

I, Margaret Ann McGrath, am a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia resident in the State of Queensland. 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 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.

I am the third of four children, having two older sisters and a younger brother. In early January 1966, at the age of 17 years and three months, I fell pregnant to a young man with whom I had been keeping steady company for a period of just over a year. He had been my first steady boyfriend, and my parents liked him. I loved him. (...) was polite and respectful, sensible and hard-working, trustworthy and reliable - and he loved me. My parents knew that we had planned to get engaged when I turned 18 in October 1966 and then marry two years later in October 1968. They had never expressed any reservations to our plans.

I had been working in the Queensland Public Service for almost 18 months and (...) had been working steadily in the same job since he had left school and was due to complete his apprenticeship and become a master tradesman at the end of 1966. He had also bought a new car in March or April of 1965. At the same time, he bought me what was referred to in those days as a "friendship ring". Amazingly, that was the first time we kissed. I have worn that ring almost exclusively on the ring finger of my right hand for 46 years. I wore it on the ring finger of my left hand for a short period between 24 October 1966 and 1 November 1966.

At around the time I fell pregnant, the threat of (...) being conscripted into the Australian Army and ultimately the possibility of him having to serve in Vietnam caused us both a great deal of anxiety and placed enormous pressure on our resolution to be "good" - for we had been good. They were frightening times for the youth of our generation and, for us, triggered the chain of events which led to my becoming pregnant.

I suspected I was pregnant long before it was medically confirmed. (...) and I talked about what we were going to do and decided that I should find out for sure and that we should tell our parents as soon as possible. Though I knew my parents would be very upset about it, I didn't think they would have any objection to our getting married sooner than we planned. We weren't worried about missing out on the "big family wedding" because I knew it would place a financial burden on my parents. We weren't unduly worried either about having to bring our marriage date forward because we had both been saving steadily and we had calculated that, between us, we had saved a little over £270. I had £57 in my bank account; (...) had £210. He also had several unopened pay packets in his wardrobe at home. Our savings equated, in those days, to more than six months' earnings, so we were confident we would manage quite well and would manage even better when he moved up to qualified tradesmen's wages at the end of that year. .

The amount has always stayed in my mind because, coincidentally, I had made an appointment to visit a doctor in the city to have my pregnancy confirmed on the same date that decimal currency was introduced in Australia. I had to withdraw money from my account to pay for the doctor's consultation fee and, never having had to go to a doctor by myself before, I was unsure not only of how much I would have to withdraw but also in what currency I would receive it. I asked for £5 and had received one of the new \$10 notes. My passbook was updated at the same time to reflect the amount in the new currency and I remember noting that the closing balance was \$104.

The doctor was almost certain I was pregnant, though he had taken a urine test

and told me to ring back for the result in a few days. (...) drove into the city to meet me after work because we had intended to tell his parents that night if I was indeed pregnant, not knowing I would have to wait for the results. When I told him that the doctor was certain that the test would be positive, he reached under the driver's seat of his car and placed a small box in my hands. Inside was an engagement ring which he told me he had been paying off since just before Christmas 1965. It was St Valentine's Day. We were both very happy, making sensible plans for our baby's and our future. He told me that he had also bought an off-the-rack suit at Myers at Chermside for him to wear when we got married. I knew I would be able to make myself a wedding dress because I could sew quite well and my mother was an accomplished seamstress.

I had been buying various household goods and storing them in a glory box - linen, kitchenware, etc. It was overflowing and I was forced to store some things in the bottom of my wardrobe. We both enjoyed good health; we neither drank nor smoked.

(...) parents were a little upset but were supportive and helpful and, rather than being recriminating, focused on sensible solutions to our situation. They offered us the use of a house which had belonged to (...) maternal grandmother who had died about a year before I met him and which was, at that time, vacant. Their only requirement was that we pay the rates on the property and told us we could stay there until we had saved enough money to buy our own home. Their offer was very generous and I felt then that my parents could have no objection to us getting married. We had a better-than-average potential to succeed and wouldn't require any assistance from them.

I wasn't prepared for my parents' reaction. They were angry and very distressed. My father, whom I had never heard use such words to describe anyone, called me a "dirty little girl". Since I was under 18, my father refused to entertain the idea of giving me permission to get married, though my mother gave me the impression that she was in favour of it. Their initial reaction seemed to be concern with what the neighbours and our very large extended family would think - though to save their own face or out of concern for me, I couldn't tell. I still don't know.

A meeting was held between my parents and (...) parents at which neither I nor (...) were allowed to be present. My parents decided we were too young to get married and that it was for the best - both for me and for our baby - to have it adopted out.

When my parents refused permission for me to marry and told me that I was to relinquish our baby for adoption, my eldest sister and her husband (who already had a baby girl of their own) said that they would adopt our baby so that I wasn't forced into having to resort to adoption. They made inquiries at the Department of Children's Services and were told that it was against departmental policy for family members to adopt "these babies".

My mother, a devout Catholic (as were all my siblings and myself), sought advice from a priest (not from our parish but from a monastic order on Gregory Terrace) and was counselled to have me placed in a home for the duration of my pregnancy and then have the baby adopted out to a married but infertile couple. The priest gave my mother the name of a doctor at Woolloowin, a Dr (...) (...) and I was taken to see him.

I had - and still have - no idea what was said in that consultation because my mother went in to see him alone first and I was called in a while later. My mother then left the room. The doctor examined me without saying a word to me other than asking me the date of my last period and then told me that my baby's due

date of birth was 24 October 1966. He then told me to wait outside while he spoke to my mother. When my mother emerged, she told me that arrangements were being made for me to go into Holy Cross Convent, or the Home for Wayward Girls as it was then known. Dr (...) was to be my treating physician throughout my pregnancy.

From that moment on, I wasn't allowed to see (...) again, though he rang me at work every day and if he had finished work early enough, he would come to the city to see me after work and we would talk about what we thought we could do to change my parents' minds.

(...) made an appointment with a solicitor in the Brisbane CBD. I cannot now remember his name but it was an Irish name - (...) I think, or (...) but I'm not sure - but I know that his rooms were not far from the George Street end of Elizabeth Street in Brisbane and I know I would recognise him anywhere. I have never forgotten his face. He told us that we could go before a magistrate and make an application to have him overturn my parents' decision and give us permission to marry. He told us that the magistrate would view our application more favourably if I could provide evidence of abuse by my parents and asked me if they had ever abused me. I told him that my father had called me a "dirty little girl". He laughed. I remember feeling foolish because what he didn't know, of course, was that my father had never spoken to me like that before and that I was deeply wounded and disgraced by it.

The solicitor said that it seemed a shame to have my parents go through the humiliation of having to go before a magistrate especially when I hadn't been the subject of any abuse by them and that, even then, the magistrate may not approve our application. He also told us that if we didn't have permission from the magistrate to marry and I simply went off with (...) the police would most likely be called. When it came to signing, I couldn't do it. I can still to this day feel the solicitor staring at me and the pen in my hand and how torn I was. We paid the equivalent of a week's wages to the solicitor for a 15-minute consultation and left.

I knew that (...) was hurt that I didn't continue with the application but a glimmer of hope had presented itself. Since I would turn 18 on 2 October 1966 and our baby wasn't due until 24 October, I would, by then, not need my parents' permission to marry. I hoped too that having seen their grandchild, my parents would change their mind. So (...) and I decided we would go along with my parents' wishes and then, after our baby was born, I would leave the hospital with our baby and go to his parents' place and marry as soon as we could after that. My parents would either come around eventually or could save face with our relatives and neighbours by writing me off as a wilful daughter. I firmly believed their reaction would be the former and not the latter.

I continued to work at my job with the Queensland Public Service until the end of May 1966 and on 4 June 1966, was taken to Holy Cross Convent at Woolloowin. I was very distressed about having to go to this place. My mother had been told that I was to dress in white - and only white - during my stay there, so we had sewn plain white smocks in the weeks beforehand.

A nun met us at the door and spoke to my mother in a small office not far from the stairs leading to the upper floors and a short while after that, I said goodbye to my mother and was then led upstairs to a dormitory. On the way up the stairs, the nun told me that usually girls were given another name during their stay in the home but that since there was no one else at the home called Margaret at that time, I would be allowed to retain my proper name. However, I was cautioned not to tell anyone that that was my real name, nor reveal anything about myself to anyone else which would allow them to identify me in "real life". Nor was I to ask

anyone else about any of their personal details. My hair was very long then and the nun also warned me that if I took too long in the showers, it would be cut off.

The dormitory contained cubicles which ran along either side of a long room, each one containing two narrow beds, a single wardrobe and a curtain for privacy across the front of the cubicle. There were bars on the windows. I was introduced to a girl called (...) who was to be my roommate, though she told me that that was not her real name.

Life in Holy Cross was harsh, punitive and impersonal. A pall of shame and disapproval covered everyone. It was common to hear girls called "stupid", "foolish", "wicked" and "sinful". What struck me in the beginning of my time there was that all of the girls seemed cowed and abnormally quiet. Everyone was required to go to mass regardless of their religion. There was an alcove off the side of the altar where the girls were out of view of the congregation. Initially, I found it a solace to attend mass but it didn't take long for the hypocrisy of the sermons to sour my view, especially when the priest was exhorting his congregation to be kind and compassionate and to judge not lest they themselves be judged one week and then the next using us girls as examples of the pitfalls of impurity and all of us being "the living proof" of our sins.

Some were girls who had been deserted by the father of their child; others, like me, were still in a relationship with the father but were under 18 and denied permission by their parents to marry. Male visitors (other than the girl's own father) were not permitted to come to the convent to see any of the girls. We were locked in and the only way out was to have the front steel grille gate unlocked by one of the nuns.

(...) wrote to me every week and I wrote back to him. Letters out of the home were to be in unsealed envelopes and were to be deposited at the office and, I assume, then posted.

We were allowed to make and receive only one phone call per week. As was fairly common in those days, (...) parents didn't have a phone at their home, so I couldn't ring him, though I did tell him in a letter to him the phone number of the home and that we could receive one phone call a week from outside. He wrote back to tell me that the number had been blacked out in the letter but that he had rung "Information" and had tried a few times to call but was told he did not have permission to speak to me. After that, I gave up all hope of receiving a phone call from him.

Since my mother (and, on occasions, my sisters) came to the home to visit me twice a week, there was no need for them to ring me. I sat in my parents' car which was parked in the driveway of the home during these visits. On one occasion - on a Saturday afternoon - while sitting in my parents' car, my mother noticed our neighbour's car driving past the home and I was frantically pushed down on the seat so that our neighbour wouldn't see me. I felt like a monster who had to be locked away out of sight of all decent people.

I had been in the home about two months when I was told that there was a telephone call for me. When I went downstairs to the small alcove near the front staircase to take the call, I found it was my boyfriend's sister who was making the call. She hastily explained that she was making the call from a phone booth near their home because she had suggested to (...) that perhaps I would be more likely to be allowed to take the call if it was a female who was calling. After asking after me, she handed the phone to (...). I burst into tears when I heard his voice.

From then on, he rang me once a week with his sister or his female cousin, (...)

initiating the call and we talked about what we were going to do after our baby was born. He asked me how I would get word to him when I went into labour. I told him that I was going to ask my eldest sister to ring and leave a message at his aunt's home, his aunt living two doors down from where he lived. I knew that my sister would do that for me. He told me he had been looking at blocks of land at Strathpine and Albany Creek. He had also started doing odd jobs around his grandmother's vacant house and also making a note of things we would need to buy when we moved into it.

There were no antenatal classes or any information at all about pregnancy and birth. The fact that we were pregnant at all was largely ignored by the nuns, though if our pregnancy was mentioned, our babies were always referred to as "the baby". If talk of labour or anything related to pregnancy came up in conversation and was overheard by one of the nuns, it was actively discouraged and the group dispersed. We were all as ignorant of childbirth as one another, so any information gleaned from these conversations was mostly hearsay or conjecture.

The days at the home were long. All the girls were expected to work in the laundry, unpaid, for eight hours, Monday to Friday, and then again until midday on Saturday. I was lucky and had been assigned work in the office of the laundry, though it isolated me from the other girls. They were on their feet all day and were very tired by the end of it. I fell asleep every night hugging my belly and whispering softly to my baby and telling it that everything would be okay.

I was very shy and found it hard to make friends, though I did become firm friends with a young woman who worked on the switchboard in the office of the Holy Cross Laundry. She was beautiful and kind and, looking back, I don't know that I would have made it through that appalling time without her friendship. Her baby was due in August and when she left, I felt particularly alone and cried a lot of the time.

Girls who had come from the other side of Brisbane or from provincial towns or interstate, or even overseas (there was one from New Zealand), were permitted to go for walks to the shops at Lutwyche once a week. I wasn't allowed out at all because my home was at Kedron and there was considered to be a high risk that I would encounter someone who knew me. So, other than my short journeys to Dr (...) surgery, I spent my entire confinement behind locked doors at the home.

All of the girls in the home at that time, were being treated as outpatients through the public hospital system at the Royal Brisbane Women's Hospital. Those who had antenatal appointments were transported by a minibus operated by the Queensland Ambulance Service. The girls returned from the hospital and spoke occasionally about their interview with the social worker/almoner. It was only then that I think I became aware that this was supposed to be part of the process for unmarried pregnant girls. Because I was the only girl in the home at the time who had a private doctor, I never saw or spoke to a social worker during my entire pregnancy. The fact that I had had no contact with one gave me hope that I would be left alone and that the plans (...) and I had made wouldn't be in jeopardy.

For my check-ups with Dr (...) my mother came to the home - always at night - to drive me a distance of about a kilometre to see him. I had to lie down on the back seat throughout the journey and, when we arrived, I was quickly ushered inside.

Dr (...) never once asked me what it was that I wanted; what plans (...) and I had for the immediate future, nor did he ever tell me what to expect when I went into labour. He was more interested in what contraceptive methods my boyfriend and I had used. He once asked me whether the father of my baby had "pulled out" and ejaculated between my breasts. He also asked me whether we had "oral sex".

I had no idea what he meant and could think of nothing else to do but to nod dumbly. On every occasion that I went to see him, he told me to take off all my clothes no matter if it was for an internal examination or simply to take my blood pressure. I didn't understand why it was necessary to undress for this but didn't question any of it, thinking that perhaps it was what every pregnant woman had to do. I remember being very embarrassed by it and really didn't know how to broach the subject with my mother or anyone else.

On two occasions when taking my blood pressure, he sat beside the examination table and positioned my arm so that the back of my hand rested in his crotch. On the second occasion he did this, I raised my arm but he casually pressed it downwards until it was again resting in his groin. I blush even now at the memory of it and am angry that he took advantage of my inexperience and angry at myself for not having said something to him about it or told anyone.

From time to time during my stay at Holy Cross, girls who had gone into labour at the home were taken to the hospital. The news reached all of us in one way or another, though certainly not from anyone in charge, and, occasionally, we caught a glimpse of them as they came back to the home after the birth of their babies. No one was permitted to speak to them and the last we saw of them was when they were waiting at the front of the home to be picked up by someone or getting into a taxi.

In mid September, my roommate, (...) had been taken to hospital during the day. I never saw her again. Her belongings were gathered up from our cubicle and taken away. No information was ever given as to what had become of her or her baby. Looking back now, I realise that that was how the system operated. We were continually kept in the dark about everything, no matter how innocuous the information.

Not long before my birthday, (...) had arranged with me during one of his weekly telephone calls to come to the home to see me. He had tried on one occasion before but had been refused permission and sent on his way. On this occasion, his cousin, (...) had come to the door of the home and asked to see me. She and I then walked to his car and (...) left to go and hail a taxi to take her home and (...) and I were able to see one another for the first time in four months. I was buoyed by seeing him. I felt happy for the first time in months and was hopeful that we would be able to carry out our plans. He told me what he had been doing at his grandmother's house and had made a list of the furniture which still remained there and what needed to be replaced. He said he was going to paint the kitchen and two of the bedrooms and asked me what colours I wanted him to buy.

I turned 18 on 2 October 1966. I remember being deathly afraid of what lay ahead at that time and worried about the birth, but consoled myself that I was at least safe now that I didn't need my parents' permission to marry and could simply leave the hospital with our baby and get married.

At about 2 am on Monday, (...) October 1966, I went into labour. An ambulance was called and I was put into it and taken to the Royal Brisbane Women's Hospital. No one came with me. The trip didn't take very long - about 10 minutes - and during that time, I removed the friendship ring I wore on the ring finger of my right hand to the ring finger of my left hand. I remember feeling relieved that I had left the home for good and that I just had to get through the next week and everything would be all right. The ambulance driver was very courteous and kind and, looking back, he was the only one during the following week to 10 days who showed me any kindness whatsoever.

I don't remember filling out any admission forms or signing anything and was taken

into a labour ward after a short wait. I was given a cropped top with ties at the back and leggings which reached to just above my knees and told to get up onto the high narrow bed. My pubic hair was shaved and one of the nurses said they would be back later to give me an enema. I was asked how far apart my pains were and had to tell the staff that the interval between the pains varied. I was then told that I was a stupid girl for having come to the hospital too early and that I was just wasting their time and that I would be there for a long, long time.

I was left alone in the room, in utter darkness, and mute with fear. I was too afraid to say a word. I wondered why these people were being so unkind to me. My eldest sister had never mentioned that the staff had been horrible to her when her daughter was born in the very same hospital. I was sure that she would have made some remark about it if they had.

From time to time, a nurse came into the room and, using what I surmised was a device used to hear a baby's heartbeat - a metal device which fitted over the nurse's ear at the smaller end and my abdomen at the larger end and shaped somewhat like an ear trumpet - tracked the progress of my baby's movements. She marked the spots on my abdomen using a biro and because the skin was taut with a contraction, it hurt a very great deal. I remember thinking that she was using unnecessary pressure to mark an "X" and tried to focus on the clock on the wall on the opposite side of the room in an effort to ignore the pain. I still had not uttered a sound and, after all these years, I am still astounded by that.

When I had been in labour for about five hours, a nurse came in and examined me. She told me that my baby was coming and asked me why I hadn't called anyone. I just shook my head. She looked at me in disgust and rushed out and then a group of nurses came into the room. One of them told me my doctor had been contacted and that he would arrive soon. I was told not to bear down if I had contractions and to just breathe through them. I found this very painful because the natural urge was to push. I was also handed a gas mask and told to breathe deeply. The gas was almost suffocating and made me feel nauseous so I didn't use it. The nurse just shrugged and said, "It's your funeral." That one remark launched me into such a feeling of terror, I honestly thought I was going to die.

Dr (...) arrived at about 7 am and told me I was a good girl for not only going into labour on my due date but also for having my baby early enough in the morning for him to miss the morning rush-hour traffic along Bowen Bridge Road. He seemed disappointed that I did not acknowledge what he obviously thought was high praise.

He broke my waters. I was then told to push when the contractions came. During the birth, my bowels moved. I was so very embarrassed and ashamed and kept whispering "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry". No one acknowledged my apology, nor did they say anything to me but I could hear their sighs of disgust. I felt deeply mortified. Then I was told to stop pushing and Dr (...) said he was going to make a small cut. I felt a sharp pain and then my baby rushed out. I was laughing and crying at the same time. I tried to get up on one elbow to see my baby but a nurse positioned herself on the left-hand side across my chest in such a way that I couldn't see anything but her back. I could hear my baby cry and pulled myself up onto my elbows and to the right. I looked at Dr (...) and he patted my leg and said, "You had a baby girl. It's all right. You'll see her after she's cleaned up."

From the start of my labour until the birth, I was so afraid, I hadn't uttered one single word.

One of the nurses started to roughly rub my abdomen in a circular motion. I gasped in pain and she told me to be quiet and then turned back to the group of

nurses in the room. And then I had stitches. I don't know how many I had. I was given tablets to take. I wasn't told what they were or what they were for. That was the last thing I remember for the next few days. The only thing I have any memory of was opening my eyes and seeing my eldest sister's face. I whispered to her to get word to (...) I don't remember anything else for those few days.

When I did become aware of my surroundings, I found I had been placed in an intermediate room. The other bed in that room was occupied by a young girl whom I had glimpsed only twice during my stay at the Royal Brisbane Women's Hospital. She was about my age and had very curly natural blonde hair. The curtains around her bed were always drawn and the only indication I had that anyone was behind them was the sound of someone crying from time to time.

At some time on what I now know to be Wednesday, (...) October (though I had no idea of the day or date at that time - I have only discovered the date from paperwork that I have received), a young woman in perhaps her late 20s or early 30s came to see me. This woman told me she had come to get some information from me. She sat on my left-hand side and held a clipboard in her hands. I couldn't see the form she was preparing to fill in. She asked me for my full name. The second question she asked me was whether I was married. She seemed to me to be uncomfortable asking the question - in fact, she seemed to me to be ill at ease throughout the five or so minutes she spent with me. I was surprised by her question regarding my marital status since I had placed the friendship ring (...) had given me on the ring finger of my left hand. I told her that I wasn't married but that my boyfriend and I intended to get married as soon as possible. She made no comment. She asked for my address, my age and date of birth, my parents' names, my occupation, my hobbies, the baby's father's name and address, his occupation, colouring, level of schooling, religion and hobbies. I cannot now remember all of the questions but there were a lot of them, including a physical description of myself and also of my boyfriend - our height and weight, etc.

I can't remember whether she told me she was there to register our baby's birth or whether I assumed it from the questions she asked, but that remained my impression for more than 35 years.

She asked me what name I wanted to register our baby in and I told her the name we had chosen. I indicated that the surname should be (...) surname. She told me that since we weren't married, I would have to register her under my surname. I asked her about my baby - where she was and when I could see her - and she said that someone would be along shortly. I now know from the forms I have been provided under the Freedom of Information Act that this woman's surname, as best I can discern from the pale and grainy photocopies I have been provided by the Department of Communities, was (...) or (...) though it is difficult to decipher. Her initial, I think, is S.

Because I'd had stitches, a nurse had brought in a ray lamp a little later to dry them out. I thought she might be the one who would tell me when I could see my baby. When I asked her, she looked right through me as if I hadn't spoken. She then jammed the ray lamp hard against the inside of my legs, so hard, in fact, that when I was finally allowed to get up and take a shower - I think on the next day - I found I had two pinkish-brown crescent-shaped marks on the inside of my thighs.

Through tears, I asked the nurse again when I could see my baby. She said, "I can't help you." I thought I had simply asked the wrong nurse. I persisted over the next few days asking different nurses but was ignored and became increasingly anxious and distressed. I slept a lot and had no idea of the time other than being able to distinguish night from day by looking out the window of my room. I know that I had looked at my watch on one occasion and noted that it was 6 o'clock in

what I assumed to be the morning and was dumbfounded to find out a little while later that it was actually 6 o'clock in the evening because not long after that I saw visitors arriving for evening visiting hours.

I do not remember seeing my doctor at all between the Wednesday or the day I was allowed to leave the hospital, though I was told when I inquired of one of the nurses when he was coming that he had been to see me but that I had been asleep and he didn't want to disturb me. I was given tablets to take, though I have no idea what they were for.

Late in the night of the day I was first allowed to get up to shower, I went for a walk to search the nurseries on my floor for my baby but was caught loitering uncertainly by a nurse and told to get back to bed or the police would be called.

At some stage, my mother told me that my father was coming to the hospital to see me on the Friday. I hadn't seen my father since I had gone into Holy Cross in June and, really, would rather that he hadn't decided to visit me. I was resentful and uncomfortable with him and afraid that he would sense it. I was also not comfortable being in a situation where I might be forced to lie to him if he asked me anything about (...)

My mother told me that they would be there sometime after 3 o'clock. She had also brought with her a pale aqua double-breasted linen dress of mine for me to wear home from hospital but had had to take it back home again and move the buttons at the front because it no longer fitted me across my chest. I had no clothing with me other than my aqua quilted nylon dressing gown, two nighties, some underclothes, and a pair of pink slippers. The clothes I had worn to the hospital had been taken home to be laundered.

On Friday, (...) October 1966, a much older woman came to see me. I heard her before she entered the room. When she walked, she scuffed the heel of her shoe with each step - step-click, step-click, step-click. She had papers with her and casually informed me that she had come to see me about signing adoption papers. Though the reality that this was the outcome that was being planned by those "in charge" was obvious, I was still stunned by it. My mind was racing as to what I could do to stop this from going any further and all I could do was to blurt out that I wasn't signing any adoption papers. She told me, quite confidently, that she would see me on Monday and I could sign them then when I had come to my senses. This woman's name, according to the Form of General Consent, is
(...) (...)

On that Friday, early in the afternoon, (...) also came to the hospital to see me. He explained that he had only found out on the Wednesday that I had had the baby and that this was the first opportunity he had to come to the hospital. He was wearing the suit he had bought and had brought a gift of flowers - red roses and red gladioli. He looked so very handsome and happy, though when I told him that I still hadn't seen our baby, he was incredulous. I told him that I had asked many times to see her but that the staff wouldn't bring her to me. I don't think he had any comprehension of how they could do that. He said he was going to ask to see her on his way out.

Because he was there at the hospital at around the same time my parents were expected to arrive, I asked him to go because I was very afraid they would suspect what we were planning and also that my father may start an argument with him. He understood the wisdom of not making the situation any worse than it already was and then he left. I told him that I would get word to him when I was being discharged.

I stood at the window of my hospital room and watched him walk down Bowen Bridge Road about five minutes later. I saw him stop at a granite wall which ran the length of tennis courts in the hospital grounds, his chest heaving, and rest his head on his arm. I could tell even from that distance that he was crying. All I wanted to do was get dressed, demand to have our baby given to me and leave the hospital. I think I knew then that our situation was hopeless and that our plans were no more than wishful thinking and I just wanted to die.

My parents arrived. There really didn't seem to be anything to talk about, such was the distance between us. The subject of my having just given birth wasn't mentioned, other than to ask how I was feeling. The birth, it seemed, was a subject which was going to be forever off limits. They didn't stay long and not a great deal was said, though my father did ask me when I was going to be discharged from hospital because my stay was costing him "a lot of money".

I do not remember the Saturday or Sunday at all. I have absolutely no memory of it. Feeling the way I do now and knowing that that was how I felt then, it would not surprise me that I simply split off either deliberately or unconsciously to remove myself from the heavy goop of despair in which I was drowning. I don't remember anyone visiting me during that time, nor do I remember seeing Dr (...) The entire weekend is a blank.

On Monday, Ms (...) again entered the room and approached the bed of the girl who shared the room with me. She then walked to the side of my bed and told me she would see me in the afternoon. I was terror-stricken. The girl in the bed accompanied Ms (...) out of the room and came back about 15 minutes later, howling in distress. I had never been the witness to such despair in my life. I am, to this day, deeply ashamed that I did nothing more than ask her if she was all right, though I knew I could do nothing to comfort her.

Ms (...) came later in the afternoon as promised and told me to go with her to sign some forms. I told her that I wasn't signing anything and surprised myself that I had had the courage to say so. I also told her that I wanted my baby brought to me. She said I would be able to see my baby as soon as I signed the papers, that I could be discharged after that and told me she would be back the next day. For a few moments, I thought if I persisted in my refusal to sign there would be nothing she could do about it.

The girl in the bed next to me was discharged not long after that. She was weeping and said to me as she packed to leave, "Tell her you want to see your baby. You have every right to see it." I think it was then I knew in my heart that while I may very well have a moral right to see my baby, I apparently did not have a right to take her home with me. I ached to see her and hold her and tell her I loved her.

Ms (...) came again the next day, Monday, 1 November 1966, and escorted me to a room which was very bright. She was smartly dressed in a pleated skirt and a cream twinset and sitting there in my nightie and dressing gown, I was very aware of her authority over me. She told me to sit, though she herself remained standing. She started to explain the consent form to me and I boldly interrupted her by saying that my boyfriend and I had planned to get married as soon as possible, that he had bought me an engagement ring and that we had a house in which to live. She just stared at me as if I was a rude child for having interrupted her. I then added that (...) had bought a suit to get married in. Her "pffft" in reply was so dismissive, I knew then how she viewed me and that was that I was nothing and nobody; that our plans for our future together with our baby were of no consequence and were utterly ridiculous.

She continued with her explanation of the form as if I hadn't said anything at all

and then handed me the already completed form and a pen. I remember looking at the pen in my hand and being aware of Ms (...) tapping her foot while waiting for me to sign. I don't think it was possible for me to feel so very helpless. She may just as well have told me to kill myself. I knew there was no escape, just an overwhelming sense of failure and hopelessness pressing down on my shoulders. I signed the form and have loathed myself for having done so every single day since then.

Ms (...) gave me a slip of paper and told me that when I was dressed in my street clothes and ready to leave the hospital that I could go to the nursery of Ward M15 and give the slip of paper to one of the staff at the nursery. I went back to my room. My two sisters were already there waiting for me to return. I felt emotionally numb and very cold. My sisters had to assist me to get dressed and I simply did as I was told - "Lift your arm; lift your leg; turn around."

I discovered that our baby girl had been hidden from us in a nursery on the floor above me. It broke my heart to think that she had been left in the care of shifts of nurses while I was less than two minutes away longing to hold her and care for her and take her home to start our lives together with her father.

I held the slip of paper up to the door of the nursery and a nurse came forward and opened the door just wide enough for me to pass the piece of paper through to her. I quickly asked her if my sisters could see my baby and was told, "Definitely not!" I turned to where they were standing and simply shook my head. They were both in tears. The nurse wheeled a crib over to the door and parked it there and stood with her arms folded while I saw my firstborn for the very first time. She was sleeping. I couldn't see the lower part of her face because of the angle of the crib. I whispered to her, "I love you and I will never forget you and one day I will find you." Then I turned and joined my sisters and left the hospital. I left there without even that scrap of paper to show for having had a baby, wishing that I was anyone else but who I was.

My wish came true but not quite in the way that I thought it would. The girl who left that hospital wasn't the same one who had entered it less than 10 days ago. She had changed irrevocably and would never return. How could she? She had been forced to abandon not only her firstborn but also the best part of herself - and that was the young girl who was optimistic and hopeful because she had been secure in the belief that she was loved and valued by her family and whose basic human rights were respected by members of the community. Instead, I discovered only too cruelly that I had no rights at all and was just a piece of meat that could be dealt with by anyone in authority in any way they sought fit.

I was then taken to a holiday house at Redcliffe with my two sisters and my elder sister's baby for a short holiday. I rang (...) aunt and left the address where I was staying at Redcliffe and he came to visit me there. We sat on the front steps of the house. I asked him whether he had seen our baby and he said he had stopped at the nurses' station on his way out and asked to see her and had been told to leave or otherwise the police would be called. We just sat there on the steps and just cried.

Over the next couple of months, (...) and I continued seeing each other. It took enormous courage for him to face my father and ask him if it was all right for us to continue going out together. I think my father realised then that we were serious about getting married and began to treat my boyfriend if not with respect, then at least with politeness. Nothing was ever mentioned about my having had a baby though I thought about it all the time and was aware of the pressure to remain silent. I felt anxious and hurt. I couldn't wait to get married and leave home.

(...) and I were engaged on 28 September 1967 and married on 22 June 1968, one year and eight months after our first baby was born. I was four months off turning 20. We moved into the house which had belonged to his grandmother and bought a block of land at Strathpine not long after.

Around the time of our baby's third birthday in 1969, I began having what I now know are panic attacks, though I was told they were paroxysmal atrial tachycardia at the time they occurred. Nothing was mentioned by anyone in the medical profession whom I saw at that time about them being caused by anxiety or stress. I didn't hear the expression "panic attack" until at least the mid-70s and had spent the previous five to six years being ambushed by them on a regular basis.

I fell pregnant in February 1970 and we sold our block of land at Strathpine and bought a house at Albany Creek and moved into it in August 1970. Our second daughter was born in December 1970 - an even-tempered and very good baby who was a joy to raise, though I barely let her out of my sight.

In January 1972, I gave birth to our first son but he died when he was 15 days old. He had been born with esophageal atresia, was operated on immediately after birth and would have survived the operation if he hadn't contracted an infection post-operatively and developed septicaemia. We never had him home from hospital and were devastated by this loss. We had to sell our house at Albany Creek to pay medical bills and moved into a caravan.

In May 1974, I gave birth to another baby girl. She too died at the age of two months without ever having left the hospital. She had multiple defects and, by then, I was mad with grief and sorrow.

I began to drink not long after that and became a problem drinker until I found our first daughter after adoption records were opened in 1991. I stopped abruptly after that.

Over the years, I managed to find employment but was plagued by emotional distress caused by triggers from every direction, so much so that I found it difficult to leave the safety of our home and took extended leave from time to time, mostly around the time of our first daughter's birthday. I felt like such a failure that I ended up resigning before I was eventually dismissed for my prolonged absences.

I sought the assistance of psychiatrists and psychologists many many times over the course of 30 years and spent more than a week in the Winston Noble Unit at Chermside. When questioned, I could never say what was causing my obvious distress. I think I had buried my anger and hurt so deeply that I was incapable of expressing what I felt in any meaningful way. I felt too that there was certain danger with catastrophic consequences if I allowed myself to explore my deepest feelings in any way at all. Besides, the psychiatrists and psychologists I saw during that time seemed to focus only on the death of our two babies and dismiss anything at all to do with adoption other than to say that it was "very sad" but that it was a long time ago and I should move on. No one seemed or, indeed even now, seems to get it. I was initially prescribed Serepax and Valium and sent on my way. Nothing by way of counselling was ever offered even though at that stage, as I have since discovered, there existed ample research to suggest throughout that whole period that women who had "given up a baby" (a fallacious descriptor of the violent and unbelievably cruel acts perpetrated upon mother and child) were in dire need of help.

I soon learned the pointlessness of trying to find understanding or validation from anyone. I took the medication prescribed to me by them all until I was effectively addicted to it only to find that once a doctor suspected my reliance on these

medications, it was withdrawn and I was launched into the trauma of withdrawal and had to deal with that as well. Most of the time, I was forced to resort to pleading for a prescription. Without them, I couldn't cope and lacked the courage to even step outside my home. I only ever hung out my washing in the dark or collected our mail after the sun had gone down. I could drive but only at night time; being someone else's passenger was excruciatingly stressful for me and having to travel on public transport was even worse, so much so that to open the door of a moving train and throw myself out was more preferable than to stay on board. To say that I was all over the place would be an understatement. Indeed, I was hooked to absolutely nothing at all and terrified of where I would fall.

A part of me began to think I was insane, though I knew that other than my anxiety, I was not. I managed to present to the world at large a false self who was, though shy, at least relatively normal. Still there was no help anywhere from anyone other than pills or alcohol. I was the wounded elephant in their living room, bleeding all over their carpets and disintegrating right before the eyes and offered no assistance other than more pills and recriminations for my alcohol consumption.

I found our daughter in 1991 after the records were opened in Queensland. Prior to that, I had registered my details on the National Contact Register which published every year a list of babies taken for adoption and which was displayed in places such as Salvation Army thrift shops and the like, or on shop fronts of other businesses whose proprietors were willing to have the posters placed there. At that stage, I applied only for her amended birth certificate, my rationale being that there was no need to obtain the original since I knew what was on it.

Our "reunion" lasted a period of 15 years. I see no need to reveal any of the details of our relationship over that period in this submission though I am prepared to give evidence of it if the Commission so desires. It is a tale of hurt and betrayal too painful for me to even contemplate putting in writing here.

In 2001, I applied for my daughter's amended birth certificate and her adoption order. I also applied for what were described to me by the Department as "social work records", such as they are. Just looking at those documents was enough to cause me to want to do physical harm to those who had done this to David and me and to our little girl. Even though Ms (...) ((...) had recorded (...) conceivable piece of information to identify our daughter's father, the space where his name was supposed to be was left blank, giving our daughter the impression that I either hadn't even bothered to name him, so intent was I on giving her away to strangers, or that I didn't know who her father is. I know that (...) was devastated by it.

One of the more notable entries on my social work notes though they are nothing more than completed forms, is that the adoptive parents of my daughter took custody of her on 15 November 1966, a fortnight after I had signed the consent and 16 days short of the 30-day revocation period about which I was supposed to be told, but never was.

The extent of Ms (...) ((...) and Ms (...) so-called professional assessment of me based on their interviews was that Ms (...) ((...) noted on the form that she filled out that I was a "nice girl". Apparently Ms (...) agreed and has noted on the form that she filled out that I was a "nice lass". The brevity of their supposed counselling and professional analysis of me and (...) is breathtakingly unprofessional and amounts to no more than a crude pedigree of sorts from which to match information with prospective adopters.

I also discovered at around that time through Origins that up until 1972 (though it could also have been 1974), had (...) and I married, thus legitimating our

daughter, we could apply to the courts to have her returned to us. We married in June 1968.

It was then that I understood perhaps for the first time what the expression "gnashing of teeth" means. I was plunged into a pit of such anguish and rage that I could think of nothing else other than to either have charges brought against them or to sue them in a civil court. I approached a solicitor, from memory, Mr (...) (...) but he told me I had no chance and that a defence of laches would probably be raised in defence of the claim.

What I felt shocked me to such a degree that not long after that, I took up a position overseas and stayed there for nearly nine years. I didn't read a newspaper or watch television in all that time. I wanted to get away from anyone and anything and any place that had played a part in this atrocity.

From time to time, I heard of cases which had been brought to court - most notably those of Dian Wellfare and Lily Arthur from Origins. I began to hope that a legal precedent may be set but both their cases failed. It seemed that not even the judiciary could recognise the crime of unlawful removal of a child and pronounced it to be instead "the mores of the time". One won't find copies of Ms Wellfare's case on any legal reference site anywhere. It has been comprehensively removed from public view.

Hospitals and community service departments all over Australia have had more than ample time to conduct full audits of medical and adoption records since the NSW Health Commission released its directive in 1982. The RBWH has destroyed its medical records and selective flooding has destroyed some pages of social work files held in the same folder and not others. It has always been my impression that any files related to the adoption of children were to be kept in perpetuity.

For each time I felt hopeful that I would be able to bring a case against the State of Queensland, I would find countervailing information or actions had been taken to quash any reasonable expectation that I might be able to. Most, if not all, of the women who have managed to live long enough to even contemplate initiating legal action are so damaged by their experience in hospitals across this country and so hamstrung in their grief, humiliation, depression and trauma disorders that they lack the wherewithal to even begin one and live on the slippery slope of hopelessness and helplessness, knowing full well that the states will bring all of its resources to fight any case brought against it.

In our society, there seems also to be an expectation that all of these women must first indicate that they are not seeking compensation or redress before their plight is taken seriously or seen precisely for what it is - a gross violation of human rights.

(...) died suddenly from a massive heart attack in November 2007 and with him I lost any real hope of being able to fashion a life for ourselves out of the rubble and devastation of what had been done to us all those years ago. He was my only solace throughout our life together and he never once disappointed me. We had been married for nearly 40 years and I love him as much now as I did the day I met him when I was 16 years old. I don't think I will ever be able to forgive those who stole from us the life that we could reasonably have expected to live had they simply done their job. Even if our life had been more blighted than what it has been, we at least would have been able to face it unencumbered by this irresolvable damage.

I doubt that those who did this to (...) and me and our firstborn could ever offer anything by way of apology. To try to forgive would be just another burden I have to carry along with everything else. They have to beg for their Maker's forgiveness,

not mine. They have been afforded the opportunity to live their lives with an honour that they do not deserve, while women like me were kicked to the kerb and left there with nothing.

It seems to me that people who could do such a thing in the first place would be incapable of genuine remorse otherwise they would have been relentless in their desire to track us down over the ensuing 46 years to try to right a gross wrong. I would only ever be satisfied by a full and genuine apology, an acknowledgement of the offence and the harm caused, a full admission of responsibility without justification or excuses and an offer to make reparation.

This submission has taken me almost three months to write and has been the source of much distress and anguish. Having to relive this to the degree that would enable me to put my experience down in words, has almost been worse than having to go through it in the first place. At least when I was 18, I had no idea of what was ahead of us and was, to a certain extent, oblivious to the train wreck that our lives would turn out to become.

To this day, I still cannot tolerate the sound of the step-click of high-heeled shoes without a leap of fear in my chest, nor being handed a pen by someone else to sign a document without the feeling that I am about to sign my own death warrant.

I apologise to the Commission for the length of this submission and it being somewhat erratic in some places, but throughout the whole time I was writing it I was cognisant of the need to relate as much as I could remember. Every word of it is the truth and every feeling is a true and accurate representation of what I felt and saw and heard all those years ago.

I find myself daring to hope for the first time in a very very long time.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret McGrath