

RE Senate inquiry into past adoption practices and their effects of these practices on adoptees and both birth & adoptive parents.

Name: Erik J Spinney
Tribal name: Standing Bear

(...)



“It is not my fault that I was removed from my birth mother and adopted out but for my entire life I have been punished for it.”

Overview of my adoption:

My name is Erik Spinney. I was born in September 1969. I was adopted out from birth and raised with my adoptive parents from two to four weeks old. My adoptive parents were not given any real factual information of my birth parents and the reasons I was put up for adoption. If they were then they would have sought the help and resources I needed to help with the trauma surrounding my birth and the memories of my birth mother and father.

They were informed that I was a blank slate and they could imprint on me my personality and identity. They were not informed of the traumatic events that surrounded my birth and of my cultural heritage. They followed adoption procedures that they believed to be legal and correct, but now have turned out to be unregulated and under common law of both Australian and internationally are deemed to be crimes against humanity and in breach of the Haig convention on the rights and welfare of the child.

They were informed that the hospital they picked me up from was the hospital I was born in (“Mona Vale NSW”) but through my efforts in searching for my birth parents was I informed by Mona Vale hospital that there are no medical records of my birth there as well as there are no records of my adoptive parents even picking me up from there.

I do not have a Birth Certificate; I have a “Registration of birth” certificate and later in life have had that refused by government departments as adequate ID. Needless to say I found it very difficult to obtain my drivers license and passport.

I have spent the last twenty years searching for my birth parents with no luck. I have been given two names for my birth mother “ (...) ” and “ (...) ” but have been unable to find any real identifying information and have been informed by birth deaths and marriages that the circumstances around my adoption are unusual but there is nothing they or anyone else can do about it.

The few facts that I know are true around my adoption are that I was not given up willingly as I remember and have always remembered my birth mother screaming “*please don’t take my baby, please give me back my baby*”

I also know that I am the son of a Viet Nam Veteran as throughout my early childhood I had and sometimes still do have recurring nightmares of a war I never fought in. I have also had recurring rashes and sores that are the result of chemical exposure during that conflict (Agent Orange). I also remember being in a cargo hold of a four prop plane and being held by a US serviceman “known from the color of the uniform” and I have always found a real comfort in the smell of aviation fuel and the drone of the larger four prop military aircraft.

I know that I am a mixed race adoptee of First Nation American and or Canadian, French and Scottish ancestry.

I have been informed by First Nations elders that I am Apache, Algonquin, French & Scottish. But I am unable to prove my ancestry due to my inability to name my family and the community “reserve” they came from.

The results of which are a continuous struggle to be accepted and results in my efforts to try and learn my language and culture are made very difficult if not impossible.

Through my continuing efforts in the search for my birth parents which has taken me to the US and Canada I have found that I could be either an R&R baby from the Vietnam War, or as felt by many First Nation elders, one of the several thousand 1960’s scoop babies shipped from Canada and put up for adoption in Australia, England and Europe.

I have not given up my search for who I am and where I came from and I never will.

The psychological and emotion effect adoption has had on me and my life

Thinking back on my life there a several very pivotal moments where awareness and simple resources could have made such a great difference in my life as well as helped me to heal and deal with the emotional side effects of being an adoptee.

Some of the basic norms that most people take for granted and that are crucial to any developing child, are missing for every adoptee. Even when you look at foster children they have a least known their parents and have an understanding even if it is not a positive one of why they are not being raised by the ones who gave birth to them. That understanding gives a foundation to build your self-worth and life upon.

When you are adopted from birth you are traumatized from the very moment you take your first breath. Your birth mother has fed you through the umbilical cord massive levels of hormones relating to anxiety, fear, stress, grief and trauma. It is not rocket science to realize the effect this has on a new born child. All of our primordial reflexes are on high alert and we remember.

The very first neural synaptic connections in our brain, instead of them being to bond with our birth parents -a place of love, safety and security- are bonded into loss, rejection, fear and abandonment. We are passed around different people while all of our natural instincts are to bond, and every face we connect to changes from shift to shift in the hospital and then through the system we go. The whole time those neural synaptic connections are being reinforced over and over again that we are abandoned, rejected and a mistake.

Then comes the time when we are to be picked up by our new adoptive parents, many of whom have had no counseling or help to understand what adopting a child actually means. All they know is that they don't have to deal with any more traumas relating to not being able to conceive a child of their own. The woman now has the opportunity to be a real woman and a real wife. Her life with her husband is now secured and the questioning looks from those around her as to why she doesn't have children can be put to rest.

Then comes the point of first contact:

The child born from trauma trying to comprehend what is going on, every natural primordial reflex, heightened with very little ability to respond other than to cry, withdraw and repel comes face to face with strangers that have built up massive expectations for this very moment.

Some children embrace but some like me reject. At that very pivotal moment the adoptive mother is faced with a child she is to raise as her own and he rejects her. Every time she tries to pick him up he cries and tries to push her away.

There is no magical moment of connection; there is no alignment of emotion, personality, genetics only a woman a man and a child, Born of different races, different beliefs and different cultures.

My adoptive parents were told that I was a blank slate and that they would be able to imprint on me my personality and behavior. What planet did those people come from? It has been well documented long before my birth that a child is born with a personal identity and has a consciousness and understanding of itself.

That simple statement made to people who believed what they were told by people whom they trusted to know more than they did on such things, created massive trauma in me. Who I felt and knew I was, was not what my adoptive parents wanted me to be, on top of that I remember my birth mother screaming "*please don't take my baby*" I have always remembered that. Then I am supposed to look at my new adoptive parents as my mum and dad. As an adult we have life experience to draw upon to comprehend what is going on; a child does not. All I knew is that something was not right. I remember every time I was introduced as a child of my parents thinking that that did not feel right..

Then came the clash of personalities. In some cases I am aware that there are similar personality types, when the adoptive child is born of the same culture as the adoptive parents. But in my case unknown to my adoptive parents this was a cross cultural adoption. Our personalities clashed. This built in me a traumatic conflict of fundamental beliefs, who am I supposed to be? The child they wanted me to be or the child that I was. This circumstance reinforced in me all the emotions and thoughts of rejection and I honestly felt like I was a mistake. I came to this realization when I was about three or four and have deeply felt it many times throughout my life even today.

With all the internal conflicts within me and no one to turn to and no one that knew anything about what was going on, I turned within myself for the answers. It created in me the uncontrollable need to ask questions that some people feel should not be asked. I had no life experience to work things out but I had no choice. Every fiber of my young self was telling me that none of this is right. The family I was being raised in wasn't right, the society I was being raised in wasn't right, I wasn't right. I was always told that I was adopted; (a good thing) but I had no understanding of what that meant. At school it came up in class and all the other kids kept on asking me what is adopted. In primary school I was different to all the other kids. I thought differently, I processed information differently, I responded differently. At school I withdrew into myself and it was then that the bullying started.

My school life was a living hell. I have no fond memories of school; only ones of abuse, violence, ridicule and a continued reinforcement of me being a mistake of nature and completely alone.

The few times I tried to change myself to be accepted only resulted in the opposite: total rejection. Everything about the system of school was unable to deal with a child who felt the way I did. At first I felt that I was the only one but later in life when speaking to other adoptees I found that this was more often the rule rather than a rarity.

Sometimes I tried to gain help with what I was feeling, but when I did it was met with insufficient answers like "*you should be grateful that you are being raised by people that chose you*" and the most insulting one of all "*it was for your own good so accept it and move on*". These responses made me see everything in human society as the enemy and "one day they all will pay".

One time I acted out at primary school and the depute principal locked me in a cupboard. It was about 11am when she threw me in there. At around 6pm the door opened and I was rushed off to her car. She had forgotten that she locked me in the cupboard and had gone home. As she was driving me home we came across my adoptive mother driving around the streets looking for me. They spoke for some time and again it was my fault.

The bullying was relentless and it was not only just the other kids; many adults, teachers also joined in. Often I was referred to by one of my PE teachers as "fat boy" some of the other things that were said to me on a regular basis were "*you should have been aborted*" and "*you're not a person you are the afterbirth that crawled out of a bucket*" "*you were born of a whore*" "*you are the sporn of the devil*" "*go back to the drain you crawled out of*" This made me feel really worthwhile in the eyes of life and the society I was supposed to be part of.

Every time I sought help all I really managed to find was a continuous reminder of how different I was and that it was my fault that I continued to fail because I didn't try hard enough and that I was a mistake. Many times I was screamed at "*Why can't you be normal, why can't you be like every other child*" I tried to be like every other kid but it never worked. The more I tried the more it fell apart.

For my school certificate we had to do a family tree for history as 50% of the history grade. I told the teacher that I was adopted and didn't know my direct family tree but do I do it for my adoptive parent's family line? He responded stating that it would defeat the exercise by doing that as it needed to be done on the blood family to pass. I repeated that I didn't know that and was unable to find out. The reply was that it was not his problem and I didn't need to bother with the school certificate as I didn't need it anyway as all I needed to learn to do was to fill out a dole form as that is all I will amount to.

The first time as a child I seriously thought of killing myself was when I was nine years old. Many times I used to sit on the railway foot bridge opposite my adoptive parents place and look at the overhead power lines and start to reach for them thinking that this time I would do it, this time I will make them all go away. I also used to lie at the edge of the train tracks and see how close I could get my head to a passing train. I have attempted it other times throughout my life, not so much as to end it all, but a cry for help that is never heard or understood.

The older I got the more messed up I became. The stress, fear, hatred and anxiety led me to nail all my bedroom windows shut with 10" inch nails and placing four 20cm sliding bolt latches on my bedroom door. As a young child I slept in a cupboard by choice and I carried a knife everywhere I went and spent most of my time plotting how I was going to kill everyone that had made my life a living hell or how I was going to kill myself.

That was my childhood and teenage years. Because of everything I went through I had no chance to gain any real form of an education. Now my physical body is in-capable of doing any of the physical jobs that I have any real qualifications for, and now I not only need to be totally retrained for another employment path, I also have to finish high school: many years of full time education without the means to support myself or even to pay for all the retraining. So now I am unemployable without many options for my future.

Adoption has made my life very difficult. No matter how hard I try to put it behind me I always come across an insurmountable obstacle created by being an adoptee. The latest being in my last trip to Canada. I became very ill, to the point of being placed on a medical flight back to Australia. Because of me not knowing my family medical history due to the way my adoption was handled, western medicine is unable to find out what is wrong with me so there are no treatment options. I am again left to fend for myself with a very poor quality of life and again no real answers.

Another serious side effect of adoption doesn't show itself until we start to have our first serious relationships. For me I have found it very difficult to get close to anyone. I don't like to be touched, held or loved. I find it very uncomfortable to be part of anything that involves actually being close to anyone. I don't trust people intentions and all my relationships have failed as a result and again it reinforces how un-healable being an adoptee really is.

Because of the trauma of being ripped from our birth mother and the way our first neural synaptic pathways are laid down we are wired to be separate from everyone that surrounds us. We are wired to be suspicious of anyone that wants to get close to us. This is lifelong and very debilitating. I have also noticed that I find it very hard to be around young children. I have feelings of absolute anger at them having the childhood that I didn't and the connection to their parents that I didn't have. Needless to say I have no children of my own and have no real desire to have any, not because I don't want to but because I don't trust myself in my ability to be close to them and give them the love that they need to become whole people. All my life all I wanted was to have a family of my own but I am also terrified at the possibility of having one.

Again I originally thought I was an isolated case but throughout my life I have spoken with many adoptees and children of adoptees and this is repeated by most of them. The trauma of adoption ends up being passed on from generation to generation with no real end in sight.

For many years I blamed my adoptive parents for the way they handled everything about my childhood and what happened to me growing up. But as I got older I gained a very good understanding of psychology, philosophy and many other disciplines and that gave me the ability to understand from an observer's perspective of how everything unfolded in my life. They raised me as best they could with the resources they had and with the knowledge and beliefs in the system that informed them of what raising an adopted child would require. I now understand and recognize that it was the system of governments and institutions that were supposed to know (and should have known) better as the information has been there for all to see. It is my hope that this inquiry will bring to light all the atrocities of the past so that we can learn from them. Adoption is unfortunately a necessary evil. But it needs to be handled and regulated a lot better.

With the allowing of same sex couples to adopt, added to the already growing list of couples wishing to adopt children, there are not enough children put up for adoption in Australia. Now this has expanded into bringing in children from other countries like China, South America, Korea, Africa and many other third world countries. We all need to slow down and really ask some very simple questions.

As the government that approves this process you are liable to cover all expenses in regard to the consequences that will result from the policies that you sign off on. You are also the ones that are accountable for the actions of those that you allow to represent you (consular staff, adoption agencies etc) in what could be considered as crimes against humanity. Many of the children that have been adopted out from the 1950's to 1980's are from situations that are not only illegal but are by any normal human understanding an act of total inhuman abuse of the highest order. The people that performed this already need to be held accountable but we must also make sure that it never happens again.

Children are not a commodity that can be traded, we are not objects that adults have a right to have. No one has the right to have a child. We are a gift that is given. Anyone that believes that having a child is a god-given right is not mentally stable enough to raise a child. The expectation that will be placed upon that child will only cause trauma and abuse.

What I personally seek from this enquiry is simple truth. No more secrets, no more lies. If we are to move forward as a society we need to first be truthful with our past. And this is not an isolated occurrence. There are literally hundreds of thousands of people seriously affected by the adoption practices of the past. It is time for all the information to be openly and publicly released so that anyone who wants to know the truth about themselves can.

If this does not happen the abuse will continue. As the effects of adoption are passed down from generation to generation it will continue to affect people, families and the society we live in. We will continue to fill your courts, jails, hospitals, rehab facilities, morgues and cemeteries. We will continue to tear apart our families without the knowledge to know why.

You hold in your hands the power to change the future and to help those who had their lives traumatized by the policies and actions of the past.

How many more of us need to fall through the cracks of society before you realize that we are human beings that have had a choice made on our behalf by others, a choice that has torn our lives apart.

We need the truth now. We need answers now. We need the resources to heal now and we need the resources to rebuild our lives our families both birth and adopted now. No more lies, no more cover-ups, only the simple truth.

Name: Erik Spinney

Tribal name: Standing Bear

Bear clan of the Chiracahua n'deh