



(...)

22nd March 2011

Commitee Secretary,
Senate Standing Commitees on Community Affairs,
P.O. Box 6100,
Parliament House,
Canberra. ACT 2600

As a person who has been affected by the past forced adoption procedures I wish to make a submission.

On the (...) July 1963 my daughter, (...) was born at the Salvation Army "Haven" in Melbourne. I was 14 years old. My boyfriend ((...) 's father) resided in Hobart but kept in contact with me via mail every day. We married 4th April 1964.

At the Haven I worked from 6am, 6 days per week as a cleaner up until the birth of (...). I was given no wage except a small amount of pocket money for a tram fare to purchase personal items eg. soap etc, on my day off. My mother paid the amount of money asked for by Matron (...) reguarly every fortnight for my board. Meals consisted of brisket, hash and bread, (no fresh vegetables or fruit). One young staff "lieutenant", was in charge of around 30 girls, she was also the cook. Bullying was prevalent, girls from the Winlaton Correction Home were transfered there also. I stopped eating through stress and lack of appetite. No-one noticed. Tinned food arrived via trucks but never got onto the table. No heating in freezing dorms meant damp clothing to wear as there was no airing facilities. Dim lighting was used to save electricity so we lived in semi darkness.

I still have an eating disorder to this day.

Consent Form (copy attached)

Three days after (...) was born ((...) July 1963) my parents arrived at the Haven to collect me for our flight back to Hobart. My friend (...) had given birth to her son and the Sister had called for a priest because the baby was dying. The rule was that after we left the Haven there would be no contact whatsoever with friends we may have made and we used our first names only. (...) was screaming. I had fed her (we looked after our babies and were encouraged to knit clothes for them) and I had changed her but couldn't quieten her. Matron came and quickly ushered my parents and myself out of the hospital section. She sat my parents in the hallway and took me to her office. She told me to write my address on a form and sign it. When I did she screamed at me and called me a stupid girl because I had put my Hobart address on it and not the Haven's address. I filled the next one in as instructed and read on it "consent form". I told her that I didn't want to sign it because (...) had been crying when I left the hospital and she might be sick which meant she couldn't be adopted and would be left in the orphanage. (I thought that if she was sick I may be allowed to keep because she couldn't be adopted). Her reply to this was "I will phone your mother when she is placed". I left feeling really confused and still can not remember the flight back home. As it turned out (...) had a heart ailment as an infant which resulted in a heart operation. She phoned two weeks later to tell my mother not to pay any more maintenance because (...) had gone to her new home. I found out years later that I had 30 days revocation period on the form. I was never given a copy of the form. (...) was discharged on the 26th July, 2 weeks after her birth before the revokation period. I also found out that my discharge date had been recorded as the 20th July (not the 15th July). When I wrote to the Salvation Army in 1997 to ask for more information, I received a letter from (...) (their solicitors), to say that they didn't want to deal with me directly again. I've enclosed a copy of that letter.

I believe (...) was "earmarked" for adoption to a couple already picked out by Matron. On numerous occassions I would be working outside and I would see a couple watching me, accompanied by Matron. When (...) sent me a photo of her adoptive parents I recognised the man in the photo as being the same one at the Haven. It was common knowlege that prospective adoptive parents did visit the Haven. We also believed that they were asked for donations on these visits.

Form 5 (copy attached)

This form was signed by Matron (...) in October 1963. I cannot believe she could have remembered me from the previous July due to the huge number of girls passing through the Haven. The form states that I informed her that my baby was illegitimate and no order had been made for the maintenance of the child. I did not inform her of that at all. In fact, I was aware that my mother had been paying maintenance for (...). A verbal agreement between her and Matron (...) had been entered into until she was told to cease payment by Matron (...). If maintenance had been an issue of whether I could have kept (...) and I had understood it properly, her father would have willingly paid it. Nobody ever explained to me about fathers paying maintenance. I never saw a form 5 until around 1997. (...) 's father was in a full time, permanent government position (GPO) and was in a position to pay maintenance and would have willingly paid it. He was never asked. We were engaged to be married in early November 1963. This was prior to (...) 's adoption on (...) November 1963.

Guardian ad Litem Form (copy attached)

Matron (...) states she knows the applicants and had investigated their home. This implies that they were her clients. I was her client as well, she was being paid board for my keep. This to me is a conflict of interest. When I was in contact with AIS in 1997 to gather information I was informed by a staff member ((...)) that I need not have gone through the Salvation Army with (...) 's adoption. There was a choice between them and Community Services. Matron (...) never offered this choice either to myself or my mother, either at the time I was admitted to the Haven or after (...) 's birth.

Birth Certificate (copy attached)

When the Salvation Army Sister came to me for information to fill in (...) 's birth certificate, I started out by giving (...) 's fathers name. I was promptly told that his name was not allowed to be on it, nor his address. I was angry so when she asked me where I was born I gave instead (...) 's father's birthplace, which was (...) in Tasmania. I signed the form such as it was. I had no copy of it. I believe copies were posted out to people but mine would have gone to the Haven as it was the only address written on it. Years later, when I was able to get a copy of the original I found that it had been altered from (...) to Hobart, of course after I had signed it and without my initials on the alteration.

Around 1996 I wrote to the County Court in Melbourne and asked for a form to overturn (...) 's adoption because I believed it was an illegal one. Eventually, after many phone calls and being told by a staff member ((...)), that I was "opening a can of worms" and I should go away and leave it alone, a form was posted to me in 1997. I hadn't lodged the form but I received a letter from my daughter to say that the County Court had written to her saying I intended to overturn her adoption and she didn't approve of it and had engaged a solicitor. I had planned to write to her myself and explain before I lodged the form but wasn't given the chance. (Copies of letters from the County Court attached).

My daughter is now named (...). She made contact with me in 1989. She feels she was rejected by me when she was two days old. She initially wrote to me to get information re health issues, family etc. We have never met, she is happy to write to me but doesn't want to meet me. I have given her the circumstances re the adoption etc but the papers that I received were distressing for me to read so I do have some understanding of how adopted people must feel and think when they read these papers, (especially form 5).

(...)

Signed.

Cherylyn Harris

Date... 22/3/11

(...)