Senate Inquiry into
"Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices."

Preamble to Submission

I, , am a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia resident in the State of N.S.W.

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 the 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

Firstly, I would like to say that even after 37 years, it is makes me ill to think about the traumatic events of my teenage years and even to write them down makes me ill.

I became pregnant at the age of 14 in 1970, and was unaware that I was pregnant until I was about 5 months pregnant as I had no symptoms of pregnancy in the early months and I was hardly showing any signs of a baby bump. I was a frightened and naive teenager, and eventually was 6 months pregnant before I told my parents. I was a quiet girl and very depressed about my situation. When I said to my baby's father that I would have to tell my parents, he said, "Well you can't tell them it was me because I will go to jail and then I can't become a lawyer". So I was forced to make up a story to cover up for him. Before I told my parents, I had a myriad of thoughts. I was depressed, frightened, and daydreaming about pushing her in a stroller for a walk near my home. I felt that my baby was a girl and I named her. When I was in English class at school we were asked to do an essay of our own choice topic so I wrote my own story about a pregnant teenager who was thinking in the night about her baby and what she should do. The last line of the story was "she decided to keep her baby". Looking back on it, it was a cry for help. I am surprised that the teacher did not ask me if I was pregnant. I also thought about running away to Queensland to have my baby but I did not have any money. I did not know about any places I could go for help or counselling. I did not know that there were refuges for unmarried mothers. In my darkest moment, I jumped off the balcony at our home in an attempt to kill myself. Fortunately, I landed on my feet and I think I broke a bone in my foot. But luckily, nothing happened to my baby. After that, I decided I didn't want to die.

Although we lived in Sydney, my parents decided that my mother would take me to Adelaide South Australia, where they originally came from, for the rest of my confinement until my baby was born.

After we arrived in Adelaide we went to see a Doctor (who examined me monthly until the birth), and then we went to the seaside town of Victor Harbour to stay until closer to the birth until we went back to Adelaide. We went up once on the bus to Adelaide for my appointment to see the doctor and then, after I fell in the bath and had a pain, we moved to Adelaide sooner than planned. My mother was a stiff upper lip sort of woman and did not give me any emotional support or counselling. I am sure that she thought she was doing the right thing for all concerned. I think my doctor and my mother decided that my baby would be placed for adoption as they discussed it without me in the room. At that time, and before the 1970's it was well documented that the medical profession's view of unwed mothers was that "in all cases the child should be adopted" Dr Lawson 1958. I did not know that I had a choice in the matter. I do not remember signing anything before I had my baby. I was not told anything by the doctor or my mother about child birth. The doctor decided to break my water to bring on the labour which was done on the morning of

I was admitted to the hospital in Adelaide (I did not know the name of the hospital), the day before the induction, and taken to a private room. The nurses did not speak to me but 4 of them came in the room to stare at me. The next morning my water was broken by the doctor and as the labour progressed, I was given an injection in my buttock which made me so groggy that I could not keep my eyes open. To this day, I regularly suffer from needle pain in the site of where I was injected with the needle as the nurse must have hit a nerve when she did it. My mother had been told (by the nurse) to come to the hospital in the afternoon as it would take a long time. So I was left in a small room on my own. I didn't know what was going to happen at the birth but I wanted to ask what the time was at the time she was born. I felt that was important to know.

I after the injection I was almost unconscious. After a long time, I heard my mother come back and I was lying on the bed unable to talk or move or open my eyes. I felt I was being given another injection. I felt a big urge to push and thought I just needed to go to the toilet but I could not get off the bed, and I could not stop the urge to push. I heard the nurse come in and felt that my bed was being wheeled somewhere else. I felt my baby come out but did not hear her cry. I asked what the time was even though I could barely speak and held my arm up to my face to read the time on my watch but I could not open my eyes properly or read the face. Someone told me it was 2.10pm. I blacked out and later felt that I was being wheeled somewhere. I was woken up in a room in the evening and I could hardly get my eyes open. Then I slept to the next morning. My baby had been taken away somewhere and I did not know whether she was a boy or a girl. I did not hear her cry. I did not know that I could ask to see her. No one asked me if I would like to see her. I was very depressed and could not talk. No one spoke to me at the hospital. When the nurses came in to see me, they did not speak to me. I was not asked any questions or given any counselling.

After a few days my mother took me to Glenelg to the seaside to recover in a little hotel. I was very weak. She did not speak to me about the birth and I was unable to talk. I could not cry. Only 2 tears, one in each eye came out. (later, when I was in my 20's and went to get contact lenses, the optometrist said to me " you poor girl, you have no tears in your eyes". I knew it was because I had done a terrible thing to sign the adoption paper but I was not given a choice.)

After about a week my mother took me to a building in the city and we sat in a room waiting for a lady. She was a nun and she had some papers with her. My heart started to pound as I thought that

maybe I could read something on the papers about my baby. I did not know that I could ask for information or see my baby. The nun asked me questions but I could not speak. This is documented in the adoption interview. So she asked the questions to my mother. Then my mother asked her should we give a false name on the adoption records and she said yes that is a good idea.

I was very upset to see on the adoption papers recently the record of the interview with this nun. She had lied about that fact that she had said to us that it was a good idea to use a false name on the records. She had, in fact, written that she suspected that the birth mother name on the documents was false. She knew it was false and recommended it to be done. She said it was best for my baby.

She showed me the document which I now know to be "Request to make arrangements for the adoption of a child where some or all identities are not to be disclosed" and said "read this and sign here" (on the second page). It said on the second page that I could never contact my child again. I felt that I had no choice but to sign it as she had said that it was best for my baby. I did not know that I had a choice. I did not know that I had rights to keep my baby. I was in shock and still could not speak. I do not remember reading that on the page before I signed, it said that I have 30 days to change my mind. I looked at the page but I was so distressed that I could not read properly.

The nun said that my baby should not be brought up as a Jehovah's Witness. All my baby's father's information on the Adoption report form was made up by the nun and my mother.

At the end of the interview she said, is there anything you would like to say. I was only able to say "I want my baby to be loved". I did not know that as I was an underage minor, I was not legally able to sign any legal documents. I was not given any copies of the documents that I signed. I was not given the chance to go away with information and the documents or give counselling as to the affect of my baby being taken away would have on my life. I was told it was best for my baby.

So all my life I have cried on the inside for the loss of my baby. I was introverted and just studied and finished my schooling. I knew that I could never contact my child. I grieved every day of my life and was unable to get counselling because I was unable to speak to anyone about it. In signing the papers, I felt I had done something really terrible. I did not have the mind of an adult. I was a very frightened girl of 15 ¼ years old. It was indescribably traumatic.

I thought about my child every day of my life and wondered where he/she was. I would have made a good mother as I had had experience at the age of 11 in babysitting my niece who was 6 months old at the time. I gave her a bath on my own and changed her nappies myself. I was responsible with her and handled her very carefully.

As an adult, I became a workaholic because the only way I could cope with my grief was to work to keep myself busy at all times. I was unable to trust people and became insular. I had 3 failed marriages and 3 children from those marriages. I wished that I could use the word "darling" in intimate situations but I could not speak the word. I survived through life by working. I was restless and moved 16 times on 10 years. I have been chronically depressed all my life and unable to speak about what happened so I could not get counselling.

The moment that changed my life came last year in 2010 and I was a witness to a car accident and had to give a statement to a nice policewoman at the scene. She was so nice that I realised that if I couldn't speak about my baby then I could write it down. So I wrote down what happened when I

was 14-15 years old and I cried uncontrollably and was shaking while I typed it. I gave it to my husband and he cried and he gave me my first hug in comfort for the loss of my baby. I had written that I was never legally allowed to contact my child. I also knew that I could never legally prove that I had had a child because of the false name give on the adoption papers.

Fortunately, my husband decided to try to find out any information he could on the internet. We had very little information, just the date of my baby's birth and the time he or she was born. I did not know that the Adoption law was changed to allow access to records in 1991. Within 15 minutes he was speaking with the Department of Families in South Australia and told them my circumstances and they said that even though I could not legally prove that I was the girl who signed my baby's adoption papers, they would find the documents and release the information to me.

We waited 2 months for the information and then we got the unbelievable news that I had had a girl. My daughter and I were reunited soon after. It has been difficult for her as she could not understand why it took me so long to find her. After we found her, I have still not been able to get over my grief. I grieved for the fact that the adoption records showed that the hospital staff named my baby and I did not know that I had the right to name her. I started counselling sessions but had to give up, as talking about it made me physically ill. Even when I write down what happened to me and my baby, my skin crawls and I get a migraine headache and have to have 2 days off work to recover myself. I still cannot talk about my trauma.

It is clear that the adoption of my baby was illegal for at least four reasons:

Firstly, being an underage minor of 15 years old at the time of my baby's birth, I could not have legally give consent to **any** legally binding document.

Secondly, I was not informed of my legal rights. I was not told that I should have been informed that I should seek independent legal advice as to my baby's rights, and my rights. I was not told that I could have had welfare assistance to keep my baby. I was not told that I had the right to keep my baby.

Thirdly, the Government had a duty of care to make sure that I was fully informed of my rights and my child's rights and that I had received counselling. At the very least I had the right to have my baby placed in foster care and that I would have been given access to visit her and that I was entitled to a pension and housing from the Government.

Fourthly, the Adoption papers were knowingly falsified by a government official, thus making them null and void. This stopped my daughter from finding when she was 18 years old and she then had to wait another 20 years to be found.

In conclusion, both myself and my child should be given compensation and free access to counselling for a lifetime of grief and silent suffering.