

She wondered why she was different

This mother who believes she has FASD herself has raised three children. She used alcohol through one pregnancy and abstained through the other two. The child of the 'alcohol' pregnancy is now experiencing very marked behavioural problems and has developed an alcohol dependency; the other two children are 'A' students. She herself is the child of alcoholic parents and was adopted as a baby into a very loving family. Even though she had the best of upbringings she always felt different.

I was adopted into a very nice family when I was a baby because both my biological parents were alcoholics. I was one of five children, the others ended up staying with my parents and they always say that I was the lucky one for getting away from them. My biological mother and father owned a mail run over in Bendigo and they would usually start by having a drink first thing in the morning. Whenever they did that, which was most days, my brothers would have to take over and do the mail run.

My dad eventually got cancer and died and I don't know where my mother is now. They both treated my brothers and sisters very badly. One of the things they did which had physical repercussions for my brother John later in life was to lock the fridge so that none of the children could eat anything. Now John has trouble with his joints because of the lack of nutrition when he was young.

It is understandable why I was adopted out but I don't know why my brothers and sisters weren't because they were dreadful parents and should have been reported to Family Services.

Another example of my mother's psychological problems and dysfunction was that she told my brother Joshua a lie when he was little and she was about nine months pregnant with me, that he had pushed her down the steps and I had died. I guess he never got over the guilt of that and he never knew the truth because he committed suicide three years before I began looking for my biological family. That's what alcohol does to a family.

The only person in my family who could be called normal is my older sister who now owns a mango farm. She doesn't drink or use drugs. Her family is stable and her children are well looked after. She doesn't treat them the way she was treated. My other siblings are all alcoholics or drug addicts and all have huge problems just like me.

My mother's mother was also an alcoholic so my mother probably had FAS too along with most of my siblings. I know I have had many problems in my life and when Elizabeth told me about FAS I knew that was me too. Even though I was adopted into a good family who treated me well, I still didn't turn out right. I used to find that hard to understand because I was only a baby when I left my biological family and from then on had everything I ever needed and I know I was loved and cared for and yet it still didn't make any difference – I still turned out exactly like most of my brothers and sisters. That just has to be something more than environment and now that I know I'm really glad. Because now I know that it's not just me doing everything wrong and being stupid all of the time – it's because I have a brain injury. I can't tell you how good it is to know that.

My adoptive father worked on the London Bridge before he emigrated to Australia in the early sixties and joined the Victorian Police. His wife, my adoptive mother, owned an art gallery.

Even though there was no distinction by my adopted mum and dad between myself and their biological children, I felt different. I didn't do well in school, I didn't even go to school half the time and I always found it extremely hard to control my anger.

When I was young I started drinking heavily. I'd go to parties, get drunk and sleep with someone and come home the next morning. My family didn't know why I did these things; nor did I. They sent me to a psychiatrist to find out what was wrong with me. He said I had ADHD and put me on dexamphetamine. It didn't work. I kept getting into trouble and didn't know how to get out. I never did understand how I got there. It was all so confusing to me. I found that being bad was better and easier because I craved attention and felt that at some level it could make me happy although it never did. I never understood why my adoptive brothers were always happier than me.

My behaviour got worse and worse and eventually I was caught by the police and charged with being uncontrollable and became a Ward of the State. I was sentenced to Youth Detention at 13, that was at Springvale Road, Nunawading – I will never forget that address.

I would always get into mischief but it never really connected with me that it was the mischief that got me into bigger trouble. It only started out as small stuff in the beginning but then without my realising escalated into bigger misbehaviour and then into big problem behaviour where the police had to become involved – I can't explain it.

I always thought bad things were fun but my adoptive brothers knew what was the right thing and what was the wrong thing and if they ever did the wrong thing they only did it for a short time. Not me – I would keep doing it until I got into trouble.

I had my first son Jeffrey when I was sixteen but he was adopted out because I couldn't manage him. I didn't drink through this pregnancy or those of my other two children because my adoptive father and brothers looked after me and wouldn't let me drink. I did drink through my pregnancy with Marcus because I was with a man who was an alcoholic and so we both drank. I am pretty sure that I would have drunk through my other pregnancies if my family hadn't been looking after me.

All through my pregnancy I drank and used drugs and now I see in Marcus the same problems I had when I was young. When he was older I did wonder if my drinking had affected him but at that time I didn't follow through on that thought. I didn't know at that time that alcohol could cause problems and for the first few months I didn't know I was pregnant anyway.

I drank a lot of Tia Maria and Kahlua. I remember one time my husband was at the pub and I got angry that I was the one always left at home because I was pregnant so I went to the pub and got so drunk I vomited all night. Marcus was born prematurely and was always sick. He always had something wrong with him, colds, infections, stomach upsets, diarrhoea and anything else that went around.

I found it all so difficult to handle. I couldn't seem to handle things the way that my brothers did. My brother Robert is the only one who understands that I have something wrong with me and understands that the things I do sometimes are because of this and are beyond my control. When I get in trouble I get depressed, I can't think clearly and I need to talk to other people about it. It's like it's not my own brain that puts things into perspective – I need someone else's brain so that I can understand things.

I ran away from my last husband because he was a big drinker. I seem to always be around people who drink and use drugs. My other children are all OK, Marcus is the only one affected. I owe this to my family because when I was pregnant with the others they took care of me and wouldn't let me drink. My other children are all 'A' students and poor Marcus still can't read and write properly and he is eighteen.

I had to tell him to leave home because he was drinking way too much and disrupting the other children. Coming home drunk and noisy and bringing other people I didn't know into the house. Now he is gone the children are happy but I feel dreadful that I have let him go and he is out there somewhere hurting other people. He is living with

a fifteen-year-old girl in a caravan park and he drinks so much. He is so much like me I just don't know how to handle him. I'm ashamed that I put my son in this position. He can't sit down and have one drink, he has to drink the whole bottle and then he gets sick but then he gets up and does the same thing the next day.

I have tried to explain FAS to Marcus but he gets angry. I don't know whether he is angry at me or angry at the situation. So of course with both of us having anger problems, the discussion is always going to end badly. I have been to anger management classes but they don't seem to work with me. I'm still a bit of an air head but I have a bit of a balance now. I am thirty-six years old and I think that my age has something to do with it.

I see so many people I am sure have FAS, most of them I know that their mums are alcoholics or drink a lot and the worst thing is that they don't know they have it and their parents don't know they have it and their friends and partners don't know they have it but I can see their behaviour and their struggles and I feel so sorry for them. I've also seen a lot of pregnant women drinking and I've spoken to them and told them what could happen. Unfortunately, a lot of women don't believe me and they don't stop. I think their doctors aren't giving them enough information. There is one pregnant lady up the street who always has a stubby in her hand. I have never seen her without it.

Because society is the way it is today in Australia you would think the government would be more willing to face the situation with FAS – otherwise what will happen to our children's children? I have never seen any teenager who doesn't drink. I know there are underage girls drinking huge amounts and sleeping around. Will they get pregnant and drink? You bet!

I feel lonely and lost because I wonder what is going to happen to my little boy. The other boys go swimming, bike riding and don't drink or use drugs. I made the mistake with Marcus by drinking when I was pregnant with him, I made the mistake and now I've pushed him away and he is doing bad things to other people. I just wish other people would learn from my mistakes. It's not what we are doing to the world that we have to worry about, it's what we are doing to each other.