



Submission to the Senate Committee on Community Affairs.

I believe that the forced adoption of my only child has had a permanent and debilitating effect on my adult life. It has affected me every day in every way, particularly in my relationships with other people, particularly younger women with children.

I gave birth to my son in 1966 when I was 20 years old. I was married, but had separated from my husband when I was 6 months pregnant. I had been brought up to believe everything my parents told me and to always obey. At the time of the break up, my mother brought a friend to my bed-sitting-room, packed up my belongings without any discussion as it was deemed unnecessary, and I was taken home to live with my parents. In the last months of the pregnancy I was neither happy nor in good health. I gave birth naturally, but only after many hours of a difficult labour. I lapsed into an unconscious state before the afterbirth was delivered, and remained like that for about 18 hours. My son had to go into a humi-crib. Because we were both so sick, I wasn't allowed to breast feed him for a number of days. I was not treated well by the hospital staff during my stay. The matron of the hospital had been advised of the marriage break up and was told that under no circumstances did I wish to have my husband visit me. I was eventually able to start breast feeding but when the matron herself showed my husband into my room I lost all my milk from the shock and distress. I was told I couldn't risk breast feeding when my milk returned as the baby was not well enough to cope with the milk changing. I think not breast feeding definitely had a big effect on the lack of good bonding with my son. I was sent home to my parents, and the baby was sent to the then Mothercraft Home for a period before either I or the baby were well enough to be at home together. Although it was not diagnosed as such in those days, and I received no treatment, it has since been agreed that I had a bad case of Post Natal Depression. Not exactly surprising under the circumstances.

In 1966, and for many years after that, there was no Housing Department housing help, Government Pension or child care to enable me to raise my son by myself. I had no qualifications that would have given me any job security. When I was well again, I tried to get work in Hobart without success. The relationships in my parents' house were very strained for all. In the end, after seeing a lawyer to make a statement to say that I was leaving my son in the temporary care of my parents, to ensure no one could accuse me of neglecting my son, I went to Melbourne where it was much easier to obtain work. My aim was to have my son with me as soon as I could financially and physically care for him. It took me some time to get the job that I had put my name down for on arrival in Melbourne, and I was happy in my work at the Lort Smith Animal Hospital and with the friends I'd made in Melbourne. When my lawyer was notified that my husband was suing me for divorce and custody of our son my father insisted I fly straight back to Hobart, which I did on my next days off. I was emotionally blackmailed by my parents to leave the secure job that I loved in Melbourne and return home to live with my parents and son, having been made to believe that I could jeopardise my son's future if I didn't. My

father would not allow me to seek work in Hobart, nor move out of their home until after the divorce was granted, which took 12 months., a year of great stress for all. My lawyer did not agree with my father on these matters but I felt compelled to obey. By the time my divorce was heard my husband had decided not to contest and did not appear. I was granted sole custody of my son, his father had not been in touch or helped with money. In my innocence I thought that that was the end of the matter, I got a job in Hobart and moved out, still leaving my son with my parents as I had no other option. How very wrong I was, I had no idea that my parents were plotting to adopt and raise my son themselves. The then head of Child Welfare in Tasmania lived behind my parents' house. He had taught me to ride a horse, and it had been to his house that I went to for friendship and in times of teenage trouble. I looked on him, his wife and daughter as MY friends, they had very little in common with my parents. My son was still too young to start school, and any government help still non existent, and it was not until shortly before he started school that the subject of adoption was raised. The head of the Child Welfare department deliberately tricked me into signing adoption papers. The whole adoption process came out of the blue as far as I was concerned, and I was not given time to think. My father met me for lunch and told me he "had the papers for 'you' to sign and a witness waiting at the office". That was the first I'd heard of any suggestion that my parents wished to adopt my son. I refused to go back to his office and sign that day and told my father I wanted to talk to someone about it first. Unfortunately it never occurred to me to go to my lawyer, partly because I didn't know how much it would cost me. Not knowing about his involvement I went to see the head of Child Welfare at his office, as I thought of him as my trusted friend. I remember his words as if it were yesterday, he told me that the papers were "simply giving permission for the department to investigate whether it would be in the child's best interests to be adopted" by my parents, with the emphasis on investigate. What they called a "closed adoption", with the investigation to take some time. When I asked him if my father could go ahead without my signature he said, "Oh yes, he could just go to a magistrate." I wasn't offered the papers to read through before I signed them and was NOT told about a period in which I could have changed my mind. I thought that the department would be talking to me as well as my parents about what I wanted for my son during their investigation. It was not until my mother told me that the adoption was going ahead that I discovered I'd been tricked, and no one had spoken to me about my wishes. I was still very young and naive, and was told that there was nothing I could do to stop the adoption, including by the women in the department who 'handled' the adoption. My son was 10 years old when I discovered if I had seen my lawyer I could have still stopped the adoption, even if the court gave my parents temporary custody. My lawyer was cross about it and started pulling books off his shelves saying he would have the adoption reversed. I pointed out that as my son had lived with my parents for the whole 10 years it would not be in his best interests, and I was going through my second divorce and couldn't give my son the security that my parents could. My son was adopted by my parents after a very cursory investigation by the department. I had deliberately not had another child as I had been led to believe that I wasn't capable of

being a mother, and I considered that I had made enough of a mess of the life of my son. My parents were really too old to be raising such a young child, besides the emotional mess they had made of raising me and my sisters. The one thing in their favour was my father's status in the community and his income as
- of Hydro Tasmania.

While my parents were alive, I did get to see my son, but any care I showed for him or he showed for me was actively discouraged, often actually forbidding me to take him out anywhere. I have tried to talk to my son about what happened on 3 occasions before he was 21, but he won't talk to me about his feelings. I know that he doesn't tell people he was adopted and didn't talk to his wife about it before they were married. I don't believe he has ever had any counselling to sort through his mixed feelings. My mother told him I didn't want him and my oldest sister has kept the myth going. Since my parents deaths my son, who lives in Hobart, has cut all ties with me, he says "it is too difficult". I am not allowed to have his address even to send him Christmas and birthday cards, if I want to know where he lives I'd have to look him up on the electoral roll, but I believe he uses a post office box for his mail and his name has never been in the phone book. As I don't wish to cause him any more suffering, at his request I have remained out of any contact since shortly after the death of my father in 1994, and I've never met his wife, let alone went to his wedding. I felt that I was just beating my head against a brick wall trying to make things better between us, and it was affecting my health.

I have spent most of my adult life trying to come to terms with having had my son stolen from me and not being allowed to be close to him. I have been married and divorced three times in total, with constant recurring bouts of deep depression and suicide attempts. I have been treated by Psychiatrists both in and out of mental hospitals but the help I received was all too late. I believe that if I hadn't had to have a hysterectomy before my third marriage I and my husband could have been good parents. I now live on my own, in my own home, on a disability pension and I continue to take medication to prevent further attacks of depression. I have only recently accepted the fact that there is nothing I can do to change the situation, or to change my son's feelings about me. My 2 sisters both live in Melbourne and contact is minimal. Having come from England I have no other family to turn to in Australia and I do feel very alone at times. I have to have some home help with personal care and it is the visits of my carers, and the medication that keeps me from wanting to die. It has only been recently that I could sit down and write about what happened without breaking down, I am now 65 years old.

I feel sorry for people trying to adopt these days with the advent of the pill, legal abortion and the government actively encouraging young, single girls to have babies. There are so few babies available to adopt now as a result. Do you have any idea how painfull it is for people like me to see young women and girls paid a baby bonus every time they have a child, as well as the pension and housing benefits now available? Not that I would want them to starve.