Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices: submission

So much is assumed about adoptions – all of it wrong. Some assumptions are:

The child benefits
The relinquishing mother benefits
The adoptive family benefits
Siblings from birth and adoptive families benefit
The adopted child is a good person
The adopted child respects all the members of the adoptive family
The adopted child does not harm the adoptive family
Etc etc.

There is nothing true in any of those statements. There is an unwritten rule in society that you cannot criticise adoption. You can only say supportive things about it. In my experience it is the most socially destructive practice. It destroys the birth mother and the birth families (both mothers and fathers); it destroys the adoptive families and it brings out the worst in the adopted person.

I often travel from Toowoomba to Brisbane and during that trip I pass a big billboard that says:

Hurt by Abortion?
Phone xxxxxxxx for help

Every time I see it I want to change it to:

Hurt by Adoption?
Phone xxxxxxxxx for help

This is my story…….

This month I will turn 58. During those 58 years I never received a hug or kind word from my mother. My mother never made eye contact with me. I was treated as trash – as though I had no right to exist. I was not adopted, but I suffered because of adoption. I am my mother's first baby, her eldest daughter. While my mother was pregnant with me she 'adopted' another woman's baby. The birth mother named the child (...) my mother called the child (...) and now I only ever refer to this baby as 'that other woman's child'.

My mother came from a socially prominent family. There were a lot of medical practitioners in her immediate and extended family. My mother had a couple of miscarriages and following this, a family friend – (...) gave my mother another woman's baby which she had delivered. I do not know if the baby was taken forcibly or not.

I was a placenta praevia and because of some bleeding, my mother had to spend the last few weeks of her pregnancy in hospital. This made my mother really angry because someone else was looking after 'her' baby (the adopted baby). I was born by caesarian section and when I was shown to my mother for the first time, she decided that I was revolting and promptly told the nurses to 'Take her away!' On the day I was born, my mother was angry with me. She blamed me for taking her away from 'her' baby. Mother went on to have a second daughter who was born 20 months after me. My mother thought that her second baby was beautiful.

My relationship with my mother never improved. My mother never looked at me, she never spoke kindly to me, she never considered me. She couldn't even say my name without a tone of contempt. An example of how I was treated: as a very young child attempting to learn to speak, my mother would ridicule my efforts and turn away from me in disgust. That other woman's child continued the abuse by telling me that I should never speak, that I had a horrible voice and no one wanted to hear it. I grew up mute and no one cared. The other woman's child made life an absolute misery for me - tormenting me both physically and mentally throughout my childhood and adult life.

As a result of the continuous and ongoing rejection I began to silently cry. From the age of about 9 – 10 years I would lie on my bed on the weekends and just cry silently. No one came near me and no one cared. I suspect that this is what is now called childhood depression.

I last spoke to my mother about two weeks before her death. I had always harboured a hope that she would acknowledge what happened and perhaps apologise to me before she died. It never happened.

Throughout my childhood I had very little contact with my sister. I was always pushed away from her by my mother and the other woman's daughter. I always wanted a close relationship with my sister. Unfortunately she was being groomed to be a sister to the other woman's child instead of her own sister.

My mother died in November 2010. My sister and the other woman's child took control of the funeral and everything else. I was excluded. I found out about the funeral in the newspaper and I decided to attend so that I could put some sort of closure on the whole tragic experience. When I arrived at the funeral I saw two coffins. I was in an extremely distressed state and couldn't understand what I was seeing. A stranger told me that my Uncle (my mother's brother) had also died. I sat towards the back of the room and had to endure listening to my aunt (my mother's twin) speak in glowing terms about her sister, her brother, my sister and that other woman's child. I was not mentioned. I also had to endure my sister and that other woman's child stand up on the stage with their arms around each other and talk in glowing terms about my mother. I was not mentioned. They stood there as a first born and a second born. Unfortunately one was a first born in another family and the second born was my sister and I was sitting at the back. I made eye contact with everybody as they spoke. I was the only person in the room who looked

most like my mother yet nobody recognised me. I don't think I will ever recover from what happened on that day. That other woman's child had stolen my family, my life, my identity. She had destroyed me completely. I did not exist.

What makes me very angry is that the parents of that other child have never introduced themselves to my family, have never cared about the effect their child had on my family, and therefore never took any action to repair the damage that they caused to innocent lives. I think the birth mother had continuing contact with (...) who delivered her child) because each year that other woman's child would receive a special birthday present that came from (...) . It would have been very easy to contact our family before (...) died. It would have been very easy for (...) to give identifying information to my family before she died - but she didn't.

Because of the trauma caused by the 'adoption' I took the following actions in 2010.

At the beginning of 2010 I contacted the Post Adoption Support Service in Queensland. They advertise counselling for everyone affected by adoption. They recorded my details and story and told me that a counsellor would be allocated to me and that the counsellor would contact me. I have never been contacted by a counsellor. I guess my case was too hard for them. It's a taboo area.

At the beginning of 2010 I found out about the Queensland Government's Right To Information Act 2009. For a long time I had tried to find out more about the adoption from my mother and other sources. No one would give me any information so following the procedures set out in the Act, I applied for any information or any documentation that would prove that my parents had adopted a baby born in 1952. They contacted me a few times during the search to be sure of the details. Eventually they confirmed by phone and letter that there was no document or record which showed that my parents had ever adopted a baby. They assured me that if an adoption had taken place, there would be a record (e.g. the Adopted Children's Register). My parents had never adopted a baby and I had no further information about the identity of that other woman's child who had traumatised my life.

Following my mother's death on 12 November 2010 I visited a psychologist for the first time. Before I answered his questions, I needed him to answer two questions:

If a woman adopts a child when she is pregnant with her own baby what happens to that family? The answer was: One of only two things can happen. Either the mother will reject the adopted child or the mother will reject her own baby. There is no third option. If the mother rejects the adopted child, the child will suffer a bit but as the child was always a part of another family, the child will always have her true identity and will be able to reunite with her true family. If the mother rejects her own baby, that baby will be abused. The adopted child will join in the abuse of the baby. The adopted child will take the place of the natural child in the family. The adopted child will take the identity of the

natural child in the family. The natural child will be invisible in her own family. The natural child will be an orphan in her own family.

If a child experiences mental and emotional abuse throughout her childhood, what happens to that child when she becomes an adult? The answer was: That child will be damaged and remain damaged for the remainder of its life.

That was the first time anyone had ever acknowledged what happened to me. It can't heal me, it can't return my family, but at least I don't feel crazy any more. I despise my mother. And I despise that other woman's child. She was nothing but a parasite in my family. She was the Cuckoo bird. Do you know about Cuckoo birds?

(...)

11 January 2011