

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

Preamble to Submission

I, Anne Burrows am a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia resident in the Northern Territory.

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.

The following is my submission to the Senate Inquiry into “*Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices*” and the role of the Commonwealth Government by its policies and practices in contributing to forced adoptions, with the potential role for the Commonwealth to develop a national framework to assist States and Territories in addressing the consequences of Government Policies for all mothers, families and children.

May the Senate Committee have a modicum of the strength of those who bare their anguish to you here.

In 1966, when I told my parents I was pregnant my Father rang a surgeon friend to acquire an abortion and my Mother said well you can't stay here what would the neighbours think?

I was taken by my Mother to an Ante-Natal appointment at the Royal Woman's Hospital, Melbourne, where I was treated with respect by a Physician who informed me of the medical details of my pregnancy and the condition of my baby. I exited the Physician's office pleased with what he had told me, to be greeted by my waiting Mother who said what are you smiling at?

I was summerarily taken to the Grattan Street Home for Unwed Mothers run by the Sisters of St Joseph founded by Mary MacKillop, most recently made a Saint, by the Catholic Church. This Mary MacKillop Home was, conveniently, located across the road from the Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne.

At the Home I was told to take another name, that of a Saint, as I could not use my real name, in case one day I should meet a fellow inmate, socially or in the street, who might recognise me.

Each morning all girls were lined up outside the (...) 's Office to go in, one by one. Each girl came out sobbing uncontrollably. I decided I would not be made to cry.

In the (...) Office I was told by the (...) what an evil girl I was, that I could never be a proper Mother to my baby and the Sister's of St Joseph would help me give my baby to a real Mother. I was harangued for some considerable time and felt my throat burn in my efforts not to cry. Suddenly the (...) banged her clenched fists down on her desk, making me jump, screaming at me why won't you cry?

My job was to polish floors on my hands and knees for hours a day, heavily pregnant. When work was finished, all girls sat at a communal table in a big hall and were allowed to listen to the wireless and talk. Music on the "Hit Parade" of that era, makes me physically ill, if I hear it today. I knitted a jumper for my Father in very small ply wool which took many hours.

The girls talked of many things at the table. The table comprised of girls about to give birth and girls who had given birth, but sent back to the Home to recover. One told how she was instructed by the Sister's of St Joseph to march another girl, in labour, across the road and deposit her at the Royal Woman's Hospital in the early hours of the morning. Another told how she was instructed by the Sister's of St Joseph to take another girl's baby and present this baby to the adopting mother. Under instructions from the Sister's of St Joseph this girl was strictly forbidden to tell the baby's mother, under threat of severe punishment from the Sister's, any details whatsoever. The baby's mother would plead hysterically of this girl, what did my baby look like, what was the woman like, what did she do with my baby?

Daily, distressing tales were told, resulting in acute distress for all who suffered and for all who listened and saw the suffering of others.

Witnessing this distress of others, daily, for months at a time, I believe had lasting psychological effects on my mental health. I remain to this day, 45 years later, acutely sensitive to the suffering of others, and with an anger, socially inappropriate at times, to refuse to let lie bullying unjust actions, but with an indomitable strength to speak out. And a profound hatred of a Church and its Patrons who would make a Saint of Mary MacKillop and condone the actions of those Brown Devils, the Sister's of Mary MacKillop.

In 1966, while at the Grattan Street Home for Unwed Mothers run by the Sisters of St Joseph founded by Mary MacKillop, I recall being in a large room with many nuns of the Sister's of St Joseph around me in a circle. I was being told by them I must sign the papers to have my baby adopted. But I was still pregnant. Sign the papers. I was a very stupid little girl. Sign the papers. Why wouldn't I sign the papers? I was selfish. I was not thinking of my baby. Sign the papers. I was not doing the best thing for my baby. I could never be a proper mother. Sign the papers.

I refused to sign the papers.

As a consequence, my Father told me he would stand up for me against my Mother and condone my marriage to the Father of my baby. On the condition, my Father said, I would not let him down.

I left the Home of the Sisters of St Joseph.

I was married two weeks before my baby was born, in the dead of night so the neighbours would not see and in a Church not of my Diocese, where no one would recognise me.

I presented, in labour, to the Royal Woman's Hospital, Melbourne, in August 1966.

In my Medical File, were prominent annotations that I had been a resident of the Grattan Street Home for Unwed Mothers. I had another name. Was I the name I had at my Ante-Natal appointment. Was I the name I had at the Unwed Mothers Home. Was I married? What was my real name? Who was I. Why was I lying.

My labour ceased. My husband went home. I was placed in a Ward. I spent 24 hours alone after labour recommenced unabated and someone finally came to ask how I was. I was admonished to stop pushing. A scalpel cut me.

My baby girl was born and shown to me and taken away at 6am, by the clock on the opposite wall. I went to sleep. Two hours later, by the clock on the wall, I was awoken by a raised male voice shouting how long has she been lying there? My legs were still strapped in stirrups and open, towards an open doorway with people standing around. No one spoke to me. I was given sickly-smelling gas and did not feel pain as he pushed his arm into my uterus and scraped and gouged with his hands, around and around to pull out the placenta.

I awoke again to being asked to lie cross-ways on the trolley with my long hair in the blood of the birth, for me to be stitched up. I asked how many stitches and was told no more stitches could be done as the kit was used up, maybe 20, internally and externally and stop asking questions.

I was in a Ward and I asked about my baby and where was she. I don't remember what happened after this or how I got to the Hospital bed or whether I was shown my baby.

I was in a Ward with many other women who spoke to each other about the girls who were outside on the balcony, who had to be separated, bad girls, one who was dying because she used something.

A woman came to me and spoke very loudly so everyone could hear about what is your name, why do you have so many names, when were you married. She went away and came back saying loudly you have only just been married, so what is your married name, why did you only get married two weeks ago. After that the other women in the Ward did not speak about the girls on the balcony, that I heard.

My time in this Ward was vague. I remember trying to get out of bed and having to hold onto the walls. I must have held my baby and tried to feed her, as I can recall being told she was not feeding properly and would need to be bottle fed. I had a large amount of milk and remember my nightgown being stiff from my dried milk at the top and red with my blood at the bottom. My breasts and stitches were very painful. I could not get out of bed to wash myself. A Doctor stood at the end of my bed and said the best fed baby is a breast fed baby and went away.

I was told to get gauze to put on my breasts and sanitary pads for the blood. I was told tell me if you pass any clots, but I never saw her again to tell her yes I was. The gauze and sanitary napkins were kept in a stainless steel container very far away. I stood against the walls and slowly edged my way along them to get to the container. It took a long time. When I got to the container I had forgotten why I was there. I tried very hard to remember what it was, but I couldn't. When I got back to my bed, someone had started to change the sheets. I thought that's nice, I need clean sheets, but I kept hearing loud bells in my head and thought she better get out of the way as I'm going to faint and I said get out of the way and fell on the bed before she could change the sheets.

My parents came to see me once and my Mother said where is the little monster and my Father was angry that I had a natural childbirth with no pain-killers. My husband came and saw his baby.

I was moved to an after-care Hospital in Kew. This was a sunny place and all the babies were in the middle of the room in cribs. It was about eight or nine days after the birth. I could barely get out of bed. I asked for a bed pan and was told no get out of bed it has been long enough after the birth and you should be getting out of bed don't be lazy. I was told I could not have a meal in bed and to get out to the communal dining room. I got up and made my way to the dining room and tried to balance myself on the chair using

my arms to take the weight off as I could not sit down on my stitches. This was too painful and not worth the effort so I went back to my bed.

When I returned, I found my baby had vomited in the crib and on the floor. I was given a clean set of clothes and linen for my baby and I changed her and cleaned everything. This was very hard to do as I had loud bells in my head. When I was finished I made my way back to my bed and a nun stopped me and said are you alright dear, I'll bring you an aspirin. This nun had a black habit, not brown. This act of kindness made me cry.

After this a Nurse came to my bed and said let me know if you pass any clots and keep the pad to show me. I showed her the pad I had on. Then a Doctor came to my bed, and looked at me.

I was given numerous injections in the buttocks. I believe I was given Penicillin. I began to feel better.

I was discharged eleven days after the birth of my daughter.

On my post-natal visit, the Doctor expressed disgust at what he stated to be the worse job he'd ever seen and informed me all stitches internally and externally had come apart and to keep my legs together so the cut could heal. He looked at my baby and said she has a tongue-tie and would not have been able to feed properly and he said hold her so she doesn't move and he cut the tongue-tie with a scalpel and gave me something to wipe up the blood.

My husband never once held his daughter. He left after three months. Before he left he gave me a venereal disease.

My Father said he was very disappointed in me as he had stood up to my Mother for me and I had let him down.

I had to ask my Mother for help. She paid for childcare while I worked in a food processing factory that made baby food which I was stole to feed my baby.

I discovered in 2010 there was a monetary benefit I could have received from the Government which would have helped me look after my baby.

I discovered in 2010 that a State-run Hospital apologised for the barbaric treatment they perpetrated upon young Mother's, even those like myself two weeks away from delivering bastards, but saved by getting married.

Today in 2011, I believe the stigma of my having resided in a Home for Unwed Mothers prejudiced my treatment at the State-run Royal Woman's Hospital, Melbourne.

I believe to this day in 2011, I suffer PTSD, as a result of witnessing the despicable behaviour inflicted by Women of the Church, the Sister's of St Joseph, towards young girls. I believe the recent Canonisation of the Leader of the Sisters of St Joseph, Mary MacKillop, caused my trauma to re-surface in flashbacks, and continues to grind salt into my still-open wounds.

I believe to this day the Sister's of St Joseph had an intimate relationship with the "Hospital across the road", the Royal Woman's Hospital, Grattan Street, Melbourne, in the removal of babies from unmarried mothers and the adoption trade - for which the Sisters of St Joseph received money from adopting childless couples.

I believe to this day in 2011, I suffer heart-breaking life-consequences due to my treatment by the nuns of the Sisters of St Joseph and my PTSD is the direct result of my treatment by the nuns of the Sisters of St Joseph who caused irrevocable harm to my bonding with my baby,

I believe to this day I suffer PTSD, from the medial consequences and lack of medical treatment during and after the birth of my baby from which I almost died, which caused irrevocable harm to my bonding with my baby, and as a direct result lead to heart-breaking life-consequences in the years to come, lasting the rest of my life and my PTSD was the direct result of my treatment at the Royal Woman's Hospital, Grattan Street, Carlton, Melbourne.

I believe to this day I suffer PTSD due to the barbaric treatment, from the Royal Woman's Hospital, where but for Penicillin, I would have died.

Even in the 1960's, to have a Mother almost die from childbirth in the Royal Woman's Hospital, due to negligence, is totally unforgiveable and unconscionable.

And you Mothers who weep for your babies, I cry for you:

Not all births were happy, not all Mothers had a dream baby to keep and hold in a rosy world. Not all Mothers, even though they kept their babies by refusing to sign the papers, lived the dream relinquishing Mothers continue to dream and dream.

I kept my baby and lived the reality.

Like you all, it was a nightmare, from which I have never woken.

To this day, when I recently turned 64, I remember the bright young girl who believed in a church and a medical profession. And I cry for her.

Who could have done it differently for us? The Church? No, too lucrative to sell babies to Middle Class sterile mothers. The Hospital? No, funding too lucrative. Doctors, Nurses and Staff too busy pontificating to frightened young girls whilst perpetrating massive abuse of power with a perceived right to make moral judgments upon us.

What an indictment on this Medical "profession" who above all, should firstly, do no harm.

What an indictment on this Church to make a "Saint" of the Order who traded babies for money.

Shame.

Shame on you all.

TO THE SENATE OF AUSTRALIA PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY: My name is Anne Burrows. You will address me as such. You will not use an appellation of Ms., Mrs. or the like, without my permission.