

SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION TO SUBMISSION 81

Dear members of the Committee,

I make this supplementary submission to my original submission because I see a need for the Inquiry to know and understand what it is to be a late discovery adoptee and the failures of society to provide adequate qualified specialists to assist persons like myself. At one stage in Tasmania, one person per week was finding out in mature age that they were adopted. Late discovery adoptees suffer extra trauma because their lives have been turned upside down with the revelation that the life they had led has been based on a complete untruth. It calls into question their life values and their whole moral compass can be thrown into disarray. Then when seeking help from some adoption support groups they are further thrown into turmoil with statements like, you have been brainwashed, you suffer the Stockholm syndrome, your only parent is your natural mother etc. These groups operate in this zone because of the failure to provide the trauma counselling to adoptees in this country. I make this submission because I feel the Inquiry is not giving due recognition to adoptees who are adults in their own right. At the hearing I attended it was discomfoting to hear senators referring to people like me as children. It was equally disturbing to see the inquiry give time to some who have theories about master races eugenics and other theories which can never be proven. However I do accept that eugenics may be used by some to explain the White Australia policy. Adoptees in general all want to hear an acknowledgment that we were victims in this catastrophe called adoption not just children of natural mothers, but as separate innocent victims of unwritten state government policies of the day carried out with the moral support of the federal government. Adoptees would also like to hear that extra funding is processed to ensure the education of professional into the trauma related issue facing adoptees. There is no desire for adoptees to receive funding from the government as some groups have asked for because all services must be provided in an accountable professional manner. Now my story.

I was born on the February 1950 at a Salvation Army home in Launceston Tasmania called Rocklyn House. In later years I was informed that my mother mourned the loss of me on 23 February 1950. When I contacted the Salvation Army to search their records I was informed that there had been a fire and their records had been destroyed. I was six weeks old when I was taken literally from my mother's arms and given to my now late parents. I know this happened as I have read part of my mother's diary. I won't regale you with my childhood stories as many I do not remember which to some now indicate I am suffering some form of Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. But from what I can gather it was a good life for the period and that my adoptive mother whilst stern did care very much for us.

And my adoptive father was a kindly man who worked as a lowly paid shepherd on a property called

I left home first in January 1962 to board privately so as to attend High School in Launceston. All I can remember of those high school years was catching a bus home on a Friday night, setting out using a bicycle torch and setting rabbits traps then all weekend killing skinning and preparing the rabbits for when I went back to school on the Sunday night. Then on Mondays morning would skip some classes as I was selling the rabbits to teachers at four shillings pair. The rest of the week was a mixture of school being made to study where I boarded and bed. Once a week I could go to the Police Boys Club. I know there was more to my childhood than that but memories have disappeared. Because of this I feel I missed out on a childhood a false impression I know. The farm where I lived was near the township of Fingal and all of my recollections it was a town where I did not feel welcome. It conjures up bad feelings and I don't know why.

I left school at 15 and worked in Launceston until I was 18 years of age. In that time I avoided, when I could, going home as I felt out of place there. I cannot remember being able to have those special moments with my adoptive parents and not knowing I was adopted chose to just do my own thing. At times I would stay in the back room of a café, the owner who ran a stable of working girls upstairs. I laugh at that now but I also realise just how I had potentially put myself in danger.

I joined the RAAF at age 18 and had a relatively successful career rising to the rank of Flight Sergeant. I married at 19 to the wonderful lady I am still married to. It has been a tumultuous marriage in many ways. In the early years our youthful immaturity was in the forefront. I also seemed to have a great deal of rage within me which did result in blackouts which concerned us. I managed to overcome this rage as it appeared in this form but always had a short fuse. We had three children and whilst I love them all dearly I have never been able to bond with them. I have always kept at arm's length and was always critical of them for no good reason. I have now been advised that this may be because of a dissociative state due to adoption related trauma

In late 1984 I was advised of my posting to RAAF Butterworth, Malaysia. As I required a birth certificate I asked my a/mother for it. She said she would get it and a few weeks later about 26 October 1984 I received this strange document. It was record of birth that showed I was born in Launceston, in the district of Hobart, a physical impossibility and that the birth was registered on October 1984. I then knew things were not kosher so on a trip over to say goodbye to my a/mother (my a/father had passed away a year before) I stayed overnight at an Aunties and I asked her how old was I when I as adopted and she said straight out six weeks old. That was when my world became a nightmare which to certain degrees I have lived ever since. I cannot remember how I reacted to this news but I did know I could not raise it with my a/mother s I was heading off for two years But I do know that in the two years at Butterworth I was not a very nice person. I drank excessively, whored around the bars of Penang had great rage where once I broke my knuckle and another time completely dislocated a finger. I almost destroyed my marriage and career and at the time I don't think I

really cared. My moral compass was completely lost at sea.

We returned to Australia in late 1986 and after a short period I retired from the RAAF after twenty service and we settled in Ballarat, my wife's home town. I rarely spoke of the adoption but in late 1988 when having some excess of alcohol I told my a/mother I knew. I mishandled it and she broke down. I did tell her it didn't matter for her sake and was never mentioned again between us. She was dead twelve months later.

After her passing I embarked upon a search for my natural mother. I obtained my original birth certificate from the Tasmanian government authorities. In those day they issued the certificate to those living interstate with no counselling, only Tasmanian residents received counselling. They stated they could not find my mother. I continued searching over many years and eventually found her living in Tasmania. Not knowing what was available to both of us I tried to arrange a meeting with her. The three letters I received from her I cherish as they were written to me her son even though she could not describe as such. Sadly after these letters I received advice to the effect it was all too much for her and could I cease contact. So I did, a decision I both am proud of and yet it brings me such heartache. The last contact I had with her was a small note in December 1997 thanking me for leaving me alone. In the December of the next year I had to visit Tasmania for a funeral. I made arrangements to meet my mother's sister in Launceston. I was told at that meeting they tried to convince her to come up from Hobart but she would not come. As an aside this as the month my blood pressure went from normal to 200/120. It is now under control with medication but I have recently learned that unresolved trauma and rage can cause such conditions.

How I reacted to this refusal I do not remember. My wife has told me I shrugged my shoulders and appeared to get on with life. And that was the way it seemed until the evening of 18 September 2006 when I received a telephone call from my mother's sister telling me she had passed away aged seventy six. It was the only time her sister acknowledged that I was my mother's son. She also gave me the telephone number of my mother's legal oldest son. So on the day after her passing I spoke to a brother for the first time. I was told that I was welcome to attend the funeral but very much aware that it would turn the funeral into being about me not her life I chose not to. To this I day I do not know if I mourned the loss of my mother or the loss of a dream or a combination of both but I mourned

In November of that year I met a brother for the first time in my life when he and his wife visited us in Ballarat. It was one of the most wonderful times of my long life. Here was a sibling from my mother albeit a half-brother. It was short weekend and when he returned home I felt such irrational loss. I went into depression and this lasted a good twelve months. I would have to pull over whilst driving because of uncontrollable crying. I knew my thought patterns were irrational but could not control them. I sought help from the Ballarat Community Health but they had no one. Couple this with the fact I found out there was also a sister out there who was adopted and I felt my situation was dire. I eventually learned of Vanish the Victorian Government search and counselling group and in late January 2007 I

sought their help with my situation. They were an excellent organisation but at the time they were only funded for three sessions. After that they could only advise to seek further help privately. I had no confidence so I just muddled through the next 11 months. In the meantime we had traced our sister and became aware that she was being told by the authorities for the first time that she was adopted. Her age was 55. My nightmare returned. We all had a brief honeymoon period where we all enjoyed each other company but for my sister the resentment came back through and eventually she cut off all contact with us citing that she never wanted to know she was adopted. I do believe this situation was due to lack of decent reunion support services where all parties' expectations were not first discussed. In this period I developed ulcerative colitis a chronic bowel disease that I must be treated for now for the rest of my life.

During this period I also met my father and had a good brief relationship with him for thirteen months before he passed away. After all the failures at reunion I had to get one right. I have also met four brothers from both sides and had one other sister say she despises me due to the fact I as part of her mother's history prior to meeting her father.

I have been able to live a relatively good life since 2006 but in the background my fears and phobias are always present and can be resurrected at any time. My wife has said that as I age it is returning with greater frequency. The inquiry has exacerbated this situation. I have a constant fear of not being believed, a fear of rejection by the few people I can call friends. Whilst I work in an industry that involves contact with people it also ensures I do not have to form relationships with these people. I have a constant feeling of having to prove myself and my opinions. And recently a support group purporting to be there for the interests of mothers and adoptees has caused great distress, by implying I have been brainwashed, have the Stockholm syndrome am a supporter of adopters against the natural mothers and was told I should be more humble and listen to the mothers for they know best. They have challenged me and accused me of being an apologist and excusing the behaviour due to the social attitudes of the day. I have never excused the actions of that period just attempted to place it in a historical perspective. All must be aware that some out there may accidentally cause emotional harm to others because of their own collective anger and grief.

I have been advised to seek trauma counselling by many people but am finding it difficult to determine who in my community would be qualified and experienced enough to assist. There has been some funding via Vanish but the support has to register with them. I could use the Medicare system but again I can only go to whom my GP would refer me to and he does not have the knowledge of the problems with adoptees. And you do not see in the yellow pages a list of psychologists showing they are adoption trauma experienced because the lifetime problem adoptees experience is not widely recognised as an area of need. In other words the medical professionals are saying that adoptees must suck it up.

This inquiry has, in my opinion, failed so far to meet the needs of adoptees who are adults. The fact that some senators have referred to us as children is an indication of this. We are the result of the adoption policies of the past. Our mothers had their children removed by many different methods most of which would come under the dictionary term "forced".

They suffered terribly and all should recognise that and as a adoptee I am now only too aware that my life came at the emotional wellbeing of what was a lovely fragile lady who was given no real choice. However, they were not the only victims of this insidious era. Adoptees were equally victims and they should also be acknowledged in their own legitimate right. Not as an afterthought.

I believe that the federal government can assist with the wellbeing of adoptees by validating that we were also equal victims of this era and ensure that decent services are provided to assist us. Adoptees are not interested in seeing if some group of doctors from a bygone era decided to practice eugenics or other stuff like that. We want to look to the future where our needs as products of a society that showed no compassion for mothers or their offspring, are met by professional services not some lobby groups who carry their own baggage

My life has been in constant turmoil since that fateful day in October 1984 and it has only been the love of my dear wife, who has to bear my lack of ability to associate with her and my children that has kept me going. She has often had to step in to fill the void I have left in my children's life. Recently for example my eldest son lost a friend in an accident. Instead of ringing him or seeing him myself, I told her to say I am thinking of him. That is the level of the dissociative state I am in and that can be traced to trauma. The need is now and the good senators can with wisdom start the process.

This submission is not from a person who was cruelly treated by his adoptive parents as described by other submissions. This submission is not from an adoptee that was experimented upon and believes it was because he was adopted. This submission is from an ordinary working class Australian who has led an ordinary life but for nearly half his life has been wondering why his life was turned upside down all those years ago. An ordinary Australian, whose wife has helped to keep him on track after a short episode of self-destructive activities, an ordinary Australian, who is just beginning to learn to trust some of his fellow human beings even though he has felt betrayed by some in recent times who claimed to be his friends and an ordinary Australian who needs to have good proficient quality trauma counselling to reduce the pain of years and years of rejection and he constant fear of not being good enough. The one feature that the discovery did help with was to understand why I had been that way in the past.

This is my story of adoption and it will never end until I have passed on

Thank you for reading my submission

Murray Roy Legro born Kerry Michael Clark