

Parliament of Australia

Senate enquiry

Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced
Adoption Policies and Practices

6/27/2011

It is almost 42 years since my baby daughter was adopted and I am grateful for the opportunity to inform others of my experience as a relinquishing mother, but it remains almost as upsetting as ever to recall the details.

I was 14 years old when my mother took me to the local G.P. for a pregnancy test. During that appointment in early 1969 my pregnancy was confirmed. I was about 20 weeks pregnant. The fear and shame I felt was overwhelming. Decisions were taken out of my hands of course. I felt I deserved to be punished and I deserved to suffer. The Doctor suggested solutions to this problem of my pregnancy: immediate placement in a home for unmarried mothers, and adoption of the baby.

The Doctor reassured my mother that the whole situation would eventually be a dim memory and have no significant effect on me or my family. I could return to school and pick up where I had left off as if nothing had happened. This attitude ties in with the policy at Kedesh Maternity Home where it was assumed "you'll have your baby and go home and forget".

I was sent to Kedesh in Kew for many months in 1969. I felt safe there but also isolated and lonely and very ashamed of myself. The surrounding area was nice and we were walking distance from the Kew shops. We had a cooking and cleaning roster in this rather large grand building. Outings during the week consisted of walks to the shops and bus trips to Queen Victoria Hospital for Ante-Natal visits. Visitors were allowed on Sundays.

At one Ante-Natal visit it was decided that my pregnancy was less advanced than first thought so my parents were forced to arrange alternative accommodation as there were limits as to how long each of the 24 young women could stay. For that one month I stayed with my Grandmother in a small Victorian country town until I could return to Kedesh.

Contrary to what is stated in the web-site records of Kedesh Maternity Home (1926-1991) I don't recall receiving any counselling or Ante-Natal education. In fact I was criticized for not realising I was in early labour and quickly transferred to Hospital for the birth of my daughter.

Following the admission process at the Queen Victoria Hospital I was restricted to bed in a large, open ward with minimal privacy. I received very little support or care from the Midwives. I was given an injection during the labour without informed consent for "making too much noise". Before long I remember involuntarily pushing and reaching down to feel my baby's head. A midwife asked "is everything OK?" I answered "I think I'm having a baby". I was promptly rolled on to my back and my baby was born soon after. Just enough time to cut an episiotomy. So there she was wailing away with her back to me being held upside down. I looked at the clock and made a promise to myself that I would always remember this moment of her birth – as many details as possible of that precious moment. Well, I did proudly remember the day of the week and the time of her birth as I privately celebrated her birthday each year for many years after. She was whisked away before I could catch a glimpse of her face let alone touch her. Later, as the Doctor repaired my episiotomy I remember him making rude and inappropriate comments and asking embarrassing questions. There was no-one else in the room and I felt so vulnerable.

It was years later during one of many counselling sessions that the Counsellor suggested I became a Midwife to "right the wrongs" of my experiences during pregnancy and childbirth. I wonder.

I was transferred to the Post-Natal ward which was similar to the ward where I laboured and gave birth in. It was a large ward full of women and their babies, with very little privacy apart from curtains that could be drawn around the bed. I don't recall much in the way of education, explanation or emotional support. It was a very lonely and emotionally painful time. Apart from my sore breasts, sore bottom and saggy belly there was no evidence that I had just given birth. I knew I had had a little girl but where was she, who was looking after her, was she alright, and was she normal? What did she look like? Could I have a photo? I named her whilst in Hospital. I named her Samantha Jane. I was never given the opportunity to see or touch her until our reunion in 1987. We had a wonderful and exciting time together at that meeting. I am so very grateful for her. It was love at first sight even after all those years.