

My submission for the: Senate Community Affairs Committee
Forced Adoption Inquiry

My name is Juanna Fatouros In 1968 at the age of 15 I became pregnant still at school and very frightened I kept this secret for more than 3 months, my family is of Greek origin and my father had left his family in 1965 which left my mother to raise her 2 daughters on her own, upon learning of my pregnancy she sort help from a friend at work the name of a doctor to perform an illegal abortion, this doctor told her I was too far along in the pregnancy and it would be very dangerous, my mother felt great shame and didn't want either her or my fathers family to find out, I spent those early months hidden away. Later in my pregnancy (5th or 6th month) I started to bleed and was taken to hospital I don't remember seeing a doctor only a nurse who told me if wanted to lose my baby all I had to do was jump in and out of bed several times. I remember to this day the feeling of shock at this suggestion and lay in that bed holding my stomach and not moving feeling so scared and alone....

On the May 1969 I gave birth, the labour was very long all I remember is my screams and a nurse telling me I was squeezing her hand to hard and hurting her and to stop screaming ... My baby was immediately taken away. When I pressed a nurse to at least tell me if my baby was a boy or girl she whispered to me she was a very beautiful healthy girl. Because I had had stitches it was very difficult for me to walk but I managed to get out of bed and walk to the nursery seeing all the babies with their full names finding mine with the label I remember how painful that image struck me... I don't remember seeing anyone during my stay in hospital except an elderly aunt of my mothers who sat for a short time holding my hand....

When I became well enough I was quickly sent overseas with my sister to visit our father, I was always convinced that the timing of this trip was to make sure I was out of the country and unable to change my mind about the adoption. Returning to Australia now aged 16 I left home and began working. My mother & I never again discussed my child and we were estranged for more that 40 years. My father maintains he was never told about the birth.....

I spent many years overseas finding it too difficult to settle again in Melbourne, I married twice and was unable to have children suffering many miscarriages and one ectopic pregnancy most of my adult life was spent battling drug and alcohol problems fighting the memories of the experience.

Finally in 1996 putting the past behind me feeling strong and positive about the future I returned home..

My daughter had begun her search for me on her 30th birthday in 1999, she had traced my whereabouts and phone number and it came as a great shock to hear her voice I had had no warning, once again those memories resurfaced again. We met many times but it always involved her family and it all became too much for me, ten years later we are trying again.

Reading the article in The Age with the headline "The trauma of forced adoption for shamed mothers" I finally felt someone is listening nobody had ever asked about the trauma the mothers had been put through. Hopefully through your enquiry someone will ask me after 42 years "are you OK is there something we can do to help."

This submission to the committee I regard NOT confidential

Miss Juanna Fatouros