

Some thoughts on pregnancy resulting from rape

In 1970, in Scotland, I gave birth to my son, Stephen, who was then adopted. Stephen was conceived as a result of a date-rape and I had no further relationship with his father, after the event which led to the conception. After the adoption was finalised in 1970, Stephen and I had no contact with each other until we were reunited in 1991. Since our reunion we have enjoyed a close relationship. In recent years I have assisted and supported Stephen to trace and contact his father.

In 1996 I completed a post-graduate degree in social work and subsequently worked for four years counselling those whose lives had been affected by adoption separation. I am also the author of a book entitled "Adoption and Loss – *The Hidden Grief*." My thoughts on pregnancy resulting from rape are, therefore, based on my personal experience, my academic research and my professional work with mothers who have lost children by adoption, some of whom were conceived through rape.

It is my view that allowing a child conceived through rape to be adopted does not assist the mother to manage the consequences of her rape experience but, on the contrary, **adds significantly to her trauma**. I believe that the loss of her child will actually delay and complicate the mother's healing process. Adoption is also in some ways a traumatic experience for the child. I explain in my book the long term impact of adoption on both mother and child and the ways in which adoption separation creates long term unresolved grief issues for those affected.

In my experience, mothers whose children were conceived through rape suffer the same grief issues as other mothers who lose children through adoption. However, their feelings of shame and self-blame are often magnified, because of their rape experience. These mothers generally do not love their children any less, nor suffer any less from the loss of them, than mothers whose children were conceived in other circumstances. Mothers whose children were conceived through rape are often angered by society's perception that their children are, by virtue of the circumstances of their conception, less valuable to them than children conceived in other circumstances and that separating them by adoption will somehow benefit both child and mother.

Throughout my pregnancy with Stephen, I feared that I would be unable to love him, because of the nature of my conception experience. As soon as he was born, however, I realised that I had been wrong. I knew then that he was my son, that I was his mother and that we were bonded to each other in a way that could never be denied or replaced. I feel very fortunate to have gained this understanding at that time, in spite of the pain which it subsequently caused me. Had I honoured this inner knowledge, I would have cancelled the adoption plans.

However, I felt obligated and committed to proceed as arranged and to allow the adoption to take place. I was able to see and hold Stephen briefly, before he was taken from me and I told him then that I loved him, that I would always love him and that he would always be welcome in my life. Throughout the years I pined for Stephen and worried that he might resent me. I feared that my suffering would never end.

Stephen and I began searching for each other, as soon as he was able to obtain information about his identity. In Scotland, reunions between family members separated by adoption are not generally encouraged or assisted by adoption agencies. Our reunion was also delayed by his adopters, who acted to prevent Stephen and me from contacting each other. Stephen and I were delighted when we finally managed to overcome all obstacles and meet each other again.

I had always hoped that Stephen would want to know me and that he would not allow any anger he felt towards me, for allowing him to be adopted, to prevent him from renewing our relationship. By the same token, I also decided not to allow any anger I felt towards his father, to prevent Stephen from building a relationship with him. I therefore gave Stephen all the assistance I could, to trace his father and to make contact with him.

Stephen understands and accepts that, in allowing him to be adopted, I acted, in 1970, with the limited experience and understanding that I had at that time. I understand that his

father also acted, in 1969 when Stephen was conceived, with the limited experience and understanding that he had at that time. Regardless of the current legal status of our relationship, I am Stephen's mother. Likewise, the adoption order has not changed the fact that he is also a member of his father's family.

The experience of giving birth to my son, of losing him and of finding him again has taught me that a good and wonderful outcome (ie my son and my relationship with him) has been created out of an experience that seemed, at the time, to be only damaging and distressing. My son is no less precious to me and never has been, simply because of his father's behaviour in the past.

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Adoption and Recovery – Solving the mystery of reunion

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