

# The New Zealand Herald

This article is owned by, or has been licensed to, the New Zealand Herald. You may not reproduce, publish, electronically archive or transmit this article in any manner without the prior written consent of the New Zealand Herald. To make a copyright clearance inquiry, please click [here](#).

## **Stuart Nash: Realism, balance needed on adoption**

11.02.05

Unfortunately, the merits of adoption appear to have become a side issue in the debate on welfare reform.

While experts have offered their opinions, I can offer insights into a life that many health professionals seem willing to condemn as unsatisfactory.

This needs to be addressed to provide a measure of realism and balance.

In an ideal world, pregnancy would come swiftly to those who desire it and not at all to those who don't.

Sadly for many, the world is not ideal. Two such people were my mother and a 17-year-old girl from Epsom Girls' Grammar - one struck with the curse of infertility and the other ... well ... not so.

So it came to be that in August 1967 I became the son of Jenny and Hal Nash. During the preceding nine months, other options were discussed but in the end Kate made what was probably the most selfless and hardest decision a woman will ever have to make - she gave up her baby for adoption.

There is no doubt in my mind that Kate's decision allowed for a level of social, intellectual, psychological and physical development that would probably not have been possible had I not been adopted out.

My parents provided me with the love, opportunities and support - financial and emotional - that would not have been available had I remained the son of a 17-year-old girl.

When I was 21, Kate made contact. She spoke of a guilt of not knowing if she had made the right decision: had I gone to a loving home? Was I okay? Was I even still alive?

She told of having to leave the country for a number of years because one day she found herself waiting outside a primary school in Auckland (I was raised in Napier) hoping to catch a glimpse of a boy she had been told looked as I might have looked at the same age.

Upon discovering the decision she had made had turned out to be the right one, she promptly became pregnant after five years of trying.

It then dawned on me that in the closed adoption system of yesteryear, it was in fact the birth mother, not the child, who suffered the emotional scars bought on by adoption.

My case is not unique or even rare: I have three siblings who are also adopted. There are a surprising number of men and women of my generation who are adopted, and I have no doubt that nearly everyone reading this will know someone who is adopted or someone who adopted out a child at birth.

Of all my adopted friends, I know of no horror stories, but I have read of cases in which, for some reason or another, an emotional bond between adoptive parents and the child has not been made.

This has resulted in short and long-term psychological problems for the child and, no doubt, years of disappointment and angst for the adoptive parents.

These stories should not, however, be taken as the norm, or used as an excuse or reason to reject adoption as a viable alternative in the 21st century. So what is the solution?

Was National Party leader Don Brash right to suggest that women should be encouraged though financial management to offer their children for adoption?

Or are the opponents of adoption right to suggest that society should do whatever it takes to ensure that women keep their children, no matter what their pre and post-pregnancy situation or circumstances are? Neither is right.

First and foremost it is every woman's right to determine the path of her personal and professional life. The choices any mother makes on becoming pregnant must, therefore, be respected and supported by society.

If a woman finds herself in a situation in which she unexpectedly gets pregnant, and is unable or unwilling to embrace motherhood but is religiously or philosophically against abortion, all options should be discussed in an objective and dignified manner and presented as positive and acceptable - including adoption.

In 1967 unmarried mothers were almost forced to give up their children at birth; abortion was not accessible and there was no welfare net available to help struggling single mothers who chose the socially unacceptable option.

Now it appears there are those who would almost force an unwilling mother to keep her child, despite the alternatives embraced by a much more tolerant and accepting society.

As with most things, the middle ground, in which a commonsense approach to issues of social morality must be taken - and be seen to be taken - is the only way forward.

We also should never forget that it has to be about what is right for the child, and hence society's important role in offering support to the mother, no matter what her choice.

Kate's decision in 1967 enriched the lives of all who were a party to the consequences. While for Kate, the wisdom of her selflessness was not fully realised for another 21 years, she went on to achieve much in her personal and professional life that would have been impossible had she been forced into motherhood at 17.

For me? Well, my pregnant wife and daughter and I are getting ready to attend my father's 70th birthday in Napier this weekend.

I will be drinking a toast or two to a great man whom I love and respect immensely and who continues to be an influence and guiding force in my life - 37 years after he received a call from Sister Mary at Napier's Bethany Home.

\* Stuart Nash is the Labour Party candidate for Epsom in this year's general election.