

25th November 2004

The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

To Whom It May Concern

RE: INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE

My name is Christine Adams my mother Carol Adams was brought up in institutions as a State Ward. When I was very young I did not know the details of her childhood as it was never common knowledge or spoken about to us. However I always felt something out of the ordinary had happened to my mum.

I can't remember how old I was when I became aware that my mum had a brother. My mum was not an open person at all about her past or even about anything at all, she has always been and still is very protective of herself, her feelings and emotions. It was not very often that I saw any emotion from my mother other than angry, she seemed to be angry all the time expecting so very much from herself. It was as if she has spent her life trying to prove herself, but I still to this day do not know who's approval she seeks and I truly doubt that she would ever feel that the hole will ever be filled. This is a fact that I have known for a very long time about my mother and I can not explain to you how it feels to be an observer of the person you have known your whole life never be free from past constraints, regardless of how much they mean to you, how many times you say mum I love you, mum you have done a fantastic job the void is still there, something has been missing from my mothers life since I can first ever remember. I know this because I feel it and It makes me so upset and resentful towards the person and people that took something from my mother a very long time ago and of course this has affected my life. I am now 33 years old, I have been and still am directly affected by the way my mother was treated when she was younger.

When I was 15 years old I fell pregnant, I did not know I was pregnant and could not possibly imagine for the life of me that I was, so I suppose I ignored it. When I was about 5 and a half months pregnant my mother took me to the doctors and at which time my mother and I found out I was infact pregnant.

This is the earliest memory I can think of that my mothers mistreatment as a child really affected my life. I was pregnant and 15 years old, my mother was still dealing with past constraints and always striving for acceptance and a feeling of not being good enough, I felt like a disappointment to my family and I was trying desperately to make up for what I had done. It was decided that the best thing would be to adopt this unborn baby out. It was decided that I would stay home and hide in the house until the baby was born, we told everyone that I was visiting an aunty and told no-one that I was actually in the house.

I kept going to school until my pregnancy became too obvious to hide. After that I stayed home by myself everyday, It seemed like a lifetime even thinking about it 17 years later it was absolutely horrible. I was upset with the situation but did not want to cause my mother to feel like she was doing something wrong, I was so scared about what was going to happen, whenever anyone came to the house I would go to the laundry and hide this was horrible. I feel this happened because of the constraints upon my mother and her tunnel vision to do well and be accepted, it just always felt like everything was trying to prove a point. We never talked about my pregnancy no-one asked how I felt about it but I knew I had upset my mother and caused her more grief. This situation would have always been hard to deal with for any family, however I still believe to this day that without the emotional and physical abuse that my mother was subjected to as a child my situation would not have been so horrific for us all. My mother was constantly told as a child that she was no good, she would never amount to anything I feel I was a victim of those haunting words my whole life.

As time passed I became more aware of the department of youth and community services and I wanted nothing to do with them and certainly I did not want my baby to have anything to do with them. My mother worked out that we could do a special type of adoption which would not involve the department that we hated so much. I saw the department of youth and community services as very bad people that hurt my mother and made her so angry. What followed from the pregnancy was a huge court case with the department of youth and community services which just enforced my hatred for them even more, now it had been proven to me that they were horrible. During this case I watched some people that were in charge of my mother when she was in the governments care laugh and snigger to her in her face, I found out more and more about the events of her childhood. Buy this time I felt responsible for bringing up all this stuff and putting my mother through facing these people, issues and her remembering things that happened.

I decided at this time in my life that I was bad, I caused my mother so much upset and I hurt people that I love. I learnt more and more about the department and government institutions how they treat children in there care, adults and anyone. It is like they have a power that can not be reckoned with and are never held accountable for what they do not even as a government institute. During our case with my daughter I watched people that worked for the department blatantly lie on the stand, hire professional people to give false statements about me and laugh at me while I was on the stand. That's when I became aware in my life at how horrible people can be and I resigned myself to the fact that you can not take on government departments because they just don't care, and they didn't care about my mother, my daughter or me a 16 year old girl that they put on the witness stand and asked to spell adoption to prove a point that I was dumb and could not look after a child. I felt responsible for upsetting my mother and knew she was put through so many things as a child many things I am sure that to this day I do not know about but I know about the affect that It has had on me, my brothers, my sister and my dad.

My mother has a brother, she was told that he was dead when she was younger and one day learnt that he was alive. I remember the day she found out he was alive, she came home so happy, but yet so angry for having been lied to about his death and even told where it happened how it happened. It was like my mother was on a constant rollercoaster being up when given a little hope and being so down at other times, however there were not many up times mostly down and I remember them being very often. My mother always wanted some family of her own. It is a basic requirement for every human being to know about their relatives, especially since my mother remembers her brother from a young age, it is like she has been on a search forever to be re-encountered with him, something of her own, someone to understand and someone for her to protect and love. The fact that a representative from the department told my mother her brother was dead.... I still get so angry and upset about this, it is like these people are playing God, but not for the greater good. The path of destruction they have created has to be accountable for, the upset and trauma inflicted upon people's lives is almost unbelievable someone must be held accountable.

I remember the day my mother met her brother, I remember it so well, I can in all honesty say that I have never seen my mother so touched and moved in the way she was when she came home that day. I was so happy to see her like this, she placed her arms around her chest, and my mother was hugging herself smiling. I was just standing there smiling at how happy she was, thinking wow this is my mum. I was so happy but in the next instance so sad about this because she had not really accepted love from anyone else in her search for her brother, I was so sad for my mum, because I could not image a life without acceptance of love even from your children, because you are so busy trying to prove yourself to everyone else. My point here is that if my mother had not been subjected to all the irreparable damage when she was younger she may not have been so distracted in her life trying to fill a void that could never be filled.

Then when my mother's brother didn't wish to pursue a relationship with her it really affected my mum badly. I can only think that for someone that spent their life trying to prove that they were good enough to everyone even through her children and then the rejection of her brother was just too much for her to bear. It was at that point my mother went into a very deep depression that lasted a few years. I could not speak to her about anything, she was always distant and it was as if she wasn't even there for a long time. It was very frustrating for me to watch her go through this I was so upset for her. And so angry at the people I felt responsible for stripping me of my mother for so long.

The above experiences have always made me feel that the mistreatment of my mother when she was a state ward and in the care and supervision of the Australian government institute affected me and my relationship with my mother. The people that inflicted damage onto my mother at a young age have directly affected my ability to trust and accept love from people but the most recent and most impact on my life happened within the last two years when my mother fell terribly ill.

In my early 30's I started to open up and talk to my mother in a way that I had never done before. I started to tell her about things that happened, that caused me huge amounts of upset in my life and I even told her about the resentment that had I build towards her for always seeming distant and pre occupied. I told her that I knew she loved me and told her about the experiences in previous years that I made mean that she didn't care for me. I dug up my own feelings of my pregnancy and told her how certain things made me feel at the time. These many talks I had with my mum didn't always go well but after the months of talking about feelings (which was something we had never done) I felt a bond with my mother that I never dreamed possible before. I explained how past constraints affected the way she parented me and when I was pregnant how I felt about her reaction. There were many tears in the many conversations we had and some laughter too. I told my mother that while I was growing up I felt I could not speak to her and always wanted to live into her world of being good enough. I can not tell you how much of a relief it was to me at that time to have an open, honest and loving relationship with my mother. I was so happy. I began to open up and tell her anything. I began to see a different side of my mother I began to develop a friendship with her I was so happy and started to see a side of her that I had never experienced before. I found out at that time that my mother was so hard and strong with me because she wanted me to be as strong as her and always do my best despite the challenges put in front of you. I truly believe that that was the first time in my life I really felt loved and accepted by my mother. This was a turning point in my life and the start of a new relationship with my mother, little did I know that it would be very short lived. I did not know that just when we were getting past the some deep rooted emotion burdens my mother's quality of life was about to be decreased due to physical abuse she suffered while in the care of Institutions.

Mum was never really in great health with the abuse that was inflicted when she was younger her bones had suffered over the years due to malnutrition and violence inflicted upon her and her back has always giving her a lot of pain.

About 2 years ago now my mother fell gravely ill. She was very unfortunate to fall so ill from an infection. It was so scary, she did not recognise me at all, I just kept thinking please don't take my mum, I only I have known her for such a short time. It was the second day in intensive care, they still did not know what was wrong with her but we knew it was very bad. On the 3rd day she was in intensive care the doctors discovered what was wrong, an infection that has taken over her body, it started attacking her heart valve and from there spread. Mum was in extreme pain, calling out, asking for water and her skin was boiling hot to touch, and her teeth were bleeding from dehydration. Just before they were going to transfer her from Auburn hospital to Westmead she pulled me down to her face and asked me to let her go. I will never forget this moment as long as I live, I felt so helpless and so mad, I was mad because in the last few months I got to see a side of my mother that I had never experienced before. I knew in my heart that this sickness was somehow connected to the miss treatment she experience when she was younger and I felt ripped off. Why should some one have to bear so much pain and suffering because of something they had no control over and undeservingly be the victim of so much hatred and then live with the damage inflicted for their whole life.

Months passed and mum was in the high dependency ward at Westmead hospital. As I learnt more and more about her condition, I knew she was facing major heart surgery but just hoped she her body would give the treatment a chance to work so she could have the surgery. I slept at the hospital for many nights rubbing mums back, feeling helpless. The sudden onsets of pain were so bad; I remember feeling so angry that my mum had to go through this. I felt that my mum was ripped off from so many things in her life and this was just one more not fair thing that has happened. I would lie there in the hospital bed next to her, looking at her and thinking constantly this just is not fair, I really feel like my mothers life has been one fight after another, she fought for herself while in institutions, from dominating employees that prayed upon the young girls in there care with no-where else to go, no one to turn to. When mum was seeing a specialist one day he turned to her and asked if she had ever been dropped from a height when she was younger or abused as you could see in her back the very distinct damage that was done. Mum fought against the department when my daughter was born against the same dominating people who used there positions for power, she spent a lifetime trying to prove herself good enough, and now at the age of 53 she is fighting again but now for her life... it really felt like a war at times. Her sickness went on for months and months, mum died about 4 times and just when she was making great recovery we received the news that the infection had hid in her spine. This particular grade of infection searches the body for a weak point and as a direct result from being physically bashed her spine was crushed so that was the next battle.

Mum is out of hospital today and living life to the best of her capabilities, before this illness took over she held down a great job, I have always felt that mum used that job and her position to prove to herself that infact she was good enough. The impact of my mothers illness has effected the quality of life my mother has. The extent of her illness is directly linked to the abuse endured while in the governments care, I feel resentful towards the government institutions that were responsible for my mothers well being at a young age and I am sick to the pit of my stomach that no-one has ever been made responsible for there actions. If I treated a dog in the way my mother was treated I would be charged in a court of law but yet somehow if you work for the government you are not held accountable for your actions even inflicted on human being and even when they are against the law.

I am 33 years old, I have watched my mother who is actually the strongest person I have ever known struggle emotionally, mentally and physically her whole life, it feels like one battle after another. I feel ripped off that just when I started a great friendship with my mother after breaking through past constraints I can not experience life with her as would have been possible if she was well. There is no secret that my mother is not a well lady, she stays with me from time to time and I see the pain that she endures every day. It was very unlucky that she picked up an infection but it was not either good or bad luck that created the severity of her condition today it is a direct result of miss treatment and abuse endured at a young age at the hand of the Australian Government.

I blame the Australian Government, I blame the authorities put into place to prevent child abuse for not doing their job. My mother was so damaged that she was incapable of giving or receiving love for my childhood. When I finally began to have the best of my mother it was then that the damage caused when she was younger again took hold and has hindered my ability to have a fulfilling relationship with my mother.

Mum is now 57 years old, her working career is over, her quality of life is minimal and her life expectancy cut very short, all at the hand of government authorities and the bodies employed by them to care and protect for the young.

There is no doubt whatsoever medically of the relation between the abuse suffered by my mother and her medical condition today, there is no getting any better than she is now... Please hold someone or something accountable for the damage inflicted, many lives have been affected by the neglect and abuse inflicted upon my mother while in the care of Government authorities that were responsible for the wellbeing of my mother. Some justice is well overdue.

Regards

CHRISTINE ADAMS