

## Submission to Senate Inquiry into Commonwealth Contribution to Forced Adoption Policies and Practices

### Preamble to Submission

I, (...) and (...), are citizens of the Commonwealth of Australia and Residents of the State of Victoria.

As citizens of the Commonwealth of Australia we have an inalienable right to protection under the Australian Constitution and Common law of this country.

As Australian citizens the Commonwealth affords us protection from unlawful and harmful actions that threaten our right to Life Liberty and Justice from those who would deny us these rights within and without the borders of Australia.

Further to the inhumane physical and emotional abuse caused by forced adoption practices and policies enforced upon our Mother, Father and Sister, we submit this record to reveal that such abuse extends beyond those immediately involved in the process of illegal and immoral family separation. We wish to disclose that this abuse extends to the siblings of those babies removed from their families and also to the family unit.

Our story unveils the suffering we experienced as a consequence of the emotional scaring carried by our Mother and Father, further compounded by ignorance in our community. A psychologist once consulted, whole heartedly agreed that we had the right to be loved by our parents. That was all he could offer by way of therapy due to the lack of professional knowledge available to him related to the loss of a sibling through divisive practices of those in a position of authority.

Our Mother recognises it was difficult to bond with her babies after her first baby was forcibly removed. Professional 'advise' given to her at that time was that she could "go home and have a baby of her own someday". Subsequently, each baby she later gave birth to did not feel like her own child. This led to an insecure-disorganized attachment style with all her children, shown to be a predictor of poor social development for the children concerned.

Our parents mourned the loss of their baby throughout their lives. Feeling pressured to relinquish their baby to adoption and a 'better life', our Mother felt remorseful, guilty and ashamed. She found it difficult to maintain relationships with family members including her parents, husband, siblings, friends, colleagues and most importantly her 'OWN' children, resulting from the fear of agonizing pain associated with the loss of her beloved baby. She became overprotective of us, her 'own' children for fear of losing us. She suffered an anxiety disorder and a nervous breakdown from longstanding grief related to her sense of loss.

Here we would like to share our own personal account:

### **Michelle's Story:**

Looking back now I suspect that I suffered from undiagnosed depression at a very early age. I remember when I was just 8 years old, lying on the couch in foetal position. I would take off my sock, wrap it around my foot like a bandage and tears would just stream out of my eyes. My parents would ask me what was wrong and at the age of 8 I had no answer for them. How could I tell them that I was already carrying their burden....? Certainly they were unable to soothe their own emotional pain, how could I expect them to soothe mine?

Now it makes sense why at 14 I was happy to discover that I had another sister. This was indeed a change in the family dynamic, someone else to share in the kindred despair.

Little was I to realise that when we finally met (...) some 8 years later, I would begin to question my place within the family. This is not an easy feeling to describe, instead of being the third child I had suddenly become the fourth child; my place had been taken from me. For someone already suffering from a low self esteem the impact of this experience is felt at a far more devastating level. To illustrate, one example would be our family tradition that the first daughter was to inherit our mother's engagement ring whilst the second daughter was to inherit our grandmother's engagement ring, my rite of passage was now in question and I still don't know how to ask the question, where do I stand?

It took me two seven year periods of being estranged with my mother to finally understand that her distrust was not personal, she was unable to trust anyone. When I was 36 years old I asked my Mother, "So what you are saying is that you don't trust me?" After further conversations with her, I was able to conclude that she no longer trusted anybody due to the abuse she endured at the hands of those whom she most trusted to take care of her, including her Mother, Father, Doctor and Nurses (which were considered sacrosanct in those days).

I grew up in an untrusting household fostered by both my Mother and Father. I always wondered why my family didn't have the bond that others had. One reason was because even though our parents remained married for 24 years, we were never taught to trust, not even each other. This was more than sibling rivalry; this was the very core of our relationships. Loyalty was what we were taught. Even though we did not trust each other, rely on each other or nurture each other, we would pretend to the outside world that all was okay otherwise we risked breaking our bond of loyalty to the family unit.

When choosing a partner, trust was not one of the virtues looked for. Distrust was expected in any intimate relationship. Thus when trust was broken there was no outrage or correction made to this kind of behaviour.

When I held a conviction, no one in my family validated it for me, so self validation was not a virtue that I understood to be necessary. As a teenager my self-worth was so low that my friend's family could not understand why I was unable to decide whether I wanted tea, coffee or hot chocolate when offered. I would almost invite other people to decide for me because I had no faith in my ability to make decisions.

As a mother, I complained to my friend about the behaviour of my son's babysitter. I was quite amazed at my friend's response that I should tell the babysitter how to discipline my child. I believed that I had no right to assert how I would like my son to be disciplined; I simply felt grateful that she was babysitting my child. I was dumbfounded when told that this was my child and I had the right to state how I wanted him to be cared for and disciplined. I returned to work when my son was 9 months old and my mother babysat for me. My maternal grandmother took over the role of parenting my two elder siblings and my mother was now taking over my role of parenting my son. I'm not sure how I learnt to submissively accept that my mother had the right to raise my son as she chose, without regard for my role as mother and parent, but I now see that it happened.

I am now 43 years old; over the years I have attended counselling off and on in one form or another. Had the medical profession been open to understanding the issues of adoption, these counselling sessions may have provided me with deeper insight into the issues I developed at an early age thus my healing may have begun before I married into an abusive relationship and before becoming a mother myself.

### **Jo's Story:**

When I was young, I would think.....imagine if I had a brother or sister I didn't know I had, one that had been adopted?

When I was young I slept between my parents and I felt safe and happy and warm.

When I was young, I remember my mother telling me that I had a sister I didn't know, one that had been adopted, her name was (···) I felt shocked, surprised, confused and sad. I had questions with no answers.

When I was young, I remember my mother taking me with her to the public office of births, deaths and marriages. She pleaded with the public servant for her daughter's birth certificate. We all felt sadness, fear, pain, humiliation, anger, madness, more sadness and more pain.

When I was young my mother told me that when I have a baby, she will raise it for me.

When I was young, my mother had a nervous breakdown and had to stay in hospital. I had to go and stay at my Aunt's house with one of my sisters. I felt homesick, separation anxiety, nausea, more sadness and more pain.

When I was young my mother suffered depression, she sat and stared but she did not hear me. She did not hear my needs. I felt sadness, depression and my days and nights were without joy.

When I was young my father had to cook and shop and clean because my mother couldn't.

When I was young my father worked shift work and he sometimes came home drunk.

When I was young my parents fought and fought and fought.

When I was a young woman, our mother found our sister, (...)

When I was a young woman I suddenly became an Aunty to children I didn't know.

When I was a young woman our mother spent a lot of time with our first sister, (...)

When I was a young woman our mother argued with our first brother, (...)

When I was a young woman our mother argued with our second sister, (...)

When I was a young woman our mother argued with our third sister, (...)

When I was a young woman our mother argued with our first sister, (...)

When I was a young woman our mother argued with our father. Their marriage ended in Divorce.

When I was a young woman our mother argued with our young brother, (...)

When I was a young woman our mother argued with me.

When I was a young woman I developed anorexia and temporarily could not reproduce.

When I was a young woman I cried....a lot.

When I was a young woman I married and our mother walked with me down the aisle.

When I became a mother, our mother was by my side supporting me with her love, strength and tenderness.

When I became a mother, my heart ached inside for all mothers who had ever lost their beloved

babies. I could not bear the thought of losing mine. I felt grief, separation, sadness, joy and love.

When I became a woman, our mother was by our first sister (...) side whilst she gave birth to her fourth child ....finally where she belonged.

When I became a woman, our mother and first sister (...) fought and fought and fought....but now they are silent....now they do not speak at all.

When I became a woman, our father developed cancer and died. (...) was with us, grieving, struggling, deciding, sorting and supporting.

Our sister will always have another family who share her childhood memories that were stolen from us. We can never get them back but over time we have developed memories of our own and we love her warts and all. We wish her peace, love and happiness.

Our sister will always be our sister, she has our blood, she has our genes and she is one with us.  
We love you (...)



## **Medical Implications:**

After the birth of (...) our mother was given Diethylstilboestrol (DES) to suppress lactation. There is now causal evidence linking DES to clear cell cancer of the vagina / cervix when prescribed to pregnant women. This information was discovered by our mother during research she undertook into forced adoption practices. This is not a cancer that can be detected by a regular pap smear. The threat of this type of cancer extends to both mothers and daughters, and for sons there is an increased risk of reproductive tract cancers and impaired fertility.

The prescribing of DES to suppress lactation has never been proven to be safe or effective. In the absence of research ruling out an increased risk of clear cell cancer of the vagina / cervix or reproductive tract cancers, we carry the lifelong burden of anxiety associated with the knowledge that we will never, be no longer at risk. This burden will remain with us until we die.

This submission is made to honour our Family.