

I am a 35 year old Daughter of a Mother who lived in institutional care. Mum's Mother abandoned her, her 2 younger Brothers and her Dad when Mum was 4 years old. Mum's Dad left Mum at Fullarton Girls Home near Adelaide and moved to Victoria with the boys. Mum never saw her Mother again and had little contact with her Dad or Brothers in the following 13 years. Mum left Fullarton when she was 15 and briefly lived with a foster family in Western Australia. She then found work in Victoria and married my Dad at 18. I was born 2 years later and my Brother 18 months after me.

I do not have good memories of life at home with my family. Growing up I rarely talked with my Mother. We did yell at each other a lot though. We wasted many years yelling at each other.

When I was 15 Mum's Dad died. In hindsight this was a trigger for other events which followed.

Mum walked out on my Dad numerous times. Sometimes their separation lasted a day, sometimes a week or longer. Mum always returned and each time she would continue yelling at us.

Mum's first suicide attempt occurred by drug overdose when I was 17. She returned home from hospital and the yelling soon resumed. I persuaded Dad to take Mum to counselling. Mum did not believe she had a problem. A significant episode in my relationship with Mum occurred a few weeks after the overdose. Yelling and pushing me against a wall she screamed that I was the reason she took the pills.

Mum's second suicide attempt occurred out in the bush with Dad nearby. They returned from a weekend away and something was very wrong. Last year, 15 years after the event, Dad and I talked about that weekend. He told me how he saved Mum from shooting herself. There was also a third suicide attempt which occurred after I had left home. I had long suspected this and Dad and I talked about it too for the first time last year.

I left home at 20 and completed an Honours degree that year. The day I left home I told Mum I was never speaking to her again. I did not have a conversation with her until November last year.

In July last year I read a newspaper article about the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care. I recognised similarities to my Mother and to myself and told a Psychologist I was seeing. She made the connection between my Mum having lived in institutional care and the issues I was experiencing. Since this big discovery for me, I really want to find out more. I also want to raise awareness of how it has affected the Partners, Daughters, Sons and extended family of people who grew up in institutional care.

Dad walked out on Mum a few years after I left home. My parents divorced and eventually remarried other people. My Brother remained living at home during some of those years. He is still very angry with Mum and has no contact with her. Sadly my Brother now has little contact with Dad or myself either.

When I was younger I felt different and alone, even though I had a large group of school and university friends. I think there is a stigma around suicide that creates a barrier to it being talked about openly. I was so angry with Mum for blaming me for her first suicide attempt. I was scared she was going to die and I did not want her to die. But I was angry with her for surviving too.

I shut down and buried the pain for years. I thought I could just get on with my life and I tried very hard to. But there was always a gap. And I did not realise that I had lost connection with my positive feelings too. I would not

allow myself to develop close relationships with anyone. It is one reason I am still single and without children of my own.

I cannot recall Mum ever hugging me. I realise now how hard it must have been for her to raise 2 children. She missed out on a lot by living in institutional care.

I also realise now that what happened is not Mum's fault or my fault. I long for a close relationship with her.

I try to live in the present and not worry about the future or fret over the past. I am grateful for my happy life. The pain is slowly healing.