



Senate Inquiry into
Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

(...)

8 February 2011

Re: Commonwealth of Australia Senate Inquiry into Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices.

Dear Senators,

I Patricia Evelyn Williams am a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia now resident in Queensland.

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.

It was 46 years ago today that my son was born at (...) Hospital (run by (...)) in Fremantle Western Australia. I was 17 years of age at the time and had no family support, as my parents had divorced during my younger years. I was raised by my paternal grandparents who were both retired when I went to live with them at the age of 5 yrs. By the time of me starting work they were quite elderly and I had moved to the city from the country for work purposes. It was there whilst living in the city that I became pregnant.

During the last 6 weeks of my pregnancy I entered the unmarried mothers' home attached to the hospital (this having been arranged for me by the doctor I was seeing) and the home was also managed by the Salvation Army.

The vivid memories I have of that time include being constantly reminded verbally that 'if you love your baby you will give it up for adoption as you cannot raise a child properly.' Also the comments that 'your child will be placed in a family where it will look as if born to that family' and 'it would be selfish of you to keep your baby as it could be cared for properly by two parents instead of just you'. The message constantly reinforced seemed to be that I could not possibly care for my child but two strangers could. There was no suggestion of how I might be assisted to provide for my child. All this before my child was even born!! At no time was I informed of any assistance that might have been available to me so that I could keep my child, I was only informed of the 6 weeks 'sickness' benefits paid both prior to and after giving birth. These 'professionals' offering me 'care and protection' for the period prior to and immediately following the birth of

my child did not mention any details of assistance at all. Not once. Why was that so?? Wasn't that their job, their responsibility, their obligation? To me. My understanding (now) is that I was supposed to 'ask' for my child to be adopted not be told that this was my only course of action.

During the time of my labour I was left on my own until close to giving birth. I had received very little information regarding what was involved with childbirth and felt very alone and scared. Following the birth when I asked the nursing staff at my side 'what did I have', the response was 'you don't need to know'. I believe I must have become upset as I was then told 'it was a boy'. There was no care or support demonstrated to me during the time I was at (...).

I was also told by staff that I was not under any circumstances to go through the green swinging doors that were down the hallway from the ward. I was 17, I had been raised to not question adults and never to answer back so I simply accepted what I was told by those in 'authority'. I shared this ward with other young mothers but I cannot recall how many or anything about them. Just that there were two wards for the unmarried mums and that we never saw or heard a baby. I now believe that the swinging doors led to the nursery ward of the hospital and the wards for the married mothers. I remember being told by one of the nurses (she must have had a heart) that my son weighed 5 pounds 13 ounces. The information that I had a son and what he weighed was all I had for 33years, 11months and 10 days.

Following his birth I was told by those 'caring considerate' folk at (...) that I would 'forget about this baby and that I would get married and have other children'. Yes I did get married and have other children, but forget, never. As my children grew and reached all those growing milestones as children do, I stopped and wondered about my first son, did he like school, did he play sport, did he ride a bike, was he ALIVE? Those haunting thoughts never left me and many times tears were shed or emotions bottled up as 'you must never tell about giving away your baby'. This feeling of shame regarding what I had done was constantly reinforced. Did I give him away or was he taken? I was not allowed to see or hold my son at any time whilst I was in (...). Wasn't he my son until he was adopted? Wasn't he my son for those days before I signed the 'consent'. Who was ensuring my rights were not being abused?

My memory of the 'consent taking' was of an older man dressed in a black suit coming to my bedside and giving me some paperwork to sign. I do not recall there being any explanation of what the various papers meant simply that 'they would be sealed away in the archives and never see the light of day'. Again, an adult was telling me what to do (where to sign) so I did (I did not dare to question). I didn't even know what the 'archives' were and was too afraid to ask. I had no recollection of what I had signed and upon receiving a copy of my 'consent' statement in 1999 I was horrified to read that the last sentence read 'that I understand that to change my mind regarding the consent to the adoption of my son would cause untold grief and heartache to the adoptive parents'. Never mind my heartache and grief and why shouldn't I change my mind? But of course I didn't question, simply did 'as I was told' by those in authority. I had no memory of ever being informed that I could have changed my mind.

My son's adoption was handled by solicitors and his adoption was not final until September of that year. Does that mean that I had until then to change my mind? His adoptive parents were both Greek born and were unable to have children. The adoptive father was 40yrs of age and the adoptive mother was 38 at the time of my son's adoption. Photos show him being snowy headed, having a fair complexion and green eyes as a child. **Placed in a family where he will look as if**

born to that family????? How greater could the lie have been? At his 21st he stood head and shoulders above the rest of his dark complexioned, dark eyed and haired 'family'. At 14yrs of age his adoptive father died, so a single mum in her 50's was a better solution than his natural mother?? His adoptive mother told me herself 'that her husband loved her so much he would get anything she wanted for her, and she told him she wanted to have a baby'. Her husband and his brother visited the solicitor to arrange the adoption. In whose best interests was this 'arrangement'?

The shame that I was made to feel in 1965 and for over 30 years later left deep and powerful scars. I always thought I was the only person who must feel like this, no other woman could have done what I did, could she?

Following the release of information by the Department, in 1999 I was able to obtain the scanty records that exist concerning my time in (...) hospital. I took the medical records to show my GP and her comment was 'I can't understand why you were given that drug (Largactil).

"Chlorpromazine (one of it's trade names – Largactil)

Drug group – Psychiatric drug

Major Uses – Chlorpromazine is a major tranquilliser of the phenothiazine type. It is used to treat mental health problems such as schizophrenia, mania, short term confusion or very aggressive behaviour.

How it works – The phenothiazines have many activities on the brain and the chemicals which transmit messages in the brain (neurotransmitters). Their major action is probably in diminishing the action of one of these, dopamine.

Common Side Effects – Drowsiness, sedation, dizziness, faintness, blurred vision, dry mouth, confusion and movement disorders are the most common.

The above is quoted from 'The Australian Guide to Prescription Drugs by Dr Mark Goyen.

Was this standard procedure for a mother following the birth of her child?

The comments mentioned in my story are so burned into my memory they have stayed with me throughout my life, and of course with hindsight and maturity I now ask 'how could this have been done to me and my child and as I now know, to so many other mothers and babies. I was not Robinson Caruso as I had felt all those years but just one of many frightened young women that was exploited by the system.

Where was the protection my country provides me as a citizen when I needed it?

(...)

PATRICIA EVELYN WILLIAMS