

This my mother's story...

[performer sits in a comfortable chair slightly side facing the audience]

We are not legally related, but Pamela Joy Burgess gave birth to me in Paddington Women's Hospital just after new year 1959. I have no qualification for telling her story other than some unsealed adoption documents. I'm not even sure I have a moral or ethical right to tell her story seeing I wasn't there, and we didn't officially meet until 3 years after these events happened.

*Except for our shared DNA and that knowing of the womb, she would be a total stranger, some headline I read in a Murdoch tabloid. "Cabbie's wife - cold and callous."
But I am blood of her blood, soothed by her Marlboros, cortisol spiked by the mortal sin of unwed motherhood in another era.*

*I am first child of a first child
women begotten by women who trudge down generations
dragging oversized epigenetic baggage*

*Truncation and repetition are my only claims
I was taken from her – she was cut off from him
his neck and hands lacerated - my only child surgically removed
all quick, all violent. All unspeakable.*

*But I am going to speak about it, probably inadequately, because the code and compression of words
can't evoke the scream of severed flesh and heat of cavernous wounds.
Maybe, if I am lucky and you are willing
some of these words will reach into your interior
and you will recall an edge
feel sudden sharpness
expel a raw breath*

Cold Case is a work in progress for print and theatrical realisation.

Cold Case is the true tale of my birth mother's husbands' gangland killing in Western Sydney in 1984 and her subsequent two-decade affair with a nun. Performed in 9 parts by a solo performer with a rubber horses head, a large pink satin tongue, a constantly lit cigarette, a shiny new hatchet and a crumpled tabloid newspaper.

Cold Case draws threads from my mother's life writing and poetry to sew the hidden violence of intergenerational forced adoption into queer romance and musical comedy. Cold-blooded morality spills with gallows humour as a happy ending becomes as likely as winning on the horses.



First Performed by V Barratt & narrated by Grace Marlow at ACE Gallery, Adelaide, November 2021. Images Tom McCammon
Performed by Melinda Rackham at RASA, Adelaide, 10th Adoption Apology Event, July 2022. Image Nikki Hartmann.

15 minute excerpts of work in progress performed Adelaide 2021 and 2022.