion of Access to Information Act angle. I try the "Registrar's discretion" angle. But she does not waver. I resort to pleading. I hear desperation in my voice: "Are there *any* circumstances under which you could give me my Dad's files?" I implore. "Is there *anything* you can tell me? Anything at all?"

Mrs Botha sighs. Finally, she says, "Put your story in an email and send me what you have about your father, his ID and what-not, and I'll talk to my supervisor."

Weeks later I call Mrs Botha to follow up on the email. I remind her of who I am and what I want. "Oh yes, I remember!" she exclaims cheerfully. "My supervisor, Mrs Schwartz will email you." A subsequent lengthy tele-debate with Mrs Schwartz is amicable but fruitless. We arrange to meet anyway but then Mrs Schwartz emails me forlornly and says she's instructed that only the PR person and Director-General are authorised to handle "media requests." These emails idle in cyberspace. I doff my cap at the stubborn integrity of Messrs Botha and Schwartz and consider alternatives.

Soon my Dad's ID will do some talking.

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I open the varnished box again and retrieve an A4 pink plastic envelope. I extract my Dad's navy-blue ID, issued in 1973. I flip through the pages. My Dad's ID shows he voted in the Yes/No referendum of 1992. My Dad's ID shows driver's licences for a car and a motorbike. "Deceased/oorlede", "deceased/oorlede", "deceased/oorlede" is cruelly stamped on every page in purple ink.

My Dad's ID shows a black-and-white photo of a man, early 20s, and another photo, early-30s. The man has jet-black hair, foreboding eyebrows, and he is not smiling. The man looks stern but handsome and resembles Elvis Presley.

I see my own eyes looking back at me.

CHAPTER 10
Brad: One son too soon and losing a name

When Brad, now 39, was 21, his girlfriend, *Bella, became pregnant and *Jeremy was born. Jeremy was adopted by a couple who now live in the US. What's interesting about Brad's story is that Bella had another son before Jeremy, who was adopted by the same parents who adopted Jeremy. These adoptions, in the 1990s, were entirely open. All members of this triad remain in contact today and all have lived "happily-ever-after" – although Brad has some regrets about the loss of a name.

Brad and I have been friends since the early ‘90s when we were students. Even then he sported an impressive explosion of dreadlocks. Those thick ropes still adorn his head today - more abundant now and perched a bit further back on an increasingly receding forehead. He emigrated to New Zealand in 2004, and he’s now head English teacher at a language school in Auckland. We’re talking on Skype.

Brad’s cheerful boyish face smiles back at me from my monitor. I recognise friendly brown eyes behind white-framed spectacles, his dreadlocks a Medusa profusion around his round face and an easy smile. Then the face of Brad’s Japanese wife fills the screen. She waves hello and then turns, proudly pointing out her pregnant profile. I “ooh” and “aah” in admiration, and squeak baby “hellooooos!” to their little three-year-old girl, who studiously ignores me. Mom and daughter bustle out and Brad turns to the webcam.

“I suppose maybe it’s a unique case ‘cause it wasn’t the first child for Bella,” says Brad, his voice bearing only the slightest trace of a Kiwi twang. “It was her second child and so, in that way, I was quite happy to take a back seat, ‘cause I knew it was a process that had already been through before.”

“How did you find out you were going to be a father?” I ask.

“I remember going to a wedding. Bella and I were sitting for a while and then she started crying. And then a couple of days later she said, ‘the reason why I was crying was…’ That’s when she knew. She took everything in her stride. I think we were both pretty much decided, from the beginning, that this was what was gonna happen. That this was the right thing to do.”

Brad seems very nonchalant, very matter of fact. He reiterates that theirs was a unique situation in that the birth mother had done this all before.

“I was at the birth. That was pretty cool. I picked up a nice set of scrubs,” he jokes. “A couple of days later we went to the agency in Johannesburg. I remember we all sat outside and met the parents. The parents seemed nice, it was the second one, so it did seem almost like it was keeping the family unit together in a way.”

“Was that important to you?” I interject.

“In a way. God moves in mysterious ways. I mean, the adoptive parents are quite religious, I’m not,” replies Brad, seemingly oblivious to his theist turn of phrase. “They couldn’t have their own kids, so they were really grateful to have two. And it was quite nice, I suppose, for the boys too; to have a brother. At least you’ve got someone who’s a blood relative – your brother. I think that made things a lot easier to be honest.”

“The adoptive parents have done a far better job than I could ever have done,” he says. “I’m not religious, but I do feel like it was part of God’s plan for them, you know. Maybe not so much for the kids, but God’s plans for the adoptive parents. I think they are the kind of people who would have prayed daily to have a kid.”

I ask Brad if he knew the baby was a boy before it was born.

“I think so, yeah. Actually, I dunno about that. I’m not too sure about that.” Brad’s memory (or lack therof) about the baby’s sex is interesting considering what he says next:

“This might sound a bit dumb but my second child I’ve got [now] is a girl, and that means I have two daughters. I don’t have a son to carry my name kind of thing. I don’t know if it’s just a male way of viewing it, but it’s kind of like I wish I did have a son.”

I lean into my laptop. “So, a bit of regret, Brad?”

“I kind of feel like I can’t say ‘I wish I did’ have a son, because I did. But then I gave him up. That is just something that does always hang around in the back of my head, ‘ah, hang on, Brad – ‘you *did* have this opportunity, but it’s gone now’ kind of thing. You have to live with this kind of thing. But it’s also quite weird, because is it just the name, or is it male offspring, you know? Your genes are gonna be passed on per man or woman anyway. But it’s just quite weird. It could be the end of the line for my family.”

Brad brandishes a scrap of paper at the monitor. It’s some prose he wrote before our talk. “I was probably drunk when I wrote it,” he disclaims.

> *I thought of Jeremy. I thought how lucky he is. He has a mother and father, he has a brother, and he has me. In the background, he has me, so he’ll never be alone. In a way he has two fathers, and it makes me think he’s doubly special. I feel the same for his brother, although his brother is not my child*

“And then it just gets illegible. And also, the last little bit there. It’s a bit of a scrawl…”

I don’t care about the [family] name, yes, I do, but I’m glad there is a male [son] out there, even though he doesn’t have the name, and then I thought, maybe there is something wrong when we name our offspring by only our male name, isn’t there a better way of doing it?

“Is there a better way of doing it?” I ask.

“The Brazilian students always keep both names – mother and father – and the kids will always have four names. Ja, so it hangs around for longer before it disappears. But at the end of the day, it’s just a name. The genes pass on regardless.” Brad sighs, feigning nonchalance.

Sure, I think. But not the genes imprinted with your name. There are no more Van Rensburgs in my family now, and if blood is thicker than water, there never really were.

CHAPTER 11
Dirty Little Secrets

My Dad’s foster sister Megan remembers when my Dad lost his name. He went to see her after he discovered he was adopted. He arrived at Megan’s house on his Yamaha motorbike one weekday afternoon in 1983. This was unusual, she says, because he usually visited on Sundays. Megan remembers a frown on my Dad’s face beneath the single grey lock in his otherwise black hair. He pushed his grey lock back from green, troubled eyes, hugged her, and said, “Megs, I want to ask you something.”

My Dad wanted to know how Megan felt about being adopted; if she ever felt that she didn't fit in and that she had no identity. But Megan had always known she was adopted. Aside from battling playground bullying and later genetic health-related issues, she's had no such angst. My Dad told Megan how devastated he was to find out that the mother he knew was not actually his mom. He felt betrayed and that everything was a lie. He didn't know where he came from and who he was.

His biggest question was why his adoptive mother, Jessie Iris, had never told him. I can guess why.

The National Party came to power in South Africa on 4 June 1948, a month after my Dad was born on 3 May. The Nats rolled out grand apartheid and their vision of *Volk en Vaderland* within the bosom of Christian Nationalism. Illegitimate pregnancy in such a society was a scandalous sin imbued with guilt and shame. Unmarried, pregnant women were spirited away to give birth covertly. They named and registered their babies before relinquishing them. Birth mothers then were told to get on with their lives and "forget about it." Birth fathers barely featured at all. Their paternity was only recorded if the birth mother knew and supplied it, after which the adoptions were organised geographically and linguistically.

The *Christelike Maatskaplike Raad* (Christian Social Council) or *Nasionale Vroueraad* (National Council of Women) in Pretoria organised Afrikaans adoptions under the auspices of the *Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerk* (Dutch Reformed Church). Child Welfare arranged adoptions for English speakers, and black African adoptions were community-based.

My Mom told me once that Dad's adoptive father, Martinus, was Dutch Reformed. My sister remembers Dad saying he visited his adoptive mother's conservative, Afrikaans family out of duty. "I had the impression that they viewed the adoption as a scandal," she said. Back then, nobody was talking. Even nowadays, some don't.

CHAPTER 12
Mark and non-adoption disclosure

Mark tells me he's "not a deep person", he has "no issues" and he's "boring". I reserve judgement on the first two but refute the latter. Mark, 46, grew up in a family of nine siblings, three of whom were adopted and were special needs children. Mark's impoverished childhood motivated him to escape to the city for a better life. He's an electrician who runs his own successful business.

Mark was 32 when he married *Natalie and adopted *James, Natalie's son from a previous relationship.

"James was like my son from young, from the first day I met him at three months," says Mark. "I don't even think of him as adopted."

But James does have a birth father – something he only found out when he was 14. His parents always intended to tell him but didn't know when. Then it "just happened." Mark says James's reaction when he found out was more curiosity than the shock, denial, or anger you'd expect from a teenager. Mark says, half-jokingly, that he knew James was fine with it because he didn't cry, and James hasn't mentioned it since.

“If your bond is strong, then it wouldn’t matter where you come from,” says Mark.

But when I mention James’s birth father, Mark shifts uncomfortably on the plush Wetherley’s sofa and fiddles with the edges of a pink frilly sateen cushion. Mark’s never met James’ birth father and he’s never given him a moment’s thought.

“Do you think James does?” I enquire, “And how do you feel about the idea that James might want to meet him one day?”

Mark squirms awkwardly. “I don’t know. If he wanted to then I wouldn’t mind him going,” he says reluctantly.

James has just turned 16 and I suggest to Mark that maybe his son will soon have some questions.

“It’s not an issue for me ‘cause if he wants to go and see, that’s cool, he can go do that”, says Mark, fixing an ice-blue-eyed stare on me. “And of course it won’t affect us as a father-son relationship. Definitely not.”

The fact that Mark, Natalie, James and his (half) sister, *Gina are a stable, secure, unified family has served them well. Child Welfare has a document that gives guidelines to those involved in adoption. These “counselling pointers” state that it’s normal for adoptees to want to search and, although adoptive parents often feel threatened and fear rejection in favour of the birth parent, this rarely happens. Most adoptees consider their adoptive parents as their parents and identify strongly with them as their family.

Although Mark’s is not a conventional adoption story, it highlights adoptive parents’ concerns that their adopted children may one day reject them. This may make adoptive parents reluctant to disclose adoption to their children.

My Dad first learnt he was adopted when lawyers read out Jessie Iris’s last will and testament, which declared her only *adopted* son, Louis van Rensburg, heir to her estate. My sister and I, then 10 and nine, were not present at the reading – most everything we learnt later was from our Mom, and most of what I personally learnt were snippets dispensed by my Big Sis, based on her conversations as a teenager with our mother.

Disclosure of adoption to adults is as traumatic as it usually is to adolescent adoptees. “Late Discovery Adoptees” (LDAs) only discover their adoption after the age of 18 years. On average, LDAs are 37 when they learn they’re adopted. My Dad was 35. Research in 2008 by Helen J. Riley of the Australian Institute of Family Studies found that, after disclosure, LDAs experience feelings of distance from others, rejection, bitterness and frustration. LDAs in Riley’s study continued to express feelings of betrayal, loss of trust, and difficulty forgiving – some for decades afterwards.

My Dad’s foster sister Megan told me how devastated my Dad was when he learnt he was adopted. He said that everything was a lie. Megan’s assurances to my Dad that his adoptive mother had loved him and cared for him, so his birth mother was irrelevant, did not placate him.

“Your Dad couldn’t understand why he was never, ever told,” says Megan. “He was so angry and hurt. He was thinking the worst scenario: He was unwanted. And I think he took this with him until the day he died.”

CHAPTER 13
Anton: T.K.O Rejection

Feelings of rejection in adoptees are inevitable – as with my Dad, who interpreted not being told of his adoption as “evidence” of being unwanted. Psychologists say that when an adoptee experiences loss, one emotional coping mechanism is to personalise it: *What did I do or not do to be given away?* Personalising loss makes adoptees sensitive to any hint of rejection in future. They may avoid situations where there’s a risk of rejection, or they may provoke rejection to validate their negative self-image. Anton, now 43, was fostered, then adopted.

Anton runs the Southern Suburbs Boxing Club south of Joburg. Today we’re in Anton’s office alongside the gym. The office is small and contains a wooden desk, computer, and shelves of branded boxing gloves in every colour. As we talk, there are occasional, spontaneous tears as Anton recounts his memories.

“I was with my biological parents the first three years of my life, ‘ey,” says Anton, his speech that flat drawl peculiar to people of Joburg’s South. “My parents were alcoholics; they couldn’t look after me. Welfare stepped in, picked me up one cold, stormy night after shit at home, and I was put in a foster home.”

At this time Anton and his sister, *Janice, who is 11 years older than him, lived with their parents in Bellevue, east of Joburg. Janice had pre-empted a crisis and made prior arrangements with the *Walsh family who lived down the road. They fostered Janice, then 14, and Anton, three-years-old, from that night. Anton lived with the Walsh family for seven years. He regarded it as an adoption because he called the Walsh parents Mom and Dad and their children his siblings. Anton’s birth parents, a block away, were entirely absent.

“I was in foster care a block away from my parents and they never visited, ever. My parents never bothered about us,” he says.

The existence of parents who chose to be absent fuelled Anton’s feelings of rejection, as did the nature of his foster relationship with the Walsh family. He wore hand-me-downs and attended the local public school, while his foster brother attended a prestigious private school. “They had to separate us for some reason, which is bullshit,” says Anton. “There was a double standard. I got fanned out to many families to look after me on the weekends. And when the Walsh family went on holiday, I went to stay with another family.”

Anton’s rejection by his negligent birth parents just made his feelings of inadequacy at the well-meaning Walsh family even worse. He’s grateful to the Walsh family, but it was always a case of “their kids and us.”

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In 1980, when Anton was 10, his sister, Janice, then 21, got married and legally adopted her brother. By then, their birth parents had died; their father from a fatal heart attack in his sleep when Anton was in primary school, and seven years later, their mother drowned in the bath

from an epileptic fit caused by 17 shock treatments at Tara and Sterkfontein psychiatric hospitals.

Anton stumbled through adolescence raised by his devoted sister-adoptive-mother, Janice, and disciplinarian brother-in-law and adoptive step-father, *Deon. Anton's adoption caused some dissonance in his sister's marriage. Having a brother-in-law doubling as an adoptive stepfather was sometimes a double-edged sword. Theirs was an ambiguous relationship that boxing would ultimately alter. Despite the complex dynamics, Janice and Deon gave Anton all they had.

"My sister gave me everything, 'ey – motorbikes, cars, all that jazz," he says. "And they had it hard, but they made sure I had everything."

But feelings of inadequacy persisted, not helped by the fact that Anton was small and bullied.

"Some kid punched me in the face at school when I was in Standard 6. Then my brother-in-law brought me here to this club," says Anton, waving his arm towards the gym outside. "And after the first night, Deon said, 'Do you like boxing?' I said, 'Ja'. He said, 'Well, if you like boxing, you're gonna have to train hard, 'cause you get hurt if you don't."

It proved a bloody introduction, but Anton loved boxing, which would become the platform for him to prove his worth. "[Initially] kids two years younger here were beating me up 'cause I was so small. I cried every night. I had a blood nose every night, [but] I always had the best attendance. I just kept on coming back, 'ey. I had this big thing to prove to people that I *am* worthy."

In 2003, when Anton was 33, he married *Kathy, 26, and they had two children, *Tammy, 10, and *Andrew, five. The couple divorced in 2011, and Anton slipped into alcoholism – just as his parents had. But one day he recalled a talk he'd had with his Dad on the porch as a little boy. Anton had asked, "Dad, why don't you stop drinking?" His Dad answered, "It's not that easy."

"I asked my Dad that question, and my daughter was so dear to me, and she was the same age as I was then, and for some reason, that thought of me on the porch with my Dad popped into my head," says Anton. "I didn't want to be like my Dad, and I decided that day to break the generational curse and not be like my parents."

He drove himself to rehab, cleaned up, found God and turned his life around. Now he operates his gym and runs Fight With Insight, a programme that empowers inner-city children through boxing.

"You know why I box? It's my soapbox, 'ey," says Anton. "I've always had low self-esteem because I was adopted, but at times I had good self-esteem because I was a winner in boxing. I've done a lot of good stuff and eventually, this year, I realised, *jis*, you're worthy, Anton."

CHAPTER 14
Alon: Father fuels fury

I remember just one adoption discussion with my Dad. I was 16 when he first mentioned his birth mother to me, then said, "I'm going to find that bitch, Deborah." More than 20 years later, my memory of his anger remains palpable. Anger is an offspring of grief, which is one of the seven adoption issues.

Psychologically, all losses must be mourned, but an adoptee has the challenge of having to grieve someone he's (usually) never known. There are no rituals to signify the loss of his birth family; no birth mother's body, no coffin, no funeral to initiate the cycle. When my Dad learned he was adopted, his mother had just died, so he had to make sense of the loss of two mothers. When loss is insufficiently mourned and the grief cycle incomplete (as I think my Dad's was), *delayed* grief results. This may manifest in anger, like my Dad, and as it did in the case of adoptee *Alon, now 43, whose anger at his abusive birth father persists today.

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Alon's birth parents are *Lawrence and *Lorraine and they had three children: *Louise, Alon, and *Chris. They didn't have them for long though, because Child Welfare removed the children from their care when Alon was two-and-a-half.

"They were abusive parents. They were alcoholics and drug addicts, and they were violent people from the time I came into the world, until the time I was taken away," says Alon. He was put in a children's home and fostered by his (now) parents before they adopted him. Grief for a toddler who's lost his abusive parents is complex. Abused children are expected to just feel gratitude for being "rescued", but separation from their biological parents remains traumatic, irrespective of parenting ability.

Young Alon suffered a further loss when he learnt years later that he'd lost a brother, Chris, whom he never knew existed. This was exacerbated by the circumstances of Chris's death and that he died at six weeks old. The autopsy showed that Chris died of internal haemorrhaging.

"I think it was just another rage of aggression – drugs and alcohol and the chaos – and maybe Chris was crying and [Lawrence and Lorraine] just decided 'Fuuck!' and threw him on the floor," says Alon. "I don't think the intention was to murder him." But Alon still mourns the loss of the brother he never knew.

Alon was 24 when Lawrence asked to meet him. By then Alon had a decade's delayed grief simmering at the rage stage. They met in a coffee-shop in Yeoville in the summer of 1997. Alon walked in and Lance said, "Ah, my son! My son!" Alon recalls, "I looked at him and said, 'I'm not your fucking son.' It was very important to me to make that very clear to him." They met a couple of times that summer, even visiting the house in Westdene where they'd lived briefly as a family, and where Chris had died. Alon says the house held no resonance for him.

Alon says, "I remember in all these meetings I said to him, 'Why did you do it? What possessed you to do the things you did?' And he just turned around and he said, 'It wasn't us.' And he was like, 'It was the neighbours.'" Alon snorts derisively. "There were no neighbours."
Almost 20 years later, Alon's still grieving, still angry. "Lawrence had this level of arrogance about him – just a shit person, a fucking loser, a waste of time, a nobody, a no-good fucking

whatever…" Alon spits out the words. "He took *no* responsibility. I don't know why he wanted to see me. I never asked him. I didn't really give a shit."

Alon resents his birth parents for their abuse and for Chris's death. He says they should have looked after their children, like normal parents. He blames them for poisoning his prospects of "normalcy" and he's bitter that their addictions probably gave birth to his own substance-abuse demons.

"I have to take responsibility for my actions as an adult, but I do think that it definitely genetically played a part," he says. "For a long time, I wondered if they'd been normal people, would I have been more normal? Would I have been an addict? I think these issues are related to the fact that I'm adopted."

Alon reckons if he'd stayed with his birth parents, it's very likely that he'd be dead today.

Evidently his birth father, metaphorically, already is.

Chapter 15
Chasing Grandma

It's hot, dusty and dusk on Louis Botha Avenue on a Monday in October and I am in a bar. The Radium Beer Hall, Joburg's oldest pub, seems an appropriate place to meet a Private Investigator. Chad Thomas is a high-profile forensics investigator now, but when we met 24 years ago (at a high school leadership camp), he was more intent on investigating the contents of my triple-A cup bra. Nowadays his focus is white-collar crime, but I'm hoping he has some insights into tracing my Dad's birth parents, in lieu of official records.

Chad and I drink whiskey and catch up. He's lost some weight off his imposing six-foot-something frame, and I know beneath his blue branded golf shirt there's a profusion of tattoos and a gold crucifix. He speaks rapidly but articulately, like gunfire from the gat I know he's packing. In contrast his pale blue eyes are steady and intelligent; he doesn't miss a thing.

"What do you have for me, Debs?" he asks. "Did your Dad die intestate? We can search for heirs."

I have all that official documentation but doubt it'll help.

I tell Chad, "I have a possible name: Evelyn Crooke-Shaw was written in my Dad's Bible and Karen's convinced that's his birth mother."

"Hmm…interesting name, double-barrelled, very unusual," Chad mutters, stabbing buttons on one of his two smartphones lying next to our whiskies.

"There's a *Patrick Crooke-Shaw in Cape Town, works in academia…" Chad reads off his phone.

I'm stunned. My own research hadn't turned up much. Now, unexpectedly, out of the Interwebs, a name.
"How did you find that? I've looked everywhere!" I demand.

Chad shrugs. “Phone him. Say, ‘I’m doing some family origins research and wondered if there’s an Evelyn in your family?’ Wanna call him now? Do you want me to call him?” Chad offers enthusiastically.

I decline, mutter something about a noisy bar. “I’ll call him tomorrow,” I resolve. And I do.

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“Um… this is rather random,” I apologise to Patrick Crooke-Shaw after preliminary introductions on the phone. “I’m a research journalist and hope you can help me.”

“Sure, go ahead,” says Patrick easily, as if he receives random phone calls every day.

I explain that I’m researching adoption because my late father was adopted, and I think his birth mother was Evelyn Crooke-Shaw. I tell Patrick he’s the only Crooke-Shaw I could find. It turns out Patrick’s family are the only ones with that name. They’re originally from Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) and the double-barrelled name is (coincidentally) derived from an adoption centuries ago. Patrick says the adoptee then grew so attached to his adoptive parents that he combined his birth name, Crooke, with theirs, Shaw.

“That’s why we’re the only ones. I remember my father telling me this being the origin of the double-barrel surname,” he says, then adds: “And there is an Eva-Lynne in our family.”

My knees almost buckle where I’m standing under a Yellowwood tree outside my office. Patrick says Eva-Lynne was his aunt, his father’s sister. Crooke-Shaw was her maiden name. Patrick doesn’t hear my heart sinking when he tells me she died in the 1980s. My mind is racing and suddenly, somewhere in Cape Town, a family’s world risks being turned upside down.

“Let me talk to my cousins and see if they remember any adoptions in the family,” Patrick says. He sounds interested and enthusiastic. I learn later that he, too, is a researcher. He has a doctorate and lectures. I begin mentally mapping a family tree. Suddenly, a penny drops, loud and clanging in my mind.

“Oh fuck,” I breathe. “What have I done?”

This is why there are laws. This is why social workers always mediate. If this Eva-Lynne is who I think she is, then Patrick’s cousins are my half-aunts and uncles. They are my Dad’s half-siblings. And they probably have no idea.

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Things move fast after that first call with Patrick. The online correspondence flies frequently between him, my sister Karen, and me. We share documents, photographs, and splintered memories relating to the Crooke-Shaw family tree. Karen and I share what we know about Dad’s adoptive mother, Jessie Iris.

Patrick contacts his cousin whose mother was Eva-Lynne and acquires her birth certificate. This Eva-Lynne’s second (possibly third-) born son joins the email thread. His tone is accommodating:

“We may be chasing a red herring to be honest? Both my Mom [Eva-Lynne] and Dad passed away in the mid ‘80s. To the best of my knowledge, I knew of no adoptions in our family.”

I have no further correspondence with this son of Eva-Lynne’s.

Patrick is intrigued at my sister’s memory of the name in a Bible. He has no doubt that this Crooke-Shaw is someone related to him. Neither Karen nor I have our Dad’s Bible, but Karen is adamant that the name it contained, written in our Dad’s hand, was Eva-Lynne Crooke-Shaw. I’d heard the name growing up but had never seen it written. I’d always assumed ‘Evelyn’.

“I would be willing to swear under oath that I recall being told by Mom that Dad’s birth mother was Eva-Lynne Crooke-Shaw,” writes Karen. “There is no doubt in my mind.”

My sister remembers our Mom telling her in high school that Dad was searching for his birth mother. Karen says that his adoptive mother’s sister finally revealed the name. (Personally, I have no recollection of my Gran’s family beyond the age of 10).

My sister is resolute: “I clearly recall seeing the name written in Dad’s Bible and being very curious about someone who I thought might be an English Lady and wondering about her history and who she was.”

I smile at my sister’s hint of a Family Romance Fantasy. This was a theory that psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud advanced in 1909. Family romance fantasies occur in children when they fantasize about being part of an idealised family, such as royalty, rather than being a member of their own biological family.

Freud proposed that these fantasies are a psychological coping mechanism for all children as they mature, encounter challenges in their own families, and become increasingly aware of their parents’ fallibility. Adoptees, however, who usually *do* have another family, have the further challenge of having to unpack what is real and what is not, based on a family that surely exists but of which they have no knowledge. My sister’s imaginings (and I confess, some of my own) suggest that maybe Family Romance Fantasies could be inter-generationally transmitted too.

Patrick and I become Facebook friends. He comments on a graduation photo of Karen and Dad. Patrick says there are similarities between my Dad and Eva-Lynne’s second (possibly third) eldest son.

He adds, “This may just be an incredible coincidence, but you look remarkably like my Aunt *Phillippa, Eva’s sister. That really struck me immediately I saw photos of you.”

I scrutinise a family wedding portrait Patrick sends. Phillippa is second from right. I imagine I see my own eyes, dimpled chin and smile staring back at me.

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The assumed birth mother, Eva-Lynne, was born December 1924 in Rhodesia.

Her parents were *Clifford and *Naomi. They were English.

This Eva-Lynne had a sister and two brothers.

This Eva-Lynne completed a BA degree and a teaching diploma at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa. She graduated in 1946.

Where was this Eva-Lynne in August 1947 and with whom did she have sex? What were the circumstances of that late winter tryst? Was it romantic and magical, or passionate and reckless, or traumatic and disturbing?

Who was he, Eva-Lynne? Did you know his name? Was he handsome? Were you in love?

If this is our Eva-Lynne, she gave birth to my Dad in Kimberley on 3 May 1948, when she was 24 years old; exactly the age I was when I became an unmarried mother in 1997 – a half-century later and a world away.

If this is our Eva-Lynne, I gave birth to her great-grand daughter, Kate Diana.

What was your child-bearing experience, Eva-Lynne? Who was with you? Were you in pain? Were you regretful? Ecstatic? Ashamed?

Did you hold your baby after he was born? What did you name him?

This Eva-Lynne returned to Rhodesia and taught there. In April 1954, this Eva-Lynne, then 30, married a man 12 years her senior in a Catholic church in Rhodesia. She took her husband's surname.

Between 1954 and 1963, this Eva-Lynne bore a son, a daughter, and another two sons. This family moved to Cape Town in the 1970s. Three of these four children still live there.

This Eva-Lynne died in Cape Town in 1985, aged 61. My Dad would have been 37 years old then – the average age that Late Discovery Adoptees learn that they're adopted.

On a hot, hung-over Saturday afternoon in November 2014, I board a plane at O.R Tambo International Airport. Destination: Cape Town.

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Patrick Crooke-Shaw steps out in front of me as soon as I exit Arrivals at Cape Town International airport. We embrace warmly like long-lost relatives, surreptitiously searching each other's faces for similarities. I see none.

"Eva's children seemed more curious than anything else," Patrick remarks about his cousins over lunch at the V&A Waterfront, and I'm relieved to not have unduly caused trauma.

I tell Patrick I'm in Cape Town to meet a social worker who does private Search and Origins work. I'm hoping she'll have more luck than me accessing my Dad's records, which will confirm if Eva-Lynne Crooke-Shaw is my Dad's birth mother. I'd also like to know my Dad's name before he was adopted, and his birth father's name if available. After lunch Patrick and I take a scenic drive along Cape Town's peninsula. To my right, the still Atlantic

Ocean is grey-blue-black. To my left, towering mountains stand sentinel casting long, dark shadows reminiscent of secrets.

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Mrs Hanekom, 76, has worked in adoption and in private practice for over 50 years. She's recently moved to Cape Town from Kempton Park, and says she'll retire eventually, but there's so much work still to be done. I am one of her clients.

"I just need to confirm that Eva-Lynne Crooke-Shaw, with this ID number, is my Dad's birth mother," I repeat. "I'd like to know my Dad's name before he was adopted, and his birth father's name if available."

Mrs Hanekom says we need to find out *where* my Dad's adoption took place. His adoption would have been arranged by a particular agency, which would likely have been geographically organised. Mrs Hanekom says she has contacts at agencies in the former Transvaal Province. She points out that the social worker's files will contain counselling notes, reports, much more than the Registrar's.

I think of a 24-year-old Eva-Lynne mapping my Dad's life with a social worker in 1948.

It becomes clear that my first recourse should have been social workers. I hand over R200 and Mrs Hanekom says she'll make some calls. But then she says she must call the Registrar too. "I'll call Mrs Botha and Mrs Schwartz," she says authoritatively. "I think they will give me the information, but there's nothing I can do if they won't," she warns.

I sigh, marvelling at the circle of things, then surrender my inquisition to Mrs Hanekom and the Registrar of Adoptions. Again. It is December 2, 2014.

Epilogue

On 22 December 2014, two decades to the day since my Dad died, I've yet to confirm the name of his birth parents and the circumstances of his adoption. The secrets of my ancestry and origins now lie in the hands of the State and social workers. His legacy endures though, through his two grand-daughters – neither of whom he met – and a foster-grand-daughter.

My 17-year-old daughter, Kate, doesn't know her maternal grandfather's back-story any more than I do, but I'm interested in her interpretation of our genealogy, and whether not knowing her grandfather and his birth parents' origins even matters to this Millennial child. She's responding to my request that she pen some thoughts on origins and identity:

"I may have Zimbabwean, English and South African roots, but because 'origins' refers to further back than great-grandparents, I wouldn't know my origins. I believe I'm South African because I was born here. You can easily change your nationality, but the fact that you can perplexes me. Change is a process, and changing your identity based on where you were born, or your parents were born, to me is illogical. I know who I am in terms of my identity. Although physically my bloodline is confused, my identity remains my own. It is not shaped by my past or future – it is shaped by who I am today."

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My investigation into adoption was an attempt to fill in the complex emotional context of my Dad's life – that which I sensed as a child but did not understand. I've learnt that the seven adoption issues are painfully real and understanding these has illuminated what my Dad's experience might have been. Our family tapestry remains tangled, but I have insight and empathy now should anyone ask, "Who's your Daddy?"

I scroll back on my Facebook newsfeed to my sister's post on 3 May 2014:

"Thinking of my Dad, Louis van Rensburg, who would have been 66 today. I could not have wished for a better Father. So privileged to have grown up in a home with a Dad who believed his job was 'to give you roots. And then wings.' His other favourite line was 'you can't change where you come from, only where you're going'."

Maybe Karen and I will never know who our paternal biological grandparents were and maybe it doesn't really matter anymore. But it mattered to our Dad. Karen and I have done what we can to untangle the tapestry. All that remains to honour his legacy is for us to give his granddaughters roots and then wings.

Postscripts as of 14 August 2015:

- Louis' foster father, Pappa Jack, died in Vereeniging, Gauteng, on 24 May 2015, aged 87. At his funeral the author learnt for the first time that John "Jack" Arneson's second name was Louis.
- The names of Louis' birth parents, his pre-adoption name and the circumstances of his adoption have yet to be ascertained. The author awaits the release of her father's adoption file to a social worker for disclosure of these details at the social worker's discretion.