An adoptee’s healing through creativity.

My name is Terrie Novak and I’m an adoptee.

Saying it like that feels like I’m introducing myself at some sort of AA meeting – Adoptees Anonymous or something. Why is it people don’t announce, right up front, how they came into their family? Is this the same as announcing something is wrong with me? If people knew, would they treat me differently? I told my bio son I was going to begin conversations with people about what it’s like to be adopted. He asked, “Mom, why would you want to make people uncomfortable like that?” I was a proud mother in the moment because, there are plenty of people who say, I’m an adoptee, without even realizing a lot of people suffer from being adopted, and I was one of them.

I was adopted as an infant and that wasn’t seen as unusual in my family. We always knew we were adopted, me and my adopted bother. And we always knew we were loved. We knew we belonged. So much so, that as a child, I thought all kids were adopted. It was a strange discovery to understand that most women didn’t go to the adoption agency to pick up their babies, they got pregnant instead. When I was 18, thanks to heroic efforts of my first mother, I had access to her contact information and over the years we were able to become friends and create a loving relationship that extended to my biological siblings.

That’s how adopted life was for me, always roses. Until a funny thing happened. I was compelled to write a whole book about adoption. Compelled. There was no stopping me. I was determined to write about the love involved in adoption. After hours of interviews and months of research, my compulsion did blossom into a story. Then without warning, my heart shifted gears, and I found myself leaving books and articles unread, because they were just too painful to take in. It took a Facebook moderator kicking me out of an adoptee support group, for me to finally realize there was plenty of healing to be had. Healing I didn’t even know was needed.

Soon the voices inside my head and heart began to speak up. Their questions were personal and probing, loud and relentless. Why did my parents keep my first mother’s identity a secret for five years? Why did it take six more to go meet her? Why didn’t I believe her when she told me the relinquishment was coerced? I typed. I read. I followed the voices and they followed me. They sat at my writing desk through the long solitude of the pandemic. Until that day. The day I clicked send and submitted the last revision of my book to my editor. As I relaxed into a shower an undeniable sense of aloneness poured over me. At first, I couldn’t figure out what it was. I’ve lived by myself for years, and my situation was the same. Except. The voices were silent. They were gone and my mind was quiet. I could hear the nothingness echo. And I knew healing happened because it felt like grief.