

## THE ROLE OF THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT IN RELATION TO ADOPTION IN AUSTRALIA

Submission to Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee Inquiry into the Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices .

### PREAMBLE

I, Pamela , am a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia, and resident 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 these rights, within and without, the borders of Australia.

August 2011

For the purpose of this submission, I will call the father of my child "C". I was 17 years of age, and "C" was 27 years of age and Italian, and my daughter was born in July 1967. I was 18 years of age at the time of my daughter's birth.

### MY SUBMISSION

#### MY BACKGROUND

I am one of six children. I have three older and two younger siblings, and I was raised in a family where my father had to work away from home, and my mother ruled the roost with an iron fist and a large leather strap. We were not a religious household, however we were raised to respect and obey authoritative figures. My siblings and I were somewhat innocent to the ways of the world . We had strict family values instilled in us from a very early age, where high on the list of priorities was 'never do something that will shame the good family name'. And so the die was cast.

I met the father of my child at my casual place of work and invited him home to meet my parents, who were instantly enamoured with "C", thereby permitting me to go out with him. After our second outing, my mother received a disturbing phone call. The woman who phoned my mother was

"C's" wife. Naturally we were all shocked to discover "C" was married, and I arranged to meet with "C" to give him an opportunity to explain the situation.

I do not like the expression "date rape", however, I was threatened, and the obvious took place.

It was some time later when I realized I was pregnant, and I confided the details to one of my brothers, whereupon he told my mother, and consequently, all hell broke loose. Obviously my parents notified the police, and a policeman came to our home, and he discussed my predicament with my parents. I was sent from the room and not included in any conversation. The officer explained to my parents that to have "C" charged with rape, (or any other charge for that matter) would be pointless as it would be ME who would be treated badly by the court, or so my mother told me. My fate was decided.

#### THE PREGNANCY

My mother immediately ordered me from the family home in disgrace. A friend suggested I talk to the Matron of the Mater Mother's BRIS., which I did.

The Matron expressed concerns at my wanting to keep my baby - my family was against that idea also. She told me I was so young and I had my whole life ahead of me, don't destroy it. I would be advised to have my baby put up for adoption as there was no help for me, financial or otherwise. My child deserved to be in a family environment with both parents. I should think of the wellbeing of the child I was carrying and not be selfish. Secretly, I had other ideas; this was MY child, and I intended to keep my baby.

The Matron found me a live-in position (with a husband, wife and two children) several suburbs away from my family home. I had to take up the position immediately as I had nowhere to go, and no-one to turn to for help or support.

It took no time for me to become aware that I was a virtual slave. I did all the cooking, cleaning, washing, ironing, child minding, and if I ever questioned them, or complained, I was slapped or verbally abused. I kept my own council, and never uttered a word out of place. I was permitted a half day off per month to attend ante-natal clinic at the Mater Mothers. I was paid \$6.00 per week and board. My mother would call in perhaps once a fortnight to take the money, all except the two dollars I needed for bus fares to the hospital. I do not to this day know why my mother did this. Pain and suffering I suppose.

During my time with this family, (which was almost 7 months of my pregnancy) I was isolated, lonely and frightened. If at any time this family had guests, I was ordered to keep to my room. I was to talk to no-one.

#### THE DELIVERY

I had turned 18 years of age by this time.

The day arrived when I was in labour and taken to the hospital. I was ushered to a room and left completely alone. I had absolutely no idea what to expect. I had only the vaguest notion about birthing a baby, and only occasionally did a nurse come to check on me. I was treated with complete disdain.

Many hours passed, and I can remember experiencing more and more pain, and I was crying. I was so afraid. Why wasn't anyone there with me?

I have so much difficulty remembering what happened from then on.

I do remember the agony and fear, even when the delivery team came to deliver my baby. I'm sure they must have spoken to me, and perhaps even tried to re-assure me, but all I can recall are a few basic platitudes. Though it was a difficult birth, which resulted in many internal and external sutures, my little girl came into the world. At that moment, an explosion of pure love and joy burst through me. It's a unique love that can only be experienced by a woman who has given birth, and wants her child. And by God I wanted my child.

I was eventually sent to the ward, and I remember receiving medication for what I assumed was for discomfort. I have no idea what the medication was, though my recollection of the next few days is blurred. At the time I put this down to exhaustion.

A nurse would periodically check my nether regions, (because of the episiotomy) and would instruct me to have my daughter adopted, that this would be the best thing for everyone. Then my mother and sister-in-law visited me, and told me that I cannot bring my child back home. How am I to go to work and look after my daughter too. I have to look for a job if I wanted to return to the family home. I have to earn my keep and pay my way, and I can't do that with a child. My daughter belongs with a proper family who can raise her, because if I keep her, I will be on my own without any funds. I have to sign some papers and get on with my life. And so it went.

After being constantly pressured from my mother and the nurses, I eventually gave in and signed a paper. I cannot remember if there was more than one paper that I signed. No-one came to visit me after that. I was bereft. I felt as though I had sold my soul. I didn't know what I could do.

Later that day whilst one nurse was giving me my medication, another smiling nurse, holding a bundle came towards me. The nurse who was about to hand my daughter to me, was ordered to take my baby away as she is being adopted.

From that point I don't remember anything, until a few days later my mother took me home. I was permitted a few days rest for the sutures to heal, then my mother told me to get a job and start paying my board. I found a position instantly.

#### ABOUT TWO WEEKS LATER

At my place of work I befriended two girls, who informed me they were raised in a Catholic orphanage. I confided in them that I had recently had a child, but she was adopted. The girls told me in no uncertain terms, to return to the hospital and get my child back. At last I felt as though I had true friends and allies, and I did in fact go back to the hospital. I asked to speak with the Matron, and she granted me an interview.

I told the Matron that I wanted my baby, and I wanted her now. The Matron then told me that my baby was adopted almost immediately, that baby girls were in demand. Her words are etched in my mind forever. I know she felt sorrow on my behalf, but that was no consolation. She also asked me my opinion of the family she had placed me with. I told the Matron how much I hated being a slave to those people, to which Matron asked me why I didn't say anything to her. My reply was "I was in no position to complain". That too I remember vividly. I also remember the shame and insults I was forced to endure from members of my family. And I knew I was withdrawing into myself.

I was aching for my baby. This little person that grew inside of me should be with me. I was her mummy, and I wanted her desperately. She was mine to love, she was a part of me, and she was taken from me. I was discarded like a piece of rubbish.

Something was happening to my thought processes. I began to think that if I can't have my little girl, then I will get another baby, but first I will have to find a man to marry me and my next child will be "born in wedlock". What a hideous term. Yes, I know now how my mind was askew, but it was only responding to the heartache I felt.

Not too long after, I did in fact meet someone. It was a whirlwind romance, and we married rather quickly. Too quickly as it happened. I did tell my future husband that I had given a child up for adoption, which provided him with the perfect stick to hit me with for 23 years.

My husband was an arrogant bully as it turned out. I was called all manner of names (for having an illegitimate child), but as I wanted to fulfil my desire to have another baby, I made a pact with myself to accept all his physical and verbal abuse. I made my bed so to speak. I was desperate and that was the trade-off.

I did have another daughter in 1969, and she was and is beautiful; I have had three subsequent children. From the moment my children could understand, I told them that they had another sister somewhere. Though I love my kids, there will remain, until the day I die, the monstrous loss of my first child. Those years that my daughter and I were deprived of, can never ever be replaced. I would privately mourn our loss on her birthday in particular. I would think of her with a very special love almost every single day for decades.

One day, I succumbed to my husband's filthy insults (always regarding my having "bastard" child, grease spot, wog lover), and the underlying pain of the loss overwhelmed me. For all those many, many years I was unable to talk to someone..anyone of my grief. I finally broke inside. Nobody can have the slightest inkling of the degree of unbearable pain we women feel, unless they have experienced the loss of a child who was wrenched from you. So, in order to stop the anguish at long last, I swallowed a bottle of sleeping pills.

I almost died. Several days later whilst recovering in hospital, a doctor explained to me that the culmination of grief, guilt at thinking I hadn't done enough to keep my first child, the cruelty of those around me, and having been surrounded by cruelty, had finally caught up with me. For all that time, on one level I had been functioning as any normal, loving mother, but deep within me I had not come to terms with my grief. I had to learn how to throw away my self-destructive guilt and tendencies, to enjoy the company of people with positive attitudes, and to develop healthy self-esteem. What the doctor was telling me all of a sudden made sense. After re-evaluating my life up to that point, I

gradually saw that I DID NOT give my baby girl away. Cold blooded and heartless people, who controlled my life, took my child. With such a cavalier disregard for my wellbeing, or feelings, those in power ABUSED that power.

Did anyone ever consider long-term the harm and damage that would be done to the relinquishing mother, or the adoptee? All in the name of servicing a baby industry? The cruelty that was inflicted upon us will never be forgotten or forgiven. It is those faceless people in government departments and petty bureaucrats who should feel the shame and guilt at what they did. They should all hang their heads.

In order for me to heal and grow, I happily divorced my husband. I immersed myself in my work, family and glorious friends. I can say unequivocally now, that since I married an extraordinary man almost two years ago, and have formed a bond with my daughter, I am able to hold my head erect. I DID survive the trauma and can say honestly, I AM alive and I AM intact and complete..almost, no thanks to any government person/ department.

Though my mother is quite aged, I have confronted her with my real story. She of course states she did the best for me at the time. Mum has apologised time and again for the grief she aided and abetted in. Mum said to me only recently, that someone should take responsibility for the damage done to all of us. "These people should be made accountable" she told me.

#### THE PRESENT

I am one of the very fortunate women who is in contact with the daughter taken 44 years ago.

Together we are united with many others in solidarity, to voice our disgust and outrage at those who perpetrated this crime upon us. My little baby girl, who is a beautiful and intelligent woman whom I have loved for decades, we are at long last together. And she is no longer a wee helpless babe. We join together and denounce the faceless people who stole our lives.

Of course it will take time for us to get to know each other properly, as we should have been permitted to do . Already we've noticed we share so many uncanny similarities. It's quite amazing and wonderful to realize that heritage shines through.

I am no longer the naive victim, and neither is my daughter.

Early in August (2011) I wrote a letter to the Superintendent of the Mater Mother's BRIS.

I asked for a copy of my ante-natal/medical records from 1967. Almost three weeks later, I received a phone call, (not a letter) concerning my request. This woman (who did identify herself) informed me that all my records have been destroyed. The odd thing she told me was the birth time and weight of my daughter. Now I ask you, how would that information be available if my records were destroyed? Surely those two details would NOT be on any birth registry - are they?

#### TO CONCLUDE

NEVER was I told I had any options.

NEVER was I counselled.

NEVER was I treated as anything other than an object who provided a scurrilous industry with a "commodity".

NEVER was any consideration given to the rights of my child and myself. Our rights under the Australian Constitution were violated.

I do not know if I was administered any drugs in hospital other than paracetamol. Because the right to have a copy of my records has been denied me, and I have no way of verifying these suggestions.

I was denied protection from harmful actions.

I was denied my right to justice.

My rights, and the rights of my daughter are CONTINUING to be violated even today, and that is with regard to my medical records. Those records are MY history. How dare someone decree that my personal records be destroyed. The stigma of all aspects of adoption is still manifest today.

I would like to take this opportunity to implore the members of the Senate, to give a directive that any and all birth records be available to any who wish to have copies of their own records. Surely this is our basic human right in the twenty-first century.

Please do not encourage the insidious secrecy to be maintained and/or perpetuated. I consider it would be a positive move to allow access to our information. It would help in the long over-due healing process. The subterfuge must not be allowed to continue.

One vital piece of information I was seeking in the letter I wrote to the Mater Superintendent, was, I had a transfusion after the birth of my daughter. The problem being, I am unable to recall which daughter - my first (who was adopted) or my second? To this day, the experiences are blurred, and if the records HAVE in fact been destroyed, I have been denied the right, yet again, to an answer to that nagging question. This discrimination must not be allowed to continue.

I thank the Senate for its time, and sincerely hope for a positive outcome to this inquiry.

Pamela