

Department of the Senate,
P.O. Box 6100
Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600
Australia.

(...)

Dear Senators,

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

As a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia I had and still do have an inalienable right to protection under the Australian Constitution, rule of law and the Common Law of this nation.

As an Australian citizen, the Commonwealth should have afforded us all protection from the unlawful and harmful actions that threatened our right to life, liberty and justice from those who denied us all these rights, within and without, the borders of Australia.

We must live by the Australian Constitution, Rule of Law, and the Common Law of this country, and Commonwealth politicians are elected to uphold Commonwealth Law; meaning they will prevail over federal legislation, and by operation of section 109 of the Constitution, will override inconsistent state laws (whether past or future.)

I am a natural mother who would like to register my biographical account in this Committee’s Inquiry and acknowledge that it is an important step in addressing the issues of forced adoptions from the 1950s to the 1970s.

As a direct consequence of the inhumane treatment I have received, I have suffered a lifetime of living grief and pain.

I believe the evidence into the Commonwealth Government’s involvement in forced adoptions will change not only your understanding of this dark period of this country’s history, but will increase your determination for the truth to be recorded

so that the past is never repeated.

Please accept my submission below as participant in this Inquiry. I thank you for this opportunity and join my sisters in standing as one as we eagerly await our great nation to hear and see the truth unfold. I would appreciate you adding my name and address to your mailing list so that I can receive future correspondence and documents on the progress of this Inquiry.

Yours faithfully,

Janice Konstantinidis (nee Exter)

- I would like this submission to be published on the Internet.

In January of 1967, I relinquished my baby daughter for adoption. She was born on the twenty-ninth of December, 1966. I was sixteen at the time of her birth. These are the circumstances leading up to her birth and relinquishment.

I am one of the Forgotten Australians. I was incarcerated in a Catholic convent — Mount Saint Canice, Hobart Tasmania — from the age of twelve until I was fifteen years and seven months old. I attach a separate document detailing these years. I believe that I am a victim twice over of a society that had no regard or time for my welfare.

I believe that my account of my years spent in Mount Saint Canice is important to this inquiry because it shows that I was a vulnerable person who had already been seriously affected by incarceration, and that this was not addressed or corrected in any way. This led to further suffering for me and so many other people in a similar position.

In the December of 1965, I was released from Mount Saint Canice and allowed to live in a girls' hostel in Hobart. I had been taken from the home by a carer to help me to find work at the government employment service. I was offered work in a women's clothing store in Hobart. After I had worked there for a couple of weeks, one of the nuns called me aside to say that there was a hostel in the city that they thought might be more convenient for me. My family had no interest in what happened to me, so it was left to the nuns to decide what I should do. I had been no

trouble to them during my years in their custody and they felt that it was time for me to leave the home.

The hostel was pleasant. I was amazed to be free of bars, bells, and all the restrictions that had become part of my daily life while in the convent. It was really quite a weird feeling. For more details please refer to my submission on my incarceration in Mount Saint Canice.

Christmas came and passed, and I was doing well in my job. I had no idea what I wanted from my life. I viewed myself as an unworthy person. I tried to keep my time in Mount Saint Canice a secret to all, as this was a bad place to have come from in the eyes of the people whom I knew. This stigma was to remain with me for most of my life.

I saw very little of my father. He was angry because the nuns had let me out of Mount Saint Canice. When I did see him, he was quick to tell me that if I lost my job or cost him any money, he would send me back to the convent. This was a threat and fear that would remain with me throughout my life in some form or another. It was a valid fear since at the time a young person could be made a ward of the state until he/she was aged twenty-one. I saw many girls returned to the home over the years.

Over the next two months, I made friends with other girls who were living in the hostel. It was a hostel run by the Salvation Army for girls from rural areas who were working in the city. Two of the girls with whom I had shared a room at the hostel found an apartment to share and moved into it. I visited them at the weekend. They had quite a few parties, and it was at one of these parties that I met the father of my daughter. He began to call at the hostel to see me, and I would go out with him in his car. He was seventeen at the time, and I was fifteen years and nine months of age. He was the first person with whom I had sex, and I conceived my daughter within two weeks of having entered into this type of relationship with him.

I continued to work and to go about my activities as normal after I had missed my period. I did not want to acknowledge that I was pregnant. I honestly thought it might all just go away. I turned sixteen in May of 1966. I thought that my daughter's father would give me an engagement ring for my birthday, but this was not to be. I was a very naïve young girl. Weeks passed and my pregnancy began to show. I was fired from my job not long after my birthday. Truth be told, the women there knew more than I did. as I was still in denial about my pregnancy. I really did not associate what was happening in my body with a child.

I was fortunate enough to quickly secure a job at a nearby variety store in the city, and more weeks passed. I was plagued by nausea, and when nausea became apparent to my employers, I was asked to leave my work I was becoming quite fearful within two weeks of leaving this job, as I was running out of money and needed to pay my rent. My father's threats about the home were at the forefront of my mind. He and his girlfriend paid me a visit at the hostel. My father's girlfriend

had noticed that I was not at work and they had come to see why. As it turned out, my father knew a woman at the Cadbury Chocolate factory and he said he would call her. He came by the next day to tell me to take the six a.m. train to the factory and I would have a job.

The train station was quite a walk away, especially on a cold morning. But I made it and caught the train to Claremont, which was quite some miles away. I began work at the factory. The smell of the chocolate often made me sick, but the situation was otherwise bearable. I believe that people simply thought that I was a plump girl. My breasts were growing quite rapidly, but I could hide the baby bump under my uniform.

No sooner had I gotten settled into my new job than the matron of the hostel called me to her office one afternoon after work. She asked me if I was pregnant. I told her that I was not. She said that she had heard rumors and that she herself thought that I had changed in appearance. I was worried about this, concerned that my father might find out, and send me back to Mount Saint Canice. I had seen young women in Mount Saint Canice who had been pregnant, and they had been sent to a Salvation home for unwed mothers, and forced to give up their babies. I knew of one young woman who had hanged herself as a result. I was becoming quite afraid.

I told my friend at the hostel that I had missed my period and that I was worried. It was she who finally made me come to grips with the fact that I was pregnant. She also informed me that she had already known that this was the case. She had a boyfriend who was a friend of my daughter's father, and my condition had been discussed between them. I had seen very little of my 'boyfriend' since I had missed my first period. I did not want to take any more risks; this was how naïve I was.

My friend, who was also sixteen, suggested that I rent a room elsewhere so that I could avoid being found out. I looked at the newspaper the following Saturday, and saw one or two rooms to rent. I took a very small room in Battery Point, which was being let for five dollars fifty a week. I had been paying eight dollars a week at the hostel, but this had included three very good meals a day. I moved into my room that weekend. My friend came to see me, and said that she would like to rent a room in the same house when there was one available. Another room became vacant some weeks later and my friend moved in as well. I often look back at this room and think that my walk-in closet at home now is almost the same size as the room in which I had to raise my baby. But in reality, had we had the means to survive, the size of the room would not have concerned me in the slightest.

I missed the hostel and was glad to have my friend close to me. We had rooms in the top story of the house. The owner let out six of the upstairs rooms and two downstairs. My landlady and her husband had their own two rooms downstairs. All the upstairs rooms were self-contained, but tenants shared the toilet downstairs. It was the first time in my life that I had to buy and prepare my own meals. My friend and I would often prepare and eat our evening meal together. I was about five

months into my pregnancy by this time. The walk to the train station was longer and still cold, so it was not a comfortable situation. But I was driven by the need to survive and remain undetected. I was carrying both the stigma of being a girl from Mount Saint Canice and an unwed mother.

When I was about six months pregnant, my father's girlfriend came to see me in my room. She asked me if I was pregnant. I said that I was not. She said that the matron from the girls' hostel had told my father about my pregnancy because she was concerned about me. My father's girlfriend said that she was relieved to hear that I was not pregnant as my father was sitting in his car drinking and was ready to kill me if he discovered that I was in fact pregnant.

A few weeks later, my boss at work also asked me if I was pregnant. I really could not deny it so I said yes. She said that I would have to leave within a couple of weeks as she could not hide it from her bosses and that she would get into trouble. I thanked her and asked her not to tell my father. She gave me her word and I left the factory about two weeks later. The woman did not tell my father about my pregnancy, but she did tell him that I was no longer working there. I think they must have run into each other somewhere and this information came to light somehow.

My father's girlfriend came to my room once again to tell me that my father knew that I was not working. She told me that she could get me a job where she worked as a waitress at the Wrest Point Hotel in Sandy Bay. She arranged for me to see her boss later that week, and I was hired as a breakfast waitress. I began immediately. The work was hard, and I had to be there at six a.m. I worked at Wrest Point until I had six weeks to go before my due date, which was the twenty-fourth of December. I had seen a doctor once. I was afraid to go to see one in case I was taken back to Mount Saint Canice.

One of the girls who had left to move into an apartment earlier that year had conceived a baby and had since married. She had visited me in my room and I had told her that I was also pregnant. She was concerned for me and asked me to come to her clinic to be examined. It was a grueling process for me, as I had not shown my body at this level to a living soul prior to this time. The doctor told me my due date and asked me to come back, but I did not return. I was terrified. I recall not being able to associate my very pregnant stomach with a baby. I have since been diagnosed with Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, so it is likely that I was continuing to apply filters to my experiences and to dissociate as I had been doing for many years whenever I had to face terror.

When I had six weeks to go before my due date, I knew that I could no longer work. I was struggling to take two girdles off after work each day, and laying in agony after doing so. I asked to speak to my father's girlfriend after work, and as we sat having a cup of tea I told her the truth. She said that she was not surprised and that she would tell my father for me. She advised me to give my notice at work. She saw that

my ankles were swollen and she told me that I needed to rest. She had seven children of her own so I was aware that she would be offering worthwhile advice.

Later that day, at about six p.m., my father arrived with his girlfriend. He had been drinking and pushed his way into my room. He called me many disgusting names, including a "worthless slut who was as bad as my mother", and he said that he was disgusted by me. These words still make me cringe as I type them. I was humiliated and ashamed. He told me that he was going to send me back to the home. I begged him not to. He said that the baby was nothing to him, and that it would be given away. I told him that I would not give my baby away and he hit me across the face and began to punch me. I screamed and his girlfriend stopped him from doing more harm. I was badly bruised and had a black eye. He left, saying that he would return. I am still traumatized by his menacing and violent actions toward me throughout my early life. My landlady had heard all of the commotion and later told me that I could stay until my baby came, but that she did not want any babies in her house. I slept with my friend that night. She bathed my eye with a wet face washer.

Later that week, my father's girlfriend asked me to go with them to see a place where I might be able to stay and have my baby in comfort. I went with them to a large house in West Hobart. I saw the sign outside, which said "Elim House" as I recall, and I remembered that this was the place where many of the girls from Mount Saint Canice went to have, and then give up, their babies. It was a place about which I had heard endless horror stories; the same place from which the lovely young girl had come before hanging herself at Mount Canice. I began to run up the street, and I jumped over a fence and into a park until I was a long way from my father and his girlfriend. I would have rather died than go inside that home.

I spent the next six weeks at home, except for the days when I would walk to visit my friend who was married and also expecting a baby. She and her husband were very good to me, always making me lunch when I was there. I had very little food and tended to get by on bread, milk, and Weetabix. I had some money in the bank, but I wanted to save this for the baby's needs. My friend who had come to live in the same house began to knit for my baby and fortunately had a good idea of what I would need, because I personally had no idea. My friend had been raised in a large family and I suppose her knowledge was a product of her experience.

My father continued to harass and belittle me, calling in to see me once a week or more. On one occasion, he came when I was talking to a woman who rented a room in the house. My father listened outside the door and heard me say that I would never give my baby away. He was, once again, abusive and violent that day and he kicked me in the thigh.

Christmas and my due date came and went. I can say that it was a dreadful Christmas. I was alone and hungry. Later in the afternoon, a friend whom I knew from working in the clothes shop came by with her mother. They brought the remains of their Christmas lunch. Her mother said she could not eat her meal while

she knew that I was going hungry. I will never forget this kindness. One of the greatest ironies in all of this is that my grandparents and my father were actually well off. Although my father was an alcoholic, he was always employed and did not waste his money. My family had more than enough money to support my child and me, my grandparents being one of the most prosperous families in Dover at the time.

On the twenty-eighth of December 1966, my father came to visit me. It was customary for him to call in and throw the money on my bed while swearing loudly at me. This particular evening when he called, I was folding some baby napkins that had been given to me by a charity. I had washed them and some other baby clothes that I had been given. My father saw this, and began to rant and swear loudly at me about my decision to keep the baby. I ran past him as I sensed that his anger was worse than usual. As a child, I had seen him beat my mother and he had also thrown me across the room on a number of occasions. I had good cause to fear him. He followed me to the top of the stairs and tried to pull at my dress to stop me from going down. I pulled away from him and I fell. I think he was afraid because he left me where I fell.

I felt very unwell, and I decided that I would ask someone at the hospital to check me to ensure that I was okay. My friend was very worried about me. For some days, my ankles had been so swollen that I could not wear my shoes. I walked to the Royal Hobart Hospital later that evening. I really caused quite a stir, as there were doctors and nurses crawling all over me. I was whisked away to the maternity floor, where I was helped in the shower and then dressed in a gown. An obstetrician/gynaecologist examined me and told me that I was dangerously ill with toxemia and preeclampsia. He told me that I was minutes away from a seizure. He also said that they would do all that they could to save the baby and me. My waters were broken and I recall going into labour. I must have been sedated from that point on, as I am unable to recall anything more until I woke up in the morning. There was no baby, and I was terrified that my child had died.

I was in an intensive care bed alone. I rang for a nurse, as I could not get out of bed. I had drips and a catheter. When the nurse came, I asked her where my daughter was. I had been convinced for a long time that I was having a daughter. The nurse told me that she was well, but that I was not allowed to see her since she was to be adopted. I told the nurse that this was not true and that I wanted to see her. The nurse said that she would have to consult her superior. I told her not to bother and that I would get out of bed and see my baby. I was asked to wait. The matron of the ward came to me and said that she understood that my baby was to be adopted and that it was not the policy of the hospital to allow mothers to see their babies in these cases. Surely this must be seen as kidnapping, as had it happened to a mother who was married and, therefore, according to the thinking of the day, 'respectable', I imagine that this would have been a colossal legal breach. So why was my case different?

I told her that my daughter would be adopted over my dead body and I began to get out of bed. I was still very unwell with high blood pressure, so she informed me that this was not advisable. This argument continued until it became clear that I wanted my child. As it happened, the gynaecologist who had delivered my daughter was in the hospital at that time, and he came to see me. He told the nurse to bring my baby to me. I am sure that I would not have seen her had it not been for his compassion and regard for my health.

I saw my daughter for the first time when she was about five hours old. She had been delivered with high forceps and her head and face were incredibly bruised. I could not believe how lovely she was; how could I have made her? I think I fell in love for the first time that minute. I was allowed to hold her for a while, but I was very tired due to the sedation, so she was soon taken back to the nursery. Later that day, my father came to see me. He continued to be angry and threatening. He had been told that I intended to keep my daughter. He was asked to leave because my blood pressure was still dangerously high. It was to remain so for some time.

My father did not come to see me again, but he sent his girlfriend, who tried to convince me that it would be better for all if I signed the papers for my daughter's adoption. I remained steadfast in my resolve not to give her up. I could not see how anyone could ask this of me. This was my child, and she was the only lovely thing that I had yet to see in my life. My flesh and blood.

Many of the nursing staff and doctors treated me with scorn. I believe that such lack of respect and compassion toward me was unforgiveable and disgraceful. I felt humiliated and ashamed each time I walked to the bathroom. My level of knowledge about the world was virtually non-existent, and I had no ability to process what was happening to me. There was no one to advocate for me. In fact, it would appear that the entire social welfare system, as it related to me, was geared toward separating me from my child, as if I was unfit to raise my own offspring. I was being made to believe that the best thing that I could do for this child was to give her to decent people who could raise her to a life of respectability. These words were to be said to me for days on end. There was no counseling for me; there was only "do this or else".

I was fortunate in that there were some wonderfully kind and progressive midwives in training in the hospital at the time. They were from Queensland and they sang lovely songs during their shift. They were respectful of me and encouraged me to keep my baby. One of them made sure that I registered her in my own name and went so far as to put the news of her birth in the paper. Looking back, I would not have allowed this now, as it was like a red rag to a bull, the bull being my father who just about blew up when he saw it. The midwives also ensured that I had formula and some hospital clothes for my daughter whom I had named (...). They told me that she had won three months' worth of formula in a Nestle competition, but I knew that they had staged this. (...) had too many bruises to have won any competition.

My own milk was not as forthcoming as it should have been. It could be that this was due to my illness and the medication that I was being given. I am not sure, but supplemental formula was necessary. The social workers who were harassing me to sign the adoption papers were so angry when they saw me breastfeeding my baby that they actually made a complaint. I was given medication to suppress my lactation; but again, the midwives who were trying to help me to keep my child told me not to take the medication if I wanted to be able to breastfeed my daughter, so I refused it. I have to ask at this point, at what level were mine or my daughter's human rights protected or respected when the people who were hungry to have me adopt out my child like a brood mare, would deny her my milk, and me the ability to feed her? Up until the matter of the lactation suppressant medication, I had taken the medication that I was given, because I was told that I had needed it. However, from that moment onward, I began to ask what I was being given. Shame on those who were part of this deception. Shame on the government, both state and Commonwealth that allowed these practices. These are unlawful practices and the State of Tasmania and the Commonwealth government should accept full responsibility for them.

During my stay in hospital, I had daily visits from social workers who bullied me about my refusal to sign the adoption papers that they brought with them each time. These visits tired and upset me. I had no idea about my rights. In fact, I probably did not know what the word meant. I knew nothing of the laws that regarded me as a minor, or my rights as it related to adoption. When all was said and done, I was in no state to sign any documents, even if I wanted to. I was stressed beyond comprehension. I was given Valium to help to control my anxiety so that the doctors could get my blood pressure under control. Dr. (...), the obstetrician/gynecologist who had delivered my daughter, was a wonderfully kind human, who I suspect was more aware of my plight than even I was. He was supportive and told me that it was wrong of people to expect me to relinquish my daughter against my wishes.

I was moved from the intensive care bed to the maternity ward where I had access to my daughter when I wanted to. She slept in a small nursery during the day. I learned to bathe and care for her, but remained terrified that she would be taken from me. Because I was ill, I was kept in the hospital for longer than normal. I recall the day before I was due to be released, that the social workers had come to tell me that unless I signed the papers for my daughter's adoption, I would find the police waiting for me when I tried to leave with her. I was also informed that I would be taken back to Mount Saint Canice. This was a terrifying notion, and the reality of it was that they could have done this to me.

One of the midwives who had been on my side, said that she had seen the papers that the social worker had made women sign. She explained that they were preliminary papers and that if I signed them, I could later say that I had changed my mind. That afternoon after thinking about this, I went downstairs to the social

worker's office and I told her that I would sign the papers. As it turned out, there was a man there, a (...) whom I was told he held a high position in the area of social welfare. He was very pleased that I had decided to sign the papers and he witnessed my signature. I did not read the document's content in detail. I was not given time, and, in any event, I am not sure that I would have understood it. The next time that I saw a copy of that paper was when I was thirty-nine years old.

The paper was signed on the eleventh of January 1967. Mr. (...) told me it was a preliminary document and that more documents would need to be signed later, but that it was a start. I felt relieved that I would not be harassed again that day, as I knew that I would be leaving the hospital the next day. I want to make it very clear that had I known that what had been presented to me had in fact been a final document, I would *never* have signed it.

I left the hospital with my daughter the next morning, believing that the police would have come for us had I not signed the necessary adoption paperwork. Let me reiterate that this was the only reason that I signed it. I wanted to make sure that the way was clear for us to leave. A woman, her husband, and her newborn baby who was also being released from the hospital that morning, gave me a lift home. One of the nurses, who had been against my decision to take my baby home, said to me "Don't be back in nine months". I found her remark to be degrading and horrid and, to this day, it still echoes in my mind. I felt humiliated. I believe that all hospital staff and social workers owed me a human duty of care and had a responsibility to ensure that I was not abused. However, they failed in this regard, and I have suffered all my life as a result of their lack of ethics, their attitude toward and treatment of me, and their consistent attempts to force me to give my child up for adoption. I know that I would not have left the hospital with my child had it not been for the decency and kindness of the nurses who regarded me as a person fit to raise my own child. I note here that at a later time, when I tried to leave some medical information about myself at the hospital for my daughter should she look for it, that it was stipulated that she was adopted. There was not record of us being discharged together.

It was a very hot day, but at least we had a ride home from the hospital. The woman who had befriended me hugged me, and I saw that she was crying as I got out of the car. Her husband helped me to carry the things that we had been given by the nurses. I went back downstairs to wave goodbye to them, and as I walked past my landlady's sitting room door, she came out and said that she had not expected me to bring the baby home, and that I had to get out as soon as I could find a room because she was not going to have any "bastards" in her house.

I set my things in order, and walked to the nearest phone box to call the Salvation Army. The nurses had called them for me as well, and they needed to know when they could deliver a crib for (...). She slept with me that night and many others thereafter. The next day, the delivery from the Salvation Army arrived. I had quite a few nice things; not many clothes, but enough for the time being as it was summer.

My friend who had moved with me from the hostel had made (...) a lovely mattress. She was an excellent seamstress, and worked for a tailor. She had made the mattress out of white cotton, and it had been filled with soft scraps of cloth from her work. She had also made me some sheets, and I was given a blanket. My biggest need was nappies, as I had only eight. My friend was able to get me some flannelette squares, which she hemmed. I had some breast milk and enough bottles, teats, and formula to meet (...) 's needs.

Food was, however, scarce for me. I needed to keep what money I had for rent; and, above all, I needed to get a job. The day after I arrived home, I was visited by the social worker from the hospital who had also brought a policewoman with her. This had also happened on other occasions. They harassed me pretty much every weekday while (...) was with me. On one occasion, the policewoman complimented me on my nails, saying that they were lovely, and that she also noticed that I kept my baby clean. I asked her very innocently why I should not have nice nails, and why I would not keep my baby clean. She viewed this response as out of line and said "Enough from you! I can take that baby here and now if you don't mind your manners". I was shocked and afraid. The social worker had never forgiven me for 'tricking' her, as she called it, in the hospital, and she kept saying that it was only a matter of time before I went to court. I told her that I had changed my mind, and that I was going to keep my baby. She slapped me across the face and said that I had made life very hard for her because she had a lovely couple lined up for my daughter. She went on to tell me that she would get my baby in the end, but that I should be ashamed because I had stopped her from being adopted by the best "parents" since my baby was no longer a newborn and, therefore, not as attractive to prospective adoptive parents. (If this does not translate to some form of baby marketing then I do not know what does!) She went on to say that I was a 'hopeless slut' whom she wished had died giving birth. Her physical abuse of me was carried out in front of the policewoman who did absolutely nothing about her actions. I knew that there was no use complaining to anyone about the physical and emotional abuse that I had endured from the social worker as well as from my father. I look back and I think, what sort of society did I live in? Was the social worker so desperate to take my child that she would knowingly let her go to people who in her own words were not the best pick of her clients? That this could happen to me in my own country, in my own culture is unconscionable, and an indictment upon the government, both state and federal, that allowed this abuse to be perpetrated and to continue so for many years against thousands of women.

There was a woman who lived in the room adjacent to mine, who heard what was unfolding. She was the same woman with whom I had been speaking when my father had heard me saying that I would never give up my baby. She was appalled by what she saw and heard that day. She told me that she thought that I would not have to give up my baby if I could support her. She said that I should look in the paper each day for work, and warned me not to answer advertisements from men who said that they wanted a housekeeper and who had no objection to a woman with a baby. These advertisements were quite common at the time. This woman was a

prostitute who worked from the house. I mention this because my support during this time came from various minority groups and people who were considered inferior by society's standards: from the young girl who had become my friend, who had run away from a sexually abusive father; to the gay young man who let me sleep in his bed with him while I sobbed for hours when (...) was finally taken away from me; to this woman, the prostitute, who lent me canned and packaged food so that my food cupboard was adequately filled when the policewomen and social workers used to do random inspections of my room. My contact with these people has been a lesson to me throughout my life. Their examples have taught me never to make judgments about people because they did not fit into society's mould of what is perceived as respectable lifestyles.

My father visited me on occasion to literally throw the rent at me. On one occasion, he came in the middle of the day. I was washing diapers in the sink outside my room. I felt that he was insulting of (...), as he asked, in a sneering voice that I knew all too well, if I enjoyed washing her "shitty nappies". I asked him if he wanted to see her. He lost his temper and hit me, saying that he would wring the f***** rabbit's neck if he got near it. I stood in the doorway of my room to prevent him from going in, and he hit me across the face again, giving me another black eye. My head ached for days. I truly believe that he did some permanent damage, as when I look at the eye that he hit twice, it seems different from the other eye, and this was not always the case. My friend also thought so at the time.

The next time that the social worker came, she asked me about my bruise. I told her that my father had done it. She said that it served me right.

I was upset about having a bruised and blackened eye because I had applied for a job that I had seen in the paper. It was for the position of housemaid to the Catholic archbishop. I received a phone call that week requesting that I come in for an interview. We used a common phone in the house for incoming calls. My grandmother had called once, as she was interested in hearing about the baby. But she asked me to do as my father wanted, and went on to say that they could not help me as my grandfather relied on my father's help in various ways. My grandfather had suffered a stroke when I was twelve, and he needed my father's help, or so he thought.

I went to the interview the next afternoon. The woman who lived near me in the house cared for (...). It was the first time that we had been separated since I had come home from the hospital. My friend told me to say that I had gotten bruised when I had taken a fall. I did well in the interview and the woman who interviewed me asked when I could begin. She also informed me that the position required me to live in. I told her that I could move in immediately. She said that she would let me know. I then told her about (...), but she informed me that this position was not available to unwed mothers. So it was back to the newspapers. I was disappointed about not being able to secure this job as I had believed that the Catholic Church might have helped me.

When I arrived home, I found my landlady besotted with (...), so my accommodation was safe as long as I could find work. My father kept telling everyone that he would stop paying my rent unless I gave (...) up for adoption. The visits from the social worker and/or the policewoman were relentless. My father would call them and demand that they check up on me. I also know now that this was not legal. But, at the time, my knowledge was very scant. I lived in fear from day to day, trying to make sure that (...) and I both had what we needed to survive.

On the positive side, my landlady offered me my room in return for me cleaning her house. But this was not to last long. I began to have pain in my left breast. I went to see a social worker whom I had met in the home. I trusted her despite the fact that she was a social worker. Ironically, her purpose in visiting us in the home was to run a series of lessons on how to care for a baby. She took (...) and me to the hospital where they diagnosed me with mastitis. I was told that I needed to be treated with antibiotics. I insisted that I would not be admitted and I went home with some medication. I had a fever and was very tired. I had been taking small amounts of Valium since my discharge as I was told that I needed to stay calm and well rested. This was said to be because I had lethally high blood pressure while I was pregnant. I was also very thin, and it was thought that I was malnourished, which in fact I was. I had not eaten a decent meal since I had left the hospital. Incidentally, this was the time when I began to become anorexic. I suspect that I may have had some intrinsic precipitator to this and that the stress triggered it. I have suffered from this disorder since that time. I am somewhat better now but only marginally.

I was told to take another half tablet at night, and I expressed my fear of not waking up for (...) to my friend the social worker.. I had slept through her crying once before and had woken to my landlady knocking on my door asking me to keep the baby quiet. My social worker friend said that she would take (...) to a receiving home for care. I did not know what a receiving home was. It sounded nice, and I was assured that I could have (...) when I was well. I asked if I could take (...) to the receiving home and the social worker agreed. I believe that she meant me no harm, as she was a very decent woman. We went back to my house where I packed (...) s things for her stay. I fed her and made her another bottle of formula. I wrote out how much I was giving her and a few other remarks about her general needs. We drove to Lansdowne Crescent in West Hobart and entered a very nice house. The woman who was to care for (...) was also nice. I felt that (...) would be safe there.

After three days, I felt a lot better and I called my social worker friend - whom I had not heard from. She had told me that she would come for me to get (...) when I felt better. She came to see me that afternoon and she told me that she had some bad news for me. She went on to explain that the courts had seen the paper that I had signed, and that (...) had been allocated adoptive parents. She told me that

my father had gone to the courts and applied for this to happen. I am not certain as to how he could have done this, but he later said that he did.

The social worker told me that (...) was no longer at the house in Lansdowne Crescent and that there was nothing that I could do about it. She told me that she was sorry, but that my father had gone over her head and had threatened them all with court action. I do not see this as enough reason for me to have lost my child, but, at that time, my awareness of anything in this area was negligible. I had enough to do to survive, let alone gain knowledge about my legal rights, and there was no one who offered to help me to do so.

I screamed at her and ran all the way to Lansdowne Crescent to the house where I had last seen (...). I went to the door of the house. The woman to whom I had handed (...) days earlier told me that the baby had been taken away by her adoptive parents. I said that I did not believe her because I could hear (...) crying. I tried to get past her, but she stopped me and said that I must leave or she would call the police. I left.

I sat on the stone fence outside the house for a long time. I could not believe what had happened. I eventually went home when it was cold and dark. My friends were horrified. I went back the next day and tried to listen out for (...). I heard a baby cry at times, but it may not have been her. My daily visits to the house in Lansdowne Crescent were brought to an end when I was taken by the police to the Hobart Police Station and told never to go back there again. I was told that if I did, I would be taken back to Mount Saint Canice. At no point was I ever told that I had any right of appeal or of any time when I could change my mind within the following three months. Had I known this, I most certainly would have done everything within my power to get my daughter back.

Many years later, my daughter's adoptive mother told me that they had lived on their nerves, hoping that I would not change my mind during the first three months that they had my daughter. I do not see how this adoption could ever have been deemed legal. People tried to convince me that it was for the best for both (...) and me, and that I had done the "right" thing. The point that they missed, however, was that it was illegal, and that my human rights and those of my daughter were violated. I do not think that I will ever recover from my time at Mount Saint Canice, and I know that I will never recover from the shock of discovering that my baby had been taken for adoption. I also lived in fear that my father would send me back to the home. This man had by now, forced my mother to leave me with my grandparents because of violent bashings that I had witnessed in some cases. Now he had made it possible for people to take my child. I do not regard him as a father. And I believe that the commonwealth and state governments should not have allowed this to happen to me. What happened to me in a progressive western society to me in defies belief. But the facts are that it did.

Soon after (...) was taken, I was invited to see my grandparents. I could see that they felt sorry for me, but nothing was said. The less said about my pregnancy, the better. I, at least, had some access to food, but my anorexia worsened considerably at that time, and my anxiety attacks were ever present. My great grandmother was broken-hearted for me and said as much. But she was eighty-five, blind, and vulnerable, and, therefore, dared not say anything to anyone in my defense.

When I went back to my room in Hobart, I began to look for work. I began work as a nurse's aid in a nursing home. This was to lead to my training as a geriatric nurse later. In the April of 1967, I met my future husband. He lived across the street from me. When I told him about my daughter, he said that he would need a few days to think about all this, and that this had changed matters. I did not see him for three days, but when I did, he said that he would still be my boyfriend. He also said that I must never tell anyone about my pregnancy. One woman at work was so full of praise for him, saying how lucky a girl like me was to find any man who would have me. This is the stigma that I lived with, and I know that I am one of many thousands of such women.

I was convinced that I needed to be married; I thought that this was the only way that I could be rid of the fear of being sent back to Mount Saint Canice. I was married in January of 1969, and I immediately felt safer. I felt cheated at some level, as I knew that I had married for different reasons from some of the people whom I knew. But it is what I felt I had to do at the time.

I was reunited with my daughter when I was thirty-nine. Although we were in contact for many years, this contact broke down. We do not agree on some issues, and I am sad about this, but resigned to the fact that she will not be in my life. I have one daughter with whom I have a good relationship. I have lovely grandchildren and I watch with wonder and joy as they are raised with so much love and good parenting.

I am at peace on many levels. This has been achieved through years of therapy from Dr. (...) my therapist, whose intelligence, compassion, and determination to help me thrive have been my saving grace. Dr. (...) has given her permission to have her name printed in my submission.

I am still in therapy for treatment for Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Although stable and well, I am extremely careful about any exposure to stress. I consider myself fortunate in that I was able to work with my doctor towards wellness. However, I understand that I will never be totally well. I am grateful to be here to write this, not only for me, but also for the other women who are not in a position to do so. Some are unwilling, some are unable, and some are no longer alive. There are many casualties as a result of women being forced to give up their babies for adoption.

I hold three University degrees. I have to say that, at times, I was driven to obtain my degrees by a need to prove to society that I was not a disgraceful person and think this is sad. One of my messages in all this is that we need to be caring of all children and young people; to be respectful of them, their innocence, and their vulnerability, and to do what we can to enable them to reach their fullest potential.

In closing, I will add that many people have said to me that my daughter and I are better off because she was adopted; that we were both given a new beginning. Speaking for myself, I will say that I truly do not know if this is the case. My entire life has been a challenge up until I began therapy. There has not been a single day when I have not thought about my daughter, and I believe that I will never get over losing her. She was all I had in a world of chaos. The specters of Mount Saint Canice, and the loss of my daughter are ever present at some level in the back of my mind. I feel defined by these years of my life, and I know that this is due to the constant message that I received from my elders that I was a bad person.

As I witness the birth of my grandchildren, there is a lot of me that aches again as my experiences are echoed back to me. And I am sure that I am not alone. What I am saying is that an experience such as that which I had does not leave; rather, it will rear its head decades later.

Can you imagine what it is to sit on a stone fence outside a house and know that you cannot get to your child because she has been stolen? Would you not agree that such cruelty was unconscionable? To spend the next forty years in pain as I have done has been so very difficult. This should never have happened, and should never be allowed to happen again.

I note that the Senate Inquiry would like me to address these terms of reference:

(a) the role, if any, of the Commonwealth Government, its policies and practices in contributing to forced adoptions;

I see that the Commonwealth Government had a very distinct role in contributing to forced adoptions, by the lack of clear policies in respect of adoption, and by the lack of uniform laws of adoption across the country.

What happened to me and thousands of other women was a crime against humanity. We now have yet another stolen generation of children who were taken from us

because government agencies did this to us, and the government, both state and federal, remained silent. This silence enabled me and other young women to be tortured and threatened to the extent that we were made sick for the rest of our lives. Until we can be sure that the Commonwealth acknowledges its part in these crimes and incidents of shocking behaviors against us, there will be no sense of atonement for us.

The Commonwealth Government should ensure that the laws for adoption are fair, and that there can be no misinterpretation. It should also ensure that all those who handle adoption are properly trained, and that all adoptions are regulated according to stringent policy that considers the legal, emotional rights and potential outcomes of all concerned in the process of adoption. The notion of a closed adoption should be banned. I believe that it is the right of all children to know who their biological parents are, for many reasons. While I am empathetic to couples who are infertile, I believe that any child is his/her own person, and not property. Be he/she a natural child or adoptee, he/she has inalienable rights of individuality that cannot and should not be hidden. Children are not the property of their parents. I am not saying that an adoption should involve inviting the birth mother for tea and scones, or any action of that nature. I am merely stating that the shrouds of past secrecy are not there. A mother who does want place her child for adoption, should be satisfied that her child is adopted by people with whom she feels comfortable.

For the sake of the child, this should be regulated by people who are able to act in his/her interest. I am not a lawmaker, so I am not going to try to continue here. However, I hope that the spirit and intention of what I say is understood.

As I think of spirit and intention, I am reminded of what the writers of our constitution would have wanted for the people of Australia at the time of Federation. I am sure that deception and theft in respect of children would not have been considered healthy for a growing nation. I would therefore like the Commonwealth government and states to publicly and openly acknowledge the crimes of which I have spoken in respect of forced adoption, and to acknowledge that there is another stolen generation in the form of the babies who were taken from the thousands of mothers in the manner in which they were. I would like the Commonwealth government and states to apologize for this, and after they do so, not be so naïve in the belief that an apology could be the end of this. That they will create and enact legislation that will protect the rights of all mother's and children in the future. That this should be the responsibly of the Commonwealth government as opposed to the states.

Furthermore, I would like the Commonwealth government to give an undertaking that it will do whatever is necessary to assist the women and children who were affected by forced adoption.

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.

I see that there is a vital role for 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.

These are some of the forms of assistance that I would like to see made available:

1. For mothers: a) Access to free therapy, medical treatment, and medication where these are needed as a result of poor health arising from forced adoptions. My hope is that the mothers who need therapy or counseling can be helped to attain some degree of good health and peace before they die. There should be adequate compensation provided for mothers and adopted children who need to manage health problems that arise from their experience of forced adoptions.

b) The waiving of costs where a mother would like to contact an adopted child. This should be in conjunction with the above therapy so that the mother can cope with this.

c) There should be an investigation into the prison system to ascertain whether there are any incarcerated mothers or adopted children who may need mitigation for crimes committed because they suffered as a result of the trauma of forced adoption.

2. For families: a) Any person who has suffered illness and pain as a result of a forced adoption in his/her family, should be given free access to therapy or counseling. These people should be given free medication and access to good health care if their health problems have been the result of coping with parent or sibling distress arising from forced adoption.

3. For Children: a) The children who were adopted by force and who were made unwell by their adoption should be given access to free therapy, medical treatment, and medication where this is needed as a result of poor health arising from their forced adoption. There should be adequate compensation provided for adopted children who need to manage health problems arising from their experience of forced adoptions.

Finally, I would like the Commonwealth government to call for an impact statement from as many of the mothers and children of forced adoption as possible. I believe that this is important to have on record, for research purposes, and perhaps as a

way for many people who were affected by forced adoption to have their say about what happened to them.

In closing I add the contents of conversation that took place between myself, and a friend who had adopted a baby girl, in 1974. I had been invited to see the new baby. I was interested to hear my friend say that they had already put their name down on the adoption waiting list for a baby boy. My friend went on to say that she had been advised to do this by staff from the Department of Welfare because “they” were simply not giving “them” up as much any more...By “they” she meant mothers of babies, and by “them” she meant their babies. I think this attitude speaks for itself. The expectation of people, that there was a market out there of babies. There was a perverse sense of entitlement of the adopting people. Did they every stop to think that the baby they took as their own, was loved and was the child of a woman who would grieve for ever because she had been forced to give her child up?

It is my belief that there are only a small percentage of mothers who actually choose and want to give their child up for adoption. It goes against the very fiber of human nature. Yet I understand there were 150 thousand women who gave up their children for forced adoptions from the year 1950 until the year 1998. I see this as tantamount to genocide given the manner these adoptions were carried out. And I am compelled to make the analogy to a holocaust, in a country that would like to think it was civilized.

Janice Konstantinidis