

Senate Inquiry into "Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices"

I (...) am a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia resident in the State of Queensland.

As a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia I have an inalienable right to protection under the Australian Constitution and the Common Law of this country.

As an Australian citizen, the Commonwealth affords me protection from the unlawful and harmful actions that threaten my right of life, liberty and justice from those who would deny me these rights, within and without, the borders of Australia.

I am a mother who had her baby son stolen for adoption in 1967 in Queensland, but I also have two adopted brothers who were born in Victoria. My story is an important one because it crosses two States, Victoria and Queensland, and two hospital systems, both public and private and it covers 5 adoptions, 2 in a public hospital and 3 in Private Hospitals, it also covers State sanctioned adoptions and private adoptions with illegal and immoral practices in both. It tells about the return of two babies to the hospital from which they came because they weren't considered good enough, and it shows widespread systematic abuse regardless of the State or the Hospital concerned, and it shows that doctors, nurses, social workers and even solicitors all knew exactly what they were doing to single pregnant women, so it was a fully sanctioned mindset by Governments of the day that was tolerated and encouraged by those who were in a position of power Federally as well as every State concerned, ie nothing was done to prevent this from happening in our hospitals even though it was so widespread with at it's peak, in 1972 over 10,000 adoptions of newborns, which is a whopping 27 babies per day nation wide. The Federal Govt knew full well what was happening in the nations hospitals as they knew the statistics because they released those statistics to the public annually. I can remember reading them in the paper every year after 1967 and they listed it State by State, Queensland always had the highest from what I can remember. If the Federal Govt wasn't aware then why wasn't there an Inquiry into why so many young women willingly "gave away" their babies. In no other time in history have so many women "abandoned their babies en masse". The Federal Govt knew it saved them a lot of money in single mothers benefits, to pretend otherwise is a complete lie. To turn a blind eye to such an abuse of single mothers is a shameful episode in Australia's history. If they'd had 10,000 suicides of young men in 1972 there would have been a hue and cry to match no other. Why were we seen as so worthless and deserving of such cruel punishment. To forcibly remove a newborn baby from his mother is "the ultimate rape of a woman".

My brothers were adopted in 1954 and 1962. My mother was depressed for most of her life, she was addicted to Valium, Pentobarb, which is a barbiturate, and codeine. She used to buy boxes of 100 Codis tablets which are an aspirin and codeine combination. She took so many of these as well as soluble aspirin that she gave herself 2 stomach ulcers.

She had my sister and I naturally, me at the age of 36. She wasn't infertile, she had secondary infertility which means that at the age of 40 she was simply "too old" to have any more babies. The doctors told her that, but she refused to take "no" for an answer.

Because babies were readily available due to forced adoption policies and because there was no proper screening of prospective adoptive parents, my mother was able to adopt 4 babies, 2 of which she took back because she didn't like them.

She adopted my first baby brother (...) from The Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne, but she didn't like (...) because she said he had "excema and would most likely get asthma" so she took him back to the hospital. The next thing I knew we had a new baby sister (...) but mum didn't like her either as she said she was "part Maori" and had "big feet" and would "grow into a big horsey woman" so she took her back as well. I can remember it quite clearly, but I suspect a lot of the finer details that I can recall are because my mother told me the circumstances at a much later date.

After that my parents decided to adopt privately. Private adoptions are now illegal in Australia. A private adoption is where the prospective adoptive parents pay for the expenses and hospital bills of the mother in exchange for her baby.

I can remember quite clearly when my parents brought home my brother (...) My mother had bought me a new coat. She and I went in a taxi at night to a private hospital to pick him up. We got out of the cab and walked up the steps to a big black shiny door, my mother knocked on the door and a smiling matron opened it and she and mum made a big fuss of me, then she led us into a room where there were several wire bassinets with babies in them. She took us over to one and handed my mother a baby. The next thing I knew we were walking down the stairs to the waiting taxi. We only drove a short distance to a park where my father and sister, who was asleep in the backseat, were waiting in a car parked under a tree. My mother and I got out with (...) and we drove home. Even though I was only 4 it all seemed very clandestine, maybe I was told to be quiet I don't know.

It wasn't until over 40 years later that I discovered the reason. My brother met his real mother and she told him what had transpired. When the solicitor came into her room to get her to sign the adoption papers, she screamed, then the second time he came in she also screamed, by the third time he'd managed to convince her to sign by using the hospital bill as leverage and promising that my brother would go to a private school and would be given things she couldn't afford. She signed. This was a clear breach of her basic human rights, she wasn't given an option, she was threatened and coerced and everyone involved was aware of it. The solicitor involved said afterwards that he'd never be involved again in an adoption where the mother was forced to relinquish her baby to pay her hospital bill.

She never married or had any other children and she was given electric shock therapy afterwards as she was no doubt grieving and was most probably seen as inferior anyway. She lived in the same tiny unit for over 40 years so that (...) could find her if he ever wanted to.

My second brother (...) was adopted privately as well. My mother was 50 menopausal and depressed when she adopted him. She had arranged with a friend that if he was a boy she would adopt him and if he was a girl she could have him. What she hadn't countered into it was that he was slightly autistic. My mother neglected (...) horrendously, he was left in a cot all day and she used to belt him to make him go to sleep and in a bizarre way it worked as he'd whimper himself off to sleep. My mother blamed him for everything that went wrong, he wasn't toilet trained until he was 5 and he was called "stupid" nearly every day of his life. I think she thought (...) would cure her depression so he was born with a

job to do and of course he failed because no baby can do that. My parents were far too old to adopt a baby at 50+ and they dressed him in old fashioned clothes and he was laughed at and ridiculed at school. My mother hated sport so used to write up to the school to excuse him from sport, so he was ostracised. He has been unemployed for most of his life and is now living in a Housing Commission unit and is on a disability pension, he's been and alcoholic and used drugs, has never married or had any children or any worthwhile relationships.

My mother didn't kiss or hug any of us. My parents decided to move interstate, most probably because my brothers mothers knew our surname and could find us any time they wanted to. I can remember I wasn't allowed to tell anyone where we were going and got into serious trouble when I told friends who quite naturally inquired. I'd had a two year platonic relationship with my boyfriend, but because I was moving to Queensland our relationship became more than that and I had an unplanned pregnancy.

When we arrived in Qld in 1967 my parents put me into (...) . This was a Church run Home for Unmarried mothers, The Church of England. Unmarried Mothers Homes served a purpose, they isolated us from family or friends who otherwise might have encouraged us to keep our babies and they instilled a feeling of shame, secrecy and powerlessness in us and conditioned us to relinquish our babies, as we were deprived of any information that would have enabled us to keep our babies and weren't aware of any other option. We were like Jews who were sent to be deloused in the gas chambers and who had no idea the fate that awaited them. We didn't know we'd be bullied, pushed down and held down as we gave birth so that we wouldn't even see our own babies, we didn't know we would grieve for the rest of our lives because even though they knew that well before the 1960's no one told us or warned us of dire future regret. They were just in the business of punishing single unwed mothers because we were seen as immoral sluts who slept around and deserved what we got, and they were playing God with our babies giving them to married childless couples who'm they saw as more deserving.

When I went into labour on 31st October 1967, I was sent off in the middle of the night to (...) Qld (it no longer exists). When I arrived there I was treated with disdain as the Matron said they weren't taking unmarried mothers anymore. The ambulance driver said they didn't have any other choice as I was far too advanced to take elsewhere.

I was left in a labour ward on my own as they were attending another married woman who was giving birth nearby. They rushed in at the last minute when the doctor arrived and when my baby was crowning, just in time to push me down and hold me down so that I never even saw my baby son. It makes me feel quite ill today as I write this down, I don't know how they could be so cruel, even my father who was a farmer used to hold the dead puppies up to their mother so she could smell them and lick them and understand they were dead. I was such a sweet innocent pretty young woman. The rotten things.

I'd tried to get up to see my son just after he was born but they pushed me down and held me down. Nobody ever asked me if I wanted to see my baby son, not even the doctor, or the nurses or in particular the social worker who came to take my signature, nobody gave me any advice at all. I was only 17. They didn't show me any kindness or compassion, they just treated me like I was a nuisance. Nobody even knew I'd given birth until 3 days later when I was well enough to walk up to a public telephone booth that I could see from my hospital window where I rang the girls up at St Mary's and told them. I was left to rot by

everyone, I had no visitors and every visiting time I could hear the other mothers visitors arrive with flowers and gifts and the oohs and aahs as they looked through the nursery window and I felt like I wanted to join in.

I was placed in a ward right next to the nursery and I could hear my baby son crying for me. At feed times each baby was wheeled out to be fed by their mothers, but there was always one left screaming, it was my son, I could tell his cry, it was a strong lusty cry, and he was screaming for me, I felt like smashing through the wall to get to him. I can still see that wall, it was painted a shade of hospital green with a darker green stripe running parallel to the ground.

I didn't demand to see a social worker, she just showed up one day. I didn't know that I didn't HAVE to sign the adoption papers there and then, I didn't know I could have walked out of that hospital with my baby son at any time as I was his sole legal guardian "UNTIL" I signed the papers, infact my young uninformed mind told me just the opposite, that I had no other option. I was a very frightened young woman, and she knew it, she capitalised on it to make her job easier.

I didn't know that I was supposed to have been treated just the same as every other mother in that hospital. I didn't know that I could have held, cuddled and breastfed my baby just like everyone else. I didn't know that they were breaking every rule in their social work manual and that they were treating me illegally. The social worker (...) told me that I had 30 days to change my mind, I think as a carrot to get me to sign because I was crying. I signed it thinking I could go back home and get some help. She didn't give me her name or a contact phone number and she most certainly didn't tell me how to go about keeping my baby son. She didn't offer me any other alternatives whatsoever. She didn't give me any information about financial provisions, foster care, state child minding facilities, she didn't offer a layette or milk as she was supposed to have, or inform me that I could apply through the courts for maintenance from my son's father which was available under the Child Welfare Act which would have enabled me to keep my son. I would have jumped at the chance.

She also didn't warn me of dire future regret and that I would grieve for my baby son for the rest of my life. Everything was quite the opposite she told me my sons father would go to jail, and she told me that I could get on with my life and that I could have a baby "of my own" later on.

She used bribery, deceit, and coercion.

I felt shamed and totally demoralised by everyone in a position of power, nurses, the doctor concerned, (...), the matrons both at (...) Hospital and also by the social worker. Not letting me see my baby was a clear breach of my basic human rights, they exploited my youth, my innocence, my vulnerability and my trust so they could play God by providing a baby to a married couple that they saw as more deserving.

When I went home I phoned the Dept of Family Services on or about the 7th day I think, to see if I could get my son back. Whoever answered the phone told me he was already gone, but they lied to me because when I got my records through FOI 20 years later his adoption order hadn't gone through until the 19th day

I can't even begin to tell you the impact this has had on my life. They didn't tell me I'd be grieving for the rest of my life. I didn't know that I'd be seen as "the sort of woman who'd give away her own child". I wasn't even aware how bigotted and prejudiced our society was and still is on the subject.

I wasn't aware that I'd be subjected to prejudicial treatment and language for the rest of my life. eg

"they didn't want their babies anyway"

"they were sluts who slept around and deserved what they got"

"they were bags of trash that didn't deserve their babies anyway"

"they didn't know the father anyway"

"they tried to trick him into marrying her by saying it was his."

"anyone can give birth but not everyone can be a mother"

"they should have kept their legs closed"

" what kind of mother could give away her own baby"

The list goes on and on and no one politically either Federally or in the various State Governments except, W.A recently, has done anything to dispel the myth. Other people have had Inquiries but up until now no one cared about us, we've been left to rot especially by the adoption industry itself who've covered up their crimes of baby theft.

I've felt ugly and worthless all my life and I've felt apologetic for being alive. It's impacted seriously on my children and my marriage and I don't have many friends as I find it hard to trust people. What they did to me was not only immoral it was illegal. I think it was social cleansing of the much hated and vilified single mother, it was a witch hunt and it was social cleansing and I believe they knew full well what they were doing to us and no one lifted a finger to help us even those in a position of power turned a blind eye. You can't tell me that with 27 adoptions every day in 1972 that The Commonwealth Govt wasn't aware of what was happening. It's like the Germans saying they weren't aware of the gas chambers even though they had to take their washing in off the lines when they were burning the bodies as their washing got dirty. This abuse was widespread across the whole of Australia.

The Commonwealth Govt knew because adopting out babies saved them from having to pay for single mothers pensions, which were actually in existence at the time, it's just that everyone involved didn't tell us about it. It's only because there was a GLUT of babies after 1972 and they were left languishing in hospitals as no one wanted 6 month old babies, that Gough Whitlam renamed the widows pension and called it the Single Mothers Pension. That's the only time anyone did anything, when there were too many babies and so they had to destigmatise single motherhood to solve the problem. They had so many babies they had to ring up people who'd already adopted and ask them if they wanted a 3rd or 4th baby.

Even then, when it was obviously staring them in the face, not one politician for 40 years has stuck their neck out and said "hey I smell a rat" This has been a nation of coverups and scandals by both the Churches who were deeply involved and the State and Federal Governments who were up to their neck in it.

Shame on Australia for pretending it's such an egalitarian society when it's been far from it, having punished, locked up, abused and then sat in judgement and marginalized young women who had already been victimised. We've been a very punishing society perhaps

because of our convict past. The people involved in this crime against young mothers should hang their collective heads in shame

Sincerely Yours
(...)

* (...), I want this to go down in history as a severe abuse of me and other women like me who are unable to write down their stories eg my brother (...)'s mother who has since died.

* (...)

(...)

((...)