

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

October 2011

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

Preamble to Submission

I, am a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia resident in NSW.

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.

Statement:

It is nearly 46 years since my first son was born on ... December 1965 at the Mater Hospital in Crows Nest, NSW.

I was seventeen and, at that time, residing in the care of the Sisters of Mercy at the Waitara Foundling Home.

I am now married nearly 44 years and together we have two children: a wonderful daughter, 43 years and a special son, 41 years.

It is only recently that I have become aware of the Senate inquiry while searching on the internet for information about past adoptions and other information; thus deciding to submit to the inquiry.

It is with great difficulty that I write about my experiences for a number of reasons.

Firstly, due to the necessity of bringing to the surface the many memories and emotions I have tried to keep contained for all these years.

Secondly, I have limited recall surrounding that time: some memories have surfaced over past years; some very sad and hurtful memories; and some that to this day I cannot believe took place and I continually try to push back so that I can simply go on with life.

I prefer not to detail all of the memories I have, and I will outline as best I can, those that I feel are relevant to this enquiry and its Terms of Reference.

Please Note: I do not wish to address the committee personally due to the above reasons; however, I do wish to lodge this submission to the inquiry in support of all the other women and adopted children, who have gone through similar experiences to my own.

Submission:**Terms of Reference:****1 The role, if any, of the Commonwealth Government, its policies and practices in contributing to past adoption practices.**

Society plays an integral role in the attitudes of its time; and, in my opinion, government reflects to some extent such attitudes, and values, in its policies and practices.

With all due respect, and particularly to the exceptions, quite often, one finds upon reflection and acquired wisdom, that many of those views, attitudes and values are built and enforced upon hypocrisy—do as I say not do as I do.

I was raised to respect authority, those in positions of authority, and those senior to myself, but to find that those same powers of authority—whether it be government, police, medical personnel, the church or within one's own family—need to be questioned when one's legal rights, regardless of age, are ignored.

Policies and best practice procedures may be written and put in place, but the individual interpretation and action taken can be quite different. There are those who seek power over another and these same policies and practices, while written with all good intention at the time, can become written and verbal weapons used that are both misguided and often abusive.

I state emphatically that at no time was I involved in any decision making process about my life and what was going to take place before, during, or after the birth:

* I *was not informed* of my legal rights.

* I *was not counselled* before, during or after the birth.

* I *did not give an informed consent* to the adoption; I did not even realise adoption papers had been signed. (I found out, through hearsay years later, that I should have had time to reconsider the adoption.)

The only signature I remember giving was to a woman who came into my hospital room and said something along the lines of ... 'I need you to sign this quickly so that we can release you from hospital.'

(To this day, I become extremely anxious if I need to sign papers, I need to read and re-read everything put in front of me to ensure that I understand the meaning.

It will plague me for weeks, with many sleepless nights before and after signing something, in case of any repercussions.

I have great difficulty in trusting anything I am told, unless I check through it myself.

* I *was not allowed* to see my son after the birth nor through the duration of my hospital stay.

(However, on the day I was released I was told I had to personally take him back to the Waitara Home and watch while the Sister-in-charge of the nursery weighed him. I then had to dress him in the clothes I was told to bring and hand him over to her and leave.

It was the most traumatic and devastating day of my life. I simply could not speak, cry nor feel anything. I cannot remember anything from that moment until a few weeks later.

All I have to treasure is a small photo of him, which one of the nurses took for me, and a little bit of information that he had gone to a good home—before I had even left Waitara, and the hospital bracelet. At least I had some friends in the nurses at the home and I am grateful to that nurse to this day.)

* I was *not* given any options to enable me to keep my son.

(One can only make a choice if one is given more than one option to choose from.)

* I also question the medical/clinical practices of that time: the need for respect and dignity afforded a person regardless of circumstance or status by the medical profession (particularly male personnel), and the right of any person, of any age, to consent to privacy and the manner in which examinations are conducted and who may be present.

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2 The potential role of the Commonwealth in developing a national framework to assist States and Territories to address the consequences for the mothers, their families and children who were subjected to forced adoption policies.

In my opinion, there *is* a decided role for the Commonwealth of this country to assist States and Territories to address the consequences, and support the needs, for mothers, their families and children who were subjected to forced adoption policies and subsequent practices.

Since reading some of the evidence provided to this Senate inquiry, I have realised that within the vast number of submissions, including my own, most have *definitely not and may never* come to terms with the trauma and reality of our earlier experiences without adequate support and counselling, and being provided with appropriate information to what happened thereafter.

A submission from Community Services, Department of Human Services NSW presented to this Inquiry noted a report by the NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues: *Releasing the Past: Adoption Practices 1950 – 1998*, tabled in the NSW Parliament in December 2000.

I agree with the findings and recommendations of that report; however, more needs doing.

My questions: How many of the recommendations were accepted, enacted upon and funded where needed?

If the statistics recognise the number of adoptions in question, who will then contact the mothers, their families and the children in question to let it be known that services and information (is) or will be available to them?

(My point being that I was not even aware that this inquiry is being conducted until I came across this myself through some inner compulsion and the need to again search for information.)

Perhaps, in the future, the most direct forms of providing information to the public about such inquiries are through the radio and television media.

Articles in newspapers or other such means do not always reach their target group.

There is also reference to an agreed joint national study into such practices by the Community and Disability Services Ministers; the study being conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Research to be delivered to the Ministers at the end of this year.

When will the findings of this study be available?

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PERSONAL HISTORY

The worst possible words I heard often from a family member was how hard-hearted I was or had become.

Did they not stop to consider or understand what it had done to me to have to relinquish my first child?

I was sorry to have caused problems in the first instance, especially for my family; however, mistakes are made, and difficult situations one may not know how to handle arise throughout one's life. It *was*, I felt, through lack of adequate education, at home, school and through my social environment, that contributed to my lack of wisdom at the time.

I also felt completely ostracised by some family members and through my contact with the entire system.

Imagine coming home from work one evening and seeing my bags packed. No discussion ensued, except that my boss had been told that I would not be returning to work due to some family matter. The next morning, I was taken to where? ... I didn't know until I arrived.

My physical needs were certainly looked after, but emotionally and psychologically—nothing. (The Sisters of Mercy at the home were kind but very strict; a discipline I was quite used to through my schooling. We had duties at the home and we looked after the young children there from around 6.00 am to 6.00 pm, six days per week.

During my breaks, I was able to continue to practise and maintain my piano studies, and was able to leave the premises on a day visit with family members only; otherwise, we were not permitted to leave the grounds.

There was little conversation, except for some chatter among the girls at times. There was a strict adherence to lights out and other requirements and no excuses for not completing one's duties—except if ill and on the attending doctor's advice.)

Upon my return home, and as previously mentioned, I could not speak nor feel anything.

I maintained a close relationship with a couple of my friends from college but, because I was with them more often than at my home, my mother accused me of running wild everywhere, which was totally untrue. But again, no-one listened to me.

Subsequently, I found myself taken, one day, to a police complex where I was questioned by two people; a woman and a man. Both of whom, I understood my mother knew.

I was accused of all sorts of things and was told that if I didn't agree with what my mother had told them I was doing, then I would be sent to a girls correctional facility until I learnt to behave. Feeling completely overwhelmed I agreed with whatever they said.

I returned home and went into an even deeper silence that to this day, even though my mother has passed on, I have difficulty with discussing anything with the remaining family member who was present at that time.

No issues were ever discussed or raised, in our family, in a child's presence. We were not allowed to raise our voices, show anger, or emotions. I was considered wilful and outspoken if I tried to give an opinion, especially when I thought something was unjustified or unfair. It is no wonder that I still have great difficulty in expressing myself. I prefer to write my thoughts and concerns rather than speak them.

These are but small portions of my experiences, but I am hopeful that my submission will support and demonstrate the necessity for adequate services and guidance when and where needed.

I would like to suggest that many of the obstacles in obtaining information, for all who have experienced the policies and practices of the times in question, be removed and we be permitted access to appropriate information together with a choice of means of access where one would feel most comfortable; also, without cost.

The lifetime cost and consequence to us is immeasurable.

There is much less stigma attached to those who find themselves in similar circumstances these days with many more support services available, financially and psychologically.

I was denied those same basic rights. My son was denied his rights to be able to live his life with me all because of the stigma placed on us by society.

Compassion denied.

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