

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

## **Preamble to Submission**

I Linda Bryant am a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia  
resident in Qld.

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

**I am the mother of a daughter stolen from me in Queensland in 1967 and given  
to strangers to my family to raise by the State of Queensland and kept from me  
for 25 years by the laws of that State.**

At the age of 21 years old and in a relationship with a young man of the same age for  
a period of 6 months I found I was pregnant with my boyfriend's child. I was very  
happy and looking forward to a life with my child and her father. I presented at the  
Public Hospital in Mackay where we lived and worked for anti natal care.

It was confirmed that my pregnancy was 3 months along and a doctor after examining  
me sent me up the hall to a lady called the Almoner. This woman proceeded to ask me  
a number of questions about my health history and the health and background of the  
baby's father. I answered all her questions including the fact that we were not yet  
married. I was not at all suspicious of her motives at the time and went home to  
prepare for the arrival of my child. As a first time mother to be and with no sex  
education at home or at school I was very naive in the ways of birth and really did not  
know what to expect.

I attended all the anti natal appointments and took great care of my health until about  
6 weeks before my due date when I finished work and went to stay with friends. My  
boyfriend visited often and we had many social outings and were looking forward to  
the birth and had decided to marry at my home after the birth.

A few days before my due date my waters broke at approximately 10pm and my  
boyfriend drove me the half hour to the maternity hospital. I was admitted and put  
into a ward with mothers and babies. At around midnight the contractions became  
very painful and I was crying out. A night nurse came to my bed and admonished me  
for making a noise .She said “be quiet you are waking all the mothers” and did not  
offer me and pain relief. By breakfast time I was in so much pain that I was holding  
on to the top of the bed and trying not to make any noise as I was frightened of being  
in trouble again. At about 7am I was transferred to the labour ward and placed on a  
table and told to suck on the mask if I was in pain and then was left alone for another  
hour. I was terrified and started to shake uncontrollably and feel very cold.

It was January in North Queensland and there was no air-conditioning so it must have been shock or plain terror.

My baby started to crown and the nurse rang for another one I now presume was the resident midwife and she told me to push. The nurse put my legs in stirrups and tied my right arm to the birthing table with a white towel so I could not move upwards or sideways. I could feel my baby making an entrance into the world and the next thing that happened was the midwife appearing with what looked like gardening secateurs and I felt a cut in the vagina. Years later I realised it was an episiotomy to allow the baby through the birth canal without tearing.

By about 9am my baby was born and the cord was cut. I tried to see her but was pushed back and my baby was taken very quickly out of the room. I got a glimpse of her black hair but could not see anything else even if I had a boy or a girl. The next thing I was given an injection and I started to deliver the placenta which I thought must be another baby it was so painful. I had a galvanised bucket beside the bed and the midwife threw the placenta into the bucket and that is all I could see and no one told me what had happened and what it was.

To this day 44 years later the whole incident in the labour ward is like a newsreel in my head and I can see it all if I close my eyes.

A Doctor appeared and he went about stitching me up and not a word was said to me he just joked about me to the nurses saying "I should just put a zipper in for next time"

When he had finished I timidly asked for my baby and what sex was it. I was told with a very sarcastic tone "you had a little girl" and "no you can't see her she is marked for adoption"

I was crying and felt so violated and so alone and was put back into the ward where the married mothers were feeding their babies. I was given another injection and some little white tablets which I have later learned were DES [Stilbestrol] to dry up my milk.

A nurse came around after breakfast with the matron and checked everyone's charts and chatted to the mothers individually but when she came to my bed she picked up the chart from the end of the bed and made some comments to the nurse and never addressed me directly. I felt like a nobody and that no one cared.

The almoner came and spoke to me about adoption and despite my objections she told me I was a selfish little girl to put myself before the best interests of my child. When I resisted and began to cry she told me if I didn't sign to have my child adopted "We will get her anyway even if it takes a year as you will be on the street and we will have her deemed neglected".

- Article titled, "Govt to Consider A Report On Unwed Mothers", relates details of the Committee of the Australian Association of Social Workers report. including that:
  - its members have interviewed more than 300 unmarried mothers, and for three months in 1953, questioned every unwed mothers who approached hospitals or institutions catering for them. The convenor of the committee, Mrs J Gore states: "A surprising large number of girls – about 40%, in fact – left hospital with their babies and intended to keep them." The Report says that only a small proportion of NSW girls who become pregnant out of wedlock seek the help of social agents during pregnancy. Mrs J Gore, regarding the latter, states: "This is to be regretted. We feel that doctors, nurses and clergymen who come into contact with the girls should encourage them to seek our help";

The Report also notes that:

- there is a lack of accommodation and other facilities for unmarried mothers during their pregnancy; and
- more funds are needed by social agencies catering for unwed mothers;
- most agencies are unable to admit the girls until the sixth or seventh month of pregnancy;
- with more funds they could care for the girls earlier.

Mrs J Gore also stated: "**We wonder how many of these girls will later decide to have their baby adopted; and if they keep them, whether they have the emotional and material ability to fulfill the needs of the child.**"

**These Social Workers in now seems were singing from the same song book.**

I was told if I loved her I would sign the adoption consent and that my 2 younger sisters would not be able to make a good marriage if it was known I was raising an illegitimate child in the family. She also said no “decent man wants a girl who has had such a child out of wedlock”. The adopters dearly want a little girl and will send her to private school and give her all the things you can’t. I tried to pretend I was asleep when she came but she was very persistent. I felt so helpless and venerable and because I wasn’t eating regularly [being asleep most dinner times] I felt very weak physically.

I now know why my daughter was so prized as it seems that in 1967 there was a great demand for female babies as seen in article from the Brisbane Courier Mail 1967

**BABY BOYS BANK UP.**

# ADOPTION WORK ON ILLEGITIMACY Boy babies 'bank up'

CHILD Welfare authorities in Queensland are concerned that boys could soon be left in orphanages for want of parents to adopt them.

The Minister in charge of Child Welfare this, Mr. Herbert said, had not expected to such an extent in the last two years that there was a danger of "banking up" illegitimate babies, out-numbering prospective parents.

"This could occur if the illegitimacy rate continues," he said.

Mr. Herbert said the current waiting list for girls varied from six to 12 months, from the date of application to the date of placing the child in its new home. The waiting list for boys was from three to four months.

"Most of the adopting parents want little girls. With boys banking up it becomes an embarrassment."

The variations in waiting time among the girls and boys depended on matching, religion, education, personality, and economic factors such as the number of children already in the family.

Mr. Herbert said the factors causing the present situation were the increasing number of illegitimate births, the increased cost of living, the reduction in the size of the average family and in the size of houses, and the difficulties associated with running a home.

**Approved**

Last year we approved 1200 adoptions, of which 74 were adoptions by relatives, 247 by the spouse, and 1077 by non-relatives.

The previous year there were 1266 adoption orders issued — 81 by relatives, 267 by the spouse, and 918 by non-relatives.

He said the average time taken to get an adopting couple was three months.

The only children not normally adopted within two weeks of birth were certain children classed as "deferred adoptions."

**Foster care**

"All children for adoption are examined by specialist medical personnel. There are some children who suffer handicaps from infancy — some physical or other defect — who are not immediately available for adoption."

"They become suitable for foster care, with the possibility of a future adoption. Every effort is made to find a home for these children."

"The Department is always anxious to hear from people who are able and willing to care for one of them."

Mr. Herbert said there was no longer any restriction on the number of children who could be adopted into a family. "But we do give preference to childless couples and to couples who have only one child and are unable to have more."

"Second placements of adopted children, and subsequent placements, are related to the age of the other children, not to the waiting lists."

"We prefer childless couples, when it is possible to put a child down again. A child is adopted to two years of age at the situation where the adoptive parent can adapt other child if it is needed."

The change in legislation in 1964 which came into operation in Queensland in 1965 was the first time adopters were promised complete secrecy so as to avoid any ongoing knowledge or contact by mothers to their children and the adoptive family.

As most were wanting a boy first in 1965 then two years later a girl in 1967 my female child was very much in demand and they were out to get as many as they could to fill the orders for baby girls.

I don't remember much of the following days except the fact that my daughter's father came and wanted to see his child and was told he couldn't. He went to the general nursery and tried to find her and couldn't but then saw a door into a small room next to the nursery and there was a baby cot in there. A nurse stood in the doorway and tried to prevent his entry but he gently pushed past her and saw our baby all alone in the room.

He was told to leave and not to come back.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> day post partum I was told there was a man to see me and was led into a room off the veranda where a small desk and two chairs were the only furniture and a man introduced himself as Mr (...) from Children Services. He said I had to sign some papers and handed me a biro. He said he had found parents for my baby and to sign and get it over with. I said I am not going to adopt out my baby and that we were going to get married and take her home. He got angry and I was sobbing uncontrollably and so he left.

The next morning after breakfast [when it seems I was most awake and not groggy] I asked for my clothes and shoes to leave the hospital to make arrangements for my child. This was refused and I was again given an injection and I don't remember anything much in the following days. On the fourteenth day I was again ushered into the same little room off the hospital veranda to again face Mr (...). By this time I felt very worthless and was again groggy and crying. Mr (...), after I again said I won't sign adoption papers got very angry and aggressive and pounded the table and said in a derogatory manner **"Listen girlie I am sick of coming up here and you will sign today"**.

I was handed a clip board with a blank sheet of paper over a form with the bottom of the form visible for a signature. He did not let me read the consent form and did not tell me what the contents were and what they meant. He never at any time told me any of the benefit I could access for the support of my child [Commonwealth benefit widows' A pension -see Origins Inc Submission] in the event of my not marrying her father and never mentioned a 30 day revocation period at which time I could claim my daughter back from being a ward of the state. I was not offered any counselling or help in any way.

*For many years I couldn't understand why I was not just given my clothes and my baby and discharged but have found upon the research myself and my colleagues at Origins have done over the last 20 years the reason why. The government sent a test for sexually transmitted disease on all unmarried mothers away to Brisbane and it took 14 days to get the results back at the regional hospitals and so they kept unmarried mothers incarcerated until the results were known .If I had been tested positive I would have been discharged with my baby as they would not adopt out an imperfect child with a disease.*

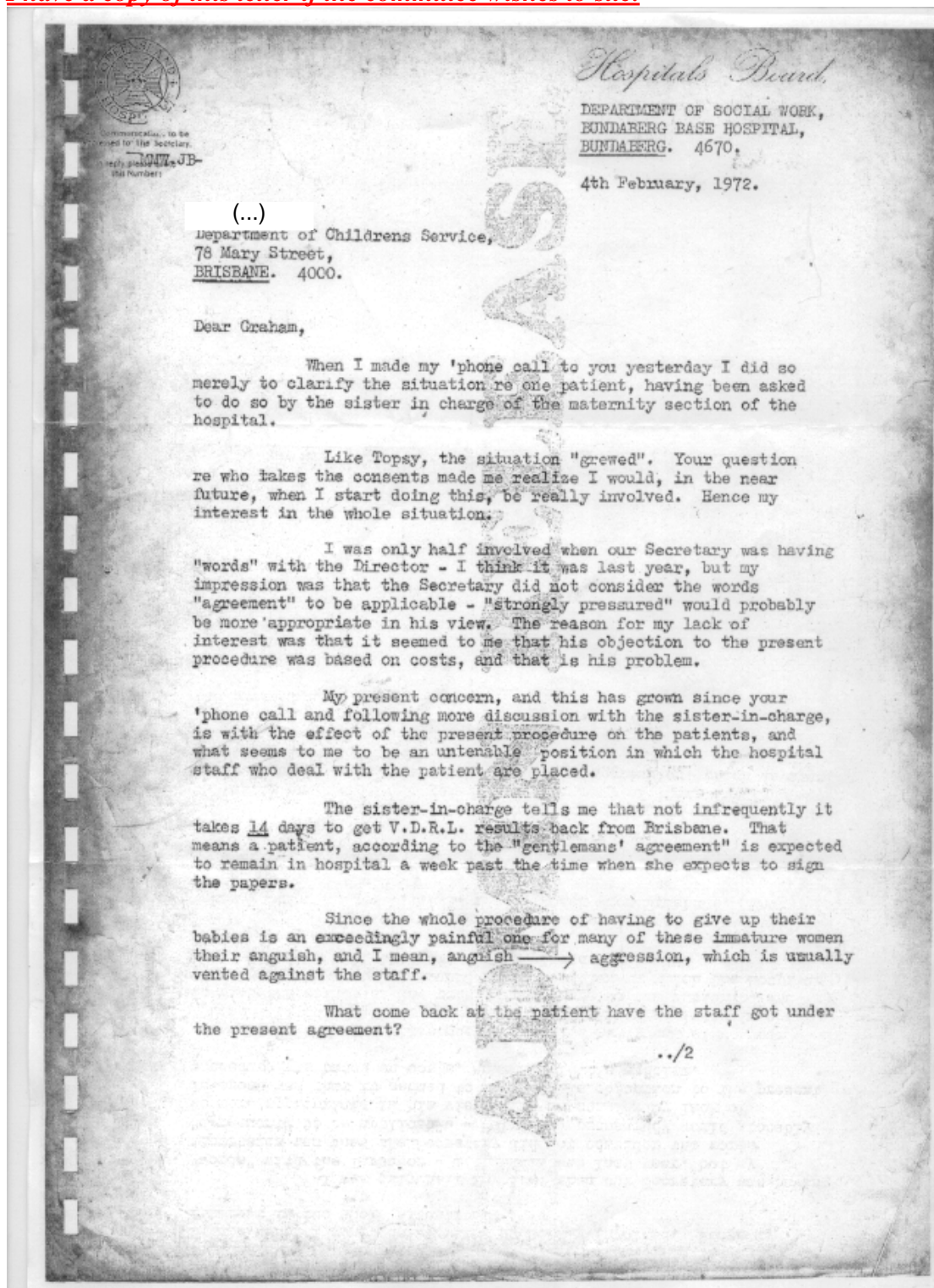
*I now understand that the Hospital was told by the Department of child Welfare to keep the mother incarcerated until the results were returned to the regional hospital. I never at any stage gave permission for the test.*

*See letter to (...) (...) of Child Welfare from Social Work Dept Bundaberg Hospital.*



Attachment 2/1

I have a copy of this letter if the committee wishes to site.



.. / 2

4th February, 1972.

What right have they to tell the woman she has to stay in hospital until she signs the papers but she cannot sign them until the V.D.R.L. results come back?

Equally, what right (and I hope you realize I am not being aggressive when I use the word) has the Department of Childrens Service to put us in the position of doing so? You could answer - we just won't take the baby and then you are stuck with it. True - but if you do, are you morally right?

If you can show me how to answer these women so that they feel obliged to stay in hospital I will be delighted.

I have not said anything of this to the Secretary at this stage as I prefer to do things in a quiet reasonable manner. As I recall the wording of one of the Director's letters was not the most tactful, and I do not want to arouse further anger unnecessarily.

I hope this reaches you before you write to me.

Yours sincerely,



ADMINISTRATIVE

I felt so degraded and bullied and alone that I did as he told me to do and signed. I never received a copy until the law changed in 1991 in Queensland enabling me to get information about my daughter. I left hospital with no record of the birth of my child and no copy of the paperwork.

I was returned to my bed and again fell into a deep sleep and awoke to see a nurse dressing a baby at the nurse's station and somehow realised it was mine and got out of bed and tried to go and see her but was stopped again. A few minutes later I saw a man and woman with a little boy about two enter and they were given the baby. I rushed to the window and two nursing staff held me by each arm while the couple walked down the path to the car park with the woman holding the baby and the man holding the hand of the toddler. I collapsed onto the floor and the nurse then went away and came back with my street clothes and shoes and told me to get dressed and go home.

**Upon reunion with my daughter in 1992 and after speaking with her adoptive mother and describing the scene she confirmed that this was indeed her and her husband and 2 year old adopted son I saw leaving with my child.**

I also discovered when I received her original birth certificate that her name I gave her, [I know I gave this to the almoner at the time of her birth as I had already selected her name pre birth], was not recorded and in its place had **'female unnamed'** and **"father unknown"**.

I would ask that the Register of Births deaths and Marriages in Queensland remedy this without cost to either me or my child.

I left the hospital with no counselling and not even any idea what just happened and went to stay with some friends. Over the next few days I was very sleepy and just cried all the time and they became so concerned that they put me in their car and drove me to Brisbane to my parents' home. My parents and sisters were happy to see me home and I did not have the energy or the heart to talk about what had happened to me and believed I was a shameful person and I should not tell anyone as the Almoner had told me to do. .

I obtained a good job and tried to "get on with my life" just like the almoner had told me to do. My daughters father came to Brisbane and asked me to marry him but I was so grief stricken and did not know that we could have retrieved our child [she wasn't officially adopted for 10 weeks after the birth] that I told him I couldn't marry him with him being a physical reminder of the trauma of losing our baby.

Ten months later I married another man and desperately tried to have a baby in marriage to replace the one I had lost. Four years later I became the mother of another beautiful daughter and I remember looking at her and wondering if she looked like my first baby. I of course had no image to compare as I never saw my first born.

I took my baby home from hospital and I expected to be happy but instead of being happy was overcome with dread and began having terrible nightmares.

**[ my story was told in "Gone to a Good Home " the documentary by Origins Inc and aired three times on S B S television.]**

I felt I was going to lose her because I was told I could not be a good mother to my



first so I had nightmares about people knocking on my doors and windows telling me to bring the baby out because “you can’t be a good mother”.

I went to the local Baby Health Clinic and they were very concerned about my baby not gaining any weight so they sent me directly to the Maternal and Child Welfare Home at St Paul’s Terrace in Brisbane and had me there for two weeks till my baby gained weight and I bonded with her enough to realize she was staying with me and no one was taking her away.

I had two more daughters in 13 and 15 years and I was a very good mother to all of them.

I was however very protective of them never leaving them with anyone but my very close family. I believe my experience with my first baby coloured my mothering of my subsequent children.

For the next two decades I kept my truth to myself and suffered many periods of depression especially around Christmas and my daughter’s birthday in January and would lock myself away and just stay in bed crying.

My general health has suffered with Irritable Bowel Syndrome, panic attacks and long periods of depression all I am told by my physicians as a result of trauma suffered at the hands of the Queensland State Government Hospitals and Child Welfare Depts. Even 44 years later her birthday is unbearable to me and I revisit the trauma and suffer a physical pain all over my body as a result.

I have had many sessions over the years with psychiatrists, counsellors and doctors in general practice. My whole life has been impacted by the theft of my daughter and I am told I will have to be medicated for the rest of my life to stay stable enough to live a reasonable existence.

Over the past 20 years I have been involved in consulting with government for legislation change and am respected as an advocate for mothers and adoptees and their rights but underlying this is the pain and grief that I suffer as a result of the illegal removal of my motherhood to my first born.

As the State Interventions listed above were funded by the Commonwealth I believe my rights as a citizen of said Commonwealth have been trodden on and the adoption of my child is illegal in every sense. I would like my daughter to be able to have and to use legally her original birth certificate and not the fake one that says she was born to complete strangers.

I would like to see the recognition of these travesties of justice in the Parliament and more money put aside for further counselling by professionals in the field who would be adoption specific as it is I believe a specialist form of therapy.

Respectfully yours  
Linda Bryant.  
(...)

**I give the Committee permission to publish my name but not my address or phone numbers.**