

Submission on Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices

As a young mother who felt she had no choice but to hand her child over I can't help but wonder what my life would have been like if I was born 20 years later than I was. I wonder what choice I would have made: as a mother, in my relationships with men, how I lived my life. I will never know what could have been I only know about what has been, what I have lost in my life. What I have spent years trying to come to terms with and the level of damage to my being has been great. I can't even begin to know what that decision 41 years ago has meant to my daughter, being abandoned the day she came into this world.

Her adoptive family was good people for which I am very relieved. My daughter and I came together 22 years ago just after the Adoption Laws changed in Victoria. Our relationship is good compared to many others but it will always be fractured. We will always be strangers. Our cultures are different even though we are both Anglo Australian, our family history is different. I don't know anything about the first half of her life. I have looked at photos and heard some stories but it isn't real to me. She has looked at photos of my life and heard stories and I expect she feels the same as me. Our life together started when she was 18 years old and we have had many, many ups and downs since.

I guess when I look at all the women I have met over the years, all the Relinquishing Mothers I see such sadness and loss. Many have never moved on, many have never allowed themselves to have another successful relationship with a male let alone allowed themselves to have another child. It has caused such waste. These Women feel like they have been marked forever and their children are equally marked forever. I have always struggled with the concept that as a young girl I somehow went against my very nature in giving away my baby. As a woman and mother I should have been able to fight and protect my own. I have never quite been able to trust myself in relationship with a man again as the cost of a failed relationship has been immeasurable in the past.

When I look back I feel I was a part of a social experiment. Girls were getting pregnant at an alarming rate. There was no real sex education to be found. You found out things through friends who didn't know much at all. You never discussed things of a sexual matter with your parents or the local doctor. So like many others I got pregnant. Unlike my friends who also got pregnant around the same time I went

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ahead with the pregnancy. I was sent away from home when I was 4 ½ months pregnant as my family was so embarrassed and ashamed of me. I had never been away from home before. My relationship broke up. My parents never once said I could bring the baby home I just had to get on with it and get this over and done with and then come home and try and be a good girl. I was 18 years old but I think my emotional maturity level was about 14 years old. I did what all the other girls did in my situation. I will feel forever sad and sorry that I didn't have the gumption or strength of character to be able to stand up for myself and my daughter. This is how you felt. You were so bad, so troublesome, so undeserving. What would a frightened, downtrodden and shamed young girl have to offer her child, where would she start? I could not fight my family or the society's values at that time. I was also emotionally distressed that my relationship had also broken up in such awful circumstances.

We were told there were so many good families (with a mother and a father) out there willing to take our poor children. That all we needed to do was have the baby, sign the papers and go home and get on with your life. It just didn't work. Over the years I have taken myself off to counselors because I felt hopeless and depressed. I didn't speak about the baby and the adoption until 8 years later. I have managed my life OK, I wish I would have had a chance to live it another way. If I had on been born 20 years later and fell pregnant the outcome would have been completely different for me and my daughter. We would have been together, we would have been family.

I don't know why society was like it was or why my parents cared so much about what other people thought or if they felt so strongly that my partner was wrong for me. I just know that they were influenced by the values of the time. There were whole organizations set up to deal with this social problem. No-one, not people in the Government or people in the Churches or in hospitals thought for one minute that what they were doing was wrong. No one was looking out for the rights of these girls or these children. No one was standing up and saying "What the hell are we doing here?" "These girls and babies need help. What can we do for them?"

The result of this social remedy for this social phenomena was mothers and babies rights were non-existent no one advocated on their behalf,

no one spoke for them when they were at their lowest point, we had no voice. The following quotes are wonderful I just wish someone was around for my daughter and I helping us through that awful time

"...the moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; those who are in the shadows of life; the sick, the needy and the handicapped. " ~ Last Speech of Hubert H. Humphrey

"A nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members." ~ Mahatma Gandhi

"Any society, any nation, is judged on the basis of how it treats its weakest members -- the last, the least, the littlest."

~Cardinal Roger Mahony, In a 1998 letter, Creating a Culture of Life

"One of the measures of a civilised society is how well it looks after the most vulnerable members of its society."

Nelson Mandela Quotes on Kindness

"There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."

Thank you for the opportunity to write this submission. I hope that you find it in your hearts to listen to the children and mothers of that lost time.

Yours sincerely,

February 4th 2012.