Below are copies of two letters which I believe are self-explanatory as they relate albeit briefly, to my personal experience with past adoption practices.

Hannah Spanswick

24th September 2008

The Hon. Tanya Plibersek
Member for Sydney
422 Crown Street,
Surrey Hills
Sydney NSW 2010

Dear Ms Plibersek,

RE: Proposed National Adoption Awareness Week

I understand that as the Minister for the Status of Women you will be taking an active role as the Federal Government's spokesperson during the forthcoming National Adoption Awareness Week scheduled for 17-23 November.

When this initiative was publicised earlier in the year, I wrote to the Prime Minster, Kevin Rudd, to express my concerns and I enclose a copy of my letter which I believe is self-explanatory.

Along with other 'relinquishing' mothers I continue to grapple with the lasting effects of that event that took place almost forty-four years ago and as time passes the grief and pain inflicted by that primal wound of separation has not diminished. In fact, for many women like me, these feelings have worsened with the passage of time like any other incident of post-traumatic stress.

Having had the misfortune of losing one of my subsequent children to a particularly virulent form of bone cancer just 4 weeks before his twenty-first birthday, I know from personal experience that the loss of a child in these circumstances is ultimately easier to come to terms with than losing a child to adoption.

When a child dies, society joins with you to mourn your loss. There are rituals that allow you to publicly grieve, such as a funeral service and a grave to visit where it's possible to retain some physical and spiritual connection to your child. And with time it's possible to achieve a sense of peace and acceptance.

However, for those mothers who have lost a child to adoption, the sense of loss and grief continues unabated. There is no end to the primal wound that was inflicted at the time of separation. This was despite those in the adoption industry being fully aware of the lasting effects that often resulted from the separation, which was first documented as far back as the early 1930's.

As an uninformed and naïve teenager back in 1964, I was not aware nor advised by those in authority that there was a Commonwealth Benefit available to me to help me keep and raise my own child.

And until I accessed my hospital records for my period of confinement at the (...) Hospital, I was not aware that the adoption marketeers obtained my Consent for Adoption within 3 days of my confinement rather then the statutory 5 days proscribed in the legislation. I also learnt that my signature was obtained shortly after I had been given some potent analgesia which makes a complete mockery of any concept of Informed Consent.

Sadly there are many other natural mothers whose stories bear an uncanny resemblance to mine, who also have documentary evidence that supports their personal traumas and the flagrant abuse of their human rights that occurred in many publicly funded institutions across the country over several decades.

If these practices can take place in a country like Australia as a signatory to a number of International Covenants which ostensibly condemn human rights abuses, what protections are available to young women in countries who do not observe these international covenants? Or in the United States where the adoptive couple are encouraged to be present in the delivery suite to 'catch the baby' as it is being born to 'encourage the bonding process' which completely dehumanises the bonding process that has taken place in-utero between the mother and her child.

In one such recent case in the U.S., the natural mother was purported to have been given assurances by the prospective adoptive parents, the celebrity Australian couple, Debra-Lee Furness and Hugh Jackman, to provide her with regular access to the child, however when this was denied, the young mother subsequently took her own life in what appears to be a direct result of being denied an on-going relationship with the child she had borne and lost to adoption.

I bring these matters to your attention in the hope that you may better inform yourself of the complex and lasting impact of adoption in the lead up to the week of 'celebration' in November. I would hope that the broader community receives a balanced view which takes into account all the relevant issues and not only the views of some wealthy celebrities who are clearly ignorant of the complexities involved and its life-long impact.

Yours sincerely

Hannah Spanswick

Hannah Spanswick
(...)

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30th April, 2008

The Hon. Kevin Rudd MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra. ACT 2600

Prime Minister,

RE: Proposed National Adoption Awareness Week

A recent edition of *The Sunday Telegraph* announced that the Australian Government intends to support a National Adoption Awareness Week, to begin on Mother's Day, 2009. The Attorney General, Robert McClelland, has reportedly pledged support for this initiative.

I am writing to express my profound dismay at this proposal.

I am aware that a steadfast and public campaign by Ms Debra Lee-Furness to expand adoption practices, particularly 'adopting orphans from overseas' has in part, led to this proposal.

I am very concerned that the 'orphans' that are the subject of many inter-country adoptions are in fact poor children from impoverished families who cannot provide for them, rather than children who are totally bereft of any immediate or extended family.

I am particularly concerned that as the number of infants available for adoption in Australia has declined, young women in the third world have become the breeding ground for infertile women who enjoy wealthier circumstances, to adopt a child to satisfy their personal needs.

Further, to use Mothers' Day to begin a week of celebration of Adoption is not only breathtakingly insensitive but also extremely painful for the more than 250,000 Australian women, who 'surrendered' a child for adoption because of the social mores of the last century. This number does not include members of the Stolen Generation who were also taken and separated from their birth families 'for the greater good'.

As an eighteen year-old back in 1964 I was one of those 250,000 who 'surrendered' a new born baby for adoption to be raised by a married couple who by virtue of their wedded and financial status were deemed to be better for the child's wellbeing than

me.

Unfortunately, the well-meaning Social Worker who convinced me that 'if you really love your baby, you will give him up for adoption' omitted to mention the lasting effects of separation for myself and my child and the unresolved grief that would, consciously or unconsciously, affect every aspect of our future lives.

For every woman who gains a child through adoption, invariably another woman is left to deal with a life-long loss.

My adoption experience and those of other relinquishing mothers gives us no cause to celebrate. Having a nationally endorsed program beginning on Mother's Day would simply add salt to a primal wound that has not, cannot and is never likely to heal.

If individuals have a genuine desire to help children overcome poverty, there are a number of well-established programs that enable a magnanimous gift to be put into effect. Separating children from their parents, particularly their mothers and removing them from their extended families and their culture is only meeting the needs of infertile couples who are unable to have a child of their own and who have not dealt with the grief associated with that loss.

The words that you expressed so eloquently in your Apology to the Stolen Generation, '*To the mothers, the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, ...*' apply equally to those of us who have also experienced misguided albeit well-intended public policy in social engineering.

It is worth noting that every state and territory has a government-funded organisation that has been established to address the life-long issues that have arisen from past adoption practices. In Victoria, that organisation is known as VANISH. Should you or your representative take the time to understand the impact of adoption, I have no doubt that you would reverse your decision to support a National Adoption Awareness Week

I hope that your government will review its support for this proposal, taking heed of past mistakes made by governments of all political persuasions.

Yours sincerely

Hannah Spasnwick

c.c Hon. Robert McClelland –Federal Attorney General
Hon. Jenny Macklin- Federal Minster for Families, Housing, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs
Hon. Rob Hulls- Victorian Attorney General