

16.10.2011

The Committee Secretary,

Senate Standing Cttees. on Com. Affairs,

P.O. Box 6100, Parliament House, Canberra. 2600.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I have been very interested in the Senate Inquiry on forced adoption policies and practices and so I sent my experience to Mr. Martin Laverty, C.E.O., Catholic Health Aust. who has appeared before your Inquiry.

I read the transcript in which he related, in brief, my story and my search for my only sibling, taken from my mother in 1928 in Orange.

Because I would like those on the committee to read all my story and find out how losing her first-born ruined my mother's life, till she finally took an overdose of drugs and ended it, I am sending you the full story. This information also proves to you that this practice was going on as far back as 1927 in Orange NSW. I think it is important for your Committee to realise that this practice did not start in the 1940's.

I can be contacted by phone or email as above if there are any further questions you would like to ask me.

Sincerely,

SIBLING SEARCH.

The information below is a true story because I have proven the facts therein in many ways. In 1928 my mother, _____ was 21, single and living in Bigga, a very small village west of Crookwell where everyone knew everyone else and the young folk had a very social lifestyle with woolshed dances, concerts, picnics etc.

My mother lived with her parents and siblings and her mother ran a boarding house, assisted by her single daughters. Among the boarders was my father _____ a WW1 Anzac from Crookwell who was working at any job he could get after the war. My mother was always fascinated with him and often vowed that she would marry that man with the funny eyes one day.

In 1928 she found she was pregnant and I am sure my father was the father of this child because I found a letter he wrote to her when he visited Sydney looking for rooms for them to go to live. That never happened.

However she was a patient young lady - 6 years later she again found herself pregnant, again to Dad and this time she and he went off to Crookwell and married quietly without telling the family and then went back to Bigga to live with her parents again where, 4 months later I turned up, much to the surprise of Mum's single sister _____ who told me many times that she knew absolutely nothing about the fact that Mum was pregnant till the morning she "took sick" and _____ was sent to run up to _____ to bring him down to the house.

_____ also told me that she knew nothing about Mum's first pregnancy, and about where and when Mum and Dad got married - when I got their marriage certificate I was surprised to find that the witness to the wedding in Crookwell was the same Aunt _____ lived her whole life in denial - anything that was unpleasant or too hard to face was just put at the back of her mind and she denied it ever happened.

To escape the wrath of her very strict father Mum left Bigga in January 1928 and went to Orange where she was employed as a tray-maid at Dudley Private Hospital in Summer Street to await the birth of her child at St. Agnes Private Hospital in East Orange. Dad was boarding with the family at the time but I have since found a picture of him working on a road gang in Orange in 1928 so it seems he went with her for support. He had 2 sisters and husbands on grazing properties just out of town so he probably lived with one of them. More details below.

Dudley Private Hospital was founded in 1915 in a cottage called "Dudley" in William Street East Orange by two nursing sisters.

In 1922 it was bought by a solicitor for his sister Matron _____ and relocated to Summer Street.

In 1928, 3 of the _____ sisters, _____ and _____ - 3 of the big Catholic family of _____ and _____ of the Goulburn area - bought the hospital. They had another sister _____ who was also in Orange - she married a local chemist _____

Dudley was rebuilt in 1947 with funds supplied by the _____ bank and guaranteed by two local doctors, - probably Dr. _____ and Dr. _____ was an Ophthalmic Surgeon and it was in Dudley Hospital that many of the cataract operations were carried out.

St. Agnes maternity hospital was run by Nurse _____ and was close to St. Mary's Catholic Church in East Orange and was also run by Catholics. Back then Orange was a very "Catholic" town. This is where the young women were moved to when their labour started

and as soon as they gave birth they were moved back to "Dudley" for their "lying-in period" so they had no chance of ever seeing their babies who were handed out when 2 days old.

There was a private arrangement between these 2 hospitals and assisted by other high profile Catholic business people in the district to give the babies of these young single girls to young childless Catholic couples to raise as their own.

There were many young single pregnant girls helped in this way during this period - of course not all of them gave their babies away - some girls had sympathetic parents who helped them raise their child, or in the case of one that I know, her mother kept her so she would have somebody to care for her when she got old - this woman said her mother told her that repeatedly whenever she asked who her father was.

THESE BABIES WERE NEVER OFFICIALLY ADOPTED - the birth was registered to the couple who took the child so there is no way of tracing who the real birth mother was. I have had searches done with Dept. Child Welfare etc. with no success. I also checked the birth registers at Orange Court House when I first started this search with no success because there were so many births for that specific period that it was impossible to tell which one was my sibling.

I discovered these facts and many more when I found _____ who was Deputy Matron of Dudley during this time - she told me all this and much more about what happened in Orange in the 1920's and 1930's.

My mother's name appears on the Orange Electoral Roll for 1928 only and I have a studio photo she had taken while there and gave to my father with the inscription "with fondest love" on the back so they were in contact. I also have a photo of her, obviously pregnant in her cap and apron at the gate of Dudley Hospital.

My mother kept a personal "birthday book" in which she recorded all important events in her life and she wrote in it "started at Dudley Hospital January 1928" and under that she has written in pencil "30th June 1928" which we think was the estimated birth date. There was also other words written on that page which were rubbed out and despite help from Forensic Police we could not work out what they were. Among these items was also a lovely card with a poem "to my dear son" on it so I feel that the baby was a boy.

I paid a professional researcher to see if she could find any information for me with no success although she did find some interesting facts about another child that for a while we thought might be my sibling. This has proved incorrect. This story below.

I checked the Health Dept. for records of these hospitals during the 1920's but none existed. I advertised in the Herald, on the Internet, wrote an article for a magazine and also wrote and spoke to some of my mother's contemporaries who were in the "younger set" of Bigga at the time.

Another Bigga girl, married to one of our family knew what had happened - but she would not reveal her knowledge to me using the excuse that she was not really our family, was only married to one of them and had no authority to reveal family secrets.

One lady told me she remembered Mum leaving early in 1928 and she did not return to Bigga till December that year just in time for this lady's wedding. She remembers Mum was not in good health, very pale, thin and shaky were her words.

This was backed up by some old prescriptions I found amongst Mum's things - she was on a "nerve tonic" in 1928 obtained from a Sydney Doctor. She went to Sydney to stay with her older married sister _____ and helped her with her two little toddlers for some months which was her excuse to her family in Bigga. Helping with 2 little boys would probably have

helped heal her own wounds too.

When I was 4 we left Bigga and went to Orange to live, mainly because my father had 2 sisters married to local graziers and he got a job at Bloomfield Hospital as a wardsman. After I finished high school I went to Orange Technical College for a year and during each holiday break we had to do work experience in local offices - imagine my mother's panic when I was allocated 2 weeks at Dudley Hospital.

But it did not end there - I joined the St. John's Ambulance Brigade and became a St. John's Sister - to keep my accreditation as a Sister I was again sent to Dudley Hospital at the weekend for work experience - this was because Dr. [redacted] was the St. Johns Doctor and it was his father Dr. [redacted] who owned, or part owned Dudley Hospital.

I knew nothing of any of this till after my mother passed away - her sister [redacted] was the last one left and must have felt that she had to tell somebody a few things of their past so she told my cousin about Mum and her experience - strangely this cousin's own mother was another of the Bigga girls who went to Dudley etc. in the 1920's.

When I was told I started sorting through Mum's personal papers and found photos of a lady and a baby with the name [redacted] (surname) who was born in 1928 in Orange - [redacted] was Mum's name - I also found other photos of this lady and this child as she grew up so decided to try to trace her by advertising etc.

At the time we lived in Engadine but had already decided to re-locate to the Southern Highlands (Bowral) when we retired in a couple of years. Imagine my complete surprise when I was contacted by a relative of [redacted] who asked what I wanted and when I explained to him the story he said that [redacted] lived in Bowral, and wanted to talk to me also because there was some mystery about her birth that her mother would never tell her, but the amazing thing about it was that when she saw my address in Engadine on my letter, she nearly fell over.

Her aunt (mother's sister) lived directly across the street from us and she and her mother used to visit her when in Sydney and "an old lady from across the road" always came over to have afternoon tea with them -her mother told her that she had known that lady years ago in Orange - yes, it was my Mum who was living with us.

So we met, swapped lots of information and I once again started searching for facts which proved to us both that she was not my mother's baby but was born to her mother, also a single woman working as a housekeeper in a private home in Orange at the same time as my sibling was born and the two women supported each other, the only difference being that [redacted] mother kept her so that she would have somebody to look after her in her old age, as she was repeatedly told. Her mother already had 2 older children living in a Salvation Army Home somewhere and [redacted] said she remembered as a young child being taken from Sydney to Bathurst to see a man in a fish shop because her mother told her that he owed her money.

We found his name and discovered that he was [redacted] father - his surname is the third name on her full birth certificate which her mother would never allow her to obtain - I sent for it with her permission - he was a redhead also - [redacted] and so am I but from different ancestors, so I think we have successfully eliminated her from the possibility that she is my sibling.

My mother had, since the death of my father, been very "unstable" having problems with tranquilisers/alcohol etc. and after we married we took her to live with us and with the births of our 3 sons she was once again happy - she had babies to spoil and to love and was a great help to me. However it was about the time the 3 boys became schoolboys, were away all day, that she met [redacted] and her mother again at the neighbour's house and she started to slide downhill until she ended up in a nursing home where she, with the help of the grandson of another patient, obtained a large supply of "purple hearts" tranquilisers and other pills and took the lot. She died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital.

Giving her first-born away and spending a lot of her life searching for him influenced my mother's life till she died - I now understand how much she suffered but wish she had trusted me enough to share her pain with me - it might have helped - but, although she did love me - both my parents did - she spent her life always pointing out my shortcomings and never praising me - always telling me how hopeless I was - "you can't sew so let me do it for you - You can't get married because you don't understand what men are like" - THAT was my sex education!!!!

So, despite years of searching, I have still not been able to find my only sibling who has probably lived his/her life totally ignorant of the fact that he was not born to the couple who raised him/her, but to a frightened, single girl from Bigga - he has missed being part of our family and I have missed having a brother or sister of my own - being an only child is very lonely.

VERA PICKFORD.