

COMING HOME TO TRUTH

by Judith Roseboom

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I admire anyone who can write about their personal experience. It takes a lot of courage to reveal to the world, warts and all, one's personal life. Consequently this book can be quite confronting in its honesty.

Judith Roseboom's book incorporates the story of her parents and their immigration from Holland; her upbringing and the influence and admiration she had for her paternal grandmother; her family life and the loss to adoption of her first child and all the consequences associated with this horrific experience.

Judith's story is also a mixture of happy childhood memories, the anguish and grief at the loss of her child, the trauma associated with that loss and the mammoth impact it has had and is having on her life: the need to let the world know how it was for her (and other mothers) and the need to express her sense of justice as well as a cathartic exercise.

The book is sometimes difficult to read because of both the heartbreak of the content and the way that it is written. However, there are standout moments in Judith's story and she makes some telling observations.

It is truly unimaginable how she was treated and how shamed her parents were. This was highlighted by the fact that in all the months Judith was at the Unmarried Mothers' Home she only had one visit from her parents and on that day when they were at Kings Park they saw someone from their home town. She writes how she vividly remembers being heavily pregnant and having to run away and hide with her father running with her saying "Run! Run! Run!"

Another telling point was the loss of her faith in Christianity; the hypocrisy of the churches and whilst she states that she is a spiritual person she "had seen the institutional religious with their masks off." On occasions when she sought the help of the clergy it was only to her detriment. Damning indeed.

Judith's reunion with her daughter Anne had come to a halt in 1997 with Anne writing to tell her mother that she had decided not to have her "physically in her life." Judith blames adoption for this stating that "It divides loyalties and puts unbearable pressure upon everyone who becomes tangled up in the process." At the time of publication, sadly this had not changed.

Judith puts forward her feelings about the change of a child's name through adoption and offers an alternative. I quote it in its entirety: "Adoption itself is abuse. No matter how loving and how kind some of the more enlightened adoptive parents may be, adoption still equals loss for the child, natural parents, subsequent siblings and families. What if a child is a genuine orphan and has no living relatives to take care of them? Even

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then it is still an insult to that child and to its dead relatives to give him or her a new adopted name: to expect that child to accept the adoptive parents as if "born to". In such situations a form of legal guardianship would be more loving, more kind, honest and in the children's best interest."

There is also an interesting comment about "forgiveness". Judith Roseboom writes: "Forgiveness suggests that you must have done something wrong and that you deserve to be punished and blamed for it. The questions that we need to ask are: Who, after all, is responsible for the bad things that happened to myself and countless other natural mothers and their babies? Who owns the issues?". She states also that mothers in her position were unable to prevent the injustice to either themselves or their babies. "While were in our most weak and vulnerable position we were imposed upon by those holding all the power over us. Some of us, however, took on and internalised the narrative of those who perpetrated the injustice. We believed that it was our fault for being sinners, or irresponsible, or incompetent, or not respectable or good enough."

There are lots of points about Judith Roseboom's story which I have not commented on - this is a very personal story but the bottom line is adoption ruins lives. The book benefited from the inclusion of pictures thereby giving a personal touch and the inclusion of a piece of art work by Jan Kashin shakes one up somewhat.

The book is set out in an easy-to-read manner and this is a story worth telling, however I think there is a disservice to both the author and her story as well as the plight of all mothers who have lost their children to adoption by not having the story thoroughly edited for continuity, structure and punctuation, as it can sometimes ramble and be repetitive.

At seventy-six A5 pages it is a manageable book in size if somewhat challenging in content. It certainly highlights how the severing of the mother/child bond has affected this mother, her child and to a greater or lesser degree the thousands of other mothers and their children throughout Australia and the world. It's a story which has been heard many times in all its variations, told by many mothers who have lost their children to adoption; the losses highlighted in this book can sometimes be overwhelming.

Diane

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