

To The Senate Community Affairs Committee.

Dear Honourable members of the senate Enquiry Committee.

Submission to the Community Affairs Reference Committee in relation to the Inquiry into the Commonwealths Contribution to former forced adoption practises.

I am a late discovery adoptee. At the age of 23, after my male adopter had passed away I confronted my adoptress, with my belief that I was not her biological child and managed to elicit a confession from her. My story is a long one and this is a condensed version of events but should give some indication of how adoption has negatively affected my life and the lives of my family of origin.

I am a 43 year old wife and mother who was born in 1967 and placed in an iron cot at St Gabriels babies' home in Balwyn. There were no cards, gifts, congratulations or hugs from my family for me. My entry into this world was a shameful event shrouded in secrecy, lies and collusion with the hospital and its governing agency to dispose of me. I lay in that white iron cot for 6 weeks, unloved and unwanted. No one to hold me, comfort me or tell me they loved me. A bastard. Amongst my adoptresses confession was the story of how I was acquired. Apparently they strolled the aisles of the babies' home, checking each one carefully to make sure they chose a perfect one. They wanted the best their money could buy, naturally. I'm sure this story was meant to make me feel special but all it did was make me feel like a product. A piece of merchandise that these selfish people had acquired.

With the dream of their perfect child realised my adopters headed home with me, in blissful ignorance of the challenges associated in raising a stranger's child. The government gave them no help or assistance or information. Simply shove a bottle of formula in a baby's mouth every few hours and hey presto you're a wonderful parent! I have photographs of the day they brought me 'home'. I struggle to look at them as I can clearly see the pain and confusion in my little face, where is MY mummy? Every adult in those pictures is smiling and happy. They got what they wanted, someone else's baby. They are completely ignorant of the fact I have lost my mummy and daddy.

From my recollections of growing up it is clear that obtaining someone else's baby did not miraculously cure my adoptresses infertility. She struggled with the fact that she was staring into the face of a stranger, and became increasingly jealous of the bond I had with my male adopter. She would proclaim loudly to anyone and everyone that I was not an affectionate child. I knew she was disappointed in me and that I had not lived up to her expectations and so I turned even further inwards. I shut down emotionally at the age of 3. No help or guidance was ever sought for me as that would mean telling people I was an adopted child. Their lies and facade were more important to them than my emotional health.

I was a quiet and shy child who did not make friends or socialise with other children. I was teased and bullied right through primary school and can remember living in a state of constant fear and confusion. I lived in a dream world, as the real life existence I had just didn't feel right. Nothing in my life seemed to make any sense and my adopters ignored my distress. My growing up years were further complicated by the arrival of an adopted brother. He was a child who clearly had special needs but again my adopters felt that shoving a bottle of formula in his mouth every few hours made them the perfect parents. My adoptress doted on him and he could do no wrong in her eyes. He was always in

trouble at school and failing classes and when the teachers would attempt to put strategies in place to help him the adoptress would complain that the 'Teachers were always picking on him.' I was the perfect student and always got high grades which made my adopted brother jealous and so he began to tease and bully me to make himself feel better.

This behaviour from him was never stopped by my adoptress and in future years escalated into physical and sexual abuse towards me. I am currently, at the age of 43 still having issues of violence with my adopted brother who has drug and alcohol dependence problems. Again, our adopters could have sought help and guidance over the years to prevent my brothers' depression and addictions but that would have meant telling people we were adopted. The lies and facade were so important to them.

I also struggled through high school with major self esteem issues. My adopters also expected me to work in their shop outside of school hours when I was in my late teens. I was a very gifted student and the teachers were always advising my adopters of suitable career options for me. Their attitude was that it was a waste of money to educate a girl as she would just go off and get married and pop out a few kids. My male adopter had a biological daughter back in his homeland and he had paid for her university education. But no university for me. They pulled me out of school in my last year to manage their shop as the male adopter was in bad health. They were both in bad health due to an unhealthy lifestyle. I guess my biggest memory of their total lack of care towards me was when my male adopter caught me trying to commit suicide at the age of 17. He told me I was an idiot, that I was useless and he barely spoke to me, or looked at me ever again after that. He did not seek help for me as that would have meant admitting I was adopted. My male adopter died when I was twenty years old and my adoptress got herself into financial trouble with the sale and purchase of another house. At the age of twenty I inherited a useless wife, a mortgage and a drug addicted teenager. I spent 3 years working up to 3 jobs at a time to get her finances back on track and she did not care one bit that I lost the best years of my life. I also had a nervous breakdown towards the end of this period of my life. She fully expected that level of service from me but as usual she expected nothing from my adopted brother. I felt like their slave.

So at the age of 23 I finally knew I was adopted and a lot of my life made sense. I was so relieved to know I was adopted. I had decided to never marry and have children as I did not want to pass my adopters genes on to anyone. I also decided to search for my mother which infuriated my adoptress. A friend of my adoptress has recently told me that when the laws changed and contact could be initiated my adoptress would monitor the mailbox to make sure she could intercept any potential contact letter from my natural family. I was after all her property as she had paid for me.

I obtained my original birth certificate fairly easily and found that my grandparents still lived at the same address. There was no father listed. I wrote a letter asking my grandparents to get their daughter to contact me about a private matter. I received a very angry phone call from my mothers' sister who told me I was not wanted then and not wanted now and I had upset my grandparents terribly and I needed to grow up, get over it and get some counselling or something. She also said she had lived with my mother and there was absolutely no way my mother had had a baby. And so twenty years of lies from my mother and her sister began, along with a barrage of 'I told you your birthmother and her family were trash' stories from my adoptress. I not surprisingly, had another nervous breakdown and serious thoughts of suicide.

I managed to pull myself together and found a boyfriend who I am still married to. I put my search on hold whilst I concentrated on building a life with my husband. Our early years together were difficult as I struggled with affection and empathy and anger. I became a workaholic as it seemed to numb the pain and I guess it was better than drinking or drugs. My adoptress was diagnosed with Parkinsons disease a week before I had my first baby. She refused to go into a nursing home and expected me to take care of her. We put her in a granny flat outside the back door of our house and I cooked all her meals and took her everywhere. All I remember of this period is years of stress. My adoptress was also jealous of my child and would regularly stage stunts on weekends so I would have to pay attention to her. She even wanted me to put my child in day care so I could focus on caring for her. That I refused to do. I had 4 miscarriages during the five years that I cared for the adoptress and two of them required a day in hospital as they were after thirteen weeks. I also ended up in court as the violence from my abrother had increased dramatically. My husband and I were granted a five year intervention order against him. My adoptress spent her final year in a nursing home and I was with her when she died, though I seriously didn't know whether to laugh or cry. At the age of 39 my real life could finally begin..... and I was 6 weeks pregnant.

When the adoptress was in the nursing home I bought a computer, taught myself to use it and started searching for my father. I found my mothers sister and contacted her. She said she had no idea who my father might be. I found an address for my mother and sent her a person to person letter asking if she was now in a better place and offering her the chance to connect. I received a letter stating she is the 'Victim of identity theft' and 'had no idea who my parents could be'. I eventually found my mothers email address and began to email her pictures of her grandkids at Christmas and after their birthdays. I never got any response. I had a couple more attempts at asking my aunt who my father was but all she did was send me off on wild goose chases. I also during this period spent thousands of dollars on private investigators.

In 2010 I found a lady who had done my mothers family tree. I contacted her begging for any information she could give me. She called and told me my mother had married a few months after having me, her first marriage, and gave me the mans name. Finally after twenty years of searching I had a lead.

I wrote a contact letter to my mother's first husband. He called me within a week and was shocked at what I had to tell him. I told him my main concern was that my children did not end up marrying a sibling or cousin some day. He said he was not my father but he was the father of my three siblings. This man drove out to my house a month later with the first ever pictures of my mother and siblings. It was a very emotional meeting and I was totally overwhelmed. I had never intended to contact my siblings as I just couldn't handle more rejection and I didn't want to disrupt anyone's life. I was also told a very sad story of a messed up family, bitter divorce from my mother and that she had abducted my siblings and moved them three thousand kilometres away from their father when he moved on to a new relationship. He also said he had told one brother about me.

A week after meeting my mothers ex husband I was contacted by one of my brothers. He confirmed the messy family saga, and that our mother was very damaged and had always had mental health issues. He also confirmed that our siblings were permanently estranged from our father and that our mother's sister had indeed known who my father was all along. He was excited to have another sister and a few weeks after that I flew

three thousand kilometres to meet him and his family. I spent a night at his house and that weekend changed my life. I began to feel. One look at my brother also told me that we were full siblings.

I was still in contact with my mothers ex husband as I had felt an instant connection to him. I organised to go and see him and the subject of DNA was discussed. He was as much in denial as my mother but agreed to the testing which I organised. The test was positive. He was indeed my father. I am a full sibling.

A year on I have an amazing relationship with my brother and could not imagine life without him despite the distance. I am also now close to my father and helping him to deal with the shock and pain and anger. We have all lost 20 years together and that hurts.

My birthmother is a damaged, bitter and twisted individual and should not have been given the power to control all our lives.

I would like an apology from the government, for their part in colluding with my adopters to change my identity. That single piece of government issued paper has robbed me of medical care for my childhood depression and taken away a life time with people who truly love and care for me. It also leaves a legacy of lies with my children as their birth certificates have my government issued identity rather than the history of my true family. I also know there are many adopted persons who require help dealing with their trauma but have no idea where to go for that help. There needs to be dedicated and trained help for these people and public education about the negative impact of adoption.

I wish to state that adoption does not cure infertility.

Yours Sincerely

My original identity.