

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

Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House. Canberra ACT 2600
Australia.

I Louise Anne Greenup am a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia in the State of 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 these rights, within and without, the borders of Australia.

Submission from
Mrs Louise Greenup (nee Seedsman)
(...)

(...)

Terms of reference

That the following matters be referred to the Community Affairs Reference Committee for inquiry and report by 30 April 2011.

- (a) the role, if any, of the Commonwealth Government, it's policies and practices in contributing to forced adoptions; and**
- (b) the potential role of the Commonwealth in developing a national framework to assist states and territories to address the consequences for the mothers, their families and children who were subject to forced adoption policies**



This is my story

Period leading up to Birth

Year 1977; I was 15 years old and living in a catholic family which was and is a very strong family unit of 6 children. To find myself pregnant was a horrendous experience and one that shook my family greatly. My parents were very supportive and the only question that they required to be truly answered was "what was **the right thing to do**" for the baby and myself. As time progressed in my pregnancy there were many, many discussions regarding my baby; the options were to give my baby up for adoption or to keep my baby. The latter option was one that was truly considered as I had a 3-year-old brother and it was believed that my baby would fit in and grow in our family.

At the time (1977) there was enormous social stigma associated with birth out of wedlock and there was in fact a strong social under-current of pregnant single girls not being fit to raise children. During this period I was verbally abused in the street and shunned.

My parents, the birth father and I approached the 'experts', people whom we thought we could trust to give us the right information and the right options for consideration in what was a traumatic and life-affecting decision. (Note experts: Adoption Agency workers)

Three months prior to giving birth (13.1.1977) my father, the birth father and I attended the Catholic Adoption Agency, Sydney to seek advice and we ended up giving personal details of myself and the birth father to the adoption agency. These details were basically the hair, eye colour, family status and limited medical history. As our records show both the birth father and I were compliant and helpful to give the details necessary to the adoption agency.

At all times during this interview we were strongly led to believe that we were doing the "right" thing. I can remember questioning Mrs. (...) regarding these details as to how my baby would be matched up; explanations and details given were to all intents made to sound like a fairy tale and very special for my baby.

The birth father and I clearly indicated that we intended to marry and continue our lives together, which we did; we married in 1980. At no time during this interview were we offered or was it suggested that there was any assistance or counselling to help us make the correct decision or keep our child nor were we given any knowledge that this decision we were making or believed we were capable of making would affect the rest of our lives; remember I was 15 years old, and the birth father was 18 years old.

Bearing the above facts in mind and now knowing the legislation stated that unmarried mothers should be advised and offered assistance in the form of financial provisions and foster care, state child minding facilities if necessary, it is hard to believe that these points were never raised, in fact, the representations made to us were as though there were no other options and we would get on with our lives.

We were never warned of the permanency of adoption and the lifelong implications and emotional risks of dire future regret if adoption was being considered.

We were offered no counselling or written information Government or otherwise to assist us, we left the interview with only having answered the necessary questions. There was a clear indication to the social worker by direct question that my parents and I needed to know if this was the correct decision for my baby and myself; we were assured it was. I cannot stress strongly enough that this question was asked over and over again.

We then waited to the time of confinement; I do not remember any telephone calls from the adoption agency checking that I still felt that I would continue with the adoption. This was an 8-week period; more than sufficient time to receive counselling if we had been advised this was an option or recommended.

My son was born on the (...) March 1977 after 19 hours of labour. To all intents I was looked after well during my labour. Immediately after the birth my son was taken from the delivery room and I was not offered to see, hold or touch him. Taken back in my single room I was sedated to the point that I fell off the bed and was unable to assist myself. Under FOI I was unable to attain my medical records for me to ascertain if I received the drug Diethylstilboestrol that many birth mothers were given, this drug is now recognized to be associated with health problems for future offspring.

I stayed in hospital until the morning of the 4th day; during my stay in hospital I was neither offered my baby, nor asked any questions relating to my baby, I was denied access and told to return to my room when I ventured into the hall. Please note that it is and was the practice that babies were never referred to as "my baby", "your baby", just the baby or adoption. This is in order that birth mothers do not see themselves as the mother. I was in fact left to myself, alone in a small room and only checked on by senior staff. I was bound around the chest to stop my breast milk from arriving "coming in". This was promptly removed my mother when she saw me as she felt that this was a barbaric thing to do (my mother had 6 children).

Although I was not treated blatantly badly it was clearly understood and conveyed by "support" staff that I was considered in the wrong and a bad person for having placed myself in the position of being an unwed mother. I was asked not to talk with the other new mothers.

The birth father was denied access to the hospital. I left hospital on day 4 to return to my family home, my mother and brother came to collect me, so strong were the family ties and support.

On the 5th day (...) from the Catholic Adoption Agency attended my family home to take the written consent. In a prior telephone conversation she had stated that it was best if only my mother and myself were present to sign the consent - quite possibly this request was because the social worker believed that my mother and myself would not cause too much confrontation. I had made it very clear that I needed (...) the birth father (Birth Fathers had no rights until the 1980 amendment to the 1965 Act) with me and was extremely emotional and feeling sick at the time of signing the consent; in fact to say I was a hysterical teenager would be understating the situation. (...) was adamant that I should not call him and strong enough in this persuasion that I did not call him.

I have read and believe that the consents were taken on the 5 day, as this is a time when postnatal mothers are at a hormonal change and at their lowest level of resistance. I suppose the most poignant memories I have of the consent taking are

1. My distress, crying and chest heaving and the shortness of time it took
2. My mother questioning (...) once again as the social worker left our home "if only we knew we were doing the right thing for Louise and the baby".
(...) replying that "we were".

I never heard the words "Are you sure you will not later deeply regret your decision to surrender your baby as once the adoption goes through you will never see him or her or hear him or her again. You will have surrendered all parental rights and he or she will be as if born to strangers and not to you?"

The above words should have been read to me and I should have answered, "yes" prior to my signature for consent being taken. In the 30-day "grace" period that followed we received possibly 2 telephone calls from the adoption agency questioning my feelings. I know for a fact that the telephone call received 3-4 days prior to the end of the grace period was then used as a signal to advise the adopting parents that my baby was waiting to be collected (21.4.1977). From this telephone call my mother once again asked if I was sure, and I answered as an uninformed 15 year old by nodding my head, I can still remember the physical pain in my chest.

Summary of Events:

13.1.77 Gave details to adoption agency (2 hours) - no alternatives were proposed or suggested.

(...) 3.77 Gave birth

23.3.77 Signed consent (approx. 1 hour)

18.4.77 telephone call checking not changing mind. (2 minutes)

Never another call to inquire if I was coping or needed any assistance.

Only 3 hours to make a decision for a lifetime.

I believe and know it was unethical for the adoption agency to deny me the information I required to make the decision to give my son up for adoption. My family status was clearly evident, my parents and family unit were strong and displayed a deep desire to know what the correct thing to do was, and the fact I intended to marry my child's father was discussed and a reality. The social workers involved in my case showed no signs of assistance to either my family or myself.

As for the birth father, (...) was shown no regard and totally denied any right rights during this period, as was his status in the Act at the time.

We relied on the experts to carry out their duties and do the lawful thing.

As for the terms of reference point (a) what role, if any, of the Commonwealth Government, its policies and practices in contributing to forced adoptions

I refer to the NSW Parliamentary Paper 600, Dated December 2000 Point 8.26
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Former principal officer of the Catholic Adoption Agency, Mrs. Margaret McDonald in referring to past failure of the Catholic Adoption Agency to inform unmarried mothers of their lawful rights said: "Options were not routinely offered, discussed or brought up." we presumed they were going ahead with it. The options were not routinely offered, discussed or brought up. If brought up by the girl, they would have provided whatever information they could.

I ask you now to consider why safe guards for the mothers were not in place and audited by the Commonwealth. How does a 15 year old and her parents know what should be offered? Who should have given me the policy? Forced adoption by deception.

As for the terms of reference point (b)

The potential role of the Commonwealth in developing a national
framework to assist states and territories to address the consequences for
the mothers and their families and children who were subject to forced
adoption policies

I believe the following measures; and the necessary changes to the law would assist persons suffering from the trauma;

Firstly Recognition

I want my rights as the mother of my son to be displayed on his birth certificate, perhaps his adoptive parents would also need to be listed on this certificate so the complete information and history is available.

Human and sympathetic assistance to enable adoptees, birth parents and their families to get the assistance needed to find their families. Not the same case workers that are currently working in the adoption arena.

I have heard many stories of caseworkers holding files in front of hurt human beings and these human being told they cannot have access or assistance with the information contained in the files. This is completely unacceptable.

Stating the above I know that these points will not mend broken hearts or make the world a perfect place; in fact there would be heartache created for some, but the legal and rightful mothers of children unethically and unlawfully taken would be restored to their correct status in the eyes of the law.

At the time my child and I were separated my parents and I simply asked what is the right and correct decision for my baby and myself. We were not given the correct guidance and have paid a huge price of emotional heartache.

Now after being reunited with my son for 16 years and now sharing his life and my grand daughters life I am simply asking for you to step up and do the right thing.

As my son's mother I deserve to be lawfully recognised on all lawful documents that are presented, used and relied on to establish his identity (i.e. his birth certificate). I want his birth certificate to show both his birth parents and adoptive parents status. Yes the Government could organize for a birth certificate for adoptees to be available and used.

It is these Australians and their birth mothers and fathers injustices, not the adoptive parents that must be finally returned their rights, which were so dishonestly removed from them and relegated to the social agenda of individuals who had no right to abuse of their power.

I hope that the Commonwealth Government can set a precedent and empower the birth mothers and fathers and their children with the natural right for information, and let people get on with their lives. Social workers who have been apart of the adoption process are not the right individuals to assist the victims of adoption; neutral and caring individuals need to be available to assist birth mother and fathers, children and extended family members.

Ongoing funding, counseling and access to records needs to be a priority and these first steps are not out of reach for this Government to start the healing process for those who are simply asking you to do the right thing.

Thankfully now the true facts of many adoptees, birth parents and families will be out in the open and accepted as the truth.

The End