

Senate Inquiry into “Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices.”

Preamble to Submission

I Angela (...) am a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia resident in the State of Queensland.

As a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia I have an inalienable right to protection under the Australian Constitution and the Common Law of this country

As an Australian citizen, the Commonwealth affords me protection from the unlawful and harmful actions that threaten my right to life, liberty and justice from those who would deny me those rights within or without the borders of Australia.

My Submission

I was that baby who was forcibly removed from my mother through sedation and coercion - this legacy lives with me every day. I was denied the right to know my biological mother and family. I was denied the right to live a ‘normal’ childhood. I was denied the right to form the emotional attachment with my biological mother which is a basic requirement that all babies need (refer to Attachment Theories for more information). Whilst this submission is in honor of my biological mother and my story it does not undermine the love I have for my parents and brother who I shared my life with.

This is some of my story

I was a lively child; in fact my mother (adoptive mother and who I refer to as mum) was worried that I was hyperactive. I seemed to have always had a keen sense of social justice and was not one to be excluded from conversations. So that day I remember feeling very indignant when my mother asked me to leave the room whilst she talked to a friend. I decided to eavesdrop on the conversation. I was only about 5 years old and thought it very harmless. That’s when I heard the words ...’Angela Adopted’. I don’t remember much more of that day and I know I did not raise it with my mum but it worried me enough to ask the nun at school what that meant. I clearly recall standing up next to her at the front of the class (when all the other children had left the room) and outright asking her “what does adopted mean” I barely remember her trying to explain to me but I always remember this sense of shock and confusion. I know that she must have called my parents and a conversation ensued.

I was told by mum that I was a ‘special child’ (I didn’t want to be special....I just wanted to be normal like everyone else). She also told me that my mummy must have loved me very much to give me up. I was too young to question the irony. I just keenly felt a sense of rejection. I was told that they picked me out of lots of babies – there were many to choose from at the time but I was the one that they wanted. Mum told me that dad, being Italian, wanted to have a big family but mum nearly died having my brother and therefore they decided to adopt me. I was given what information mum had been provided at the time they adopted me which was not very much. I was born in 1967 in the

Mater Hospital, Brisbane. My natural mother was 18 and my natural father was 27, Italian and a construction worker. Not very much to grasp on to and didn't help solve the all important elephant in the room – who am I?

I vividly remember getting teased at school by children saying 'your parents aren't your real parents' and how awful that was for me to bear although being feisty I did stand up for myself but inside I felt so very different and scared. Yes they love me! Surely they must – isn't that why they chose me?

I was very different to my brother (adopted brother and their only biological child) who was calm, intelligent and seemingly compliant and who I adored and looked up to (and still do). This seemed an ever salient reminder that I was adopted and reinforced my sense of feeling different.

As an adult I have been told that my parents could not have loved me the way they would have loved their biological son because after all I was their adoptive child and not their real blood. Whilst I have always tried to detach from hurtful comments like these, which I have faced throughout my life, my inside voice was always screaming "why can't I be loved as much as a biological child– am I not worthy"? Having said that, I know that mum and dad loved me – absolutely. They wanted the best for me and strived to achieve that in the best way they could and consistent with parenting styles of that era.

At 16 I had some physical ailment and it was that time, at the Doctors, a conversation was discussed about the possibility of obtaining any medical history from my biological parents. I am not sure what occurred and I can't remember the attempts that were made to obtain this type of information but I do know there was never any information that was produced. I think it was at this time we had found out that my records were destroyed. To this day, I still have to live with that question if I see a specialist or a new Doctor.....no I don't know my family medical history...I am adopted. Did I not have a right to know my genetic history – what would lay in store for me? Did I have a predisposition to breast cancer or diabetes or heart disease? Isn't it funny what some people take for granted....I never will – there are always reminders?

Life went on but I could never shake that incredibly strong desire to meet my biological mother – I just yearned to meet her – I **needed** to know why? Why did she love me and give me away? Who was I? What is my history? ...you can't imagine how strong that urge was. Alongside of this I felt terribly guilty that I felt this way because I had parents – what was wrong with me – why can't I just be grateful for the home they have given me? I always struggled and tried to fight this desire to meet her – it's a large burden to ask any child to reconcile.

I moved from that small country town to Brisbane. It was when I was aged 20 that my friend showed me a newspaper clipping from the 'Adoptees Association of Qld' it was a telephone call in to reunify mothers and their adopted children. This was highly unusual as I was only too well aware of the Queensland Governments position on that at the time (I wonder whose interests it served to not support reunification). I was very conflicted about proceeding and I talked to mum about this. She was very supportive of me but dad was terrified – he was adamant that I was their child. I called in and provided my information. Some 6 weeks later I received a call to say that they had found my biological mother - I was in shock.

I remember the drive to meet her and the thoughts and fear that was running through my mind – the hope and the expectation of finding answers to my questions... where did I come from? What is

my history? Would she love me? Will I look like her? What are her children like? What will they think of me? and on and on. I walked up to the front door and knocked...and there she wasthis vibrant, beautiful woman who had given birth to me. She embraced me so tightly and we cried...she said to me 'you are beautiful'. She also told me that she could see 'him' in me as well. We talked for hours and hours and I showed her photos of myself when I was a baby...which must have been so painful for her.

It was some time after our reunification that she told me the circumstances surrounding my conception. She had been date raped. This information was devastating. She was not supported through the justice system and thus did not proceed with any formal charges. What woman could in that era? what blight on our history. I remember looking in the mirror at myself with difficulty and I still think about this today – it is inextricably linked to me. When she gave birth to me at the Mater, she was under sedation when Children's Services had her sign the adoption papers – how can this be informed consent? How can this be legal? She was not advised of her options or her rights. She went on to tell me that they brought me back to her 'accidentally' and then took me away again – how unjust and cruel. Neither of us was afforded the right to form an attachment. I can only assume I was placed in a nursery with other babies without the comfort and nurturing from my biological mother who had just given birth to me. What type of practice framework was in place to suggest that this was ever conceivably ok? Was this not a breach of our basic human rights? She told me that she went back for me (I think it was two weeks later) 'screaminggive me my baby back!' she was told... I had been adopted. I cannot imagine the trauma and pain she must have felt and lived with. The words of my mother 'your mummy must have loved you very much to give you away' was not true - she was forced. How could I reconcile this? How can I now? The complexities of this myth were too much to comprehend. I do not blame my mother for telling me this – this is no doubt what my parents were advised to tell me and they did so out of love for me.

My biological mother and I had discussed many things and including the fact that she had tried to pass on medical records but was blocked from doing this. Likewise, and as aforementioned, my records were destroyed – this is my history – how can my records just go up in a puff of smoke?

Our reunification story made front pages of the Qld Sunday Mail –and whilst I am no longer in contact with my biological mother, I will quote some of her words as published in this story "Things were so antiquated then, she said, " A girl in my situation – unmarried mother to be – was pretty isolated in the hospital as well as society. "Then I had Children's Services Department telling me **I had to** sign the adoption papers just after I'd given birth. There was no counselling, no nothing – I wasn't told anything about my options. So I signed the papers". "**I desperately wanted to keep her** but there were no pensions, I had no income of my own and I was only 18".

In 1990 my mother passed away as a function of the illness she was diagnosed with 3 months after she adopted me. I was only 22 and still coming to terms with the reunification and then having to face the death of the only mother I ever knew.

Soon after mum's death, the reunification broke down. How could it not – there were no support frameworks in place to ensure this occurred safely. I would have dredged up all of her significant hurt and trauma – I was a living reminder of all the emotional harm that had been imposed on her and I was leaning on her heavily at the time for emotional support. It has taken me 20 years to understand that now – At the time I was just immersed in my own grief and loss at having lost my mother and the rejection of my biological mother. Now at age 43 my heart just breaks for my

biological mother - for her hurt, pain and grief and loss. Likewise, for my mother who knew that I always felt that a piece was missing for me.

A couple of years ago I sat down and watched the documentary 'Gone to A Good Home' – this was a monumental revelation. For the first time I actually realized that there were other people out there who felt like me, who had similar stories – I could actually identify with the adoptees and indeed the mothers stories. My fiancé (at the time and now my husband) and I cried throughout the entire story and I felt for once that I was not this ungrateful and flawed person in terms of my grappling with the complexities of my adoption – other people shared my confusion and unresolved dilemmas. I heard for the first time one of the adoptees utter the same words I always articulated... 'I did not want to be special, I just wanted to be normal'. What occurred was a breach of human rights – that these women could be treated so inhumanely and their babies as property to be given away. How do I comprehend that I was one of those babies? How do I come to terms with the deep love I have for my family whilst simultaneously feeling such immense grief and bewilderment at the way in which the adoption framework was operationalised? Do they have to be mutually exclusive? What if I got answers – am I not entitled to this – or do the principles of social justice not apply to me because I am adopted?

This has been very challenging for me to write and it will be very difficult for many people who love me. Nevertheless, I know they will support me and respect that I feel so strongly about this significant and emotive issue. Thank you to my loving, patient and caring husband David – it is with your continued love and support that I have the courage to write this submission.

To (...) and the broader (...) family – I love you. Thank you for accepting me into your family – I remain proud to stand amongst you and to call myself Angela (...). You are my family and hence please be assured that my submission does not detract from the deep love I have for you. However, I know that you will also accept that my life and that of my biological mother is forever inextricably linked – she is part of my identity too. With respect to my biological father – of course there are many, many unanswered questions and that is something that I must live with.

To the members of the Senate Community Affairs Committee - thank you for affording me this opportunity. Please consider that Adoption does not just intensely impact the biological mother and child - it also entwines the adoptees families, the biological mother's families, the biological father's families and broader relations and friends. Even when unspoken and hidden it is still an ever present nebulous entity – it is always there, always with me and always just that bit beyond my grasp of total and complete acceptance. I urge you to please consider each submission with an empathetic and open heart – I have merely shared only a small component of the impact of adoption on my life it is too difficult to even begin to know how to convey what it is and continues to mean for me.

I am not just a statistic and I, along with every other mother and child and their broader families and indeed the Australian public now deserve the truth to be revealed. Please do not contribute towards any further harm – I respectfully contend that the Commonwealth Government did contribute to forced adoptions. I further contend that the Commonwealth Government, both ethically and morally, must play a pivotal role in developing a national framework to assist the states and territories to address the consequences for the mothers, their families and the children who were subjected to forced adoption policies.