

**I, Deborah Jean Leaf, am a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia, resident in New South Wales.**

**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 those rights within or without the borders of Australia.**

**I firmly believe that these said rights were violated before and after my birth on October 26, 1959 in the state of New South Wales and as a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia, I respectfully ask that my submission be thoughtfully read and seriously considered.**

**I also ask respectfully that I may be considered as a relevant party to the terms of this submission to be summonsed to speak at any hearings pertaining to this submission. I wish to be further heard in this matter and thank you for any forthcoming opportunity.**

**I also state on record that all parties to my case, (those who are known to me) are all deceased and as such, no violation of privacy is breached. The submissions received by (...), Victoria also relate to my mother (...) and myself and I ask that they be read in addendum.**

**For purposes of continuity, my submission will be broken into sections.**

**Part A - Statement of facts**

**Part B - The Early Years**

**Part C - Adulthood**

**Part D - The Present**

**Glossary of Terms.**

**(...), my true mother = Mum.**

**Adoptive mother = AM**

**Adoptive father = AF**

**Adoptive parents = AP**

**PART A**

**The following is a brief overview of my life, sequenced chronologically for simplicity.**

January 1959.

My mother, (...),  
Victoria, falls pregnant with me. She is 17 years old.

April 1959

Mum is taken away by Police and Child Services escort against her will and sent by train to Booth House, Marrickville, Sydney. She is kept there against her will until weeks after my birth and subsequent illegally State endorsed and sanctioned separation from me by adoption. (...) takes a particular dislike to my mother and punishes her often by making her scrub floors for hours on end, even shortly before my delivery.

October 26, 1959

I am born at Bethesda Hospital where mothers kept in Booth House were sent to deliver. Both were under the auspices of The Salvation Army Church. My mother names me Deborah Jean (...). **She names me after Debbie Reynolds the actress. She loves the "Tammy" movies that Debbie Reynolds starred in**

October 27, 1959

My mother signs my Consent to Adoption Order but the date is crossed out and changed to October 28. All documents omit any details of my father.

November 1959

**I am adopted and "gone to good home" in Belmore, NSW. My name is changed to (...).**

December 18, 1962

My mother dies in Box Hill Hospital, Victoria as a result of a car accident. She is just 21 years of age. I, of course, have no knowledge of this and grow up longing for the day I am reunited with my mother and father.

1977

The day I turn 18, I request my non-identifying information. After months of waiting, I am sent a piece of **paper telling me that she had nice skin and that my father's chief interest centered around cars.**

December 18, 1980

My adoptive father dies.

February 4, 1982

**I marry for the first time, not knowing that the desire to run away from commitment and to keep further looking for home is hardwired into me through circumstance of adoption and intrinsic Post Traumatic Stress, carried from the day I was handed over to AP's.**

May 6, 1983

My first daughter, (...) is born

May, 1985

**I graduate with Honours from The University of Wollongong, get divorced and commence Post-Graduate work.**

October 31, 1986

My second daughter, (...) is born and shortly after I remarry.

1987

**I divorce and remarry in the same year.**

1991

**The laws are changed and I request my Original Birth Certificate and Supply Authority. After receiving them, I immediately change my name back to my first and rightful name, Deborah Jean. I am assisted by VANISH in Victoria and discover that my mother is dead, her parents died a matter of months before and with those deaths, any knowledge of my father has also died. I am pregnant at this stage with my third daughter**

December 3, 1991

My third daughter, (...) is born.

May 1, 1995

My adoptive mother dies.

October 13, 1995

My fourth daughter, (...) is born.

September, 1996

I divorce.

October 30, 1999

I marry my present (and last) husband. As the world has changed and become more open about trauma, I start my ongoing therapy to delve into my root causes of trauma. As it turns out, there is only 1. Adoption. Two, if you count the total inability adoptees had in my era to discuss and process their adoption experiences.

1991 - Present

I continue my quest to find as much about my mother as I can. I uncover her good friend who fills in as many gaps as possible and gives me all anecdotal evidence but not even she knows who my father is. The Australian Govt has enabled this process by (to my knowledge) ensuring that no record of his name is kept.

## **PART B - THE EARLY YEARS**

### **GROWING UP ADOPTED**

There was never a time when I did not consciously know that I was adopted. Child Welfare told my adopters that it was the proper thing to do and so I was told on an almost daily basis that I was special.

This was irrelevant information, as I knew with every fibre of my being that I was in a place where I did not belong. **I instinctively knew I was not "special" - just available at the time.**

My adopters were kind, simple people who did not really aspire in any way to have a life beyond what was theirs. They had a solid marriage and were very simple, stable people. **My AM sewed, knitted, and loved her thick, curly hair. I loathed any form of craft, was academic and had straight, fine hair that every night was tortured by wire curlers all through my head to resemble my AM's.** No doubt they came to my adoption with all good intentions, although, as with all adoptions the intent was to fill their own need.

**My early childhood years are in the main hard for me to recall. I grew up in what were then the suburbs of Sydney.**

Today, Belmore would be classified as a part of Sydney's inner west.

My childhood was unremarkable in the sense that nothing of any major significance externally occurred. I lived in the same house until the age of 21, I went to the same Infants/Primary School that was across the road from my house and I then attended Canterbury Girls High School for all my Secondary schooling. My parent's marriage was stable, I attended church and Sunday school weekly, as was common in that era and I went to Girls' Brigade and other weekly activities. I rode my bike and played with local kids: the sort of childhood immortalized in many retro movies and TV shows of the 60's. On the surface, it was a stable, almost boring type of existence. Internally, my childhood was a very different matter. This was not "Happy Days".

As already stated, I always knew I was adopted. I had been told this over and over. The trouble was, no one ever had to tell me. I knew I did not belong in this place as surely as I knew that my name was not (...)

My earliest childhood memories (and in fact, the majority of my childhood memories) centre around running away. I was always running away. One of my first memories is, around 2 years of age, standing on an old-fashioned gas heater above the bath and swinging up to a small federation size window. I crawled through the window, swung down the drainpipe and ran down a long driveway onto Burwood Rd. This road is a major road in Sydney and even in those days, was very busy. As I had escaped from the bath, I was butt naked and ran as fast as my toddler legs could carry me. When an adult thwarted my attempt and I was returned to my AM, my answer was always the same.

**"I was going home". I was never actually running *from* anything. I was always running *to* my Mummy, my home and the place I belonged. This scenario was repeated daily.**

The overriding sense I have of my childhood is simply going home. I can remember very little else. I remember the sense of urgency that was in me, a sense that I had to get home quickly. I was aware that where I was in some ways was reasonably pleasant but even then, it was irrelevant. My entire focus was in getting back home to my Mummy and Daddy. I knew there had been some cosmic mistake and I did not belong where I was.

I know now that I was completely traumatized by the separation from my mother and was a victim of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Because this trauma was suffered as a newborn infant, it was pre-verbal. Most trauma victims in some way are able to, at the very least understand or acknowledge the event or events that first caused the trauma. I was completely without this conscious knowledge or any ability to understand or process my trauma. Having said that, my actions and emotions throughout my life have been typical of a major survivor of trauma. In the early 1960's when I was growing up, I was not given any options to either acknowledge or process this trauma. In fact, even if such a term had been coined in those days, denial was the order of the day. Not only did I not have the ability or opportunity to process my trauma, but also I was not allowed on any level to even admit that such a trauma existed. Like a sufferer of abuse, I was not allowed to admit the evidence that was right there in front of me. The result of all this was complete dysfunction and emotional chaos. The stage was set for my future abusive relationships because that was already the norm. I took on my AM's shame at not being a mother. I was rebuked if I ever mentioned it in front of anyone and quickly took on her shame. I was a shame. The shame was me. I carried this shame for decades and never talked about it.

Apart from this, memories of my childhood are permeated with an overriding sense of loss and grief. After my adoption, nothing else in my childhood would have warranted this. I was not abused physically, not attacked, saw no disharmony in the home, (except for what I caused daily with my questioning) and was kept safe. But as already stated, it was irrelevant. My life was irrelevant. My memories are a haze; save for the emotions that were constant, as I knew that I was not where I belonged.

I asked on a daily basis about my real parents. I asked daily if I could return home now. No amount of punishment, guilt (if you ask that again, it will kill your mother) or anger would dissuade me. I was single minded and totally focused on going home. It was instinct: as strong, pure and tribal as a lion cub or puppy running straight to the safety of its mother. This asking to go home was happening long before I even had the words. From earliest memory, I was doing it constantly but in later years my AM admitted that even as a baby she could tell I was asking to go home long before I had any words. I

refused to bond with her or make eye contact. This was well before I had the cognitive ability to understand words and concepts, particularly a concept as complex as adoption. My instincts told me I was in the wrong place and my DNA screamed out for my kin. No amount of social conditioning could remove this knowledge. I will discuss this in depth later in my submission but suffice to say at this point that the discovery of DNA many years later came as no surprise to me, nor I suspect to millions of other adoptees around the world. My life was lived in a vacuum of its complete absence and that is, in effect the sum total of my childhood.

## **PART C - ADULTHOOD.**

**If I thought it was bad before .....**

The book, *The Primal Wound*, discusses what is now known as *Adopted Child Syndrome* where children usually grow to fall into one of two main categories: either the good and perfect adopted child or the rebel. There is no doubt where I fell.

**I was a lost, lonely, angry adolescent and young adult. I was completely disconnected from my reality. I write about this now in hindsight. At this time, in the early 70's and later, the concept of adoption trauma was still decades from consideration. Adoption was still never talked about and not once was it ever considered medically to impact on me at all. Even as I write this, I am still stunned and disgusted by the level of naivety and ignorance of the time. I know now that Dr Geoffrey Rickarby was already talking about this but I suppose no-one was listening. Certainly no-one in my street, anyway!**

**I still asked for information on my adoption daily. The once tranquil, happy parents had long ago lost any semblance of peace or order in their home. I made sure of that. I was dysfunctional and furious. The trauma that had commenced at my separation from my mother was a constant. My adoptive parents took me to a barrage of specialists and doctors trying to get help for their 'troubled' daughter. Yet not once was adoption even remotely considered as an issue. "Adoption" was a word emblazoned on my records under the banner of a social issue. It was never considered relevant as a cause, let alone an effect of trauma.**

**The running away that had started in early childhood continued. All through my teenage years I had run away physically, emotionally**

and spiritually. The urgency never left me as every minute of every day I was conscious of needing to get back home to my mother. Not once did I ever blame her. For some reason, I always just knew that she never wanted to lose me.

**I engaged in many dangerous practices as I continued to run away. I had no self-confidence or respect. After all, how could I possibly be worthy of any love? I had listened to my AM's stories many times: heard how the reason I was so tiny as a baby was because 'it was obvious that she, you know .....had tried to stop it'. In other words, I was an abortion gone wrong. Even as a child I instinctively knew that nothing could have been further from the truth than this kind of rubbish and the stupidity and ignorance of this kind of comment fed my anger and resentment.**

**I had no concept of being "daddy's girl". The positive effects of a healthy father/daughter relationship are well documented today. My AF, like many other men in his position was a non-event. He was kind and distant and to this day, I really have no great memory of him. When he died, I remember vividly feeling nothing. I have never grieved for him for he was, in essence a stranger. This is not unusual of adoptive fathers. The women were often the prime movers in the quest to adopt, in response to their own ticking biological clocks.**

With no role model of a father, I had no scaffold of a strong father figure. This combined with my lack of self-respect sent me into a spiral of disastrous relationships. I have **all my life been unable to sustain a relationship. I was the 'runner'. I ran from relationships with everyone. I changed towns and addresses like some people change their socks. I had no concept of commitment. How could I? The glue that binds and cements comes from the previous generations before us. Without a history to look back on, I had nothing to follow. No moral code. No understanding. This can be hard to explain to the non-adopted but the complete absence of what went before gives you no heritage or notion of self. Cultures worldwide celebrate their family heritage and ancestors. Try living without any past or past links. It is a lonely hellish place to be!**

On the outside, I was a successful professional with a First Class



**Honours Degree and Post Grad qualifications. I was an expert at hiding my feelings in the workplace. During working hours, the highly functioning, intelligent woman with the responsible career seemed light years away from the small adopted child inside me. Not once has this little girl ever left me. I have just been an expert at keeping her hidden in my professional life.**

**This pattern of running continued until I was at least 40. I divorced more than once and sustained physical and emotional abuse. My four beautiful daughters were the silent observers of this madness. They too, have suffered daily from my adoption since they were born. If the sins of the fathers are indeed visited on the children, then the sins of the Australian Govt and their closed adoption policy certainly visited themselves upon me and mine.**

**When the laws changed in NSW and I was able to access my original birth certificate and supply authority, I was quickly in line. This time, at least I was going to find out where she was and we would make up for the time apart. This was going to be different to the time years before when I had waited over 8 months to receive my non-identifying information. The way adoptees were treated in those years was beyond disgusting. To have to beg, to have to furnish a reason for wanting to know who you are? It is beyond belief. I actually had to state that I needed this information for medical reasons. All this to be told that my mother had nice skin and my father liked cars. Yeah, cheers. Thanks a lot, Australia. I'll trot off now and write a family tree!!!**

**This was the story of my life. Adoption was the hidden taboo, the shame of the AM. It was never to be discussed for only in the denial could the myth be perpetuated that you belonged there - there in the place that you were thrown without any major rhyme or reason.**

**I remember the pain of feeling I would sell my soul to have one person, just one, to talk to about it. I remember screaming at my psychiatrist when I was about 15 "I'm angry because I'm adopted". I will never forget his response. He stared at me and responded, "No (...), you are very lucky to be adopted by such nice people". I was just a kid but I will never forget this man's ignorance,**

**cruelty and stupidity. This memory is also an excellent symbol of what life was like "growing up adopted". The silence on the topic was deafening!**

**In 1991, I received my documents and my life changed forever. After searching, the truth was revealed.**

**She was dead. Mum was dead. I was 4 months pregnant and stayed in the foetal position for 3 days and 3 nights. My grieving was twofold. I was a pregnant 32-year-old woman. Mostly, I was a tiny 3 year old: Mummy, don't get in the car. Mummy come home to me now. I love you Mummy, please come back. Mummy don't go. Mummy. ... Mummy....**

**Even now I can't really talk about it. Not even for this! All my life, people came and went. Friends came and went, husbands came and went. None of that mattered for one day I would find my mother and go home.**

**So the information that eventually came from my OBC? I now have my Uncle and cousins. My Uncle (...) is my mother's full brother yet sadly, he cannot tell me about her. She too was adopted. Twice in fact. Her story will be dealt with in a separate submission.**

**And my father? I don't know. Perhaps you good people could tell me? There are no records to tell me and no people that I can find who will. Believe me when I say that my search has been beyond comprehensive. This submission is long enough without going to any great further lengths to demonstrate my commitment to finding my father. I kind of think that you get the gist.**

#### **PART D - TODAY**

**I have worked very, very hard on my issues over the last decade. My life changed the day I stumbled online across a group called "Origins". I rang the phone no and spoke to a lady named Di. I had no idea at the time that I was speaking to the wonderful Dian Wellfare, a champion of the adoption cause and now a world famous name in adoption reform. Sadly, her passing means that I can no longer call her when I need support but many other wonderful women**

**have stepped in to fill the gap. When Di said to me on the phone, "poor little thing, she never stood a chance", my entire world changed. I felt vindicated for the first time in my life. Suddenly I understood. I was not a freak, an ungrateful, dysfunctional person with mass issues. I was just adopted! I was a classic adopted child with classic Adopted Child Syndrome and I fitted, to a tee the symptoms of adoption trauma.**

**In other words, it might have been a strange place I belonged in, but for the first time in my life I belonged somewhere!**

**I have spent literally thousands of dollars on therapy. Luckily, my profession allows me an excellent private health provider. Adoption is an expensive business. I had to pay money to find out who I really was in 1991 at a time when I could ill afford it. Changing my name by deed poll was expensive as was paying for the new change of name certificate that superseded the deep poll. I have spent a fortune on searching, applying for documents, travelling to continue my search and then joining groups and paying for yet more documents.**

**My life has been littered with past mistakes, broken relationships, guilt over all my mistakes and shame carried on from my infancy. This shame, as already stated, should never have been mine. It belonged to my AM and it should have stayed with her. I am not barren! I gave birth to four beautiful daughters, one of whom is one of the most well-known actresses in Australia today.**

**I am not a cast off, throw away, disposable kid. I will always be, as I called myself from about 13, a displaced person. I am displaced, as surely as any refugee. I have biological family now, with my uncle and cousins. What I do not have, and never will have, is my story.**

**Everyone needs their story. Despite their ages now, my girls still love to hear their stories. They love to hear how they were born and how they came home.**

**I have no story and I never will. I don't have my mother, my father, my grandparents, my siblings. I have nothing that went before. No past. No history. No sense of continuity or belonging in the great circle of life. Ever since I was tiny, I have always felt that I have a sister. That may be hope, but I choose to believe that it is more**

than that. It is highly unlikely that my father never bred again. The chances are heavily weighted that I have brothers and sisters somewhere. My children are mostly half-sisters to each other but they would be furious if any one mentioned this to them. They adore each other and are sisters in every sense of the word. I have been denied this. I am denied flesh, blood, bone, name, story, nationality, heritage, past, future, kin, DNA. I am without a story. That is my story. I am displaced. I am adoption.

DNA is now a statement of fact, a scientific "breakthrough". I knew it existed 50 years ago. I grew up with its absence staring me in the face every second of every day. I watched and observed families very closely. I was (and still am) an expert at observing genetic resemblance. Watching what I didn't have helped me to survive another day.

I firmly believe that in some way, our very essence is hard wired to our DNA. Nobody told me to break my heart that day in early November, 1959 when my own mother dressed me and handed me over to strangers. And yet my heart did break, as surely as the sun rises in the east every day. My AM was a simple soul, not given to great rhetoric. But even she told the story over and over of that day and when she told it I saw fear behind her eyes. Her version was "there was something in the air that day, something unnatural. I could hear a baby screaming blocks away from the hospital and we both laughed and said 'hope that's not ours'. But it was you, (...). There was something in your scream that I never heard before or since. I don't know what it was but it made the hair on my neck stand up."

Without even knowing what she was saying, this woman was giving an eye-witness account of the primal wound. My heart was breaking in the way that only a newborn infant's can. I was utterly loving, utterly trusting, totally dependant on my mother without any life experiences to pollute that love. My mother and I were joined by DNA which permeates every nerve and cell in our body. I firmly believe that it also joins us spiritually - a soul contract that is eternal and cannot be broken. We lose our parents in the normal course of life but that is natural and part of the

**order of life. Losing your parents and story at birth effectively puts you in a vacuum of nothingness and freezes you into total inaction.**

**Once upon a time, some Government geniuses who were in a position to, because they could, decided that adoption was a great idea to cut financial costs for single mothers and to repair in part, the fact that men were coming back sterile from wars. The early contraceptive pill added to the number of women who could not conceive. This was all very sad but ultimately not my problem. I was a newborn baby and one of the ultimate victims of this despicable, amoral practice. To the best of my knowledge, this is the only period in the history of the world where mothers and their babies were forcibly separated by law and government sanction and then forced to justify why they were displeased with this practise.**

**It is not the purpose of this submission to outline the breaches of common law enacted by the powers of adoption broken in my case. I will leave that to those more learned than me: in any case they have been established already. This is a personal submission that directly relates to those abuses.**

**The Australian Government had no right to take away my name. They had no right to enforce a system so flawed. I have every right to know my name. I have every right to know who I am. My father's name is a basic human right that I am forever denied. I should have access to my siblings and it should be up to us as adults to work out our place with each other.**

**I should never have been denied the evidence in front of my eyes. Society at the time enforced and propagated the lie that I was someone else's child. I should never have had to spend my life begging for every crumb of information I could get. I should never have been put in a position where I have rung up total strangers to ask them "are you my father?" I appreciate that the govt did not kill my mother but steps should have been implemented to ensure generations did not go through the humiliation of this. Responsible record keeping is not a privilege for the few. The government should have kept my records accurately and thoroughly for future reference. The climate of the time was irrelevant. Government responsibility is by definition, just that. I have a right to expect that the system of the**

**day ensured accurate, thorough records.**

**I may have not been a functional person in my private life but in terms of service to my country I have done nothing wrong. I have never been incarcerated or charged with a criminal conviction. I have paid my not inconsiderable taxes religiously. I have been a productive member of society in the workplace and acted for the common good of my country. I have never kidnapped an infant, taken it away from family, breast and heritage and then kept it stolen with fabricated name and blatant disregard for its misery.**

**That was done to me. I want an apology. I want support to find my father. I want access to specialised counselling 24/7 by professionals who actually know what they are doing. I want validation of my trauma and I want to be acknowledged. I want adoption - the sort where they change your name and refuse you your truth to disappear forever. I want adoption of this kind banned worldwide and I want the ignorant crusaders who have no concept of what it is like to be adopted to be shut down. I want to speak at your hearings and I want to be heard.**

**On December 10, 1948 the Charter of International Human Rights was invoked worldwide. With respect, I ask that you ponder some of the articles of the Charter in view of the above submission.**

**Article 12.**

**No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks**

**Article 16.**

**.3 The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.**

**And finally:**

**Article 25.**

1. **Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.**

**It is my sincere hope that you will read this submission and all the others returned to you with open eyes and hearts. It cost those of us who submitted them a great deal. We have written with ink, keyboard, blood and broken hearts and lives. We deserve respect and retribution. Most of all we deserve an apology and equitable means of restoration.**

**My name is Debbie Leaf. I am mother to (...)  
(...). I am wife to (...), who helped me to stop running and encouraged me to heal myself. First and foremost, I am (...)'s baby. I miss her every day. I love her every day. Every beat of my heart is dedicated to her, as is this submission.**

**Debbie Leaf**

**March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2001**