

## Senate Inquiry into 'COMMONWEALTH CONTRIBUTION TO FORMER FORCED ADOPTION POLICIES AND PRACTICE.'

I am a citizen of the C'lth of Australia resident in ...Victoria.

As a citizen of the C'lth of Australia I have an inalienable right to protection under the Aust. 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 that would deny me these rights, within and without, the borders of Australia.

### **My adoption:**

- A story about synchronicity
- Background
- My pre school years
- My growing up

### **Becoming a mother:**

- St Joseph's Recieving Home
- Royal Women's Hospital, Carlton, Vic.

### **My thoughts and feelings about adoption**

A story about synchronicity is where I would like to begin my experience of adoption. I was tired of waiting on the list of adopted people who had applied to get our information. Vic, the first state in Australia had opened their 'sealed' adoption records in 1984. I was living six hours away from Melbourne, so while visiting, I took the opportunity to visit the Department of Community Services. I was told the adoption information service was in Coventry st, South Melbourne so I caught a tram, and pondered on the coincidence as I had worked in this same street more than a decade earlier. When I arrived at no 32, a small office block, I marvelled even more when I realised I was in the same building where I had worked

previously. When I was having my 'mandatory interview' required under the new legislation before we adopted people were given our Original Birth Certificates and information regarding our adoptions, the young social worker asked me if I had considered changing my name to my original name. That is when I told her that I had met the father of my first child in the very same room that we were now in.

She looked dumbstruck by the coincidence but it took me many years to figure out the amazing synchronicity that took place in the nondescript, partitioned office with red carpet. Quite possibly the two most significance decisions I ever made in my life took root in that room.

The first one, was in 1972 when I began a relationship with a 'womaniser' and became a mother left to raise our child without him. So my family went forwards into the future, then 17 years later in 1989 there I am, back in exactly the same room having the mandatory interview enabling me to connect to my family from the past.

To complete the synchronicity I was born quite close by, so from the Indigenous perspective I was where I 'belonged.' In my place.

This is not the only coincidence in my adoption story and many other adopted people I have met have amazing synchronicities in their life/ adoption stories. I believe these synchronicities tell us it is 'unnatural' to separate an infant from its mother and origins and to do so is a terrible abuse of power, denying us our basic human rights to know who we are, our culture, medical histories and our genealogies.

My adoption story began when my mother became pregnant at 16, in 1950 to an Irishman, a radio technician with the British Air Force. Her , grandmother, a Maori woman was not happy about her marriage to him but they were married in July 1950, with a special dispensation from the catholic church as my mother was still under 17. My elder sister was born in December. My brother was born a year later and me the following year. My father was overseas when I was born, on his birthday in 1953. My mother approached her doctor about relinquishing me. I was born in the Avonhurst private hospital, South Melbourne, on the other side of the city from where she lived and where my siblings were born.

Dr (...) rang my a/mother (they were old family friends) and said " I have a fair, blue eyed new born girl who will possibly look like you, do you want her." I was handed over to her 16 days later, by the matron of Avonhurst private hospital, after my mother had signed the relinquishment paper. My father, despite being married to my mother told me he spoke to a lawyer about getting me back when he got home, but was told it was too late I was gone. There was no consent to relinquishment signed by my father amongst my records.

My mother made a decision to relinquish me to adoption to protect me. Perhaps if this option

was not available she may have made other choices in regards to child protection which perhaps may have been more effective in protecting all four of her children. I don't know if the doctor who arranged my adoption knew the reasons why my mother felt as if she had no choice but to hand me over to genetic strangers to rear as their 'OWN' and if he did; my question is why weren't my sisters afforded the same 'protection' as I was?

I was relinquished to adoption in August. In December I was 'legally adopted.' These genetic strangers had no intention of telling me the truth. In the court documents they asked if the case can be heard 400 miles away in the state capital. Why? To preserve the secrecy surrounding my adoption, so they could live in denial and pretend I was their very OWN daughter. My female adopter gave birth to her only child, a son nine months after my adoption was formalised. I often felt she resented me being around.

When I was 22 months of age my adopters close friends adopted their second daughter and despite my tender age, it was seeing this infant that made me realize I was just like her, a baby that didn't come by the tummy route but just appeared one day. My a/father was a viticulturist and we always had alcohol in the house and it was within a year of this experience when I was diagnosed as 'drunk' by the family GP.

My memories of my childhood are very sporadic. I do remember being left with an assortment of baby sitters often. One of them, a neighbor, whom I adored, who taught me magic tricks, card games and chess and then sexually abused me before I went to school. I know I told , but despite my adopters knowing, this abuse was never talked about and was added to the other 'secrets' kept.

The summer before I started school my mother somehow managed to come and find me. It was at the local swimming pool and in those days before air conditioning that's where families congregated in our small country community. Also my paternal a/grandfather owned the orange packing shed and had a big sign, with our name on it right opposite the baths. My mother sent my two older siblings over to play with me to get me to come to her. My younger sister, an infant, was sitting on her lap as she talked to me for just a while. I remember her wanting to hold my hand, to hold me, when my female adopter noticed and came rushing over and literally dragged me away from my mother and sisters and brother. I then recollect her sobbing hysterically "she wants to steal my daughter" over and over and being comforted by some of the local women. I just stood there quietly and wondered why nobody was comforting me because I was sure my heart was breaking. Hours later, when we were leaving, I defied my adopters and ran and dived into the pool at exactly the place I had played with my siblings. I held my breath and traced the outline of the octopus painted on the bottom of the pool and repeated over and over "Coral lives under the water." I now knew my mother's name. In those few minutes we had together in this lifetime she gave me

enough of a sense of 'myself' that now, looking back, I have realized I always clung to this. My life buoy. To write down that experience makes my heart bleed to this day but it is the memory that best illustrates the total narcissism my female adopter had towards me. It was always about her and my needs didn't mean a thing.

On my reconnection with my family I was to learn; My mother went home from that terrible experience and her health deteriorated, which meant she wasn't able to care for her three children with her properly. She went into the bathroom put towels under the door and turned the gas taps on. She died five days later, as a result of carbon monoxide poisoning, aged 27. My siblings were aged 10, 9, and just 3. Since our reconnection they have all shared some of there shocking stories of their time in the very abusive catholic system after she died. I think the one thing I am very grateful about is my mother's only directive in relation to 'relinquishing' me to genetic strangers to rear was to say "Don't put her in a catholic family."

### **Becoming a mother:**

In 1974 when I was twenty, single and 9 months pregnant I realised my child's father was abusive. I left him and I asked a social worker at the royal women's hospital in Carlton for a safe place to stay until my baby was delivered. She directed me to the St Josephs Receiving home, directly across the road from the hospital. How lucky was I was my thought as I got a parking spot right out the front.

As a little nun in full habit directed me into the front office, I noticed two young pregnant women scrubbing the spotless floors. She asked me about my plans and in complete honesty (she was a nun after all and I was brought up to be respectful to my elders) I told her I had money saved and a few choices of a place to stay and felt I was well prepared and looking forward to becoming a mother. When I mentioned I had a car parked out the front and asked where I might park, I noticed her startled demeanor, and her attitude altered. She insisted on getting some help for me. Despite my protestations to the contrary she asked/ordered me to remain seated while she went for some help for me. When she shut the door I heard her stand there and rattle some keys before I heard her footsteps fade. I looked around me at the catholic paraphernalia and felt a surge of gratitude that my mother whom had relinquished me

to adoption had said "don't put her in a catholic family" My instinct surged within me and urged me to run. Thankfully, I acted quickly and as I opened the door, most relieved that it wasn't locked, I looked down a long corridor past the stairs and saw the nun coming around the corner with two big burly men dressed in white. When they saw me they started running towards me. I bolted and just made it in time to lock the doors of my car and as I was pulling away they were pounding on the windows and one of them was in front of my car trying to prevent me from driving away. Sobbing and shaking I just pulled out into the traffic.

A week later I went into labour. I wore a gold plastic ring and informed the staff my 'partner' was away working but was expected any moment. I was treated harshly during my labour, left on my own while in labour, sworn at by a young doctor and when ready to deliver my legs were tied up in the stirrups. I remember screaming at the nurses to untie me because my backside was not on the delivery table and I couldn't push. I was reluctantly untied and within minutes my daughter was delivered. I remember being given an injection just as I saw them rushing my baby from the room. I screamed at them to bring her to me, which they did. I demanded to know where they were taking her they told me her body temperature was low so they were taking her to a special care nursery. I asked where that was. That was just after midnight and I don't remember anything until I woke up the next morning in a ward with 3 other women.

When they brought the other women's babies in I kept asking where my baby was. They were evasive so I went to find her. They found me at the lifts and demanded I go back to my bed. I kept up with my demand to see my daughter when luck kicked in. One of the sisters had grown up in the same small country community as me. I pleaded with her and she ensured my daughter was brought to me.

For the next five days I was subjected to extreme pressure to relinquish my child by the senior social worker. The same one that had sent me to St Joseph's Receiving Home, directly across the road from the hospital a week before. I was constantly told I was selfish and uncaring and couldn't possibly bring her up on my own. One day they brought in some forms to be signed giving my authority to take a blood test from my baby. There were two forms on a clip board, the top one being the consent for a blood test my baby needed, the other they asked me to sign sight unseen. Well one thing my a/dad taught me was never sign anything you haven't read. It was a consent to adoption form they tried to trick me into signing. I was outraged. The next day I left the hospital. One of the sisters carried my daughter and didn't hand her to me until we got to the exit. As she put my daughter in my arms she sneered "happy April fool's day" It was April 1st.

My daughter is a wonderful, successful woman today and the mother of my two granddaughters.

## **My thoughts and feelings about adoption.**

I believe the death and illness toll from adoption is huge.

I believe the mental health effects of growing up feeling 'abandoned' by our mothers and families are profound and chronic.

I experienced 'genealogical bewilderment,' a term coined by British Psychiatrist E. Wellisch in an article published in 1952.

***In questioning whether it matters if a child has such knowledge, it should be remembered that most people accept their own genealogy as a matter of fact, and are no more aware of it than one is of one's own shadow or mirror image.***

***Expanding this analogy, Wellisch pointed out that the shadow and mirror image of a person have considerable psychological significance in that they are extensions of the body image.***

It wasn't until I was in my late 30's and in reunion with my sisters, when I first saw images of my parents and siblings and then I suddenly realised, for the very first time I had an image in my mind of what I looked like! Before this if I saw photographs of myself it was as if I was looking at a stranger.

I believe if the option of adoption hadn't been available to my mother maybe she and her children would have received the protection they so badly needed. I was the only one of my father's five daughters he didn't sexually abuse.

Adopted people like me who grew up in the "secretive era" where we were considered 'blank slates.' We had no opportunities of reconciling and coming to terms with our feelings in relation to our being adopted.

It was the legislation introduced in all the states in the 60's that eventually 'closed' the paths of communication and information between the adoptee and their past. This increase in the secrecy aspects coincided with the 'Baby Scoop Era.'

I believe nobody is entitled to deliberately deprive a person of their identity, their genetic origins or their medical histories. These are our birth right, a basic human right. These belong to us and nobody has the right to deny us the truth.

Our birth certificates were hidden away and the states contrived fraudulent documents to replace them. I believe everyone has the right to 'identifying' information that is accurate and the truth.

Was my adoption a forced adoption. Yes.

My mother made a decision to relinquish me to adoption to protect me. Perhaps if this option was not available she may have made other choices in regards to child protection which perhaps may have been more effective in protecting all four of her children

The forced aspect of my adoption was in relation to my father (my mother's husband) who was overseas when I was born. I was gone when he got back and despite that he contacted a lawyer and made efforts to get me back and the fact that there was no evidence amongst my paperwork I received as a result of Vic opening their adoption records that he ever signed a relinquishment form.

I do remember feeling as if I was an alien, always an outsider, being far too 'sensitive' and ALWAYS... hyper vigilant.

I was a sad, smart and unassuming child but always had a warrior woman streak, and pulled off my first act of anarchy at aged 8 or 9...very successfully, by hiding all the chalk in the small country primary school I attended and back then schools needed chalk to operate.

Occasionally, in my life, I will have short bursts of not being depressed and the really sad part about that is I will start feeling unsettled because I recognise it is so rare and fleeting but just for a while I feel like what I would imagine non depressed people feel like most of the time.

Sadly, I think for me not to feel as if..... I have carried this overwhelming depression from the beginning all it would have taken is for those adopters of mine to have actually spoken the truth of the matter, just once. Still, I would have had to bear the grief of living amongst genetic strangers and adapting but at least my life and its adjustments would have been based in reality. Not somebody else's delusion. This delusion is called 'closed, secretive adoption.'

I live with the feeling of being a lab rat in the great maze of life. Part of the great eugenics experiment that is Australia. "The blue eyed, fair skinned female infant" that will look like you,

To me I FELT AS IF I WAS IN A PRISON OF DECEIT and the subject to be avoided was my own truth and my basic human right to have the freedom TO KNOW WHO I AM was breached.

They weren't MY FAMILY.

Sadly for me, adopted in 1953, the concept of A BLANK SLATE was advocated. Take this newborn and lie to it everyday by denying the TRUTH.

Well Mahatma Ghandi was wise to the consequences of this sort of behaviour when he said; "Lying is the mother of violence."

I also believe the eugenics era so embraced by AO Neville in the between wars period was still an influential aspect to this era. White Australia has always been a social experiment of some kind or another. Neville, protector of aboriginals and his foresight about breeding them out of existence. Them, being Australia's Indigenous peoples.

I believe many of us with Indigenous origins, by way of our blue eyes and fair complexions were removed from our mothers also. But our lives took a different track to the one that most people identify as Australia's STOLEN GENERATIONS. Our mothers were targeted and if they were single and unprotected then the system conspired in many ways, from downright imprisonment and brutality, the overuse of drugs, and huge emotional abuse designed to shame these defenceless women and deny them of their children. So instead of the experience our darker cousins and siblings were experiencing in the 'homes' and 'missions' as they were being ASSIMILATED into the dominant colonist culture we ADOPTED ones were ABSORBED into the same world but invisible to even ourselves.

One of the most traumatic experiences any infant/child can experience is abandonment from it's parents. That is the basis of adoption.

Adoption is opportunistic.

Adoption is a precursor for genocide

Adoption isn't a cure for infertility.

One of the best ways to destroy a woman is to take her child/ren away from her.

How can a child's signature on a relinquishment paper be held up as a legally binding contract that can profoundly change peoples lives for generations in some cases.

Adoption is abduction if

A signature to relinquish was gained by force, coercion, deceit or whilst the signatory was traumatised or under the influence of drugs .

I think the Green's idea of a national standard for redress for people adversely affected by past governments policies and practices is long overdue.