

I am a mother who lost her first child to adoption in 1964.

When I became unexpectedly pregnant at the age of 19, I had been in a stable, exclusive and committed relationship for several months, so I naturally expected my boyfriend to stand by me and our prospective child. Unfortunately, that was not his response and in desperation I turned to my parents.

I was terrified of their reaction and knew what a disgrace I would become in their eyes, but having always been a close and loving family, I naively assumed that, even without a husband, I could bring up my child with their help. I was permanently employed at a well paid job, so finances were not an issue and while I fully expected their anger, disappointment and censure, I also imagined that once the recriminations were over they would accept the situation and we could all work out a plan together. After all, this was also their first grandchild, so what other outcome could there be? I couldn't have been more wrong. My mother's furious response was 'of course you can't keep it, how would we explain it to the neighbours?' It was made perfectly clear to me that this child of mine would not be joining our family under any circumstances and with nowhere else to turn, I seemed to just lose all hope and retreat into a fog of apathy and denial.

My mother phoned my employers and resigned on my behalf, told everyone I was going to Brisbane to live and work for a while and made an appointment with the almoner of Crown Street Women's Hospital. Little did I know it then, but the course of action she had chosen would abandon me to a system that provided for only one possible conclusion - the loss of my child. Everything was arranged within days and I effectively disappeared from view from then until the end of my confinement.

I clearly remember that first interview on (...), 1964. The almoner discussed all the details with my mother. She vigorously promoted the institution of adoption and my mother agreed that this would be the ideal solution to our 'problem'. The almoner was unwavering in her assurance that this perfect plan would give my as yet unborn child the life it really deserved, that of being relieved forever of the stigma of illegitimacy to become part of a complete family that consisted of a mother *and* a father, who would of course be legally wed. She assured us that it would also benefit me by relieving me of a child that would ruin my life and heap shame upon us both forever.

I've learned from my hospital records that this was Miss (...) and according to her there were many nice, deserving *married* couples who, by some tragedy of nature were unable to have a child of their own. Luckily for me, one of these couples would deign to accept my baby, bring it up as their own and give it all the benefits of a 'proper' family life. My future child would be eternally grateful to me for providing him/her with this wonderful opportunity and would have a far better life than I could ever hope to provide - a better home and educational opportunities, more material benefits - and she painted a rosy picture of the adoption procedure by which my child would be matched as closely as possible with one of these hypothetical couples. Then, through my unselfish and loving act, they would all be miraculously transformed into the perfect family unit.

Just the fact that we were there seemed to be proof that my child would be adopted and at no time were any other alternatives ever suggested. The entire conversation took place solely between my mother and the almoner, I was never consulted until, finally at the end of their conversation, she turned to me and asked for details of the father of my child. I obediently supplied them and Miss (...) praised 'my(?) unselfish decision' and assured me I was 'doing the right thing for the baby'.

But in spite of her complete faith in the outcome of this pregnancy and my mother's wholehearted agreement, it's clear from my recently acquired hospital social records that Miss (...) sensed my opposition to this plan, since she summarised the information of that first interview in her files as "*not sure yet re plans for the baby.*"

The outpatients' department of the hospital was not so circumspect in their opinions. The first of several pages of medical notes that would be written as my pregnancy advanced, is dated July 1st and is already stamped with the initials "B.F.A." – baby for adoption.

It didn't take (...) long to completely undermine any vague, desperate notions I was entertaining of trying to keep my baby. In July she stated that no decision had been made, but by September, still several weeks before the birth, I had apparently succumbed to her 'advice' and resigned myself to adoption. She wrote: "*Seen regularly...Definitely B.F.A...*"

At each hospital visit I had with her as the months passed, she was relentless in her counselling of me towards adoption. Any other alternative was never broached, instead her advice consisted of a constant litany of the marvels of adoption and the dreadful, unimaginable pitfalls of being an 'unmarried mother' for both myself and my baby. During every interview, she reiterated time and again that to keep 'the baby' would doom me to a life of shame that would make me an outcast in society. No man would ever want to marry me and raise 'another man's child'. I would be ostracized by all decent people and even worse, so would 'the baby'. It would eventually grow to hate and resent me for being forced by me to bear the stigma of illegitimacy. If I truly loved 'the baby', I would give it its best chance in life by giving it to this unknown, but saintly, loving married couple. My child was never referred to as *my* baby, always 'the baby', until I soon reached the point of feeling that this child growing inside me already belonged to someone else.

She explained patiently that being so young, I could always have other babies 'of my own' in the future, when I was respectably married. And she consoled me - and I was young and naïve enough to accept this - that I would soon forget all about this 'unfortunate incident' in my life. To facilitate this forgetting, I was strongly advised not to think of this as my own baby and not to name my child.

Over the last few years, since I have shared others' personal stories of adoption loss, I have discovered that there were very many girls like me who did bestow names on their babies. I don't know if they were advised against it and had the strength to ignore that advice, or if this was peculiar to (...) , Crown St hospital procedure or if my case was unique, but the fact that I followed this advice and refrained from giving my child a name at birth has been a source of the most profound and gut-wrenching grief, shame and regret imaginable. When I recently accessed the Supreme Court documents of my son's adoption and saw him identified as 'unnamed' over and over again on page after page, I thought my heart would break. Had he seen these papers too, and if so, why would he not hate me for apparently being so cold and heartless? What kind of mother would allow her precious baby to go out into the world without even a name? I am still struggling to find a way to deal with that particular guilt.

As a young girl brought into the almoner's office by a mother with such strong opinions, what I needed was help from another source. Surely a social worker's job was to find out her client's true wishes and act on those. Miss (...) obviously sensed that I wasn't in favour of adoption and could see that my wishes were being over-ridden by my mother's. Therefore, what she should have explored with me were ways in which I could have found alternative support for myself and my child, like social benefits in the form of housing and childcare facilities. I could have managed financially on my own. My job as a comptometrist was one that was in demand and well paid, what I was deprived of was moral and emotional support.

But I was permitted no voice in the proceedings. I was young, from a sheltered background, with parents who had brought me up to defer to my elders and betters and be guided by older people's advice. I was trusting and had never experienced manipulation of this kind, so I failed to recognise the tactics when they were used against me. I had no support from my parents or my boyfriend and I could see no way out. In short I was made to believe that this was what I had to do. So who was Miss

(...) really representing? Clearly the needs of the young, pregnant, single mother with no support system came second to the desires of a childless married couple.

It was apparently agreed at that first meeting between my mother and the almoner that I would be known under the alias of (...) on my hospital records, although all official documents bear my real name. It may have been my mother's idea to further hide the true identity of our family. Or perhaps it was the almoner's suggestion. (...) was a shortened version of my own name, but it was also my boyfriend's surname and the very one by which I would have been known, had he fulfilled his obligations and stood by me and his child. Ms (...) may have seen this as another way of denigrating me even further. If so, she succeeded admirably.

The matter of hiding my true identity settled, next there arose the question of what to do with me as my pregnancy advanced. It was decided that, since I must be hidden from the view of anyone who knew me, it would be best to send me somewhere to live-in with a family and work as a 'mother's help'. The family at Killara where I spent the next 4 months were very nice people who showed me great kindness. While I was deeply grateful for that, this was exploitation. These people profited by having a virtually unpaid maid-of-all-work to care for their home and their children. I find it ironic that while I was considered unfit and incapable of parenting my own child, I was considered, even while heavily pregnant, to be perfectly capable of being in almost total charge of a very large house and five children who ranged in age from four years old to twelve. For all this responsibility and extended hours of work, I recall being paid a 'wage' of something like 10 shillings. The equivalent in today's money would be a little less than \$11.

The months I spent at Killara passed in a kind of haze. I worked hard, the hours were long and I was always tired, so it seemed easier to just remain in my apathetic state of getting through each day in turn without allowing myself to think about what was happening to me and my child. I still clung to the vague hope that my boyfriend would appear and rescue us, but I could think of no other way out and as that hope faded I found it easier to simply not face what was happening. Everything seemed unreal and I felt utterly unable to grasp the fact that I would not be taking my baby home. Although the almoner continued to stress how happy and fortunate he would be in his new home, with his new 'parents', it all felt as though it were happening to someone else.

My regular hospital appointments included a visit to the out patients department for a physical examination and I would usually be seen by a different doctor at each visit. The doctors were all much alike. Each one would be surrounded by a retinue of students and were invariably cold, hostile and patronizing men. On one occasion he was also very rough. When I showed discomfort, he told me angrily: 'don't complain, *girlie*, this is nothing compared to what's coming!'

The belittling way I was treated at these visits served to further lower my self esteem and increase my feelings of utter worthlessness. The medical staff and the almoner's undermining of what little self confidence I still had was continual, but I have since discovered that there were some 'unmarried mothers' who had much more courage than I and had not completely crumbled under this continual assault. They had defied the 'advice' by insisting on keeping their children. That I lacked their superior courage has created a new source of guilt and shame for me and I have huge respect for them, but tragically, their outcome was the same. Not one of them was able to keep her child in the end, but at least they did try. I had become utterly submissive. They had broken me and I had lost all hope simply from the lack of any other choice, but when it came to the treatment we all received at the hands of the hospital staff, there seems to have been no discrimination shown between those who complied and those girls who didn't.

This leads me to believe that there was a recognised procedure being carried out on those unfortunate girls like me whose babies were marked for adoption. It seems that young, unmarried pregnant girls were simply launched onto a type of conveyor belt process from the first interview with the almoner. While I trusted this woman and believed she was treating and advising me as an individual, she was in fact delivering a

tried and true service designed to take my baby and give it to a barren, married couple who wanted to complete their family and who were considered more worthy than me.

I learned nothing about the coming event. Neither my mother nor my employer felt inclined to discuss the subject with me and I was too shy and afraid to ask. Not a word of instruction about what to expect was provided by the almoner or any of the medical staff I saw at the hospital.

Even though almost half a century has now passed, the details of my son's birth have remained so deeply imprinted on my memory that it might have occurred yesterday. But there are periods of blankness surrounding it. I always wondered what caused these prolonged and mysterious gaps in my memory and my recently acquired medical records reveal the reasons. They explain a great deal about that day and the ones that followed and confirm that this absence of memory was caused by copious amounts of medication. When I discovered the amount and variety of drugs administered to me, I was staggered. For one who had never taken more than a very occasional aspirin, it's a wonder I survived this onslaught of medication at all.

I began labour very early on the morning of Thursday (...), 1964 and arrived at the hospital mid-morning. My medical records of that day begin with admittance and the 'Nursing Notes' give some idea of the trauma I was experiencing. My vital signs show that while my temperature was a normal 37, my pulse (96) and respiration rate (30) were so high as to be practically tachycardic. I was in early labour and terrified.

The afternoon's notes make interesting reading, considering the nervous state I was in on arrival. Just a few hours later, the notation is made: '*appears to be asleep*'. A little more light is shed on this apparently sudden need, not to mention ability to drop off to sleep during the most traumatic day of my life in an earlier entry stating that I was administered "2 *Doriden tabs*" at 1.55.p.m. Two hours later my temp is 36.4, my pulse has returned to a much more normal 72, respiration is also more normal at 22 and I am 'asleep'. I was obviously sedated.

My next memory is of being in what must have been the labour ward. Several hours seemed to pass, while I remained entirely alone with pains getting progressively stronger until a nursing sister came in and unceremoniously and without any conversational preamble, stuck a needle in my buttocks. This event is recorded as happening at 7.30 that evening as an instruction for: "*Pethidine 100 mgs*".

I remember nothing more, but an hour later, a note was made on the 'Continuation sheet' that says: "*apparently has been fully dilated for 2 hrs*". The 'apparently' in this report strikes me as a very off-hand remark and shows that not a very close watch was being kept on my progress at this point. My baby was ready to be born, but the preceding instruction for Pethidine to be administered at that time indicates to me that instead of delivering me then, they chose to sedate me again until a more convenient time. Perhaps there were married women who enjoyed a higher priority than I did!

The Pethidine certainly had a powerful effect because when I regained consciousness, the room was full of doctors, nurses and students. I was on my back, the metal railed sides of my bed had been raised and I was apparently in the last stages of labour.

Even after all these years, I need only close my eyes to have a perfectly preserved image of that moment appear. I was terribly confused and frightened, and some part of me will always be that terrified young girl, surrounded by an army of uncaring, unfeeling medical staff who never offered me so much as a glance or a kind word, let alone any compassion, and not one word of explanation about what was going on. Standing on my right hand side was an older nursing sister with a hard, stony expression, while on my left stood a young nurse not much older than I. Both women were looking toward the foot of the bed, where I could just see a doctor, flanked by a crowd of onlookers. I could only just see him because a large, fat pillow had been laid on my chest just under my chin and being flat on my back, I was unable to see over it. Why I made no attempt to

remove it is a mystery, as that would have been instinctive, and I believe that I was restrained in some way.

A moment later I felt something leave my body with a rush and instinctively knew that my baby had been born.

Still no one spoke to me and no one looked at me. Without exception all the medical attendants present treated me with complete indifference so I appealed to the young nurse by my side. Struggling to see over the pillow, I asked her if I could see my baby...and was totally ignored. It was simply as though I hadn't spoken! No one in attendance made any response or acknowledged me in any way and she kept her gaze fixed firmly ahead. I asked her if my baby was a boy or a girl. She lifted her chin contemptuously and replied that she couldn't tell me. Then I asked if my baby was OK. Without turning her head or making eye contact with me, she spat out over her shoulder that I would be "told later". She offered each of these brief replies with the most utter contempt and loathing of which she was capable and I felt reduced to the status of the most abject wretch who'd ever lived.

I have a vague memory of the doctor and his group moving to a table on the right of the room, where he carried out some sort of hurried activity, but again he was surrounded by his students and all I could see was a wall of white-coated backs. It seemed only seconds later that he and his students were gone - and so was my baby.

The pillow was removed and the room now contained just me and my two guardians on either side of the bed. The older sister turned to me and without a word immediately placed her finger in my navel and began to move it vigorously and with great force in a circular motion. When I cried out with the dreadful pain and tried to push her hands away, she slapped my hands, glared ferociously at me and snarled 'stop that, you stupid girl, we have to get rid of the afterbirth!' My ignorance was so great that I didn't even know what 'afterbirth' was, so I burst into tears of confusion, humiliation and misery.

Still not a scrap of compassion was shown and I was completely ignored. The entire experience had more in common with an assault than a medical procedure. I felt completely violated. I was at my most vulnerable and defenceless and these people took full advantage of that fact by stealing my baby away from me and treating me like something less than human. One can only imagine my baby's reaction to this abrupt and total severing from his mother. I can't even bear to contemplate that aspect of this unnatural behaviour. But as evil, as barbaric and as permanently damaging as the medical procedure was, it wasn't the worst thing that happened in the labour ward that night. The worst act, for which they will all be eternally culpable, was the brutal act of taking my baby and violently and permanently severing the most sacred human connection that exists - that of a mother and her child.

The next 'Continuation sheet' records this severely traumatising event in just a couple of entries. At 9.50 p.m. a note reads: "*has now been fully dilated approximately 2 -3 hours. Making only very feeble expulsive efforts*" An interesting remark, since I doubt anyone under the influence of Pethidine could be expected to make more than a 'feeble effort' to achieve anything! Clearly, this note was made to justify the action that took place 6 minutes later - "*instrumental delivery*". The method of delivery is described as "*Kjelland's forceps moderately difficult pull*".

Then there is a muddled memory of a doctor inserting stitches. These last stages were carried out without a word of explanation and in an enormous hurry while I fretted silently about what had happened to my baby. I hadn't the courage and was far too intimidated by the nurses to ask any more questions. I felt I hadn't the right to 'make a fuss', or to 'be a nuisance'. Over the months of the almoner's indoctrination, I had become convinced that I hadn't any rights at all and wasn't entitled to any answers.

I never heard my baby cry and as a naive and uninformed 20 year old, the only conclusion I was able to draw from this and the nurse's refusal to answer my questions,

combined with the placing of the pillow to obscure my view, was that my baby had either been born dead or so hideously deformed that the medical staff had been unable to discern its gender. As a completely subjugated 'unmarried mother', who wasn't worthy of her child, I suffered in silence, but the anguish and worry I experienced over this during the following days was barely tolerable. And even during all the years that followed, on especially dark days, I would still wonder whether or not the information they had eventually given me about my son was the truth.

Every mother's first reaction is to want to know that the child she has nurtured and protected with her own body has entered the world healthy, intact and normal and to deprive me of that reassurance was the cruellest and most inhuman kind of treatment imaginable. It's very difficult to believe that trained medical professionals were capable of acting in such an inhumane way. I have never recovered from it and suspect I never will. Nor have I trusted or respected a single member of the medical profession since.

At 11 p.m. an entry is made on the 'Treatment Record': "*cap pentobarbitone 200 mgs*" and "*stilb 20 mgs*". A further "*cap pentobarbitone 200 mgs*" is prescribed nightly for the remainder of my stay in hospital. The 'Nursing Report' also records these details and on this page "*B.F.A.*" is noted no less than 3 times. The last entry is at 11.15 p.m. when I vaguely recall being "*taken to ward*". Since it was by then the middle of the night, I could barely make out my surroundings. I was aware of other patients, but I was never to see them or them me. I was put into a bed right beside the door, the curtains were drawn around me and I was left, in isolation and unconscious once more from the Pentobarbitone, until early the next morning.

I claim no medical knowledge whatsoever, but my need to learn about all these drugs was so great that I carried out extensive research on the Internet. The information I uncovered contained much to alarm me, but it also helped to explain why my memories of that day and the days that followed had always remained so vague and fragmented.

I eventually learned that many of these medications come under the category of 'psychotropic substances'. I found sites that described Doriden as: "*a hypnotic sedative*" and that "*recreational abusers discovered that combining the drug with codeine produced a euphoria which closely resembles that obtained from heroin*", while effects included "*impairment of thinking, memory loss*" and "*a cheap, euphoric boozeless drunk*". Pentobarbitone is used in veterinary and human euthanasia and in the administering of the death penalty by lethal injection. Pethidine is related to morphine and heroin and "*was consistently associated with more euphoria, difficulty concentrating, confusion, and impaired psychomotor and cognitive performance.*" Another site quoted: "*pethidine does not provide adequate pain relief during labour, but ends up heavily sedating the woman*". Several sites claimed that Stilboestrol is a known carcinogenic and this drug was administered on a regular basis over the next days. The nurses at Lady Wakehurst told me its purpose was to 'dry up my milk'.

I have no memory at all of the day following my baby's birth. There is one foggy recollection of being wheeled along a dingy corridor by silent nursing staff and another brief impression of scenery passing the windows of a vehicle in which I was travelling, but once again I was told nothing and I had no idea where I was taken.

The 'Nursing Report' for the morning after my son's birth throws more light on those early events and begins at 6 a.m. with a note that I "*slept well*". No doubt my 'sleep' was helped in large measure by the drugs I had been given, but in spite of that I was then given more. This time a cocktail of something illegible followed by "*+ pot brom + chloral hydrate*". I'm unable to identify the first drug, but have found various explanations of the other two. Potassium bromide is used by vets and was originally a treatment for epilepsy. Its side effects include "*lethargy and somnolence*" which I presume was the desired effect. Chloral hydrate is another drug used by vets, and is the ingredient added to alcohol to create what was once known as a 'Mickey Finn' and now more commonly referred to as the 'date rape drug'.

I was knocked out so successfully, that with the addition of codeine at 11 a.m., which would have increased my drowsy and lethargic state, I was left with no idea of where I was at all for the entire day. I later learned that I had been taken to an annexe of Crown Street Hospital called Lady Wakehurst Home, located at Bondi. My records state that I arrived there at 2.30 p.m. No other medication is noted for that day until I received another dose of Stilboestrol at 6 pm and at 8.30 pm yet another 100mgs of Pentobarb.

I spent the next six days in a ward with several other girls, but my memories of the entire period I spent there are very few, patchy and confused. My medical records report that I was placed on a regime of a variety of drugs administered several times each day.

On the evening of November 2nd, I was given another 100mgs Pentobarb. I was unaware of the fact that night, but I was to be presented the next morning with adoption papers. Another notation for more Doriden is shown for the day the signing actually took place.

Despite all this over-medication, the one event during those days at Lady Wakehurst that has remained in my memory, albeit in bits and pieces, is the signing of the adoption papers. On the fifth day after I had given birth, a woman arrived at around 10 a.m. Before receiving my medical records, I always believed that she was the almoner, Miss (...), but apparently she was not. Whoever it was, it was finally at that point that I learned about my baby. When she told me, very casually, that I had given birth to a boy and that he was well, I was overwhelmed with relief and gratitude to know that he had, after all, been born normal and healthy. She described him as having a 'square face'.

And those were the few meagre details with which I was provided to sustain me through what were to be the next 44 years of his life. I had been prevented from seeing him, hearing his cry, holding him or knowing whether or not he was healthy and normal. I was denied all those details that a mother wants to know about her newborn child – his weight, length, colour of hair, the time of his birth and whether all his fingers and toes were there, but she seemed to believe that I was entitled to no further details than those and I was too convinced of my own worthlessness to dare to ask.

She then asked me, equally as casually, whether I'd like to name my baby. I panicked. I had been relentlessly 'advised' not to name my baby and, like a naughty child, I felt I was being tested to see if I'd properly learned the lesson I'd been set, so to my undying shame and regret, I mumbled a refusal.

Without further ado she put a paper in front of me. She asked me if I understood that by signing it, I was signing away any future contact with my child as of that moment, and that was the total extent of information she offered. I was not permitted to read it and no one else was there to either advise me or to witness my signature. She handed me the pen and like an obedient schoolgirl, I signed my name. All I wanted was for this to be over, so that I could find somewhere private to let go of all the tears and emotions that I was battling to hold in check.

When I received my medical records, one document was of particular interest to me in the light of the signing of this consent to adoption. It's a copy of a medical consent form dated July 1st, signed by my mother and countersigned by (...). My mother's signature gives permission for the hospital to carry out any treatment required for my care while a patient, and while she could never have imagined the barbaric treatment to which she was consigning me, her consent was required because I was under 21, the then legal age of majority. I was a minor. How then was the consent that I signed to relinquish my own flesh and blood without ever having seen him, without the consent of a parent, without an unbiased witness, without advice of any kind and under the influence of 'psychotropic substances', a valid document?

By the evening of the day on which I signed the papers, the record keeping had become almost desultory, even though I was to remain a patient for another two days. Clearly I had become of no further concern. My baby was gone, the adopters were sure of their prize and in the eyes of the hospital staff I was now of no importance.

Certain other pages were included among my medical records. These are the most precious and the most poignant and they record the first days of my son's life. They detail the days he spent alone in the Crown St nursery, while I was incarcerated several miles away. These are the days we should have spent together. I had signed nothing; he was still my baby then, and I was and always will be, his mother. But, of course the medical staff and the social workers knew. They all knew how strong the bond is between a mother and her child. And they knew that had they permitted me to see, hold, feed, care for and bond with my baby, that all their months of conditioning and indoctrination would have been for nothing; the fog caused by their lies and bullying that was confusing my mind would have cleared, I would have returned to my senses, rediscovered my backbone and moved heaven and earth to keep him somehow.

Had the public learned at the time about the manner in which young single girls were being drugged and mistreated in the country's public hospitals, in order to take their new-born babies, there would have been an outcry. Should a stranger abduct someone else's child, police forces are instantly mobilised to track down the perpetrator and rescue the child. Whenever a case of a missing child is reported in the media, entire communities are motivated to search while the parents are provided with all the support and counselling society can muster. The relatives of missing persons beg for help to find out what happened to their family member so they can achieve 'closure'. And rightly so.

I was told to go home, get on with my life, never speak of it and forget this ever happened. No therapy. No counselling. No permission to grieve for the loss of my child. No knowledge of his name. No information about the people who were raising him. No idea how or where he was being brought up. No clue as to whether he was alive or dead. No hint of 'closure' there.

I did go on with the rest of my life. Desperate to make amends to my parents, I did follow the rules; I went home and never spoke of it again. And for several decades I continued to believe that I deserved what had happened to me. The almoner and the Crown Street staff could never have imagined how successful their indoctrination and humiliation of me had been. I guarded the secret and never spoke of my experience or of my lost son, because I believed I was one of a very few. I had swallowed all the conditioning that I was not like other girls of my age and class. I wasn't as 'nice', I wasn't as 'good'. Unlike them I was a shameful example of young womanhood, who had done the wrong thing. One girl who had fallen by the wayside; a 'bad' girl who had disgraced her parents, ruined their lives and hopes and wrecked her own life by having a child out of wedlock.

But I never forgot. I searched the faces of children in the street and wondered. I grieved privately and in silence and learned that the only way I could deal with my feelings was to bury them. That way I could cope with not knowing where my son was and who he now called his parents. I tried to pick up my life and go on as though nothing had happened, but the effort took all I had and my life became segmented into two parts, the years before the birth and the years that came after.

I couldn't stay in Sydney. Around every corner of this city, I expected at any moment to come across a boy who looked like me and I found myself thinking too much about him while I lived in the place where it had all happened and where I assumed he lived. I couldn't allow myself to be so constantly reminded, it was far too painful, so I spent the next several years travelling the world, never staying in one place permanently. Friends were people with whom I mixed until they delved too deeply into my past. Relationships were briefer than that. It was easier to conduct a series of casual friendships that could easily be broken, than to commit myself to one person who would someday have to be told my secret, and I was unable to tell anyone.

So long as I refused to dwell on my lost boy, I eventually found I could live a conventional life after all. I have never, by any stretch of the imagination, 'got over it', or 'moved on'; instead I suppose I taught myself how to cope, but more than a decade

passed until I finally reached that point. I went on to lead what would be considered a 'normal' life with the requisite husband and subsequent two wonderful children, but my lost son was always there in my heart and at the back of my mind.

My personality was permanently affected by this experience, and I was also affected physically. In 1969, I was 25 years old and living in Vancouver Canada, when I was diagnosed as suffering from a mild prolapse of the uterus. I was told this had been caused by 'being left too long in labour', 5 years earlier. So, thanks to the butchery practised on me at Crown Street Hospital under the guise of medical attention, I was required to undergo an operation that year at Vancouver General Hospital to correct the condition. As a result, I was unable to give birth to my subsequent two children naturally and they were both born by caesarean section. So along with my son and a part of my soul, I also lost the ability to ever experience another natural birth.

I was unable to breastfeed my daughter, born in 1980, I believe because I had been so traumatised by that first birth, that I still considered myself worthless and didn't really expect to be given my new baby. When I became pregnant again, four years later, I learned from an amniocentesis that this child was a boy. The remaining months of that pregnancy were filled with worry that since I hadn't deserved my first son, something would happen to this baby too. I was ridiculously overprotective with my two raised children; neither were ever left with baby-sitters, I didn't allow them to attend school camps and I worried continually that I wasn't an adequate mother to them.

I never forgot. The major events – his birthday, Christmas and Mother's Day – were especially difficult and would force me to think even more about the boy who should be there to share those days with me. I would allow myself a little time to think about him and then resolutely put those thoughts away again to the back of my mind. And even after spending two thirds of my life and all of his without this child to whom I gave birth, I was still coming to terms with the extent to which that one time in my life has so thoroughly affected all the rest of it.

I was told I was never to know where my son was and could never have any future contact with him, but I always intended to find out his fate at some unspecified date in the future. The not knowing haunted me, 10, 20, 30 and even after more than 40 years; the not knowing if he was alive or dead, whether he was happy and how he had lived his life. I believed I hadn't the right to disrupt his life, but having no knowledge of him at all was more than I could bear.

To search while my parents lived seemed terribly disloyal, but by 2001, with the death of my mother, all of my original family had passed away and the realization that no one was left to be hurt by my actions seemed to open the floodgates. Of course, in the interim, a new family had grown up around me. There was now a husband who thought he knew everything about me after decades of marriage and, most importantly, two adult children who had a half-brother they never knew existed. I agonised over telling them for months and worried that this confession would break up my family, but when I did finally reveal all, I was amazed to discover that the world did not cease to turn, I was not hated, shunned and reviled and they were, and continue to be, more understanding and supportive than I could ever have predicted.

My son had never looked for me, and while I missed him dreadfully in my life, I tried to look on his lack of contact as a positive thing and be comforted. It seemed a clear vindication that what the almoner had promised had come to pass. He had gone to a good, kind, loving home with parents he was entirely happy with and who had provided him with the best of everything. I imagined that he had enjoyed a good upbringing with superior educational opportunities and had matured into a well-adjusted, happy man who was completely content with his life. And I was convinced that should I ever intrude, I would just be an embarrassment to him.

There was also the possibility that he hadn't been told of his adoption, but I always harboured the fantasy that one day he would travel and when he required a passport and applied for his birth certificate, he would learn the truth of his parentage.

As strange as it seems to me now, never at any stage over all those years had I looked into the laws surrounding adoption. Perhaps not really so strange, since for me, his adoption was a wound that never healed and that I dare not disturb for fear of the pain flaring up all over again. So I had just put all my faith and trust in the almoner's assurances that my child was 'better off', and that had left me completely ignorant of the way in which the adoption process really worked.

Again I turned to the internet and in utter disbelief, I learned that each child in this situation was issued with a falsified birth certificate, a fact I had never even suspected. That the government of a first-world democratic nation could condone the re-writing of history by falsifying documents such as birth certificates – the very basis of one's identity – is to me absolutely incredible and unspeakable. I realised that my fantasy about my son's spontaneous discovery of his adoption and his true name simply could never have happened. If his adoptive parents had kept the truth from him, his birth certificate would only have reinforced his belief that they were his true parents.

As I searched further on the subject, I also discovered that there were so many others who'd been in my position. I was stunned. I'd always believed I was one of a very few, but I knew that I hadn't been the only young girl who had been through this. I knew I had shared a ward at Lady Wakehurst with others, but I was to discover that just during the 1960s, there had been tens of thousands like me in NSW alone! I learned that it was now possible for separated mothers and their children to trace each other and how to go about it and I began to understand that I was entitled to find him, make contact and somehow try to make up for all those lost years.

I applied for my records and 4½ months later received a large envelope of documents. The letter included gave details about the adoption and information about the adoptive couple. And yet another illusion was well and truly shattered. For over 40 years, I had visualised my son growing up in an affluent, upper class home with access to everything material that money could buy. My long held fantasies about the mythical, saintly, prosperous couple who had condescended to accept my child as their own instantly evaporated when I read the details of the people who had been considered more worthy of raising my child than I was. These were two very ordinary people, of a very similar background to my own, but of course the critical difference between us was one vital fact – they were legally married!

Just three copies of original documents had been included with the letter from DoCS. One was the adoption card dated the same day as the signing of the adoption consent, and the second was a form listing my personal details and dated November 2nd, the day before the signing took place. It bears the signature of a (...) and it has apparently been summarised from my file. It records my personal details and those of my family and the father of my child. Ms (...) has copied almost all the details correctly, but when it comes to my physical characteristics, there is one discrepancy. On the line where Ms (...) had correctly described the colour of my eyes as green, Ms (...) has seen fit to write "green-grey". The letter included with these documents states that the adoptive father had "grey/green" eyes! So it would seem my son had already been earmarked for this couple, even before my signature had been procured.

The form goes on to list the attributes of the 'Natural Father'. Before any details are recorded, the fact that was apparently considered the most important is stated in just 3 words "Aware. No action"! His details are all listed correctly, but in spite of the fact that I willingly supplied it, no name is included.

The third of the original documents supplied by DOCS is the '*Preliminary application for the adoption of a child by a parent who seeks to have a child adopted by approved adopting parents*'. I was not been permitted to read it at the time, so the wording was

completely unfamiliar. It reads in part: "*I make this application for the adoption of my child realising thoroughly that once an order of adoption is made...*". So in spite of the fact that I was told the consent I was signing would come into effect immediately, I actually had until "*an order of adoption is made*" to rescind that consent. Of course, since any information about that fact was withheld from me, there was certainly no danger of me acting upon it.

The final paragraph states: "*The law pertaining to adoption has been explained to me and I have been afforded an opportunity of asking for the fullest information concerning adoption.*" The only 'explanation' I was given was that my signature made this act final and immediate. It is dated November (...), 1964. Signed by me, it bears no witness' signature, but again (...) signature is at the foot of the page, this one identifying her as a Justice of the Peace.

I remember signing only one form at Lady Wakehurst, but when I received the documents from the Supreme Court, among them was a second form, also signed by me and also dated November (...), called a "*Consent to the making of an Order of Adoption*". And while I have always remembered the signing being take by the almoner, neither form shows any indication of her presence. I have always been known to family and friends as someone with a long and accurate memory and the fact that I was entirely unaware of how many forms I signed or even who I was dealing with on that day, will perhaps convey to some extent, the depth of my drug-induced bewilderment.

I admitted to my lack of medical knowledge and the same is true of my knowledge of the law, but I believe that crimes were committed against my son and I.

- My baby was removed from me, his mother, at the moment of his birth and without my consent. I had signed nothing and was therefore his mother and legal guardian. I consider that abduction.
- I was denied all sight or knowledge of my son. No consent to adoption was signed by me until he was 5 days old and yet for all that time, I was kept drugged and uninformed and, without my knowledge or consent, we were deliberately separated, not just kept apart but removed from each other by several miles. I consider that my rights as my son's mother and legal guardian were deliberately and criminally violated.
- I was provided with no advice prior to signing the consent, nor was my signature witnessed by an impartial advisor.
- The consent was procured by constant and relentless coercion.
- The consent was signed while I was under the influence of drugs and while I was still a minor.
- I was not informed of any revocation period.

Again and again my civil and human rights were violated. This lack of advice and information pertaining to the adoption laws in relation to name changes and alteration of the birth certificate, led me to believe, erroneously, that I would one day be able to find my son again through normal channels.

But, illegal as they were, those events and the damage they caused happened. The adoption took place; my son grew up with a family who began as strangers to him. He and I are very fortunate that the adoptive parents with whom he was placed, are good and decent people who love him and raised him well. But they were not the prosperous, professional, upper class people of whom the social worker spoke – *and they were not his own kin*. They are the same kind of people as the parents by whom I was raised and had my son not been snatched from me at birth, his upbringing would have been very much the same. He did 'go to a good home', but it wasn't a better home, just a different one. So what was the point? How did society benefit from all this pain? Why were the

lives of both my son and I as well as all the extended family members he should have known, altered irrevocably and for no good reason?

He lost so very much that can never be regained – growing up with his mother, knowing his true identity, knowledge of his genetic family and his ancestors and, when he was relocated across the world, his heritage and his country as well – and he gained nothing.

But I have great hopes that the truth will finally emerge from this inquiry, these crimes will be acknowledged and perhaps some closure and validation will be gained by those of us who paid such an enormously high price and surely it's not too late to rectify some of the mistakes and to correct history.

As to the specific terms of this inquiry and *the way in which the Commonwealth Government contributed to these past practices.*

Sadly our nation has a history of social engineering, beginning with the first settlement and continuing through the various early immigration schemes, to last century's infamous 'White Australia policy', 'Stolen Generation' and 'Forgotten Australians'. These decades in our history when the governments and the hospital systems redistributed new born babies to different families in the name of 'the best interests of the child' was the only time in the history of mankind that hundreds of thousands of young, unmarried girls spontaneously 'gave up' their babies for adoption by strangers. It must be obvious to anyone that their 'decisions' were made with a great deal of coercion if not outright force and that this was also an experiment in social engineering.

The Governments, the public hospital system and the media of the day manufactured the demand by portraying every baby for adoption – and by the seventies, the hospital nurseries were overflowing with them - as unwanted and unloved by his/her 'unmarried mother'. Childless couples were assured that an adopted child was a 'blank slate', a '*nullius filius*' - no one's child - and would be just 'as if born to them'. Then these same agencies manufactured the supply by coercion and brute force. The campaign was blatant, public and completely open as evidenced by numerous magazine and newspaper articles of the day. Just because all this was implemented by state authorities doesn't mean that it was not authorised, condoned and recognised by the Commonwealth as were all those other former policies. And in any case, neither my son nor I were defined only by the state in which this happened, we were also citizens of Australia and the Commonwealth of Australia failed to protect our constitutional and human rights.

And as to 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*, these would be my personal suggestions:

Once the truth has emerged and been made public, former 'unmarried mothers' like myself, the 'natural fathers', the children who were lost to us and the siblings of those children who grew up without their sister or brother all deserve an apology delivered by the Prime Minister in front of the public and in the full glare of the media spotlight, much as previous victims of unjust practices have received. Perhaps then those lost sons and daughters may finally become informed about the practises under which we mothers signed those consents to adoption of our precious babies. Only with that knowledge can a greater understanding come and healing begin.

And the most important aspect of all this to me personally, has to do with the falsified birth certificate issued to every adopted person.

My son always was and always will be my son. An illegally procured signature on a piece of paper purporting to change that fact by law makes no difference. Now I know that I have two adult grandchildren who also somehow come under the authority of that same illegal piece of paper, and I find this particularly difficult to deal with. For 46 of my 66 years, there has been a wound on my soul. Now there are three. I dread living long

enough to suffer any more generations of loss. These three people are my bloodline. They carry my genes and DNA and those genes will be passed on to all my future descendants. As an avid genealogist and family historian, I grieve deeply that my son *and his children* have to take their places on our family tree under the name of another family, because of my signature on a piece of paper that was obtained illegally and fraudulently. I was given no choice but to surrender my son, but I made no such arrangements for every descendant ever produced by him. Entire family histories are being distorted and corrupted by adoption in this way and for that reason I would like to see the reinstatement of the factual birth certificate.

A birth certificate, like certificates that record marriage and death are legal recognition of actual events and can therefore not be changed much as the event itself cannot be changed. Until recently, when a marriage was dissolved by divorce, a notation was made on the original marriage certificate and both the marriage and the divorce documents continued to legally exist. Therefore I would propose that the original (factual) birth certificate, marked with an amendment to recognise the adoption, should become the only official recognition of the birth. And since every individual has the inalienable right to know whose DNA he/she carries, those certificates should also include the name of the 'natural father'. The amended (falsified) birth certificate should be renamed as a certificate of adoption. This arrangement would then reflect the true facts.

Not only is it past time to address the dreadful practises that have taken place, but to completely reform the concept of adoption. Australia has the opportunity to take the lead in this and the world will be watching the outcome of this inquiry. The Australian Government can demonstrate how it should be done, not by stealing babies from defenceless young girls, but by developing and implementing honest and ethical ways to look after the interest of the child who truly needs a family.

I apologise for the length of this submission. This is the first time in 46 years that I have told my whole story to anyone and it has been very difficult. Every word is the truth, although I have tried to suppress my emotions and write an objective account, but please don't be misled by that. This experience has affected me in the most grievous and profound way for more than two thirds of my life.

In August 2009, I found my son and made contact with him. I naively expected that our reunion would bring about a resolution of the grief, shame, guilt, regret and the dreadful feelings of loss I suffered all those years when I knew nothing about what had happened to him. Of course, it hasn't. The gaping void left by all those years we spent apart can never be properly filled. I must instead make the most of the future I hope to share with him. Having the privilege of finally knowing him and the wonderful relationship we are now building has contributed enormously towards healing all that dreadful grief I endured for 44 years, but even so I expect to be profoundly affected by this experience for the rest of my life.

I appreciate your time and forbearance in reading all this and thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Jackie Sherman
18/2/2011