

From: Lina Eve

Sent: Thursday, 5 May 2005 12:57 AM

To: Committee, Mental Health (SEN)

Subject: Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Mental Health.

I would like to make a Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Mental Health regarding my experience of losing my first child to adoption

Towards the end of 1963, finding myself pregnant, alone and unsupported, I travelled interstate to Sydney's Crown Street Hospital for Women to seek help.

Instead I was treated with scorn and made to feel as if I had nothing to offer my child. The social worker placed me with a family with 4 children under 5 years of age as cheap labor. There, I not only had to deal with my lonely pregnancy, but I also had to avoid the unwelcome attentions of the father of the children. It was a morally dangerous situation, but I knew from the derisive reception I received at Crown Street, no one would believe me if I complained or accused, as it was obvious, as far as the hospital and social workers were concerned, they thought me a slut and of no consequence.

At every meeting with the social worker she kept telling me how much happier my baby would be with a respectable family who would be able to provide for the baby as I never would. I was only 17 and kept hoping my boyfriend would turn up and save me, I was that naive, Instead the social worker kept chipping away at my confidence and implying that it was selfish of me to even consider keeping my baby.

Finally the day arrived when my labour began, as did yet another nightmare. I was treated as if I didn't exist. Doctors came and examined me, but only talked about me, never to me. It was as if I had committed some unspeakable crime that banned me forever from the human race.

As the contractions built in intensity, a nurse came and asked me if I had a lot of pain. I said yes...and she said, "serves you right". Apart from that nurse, no one spoke to me. When it came time to push my baby into the world, a pillow was placed in front of my face, to prevent me from seeing my baby.

I had no idea why they were doing this to me and I strained to sit up and see, but was pushed down again. I heard a little cry as my child was carried out of the room. I was not allowed to see my child. I was not told what sex or if the baby was OK....I was taken by trolley to another ward and left there. A nurse came and gave me some medication. Then I fell asleep.

I work up in another hospital. I asked after my baby and was told she was a little girl. I asked to see her, but was told that this was not allowed. I didn't understand why, except it seemed to fit in with the treatment I had received ever since I stepped into Crown Street. I asked to see my social worker (called the almoner at the time) but was told she was away for a few days. I was given more medication. My breasts started filling with milk and nurses bound them and gave me more medication.

I was totally traumatized, thinking I must have given birth to some monster and that was why they wouldn't let me see my baby. I thought I was going mad because I didn't understand how I had been shifted to another hospital without being aware of it. Nothing seemed real.

(A few years ago I finally got my medical and social records and to my disgust and anger found that BFA (Baby for Adoption) was written on my records from my first visit to Crown Street, weeks before I was finally bullied and coerced into thinking it was in my baby's best interest to be adopted. Also on my medical records were repeated large doses of Phenobarbital, 4 times a day and prescribed for me even after I left the hospital)

When the social worker turned up again a few days later, she kept saying if I loved my baby, I would release her for adoption. She had a lovely couple just waiting to take her home and my procrastinating about signing the papers was keeping my little girl from being loved and taken to a beautiful home. She then asked me how I could possibly take care of a child when I had no job and no where to live. There was no talk of any other alternatives except putting my baby into foster care which she intimated was not in her best interests when a family was already waiting to take her home.

(I found out during reunion my daughter stayed at the hospital for 3 weeks as it wasn't convenient for her adoptive parents to take her home before then)

All my confidence of motherhood was eroded. I didn't want my baby to receive the treatment I was experiencing, because I had no wedding ring. I felt as if I was on a sinking ship and my little girl only had a chance of survival if I agreed to adoption. But first I needed to know she wasn't a monster, because then no one would be able to love her, except me. So I told the social worker I would only sign adoption papers if she allowed me to see my daughter.

She told me it was against the rules...but that I could have a peek if it would make me feel better about allowing the adoption. I saw my baby asleep, perfect and beautiful for about 30 seconds. I must have signed papers after that...I don't really recall...I was so overwhelmed. I had no one to advise me....only those who wanted my child to give to others. Had I been trying borrow money for a car or house loan, I would have needed my parents authority. I was 17.

These events have overshadowed my life. I stopped trusting people. I shut down emotionally for decades. I had continuing bouts of depression I didn't associate with the loss of my first child, but which lightened once we were in reunion.

Losing my first child to adoption undermined my confidence in mothering my next child .When the relationship with his father ended, I allowed his father to take him, still thinking I didn't have anything of worth to offer.I was afraid to go to welfare to ask for help in case he would be taken away

My first daughter was not happy in her adopted family. They provided her with everything material, but she never felt as if she belonged. During our reunion she said to me, "If you really loved me, you would never have signed those adoption papers" Its impossible for her to believe in this day and age that such cruel and inhumane practices towards unmarried women and their babies of the 50's 60's and 70's ever existed.

I am happy to give evidence at a public hearing.

Lina Eve