



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

I Susan Ruth Atkinson am a member of the British Commonwealth, a citizen of New Zealand and a resident of the Commonwealth of Australia currently on holiday in New Zealand.

As such I believe I have an inalienable right to protection under the Australian Constitution and the Common Laws of these countries. As an Australian resident, 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

My submission is in two parts. The first is my experience as a birth-mother and the second is my observations after working with NZJigsaw as an informal counsellor.

Part One: My experiences as a birth mother.

Christmas 1961 and I was looking forward to the new year; receiving my School Certificate results, getting engaged on my birthday in June & starting to plan my wedding in the near future. But, then the bombshell hit, I realized that I must be pregnant & no sooner had I realized this my mother also realized the same thing. She immediately demanded that I ring (...) , my boyfriend of nearly two years, and get him around so I could tell him the news. He duly came around & I barely had time to tell him when mother stormed into the room screaming at him to get out of the house & to never come back. The last I saw of him was as he walked away, stopping every few steps, hesitating & looking back obviously not wanting to leave but not daring to come back to face mother again.

Immediately I was sent to Auckland to Motherhood of Man but a few days later I refused to stay & went home again.

After this I was sent to stay with my aunt in Hamilton where all the talk was about having my child adopted. I told my aunt that I did not want this to happen & fully believed that I had the right to decide this. I was told by mother that because I wasn't married I needed to talk to Social Welfare to see about getting income support from them. She took me to see SW in Hamilton & I was signed up to receive a Sickness Benefit. What I didn't realise was that the interview was also a pre-adoption interview. I signed up for ante-natal care and to ensure that I was registered with the hospital when the time came to give birth. I signed in as a married woman. Later I discovered that someone, possibly mother had told the hospital that I was single. Mother was so determined to get rid of my child that she even chose to ignore advice from our family doctor that adoption is not always the best answer.

A family friend was a registered midwife and she advised me to keep active & suggested walking. My aunt & I walked many miles over the next few months. My doctor never had any concerns over my health during my pregnancy and there was never any discussion about adoption.

About a week before my due date I woke with my first indication that labour had

(...)

started. My uncle drove me to hospital, where I went through the preparations for the birth of my baby. I was put on to a bed and given an injection for 'pain'. Immediately I went to sleep. I didn't wake up during the entire labour. I woke briefly after my baby was born when a nurse told me 'congratulations you have a daughter' and she was told that I wasn't allowed to know this because the baby was to be adopted. Before I could dispute this I went back to sleep. Next time I woke was when there was a commotion & heard the theatre sister laughing at a nurse & saying 'what, did you think it was twins?'; immediately I went back to sleep. Then I woke again as they removed my baby from the theatre but as I tried to stop them I went back to sleep & did not wake until very late that day or early the next day. When I asked for my child I was told I couldn't see it because it was to be adopted. I could not get anyone to hear me when I said & repeated that my baby was not for adoption. Unknown to the matron, sisters or mother two of the nurses were girls I had been to school with and they risked their jobs to give me news of my daughter. After I had searched the hospital looking for my child they told me where she was about when I went to that ward I was ordered back to my room.

On the 5th day after my baby was born I was told I was going home. By then I knew that the hospital was never going to give my child to me but, I had had a visit from a Social Worker who told me that I would be required to sign papers to finalise the adoption. I was determined not to sign & then they would have to return my baby to me. A day or two after I had been taken back to my aunts house mother said she was going to register the 'kid'. & she went off into Hamilton to do this only to return a short while later in a screaming rage because she could not register the baby without me being there or having a signed consent from me to do so. I signed the paper & told her that the child should be named Soraya Rata but when she came back again she said 'I didn't give the kid a name'.

I was taken to my home town the next day.

During the next week or so mother realised that I was carrying our cat as one would a baby and asked why. I told her that my arms ached for my child and the cat seems to ease this. I was ordered not to go near the cat again!!

About a week after we got home I was taken to the local solicitor to sign the consent forms which I refused to do. Mother got very angry & stormed out of his office but I still refused to sign. After some time the lawyer said 'it doesn't matter if you sign or not, the adoption is final anyway'. Foolishly I believed that I had been beaten & I signed the papers.

However, I couldn't accept the fact that my child was gone & I went back to the lawyer asked him to help me get her back. He told me that he had no reason to help me because he had been working on behalf of the adoptive parents. However, his receptionist was a friend of mine & she told me where my daughter had been taken & the name of the other lawyer who had acted for the adoptive parents.

Within days I had found an excuse to visit friends in Auckland & once there I caught a bus to the town where my child was. I went directly to the lawyer & told him I wanted my child returned to me. He told me that the adoptive parents had already had to return one child & that there was no way they would be returning mine. He then ordered me out of his office before he called the police.

Back to Auckland where I went to Social Welfare & asked them to help me. They said I should talk to a lawyer, which I did to no avail. He was of the impression that a child needed 2 parents & would not listen when I said that my child would have 2 parents because once she was returned her father & I would be married.

When I went home I was surprised to find that mother had decided that she would try to get my child returned. I think that for once in his life my father had stood up to her &

had demanded that she try. He never forgave himself for not taking a stand, earlier, over this. It may also have been because she realised that I had tried to commit suicide because of the grief I was feeling or because I, an adoptee, told her that my real mother would have understood and helped me keep my child.

Needless to say, I was never reunited with my baby. I finally met my child when she was 17 and due to get married. She fitted into my family as if she had never been anywhere else. A few years later I arranged for my daughter, her husband and 3 children to come to my home to meet her birth-father. We all had a great afternoon and I could not help thinking that this is how we should have been. But, next morning I woke up crying again. I spent that day walking the house & screaming - 'they took my baby' 'I want my baby' 'the bastards took my f...n baby' all versions of the same theme. Next day I went to my doctor who told me that I was suffering from unresolved grief.

This grief has never gone away, it has abated and I have learned to control it but it is just under the surface.

My other children have suffered because of my loss. I love them all but have never been able to express it unreservedly. I have always been afraid that if I got too close I would lose them as well.

Part Two: Observations from work within Jigsaw.

For close to thirty years I have worked with Jigsaw Inc, (now disbanded but still operating as NZJigsaw) operating the Nationwide Register of people searching for family lost to adoption. During this time I have spoken to innumerable women who were searching for their child/children. The overwhelming insight I have gained is that most of these women, even if superficially they relinquished their child 'willingly', would have chosen to keep their child if they had been offered a way to do so; ie maintenance from the father. Instead some were subjected to 9 months of being told they would never cope; others were subjected to cruelty and abuse until they agreed to relinquish; others were drugged at the time of the birth and their child removed without their consent; others were allowed to tend for their child in the hospital but were refused the right to leave with the child; many were lied to by the solicitor whom they believed to be working on their behalf but who, because the adoptive family was paying believed their allegiance lay with the adoptive family. I draw your attention to the New Zealand tv/doco-drama 'A Piece of my Heart' portraying the real life experience of 3 young girls incarcerated in a religious home for unwed mothers.

However, it was not always unwed mothers whose children were taken. I have spoken to several women who were married and giving birth to child number 3,4,5 etc whose child cried and looked a healthy pink colour. After the first glimpse they were refused access to the child and were later told that the child had died. These women were never permitted to see the child's body, and later were told that their hospital records were no longer available. They firmly believe that the child lived and had been given away.

I have also noted in my work with adoptees, that many have always felt that they must have done something wrong - otherwise why would they have been given away and had their identities changed. It is interesting to note that in the 1990's a New Zealand male prisoner undertook research into the population of male prisoners in New Zealand. He found that 95% of the male prisoners had either been adopted or fostered. Jigsaw had always believed that this figure stood at 85% and have heard that Australian figures were similar. I find these figures very disturbing because they confirm the research undertaken over many years (some dating back to the 1920's) which found that children removed from their birth-mother do not 'flourish' in the same way as children left with the birth-parent.

I have also found that, although birth-parents were assured that their child would go to 'good' homes, adoptive parents are not always 'good' people. They raped, beat, murdered and generally abused the child in their care, usually with impunity because adopted children tend to try to please the adoptive family just in case they are found wanting; see my initial comment re adoptees.

Conclusion:

It is my firm belief that all parties who have at any time denied a mother, unmarried or not, the right to decide, without any form of coercion, the future of her child should be forced to face up to their behaviour and be subject to the full force of the law.

(...)

SIGNATURE

(...)

11th March 2011

ANTHONY KERMODE
SOLICITOR
AUCKLAND (...)

(...)

#Signature of legal
representative

#Signature of or on behalf of
party if not legally represented

Capacity

Date of signature

**ANTHONY KERMODE
SOLICITOR
AUCKLAND**

[eg solicitor, authorised officer, role of party]

11th March 2011.

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