

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

Preamble to Submission

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

As a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia I have an inalienable right to protection under the Australian Constitution and the Common Law of this Country.

As an Australian citizen, the Commonwealth affords me protection from the unlawful and harmful actions that threaten my right to life, liberty and justice from those who would deny me these rights, within and without, the borders of Australia.

Submission

I became pregnant in November 1968 after going out with my boyfriend (...) of 18 months. We were both 18.

I wrote to him as he was away on an army camp to tell him and for him to come around to our house to discuss what we were going to do. We didn't really get a chance to discuss the possibilities of setting up a home as our parents took over and decided for us.

My father told my boyfriend not to come back that they would handle things and his parents told him not to get involved and think of his career. We were forbidden to contact one another, and we obeyed our parent's wishes at the time.

The only two options that were given to me was to have an abortion or adoption, I wasn't given the option of having my baby and receiving a pension from the government. Whether my parents enquired or knew there was such a thing I don't know, they never said so.

I chose adoption over abortion.

As soon as I started to show I went to stay with my sister and then to a married friend of mine, before entering (...) Home for unmarried mothers in Adelaide) for the last 3 months of my pregnancy. I don't know why my parents chose a (...) Home instead of their own religion - Church (...)

At (...) 's the Matron took details of (...) and my features and educational status, *so they could match us to the adoptive parents. I was told that I wouldn't be able to look after a baby with no money and no job, that it was best to give the baby up to a couple who were desperate to have children but couldn't have any.* But that didn't happen, my daughter was given to a couple who already had two natural boys, and she wanted a daughter.

I signed a form allowing (...) to claim a sickness benefit from the government, a Maternity Bonus and Hospital Benefit from my private NHTA Health Benefit Scheme to be used to cover the expenses of my confinement and any deficit or surplus to be finalised at the time of my discharge from the "Home". I signed this with my father in March 1969. So there was plenty of time for my family to find out about pensions etc and or change their minds about supporting me but unknown to me until 2000 my mother had suggested that they raise the baby but my father said no and my mother abided by his decision.

My due date was 12 August 1969 but I didn't have my baby till 11th September 1969.

I arrived at (...) on 28 June 1969 and was sent to work either in the laundry or kitchen. We were treated like lower class citizen's, we were not allowed to be seen by the paying public who had their babies upstairs. I remember getting old crumpets delivered and having to cut off the mould and cook them for the hospitals breakfast.

We had to attend chapel on Sundays.

There was no instruction on what was happening to our bodies or what to expect in labour.

We were allowed visitors once a week, the visitors stipulated on their form was my mother and my sister. I was cut off from my friends.

I always felt sure someone would tell (...) where I was and he would come and get me from the home and all would be well, but he didn't know where I was and I didn't have any outside contact except with my family. It was a dream I kept having.

All the girls there we were not allowed to know each other surnames only first names, in case we wanted to contact each other when we left the home.

I remember being told to choose a name for my baby ***"something that I wouldn't want for any other children"***

I don't remember much about the birth of my daughter except to say that I was very scared and frightened with no one to ask what was happening to me especially my mother who by this time lived in another state.

I cannot remember been given any drugs, but the scant records of the birth that I have show I was given drugs during and after labour, ***" pethidine 100mgs given"***, after it was noted that I was distressed. ***"P Aocin 1cc, 1ml given"***, after baby was born. ***"ergometrine 0.5mgs 1m"*** after the placenta was expelled and complete. ***"xylocaine 0.5% infiltrated into Peri"*** to insert stiches. There doesn't seem to be any records of post natal care.

I do remember that I was bound up to stop the milk coming in, but don't remember been given any drugs and I ***think*** that I was allowed to see my baby once, whether that was before or after I had signed any documents I don't know.

After the birth I was taken by taxi with some other girls into town to sign the papers. I remember the building in Rundle Street it was the same building my father worked in. I read the forms and understood that I would never see my child again or have any rights over my child, I had no choice, I had to sign them.

From that very first interview at (...) I was told that I wouldn't be able to look after a baby and give it everything it needed with no job and no money, how was I going to support myself and a baby. I didn't know there was a pension for unmarried mothers at that time. I had no way of looking after a baby unless I had a job and I couldn't do that as my parents weren't agreeable to looking after they baby while I was at work. The Matron said I was doing the right thing, have the baby adopted and then get on with my life and to forget all about it. I did not insist upon adoption but I had little choice, by the time my daughter was born my parents had moved to NSW for a new start and I was to follow.

I left SA to live in NSW and start a "new life" I got a job and started dating again, eventually married and had two more children, moved back to SA. I told my husband right from the beginning that I had a child and she was adopted out. But I could not talk to him about it, he thought I didn't want to talk about it, he didn't press me. I kept it all inside.

I kept very busy not allowing myself to think about the enormity of what I had done, not that there was much on TV in those times about adoption, but I could not watch anything to do with adoption I would always find something else to do.

There was never a right time to tell my other two children but as they became teenagers and started to experiment with sex, just as I had done, I told my daughter about my experience. My son learnt after he was in the same situation with his girlfriend, and to my amazement now I gave him the same options that were given to me, abortion or adoption, gladly they chose to keep their baby with the full support of me and my family.

I put a veto on my file as I didn't want to spoil what I had "the perfect family" and didn't want that to change, as I knew it would if I let my daughter into my life.

My daughter had been looking for me since she was 15, with the consent of her adoptive mother. She was given different bits of information at different times that eventually led her to finding me in Nov 1999. She was 30 years old.

I contacted the Department of Community Services to see how I went about meeting my daughter, their advice was to go slowly send photos and a letter to start with before a meeting. That was about the worse piece of advice I ever had. I asked about counselling they offered none.

I did write that letter and gave her details about her father and what I knew of her father's whereabouts, and they in fact met before we did. As with both our spouses it went well for a short time only. I went for counselling on my own accord, and my husband refused to go and see anyone for himself. We parted in Dec 2000. My daughter didn't cause our separation but it

brought it to a head. (...) and his wife also parted in Dec 2000 not caused by our daughter but she contributed to it also.

During that year I had spoken to (...) on several occasions about our daughter and we set about firstly setting the record straight on her original birth certificate and named him as her father.

Secondly we discussed what really went wrong all those years ago, and we both came to the conclusion that our parents both did what they thought was the right thing by us both however misguided I think it may have been. We both accept that we could have stood up to our parents but we didn't. I know now that I wasn't the only one responsible for giving my baby up for adoption, there were many players. Knowing the people we are today we don't know how we could have let it happen.

As time went on (...) and I spoke more often and eventually started seeing one another and realised that we should have made a go of it back in 1969, we married in 2003 and we are still together. We enjoy a rich and enjoyable relationship with our daughter, her partner and our grandchildren.

I won't say it has been easy on everyone there has been injured parties on both sides.

The one thing that has affected me the most about having my baby and her adoption is my memory of that time, sometimes I remember very small bits, a flash even, but no detail.

(...)