

**COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE FOR INQUIRY AND  
REPORT – PAST ADOPTION PRACTICES.**

**CONTENTS:**

**TERM OF REFERENCE ‘A’**

**INTRODUCTION**

**OVERVIEW OF ADOPTION**

**MY PERSONAL STORY**

**W.A. HANSARD (HISTORICAL)**

**REFERENCES AND QUOTES – GIVEN TO W.A. MEDIA ON  
ANNOUNCEMENT OF APOLOGY**

**ALISON XAMON’S SPEECH W.A. LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**TERM OF REFERENCE (B) –**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**PERSONAL LETTER REGARDING CONCERNS ABOUT MY INTERVIEW  
WITH PAST ADOPTION SERVICES**

**TERMS OF REFERENCE “A”:**

(a) the role, if any, of the Commonwealth Government, its policies and practices in contributing to forced adoptions.

**INTRODUCTION**

My name is Sue MacDonald

. I am happy to have my submission on the submission’s site.

**The following are my opinions** based on reading - from records, Hansard, research, testimony from two State Inquiries, talking to many, many mothers in support groups and my own personal account of my experiences and feelings when my daughter was taken for adoption.

MY CEREMONIAL GARDEN SPEECH AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, PERTH WESTERN AUSTRALIA ON THE 19<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2010 (acknowledging mothers who had their children taken for adoption and have since taken their own lives or passed away).

IN THE MELBOURNE GENERAL CEMETERY, JIM SCULLIN, A PRIME MINISTER OF THIS COUNTRY DURING “THE GREAT DEPRESSION” PEACEFULLY SLEEPS IN HIS FINAL RESTING PLACE.

HE IS REMEMBERED ON HIS TOMBSTONE WITH HIS OWN WORDS:

“JUSTICE AND HUMANITY DEMAND INTERFERENCE WHENEVER THE WEAK ARE BEING CRUSHED BY THE STRONG”

JUST INSIDE THE GATE OF THE SAME CEMETERY, IS A POWERFUL MEMORIAL IN RECOGNITION OF MOTHERS WHO HAD THEIR CHILDREN TAKEN FOR ADOPTION AND SUBSEQUENTLY DIED WITHOUT EVER KNOWING THEIR OWN CHILD. IT SAYS –

“BUT WE WERE NOT SEPARATED IN OUR HEARTS, TOMORROW WE WILL SIT WITH YOU AND HEAR YOU LAUGH”

TODAY WE REMEMBER THESE WOMEN **IN THE NAME OF JUSTICE - IN THE NAME OF HUMANITY - WITH THE DEEPEST RESPECT AND A GREAT LOVE IN OUR HEARTS.**

**(ONE MINUTE’S SILENCE)**

Past Prime Minister and Statesman Jim Scullin obviously cared about people and their fundamental rights as citizens of Australia. I believe he would turn in his grave having once said the above words, if he knew the extent of the shocking abuse inflicted upon thousands of innocent Australian women and their babies from the 1940's into the 1980's.

*The only thing weaker than a young, terrified mother giving birth is her tiny newborn baby. At the mercy of doctors, hospital staff and adoption agency workers - mothers were isolated, assaulted, drugged, restrained, coerced, bullied and denied any access to their own infant.*

*Not only were the mothers' and babies' rights ANNIHILATED, the common practice of the day, was to deny access rights to grandparents and family members as well.*

*In dividing the mother from her baby at birth - the family from the mother - the father from the mother and his baby - the baby from its family - it was a case of -*

## ***“divide and conquer”***

**“INTERNATIONAL LAW:** Two fundamental principles in international adoptions (1960) were that:

*Careful consideration should be given to all possible alternatives before a child is removed from his own relatives for adoption,*

*and*

*Parents should be warned of the legal and psychological consequences<sup>i</sup>*

that might result from adoption. These principles were re-stated in Australia by the Minister for Child Welfare and social welfare - Mr. Hawkins Child Welfare bill second amendment reading, Legislative Assembly ( 19<sup>th</sup> September 1961):

*..... the child must be protected from unnecessary separation from his own family and that there should be no attempt to persuade the natural parents to place the child.<sup>ii</sup>*

**Ref: Christine Cole** from the book ‘Releasing the Past a book’ funded by Department of Community Services (NSW) as a result of recommendation from the NSW Inquiry into Past Adoption Practices: Referenced with her permission.

**Ref: Cathleen Sherry**, Lawyer and legal academic involved in the Review of Adoption of Children Act. This review was conducted early 1990's – wrote the following about historical adoption practice:

“What these individual women were describing were not **isolated incidences** with atypical doctors and social workers: rather their experiences revealed systemic violations of human rights. The treatment they received from doctors, social workers, charitable organizations and government depts. violated their right to be free from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, free from discrimination, free from arbitrary interference with the family, as well as their right to be entitled to special protection as mothers.

My story appears later in this submission. It was encompassed in a speech read out by the Hon. D.A. Templeman ALP in the W.A. Parliament on the 24<sup>th</sup> February 2010. The delivery of David Templeman's powerful speech that day, together with his compassionate, committed advocacy, brought about the first apology from a Government in Australia -indeed anywhere in the world. This apology has positively helped the victims of historical adoption practice. It has re-instated our dignity as mothers, informed and soothed our children, educated the public via huge media coverage in the West and put this issue in front of both state and federal politicians. Mothers around Australia, in Canada, America, New Zealand, Ireland and the United Kingdom, regardless of the time differences, paused and celebrated at the moment of this apology. An adoptee, accompanied by a Sherpa climbed up the side of a mountain in Nepal and held a ceremony to mark this deeply, emotional moment in her life.

I wish to thank Mr. Templeman ALP, Ms Alison Xamon and Ms Rachel Siewert of the Greens and their respective staffs, for their determination and support for this historical apology and this inquiry. I also wish to thank the Greens in the ACT for raising our issues in their Parliament and gaining consensus for an apology in the ACT after conclusion of this inquiry.

My personal deep gratitude also goes to Ms. Christine Cole for supplying these Members of Parliament, the media and myself, with a library of research and knowledge. She has committed herself tirelessly to this cause.

**Finally - thank God for the courage of all mothers who have survived this aberration and the mothers' support groups around Australia, who have lobbied constantly and for decades - for the truth to be told. Let us hope this is the beginning of the overturning of this injustice, which has and continues to permeate and damage, the lives of mothers, fathers and their families in all corners of the Globe.**

I thank the Honorable Senators sitting on this committee for recognizing the need for this inquiry, following in the wake of the W.A. apology.

## **OVERVIEW**

**Adoption** in Australia was underpinned by mainline and reform eugenics. It also represented huge savings to Government welfare purses. Unmarried mothers were deemed feeble-minded and tainted. Because of this view, they were considered unfit to raise their own children. The families of these mothers were also considered unfit. In the early 1900's in Tasmania babies were removed under the Mental Health Acts and their mother's consent was never required. Adoption became the administratively tidy, but cruel way of keeping the welfare budget figures in the black. It was also the perfect "solution" to deal with the rehabilitation of unmarried mothers, illegitimacy and the pain of infertility. According to this eugenics based ideology, only married couples were

deemed fit to reproduce and denied this opportunity, adoption was vigorously promoted as the solution to ease their pain. **Respectable** married couples were considered far more capable of raising **good and productive** citizens. Adoption was consequently viewed as cleansing the child's frowned upon biological roots and making **the best of inferior genes**. Adoption ensured the best remedial opportunity for the country, to return our children to **a line of good 'British stock'** thereby **purifying the race**. It is my opinion our illegitimate children were thought to be **socially assimilated** once given to **respectable** married couples **'as if born to them'**. The mothers were considered socially assimilated after their babies were taken, hence the term **'socially cleared'** written in many **hospital** records.

**Doctors** were recruited to **promote adoption**. In a W.A. Welfare Department annual report a 'leading medico' wrote ".....given the training of a good home under well balanced parents, what cant be done with the plastic brain of a new born infant...". (Dr. Rosemary Kerr "Appeal of Blue Eyes" 2005). The notion of the 'unwanted' child was a deeply emotive one and also used to promote adoption by Welfare Departments in their propaganda. (Kerr 2005). This duplicitous notion was to make adoption palatable - as society would never have condoned the forced removal of babies for adoption.

It is my opinion, that this **social engineering** could not have been created by all the States **in isolation and independent** of Commonwealth Government involvement. I believe it came from a Commonwealth directive to the States' Health, Welfare and Education Ministers and was part of **a population policy grounded in eugenics**. **This social engineering** was **'sold'** under the **guise** of **"in the best interests of the child"**. Until the introduction of safe baby formula, the babies of unwed mothers were kept with them so they could be breastfed. This guarded against infant mortality. Once baby formula was introduced the babies were taken at birth, as the mother became obsolete.

(Ref: **Cunningham Report** Page 20 – in a letter written by the Medical Commissioner of Tasmania addressed to the Minister of Health Tasmania - it is stated that mothers were not allowed to see their babies.

In light of the **uniformity, consistency and complete acceptance** of these practices by State and Federal Governments and down through the chain of command to adoption workers – it is indicated this was **'systemic'**. These practices were allowed to continue for forty odd years and adoption workers, in the most part, **acted with impunity**. **Informed consent, natural justice and common law were treated with contempt**. Regardless of many experts warning of the severe damage being caused to these mothers, the warnings were **blatantly ignored**.

***1965: Wilfred Jarvis (clinical psychologist) and lecturer at the University of NSW found - 'mothers who surrender their children for adoption seem to suffer chronic bereavement for the rest of their lives'.***

There is a collective and excruciating pain body shared by the victims of past adoption practice. This pain body is acted out in our relationships and continues to blight our lives. Many women have lost their ability to feel and to connect because they continue to live in fear, shame and humiliation. A deeply rooted and all pervading mistrust stalks the background of their lives. Mothers and their children, who were unable to tolerate the pain and injustice, have committed suicide. Subsequent generations continue to suffer as well. In those decades, we as young, frightened, vulnerable mothers were exposed to the actions of people who took the meaning of “human” out of the words “human-being”.

We were treated like animals with no feelings for the babies we conceived, carried, gave birth to and love. We were viewed as little more than breeders, unpaid surrogates, fallen women who needed to be punished and rehabilitated, by having our babies taken. We have lived with the injustice of knowing that the perpetrators of this abuse have by in large, been viewed by society as squeaky clean professional people performing wonderful work in the community, finding perfect homes for the children “**we supposedly did not want and abandoned**”. We have had thirty, forty or fifty years of living with the injustice of this general and sanitized view. This view continues to colour our children’s perception – most believe they were abandoned, unwanted, unloved and then rescued by their adoptive parents.

**Ref: Dr. G. Rickarby “Releasing the Past”-** “Each time I hear an adoptee say, If my mother had really wanted me, she could have..... Something inside me boils, no matter how much I feel with the adoptee before me. As a psychiatrist, I am left with one stand out conclusion: that a woman having a baby taken from her is one of the deepest traumas available, and the grief is untenable.....”

Until we are **heard**, understood and **the truth openly and widely acknowledged across this Nation**, we will continue to feel aggrieved. We cannot openly mourn our losses and we have no way of dispelling the anger, humiliation and pain we feel. Through ignorance and denial we have been wrongly accused for decades, ostracized, judged and punished for being unmarried mothers who did not want their own babies. Just to hear past adoption workers and their agencies, **denying or minimizing the truth**, re-traumatizes and increases our anger. The truth is that our children were taken from us. Our children are still suffering and we as mothers wish them to know this truth to ease their pain. They need to know and understand that their mothers were denied the help and protection they were entitled to, under our Constitution and law.

Just recently, a pregnant mother had her baby torn from her arms by the raging flood waters in the eastern states. She did not have the physical strength to overcome the power of those raging, lethal waters.

**My heart aches with her and for her**

Her life may be afflicted in the following ways. She will relive this trauma over and over again, in every waking moment and also in her dreams. Her instincts for her baby are so strong, that she will question that she could have done more, even though she **could not** and somewhere deep, deep inside, she will continue to blame herself. She will have an all pervading fear and anxiety. She will persecute herself, doubting her abilities as a mother. She will become overprotective with her remaining children. Her empty arms will physically ache to hold her baby again, close to that special place in every mother's heart that each child holds exclusively and for eternity. There is no doubt her life and the lives of her family have been irrevocably scarred with a deep unending grief and intolerable pain.

Our babies were torn from our wombs by a raging torrent as well - a raging torrent of unstoppable, collective **insanity**. I believe that it is **indefensible** for people to tear a mother and baby apart at the moment of birth and tell that mother – “the baby's gone” or “it's not your baby and “forget about the baby, go home and get on with your life”. She knows within her whole instinctual being, that her frightened baby screams for her **and her alone**. She too, silently screams in agony, for she is rendered **powerless** to answer her baby's cry. I believe it is **indefensible** to try to switch off and override a mother's mind, her instincts and her ability to feed her baby by administering powerful and dangerous drugs or cruelly binding her breasts before she gives an informed consent for the adoption of her baby. All these heinous, vicious assaults of medical intervention have endured for life, leaving a fear and mistrust of doctors, hospitals, medical staff and their procedures. I believe it is **indefensible** to then pressure her to sign away her child forever, in a state of sheer terror and subjugation and not inform her of her rights and entitlements. How do we ever trust Governments and their departments again? Our bodies and minds will never forget and forever remain confused, stuck and traumatized by these events - horrific events which butchered our maternities and stole our children at birth. **Surely these abuses belonged in a Nazi concentration camp, not in public and private hospitals across Australia.**

The raging floods in the Eastern States were an act of nature. Governments have no control over acts of nature. However, over 250,000 babies were routinely ripped from their mothers wombs for adoption and mothers were robbed of sometimes **the only child** they ever birthed. Australian governments **did** have control over this legislation and broadly followed the Commonwealth Model Adoption Act and the protection clauses therein. Those protection clauses were based on the law. They also had the responsibility to oversee the stakeholders licensed as adoption agents, which included their own Departments, holding them to transparency and accountability. These licensed Stakeholders were to operate within legislation and guidelines of moral and legal integrity. However these adoption practices, which flouted the law, were condoned by all our Governments. They were accepted as “normal” - nationwide. The ink that was used to write clauses into legislation for the protection of the mother as sole legal guardian **was wasted**. As a result, the mothers were **left wasted** - banished to wander a vast, empty desert of shame, **anger, untenable grief and aching despair**.

For centuries men of position and power have fathered illegitimate children – some of them were Royalty. If governments back then legislated that castration was the punishment for fathering a child out of wedlock, how would those men of position – react? Governments would be lobbied and members of the parliaments in a furious, patriarchal uproar. There would be anarchy in the streets. Yet thousands of women in this country had their motherhoods castrated - **yes castrated** - for we and our babies were **a continuum** – **psychologically and spiritually one**. Mothering our infants is an intrinsic, deeply complex and vital part of the female psyche. **Cut it off** by taking one of our children and we are physically, mentally and emotionally torn apart forever. Young fathers, who supported their pregnant partners and their child, **were torn apart too**. This is what past Australian Governments did to us. Our children's right to be remain part of a continuum, to feel safe in the 'knowing' of their own mother and their true identity was reduced to a **commodity - traded off** for welfare budget bottom lines and the social assimilation of their so called 'inferior' births.

***1963: author Mary Ellison "to part a woman from her child in a violent manner is a most dangerous step to take. It will so unstabilize her that she may emerge from the shattering experience as an entirely different personality." 'Deprived Child and Adoption'***

Australia is currently involved with some countries in international adoption whose governments still have no respect for the sacred bond between a mother and her child. These women and their children are also condemned to a lifetime of confusion and pain. This to me is **ABSOLUTE INSANTIY and MORALLY INDEFENSABLE!!** - **It makes a complete mockery of our pain and the holocaust we and our children have survived.**

### **MY PERSONAL STORY – W.A. PARLIAMENT 24<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2010**

**MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah)** [4.37 pm]: I am pleased to rise today to speak to the Premier's Statement of yesterday when he spoke of his government being compassionate. I hope he is true to his word because my speech today will focus on a great wrong that was allowed to happen in Western Australia and other states and territories across the nation. The period I speak of is the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and even into the 1980s.

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<sup>1</sup> Ellison, Mary, *The Deprived Child and Adoption*, Pan Books, London, 1963.



It involved the taking of babies at birth from young Australian women, many just girls, in hospitals, both staterun and private; in hostels; and in church-run and community-operated facilities in the state. It was a policy and practice sanctioned by governments of the day and it has had an immeasurable impact on literally thousands of women across the country. For many, a deep and lasting scar remains in the hearts and souls of those women, their children and their families. Over the past six months I have been reading documents, personal stories and

[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 24 February 2010] 23

evidence presented to a New South Wales parliamentary inquiry on the subject. I have also met personally with women and listened to their stories, including one, a constituent of mine, who is here today. Her name is Sue and she is in the Speaker's gallery, along with three other mothers, Heather, Michelle and Carmel. I thank them for being here this afternoon. To understand this issue and the impact it has had on just one person is best told in her words, so with her permission and in light of her great courage, I am proud to read to this Parliament my constituent Sue's story —

In 1967 I was a shy fifteen year old student at high school sitting for my junior examinations. I was young and vulnerable with little knowledge of human reproduction. I succumbed to a young man of seventeen, lost my virginity and became pregnant. I was naïve that I did not really admit I was pregnant until some 16 weeks into my pregnancy. I was very ill and was hospitalized at Devonleigh Hospital in

Cottesloe. This was once a private hospital; however the WA Government purchased the hospital years before my admission, to increase obstetric services to the community and house the W.A. School of Nursing. Upon recovery, I was sent by my parents to live with distant relatives and then closer to my confinement date, with my married sister. I did have an interview at Ngala but the matron there upset my mother by stating in a vicious tone, that a condition of entry into the home was that I would have to be tested for sexually transmitted diseases. This treatment offended my mother deeply and she decided against sending me there for the last months of my confinement.

Throughout this period I was in contact with the father of my baby and we planned to keep our child and a layette was gradually purchased as he was working. Some weeks before the birth of our baby, my boyfriend stopped visiting. Years later I found out that he had become ill and when he did make contact after the birth of our child he was threatened by my parents and sent away. He was dragged into court by welfare and made to sign a consent to adoption – a requirement as he was paying maintenance. Prosecution for carnal knowledge was threatened if he did not sign. Adoption was raised by my parents at the time nearing my confinement, but no decision on my part was ever made nor conveyed to **anyone**, I would just avoid the subject as I wanted to keep my baby. My thoughts were that when my baby was born and they saw her, they would change their attitude. Welfare Department records, which I have recently acquired, showed that my father was against me coming home with my child, however, my mother said that she would insist that I be allowed home and that she would help me take care of my baby. In my six months of pregnancy the records also show that the welfare officer involved at that stage, demanded that my parents make me give up my child for adoption and that the father of the baby be sent away. He threatened to take me and my child in front of the courts and have both of us declared neglected, if they did not take very good care of me at home. I am only very recently aware of this information and the pressure

that the Department was placing on my parents. My father was not enjoying good health and a year or so after my baby was taken, he passed away from cancer. ...

I only had a few visits with the GP involved, neither information nor instruction was given to me about giving birth and adoption was never, ever discussed with him. There was a veil of silence concerning the whole matter and my family never spoke about it then, nor in the years that followed. I was extremely afraid throughout my pregnancy although I was looking forward to having my child and raising my child with her father when we were allowed to marry. We were to announce our engagement on my sixteenth birthday in April.

On the 15th of July I went into labor and my water broke around 11pm. I stayed at home with my sister until the next morning. I was dropped at Devonleigh Hospital early that morning and left to face what was about to happen to me and my baby **completely deprived** of any person I knew.

Immediately I became afraid to the point of sheer terror. Orders were given to me sternly without kindness or compassion throughout my preparation to give birth and my admittance to the labor ward. My labor pains were strong. After entering the labor ward I endured derogatory comments from staff and I was scolded over bodily functions which I had no control over. "Disgusting!" was the word used.

Shamed throughout my pregnancy, my shame reached infinite proportions through this treatment. As the process of labor continued, my terror and shame reached intolerable levels and I now believe my child felt my terror too. Through the administration of drugs I was rendered unconscious and the next memory I have is a room full of complete strangers, my shoulders being raised and being told to push.

My legs were in stirrups and there was a doctor attending who was completely unknown to me. I had neither physical pain nor sensation of any kind. I have had two further children and I can assure you that I was fully conscious and I felt everything.

At 9.00pm on the 16th of July my baby was born and that moment has haunted me ever since. It is the subject of recurring nightmares and I am afraid, after having this nightmare to go back to sleep in case I experience it again. My beautiful little baby was born and I heard her terrified cries for me, her mother. Her helpless plea to begin her transition into the world slowly and naturally, via the warmth, knowing

234 [ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 24 February 2010]

and safety of her own mother was inhumanely and deliberately denied her by hospital staff. They covered my face to prevent me seeing her and drugged me into oblivion. As that veil of darkness descended, so a veil of secrecy, shame and toxic humiliation descended on my life. They succeeded in destroying me at that moment and I will never fully recover. (I was informed of the sex of my baby by my mother upon discharge.)

I drifted back into consciousness to find not one but two, young doctors busy suturing. I remember feeling intensely ashamed and embarrassed. I had just turned 16 years of age. I succumbed to unconsciousness again and woke up in a room. I was bewildered, shaking uncontrollably and what I realize now in profound shock. I stumbled out of the bed, trying to find my baby. I was standing in a pool of blood. At that moment a member of the nursing staff came in and I asked what was happening to me. I was dealt with harshly and told angrily "you have just had a baby, you silly girl. Get back into bed." I asked through timid tears "Where is my baby?" The response was a very firm "Gone." I was then instructed to stay in my room and to shower at night to

prevent anyone “seeing me”. I felt totally inhuman, deeply ashamed, worthless and terrified. I have little recollection of my stay in hospital. I remember babies crying outside my room at times and just being curled up frozen with fear—numb. I remember just one shower—late at night—as per cruel instructions. I stood weeping, sobbing as I looked down at the water running over the sagging, empty sack of my belly. My baby was once inside me, protected; now they had taken her—she was gone. I remember walking down a passage and my parents walking towards me all dressed up. I broke down and begged them to take me home. It was my understanding that my baby had gone and I thought they were allowed to take her and I had no right to stop them. I do not remember any further conversations with hospital staff, my GP nor my parents whilst in hospital. There is a vague recollection of being given drugs in the hospital after the birth and I took drugs after I was discharged . Until six months ago, when I received discharge and admission dates from scant hospital records, I believed I had been in hospital the day my daughter was born and taken home the next day. Records show that I was in hospital for four days. Four days that I have no recollection of other than very fleeting moments. Yet I can remember my previous stay in that hospital at the beginning of my pregnancy, very well indeed. ...

To my knowledge nobody approached me about adoption during my stay in hospital. I was astounded recently to find my admission records were marked ‘Adoption’ and that I was noted as my daughter’s next of kin and mother. It was never explained to me and therefore, not understood by me that I was her legal guardian, nor the implications of that term. I went home to another cone of silence, and within a couple of days my mother took me by bus to the city to sign some papers. I was very unwell, bleeding heavily, feeling faint and numb all over. Counsellors with the Adoption Research Council tell me that I had been placed into deep trauma. I remember parts of the interview with the social worker telling me the wonderful virtues of the adoptive couple whom I believed already had my baby in their possession. I was then shocked even further to learn she was still at the hospital and she had been left there. They were going to place her in a foster home (which I thought was an orphanage)... if I did not give consent and this was just too much. My head was reeling having just learnt that she was still at the hospital and no one was loving her and comforting her. I was just sixteen, deeply traumatized by my experience and being told information that was traumatizing me further. I signed a consent not believing I had any power or rights at all. I had just been through a process in the hospital which created such a deep profound belief that I was a nothing, less than human, a body that created a baby for some one else. I had no sense or thought of entitlement to my own child.

Forty one years later my baby’s cries are just as vivid today as they were back then, my empty arms still ache from the inability to respond, to hold and protect her. I live daily with a frozen tension in my body, rising to panic at times at my inability to satisfy my maternal instinct to take care of her and answer her cry. This is in a constant holding pattern together with a profound sense of loss, grief, frustration, depression and anger. I have had years of counseling partly funded by the W.A Government. I asked my counsellor if the welfare department would have known what procedures were in place in the hospitals and she said that they certainly did know.

If this is so, how can consent be taken under such treatment or in fact, be valid. I have to live with what happened and accept that these debilitating emotions and reactions will

accompany me for the rest of my life. What I cannot accept is the perpetuation of the lie that my baby was unwanted and given away.

This hideous lie, which they thought would never be uncovered because of closed adoption, continues to undermine my life and destroy the very fabric of the life of my grown up daughter. She cannot come to terms with being abandoned. Can you blame her? She is caught up in the deliberately manufactured myth and propaganda of the day, as her adoptive parents are—that unmarried mothers did not want their babies and gave them away to strangers.

[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 24 February 2010] 235

The fact is that she was taken unlawfully at birth from her lawful, natural mother by a conspiracy between my parents (who were placed under duress by the Welfare Officer) the doctor, the hospital and government welfare services. This dark, evil history of past adoption practice was eugenics based and was to save public money. These facts remain conveniently suppressed and hidden from general view. Years later, I asked my mother why she never came to see me during my labor and stay in hospital. It was a lifelong hurt that I cannot forget. Her response was that the hospital told her I was sedated and asleep and not to come. My parents, the doctor, the hospital staff and the Welfare Department were not the legal guardians of my daughter—I was. Did I ask to be sedated for nine or ten hours during my labor and the duration of my subsequent stay in hospital? Did I ask not to see my child? Did I ask for anti-lactation drugs to dry up my milk? Did I ask to sign adoption papers? Did I ask for a matron or nurse to name my child. I will have to live with the insult of a name I hate on my daughter's original birth certificate—forever. I did not ask for any of the above! All I asked was “Where is my baby” to be told she was gone. What message does that give to a terrified young girl at her most vulnerable? It says that people you trust to look after you and your baby are **so powerful** that they can do anything they want to do, if it suits their purpose and this destroys your trust for ever. All of these actions presumed adoption without consultation with me, her natural mother and sole legal guardian. The Adoption Act did not come into play until the consent was signed. So under what act was my child abducted from me at the moment of her birth and what constitutes duress, which was deemed unlawful under the Adoption Act at that time. I have to deal with a deep mistrust of government departments and having any gynaecological procedure is deeply disturbing to me. I consider myself lucky though, as studies show that a staggering forty percent of women who experienced this never had another child because of the severity of the trauma experienced.

Welfare and hospital practices were extremely uniform around Australia and in the late seventies hospital's were warned by the Health Commission that they risked litigation. In an edition of the

Australia Medical Journey a senior obstetrician of that era is quoted as saying “when it comes to unmarried mothers we can ignore the law.” Young women were shackled to beds during labor, drugged, bullied, their babies placed in locked nurseries or the mothers were removed by ambulance to hospital annexes to totally separate mother and child. Some were told that their babies had died only to find their adult child turn up on their doorstep years later. Some had their babies taken for adoption , however,... because they were not perfect in some way, they spent their lives in institutions. In some instances, grand parents who advocated for their daughter and illegitimate grandchild, were

threatened by hospital security. Unmarried mothers' homes were places of incarceration. I can assure you that this happened here in Western Australia, as it did all over Australia.

Last year, the Royal Brisbane Women's Hospital publicly apologized to mothers in Queensland. The hospital's current Director of Obstetrics was deeply disturbed about these practices and the ongoing severity of the detrimental effects that continue to play out in the lives of women and their children. It is the first hospital in Australia to want to make a difference and I applaud their compassion and honest action. The Archdeacon of Brisbane has apologized for the treatment endured by young women in the Anglican Unmarried Mothers homes. It is only over the last year, through research and the testimony given at two inquiries into past adoption practice in Australia that I have become aware that this horror took place in hospitals around Australia.

The insidious tentacles of secret adoption continued to erode the lives of those who have endured this shocking, dark and cruel time in Australia's History. Duty of care now rests with those who are powerful enough and conscious enough to make a difference by publicly acknowledging and setting

right the terrible wrongs of the past. I request this to facilitate our healing. **OUR CHILDREN NEED TO KNOW.** We have lost another one of our mums to suicide. Her two subsequent children born to her after she lost her first born to adoption are now also deprived of their natural mother. I believe the **way** that she chose to end her life held a **desperate and urgent message** to those who have chosen not to listen and acknowledge her trauma and pain resulting from the treatment she received. Just like the time she gave birth to her first born, face veiled, covered, in a black void of drug induced unconsciousness, so she ended her life—veils of plastic wrapped tightly around her head accompanied by a huge overdose of drugs.

Sue finishes with —

When will this carnage cease—Do we still have to suffer under the oppressive hand of a past patriarchal society?

I admire my constituent, Sue. I admire the many other women in this country who live with a great pain that must be healed. Sue's story is only one story but there are thousands just like her. For too long these women's voices have not been heard. I hope that from today in Western Australia that will change. It is my firm view that it is time for this Parliament and the government to formally and publicly acknowledge that this practice

236 [ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 24 February 2010]

occurred and that it has had an enduring impact on many children, mothers and families in Western Australia, just as it has across Australia.

[Member's time extended.]

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** It is now time to give these women a voice to ensure that they are heard and consulted about a formal acknowledgement and apology to them, their children and their families. That apology should come from the government and the Parliament of Western Australia. It is time that we do not simply dismiss this as a social moray of the day, which is a common belief. That is wrong. What happened was wrong. It involved the removal of babies from their natural mothers at birth, in many cases by illegal means, and also through threats, coercion, intimidation and the use of drugs. When I met Sue last year, I could not help but be moved by her story. I was also moved by the

stories of many others. With Sue's help, I set about ensuring that I gained as much information about and understanding of what happened in not only Western Australia, but also the other states. As Sue mentioned in her statement, only late last year the director of the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital formally acknowledged and apologised on behalf of the hospital for the practices and policies that existed. It is important that these women and their children hear this acknowledgement. I really want to stress that. It is not just for the women; it is for the many thousands of children, many of them from Western Australia, who suffered this great tragedy.

I believe that this Parliament has a role in such matters. Earlier last year we saw the apology to the stolen generation, and then subsequently to the forgotten Australians, in the federal Parliament. Federally, preliminary discussions took place to see whether the women and children I am talking about should be included in the apology for the forgotten Australians. For a variety of reasons, that did not take place. It still may take place. I understand that the federal minister is engaging a formal review to see if that would be an outcome.

I think that we in Western Australia should show some leadership. We should acknowledge that there was a period in our history that saw babies taken from their mothers. That has created a great hurt for them, for their families and for their children. For many, it has caused irreparable damage. As part of the healing process, surely we know in our hearts that there is a reason such an apology and acknowledgement should take place.

It is my intention to talk to members about this issue over the coming weeks and months. I want to talk about how we can move forward towards a formal acknowledgement in this place of those practices and policies and a formal apology to those women, children and families, many of whom have a deep scar that remains forever in their hearts. I hope that members in this place will support that move. If they have not already been contacted by women and children, many of whom would be adults now, who are part of this, I ask them to listen to their story if they come to their offices and understand the deep hurt that many of them have and continue to carry. I think that is what Parliaments are for. They are for the banter that we saw before this speech, they are for questions and they are for keeping people, governments and oppositions accountable. They are also for us to reflect on our history and the occurrences that have a deep and lasting impact on our citizens. If we as a Parliament and ultimately as a government can make moves to help in that healing, it should happen.

The unfortunate outcome of the New South Wales inquiry 10 years ago is that very few of the recommendations made were implemented, including an apology. It may be appropriate that this Parliament recognises the need for a formal inquiry at some time in the future. My focus is on acknowledgement and an apology because that is what the women, their children and their families tell me they want and need for them to heal. I want to pay tribute to Sue, Heather, Michelle and Carmel. I cannot imagine what it was like. I do not know; they know. Many thousands of women know, and they live with this every single day of their lives. Many have taken it to their graves. I appeal to all members in this place to work towards what I hope we can achieve, and that Western Australia can be one of the first, if not the first, state in Australia to formally acknowledge what happened, to formally say sorry and to aid in the healing process that is so important for these women, these children and these families. I hope members will support me.

**Footnote:** I returned to the Doctor a few weeks after the birth of my daughter with a raging infection from the birth. I did not understand what was wrong with me – I was deeply embarrassed and ashamed, I felt like I was rotting from the inside. I broke down, sobbing uncontrollably - I was missing my baby. Why couldn't I have her with me.? I asked. He did not look up from his desk. He told me I was selfish, it was too late - she was with a wonderful couple who were rich and she would not want for anything. He wrote a script for anti-biotics, did not examine me and virtually tossed me out of his office. He did not tell me I could revoke my consent. My daughter's adoption order was finalized six months after that visit – all he had to do was make a phone call that day on my behalf, as the irrevocation period had not been restricted to 30 days at that time. From that day on, I got the message – I was a nothing, a no-body and I was just dirt – it did not matter if I died. My much older brother told me recently that the Doctor made the arrangements for the theft of my child with the welfare department and that the welfare department instructed my father to threaten the father of my child with rape, when he tried to see me in the hospital. The district officer knew that my partner and I wished to keep our child and that my mother would support me, however, he still threatened, demanded and intimidated my mother. He visited and could see that we had a good, clean home in a nice suburb. He knew that I had excelled at school and had won a commonwealth scholarship.

## **‘THE HIPPOCRATIC OATH’**

The Hippocratic Oath is an oath demanded of physicians who are entering practice and can be traced back to the Greek physician and teacher Hippocrates (ca. 460-ca. 377 B.C.E.). The oath reads as follows:

"I swear by Apollo the physician, by Aesculapius, Hygeia, and Panacea, and I take to witness all the gods, all the goddesses, to keep according to my ability and my judgment the following Oath:

"To consider dear to me as my parents him who taught me this art; to live in common with him and if necessary to share my goods with him; to look upon his children as my own brothers, to teach them this art if they so desire without fee or written promise; to impart to my sons and the sons of the master who taught me and the disciples who have enrolled themselves and have agreed to rules of the profession, but to these alone, the precepts and the instruction. I will prescribe regimen for the good of my patients according to my ability and my judgment and never to harm anyone. To please no one will I prescribe a deadly drug, nor give advice which may cause his death. Nor will I give a woman a pessary to procure abortion. But I will preserve the purity of my life and my art. I will not cut for stone, even for patients in whom the disease is manifest; I will leave this operation to be performed by practitioners (specialists in this art). In every house where I come I will enter only for the good of my patients, keeping myself far from all intentional ill-doing and all seduction, and especially from the pleasures of love with women or with men, be they free or slaves. All that may come to my knowledge in the

exercise of my profession or outside of my profession or in daily commerce with men, which ought not to be spread abroad, I will keep secret and will never reveal. If I keep this oath faithfully, may I enjoy life and practice my art, respected by all men and in all times; but if I swerve from it or violate it, may the reverse be my lot." (The oath varies slightly in wording among different sources.)

IT APPEARS ABORTION WAS NOT ACCEPTABLE UNDER THIS OATH. HOWEVER, TAKING A WOMAN'S LIVE BABY AT BIRTH, HIDING HER BABY, DRUGGING A MOTHER WITH DANGEROUS DRUGS AND NOT GIVING ADEQUATE MEDICAL TREATMENT WAS ACCEPTABLE. ALL THIS ABUSE WAS JUSTIFIED UNDER THE NOTION - 'IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD'. WHAT ABOUT THE WELL KNOWN LIFE THREATENING, PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE TO THE MOTHERS? MOST MOTHERS WERE MINORS AND DEEMED CHILDREN THEMSELVES UNDER LAW.

**WA Hansard 10th November, 1964 page 2376 onwards –**

**DISCUSSION ON FORMULATING A NEW W.A. ADOPTION ACT, BASED ON THE COMMONWEALTH MODEL ACT.**

Hon. L.A. Logan (Minister for Department of Welfare)

"It has been my aim in preparing this bill to safeguard the freedom of all those groups of persons at present concerned in adoptions to continue their good work without unnecessary bureaucratic interference, but at the same time to provide safeguards against abuses which have become apparent in more populous centres, and which with our increasing population may develop here. I hope that honourable members in considering the Bill will keep always in mind the human welfare of the adopted child and of the childless couple who would take him into their home and their hearts.

Various conferences of Attorneys-General of the States, of Ministers, and of officers of the child welfare departments have been held in the past three years to discuss the practicability of a uniform Australian adoption Bill to be enacted by all States."

**The Commonwealth Government were represented at these discussions and conferences from which the Commonwealth Model Adoption act was drawn up and adoption practices/policies were discussed. I do not believe that the uniform treatment of mothers in hospitals and unmarried mothers homes around this country was not known by the Commonwealth Government and respective Health Ministers, attorneys-general and welfare ministers. Many adoption workers new these practices were not lawful and stated so at conferences with great concern. Many Politicians were lawyers and would know common law. Both territories( ACT and Northern) did**



**not have their own governments. Same policies and practices occurred there. Adoption is part of population policy, very much the realm of the Commonwealth Government**

*In discussing Clause Seven of the new Bill Mr Logan goes on to state.*

"Clause 7 (1) prescribes that a consent can be revoked by written notice service on the Director of Child Welfare before the expiration of 30 days from the date on which the instrument of consent was signed. The consent cannot be revoked in any other way, nor after expiration of 30 days. This provision is intended to remedy the present situation where the mother of the child can revoke her consent at anytime and verbally up to the moment when a judge grants the order of adoption. Childless couples who at present accept a child into their home, hoping to adopt it, are always now apprehensive that the natural mother may revoke her consent and deprive them of the child that they have commenced to love."

9 October 1973 Hon I G Medcalf – " Unfortunately adoptions generally take too long, but I do not know what can be done about this. It is a pity, because is a matter of great emotional concern, more so to the adopting parents than to the natural parents who usually drop out of the picture and, in some cases, are happy to do so although, in other cases, they are not so happy. I am not suggesting there is not great trauma on the part of the mother of the illegitimate child, because she usually goes through a period of great distress, **but that is limited and she is cut off from the child when it is taken away.** The trauma then descends of the adopting parents are waiting, with bated breath as it were for the judge to make his order, which can take a long time".

**The adoptive parents need not have worried about us revoking our consent. Mothers were not told they could revoke their consent. I have never met a mother who was told that they could revoke their consent up until the final adoption order was granted. Mothers were made to believe that once a consent was signed it was final. When the 30 day period became law and they had to inform mothers, mothers have testified that they were told it was too late to revoke their consent within that period - the baby had gone. Most were told their baby was gone in the hospital – I was one of them.**

"12.11.64 Hon E M Heenan - It is a remarkable thing that there is a great demand by most worthy people to adopt little children. Usually the supply of children for adoption falls far short of the demand for them, and that is a very wholesome state of affairs. ....and ...the rights of the mother of a little child have been more closely safeguarded than they have been in the past, although I do not admit that we have derelict in this respect previously."

**W.A. PARLIAMENT APOLOGISED 19.10.2010 - THEY WERE DERELICT especially for not allowing mothers to ever see or have access to their baby. This was standard practice in most Australian Hospitals and the various Health Ministers would have known of this policy.**

12.11.64 . Hon L A Logan. “The measure also deals with abuses which could be associated with the adoption of children. I think we know that in other parts of **Australia** and the world, **little children are sold almost.**”

*And discussing the new Bill Mr Logan states page 2376 – .....”It retains also the present right of medical practitioners, legal practitioners, members of the clergy and private persons to act as adoption agents placing the unwanted child with reputable persons known to them.....”**hospitals also acted as agents Vic Hansard 14.4.1964 Page 3649 and W.A. Hansard 6.12.1983 page 141. Every point of contact that an unmarried mother was exposed to during her pregnancy and confinement were AGENTS SOURCING BABIES FOR ADOPTION. All through WA Hansard it constantly makes reference to the supply of babies falling short of the demand from infertile couples. In the seventies welfare introduced waiting lists based on certain criteria***

25.11.1964 Hon Mr Hall Page 3001 *This member asked the Minister representing the Minister for Child Welfare about unmarried mothers benefit entitlements and reported that an unmarried mother can receive: - “Social Services Four pound 17 shillings and 6 pence and child welfare entitlement of 2 pound 5 shillings and 6 pence – totaling 7 pound 2 shillings and 6 pence per week.” **I have yet to meet a mother who was told of these benefits which would have enabled many to keep their child.***

10.11.1964 Hon L.A. Logan *discussing the new **Bill enacted may 1970.***

“Amendment (d) that the natural mother of a child is protected from coercion by the putative father, her own parents or any other person to place the child for adoption. (severe penalties)” **under common law she was never to be coerced or placed under duress, however, the following is recorded in WA Hansard after the inclusion of protection clauses May 1970**

23.9.1971 Hon R.F Cloughton also referred “to the shortage of staff in the (WELFARE) department, making it difficult to liaise sufficiently with public hospitals, thereby **intervene** should a mother make a decision concerning keeping her child that is not the child’s best interests.” **Director of Welfare in WA was informed of every ex-nuptial birth in the State W.A. Hansard**

**See also attachment - Department publication concerning illegitimacy explaining external policy concerning adoption and mothers’ rights/entitlements. However, the internal policy was completely different. If I had been treated according to this publication and the procedures outlined had been adhered to, I never would have had my daughter taken from me the moment she was born.**

**REFERENCES and QUOTES given to the media on the footsteps of W.A. PARLIAMENT ON THE DAY OF THE APOLOGY ANNOUNCEMENT compiled by Ms. Christine Cole - referenced with her permission: All references can be supplied on request.**

The Federal government has already admitted that there is a white stolen generation  
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia: *Overseas Adoption in Australia: Report on the inquiry into adoption of children from overseas* House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services November 2005 Canberra "The stigma associated with forced adoption practices in the past leading to the 'stolen generation' (**both Indigenous and non indigenous mothers and children**)" (p.2)

(Extract from an interview with Dr. Geoff Rickarby - 9.8.2007) Ref: C Cole from the book *Releasing the Past* )

JM: *What do you say to the fact that some mothers say there is a 'white stolen generation'?*

GR: *It's true ... there is a white stolen generation as well as a black one. And if you look at the white generation numbers, there is a lot more of the white generation that were stolen than the black generation.*

JM: *Why then would it not be recognised?*

GR: *Oh, I think it is, in a way, but people do not want to open the door ... it is almost too big a problem to deal with ... if people had of opened the door to somebody proving that illegal things were done, it would have opened up a huge lot of problems for the Crown Law Department ... to undo a whole lot of things that happened ... they want it to go away ... it is a complication they could do without.*

JM: *You mean it is an inconvenient truth?*

GR: *It is an inconvenient truth ...*

Gair, S. *Missing Voices About a Foreign Place: Exploring midwifery practice with midwives who cared for single mothers and babies for adoption in Queensland (1960-1990).* *Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies* Vol 10, 2, 2006/2007  
(p.58) "Bernoth (1999) and Olsen (2004) identify that the moral bullying of Australian single mothers resulted in a 'white' stolen generation."

Children were kidnapped at birth  
Chisholm Testimony NSW Inquiry into Past Adoptions

Whilst mothers and babies were falsely imprisoned  
Chisholm as above

Drugged and traumatized then forced to sign consents -  
Dr. Geoff Rickarby Testimony NSW Inquiry

many mothers, if they did not sign consents, were told their babies had died  
(Elphic: 2000, p. 44; Report 21: 2000, p. 227; Report 22: 2000, pp. 145-146; Cheater:  
2009, p. 182; Critchley: 2006, p. 113)

### **DEAD BABY SCANDEL – The Australian**

“More reports of adoption trickery (staff reporters) The national scandal of new mothers being tricked into giving up babies in the false belief that they were dead widened yesterday as fresh evidence of the deception emerged. **Government officials in WA and Victoria** confirmed cases in which women had been contacted years later by children supposed to have been stillborn but who were actually adopted out under false pretences” There was a call for an Inquiry by **a spokesman for the Minister of Health rejected it.** But the national Convenor of the Defence for Children International, Ms Helen Bayes, said “an inquiry was necessary as it was clear that adoption laws had been contravened...Because it’s clearly an offence, there may be situations where prosecution should be pursued,” she said... **“Agencies who stated that they had been contacted by mothers who were told their baby died at birth: Adoption Triangle (ACT); Jigsaw (SA); Jigsaw (Qld) and State Welfare Dept’s: Victorian’s Minister for Youth and Community Services; Department of Family and Children Services (WA); Adoption Information Services (Tasmania) (50 “dead” children had subsequently made contact with their mothers).<sup>2\</sup>**

(Report of the Departmental Committee on the Adoption of Children: 1954, pp. 14-15).

Damage was well known from the 50’s: British Report noted that:

“It is very desirable, however, both for the child’s physical health and for the mother’s psychological well-being that there should be greater facilities for unmarried mothers to keep their children with them for up to three months after birth...[and] that a document signifying the consent of a mother shall not be valid unless the infant is at least six weeks old when the consent is given, was intended to ensure that children below that age were not placed for adoption...we found little disagreement with the view that it is preferable for a child not to be taken away from his mother before the age of six weeks.”

(WA Government submission page 26 cited in Chapter 7 Bringing them Home Report).  
In Australia "1958 the Special Committee on Native Matters warned that `removal of a child from his mother at an early age can cause serious psychological and mental disturbances'.

.Dr. Rosemary 2005 ‘The Appeal of Blue Eyes’ WA child welfare Dept run a propoganda campaign that the babies of unwed mothers were unwanted - *this was to make adoption palatable to society - as society would never have condoned the forced removal of newborns from their mothers. This was promoted across all States in the media via the various Welfare Departments.*

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Justice Richard Chislm – Review of the Adoption of Children Act. Report No.69. He stated that the practices were illegal.

Chris Cole – reference from the book *Releasing the Past*:

“A primary principle of international law is that a child has the right to be brought up in its family of origin. This principle was supposed to have been followed in Australia. Further, a single mother was, and is, allowed by law and common human decency to have the right to see, hold and feed her infant. She had the right to name her child and to have unfettered access to her baby in the maternity hospital. When a child is born to a single mother, it is not subject to adoption legislation; its mother is the legal guardian and has the same rights as any other mother. Legally, the *Adoption Act* does not come into operation until the mother signs a ‘consent to adopt’ form and then only if the consent is informed and taken without duress or coercion. Separating a mother from her child, or placing pillows or sheets to obstruct the view she has of her baby at the birth in order to facilitate an adoption was, and continues to be, classed as coercion and is therefore illegal. Injecting mothers with drugs to dry up their milk immediately after the birth, without their permission, was and is illegal and deems to presume that the mother has already signed a ‘consent to adopt’ form.<sup>iii</sup> Dr. Geoff Rickarby has stated that the act of injecting a mother with stilboestrol immediately after the birth constitutes a major assault as mothers were not informed that this would occur and the routine ‘consent to necessary procedures’ that patients sign on being admitted to hospital would not cover the consent to have their milk dried up by an injection.<sup>iv</sup>”

“A mother was supposed to be warned of the ‘dire psychological consequences’ that could result because of her decision to relinquish her child. She was also supposed to be advised of all means of financial assistance available to her to assist her to keep her child. It was only after all alternatives to adoption and means of available support had been explored, and if the mother continued to insist on adoption, that the papers were brought to her to be signed. No decision was supposed to be made prior to the fifth day after the birth or if the mother was distressed. If the mother was not definite in her decision, she was legally entitled to leave the hospital with her baby and to make the decision weeks or months later.”

“Many mothers were given large doses of drugs prior to and after the birth, often right up until they signed the ‘consent to adopt’ form. Some of the drugs used were: sodium amytal, chloral hydrate and sodium pentobarbitone; all of which are mind-altering barbiturates. The curtailing of mothers’ rights and the above coercive practices meant that by 1972 there were nearly 10000 babies adopted by non-relatives in Australia. This extraordinarily high number of adoptions was a social aberration that did not occur before the 1960s and rapidly declined with the rise of the women’s movement in the early 1970s.”<sup>v</sup> Christine Cole -Reference from the book *Releasing the Past*

Report 22 – recommendations of the NSW Standing Committee on social issues. - NSW Inquiry into Past Adoption Practices

7.61 Mothers argued that the practice denied their legal rights as guardian of the child, explained above, the Health Commission stated that the mother was the legal guardian of the child until the signing of the consent form. Justice Richard Chisholm agreed that the mother remained guardian of the child until she gave consent and that preventing her from having access to the child prior to the consent “would not have been authorized.”

7.62 The Committee therefore believes that the practice of denying a mother access to her child prior to the signing of consent was unlawful. Those professionals who contributed to the process where access was denied were clearly acting unlawfully.

**Chris Cole** – “During the NSW Inquiry (1998-2000) into past practices in adoption, representatives of an Indigenous group that facilitates re-uniting Indigenous mothers with their stolen children gave evidence. They stated that Indigenous mothers were brutally separated from their infants at the birth. Those babies were subsequently adopted or fostered out. The removal of their children was undertaken by the same social workers and medical staff (in the same institutions and under the same laws), who were involved in the theft of white babies. They further stated that there was a common theme between the black and white stolen generations. For instance, Indigenous mothers told them of the use of pillows and sheets to obstruct their view of their baby at the birth with the intention to interrupt bonding, and of being forced to sign consents before allowed to leave hospitals while under the influence of drugs: the same procedures used to gain white mothers’ babies. There has never been any question that these families are part of the stolen generation<sup>3</sup> – and thankfully they have been apologized too – the loss of these mothers and their families has never been dismissed as social mores or explained away by statements such as the mothers did not have recourse to financial benefits. 17% of the Indigenous stolen generation is made up of babies taken from their mothers in the same hospitals by the same social workers and medical staff under the same legislation as non-Indigenous or white babies.

Furthermore it is now well established that money had been available to assist single mothers to keep their babies since 1912. From 1923 onwards single mothers were given the same financial assistance as deserted wives. The different outcome for single mothers though was that there was no Governmental push to remove the babies of deserted wives or widows – the reality was that white single mothers without family support, orphaned or migrant were preyed upon, our rights extinguished and for that we want and deserve an apology – this is about how our children were stolen at birth, without our consent, this is a human and civil rights crime against mothers’ and their babies and should be acknowledged as such.

<sup>1</sup> The crime was committed at the birth before the Adoption of Children Act came into force. Justice Richard Chisholm stated that mothers were the guardians of their infant and it was illegal to deny them access to their babies at the birth and thereafter, or inject them with drugs to dry up their milk so they could not feed their infant. Further forcing a mother to remain in hospital until she signed a consent Chisholm described as False Imprisonment and he labelled the theft of the baby at birth: kidnapping. The use of drugs on mothers to gain consent would null and void any contract – the fact it was done when

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mothers were at their most vulnerable would have to be interpreted as a fraud upon the mother and an unconscionable undertaking. Further, more than 20% of our children were not deemed fit enough to be adopted and were placed in foster care or institutions.”

The following is quotations from the Report (pp.7-9)1999 Joint select committee Parliament of Tasmania

Director Gordon Smith, his Deputy, Bernard Hill and others, including Child Welfare Supervisor, Ms Joan Brown, acted upon the belief expressed in 1966 by Mr. Smith that the “the bond between a child and his parents is of greatest importance, to be disturbed as a last resort”....It was...obvious from his actions that he believed that unmarried mothers should be given the opportunity to keep the child if it was possible to do so...In the Director’s view it was immoral that a mother be forced to give up her baby because of economic circumstances....Mr. Smith’s view concerning the rights of parents regarding a child before adoption, such as the mother being able to see her child, **conflicted with the opinions of influential ...medical practitioners**...In a memorandum dated 25 September 1969 from Ms Joan Brown Child Welfare Supervisor “where once the maternity hospital adopted the fixed rule that no mother should see her baby and often conveyed the impression that she was not allowed to do so, they now accept that the mother has a moral and legal right to see her baby if she wishes....The incumbent Minister for Health, Dr. N. D. Abbott, appears to have disagreed with these sentiments. In an extract from his letter to the Chief Secretary dated 8 October 1969 he states; **“Whatever one feels, there is a need some mothers express and agreed to by their own mothers, to keep the infant, and in this I think they should be strongly discouraged; rather should they be encouraged to adopt-out the babe.**

Heartbreak Ward. Article -Sunday Truth , October 1965

Here are some of the sickening and tragic facts uncovered ... in a Sunday Truth special investigation into the growing incidence of juvenile vice in Queensland... At this moment at least 100 young girls...are in homes in Brisbane waiting to be taken to Heartbreak Ward to have their babies.....The Minister in charge of the State Children’s Department ...and the department’s Director.. have expressed grave concern at the growing problems of wayward girls... Sunday Truth contacted dozens of child welfare experts and social workers to complete this report ... In Heartbreak Ward ... girls ... wait for the babies they are never allowed to see.<sup>4</sup>

Dr. (...) states in 1963:<sup>5</sup>

The lying-in experience presents another area where professional workers fail to integrate their knowledge towards the best interests of the patient ... .. An argument often raised against a mother's seeing her infant is that the sight of her baby may awaken conflicts about giving up the child for adoption placement, which may delay or interrupt placement proceedings. This indicates that the mother, who actually **has the right to her own baby**, has not worked out her feelings about releasing the baby the infant for adoptive placement and needs more time to consider her plans... .. papers may be presented to a mother before she has recovered from the physical and emotional impact of the delivery...

(...) goes on to explain that **Physicians assume a paternalistic and directive role** and they do not understand the connection the mother has with the baby and is often expressing his

uncomfortable ...subjective reactions to the woman who is pregnant out of wedlock ...

1919 by (...) in his *Manual for Social Workers*, wherein he explains that it was only used by those involved in the business of baby farming:

Said a doctor in one hospital: "We never let a mother see her child, for when she does she is not so willing to part from it ..."

1961: (...) Social Worker<sup>6</sup> Adoption and the Unmarried mother – conference in England.

The danger of encouraging the unmarried mother to care for her child...she [may] then find it impossible to part from the baby

Rev (...) Director – Methodist Department of Child, Executive Director, The Child Care Service of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches states (1972): "... we have noted some difficulties in certain hospitals for the single mother. Such penalties as not allowing a single room, forbidding the mother to see her child, and other difficulties have been experienced by single mothers booking into certain hospitals..."<sup>7</sup> ... "But if we talk about the availability of free choice then we must also talk about the rights of the mother **to keep her child** (underline in original).



McHutchison J.(1984) Adoption in NSW an Historical Perspective.

(...)

No-one in the technical literature has stressed the heartlessness, the cruelty, and the sadism that the pregnant woman senses when it is suggested to her that she carry the child to term and then hand it over never to see it again, to someone else to rear...During the past 19 years, I have only seen three patients for whom 'farming' out a child for adoption would not have been emotionally traumatic and psychiatrically contra-indicated.<sup>8</sup>

(...) **(1965). Unmarried Mothers Australian Association Welfare Workers National Conference Social Worker Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, Sydney**

The unmarried mother must make a free choice – to keep her child; to surrender it for adoption... There must be no moral pressure brought to bear, no condition laid down when agency help is offered. She must be free to see, nurse and/or nurture her baby, whether or not her final plan is adoption... Many Agencies in this country have punitive, illegal and harmful rules regarding the unmarried mother's inalienable right to physical contact with her child, when she has decided on adoption. Some Agencies refuse to allow the unmarried mother to see her child, nor do they tell her the child's sex. While this may be done from the best motives, these misguided people should look more carefully into the situation' (p. 112).<sup>9</sup>

At the 1st Conference on Adoption<sup>10</sup> — Uses and Abuses of the System in 1976 — Father (...) , Catholic Social Welfare, stated: ***'She is powerless and particularly vulnerable to abuse, and that abuse is not an uncommon feature. She has for example the [same] rights as any other patient in the hospital. She has the right to be told what has been prepared for her by way of physical and medical treatment; she has the same right as any other patient to refuse such treatment. She has the right to name her child and the right to see her child with no more restrictions than any other patient in the hospital, and even those restrictions are subject to her final decision.***

In 1967 Sister (...) stated<sup>11</sup>:

Under the new legislation: *Adoption of Children Acts* for the states based on the model Act developed by the Commonwealth in conjunction with the States:

It is envisaged that under the NSW legislation there will be need for much closer liaison between the agencies offering care to the natural parents and those concerned with the plan for the child, i.e. the adoption agencies. Indeed, in some cases, these will be virtually one."

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Bearing this in mind (...) warned:

“ ... social workers operating within the framework of the NSW legislation would seem to have responsibility to natural parents in the following areas:  
**1. The natural mother must be given all information and assistance about her sole right to keep or surrender her baby as she decides its best. If she decides on adoption then she must have the right to choose the adoption agency with which she will negotiate for adoption. ...**  
**2. The natural mother’s right to see, handle and nurture her child, if she so desires, often requires protection. No agency should refuse to disclose details of the child which she may request-e.g. weight, sex, colouring, etc.-even if her ultimate decision about the child is for adoption**”

The Australian Social Workers Association<sup>12</sup> stated in their adoption manual:

***that denying a mother freedom to access her child was morally and ethically indefensible.***<sup>13</sup>

**1927:** (...),<sup>14</sup> Associate Director Research Bureau on Social Case Work, states:  
***... Mothers in a weakened condition, bewildered and fearful...following illegitimate childbirth, are being allowed-sometimes forced...- to make permanent decisions of momentous importance. The mortality statistics for babies early separated from the mother, and the frenzied searching of mothers in after years for the children they might have kept***

**1938:** (...) of the Department of Social Service of the Children’s Memorial Hospital stated:

***The unmarried mother in a hospital maternity ward is in no fit condition, physically or emotionally, to decide the future of herself and her child ..... It is important to realize that the mother is undergoing a major emotional experience with trauma ...***<sup>15</sup>

**1941:** (...) – worked as a psychiatrist at the New England Home for Little Wanderers from 1932 to 1957 stated:<sup>16</sup>

... This trauma is inevitable...the social worker's decision as to the separation of the mother and the baby ... the traumatic psychological effects on the mother of separation from her baby

**1953:** (...) <sup>7</sup> **Psychiatrist**, Director, Department for Children and Parents, Tavistock Clinic, London states:

But it should not be forgotten that emotionally mother and baby are one unit

**1996** Cunningham Report - (...) states: The adoption workers with whom I spoke and who had worked for the Department in the late 1960s and early 1970s all acknowledged that ... adoption involved pain and suffering for the natural mother and that little was done to assist her in the process of grieving for the child...Many put this down to lack of time and resources for workers at the time and the extensive case load that each worker had to carry ... There was no ongoing support services for the mother and little if any antenatal care.<sup>18</sup>

(...) principal adoption officer at Victoria's Methodist Adoption Agency from 1966-1978 states:

that he was told by a doctor in the 1960s that he had taken a baby, which had been put up for adoption, from the third floor of a hospital- where the young unmarried mother lay-to the fifth floor. There the child was put at the breast of a married woman whose baby had just died. Gregory remembers the doctor telling:

***“And that was adoption and we didn't need any social workers to do it”***

**ALISON XAMON'S APOLOGY IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ON THE  
19<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2010.**

**REMOVAL OF CHILDREN FROM UNMARRIED MOTHERS — APOLOGY**

*Statement*

**HON ALISON XAMON (East Metropolitan)** [9.47 pm]: On behalf of the Greens (WA) I wish to acknowledge the significance of an event that occurred in the Parliament today. I speak, of course, of the apology given by the Western Australian Parliament to those mothers who had their children removed and given up for adoption either through coercion, intimidation, threats, guilt or just plain fraud. Today's apology was very important to so many people, and I thank the ALP, the Liberals and the Nationals for recognizing how important this apology is and for treating it with the bipartisan approach it so deserves. I particularly acknowledge the hard work of the member for Mandurah, Hon David Templeman, whose perseverance, I believe, has been absolutely instrumental in bringing about this apology. I also thank him for the generous way in which he has been prepared to work with others, and for the sensitive and compassionate way in which he has worked with the mothers. I also acknowledge the role that Dr Kim Hames has played and the willingness with which he was prepared to ensure that the apology came about. For the women so tragically affected by past adoption practices, for so many of their children, for the fathers who never consented to give up their babies and for so many of the extended families, I hope and pray that this apology—the first public acknowledgment that what was done to them was wrong, and it was wrong—will be the first step towards some sense of healing, although I am not convinced that complete closure will ever be possible. To be honest, when I hear the stories of some of these women, I wonder whether I would ever be able to recover if that happened to me. I think about my own relationship with my children and how sacred that is. I think about my beautiful daughter, whom I had out of wedlock and raised on my own only 14 years after these terrible forced adoption practices ceased. I think that it is only because of an accident of history that I was able to have my little girl when I did and I was able to keep her when so many other women could not. The stories are horrendous and devastating. Around Australia thousands of young, unmarried, primarily teenage mothers, who in the period from the 1940s until as recently as the 1980s found themselves pregnant were subject to the cruelest adoption practices of their children, which in many instances can be described only as institutionalized baby theft. Young women were subject to practices that denied their rights as mothers and told them they were unworthy, sinful, substandard and selfish for even falling pregnant, and worse if they wished to keep their children. They were ostracized, degraded and diminished. They were denied the chance to see their babies, hold them or name them. The state and churches intervened to sever that primal relationship that exists between a mother and her child. These women were weak and vulnerable; they had no advocates and, in the face of the unassailable power of the church and of the state, they had no power. Some women tried to keep their children, or even just tried to see them, to assert their fundamental rights as a mother but were forcibly drugged and restrained. Many women were tricked into signing adoption papers, believing that

they were signing other documentation, or were so deeply in shock or affected by medication that they were simply unable to provide legal consent as we know it. Women giving birth would have their face covered to ensure that they did not see their babies. The point is that they did not want to relinquish their children, yet they were forced to, whether it be by coercion or straight-out fraud. What we know now is that many of those women never survived this experience. We have been told of mothers who, unable to live with the guilt and grief, committed suicide. I have also been told of adoptees who, never able to understand why they were given up, have also taken their life. What we also know is that for those who have been left behind lives have been shattered and families ripped apart. Mental illness and depression have become recurrent themes in the lives of these women. They live with the eternal shadow of grief and loss and, tragically, the sense of guilt at their utter powerlessness to keep their baby. Members who spoke in the other place referred time and again to their relief at today's changed social mores and their gratitude that the practices of those terrible times would no longer be tolerated or accepted. Of course, it is true that the absolute worst of it is in the past. Adoption practices are clearly far more stringent and models of open adoption are clearly designed to ensure the long-term emotional wellbeing of all parties—the new parents, the relinquishing mother and, of course, the child. We are also grateful that this is now the way. But I cannot agree that the thinking that drove these abhorrent practices is entirely dead. Prejudice and discrimination against women who raise their children out of wedlock and on their own are still very much alive and well. Those who peddle this hurt may not be stealing the babies anymore but they are still attempting to perpetuate the thinking that led people to think that it was okay, if not preferable, to steal these babies from their mothers. Every time someone claims that children raised by a sole parent are more likely than other children to become alcoholics or drug addicts, or have a mental illness or become delinquent, or every time they predict some other inevitable catastrophic and desperate outcome, or attempt to justify this warped thinking on some bogus study produced from some entirely partial source, they continue to be part of the problem, because this is the thinking that remains a painful hangover from exactly the same thinking that enabled the state and the churches to tear at the very heart of the mother-child relationship and to undertake the very behaviour that we are apologizing for today. What we know now, which was not accepted then, is that marriage in itself is no guarantee of a happy and stable home, and that having a mother and a father figure is not automatically a substitute for the love of a birthmother. Families in all their forms can succeed or fail, and there is no one right or wrong way to do it. I am grateful for today's apology. I think it is particularly special that it has been Western Australia that has led the way. I would have liked the opportunity to have this chamber echo its support for the apology in a more formal way, but this was not meant to be. However, I hope that Western Australia's example is now just the beginning. I am aware that there were women from around Australia who flew here to hear the apology and who are desperate to have the role of their own state governments, departments and churches acknowledged and admitted. I also support calls for an apology and an inquiry to be issued in our federal Parliament, and I am pleased to know that my colleague Greens Senator Rachel Siewert will again be introducing a motion calling for this exact thing next week in the Senate. So to those mothers, to their children, on behalf of the Greens, you are not to blame for what happened to you. And on behalf of the Greens, I am truly sorry.

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE: (B)**

(b) 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 subject to forced adoption policies.

**Ref: Dr. Geoffery A. Rickarby MB BS FRANZCP MANZAP** Member of the Faculty of Child Psychiatry RANZCP (**A PSYCHIATRIST WHO HAS SEEN ALL ASPECTS OF ADOPTION OVER 35 YEARS**) reference from the book “Releasing the Past.

“It is only when the suffering of those most directly damaged by a socio-cultural disaster are heard that there is any opportunity for **a Nation to evaluate a malign aspect of its own development**. In the instance of the thousands of Australian young mothers who lost a baby to adoption in the latter half of the last century, the distress and consequences are little known because they were dealt with one by one, and, at the time, mostly isolated from their family, partner and friends.”

1.

**TELEVISED AND WELL PUBLICISED COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT APOLOGY WITH PREMIERS OF EACH STATE APOLOGISING AS WELL - ACCOMPANIED BY A PRINTED LETTER OF APOLOGY TO mothers, fathers, children and families as well as adoptive families.**

### **2. Recommendation 17 from the N.S.W inquiry**

The departments, private agencies, churches, hospitals, professional organizations and individuals involved in past adoption practices( **especially doctors and hospitals**) should be encouraged to issue a formal apology to the mothers, fathers, adoptees and their families who have suffered as a result of past adoption practices.

### **3. Recommendation 20 from the N.S.W. inquiry**

The Minister for Community Services should establish a public education campaign on the effects of past adoption practice. (as well as the truth about what happened back then)

4.

**All state governments should issue a statement of public acknowledgement that past adoption practices were misguided, and that, often unethical or unlawful practices have occurred causing lasting suffering for many mothers, fathers, adoptees and their families.**

5.

**DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION SHOULD BE BANNED – RESPECTING THE RIGHTS OF A MOTHER AND HER CHILD TO REMAIN TOGETHER - AVOIDING THE SHOCKING DAMAGE PERMANENT SEPARATION INFLECTS.**

6.

**PAST SOCIAL WORKERS INVOLVED WITH PLACING CHILDREN INTO ADOPTIONS PRIOR TO 1985 SHOULD NOT BE ABLE TO SERVE ON REVIEWS ON ADOPTION, NOR SHOULD THEY BE ALLOWED TO COUNSEL ANYONE WHO WAS VICTIM TO ADOPTION PRACTICE IN THE PERIOD 1940 TO 1985.**

7

**JOINT COMMONWEALTH AND STATE GOVERNMENT REDRESS FUND TO BE ESTABLISHED.**

8.

**STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS LIFTED AS MOTHERS DID NOT HAVE RECORDS AVAILABLE UNTIL THE NINETIES. ALSO EXTENSIVE RESEARCH WAS NOT AVAILABLE UNTIL MORE RECENT YEARS.**

9.

**EXTENSIVE AND SPECIFIC TRAINING INTRODUCED FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS TO SPECIALISE IN THIS AREA ENCOMPASSING TRAUMA COUNSELLING. COUNSELLING TO BE MADE AVAILABLE FREE OF CHARGE TO THE VICTIMS OF PAST ADOPTION PRACTICES. ]**

10.

**THE BOOK FUNDED BY THE NSW DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES AS A RESULT OF THE NSW INQUIRY INTO PAST ADOPTION PRACTICES AND TITLED ‘RELEASING THE PAST’ EDITED BY MS. C. COLE SHOULD BE REPRINTED AND CIRCULATED TO ALL THOSE IN PAST ADOPTION SERVICES. IT SHOULD ALSO BE CIRCULATED TO TERTIARY EDUCATION FACILITIES INVOLVED IN THE STUDY OF THE HUMANITIES.**

11.

**MORE FUNDING FOR RESEARCH INTO THE EFFECTS OF STILBOESTRAL ESPECIALLY IN THE AREA OF POSSIBLE EFFECTS ON SUBSEQUENT PREGNANCIES – MY SECOND BORN DAUGHTER SUFFERS FROM MANY**

**SYMPTOMS OF CHILDREN WHO WERE EXPOSED IN UTERO. SHE WAS BORN SEVEN YEARS AFTER MY FIRSTBORN.**

**12.**

**ALL RECORDS SHOULD BE OPENED AND CONTACT VETOES LIFTED.**

**13.**

**I WOULD LIKE THE NAME I CHOSE FOR MY DAUGHTER TO BE PLACED ON HER ORIGINAL BIRTH CERTIFICATE. I WOULD LIKE THAT RIGHT WHICH WAS TAKEN AWAY, TO BE RETURNED TO ME.**

**14.**

**THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT TO LIAISE WITH STATE MINISTERS IN CHARGE OF THE PORTFOLIOS OF COMMUNITY SERVICES, HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH AND WOMENS ISSUES REGARDING THE FOLLOWING:**

I think there needs to be a total overhaul of the services provided by Child Protection in past adoption services and indeed the staff of all stakeholders who are involved in services concerning historical adoption. Staff (NOT JUST SOCIAL WORKERS) in all areas concerned with this need to be re-educated starting with the truth about what happened back then. They need to be more mindful and respectful around language and fully briefed on the mental health issues of mothers.

One mother had an interview with the senior management at Child Protection a few days after the W.A. Apology. He was defensive and extremely rattled, wanting to terminate the interview. The mother was not aggressive to him at all (according to witness present) She just wanted straight answers. She has a fear of this Department because of her treatment – **as we all do**. Regardless of the government’s apology, to which members of this department were present, she was told dismissively that after all ‘**she had signed the consent**’. I have seen her drug list - administered whilst confined, and her baby was removed from the hospital without her knowledge or permission 2 DAYS AFTER THE BIRTH. This ignorance must cease, it continues to damage. My own experience with Past Adoption Services is outlined below and was communicated to them. I received an apology from the head of that Department.

INTERVIEW WITH PAST ADOPTION SERVICES – 31/07/09

On the above date I attended an interview to receive information concerning the adoption of my daughter in July 1968. The social worker who interviewed me could not have shown more compassion and respect at this interview and I would like you to know how much her kind attention was appreciated. However, I was profoundly disturbed for days and very alarmed at the last few paragraphs of the written summary that I was given. I



have had counseling for years from the Adoption Research Council concerning the loss of my daughter to adoption. This is an organization that is partly funded by the government and in my counseling sessions I have been reassured many times that I was not responsible for the loss of my daughter. Yet I attend an interview and I am told in the Departments summary that “an affidavit was signed by my mother supporting my decision to place my child for adoption.”

Those words are enough to send any mother over the edge. I have had to have considerable support in the week following this interview because of the above statement. I find it unbelievable that given the depraved history of adoption practices, that such dangerous ignorance still exists and is being promoted by your department. We mothers walk a very painful and fine line. The abuses that were perpetrated against us have left a legacy of mental health issues that continue to plague us, forty odd years on from the experience. You never get over this, especially when there is no acknowledgement and continued ignorance around the truth. We have lost another one of our mums to suicide this year. The tragedies of adoption are repeated. This mother’s subsequent children have also been left to live the rest of their lives without their mother. The way in which this mother ended her life held a very deep and clear message about her shocking, dehumanizing experience of forced relinquishment.

My own personal records show that the officer (monster in this instance) was demanding my baby be placed for adoption, whilst I was only in my sixth month of pregnancy and she was still growing in my womb. This was despite him being told that it was our intention to marry and raise our child. In the interview regarding consent taking, I was lied to, the virtues of the adoptive parents were coercively promoted and no information was given as to how I could keep my child. Furthermore, I was deeply traumatized at the time of the interview (7 days after birth) by having my baby forcibly removed at birth. To give consent you have to have the capacity, full disclosure to what you are giving consent to and information about choices available. I had none of the above.

Psychiatrist Geoff Rickarby’s submission to the NSW Inquiry into Past Adoption Practice is available on- line. This man has had years of experience in the field of Adoption and his submission gives a clear indication of the shocking ramifications of adoption practices in the past and what needs to be done to help heal from one of the darkest times in Australian History, a history that is still kept in the dark. I hope that all staff who have dealings with mothers in your Department read his submission and use it as a guideline for more sensitive communication. Surely today we can expect “best practice” when facing the very department that failed us on so many levels in the past. I believe that this is of paramount importance in deterring any more loss and pain.

**I would like to convey my sincerest thanks to the Committee for its attention to my submission on this issue.**

**END OF SUBMISSION:**

signed      SUE MACDONALD

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