

Monday, 13 June 2011

SUBMISSION TO SENATE ENQUIRY INTO FORCED ADOPTIONS

My name is Deborah Snelson born 1st July 1952. I currently live in Victoria but was born in Sydney. I am a Forgotten Australian and also a relinquishing mother – not by choice.

In 1965 myself and my three siblings were made wards of the State.

After being shuffled around and separated my younger sister and I were placed in Foster care with _____ in Mayfield NSW. I was 13 years old and my sister was 10 years old. Both of my brothers were in over 15 foster care homes during this time.

We were instructed we must change our names and use the family surname at all times, effectively changing identity. I have since have contact with both of my brothers and obtained ward files for all of us and the lies and deceptions contained within these.

Within 2 weeks of arriving at the foster home the foster father made sexual advances and threatened to hurt my sister if I did not comply. This went on for quite a few years and escalated when my younger sister was diagnosed with Cancer at the age of 14. I was led to believe it was my fault for not complying with my foster fathers demands.

My sister died in March 1970 and shortly afterward I discovered I was pregnant.

The case worker was informed and together with my foster father and mother decided I was to be sent to the Villa Maria home for unmarried mothers at Maitland for the course of my confinement.

I had attempted on many occasions to tell the case worker, _____, of the circumstances surrounding my pregnancy however I was told I was lying and to behave and be grateful I had a home and supportive foster parents and the amount of wonderful things they had done for my sister. This was to be the pattern in dealing with this case worker the whole time. My files are filled with false reports he made.

I was instructed to say a family friend was the father, who incidentally had no idea he was named as the birth father.

I was duly packed off to the Villa Maria and in the care of nuns, even though I was not a Catholic. My name was changed to _____ and I was to be known as that for the entire time I was at Villa Maria, visits to the Mater Hospital at Waratah for pre natal clinics and on my admission to the Mater Hospital at Waratah for the birth.

I again approached _____ and the social worker at the hospital, again I was told I was making it all up and was an ungrateful person.

The night I went into labour, I was taken to the Mater Hospital who were ready for my arrival, I was treated appallingly and left on my own in the labour ward with my feet in stirrups and my hands tied to the bed for hours until the birth. A sheet was erected to cover my view; I could not move or even change position. Several student doctors came in and out of the room, with the nurse telling them this baby was “not a normal” birth, when I protested I was keeping my baby, the nun who accompanied me and stood at the door told me to be quiet and “we will see about that”

Once born my daughter was taken away, with the nurse saying as she was leaving the room,

this baby will go to a much more deserving family despite my wanting to see and hold the baby. The only thing I overheard my baby was a girl, I don't know how much she weighed, how long she was or even what she looked like.

I was then moved to a ward and by 10.00am the next morning the Child Welfare case worker and the social worker at the hospital and the supervising nun at Villa Maria were there to see me and inform me I didn't have any rights and I needed to sign papers for the baby to be given a home. If I didn't sign the papers I would be turned out of the hospital and would have to find somewhere to live, there would be no support financially and any support from the Child Welfare would stop immediately. I was 17 years old.

I still refused to sign the papers. 4 days later I was due to be released from the hospital and again the Case Worker, the social worker and another nun told me I could not leave the hospital until the papers were signed. I was being selfish and cruel not to sign the papers. I still had not seen my baby at this time and was placed at the other end of the ward away from other mothers who had just given birth. The nun had actually told the other mothers I was an unmarried mother who had no morals, so you can imagine the atmosphere.

My foster "father" and "mother" also informed me via the Child Welfare case worker that if I didn't sign the papers I could not return to live at their home.

I was given medication to "dry up my milk" however the effect of this medication was to make me extremely drowsy and nauseous.

I signed the papers; it is the biggest regret of my life. I returned to live at the foster home for a very short period, but could not stay there and stayed with friends in the city after finding a job.

I have tried for many years to gain information to no avail. The Villa Maria at Maitland will not release records.

It took 3 years just to obtain ward files for myself and my siblings. However without spending huge amounts of money I do not have it seems I will never be able to obtain information of the welfare of my daughter or leave information for her, so she knows she was not given up willingly.

Even the NSW Government will not release information or provide basic information without incurring huge fees. When I applied for a supply authority I was told I could not have the discount as a former ward without bringing all my files into their office and proving who I was, this is very difficult given the name changes most former wards have gone through.

I now know what happened to me was illegal and unjust and I hope this enquiry will expose the injustice of past practices.

Nothing can be done to undo the past, but perhaps with this enquiry recognition of the illegal and immoral deeds of the past can be exposed, and maybe if my lost daughter hears about the enquiry, she will know she was not given away or abandoned.

Please feel free to contact me if you require any further information or clarification.

Deborah Snelson