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Senate Inquiry into
“Commonwealth contribution to forced adoption policies and
practices.”

Preamble to Submission.

I am a citizen of the Commonwealth resident in the State of
New South Wales.

As a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia I had and still do
have an inalienable right to protection under the Australian
Constitution, Rule of Law and the Common Law of this country.
As an Australian citizen the Commonwealth should have
afforded me protection from the unlawful and harmful actions
that threaten my right to life, liberty and justice from those who
denied me these rights, within and without, the borders of
Australia.

I wish to remain anonymous as I do not want to cause any
problems to my son.

I became pregnant in a country town and the father was not
prepared to help me. I knew my parents, especially my mother,
would never cope with the shame of having an illegitimate
grandchild so I decided to go to Sydney and have the child there.

Her last words to me as I was leaving were “If you don’t have
that child adopted, you can never come home again.” I went to
the Salvation Army in Sydney and was placed into a home for
old women where I and several other unmarried pregnant girls
did most of the work there under the orders of the matron,
some Salvation Army women, and a cook.

I worked in the kitchen and it was hot, hard work. One of my
tasks was to scrub the floor until one day the cook told me to use

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a mop as I was having difficulty getting down to do it. I had almost finished when Matron came in and said “What is she doing with a mop? I want to see her on her hands and knees before our precious lord!” Matron came in as I was scrubbing it and said “That’s better; down on her hands and knees where she belongs.” This is just one example of how we were treated there.

I was sent to Bethesda, the maternity hospital in Marrickville. The girls usually went there six weeks prior to their babies’ expected birth date but as no one was available to take my place I was kept there until I only had four weeks to go.

Again I worked in the kitchen but the duties there were much lighter. We were virtual prisoners there as we were not allowed out except on a Saturday from 2.00p.m until 4.00p.m.

We were always being told by the staff that it would best for our babies if we gave them up for adoption as we couldn’t afford to keep them and they would have far better lives with a mother and a father. If we REALLY loved them we would give them up. We would forget about our babies and would marry and have other children and be happy. One day I was asked by one of them if I could describe the father of my baby, that is, if I knew who he was! This was so they could match the baby to possible adoptive parents.

Although I was now 21 I knew very little about giving birth. When I was 13 my mother asked me if I knew where babies came from. I said no and she told me they came out of your stomach. I assumed they must come out through the navel. One of the girls who was pregnant was a nurse and on Sundays after lunch she would give a talk to any of the girls under 18 about giving birth. I would walk slowly past and hear words such as “the water breaks.” (What water?) “You have a show.” (What

is

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that?) “Bearing down pains.” All a mystery to me.

This was all I knew when I went into labour one night in March, 1958. One of the Majors took me over to the hospital and I was changed into a gown and put into a bed and given an injection which made me very sleepy. I was then asked a lot of questions for some form to be filled in but I can't remember what it was about. I felt a rush of liquid and realised this must be the waters breaking so pressed the buzzer and a nurse came in. I told her my water had broken and she said that I'd had a show too and I looked down and saw some blood. I was learning fast!

I was then taken to another room and they were very busy that night as there were married women in labour too and they were short staffed. I was given a tablet to make me sleep and told to be quiet and the light was turned off and the door was closed and I was left in the dark without a buzzer for approximately five hours. I couldn't see any light anywhere and couldn't hear anything. Nobody came near me all that time and I felt completely alone and abandoned. I didn't find labour very painful at all; it was extremely uncomfortable though as it felt as if the baby was pushing my stomach with its feet as hard as it could. I knew nothing about the shallow and heavy breathing technique but I found myself doing this as it was easier.

Then I began to bear down and reached down and felt the baby's head. This was a tremendous shock to me as I was expecting it to emerge through my navel so I began calling out for help and then screaming until finally a nurse came with a torch and said “What are you screaming about?” She gasped when she saw the baby's head and then a sister came and wanted to know what all the noise was. The nurse said “Look at this! We'll have to stay with her now as if we haven't got enough to do.” Sister said that she had to go and help one of the married women but

would be back as soon as she could.

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They tied one of my legs up in the air which I found very uncomfortable. They gave me chloroform which made me sleepy as I had been awake all night. They were not at all nice to me and kept telling me to push and to stay awake. My baby was born around 4.30a.m. and I heard a cry. The sister asked me what I was going to call him and I sleepily said "Him?" He was taken away. I heard the nurse say "Look at this sister. Do you think it should be stitched?" The sister said that it didn't matter as it was only one of the girls so I was only given one stitch but there should have been more. We girls were supposed to have either the doctor or Matron present when we gave birth but I didn't.

I was eventually taken to the unmarried mothers' ward. Four other girls were in there. Our babies were brought to us six times a day and we had to bottle feed them and orange juice at 4.p.m. after two weeks. The door to our ward was always kept closed but occasionally Matron would come in with a group of people and announce that this was the unmarried mothers' ward and put us on show as if we were animals in a zoo. We would hear comments such as "How kind of you, Matron, to take in these poor wayward girls!" I always pulled the sheet over my head as I hated being humiliated like that.

My breasts were bound tightly with a towel to dry my milk up and I was given tablets as well. I don't know what they were. In later years I had several breast lumps which had to be aspirated. I wondered if these lumps were due to the tablets.

One day a woman came in and pulled the curtains around me. I was amazed as the nurses never bothered to when they attended to us, even when we were put on pans. She had the adoption

papers and I was told that I had five minutes to sign them and

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they had better be signed when she came back. As I had no one to help me and I didn't know what else to do I signed them.

Then I wrote to my mother and told her I'd signed the adoption papers and as soon as the people came for my baby I could leave there. She wrote back immediately and told me she expected I would stay in Sydney and find a job there. I was very upset as I thought I was going back home. If I had known that I wasn't wanted back perhaps I could have kept my baby. I don't know how I would have looked after him and I was never told that there were other options we could have taken if we had been informed about them. I also was never told that I had 30 days to change my mind.

During the time I was at Bethesda all of the girls had their babies adopted except two girls who were intellectually impaired. They were encouraged to keep their babies. I was amazed! Obviously only perfect babies were wanted for adoption! If my son had not been perfect would I have been encouraged to keep him and would I have been assisted to do so and told of options that were available so I could do so?

I had my baby for three weeks. I did not realise that I would love him so much. I lived for the time when I would be holding him and feeding him and I wanted it to go on forever. The babies usually went on Tuesdays or Thursdays but mine didn't so I expected to have him for the weekend but it happened on the Friday.

Matron was standing outside the babies' ward with my baby on a counter and was dressing him. He was crying and so was I. She said that it was the best thing I could do to give him up for

adoption and he would have a proper mother and a proper father
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(as if I wasn't a proper person) and look at these lovely clothes and I would never be able to give him anything like that. Then she gave him to me to hold while she said a prayer "Guide this little soul along life's pathway and bless this poor mother in her time of sorrow." There was more but I can't remember it. She then took him out of my arms and walked down the corridor with him and out of the door.

I was sobbing and went into the toilet opposite. I thought I would cry for a long time but I couldn't as I was so angry that this was done in the corridor of the hospital with doctors, nurses, patients, staff and visitors walking past knowing my baby was being taken. I felt so humiliated that this wasn't done in a private room. How could she be so cruel and heartless?

Eventually I went back and packed my belongings and went to see Matron to collect my money. She didn't bother to ask me where I was going; she only said "So you are going now? And you'll be a good girl and not get into any more trouble?" "No, Matron. Thank you, Matron. Goodbye Matron." I went to say goodbye to some of the girls I was friendly with and one asked where I was going. I said I didn't know but I was getting out of there as fast as I could. She told me about a place called The Travellers' Aid near Central Station so I went there and stayed there for several days until I found a room to rent.

After three weeks I found a job but I can't recall what I did during those three weeks. I know I was incredibly angry about what had happened and feeling so humiliated. I couldn't cry as I was so angry so I blocked all of my feelings out because if you don't feel anything you don't hurt. I never looked in prams and kept away from babies. I never let myself think of my baby except on his birthdays. And so the years went by with me

wondering each birthday how he was, where he was, was he
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happy, were they looking after him, **WAS HE STILL ALIVE?**
Because you **DON'T KNOW.**

I married twice but both of my husbands were sterile. My first husband had had mumps in his early teens and he was sterile because of it. I didn't know this until we had been married for some time. After he told me I stayed in bed for two days and cried for the babies I knew I would never have. He began abusing me physically, sexually, mentally and verbally until I left him after five and half years.

Some years later I married an older man who had to have a prostate operation not long after we married and the doctor didn't tell us it would make him sterile. So I never had another child.

I never found it easy to make friends as I felt different from other girls as I had such a big secret in my life and I found it difficult to trust people. And one never forgets; it is always there in the back of one's mind.

As I am in my seventies I don't expect anything from this inquiry. An apology will not help me; and no amount of reparation will ever replace losing my son. But people should know how cruelly, inhumanely and insensitively I, and how many other girls, were treated by these "religious" people.

I would like to thank all the people who have sent submissions in; I know how difficult it has been for me to do mine, and I wish them all the very best for the future.

Thank you.

