

15<sup>th</sup> Nov 2011

IRENE KAWES

To Whom It Concerns,

I am writing this submission as my first child was taken from me under the welfare laws of the 60's. The heartache this caused me has never eased.

I turned 14 on Nov 3<sup>rd</sup> 1963 and was expecting a child soon after. I was made a ward of state and spent most of my pregnancy in Winton, without any pre natal care, which was very traumatic. I had arrived in Australia Dec 58 from Finland and was very naive and had to learn to speak English from scratch. When I was 8 mths pregnant I was put into a Methodist Home in Fairfield Melbourne, for pregnant girls, and finally got to go to Royal Womens Hospital.

I knew nothing about birthing or babies, or sex for that matter. He worked hard in both homes and when I got my labor pains I was made to scrub a floor on my hands and knees. I was petrified and had to stop every time I got a pain. Then I still had to wait for the matron to have her tea before they took me to hospital. In the homes the social workers and staff kept telling me I was no good and couldn't look after a baby as I couldn't look after myself. I was never told there was any kind of finance

available for my baby and for me to look after him. After the birth the social workers again pushed me to sign adoption papers, saying I was doing the right thing for my son. So I did. I was sent back to the Methodist Home for a few weeks and then back to my mother. My life after that derailed completely, because I hadn't wanted to give my son away, but was given no choice. I got into a lot of trouble with the law and ended up in Winstan for 3 years nearly. I didn't care if I lived or died I had demanded to see my son in the Royal Womens after his birth until they let me see him for a few minutes. I caressed his toes + fingers and kissed him goodbye. I was moved by ambulance to an after care hospital two days later and waited for my baby to come but he didn't. Every feed time for the other women + babies I would bury my head under blankets + cry. I cried for 22 years, even after getting married and having at 17. I looked for my son, but all doors were closed to me. I had two children <sup>more</sup> before I turned 20 and was glad, but the tears never stopped for my first born son. My marriage only lasted 6 years and I was a single Mum from there on. I would cry at night after the children were asleep, I drank + cried. Then when the law changed in Victoria I was among the first to meet my son. How scared but happy we were. He lived with me on and off for a couple

of years, but just kept saying why couldn't you bring me up on your own as you did the other two kids. He couldn't forgive me. The tears stopped but now my heart still cries for what could have been. You can't bridge the 22 year gap. My son comes in and out of my life now, sometimes I don't see him for years. I've said sorry many times, but I blame the government and social workers and the system.

They stole my child and caused my life to be hell on Earth. I can't trust anyone and the problems with authority, doctors etc I still have, was caused through forcing an innocent 13 year old into homes and lying to me about my son being adopted when he was still in a home when I was looking for him. No one can imagine the pain and the scars it leaves but it ruined my life. Not because I had a baby, because he was stolen from me.

I hope it never happens to young girls again, as it is horrific the chain reaction it has caused. I am now 63 my son doesn't live far from me, but I don't see him at all, and my two grandsons. So the hurt just keeps on going.

Yours Sincerely  
Lrene Kalves

PS. No apology or compensation could take the pain away, but it would be a start to healing. It wasn't our fault but we carry the guilt all our lives.