

To: Committee, Mental Health (SEN)

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

In 1967 and at the age of 19, while living overseas, I became pregnant to a man I was living with at the time. When we found out I was pregnant he said he did not wish to get married and take responsibility for a child. I made the decision to return to Australia to have my baby, so I could have the support of my family and friends. My parents were initially shocked to hear of my pregnancy, but took it in their stride and looked after me financially and emotionally before and after the birth of my son.

I saw a doctor at 4 months and every month until the birth, at no time seeing a Social Worker to discuss adoption, as my parents said the decision was mine as to whether I kept the baby or not, they would support my decision.

My doctor mentioned adoption but I told him I wanted to keep my child, so nothing more was said. I was admitted to the Western Suburbs Hospital, Newcastle, on the night of May 31st, 1967 at approximately 11.30 PM. My paperwork states that I was a Mrs. and not a Miss, which I believe my Doctor did to protect me from adoption. I arrived with baby clothes and though frightened was looking forward to having my child.

I do not remember how the nurse knew I was unmarried, maybe I told her, I couldn't see it being a problem as I had parental support and knew very little about the practice of adoption. However, from that moment on her attitude changed and she treated me as if I was less than human. I was alone in the Labour Ward and very frightened as most new mums are and as the pain worsened I became upset. I was told to shut up and put up with the pain as I had gotten myself into this situation. As the night wore on, I was given several drugs, I have my medical records; among the drugs were barbiturates and an anti-psychotic. At approximately 6.30 AM I was in a great deal of pain and asked the same nurse how much longer I had to go, she had just examined me so would have been aware of my progress. Her answer was, that I had all day to go yet and just to shut up and get on with it. I gave birth less than 2 hours later with the blankets piled over my face and a needle jabbed into my shoulder immediately upon giving birth. This needle contained Stilboestrel to dry up my breast milk

My baby was whisked away without me seeing him. I asked the nurse what sex the baby was and what the baby weighed, she told me that was not for me to know. Twenty minutes later when my doctor arrived he asked me why I was so upset and I told him I wanted to know about my baby, he looked the nurse in the eye and said, tell Margaret what sex her baby is and what it weighed. She glared at me but she had no choice but to tell me at that stage that I had a baby boy who weighed approximately 7lb 6 ounces.

I was taken to a private room, where I remained for 4 days, sedated and very upset. Adoption was mentioned frequently with me being told this baby needed 2 parents and I would have no way to support the child, even though my parents would help me. On the

fourth morning I said to my Doctor that I wanted to keep my baby, he left the room and returned with the Matron, the Head Sister and another woman, who carried paperwork. I was told I was selfish to want to keep my child, if I loved him I would want him to have 2 parents and a better life than I could give him. With four powerful people surrounding me and in my very distressed, drugged, emotional state, I agreed to give my child his 'better life'. At no time was I told that there was financial assistance to keep my child, or told that there was a time period in which I could still get my baby back. I was told never to look for him, as he would be sent interstate. I eventually found out that he was only 12 miles from me the whole time I lived in Newcastle.

I was sent home that day, together with my baby clothes and told to forget about him and get on with my life and get married some day and have more children and be happy for the gift I had given some childless couple. The adoption was never mentioned, nor did I ask my parents why they weren't there to advise me, firstly as I was underage at the time and secondly because they had said they would support me in my decision. They are deceased now so I still don't know the circumstances in which their support was withdrawn. I was never warned or aware that there could be life-long consequences of losing my child to adoption.

I eventually married and gave birth to a son who died at 7 weeks of age. Not having been advised that the adoption may cause a lifetime of emotional distress I believed I was being punished by some external force and my second son had died as punishment for 'giving' away my first born. When my third child, a daughter was born, I was suffering from severe depression and a restlessness that has never abated to this day. I woke her every night for approximately 6 years to see if she was still breathing. I went to work when she was 6 weeks old, as I was frightened of her and too emotional to breast feed or care for her properly, I felt. She had a wonderful babysitter, which I am grateful for, but she has suffered emotional problems through her life due to my depression and inability to 'mother' her sufficiently.

I found my son in 1991; he had experienced a good life with supportive adoptive parents, who encouraged us to have a relationship together. My daughter and he were ecstatic to have found a brother and a sister for each other and became very close. My son however died in 1995, a victim of cancer, after knowing him for only 4 years. I am still left to wonder if the drugs I was given during labour contributed to his death.

I can remember every moment of my time in that hospital and every waking moment the events are in my head and affect my everyday life. I have recently been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and still suffer from depression that is helped by medication. I have been very unsettled throughout my life, always trying to escape my pain and have moved 37 times in 5 different countries, never settling in a job or a relationship. I am currently seeing an excellent Psychologist and having Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, which helps me cope on a day-to-day basis. However, I am not able to be in a social or work situation without becoming extremely distressed and agitated. I am unable to listen to music or watch television and avoid noise as much as possible. I am having flashbacks of both visual and olfactory situations, I have made a personal

decision not to drive any more, which isolates me even more, but I do not believe it is safe for other road users for me to be driving while my mind is somewhere else. My dreams are traumatic, both from the deaths of my sons and many other traumatic life events brought on at times by my feelings of having no self-worth and an overwhelming sense of feeling useless in all areas of my life.

I would like to request that my address only be kept confidential.

Thank You,