



Submission to National Inquiry Regarding Forced Adoption Policies and Practices and With Regard to Commonwealth Contribution

(a) Past Practices.

The horrors of past adoption practices have been written and spoken about for many years. My submission regarding past practices is to support and endorse others who have written regarding illegal, inhuman and cruel behaviour which was widespread during the bumper adoption years, namely: the removal of the baby during second stage delivery; deliberately preventing the mother from seeing the child; refusal to inform the mother of the sex of the child; isolation of the mother from any support systems; cruel and punitive treatment of pre and post natal mothers; consent-taking before the allotted 10 day time period; and the drugging of mothers to silence them. Each case is slightly different but all had the same end purpose, the enforced and permanent separation of a child from its mother to give to strangers. I had my baby taken in this way at Hillcrest Hospital and given away to incompetent strangers who treated her very badly.

All the above types of behaviours, acts of cruelty, which were perpetuated by social workers, nurses, nuns, doctors or representatives of any religious or state organisation were in direct contravention of my rights as a human being under the Commonwealth Constitution yet it was common practice with unmarried women who had no advocate to defend their rights.

The final insult to mothers of the stolen white generation was perpetuated by the Federal Government when offering apologies to the stolen black generation and English child migrants. As usual there was no mention or acknowledgement of the stolen white generation of babies forcibly removed from their mothers and given to strangers. There is no excuse for, rather it was a further confirmation of, the attitude of the Federal Government to pretend that there was nothing wrong with past adoption practices. It was yet a further extension of the same behaviour as in the past, another insult inflicted by a cruel and cowardly government that chose once again to ignore the size and gravity of this dark part of Australia's history.

It was silence and ignorance that allowed this illegal, cruel and disgusting practice to flourish and 30 years later still the Federal Parliament washes its hands of these flagrant breaches of human rights. In choosing once again to ignore forced adoptions the Federal Government has confirmed and compounded its complicity yet again.

(b) Future Needs of Separated Families.

PUBLIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The first and most basic need is for a public acknowledgement of past illegal and coercive practices. The difficulties facing the plight of families separated by adoption is increased as such families are often unable to put their experiences into the framework of their daily lives. Many mothers whose child has been taken for adoption keep silent about it purely because of public lack of recognition of what has happened in the past. In order to understand I would ask you to put yourself in the position of a women whose child dies. If she is ridiculed for grieving for that child or told to get on with it or that it was all her fault then this will retard her recovery and further

compound her grief. Victims of forced adoption have had to contend with "wrong" responses all their lives and the only wonder is that any of them have survived such a prolonged psychological battering.

In the case of adoptive parents to state that they are not the natural parents of a child is a public acknowledgement that they are infertile thus instead of being grateful for being given a child they quite often are suffering a private grief relating to their personal and private situation. Adoptees are often condemned for not knowing their backgrounds and told to be grateful for being adopted yet quite often they may have identity issues to work through and may be asking themselves why they were unwanted in the first place. A thorough public education campaign is needed for all parties to incorporate the adoption situation so that everyone can go forward from a position of truth and respect between themselves and the rest of the community. The first step to solving an issue is to first acknowledge the problem. It is very difficult to heal unless you first address why forced adoption has created so many difficulties for individuals who are trying to live within the framework of such adoption loss.

A mother's love for her child is probably the most powerful instinct a woman experiences. Frequently it overrides the survival instinct as demonstrated by mothers who have given their lives in attempting to save their child from a life-threatening situation such as a fire or an accident. Such devotion is considered normal and I would agree it is normal for women to be prepared to give their lives for their children.

It is not a logical expression of maternal devotion to give a baby away to complete strangers to be looked after and yet part of the myth of forced adoption was "If you love your baby you will give it up for adoption," or, "Only the bad mothers keep their children," and, "It is in the best interests of the child that you do the right thing." Tragically this was one of the biggest weapons used by the state to justify separation of mothers and babies. Unless and until it is publicly acknowledged in great big letters that mothers who lost their children in this way were victims of a misconstrued idea by the state that their children would be better off without them there can be no healing. Many people trapped in this situation, mothers, children and adopters cannot move forward whilst their lives are based upon a lie. These myths need to be exposed and acknowledged as the tools of a rabid adoption industry rather than platitudes about the best interests of the child.

Society has perceived adoption as that of woman getting rid of an unwanted child rather than as an act of maternal love and sacrifice. It is time that myth was publicly acknowledged and an apology offered very specifically stating that in fact these mothers loved and wanted their children but they were coerced and misled by state workers who should and probably did know better. The general social acceptance of adoption as practiced in the developed world remains a great source of ongoing difficulty to families who have been forcibly separated. Separation pain is at best minimised and at worst negated as long as adoption is seen as beneficial for babies. Forced adoption makes a lot more sense than being unwanted by your mother.

It is not for such families to be able to grieve their loss as they are unable to talk about it at all. In the case of the mother it remains her fault and in the case of the child they should be grateful for being raised by genetic strangers. The social acceptability of the practice of adoption compounds the confusion, grief and trauma of its victims. It is not for any person thus affected to even be allowed to cry about their situation for in so doing they are then subject to ignorant responses, "It was better for the baby." "You are lucky to have been adopted," which further exacerbate the pain. No-one would tell a mother whose child had died that she had been lucky the child died yet the grief of adoption loss is far more complex and difficult to deal with than the grief of death. There is nothing to feel lucky about.

Adult adoptees also need some clarification of their situation as once again unless the problem is validated how can they deal with it? They have to deal with the loss of their family, a feeling of being unwanted and identity formation problems to mention but a few. Unless and until there is a real and proper presentation of the truth of their origins as opposed to it being shrouded in mystery and myth then there can be no resolution. Equally, of course, adopters would be better for recognising how very fortunate they were to be able to be given a child and to realise that they were used by government policies to underpin the nuclear family and to provide a cheaper way of raising the next generation.

CHANGE OF RULES SO ADOPTEES CAN NULLIFY ADOPTIONS WHICH HAVE BROKEN DOWN

In framing adoption legislation the object was to make the child "as if born to." This is a legal myth designed to sever the genealogical connections of a child and to create a fictional nuclear family. Such legislation assumes that people who adopt children do so for purely altruistic reasons and will always have the best interests of the child at heart. Sadly this was simply not always the case. People who adopt children can and do abandon them.

Where an adoption has broken down an adopted person should be able to reclaim their birthright. At present they are obliged to pay for a lawyer and put a case before the Supreme Court stating why they need to have an adoption overturned. To begin with an adoption that has broken down should be nullified, not overturned. An adoptee should not have to justify reclaiming their birthright. Certainly adoptees who have been abandoned by their adopters are entitled to have their origins acknowledged and even more so when their natural parents did not want the situation to happen in the first place.

INVESTIGATION INTO VESTED INTERESTS OF PRIVATE ADOPTION AGENCIES

It is difficult to understand why private adoption agencies and religious organisations were so keen to remove babies from their mothers. In many cases babies were removed from women who would have been very competent mothers. The means used and the avidity with which babies were taken gives rise to the question: what was in it for them? It is time an investigation was held into the financial dealings of these institutions and to understand why they were so keen to supply the adoption market. It seems to strain credibility that so many of these people were operating to satisfy sadistic tendencies although given the level of cruelty used to separate mothers and children that must have been part of it.

Is it true that many prospective adopters donated money to the institution before they were given a baby? Or did these institutions receive some sort of government payment for every child taken? There must be some explanation for such wholesale baby stealing, such single-minded application to enforced child removal. Many mothers have commented that they were forced to sign over their maternity allowance which as available to them at that time on the pretext it was needed to pay for their keep. This also happened to me yet I was a private patient with HBF paying for my hospital fees so why was my maternity allowance taken from me? Surely that is stealing.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to submit to this inquiry.
(...)

Lynne Devine
20/3/2011