

Kirstin Ross
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Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee
Inquiry into the Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption
policy and practises

This submission is dedicated to the memory of my cousin Fiona, who died while trying to understand and heal our family's past.

Terms of Reference

- (a) the role, if any, of the Commonwealth Government, its policies and practices in contributing to forced adoptions; and
- (b) the potential role of the Commonwealth in developing a national framework to assist states and territories to address the consequences for the mothers, their families and children who were subject to forced adoption policies.

Submission Focus

This submission is going to focus on (b), why the Commonwealth should develop a national framework to heal the families who suffered. I also want to acknowledge the deadly consequences, for many families, of the Commonwealth Governments' role in past policies and practices that contributed to forced adoptions (a)

My Family's Story

My Grandmother was born around 1906 into a large Aboriginal family. I believe this occurred at Warrengesda mission, in the NSW Riverina. She had lighter coloured skin and was 'stolen' from her birth family. This most likely happened when she was an infant and treated in hospital for a spinal condition.

My Grandmother was spirited away to Christchurch, New Zealand, where her birth was registered by her new 'waiting' family. There was no adoption process – her birth registration was, and still is fraudulent. It was the beginning of living a lie. In a twist of irony, her new 'mother' was the great niece to the perpetrator of the earliest removal of Aboriginal children – Rev. Richard Johnson, pastor to the first fleet.

These events were not talked about in my family. My grandmother tried to hide the truth, her greatest fear was that her children and grandchildren would be removed. This fear was exacerbated because she only discovered her true identity when she was in her late 30's and her children were little. This 'hiding' was the beginning of a blackness that has haunted my family ever since.

The effects of trans-generational trauma have been well researched and documented, most particularly with the grandchildren of the holocaust survivors'. Researchers have noted how these grandchildren suffered emotionally and physically – they unknowingly relived their grandparents' trauma. For the most part, these grandchildren had no knowledge of their grandparents holocaust survival.

My family has been dogged by the effects of trans-generational trauma. As a family we have experienced all forms of domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse, mental health issues; and ultimately early deaths.

My grandmother only started revealing her truth when I was in my late 30's, and my children were little. I think she started talking because she saw her traumas repeating in me – it upset her to see the abuse I was suffering at the time. Unfortunately she did not reveal all, but merely hinted at 'other' stuff which has led me on a questioning journey.

My journey has led me to seek and find healing. It also allowed me to reconnect with my cousin as we asked the same question, 'who are we', before her untimely death. It is an ongoing process, but I am well and truly on the path. I do not have the answers, but I am willing to share my story about how healing can happen.

The Commonwealth needs to deal with the consequences of past forced adoption policies. If left untended it will result in greater numbers of dysfunctional people and families, as the effects of trans-generational trauma play out in the grandchildren of those children forcibly adopted.

K. Ross

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