

Depression; anxiety; phantom pains; post traumatic stress disorder; suppressed emotions; grief and shame.

The year 2011 wasn't meant to be anything special or hard, we just expected to carry on like other years, enjoying the wonderful place we live in, Tasmania; anticipating buying a caravan, because that is what we the "Baby Boomers" do at the age of 60 plus; enjoying our two grown up children and their amazing spouses and our four wonderful grandchildren, and our two little dogs.

After many blood tests, visits to the doctors, and an appointment with a rheumatologist I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety. So it was off to a councillor, then a referral to a psychologist. Not an ordinary year!

I grew up in a small country town on the North West Coast of Tasmania; about 20 minutes drive from Devonport. As a fifteen year old, from the country, the town was an interesting place. I met a boy —my parents knew his parents – he was 19 years old and I was 15. I got a job at Coles, in the lolly department, on Friday nights, my 19 year old male friend picked me up from work at 9 p.m. and I had to be home at 10 p.m., which was a half hour drive. He was my friend: he took care of me and looked after me, we chatted and talked, kissed and hugged and as with young people hormones acted up. Even though I became pregnant our relationship was not a very active one in that way.

I went on a school trip to Western Australia in the September school holiday and my feet swelled, so when I got home the teachers advised Mum I should go to the doctor. The doctor felt around my tummy, I had no idea what he was doing. He told me I was having a baby, that's all he said, nothing more. After that he sent me outside and called mum in. It wasn't very long before she came out. We drove home in the car and not a word was spoken. When we arrived home mum told me to go to my room while she told Dad. Dad was amazing, he came in gave me a cuddle and told me I was going to have to be a brave girl. That was the end of the person I knew - me!

I had to re-create myself to survive this particular time and the heartbreak and shame I was made to feel has been with me ever since. I was excluded from every decision that involved me and my baby.

My parents arranged for me to end school. I never saw my friends again.

My male friend came up that night to pick me up. My parents met him at the door and told him I was pregnant and to go away and to not come back.

I was told if people came to visit I had to go to my room because they didn't want people to know I was pregnant. It had to be a secret. They needed time to work out what they were going to do with me.

The fear, shame, isolation, loneliness, the sense of abandonment was overwhelming.

There I was, utterly alone and ignorant of what would happen to me, while there was secret talking and phone calls. If someone would only tell me, but no, it was none of my business. The shame and the disappointment I caused them took away any confidence I might have had to ask any questions. My dear male friend whom I used to chat to and tell my worries to was banished from me as well.

I went into robotic mode and have stayed that way, I think, ever since.

By the time this "terrible" thing had been discovered I was five months, starting to show. So arrangements were made for me to go and stay with a family acquaintance in the Melbourne suburb of Oakleigh. This lovely kind person was a 60 year old single woman who was working full-time; she would leave home

at 7 a.m. in the morning and arrive home about 7 p.m. in the evening. Keeping in mind I came from a small country town with approximately 40 homes, Melbourne was a scary place where scary things happened.

I was only 15 years old and once again I was all alone..

After about 5 weeks in Oakleigh I was informed I was going to a home for unmarried mothers. So I packed my bag and off we went in a taxi to the Presbyterian Sisterhood Home in North Fitzroy.

I was abandoned once again. Alone with the matron in her office, the first thing was to find a name for me. I couldn't use my proper name. It had to be a fictitious name because it all had to be hush-hush. Someone might find out I was in a home for unmarried mothers! A lot of the girls used their second names, mine is Anne, but I couldn't use that as there was already an Anne in residence. So she said, "We will call you Nan." I was horrified. What a stupid thing to do and what a stupid name: I liked my name, Barbara.

Whatever was happening to me, where was I, how was I going to survive this experience on my own?

I guess I was one of the lucky ones, I got the job of cleaning the brass, which was in never-ending supply. I have never cleaned a piece of brass since.

Everything was so impersonal and regimental. There was no Christian love or forgiveness or understanding. There was no joy in this pregnancy.

The Home had high fences; everything was locked; we were not allowed to go out. I think some of the girls had visitors but that was regulated. Any letters or parcels from home went to the Matron's private address, as they could not have the Home's address on them, and all the mail was opened.

There was one girl in the home who was keeping her baby. She was determined she was keeping it but I never got to find out if she did. We were not encouraged to talk to her. She had a room on her own down the end of the hall, and we were not allowed in her room.

I arrived at the Home in December, about two weeks before my 16th birthday, and my baby was born on the 21st January 1966. My time at the Home was short compared to some of the girls.

My water broke at 1.30 in the morning, one of the girls went and found the matron and off we went to the hospital. I was left at the hospital on my own, completely ignorant of what to expect. I do not remember another thing until I heard my baby cry. For some reason I needed to look for a clock. I looked up at the wall but couldn't quite see it, I remember having to twist my body so hard to try and see it. It was then I realised that my arms and hands were restrained and I was unable to move them. I think the clock said 9.45am but I am unsure as I remember panicking due to my arms having been tied to the bed and of not knowing what really had happened. The next thing I can remember is waking in a room on my own, I don't know how long I had been there and I don't know how many days I stayed. They bandaged me from my waist up over my breasts, it was to stop my milk. I asked about my baby and I was told it was a boy. I was put in a different part of the hospital and as far as I am aware the babies were not there. I never saw my son. I never held my son. I was just a child a victim of the system. It felt like I was there to be punished and have my spirit broken. I am now suffering from phantom pains in my wrists, thumbs, lower arms, upper arms, shoulders and legs which I am having ongoing treatment for.

After a period of time I went back to the Home, arms empty, heart empty, and totally confused. I could leave the home once I signed the adoption consent. My wonderful father told me, 21 years later, that he

had paid extra money so I could go to a private hospital, have a private doctor and medication to help make the experience as painless as possible. (He did not pay to have my arms and hands tied to the bed.) He also told me I shouldn't have been made to give up my son. I love him forever for those words.

The Home I went to was run by the Presbyterian Sisterhood. The last thing I had to do, after I had signed the adoption consent form, was to have some counselling by a minister of the church. He told me I had been a naughty girl and don't do it again!

I secretly exchanged addresses with one of the girls at the Home. She wrote to me when she went home, but my mother tore the letter in half and threw it in the fire. She said I must not have contact with anyone from the home. It was over, I should forget about it and get on with my life.

I decided in October 2011 that I needed to find my friend and speak with him about things that had not been said and dealt with. I was going to go where ever he was to talk to him, as we were both treated badly. I needed to apologise for the rudeness of my family and talk with him about the baby. Did he every worry about him?

Sadly, I found my friend had passed away in January 2007 from cancer at the age of 59. I pray that the secrets and the suppression of events so long ago did not contribute to his cancer and death.

I always worried that his name was not on our son's birth certificate. I was not allowed to have it on there, otherwise he would be charged because I was under age. I felt the empty space on the birth certificate would look like I didn't know who the father was. I have since found out they didn't put the names on because they would have had to have the father sign the consent papers for adoption.

My summary

- The single mothers Home was run like a jail. We were lovely young people, living life, giving the gift of life, but we were treated like evil people.
- Why did they presume to know what was best for us and our babies?
- I wonder what education/University degree they had achieved to make these decisions—to take the moral high ground?
- Can we please have an admission of shocking ethics and barbaric treatment of young unmarried mothers and their babies from all the agencies and Church's involved, I feel this would help everyone move on with their lives.
- Stolen generations, Orphans from England, Forced Adoptions - God Bless the Asylum Seekers hasn't history taught human beings and the Government anything.
- Barbara Pendrey