

# Please forgive me, son, I gave you up

■ Former Advertiser journalist **DEREK PEDLEY** was born Abraham Maddison. He has spent two years researching a memoir inspired by a letter his mother wrote, 50 years ago next month, as she struggled under pressure to surrender him. ■ Today he is sharing that letter to mark the 50th anniversary of the peak year for forced adoption in Australia.

## Joye Maddison's letter to her son Abraham Maddison, May, 1972

How do I begin to describe or even explain what has happened over the last nine months? My emotions were mixed with love, happiness, sadness and fright. When I first began to realise I may be carrying a child I just thought it was my imagination, and I prayed that my periods would come. But of course they didn't. It must have been god's will for me to have a child his child. But still I would not face up to it. I felt very alone and afraid and I used to pray to God to help me.

I still went back up to Darwin trying desperately not to think about what was growing inside me. Darwin was my thing, but I knew I couldn't stay there forever. The nights on the beach by myself were beautiful. The sounds of the waves, the smell of the air. The sand that I lay upon was so comforting during my times of loneliness and fright. And when I was out on the boat although I was as sick as a dog I didn't really care because I seemed to live in a small world of my own with just god, the understanding ocean and nature. I would sit on deck at night and just look and remember the calm sea was my closest friend other than god. God's tiny creatures in sea seemed to talk to me, for they are peaceful and loving.

I must interrupt the story here as I am going to see my baby son Abraham. I am really frightened. God please help me and forgive me for I know he is your child not mine. I am sitting here just waiting for them to me I can see Abraham.

Just thank god our child that we will see for the first time. And never to see him again please look after him and tell him I do love him even though I am not going to keep him. He will remain in my heart always my love and thoughts are his.

God help him to forgive me for what I am doing to him. Do you think I am doing the right thing not keeping our child? Please answer me in your own way and whichever way you decide I know it will be for the best. Just give me a sign for you are the only one who ever help me. I know you have a lot of children to look after, but please help our child Abraham Simon.

They didn't come afterward to get me. They don't want me to see my baby. I think of our baby son constantly. I want to keep him so badly, but I don't know if that is the right thing to do. Even now I feel alone and frightened. Give me strength to carry on whichever way I decide and we decide.

I am now in need great need of something, but I don't know want. Maybe it is self-pity, but I don't feel sorry for myself so what am I in need of. Please help me.

“I just want to die ... I don't think I could go on without you

Well, my dear son Abraham Simon, I have finally seen you. You are really beautiful and I really love you so much I cannot put it into words.

Please forgive my son for what I have done and what I am doing to you. Only hope I am doing the right thing for you.

I remember you when you were so much smaller. Oh boy could you kick and kick a lot. But that only reminded me that you were alive and growing with so much love. You didn't even cry or open your eyes. Didn't you want to see your Mum.

Yes, Abraham I am your Mum and I love you deeply please don't forget me, for I will never ever forget you or your sweet peaceful loving face.

Please think of me, and when you are grown up, please come and see me when you grow up to be a fine young man. Abraham, please do one more thing, love your new Mummy and Daddy whoever they may be. I am sure they will really love you, because you see Abraham, they probably can't have any little boys or girls of their very own so please try and make them as happy as possible.

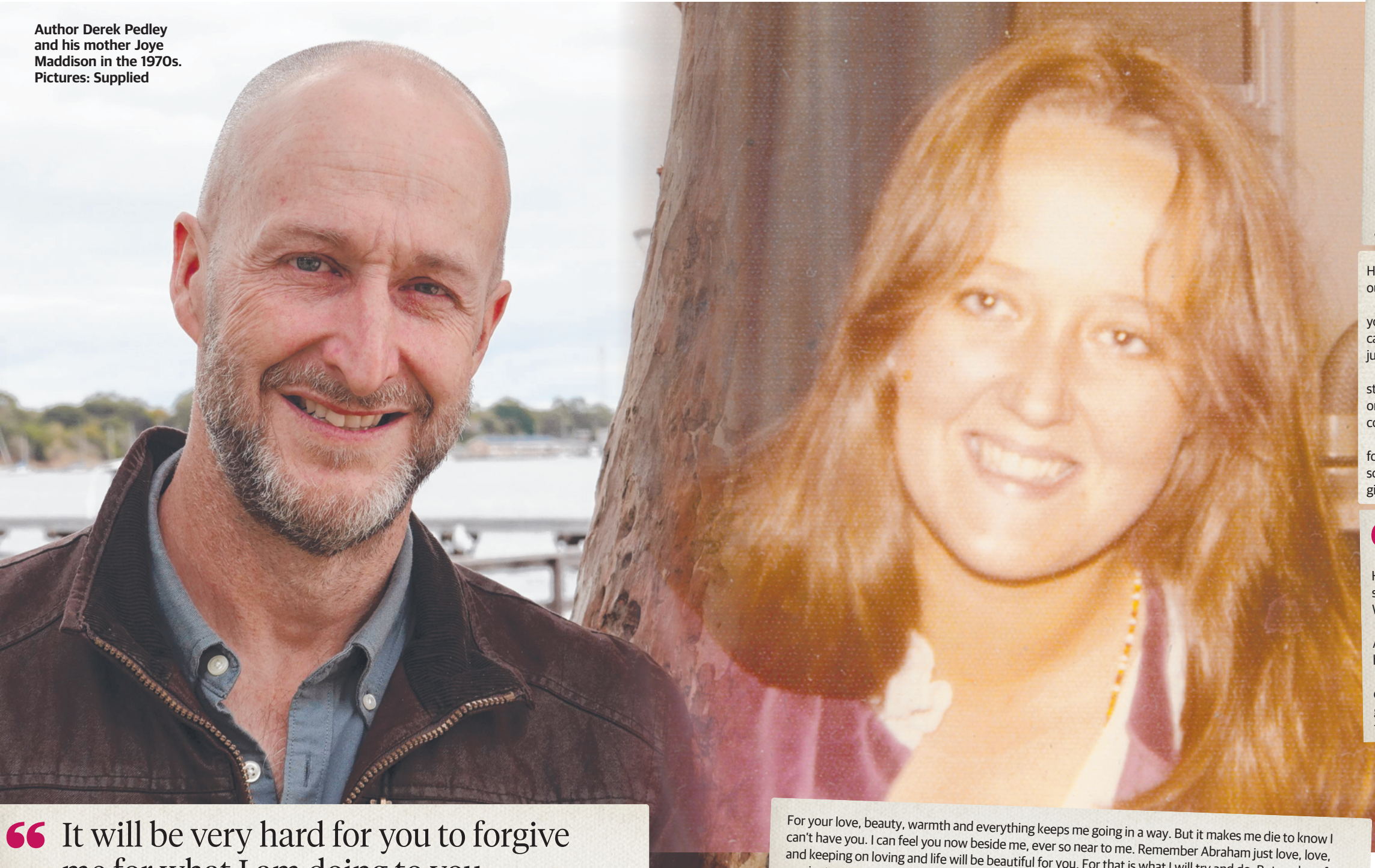
I think I should tell you something about your father. This is very sad because I didn't love him in the way that I should have, but after all he is your father. He doesn't even know that he has a son. I know I don't deserve your forgiveness but please forgive me my beautiful son. I cannot repair the damage that I have done. I hope with all my heart that you do understand.

I have asked God to look over you and take care of you. I know he will. Have faith and love all. Abraham, I feel so very close to you at this moment my heart is full of love and also of so much sadness. Yes, there is a song on radio at the moment. First Time Ever I Saw Your Face. Yes, I will never forget your gently serene face. What more can I say my son? Only that I love you so much it hurts and fills me with sadness.

I just want to die because I don't think I could go on without you the beside me. Help me my son. Help me.



Author Derek Pedley and his mother Joye Maddison in the 1970s. Pictures: Supplied



“It will be very hard for you to forgive me for what I am doing to you

How are you feeling today my son? You were out in the sun today, but I didn't see you. I want you more than ever now, so please help me, Abraham. As I need you so badly. Tomorrow I will come and see you and cuddle you. And I am very glad that you will at least feel the warmth and love of my arms. Please don't forget the feel of your mother's arms as I am terribly sorry and sad that it will be the only cuddle or feel that I will give you.'

Please forgive me Abraham, I know it will be very hard for you to forgive me for what I am doing to you. I love, I love, I love my son please don't forget me for I shall never ever forget you. My love you for is gently, sweet, peaceful passionate and so deep, but also sad, burning love at the same time. I just don't know what I am going to do without you. Goodnight my son, my only man. Yes, you are asleep now. For there is peace in loving and believe me it comes from the heart. For you Abraham are all of my heart. Love me, please LOVE ME even thought I don't deserve your love.

This time I week ago I was beginning to have you. But I was selfish because I couldn't take the pain that you were giving me so they had to drug me up. Forgive me for not allowing you to come natural. It is now 9.15 you were really on the way then, you really wanted to see the world. I can't quite remember exactly what was happening at this time, so please forgive me once again.

Only 10 minutes and you will in the world, but not my world, I am so sorry Abraham. Only 3 minutes until you are born. How beautiful yet how very saddening for us both in a way. Your head is through and you have begun life, but I have only given you love to start life with. You have left me now, but you are still with me so very, very much. I love you my precious Abraham.

keep her baby demolished all my defences. She did not want to surrender me. She was a terrified, vulnerable 18-year-old alone in Perth's King Edward Memorial Hospital, given no other options except to sign papers that delivered me to the government's machinery of adoption.

Have I explained that clearly enough? My mother wrote a letter shortly after I was born that reached across almost half a century – bridging my adoption, our estrangement and her death – to connect with my troubled psyche and deliver agonising truths that forced me to embark on a self-excoriating, life-altering journey. I

put my future on the line to uncover difficult truths about my mother, my father, and myself.

Some of that story is explored on SBS's genealogical mystery series Every Family Has A Secret, which used my DNA to track down my father and his family.

That extraordinary adventure also helped me find evidence that confirms my "origin story" theory that I was conceived at or shortly after Pink Floyd's first ever Australian concert, in Melbourne in 1971.

And next year I'll bare my soul, and darkest secrets, when CRAZY BASTARD – A Memoir of Forced

Adoption is published. But right now, with my life finally in a better place after this arduous journey, I find myself counting down the days to the 50th anniversary of the day I was taken from my mother.

Because this letter she wrote me has burned the moment into my soul – and it's helped me recognise that this earliest memory of separation trauma has always been there, deep inside me. It's also finally forced me to walk a mile in her shoes.

For much of my life, I didn't truly understand the world Joye grew up in, when harsh prejudice and hypocritical moral judgment reigned supreme. A world where it was perfectly acceptable to steal newborns from young mothers and give them to married couples deemed more morally worthy.

A world where my mother was repeatedly turned away when she tried to reclaim her baby, then treated like dirt by doctors when her psyche collapsed under the weight of grief she carried but never shared, except in her diaries. A world that robbed Joye of her right to be a mother, and my right to be Abraham, her son.

To honour the memory of my mother, and to mark the 50th anniversary of the day I was taken away from her, I'm sharing her letter.

It's a time capsule from an Australian labour ward, written in the peak year of this country's shameful baby-taking era and it's the voice of a generation of mothers who never, ever wanted to surrender their children.

**Derek Pedley's CRAZY BASTARD – A Memoir of Forced Adoption will be published by Wakefield Press in early 2023; Every Family Has a Secret, Season 3, available on SBS On Demand**

“My love for you will never die

My dear son yesterday the 12/5/72 I gave you away so please please forgive me for that. Seemed to me to be the only human thing to do. But with every breath that I take I will pray that you are being loved and cared for. But there will always be someone who loves you deeply and is constantly thinking of you.

How is my beautiful son today? We did see each other. I desperately need your love and want you. I know now that you want me, need me and I hope you love me. Perhaps if I begin tomorrow to explain how I felt when we were together. My heart my whole being was overwhelmed with love and so many more things.

Abraham, why I am doing this to you and to myself. I just can't work anything out anymore. But there is one thing that I do know for certain and that is my love for you will never die.

The moments I spent with you are every so precious to me and I will treasure them always. My mind Abraham is so mixed, do you mind if I speak to you with my mind, for that way you might understand me better, and try and forgive me for what I have done to you. For it is not goodnight for we are always talking and loving together as one.

Hi Abraham, how are you today, I hope with all of my heart, that you are happy. For I feel so very down and out, I think most of it is because of you. I want to keep you, so much it hurts me to even think about it.

It is not too late to change my mind about keeping you, but please understand why I am not going to keep you. I am trying to do the right thing for you but am I doing the right thing for you. I know you love me for I can feel your love. My love for you is so strong that it is tearing me apart bit by bit, but I don't care anymore just so long as you loved, happy and giving love.

Everything is becoming too much for me for I just can't go on anymore. My mind is like a ball of tangled string not being able to find the beginning. Don't get the impression that I don't care about you or anybody or anything. My whole being is so screwed up. I just want to run away from everything. In other words, I am a coward and I just want to die. That is what I am a selfish coward.

Abraham I will pray that you are strong and that you can handle everything that comes your way. Please forgive me God for not going on but I can't anymore. Watch over all and let there be love and peace in this screwed up world. I know I am not the only one with hangups, but I am not stronger enough to go on. Forgive me my son and God.

“Why did I ever make such a mistake?

Hi Abraham. I've been thinking about you so much lately I just had to write a few lines to you. Every day it seems to get worse. I don't think I can handle it much longer. Why did I ever make such a mistake? Why Why. You are nearly seven months old now. I only pray that you loved by your new Mummy and Daddy.

The thought of you calling someone else Mummy really hurts me a lot. Them calling you their son. Wow Abraham it really sounds so unreal – it just isn't so. I still can see you now the day I nursed you. Love and happiness shone from your eyes. Abraham what are we going to do.

I feel so lonely and lost. I know that you think of me and love, but I feel so hassled about everything else. I am so screwed up I just don't know what I am going to do. Please give me strength as I am trying to give you. Abraham, I ask one thing of you please try and find me when you are able, for I will be searching for you until there is no more time. Goodnight – God Bless. Keep You and Love You.

“Yesterday was the final D day for me

Hi Abraham, well my son you are really gone now. Yes, yesterday was the final D day for me, and I thought it was Friday and I suddenly realised that 11/6/1972 was Sunday. I really don't know how say sorry to you for I am sure now that I have made a mistake, I shall never forgive myself for what I have done. Please forgive me, and I shall keep searching for you until I find, and I only hope that one day we shall meet and so that I can say many more things too. I know you will never fully forgive me completely. But my son, please love your knew mother and father, I only hope that they are beautiful parents to you. Never, Never shall I forgive myself for what I have done.

Dear God, I know I have sinned, but I sincerely ask for forgiveness. But I can't even forgive myself. Please, Please take care of him and tell him I do love him dearly. For I ask one thing now. Please guide us both so that one day we shall meet and love, but not forget, for I know I can never forget or forgive myself for what I have done.

Life now to me is so empty and useless. But knowing Abraham that you are alive and loving I will continue to live and love.

My words are endless for you, my thoughts are constantly of you. Hoping and praying that you shall find eternal happiness and love. Have faith my son and love and you can't go wrong.

My son I hear your cry, I am with you there beside you. I will always be there My love for you is so deep it hurts, But remember my son, we will always be one. God has given me something so beautiful, that he would never take it away. You my son. Goodnight my son, have faith for I am with you. My dear son, so many things have happened since I last wrote to you. You are constantly on my mind; I ask myself so many questions but there are no answers. My heart grieves for you, I want you with me so much.

27/6/1973 – My dear son, my thoughts are constantly of you. Time has passed, your grown, I try to accept and understand what has happened. I find it so very hard. I may write many words, cry many tears, I see sunshine sometimes, but you are with me always. By now you will be saying Mummy.