The Collective Consciousness of Society: 1945-1985
The Crimes Against Unmarried Mothers

From the end of WWII until approximately 1985 in Canada, Australia, the UK and the United States among others, a phenomena took place which is being called by some the "Baby Scoop Era" 1. ...the mothers of that time being known as "BSE Mothers".

During WWII, women in allied countries "held the fort" while the men went off to fight. Women drove trucks, worked in steel plants and much more, some simultaneously caring for home and children. After the war during the 1950's the ideal woman in the Commonwealth worked in the home as a "housewife" or "homemaker". Social conventions of the time argued that "women's most basic satisfaction came through service to others in the domestic sphere"2. After both world wars, it became the social duty of women to provide offspring to "re-populate". The arrival of Displaced Persons, War Brides, and others added to the theory that the economy and the social fabric of society depended on the creation of families and women being in the home to nurture those families. Soldiers wanted their jobs back and so the women returned to home and motherhood. In Commonwealth countries, the Royal Family with a new youthful monarch in Elizabeth II and her devotion to "family life" was also to become an ideal to emulate. Birth rates increased dramatically now known as the "Baby Boomers".

With the increase of car purchases, the ability to live further from the core of the city became easier and suburbs were created. Women took on the task of creating and nurturing family life in those suburbs while men took on the role of provider. Everything in society supported this model including advertising, television programs, books, magazines and other media. Church attendance and enrollment in Church Schools was at an all time high and the morality of the neighbourhood was closely watched and enforced by the women in these suburban homes.

It was in this setting, in this Collective Consciousness of how post war life should be - that some of the most horrific acts of society took place. Mostly in secret and hidden from public view even until today, the human rights violations against the unmarried mother have never been talked about, or acknowledged.

Unmarried pregnant youth and women were a blight on this ideal of society. These women had "broken the rules" of motherhood and sexuality. The social stigma attached to an unmarried girl who was pregnant during this period cannot be understated. She was in severe violation of what was expected by the norm of society.

Sometime before WWII, these women were viewed as "Fallen Women" and their children as "Bastards". Society scorned both mother and child legally and socially and they were encouraged to stay together in their misery and ostracism. After WWII, a new theory emerged with the growing professionalization of Social Work and Psychiatry. "Appointing themselves the new experts, social workers sought to claim the field of illegitimacy as their proper domain".3 The deviant mother was no longer considered to be "feeble minded" or "morally unredeemable", instead she was ill. The idea emerged that the mother could be rehabilitated by keeping the pregnancy a secret, relinquishing her child for adoption and returning to society to fulfill her role as "bride, coquette and co-ed"4 and eventual "real mother". "This procedure...is based on the concept that the baby is a symbol, without actual reality to the mother"5 The child would be given to infertile couples to raise "as if born to" which would help them in their quest for the ideal. In a mother driven society this became a social experiment which destroyed hundreds of thousands of lives.

This simplistic idea seemed to solve everyone's problems:

The unmarried mother would forget about her child and be transformed from an aberration of society to a respectable and marriageable woman once again. She would have learned the lesson of her crime and pay her debt to society by her punishment which included harsh and inhumane treatment designed to teach her not to duplicate her behaviour, and the loss of her child to adoption. A harsh punishment indeed. Dr. Marion Hilliard of Women's College Hospital stated that "When she renounces her child for its own good, the unwed mother has learned a lot. She has learned to pay the price of her misdemeanour and this alone, if punishment is needed, is punishment enough."6

The deserving woman, the revered woman, the moral woman, the woman who had not broken the rules and by no fault of her own was infertile, would receive "the gift" of a child to carry on the ideal - perhaps in those very suburbs. The child would be considered "as if born to" with records altered and sealed, perpetuating the myth and denying the child their right to know its origins. These records were sealed for the Adopter's peace of mind, and not to protect the child's mother as governments would later attest. These desperate women would live out the adoption myth believing the children were theirs, the truth being far too precarious to think about.

Society would go back to normal, with a newly redeemed women in place to continue on to perpetuate the ideals of motherhood and a new Adoptive Mother to do the same. All was well in the suburbs. But was it?

This "method" was endorsed by all aspects of society and each segment of society **met the terms.**

Religions **met the terms** by the creation "Homes for Unwed Mothers", "Magdalene Laundries",7 and "Reform Institutions for Wayward Girls" among others to house the deviant mothers and to "redeem" their souls thereby transforming them from Magdelenes to Marys. In these homes young women en masse were required to change their names and wear apparel provided by the institution. Their movements and communications were restricted, mail censored, telephone access and visitors restricted, particularly male visitors (to discourage the fathers of their children from being involved). In these institutions they were subjected to physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional abuse. Their self esteem was systemically eroded. Their ability to parent was ridiculed and undermined at every turn so as to make them believe that their baby "would be better off" with others. These young women were required to attend religious services daily, labelled "sinners", some even baptized with disinfectant to illustrate their "dirtiness". They were told repeatedly their only way to redemption was in the relinquishment of their child. They would become a martyr to their sin, and their child the price of their martyrdom. The coercive nature of these institutions to force a mother to surrender her child cannot be overstated. These institutions provided little if any information about labour and delivery. Young women were routinely left alone at hospital admission with no knowledge or support through labour and delivery rendering them terrified and traumatized. The entire "procedure" was designed to groom the inmates for adoption and to make the experience so terrible that they never returned. It was also designed to make it easier to obtain signatures from terrified, traumatized, medicated, young women. Most of these institutions were either wholly or partially financed by the government.

The Medical Profession **met the terms** by keeping mothers separate from married mothers in hospitals, by restraining mothers on delivery tables, by taking babies away their mothers while still in the primal act of birth, still in labour, bound, awaiting the expulsion of the placenta (culminating in a violent trauma to the female psyche from which no mother is able to recover)8, by preventing eye contact between baby and mother, by preventing lactation by the use of cancer causing medications, by sedating and drugging mothers, and by denying mothers free access to their own babies by having babies removed to remote locations, by trading live babies with stillborns.

Governments **met the terms** with Social Workers who denied the deviant mothers all knowledge of their legal rights regarding adoption, foster care, or visitation, by using overt and covert methods of coercion to obtain consents9, by not advising mothers of the long lasting severe psychological damage of separation to both mother and child, by discriminating against Caucasian mothers by withholding information and resources which were commonly released to visible minority mothers, by refusing to listen to mothers who wanted to "keep" and mother their children, by "grooming" mothers throughout their pregnancy to "unbond"10 with her child, by consistently pressuring mothers into adoption as the only "loving option" for their child by using their love for their child to extract a surrender when no other recourse appeared to be available to them. "The mothers desperately wanted to keep their children and were perfectly capable as loving souls to do so, but were forced, literally, to surrender the most precious little one they protected and carried into full life from their own bodies. Between harassments, betrayals, demeaning treatment, being told they were incapable and withdrawing all resources in order to prove the point instead of bending to help keep mother and child united, the mothers and children were given no choice but severance."11

Society **met the terms** by keeping the secret of their daughter or other family member, by supporting the professionals, by supporting the redemption myth, and by supporting the idea that the child and the mother would be "better off". Society met the terms by building a multi-million dollar adoption industry and promoting adoption as "the loving option". "Regrettably, in many cases the emphasis has changed from the desire to provide a needy child with a home, to that of providing needy parents with a child. As a result a whole industry has grown, generating millions of dollars of revenue each year, seeking babies for adoption and charging prospective parents enormous fees to process the paperwork."12

When it was all over, society was satisfied, but what happened to the mother who was released from hospital without her child? Breasts still flowing with milk, traumatized, stripped of her child and motherhood, still recovering from birth, told never to tell a living soul of her secret, told that she would forget about this child and would go on to have "children of her own" in the future, sent home with not even a piece of paper in her hand as proof of the act, and no counselling to help her.....a "throwaway mother". What happened to the child who was separated as an infant from his mother's smell, heartbeat, voice, skin and touch....a child who lived with strangers and was supposed to be "grateful that his mother gave him away because she loved him"; a child who was never allowed to grieve his mother, but was expected to just fit in "as if born to".

In 2011, we know the answers to these questions. We know that the mothers never forgot their children and that they suffered long lasting permanent effects including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder,13 Splitting of the Psyche, Unresolved and Pathological Grief, Clinical Depression, Post Partum Depression after subsequent children, Secondary Infertility, Unresolved Anger, relationship issues and more. They simply never recovered. We know that their children suffered Abandonment issues, Attachment Disorders, Unresolved Anger, low self esteem, Clinical Depression, Unresolved and Pathological Grief, Post Partum Depression, (for women adopted persons), Identity issues and more. We know that these mothers and children search for each other in the thousands.

We also know that only in the telling of these terrible secrets does the shedding of shame begin... "For People to Heal, the Truth Must be Revealed"14

Australian mothers were treated no differently than Canadian mothers, British mothers, or mothers in the United States. Now that these mothers are communicating with each other with the help of technology, social media and other resources, they have shared their stories and come to the shocking realization that they were victims of a systemic plan with few differences in the method, particularly between Australia, Canada, Britain and the USA.

At universities all over the world, members of faculties of History, Humanities, Sociology , Social Work and Women's Studies are writing books and papers and acknowledging this terrible history. No longer can the facts be ignored.

These events took place with the sanction of the collective consciousness of society. Because it is the norm of society in some countries is to stone an adulterous woman, does this make it right? Because it was the norm of German society to round up and murder Jews, does this make it right? Because it was the norm to incarcerate Aboriginal peoples in Residential Schools in Australia and Canada, does this make it right? The crimes against the unmarried mother cannot be explained away by saying they were the "norm of society at that time" any more than any other human rights atrocity.

It is time that the stories of the mothers are told**. It is time** for validation and acknowledgment for mothers. **It is time** for the mothers of adoption separation to shed their heavy coat of shame and in that shedding, the naked perpetrators of these crimes will be exposed. **It is time** for governments, religions and others to take responsibility and to acknowledge their part in the separation of mothers from their beloved children. Mothers are beginning to speak out, to move past their secret, their shame, but for many mothers this is still not possible. The shackles of the secret they were told to keep, the emotional trauma, and the shame still bind their souls, their spirit and their very lives.

It is time for the acknowledgment of their truth. **It is time** for those involved to be accountable.

For the mothers. For the children.

Valerie Andrews, 2011
Origins Canada

Resources:
1 Karen Wilson Buterbaugh, The BSERI/BSE Mothers
2 Home Dreams: Women and the Suburban Experiment in Canada 1945-1960, Veronica Strong-Boag
3 Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work 1890-1945, Regina Kunzel
4 Wake Up Little Susie, Rickie Solinger
5 Wake Up Little Susie, Rickie Solinger
6 Toronto, Daily Telegraph (November 1956).
7 Origins of the Magdalene Laundries: An Analytical History, Rebecca Lea McCarthy
8 I Will Not Live your Lie, Dian Wellfare, Australia
9 I Will Not Live your Lie, Dian Wellfare, Australia
10Maternal-baby Unbonding Rrituals for Undoing Nature, James, Veronica, Gabe, Jonathan Health and the sociology of emotions. (Analyses of the techniques employed by professionals to separate or "unbond" the mother from her newborn infant)
11 Clarissa Estes, PHD, Author of Women Who Run with the Wolves, Facebook 2010
12 United Nations, Special Rapporteur, Commision of Human Rights, 2003
13 Adoption Induced Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in Mothers of the Baby Scoop Eras, Karen Wilson Buterbaugh, 2010
14 Desmond Tutu

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