

Submission to Senate Inquiry into Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices

The day I told my mother I thought I was pregnant we were doing the lunch dishes together. By that evening I had been seen by the doctor and booked into Kate Cock's 'Home for Unmarried Mothers' in Hove in South Australia.

The next few months were hazy; fainting at work (an apprentice hairdresser), feeling emotionally drained and distressed, a lot of crying and feelings of intense fear and shame - and having to tell my employer I was leaving my job and saying goodbye to friends and family, telling them I was going to do a 'course' in Adelaide.

When I was four and a half months pregnant I arrived at Kate Cocks – my parents upset at leaving me there, my mother crying, walking away and Dad marching on ahead.

We worked six days a week at Kate Cocks. Various duties – kitchen, laundry, always a job to do, up early, chores and daily church service became the norm!

We had to rest each afternoon for an hour with our feet up. We were cared for but no affection was shown and even the friendships formed were shallow and we were not encouraged to bond with any other young mothers.

The laundry work was particularly arduous and I later found out that the laundry was brought in from hotels – a means of making extra money I presume. My unemployment money also went straight to Kate Cocks for my accommodation.

Our weight was particularly monitored. If you put on too much extra weight it was a boiled egg for your tea. This was a big worry on 'weigh in' day and I remember many a night going to bed really hungry. I think when I arrived home after having my baby, I weighed less than my pre-pregnant weight!

I named my baby _____, but her adopted name is _____, and she was born at the Queen Victoria Hospital. This was one of the worst nights I have ever experienced. After delivery I was left in the birthing room, not mixing with other mothers and I could hear babies crying over my own tears.

The following morning I was picked up with _____ and taken back to Kate Cocks. _____ travelled in the front seat with the nursing sister and driver, me in the back! I tried to look at my baby by peering over, only to have her blanket drawn over her face. You were unable to see your own baby, that was the rule!

I stayed in the hospital section for a week for recovery. An aunt and my paternal grandmother visited me there. My grandmother asked to see my baby, but once again this was not allowed.

This aunt would often pick me up for lunch on my day off, my only visitor for the five months I was at Kate Cocks.

Sometimes some of the mothers were allowed to have a walk to the local shops. I always wore a gold coloured wedding band on my left hand, in case I was 'seen.'

"Go home and forget you ever had a baby," was the only advice I was given when leaving. Six weeks later I signed the adoption papers. My baby was at Kate Cocks for this six weeks, waiting for me to sign the papers. I don't really remember being given any choices at this time and always thought went straight to her adoptive family when I also left Kate Cocks.

I later found out that although I had provided all of the information regarding Rachel's birth father (name, address, occupation etc) none of this appears on her birth certificate – this was left blank!

Years rolled along, many relationships but drifting, until I met my husband (of nearly 33 years) – finally a man that showed love, respect and commitment and we went on to have two wonderful sons.

I finally met , 'my baby' on the eve of her 20th birthday in 1990! It was a long search, sometimes difficult with doors closing but I had help and support from my husband and JIGSAW SA. Also, some kind social workers gave me some non-identifying information that proved very helpful.

My relationship with my daughter has been and still is 'rocky' as she fights depression and the bond between us is not strong.

I love my daughter, but know that she still blames me for giving her up for adoption to a family with whom she never really connected and having her true identity denied her.

I have had a happy, full life but always a section of my heart never healing after being denied the love a mother can give and receive from her child.

Society made me give up my baby for adoption because of the stigma attached to unmarried mothers. The stigma is still there as society now blames you for not keeping your baby...

Marion Simms
Adelaide SA

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