



## *All done with mirrors!*

*(An illusion accomplished that is purposefully deceptive.)*

**So there was I: the unknowing subject of deception, a decade on from emigration to the antipodes - mid-twenties gent, wavy locks, gangster moustache, burgundy flares - at the dining table nonchalantly slicing open a slim white envelope. Little did I realise the contents were to change my life irrevocably.**

I recall the exact moment. It was a world before the domain of digital, when communication was the province of paper, serviced by postage stamps. I eyed the letters with curiosity. One, official looking with a UK stamp, puzzled me. As I withdrew the two papers, the penny dropped: a response from London. My employer in Australia had demanded birth details; passport would not suffice.

The first sheet, or half sheet torn along a dotted line, was termed an *extract*: a crude typewritten document, to which handwritten information, in blue ink, had been added. I turned to the accompanying letter, which explained a search found no birth record for names submitted, regarding father or mother, but that a certificate *had* been retrieved for those given as my own.

The extract showed my decidedly Scottish-leaning quartet of names: the first in respect of His Majesty, the rest in deference to my Gaelic pedigree. Strangely, the names written next to MOTHER were a replica of the trio I recollected for my elder sister, 25 years my senior. Birth-place correct. Against FATHER was scrawled a single word: *unknown*. There in Adelaide, at 26 years of age, I came to know I was a bastard!

It took just moments to conclude the preceding years had been something of a sham. I'd been soundly deceived by a posse of people, who until then, I would have trusted with my last breath. It took a further two or three years to confront a mishmash of conflicting thoughts. Who knew the truth? Who did not? Was I stupid? The person I believed to be my mother (my grandmother) was almost fifty when I supposedly emerged from her somewhat wrinkled vagina! And I had lived with my mother (believing she was my sister) for the past ten years! Jesus!

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Years later I was astounded to find Hollywood actor, Jack Nicholson, recounting a astonishingly similar experience. For 26 years he lived with people he believed to be his parents and sister, when the 'sister' (17 years older) died of cancer. Ten years after that, he discovered those people he'd grown up with, were his grandparents and his mother! He never knew his father. Nicholson commented:

*"... it was a pretty dramatic event, but it wasn't what I'd call traumatizing. By the time I found out who my mother was, I was pretty well psychologically formed. As a matter of fact, it made quite a few things clearer to me. If anything, I felt grateful."*

At the time of discovery, I was younger than the actor, but the story is remarkably comparable: a cover up by grandparents to protect daughter and child. Like Jack, I was affected, but in the end came to terms with it.

Nicholson also remarked he was *"very impressed by their ability to keep the secret, if nothing else."* I too was begrudgingly impressed by my family's capacity to maintain the secret for so many years.

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*Duncan Gregory*

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