

## **Tammy tells her shocking story to the conference of professionals in London 30th October 2006:-**

"In the best interest of the child" that's what the professional's state, but even the professionals and the family courts can be wrong as they were in my case.

Let me explain about my birth family, and myself. I am a young adopted adult; I was taken from my mum nearly 17 years ago on a false allegation, I was seven months old and sitting in my bouncing chair, my mum had gone into the kitchen to make me a night feed. I was happily playing with an activity toy, which I dropped on the floor; I leant forward to reach the toy but the chair followed me and tipped forward falling on top of me. I sustained a bruise on my cheek. And that's where my life was changed forever.

My case was heard within the family court in the years 1989 which lasted all the way to 1992. I was placed with a set of foster carers whom I stayed with for 13 months.

Then one-day social services accused the foster carers of suffering from depression and removed me from their care! I was then placed with three lots of emergency foster carers before being placed with my pre adopters, who then became my parents.

While this was happening to me my mum gave birth to my brother Cameron. One minute after his birth social services (a male) walked into the labour suite and tried to hand a place and safety order in writing to my mum who was laid on the bed with no clothes on and she had not even delivered the placenta. Medical staff asked the social worker to leave on three occasions eventually the social worker left the labour suite, leaving my mum very distressed and losing all her dignity.

My mum and Cameron went home to my grandparents where they resided until the 28th of December 1990. My mum then went to the family court as social services were trying for an interim care order to remove my brother from her care. My mum fought and won full parental rights of Cameron and no further action was taken.

All my mum wanted was to fight for me, she attended many family courts, which were held in secret and she was not allowed to talk about our case or me to anyone.

Time passed and Cameron reached the age of 21 months old, when the social services actually reached a date for my freeing order, which was in the year of 1992; there were no concerns to Cameron's welfare. She was an excellent mother to him.

The judge who heard my case made his decision on the basis that social services had delayed my case for over two and a half years. On reading his decision to my mum (he stated) "Miss Coulter if I return your daughter home to you, you will be a stranger to her" and on that decision I was freed for adoption and my whole future was completely changed.

Finding out that you are adopted is one of the worst feelings in the world because you feel that all your identity you have known of yourself is a lie; for example your whole childhood and personality.

I found out through photos that my brother was still with my mum and is one and a half years younger than me. This was very upsetting and left me wondering why my mum wanted my brother and not me.

Left with these unanswered questions and feeling very confused; like I did not belong anywhere I wanted to find the truth, and the answers to my questions, the only person who could answer them was my mum.

My decision to find my birth family was not supported in the way in which I would have liked from my adoptive parents. I went about looking for my mum by first of all ringing support after adoption that told me I must wait until I am 18 years of age and would not offer me any help or advice. Which left me more confused and very upset?

In January this year on a Thursday night I received a phone call from my best friend. She told me to go over to her house, as it was very important. I had no idea of what I was to be told. Her laptop was placed on her bed and she told me to read the posting. I was ecstatic as I read the information, which confirmed that my mum was looking for me as much as I was looking for her.

My friend who knew as much as I did about my adoption found the posting when secretly putting my name on GENES REUNITED. I found myself emailing her my mobile number as I knew the same information which was written in her posting; which included information that nobody would have known about me.

I waited three and a half hours for the phone call which would change my whole life, and answer all the unanswered questions which had been tormenting me since the age of about 11 when I moved to Comprehensive School where I met many other adopted and fostered children.

Waiting for the phone call was the most exciting and precious time of my life, the hours seemed like weeks. In the next breath I was actually talking to my mum on the phone, we spoke for an hour about everything that we could. We put the phone down and later that evening I rang my mum back and told her I know it was short notice but could we please meet the following morning and she agreed to.

Our meeting was very emotional for the both of us, neither of us spoke we just put our arms around each other and cried together, we held each other very tight and I cant explain how happy I was feeling.

After many secret meetings I decided to tell my adoptive parents about my news, I did not tell them for about two months because I knew what their reaction would be. When I told my mum, as my dad was at work she cried and turned her back on me making me feel very isolated as if I had done something wrong. They never did understand why it was important that I find my birth family nor did they support me at the emotional time. I was keeping in contact via the Internet with my birth family as my mobile phone was confiscated; however they also stopped me from using the Internet to stop any contact, which I was having with my birth family. During this time I was studying for my AS levels which I failed due to all the stress and confusion.

The way my adoptive parents were towards my other life caused a huge conflict in the house making life unbearable at home and at school. I was eventually turned away from my home due to arguments other than my birth parents; this is when I phoned my birth mum, as I had nowhere else to turn. It was too late when I was asked to return to the house I did not want to be treated like a child nor did I want to my feelings to be ignored any longer, so I decided to move in with my birth family.

This brings me to why I am here today, I was a child who was wrongfully removed from the care of my mother and most of all I have had the rights taken away from me to have enjoyed the right to a family life with my natural family.

I would like to say I have had a good upbringing by my adoptive parents and I love them very much, however the complication of my adoption also ruined my relationship with my adoptive parents, as I only wanted to find the truth about my life.

I am publicly speaking today on behalf of children and parents who have also been through the secrecy of family courts and the injustices that have taken place and do still take place and the devastation of what one decision that determines the future of a child can cause to a whole family.

Since I have moved in with my birth family I see the relationship between my mother, brother and sister and cannot help feeling like I have missed out no matter how much I fit in now. We have all bonded very well, I now feel as if I fit in somewhere and feel I can be myself as I have found out who I really am and that my mum never did anything wrong. Over the years Yvonne has been fighting to prove her innocence and that an injustice has taken place. I am very angry and also upset that my mum was treated like a criminal and punished for life on something that she never did, and she had the right to a family life taken away.

Let me explain to you how I am feeling:

- Confused
  - Hurt
  - Stripped of my identity
  - I missed out on a relationship with my brothers and sisters, mum and dad and other close relations
  - Exhausted through lies
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- I know I am not the only person to have gone through the hell of secrecy in family courts and hope to have expressed the way in which they will feel and are feeling at my age.

Changes that I would like to see happen.

- 1) For medical evidence used in the courts to not be based on probabilities when determining a child's future, it must be fact.
- 2) To stop social services making medical diagnoses when not qualified to do so.

3) For social services when conducting assessments to be thorough and not based on self-opinions but facts.

4) For an independent body who is impartial to social services to be brought in when social services are assessing a family and to check they are following all guide lines of social work.

5) More support for families with whatever reason; a low IQ, a mother whom has depression, a parent that has suffered domestic violence and also a parent whom has a disability. More outside agencies should be involved to help put support packages in place to help families stay together and have the right to a family life.

6) Slow integration of a child back with its natural family should be paramount and decisions to take away the child should be the last resort. For example my mum was told she would be a stranger to me if I were returned home to her however my foster parents and my adoptive parents were also strangers.

7) The most important factor of us all being here today is about the secrecy surrounding the family courts and why they should be opened, you have all listened to my story and many of you would have read similar stories to mine in the media. I am of age where I can talk about the detrimental effects that the secrecy of the family courts has caused to me.

Many of the children who have been taken in the past and are still being taken do not have a voice.

The opening of the family courts would make it a fairer, non judgmental and a more impartial system which would help children that are left in the hands of abuser's and would also work by stopping children from being wrongfully removed and injustices from taking place.

So please when considering the opening of the family courts take into account that we are all human and we have feelings and the way in which the courts have been working up to this day has been inhumane in many cases and human rights have been exploited.

The detrimental emotional effects and the separation, has on children torn apart from their birth families, lasts a life time.