

**Releasing the past:
Mothers' stories of their stolen babies**

**Editor
Christine A. Cole**

**Illustrator
Jan Kashin**

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'when
the matron
was sure
I was drowning
she came in
and helped
herself'

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Illustrator Jan Kashin

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**THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO
OUR CHILDREN
GRANDCHILDREN
AND SO ON DOWN THE GENERATIONS**

**MAY OUR STORIES BARE TRUTH TO
THE SACREDNESS OF BLOOD TIES
AND MOTHERHOOD**

Foreword

It is only when the suffering of those most directly damaged by a socio-cultural disaster are heard that there is any opportunity for a Nation to evaluate a malign aspect of its own development. In the instance of the thousands of Australian young mothers who lost a baby to adoption in the latter half of the last century, the distress and consequences are little known because they were dealt with one by one, and, at the time, mostly isolated from their family, partner and friends.

In this book you will read of the facts and feelings of their experience. You will also be brought up against many of the consequences of this strange time of social aberration that followed what was mostly sound enactment of law by Australian State governments in The Middle Sixties. However it was like road law without a police force – it functioned anarchically. In New South Wales it came into force on the fifth day after birth when it was possible for a mother to sign documents under the Act with a 30 day time to change her mind. Nevertheless, a hidden piece of information (like the benefits available to her if she were to keep the baby) was that she would have to deliver further documents to the Supreme Court office to rescind her 'consent'.

In the numerous stories I know, a common theme is that the 'baby takers' made sure the law and lawyers were kept right out of any such transaction. If ever anybody needed a lawyer it was these babies, girls and women – but right there and then. Informed Consent, Natural Justice, Common Law and The New South Wales Parliament were treated with contempt.

The Reader, like myself, when I heard such accounts, will be stunned with disbelief that such practices could happen in Australia so recently and that there are tens of thousands of our population profoundly affected by them. It took me a long time to know they were a common problem, and not extraordinary events of the one-off kind. I expect every reader not already familiar with such matters as this book to feel similar shock.

During more than thirty years I have heard many hundreds of such stories and my views are well known on the Internet, but even now I have an inner feeling of irrational disbelief that such a time is part of Australia's history. Each time I hear an adoptee say,

If my mother had really wanted me, she could have....

something inside me boils, no matter how much I feel with the adoptee before me.

As a psychiatrist I am left with one stand out conclusion: that a woman having a baby taken from her is one of the deepest traumas available, and the grief is untenable when she knows her child is out there – where?

January 2008

Geoffery A. Rickarby MB BS FRANZCP MANZAP
Member of the Faculty of Child Psychiatry RANZCP

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Colour plates: Artist — Jan Kashin

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Introduction

JM: *What do you say to the fact that some mothers say there is a 'white stolen generation'?*

GR: *It's true ... there is a white stolen generation as well as a black one. And if you look at the white generation numbers, there is a lot more of the white generation that were stolen than the black generation.*

JM: *Why then would it not be recognised?*

GR: *Oh, I think it is, in a way, but people do not want to open the door ... it is almost too big a problem to deal with ... if people had of opened the door to somebody proving that illegal things were done, it would have opened up a huge lot of problems for the Crown Law Department ... to undo a whole lot of things that happened ... they want it to go away ... it is a complication they could do without.*

JM: *You mean it is an inconvenient truth?*

GR: *It is an inconvenient truth ...*

(Extract from an interview with Dr Geoff Rickarby, 9 August 2007)

Babies have always been a desirable product. In 1882 Arthur Renwick, President of the New South Wales Children's Relief Board, a predecessor of the New South Wales Child Welfare Department, noted that there was no shortage of persons wishing to adopt babies: 'childless women yearn for a little one ... [and lonely] women whose families have married ...'.¹

Permanently placing children with foster families was labeled 'adoption without subsidy',² and was deemed to be an excellent source of cost cutting for the State,³ but Renwick complained that many foster parents were being deterred because without legislative protection there was nothing to ensure that the biological parents would not try and reclaim their children⁴ after, he lamented, 'a stranger went to the trouble and expense of properly training and educating the offspring of an unworthy person ...'.⁵ It was not until 1923 that foster parents were granted this protection with the introduction of the *New South Wales Child Welfare Act 1923* with its adoption clauses.⁶ Once this was done, T. D. Mutch, the Minister for Public Instruction announced that 'people wanting children are coming forward in greater numbers, and already a great saving to the State has been effected.'⁷ So it was that modern adoption, as a service for married couples and a cost saving exercise for the State, was born.

Adoption also gained in popularity when, in the 1920s, the nature/nurture debate began to swing more in favour of nurture. A child's development was seen to be as much, if not more, influenced by its environment than by its biology. The metaphor of a child being akin to 'a clean slate' was embraced and psychologists⁸ pronounced that the environment could endow any child with the potential to be whatever the parent desired. Thus adoption came to be seen by those who could not have their own children as a legitimate and 'safe' alternative.

By the 1930s, the importance of the home life and the quality of parenting emerged as a strong theme throughout the social sciences. This coincided with the promotion by eugenicists⁹ of the importance of the nuclear family for a 'fit' and 'healthy' society.¹⁰ Therefore, by the end of World War II, adoption had been successfully promoted by social engineers as the solution to two social problems: illegitimacy and infertility.¹¹

Potential adoptive parents were assured that they would be given only children who were classified as 'adoptable', which meant they were thoroughly 'tested' and therefore guaranteed to be both physically and mentally healthy.¹² This assurance further increased the number of middle-class couples wanting to adopt; which created an even stronger demand for these healthy, white infants. The demand for newborn babies subsequently influenced the attitudes and social policies of those working in what was eventually termed the 'adoption industry'.¹³ This occurred in an historical period when the sexual practices and attitudes of many young people were changing. By the 1920s, teenagers were no longer being chaperoned and were becoming more sexually adventurous, despite having little or no access to contraception or any competent sex education. Many young women were no longer staying at home until marriage, but were out in the work force and living on their own.¹⁴ Young people were also being exposed to the motion picture industry and advertising, which promoted ideas of 'sexiness'. This sexual freedom, without adequate sex education or access to contraception, inevitably led to many more women giving birth outside of marriage. In fact in the 1920s the number of ex-nuptial as a percentage of nuptial children born was 5 percent, a number not reached again until 1961.¹⁵

The adoption industry involved maternity staff, social workers, adoption agencies, child welfare staff and those working within unmarried mother's Homes, which were run by government, non-government and religious organisations. It could be argued that society, generally, had been more tolerant of single mothers in the early part of the 20th century, when the demand for babies was not as strong, than it was between the 1950s and the 1970s. For instance, in New South Wales, in 1924, when 5 percent of babies born were ex-nuptial, there were only 28 adoptions, in 1961, with a similar percentage, there were 2,217.¹⁶ What had caused such a huge increase in adoptions? It seems that at the same time that sexual mores among teenagers were changing, social engineers were involved in a campaign to, on the one hand, promote adoption and on the other to deeply stigmatise single motherhood.¹⁷ Consequently, by the 1950s, some parents saw their daughter's pregnancy as a deeply shameful event and something that had to be hidden. Many turned their backs on them, refused to help and often sent them away to stay with relatives in different States or to hide in Homes for unmarried mothers until after their baby's birth. These young mothers therefore entered the maternity ward with no-one to ensure that their rights were protected. The unsupported were easy prey. It made the job that much easier for those who believed that a single mother had less rights to her child than a married, infertile couple.¹⁸

It must be said that some grandparents would have supported their daughters, but were 'counselled' not to, being told that adoption was in their daughter's and grandchild's best interests.¹⁹ They were encouraged in this view by those who were working in the field of supplying babies to married, infertile couples. However, this was not the majority view.²⁰ Most parents did support their daughter, and their grandchild was absorbed into the extended family with the mother marrying soon after, quite often to the father of her child. It seems though that if a mother was unsupported by family, or was a migrant or an orphan, she was exposed to the pro-adoption agenda that existed within the adoption industry.

In New South Wales, the implementation of the 1965 *Adoption of Children Act* meant that mothers' rights were sharply curtailed. No longer did mothers have up to the making of the adoption order to revoke their consent, which could have been as much as 18 months under the previous legislation: *Child Welfare Act 1939* (NSW). Instead, they now had only 30 days. It became hospital policy to get the mother's signature on a 'consent to adopt' form in the minimum time legally allowed, which was on the fifth day after giving birth and before she left the hospital. Generally, mothers were forbidden to leave the hospital until this form had been signed. In cases where the mother had been staying in an unmarried

mother's Home, they were transported back to the Home and were required to sign the form before being discharged.

It was routine practice, though illegal, not to allow mothers to see their babies after the birth. This was achieved by placing an object such as a pillow or sheet in front of them so there was no possibility of any eye contact between mother and child.²¹ Some women stated that they were told they could only see their babies *if* and only if they signed the consent form. It was also practice, though illegal, not to allow mothers to feed their babies and they were often given injections of stilboestrol, a lactation inhibiting drug, to dry up their milk immediately after the birth, making it impossible for them to feed their infants. This was the case even though, legally, mothers were not supposed to have made any decision until *at least* three clear days after the birth. It was as if the maternity staff took it upon themselves to presume the mothers' consent. It must be emphasised that unwed mothers were the legal guardians of their children and had the same rights as any other mother to see, hold and nurse their babies. A woman who had just given birth was in no way subject to the regulations of any *Adoption Act*. The *Adoption Act* only came into effect after a woman signed the 'consent to adopt' form and on no account was that form to be signed before the fifth day. Furthermore there was no legal imperative that compelled women to sign the form on the fifth day, yet the majority of mothers' signatures were taken on that day just before they were discharged from the hospital. Many unwed mothers were never informed that they had every legal right to leave the hospital with their baby if they desired, and could take their own time, whether days, months or years before having to make any decision about whether to sign a relinquishment form or not. It was *only* after the consent form was signed that the *Act* come into force and a mother became subject to its regulations, yet mothers were treated as if they had already signed away all rights to their child *prior* to birth.

Recently science has confirmed what mothers have always known: childbirth changes them forever. Research shows that during pregnancy a woman's brain changes dramatically and permanently as it is literally reorganised to equip her with the skills needed for motherhood. This is particularly so at the birth, when there is a huge influx of the hormones: oxytocin and estrogen. A mother's maternal instinct is fully woken, and she is never the same. Thus, if a mother's consent is presumed prior to birth, it is at best uninformed, at worst criminal and a situation legislators obviously intuited and legislated against accordingly long before gaining any scientific support.²²

Many mothers were given large doses of drugs prior to and after the birth, often right up until they signed the 'consent to adopt' form. Some of the drugs used were: sodium amytal, chloral hydrate and sodium pentobarbitone; all of which are mind-altering barbiturates. The curtailing of mothers' rights and the above coercive practices meant that by 1972 there were nearly 10000 babies adopted by non-relatives in Australia. This extraordinarily high number of adoptions was a social aberration that did not occur before the 1960s and rapidly declined with the rise of the women's movement in the early 1970s.²³

Signing the consent form meant that a mother was signing away any right to her infant and that she would never see or receive any information about her child for the rest of its life. Mothers did not have any independent legal representation. There was no-one that would ensure that their rights were upheld. They were at the mercy of those in authority within the hospitals and unmarried mother's Homes; the very people whose agenda it was to find babies for married infertile couples.

After losing their babies, mothers were told to go away, put the experience behind them and never speak about it again. They were made to feel as if they had committed a crime for which they had to sacrifice their infant, and, most significantly, they were brainwashed into believing that *only* by making this supreme sacrifice could their child have a good life.

They were guaranteed their precious baby would go to a perfect home, with perfect parents who could give their child everything they could not. If mothers went along with the 'program', they were led to believe they had made a choice; a 'Sophie's choice', but a choice just the same. This ensured that mothers remained silent about their treatment. For now not only did they have the profound grief associated with the loss of their newborn to deal with, but they had the additional burden of carrying guilt and shame for being made to feel that they were not as fit as strangers to keep and rear their child. Many women felt they had failed as mothers and as human beings, this sense of inadequacy and shame became deeply imbedded in their identity.

In order to remain sane mothers continually reminded themselves of what those in authority had brainwashed them into believing: they had done the right thing because their child would have a better life without them. Unfortunately for their future self esteem and bonding with subsequent children holding this belief meant they also had to accept its implicit assumption: they were not as fit as strangers to parent.

Not all unwed mothers though accepted the brain-washing and indeed some were not exposed to it. These women may have been older and working and entered the hospital as private patients. They may have been in a de-facto relationship that had split up just before the birth and in these instances entered the hospital with every expectation that they would leave with their infant. Some mothers, even if they were exposed to the highly coercive system that operated within the maternity hospitals and unwed mother's Homes, did not go along with it and expressed to the hospital social worker or matron of the Home that they had no intention of giving their child to strangers. Other women, usually the younger mothers, who may have succumbed to the pressure exerted on them by parents and authority figures to adopt whilst pregnant, may have completely decided against adoption after giving birth when their baby, usually their firstborn, became a reality. In fact most mothers found themselves in this position. After all they were only children themselves and were socialised into obeying their parents and those in authority. As well the brainwashing techniques employed by those in the adoption industry led many young pregnant mothers to disassociate from the reality of their pregnancy and they saw themselves as carrying a baby for the 'perfect' adoptive couple they had been told deserved their child.

It was after the birth when mothers fought back and made a deliberate stand against having their child taken that the 'well-oiled'²⁴ system operating within the maternity hospitals and unmarried mother's Homes shifted into overdrive. The more these women fought the more measures were implemented to make it impossible for them to keep their babies. This was when the practices of denying mothers their right to see, feed and access their babies were used as weapons against them. And in Sydney's Crown Street Women's Hospital, if they were unsupported and had no-one to demand that their baby was brought to them, then they never saw their child. The effects of these practices were to traumatise and cause long-term mental health problems for the mothers. They also gave them a very powerful message: this baby was not theirs. There does not seem to have been any mechanism in place, for mothers whose files were stamped with BFA (baby for adoption) whilst pregnant, to interrupt the baby-taking process once it began. It was as if mothers were on an adoption conveyor belt they could not get off. It seems that unless they had someone who intervened on their behalf the removal of their baby was a foregone conclusion, irrespective of what the mothers wanted or desired.

If women objected and refused to sign the consent form, the pressure was 'ratcheted-up' or increased incrementally depending on the level of resistance. This 'ratcheting-up' consisted of both psychological and physical pressures. For instance, if a woman refused to sign a 'consent to adopt' form one of the tactics used was to threaten to call in the Welfare, which the social worker taunted, would take the baby away and institutionalise it as a State ward,

And you wouldn't want that to happen to your baby would you, dear.

Under the *Adoption of Children Act 1965* (NSW) a mother's consent could be dispensed with (she could have her child taken even if she refused to sign any legal documents) if it was construed to be in the child's best interest. So to save her child from what many saw as a fate worse than death she signed the consent form so at least her child would not be institutionalised but would go to the perfect home promised by adoption workers. Some mothers reported that even though they had stubbornly refused to sign any documents they still were not permitted to take their baby with them, being told, as they had no family support, that it was not in their child's best interests. In other instances more physical means were used. Some mothers reported that they were tied to beds whilst giving birth to supposedly prevent them from doing 'a runner'. This they believed was the result of previously letting it be known that they intended to leave the hospital with their baby. Most mothers were heavily sedated with large amounts of the barbiturates already mentioned. Some mothers signed the consent form just so they could get out of the hospital and have time to garner support, but when they tried to reclaim their baby within the 30 day period, they were told their baby was now with adoptive parents and that there was nothing they could do about it. Whilst mothers were treated in this brutal and dehumanising fashion, their babies were advertised through the mainstream media as being 'unwanted'. Adoptive parents were idealised as their saviours. The 'unwanted child' became a central theme in the promotion of adoption.

Early in the 20th century the Child Welfare Department began its campaign of advertising babies as 'unwanted' with the aim of making those wishing to adopt feel less guilty and more comfortable about taking another woman's child. The Dept. did this even though their own files indicated that these babies were very much wanted.²⁵ Although some sections of the community held harsh attitudes towards unmarried mothers, it is doubtful that society in general would have accepted the forced removal of a baby that was very much wanted by its own mother, as to do so would call into question the very notion of what it is to be a 'civilised' society.

By 1968 the propaganda campaign was in full flight and headlines such as: '*500 unwanted babies in Australia have found homes to go and someone to be loved by*' were bandied across newspapers.²⁶ This campaign promoted the false myth that unwed mothers willingly gave away their babies to unknown strangers, and that being unwed automatically equated with having an 'unwanted' baby. Hence, many mothers not only suffered the indignity of having their babies taken against their will, but were also subjected to the lie that they were callous and unnatural for giving their children away without a backward glance. This socially manufactured lie has not only hurt and demoralised mothers, but has also caused untold suffering to thousands of adoptees, who mistakenly believe their mothers abandoned them.

The propaganda campaign had an additional benefit for the adoption industry. Advertising babies as unwanted effectively cut off support from the women's movement. This was because it gave the false notion that women were exerting a reproductive 'decision' and were 'choosing' to be or not be, mothers, with many feminists placing adoption in the same category as abortion.

To equate an unplanned or even unwanted pregnancy with an unwanted baby has been a strategy of the adoption industry to promote and justify adoption to the public for decades. Many married mothers have unplanned or inconvenient pregnancies but once the child is born it is usually welcomed and accepted into the family. In fact if a baby born to a married woman is unwanted it is thought the mother may be in need of counseling for some psychological disorder such as Post Natal Depression. Research done in the 1950s found that once the family got over the initial shock of the young woman's

pregnancy she was given support and the baby became a very much loved grandchild.²⁷ It is simplistic and insulting to mothers to state that in the 1960s there were many adoptions because of the unavailability of abortions and the pill leading to high numbers of unwanted babies. This lie has been used to obfuscate the truth about the forced removal of thousands of very much wanted babies from their unwanted, unwed mothers.

Some mothers were so traumatised by their experiences and the treatment they received around the birth of what was usually their first child that they did not go on to have other children. Some did not marry or have further intimate relationships, and sex often became equated with punishment, loss and profound grief.

This book describes what was supposed to happen to unwed mothers when they gave birth and what in fact really happened. It examines the 'culture' that pervaded the adoption industry and the justification used by those working within it to separate mothers from their babies. It also reveals how the notion of 'choice' for unwed mothers was in reality nothing but an illusion to keep them shamed and silenced. This book is about the struggle of mothers to tell their stories and their fight to gain an Inquiry into past practices in adoption. But most of all, it is about their undying love for their children and their need to tell them that they did not willingly give them away: they were stolen.

Ethically and legally: what was supposed to happen?

Overview

A primary principle of international law is that a child has the right to be brought up in its family of origin. This principle was supposed to have been followed in Australia. Further, a single mother was, and is, allowed by law and common human decency to have the right to see, hold and feed her infant. She had the right to name her child and to have unfettered access to her baby in the maternity hospital. When a child is born to a single mother, it is not subject to adoption legislation; its mother is the legal guardian and has the same rights as any other mother. Legally, the *Adoption Act* does not come into operation until the mother signs a 'consent to adopt' form and then only if the consent is informed and taken without duress or coercion. Separating a mother from her child, or placing pillows or sheets to obstruct the view she has of her baby at the birth in order to facilitate an adoption was, and continues to be, classed as coercion and is therefore illegal. Injecting mothers with drugs to dry up their milk immediately after the birth, without their permission, was and is illegal and deems to presume that the mother has already signed a 'consent to adopt' form.²⁸ Dr. Geoff Rickarby has stated that the act of injecting a mother with stilboestrol immediately after the birth constitutes a major assault as mothers were not informed that this would occur and the routine 'consent to necessary procedures' that patients sign on being admitted to hospital would not cover the consent to have their milk dried up by an injection.²⁹

A mother was supposed to be warned of the 'dire psychological consequences' that could result because of her decision to relinquish her child. She was also supposed to be advised of all means of financial assistance available to her to assist her to keep her child. It was only after all alternatives to adoption and means of available support had been explored, and if the mother continued to insist on adoption, that the papers were brought to her to be signed. No decision was supposed to be made prior to the fifth day after the birth or if the mother was distressed. If the mother was not definite in her decision, she was legally entitled to leave the hospital with her baby and to make the decision weeks or months later.

International law

Two fundamental principles in international adoptions (1960) were that:

careful consideration should be given to all possible alternatives before a child is removed from his own relatives for adoption,

and

parents should be warned of the legal and psychological consequences³⁰

that might result from adoption. These principles were re-stated in Australia by the Minister for Child Welfare (1961):

... the child must be protected from unnecessary separation from his own family and that there should be no attempt to persuade the natural parents to place the child.³¹

Australian law

In 1957, the Annual NSW Child Welfare Report (p.25) stated that:

mothers desiring to keep their babies are afforded every reasonable facility: financial assistance under Section 27 of the Child Welfare Act 1939 if required., admission of the baby to wardship until the mother is able to resume guardianship and skilled and sympathetic guidance by specially trained female officers of the Department who all ensure that indigent mothers receive social service benefits to which they are entitled.

Hence professionals working within adoption were supposed to provide mothers with information about financial benefits (which had existed from the 1920s)³² and their legal right to obtain support from the baby's father. They were supposed to offer them support to find accommodation if needed, either prior to and/or after the birth. If mothers had to work after their babies were born, they should have also been given information about the availability of child care.³³ There was never supposed to be any coercion; indeed, adoption professionals were expected to protect vulnerable mothers from coercion by others, including their parents.³⁴ It was also considered of utmost importance that mothers be warned of the 'dire psychological regret' that they may experience because of being separated from their child by adoption.³⁵ Mothers testified at an Inquiry into past practices in adoption, that this warning was never given.

Donald McLean, in the 1956 manual for adoption workers, *Children in Need*, commissioned by the NSW Deputy Premier, the Hon. R. J. Heffron, outlines Child Welfare Dept policy as it related to consent taking:

A mother ... must be emotionally and mentally able to appreciate all the implications of [her] consent. A consent should not be taken if there is any suggestion of indecisiveness or that she has not given sufficient consideration to the matter. To avoid any misunderstanding or any suggestion that the mother was misled or uninformed, District Officers are instructed to explain fully to the mother, before taking the consent, the facilities which are available to help her keep the child ... When all of these aids have been rejected, the officer is expected to explain to the mother the full implications of the act of surrendering her child ... Only when a mother has considered these, and still wishes to proceed with the surrender for adoption, should the consent be accepted. However, having taken all the steps referred to previously to ensure that she is aware of the alternatives to surrender for adoption, the officer advises the mother that the decision must be her own If there is any sign of uncertainty or vacillation the officer will insist that the mother consider the question further before signing the surrender for adoption

A Departmental bulletin (1964) reported that:

before accepting an adoption consent, the Department's officer must be satisfied that the mother is fully aware of the import of her action. Alternatives to adoption are explained — financial assistance, the placement of the child in a licensed home, or its admission to State control until the mother is able to take care of her child. And only if the mother still **insists** that she wishes to surrender the child for adoption does the officer proceed with consent.³⁶

A New South Wales Child Welfare Manual (1958) stressed that:

due account is taken of the mother's state of mind immediately following the birth, and the question of her consent to adopt is deferred until it is apparent that she is mentally and emotionally capable of making a realistic decision.³⁷

However, the above policy and legislative requirements that reflected the social mores of the time were simply not implemented.³⁸ Women's accounts of their interactions with those working within the adoption industry are remarkable in their similarity. They all tend to report that no information was given about any financial support or other assistance

that was available,³⁹ just an insistence that they were in no position to appropriately care for their children.⁴⁰

Adoption was meant to be a measure of last resort: a process whereby a child without a family was given the opportunity of family life. It was never supposed to be a process of social engineering, one in which newborn babies were routinely removed from their natural families to be given to 'respectable' married couples.

NOTE: Many adoption workers have assertedⁱ their treatment of unwed mothers reflected the social mores of the era and though they would be considered unlawful and unethical now, they were not so then. This is plainly, untrue. They were well aware of what they were doing at the time, as they had been warned to stop their mistreatment of single mothers, having been accused of acting illegally,ⁱⁱ punitivelyⁱⁱⁱ and of using unnecessary cruelty.^{iv} They were informed that denying a mother freedom to access her child was morally and ethically indefensible.^v Not only did they know they were acting illegally they were actively encouraged to do so. For instance a leading Australian doctor delivered a speech at the Medical Society Hall, East Melbourne, on August 19, 1959, stating that 'The last thing that the obstetrician might concern himself with is the law in regard to adoption' and that 'The prospect of the unmarried girl or of her family adequately caring for a child and giving it a normal environment and upbringing is so small that I believe for practical purposes it can be ignored. I believe that in all such cases the obstetrician should urge that the child be adopted.'^{vi} Many of the public are as unaware now as they were then of the above ideology that underpinned the treatment of single mothers or of the means used to procure their babies for the adoption market.

As previously stated legislation is a fairly accurate barometer of a society's mores and a mother's consent was never supposed to be acquired by the use of coercion or by placing her under duress. Practices such as not allowing a mother the opportunity of completing the birthing process by kidnapping her infant from her womb, then hiding it, or coercing a minor into signing a legal contract, whilst under the influence of drugs, was never lawful and certainly would not have reflected social mores of any era, except maybe Nazi Germany. If those working within the adoption industry truly believed what they were doing reflected society's wishes why wasn't society informed of the measures used to acquire mothers' signatures? Why did they hide what they were doing? Why were the public lied to by being told babies were unwanted and mothers were 'choosing' adoption? If practices within the hospitals reflected social mores then society would be well aware of what those practices were and writing this book would have been unnecessary.

When women first started to speak out about the atrocities they suffered they were not believed, society found it hard to accept that such abuses occurred in hospitals across Australia, this hardly supports claims that the 'well oiled system of baby-taking' reflected

ⁱ Report 22, Dec 2000

ⁱⁱ M Lewis 'Unmarried Mothers', Australian Association of Welfare Workers National Conference 1965: Lewis was a Social worker with the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau Sydney; An unmarried mother's right to make a free and informed decision (free of duress and coercion) about the future of her child was (always) a fundamental principle of adoption law and practice: *Report 22*, Dec 2000, p. 122

ⁱⁱⁱ MA Wessel, 'The paediatrician and adoption', *New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 262, 1960, pp. 441–450.

^{iv} MA Wessel 'The unmarried mother: A social work – medical responsibility', *Social Work*, vol. 8, no. 1, January 1963

^v Australian Association of Social Workers, NSW Branch, *Manual of Adoption Practice in New South Wales*, 1971, p. 4

^{vi} DF Lawson 'The Anxieties of Pregnancy', *The Medical Journal of Australia*, 1960 vol. II, no. 5, July 30, pp. 161-166

social mores, a fact, most fair and decent Australians, I am sure, would find highly insulting both then and now.

What happened in reality!

Unwed mothers were not a homogenous group. They came from divergent racial and ethnic backgrounds, and from the working and middle-classes. There were Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, migrants and orphans.⁴¹

If an unwed, pregnant woman presented herself at the hospital, she had to visit the hospital social worker before she was allowed to be admitted into the hospital as a maternity patient.⁴² If the mother presented without any family, with ambivalent parents or those adamant that their daughter was going to 'choose' adoption, she was exposed to the pro-adoption system that operated within the institution.⁴³ To be fair, some parents were bullied and coerced as well, particularly when one parent was not as supportive as the other. Some grandmothers, for instance, were told that giving birth outside of marriage would ruin their daughter and future grandchild's life — in this way, their support for their daughter was undermined. It was the era when the professional was put on a pedestal and their words were treated as law.⁴⁴ The professionals working within the adoption industry believed it was their duty to convince the grandparents that their impending grandchild was better off adopted. This was because, unbeknown to the grandparents, the entire biological family was considered unfit to bring up the child. This stemmed from the fact that adoption workers initially believed that women who gave birth outside of marriage were feeble-minded and feeble-mindedness, according to eugenic notions of the time, was believed to be an inherited trait.⁴⁵ As Freudian theory became more popular this belief evolved into one which held that unwed mothers were too neurotic to parent their child and this neuroticism stemmed from being part of a 'neurotic' family. Therefore it was thought to be in the child's best interests to remove it from the entire biological family.⁴⁶ It was well known by these same professionals though that if the daughter had her mother's support to bring her baby home, 'she was not likely to consider any other plan'.⁴⁷ So it was imperative that the vulnerable young woman was isolated from any familiar support, particularly the grandmother's.

Treatment of Unwed Mothers at Crown Street Hospital

Pamela Roberts, head social worker at Crown Street Women's Hospital (1964-1976), in a sworn affidavit,⁴⁸ described the routine procedures carried out by the hospital when an unwed mother was admitted. Roberts explains that before being admitted as a maternity patient an unwed mother had to see the hospital social worker, this effectively brought all unwed mothers under the control of the social work department and it was at the first meeting that the mother's file (unbeknown to the mother) was marked with a code designating her baby for adoption: 'BFA' (Baby for Adoption) or 'UB-' (Unmarried, baby for adoption). This code was recorded irrespective of whether the mother had requested adoption or not. It was this code that would guide the maternity staff several months later as to the manner in which the mother would be treated in the maternity ward.⁴⁹ Even though legally, only the mother should have made any decision about her child and only after it was born.⁵⁰

This also marked the beginning of 'counselling' sessions, whereby the 'adoption plan' was introduced to the mother. The sessions were usually conducted prior to the mother's antenatal visit. It was during these interviews that mothers reported they were asked shame-inducing questions that left them feeling incompetent and incapable.

Some of the questions asked included: 'Do you think, dear, you could provide the baby with all the things a two parent family could?' and 'I have a lovely couple that have been waiting a long time for a baby; you don't want to deprive them, do you?' Examples of the coercive statements made include: 'You're being selfish if you keep your child'; 'You can

go on and have children of your own one day, whereas this lovely couple cannot' and 'If you love the baby, you will do what's best, you will give it up'.⁵¹

In this way, the mother's love for her unborn child was used as a weapon against her.⁵² She became what some have called a 'Solomon's mother'.⁵³ In the cold hard light of day, tactics such as these can be seen for what they are; but to unsupported pregnant women in an emotionally charged situation, such comments led to many mothers feeling overwhelmed and disempowered. These tactics have been labelled by some professionals as exercises in brainwashing, similar to those used on POWs in the Korean War.⁵⁴

Roberts, in her sworn affidavit, explains how the code guided maternity staff. Firstly, the mother was immediately separated from her baby at the birth before the baby could see or touch her — according to some, this was done 'to facilitate the adoption process'.⁵⁵ In Crown Street the usual method employed for obstructing the mother's view of her infant at the birth was to place a pillow or two across her chest, in other hospitals a sheet was used. Then the baby would be whisked out of the labour ward to ensure the mother and baby did not accidentally make eye contact. In the early 1960s, a paediatrician described this practice as 'a punitive measure, unnecessarily cruel and as serving no medical purpose'.⁵⁶ Mothers were then forbidden access to the nursery and medical staff would refuse to bring the mother her baby, even if she repeatedly requested them to do so.

The earliest mention of forbidding mother and baby to see each other⁵⁷ was a reference to the practice in 1919 by W. H. Slingerland in his *Manual for Social Workers*, wherein he explains that it was only used by those involved in the business of baby farming:

Said a doctor in one hospital: "We never let a mother see her child, for when she does she is not so willing to part from it ..."

Slingerland explains:

Their stated purpose is to aid these unfortunate girls; their reason for existence is the heartless exploiting of the misery of these girls for personal gain, a reckless and remorseless dealing in helpless human lives ... the midwives, physicians and other individuals who go into the secret maternity work and take charge of illegitimate children, even organising institutions to prosecute such business, simply for the money ... These harpies do a thriving business with bruised motherhood submitting under protest to robbery in both finance and child life ...⁵⁸

It seems then that adoption professionals were aware from the 1910s that not allowing the mother to see her baby facilitated adoption. It also appears that from at least the 1930s⁵⁹, they were aware that coercive practices such as those described caused psychological problems.⁶⁰

After the birth, mothers were injected with a carcinogenic, lactation inhibiting drug, diethylstilboestrol (stilboestrol), along with a heavy dose of barbiturates (see Sample Medical Record p. ??). Stilboestrol ensured that the mother could not nurse her child. The question as to why this drug was given immediately after the birth, before it was legally possible to make a decision about adoption, has never been adequately answered by any adoption professional in Australia.

However, Dr Florence Clothier, a psychiatrist connected to the Home for Little Wanderers in Boston Massachusetts, does throw some light on this issue:

Although the adopted infant obviously cannot experience fully with his substitute mother the satisfactions of the nursing period, he will experience with her his first and supremely important socialising relationship. The process of receiving food or sucking is for the infant at first an intensely personal experience, but through it the child establishes his earliest meaningful rapport with another individual ... a child placed later has [already] been profoundly influenced by his feeding experiences ...⁶¹

Professor Dorothy Hutchinson, New York School of Social Work (1947), was also concerned that the 'right' person fed the baby:

The omission of the tiny baby from her life, constitutes for the adoptive mother an unnatural exclusion from an experience that more than anything else normally binds the two ... It is not the blood-tie which creates that "mother love" ... but the mutual satisfaction derived by mother and child in their common need of each other [the feeding process].⁶²

Finally, the BFA code informed hospital staff that the mother would be removed from the hospital by ambulance soon after the birth and taken miles away to an annex of the hospital. This ensured that she had no way of ever finding her baby. According to testimony given at the Inquiry into Past Adoption Practices (1998–2000) (the Inquiry), mothers were sedated and kept at the hospital annex until they signed the 'consent to adopt' form. If they tried to leave before signing a notation would be made on their medical files: 'not socially cleared' and without 'social clearance' mothers were not allowed to leave the hospital. Many mothers said they were also threatened with police action if they tried to leave the hospital before being socially cleared. This was evidenced on some mothers' files.⁶³ After the mother, traumatised and drugged, signed the form the notation 'socially cleared' was written on the bottom of her files and she was then allowed to be discharged.

Under oath, at the Inquiry, Dr Geoff Rickarby outlined the mind-altering drugs that were routinely administered to mothers.⁶⁴ Yet in a recent court hearing, in which a mother charged the State with illegally taking her child, a witness, when asked about accepting the consent of mothers, usually minors, under the influence of drugs, stated:

well — oh, no, no. It never happened. If I thought a mother was under the influence of drugs, sedation, that type of thing, I wouldn't have taken a consent.⁶⁵

Therefore, although mothers were able to produce medical files, acquired under the *Freedom of Information Act*, that stipulated the drugs administered to them, and although Rickarby, a psychiatrist, testified that mothers were indeed drugged, according to the aforementioned evidence, no mother was ever prohibited from signing a consent form because of being under the influence of drugs.

It seems obvious that mothers would be traumatised, having been forbidden to see their babies at birth and then taken to a location unknown to them without their permission and without their baby. Yet these vulnerable young mothers were still expected to sign consents only five days after giving birth, without regard to the procedures that should have applied as outlined in professional manuals: that is, 'that a mother must be in a fit state mentally to sign'.⁶⁶ It is perplexing therefore that, in the court proceedings mentioned previously, evidence was given by a witness that some mothers whose consent she took were in:

uncontrollable distress, some of them wouldn't — [or could] barely speak ...⁶⁷

Criticism of allowing mothers to sign consents whilst still in hospital was noted in 1919 by Slingerland, and by another adoption professional in the *The New England Journal of Medicine* (1929):

Not a few very young babies are being deprived of their mother's care and feeding ... mothers still in a weakened condition, bewildered ... are being allowed — sometimes forced — by relatives and others to make permanent decisions of momentous importance. The unfairness to mother and child and the unsoundness of allowing a woman to come to so important a decision before she had returned to normal health is apparent. The facts show that tragic mistakes are made at this time.⁶⁸

The above opinion was reiterated by Marian Russell of the Department of Social Service of the Children's Memorial Hospital (1938), who also added that:

... too often the hospital administrator is unduly concerned with plans for adoption of the infant unborn or only a few hours old. The unmarried mother in a hospital maternity ward is in no fit condition, physically or emotionally, to decide the future of herself and her child ... We must guard against the social worker assuming too much control ... It is important to realize that the mother is undergoing a major emotional experience with trauma ...⁶⁹

Why did it happen? Adoption industry culture: explaining the ideology behind the removals

Journal articles and women's accounts reveal an ideology that existed within the adoption industry that labelled an unwed mother as unfit.⁷⁰ It was this ideology coupled with the strong demand for the supply of healthy newborns that fashioned and moulded the practices and processes within the adoption industry. Notions of 'unfitness' provided the moral justification needed by adoption professionals to acquire newborn babies for the adoption market without the burden of guilt. Put simply it provided the justification for single mothers to be treated as less than human and as having less rights to their babies than married, infertile couples.

In social work literature unwed mothers were described as neurotic⁷¹, too neurotic to make up their own minds about 'consenting' to the adoption of their infants.⁷² It was thought that because of the mother's neuroticism, it would be in the 'child's best interests' if the mother was actively introduced and guided towards 'choosing' an adoption plan by the social worker. An adoption plan meant an unwed mother's baby would be taken and given to strangers and that she would never be able to see or know about her infant again. Many mothers reported that they experienced the loss of their baby and lack of all knowledge about its whereabouts as akin to having their baby kidnapped.

Unwed mothers were forbidden legally to have access to any information about their infant. They were not told whether their child was dead or alive, well or sick, nor were they given any information about its whereabouts or any identifying information about the people who had taken it. To maintain their sanity mothers had to believe the reassurances of those working within the adoption industry: adoption was best; their child had gone to a better home and had two parents who could give him or her all the things they couldn't.⁷³ To have entertained any other thoughts would have caused such mental and emotional distress it is hard to believe they would have survived. Dr. John Condon⁷⁴ states that this state of 'not knowing' is similar to what families' experience when a relative goes missing in action during wartime. Their loss can never be fully grieved, and can and does go on for decades, because there is no resolution: their loved one is out there somewhere, but where?

The 'adoption plan' was generally introduced to mothers via 'counselling' sessions conducted at the maternity hospital. Some mothers were also 'counselled' by Matrons in unwed mother's Homes.

In theory, the objective of counselling was to form a special relationship; a relationship whereby the mother became receptive to the social worker's guidance to accept the adoption plan. The social worker presented herself as someone a frightened, young, pregnant woman would trust: a mother figure. It was within the context of this relationship that the social worker would introduce the adoption plan and promote it as being in the unborn baby's best interests.⁷⁵

Dr Ner Littner explains:

... as the relationship to the worker develops, and as the unmarried mother looks to her as the new idealized mother figure, it is the worker and her agency who finally become the recipient of the gift of the baby ... it is this strong relationship, that is built up through the pregnancy that allows the caseworker to be so effective after the delivery ...⁷⁶

Babette Block states:

... the worker, playing the role of a guiding mother, can help the client to a real decision that will save her from random searching.⁷⁷

Likewise, Dr Florence Clothier states:

... preliminary work ... will include case-work treatment aimed at making ... it possible for the mother to give up her baby.⁷⁸

Clothier goes on to explain how social workers must use their relationship with, and knowledge of, the unwed mother's psychological needs to achieve this aim.⁷⁹ Further, she claims it is the social worker who will decide whether a mother keeps her child. She urges them to be:

realistic and ... guide the client to an understanding and acceptance of future reality factors ... Social workers, like physicians must be prepared to reach a decision [and] then to work actively toward the carrying out of that program

even, she explains, if that will

involve suffering for the patient or the risk of untoward results.⁸⁰

Clothier also believed that counselling mothers helped them to better 'understand their neurosis', or put another way, unfitness to parent their own child.⁸¹ Mothers at the Inquiry attested that the 'counselling' they received from social workers was experienced as coercive and manipulative and they felt bitterly betrayed by them for developing a relationship for the sole person of acquiring their babies. The 'counselling', according to Dr. Geoff Rickarby, has significantly contributed to the mental health problems and life-long pain that mothers now suffer.

In support of the right of counsellors to *guide* mothers to a decision, Dorothy Hutchison stated:

In my opinion the majority of these mothers are unable, if not incapable, of making a decision without skilled case work service ... we need to help a unmarried mother ... in making a definite decision about the baby ... we help her by being warmly interested in her ... enabling her ... to visualize the future ... without the baby ... There is much difference between a laissez faire attitude which "leaves a mother free to make her own decisions" and a taking of responsibility in actually guiding her *to* a decision ... [italics in original].⁸²

A similar ideology, of making the decision for the mother prior to the birth, extended to and permeated Australian social work, as Mary McLelland, Supervisor of Professional Training, Department of Social Work, University of Sydney, explains:

... the responsibility for considering the interests and needs of the child is often beyond the capacity of the frequently immature, frightened and confused pregnant girl.⁸³

Pamela Roberts stated that the unwed mother should be helped to make her decision *prior* to birth and referred to unwed mothers and their children as

... things seen as a threat to the concept of the family as a unit of society⁸⁴

An even more prejudicial viewpoint was taken by researchers Kasanin and Handschin⁸⁵ who stated:

... these pregnancies represent hysterical dissociation states in which the girls act out their incest fantasies ... In such cases the authors suggest no special effort be made to make it possible for the child to remain with the mother since the child does not necessarily mean the same thing to her as it does to the average woman ...⁸⁶

The more an unwed mother insisted she wanted to keep her child, the harsher she was judged. This placed her in a no win situation. For instance, if she specifically expressed a desire to keep her child she was most often labelled immature,⁸⁷ sometimes psychopathic, even occasionally, schizophrenic.⁸⁸ Once the mother was so labelled the 'ratchetting up' of pressure, coercion and threats was justified;⁸⁹ as the mother who insisted on keeping her child was now considered by adoption workers as the least fit to do so.⁹⁰

By the 1950s, an unwed mother being labelled neurotic and in need of social work intervention became part of the standards in adoption practice. This was mainly achieved through the undertakings of America's Child Welfare League, which commissioned Michael Schapiro to do a study of adoption practice. His findings were presented at a Conference held in January 1955, where 300 executives, board and staff members of adoption agencies in the United States and Canada met together with scientists, lawyers and members of the clergy to examine the findings. Schapiro's findings and selected papers given at the Conference were subsequently published in 1956 in two volumes by the Child Welfare League. These volumes were supposed to encompass the principles that would guide Western adoptions over the coming decades. Many of the papers drew heavily on the work of Freudian-orientated social workers and psychiatrists, such as Leontine Young, Margaret Gerard, Florence Clothier, Viola Bernard and James Cattell. These authors all presented the unwed mother as a deeply disturbed neurotic, unfit to parent.⁹¹

Schapiro describes the unmarried mother thus:

The one common characteristic they seem to possess is a neurosis ... weak ego-development ... since one of the most prevalent symptoms of some neuroses is inability to make and act upon conscious decisions based on the reality situation, the agency has responsibility for participating actively in the decision (regarding adoption of her baby) to avoid leaving the burden entirely on the unmarried mother ...⁹²

The following year Joseph Reid, Executive Director of the Child Welfare League of American and Deputy President of the International Union for Child Welfare, published what he described as the detailed standards for adoption practices as crystallised from Schapiro's volumes.⁹³

Reid stated:

It is not an unwarranted interference with the unmarried mother to presume that in most cases it will be in the child's best interests for her to release her child for adoption ... The concept that the unmarried mother and her child constitute a family is to me unsupportable. There is no family in any real sense of the word ... The concept that the unmarried mother has an absolute right for self-determination is to me fallacious ...⁹⁴

Reid confirmed the above as social work principles when he presented his paper some years later at the National Conference of Social Work (1965).

Reid's principles, values and assumptions underlying adoption practice are summarised below:⁹⁵

- An unwed mother and her child are not a family.
- The mother is not entitled to make her own decision.⁹⁶
- If family members do not support adoption, they should be counselled otherwise.
- It should always be presumed that adoption is in 'the child's best interest'.
- A service that must be rendered for infertile couples is the use of case work by social workers utilising psychological methods, to ensure mothers do not try to reclaim their babies.

- Agencies should be politically active and lobby for law changes to reduce the rights of natural parents.
- Because the above principles are only partially accepted by the community, social workers must advocate strongly and publicly for their acceptance.
- Agencies must network with those in law and medicine to ensure the above principles are disseminated.

The League presented itself as the arbiter on adoption practice.⁹⁷ Its influence, and that of the Freudian analysts, was felt throughout the Australian adoption industry. Rose Rawady states:

The fledgling Australian social work profession adopted and reinforced the theories of American social worker Leontine Young⁹⁸ who moved the discourse of ex-nuptial pregnancy motherhood from “bad” to mad.⁹⁹

Reid’s notion that an unwed mother and her child did not constitute a family was accepted as fact within the adoption industry in Sydney. At a Conference¹⁰⁰ to herald in the new *Adoption of Children Act 1965* (NSW),¹⁰¹ Mary McLelland stated:

The ultimate objective of adoption is such a planned change through helping to make a family where before one did not exist.¹⁰²

This idea was re-articulated in the *NSW Social Work Manual* (1967), which stated that social work’s primary objective was to make ‘a family, where before there was none’.

Pannor and Baran, two professionals that worked in the adoption industry from the late 1940s onwards, state:

We were relinquishment-oriented. Social workers felt that they had failed in their jobs if too many mothers chose to rear their children. In defending our practice, we put the onus on the birth parents, whom we labelled “disturbed” if they fought the pressures of relinquishment. We supported the needs of the adoptive parents, whom we saw as the primary clients¹⁰³ ... Wasn’t this what our practice [was] oriented towards — finding babies for childless couples? The fact that this might not be in the best interests of the child or the birth parents somehow eluded us ...¹⁰⁴

The attitudes described by Panor and Baran also existed in Australia. McLelland states:

The social worker’s concern is with childlessness or infertility, but the particular area of competence is, naturally, not in its treatment, but in assessment or resolution of its effect on the marital relationship ...¹⁰⁵

Elizabeth Herral, a social worker speaking at a National Social Conference of Social Work in the US, probably summarised the adoption industry’s ideology most succinctly: ‘Agency and applicant and child share the same ultimate goal, a developing adoptive family’.¹⁰⁶

It was not only acknowledged that those working in the adoption industry identified with adoptive parents,¹⁰⁷ but that many adoptive parents themselves worked within it and promoted adoption.¹⁰⁸ For example, Leontine Young who wrote extensively of the neuroticism of unwed mothers¹⁰⁹ was herself an adoptive mother.¹¹⁰ Ironically, many felt that it was their duty to recruit more adoptive couples, even when there were not enough babies to satisfy demand.¹¹¹

The Inquiry supported the above assertion and found that the natural mother was ‘not necessarily the client of the adoption professional’,¹¹² but ‘rather the profession acted on behalf of the parent who wished to adopt’.¹¹³ Judy McHutchison states that it was quite clear that adoption was a service provided for adopting couples. She cited a 1958 Child Welfare booklet that states ‘The Department provides an adoption service ... for married

couples who desire to adopt children...[the service] has 3 phases [which included] (1) the location of suitable children, mainly babies for adoption ...¹¹⁴

Demand by persons wishing to adopt was so intense that the Honourable Evelyn Barron, during a Parliamentary debate prior to the introduction of the new adoption legislation that further curtailed mother's rights, commented that:

Pressure exerted by people who want to adopt children has been one of the great difficulties that the Minister and the Department have had to bear. The scarcity occurs not in the number of people who want to adopt children but in the number of children who are available.¹¹⁵

If childlessness rather than parenting skills was the main criteria for adoption then it seems logical to assume that in this sphere of time adoption was indeed a service provided for infertile couples.

Leontine Young probably put the adoption phenomenon most succinctly stating:

... the tendency growing out of the demand for babies is to regard unmarried mothers as breeding machines ... (by people intent) upon securing babies for quick adoptions.¹¹⁶

So to conclude, while publicly, via newspaper and magazine articles, the adoption industry maintained mothers had a 'choice' and repeatedly asserted that it was the mother's decision alone to relinquish her child for adoption, its statements in social work journals and at conference proceedings revealed an antithetical ideology that stipulated mothers were neither capable nor had the right to make their own decision and so in fact had no real 'choice' at all. Rather, it was the adoption industry itself that took on the role of decision maker and arbiter of what it considered to be in 'the child's best interest' and having done so proceeded to act with impunity. This behaviour though was duplicitous, unlawful and unethical.

So to sum it up it seems that those who worked within the adoption industry believed it to be their duty to help pregnant single women decide on adoption, whilst solving the marital problems caused by infertility of their primary clients, adopting parents, who they provided with a service which included locating suitable babies. The demand was great, the supply was short and babies had to be sourced from somewhere.

Note: According to the Law Reform Commission Report,¹¹⁷ soliciting a mother or urging her to carry a child for another is surrogacy and is illegal in New South Wales.

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Australian Women's Weekly, September 8, 1954, p. 28, The unmarried mother's
problem...should she SURRENDER HER BABY? By staff reporter - The following
article is an example of the promotion of adoption and the justification for the
removal of a single mother's baby as being 'in the child's best interest'. Note that
social workers of the time believed that the mother and her child 'did not constitute
a family'.**

The illusion of choice

For many Australian women adoption in the past had nothing to do with 'choice'. Any notion of choice, according to Australian researcher Dr. John Condon,¹¹⁸ was nothing but a ploy to obfuscate societal guilt for forcing young mothers to relinquish their newborns. Within the adoption industry women were said to be exercising a choice, even when no alternatives to adoption were offered and they were being told by the 'experts' that if they kept their baby it would be disadvantaged, even harmed: leaving unwed mothers' with nothing more than a Sophie's choice! It must be understood that the concept of mothers' exercising a 'choice' cannot be taken in isolation or viewed simplistically; it must be examined in its connection with the other parts that made up a system that was designed to facilitate the adoption process. It must be seen as a component in a coercive regime of practices that constituted a 'well-oiled system of 'baby-taking' that included such things as placing pillows or sheets between mother and child at the birth so they could not make eye contact, then immediately whisking the baby away; denying mothers any contact with their babies after the birth or any opportunity to feed them; refusing to bring mothers their infant when requested; refusing mothers access to the nursery; the use of mind altering barbiturates up until the 'consent to adopt' form was signed; not allowing mothers to leave the hospital until they had signed a 'consent to adopt' form and treating the mother as sub-human in the maternity ward and after the birth. All these practices cohered in a system set up to deprive mothers of any real chance of informed consent.

Choice is about having a range of alternatives from which to choose, but many mothers state that adoption was the ONLY option offered because those working in the 'industry' failed in their duty of care to discuss any of the measures or assistances that would have enabled them to make an informed decision. For instance, disclosing the financial assistance that was available. In interviews, conducted by this author as part of the research component for a PhD, many mothers stated that lack of finances was not a consideration for them but would have made the world of difference to their parents. They believed that without fearing the additional financial burden of another mouth to feed their parents may have supported them to keep their child and consequently intervened and stopped the coercive practices they were subjected to in the hospital or the unmarried mother's Home. In some cases a woman may have been a migrant or an orphan and had no familiar support, so without being informed of any of the financial benefits that were available she may have seen no other alternative but to relinquish. Most mothers, not wanting their child to suffer, put its welfare above their own. It must be added that even without being informed of any of the financial benefits available some mothers still refused to sign a 'consent' form. It seems though, if they were without support, they were not allowed to leave the hospital with their baby. In these instances they were informed that because they had no family it was in their child's best interests to remain in the hospital. One mother, an orphan whose story is included in this book, returned to the hospital some months later after having got married, only to be told that her child had already been placed with its adoptive family.¹¹⁹ She had never signed any legal document that permitted her baby's adoption.

Adoption was touted by sections of the feminist movement as a reproductive choice akin to choosing abortion. But it is impossible to equate a woman's right to choose to abort a foetus a few days or weeks old with giving birth to a child, fully-formed, to whom she has already bonded. For it is now well-known that a pregnant woman bonds with her baby during the 9 month gestation period, particularly in the 3rd trimester. Adoption can never be reduced to being a reproductive choice. And further, the notion that a mother could choose to be or not be a mother after giving birth was/is a straw man argument constructed by the adoption industry to give the illusion of choice. Once a mother gives birth she is a mother for life. Not though, in the adoption Lexicon. Being a mother is demarcated by whether or not the woman parents her infant. If she has lost her baby to

adoption she is labeled a 'birthmother'. In the adoption reform movement being a 'birthmother' is considered derogatory and is equated with being labeled a 'breeder'. It is only within the institution of adoption that a mother's status is so reduced. One would never dismiss the pain of a mother who delivered a stillborn baby by diminishing her status to that of a 'birthmother' because she did not get the opportunity to parent her child.

At an Upper House Inquiry into past practices in adoption, mothers' reported that the most compelling and convincing argument presented to them to consider adoption was the one repeated during their mandatory 'counselling' sessions with adoption workers: 'it is in the child's best interests to be adopted' and its corollary: 'the child will suffer if you keep it'. Mothers repeatedly said they were told: "You must sacrifice yourself so your child will have a better life". Mothers, like the mother in Solomon's tale, will sacrifice themselves if they truly believe it is best for their child. That is mothers' nature. Thus, stating that a woman will harm her child if she keeps it combined with the practice of denying her any access to it at or after the birth, can be seen as a form of psychic manipulation that kept mothers in a state of trauma and shock, ensuring the baby-taking process was less problematic for the maternity staff. Its most insidious outcome though was that mothers now carrying deep feelings of shame and inadequacy were effectively silenced for decades and therefore the practices within the adoption industry went on unchallenged.

Edmund Mech, Professor of Social Work, conducted research in the 1980s to determine the most efficient ways to counsel young unwed mums out of their babies. He concluded that by far the most effective strategy was to suggest that giving up the child was in its best interests and not to decide on adoption would mean it lost the opportunity of having a good life. It is not surprising that this strategy works because during late pregnancy and post-birth maternal instinct kicks in and the mother is biologically primed to protect and ensure the welfare and happiness of her baby, even if that means sacrificing herself. Mech's aim was to develop a method of introducing and promoting adoption that could be used by anyone working with vulnerable women experiencing an unplanned pregnancy.

Mech's (1984¹²⁰; 1986) research arose out of concern for the dwindling number of healthy newborn babies available for the United States adoption market. He believed the numbers of babies available could be substantially increased purely through 'improved' counselling methods:

... little attention has been directed at counsellor practices as a factor in the decline in adoption decisions (Mech 1986: 556)¹²¹.

He noted that the difficulty with implementing adoption plans with young mothers was that adolescent cognitive development only allowed them a very

limited ability to plan ahead and to anticipate the consequences of decisions (1986: 565).¹²²

Further, he stated, that it was this inability to plan ahead that explained why mothers would

never think of such an unnatural solution to unwed pregnancy as adoption by themselves.

In other words young mums did not ordinarily think of giving their babies away to strangers; it was an idea that had to be artificially introduced and promoted. They were just not mentally capable of formulating something as long term and unnatural as an adoption plan; counsellors had to do it for them. Therefore he insisted that it was the counsellor's duty to introduce the adoption option, even though the young mother had

never mentioned it or had any inclination towards it. What Mech's research concluded supported what Australian mothers claimed at the Inquiry: they did not think up and never 'chose' an 'adoption plan'. This research proved that they were not mentally capable of doing so! It supports their claim that adoption was introduced to them via coercive counselling sessions in which they were brainwashed into believing they had no other alternative but to 'choose' adoption because not to do so would harm their child. Without support from anyone and without being told of any assistance that was in place to assist them to keep their child the adoption workers job to convince women that their baby would be better off without them was that much easier. It must be noted that it was not just the 'brainwashing' alone it was the combination of all the factors, such as denying women access to their baby at the birth so they could not complete the birthing process. This act alone according to Dr. Rickarby was enough to cause Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The drugs and the other coercive practices all played their part in ensuring the mother saw no other 'choice' but adoption.

The only conclusion one can draw from the literature is that the notion of mothers exercising informed consent or of them 'choosing' adoption was a sham to protect the adoption industry from closer scrutiny. The use of the counselling relationship to convince the mother to give up her child is made clear by Leontine Young, when she states:

In my experience, the majority of unmarried mothers are not strong, mature, well adjusted people, and the reality is that only such a person can assume and carry out responsibility for an out-of-wedlock child without serious damage to both herself and the child ... Our great need is to see the unmarried mother as she actually is and relate this realistically to her life. We need to see that we do not take the baby away from the mother as we did when punishment was the motive, but that on the contrary she gives the baby to us and can do so because of her relationship to us ...¹²³

The outcome of the use of coercive counselling, the drugs and the denial of mothers' rights to access their babies, is demonstrated most clearly by the numbers of newborns removed from their mothers at Crown Street Women's Hospital, at Surry Hills in Sydney. The hospital was responsible for facilitating more adoptions than anywhere else in New South Wales. In 1949, NSW Child Welfare Department figures reveal that from 40% to 50% of all adoptions in NSW came from that hospital,¹²⁴ and 40% of ex-nuptial babies born there were taken for the adoption market. By 1968 this figure had risen to 64%.¹²⁵ According to Dr. Geoff Rickarby this was the result of the 'well-oiled' baby-taking measures that operated within the hospital. Pamela Roberts, in her aforementioned sworn affidavit, stated that she began to implement change within the hospital with respect to the treatment of unwed mothers in 1970 which coincided with the decline of the percentage of ex-nuptial babies taken. By 1972 the number had decreased to 48%,¹²⁶ prior to the introduction of the Supporting Mothers Pension, usually credited for the decline in the babies available for adoption. Rickarby was not the only one that attributed the high number of adoptions to baby taking measures such as those used in the hospital. The Human Rights Commission (1984)¹²⁷ and Joss Shawyer (1979)¹²⁸ both concluded that the coercive counselling methods used on unwed mothers and the use of practices such as not allowing mothers to see their babies at the birth contributed to the high number of adoptions that took place during the period.

Why is it then that some women still believe they made the decision to adopt out their child? The short answer, in my opinion, is that because mothers signed the consent form their minds have to rationalise what they have done. We are, after all, rational beings.

According to Dr. Geoff Rickarby, a psychiatrist who has worked extensively with women who have gone through the trauma of losing their child to adoption, it was the result not only of getting their signature on the consent form but also because of the 'brainwashing' techniques employed by adoption workers to do so. He explains that women were led to

believe they were unfit to parent and convinced that the 'right thing' to do for their child was to give him or her up for adoption. Though, I doubt the brainwashing by itself would have convinced mothers to relinquish. I believe if women had been able to see, hold and feed their newborns, if they hadn't been drugged and particularly if they had been able to leave the hospital with their child most would have kept and reared their infant. The brainwashing techniques were most useful after adoption workers acquired the mother's signature on the 'consent to adopt' form. It was then, I believe, that mothers in order to stay sane, relied upon what the 'experts' had told them. A mother could reassure herself that she had done the right thing and that her child was safer and more secure without her. Believing this made the heartbreak and mental anguish of not knowing where her child was, bearable. It also made sense of the fact that she had actually signed the 'consent' form. It did not, though, take away the guilt and shame she felt in believing she was inadequate to parent her child. In fact signing the consent form reinforced that belief because now there was tangible evidence, her signature, which, in her mind, was proof of her incompetence.

To stay sane our minds need to 'make sense' of what we do. It has to accord with our sense of who we are; our identity. It was shown that when American POWs in the Korean War signed documents attacking their country, even though the Chinese Communists had utilised various brainwashing techniques to illicit the POWs testimonies, they later believed that they had willingly become collaborators. Robert Cialdini,¹²⁹ social psychologist stated, that when these documents were signed the POWs were driven 'to make ... beliefs and ... self image consistent with what ... had undeniably [been] done'. Mothers signing the 'consent to adopt' form were trapped and powerless in much the same way as the POWs. In fact they were in a more susceptible state because they were pregnant. According to Dr. John Condon,¹³⁰ in a research paper about cognitive functioning, pregnant women have altered psychological functioning wherein they experience cognitive dysfunction during late pregnancy which makes them more easily influenced because of a 'a diminution of the more logical critical and intellectual functions ... '. This psychological event is in preparation for their role of mothers as it enhances their ability to intuit their newborns' needs.¹³¹ So, it seems, to rationalise what they had done, signed a 'consent' form, some mothers now believe they 'chose' adoption because it was 'best for their baby' and because they were unfit to be its parent.

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Sun-Herald-Tempo, April 1, 2001, p 9, Kidnapped at birth by Clarissa Bye***

Mothers of the white stolen generation: their stories

The stories, poetry and paintings that follow not only describe a very dark period in the history of motherhood, but are a tribute to the survival of the human spirit and its ability to overcome adversity that for most is beyond comprehension.

'The Birth of David'

From ‘JB’ to ‘Janice Benson’

JM: Were any mothers restrained whilst giving birth?

GR: Oh yes, there were quite a few of those. Certainly they were tied down so that they could hardly move and I have talked to one woman who was frightened of being killed because she insisted on taking her baby...

JM: So what you’re saying, Dr Rickarby, is that individuals working within the adoption industry seemed to make up their own rules?

GR: All the rules of informed consent that solicitors bring together were just flouted. It was a system with no police person and at the slightest hint of anyone suggesting a lawyer, they [the adoption industry] were up in arms and they would tell the young woman how much a solicitor would cost and what lawyers were like - the lawyers used to frighten them [adoption industry] ... because any lawyer brought into it would see immediately the breaches of common law, the breaches of natural justice. In fact, they [the adoption industry] were doing all the things that were quite illegal. Whereas the mothers were made to feel they were the ones who were likely to break the law because a hospital like Crown Street would threaten them with calling in the Welfare. They would say “You don’t give up your baby quietly, we will have you declared an unfit mother and we will have the Welfare put you under their Act — that was part of their threat. They would threaten the mother that their child would be made a ward of the State. No mother would have contemplated that. So the mother couldn’t win either way.

(Extract from an interview with Dr Geoff Rickarby, 9 August 2007)

Janice Benson

I tell my story in the hope that events of this nature may never happen again to any mother, or her about-to-be-born baby. My son was taken from me without my permission, without my informed consent and without my intention. I signed adoption papers in a drugged state. The drug used by the Maternity Ward of the Hornsby District Hospital was Bomadorm. This drug was not administered to me when I had subsequent babies as a married woman.

In August 1962, I became engaged to my fiancé after ‘going out’ with him for 20 months. We had a small party at the Carousel Restaurant. I had picked up my diamond ring the day before; I was 20 years old and had been teaching for two years. My boyfriend of 18 months was 19 years old and had come with his family from Manchuria in 1954. My parents did not approve of my choice. His family were ‘White Russian’ immigrants, and he was a year younger than I was.

Two of my cousins had similar parental responses to their choice of partners, but after each of the prospective partners fell pregnant, both cousins were permitted to marry their chosen partners.

The second month anniversary of our engagement, we celebrated. And it didn’t matter to us if I fell pregnant, as we would be marrying anyway. Our engagement photos had been sent to Nick’s relatives in Georgia, so our lives were virtually mapped out. But when I informed my parents that I was pregnant, my father erupted as though some unseen button had been pressed. ‘If I have breath to prevent this marriage, I will’, was his reply.

Each time Nick visited, he was made to feel very uncomfortable by my father. Each time Mum and I went on a buying spree for singlets, blankets, nappies, etc. for the baby, my

father exploded. Eventually he said, 'This marriage will not go ahead, and you will have an abortion. You are living under my roof. You will do as you are told'.

By now, Nick's mother was wondering what sort of people we were and began to regret Nick's and my engagement. She expected my father to offer to help us. A conference between the two families decided that we shouldn't marry, that Nick be sent to relatives in Sydney and that I was to have an abortion. I did not want an abortion. I wanted Nick's and my baby.

Two Brisbane doctors refused to abort my pregnancy, so my mother took me to a Macquarie Street specialist. His rooms were opposite Hyde Park. My mother and my Gran came to see me. When the doctor and I were out of my mother's earshot, I said to him quietly, 'I think you will find I am too advanced for you to do anything'. I kept looking at his eyes to make sure he understood what I was saying. He continued to feel my tummy. Then he looked at me. Clearly he understood what I wanted, because he stated, 'Mmm. You could be right'. When we went back to the room where my mother was, he simply said, 'It would be unsafe for me to do anything'. My mother replied, 'Rubbish!'

She was angry. I looked at my Gran, who understood what had transpired. That I had indicated to the doctor I did not want an abortion. So he also refused to abort my pregnancy — even though I was in the very early stages of my pregnancy.

So, instead I was taken to 'Carramar', which I thought was a home to assist unmarried women. Shirley Jones, the Matron, informed us that as I would be 21 years old by the time I returned, I would have a room of my own.

To me, this scenario was totally surreal. I walked out of that place thinking, 'This will never happen. Nick will get a job, and we will be out of here. They can plan all they like, but I won't be back here'.

On Boxing Day 1962, Nick left with his relatives for Sydney. They came to my parents' house to say 'goodbye'. But something wasn't quite right. By now my father had filled in my forms for my 'Carramar' admission. For my 21st birthday, there was no celebration. I alone celebrated with a studio portrait of myself and my brother. I would not let my parents forget. If anything happened to myself or my baby, there would always be three people in that portrait.

At the beginning of the school year, I returned to teaching. My fiancé had gone to find work, but was prevented from any communication with me. Almost two months after Nick had gone, I was put on the train for Sydney at the South Brisbane Station. Just my mother and father came. Nobody smiled, nobody cried. As the train moved out of the station and my parents moved out of sight, I sobbed all the way to Sydney. On 24 February, I arrived at Hornsby Station with the name 'Janice Benson' on my suitcase; this was the name I was told I should use. I continued to wear my engagement ring, so not everything had changed. At 7.45 am, I took a cab to 'Carramar'.

Shirley Jones put me in the 'dungeon dormitory' with the early teens, all still school age; and I — a teacher. There were no single rooms vacant. I would get the next one available, I was told. But that didn't happen. Teenagers were given the next available single rooms. When I asked her about her promise to my mother, she said, 'You'll just have to wait your turn — they were here before you'. I believe Matron deliberately intended to break my spirit.

The dormitory had one high window at ground level — the majority of the room was underground. It was musty, dark and had a smell of trapped water. It had probably been

servants' quarters, or a storage room, but it was now occupied by seven teenagers and me.

I hadn't unpacked my suitcase. I tried very hard to assess my situation. I kept telling my baby that we probably weren't in the best of circumstances, but we were still alive and together.

I remember being given an I.Q. test while I was in the dormitory. This was about my fifth week there. As I was a State champion actress and the second top student in class teaching when I graduated from college, I remember thinking what a breeze it would be.

Under the Freedom of Information Act, I read the results of those tests in 1995. I could not believe them. In some, my 'score' was below average. I now believe they are a clear example of how much shock and trauma I felt at the time. I believe that the isolation in the homes caused diminished intellectual capacity, and diminished ability to make decisions in our own interests, and in the interests of our potential baby.

In 1966, when I did an I.Q. test while at University, my capability had climbed back to 139+.

From the day I arrived at 'Carramar', we were subjected to daily readings from the Bible, with the Matron extrapolating on the relevance to our lives of the stories.

The readings focussed on:

- the need for atonement (ours)
- doing good for others (us for them)
- noble sacrifices (ours)
- God's will for his people (the perfect childless couple)
- having sins forgiven (ours, if we did as we were told)
- what happens to prodigals and dissidents (us) if they continue to disobey God.

Then there was chapel every Sunday for more of the same.

I observed the private confidences that Matron Jones seemed to have with each of the girls individually from time to time. On the occasions when she exhibited this sort of behaviour towards me, I was exhorted not to talk to anyone else of our conversation. This reinforced the isolation of each girl from the other, and seemed to make them dependent on the Matron for approval. This technique of relating to the girls seemed to reinforce her control.

Gran came to visit me every second Wednesday. She was always calm and brought something new each time — I guess to keep up my spirits. She told her friends that she made the trip from Birchgrove to Turramurra to see a friend of hers 'up the line', whatever that meant in 'Balmain speak'.

After five weeks, I got a room at the top of the stairs looking out the back over hills. At the time, Turramurra was large blocks of land, almost semi-rural in parts. I drew the view from my window in many different lights. I had been told by Shirley Jones not to bring a 'camera, in consideration of the feelings of the other girls', so I couldn't record anything on film.

By now, I was just over five months pregnant, and didn't fancy cleaning toilets or bathrooms, so I volunteered to supervise the correspondence lessons of three of the teenagers. Shirley Jones saw fit to mention this to her employers at their monthly meeting.

One day I was asked to answer the phone in the Matron's office while she was out, as neither the secretary nor Sister Sturt would be there.

Judy, on that occasion, burst into the room and said, 'Think you're so smart Benson, don't you? Well, look in the second drawer and you'll see how smart you aren't'.

She realised I wasn't going to open the drawer, so she opened it. She showed me the letterhead on the writing paper — it read:

'Carramar'
Church of England Home Mission Society
Home for Delinquent Girls
16–18 Boomerang Street
Turramurra

I was unable to go back to the book I had previously been reading. When Judy left the room, I opened the drawer again. 'Home for Delinquent Girls'. Did my parents know that that was what this place was? It certainly was the correct name and the correct address. I didn't see any of her correspondence to my father, so I wasn't sure if he knew.

I began supervising the younger girls' correspondence lessons. They tended to squabble and argue a lot in the dormitory, as teenagers do, so I suppose it gave them something beyond the perimeter of the grounds to think about. For me, it slowly became a tie to my former life. I started to remember that I was intelligent and capable before I entered 'Carramar'.

By the six month point of my pregnancy, my grandmother offered me a roof over my head for myself and my baby.

Just after Easter, I got a phone call from Nick. He had begged my parents to give him my phone number, but they gave him Gran's and she gave him mine. He had promised not to get in touch with me. He had a place of his own and wasn't living with his relatives any more. He had a job and was studying at Uni, and was in the process of organising the legals for us to get married. 'I'm going to get you out of there...', he promised. I had prayed to hear those words.

From then on, we spoke on the phone whenever he could ring from the public phone nearby his place. And there was a pay phone where he was staying. As he was still under 21 years, he needed his mother's permission to marry. And she had refused to sign the first form he had sent her. I visited him at Burwood one Saturday and we formulated our plan.

Things started to look hopeful for my son and myself at last. I began to take heart that, with a roof over our heads and a marriage very soon, my baby and I would get out of this okay.

I felt now was the time to tell Shirley Jones of what we intended.

Judy had warned me before that, 'Matron hates it if somebody messes up her paperwork!' So I wanted to give her plenty of warning.

I approached Matron Jones. I told her that I intended to leave and take my baby with me and that I would live with my grandmother, and that my fiancé and I would marry.

I thought this good Christian lady would be as overjoyed as I was. But her response was, to the effect, 'Oooh, do you think that's wise?'

I can still see the contortions of her face. It took on the look that emanates when someone has stood in dog poo. My answer was, 'Yes'.

She kept it up. 'I don't think that's such a good idea. I don't think you've really thought this through.'

I was shocked by her response. I was astounded. For six months, I had been thinking this through and I knew exactly what I wanted. She added, 'I can't talk about this now — have you told any of the other girls?'

I told her, 'No, I thought I'd let you know first'.

She said, 'Now I am going to have to have a talk with you about this and I don't have the time right now. I'll find a time when we can talk undisturbed. Keep it between us. I don't want you upsetting the other girls'.

I agreed not to say anything to anyone else.

I approached her the next day, and the day after, but she was always too busy to talk to me, or the time was not right.

So I waited for her to find the time. With each day, I got more joyous on the one hand, but more fearful on the other hand, as I now had to deal with her.

I had suffered her dungeon, done her intelligence tests, listened to her Bible readings, done her exercises, supervised correspondence lessons and I was ready to move on.

She made me wait days before she found the time to talk to me. There was a decided cooling in her attitude towards me. I had become a non-person. She had begun not to notice me and to treat me with avoidance.

Duress, lies and fabrication

Two weeks later, she called me into her office and closed the door.

'Now, how do you know Nick wants to marry you?'

'We've been talking on the phone. I have visited him. He says he's organising things.'

She wanted to argue. 'You don't seem to have thought this through. This is not a very good way for you and your fiancé to start married life. You need time with each other, without the added pressure that a baby brings. You need to be by yourselves, to get to know each other.'

I found that a stupid thing for her to say. At this point in time, we had known each other for over two years, and Matron Jones was aware of that. I replied, 'Both my cousins coped, so I don't see why I wouldn't'.

She hit back: 'But your father doesn't want you to keep this baby. If the baby went to the lovely couple I have chosen for him, he will have grandparents who want him. If he stays with you, he won't have grandparents'.

I couldn't believe the words that came out of her mouth.

'My Gran and my fiancé and I want my baby. And as for not having any grandparents,' I replied, 'my baby will not only have my Gran and my fiancé's parents; my baby will have me, and his father, so he will have plenty of family to help and, especially, he will have his REAL mother and father!'

I could not understand why she chose not to see that my baby would have a mother and father, grandparents and a great-grandmother, as well as all his Russian relatives.

She then stated: 'How long will it take your fiancé to get permission to marry? What if his mother won't give permission? How will you and your baby survive?'

I asked her if there was any benefit that my baby and I could get while we were waiting. I expected there would be a benefit, like the one we were all receiving while we were in 'Carramar'.

She told me there was one, but it was very small. She assured me that my baby and I couldn't survive on it.

I reminded her that we would be staying at Gran's, and we wouldn't have to pay rent. I told her my Gran had plenty of room and it was a wonderful place. I had grown up there.

She said, 'But your grandmother has only her pension and babies are very expensive, especially the first year of their lives. It is selfish of you to expect her to use her pension to support you'.

She wasn't going to give up. I added, 'Nick has a job. We will have money to support ourselves'.

She continued: 'Your father has left you in my care, so I have to let you know that this has happened to other girls in the past, and when they arrive on the boy's doorstep, the boys have changed their minds and don't want anything to do with the girl or her baby'.

'This is not likely to happen', I said.

'In fact, we have had girls whose boyfriends have claimed they weren't the father of the baby and named four of their friends as possible fathers. And the other boys have gone to court to say, "Yes, that they could be possible fathers".'

Shocked, I replied, 'Nick and I are engaged; we love each other; he is NOT going to do that!'

She went on, 'It's a terribly messy business. You would have to prove paternity, and the baby would have to go to a foster parent until it was all sorted out'.

I couldn't understand the thinking. The government was quite willing to give her money for my support in the Home, but was going to make it impossible, and even give my baby to foster parents until the process had run its course, if I wanted some support until my fiancé and I could organise our marriage. At this point, I told her maybe I should get a solicitor. I might need some help to work this all out.

And again she came in with her superior knowledge on all matters pertaining to the law in NSW. 'I know of other cases where the fellow has denied paternity. It's terribly distressing for the girl, especially when it could all have been avoided. One girl tried to cope for three months, but eventually brought her baby back. I then had to try to find a family who would take a three-month old boy. That is an incredibly difficult task. Nobody wants a three-month old child. It's not a baby any more. It has already bonded to the

girl, and then she has to bring it back. And then, of course, it's worse for her too, because she has been with the baby for that length of time.'

But I thought, 'I have already bonded with my baby. I talk to my baby every day. I feel as if my baby is part of me, not something I am producing, like a cow for somebody else who can't have their own'.

According to her, a solicitor would not tell me anything different to what she had just said. She continued, 'You can't afford a solicitor. They are very expensive. You would have to take your fiancé to court, and his solicitor would try to blacken your name. It's very difficult to prove paternity'.

I insisted that my fiancé would never try to deny paternity, but she would not give up. I was starting to feel the walls closing in on me.

She went on, 'But he would have to do what his solicitor told him. You see, as soon as solicitors are brought in, it changes everything. And you would need a solicitor. Then there would be the solicitor's fees and there would be no guarantee you would get a benefit at the end of it all'.

I still believed that my fiancé would not deny paternity, even if he was directed by a solicitor to do so. I told her this.

This was becoming bizarre. The cases she was describing were nothing remotely related to my situation. She was recounting one horror story after the next, and none of them echoed my circumstances.

She continued, 'Well, what am I going to tell these lovely people who have got everything ready for your baby? The room is ready; they have clothes, toys, and they have told all their friends. How am I to tell them you have changed your mind? What am I going to say to them?'

I was no match for her. She had all the bases covered, and I was in receipt of the worst piece of emotional blackmail she had yet delivered. I lamely offered, 'Can't they have someone else's baby?'

A frown came over her face, and she continued, 'But I have told them all about you. They are so like you. They have a similar background. They are a perfect match for you. I'd have great difficulty finding another family so perfect for your baby. His new mother's name is even the same as yours'.

She was not listening. She did not see me. She only saw me as a 'something,' a 'breeder' who was going to deliver her friends a baby.

When she finally spoke to me, she said words to the effect of the following: 'What have you got ready for this baby?'

I mentioned blankets, singlets, two dozen nappies, a bassinette (my own) and a chest of drawers.

She said, 'Is that all?!!! When do you think you'll have time to get clothes, bottles? Babies have hundreds of needs. The lovely couple **I have chosen** for your baby already have a nursery ready. I've seen it. It's lovely. They have everything ready for him. He would be so happy with them'.

She continued, 'And who will help you if the baby gets sick?'

I answered as strongly as I could. 'I will have my Gran and my fiancé!' She continued, 'Your grandmother is too old (62). Do you think that's fair to her? To expect her to help you? She is too old to be of any real help to you. Anyway, your father doesn't want this baby'.

I replied, 'My grandmother, my fiancé and I DO!'

I reaffirmed, 'Well, anyway, we are getting married and I am taking the baby with me'.

Sensing that the idea to run away had already crossed my mind, she said, 'Of course, should you choose to leave of your own accord, I would have to inform your father, as he has given you into my care, and, secondly, I would feel duty bound to inform the authorities. It would be very embarrassing to be brought back here under police guard. Maybe the Court would consider it necessary for the wellbeing of the baby for you to be placed under more stringent confines until your baby is born'.

I did not think for one minute that she was lying. The total madness of my situation was becoming all too clear. These people were going to take my baby; by hook or by crook. They had all the bases covered. I was in 'Carramar' to surrender my baby, according to Shirley Jones.

She fixed me with her pale blue eyes and said, 'Well, what am I going to tell these lovely people who I have told can have your baby? What am I going to say to them?'

I just stared at her. She wasn't there to help. This was no Christian organisation. Christ was nowhere to be seen. She was there to get babies for married Christians who wanted extra children. I was to be simply a baby provider. And 'Carramar' was a baby farm. The duress under which she was placing me was unlawful. My talk with her let me know that my life with my baby was now seriously under threat. Shirley Jones had declared her hand. I would now need a miracle to get out of this place with my baby. I didn't know, that at the time, all she had said to me were lies and untruths.

Judy's words came back to me, 'Matron doesn't like people who do a runner. Matron hates "bolters". They mess up her paperwork'.

By now, every girl knew that I was planning to 'do a runner', as Judy had put it. And they all knew Gran had my room ready for me.

She continued. 'But your father doesn't want this baby', she insisted.

I told her, 'I am over 21 years, so it's not my father's decision. It's mine'.

She kept arguing with me. 'What if Nick's mother won't sign the permission to marry papers? Your baby will become a ward of the State because you won't be married.'

That one I wasn't ready for!

She continued, 'And if it becomes a ward of the State, and my recommendations are taken into consideration in these cases, it will go to foster parents until the legals are worked out. I have explained to you that foster parents are people who didn't quite make the grade to be adoptive parents. Second best, really. You don't want second best for the baby now, do you? Promise me you'll give this a lot of thought. It's so important. We'll talk again soon'.

After that I spent a lot of time thinking — and a lot of time supervising study and painting. But any crying was done at night. I no longer saw her as a nice Christian lady. It was clear that helping me was not on her agenda. She was clearly in the business of finding babies for the 'lovely Christian couples'. My needs, my wants, my hopes were nothing to her. Especially if my wants interfered with her plans.

I began to feel unworthy of my own baby. That the Matron had all the answers. All my efforts to rise above the situation, regain my self-esteem and put my plans in place were denigrated, belittled and, in her eyes, were interpreted as stuffing up the well-oiled system. Yet I still continued to wear my engagement ring, and I still prayed for a miracle — that my future mother-in-law would sign the permission slip, and I would be able to get out of there with my baby.

At the seventh month of my pregnancy, I slipped on the kitchen floor which had been newly polished that day and was so slippery that my feet went from under me and I landed on my bottom. At the time, I was on kitchen duty and was stirring the custard when I went for a skate.

That night, after my shower, I noticed blood on my towel. The next day, the blood kept coming, so I told one of the girls, who informed the Matron of my problem. It was decided that the fall the night before might have started things off. I was sent to Hornsby Hospital in an ambulance. I was sedated and put under observation.

My hospital record shows:

1. Breech birth presenting 11.00 am
2. **Pechalorform 100 mgs** given 11.15 pm

9 May 1963

3. **Pentobarb 1½** given 9.00 pm

11 May 1963

Discharged

I was not informed that a breech birth was presenting, or the implications for my own or my baby's wellbeing. I signed permission for a Caesarean section, however.

I returned to 'Carramar' shaken, sedated and shocked. The hospital had told me to ask Matron to change me to a room on the ground floor, and to give me only light duties.

She said 'I can't ask somebody to move from the ground floor to the top floor just to suit you. Don't go up and down the stairs often'.

I and my plans had become a thorn in the Matron's side. She would go from one day to the next without so much as a nodding acknowledgement of me.

Nick rang while I was in hospital. Now he was aware of my anxiety, and the precarious legal aspect (according to Shirley Jones) of my relationship with my baby. He said he would take the paperwork to Brisbane and make his mother sign the papers, and bring them back himself.

The Matron informed me that she had told the 'nice couple' about my 'false alarm'. I felt it was none of their business. In fact, I felt totally betrayed. She was already acting as if my baby belonged to them. That my health was important insofar as I should deliver TO THEM a healthy baby. I didn't think any of my medical stuff was any of their business. It should have been confidential.

The Matron began to bring up our earlier conversation again, after I was back from hospital a couple of days. She wanted to know if I had 'thought any more' about our earlier talk. She asked what would happen if I had the baby before my fiancé managed to return with the duly signed documents.

She said, 'YOU REALLY HAVE TO BEGIN TO THINK OF THE BABY'S BEST INTERESTS. YOU DO WANT THE BEST FOR YOUR BABY, DON'T YOU?'

She continued hammering at my confidence and my ability to cope. That if I gave birth before my fiancé returned, the baby would probably be placed with a foster parent until the legalities could be sorted out. I couldn't, for the life of me, understand why my baby would have to go to a foster parent as a standard procedure. As the Matron knew I was 21 years old, I now view this aspect of her interpretation of 'procedures' as a blatant lie. Having been discouraged by her from seeking legal advice, assuming she was taking care of my interests, she simply abdicated from a duty of care towards me, and ignored any sense of duty to me or to my wishes.

Then Matron Jones continued with words to the effect, 'What if your fiancé doesn't return at all, and you have decided to keep the baby?'

I guess, feeling she wasn't getting anywhere, Matron changed tactics. She started going on about how the 'lovely couple' whom she had selected for my baby would be given another baby.

She continued to say that if I came back to her in three months, she probably would be 'unable to place' my baby then — that nobody would take a three-month old baby. And by then, he would have bonded to me and would **not be able to attach himself to anyone else.** So it wasn't my pain she cared about, but that my baby would not attach to another mother.

I thought, by the time my baby is born, he will have been in my womb for nine months, his whole life up until then — my baby surely has already bonded to me as I have to him. Isn't that what a mother is? Someone who produces a new life out of her body? And he had heard my voice for seven months already.

Then she would always get back to the fact of my parents.

'Your parents don't want you to keep this baby, and they are your parents, and you know they want the best for you. How do you think your father will respond to the idea of you keeping this baby?'

But she was a medical person, and this was my first baby, so if she said my baby would bond to the first person he saw, who was I to argue with her authority or experience?

Only my grandmother and my fiancé acknowledged my right to mother my own baby. The Matron treated me as if I was a necessary evil to her fulfilment of the wishes of the 'lovely Christian couple'.

And I was living in 'her' Home, under 'her' roof, eating 'her' food, yet I was not her client. My requests were treated as invalid. I had no privacy. My information was not treated as confidential. My wishes and concerns were expressed out of ignorance or naiveté, and so were of no consequence. She had all the power. She mentioned that I had stayed at 'Carramar' and the Church hadn't asked a penny from me. **BUT IN FACT, THEY WANTED EVERYTHING FROM ME — THEY WANTED MY BABY!**

I said, 'Didn't the government give you money for my stay here?'

She replied, 'Yes, but it's nowhere near enough. Remember, there are the maternity dresses (donated by the parishioners), and the exercise therapist. The amount from the government barely covers your food. Then there is the electricity bill, which is enormous, as you can imagine'.

'The Friday Quota'

I began to feel the expectation being spelled out; from the moment I entered 'Carramar', there was an EXPECTATION that my baby would be surrendered to Matron Jones in gratitude for services rendered! Was I going to prove to be an ingrate, and leave them without paying the price, which, it seems, was going to be my baby? This was a transaction of the worst kind — to take in a young, single, pregnant woman on the assumption that she would deliver her firstborn to you is nothing short of bartering in human flesh.

There was only ONE desired outcome as far as Matron Jones was concerned, and it had nothing to do with me sorting through the legalities to enable me to keep my son.

My fiancé was having difficulty getting his mother's permission to marry. The Matron was aware of this situation, so she used the technique of taking me into her confidence again. She said, 'Jan is so like you. It's such a coincidence that you both have the same name, and you are SO alike. And they are "such modern, progressive people"'.

By now, I was just about worn down to insanity. I came back from the 'false alarm' to be subjected to more of what I had experienced before I went to hospital. I thought this was no way to treat a young woman expecting her first baby. This was the worst kind of duress imaginable, reducing all my hopes for my newborn, as though I should be hoping them for someone else.

Seven days after the first, I haemorrhaged again. I was again sent in an ambulance to the Hornsby Hospital, and placed in the labour ward. I spent all night and all the next day there in pain with a breech birth presenting. When I would mention the pain, the nursing staff would say, 'Oh, that's nothing. The head's not engaged yet. You've got ages to go'.

18 May 1963

Arrived at hospital: 6.00 pm — contractions

Chloral gas (self administered)

Morphine ¼ given

Dr Hughes notified

Dr Hughes 11.30 pm

I had already signed papers to permit a Caesarean section, so I didn't understand why I was simply given Triline, Pethidine and Morphine and nobody was getting me ready for a Caesar. At about 5.30 pm the day after being admitted, I told the nurse the baby was coming. She said, 'Don't be ridiculous!'

19 May 1963

Chloral gas (self administered)

Pethidine 100mgs 4.30 pm

Dr Thew 4.30 pm

I kept telling the nurse that my baby was coming but she kept saying, 'The head isn't engaged yet ... Your baby isn't coming'.

Exasperated, I yelled at her, 'For heaven's sake, look between my legs!'

The nurse then ran from one end of the hospital to the other, screaming, 'BREECH!!! BREECH!'

People came.

My legs were placed in stirrups.

A sheet went up between me and the people at the foot of the bed so that all I could see were the tops of their heads.

'What is that for?'

Giving birth while handcuffed to the bed

A nurse came in smiling and pulled up the chair near my bed, beside me. She was still smiling as she removed a leather handcuff with two metal buckles from the pocket of her uniform. She buckled my right wrist and closed off the other side, locking my wrist to the metal pole of the bed.

‘What’s that for?’ I asked her.

‘Just a precaution’, she replied.

‘A precaution against what?’ I asked.

'I remember you nurse!'

She didn't answer me. Just grinned and looked at me. She placed my handcuffed hand between her hands, which she placed between the tops of her knees. I looked to see if she had a name. There was no name or number badge on her.

'They're going to kill me. I'm going to be an accidental death.'

She sat hunched close to the bed so that people passing by the door would not be able to see what she had done to my wrist. The doctors attending the birth would not have seen what she had done, for the raised sheet blocked most of their vision. And as my hand was dragged down from the horizontal line of the metal bed side, only she and I knew what she had done. Last thing I remember is that I passed out in terror, awaiting death.

After about 25 minutes, I woke out of my faint as the nurse was replacing the handcuff into her uniform pocket. She then left. 'What has happened?' I asked.

'It's all over', said a voice from the end of the bed. 'You had a little boy!'

'How is my little boy? Is he all right?'

'He's fine. He's gone off for a bath and some tests. He's very small, so he will go into the humidicrib.'

My little boy was seven weeks premature. He was born on 19 May.

'Lyn'

Pentobarb 300 mgs, Stilboestrol

I attempted to see him three times while I was in hospital, but was sent back to my ward each time.

'Matron doesn't want you here.'

'You know you're not to come near the nursery.'

'If Matron lets you girls come to the nursery, nobody will get any work done.'

'Back down to your ward. Off you go!'

20 May 1963

Stilboestrol — a drug to dry up my milk

Bomadorm 200 mgs

21 May 1963

Bomadorm 200 mgs

Pills to dry up milk (not recorded)

I tried another day, and when the nurse asked, I told her I was going for a shower. She said, 'You can't use the shower on this floor — go to the one on your own floor!'

I asked for some progress reports on my son from one of the nurses, but was told they were not supposed to discuss the progress of the babies with 'the girls' from the 'Home'. The fact that I was 21 years old, or hadn't signed any papers didn't make any difference.

I asked the Matron from 'Carramar' how my son was going.

She said, 'Oh, he's such a fighter. He has such determination. He's doing really well'.

My Gran got to see her first great-grandchild by pretending to be related to his 'new' family. His 'new' parents had already seen him just after he was born. After my three attempts to see my baby were thwarted by the nursery staff and Sister Marsh, I didn't get to see him at all.

A woman arrived unannounced two days after I had given birth, with papers for me to sign, registering the name and birth of the child. I thought, 'How marvellous — the Registrar General's office is now attending hospitals to make sure all newborns are registered'. I told her my son was simply to be named 'David' — that he only needed one name.

She said, 'What about giving him a second name, like "Bruce?"'

I said, 'I don't want him to have a second name'. She went on and on about how "Bruce" would be a great second name. I kept telling her he wasn't to have a second name. Finally, after much arguing, she left.

Twenty years later, when I applied for my papers under the F.O.I. Act, I discovered that she had named my baby 'David Bruce' and that my son's new father was Bruce. It was certainly a 'well-oiled system'. I also found out that the woman, Ms Williams, worked for L J Harvey Solicitors ('Carramar's' solicitor). It was just another example of how my voice wasn't heard and my son was destined for other parents, irrespective of what his real parents wanted.

The whole consent process had become a charade to placate the parliament. The papers were signed in Matron Jones' head the day I arrived on her doorstep. I had become a non-person and a non-mother from that day on.

The woman who I thought was from the Registrar General's office was really a consent taker. A person who takes the signature of a mother who is to relinquish her child for adoption. Ms Williams witnessed my signature on the fourth day after my son's birth. She said they would date the document later. Before I signed, I mentioned about needing a solicitor to proofread the document before signing.

'You don't need a solicitor. That's not necessary at all. This is very straightforward', she said.

'I will need a copy of the document as well', I ventured.

'No. We can't give you a copy of the document', she said.

At no time was I treated as though I was the legal guardian of my child.

'But my father said if I ever sign anything, I must keep a copy of what I have signed.'

'No, I can't leave a copy with you. Rules.' Sometimes, it was fortuitous for her to remind me that there were 'rules' to all of this.

22 May 1963 **Bomadorm 200 mgs**

23 May 1963 **Bomadorm 100 mgs** 9 pm

24 May 1963 **Bomadorm 100 mgs** 9 pm

I thought of what the 'lovely couple' might need of me to help them give David every opportunity, so I wrote a family history of two foolscap pages, outlining our professional interests, hobbies, illnesses and particular quirks. I was worried that if he was bright, they may not send him to University, and he may become bitter. I gave the list to the Matron to give them next time she saw them.

25 May 1963 **Bomadorm 200 mgs** (to settle)

I determined that, as it was my last day in the hospital, I would endeavour to go up to the ward where my son was. This time, I went up when it was busy, in the hope that I could get a look at my son, almost by default. I said the name 'David Benson'. When the nurse realised he was a BFA (baby for adoption), she just said, 'Sorry, it is hospital policy and I cannot identify him'.

I looked over to the window ledge where two babies were in humidicribs next to each other. I couldn't see them because the ends of the cribs were facing the viewing window.

Shirley Jones ignored me and my wishes. Ms Williams ignored me and my wishes. The labour ward staff not only ignored me but physically assaulted and restrained me. The nursery staff ignored me and treated me with contempt.

There was a chain that went from my father to Matron Jones to the hospital to the new parents. I had been wiped out of the chain altogether. I began to see that if I was lucky, I might get out of the hospital with my life, but that would be all.

I cannot remember leaving the hospital. I do not remember arriving at 'Carramar'. But I do remember taking the plane out of Sydney and my father's ashen face as he picked me up at the airport.

My fiancé's mother signed our 'permission to marry' papers on the same day I signed the adoption consent papers. The consent papers were dated the day after signing. I was not aware that the consent to marry papers had been signed.

Then three weeks later we married on the 8th June, 1963 at the Auburn Registry office. Two strangers witnessed our signatures. I rang the Matron to let her know and as if to say, 'See, my fiancé did return. You were wrong — I did get married', and then I asked her about my son.

She said, 'I wouldn't know how he's going. I have nothing more to do with him. He's gone with his new family'.

Twenty years later, under FOI, I discovered that my little boy was in a humidicrib for over six weeks, so Shirley Jones would have known exactly how he was going.

My spirit was broken. I felt physically alive but spiritually dead.

I believe that she was well aware that my son's adoption was illegal, as she was a Justice of the Peace, and she had submitted documents to the Supreme Court, under oath, that she knew were incorrect. Under FOI, I discovered that my son's adoption was not finalised until October 1963, four months after Nick and I were married.

Epilogue

My story is to dispel the myth of Christian charity that the Anglican Church would have you believe permeated the establishments of the 1960s and 70s. 'Carramar' was nothing more than an incarceration facility for the extraction of young women's babies. Only if you tried to leave, as I did, would you discover the real truth.

Shirley Jones ruled over her 'farm,' for this was surely a baby farm; her 'partners in crime' were the staff of the Maternity Ward at the Hornsby and District Hospital.

As a training hospital, many young women did their midwifery at Hornsby. Shirley Jones kept the babies coming, Hornsby got the government grants to build up its teaching facility and attract new nurses, and the matrons of both establishments built reputations on the smooth flowing systematic extraction of babies from their mothers.

Not even Lindy Chamberlain gave birth handcuffed to the labour ward bed, as I did.

I request that the Statute of Limitations be overturned in relation to women whose babies were taken against their will and intention.

I request that those who were a party to the gross denial of human rights of myself and others, face charges of child theft, and be made to acknowledge their participation in: -

- *assault and abduction*
- *failure in their duty of care*
- *fraud in relation to extrapolation and interpretation of the law*
- *administration of massive overdoses of psychotropic drugs*
- *denial and interference of common law rights of a mother to her baby*
- *neglect of the psychological wellbeing of mother and baby*

- *the signing of false declarations in their capacity as Justices of the Peace. In other words, perjury.*

'Carramar Babies'

'The Catwoman of Carramar Silenced'

Afterthought: 'Carramar' was demolished in or around 1984. It was owned and managed by the Church of England Home Mission Society in 1963. In her affidavit [sworn] to the NSW Supreme Court in 2001, Shirley Jones claimed not to remember anything she said, or the person to whom she was claimed to have said it. Yet the person she could not recall was an inmate at 'Carramar' for four months, and occupied the room across the hall from her. She is represented without a mouth so that no-one will have to endure her conniving lies ever again.

Margaret Watson's oral testimony

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES
Report 21 June 2000
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GR: The adoption industry took the support away from the mothers, you have got to remember, they deliberately isolated them from support; that is the way that they took the babies, the lack of support was really an integral and one of the most powerful parts of their plan of taking babies.

(Extract from an interview with Dr Geoff Rickarby, 9 August 2007)

Ms WATSON: Yes. I need to preface my response by stating that what I am about to say or the following information came from my mother, my adoptive family and my Crown Street medical file. I was born in November 1949 in Crown Street Women's Hospital to a single woman who was then aged 22 years, who had arrived in Australia as a child migrant. On arrival in Australia she was placed into the care of the Fairbridge Foundation in Western Australia. It is my understanding from her information to me that she also spent some time in the care of a Catholic establishment where she described conditions and treatment of the children as being extremely harsh. She ran away from this establishment and boarded with a Perth family until joining the army, from which she was medically discharged in Sydney due to severe bronchitis. She commenced a relationship which she hoped would result in marriage and which resulted in my conception. Her partner deserted her on learning of her pregnancy.

My mother was without any family in Australia and it was her intention to keep me following my birth. A Crown Street doctor suggested to my mother that he and his wife adopt me. My mother refused this offer and another, when the same doctor suggested that my mother go and live with him and with me, and that she could be employed as the housekeeper of he and his wife. [Social worker 1] was a hospital social worker assigned to my mother and she was a friend of my adoptive family. Following my mother's rejection of the doctor's offer, [social worker 1] continually criticised my mother for her personal and financial inadequacies in supporting a baby. Prior to and at the time of my birth, my mother was in receipt of a sickness benefit for severe bronchitis. No advice was given to her on other benefits possibly available to her to support herself and the baby. I was breastfed by my mother in hospital following my birth and one day [social worker 1] informed her that she had a family who wanted a child and that I was going to be that child. I was removed from my mother.

With this and subsequent actions, I believe that I was stolen from my mother. My mother left the hospital nine days after my birth. I was informed by adoptive relatives that my adoptive parents then collected me from Crown Street Hospital when I was six weeks old.

I have obtained my medical file from the hospital, which contains the document stating, 'Mother and baby discharged together on 28 November 1949. Baby weaned from breast onto lactogen'. At no time was I discharged from hospital with my mother. This document begs the question: Why would a baby being breastfed and discharged with its mother be weaned from the breast onto a formula? I consider that document was completed to conceal the private arrangement organised by [social worker 1] for my adoptive family whom, I am sure, would have been reliant on [her] actions and totally unaware of any

probable illegalities in the situation which involved my mother not giving her consent for my adoption. [Social worker 1] later became my godmother and I had to endure many holidays spent with her following her retirement. I was instructed to address her as Grandma [...]. We did not get along. We had a major personality clash. I am sure that her role of godmother was as a reward for her procuring me for my adoptive family.

CHAIR: Can you explain, particularly given what you have just said, the signing of the consent document for your adoption as told to you by your birth mother?

Ms WATSON: My mother stated she did not give consent, nor did she sign any documents connected with the giving of her consent to my adoption. It was her intention to keep me with her and my medical file documents her request to see me the day following my birth. Within a year of my birth, she married a man who was not my father. However she informed him about me and he accepted that. Following their marriage, they travelled from their home in Melbourne back to Crown Street Hospital to reclaim me. They were informed by hospital staff that I had been adopted and it was suggested that they forget about me, go away and commence a family of their own. I was informed by a staff member of the Supreme Court that a signed adoption consent form dated July or August 1950 was on my adoption file. My mother stated she signed no such consent document and was in fact residing in Victoria at that time when it is alleged to have been signed and completed. My adoption became final in December 1950.

CHAIR: Do you want to say any more about that? What you have told us is all that you can tell us really?

Ms WATSON: That is right.

CHAIR: That is all you can tell us about the implications?

Ms WATSON: I do not have a copy of my adoption order. I have not seen the documents.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you believe it was forged?

Ms WATSON: I can only go on the information I was given and the information that is in my medical file, which I clearly feel covers up the fact that mine was a private adoption.

CHAIR: And there were the inconsistencies between being discharged with your mother and adoption some months later?

Ms WATSON: Yes, absolutely.

CHAIR: Can you describe the manner in which you discovered that you were adopted?

Ms WATSON: Yes. My husband of 12 years left our marriage in 1990. Two weeks after separating, he informed me he had known for those 12 years of my adoption, having been told about it by my adoptive father a few days prior to our marriage. This information was not imparted to me in a kind or supportive manner. It was delivered in hostility and anger and, I think, as a way of my husband relieving himself of the burden he considered this information to be and had chosen to carry for 12 years. I acknowledge it was always the responsibility of my adoptive parents to disclose this truth to me. My adoptive father did not request that my husband keep this information a secret from me. At the time it was disclosed to me, both my adoptive parents had died.

I can only assume that my adoptive father could not bring himself to tell me the truth due to his failing health, advanced age and the fact that I was his only remaining family

member. That may have caused him to fear and believe that I may have rejected him with the telling of the truth.

CHAIR: How did you respond to that news of your adoption? What do you think are the short- and the long-term consequences of adoption for you?

Ms WATSON: My immediate response was one of shock and overwhelming sense of betrayal. There was also a feeling of disbelief, while at the same time knowing that this information about me was correct. I think in a deep spiritual and psychic level, I had always known the truth because I do not bear any resemblance to my adoptive family and had grown up with feelings of not belonging in that family as there was no-one who looked like me. I had also asked my adoptive parents on at least two occasions I can recall if I had been adopted and they had said no that I was not.

My sense of betrayal on receiving the news about being adopted was highlighted when, on contacting family members and family friends, all of them confirmed that they had known about my adoption all my life. I felt like my life and marriage had been built on lies of omission. In the short term, I had great difficulty trying to reconcile this truth about myself. I was grappling with the ending of my marriage, which I had not wanted, and I was faced with my identity of 40 years disintegrating simultaneously.

I went from being a highly functioning and competent wife, mother and professional person to one who had trouble getting upright each day to face the day. I became seriously depressed. I lost 10 kilos in a short time. I was unable to eat. I experienced panic attacks and was eventually diagnosed with post-traumatic stress syndrome. I rode an emotional roller coaster with feelings of rage, fear, anger, terror, despair, worthlessness and, for the first time in my life, I seriously contemplated suicide. Also at the same time I was attempting to keep my young sons, who were then aged five and 10, on an emotional even keel as they were distressed by their father's departure and then they had to face the changes in their mother.

In moving from the short to the long term, I have chosen to involve myself first in counselling for about 18 months and then five years of intense psychotherapy. This has not been an easy journey. However, it is one that has brought me enormous challenges, personal growth and insights into myself and my behaviour and my place in the world. It has also been extremely necessary to rebuild and find my new sense of identity and who I am. My therapy has facilitated a greater sense of healing, integration, acceptance, strength, self worth, and inner peace. I have also discovered that a lifelong free-flowing sense of anxiety I have experienced from time to time, which has always been intensified when I am separated from those I love, is the direct result of my removal from my mother. I have also formed the opinion that adoption is not the real enemy.

Adoption is the final act in the most profound and damaging process, that is, the severing of the unique bond between mother and child. It is in that first and savage separation of mother and child that the foundation is laid for what, in so many people affected, are future emotional, psychological, physical, somatic and relationship difficulties which I have already heard described this morning. It is a wound and a gaping hole of the heart and soul that many mothers and adoptees carry for the rest of their lives unless they seek and receive appropriate assistance. I think it is barbaric to remove or steal a child from its natural mother and then expect that child to bond or re-attach to another woman or other care-givers without any resulting trauma or difficulties. In my situation — and I believe it was as a result of being left in the hospital for six weeks following my birth — I had a very difficult relationship with my adoptive mother. Despite all my physical and material needs being attended to, I never felt loved by her or even loving towards her. I believe that we failed to bond and attach with each other. Having said that, my experience with my

adoptive father and grandmother was completely different, as I always felt their love, approval and acceptance, and was able to reattach to them with mutuality and reciprocity.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Could you tell the Committee about your 2 ½ -year search for your mother?

Ms WATSON: I discovered that I had a very strong obsessive streak with my search. Given the circumstances of my adoption revelation, I was left feeling extremely fragile and vulnerable, and I think I disintegrated pretty much to a very child-like state where I just wanted a mother to pick me up, look after me, and make life okay again. The search was extremely frustrating, time consuming, lonely, and emotionally and financially draining. It began a year prior to the *Adoption Information Act* being proclaimed in 1991, so I was only able to access my then non-identifying information from the Department of Community Services. It seemed that there was one shock after another, as I learnt my mother was French, possibly Jewish, and possibly an evacuee. As I had been raised in an Anglo-Saxon Protestant family, this information was very difficult to comprehend and integrate.

I constantly felt I was living in a story that belonged to someone else. Armed with only my mother's two names, I followed my intuition and began searching the electoral roll of the State Library. I also approached organisations and Jewish welfare organisations which had brought children and people to Australia as evacuees after World War II, and I spent three days in Canberra in the archives searching immigration and shipping manifest records. I was also greatly assisted by the efforts of Bob Miller, who was then the Deputy Registrar in Births, Deaths and Marriages and well-known for his humanity and expertise to those attempting to navigate a search.

When the adoption laws changed, I was delighted to receive my original [birth] certificate, and at last I had some more complete information with which I could search. However, I was still unable to find my mother through the usual channels, as I was later to discover that she had changed her first name and had married and this had taken place interstate and I was only searching in New South Wales at that time.

I also wrote to the Department of Births, Deaths and Marriages in Marseilles, France, her place of birth as stated on my birth certificate. However, a response from there was also unable to find a record of her birth.

Finally again, through relying on my intuition and after reading an article about the forthcoming ABC documentary *The Leaving of Liverpool*, I contacted the Child Migrant Trust in Melbourne. A researcher there assisted me in my search and felt my mother's two names were English, although her surname was French. He contacted Births, Deaths and Marriages in Nottingham, who did a search and found her birth registered in London. Her birth certificate was then forwarded to me by the Child Migrant Trust, and a week later the ABC documentary *The Leaving of Liverpool* was screened.

This was followed by my mother also visiting the offices of the Child Migrant Trust in Melbourne to request that they obtain a birth certificate, as she had never had one. The person she first spoke to at the Child Migrant Trust was the researcher who had assisted me. He immediately realised who she was, and she was invited to have an interview and to return the following day.

It was during her second interview that she revealed having had a child taken from her. The Child Migrant Trust was able to tell her that I had contacted the trust and was searching for her. Our reunion followed that. It was quite miraculous.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: In your submission, you say that the first six months after the reunion you experienced a honeymoon phase. Could you explain to the Committee the different stages in the development of your relationship with your birth mother?

Ms WATSON: We were both overjoyed to find each other and to have a reunion. The feeling was similar to falling in love: of wanting to constantly be with and know everything about the other person. There was a lot of discovering to do. After all, we had 42 ½ years to catch up on. We found that we had a lot of likes, dislikes and personal standards and principles in common and that we shared a great love of music, dancing, reading, even down to a love of eating salmon. The greatest joy for me was to look into her face and to see someone I resembled and therefore to know where I had come from. My mother's greatest sadness was that I had never known about my adoption, and she was extremely distressed at learning about how I had been told.

Within the first six months of the reunion, she and her husband visited my sons and me in Sydney, and it was very touching to see the acceptance my sons showed them both. Three months later, the relationship seemed to change after the boys and I visited them again in Melbourne. I think my mother had difficulty dealing with the emotional confrontation of her past revisiting her. She also continually told me, 'They have done a good job of you', referring to my adoptive family. I think this and similar comments showed her lack of self-esteem. She would often speak to me of the poor treatment she received in Crown Street Women's Hospital, which had caused her to feel shame and disgrace at her circumstances.

Despite our verbalisations that we wanted to maintain regular phone contact after that visit, phone calls would only be initiated by me. I could not understand her distancing, and for the first time I felt angry and rejected by her behaviour, which was without any explanation from her. There was a five-year period when we did not see each other and I would phone her on Mother's Day and at Christmas. While she seemed pleased to receive my calls, there was never any explanation as to why she did not contact me. I last saw her in December 1997. My last conversation with her was in November 1998, when she was quite ill and I offered to visit her, which she declined. She died in January this year.

The Hon. D. F. MOPPETT: You explain in your submission that, 'My adoption into a good family, despite it possibly being illegal, gave me a decent, loving upbringing amongst caring people who instilled in me the values I consider important'. With the knowledge you now have of your mother's circumstances, do you think that she did the right thing for herself and for you?

Ms WATSON: I do not think she had a choice; I think the system made a choice for her. I do not believe she was in a position to oppose the dominance of [social worker 1], whom I experienced when I was growing up to be very authoritarian and bossy. My mother also had NO advocates by way of family members or partner to support her in her desire to keep me. I think the whole experience for her was devastating. After she left the hospital, she travelled to Wagga Wagga, where she met her future husband. I believe that the experience indelibly affected her health. She had major health problems, and she also developed an excessive use of alcohol. My half-sister recalls growing up with her mother frequently crying for no apparent reason, being very distracted and seemingly unhappy. My mother had already lost her own family of origin, and the loss of her firstborn probably continually triggered those other losses. So I do not think the situation was the best for her.

Having said that, ever since I learnt of her existence as my mother by birth, I have only ever felt compassion for her and never experienced anger at her for not keeping me with her. Perhaps it was due to learning of my adoption in mid-life, as hopefully I had had a

broad range of life experiences and compassion myself, and as a mother myself I was better equipped to understand her situation. Having had my own children, I just cannot imagine the emotional suffering she must have experienced at having her child taken from her. I also think her emotional suffering, grief and loss were enormous for her to carry for 42 ½ years before our reunion. I had only known for 2 ½ years, and that was traumatic enough for me.

'When we were One' by Jayne Miller

Before meeting you by Jayne Miller

Why is it that I feel
We have not yet really met
Eye to eye
Mouth to mouth.
Is it because you have yet
So much to learn about
Yourself and so much travelling to do?
Or is it that you have to
Return to the fork in your road
Before you started
Taking the easy way out,
Over the cliff, to avoid the abyss.

Sometimes I feel we are having our
First ever conversations,
And it is our first day
Of discovering each other,
When you tell me the history
Of your life, and of life itself,
As your soul sees it.

Why has it taken
So long to find your voice?
Where did you lose it?
We have been on a long journey
To find your own unique feeling tone,
As the vehicle of your heart
And the spokesperson of your soul.

So great has been your pain,
So deep has been your longing,
So long has been your loneliness
Since then, even from yourself.

And now as the tears
Wash the grimace from the mask
That covers your lovely face,
I see the radiance come back into your
smile.

I watch you carefully
From my inner window.
I know you are
As fragile as a leaf
Upon the wind.

Still curled upon yourself,
The embryonic beginnings of your
Self-awareness
Unfolding bit by bit,
Painfully,

And with miraculous effort.

As though you are trying to lift a
mountain,
So great are the burdens
You have placed upon yourself.

And yet all the time,
I have been beside you
Also waiting for you to,
Rediscover yourself,
The real YOU.

Like the genie
Or the magician
That you wish you were,
Your real self
Offers you
The magic that you need,
To transform yourself
And emerge from your cocoon.

Maybe when you too have become a
butterfly
Or a mother,
Or even as powerful as
A winged spirit of the universe you will
then find me too
And realise
I was hovering,
Waiting for you to emerge
For a long time.

Only then will we
Be able to look into the mirror
Of each others eyes
And say 'I understand'.

Only then will our
Thoughts and feelings
Become again as one,
Complete and timeless,
And we will not need to
Speak our minds in words alone.

Only then will our
Mouths belong
And we remember where
We met before,
And have no fear of
What may follow

Or from where,
And of waiting for too long.

So for now
I'll write your story
And sing your song.
I'll cradle you in my heart
So that nothing can go wrong.

I'll be the nightwatchman
At your temple gate.
I'll tell you who comes back and forth lest
you hear it far too late.

And I won't give up my duty
Though I'm weary to the bone
I won't desert you
While you're waiting
For your spirit to come home.

Carmel's story

I grew up in the western suburbs of Sydney, as one of seven children with a strict Catholic upbringing. Every night, my father would read a story from the Bible; we loved to hear the stories. My mother was always cooking or doing something for one of us. It was a very hard life for her. We were not a rich family. My father was suffering from tuberculosis, which he contracted during World War II.

In May 1970, my father died. It was very sad for all of us; mum had two younger children to look after. I was nearly 17 and pregnant to my boyfriend, John, who was the same age. We had met whilst attending adjoining Catholic schools which we both left in 1969. I was very nervous about telling my mother I was pregnant because she had enough to worry about. When I finally did, she was very upset and angry with John. John's parents insisted on holding a meeting. At their place, we sat at the dining room table to discuss the first grandchild of both families. There was a lot of anger and tears at the meeting. John's parents had it all worked out before we arrived. They mentioned a home for unmarried mothers called St Anthony's at Croydon in Sydney, and they said the baby should be adopted out. Though upset and angry, my mum agreed. John was about to start a career in the police force and thought he could not support a wife and child at his age of 18, so he also agreed. I had no say at all in the matter and with no source of support from anyone; I had to do what was arranged.

My mother wanted me to go to St Anthony's straight away so my brothers and sisters would not find out I was pregnant. Mum told them I went to Queensland for a holiday because, coming from a Catholic family, my mother was very conscious of other people's opinions, especially our local priest who would usually visit us at home on a regular basis.

I arrived at St Anthony's in August 1970. My baby was due in early January of 1971 and I remember on my arrival that the nun who was in charge told me I had to take a different name because there was another 'Carmel' in there already. They said, 'We will call you Lorraine here', which was my second name. I said I would rather that they didn't, so they then suggested they refer to me as 'Carmel R', to which I agreed.

The other girls there were a mixture of ages and backgrounds. The first room they put me in was temporary. It was very large with a very high ceiling. I cried most of the night but I did not get any sympathy from the nuns. To them, I was a sinner. I was moved to a closed-in veranda, which had sections curtained off from each other; the area was big enough for a bed and a set of drawers and that was my space for the rest of my time there.

We were given work to do in the kitchen, laundry or residents' quarters. At first, my duties were to sweep and polish the floors in the residents' quarters. The polishing was hard because it was one of those polishers that, when turned on, it would go its own way if you did not have enough strength to control it, which I barely did.

I had just one day off a week, and I was told what day that would be. At first, my day was Sunday. John would visit me and take me out. The nuns soon found out my guest was the father of my baby, and so stopped my Sunday visits. We were constantly told that our babies were going to good families because we could not look after them on our own, and that it was the best thing to do for our baby and for us. When I think back, I wonder if they already had someone in mind to adopt my baby. We were unmarried and apparently that meant we had no rights at all.

My day off then became a Wednesday. My mother would visit me every Wednesday with chocolates and sweets, which were forbidden at St Anthony's. We would walk to Burwood shops and have lunch, and on one occasion, mum even bought me a maternity dress. I

think back now and wonder how hard it was for mum to cope with my father's death, two young children at school and my situation.

I later had a job in the laundry putting sheets and clothes through a large wringer. It was a very hot and steamy chore. I had to work to stay fit so I could have a healthy baby. I didn't mind the work because it meant I had something to do.

Some of the girls were nice but I did not make any lasting friendships. I remember one girl who had a nine pound baby girl. Her family and boyfriend came from another state to visit her and give support. She was one of the lucky ones who actually went home with her baby.

I do not remember if I had a meeting with a social worker while I was at St Anthony's.

I went into labour on 2 November in 1970. I was taken to St Margaret's Hospital in Sydney by ambulance, where I had a 35 hour labour. I lay face down on the bed, which had a hole in the middle of it that I could breathe through. All the way through the labour, I wondered if the pain was my punishment for getting pregnant. I had an epidural, anaesthesia and then a forceps delivery. I had a son who was delivered six weeks premature and I was not allowed to see him. He was put straight into a humidicrib.

It felt like forever that I was left in the labour ward. I was then put into a room on my own with an intravenous drip in my arm. I asked if I could see my son. The answer was 'No'.

There is a lot I can't remember now, but I do know that my chest was bound tight everyday. I now have my medical records, which showed I was given medication for reasons I still don't know. When I was able to, I went for a walk to find my son. I cannot remember if I went up or down in an elevator but I found him in a room in the humidicrib. The nurses on that ward let me see him because they did not know my son was to be adopted. I counted his fingers and his toes and just stared at him for a very long time. He was a beautiful baby.

My time wandering the wards of St Margaret's Hospital was soon over. I can remember the day I left was 13 November 1970. On leaving the hospital, I had to fill out a birth certificate for my baby. I named him Matthew John. And I never saw him again. I left the hospital in a taxi with another girl, to return to St Anthony's.

At St Anthony's, I was asked to sign a form. Mum said 'just sign it, just sign it. The sooner you get on with your life, the better'. When we arrived home, my mum told me that when she was visiting me in hospital, she went to see her grandson. She stood outside the door where he was and asked to see him. The nursing sister on duty that day told mum my baby had died. Mum did not question the Catholic hospital and we never spoke of my son again. I now wonder whether my mother thought it was a death certificate that I was signing that day.

In 1973, I married my first son's father, John, and had another son whom we called Joseph. He was my life. After five years, my marriage to John was over. John and I remained friends but he did not know of our baby's death. Joey grew up as an only child until he was 16.

In 1985, I met a lovely man who I married some years later and had another two children with. I told him about my past. He seemed suspicious about the hospital telling my mum that my son died, but not telling me the same thing. I was very naive in the 1970s and was taught not to question the Catholic Church. Who would have thought the nuns representing the Catholic Church would deliberately lie about such an important and heart-wrenching issue?

In the late 1980s, I decided to find out about Matthew. I made an appointment with the Catholic Adoption Agency in Sydney and while they did not tell me his new name, they did say that the last time they saw him, he was around 18 months old, and was happy and healthy with his adoptive parents and adopted baby sister.

I cried. She was not sympathetic, but asked me why I was enquiring about him after all these years had passed? She would not give me any information about Matthew, as the law prevented it. I could not believe he was alive and thought my mother must have made up the story. But after quizzing my mother, she assured me that they definitely told her my baby had died, which led me to believe the hospital staff had lied to her.

When the laws changed, I sought information about Peter, which was the name my son was given by his adoptive parents. I found an adoption support group in my area and they helped me find him. Joey was in England playing cricket at the time I found Peter. He was delighted to hear about his brother, and Peter was very happy to hear that he had a full-blood brother. His adoptive parents told him at a very young age that he was adopted and for that, I am very grateful.

Our first meeting was scary. Peter and Joey are very much alike in many ways. They became friends the very weekend they met. We keep in contact with each other, despite having many unresolved feelings to deal with. I am happily married with an 11 year old daughter and another son aged eight. Peter is now 30 and Joey is 27.

If mum had been able to see her first grandson, Peter, when she had asked to and seen how beautiful he was I wonder now if she would have changed her mind and insisted that we keep him!

'Tablets from the Mount'

A work in progress — Jenny's story

JM: You just stated that mothers were literally brainwashed into believing they were doing the best thing by their babies if they gave them up; what did this 'brainwashing' entail?

GR: The brainwashing process went on fairly subtly; it created quite a lot of beliefs and some of the people who were brainwashed still hold those beliefs ... the brainwashing is the problem the psychiatrist has to deal with later ... 'I am not a person who could be a mother ... I am not an okay person, I am an incapable person, look what happened to my life ... '. They believed the brainwashing, and believing the brainwashing, like a post- hypnotic suggestion, has been part of their mental illness as well as the loss of the baby ...

So there was a whole lot of adoption manoeuvring and people were being groomed in a systematic kind of way, in a type of brainwashing way, to prepare them that they were not going to keep the baby, that it was a great thing that they were doing to give up the baby ...

Well they got brainwashed into that, that they were choosing, this was what they were choosing — was best for the baby. They would paint a glorious life with an adoptive family who were wealthy or would provide very well, bring up the baby very well. All of these adoptive families were very idealised.

(Extract from an interview with Dr Geoff Rickarby, 9 August 2007)

This is my story. It is the story of a mother who lost her firstborn son to adoption. It is an immensely personal story and yet contains moments which, for some mothers, will prompt recognition.

I am mindful that it is not every mother's story and I have no intent to impose what I am writing upon another's personal experiences. Rather, my writing is to give recognition to my eldest son, to acknowledge my loss — a loss which has carried with it an overwhelming, life-pervading and complicated grief, which I have struggled with, in its defiance of resolution. I am also writing to reveal a little of the deep wound this loss has inflicted upon my being; to challenge its power and in so doing, to continue the healing process.

As I write, it is the beginning of the year 2000; a time in which societal attitudes permit acceptance and support for the single mother, a time of new reproductive technologies, a time of international adoption. It is a time of legislation granting the possibility of reunion between members of birth families separated long ago. It is the year in which I will celebrate the sixth anniversary of reuniting with my firstborn son. From this vantage point, I invite you to turn and visit with me my story of adoption loss.

Travelling back in time through the 31 years of marriage and beyond, I would like to indicate to you some of my most significant life events. The pleasure of knowing my eldest son; the reunion experience, the search process and the stirrings which prompted my search; the death of each of my parents and their times of illness; the years of loving and parenting my subsequent three children; the precious moments of their births; my wedding day. I would then beckon you more slowly, tentatively, back to the year 1964.

1964 saw me standing on the threshold of adulthood, an exciting and yet terrifying time. It was the year the Beatles came to town, the year of my final high school exams, a year of

experiences; of being a school prefect, house captain, class captain and the year of my 17th birthday.

While many of my peers had their sights set upon further studies, the future beckoned me rapidly towards the roles of wife and mother, roles for which my father had diligently prepared me throughout my childhood. His dissatisfaction with life and love and ineptitude in relationships had declared itself in his tutelage of me, his youngest child, giving expression to his own yearnings for a woman who would unceasingly dedicate herself to his every need. At my father's bidding, I accepted there was no future for me, other than that of a wife — his interpretation of this role deeply embedded within me. Considering his attitude towards me, his assertions that I was sadly lacking intelligence and the fact that I had found Ross, the love of my life, who today is my husband, it is not surprising that 1964 was also the year I experienced my first pregnancy.

November of that year remains etched in my memory as containing events, moments, which were to change my life forever.

Even as I begin to write this, vivid and painful memories force their way into my mind, transporting me back through the decades to re-experience the impact these moments had upon me, evoking responses felt in my emotions, my body, my whole being.

I am transported to the morning I woke to a world barely recognisable from the one in which my body had surrendered to sleep.

While I was sleeping and my baby growing within me, my mother, perhaps prompted by suspicion or in an attempt to discover more about the daughter with whom she had never sought intimacy, had sifted through my school things. Tucked away among them was a loving and beautiful letter from Ross, revealing my pregnant state and his pleasure about our forming child. She read the letter. When a teenager herself, my mother's dreams and opportunities for an academic future had been shattered by her own mother, my grandmother, who held to the conventions of the female role. Long imprisoned, my mother's bitter disappointment found release.

Rage. Shame. White hot rage.

Her judgement and subsequent sentence fell upon all three of us, shattering dreams and severing relationships. I was banished to a distant place, Ross was barred from contact with me and our child's future was dictated. The baby would be adopted.

Cold... black... despair.

Rejection. Isolation. Desperation. Desolation.
Exercise. Eat well. Take care of my developing child.

Terror. Sorrow. Beyond tears. Beyond words. Survive.
Labour. Birth. Beautiful son. Exhilaration. Baby taken. Emptiness. Darkness. Despair.

Papers signed. Deal done. My life given for him.

At his grandmother's behest, and his mother's submission, my tiny, newborn son was cut loose from his history and his mother's love and set adrift into the unknown. I returned to my parents' home, to all appearances the same 17 year old who had left six months before. Physically, I had survived; my inner self had suffered deeply and was desperately wounded. It was to remain so through three decades; unseen, undiscovered, unacknowledged, untended, unhealed.

1994 saw my youngest child, my daughter, standing on the threshold of adulthood, an exciting and yet terrifying time. It was the year of her final high school exams, a year of experiences; of being a school prefect and drama captain; it was the year of her 17th birthday. Similarities complete, my daughter continued, loved and supported, into her own chosen future. Loving her, observing her, noticing the fragility of her youth, stirred deep memories of my own 17th year. Scrutinising those memories for the first time from the perspective of my own parenthood, I saw how harsh, cold and punishing my mother had been when I had needed her the most. I was left with one overwhelming and lasting question: 'Did my mother ever love me?' Sorrow and bewilderment attended me, as I recognised myself at 17, saw my deep wounding, began to feel my pain. My healing had, at last, begun.

The years between my 17th birthday and my own daughter's, were years of normality, containing experiences shared by many women of my era — experiences of childbirth and parenting, of family life, of birthdays and birthday parties, of tuckshop duty and helping in the classroom, of homework, school sport, of university students, assignments and exams, of weddings and funerals — to all appearances, ordinary years. All have, in some form, contained the presence of my eldest son; a presence of my own creation. I held fast to the belief that I had given my son the best. I had been prepared to give my life for his. This was the cost for me — a small cost for his happiness.

Looking back across those years, I see the spoiling presence of sorrow and anxiety working their will upon me — tainting my pleasures, distorting my perspective, marring relationships. Burdened by a deep sense of worthlessness, of not deserving or belonging in my own good life, my constant fear was that of losing those I loved — a fear that they, too, would be snatched away. My experience of loss at age 17, of being required to give too much, had left its heartbreaking imprint upon every aspect of my life, my being. Not only was I in desperate need of healing, my life was in need of repair.

I embarked, hesitantly at first, upon a journey to discover the lost fragments of my self — of creativity, intellect, spirituality and personality. As these fragments were discovered, gathered and explored, I found myself reforming and in doing so, repositioning within my own life, experiencing at once both freedom and security. It has been an amazing journey thus far — my particular and courageous journey. I am travelling its path at this precise moment and will continue along it. My journey began the year my daughter turned 17; the year I began to search for my firstborn.

You may think the search for my own son was for my own healing — it was not so. Long believing that I had released him into a perfect life, I was loath to consider searching, having no wish to intrude upon his happy existence. Reluctance to disturb his familiar presence locked tightly in its secret place in my own life encouraged my inaction. These factors aside, I could never have searched to fulfil my own desires — remember, I believed myself to be worthless. Permission to begin was ultimately granted by the entirely new realisation that my son may have been asking the same compelling question I had asked: 'Did my mother ever love me?' His question could not go unanswered.

Reunion is an experience which defies description, holding within it the intertwining emotions of joy and sadness — joy magnified by loss, sadness deepened by recognition of the immensity of that loss. I had surrendered a baby named Simon, to meet a young man named Robert. Thirty years had passed and were gone; irretrievably so — years that we might have shared. I had lost my baby son and so much more. This unique and precious person's life had been lived out in separateness, from his history, from all the members of his birth family. I mourn my own loss and Robert's — all the while sharing the present with him, discovering him, loving him, continuing the eminently worthwhile work of our relationship.

In the telling of my story, you have been introduced to some of the people who have featured in my life; have heard some of my deeply personal experiences and have been permitted to glimpse the way those experiences have impacted upon me. The work undertaken in writing this will be done, unlike the other and most important work I have embarked upon. This work — of reforming myself, of feeling my sorrows and my joys, of loving those closest to me, now including my eldest son — will remain my work in progress.

Secrets

Reflecting back in time to the early 1960s when I was a teenager, everything was so different from modern times. In those days 'good' girls went steady, got engaged, got married and then had children — in that order. If a girl got pregnant back then, they didn't have many choices. They either had to get married in a hurry, have an abortion, or go to an unmarried mothers home and have their child adopted out.

Back then, it was very rare for girls who were unsupported, who were abandoned, or who had broken up with their boyfriend, been raped or even had casual sex, to keep their baby, stay home and be supported by their family. It was a time when the impressions of neighbours and friends mattered more than they should; it was a time of being a disgrace to your family. Today, everything is different. There is so much help and support for unwed or single mothers, allowing them to keep their child without being made to feel ashamed or judged for the decision.

I can remember going to the doctor and being told I was over two months pregnant. I was devastated, as I was no longer with my boyfriend at that stage, and I'd no idea I was pregnant. When I told my parents, they got very angry and upset.

I was told I would have to go away until it was over because of the disgrace to the family, and that I'd have to give my baby up for adoption and only then I'd be allowed to return home.

At that time of my life, I had no self-confidence or self-esteem. I was 20 but I was unable to stand up for myself, especially against my parents, so I just did what I was told. Inevitably, I ended up going to Sydney from Brisbane, and St Anthony's Home at Croydon became my home for the next six months or so. I felt so numb, I just did what they all told me to do.

So home became a dormitory shared with 15 to 20 other girls, all in similar situations. We each had a small cupboard and bed with a curtain separating us from each other. The government paid us sickness benefits, which, in turn, went straight to St Anthony's. We worked six days a week doing cleaning, laundry and kitchen work. A doctor used to visit us for check ups and there was a nursing sister who lived with us.

My job was in the laundry. It was a real culture shock to me at the beginning, as I had only ever worked in an office, but I soon got used to it. Years later, when *Prisoner* was on television, I remember it making me think of my time in the St Anthony's laundry.

We were often told that we were doing the right thing by giving up our babies because we could not give them a good life or the things they needed, and these people, who could not have children of their own, really wanted a baby. We were told they had a house, good jobs, were of the highest integrity and could give our children everything we could not. We were also told that once this was over, we should just put it out of our mind because we could have more children later and, therefore, we should just get on with our lives.

In hindsight, I don't know why I believed anything they said. I guess it was because they were nuns and people of authority and so surely they wouldn't lie. How wrong I was. I know one thing — they sure didn't tell us our rights, or that we would never feel 'whole' again, or that our lives would never be the same, or that it would affect us for as long as we live, or that the pain of the loss would never go away.

They told us: 'God never gives us anything we can't handle'. Well, he sure tested me at that time and it still affects me nearly 40 years later; and I know a lot of other mothers who feel the same.

About a month before I was due, my parents called in to see me while on their holidays. On my day off work, they took me for a drive to Bobbin Head. We were walking around when we saw a friend of theirs whom I hadn't seen since I was younger. My parents were so embarrassed by me being pregnant and unwed that they made me walk away from them so their friend couldn't recognise me as their daughter.

This really upset me because the nuns had never treated me like this, nor the people in the local area who knew where I was living. They all treated us very well and never with such disrespect or shame. Now that I am older and have had some help coming to terms with what happened, I can see how my parents' background led them to do what they did on that day, but it still hurts, and I even still feel angry from time to time about it. Maybe one day, hopefully, it won't be so hurtful.

A lot of friendships were made during my time at St Anthony's. Being pregnant and having to relinquish our babies created a strong and common bond among us; in normal circumstances, most of our paths would never have passed because we were all so different. We used to talk about whether we wanted a boy or a girl, and what we would name them. Some of us made things for our babies, but a lot of the time, these were not handed on to the adopting parents.

The day before my parents went back home to Brisbane, I asked them if they wanted to know when I went into labour, and what the gender of the baby was. My mother didn't say anything, but my father got red with anger and told me he didn't want to know anything about the 'little bastard'. I got so upset that I took off to my cubicle and just cried and cried. As a result, I didn't tell them anything again. I knew by their reaction that I had no chance of being able to keep my child who, by this stage, I loved with all my heart. What used to make me angry was that I had a brother two years younger than me, who was always getting into trouble with the law, yet they would get him out of trouble by supporting him in court. Ninety per cent of the time he would get off with a warning or a fine, which they would pay.

Labour for me turned out to be so traumatic because I fought my son's birth, as I didn't want to part with him. It took 36 hours. We were sent to St Margaret's Hospital in Sydney and because I fought against the birth, I was strapped down with my legs put in stirrups. The nurses yelled at me to settle down and behave. A sheet was put in front of my face so I couldn't see the birth occur. As a result, I tore quite badly, was doped up with morphine and had to spend longer than usual in hospital to recover. They took him away from me so I couldn't see him. My breasts were tightly bound with big bandages to dry up my milk and all they would tell me was that he was a boy.

I was placed in another ward that was filled with other relinquishing mothers. The nurses would often let me nurse the other women's babies for a few minutes. During one of these times, they brought a little babe to me all wrapped up in a white bunny rug. I sat playing with the baby's little fingers and saying to the woman opposite me, what a beautiful little baby I was nursing. Time went on and I commented on how long I had been nursing this child and that its mother would be wondering where her child was. She told me to turn the baby over and look on its back near the neck, and there would be a tape with the name.

When I did this, I discovered that it was my own child. I nearly threw him back on the bed to look at him again. I was crying and saying, 'He's mine, he's my baby, he's so beautiful' over and over again. I pulled the covers off him and checked and counted his fingers and

toes. I couldn't stop looking and cuddling him. The next thing I knew, a nurse came in, took him off me and raced out of the room. I couldn't stop crying and felt like someone had ripped a hole in my heart. That feeling of part of my heart missing has never gone away and probably never will until I die.

I only saw him once after that moment, and it was during my ride home to St Anthony's in a taxi with one of the nurses. She let me nurse him for about half an hour. I was luckier than a lot of the girls who didn't get to see their babies at all. During my time at St Anthony's, I had become friends with one of the nurses and weeks after I returned to Brisbane, she sent me a couple of photos of my dear little boy whom I loved with all my heart. I have always treasured these photos, as they are all I have of my baby. They are kept in a special photo album. Today, I can't remember the nurse's name, but I will always be eternally grateful to her for doing what she did for me.

I had to sign the adoption papers to say we would give up all the rights to my child. I was not told that we had six weeks to change my mind, or that there was support if we wanted it.

I returned to Brisbane and neither my parents nor myself mentioned what had happened. I was angry and upset all the time, but put on a brave face for everyone around me. Friends and family used to ask me how I enjoyed my time in Sydney; they asked me what I did there, and where I went. I either told lies or evaded the questions as best I could. I found it really hard to cope with giving up my baby and having to act like I was fine, because for the entire time my heart was breaking.

The following year, I married a man from Sydney. All I wanted was to move from Brisbane and have a baby to replace the one I had given up, in the hope that this would fill the hole in my heart. It was seven years before I was to have another child though. And during those seven years, I didn't cope well. I started drinking heavily and doing drugs with friends because it was one way to stop me from feeling the pain created over the loss of my baby. It took a few years from then before I stopped, woke up to myself and got my life back on track.

During the years when my son was a baby, I used to look at other babies around his age and wonder how he was doing and what he looked like. These thoughts still continue today, because I have still never met him.

When the law changed in 1991, I read about an Adoption Group: the Parramatta / Holroyd Family Support Inc. at Pendle Hill. I joined the group, which consisted of mothers, adoptees and adoptive parents. I finally had a place with people I could talk to about how I had been feeling all these years. It took me until 1994 before I stopped agonising and began to search for my son. When I found out where he was, I couldn't believe he only lived 10 kilometres away from me.

Everybody in our group is very supportive and compassionate with each other. I always used to say that all I wanted to know was that he was happy and that he had received and created a good life.

In 1995, I wrote to my son, telling him who I was and that I didn't have a choice about keeping him and that I hoped he did have a good life, and that I would love to meet him if he wanted to. It was 12 months to that day from when I wrote to him that I received a letter back from him. In that 12 months, I agonised over whether I had done the right thing; wondering if he even knew he was adopted, or thinking he hated me for giving him up in the first place. His letter to me told me that he always knew he was adopted and that he had a good life, but didn't know if he wanted to meet me and that he needed more time to think about it.

We exchange Christmas cards and I send him birthday cards. I have written a couple of times over the past few years and asked to meet him again, but with no success. I still live in hope though. He will be 38 next year. I have two more sons now, who are 30 and 25, and I have never had the courage to tell them about my first son. I am scared to do so, in case they hate or reject me for what I did.

When I look back and reflect on my life now, I don't have any regrets, because if this hadn't happened the way it did, I never would have met the people who are now in my life, and who have been for so long now. I do not know how I would have coped without the support group; over the years we have supported each other through good and bad times, and we have all learnt to understand a little better about where others in the adoption triangle (birth parents, adoptees and adoptive parents) are coming from. This has definitely been one of the biggest lessons in my life.

It seems like yesterday — Roslyn's story

In 1962, at the age of 17 and a half, I became pregnant. I refused to marry the father, so my parents, with the encouragement of the local GP, arranged for me to enter Kate Cock's Home for Unmarried Mothers in Brighton (South Australia). I would live there until the baby was born, leave the baby there, then arrive home as if I was returning from working in the country. Because of my great shame and fear of being 'found out', I went along with all these lies.

The lies continued when I resigned from work and told my colleagues that I was going to the country for work. This is also the story my parents told to family, friends and neighbours before I entered the Home. I lived in fear of someone coming to the house and seeing me before I had time to hide somewhere. It was obviously a very stressful time for me and my baby.

I entered the Home two months before my son was born. Before I entered the Home, I had to have a chest x-ray in case I had tuberculosis. I also had to give a faecal sample to ensure I didn't have a sexually transmitted disease. All of this ensured I felt like a very bad girl when I finally did arrive at the Home. My first duty was to visit the matron in charge of the Home. She informed me that to protect my anonymity I could not use my given name, but would have to choose another. This didn't seem unusual to me at that time as there had been so many preceding lies up until then, that it just seemed normal. I chose the name 'Lyn' and I became another person. I think this may have been what helped get me through that time I spent in the Home.

After this meeting I was shown to my room in the dormitory and then sent to assist the nurses in the children's Home. From then on, I worked, unpaid, six days a week in the kitchen, laundry, childcare centre, garden and nurse's home, and if we'd had any training as a nurse, we even worked in the hospital where our babies were born.

If we were rostered in the kitchen, we prepared meals for the nursing staff, who made it pretty clear what they thought of us. I can remember there was an elderly lady living in the dormitory with us who, I think now, may have been a social worker. She used to call us into her room occasionally to sign forms. I presume it was to obtain our unemployment benefits from the government, which went towards the fees we had to pay each week to the Home. We were never given any help or advice from her, though, on how to keep our babies. We were so conditioned to the fact that we were going to leave without our babies that we never even asked about alternatives to adoption for our children. We just presumed there weren't any. It was made perfectly clear to us from the beginning that there would not be any support from our families or the government if we kept our babies.

So here we were. A bunch of society outcasts, brainwashed into submission and suffering feelings of such low esteem and low self worth that I can say it has impacted on every decision I have made in life since.

On 5 January 1964, after a long and difficult birth, my son was born. The week prior to his birth, I was told by the nursing sister that my blood pressure was very high, but because most of us had little or no knowledge about pregnancy and its inherent dangers, I didn't worry about it. The nursing sister didn't suggest bed rest or taking it easy, so I carried on working as normal until the day I went into labour. We were always worried that we would have difficult births that required us to be rushed, haemorrhaging, to the Queen Victoria Hospital in Adelaide. It happened occasionally, and we'd heard horror stories from those girls who worked in the hospital that the general mode of transport in this instance was in the back of the Home's station wagon.

We were warned that we would not see our baby after it was born, but the matron who assisted at the delivery was worried about me and let me nurse my son. I did develop toxæmia and so was sedated and confined to bed for about five days afterwards. All I can remember of that time was the matron waking me up through the night to take my blood pressure and administer more sedation, whilst the nursing staff attended to me during the day.

One the seventh day, I was able to get up and move around. Deaconess Phyllis Bonython called me into the waiting room. She said, 'I have a form for you to sign'. She then asked me if there was any request I had of the adopting parents. All I could think to say was, 'Don't make him learn the piano if he doesn't want to'. She then asked me if I wanted to name the baby. I said I didn't want to remember a name, thinking it would somehow be easier if she named him instead. She said she would name him after her own husband and wrote down his name. She then handed the form to me to sign, without covering up the adoptive parents' names.

And that was it. I was never informed of any of my rights. I know now that if I had changed my mind within 30 days, I could have kept my baby. I don't know if my parents were even aware of this at the time. The Methodist Church who ran this home was running an efficient adoption agency for their parishioners. The family who adopted my baby eventually adopted three children through Kate Cock's Home.

I stayed in the hospital for two weeks and, during that time, could hear babies crying but was told that I was not allowed to go anywhere near the nursery. So I didn't, but I knew one of them was mine. The young mother craft nurse who looked after our babies felt really bad about how we were treated, but obviously felt powerless to disobey the rules. I feel really angry now when I realise I could have gone down the nursery, picked my baby up and walked out. My mother was allowed to go and see him. She said to me, 'Don't make me do that again or we won't be able to leave him here'. How stupid of me. Obviously, she was weakening, but I wasn't aware that I had any rights to my own baby.

After two weeks, I was able to go home. I was given tablets to dry up my milk and told to go home, 'forget about it' and get on with my life. I followed these instructions and I now believe it would have destroyed me if I hadn't. The family never mentioned 'it' and I went along with this silence for many years. It was only when I had my daughter and son later on, that I understood what had been stolen from me, but to survive mentally, I had to put it to the back of my mind. Due to the laws of our land, I couldn't search for my son until he turned 18, so I just had to grieve in private. Even my husband didn't seem to have any understanding of what I was going through.

I attempted to search for my son when he turned 18, but because there weren't any support groups to assist me, I didn't really know what to do. So, once again, it was put to the back of my mind and I continued to 'get on with my life.' One of the places I phoned was the Methodist Mission who owned Kate Cock's Home. I received a hostile reception there; I was told to stop searching and that they had destroyed all the records anyway. I had hoped to follow up my medical history, but they put an end to that pursuit. I also had a phone call from the Department of Community Welfare and was told to stop looking for my son and not to phone the Mission again.

In 1985, when my son was 22, I started searching again. This time, due to suggestions from another mother, I searched the electoral rolls and birth notices from the year he was born, and believed I had found my son. I phoned the Department of Family and Community Services and told them I had found my son and requested their help in reuniting with him. This did cause a slight problem, because I had actually found an adopted boy who had been born on the same day as my own son. Because of this, my case worker decided to tell me that they had had contact over the years with my son's

adoptive mother, who wanted my son to be reunited with me. Because my son hadn't requested contact himself, they could only write to him on my behalf and ask him if he would like to meet me. I was told that he didn't reply to the letter, so the social worker handling his file at the time decided not to bother anymore, and filed it away at the bottom of the pile.

Fortunately, as a result of my locating the wrong child, they decided I should have contact with my son before I caused any more trouble for them. And this is where my search ended. I was finally given my son's address so I could write to him myself. And after receiving a letter back from him, the Department decided we could reunite with each other.

And so we did; in March 1986. It was 22 years after my son's birth. The reunion was not what I had hoped it would be. My son lives in a country town in South Australia and was very laid back about his adoption. He was not too bothered about meeting me and had stipulated that if we met, then I'd have to travel to him. Generally, the reunions were on neutral ground, but this one was in his house, with his family present. His adoptive father was cool towards me, and clearly disapproved of our reunion; however, his adoptive mother was lovely, because the reunion was what she had hoped for.

My son is now 44, married with two beautiful children. We keep in contact through phone conversations and email. It has only been in the last few years that I have finally begun to "be myself" with him. He understands why we were separated by adoption and holds no animosity towards me. Since our reunion, I have attended various counselling sessions. It is now very clear to me that after my son's birth I was denied the normal feelings of anger, hurt, emotional pain, envy and jealousy. And I have to deal with that now.

'Mutilation, mummification, dummification' by Janice Benson Kashin

Those of us who have agitated (like the original 'agitator' washing machine) for the past 30 years for changes in law, practice, policy and recognition are very pleased to see this book finally in print.

I began Adoption Triangle in Queensland in 1980, but had joined Jigsaw in New South Wales in 1978. I was part of the transmigration of young women, so although I consider myself a 'Queenslander', my son's adoption is governed by New South Wales law.

After a visit from Marie Meggitt, we established A.R.M.S. Queensland in 1982.

Adoption Triangle had the first glimmer of acceptance when the Minister for Family Services, Terry White, addressed the Adoption Triangle meeting at Mt. Gravatt in May 1983. The meeting was packed, and as we agreed not to record his comments, the Minister felt free to speak openly. We were assured that many members of parliament were sympathetic to 'open access to information', but that any new laws would have to 'make it' in the Cabinet.

Ross Daniels and I had separately delivered papers at an adoption conference at Mt. Gravatt Teachers' College in 1982. In late November 1984, I asked him if he would be prepared to chair a group of all interested parties to adoption, with a view to changing the laws to open access to information. Ross was an adoptive parent and saw the value in having information for his children.

So A.C.I.S. was born. Adoptive Contact Information Service was the name chosen, as we were hoping that once the laws were changed, A.C.I.S. would become a post-adoption resource centre. I was the secretary in the formative stages of A.C.I.S. We met at the Kelvin Grove Teachers' College once a month, devised our strategies for targeting the politicians, and agreed on a common agenda. Every adoption support group in Brisbane in 1985 joined the lobbying. Some lobbyists came from Ipswich and Toowoomba.

We lobbied in threes: a mother who had lost her child to adoption, an adopted person, and an adoptive parent. Nobody wanted to lobby Mr Bjelke-Petersen or Mr Keith Wright.

'Since this whole thing is your idea, Janice, you can lobby them.' Paul Faulkner and Gayleen Faggotter were my lobbying partners; and so we began in earnest. In threes, we lobbied all members of parliament, no matter what political persuasion. And it was the job of each lobby group to keep their targeted politician informed of our agenda, to stay in contact, and become a conduit for A.C.I.S. ideas.

On me, the workload had begun to take its toll, and I collapsed on 13 March 1990, with the end in sight, and with assurances that the new proposals would 'most likely' go through.

You can imagine our sense of betrayal, when, after the Bill had passed two readings of parliament exactly as we wanted, the third reading had an added section called Section 39, which permitted the placement of objections to the separated party obtaining information or having contact.

In 1996, my son agreed to meet me. Now I was really out of my depth. How does a mother relate to a 33 year old son she was never permitted to see?

My imminent reunion brought home the need for public information to be made available to all on the nature of 'reunion'. What were the protocols?

I approached the Association for Adoptees to host a National Conference called 'Adoption — The Primal Wound'. The first speaker I secured was Nancy Verrier. A.F.A. were happy to work with me, even though I was still very sick and still slept for two hours in the middle of the day.

Many assured me that Australia wasn't yet ready for such an event under that banner; however under a softer banner, 'Separation, Reunion, Reconciliation', I could address the same topics, with a mother's agenda, and it would still be a financial success.

Three months before the conference, I was struck 'dumb'. I couldn't speak. Silenced. My reunion with my son, coupled with reading extracts for 12 months, and dealing with the enormity of the 'theft' of thousands of babies, caused my information processing faculty to shut down. I had become pre-verbal.

So I began to draw. The three pictures in the centre of this book are what emerged:

- 'Mutilation'— my journey from falling pregnant, to pre-hospital admission
- 'Mummification' — my treatment in the hospital
- 'Dummification' — my new life to be lived without my son.

I worked on the pictures for one month. With the help of my pastels, I had been able to define the unspeakable tragedy that had occurred to me.

The 'Separation, Reunion, Reconciliation' Conference included an art exhibition of pictures addressing the topic of family separation. All Queensland artists depicting women's issues, specifically mother/child separation, or the sacred aspects of birth, were asked to submit a work. Anna Bligh was asked to open the conference in her capacity as Shadow Minister for Families, Youth and Community Services, and Senator Cheryl Kernot, Leader of the Democrats, was asked to open the art exhibition. As Mrs Kernot had been a foster parent, she was aware of many of our issues personally.

The purpose of the conference, apart from being the sixth Australian conference on adoption, was to put the separation of mothers from their babies on to the national agenda. This was the first national adoption conference called by a mother; the first national adoption conference that paid for itself; the first national adoption conference with a tied-up mother depicted on the cover of the conference papers; the first national conference incorporating an art exhibition.

The conference called for:

- the establishment of an 'Adopted Person's Trust', similar to the Child Migrant Trust
- the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry into Past Adoption Practices
- an apology to be forthcoming to all Australians damaged by adoption.

Finally, Dr Geoff Rickarby called for the banning of adoption when he delivered his paper.

It was wonderful that the New South Wales Inquiry into Past Adoption Practices was announced hot on the heels of the 1997 National Conference recommendations. That we have waited so long for the implementation of any of the recommendations from the New South Wales Inquiry is testament to the terrible legacy of adoption: damaged mothers; dislocated children; and disconnected grandchildren.

Which brings me full circle back to my art.

When I can't speak, I paint.

When I can't write, I draw.

When life circumstances force me back to a pre-verbal state, I pick a colour. Any colour.

Janice Benson Kashin

August 2007

1) ***'Mutilation' — 'Oh, Come on Now, Pin Her Down!'***

2) 'Mummification'— 'Dry those Tears'

3) 'Dummification' — 'When You Go Home You'll Put all This Behind You!'

Robin's story

To understand my feelings when my first child was born, one needs to know something about my early life. More than 60 years ago, when I was a child, my father returned from World War II. My parents divorced and I went to live with my grandmother for four years because my mother was unable to support my three brothers and me. It was 20 years later when I next saw my father.

My mother married again, and at the age of nine, I returned to live with her and her new husband, as well as my three brothers. The eldest brother, a half-brother, was a product of a relationship before her marriage to my father. So he and I had the same mother but a different father. I soon learnt what womanhood was about when my stepfather and my half-brother began to continually molest me at different times. I often still wonder if either of them knew if the other one was doing the same thing to me that they were.

I tried to tell my mother; however, she was never around to listen, so eventually I stopped trying. Both of the sexual molesters said they would kill me, and that everyone would blame me for encouraging them anyway.

So from the age of nine to 14, this constant threat was very real but I had no-one to turn to, so I bore my burden alone.

Just before my 15th birthday, I sensed something was amiss. I had ceased menstruating and my stomach was growing bigger. As it was such a long time ago, I am unable to remember the details of how my mother found out, but of course, she did.

Her only daughter was pregnant, yet she never questioned me as to whom the father was. Instead, she made the decision that I was a 'bad girl' and just assumed I'd had a sexual relationship with someone outside our home.

My mother took me to Crown Street Women's Hospital, where many pregnant girls went to have their babies. The waiting room was full of expectant mothers, some like me who were very young. I still remember the agonising pain when the doctors measured me internally to test whether I was big enough to have my baby naturally.

Because it was shameful for an unmarried girl to be pregnant, we moved to a far away Sydney suburb. I had to be kept hidden until after my baby was born. I was made to feel in disgrace. No-one knew who the baby's father was, but then neither did I. Was it my half-brother, or was it my stepfather? My mother insisted on remaining with me during my visits to Crown Street for prenatal tests, so I was unable to talk to anyone there, even if someone was actually willing to listen. During my pregnancy, it was only these visits when I was allowed to leave the house. The only upside was that I was not sexually molested again.

My baby was growing inside me. I would have someone to love me, or so I thought. I did not think about all the baby supplies that I would need; my only thoughts were that I would be loved and have someone to love in return. My child would quench this terrible thirst I had for love.

On the first day of October in 1952, when the time came for my baby to be born, I was whisked away by ambulance to Crown Street Hospital. Again, my mother came with me, but having told me repeatedly that she hated me. I wished that she was not there. After admitting me to the labour ward, she left me alone. I was all by myself — finally — yet I still hated it.

My labour pains grew stronger. The labour ward contained a number of expectant mothers that night; some who screamed until the nurses told them to shut up, and that it

was entirely their own fault they were there. We received no mercy from anyone there. In between labour pains, I remember looking around the ward and thinking to myself, 'Why are all these nurses placing pillows over the mother's stomachs?' I soon learnt why!

When the time came to give birth, I would not see my baby. What were they doing? I wanted this child; I wanted to love him or her. My heart was craving for their love.

I remember screaming so much that the nurses gave me something to put me to sleep until it was all over. When I woke, I felt my stomach and it was flat. My baby had been born. I called the nurse and asked her where my baby was, and whether I had a boy or a girl and I remember her telling me to shut up, stop calling out and to get over it. Get over it? I wanted my baby! I wanted to hold and love my baby!

I was in a large ward which contained at least 10 beds. Some mothers had their babies beside them, yet others didn't. Then I realised that I was in the bed next to the nursery, as I could hear all the babies crying. That sound remained in my memory for many years.

My mother came in and told me that I had given birth to a boy, but it was best that I did not see him, as he was being placed for adoption; she had made all the arrangements. I was told that I would recover; I would get over it quickly and move on with my life.

So my arms remained empty. I felt so alone. My mother also informed me that she had named the child Peter Anthony, as he looked so much like my half-brother. Was he the father of my child? I don't know if my mother ever suspected anything because she never questioned me about it. All I felt was tremendous pain because I could not see my own child.

The social worker came and told me to sign the adoption papers. It was better for both of us, she said. Once again I heard the words 'you will get over it'. Both my mother and the social worker stood over me and watched me sign my baby away. My heart was breaking. The next day I was transferred to a resting place at Waverley until I returned to the house that had held me bound.

The days grew into weeks, then months, but my life and arms remained empty. I walked around like a zombie. I felt I had been robbed; like my baby had been stolen. The words 'get over it because it is better for both of you' continued to haunt me.

Two years later, I married the first man that was interested in me. He was 10 years my senior, but that did not concern me. I wanted a child; a baby to hold in my arms and love. My next son was born 10 months later and I got to hold him. Nobody could take him from me this time, not even my mother. Although I bore a further six children, I still miss my firstborn. I tell some people I had eight children, yet only raised seven. If they ask the reason why, I respond with the reply that my firstborn was stolen from me; an empty void has always remained in my life.

Peter, I did love you. I did want you. I did not force you away, you were stolen from me. Fifty years later, I still remember your birthday. I suffer quietly wondering where you are. Many questions remain unanswered, including whether you are even still alive. I do not want to take you away from the people who raised you, and I do not want to replace their love with mine. I just want you to know that I did not surrender you willingly, but as a child myself, I had no-one available to help me keep you.

My mother died in your fourth year; my half-brother died the following year and my stepfather died two years after that. My story was never disclosed to anyone until now. In fact, it was never even questioned, but it continued to haunt me. I struggled all these years alone, always hoping that one day you and I would be reunited.

I always remember your birthday on the first day of October in 1952. It was a long time ago, but I have never forgotten. No-one can steal that hope from me; however, unfortunately my health is deteriorating from a genetic disease, so sometimes I wonder if my time is running short. Will I take my yearnings to the grave with me? Only time will tell if this story will ever be completed. I do hope so.

Since writing this story, I have found out that Peter is still alive. I hope and pray that one day before long, we will be reunited. Then my nightmares can finally be over.

'Arrival'

A mother's loss by Cheryl King

My story of a child lost by its mother begins with my own birth. Because I am a child who was taken from her mother at birth; and I am a mother who had her first child removed and taken for what is still, for me, forever.

I cannot tell my story of my son's adoption without including my own. To me, adoption is about loss — a loss of rights, a loss of genetic links, a loss of birthright, a loss of a mother and a father, a loss of siblings and other family, a loss of everything that makes us who we are. Most adopted people I know are continually searching for where they belong, as we no longer belong to a 'birth family'; and no matter how wonderful the adoptive family is, sometimes we feel like we don't really belong there either because we look different, we have different tastes and ideas, we act differently and feel different, no matter how hard everyone tries to make us fit in.

The name I am using as author of this story is the one I was given by my mother at birth. It is one very small way that I can claim back something that is genuinely mine. As an adoptee, I have two birth certificates and I don't feel that I am either of the people stated in them. I have constantly struggled with my identity and the need to be who I feel is the right person. I am what my adoptive family attempted to mould in order to make it appear that I belonged within that family, when in fact I never did belong.

As an adopted child, I have always, and still do, looked for love and acceptance. I was the compliant adoptee and lived in fear of being sent away to a home or to some institution that took unwanted children.

I learnt of my adoptive status on the morning of my tenth birthday. I went into my mother's room and asked her to imagine that only 10 years prior she was in hospital having just given birth to me — wrong. That was when the bombshell hit — the explanation given was that, 'No we aren't your real parents — your mother gave you away to us so we could have a baby girl'.

I have an older adoptive brother, who is six years older, and has always been the rock that has been there to support and comfort me. I was the baby girl that was taken in to replace the baby girl that my adoptive parents had lost seven years previously.

The importance of my own adoption in relation to this story is that I have always maintained that had I been the natural child of my adoptive parents, that when I did become pregnant with my son, they may have been there for me. This was their grandson that they insisted I give up for adoption — my own genetic link; but none of that mattered to them. They only saw what they wanted and not what I needed. I know many mental health professionals and others would challenge this claim, but I am the only one who really knows and feels the truth. So many lies were and still are being told in relation to my son's adoption, but those involved will one day face the truth of the role they played.

I met my son's father at a time when I was so desperate for love and the need to belong to someone. In hindsight, I should have seen the clues, but as they say 'love is blind'. I was six months pregnant before my son's father announced that he was unable to care for me or our child. Until then, I was preparing for a life together as a family. Once my parents were approached about my 'condition', immediate action was taken on their part to ensure that my only option was adoption. They were hard and showed no feelings of compassion or remorse and, to this day, deny they took part in such action. To date, my adoptive mother will not show any compassion for what I went through — her only grief is still for the loss of her child. Her current explanation for my sense of loss is that I must be suffering from menopause.

Once it was stressed upon me what the course of action would be — adoption — I was then packed off to live with my brother, sister-in-law and baby nephew. It is only because of these loving people that I am still here today to tell my story — suicide was a very real thought after my son was taken away and it was only because of the love of my brother and sister-in-law that I kept going and have been able to obtain a level of happiness and comfort in life. I have been fortunate to find a wonderful loving husband, and together we have raised two children that are my life. I have a small circle of friends and a very special girlfriend, who is like the sister that I have never had.

Once safely living in my brother's home, the round of visits to various health professionals began. These were the people who ultimately ensured that my son would be taken from me at his birth and that my rights as his mother would be severed. The doctor that I consulted lectured me at every prenatal visit on the option of adoption. I can still recall the words: he would say, 'If at any time I sense that you are changing your mind about adoption, then I will do everything in my power to ensure that you change it back again'. So many may question how I could remember what was said, but there were certain things said that I will never forget as long as there is breath in my lungs. I accepted what he said to me, as I felt from the start that I had no rights and that these people had the right to make these decisions. I was disempowered as a baby, as a child, as an adult and am only just now starting to take some control in my life.

I was also referred to the social worker at the hospital, as well as an officer from the department that handled adoptions. At no time during our interviews was I told about financial support to enable me to take a stand and be able to keep my son. At no time was I given other options of support and assistance. At no time was I told of the long-term effects that losing my son would have on me. I was also counselled intensely on the fact that giving my child for adoption was the best thing for him — he would go to a loving family, and if I kept him he would most likely resent me for it later in life. I was so brainwashed that I couldn't relate back to my own life and realise that my son would be better off with his mother. My ability to think logically had gone and I went along with what I was instructed to do.

At no time was I allowed to see my son after his birth. I was told I could only see him if I signed the adoption papers. At no time was I given any hope that someone could help me — decisions were made for me and my rights were taken away. As soon as my son was born, he was quickly removed from the room while the staff ensured that I could not see him. I was then placed in a maternity ward with three other mothers and had to endure five days of watching these mothers feed, care and hug their babies. I can't think of a crueller thing to do to someone — what had I done to deserve such cruelty? I wanted to leave the hospital immediately after the birth. I felt unable to deal with being in that ward. However, I was told that if I attempted to leave, then the police would be called and I would be charged with abandoning my son. I was unable to leave without signing the adoption papers and had to wait the required legal time. This now is a joke, as this was the only legal thing that happened in relation to my son's adoption.

Somehow, despite all that has happened in my life, I have survived and to those around me I appear quite normal. However, no-one knows the torment that I suffer regularly. There are so many nights that I go to bed to cry and secretly mourn the family I have lost. I have spent the last few years undergoing intense counselling at a great financial and emotional cost. I have had to live through these sessions every moment of the horror that was my son's adoption while trying to work and carry out what others see as a 'normal life'.

To the health professionals that read these mothers' stories, our only hope is that you gain some insight into what other health professionals decided was the right thing to do.

All that they did was to condemn the mothers and their children to a lifetime of loss — I spoke earlier in my story of what we have lost. As mothers, we were told to go away and forget what had happened and 'get on with life'. How? How can you ever forget and ever feel whole again? How do we forget? I have tried for so long to bury my loss deep within myself and have not shared it with anyone until the last few years. It will always be with me. My first son will always be a part of me, just as he is a part of my other two children. They have a brother who they have never known. Even if I do find my son, how do you make up for all those years lost? You can't — they are lost forever. A needless loss.

'Departure'

My story by Maureen Watson

I have often wondered what the man in the Armadale Hotel thought on that cold July morning, in 1995, when we passed on the way to the bathrooms. How much had he heard and how had he interpreted it? Did he wonder at all?

The previous night, in the safety of our hotel room, I had crashed again, pouring out the hidden emotions of 37 years. I had wailed and wept and screamed out in despair and anger. Two nights before, I had wept and wailed, crouched in a corner of the room in a hotel in Wagga Wagga. Images of women wailing at funerals flashed through my mind. In my distress, I asked my husband, 'Why? Why did they do this to me?' I stood back and watched myself. I relived the time in Crown Street Hospital when, bleeding to death, I floated to the ceiling and sat there and watched the doctors down below as they worked to resuscitate me. That night in Wagga Wagga, I hoped the noise from the karaoke down below drowned my hysteria. I had wanted to smash everything in sight, but common sense held me back. I couldn't afford to pay for the damages!

I had been warned that my life would be turned upside down by reunion, but nothing had prepared me for this. My road to Damascus moment occurred in a park in that NSW town. My son and I had arranged to walk and talk by ourselves. He was explaining why he walks the way he does — he has cerebral palsy.

Without thinking, I said, 'Why? What caused it?' I knew nothing about cerebral palsy. He looked at me in amazement. 'Lack of oxygen at birth, we were told. Didn't you know?'

And that's when it hit me. Instantly. I thought, 'I have been betrayed. My son has been betrayed'. I began to feel very angry. I was shattered. I knew I had been lied to, but this was huge. That sacrifice, that month long stay in Crown Street Hospital, that 37 years of silent suffering imposed by society, all those years of living in fear that someone would discover my shameful secret, that perpetual cloud that hung over me; all for nothing.

Once, at a course on procrastination, in a self-discovery session I burst out with, 'When will I stop being punished?' I was haunted every day by my adoption experience.

It took five years of vacillation to reach reunion. I had vowed when I gave birth to my son, that before I died, I would meet him — how and when, I had no idea. However, times change and in 1990/1991, the NSW Government changed the adoption laws, allowing mothers access to all records of their children's adoption, hospital records, etc. We were free to contact our children, unless a veto had been applied. I spent the next five years changing my mind as to when or ever I would 'do it'. I continued to practice deceit, to keep my secret. I did not tell my husband what I was up to. My children and some of my siblings were still ignorant of why I had gone to Sydney so long ago.

Eventually, I tracked him down in NSW, and was just about to post a letter, when I thought to check the electoral roll again. For once, the gods were looking after me! The original entry had gone. Instead, there was a new one, which indicated single status and a different town. I started speculating — had his marriage broken up (the previous address had a woman's name attached)? What was he doing there? He told me later that he had only recently put his name back on the electoral roll.

When he rang, I was so shaken; I didn't know what to say. He took charge and suggested that maybe we could talk later. It turned out we were both librarians! And you may not believe it, but I went off to my weight loss club that night and sat there, silent as usual. I wanted to stand up and shout, 'Behold! This is my son. The prodigal has returned!' I was awake all night, wondering how he would feel about me.

My emotions were all over the place. I was sad, angry, and pleased that I had done it. I drove to work and managed not to get any speeding tickets, but how I ached, how I ached. That Friday, I walked around the library and physically ached. I understood why people die of a broken heart. I was overwhelmed by sadness. 'Why did this have to happen to my son and me?' I was in shock.

Over a period of 12 months, I railed in my journal, tormenting myself about living in a shadow for more than half my life. I asked, 'Is there anything good to come out of this?' I relived all the arguments that I was given to enable me to give up my child. I wondered where this reunion would lead. I could not, would not, be able to suffer rejection again. I wrote, 'I will bring down the shutters for all the time on this period of my life'. If I didn't hear from him for a fortnight, I was devastated and rang for help from a counsellor. I have four other sons and should have known better. They don't consider it necessary to contact me all the time. I examined my distrust of other women, and their betrayal and lack of compassion for women in my situation. I began, with help from a psychiatrist, to understand the anger that had always puzzled me. I began to understand and to like myself.

Always the reader, I searched for answers. I had been fascinated for years by the Holocaust stories of loss and grief, but could never understand why. Now it became clear. I related to the character in Susanna Tamaro's *Follow your Heart*, where she remarks, 'The tears we do not shed settle in and around your heart, and as time goes by they form a crust which paralyses'. I re-read Colm Toibin's haunting novel about loss, *The Heather Blazing*, and wept when the retired judge says to his daughter, 'I have never asked anyone for anything. I think I feel that if I did, I would be turned down'. I was so frightened that this would be the end result of the reunion with my son.

Life went on after the reunion. I told 'my sin' to my friends and, for the first time in 37 years, I held my head up and said to myself, 'No-one can touch me now. No-one'. Gradually, I realised that I could go for days without thinking of him, something I had never been able to do. No-one can take away from me the feeling of happiness I can now call up at anytime. My children were told of their sibling, and they responded lovingly, stunned by this unknown side of me, but also sad for me. Their loyalty and love has unlocked in me an overwhelming love for them. My husband has supported me through all my grieving and has grown in stature in my eyes.

I have always dreamt in colour, but there was one recurring dream which haunted me for years. So locked was I in silence, in denial, that I had not linked it to my loss of my firstborn. It was always the same — I was running away and trying to save my children; from what, I don't know. Their faces were turned away from me. Everything was grey, the grey of an unpainted paling fence. I always woke up feeling bewildered and sad. After I met my son, I realised my dream world had gone. I was willing to accept this loss in payment for the return of my son. I was glad to be rid of the nightmares.

So it was, until a traumatic incident occurred in our family. Our third son's wife suffered severe postnatal depression after the birth of their daughter. Their world fell apart. The Victorian Department of Human Services became involved. Hardened by my adoption experience, I resolved to do everything I could to stop the authorities removing our granddaughter from our family. Emotions overwhelmed me and the dreams began again. In one, I was running away with my husband. We had kidnapped her. She was strapped in her capsule in the back seat of our car while we drove fast through NSW. All the while, she was fading away like Little Daylight in the fairy tale, who waxed and waned with the moon. I knew I had to take her to hospital but I couldn't trust authorities and, instead, we looked for a chemist. I woke up crying.

We were given custody and worked hard to keep the little family together. And before her first birthday, the Children's Court eventually ordered her return to her parents. Curiously, out of the experience, I came to understand a baby is very easy to love and make your own.

My story began in 1958 when, single and pregnant, I went to live in Sydney with friends before having 'the baby'. I booked myself into Crown Street Hospital. I was 24 years of age and had been working in a small Victorian seaside town. I was one of the many thousands of Australian girls who went interstate to hide their shame at being pregnant and single; of having committed the worst possible sin of being caught and not being able to access a safe abortion or willing to do so because of religious beliefs.

I was happy enough with the friends and eventually decided to keep the baby, even making a layette during the months preceding birth. I eventually made arrangements with the almoner to have the baby minded (fostered?) after the birth, while I looked for work. I went out to the people's house one evening to see the arrangements. I was horrified — the babies were strapped into their cots in a small room. I left a case of clothes there for the baby.

Doubts set in. I had never seen babies treated like that. Eventually, I was admitted to Crown Street because of some health problems. At that time, my sister came to see me and I told her I was keeping the baby. She went on and on about how it would hurt my parents if I did this and told me, 'You can't keep the baby'. The die was cast. I gave in and informed the almoner. No counselling was given, no evidence given of the effect this decision would have on me and the child, on both our lives. Only one person — the husband of my friend — said I would live to regret it.

Eventually, I was put up for a trial of labour — even though the baby was supposed to have big shoulders. Consequently, he and I very nearly died, both having to be resuscitated after the birth. But worse was to come. When I was sent out to Wakehurst to recover from the ordeal, before going home, I was given something to dry up my milk, which caused severe diarrhoea, which, in turn, caused the stitches to not heal. I was sent back to Crown Street for a repair, I did not leave that hospital until a month after the birth. I haemorrhaged three times and had 10 blood transfusions. All the time, I wondered what had happened to my baby. I had to ask when he was born, what sex the child was, and how much he weighed. I never saw him and yet when I got his and my records, I found out he was there all the time. He was a very sick little baby. I went looking for the nursery one day, but was turned back and told I had no right to go there. He and I left the hospital on the same day.

I eventually did as I was told. Go home and get married and have your own children. I fled overseas and did just that. But I never forgot and my anger remained simmering underneath until I met my son and was able to finally understand what the adoption had done to him and me.

It was just too easy for society to get its hands on the supposedly 'unwanted' babies of the mainly single girls. It is a dark period in Australia's history, which no-one wants to know about or to say sorry it happened.

My story by Pauline Tucker

The following brief account will in no way be able to express the depth of confusion and powerlessness I felt before, during or after my son's birth, but it is my attempt to provide some insight into the deeply traumatic experience of losing my son to adoption. I have found the process of dredging up these memories extremely stressful, and physically and emotionally painful. An even worse aspect of remembering is trying to remember. I have no recollection of feeling the pain associated with giving birth. I have large gaps in my memory of the days following my son's birth.

On 19 July 1972 at 7.45 pm in St Margaret's Hospital, Darlinghurst, I gave birth to my son. I was 21 years old, unmarried, in a relationship — unofficially engaged. When I discovered I was pregnant, I was living at home with my parents in Hobart. I was in my third and final year of nursing at the Royal Hobart Hospital and engaged to be married.

My shame and confusion at discovering I was pregnant out of wedlock was initially compounded by my father's silence and the verbal abuse I received from my mother. I was referred to as a 'whore' and told that I would give birth to a 'black bastard' as my fiancé was Indonesian.

I was an embarrassment to my family and so was removed to protect the innocence of my siblings. My parents arranged for my hasty departure from Hobart to Sydney, where I was to live with my maiden aunt, my elderly and sick grandmother, and a very spoiled dog. I was removed from the presence of my fiancé who, a few months later, returned to Indonesia, never to return.

I was, virtually, alone.

So I wouldn't be a burden on the grandmother and spinster aunt, it was later arranged that I would be interned at St Anthony's Home in Croydon for the final few months of my pregnancy.

I lived in this Home, with what seemed like hundreds of other girls; some as young as 11 or 12. I admired their cheerfulness and obvious childlike oblivion to their future of suffering and pain.

I was near 21 years old and entitled to a room of my own. I did not have to share with other pregnant unmarried girls in the dormitory section of the Home. Lucky me! I had certain duties which I had to carry out. The one I remember most was polishing a parquet floor using a very heavy industrial polisher.

I was a consenting adult at the time I became pregnant, and my fiancé and I had been making plans for our future together. But it didn't seem to matter. In retrospect, the Home was more like a prison and I had committed a crime. We were permitted visitors, but had to receive them in specific visitor rooms under supervision.

I was made to believe that I would not make a good mother because I was not married, that my baby and I would be stigmatised by society, and that our life together would be extremely difficult with little money and without family support (I had been told by my parents not to bring that 'black bastard' home!). My shame and powerlessness was exacerbated by my isolation and feelings of deep, deep sadness and aloneness.

The feeling for my baby was to protect and love him. I did not want my baby in an environment where he would be emotionally or financially at risk. I was led to believe that the best alternative was adoption and I was led to believe that the Catholic Adoption

Agency would provide my son with the perfect family who would raise him in an ideal environment that I could not provide for him.

I had shamed my family. My baby's presence would perpetuate that shame. If I gave him away to strangers, then all would be well for him, for me and for the future. I had serious doubts that I was doing the right thing. It didn't feel right. Therefore, to 'broker' the deal, I attempted to negotiate some kind of arrangement with the social worker handling the case. I remember asking for regular updates from the people who would come to be my son's new parents. She gave me verbal assurances that this would happen. I believe it was these promises of regular updates on my son's wellbeing that eventually resulted in my signing of the adoption papers. At least I could keep tabs on him. But this never happened. I was lied to; I never received one piece of information about my child. Years later, I approached Margaret McDonald and told her that I had been promised regular updates about my son. She was the most cold, efficacious person I have ever met. She just fobbed me off. No apologies, no explanation. Certainly no concern. She only stated that she could do nothing about it now. I left her office completely devastated.

Immediately after I had given birth, I recall the nurse walking out of the delivery room with my baby, without providing any explanation and without my permission to do so. As I have become more aware of the basic principles of human rights, I was incensed when I discovered that I did have rights, which were not observed. I had the right to hold my son, feed my son, bathe my son — but no-one brought him to me. I had to call out during a drugged stupor to ask the nurse to bring him over to me so I could see him!

My son and I were reunited when he was 18 years old. He and his wife had given birth to a son of their own. The tyranny of distance separates us, but I am welcomed by his wife as her husband's mother. She is a supportive and understanding person and they should have a great life together.

The shadow of the adoption experience will always loom large in our psyches and seems to bare its teeth when our emotional reserves are at an ebb; for example, in times of crises, such as the death of a friend, child or parent, or even at a birth. It is during experiences such as these when the demons emerge and pound our brains to pulp, so we have to start building ourselves up all over again, to establish who we are, where we belong, and who really loves us — unconditionally.

I had hoped that the NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues Inquiry into adoption practices, 1950 to 1998 would mean our losses would be recognised, our haunted lives redefined and that we would be able to access helpful resources that encourage the release of our pain and help us to move forward into the realms of self-determination.

I struggled for nearly 25 years to achieve my Bachelor of Arts degree. I am a literate, intelligent person, with a love for language that is only exceeded by the love I have for my husband and children. Yet I have struggled to learn things that, before I lost my son, were a joy and a challenge. The only challenge I have had that seemed of greater importance was to find my son.

I was afraid for him, afraid because I felt he went to the wrong parents. I was the right and rightful parent — no-one else.

I have never received an apology from my parents. They have met my son and now acknowledge the birth of their first great-grandson. They, too, were sucked in to believe that adoption was the best alternative. Their motivation and their rudeness will always be a wall between us. Recently, for the first time, I turned to my husband and said, 'You

know, if everyone had just sat down in a room with me, and offered to help, things could have worked out much differently'.

If only.

I'm still thinking about it and it's more than 30 years down the track.

We cannot live our lives

We cannot live

Our children's birth

Our children's death

Until it's known

From where they came

So they can decide

Where they are

Going to live!

The memorial plaque by Barbara Maison

As a result of a special meeting in May 2006, a group of six Victorian mothers of the children of the White Stolen Generation (June, Maureen, Mary, Sue, Pauline and Barbara) decided to work towards establishing a memorial for all mothers who had lost their children to adoption, and in particular those who had subsequently learnt that their child had died before a reunion could be achieved.

And so the MOSWG (Mothers of the Stolen White Generation) came into being. The camaraderie developed during the prior nine years was an important supportive element; the sharing of mutual grief of the loss of their babies, and the complete understanding, created a most valuable bond.

The idea of a memorial originated with Pauline's husband, Malcolm Tucker, who presented a paper at a Mental Health Conference in Brisbane in 2004. A former CEO of The Necropolis, at Springvale in Victoria — Australia's busiest cemetery/crematorium complex — Malcolm holds tertiary qualifications in civil engineering and town planning, and a Master's degree in Social Science.

His paper, '*Memorial options for those experiencing the grief of separation*' centred on 'the grief associated with the forced separation of loved ones, which is well established. When a loved one dies when these circumstances exist, it is often difficult for the survivor to fully deal with their grief due to the restrictions/mores placed on them by society. The possibility of memorialising a deceased loved one in these circumstances is often a positive assistance in dealing with grief and will have general applicability also for those who have been separated for other reasons'.

Feedback from other groups was positive, so it became a goal to work together to achieve a place for all mothers who had suffered the 'death-like' loss of their babies to adoption; allowing them to have their own special niche to visit, and hopefully find peace at a very exclusive place memorialising the loss of their babies in unresolved circumstances.

This was achieved through the generosity of the Necropolis Trust of Victoria and Arrow Bronze, Cheltenham, Victoria, who together donated and installed a wonderful memorial at the Melbourne General Cemetery just inside the front gates, at which the group held an intimate, private inauguration ceremony on Mother's Day 2007.

Insert pictures

From the Herald Sun. 8 June 2007
'Memorial gives mums a place to grieve'
Carla Danaher, family reporter.

A unique memorial has been unveiled in Melbourne for a special group of mothers. The memorial, at Melbourne General Cemetery, is for women whose children were adopted out at birth, but have died before being reunited with their mothers.

For Cranbourne grandmother Sue Martin, it is a long-overdue recognition.

Pressured to give up her son when she was 19, Ms Martin tried to find him 18 months ago. Tragically, she discovered he had died of cancer aged 20. He would have been 40 in December.

'To be told your son is dead and to be given his death certificate is awful, absolutely awful', she said. Ms Martin contacted her son's adoptive parents, who sent her precious photos of him.

'The only photo I had of him was in my head of him at 10 days old', she said. 'I nursed him for 10 days and then signed his life away.'

Ms Martin said she had kept her son's existence a secret for fear of people judging her. 'We were told once your child was gone, we had no rights', she said.

'For most of these 40 years, I had a private nightmare on my own.'

Ms Martin visited the cemetery on Mother's Day, along with other mothers who were instrumental in organising the memorial. Maureen Cleary, manager of adoption support agency VANISH, said the memorial was an important symbol for women such as Ms Martin. 'We think it's really important to have some acknowledgment of the grief and pain of this', Ms Cleary said.

Melbourne General Cemetery chief executive Russ Allison said the memorial would touch the lives of many families.

Members of the group: Mothers of the White Stolen Generation (MOWSG) attending the memorial service and plaque blessing

Insert pictures

From left to right: Maureen Watson, Sue Martin, Maureen Cleary (VANISH), Barbara Maison

An open letter by June Smith

To whom it might concern

I am writing to you of another stolen generation of children, a stolen white generation that for too long has been denied recognition.

I do not want to give the impression of negating the enormous loss of our Indigenous families but to present the truth of non-Indigenous families who suffered the same immense sorrow at the loss of *their* children.

During the **1950s** and the **1960s**, 'large numbers of **Indigenous** children were removed from their families to advance the cause of assimilation ... At its peak during the 1950s and 1960s, large numbers of Indigenous children were placed in institutions or foster homes or adopted by non-Indigenous families' (Australian Social Trends 1998 – Australian Bureau of Statistics).

From the **1950s** to the late **1970s**, single, **non-Indigenous** mothers' babies were routinely removed from their mothers at birth. This was enacted by the negligence of state governments, hospital's illegal and unethical practices, and the vindictiveness and punishment of religious hierarchy. Our babies were placed in institutions, or foster homes, but in the main were adopted by infertile non-Indigenous families.

'Following the establishment of legal representation for Indigenous children and their families, the practice of removing Indigenous children from their mothers declined in the 1970s' (Australian Social Trends 1998 – Australian Bureau of Statistics). Non-Indigenous single mothers were not afforded any such legal representation, and so their abuse continued. Hence the number of non-Indigenous babies being routinely removed continued into the 1980s.

The difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children who were taken from their mothers is that Indigenous children cherish their families and their past, whilst non-Indigenous children have contempt for their mothers because they believe the lie that we didn't want them.

Those who used illegal and unethical means to procure our children, a crime under law, then decried us as 'relinquishing mothers', a truly cruel and false expression, created to present to society mothers who would willingly give away their own children. Even though some Indigenous mothers signed a consent to adoption, they have **never** been referred to as 'relinquishing mothers'.

Those who stole our babies literally took them from their mother's wombs, breasts and arms before any consent to adoption had been signed (illegal abduction). They showed no compassion, and displayed only coldness and disinterest in us.

They took our babies and then discarded us, cruelly uttering that we would have our 'own' baby later. Many mothers did not have another child due to the trauma they experienced in losing their firstborn.

This was the adoption era in Australia. It was unprecedented at that time and still is.

I held my son Michael many times in his first few days of life. I loved him with the same passion that all new mothers experience. I rejoiced in his life and never believed for one moment that I would lose him forever. How wrong I was.

The staff at the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church ensured that not only would my son be taken from me for nothing more than being unmarried, but that he would also grow up believing I did not want him and now holds the view that I was a mother without feeling who could hand him over to strangers without a backward glance.

I have grown older, with my own son growing older, yet not of my family. I cannot know his legal name nor am I allowed to know if he is alive or dead. There has never been a day in my life I have not thought of him. I still to this day do not understand how the cruelty of those who presented a false veil of trust and caring to society could have separated me from my own child.

I am only one of a least 250 000 non-Indigenous Australian mothers who were treated in similar ways.

There was supposed to have been laws to protect my baby and me. Yet those whose prejudices could be manipulated into their reality abused those laws.

This manipulated reality has been perpetuated throughout the past few decades by the very organisations that were responsible for the abduction of our children. They have successfully, perpetually, created for society an acceptance of 'class culture' — that infertile **married** women have the **right** to another's baby **regardless** of the rights of the mother or her child.

We have an acceptance in society now of the pain and suffering of the mothers of the Indigenous stolen generation. However, in our supposed democratic society, we non-Indigenous mothers have been denied any recognition of our stolen babies; in fact, quite the opposite — we are told that our babies were taken in the best interests of us both. Who made this assumption? Who allowed hospitals to tell mothers they could not see their babies, that they had no right to hold, suckle or rear their own babies? Who allowed this very brutal exercise in social engineering to occur? Who?

Please do not deny what happened to us by ignoring us. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous mothers from the 1950s to the 1970s had their children stolen by the unethical and illegal practices of those who were there to care for us.

There *are* two stolen generations.

June Smith

A mother of the stolen white generation

For people to heal, the truth must be revealed ... Desmond Tutu

Dr D.F. Lawson of the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne is quoted in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, dated 30 July 1960, as saying, 'The last thing that the obstetrician might concern himself with is the law in regard to adoption'. Dr Lawson also went on to give class distinct examples of how low on the ladder of life single mothers were. He arrogantly assumed himself to be the pinnacle of creation. He quoted another obstetrician, Dr R. L. Stevenson: 'There are men and classes of men who stand above the common herd, the soldier, the sailor and the shepherd not infrequently; the artist rarely; rarelier still the clergyman; the physician almost as a rule, he is the flower of our civilization'.

In the *Australian Journal of Social Work*, vol. 10, no. 1, dated February 1966, Social Worker Maev O'Collins, (an adoption consent taker) of the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, stated in part about placing single mother's babies for adoption: 'Our judgement in many cases is only a little better than chance and our ability to assess possible problems must leave a greater margin for error than perhaps any other field of social welfare. This may mean that in the stress of the moment we place a child hurriedly, perhaps too soon, perhaps to the wrong couple, perhaps to unsuitable people'.

An excerpt from 'The Intermediary System is Not the Solution', a speech given by Margaret Lawrence of the American Adoption Congress in Washington D.C. at the first National AAC Conference on 4 May 1979.

'In order to bring the issues surrounding the intermediary system into clear focus it is necessary to examine the myths and motives that surround the adoption experience. Outsiders need to realize that social agencies not only control adoption procedures, but also control the information about the institution, which is provided to the courts, the legislatures and the public.

It is the child welfare establishment that has provided the picture of "birth mothers" as different — as mothers who abandon their unwanted children with a wish to remain forever hidden from them. They know that this is seldom true, but it helps facilitate their work for the public to believe this. Society does not dismiss the importance of the natural family as readily as the social planners, and so it is useful to portray relinquishing parents as different from caring parents.

The "birth mother" must be different, an aberration; for if it were true that she had the same degree of love for her child as all other mothers, the good of adoption would be overwhelmed by the tragedy of it. Adoptive parents are presumably somewhat relieved of guilt if they can be assured that the parents truly did not want their child; for, under the circumstances, it is possible to feel entitled to claim the child of others. Neither society

nor the mother who holds the child in her arms wants to confront the agony of the mother from whose arms that same child was taken.

But the agony is real, as we have come to learn through our experience with reunions. It is a cruel punishment for relinquishing parents to bear life-long anguish over the fate of their lost children.'

At the Association of Social Workers National Conference in 1965, Mary Lewis, Social Worker, stated: 'Many agencies in this country have punitive, illegal and harmful rules regarding the unmarried mothers' inalienable right to physical contact with her child. Some Agencies refuse to allow the unmarried mother to see her child, nor do they tell her the child's sex. While this may be done from the best motives, these misguided people should look more carefully into the situation'.

At the 1st Conference on Adoption — Uses and Abuses of the System in 1976 — Father J. Davoren, Catholic Social Welfare, stated: 'She is powerless and particularly vulnerable to abuse, and that abuse is not an uncommon feature. She has for example the [same] rights as any other patient in the hospital. She has the right to be told what has been prepared for her by way of physical and medical treatment; she has the same right as any other patient to refuse such treatment. She has the right to name her child and the right to see her child with no more restrictions than any other patient in the hospital, and even those restrictions are subject to her final decision.

Many of these rights are not being recognised, apparently on the grounds that restrictions are in the interest of the mother and/or her child. Not only is there no evidence to support such restrictions on such grounds, but there is an abundance of evidence that this type of repression is damaging to mother and child and can seriously jeopardise the realism of the decision that the mother is endeavouring to make about whether or not she should surrender her child for adoption'.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed on 10 December 1948

Article 5: No-one shall be subjected to ... inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child 1959

Principle 1:

The child shall enjoy all the rights set forth in this Declaration. Every child, without any exception whatsoever shall be entitled to these rights, without distinction or discrimination on account of ... birth or other status, whether of himself or of his family.

Principle 3:

The child shall be entitled from his birth to a name and a nationality.

Principle 4:

The child shall enjoy the benefits of social security. He shall be entitled to grow and develop in health; to this end special care and protections shall be provided both to him and to his mother, including adequate prenatal and postnatal care ...

Principle 6:

The child for the full and harmonious development of his personality needs love and understanding. He shall, wherever possible, grow up in the care and under the responsibility of his parents, and in any case, in an atmosphere of affection and of moral and material responsibility: a child of tender years shall not, save in exceptional circumstances, be separated from his mother. Society and the public authorities shall have the duty to extend care to children without a family and to those without adequate means of support.

Available benefits

by June Smith

On the 5 April 1944, Royal Assent was received under Commonwealth social legislation for the payment of Unemployment and Sickness Benefits.

An important feature of the Unemployment and Sickness Benefit was the provision for the granting of a Special Benefit.

Special Benefit was able to be granted to a person who 'by reason of age, physical or mental disability or *domestic circumstances* ... is unable to earn a sufficient livelihood for himself (politic gender at the time) or his dependants'.

This meant that in circumstances whereby a person would not *qualify* for a pension or Unemployment or Sickness Benefit, Special Benefit could be paid, thus providing income to all Australians in time of need.

Written in Social Services guidelines (guidelines are *not* law; criteria *is* law) was a suggestion for the payment of Special Benefit — that it could be payable to a woman who had to stay at home to care for her sick father.

In the guidelines of 22 September 1952, it is written:

'Women single or living apart from husband caring for a sick child ...'

'Medical evidence should be produced to show that the claimant is required to remain at home to care for her child.'

'Enquiry should be made to ascertain whether the claimant can make other satisfactory arrangements to care for her child and so permit her to engage in either full time or part time employment.'

'A social worker's report should be obtained in these cases wherever possible.'

However, the criteria for Special Benefits under the *Social Services Act 1947* stated, and still state, that an applicant for Special Benefits must be:

- aged at least 16 years and under pensionable age
- a resident of Australia for not less than 12 months prior to application for Special Benefit
- not qualified for or receiving another pension or benefit, and by reason of age, physical or mental disability or domestic circumstances *or for any other reason*, that person is unable to earn a sufficient livelihood for themselves or their family.

Prior to June 1968, unmarried mothers were granted Sickness Benefit for 12 weeks before and six weeks after confinement; yet from 1968 to 1969, *'there was a substantial increase in special benefit granted. The main reason for the increase was that figures for special benefit in that year included unmarried mothers who were previously granted sickness benefit before and after confinement'* (p. 460 in KH Kewley's book *Australian Social Security in Australia 1900 to 1972*).

This situation is also supported by the *Commonwealth Department of Social Services 28th Report of the Director-General of Social Services 1968–69*, which states that Special Benefit payments to ex-nuptial confinements rose by 47.8%. However, the legislative criteria for special benefits had *not* changed since 1947.

**So why had it not been paid to unmarried mothers prior to this time?
Was it due to the fact that a social worker's report was necessary?**

In 1945, in the *Rules for the Guidance of Officers concerned with the grant of Unemployment and Sickness Benefit*, under the heading of 'Special Benefit', the Director-General of the Department of Social Services, FH Rowe, stated that *'all officers concerned in the administration of this legislation are required to exercise courtesy and tact in their dealings with the public and it is desired that each claim shall receive sympathetic consideration'*.

Footnote: There were many ways mothers could have kept their babies if only they had been allowed to leave the hospital with them. I worked in 1965 because I had a six month old baby boy to support as my husband had deserted us! I did not claim any benefit from the government, I WORKED. It was easy to get a job then! I got no maintenance for 18 months till I went to court and fought for it! My son was cared for by a triple certificated nurse. NO ONE cared whether I was married or not and often people actually thought I was a single mother and went out of their way to help me thinking I was on my own. Yet in 1965 the demand for single mothers' babies was beyond supply and mothers were still being abused by adoption workers who used the excuse of the so called stigma and lack of financial support to justify their agenda. Makes me so angry - this cover-up in our history. My firstborn (who was adopted against my will) wrote to me once and said "it must have been a difficult choice to make." WHAT choice!

The gift by Christine A. Cole

Can we throw our hats with pride,
if we cannot take them off in regret?

We love to brag old glories,
even if they're not our own but generations past.
How we laud our brave ANZACS and wish to
keep the light of such victories glowing.

How can we then divorce ourselves from blame,
for crimes our fathers and grandfathers committed?
It is only right we share the shame.
We cannot take credit for the nobleness of the past,
if we do not accept the shadows our forebears cast.

For all those who live in this land to feel they belong,
we must do our best to right past injustices and wrongs.
If we want this nation to stand proud and true
then we cannot deny
its pillars of light, or its foggy mists;
both created the identity we carry today.

If we only bask in the glow
of fallen heroes and glorious battles of the past,
how proud and blown up we seem.
This is not what our country is,
this is not what forged us into who we are today.

We are an imperfect people,
which is neither good nor bad.
But to be consumed with self importance,
and hold firm a deluded sense of reality,
will hurt us more in the future
than the mistakes a less enlightened generation left behind.

As a people we stood by doing nothing.
We ignored the weeping, the screaming,
of mothers black and white,
as heartless officials tore babies
from cradling arms, wombs and hearts.
With our silence we colluded in the madness.

At last the chance to do something.
The gift of saying I am sorry,
I am sorry.

Extracts from an interview with Dr Geoffery Rickarby, 9 August 2007

Dr Rickarby has worked with adoptive families in crisis since the 1970s. With his colleagues Mee Mee Lee, John Said and Pauline Egan, he wrote 'Adoptive Families in Distress', which was published in the *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, and earlier with Pauline Egan, 'Issues of Preventive work with Adoptive Adolescents' in the *Medical Journal of Australia*. These and other similar articles are referred to extensively overseas, as well as in Australia. Rickarby was employed by the Department of Child and Community Services to set up the first real screening system of potential adoptive parents in 1980 because of concerns the Department had due to their inability to have their refusal of adoptive parents circumvented by appeal.

Rickarby has worked extensively with mothers and adoptees who have sought him out because of the psychological damage they suffer, caused by being separated at birth. The three most common psychiatric problems affecting mothers are Depression, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and Pathological Grief. Often adoptees suffer feelings of deep-seated rage from thinking they were abandoned by their mothers, as well as identity disorders and adequacy conflicts because of dislocation from their families of origin.

JM: Was an unsupported unwed mother able to leave Crown Street Women's Hospital with her baby, if she did not want adoption?

GR: It would have been very difficult in Crown Street ... it was virtually impossible ... very difficult. In Crown Street you were getting pumped full of huge doses of Pentobarbitone and you were in cloud cuckoo land for five or six days and you would keep receiving that if they didn't have a signature down, or they hadn't got some other way of getting it ...

JM: What was the effect of those drugs on the mother?

GR: Well, they were the same kind of drugs that were used at Chelmsford for Deep Sleep Therapy. It was just a matter of the quantities given, but usually quite big quantities were given to mothers in those first five days and then someone would come along on the fifth day and they would bring the form and stay there and put it under the mother's nose. There was never a mother who went and asked for the form to be brought to her so she could sign it [the legal process]. They really chased the mothers [to get a signed consent] because they did not want them to see the baby before they got their consents ... the hospital [Crown St.] would be afraid of this, because quite often in hospitals that were not as tightly baby-taking, the mothers would go and find their babies in the hospital. So to stop this, they [Crown St] would move mothers from one hospital to another so that the baby was in one hospital and the mother was somewhere else...

JM: Why do you think they did not allow mothers to see their children at the birth?

GR: To give them a very shocking message, teach them it wasn't their baby ... but their ostensible reason was to prevent the mother forming a bond to her baby which was quite silly anyway.

JM: Why do you think they would not allow mothers to breastfeed their babies?

GR: Well, they have presumed that the mother was going to sign the consent ... because they are going to get it from her one way or another and they have just presumed that these mothers are going to sign the consent.

JM: It doesn't seem ethical not to allow a mother to feed her baby; in your opinion, was it legal?

GR: I have read numerous records, particularly from Crown Street, where the mother was given stilboestrol by injection, sometimes by mouth, while she is still in the labour ward and this would dry up her milk; many of the mothers had no idea they had been given it and when I have got the records from the hospital, they

have been very surprised to see what has happened many, many years later. And there can be no way that the consent to necessary procedures would cover the consent to have their milk dried up by an injection when the consent for adoption was to be taken on the fifth day and not before it. So this was certainly an issue of quite a major assault, and I have often been mystified why this assault, which would seem to be a criminal act rather than anything else, why they have not been able to have any legal redress just for this act alone. Never mind having their baby taken from them against their will.

JM: So an unsupported mother could not just get her baby and leave?

GR: No. Crown Street was highly organised. There were many communications between various professions that were all involved in this baby-taking procedure ...

JM: So you are saying it was virtually impossible for an unsupported unwed mother who had not seen her baby at the birth to leave that hospital with her baby because she wouldn't have even known what her baby looked like?

GR: Exactly ... and there would be no way in which a mother who has been removed to their aftercare hospital (Lady Wakehurst) would have a chance of finding their actual baby ... No, to really do something, they would have had to get a relative to obtain a solicitor. Some people tried asking for solicitors. What they needed was lawyers ... it was a whole profession that was missing ... all of this stuff, if they [the legal profession] had gone in there, they would have obviously seen what the other professions were doing ... it would have been obvious to them that what they were doing was quite illegal ...

JM: What about if a mother had signed the consent and changed her mind; what happened?

GR: The social worker or the staff at the unmarried mothers' home would say something like 'Dear, if you change your mind, give us a ring'. They were never told about the Supreme Court building (where one had to go to revoke the consent). Then they would berate the young woman ... 'You don't want to do that to your baby dear, why the adoptive parents have already seen her dear, they have already given her a name and everything. You go and have a good think about it dear.' Click, hang up the phone. This is what happened. Or they just lied and said it was too late, even if it was not, and even in some cases when the baby had not yet left the hospital ...

JM: What was the use of signing the consents at all, then?

GR: They had to get a signature there for it to be legal eventually if it was reviewed later ... But some signatures have been missing, some have allegedly been forged; they used to have a procedure where if a mother refused to give her consent ... their consent could be dispensed with; some solicitors used to specialise in it.

JM: So it seems that laws were broken?

GR: In my view, I think parliament was treated with contempt ... utter contempt. Very much later, The Queensland Government, as a result of its concerns with hospital practices, insisted that the unwed mothers who gave birth took the baby home. They then did not allow hospitals to have anything to do with adoption whatsoever. And, in a way, this is a very sensible move and if this had been done earlier, that would have stopped a huge amount of this illegal removal of babies.

Lost, found and lost by Mary Walsh

April/May 1961

The Sydney Harbour Bridge is a symbol of Australia throughout the world — but to me, it has a special meaning. Sydney is where I had my daughter in April 1961 and found her again in October 1999 — but now I've lost her again.

I ran off to Sydney in my fourth month. My mother (like countless other mothers) was horrified and ashamed to think one of her kids could bring this disgrace on the family. I'm the third of six children and the eldest girl was to be married in November 1960. I believed I was also getting married but when I dropped the news to AM, he not only denied paternity, but called me a slut and slammed the door (literally) after pushing me out.

I fled to Sydney on the Daylight Express, which stopped at Albury for 45 minutes to link up with the NSW train. Claire (the bride) met me at Central and let me know in no uncertain terms that there was no way she wanted to be seen with me much. I went to Crown Street a few days later, after going to a pawn shop to buy a wedding ring. I had written to Kath Dalton a few weeks before to ask if there was somewhere I could stay until the baby was born. I have since seen that letter and nowhere did I request an adoption.

Dalton arranged for me to be 'Mother's Help' with a family who had three kids. The family was orthodox Jewish! I had no idea of Judaism and the dietary laws or the Sabbath Sunset to Sunset. After Christmas, I found a job as a temp on a switchboard for three weeks and also found a boarding house nearby. Then it was back to Crown Street and off to Wakehurst for the duration.

I was one of 12 girls on the ward. We were referred to as the 'antenatals' and a girl asked one day what it meant. She somehow thought it meant 'anti' and the 'natal' part she couldn't comprehend at all! The days were long, as we had nothing to do except make our beds. We had to be in bed at 7 pm for visitors, who seldom came. My second sister (Cissy) by this time had found out and she became one of the few visitors to the ward.

I made friends with a Jewish girl, Lotte, who worked out a way for us to keep our babies. She would work as a librarian and I would mind the two babies. We would need some sort of, at least, moral support from our families, but when she broached the subject to her parents they were aghast. I knew I couldn't count on mine either. Not even Cissy. Actually, I didn't think a lot about any future, as I was having huge doses of Sodium Amytal and Sodium Pentobarbitone. There was only today; no tomorrow.

Tomorrow came on 21 April, which was my youngest sister's birthday. I crept down the stairs to Sister's office to ask for Disprin for an ache in my legs. The aching legs were the start of labour and before I knew it I was in an ambulance heading for Crown Street. I didn't want to have the baby. I wanted to remain pregnant. I remember hanging onto a lamp post crying, 'I don't want to have it yet'. The men had gone for a wheelchair, as I was about to deliver right there and then. Next thing, I was in that chair being wheeled at top speed. I still cried 'No, no', but no-one listened. I heard someone say 'She's a Wakehurst girl. Pillows, quickly!'

I was whisked into a room and was surprised to see an ordinary bed. I think I expected a table, but it was a regular bed. I didn't have time to take in much, as the baby was just about out. But there was time for the pillows on my chest. People in gowns and masks were everywhere. I now know that the most important one was the paediatrician. He was the only one with the duty of swift removal of the baby to the nursery. I was of little importance. I did what I was told, took whiffs of gas and tried to breathe like the

physiotherapist taught us. My mother had told me how to behave in the labour ward when she came to Sydney for a visit.

Little 'Sydney' shot out quickly. I heard her cry, then lowered voices and footsteps leaving the room.

'What is it? A girl?'

'Everything's okay, dear. You were a good girl. Now we just have to stitch you a little, only three.'

My questions remained unanswered. I felt a jab in the buttocks and started to float. Someone washed me, and then everyone left the room. I was alone until the ambulance men came. On the way back to Wakehurst, one of them said I had a little girl. I was still euphoric and didn't really take in the information. They carried me in a 'Boson's chair' up the stairs where I would now be a 'post' (natal). The 'antes' would bring my meals and cups of tea.

'What did you have, Mary?' Lotte asked. 'What was it like? Did you have pillows on your chest?'

I didn't want to talk much, but told her I had had a girl. It was at this moment reality hit like a slap. I have to give her away! I don't want to. I started to cry, so Lotte pulled the screen around my bed and apologised for upsetting me. A nurse appeared, gave me a jab, and I cried myself to sleep.

Four days later a JP, someone called Grimes, took me out on the balcony for a 'little chat'. The 'little chat' was to acquire my signature on the adoption order. This was on 26 April — my fourth day — and not the first of May, as stated on that document.

On *that* date, Cissy and I were in Dalton's office asking to rescind my signature. 'I'm sorry Mary, but it's too late.' It was *fait accompli*. We left that office with me in pieces once more. Our mother had sent me a telegram saying, 'Don't sign anything. There may be a way'. Dalton took no notice of the telegram and refused my sister's request to have 'just a peek at the baby'. I sat there like a zombie.

A few days later, the *Strathaird* was leaving for its last voyage to be broken up. I booked a ticket for Melbourne for eight pounds, which was a better deal than the train and that change over at the border. The ship was packed with people eager to be part of *Strathaird* history. Many passengers were 'Ten Pound Tourists' who had arrived here on the *Strathaird*. Now it was to be the last voyage. The ship's leaving was very emotional, with the entire harbour decked out for the occasion, and every deck on that great ship was crowded with people. My sisters came to see me off, as I too was going to South Hampton and not Melbourne. In our family, we, none of us are tactile, but Cissy hugged me and we both cried for 'Sydney', who was now with 'real' parents.

The ship's orchestra played *Waltzing Matilda* and *Will Ye Nay Come Back Again* as we pulled away from Circular Quay with at least a thousand people singing and holding streamers thrown by the passengers. It was just on dusk as the ship made its way under the bridge and every building flashed lights on and off in farewell. All the way down the harbour right to the Heads, with lights from every window along the shore on and off. Salt spray hit my face and an observer couldn't tell if I was crying or not. I was — not for the *Strathaird*, but for little unseen 'Sydney'.

A small group of people invited me to dine with them, which heralded the start of my secret past life. I was just another tourist, so I joined in the many events that P&O offered on their ships. This trip was a good idea and for the first time I ate oysters and have loved

them ever since. I explored all that I could, and enjoyed being waited on with style for the next 36 or so hours. There is still only today. Two mornings later, I was aware we were in Port Phillip Bay and would be at Station Pier after breakfast. Sydney and 'Sydney' were only a bad dream and remained so, for 34 more years.

I didn't ask my mother for many years why she sent that telegram. I wasn't to mention 'Sydney' again, but I went into a depression around 21 April every year. I once left a writing pad in a phone box with letters to Lotte. I didn't always post them but talked to her on paper. Someone found the pad and sent it to our house, addressed to me, but I share my name with my mother so she got it. At first, she was furious but when I broke down and cried that I only *talked* on paper, she calmed down, said it was a good idea, but to hide it in future. I did.

Mother applied (on my behalf) for a job at, of all places, Queen Victoria Hospital. I didn't want it, as it is a hospital similar to Crown Street. Mummy said it would do my character development the world of good as it, to her way of thinking, would get my mind off what became known as 'Mary's Sydney Trip'. To my surprise, I got the job on the switchboard, and to my greater surprise, I came to be very fond of that hospital. I felt cocooned again. When all was said and done, I had been institutionalised by this time having been in Wakehurst for three months. I stayed at the Queen Vic for six years but I never could get used to seeing the term BFA (Baby for Adoption). Sometimes it was twins and I wondered if they would be separated. I hoped not.

As advised by Dalton and Grimes, I married as quickly as possible, with the aim of replacing 'Sydney'. I met my husband 13 months after coming home. We married eight months later. He is a good man and we are still (almost) together. I had a miscarriage just before our first anniversary. I asked myself, 'Why?' I am married now! I was shattered, but my mother visited me after the D&C and said it was just one of those quirks of nature. I had not, at this stage, said anything to Michael about the 'Sydney' excursion but 'got over it'. I went back to work at the Queen Vic. I left in 1966 to start a family, which eventually resulted in the birth of my son in 1967.

His birth was a replay of Sydney. Very quick and once again, I didn't get to see him immediately. It took three hours, and it was only due to the threat of me pulling the place down that he was finally brought to me. Cissy rang from London to say she was glad it was a boy. I knew what she meant. Another girl may have been a subconscious replacement. I was thrilled to be a real mother but couldn't help crying on my third day, remembering that there were no flowers and cards to welcome 'Sydney' in 1961.

When we came home from the Jessie Mac, I had bought almost nothing for the baby. Mummy came to give a hand with the new baby and was shocked to find no extra feeding bottles (I have totally inverted nipples).

She asked, 'How were you going to feed him?' I blurted out, 'I didn't think I'd bring him home; I didn't think I'd have a real live baby to keep'. Me, being me, there were copious tears.

Mummy softened her attitude and sent Michael down to the chemist with a list of necessities, including carnation milk (from contented cows) and Pentavite, which I managed to spill — often! Mummy stayed for a few days and when Michael took her to the station to return home, they passed a lovely old house named St Ronan's. As soon as she walked in her own door, she jumped on the phone to tell me to change Patrick's name to 'Ronan'. Michael's mother's maiden name was Ronan and it would have gone well with our surname of 'Walsh', but I saw red. I said she had all the kids she wanted and called us what *she* wanted, and so he was going to be called 'Patrick', and that was that. She was furious, but I felt I had a victory for once.

The years passed, with me still working on various switchboards as we had bought this house and money was, of course, scarce. My son was no problem, but his mother was. I had migraine-like headaches from daylight to dark. I was too scared to bathe my little boy, as I had triple vision. I was over-anxious and never really bonded. When Patrick was two weeks old and I was becoming ill, I went to the Grey Sisters for a rest, taking him with me. My headaches continued for 12 years or more despite all attempts at diagnosis. What I put it down to now, it was post-traumatic stress; either that, or postnatal depression, which was 'unheard' of in the 1960s.

I still went quiet every 21 April. I couldn't give my youngest sister a present or even a birthday card. I didn't answer the phone on that day unless I was working on a switch. Sometime in the 1980s, I tuned into Radio National's *Coming Out, Ready or Not* (which was later called *The Coming Out Show*). It was through this program I first heard of ARMS. I joined the group, and it was comforting to meet so many women in the same rickety boat as myself (we always think we are the only one without an oar in rough seas).

Over the years, it got easier to think about 'Sydney', as I was always working to discharge our mortgage, which we eventually did. When 'Sydney' was about 19, there was an advertisement for Amaco petrol, which featured a lovely looking girl in a little red car. I was certain that the girl was the one taken from me all those years ago, so every time the ad came on television, I stopped whatever I was doing to have another look. Yes, she looked like me at the same age, although prettier, and those high cheek bones! I was tempted to ring the Agency but what would I say? She turned up as an extra on *Prisoner* and then in dozens of productions. Was she 'Sydney'? I hoped so.

I did ring an Agency once, after some friends started to see a resemblance. The girl rang me one night and put to rest the idea that she was my lost baby. She turned out not to be adopted, but also was of a totally different ethnic group! My genes are all Celtic, as was Sydney's father. This girl was Eastern European. She was lovely and invited me to see her in her next production at the MTC. I didn't attend.

Addendum

In 1999, with the encouragement of a friend, the writer knocked on her daughter's door in Sydney and finally saw her daughter and met her two little grandsons. She spent the afternoon talking and comparing notes. The friend was amazed at the similarities by way of appearance, mannerisms while talking and laughing, and tastes in reading and music. The writer's hopes for an ongoing relationship were cruelly dashed the next day, when she received an official notification via the Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC) that she was never to contact her daughter again. She was never told the reason, which left her devastated. She died on 18 March 2003 from a massive heart attack, after signing off from her radio program at a bayside community radio station. Certainly, there were other causes for her death, but many firmly believe the loss of her daughter was a factor. Rest in peace Mary: 1938 to 2003.

'Placenta and Pillows'

Jacki's story

As a young person growing up in a very Catholic family in a country town, life was not as easy as one might hope. I was taught to trust people who were there to supposedly help one; however, this turned out not to be the case.

I fell pregnant at the age of 16 years and six months. My family placed me in a home for unmarried mothers named St Anthony's, located at 9 Alexandra Avenue in Croydon. I still had four months until the birth of my child and after being there for only one week, two members from the Catholic Adoption Service came to see me about giving my child up for adoption. This continued every week until I gave birth to my daughter, DA.

Upon my return to the Home after the birth of my child, I was told that I owed the Catholic Church for all the help they gave me while at St Anthony's, but if I agreed to give up my child for adoption then they could and would recover the cost from the new parents.

Even at this young age, I knew it was wrong of them to talk about my baby like this, so I told them that I'd never adopt my child out, let alone through their service. I found it quite strange they never told me what I could do, or what the law was regarding adoption.

While at St Anthony's, there was a lot of effort to ensure we were hidden from the outside world. No-one could or would know we were there because, for example, they would change our name and send mail interstate via Queensland or Victoria so people couldn't track down where we were. No photos of my family were allowed in the Home and I was never allowed to go beyond the Home's gates. Contact with anyone who might encourage us to change our mind about adoption was also forbidden.

After returning to St Anthony's Home after giving birth, I was not allowed to see my baby; none of us were. We were never given the chance to say goodbye to our babies, and the Catholic Adoption Services failed to inform any of us unmarried mothers of our legal rights as a mother. Instead, they just pressured us to sign the paperwork as soon as we got back to the Home.

I know of many girls from St Anthony's who changed their mind about adopting out their child, but they signed the paperwork in an attempt to get away from the people of the Catholic Adoption Agency. The Adoption Services have a lot to answer to, being responsible for affecting thousands of mother's lives.

Hundreds of mothers signed those forms without understanding their rights, and I was one. I do not ever remember them asking me about the father of my unborn child; about what he looked like, his hair and eye colour, weight or height, so how could they match up the new parents with my child? I began to wonder if this was a 'who has the most money' type of service.

In early 1966, when my de facto relationship broke down and my mother kept telling me that she would have my child removed from my care because she considered me to be an unfit mother, I returned to St Anthony's because I felt comfortable among the supportive nuns.

Things hadn't changed with the Catholic Adoption Agency even by then; they were still saying the same things to unwed mothers, although they'd added a few more lines, such as telling relinquishing mothers their child would be adopted from an early age, that we would have access to find out how our child was going via their services, and that the adoptive parents would be given our name so they could make contact if they wanted to. I remember them saying the child would be better off by being adopted, and that they would match up the child with a family who fitted the physical descriptions of the parents.

The same level of pressure was applied to sign our child away without bothering to tell us that by law, there was a period of time in which we could change our mind, even after signing the papers.

It was nearly one year later, while working at the orphanage, that I learnt that I could have gone to court to stop my adoption from eventuating. It wasn't until 5 April 2002 when my search ended by me finding out that my son had lived for the past seven years just seven streets away from my own home. He was so close, yet so far away.

After making contact with his adoptive mother, to my surprise she told me that my son had never been told he was adopted. She informed me of the reasons why she had not told him.

I thank God that I was one of the stronger mothers who survived the ordeal to go on and have a relatively 'normal' life, devoid of any mental problems, drug taking, drinking, prostitution or suicide attempts. I have, instead, been married for 31 years and was fortunate enough to give birth again, after many years of fighting cancer.

My dear son Jeb has had to pay the price of having a mother who is too scared to get close to her child for fear of him being taken away, and I do blame the Adoption Agency for this.

Since finding my son, JT, and finally making contact with him on Christmas Eve, and over the past five months of getting to know him and his own young family, one thing I have learnt was that he always knew he was different because he always felt like he didn't quite fit in. His adoptive parents were Irish and Scottish and very short; however, my son, JT, is well-built and stands at a tall 5 foot, 11 inches, with dark hair and an olive complexion.

So did it all come down to money? I believe it did, after having worked at St Anthony's Home for one year after the birth of my son, and after having heard the stories from the other unmarried girls and what was told to them by the Agency.

I truly believe many of the private adoption services have a lot to answer for, considering how many lives have been mixed up because of the lies told to them. And to this day, nearly 50 years on, mothers are still paying the price for having their children taken from them.

'New Life — The Truth!'

The family as it should have been allowed to flourish. The older son and daughter help the mother welcome their new little sister. Each member fits together in harmony. No dysfunctionality of place or relationship

I forgot to remember to forget by Barbara Maison

Our story began in 1957. I met Peter, the love of my life. He was my first boyfriend. We liked each other: we could talk about everything and laugh at the same things. We were very much in love with each other and despite our youth (we were 16) were planning our marriage in the future, just as soon as we were allowed.

Peter was very mature physically, intelligent, and sensible for his age. Months later the inevitable happened. We worried and planned together and when I was about three months pregnant, Mum asked me if there was a chance I could be pregnant. I burst into tears, confirming her suspicions. We both cried — I was so sorry I'd upset her so much, she was a lovely caring Mum. After an urgent visit to and confirmation by the family doctor, Mum and Dad visited Peter's parents to discuss the problem. We weren't asked how we felt, or what we wanted. We were told of their decision that neither family could afford to help support us with a baby. Told we would have to have 'it' adopted.

Abortions were all 'backyarders' then, and we didn't even consider it. We wanted our child, despite the inopportune timing, and now knowing our son I'm so glad. But now given the same choice: I don't know!

Our family doctor conveniently knew of a couple who wanted to adopt a child. Dr Wilson knew Peter's family also, as the three families lived in the immediate vicinity. He arranged for me to go to the 'Alexandra Home' for unmarried mothers, a Mothercraft Nurse Training School.

A sickness benefit payment partly paid for my board and Mum paid the balance. I worked in the kitchen during my stay. My father didn't want anything to do with me, or the situation — even to the extent of making my mother use public transport to visit me, instead of driving her in his car.

The shame of it all!

The Matron was a formidable, cold person, who ran the home very strictly for the pregnant girls. It was a given that you had to give up your child for adoption to stay in the Home. She made it clear that my baby was not MY BABY — there was no way I was going to keep 'it', if I wanted to stay in the Home. I had nowhere else to go. It was a rule of the Home that no contact was allowed with the father of the child. Peter was fully supportive throughout my pregnancy despite us not being allowed to contact each other; but we did by mail, via my mother, and by phone from the Outpatients at King Edward Memorial Hospital. Peter was my rock.

Matron supposedly explained to the mothers what to expect up to and after the birth, but never did tell me and I remained ignorant until I gave birth. There was no privacy in the Home, only in the bathroom, as we all slept in a dormitory and worked in the kitchen and laundry.

Because the adoption was arranged privately by Doctor Wilson, I never saw or heard from any Social Worker. At the time I was relieved, because they were from the 'Child Welfare Department'. The threat of 'the Welfare bogeyman' was extremely frightening, as they interrogated you to learn if you had done 'it' too many times, which meant a Home; generally the Sisters of No Mercy, or the Good Shepherd, until you were 18.

Totally irrelevant voyeurism? It was obvious that they [the girls] had been sexually involved with a male, so why the necessity for detail?

Another fear was that your boyfriend could be charged with 'unlawful carnal knowledge' and have to go to court, and possibly gaol. For what crime? We loved each other, and were dreading the day they came to question me. Naively, I was relieved I had escaped the inquisition by giving birth before they did interview me, as I dreaded going into another 'Home'.

Not one person ever explained any of the options available to us to keep our child. I never knew until 40 years later there was any help available. No-one ever told us that after signing the consent papers we had 30 days to change our minds! Change our minds? We were still planning ways we could take our baby home and manage by ourselves, until the end.

The Matron refused to believe I was in labour, telling me to go back to bed, despite the pain and stage of labour I was in. Fortunately, I was able to convince the night sister and I was taken to the King Edward Memorial Hospital in the final stages of labour. Then lying on my back on a cold, hard, narrow trolley, legs up exposing myself — no privacy, but buggler the embarrassment now — I couldn't have cared what they did to me. Bright lights in my eyes, and white tiles, lots of them. Loud voices, rattles of metal clashing, echoing. With lots more poking and probing at the source of my pain. Then lying by myself, for hours it seemed, in a dully-lit passageway on the narrow trolley up against the wall. Nurses and orderlies, rushing trolleys past, not even a sidelong glance at me, in my terror and ignorance.

More probing and poking from a harassed looking nurse, who gestured for another one to come and look at me. 'You're coming too soon. Try and hold on, we're not ready for you yet. You haven't even been shaved', she said. I couldn't answer, I couldn't even think, the pain was so intense. What was I supposed to do? I can't stop this happening! I couldn't have stopped it even if I had wanted to. I was close to tears. I was living a nightmare. Besides, the pains were horrific and I wished and hoped I could have some of that gas the girls said they'd give you towards the end.

I desperately wanted them, or someone, here with me.

More poking and probing, and then an urgent rushing around of nurses. A long, steady blur of pushing and pain. Someone put their hand inside me, or used their hand to stop the baby coming out — they pushed him back in: the most terrible, excruciating sensation! Then suddenly the trolley was moving fast, bashing against wide swinging doors into another large, white tiled room. More bright lights. Me, dumped onto another bed with a huge light above me, my legs poked unceremoniously through some strap things at the sides of the bed. When would it stop? I wish I could die! I can't take any more! I just hoped I'd get some of that gas soon!

A kindly voice through the fog, 'Just a while longer, dear. No, you can't have the mask. Don't push. No! I don't want you to push until I tell you. You're doing nicely. Adams, bring those forceps, she'll tear! Why didn't they send her in earlier?'

I had no control over the next urge, and didn't care, and gave an almighty push — then splat! Heat, right in the core of me, and wetness! Water — all over my legs! The pain not quite so intense now, it was like a heavy clamp on my belly pushing me down. I was on a roller coaster; everything was an uncontrollable blur, like a nightmare. I didn't care any more.

Then, groaning and pushing as hard as I could, feeling as though I was ripping apart, the strongest pain of all. A sharp, white hot tearing pain and then suddenly I felt the most beautiful feeling of relief, as he slithered hotly and wetly out of me. All wet and warm.

I thought I heard someone say, 'It's a boy'.

I cried. Great gulping sobs.

'Come on, don't be silly dear, it's all over now.'

I lifted my head to see him, to get my first glimpse. Where was he? The nurses stood, their backs to me doing something to him and I heard him — his first cry; a little mewling, squawking cry — that particular, unique wailing sound I can't, or will ever, forget.

His first call to me — he wanted me then — and they denied us both. Even now, when I hear the cry of a newborn baby, the memory still brings me out in goose bumps. A large dark-haired nurse stood in front of me, deliberately obstructing my view. Then he was gone — gone before I could see anything of him. At first, she didn't even want to confirm whether 'it' was a boy or a girl. My pleas were brushed aside; 'No, not now. Ask someone else later'. 'Bitch!' Another brusque nurse tells me, 'Pull yourself together, no need for tears, you'll be in the ward in no time and you can have a nice sleep. It is all over now'.

Ha! Little did she know the pain was just starting — this was merely the beginning!

I was badly torn, as he came out too soon; in too much of a hurry, his little elbow at the wrong angle. They said they couldn't give me gas as I was too far advanced, and they didn't have enough warning; I should have been there earlier when they weren't as busy! The spiteful old cow — she who caused me this extra pain and suffering — I loathe her even today. Some student doctors had fun, or practice, stitching me up. It was a cobbled up mess; luckily it is something that is rarely on view and even then not for general exhibition.

Then I was wheeled into the ward with the married, respectable mothers. Next came days of torture — the longest days I have ever spent in my life; empty, torturous days. Days that should have been a glorious and joyful experience.

Curtains hastily whisked closed around my bed each time the babies were brought in at feeding time, every few hours. 'Squeak, squish', heralded rubber soled shoes on the shiny floors, nurses carrying little pink or blue wrapped, wailing bundles which were handed over to outstretched arms and smiling faces.

'We'll just close these dear', whisk, whisk: so efficient! Those yellow curtains hiding my heartache, *after* I'd seen the babies given to their mothers! I doubt whether it was to save my feelings! Probably to avoid embarrassment for the mothers feeding their babies with me watching them — with an aching heart and empty arms!

Speculation as to why no baby for me to feed? Whispers behind hands ... ssshhh!

More fun — having my breasts bound to stop the milk coming in. No medication, when it came gushing in like a spring stream filled with melted snow. They gave me a binder with safety pins to pin around myself. The idea was a wide strip of material tightly bound around my chest, squashing my breasts up hard against the rib cage to discourage further production of the precious milk I had for my son. I couldn't manage it by myself and had to suffer the assistance of the hard-faced black-haired nurse, as though she was wrapping up a bag of potatoes.

I made sure I did it myself after that, whether it was tight enough or not. I was a very prolific cow! It was a big problem putting the binder on after a shower, and adjusting it by myself, as my breasts were huge, engorged and very sore and hard. Full of painful rocks, and just to move my arms was painful. I couldn't lie on my side as they would drag down.

I didn't like lying on my back because my breasts would slip sideways — both painful positions.

I was scolded because I avoided rolling over to lie on my stomach, as it was achieved with great difficulty due to the pain of pulling stitches and my painful breasts. Because I was not breastfeeding, my uterus was not contracting to expel the residue from the birth, and I was supposed to lie on my stomach for some time each day, a towelling covered pillow pressing firmly up against my belly. I managed to, as I didn't want a large, floppy stomach, which would have been a dead give-away that I'd had a baby. The stretch marks were proof enough: at least they could remain unseen.

Even at the hospital, I had been told to keep away from their nursery. It was forbidden — to those like me! Another distortion of the truth; more deceit, I found out years later. **Our** son was legally **ours** until the adoption order was ratified in the Supreme Court, and they lied to us! They denied us our only chance of holding, cuddling and kissing him. How could they be so cruel? It was not much to ask, particularly as they were keeping him to give to someone else!

Peter and I saw our son only once. I kept obediently away from the nursery, but just before I was due to be discharged Pete insisted we would try: our last chance! So there we stood, his arm protectively around me, both nervously peering through the nursery viewing window trying hard to see our baby son or his name among those rows of white covered bassinets on stands, each carrying a card, and one with my name on it.

A nurse looked at us, and after hesitating and looking cautiously around, lifted a baby out of a bassinet, and carried him over to the window and showed him to us. Both of us stood gazing at him. I could feel Peter's hand on mine, his thumb gently stroking the back of my hand, soothing and calming. I was overwhelmed and couldn't stop staring, trying to imprint the image of that little face on my mind. I was desperate to capture it before he was gone ... I can see that tiny face even today. I will have the picture of his little face engraved on my memory forever, I will always be grateful to that unknown nurse and would love to thank her for that gift, one of the most precious I have ever received.

The nurse smiled and all of a sudden turned and carried him back and put him in his cot, just as some other nurses walked into the nursery. I hope they didn't notice. If it wasn't for her compassion and the risk she took, disobeying orders, to show one of those babies (name cards marked 'A' for adoption?), we would have had absolutely nothing to take with us.

As it was, I never received even a piece of paper to show I had given birth to a child, until I was able to make application for the proof, 35 years later! My only proof; stretch marks, stitches, engorged breasts, and a broken heart.

Later, lying on my bed in the ward, the nurses would pull the curtains around my bed, not taking particular care, leaving gaps. My backside on a pillow, my legs wide open, bent up at the knees, with the healing heat lamp casting its warm glow on my tears and stitches to heal the cobbled-up mess. The doctors would walk past during inspection time, and with no warning, rip the curtains back for anyone to see me in my most unbecoming position. Curtains rudely pulled aside, to enable the student doctors to see the progress of their handiwork. I heard one of them make a derogatory comment about the position of my legs, and my marital status, as though I was not there, and the others laughed. Like an exhibit in the zoo!

When I compared notes later, we were treated like second-class citizens: less than animals.

At the time for the completion of the Birth Registration form, the Almoner came and took all the details for the registration of his birth. To her annoyance, and against her wishes and advice, I insisted that his father's name be put on the birth certificate/registration papers. But it was never recorded on the original birth certificate. They left it off — as though he had no father! What right did someone have, to make such a decision, not to include the name of his father on his birth certificate? I gave her all his details. Too lazy to follow up, and get his signature on the form? Yet he had to sign the consent papers!

Many years later I was able to apply and have his father's name added to his birth certificate.

When I was discharged from hospital, I was given nothing; not one piece of paper, a receipt, or certification to show he had even come from me — nothing whatsoever. We entered that place together my child and I, and I walked out alone. As though he had never been or existed.

Not knowing just how illegal and unethical their actions were then, I am extremely angry and frustrated even now — over 40 years later. They had no rights, until I had actually signed the papers; **because until then he was mine!** And I didn't know my rights, because they lied to me, and all the other mothers like me. We could have taken his picture, kissed his soft cheeks and touched his face and hair, felt the shape of his head, seen his tiny limbs and kissed his little fingers. And at least said 'goodbye'.

I was to forget about my baby and get on with my life!

Stupid, useless, empty words reverberated down through the years! It was impossible to forget him — so simple to say, impossible to do. Better still, let them all give away their firstborn child, to all those poor infertile people who couldn't have their own, and then tell me how they managed to forget!

This authoritative indoctrination, with firm opposition toward anyone who tried to object to their collective wisdom, came under the guise of advice, from all levels; the doctor, matron, sisters and nurses.

I was in hospital for nine days, still no medication to dry up breast milk, just the large painful binder. Then it was time for me to go back to the Home, wait another aeon in my vacuum for orders from Matron to go and sign away my rights to our son.

'You can have more when you get married ... there's plenty of time ... you're only young!' More brainwashing, as though there were fears we might buck the system. You can replace him! Like an old dog with a puppy?

I was told, '**You will forget about it**', '**Get on with your life! Everyone does**' and even '**You can have another one when you get married, *one of your own***'.

One of my own? He was my own! Not only was I his mother, Pete was his father: he was our son. This is fact and can never change, whatever laws were/are in place and whatever papers were signed. They were a false reality for someone else!

After three days waiting around, I was told to go and sign the papers and when I did I would be allowed to leave and go home. We were told if we didn't sign the papers, our son would end up in a Home, so Peter and I went together to the solicitor's office and I, with the stroke of a pen, and Peter a few days later, 'consigned' a tiny precious human being to a life with strangers, as though we were sending a parcel through the mail.

We walked away, up the hill in Howard Street, Perth — empty. I was numb, but dumbly accepting, crying endless tears. Pete was grim and with tear-filled eyes tried to comfort me. I had to hold back the sobs in the main street of Perth ... people might guess why.

Days stretched into nights, and more nights ... never-ending pain. I hated my life, waiting for the pain to go away. It didn't — not for 37 years did it merely abate.

It will never go and cannot, ever. I am a mother — I will always be *his* mother — who was separated from my child and told to *'forget about it, and get on with your life!'* Not to mention his existence to anyone. Just to pretend 'it' never happened.

'It'? 'It' was a human being!

How to do the impossible? If I was respectably married and my child had died, I would have been inundated with sympathy and caring.

My sin, our sin, was having had sexual intercourse without the blessing of marriage. But we loved each other; how could that be a sin? The proof we had sinned was a child! A child is a blessing not a sin. One of those many bigoted, religious, moral decisions, made by man. How then are non-Christian peoples on this earth, whom God is supposed to have created, not separated from their children at birth? Absolute hypocrisy!!

I was devastated. We were devastated. For a long time after his birth, months blended into a void for me. I was very depressed and disoriented, even with Peter's loving support.

I had been forbidden to speak to, or even see him; orders we still both disobeyed, as we loved each other, even more so with the bond of our son between us. Our futile plan was that one day we could be all together: we would get him back!

Now, I understand that I either suffered from postnatal depression, aggravated by the loss of our baby, or vice versa, and the suppression of the grieving process. It was considered abnormal if you *'didn't put it out of your mind'*. The problem was compounded by the fact that the subject was also forbidden to be discussed at home. I was to forget that I had been a 'wayward girl' and an 'unmarried mother' and, as I was not allowed to let my brothers suspect, and as only Peter and a couple of close friends knew, the secret was not to be leaked. The tension made my life intolerable.

Eventually I broke it off with Peter. One side of my brain/heart was 'Pete and our baby equals pain'. The other side said if I left him, it would help me to forget 'it' and freedom would equal no pain. It didn't work!

Peter told me recently, just before he died, that he cried for months after I left him. I did too. I wanted him but wasn't happy with him, knowing it wasn't his fault, but didn't know what else I could do. I withdrew into myself too much. I was so restless and unhappy, and ran wild for a while: the life of freedom? No. So after my father told me to shape up or ship out, I decided I had to get far away from the memories. I left my home in WA and came to Victoria in 1959 to start a new life, where I would not be peering into prams, staring at baby boys, and could hopefully try harder to forget, as I was told that everyone else did!

I really thought that I was unnatural and unbalanced because I couldn't forget. I had been told I was being a *'silly girl and to grow up!'*

I married within a year, and had a beautiful baby son by my first wedding anniversary, then a gorgeous baby daughter; two babies within four years. The marriage broke up

after nine painful years of abuse, contempt for my 'bastard' and my subservience, with me believing I deserved no better. 'Not respectable' again — a divorcee! Was I in a hurry to fill the great empty hole of my lost loves?

From the 1970s onwards, I was anxiously searching for information of him. My two children of my rash, failed, only marriage, were finally told of their brother's existence in 1985 and were supportive. Prior to that time, I could not speak of him, his birth and loss, to anyone without extreme distress. My jaw would literally freeze up and tremble. Back then, it was generally believed that your chances of finding your child were more remote than winning Tatts.

It was impossible to ever know if he was dead or alive, loved and happy, or living in misery, or anything of his life or fate. I wrote my futile letters, searching, knowing I could be disillusioned and more hurt. But I had to try. My greatest fear was that he was unloved and unhappy. All I needed to know at that time was that he was well and happy — I just **had to know!**

To confirm that he had had a better life than one that his parents could have given him!

For all I knew he may not have been alive. I may have been grieving for a dead son.

I finally found and met him in 1995. A dream finally come true; a dream far surpassing any I ever imagined. My son was 37 years of age before I touched, kissed, and spoke to him face to face! I could finally give him a birthday gift. He hadn't known he was adopted until the rigid laws were finally unlocked to enable me to initiate inquiries.

For this, I have to thank Glennis Deas of Jigsaw, Perth, WA. I am forever in her debt.

I am so fortunate he does not hold it against us like so many adoptees full of anger or resentment for the parents they believe rejected or abandoned them.

We continue see each other, write and telephone. He is a son to be proud of. His adoptive parents have given him a good, happy, stable home and upbringing. He is now in an established relationship and is the father of two gorgeous little girls; little girls he acknowledges as my granddaughters!

I had tracked down and got in touch with Peter a few years prior to finding our son, just in case he had heard anything about him, as I believed that our son would have known he was adopted, and hopefully might be looking for either of us. He wasn't and didn't, as he had not been told!

Pete had married twice and had four children. His first wife had died and the second marriage had ended in separation. As we were both single again, we spent quite a lot of time writing and phoning each other and when I learnt that he had terminal cancer, I visited him in Perth. We found that time had stood still as far as our feelings were for each other. It was most distressing that we had lost the chance of finally being together, that we had met up again too late because of his illness. But at least we did have time to say the words, and tell of many things we needed to say to each other.

Peter was adamant that had we had support, temporary financial and moral, and advice at that time we would not have separated; our son would have been ours and we would have been together still. I also believe it and had he survived, we would have resumed our relationship. The blessing we both have had is all our children that we have had with our other partners.

Peter died on 12th October 1997. But father and son had met and talked, and knew each other, albeit briefly. Not deeply enough, because time was too short, but Peter was extremely happy in the knowledge that he had finally met his son, and liked and admired the man he had become. I know his son is glad that he had the opportunity to know his father before it was too late.

Pete's last words to me were, 'I love you Barb, and I always will'.

'New Life — The Reality'

The family has to function without the firstborn son. The mother always feels his presence and makes a place for him.

A mother's plight by Christine A. Cole

In 1969, I gave birth to a baby girl at Crown Street Women's Hospital. The moment she emerged from my womb she was gone forever. The pillow they thrust across my body ensured I would never behold my daughter's face. The only memory I have is her first cry. The trauma of my baby's birth, our brutal separation, and the dark desperate years of yearning and anguish that followed will never be erased. These events sit heavy on my heart, and in my mind they are a never-ending nightmare. A part of me, a part of my soul, was taken when they stole my child, and what they left was a void filled with indescribable pain.

Mother Nature has made provision for acceptance of death, but I was never prepared for the theft of my healthy newborn. I was never prepared for this violation of my motherhood.

*Like villains in the night they came,
cloaked in deceit, lies and selfishness.
They had conspired to steal my child;
I was their quarry and they hunted me.
They had lain in wait
so when I stumbled, they were there
with grasping hands
and spider fingers.*

*When the deed was done,
the crime committed,
No-one offered solace;
only watched with dullard's eyes
as I lay bleeding, sobbing, wrapped in grief.
A torturous silence, my only companion.
A companion that tore my mind
and smashed my heart.
A companion that would be mine for life.*

*My world took on the hue of mourning,
with days, a struggle to survive.
Death brings peace,
yet there is no peace for me.
No termination of pain,
no grave to mark a passing,
no memorial to dress with flowers.*

*Mother Nature, mother of us all,
had been cheated
And like any mother, her wrath
is violent and unending.*

This is my story.

I didn't tell my mother I was pregnant until I was about five and half months along. I had known though, almost from the beginning, but I had been terrified to disclose the information to anyone, especially my parents.

My background was Catholic and for Catholics at that time, a child out of wedlock was considered an absolute disgrace. People now believe that in the past, adoption was the

automatic reaction of all parents; however, I know now that this was not the case. Many parents supported their daughter and the baby was absorbed into the extended family.

I believe the Church promoted adoption because it had the dual function of punishing so called 'wayward girls' for their transgression by removing their children whilst at the same time rewarding morally righteous married women by providing them with a child they couldn't produce themselves. Adoption used in this way provided a social control on women's reproductive behaviour.

Adoption had been actively promoted for more than 20 years by the time I became pregnant. So naturally, my mother saw it as a solution. Our local doctor, also a Catholic, instructed her to take me to Crown Street Women's Hospital, which facilitated more than half of the State's adoptions; it obviously had the process down to a fine art!

My mother took me to the hospital. Before being admitted, I was told I must see the social worker. I thought how young she looks, could only be a few years older than me. Yet here she was able to make decisions that would impact on so many people's lives. Really she had a god-like role, deciding who would have babies and who wouldn't. It was she, young and unmarried, never had a child herself, who was going to select the people who would take possession of my baby. It was she who held the destiny of my child and grandchildren. I wonder if she now knows how much pain she caused so many people? Sitting behind her very large desk, looking very important and professional she scribbled a few notes, years later I would read the degrading things she wrote about me and sob with anger. I felt so uncomfortable. My mother had already told me that I must adopt out my baby and that I could no longer live at home, she was worried about what the neighbours might say. Ludicrous really, when you think about it, one of the neighbours had been 16 years old when she had to get married because she was pregnant and the woman down the street and had an affair with another neighbour and they had both left their respective spouses to be together. So why my mother was so willing to give away her first grandchild because of what the neighbours thought was incomprehensible to me. So our meeting, or what was referred to as 'counselling', continued.

The social worker spoke glowingly about adoption. She and my mother formed an alliance and they both supported each other in telling me I must give up the baby for adoption. It was the right thing to do they both agreed. I was being selfish if I didn't. My mother went on about how I had disgraced the family. How after all she had done for me I had let her and my father down. The social worker sat there and nodded her head, agreeing with my mother. Oh yes, poor mum, as if I had got pregnant just to annoy *her*. When I reflect back now I wonder why I even had to attend this meeting, it was just a charade, my mother and the social worker had already made the decision. I felt like I was starting to disappear, becoming invisible really. Nobody heard or saw me. What I wanted was of no matter, no consequence. The social worker never suggested to my mother that she might feel different about her first grandchild once born. Nor did she warn my mother that I may suffer psychologically from the loss of my child. No, it was all about how great adoption was and how my mother was doing the best for me and 'the' baby.

I reflect back and think it was obviously the social worker's job, well that's what she was getting paid for, to procure babies for married couples, so when my mother came in and aligned herself with the adoption happy agenda at the hospital this young woman must have clapped her hands, a healthy white baby she could dispense with as she wished. I wonder if she got bonuses. Years later when I was told that the hospital social worker's job was to be my advocate I laughed out loud. What a load of nonsense I thought, her job was to get my baby, nothing else.

I saw this young woman on many occasions but she never once referred to my baby as 'your' baby; it was always 'the' baby. I think she was playing mind games and she wanted to make me feel disoriented to my unborn infant, create psychological distance. I have since talked to many other women and they all say that is how their baby was referred to. One wonders if learning such psychological techniques was part of her training.

My mother had no need to come to any further 'counselling sessions', her job was done. She knew she could count on the social worker to continue keeping up the pressure. And she was not disappointed. At every session I was asked the same shame inducing questions. It was as if the adoption worker had a script and she was sticking to it. She wanted my baby and there was no way getting around it. She asked me questions like, 'Can you give the child all the things a mother and a father can?' and 'How will you afford to clothe and educate 'the' baby?' I was only 16, I had never worked, what did she expect me to say? I gave her the only answer I could: 'I don't know'. I guess I wasn't smart enough to think up a cleverer answer. I would look at the floor, hoping something would occur to me. Nothing unfortunately did, so she would continue. 'The' baby, she reiterated, would go into a stable home with a two-parent family and they would provide all the things that I could not. I told her that I had planned to marry my child's father when I was a little older, but this was of no consequence. Instead, she kept arguing that what was important was that I do the right thing, right now. And that meant adoption. And of course she could always come back with: "And that's what your Mum and Dad want".

It didn't matter how often I told her I wanted to keep my baby it was countered by: 'You are so young; you wouldn't be able to manage on your own'. Years later when I got my social work records she had written that I was very selfish and immature. I remember shaking with anger and through blinding tears asked the social worker whose job it had been to furnish me the records and sit with me while I read them: 'How could she have written that, she didn't even know me!' The woman responded: 'You must have said you wanted to keep your baby, it was considered immature and selfish if you did!' So being immature and selfish was sort of a private code about which only other adoption workers knew the meaning. I was to learn they were all quite fond of using secret codes. Unfortunately for me their secret codes had life altering effects.

Never at any time that I met with the hospital social worker did she explain any alternatives to adoption. I was never told about any financial assistance that was available. If I had it may have softened my mother's stance and she may have then been more inclined to allow me to come home with my baby knowing that she was not going to be my sole support. She told me years later that the Catholic doctor who had told her about Crown St Hospital had warned her that she would be the one who ended up supporting my baby – knowing that there was financial help may have made all the difference to her. But unfortunately the social worker had the power to control what information was given, and with a mother so gung-ho about adoption I guess she thought it really was just an unnecessary formality that she needn't bother adhering to.

When we started with the 'counselling' session my self esteem was battered but not completely lost and I had thought of myself as a capable person having had the responsibility of minding my younger siblings since I was about 5 years old. Looking after one small baby would not have been that difficult. I was young, strong and healthy, and an IQ test I had done to determine what career potential I had, confirmed that I was intelligent enough to go on to University. But after months of this woman's counselling sessions my self esteem was in tatters and I began feeling as if I was carrying 'a' baby for a married couple "who couldn't have children of their own". Worse though, I felt if I kept 'the' baby it would be deprived of "all the things that a two-parent family" could provide.

I believe by the end of my pregnancy, my identity had become entirely shame-based; I felt I was a mother who was not really a mother. I am now of the conviction that I was

being manipulated to make the task of removing my baby less problematic for the social worker and the hospital, and to ensure that I was so broken, shamed, silenced and traumatised that I would never speak out against their evil practices and they could continue unchallenged for decades to come.

I have since read that social workers were well aware of the grief and trauma women suffered from being separated from their newborns, yet this was never discussed. And even though journal articles informed social workers that mothers needed to be supported through a mourning process after the loss of their baby her advice to me was "Just put it all behind you, get on with your life". No mention of the grief, no warning of any psychological problems I might encounter, such as depression or acute rage or feelings of suicidal despair. No nothing. But what was worse she lied to me about the effect adoption would have on my baby. All her 'counselling' was on how beneficial adoption would be both emotionally and financially. Social workers as a profession knew from the 1930s onwards that babies suffered a profound wound from being separated from their mothers to whom they had bonded during the pregnancy, but as women they should have always known. They knew from the 1960s that adopted children were over represented in psychiatric institutions and as private psychiatric patients. Yet her counselling efforts were solely based on the premise that she must convince me that my baby would be far happier and healthier without me. Just like the mothers fighting over the baby in Solomon, I was being led to believe I had to give my child to another woman in order to save it.

Who was this other woman? Why was she so much more capable than me to bring up my child? At 16, not only did I have no answers for these questions, I didn't even know how to pose the questions. A large part of the meeting with the social worker was taken up by discussion of the perfect couple that needed my baby. Not only was I told that they could give my unborn child everything I couldn't but they were, 'Such a lovely couple who sadly couldn't have children of their own'. I obviously could, so I was told not to be so selfish, after all, 'you can go on and have children of your own one day'. This couple were supposedly financially and emotionally stable and all they needed to perfect their family was the baby I was carrying. Surrogacy, I had never heard of the term. Certainly had no conception of what it was, but not knowing the term certainly did not stop adoption workers using me in that way, for a couple the social worker had already chosen. As the social worker already knew them, I wonder if the 'lovely couple' were informed that I was carrying 'their' baby, whilst I was still pregnant.

The social worker had no right making me responsible for another woman's infertility. It seems she was in the business of providing an unpaid surrogate for the benefit of those she saw as superior. I also got the feeling that by providing a 'lovely couple' with my baby was somehow making up for a crime that she thought I had committed. I know now that she played on my vulnerability, on having no family support and being completely alone. She played on the fact that my mother was against me and wanted my child adopted and she played on the guilt my mother had loaded on me for getting pregnant outside of marriage. This was such an unfair advantage, such an abuse of power, who was she accountable to, what ethics did she, as a professional, adhere too? This was baby-farming in the worst sense of the word. Farming babies from unsupported, vulnerable young women like me. She had not one iota of compassion for my predicament or for that matter, my unborn child. She was facilitating in the abduction of my child and I now hold her accountable.

How often have I heard a mother or father say that the most heartbreaking disaster that has ever happened to them is the loss of their child? 'We will never recover', they'd say. TV announcers respond to their tragedy by saying, 'No parent should have to go through that'. Or a child goes missing and they say, 'Not knowing where your child is, is a horror that no parent should ever have to endure'.

So why, did those working as so called 'adoption professionals' treat me and other young mothers with such contempt? When did having a marriage certificate determine maternal feelings? How could adoption workers be so arrogant to think they should be ones that decided who was fit or not fit to parent their own children? The fact I was not married did not mean I loved my child any less or would not suffer if she was taken from me. Was I considered so unnatural that it was assumed that my child could just be taken and given to strangers and I wouldn't feel all the grief, terror and rage that any other woman who had her baby kidnapped would feel? How could they expect me to suffer such a catastrophic loss and not suffer the most indescribable pain? Only individuals whose own self-interest so totally obscured their view of another human being's tragedy could ignore the pain of a mother who had her child kidnapped at birth. Yet the social worker and the other adoption workers were so blind to my pain that they arrogantly told me 'to forget you even gave birth' and to 'put it all behind you' because 'you can have children of your own' one day. Whatever the hell that meant!

Without my knowledge, and at the first interview that my mother and I attended with the social worker, my file was marked with the code 'BFA': baby for adoption. The meaning of this 'secret code' was understood by the maternity staff. It told them that I was to be separated at birth from, and never allowed to see or have contact with, my child. It also informed the maternity staff of what drugs I was to be given and that I was to be removed from the hospital by ambulance very soon after the birth so there was no way of me stumbling into the nursery and finding my newborn. It also informed the medical staff that I should be injected with a carcinogenic hormone, stilboestrol, to stop me from being able to feed my baby. This little code said all that and more. It said that nurses were not allowed to talk to me and that I should be treated with disdain, because I was a single mother and my baby was going to be adopted – all of this determined 4 months before I even gave birth and against my direct wish to keep my child.

Because my mother and father would not allow me to stay at home whilst pregnant the social worker suggested that I work as a housekeeper. She said she had a 'very kind family' that would consent to me working for them. So at five months pregnant I was unceremoniously packed off to a stranger's house. My work included cleaning a very large house as well as washing and ironing, and minding three small children; two of whom were not toilet-trained.

I worked 6 and half days a week, 12 to 14 hours every day. I was paid \$10 weekly and was expected to be grateful for the opportunity. This was the job from hell. It was a nightmare, the woman was a hard nosed bitch who would follow me around all day yelling, 'Do this, don't do that, clean here, dust there and hurry up!' She would constantly complain that I was too young to do the job and continually scream after me, 'I told them to send me someone older, and someone with a driver's licence!' If the three year old ever got out the front door, he would tend to run and there I would be, fat belly, chasing him up the street. I remember once, I had to make the lunch and the woman told me to choose something from the cupboard. I chose the salmon. That was a mistake. This woman was very wealthy, but the salmon was 'oh so expensive'. I was grateful she didn't deduct the cost from my meagre pay.

I was worked like a slave and totally exploited. I remember, on several occasions when she didn't think I was working hard or fast enough, I was spoken to by her husband. I felt so isolated and absolutely miserable.

Later it struck me as ironic that the social worker, who had told me I was unfit to mother my own child, gave me the responsibility of looking after 3 of someone else's. During this time I was cut off from my friends and family, I had only two visitors: my mother and my partner. I was only allowed to see my partner one night a week and on Sunday

afternoon. The rest of the time I was not allowed to leave the house. Many a night I cried myself to sleep. One night, whilst the couple were out, I got so miserable I became desperate and took four or five sleeping pills. I rang my partner and not knowing what to do he rang my mother and they both drove to where I was staying. I told her that I could not stand living in this house one moment longer. I couldn't stand the woman constantly picking on me and putting me down. I had spilt some water on the floor in the bathroom and she had berated me for more than an hour. My mother, though, was angry at *me*. 'Who is going to want you in your state?' She shouted. 'You should be grateful you've got a job!' But my partner said he was worried about me and so she relented and said she would find me another position. I moved in with a family who had only two children and the wife worked, so I could clean the house and do my other chores without being harassed. But, unfortunately, the husband made improper advances, but I never said anything, I just fought him off. I was terrified that I would be sent to work in another place, like the one I had just escaped.

The due date to deliver my baby came and went, so I was admitted to Crown Street, which turned out to be 10 days before the actual birth. Here, the abusive treatment of being humiliated and shamed that I had been subjected to during my pregnancy, continued. On one occasion, I was summoned by a supervising doctor and instructed to lie on a bed so he could use me as a teaching specimen for the benefit of his 10 young male students. He told me to lie on a bed and without asking my permission he lifted up my nightdress, poked my stomach and squeezed my nipples until my milk ran. He discussed my body with the other students as if I wasn't there. I felt invisible and totally powerless. Afterwards I felt like I had been raped. I was treated just like a piece of meat.

Finally, after being kept locked up in the hospital like a prisoner for 10 days, I was ordered up to the maternity ward. No-one accompanied me. I was totally on my own. At first I was not sure why I was being sent there. My baby's head was not engaged and I was still carrying quite high.

On arriving at the maternity ward a nurse motioned for me to go and lie on a bed. I was told the birth was to be induced. I was not sure what that meant, nothing was explained. A doctor appeared and I was injected with pethidine. No-one bothered to explain what the effect of the drug might be. I started losing consciousness and panicked. I felt like I had absolutely no control over my body. I could feel myself losing consciousness. I was terrified and started to panic. It was like falling into a black hole and I started to gasp for air. I screamed, 'What's happening to me, what's happening?' An Asian doctor, the only person who seemed to have an ounce of human decency in the labour ward, tried to calm me down by saying, 'Don't try and fight it, just go with it'. So I closed my eyes and, with my heart pounding wildly, I fell into unconsciousness.

About three hours later I started to wake. I was aware of the most excruciating pain. It felt like my insides were being ripped apart. I really thought I was dying. I experienced childbirth twice more after this and the pain was nothing to the agony I went through having my first induced, and obviously not yet ready to be born. As the pain got worse I thrashed around and in my distress I accidentally touched the pocket of a nurse who was standing beside my bed. She punched my arm and spat, 'Don't touch me!' Another nurse, taken aback by her viciousness, said 'Don't speak to her like that — she is only a baby having a baby!' The other nurse retorted indignantly, 'Well, she shouldn't have touched my pocket'.

Then at 3 pm, as I pushed my daughter into the world, a pillow was placed in front of my face to block my view. I heard the doctor smack her but she did not utter a cry. I panicked and thought something was wrong. I called out, 'Is my baby alright?' No-one answered. More loudly, I called out once more, 'Is my baby alright?' Again I was ignored. I then tried to sit up to see if she was okay. Three nurses violently shoved me back onto the

bed and held me down, whilst one nurse at the head of the bed yelled, 'It's got nothing to do with you'. The baby I had just given birth to, unbelievably, had '*nothing to do with*' me. If I had ever been under any illusion that this baby was mine, the words that nurse uttered, shattered it. I was only the incubator, a breeder, the vehicle the adoption industry used to provide others with, who obviously did have something to do with my baby, a commodity. Many years later when I reflected on the treatment I received prior to and at the birth of my child I likened it to being treated or used in much the same way as a slave. I was not a human being. I was not treated as one. I was an object used to accommodate the needs of someone else. I believe the process I went through was a form of reproductive slavery. My reproductive labour was used to produce a human being for the benefit and possession of another. My daughter would be given to strangers and transferred to them in law like a piece of property. They would formally take ownership of my child and her birth certificate would note them as the parents that gave birth. The whole process would effectively annihilate me as the mother of my child. How does one ever recover from such annihilation?

After the birth, I lay there in shock and confusion. Numb with disbelief. Two nurses appeared by the side of my bed. One stated: 'There is a beautiful little girl outside that just looks like you'. I looked at them; this was when I knew I had delivered a baby girl. The other nurse said 'Shhh. She is not supposed to be told anything. Her baby is being adopted'. 15 minutes after the birth I was injected with stilboestrol, a drug that would ensure I would never get the opportunity to feed my child. After that I was given 200 mgs of sodium pentobarbitone. I was effectively knocked out for hours.

Many years later I found out that before I signed adoption papers, I was the legal guardian of my child and had every right to see, hold and touch her. Therefore when they put obstacles in my way, preventing me from having any contact with my baby, they were not only acting brutally and immorally, but *illegally*.

The day following the birth, I lay in the hospital ward, sobbing, grief-stricken. Giving birth had made my baby a reality. She was no more a phantom but a real flesh and blood baby, MY baby. My whole body ached with the longing to nurse her. My arms needed to hold her, and in spite of the stilboestrol, my breasts in swollen pain cried out to feed her. Other mothers were feeding their babies, but not I. I was not allowed. Other mothers could touch their infants, but not I: I was forbidden. The pain was so unbearable it was more than my mind could take. Inside my head, I screamed, 'Give me back my baby, where is my baby, bring me my baby!' But the drugs, grief, shock and trauma had silenced me. I was incapable of articulating what I felt. No words did I utter. No sound passed from my lips. Only gut wrenching sobs. No mother should ever be forced to bear so unnatural a pain. They had not just stolen my daughter; they had stolen part of me. My heart was torn apart and just like Humpty Dumpty, could never be put back together again.

'May I please see my baby?' — the first request?

'May I please see my baby?' — the second request

'May I please, please, please see my baby?' — the third request

The only person who asked me why I was crying was another patient. She inquired, 'Why are you so upset? Is your baby sick?' I said, 'No, I don't know, I haven't seen her. They won't let me see her, I am not married and my baby is being adopted!' Perplexed, she replied, "I don't see why you have to give up your baby because you're not married! If you're so distressed about it, keep her! It's your baby; I can't see why you can't keep her?" It was as if a light had been switched on. I remember thinking, 'Yes, she is *my* daughter. Why can't I keep her?' In the past months, I had been so isolated and brainwashed into believing that I was carrying a child for someone else that I had psychologically disconnected from her. The social worker had repeated at every 'counselling' session that 'the' baby was to go to a two-parent family that would give 'the' baby everything I could not. This being my first child and I only 16, alone and vulnerable to her suggestions, began to believe the brainwashing that 'the' baby did not belong to me. I was only a surrogate for much more deserving parents. As the nurse in the maternity ward had stated: 'It has nothing to do with you'. This patient was the first person who had actually suggested that I might be able to keep my child. This and the fact that giving birth had made my baby a reality opened up my mind to the possibility: maybe I *could* keep her. At that moment I became most definite in my decision: this was my daughter and I was keeping her irrespective of what the social worker, medical staff or my mother wanted, and that was final!

Later that day, I was moved by ambulance to an annex of Crown Street. I was not asked if I wanted to be moved and neither did I give oral or written permission. In fact, at the time, I wasn't even told where I was being taken. I don't know what happened to my clothes; all I remember is being drugged and then put into an ambulance and spirited away. At this time, I had no knowledge of the amount of drugs I had been given.

My daughter was kept at the hospital by the medical staff, effectively separating us by a distance of miles. Later, I found out I had been taken to Lady Wakehurst, an annex of the hospital, generally reserved for unmarried mothers. I found out later that apparently it was illegal for the baby to be taken from the hospital without its mother, so this was circumvented by removing me instead. Considering all this was done without my permission, I consider myself as being abducted. And since the medical staff held my daughter captive without my permission, I consider her as being kidnapped.

The day after I arrived at Lady Wakehurst my mother came to visit me, she was the only visitor I was allowed and she only came once. While I lay bleeding, crying for my child, I begged my mother and the social worker to let me keep her. I said, 'Please give me my baby. I don't want my child adopted. This is my baby, my daughter and I want to keep her'. The answer was an emphatic, 'NO'. Again I asked, my voice trembling with emotion. 'Why can't I keep her? She is my child. I do NOT want her going to some stranger. She is my daughter. Please, I beg you, please, let me keep my baby'. Again the answer was: 'NO'. Once more I tried, by now crying uncontrollably, 'But, this is my baby, my baby, and I want to keep her'. The social worker, without one iota of compassion, stated 'No, it is best for the baby if it's adopted'. I saw no way out. They were not going to give me my baby and I could not just go and get her as I didn't even know where she was. I really don't remember much of what happened after that. And of course there was the constant supply of drugs.

I was told that I was not allowed to leave the hospital until I signed the 'consent to adopt' form. It was usually on the 5th day that a maternity patient could be discharged. It was, coincidentally, the minimum time legally allowed for me to sign the consent form. Hence my mother came to collect me on the 5th day and she and the District Officer from the Department of Welfare stood over me and made sure I signed. Then, I was allowed to leave.

Even though I was forced to sign the 'consent to adopt' form before my mother was allowed to take me home, I had made my decision: I was keeping my baby. I had repeatedly made it clear to the social worker, my mother and the medical staff that I wanted to see my baby and that I wanted to keep her. I had repeatedly stated that I DID NOT WANT ADOPTION for my child. Yet no-one paid any attention to me or acknowledged my decision. The adoption gravy train was in motion and what I wanted was irrelevant. The simple act of demanding to keep my daughter though allowed me the insight in the years that followed, to know that I had never 'chosen' adoption. I feel sure if I had not demanded to keep my child, but had remained silenced by my trauma and just got caught up in the system of; being drugged, being forbidden access to my child at the birth; being removed from the hospital where my baby was being kept; being told I had to sign the 'consent to adopt' form before I was allowed to leave the hospital; believing that I would harm my daughter if I kept her, I am sure I would have felt like I had made some sort of choice. After all, as social workers who worked with mothers of the time are quick to point out, mothers signed the 'consent to adopt' form therefore they must have 'chosen' adoption. And I cannot deny it is my signature. Though, it has always struck me as being unmercifully cruel to force a minor, such as myself, to sign a consent form when it was a decision made by the social worker and one's mother. As my mother was my guardian and the person who had taken me to Crown St and sat through the first counselling session and informed the social worker of what she wanted, why wasn't it she who signed the consent form? As a child in law, legally I could not sign any contract, yet in this legal farce, I could be drugged, forced to sign a document that I did not fully comprehend, and all because of the decision of my guardian on whom I was totally dependent. A contract of such momentous import that it would forever alter my, my daughter's and my future grandchildren's life. As far as I am concerned that document is not worth the paper it is written on. And if we really do live in a country that lives under the Rule of Law, this legal farce would be exposed for the lie it is, and somebody would be made accountable for the legal joke, thousands of adoptions in this country, rest upon.

In 1994, I applied under the *Freedom of Information Act* for my medical records. What I found revealed nothing less than total betrayal by those who were entrusted with my welfare. The information I uncovered was an indictment on a society that considers itself civilised. My medical records revealed that from the moment I was admitted to hospital I had been given massive amounts of barbiturates.

In fact, for a period of 10 days prior to the birth and for five days afterwards, I was systematically drugged. I was administered a powerful cocktail of hypnotics daily, beginning at 4am with sodium amytal (the drug used for deep sleep therapy), then again at 10 am and at 2 pm, and chloral hydrate (better know as a 'Mickey Finn') was handed out like lolly-water. Finally, at 9 pm I was given 100 mg of sodium pentobarbitone. This drug was later banned and, these days, is only used to put animals down. I am amazed that in their efforts to keep me docile they didn't kill my unborn child. The infamous 'Chelmsford doctors' were the consulting psychiatrists at Crown St.

'Strathfield Fiveways'

Sample medical record: the drug regime at Crown Street Women's Hospital

(continued)

Socially cleared

It seems that this term was exclusive to Crown Street Women's Hospital. It was placed on the bottom of the medical records only after the mother had signed the 'consent to adopt'. The author has viewed another mother's file which had written across it: 'DO NOT NOTIFY POLICE, mother has promised to come back on Monday to see Miss L' (a social worker). It seems that the threat of police action was very real if a mother did not sign the form consenting to the adoption of her infant prior to leaving the hospital.

Insert picture

My records revealed that I was injected with stilboestrol. This drug, when administered immediately after birth, shocks the pituitary gland to terminate the production of milk. No-one asked my permission to use it. Obviously, they had no intention of allowing me to feed my baby even though I, at this point, had signed nothing. The drug has since been withdrawn from the market.

Not only had I been bullied and coerced into signing my daughter's adoption papers, but the medical records disclosed that I had done so under the influence of very strong mind-altering hypnotics. This was an unconscionable and criminal act because I was definitely *not* in a fit state of mind to consider anything, let alone capable of signing a legal document that would forever alter our lives. By law I was considered a child, yet I had no independent person ensuring that my rights were protected. The person who witnessed my signature worked for the Department that was taking possession of my infant. Wasn't that a conflict of interest? I never received a copy of the document I signed, nor was I given that document to read prior to the day that I was forced to sign it. Furthermore, I was forced to sign the document before I was allowed to leave the hospital, which was only five days after my daughter's birth, before I had recovered from the trauma of her birth and what I believe was her kidnap. My mental state the day after giving birth was noted on my social work records as: MOTHER DISTRESSED. Three days later another notation: MOTHER STILL DISTRESSED. When I returned 3 months later to reclaim my child the social worker again noted: MOTHER STILL DISTRESSED. Her advice to me when I did return to the hospital at that time was that my baby was gone forever and there was nothing that I could do about it so I should go home and forget about her. She went on to berate me by saying that all the other mothers had got on with their lives, why hadn't I?

After I signed the adoption consent form, a notation was placed on the bottom of my medical records. It states: Pt. SOCIALLY CLEARED — what that term means, I am yet to find out. I believe what happened to a quarter of a million mothers, across Australia, is one of the greatest hidden injustices perpetrated on women in this country.

In my case there was no way that Crown Street was going to let me leave the hospital with my baby. And without any assistance it was impossible to just take her and go, a fact that many might find hard to imagine in today's world. For instance, I was removed from Crown Street Women's Hospital, whilst drugged and traumatised without ever been able to see my child. I did not know where I had been taken, I did not know how to get back to the hospital where my baby was being kept, and even if I had known when I got there I would not have known which baby was mine because I had never been given the opportunity of seeing her. And even if I had known where to find my child and what she looked like maternity staff were under strict instructions not to let me see or have access to her. Whilst kept a prisoner at the hospital annex I had no access to clothes or money and I was kept drugged until I was forced to sign the consent to adopt. I had no access to a telephone and I had no visitors, except my mother and the social worker. I was young and inexperienced when I was subjected to this torture, this crime against humanity.

It must be noted that even if I had refused to sign the consent, without any family support, it could be dispensed with. I was in a no-win situation. Adoption legislation, it seems, was written with the purpose of reducing my rights as a natural parent to zilch.

I had been deeply in love with the father of my daughter and we had planned to marry at a later date, a fact the social worker was well aware of. Unfortunately, this never eventuated, because after returning home I could not bare to continue our relationship, because when I looked at my daughter's father he reminded me of our lost baby. So not only did I loose my beloved child but I lost the man I loved and the family we would have had together.

So the years of pain and grieving commenced. I remember, particularly, that first year looking at other mother's carrying their baby, wondering if that was my child. I remember peering into strollers trying to catch a glimpse, wondering always wondering, is that my child? The years did not diminish my grief, if anything they only increased it.

A few years later I married and went on to have two further children and am now a grandmother to eight wonderful grandchildren. My family is my life. I have met my daughter and our reunion was the beginning of my healing process. But the years we should have had together were stolen from us. They were also stolen from her siblings. The loss I experienced when my daughter was taken was not isolated to only me, my sons lost their sister, my sister her niece and so on it goes. My mother has also suffered. She has suffered enormously from the guilt of not assisting me when I most needed her. She also carries grief because of the loss of her first grandchild. She was duped. If she had been warned by the social worker of the dire psychological regret her daughter would suffer, legally something she should have been warned about, rather than be encouraged by being told she was doing the right thing by adopting out her grandchild, she also would have been saved a lifetime of pain and regret.

It has taken many years, but for me it is only now that my family feels that it is becoming whole once again, and that is because my beloved daughter her partner and her children: my grandchildren, have come home. But not to paint too rosy a picture, I still live the pain of my baby's kidnap every day, I know I will have to live with that for the rest of my life so I take each day as it comes and am grateful for the good things I now have.

I believe my daughter was part of another stolen generation — the white stolen generation — and I am waiting for my government to apologise for what happened. I am waiting for the Australian Government to state that, through the agencies and charitable organisations it is supposed to monitor, it either wilfully or without exercising appropriate care allowed my child to be taken from me, and no-one as yet has been held accountable.

Footnote

My eight year old grandson is a very shy little boy, so I was surprised when he relayed this story. His teacher was discussing the stolen generation and he bravely spoke up and said 'I am part of the stolen generation!'

His teacher replied, 'Are you, Junie, why is that?'

'My aunty was stolen.'

His teacher stated: 'Are you Indigenous, Junie?'

'No, I am white', my grandson explained.

'Oh, then, you can't be part of the stolen generation!'

Then his class mate raised his hand and said, 'But Miss, I am part of the stolen generation, and I am white. My uncle was stolen, and he is white!'

So it seems the truth has a way of finding its way out, after all.

'Trish: Warrior Princess'

Parliament of New South Wales Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues Interim Report on Inquiry into Adoption Practices: Transcripts of Evidence Report No. 17: 103–107

continued

continued

The campaign for the Inquiry: the 'scandal of white stolen babies'¹³²

JM: What would you like to have seen come out of the Inquiry?

GR: I would have liked to have seen a huge exposure of what was actually done ... you know ... for the adoptees to actually see what a helpless isolated position their mother was in, what drugs were given to them, what coercion, what brainwashing, what illegal things happened and how they were taken from their mothers ...

(Extract from an interview with Dr Geoff Rickarby, 9 August 2007)

In 1997, mothers who believed that their babies had been taken unlawfully began to lobby the NSW Government for an Inquiry into Past Adoption Practices. Patrick Rogan, MP for East Hills, in a Private Members' Statement (11 December 1997; see Appendix), called on the government for a 'full judicial commission of inquiry into white stolen babies' and demanded on behalf of the mothers 'a full and sincere public apology and compensation ...'. He also demanded an apology from 'government agencies and authorities, social welfare groups, medical staff, churches and all those who unwittingly, deliberately or callously caused much hurt, damage and ongoing trauma to so many mothers, sons and daughters'. Rogan, in his passionate address, asked rhetorically, 'Were these poor young women with no voice or power being punished for their mistakes or was this a Nazi-style social cleansing exercise, stealing babies from undeserving, unwed mothers and supplying them to deserving infertile couples?'¹³³

During the course of the campaign, thousands of non-Indigenous babies who were taken from their unwed mothers began to be referred to as the 'other stolen generation' or 'the white stolen generation'.¹³⁴

Insert picture

Reprinted with permission of The Canterbury Bankstown Express©Copyright 2008 Canterbury Bankstown Express, Tuesday, November 18, 1997, p 7, Adoption Plea by Linda Fallon

Other MPs who had been contacted by constituents with similar complaints were inspired by Rogan's address and added their voices to the call for an Inquiry. Notably, these included Bryce Gaudry: Newcastle; Jill Hall: Swansea and Deidre Grusovin: Heffron.¹³⁵

Ms Christine Cole first approached Rogan in 1994, whilst Chairperson for a mothers' activist group: Mothers for Contact. She told him how, as a 16 year old unwed mother, she had her child forcibly removed, but never questioned the legality of it because it occurred in a public hospital. She reported to Rogan that she had now met many other mothers whose stories were similar to her own and they all wanted to know why this had happened in the so-call 'lucky country', the 'land of the fair go?'¹³⁶

Three years later, as Chairperson of Origins, another activist mothers' group that had grown out of Mothers for Contact, Cole returned to Rogan's office. She explained that women could not get justice through the courts because it was presumed to be too long ago and legally they were told they were 'out of time'. She asked whether he would support the mothers in their call for a National Inquiry.

The collaborative effort spanning decades

It must be stated that getting the Inquiry was a collaborative effort that took many decades to achieve. A few mothers had started speaking out in the 1970s, when support groups for both single mothers who kept their babies and those who were separated by adoption were first set up. It was then that some mothers began a campaign to educate society about the practices occurring within the adoption industry. After a change in legislation in 1991, which enabled mothers and their lost children to reunite, the campaign gathered momentum, with mothers calling for a Royal Commission into past adoption practices (*Sunday Telegraph, October 13, 1991 Baby Scandal Inquiry Demand: see Appendix*) Before then, it would have been too painful for many mothers 'to wake up'. This was the label given by mothers to the process of allowing the full reality of what happened to them to re-surface to consciousness. Many mothers have been diagnosed as suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome¹³⁷, and for many sufferers the dreadful reality of what has happened may be blocked from conscious awareness for decades.

The changing of legislation to allow mothers and their children to reunite when their children reached the age of 18 was achieved through the collaboration of both mothers and adoptees. They were supported in their efforts by the publication of research that showed long-term pathological grieving experienced by mothers and various reports that were critical of past adoption practices.

The Inquiry was never the result of a single individual. That would be impossible. It was the result of years of hard work by many mothers, with the call for justice getting louder with each passing decade. It must be said though, that without the concerted effort of Mr Pat Rogan and his personal assistant, Ms Margaret Como, mothers would still be waiting for an Inquiry.

Judy McHutchison, a mother who began speaking out in the 1970s, did extensive research for an Honours thesis for the University of New South Wales in 1986.¹³⁸ McHutchison's historical research was heavily drawn on by mothers to support their claims of past injustice at the Inquiry. With the event of the internet and various Blogger sites, mothers in countries such as New Zealand, UK, Canada and the United States are being educated and are gaining strength from the knowledge she provided.

Mothers felt strongly about educating society about what really happened to them. Their intention was to let their children know that they had always been loved and wanted, but that they had been forcibly taken. To do this, mothers risked upsetting family members by appearing on various television shows. Some mothers even received death threats. They wrote to the media, and were featured in newspaper and magazine articles. Mothers spoke on talk-back radio and were featured on ABC radio.

The media blitz really heated up in 1997, when a mother's case failed to get through the 'statute of limitations'. This meant that mothers would not get justice through the legal system because, according to the Judge, too much time had passed. This setback launched what might be called the second wave of mothers' activism. It was also the catalyst for Cole to return to Rogan and urge him to call for an Inquiry. Rogan agreed. Meanwhile mothers, buoyed up by Rogan's support, became much more proactive in the media. A two page spread in the *Sun-Herald*, written by well-known Sydney journalist, Sue Williams, brought renewed public interest in the issue. Both radio and TV invited mothers onto their shows and interviews were conducted by well-known radio talk-back hosts, such as Mike Carlton, Graham Richardson and Allan Jones.

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Sun-Herald, August 17, 1997, Mothers go to United Nations for justice over
'kidnappings' by Sue Williams**

Mothers go to United Nations for justice over 'kidnappings'

(Excerpts from the article that kicked off the publicity to gain the Inquiry)

They drugged us and brainwashed us into giving up our babies. Like the stolen Aboriginal children, babies born to white mothers were also taken at birth. Report by Sue Williams.

Two Sydney women whose lives were shattered after they were forced at the age of 16 to give up their babies for adoption plan to take their case to the United Nations Human Rights' Commission. They say if they are not given the legal go-ahead to sue the NSW Government through the courts, they will expose Australia's 'baby farms' scandal to the world. 'We now know all about the stolen Aboriginal children, but the authorities did exactly the same to us', said Chris Schar [Cole] ...

'They drugged us, threatened us and brainwashed us into giving up our babies', she said. 'That was totally illegal. They ignored the laws that were supposed to protect us. And it's totally devastated our lives. Most of us will never recover.'

One mother, who can only be legally referred to as 'W', is appealing against a NSW Supreme Court ruling that the six-year Statute of Limitations can't be lifted to allow her to sue the government. She was granted legal aid after the Public Interest Advocacy Centre argued that it will be an extremely important landmark case.

*A second mother, 'P', is also taking action through the court. But now Ms Schar [Cole], together with Dian Welfare, also **plans to launch a campaign** for a full public inquiry into their treatment ...*

The women's plight was first revealed last year by Family Court judge Richard

Chisholm. In the course of researching a report on the Adoption Of Children Act, which was finally released late last month, he discovered widespread deception and the use of drugs to enable the newborn babies of young, unmarried women to be taken away for adoption. Some women were told by social workers that their babies had died at birth while others were tricked or coerced into signing adoption consent forms so their babies could be given to infertile white, middle-class couples.

'This came out of the woodwork while we were reviewing the act', said Peter Hennessy, the commission's executive director, last week. 'It was a real sleeper.' University of NSW law lecturer Cathleen Sherry, who was involved in the report, said it was 'barbaric'. The Minister for Community Services, Ron Dyer, said the women were entitled to go to the UN but he was aware some were also proceeding through the courts.

NSW social workers are also finding it difficult to decide on a stance. The Australian Association of Social Workers was planning to issue a statement outlining its 'regret' ... Dian Welfare and Ms Schar [Cole] formed the organisation Origins two years ago for mothers who had their babies taken away for adoption and so far they've been approached by thousands of women in NSW ...

None was treated according to the Child Welfare Adoption Regulations of 1958, which obliged the authorities to offer financial assistance and foster care to

*enable the women to keep their children,
to warn of the risk of 'dire future regret'
and to inform women they had to insist
on adoption before any consent was
taken.*

Rally outside New South Wales Parliament House

It could be said that the campaign for the Inquiry officially began on 18 November 1997, when mothers held a rally outside the New South Wales Parliament House. Rogan and his personal assistant, Margaret Como, had organised and booked the theatre at Parliament House so that after the rally mothers could come into the House and speak formally to the attending media, other MPs and their supporters.

***Reprinted with permission of Ardyn Bernoth©Copyright 2008
The Sydney Morning Herald, November 19, 1997, Practice of 'Stolen White Babies'
Resurfaces to Haunt Authorities by Ardyn Bernoth***

Insert picture

The rally speech given inside the NSW Parliament Theatre November 18, 1997

Insert picture

Pat Rogan's letter, November 24, 1997, calling for a National Inquiry

On 24 November 1997, Rogan sent a letter to Bob Carr, the then Premier of New South Wales, formally requesting a full judicial public inquiry on behalf of his constituent, Ms Cole. He also asked Bob Carr to raise the matter with the Prime Minister for the purpose of establishing a National Inquiry.

Insert picture

On 26 November 1997, Cole, again with the help of Margaret Como, organised a press conference at Parliament House. This conference was attended by Rogan, and the other MPs who had also called for an Inquiry: Gawdry, Moore, Hall and Grusovin. The conference was televised that night on the Channel 10 evening news. During the press conference, Ms Cole called on the government to hold an Inquiry so that:

Society is told the truth. Our children were stolen. This allows us the validation we need to begin our healing process and this allows our children to heal knowing that they were loved and wanted.¹³⁹

In February 1998, Rogan, Bryce, and Cole met with Mrs Faye Lo Po, the Minister for Community Services, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Women.¹⁴⁰ During this historical meeting, the possibility of an Inquiry was discussed. Directly after the meeting, Cole was contacted by the media, who mistook her optimism for an affirmation that the Inquiry was definite. Not wanting to seem as if they were backing out, and due to the fact that Rogan and other MPs were working tirelessly behind the scenes, the government announced two months later that indeed an Inquiry would take place. It was greeted with bi-partisan support.¹⁴¹

Mrs Lo Po, in a Ministerial Statement given to the Legislative Assembly (2 April 1998), stated: 'I am pleased to advise the House that late yesterday afternoon I referred to the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues that: "The Standing Committee on Social Issues inquire into and report on the professional practices in the administration and delivery of adoption and related services, particularly those services relating to the taking of consents, offered to birth parents and children in New South Wales from 1950 to 1998" [and] "Whether adoption practices during this time involved unethical and unlawful practices"'.¹⁴²

The Inquiry took two years to complete and in December 2000, the Final Report was published.¹⁴³ The report acknowledged that unlawful and unethical treatment¹⁴⁴ of young unmarried mothers had occurred and made 20 recommendations. It must be added that most mothers felt that this report, though a very worthy first step, took a 'softly, softly' approach and fell much short of the outcomes they had wanted.

Recommendation 16 urged the NSW Government to issue a statement of public acknowledgement that past adoption practices were misguided, and that, on occasions, unethical or unlawful practices may have occurred causing lasting suffering for many mothers, fathers, adoptees and their families.¹⁴⁵ Recommendation 18 stated that, 'The Department of Community Services (DOCs) should provide funding to appropriate organisations or support groups for mothers to collect, collate, edit and publish comprehensive accounts of their experiences'.¹⁴⁶ The NSW Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care Incorporated (COAPC), whose members include mothers who have experienced such practices, was given the funds by DOCs for this project. It must be added that mothers themselves supervised the project and carried out the collection, collation and editing of the stories included in this book.

The Inquiry validates mothers' claims

More than 350 women gave written and oral testimonies under oath,¹⁴⁷ at the Inquiry into Past Adoption Practices (1998–2000), describing the treatment they suffered at the hands of church and state agencies. All spoke of how they had NOT 'chosen' to adopt out their children. Rather they had been bullied, coerced or tricked out of their babies.¹⁴⁸ Many believed their babies had been stolen for the adoption market. Dr Geoff Rickaby gave evidence at the Inquiry that 'the removal of their newborns was well-oiled and systematic'.¹⁴⁹ Cathleen Sherry drew the same conclusion after reading many personal stories of unwed mothers whilst working at the Law Reform Commission when it conducted its review of adoption legislation in the early 1990s. She states:

What these individual women were describing were not isolated instances with atypical doctors and social workers; rather their experiences revealed systemic violations of human rights. The treatment they received from doctors, social workers, charitable organisations and government departments violated their right to be free from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, free from discrimination, free from arbitrary interference with the family, as well as their right to be entitled to special protection as mothers.¹⁵⁰

These young, unwed mothers had one thing in common: they were unsupported. Mothers' accounts describe how parents turned their backs and left them vulnerable, without any person independent from the adoption industry to ensure their rights were protected, even though most mothers were minors or still children under the law.

This fact was highlighted in a recent case where a witness was asked whether there was anyone to assist a young mother other than the government or church employed social worker. The solicitor appearing for the State answered: 'Having a parent involved would be seen as inviting parental pressure'.¹⁵¹ So the short answer was that the young mothers had no-one.

Mothers who gave testimony about having pillows and sheets placed in front of them¹⁵² were supported in their claims by evidence from social and medical workers that this indeed was the practice up until 1982.¹⁵³ It only stopped completely in hospitals when a Health Commission Circular¹⁵⁴ went around to all the hospitals stating that not allowing mothers to see, touch and nurse their children constituted coercion and duress and was illegal. No-one as yet has put forward an explanation as to why it took so long for this practice to end, even though individuals both in medicine and social work had been speaking out against it for decades, stating it served no purpose other than being cruel and punitive, and was illegal.¹⁵⁵

At the Inquiry, documents were tabled that supported mothers' claims that they were not allowed to leave the hospital until they signed away their babies.¹⁵⁶ Justice Richard Chisholm, who was an Associate Professor of Law at the University of NSW before undertaking two major reports on adoption in the 1990s as the Commissioner of the New South Wales Law Reform Commission, also gave evidence at the Inquiry. He stated that the practice of not allowing mothers to leave the hospital before they signed the consent amounted to false imprisonment.¹⁵⁷

Some mothers spoke of being threatened with criminal action if they did not sign a consent form before leaving the hospital.¹⁵⁸ Professor Chisholm told the Committee that informing mothers that they would face criminal charges if they did not sign 'consent to adopt' forms constituted either fraud or duress.¹⁵⁹

Some mothers told of how they only signed 'consent to adopt' forms so that they could get out of the hospital annex, Lady Wakehurst, and go and get their babies from the

hospital nursery at Crown St, where they presumed they were being kept. Although some mothers were told by social workers that they had a 30 day revocation period in which they could reclaim their babies, when they arrived at the hospital they were told words to the effect of 'Sorry, you're too late. Your baby has already been placed with adoptive parents and there is nothing you can do about it!'¹⁶⁰ The practice of denying mothers their lawful right to revoke their consent was considered by the Standing Committee as being 'unethical and possibly unlawful'.¹⁶¹

It is not surprising therefore that the Human Rights Commission (1986) concluded, after it received many submissions from mothers who had lost their babies to adoption, that there was 'a failure of bureaucratic procedures to protect their rights'.¹⁶²

Considering the 'well oiled' system that operated within the adoption industry it is not surprising that between 1971 and 1972, with a population of only 13 million¹⁶³ 9798 local adoptions¹⁶⁴ (Australian children adopted by non-related persons)¹⁶⁵ took place in Australia. To put this enormously high number of adoptions in perspective, one need only contrast the figures with those available for 2004–2005 and 2005-2006 periods. For instance in 2004-2005 with a population of 20 million¹⁶⁶, there were 65 local adoptions and in 2005–2006, there were only 60 local adoptions for the whole of Australia.¹⁶⁷

Mothers at the Inquiry spoke about how their lives had been ruined by grief and trauma from their experience of losing their baby in the ways already described. Many said they never recovered from their ordeal and even though 30 or 40 years and more had passed, they still grieved for the babies they never saw. Much research now validates the life-long pain mothers at the Inquiry and in this book have spoken about, though anecdotal evidence about the pain a mother goes through when she loses a child has always been available.¹⁶⁸

Conclusion

Many mothers cannot forget what happened; their struggle for justice is not yet over. They are still suffering because of the unlawful and unethical practices in past adoptions. That these practices were unethical and 'in some cases illegal' was acknowledged by the Inquiry. It has also been acknowledged by the Commonwealth Government that there are both Indigenous and non-Indigenous stolen generations.¹⁶⁹ Mothers, though, are still waiting for an apology by a government that either willingly or carelessly allowed the barbaric practices described at the Inquiry, and in this book, to take place.

Mothers are still waiting for the time when the government of the day will tell their children the truth: that their mothers loved and wanted them and they did not willingly give them away. Far from it! They were tricked, lied to, bullied and coerced. In some cases, they were physically tied to beds, drugged and had pillows and sheets placed in front of them so they could not see their children at the birth. The mothers' only crime: they were absolutely unsupported. They were young, and totally alone. Their family and their society, in the form of representatives of the adoption industry, had abandoned them. No-one spoke on their behalf and no-one ensured that their rights were protected. They were non-citizens in the country of their birth.

These mothers were denied the civil and human rights afforded to every other citizen in this country. For instance every citizen has the right to freedom of movement,¹⁷⁰ yet these mothers were denied the right to leave the hospitals where they were imprisoned until they signed adoption consents. This denial of rights was acknowledged by the Inquiry and specifically by Justice Richard Chisholm, who equated the practice with the crime of 'false imprisonment'.

It is hard to imagine a greater travesty of justice. Mothers were being traumatised by not being given the opportunity of completing the birthing process, as they were forbidden to see, hold or even touch their infants at the birth, then only a few days later, forced to sign them away for ever. In reality signing the 'consents' meant their newborns were left in hospital nurseries for strangers, they had never met, to collect.

It is an indictment on this society that we have entered the 21st century and not one representative of the legal profession has taken up the cudgel and asked, 'Who is accountable for this absolute travesty, this unspeakable injustice?' And as yet not one has proceeded to undertake a class action on behalf of these women.

Many consents were taken from drugged minors/children. Many mothers stated they were threatened with having their children made wards of the State if they did not consent to their adoption. Others were told that even if they did not sign, it didn't matter, because under the *Adoption of Children Act 1965* (NSW),¹⁷¹ their consents could be dispensed with anyway. So their signatures were in fact, never really necessary to facilitate the adoption process, it seems they were only a mere empty formality.

Why then, was it so important for those working in the adoption industry to get mothers' signatures? What was the purpose of obtaining consents that could be dispensed with so easily? Was it only a trick to give mothers the impression they were making a decision?

Maybe the answer lies in the effect it had on mothers who signed the 'consent to adopt' form. Once the 'consent' was signed the mother had to make sense to herself of what she had done. She had to rationalise why she had signed such a document. Signing the 'consent' ensured women were shamed into silence. It led them to falsely believe that somehow they had willingly agreed to give their children to strangers. It made them feel complicit in what many now consider was the abduction of their own child. All the coercive

practices they had experienced paled into insignificance when mothers compared them to the act of signing that document. Hence, the vulnerable and traumatised mother was left blaming herself for failing her child. The child she had been brainwashed into believing would be given a perfect upbringing by a 'perfect' married couple. A couple that would never divorce and would give her child all the things she supposedly could not. Such guarantees were akin to promises that adoptive parents could sprout wings and fly, but when made over and over again by those in authority to an isolated and vulnerable, pregnant young woman, who was also subjected to other abusive and coercive practices, the end result was, the mother believed them in order to maintain her sanity. Believing that her child had gone to a perfect home was preferable to thinking he or she was out there, somewhere, being subjected to who knows what by whom! Believing the propaganda was preferable to the unknown.

Getting signatures on the 'consent' forms also allowed adoption professionals and others working in the adoption industry to falsely declare over the ensuing decades, 'Mothers signed the forms, see they made a decision, it was their choice'. So, those who participated in the well-oiled 'baby-taking' regime that existed within the 'adoption industry' effectively washed their hands of any guilt and instead blamed their victims.

The complete lack of respect for young women's motherhood was made blatantly apparent when, in 1975,¹⁷² social workers lobbied the government for the law to be changed to reduce even further the rights of mothers. This happened, coincidentally, when the number of infants available for adoption was drying up. They called for the immediate dispensing of consent for any mother who gave birth under the age of 16 years old. Their children would be made immediately available for adoption, no matter what they or their families wanted.¹⁷³

Yet injustice is laid upon injustice. Many adoptees believe they were unwanted. They have accepted this because of the lies told to them by a society that too willingly believed that mothers, numbering in the thousands, for a brief time in history, suddenly denied all their maternal feelings and the strongest biological urge known to humans; to protect and nurture their own flesh and blood. Implausible as it seems, society has come to accept as fact that mothers denied this biological imperative to such an extent that nearly 10000 of them in one year willingly left their children in hospital nurseries for the benefit of strangers. If 10000 young men had jumped off the Sydney harbour bridge in one year, I have no doubt there would have been a public outcry and a call for an investigation into what would only be described as a social aberration.

That these mothers willingly signed a document that gave them nothing, but took from them everything is one of the greatest lies that has been perpetrated on a gullible public. To believe that thousands of mothers willingly signed a document which legally broke up their family and forbid them any information about the child they bore is to believe the unthinkable — that mothers *willingly* signed a document that permanently gave away all rights to their child to strangers they never met and then proceeded to prohibit them from accessing any information about their child's welfare or whereabouts forever. A Faustian Bargain would have given mothers more rights. It is also akin to believing that thousands of mothers willingly complied with the State kidnapping their children — because what is the difference between the State giving your child to strangers and refusing to reveal their identity and the event of some stranger creeping through your window and stealing your child in the middle of the night? Who of you would willingly sign a document that put you in such a position or through such torment?

Today, many mothers are being re-traumatised by the lies that are still being told. Now, it is argued that mothers willingly gave away their children because of stigma and because there was no financial help. Both propositions are untrue.

One would think there would have been more stigma in the 1940s than in the 1970s, but there were thousands more babies taken from the 1960s to the 1970s than in all the previous decades combined. In the 1940s, many mothers who had family support got out of the hospitals with their babies and managed to survive on the benefits that were available, prior to the introduction of the Sole Parents' Pension in July, 1973. Yet in 1968, the percentage of ex-nuptial babies taken at Crown Street Hospital was greater than at any other time before or after in the history of the hospital. In fact, the hospital could boast that 64% of all unwed mothers had their children removed. It seems that women who were unsupported were trapped, and the question must be asked why in the era of free love and the Beatles were more babies taken for adoption than in any other time in Australian history?

Some mothers, because of the brainwashing, remain convinced, even decades later that they did what was right when they 'chose' adoption. Why? Not because their babies were unwanted, as was the propaganda disseminated by the adoption industry, but because they were led to believe they would harm their child by keeping it. Adoption workers told them that a two-parent family would provide all the things they could not. Therefore mothers felt they had to make the supreme sacrifice of 'choosing' adoption. The notion of Christian sacrifice was never used more blasphemously than when used to convince mothers that they had to give up their children in order to save them!

Though these mothers were left to suffer for decades, alone and in silence, they have maintained their sanity by continuing to believe they made a decision that benefited their child. It may be easier for those mothers to continue to do that than to acknowledge how powerless they really were! But for other mothers, who had fought back and had experienced the full force of the 'baby-taking' system there was no such consolation. They were well aware of the pro-adoption campaign. They had experienced the use of handcuffs to tie them to beds during the delivery, or being forcibly pushed back onto beds when they tried to view their infant at the birth. Many who were in the same hospitals as their babies tried to find them, only to be hunted away by medical staff and told they were forbidden to see their children. Mothers, drugged and traumatised, pleaded with maternity staff and social workers to have their babies brought to them, to be able to feed them, to have been able to leave the hospital with them. It was all too apparent to these mothers; they were not in control and in reality there was no 'choice' — only an adoption market that had to be satisfied at their and their child's expense.

Mothers are now waiting for the lies to stop and the truth to finally be told, so they can wake up from the living nightmare they have found themselves in and they and their now adult children and grandchildren can move forward and finally get on with their lives. Some who benefited by the adoption agenda of the past do not want our children to know the truth; they feel that their position will be threatened. It is hoped that for the sake of the children they profess to love they stop obstructing the truth. Our children were and will always be part of who we are; for them we continue on and for them we will not rest until justice is done.

Following are the recommendations from the Inquiry. Most have not been implemented.

***Recommendations of the Standing Committee on Social Issues:
Releasing the Past Adoption Practices 1950–1998 Final Report***

[http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/PARLMENT/Committee.nsf/0/56e4e53dfa16a023ca256cfd002a63bc/\\$FILE/Report.PDF](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/PARLMENT/Committee.nsf/0/56e4e53dfa16a023ca256cfd002a63bc/$FILE/Report.PDF) (pp. 14–16).

Recommendations

Many past adoption practices have entrenched a pattern of disadvantage and suffering for many parents, mostly mothers, who relinquished a child for adoption particularly in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The purpose of this report has been to describe and explain the past, with a view to recommending changes for the present and for the future. The report is an acknowledgment that many mothers who gave up their children to adoption were denied their rights, and did not uncaringly give away their children.

Recommendation 1 *Page 158*

The Department of Community Services should provide funding to the Post Adoption Resource Centre to co-ordinate the provision of a post adoption resource kit. The content of the post adoption resource kit should be determined in consultation with the NSW Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care, the Department of Community Services, and the Department of Health.

Recommendation 2 *Page 159*

The post adoption resource kit, referred to in Recommendation 1, should contain information regarding support and counselling for parents who relinquished a child to adoption and information regarding support and counselling for adoptees.

Recommendation 3 *Page 161*

The Department of Community Services should ensure that the post adoption resource kit referred to in Recommendation 1 is distributed to all counsellors providing support and assistance with adoption and related issues, and to crisis services.

Recommendation 4 *Page 162*

The Minister for Community Services should establish a program of specific project grants for NSW parents' support groups for the purpose of providing financial assistance for projects related to counselling, training, research and writing on the impact of adoption.

Recommendation 5 *Page 163*

The Department of Community Services should provide additional recurrent funding to the Post Adoption Resource Centre to create a designated position for rural and regional NSW.

Recommendation 6 *Page 163*

The Department of Community Services should provide funding for travel and related expenses to ensure adoption counselling and support services in rural and regional NSW have face to face contact with the designated worker.

Recommendation 7 *Page 166*

The Minister for Community Services should provide funding for a major independent research project on the reunion process and the short- and long-term impacts of reunion on adoptees, birth parents, adoptive parents and their families.

Recommendation 8 *Page 167*

In consultation with relevant interest groups, the Department of Community Services should review the current contact veto provisions of the *Adoption Act 2000* with a view to establishing procedures for periodic review of contact vetos. The review should consider whether it is appropriate to establish procedures for renewal and/or cancellation of contact vetos.

Recommendation 9 *Page 168*

The Minister for Community Services should contact her counterparts in all other states and territories with a view to establishing uniform law and procedures in relation to contact vetos.

Recommendation 10 *Page 169*

The NSW Government should review the current funding arrangements for Link-Up (NSW) to ensure that current funding levels for support, counselling and reunion assistance for Indigenous people affected by past adoption practices are sufficient.

Recommendation 11 *Page 171*

The Department of Community Services should waive the fee for the provision of a supply authority by the Department of Community Services.

Recommendation 12 *Page 172*

The Department of Community Services should remove the additional costs for services provided by the Department including registration on the Reunion and Information Register; access to identifying information (prescribed information) from departmental files; attendance at an information meeting and a copy of a Search Guide.

Recommendation 13 *Page 172*

The Department of Community Services should take the necessary steps to ensure all adoption files are provided to the applicant at the same time as the supply authority.

Recommendation 14 *Page 173*

The NSW Attorney General should collaborate with his state and territory counterparts to achieve greater consistency in adoption information legislation and procedures across Australia as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation 15 *Page 177*

The NSW Attorney General should consider whether there is a need to review the *Limitation Act 1969* to determine whether the Act should be amended to allow certain types of claims to proceed.

Recommendation 16 *Page 186*

The NSW Government should issue a statement of public acknowledgment that past adoption practices were misguided, and that, on occasions unethical or unlawful practices may have occurred causing lasting suffering for many mothers, fathers, adoptees and their families.

Recommendation 17 *Page 186*

The departments, private agencies, churches, hospitals, professional organisations, and individuals involved in past adoption practices should be encouraged to issue a formal apology to the mothers, fathers, adoptees and their families who have suffered as a result of past adoption practices.

Recommendation 18 *Page 189*

The Department of Community Services should provide funding to appropriate organisations or support groups for mothers to collect, collate, edit and publish comprehensive accounts of their adoption experiences.

Recommendation 19 *Page 189*

The Minister for Community Services should establish a research grants program for the purpose of investigating the effects of past adoption practice on mothers, and the issues surrounding the reunion process.

Recommendation 20 *Page 189*

The Minister for Community Services should establish a public education campaign on the effects of past adoption practices.

Recommendations 16, 17 and 20 are particularly important and need to be acted upon without delay, because the damage done to both our now adult children and ourselves cannot be repaired until the truth is known and our suffering acknowledged. Our children need to know that they were lied to, that they were NEVER unwanted. They need to know that we mothers, many of us still minors, fought our parents and the authorities in the form of police, social workers, maternity staff and the legal system to try and keep them. We did not just walk away without a backward glance, but the system was such that we, traumatised and drugged and without assistance from anyone, did not have a chance. Only a mother who has walked in our shoes will ever know the powerlessness of our situation. Our children need to know this because they cannot understand in today's world the impossibility of keeping our babies at the time.

Excerpt from an interview with Mr Patrick Rogan, Former MP for East Hills, NSW

Conducted by Christine Cole on 29 March 2006 at Revesby Workers Club Boardroom

CC: Pat, it is now nine years since you first called for an Inquiry into what has become known as the 'white stolen generation.' How did you first become aware of this issue?

PR: Well, when you, Chris Cole came to see me and later after talking with some of the other mothers about how their babies were taken away at birth, I was struck by the injustice and human tragedy of it all. That is, that these babies grew into adulthood and believed that they had been deserted by their mothers when, indeed, in many, many instances the children were literally, forcibly removed from them. And I just felt that it was an awful injustice. I felt much the same way when I campaigned for an Inquiry into the Chelmsford Private Hospital tragedy.

CC: There was a link Pat, wasn't there, between Chelmsford and Crown Street? The two consulting psychiatrists at Crown Street ran the Chelmsford Hospital.

PR: I am led to believe that is correct. It certainly appears that in both cases there was a lack of the system — the bureaucracy, if you want to say it that way — of really doing what it should have been doing; protecting the rights of Chelmsford patients. And, in the case of the stolen white babies, the rights of the mothers and the rights of the children. I think the mothers and children were victims of the system as it applied then, and that was really what led to babies being taken. It was just appalling and should never have been allowed to happen.

The stories that I have heard from the mothers — and I have no reason to disbelieve them; indeed, as the subsequent Upper House Inquiry confirmed under oath, that this was the case — these mothers had no rights, were given no rights whatsoever, and I just felt it was appalling. And I always took my role as a MP seriously; as I did with Chelmsford.

CC: Can you recall how the other MPs became involved?

PR: Yes. While working together with you and my personal assistant, Margaret Como — who was very good and of great assistance — we worked out a strategy where the other natural mothers who formed part of the group contacted their local members in whatever area they lived, so as to broaden the understanding of other MPs of what transpired. The activist group of mothers worked very well with their members; I forget what we called you back then Chris. What was the name of the mothers group? I can't quite recall now.

CC: When I first met you in 1994 Pat, the group I represented was called 'Mothers for Contact'. In 1995, I co-founded another group, which included some of the former members of Mothers for Contact. So, in 1997 when I called on you and asked for your assistance to get an Inquiry, I was chairperson of the group 'Origins', and remained so up until late 1998.

PR: Yes, yes; now I recall. Anyway, I worked with those MPs to put pressure on the government and to put up a case for an Inquiry into the issue. I might say that my first inclination was to have a Royal Commission, but I became somewhat dissatisfied with the Chelmsford Royal Commission in the sense that it cost in the order of 100 million dollars, literally a feast for the QC, SCs, barristers and solicitors and, of course, judges who

conducted it and all the other counsels assisting. And at the end of it, while it produced quite a voluminous report, virtually no action took place. I felt that it might be more effective and certainly wouldn't be as bureaucratic as a Royal Commission, to have an Upper House Inquiry. I had retired by the time the Upper House Committee reported, so you would be in a better position to indicate whether or not you were satisfied with the findings and the overall report of that Upper House Inquiry.

CC: It was a good first step, but unfortunately only very few of the Committee's recommendations have been implemented. Many of the mothers felt that the Inquiry did not go far enough, that the Committee was too concerned with upsetting others involved in the adoption process. When, in actual fact, mothers wanted what happened to them validated and — as you said — the injustices exposed, and for our now-adult children to know that they were loved and wanted, and that they were stolen from us. Unfortunately, the release of that knowledge seemed to frighten some people. But getting back to the Inquiry's Report, why do you think that so very few of the recommendations have been implemented?

PR: Well, that is very disappointing for me to hear as the person who — with you and the other activist mothers — played a leading role along with my personal assistant, Margaret Como, in having an Upper House Inquiry established. I would have thought there would have been more action; unfortunately, unless the pressure is applied, these things are put to one side, as with so many Inquiries, so many issues from day-to-day that the government looks at. Unless the pressure is maintained, then it tends to be put to one side and it really needs the MPs that are there now to reactivate some of the pressure, in order that the Report from the Upper House be revisited.

CC: Why do you think Faye Lo Po agreed to the Inquiry, when the previous Minister refused?

PR: I like to think, personally, it was because we — the group and yourself — put a very solid case forward; perhaps being a woman, she had more empathy with and understanding of the issue, but I think at the end of the day she was aware, and I certainly made her aware, that I was not going to drop off on this. And I didn't believe the other MPs were going to drop off on it either. If I couldn't get an Upper House Inquiry, I would be campaigning for a Royal Commission. It was as simple as that.

CC: And Minister Lo Po agreed to meet with us because of the deputation we did?

PR: That's correct. I think that before Ministers agree to a meet with a deputation, there is a lot of behind-the-scenes work done, and I had spoken to the Minister and indicated my views. I think at the point when the deputation met with the Minister, there was more or less agreement that we would refer all of the circumstances of the stolen white babies to an Upper House Standing Inquiry Committee and that they conduct Inquiry into these sorts of issues.

CC: So when you look back now, who would you see as being the key players in getting the Upper House Inquiry?

PR: Without a doubt, yourself and the activist mothers. I think activating your members to contact my fellow MPs and, with all due modesty, I like to think I had a particular role myself, as indeed, did my PA — Margaret Como — who had a very important part, as she did in the Chelmsford Royal Commission. I guess I remember you and another mother — Di Walton — as the two principal women from the group, and then there seemed to be a small core group of activist mothers.

CC: Can you recall the first day of the Inquiry?

PR: Yes, the auditorium was packed and indeed I recall that it was the Jubilee Room, the old parliamentary library in the old building that is now used as a committee room and Inquiry room, and so forth. Most days I recall the room was well filled up. There was great interest from the media and great interest from the public. I think that everyone was taken with the injustice of this. I do recall one mother's story. She made contact with her daughter who, by then, was a 19-year old woman. They arranged to have coffee in the city. They sat down and they talked and they talked. They really just held hands for about an hour. It was just very moving; very moving indeed, but I know there were many times that the reuniting was very tragic, where either the mother or the child had died before meeting, or one or the other could not face all the pain and refused to meet.

APPENDIXES

Rose Rawady's letter, April 10, 1997, requesting a formal apology

***Pat Rogan's Private Members' Statement: Stolen White Babies,
November 12, 1997***

Bryce Gawdry's Private Members' Statement: Stolen White Babies, November 14, 1997

***Jill Hall's Private Members' Statement: Stolen White Babies,
November 26, 1997***

Deidre Grusovin's Private Members' Statement: Adoption without Consent, November 17, 1997

Letters that went out to every member of parliament in New South Wales in both the Liberal and Labor parties

Draft letter to MPS

«The» «Christian name» «Surname», «Title» 1997
«Electorate»
«MinisterialPort»
«Parliament»
«SYDNEY»

Dear «Gender» «Surname»

We are writing to request a judicial inquiry into the 'Stolen White Babies' scandal — the illegal removal of babies from their mothers at birth to supply the adoption market.

It has been estimated that around 60,000 illegal adoptions have occurred in NSW, with 4,400 babies illegally removed from their mothers in 1972 alone — 10,400 Australia wide.

Mothers were coerced, deceived, drugged, bullied and manipulated into surrendering their babies, others were threatened with sterilisation or told their babies had died. Mothers were physically and verbally abused. No informed consent was given, nor advice on options, financial assistance or the 30 day revocation period advised of. Consents were taken whilst mothers were drugged, papers were forged, consents were dispensed with and medical files recorded mothers as 'SOCIALY CLEARED' once a signature was obtained.

A summary of abuses is attached.

These practices were first officially exposed in 1992 by Justice Richard Chisholm of the NSW Law Reform Commission while reviewing the *Adoption of Children Act 1965*, with Kathleen Sherry (a lawyer with the Commission) writing a paper exposing major Human Rights abuses of mothers. No inquiry as yet has followed into these illegal practices or human rights abuses. This failure by authorities to look into these past barbaric practices will undoubtedly lead to their recurrence.

Mothers have only had access to their medical/social records since 1991 to validate their claims, and only in 1994, after much intense personal research, have we been able to uncover our legal rights.

From the early 1950s, according to Adoption Regulations, provisions were implemented enabling unsupported mothers to keep their children, however, those regulations and protection clauses were never followed and instead, the systematic removal of babies was implemented in an illicit 'social cleansing campaign' to rid society of single mothers and illegitimacy.

From 1967 with the introduction of the new *Adoption Act*, mothers rights were supposed to be protected and no duress or coercion was to be used, and a warning of the dire future regret a mother would experience given — instead mothers were forbidden contact with their babies at the birth, with the intent of interrupting the bonding process and told that giving their babies to strangers was 'in the best interests of the child'.

These flagrant abuses of the law went unchallenged for decades. By 1972, this social engineering experiment was so successful that there were more babies than adopters — so many of our children were institutionalised.

Adoption propaganda deceived the public into believing unwed mothers did not want their babies, while at the same time social workers, medical staff, adoption agencies and church-run institutions connived to deny mothers their legal and human rights — therefore effectively stealing their babies. These scandalous baby trading practices can not be justified as being ‘societal mores of the time’ — an affront to all law abiding citizens, given that it was the very laws of the time that were being entirely contravened and insulting, as it also implies that the barbaric practices and baby farming were done with the full knowledge and collective consent of the public.

The forced separation of mother and babies was/is so horrific that mothers now suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, pathological grief, dissociative disorders, severe depression, and disabling anxiety levels.

According to Dr Geoff Rickarby, mothers can never fully recover from this highly traumatic experience as the primitive part of the brain experiences the loss as if the baby has been kidnapped.

Mothers are continually re-traumatised by vetoes, birth of grandchildren and from the ongoing rage of their now adult children who have been brainwashed into believing they were willingly given away.

Our children not only lost the opportunity to be loved, raised and nurtured by their own mothers, they have also suffered the loss of their family of origin, their ancestry and heritage. And their families have lost them.

A full judicial inquiry is imperative

- to expose this horrific blight on Australia’s Human Rights record and to allow the truth to be told. Healing cannot begin until these illegal practises and human rights abuses are exposed
- so an apology can be given to both mothers and their children for the psychological trauma and ongoing emotional pain they both suffer
- so that society is informed of the lies and deceit upon which adoption in this country has been based.

We want an inquiry first and foremost so that:

- our children know the truth; they were not unfeelingly given away — they were stolen. Our children were very much loved and wanted and still are! There can be no healing for either mother or child until this truth is revealed
- those who broke the law are made accountable
- appropriate accredited seminars/workshops can be implemented to train/educate mental health workers and counsellors on the long-term trauma and psychological issues that mothers, their children and other family members are suffering from
- trauma centres can be established.

Through this inquiry, assurances must be given to the Australian community that what happened to these mothers and babies was wrong, so that this country is not seen as one condoning the illegal removal of babies from their mothers.

We believe that only then can the reconciliation process begin so that mothers can once again feel they are an accepted part of this society, and so that where before they only felt betrayal, they can begin to build trust.

Attached is a copy of the unsupported/unwed mother's legal rights and entitlements.

We would welcome the opportunity of meeting with you to discuss this matter. Your response would be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Cole
Chairperson

Some of the illegal practices and human rights abuses

Legal rights of unwed/unsupported mothers: 1953 onwards

Pat Rogan's letter, December 23, 1997, requesting formal deputation to the Minister to discuss an Inquiry into Past Adoption Practices

***Letter, January 12, 1998, from Franca Arena - evidences
Government's awareness of past abuses in adoption practices
prior to NSW Upper House Inquiry***

***Media release, April 2, 1998, formally announcing an Inquiry into
Past Adoption Practices***

***Minister Faye Lo Po's letter, July 17, 1998, to Pat Rogan
informing him of the forthcoming Inquiry***

Dr Geoff Rickarby's final statement at the Inquiry into Past Adoption Practice, October 18, 1999

The media campaign

The campaign for the Inquiry started in the 1980s, but it wasn't until the laws changed and mothers were able to reunite with their lost children that it really got under way. For many mothers, the reality of what happened was too painful and, deeply traumatised, they rarely spoke out. But in 1991 in NSW, when the laws changed to allow mothers and adoptees the right to access information about each other, more mothers joined the campaign for an Inquiry and the call for justice. The following articles are a testament to the courage of mothers who spoke out, even if it meant public admonishment or family ostracism. The time had come to seek justice and they were not going to be silenced again.

Included also is Bob Carr's acknowledgement of another 'stolen generation' and various announcements of the Inquiry and some of its findings.

***Reprinted with permission of The Daily Telegraph©Copyright 2008
The Daily Telegraph, October 19, 2000 p. 12, Cash 'no recompense' for stolen generation by Rachel Morris - Premier Bob Carr acknowledges there are two stolen generations — a non-Indigenous as well as an Indigenous***

***Reprinted with permission of Ardyn Bernoth©Copyright 2008
Sydney Morning Herald, March 5, 1998, p. 7, Mothers Win Inquiry Into Forced
Adoption by Ardyn Bernoth - Newspaper article announcing the forthcoming
Inquiry into forced adoptions.***

***Reprinted with permission of The Daily Telegraph©Copyright 2008
Daily Telegraph, December 9, 2000, pp 1, 8, Babies Stolen for Adoption by Rachel
Morris - The findings of the NSW Upper House Inquiry into past adoption
practices – mothers believed their babies had been kidnapped.***

***Reprinted with permission of The Manly Daily©Copyright 2008
The Manly Daily, 1998, 80,000 adoptions illegal? By Amanda Sheppeard***

***Reprinted with permission of The Canterbury Bankstown Torch©Copyright 2008
The Bankstown Torch, September 9, 1998, Action finally on stolen white babies by
Joy Wilson***

***Reprinted with permission of Julie Delvecchio and Andrew Darby©Copyright 2008
Sydney Morning Herald, June 11, 1996, p. 1, Kidnapped: Adoption Scandal
Revealed by Julie Delvecchio and Andrew Darby***

Article reproduced from St. George & Sutherland Shire Messenger, December 10, 1997, p 1, Closet of Shame by Kimberley Ware - Mother's activism - going public with personal stories in bid to gain Judicial Inquiry.

Article reproduced from St George and Sutherland Shire Messenger, December 10, 1997, p. 6 (cont. from p. 1), How Diane lost and found her son by Kimberley Ware

***Reprinted with permission of Daily Telegraph©Copyright 2008
Daily Telegraph, 1991, Reunion puts back missing pieces of two lives by Brad
Crouch - Past practices exposed: Mother speaking out about being tricked into
signing consent form***

***Reprinted with permission of Candace Sutton©Copyright 2008
Sun-Herald, June 16, 1996, p. 29, They stole my baby by Candace Sutton - Mother
speaks out about how she was tricked and coerced into signing 'consent to adopt'
form***

***Reprinted with permission of The Sunday Telegraph©Copyright 2008
Sunday Telegraph, September 6, 1998, p. 22, They took our babies: Mothers
demand apology over adopted children***

**Reprinted with permission of Time magazine©Copyright 2008
Time, June 24, 1996, p 79, Adoptions arranged by deceit by Lisa Clausen**

***Reprinted with permission of The Newcastle Herald©Copyright 2008
Newcastle Herald, July 26, 1999, p. 1, They took our babies by Donna Page***

***Reprinted with permission of The Newcastle Herald©Copyright 2008
Newcastle Herald, July 26, 1999, p. 4, (cont. p.1) Inquiry into 'white stolen babies'
by Donna Page***

***Reprinted with permission of The Sunday Telegraph©Copyright 2008
Sunday Telegraph, October 6, 1991, Mothers told — give up your babies by Brad
Crouch***

**Reprinted with permission of The Sunday Telegraph©Copyright 2008
Sunday Telegraph, October 6, 1991**

Politics in the Park — Chris Cole was part of the International Women's Day Collective and was invited to speak out under the banner of 'Feminist Campaign for Justice' at an annual event held on the Friday evening prior to the Women's Day March, March 10, 1995, hosted at Harold Park.

***Reprinted with permission of The Sunday Telegraph©Copyright 2008
Sunday Telegraph, March 12, 1995, p. 3 - Being part of the Women's Collective
meant that for the first time mothers marched at the head of the Women's Day
March, March 11, 1995.***

Christine Cole (left) and Ristin Nichols (right) led the march

***Reprinted with permission of The Daily Telegraph©Copyright 2008
Daily Telegraph, December 12, 1972, Couple battle with State for their child by
Leigh Bonheur - Young couple were told that their sick baby would only receive
medical treatment if they signed the 'consent to adopt'***

***Reprinted with permission of The Bankstown Canterbury Torch©Copyright 2008
Bankstown Torch, April 8, 1998, Stolen white babies story opens wounds***

**Reprinted with permission of Gay Alcorn©Copyright 2008
Times On Sunday, October 18, 1987, Police probe claims of adoption scam in
Victoria by Gay Alcorn**

***Reprinted with permission of Clarrisa Bye©Copyright 2008
Sun-Herald-Tempo, April 1, 2000, p 9, Kidnapped at birth: Lifelong baby blues —
the parents' stories by Clarrisa Bye***

***Reprinted with permission of The Sunday Telegraph©Copyright 2008
The Sunday Telegraph, October 13, 1991, Baby scandal Inquiry demand by Brad
Crouch - Mothers begin activism after law changes and they can reunite with their
stolen children.***

The Sun, June 19, 1965, Baby Taken Young Mother Flees by staff reporter - How difficult it was for mothers who were unsupported and unwed to keep their babies! The following article describes a young mother fleeing with her baby because she obviously does not want it adopted — as a result the police are called in.

Mothers' activism spreads overseas

One of three papers presented at a Mothers' Conference in Felixstowe England. The following paper was subsequently published May 21, 1998, in an English newsletter for Mothers titled NPSG (Natural Parents Support Group).

The Importance of an Apology

Jan Kashin

Out of the blue her comment: "I'm sorry about what happened to you." Initially I wasn't sure who my mother was referring to. It was 1991.

"I'm sorry about you losing your son. We could look for him. We could hire a private eye. I have plenty of money."

"I have found him, Mum. He doesn't want to know us."

"I couldn't stand up to your father. He would have divorced me. He would have cast us all out. I had no courage. I tried. I just couldn't defend you."

She had broken her silence of 29 years. Her atonement had begun. She had failed me at the most important moment of my life, and she was now acknowledging her shortcomings to me. At the age of 73 she was trying to make her peace with me. I stayed very detached. I wasn't going to break down. My grief was so internalized that it rarely connected to my brain, my heart, or my tear ducts. It had become cellular. But because of her apology, I was slowly able to reinstate my innocent self. I emerged from her apology like a cicada emerges from its transparent casing. I left the guilt that my parents and society had encased around my selfhood, and gradually returned to spiritual wholeness. I now had permission to be me. And as my thought processes now came from spiritual wholeness, I had every confidence in my ideas, my art, my theories, my plans. All mothers separated from their children by past unlawful adoption practices, need an apology from their mothers, their former partners, and their governments. Their separated children need to hear this apology. They need to see it in writing. They need to know that they were perfect enough to deserve their mother's love.

INSIDE FRONT JACKET

Christine Anne Cole worked in the complimentary medicine field for more than 20 years as a traditional healer before becoming an activist for mothers' rights and then an academic. Her journey began in 1969, when as an unwed 16 year old she gave birth in a large Sydney maternity hospital to a little girl, who she had wanted to keep, but despite her protests was forcibly taken from her. At the time she thought it was punishment for having a child out of wedlock and because of the many professionals involved, did not question the event. After being reunited with her daughter in 1988, she suffered a deep depression which began her quest to understand why her daughter had been taken without a thought for her or her child's traumatic loss. In 1994, she joined a political lobbyist/support group for women who had gone through a similar loss. In 1995, she co-founded and was elected chairperson for a group called Origins, which she subsequently led in its call for an Inquiry into past practices in adoption. Since the successful culmination of that Inquiry, with its acknowledgement that in some cases past practices in adoption were both unethical and unlawful, she has devoted herself to an academic career, attending the University of Western Sydney where she has achieved a double degree in Law and Social Sciences with Majors in Psychology and Sociology. She is presently on a full-time scholarship, working towards completing a Doctorate on the topic that has dominated her life since 1969: the white stolen generation.

Previous publications:

C Cole, 'Mother to birth mother — how my identity was altered', *Separation reunion reconciliation: proceedings from the sixth Australian conference on adoption*, Brisbane 1997.

C Cole, 'Exposing adoption fraud', *Has adoption a future: proceedings of the fifth Australian conference*, Sydney, 1994.

Conferences presented at:

International Adoption Conference Felixstow, England May, 1998: Keynote speaker (presented 3 papers): *The Australian journey, Opening speech and Language*.

The Australian Adoption Conference Sydney, 1994, *Adoption fraud*.

Papers presented:

C Cole, 'An apology', *Parliament of New South Wales Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues interim report: inquiry into adoption practices: transcripts of evidence from 27 August 1998 to 19 October 1998*, Report 17, 1998, pp. 103–105.

The Theatre, New South Wales Parliament House, *Rally speech: call for an inquiry*, 1997.

Grief and trauma workshop, *Adoption trauma — a personal story*, Sydney, 1995.

'Politics in the Pub', *Feminist campaign for justice: abuse of adoption*, Harold Park Hotel, Sydney, 1995.

Unpublished:

'The White Stolen Generation and its Meaning for Women's Citizenship in Australia', unpublished Honours thesis, University of Western Sydney, 2004.

'The Injustice of Adoption', unpublished booklet, 1994.

Notes

¹ New South Wales State Children's Relief Dept. Annual Report For the Year ending 5 April 1883, p. 19

² New South Wales State Children's Relief Dept. Annual Report For the Year ended 5 April 1883, p. 21

³ New South Wales State Children's Relief Dept. Annual Report For the Year ending 5 April 1883, p. 21

⁴ New South Wales State Children's Relief Dept. Annual Report For the Year ending 5 April 1883, p. 21

⁵ New South Wales State Children's Relief Dept. Annual Report For the Year ending 5 April 1883

⁶ New South Wales Child Welfare Department Annual Report for part of 1921 and the four following years ending 1925, p. 3

⁷ New South Wales Child Welfare Department Annual Report for part of 1921 and the four following years ended 1925, p. 2

⁸ John B Watson, psychologist and father of American behaviorism stated: '... and my own specified world to bring them up and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select ... '(Mullan 1987: 5 citing Watson 1926.

⁹ Individuals devoted to 'better breeding' practices, such as promoting the fertility of those deemed superior and reducing or eliminating the breeding of those considered 'unfit'. Eugenics also included removing children from those they labeled 'unfit' in order to place them in a supposedly 'superior' environment because it was believed this would raise the child's IQ level up at least 10 points (euthenics) see P Popenoe 'Eugenics and Human Morality' *Journal of Heredity* 13(2) pp. 77-81, 1921; DF Lawson, 'The R. H. Fetherston Memorial Lecture: the anxieties of pregnancy', *The Medical Journal Of Australia*, vol. II, 1960, pp. 161-166.

¹⁰ Time Magazine 'Desirable Marriages', June 13, 1938, Accessed 2/04/07 <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,849031,00.html>; Time Magazine 'The American Family: Future Uncertain, Dec 28, 1970, Accessed 2/04/07 <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,944265,00.html>; P Popenoe *Modern Marriage: A Handbook for Men*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1945.

¹¹ Child Welfare in New South Wales, *A child welfare training manual of NSW adoption practice*, NSW Government Printers, Sydney, 1958, p. 34

¹² LM Brooks & EC Brooks *Adventuring in Adoption* Chapel Hill, USA, The University of North Carolina Press. 1939

¹³ G Rickarby Personal Interview conducted August 9, 2007.

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- ¹⁴ W Kline *Building a better race : gender, sexuality and eugenics from the turn-of-the century to the baby boom* Berkley, University of California Press, 2001.
- ¹⁵ C Cole, 'The white stolen generation', unpublished thesis, School of Social Sciences, University of Western Sydney, 2005. <http://www.geocities.com/crisacolau/>
- ¹⁶ Standing Committee on Social Issues, *Releasing the past: adoption practices 1950–1998 final report*, Government Printers, Sydney, 2000, pp. 218, 220.
- ¹⁷ R Kunzel 'Pulp Fictions and Problem Girls: Reading and Rewriting Single Pregnancy in the Postwar United States', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 100, no. 5, Dec 1995, pp. 1465-1487.
- ¹⁸ G Rickarby Personal Interview conducted August 9, 2007
- ¹⁹ *Cooke v State of NSW & Anor* [2006] NSWSC 655
- ²⁰ A Marshall & M McDonald *The many-sided triangle: adoption in Australia* Carlton, Victoria, Melbourne University Press, 2001
- ²¹ P Roberts, 'Statement of Pamela Thorne, nee Roberts, 30 September, 1994' in the matter of *Judith Marie McHutchison v State of New South Wales* no. 13428 of 1993
- ²² The Sunday Telegraph, 'Scientists locate 'super mum' key' April 27, 2008, p. 14; see research of Professor Craig Kinsley, a neuroscientist at the University of Richmond, Virginia
- ²³ C Cole, 'The white stolen generation', unpublished thesis, School of Social Sciences, University of Western Sydney, 2005. <http://www.geocities.com/crisacolau/>
- ²⁴ Term used by Dr. Geoff Rickarby to describe the systematic way in which babies were removed from their unwed mothers within the maternity hospitals and unwed mother's homes: G Rickarby, *Standing Committee on Social Issues Interim Report no. 17*, 1998, pp. 62–73
- ²⁵ R. Kerr, 'The State And Child Welfare in Western Australia 1907-1949' unpublished thesis Research Institute of Cultural Heritage, Curtin University, 2005 Ch. 4; New South Wales State Children Relief Board Annual Report Year ending 6th April 1920, p.12
- ²⁶ Sunday Telegraph February 18, 1968; In the same article, the Minister for Child Welfare, A. D. Bridges, stated in response to an accusation that Indigenous children were being stolen for assimilation purposes: 'There is no truth in the suggestion that Aboriginal children can be forcibly removed from their parents'
- ²⁷ Anderson, EW, Kenna, JC & Hamilton, MW 'A Study of Extra-marital Conception in adolescence' *Psychiatry et Neurologia* 139, 6, 1960
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- ²⁹ G Rickarby Personal Interview conducted August 9, 2007.
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⁷⁹ F Clothier, 'Problems of illegitimacy as they concern the worker in the field of adoption', *Mental Hygiene*, vol. 25, 1941, pp. 576–590.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 581–583.

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⁸³ M McLelland, *Proceedings of a seminar: adoption services in New South Wales*, Department of Child Welfare and Social Welfare, 3rd February, 1967, p. 42. Since it was the mother, who was the legal guardian of her child, and only the mother that was to make any decision with respect to relinquishment, what Mary McLelland is advocating: (that social workers either make the decision or help a mother to a decision), is clearly unethical and unlawful.

⁸⁴ P Roberts "The Hospital's responsibility to the unmarried mother and her child' *Hospital Administration* Dec 1968 p. 13

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- ⁸⁵ Two psychiatrists oft quoted by other professionals working within the adoption industry.
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- ⁸⁹ Report no. 22 (2000), p. 132.
- ⁹⁰ R Rawady, Open letter to Mary Hood, President/Director Australian Association of Social Workers SA calling for a public apology, 10 April 1997; E Smith, *Readings in adoption*, Philosophical Library, New York, 1963; B Boehm, 'What shall I do with my baby?', *The Child*, vol. 12, 1948, pp. 166-169.
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- ⁹² M Schapiro, *A study in adoption practice*, vol. 1, Child Welfare League of America, Inc., New York, 1956, p. 47.
- ⁹³ JH Reid, 'Principles, values and assumptions underlying adoption practice', *Social Work*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1957.
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.10. While publicly, via newspaper and magazine articles, the adoption industry maintained mothers had a 'choice' and repeatedly asserted that it was the mother's decision alone to relinquish her child for adoption, its statements in social work journals and at conference proceedings revealed an antithetical ideology that stipulated mothers were neither capable nor had the right to make their own decision and so in fact had no real 'choice' at all. Rather, it was the adoption industry itself that took on the role of decision maker and arbiter of what it considered to be in 'the child's best interest' and having done so proceeded to act with impunity. This behaviour though was duplicitous, illegal and unethical.
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.1–13.
- ⁹⁶ This was in direct contrast of the espoused principles of social work: clients at all times were supposed to be autonomous and the rights and freedoms of individuals were to be protected.
- ⁹⁷ M Schapiro, *A study in adoption practice*, vol. 1, Child Welfare League of America, Inc., New York, 1956, p. 8.
- ⁹⁸ Whose Freudian-based theories 'strongly influenced Australian professionals' (Report 22, 2000, p.16).
- ⁹⁹ R Rawady, Open letter to Mary Hood, President/Director Australian Association of Social Workers SA calling for a public apology, 10 April 1997.
- ¹⁰⁰ The seminar was sponsored by the Council of Social Services of New South Wales and the paper subsequently published. The seminar was held in 1967, when the *1965 Act* was implemented.

¹⁰¹ JH Reid, 'Principles, values and assumptions underlying adoption practice', *Social Work*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1957; M Schapiro, *A study in adoption practice*, vol. 1, Child Welfare League of America, Inc., New York, 1956, p. 8.

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¹⁰³ R Pannor & A Baran, 'Open adoption as standard practice', *Child Welfare* vol. LXIII, no. 3, 1984, pp. 245–250.

¹⁰⁴ R Pannor & A Baran, cited in MA Hale, 'Past relinquishing mothers: a forgotten group. A study of the legislation, policy and social conditions for a group of women who relinquished new-born infants for adoption in the past', unpublished MA thesis, School of Social Studies, SA Institute of Technology, 1988.

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¹⁰⁸ E Herman, 'Jessie Taft: the adoption project', <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~adoption/people/taft.htm>; Brooks & Brooks, 'Some scientific and professional views of adoption', *Social Forces*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1939, pp. 509–513.

¹⁰⁹ L Young, *Out of wedlock*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1954

¹¹⁰ L Carangelo *Chosen Children: Billion Dollar Babies in America's Foster Care, Adoption and Prison System* Palm Desert, Calif: Access Press 2002 Accessed 10/01/08 <http://www.thechosenchildren.com/ebooks/chosen.pdf>

¹¹¹ 'Mary McLelland', *Daily Telegraph*, 5 February 1967.

¹¹² Though many mothers were led to believe they were the primary clients of the person counselling and advising them that adoption was in their child's best interest, it seems they were not. Certainly women would not have been aware of the very real conflict of interest of being counselled by the person who was also in the business of finding babies for married couples.

¹¹³ Report 22 (2000), p. 61.

¹¹⁴ J McHutchison *NSW Adoption: an historical perspective* 1985 Unpublished paper

¹¹⁵ Cited in J McHutchison *NSW Adoption: an historical perspective* 1985 Unpublished paper

¹¹⁶ L Young *Is Money our Trouble* a paper presented at the National Conference of Social workers Cleveland 1953

¹¹⁷ NSW Law Reform Commission, *Report 34*, 1994.

¹¹⁸ J Condon, 'Psychological disability in women who relinquish a baby for adoption', *The Medical Journal of Australia*, vol. 144, 1986.

¹¹⁹ See Margaret Watson's Oral Testimony.

¹²⁰ EV Mech *Orientations of Pregnancy Counsellors Towards Adoption* (Final Report) Washington, DC: Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Program, Department of Health and Human Services 1984

¹²¹ EV Mech, 'Pregnant adolescents: communicating the adoption option', *Child Welfare*, vol. 6 November-December, 1986

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¹²⁴ L Stoker, 'Reflections on Crown Street', *Australian Social Work*, June, 1985, p. 2.

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¹³¹ C Cole, 'Mother to Birth Mother – How my Identity was Altered' in *Separation, reunion, reconciliation: Proceedings from the Sixth Australian Conference on Adoption*, Brisbane, June, 1997

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¹³³ P Rogan, *Stolen White Babies* Private Members' Statements 12 November 1997 LA Hansard Articles 51st Parliament / 513pa015/38.

¹³⁴ J Byrne, *Birth rights*, ABC Lateline; Link-Up, *Report on adoption practices: second interim report*, transcripts of evidence 16 June 1999–25th October 1999, p. 224.

¹³⁵ D Grusovin, *Adoption Without Informed Consent* Private Members' Statements 27 November 1997 LA Hansard Articles 51st Parliament/513ga023/17, p. 26; B Gaudry, *Stolen White Babies* Private Members' Statement 14 November 1997 LA Hansard Articles 51st Parl/ 513ga017/24, p. 53; J Hall, *Stolen White Babies* Private Members' Statements 26 November 1997, Motion LA Hansard Articles 51st Parl/513ga022/40, p. 64.

¹³⁶ Interview with Pat Rogan, Chairman, Clubs Association New South Wales, at Revesby Workers Club Boardroom, March 29th March, 2006.

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¹⁴⁰ F Lo Po (MP Minister for Community Services), *Inquiry into Past Adoption Practices*, media release [3/498], 2 April 1998.

¹⁴¹ Skinner, 2/4/1998 LA Hansard Articles 51st Parl/513pa031/11.

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¹⁶⁹ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, *Overseas adoption in Australia: report on the inquiry into adoption of children from overseas*, p. 2: 'The stigma associated with forced adoption practices in the past leading to 'the stolen generation' (for both Indigenous and non- Indigenous mothers and children)'.

¹⁷⁰ Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates: Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.

¹⁷¹ Sec 32 *Adoption of Children Act 1965* (NSW).

¹⁷² A group of obstetric social workers representing seven major NSW hospitals forwarded a submission to the Department of Youth, Ethnic and Community Affairs regarding a review of adoption legislation.

¹⁷³ Two years later, a Royal Commission on Human Relationships also discussed similar submissions but concluded: 'We believe that the first right of a child is that its natural parent be given every possible assistance to care for the child', (and her family) — no matter the age of the mother.