

To the Department of the Senate.

19<sup>th</sup> January 2011

(...)



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

I, Anita Jane Welsh, am a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia, resident in Western Australia.

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 to life, liberty and justice from those who would deny me these rights within and without the borders of Australia.

Anita Jane Welsh

DOB: 14 May 1961

My address at the time of my son's adoption was : (...)  
(...)

The name I gave my son before he was adopted was : (...)

DOB: (...) 1976, he was born at King Edward Memorial Hospital, Subiaco, Western Australia.

The adoption was conducted by the Department of Community Welfare, Perth, Western Australia; the above mentioned public hospital and my parents (...)

The father of my child is

In August 1976 I was fifteen and in my third year of high school. One of my teachers called me into her office and confronted me with her suspicions of my pregnancy. I had to admit it. I was five months along, frightened and in self-denial about my own situation. My parents came to get me from school and from there onwards all decisions regarding what was to happen to me and my baby were taken from me. Conversations between my parents and the agencies that were involved were about me not to me and went on without my having a say in any of it.

We went first to the family doctor who said, with thinly veiled disgust, "She won't be allowed to keep it you know, she's too young". (Dr, (...)  
1976) and my parents no doubt agreed. But I wanted to keep my baby. I was young, not inept.

The father of my baby came back to Australia from England when I was eight months pregnant. He came back for me and our baby, to do the right thing, however, my father spoke to him, threatened him with some sort of legal action - I don't know exactly what he said, but I didn't see him again for four months. My baby was wanted by both of his true parents.

I had to finish my schooling by correspondence as I had been expelled from high school because of my pregnancy. I remember going with my parents to the offices of the Department of Community Welfare while I was pregnant where I had to sign some papers. I was never interviewed alone by anyone at the Dept of Community Welfare, my parents were present every time. There was not a time when I was told that I had any choices, let alone shown any kindness or compassion. I was told that I was too young to be allowed to keep my baby. I was told that I was incapable of taking care of a baby, I was not told of the long reaching negative effects this could have on my life. I was told that I'd forget, I did not know then that this was not the truth and I was not made aware of any rights that I had. They all made sure: my parents, doctors, nurses and department staff, as a collective, that I was to have no hopes of ever being allowed to keep my baby.

Apparently adoption was "in the best interests of the child" and I was deemed "unfit". My mother took me to sign some papers, I don't know what was written in them. At one of these interviews they asked me for a physical description of the baby's father, this was apparently intended to assist in 'matching' our baby to a couple of strangers. The conversations between them, regarding my baby and me, took place over my head. I was never in any doubt that I was supposed to be ashamed of myself. I was treated with disdain, as if I'd been a very naughty child. I had caused this problem and I should just be quiet and grateful they were solving my problem. It was made very clear that I was bad and the price for my social redemption was my child. In actuality I didn't ever feel ashamed but I was very scared.

My parents also made me attend birth preparation classes at King Edward hospital. My mother is far too conservative to have told me herself about the birthing process. The classes did nothing to prepare me for anything that was to follow. What I felt was judgement and humiliation for being a young single girl alone in there amongst all those so-called respectable married couples. Admittedly, I didn't pay a great deal of attention to the information, there seemed no point as any chance to envision a joyful loving image of keeping my baby afterwards was futile. I have had to develop a thick hide to live with all of this, I have had to become emotionally detached to deal with my inexpressible feelings of grief and violation by all who had had a part in the stealing of my own flesh and blood. I did not want anyone else to bring up my child, especially strangers who no doubt perceived me

in a similar way as the rest of the community. I had no idea what kind of people wanted my child for themselves, I was also shocked that my parents could be so cold towards their own daughter and so easily dismiss their first grandchild. Not one person expressed concern towards me, I had to do as I was told to 'fix' the problem, to eliminate my disgrace.

On the day my baby was born I was taken to King Edward Hospital in the afternoon of (...) 1976, I had been in labour since early that morning. When we got there I was given an internal examination, shaved and then given an enema that made me vomit. I was put in a ward with many beds and left there on my own. I was crying because I was frightened and shouting because I was in such a lot of pain. The nurse told me to stop being silly. They gave me an injection of something strong that knocked me out.

When I came to it was about three o'clock in the morning and I was in the delivery room. I woke up in excruciating pain, I had not had my baby yet. My mother was there and I think she (or someone) asked could I have some more of whatever it was but the nurse said "no, we want her awake so she can push." I remember the birth of my son. I remember an unexpected episiotomy and I remember pushing my baby out. When my baby was taken straight away I saw a nurse mouth the word 'boy' to my mother who was at my right shoulder - she didn't say it to me.

My baby was literally taken from between my legs and whipped away to somewhere behind a curtain before I could even glance at him, not a glimpse and I never heard his first cry either, he was just gone. There may have been something to block my view, I'm unsure about that. I don't think it was very difficult for them to steal my child. Then they gave me another injection. I don't remember delivering the afterbirth and I don't remember having my vagina stitched.

Later that day I woke up in a ward that they called the sun room, I was the only person in there. After I'd had something to eat and a shower I was moved into another ward, I was put in with women who were keeping their babies, the married ones. The babies were wheeled in to their mothers for feeding and cuddling in front of me. I had a brief moment of hope and excitement and I foolishly thought that someone would wheel my baby in to me and that I was going to be allowed to keep him. That did not happen though. I feel this was so heartless, it was incredibly cruel and insensitive on the part of the hospital staff and I wonder if that was just another part of my 'punishment'.

I asked a nurse if I could see my baby; she told me no. I asked another nurse the same thing later on and she said your baby is not here so I asked her where he was and she would not answer me. The next day was Christmas Day and a long table was set up in the middle of the ward for Christmas lunch, so we could all 'celebrate' together, what a farce. More humiliation, I felt like I was nothing and no-one. I lost track of the days. At some point a woman came to me and asked

me to sign something and asked me did I want to give my baby a name. I said (...) I signed something and that was that.

I don't remember having engorged breasts so perhaps I was given something to stop lactation, however I vividly remember the sting of salt baths every four hours to heal the episiotomy that I had been given without warning. In the weeks following the birth and removal of my baby I desperately wanted him. I didn't want to just see him or hold him – I wanted him back, he was mine.

I somehow gleaned the information that the babies for adoption went to N'Gala for six weeks. I phoned N'Gala, I wanted to see my son. The woman I spoke to denied any knowledge of my baby. I phoned them several times and was told not to phone there anymore. I felt dehumanized.

After some time, a couple of weeks I suppose, I was taken again to the Dept of Community Welfare office, this time to sign something irrevocable. I was told that I had thirty days to 'change my mind' but it was never a genuine option. Actually I had not changed my mind at all – I still wanted to keep my son, that has never changed in thirty four years. On that particular day there was a baby in the foyer as we were on our way out, I thought it might be my baby and that the new parents were here to get him. It was horrible. Everyone was ignoring me and pretending that the baby wasn't there and we all acted like I couldn't see the baby, not to mention that I might be feeling very hurt and vulnerable. I felt like I wasn't allowed to acknowledge that there was a real baby there, it seemed that babies in general were now another taboo subject, like my pregnancy had been. I don't know if it was my baby or not - probably not, the various 'departments' all made sure I couldn't get anywhere near him. All courtesy of The Department of Welfare. What about my welfare? I was denied a voice and had no advocate.

My own welfare was of little consequence to those with authority over the adoption. I was not told by anyone that I actually did have rights regarding my own life and that of my son, I was not told that the very same department that was taking my baby from me also had the capacity to help me and my boyfriend be parents to our baby. The options were not explained to me and I was certainly never ever informed of the lifelong consequences - regret, remorse, mental turmoil and social dysfunction – that I might encounter due to the relinquishment of my child. Every aspect of my situation, namely – being young, pregnant and unmarried – was regarded with scorn and the shame was laid on with a trowel. The word 'relinquish' is loaded with negativity, I want it known that I did not willingly relinquish my baby.

From then onwards the key word was silence. I was never counselled, it was never spoken of at home, seemingly I had put it behind me. The truth is that it was in front of me, and has been ever since. I felt emotionally abandoned. I have had to numb my feelings, and not always very effectively. This tragic event has shaped my life. I have a particularly hard time with the fact that the government assumed I

was unfit to be my own beautiful child's mother. The presumption that it would be of little consequence to my baby's well being that he not have a solid, consistent bond with the person who really loved him for the first six weeks of his life. That to be passed from nurse to nurse and live in an institution was a better option for him that to be with me, his true mother, who wanted and loved him. How can that possibly be seen to be in the best interest of anyone? It is both cruel and ridiculous.

I went on to marry the father of my baby when I was seventeen and promptly had another baby - my beautiful daughter - which was all just fine, a joyous occasion for everyone as I was now 'respectably wed', and incidentally still quite young, yet I was treated decently and respectfully that time. The hypocrisy and narrow mindedness of our society never ceases to amaze me.

When the laws changed in the 1990's my son sought contact with me, he was nineteen then. It took eighteen months before we met (and even then that was only one meeting). Once again, I did not seem to have any rights, I could only go through the Dept. of Community Welfare - by then called Department of Social Services, to contact my son, I was again at the mercy of others making decisions that should have been mine.

These are the basic cold hard facts of what happened to me as an unwed mother in 1976 at the hands of doctors, department staff, hospital staff and my parents, who all salvaged their own sense of respectability in exchange for my child. The psychological effect this has had on my life has been unfathomable, the silence has by far been the hardest to endure - to never be able to talk about it because of the shame it evokes has only perpetuated further silence and concentrated the grief, the whole thing reeks and festers.

I was court ordered to do drug counselling two years ago and that was the start of my healing; facing the facts of the repercussions has been an ordeal that is more painful than I can adequately describe.

I attended the adoption apology on October 19<sup>th</sup> at Parliament House in Western Australia - it's a start I suppose.

I thank the people who have fought long and hard to have this inquiry. I appreciate that all their work has enabled me to jump on the band wagon. How could I not want to be part of it. From a selfish perspective, the timing is perfect for my own healing, but also I'm finally feel like I am a part of something, it's like I finally belong to a group.

I have quite thoroughly researched the adoption practices and I know that my human rights were denied to me. I believe the processes used to procure my perfect baby for an infertile couple were illegal. The use of coercion and lies to belittle me, by saying I was unfit, and trick me into believing that I did not have a choice, when I actually did, has all but destroyed my faith in humanity and reinforced the knowledge that I was badly wronged.

I am aware that the social mores of the time had no room for single parents but that is in direct contradiction to the laws of the same time

that did have the power to assist single parents. It's ironic that during such a law abiding era the law was so blatantly disregarded by so many and the deception justified in the guise of keeping society 'respectable'. How respectable is that society which violates the most fundamental of human relationships, that of a mother and child. How does a so-called 'civilized' society tear the two apart at the moment of birth? How does that society justify itself 'legally' declaring that baby "as the babe of no-one" when the child quite clearly is the baby of someone - it's own mother. What kind of ideology supports those acts?

I have now found common ground with an unknown group of women who were all denied our basic human right to be mothers to our own babies. I want to help as much as I can by adding my name and my voice to support this important issue. What I want is justice; I want vindication for myself and my now adult son and I want the truth to be known. The methods that were used to take my child from me were wrong, inhumane and devastating in the extreme, not to mention illegal. The results of these practices have had such a negative impact on my life that I have never really recovered myself after having part of me stolen. Infertile strangers were NOT entitled to my baby as a matter of course, yet they were considered more worthy than me - in every aspect: socially, morally and financially. My pain has been their joy.

I swear that everything I have written above is the truth.

Yours Faithfully.

Anita Jane Welsh