

Margaret Singline

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Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

**SENATE INQUIRY INTO
“COMMONWEALTH CONTRIBUTION TO FORMER FORCED ADOPTION
POLICIES AND PRACTICES.”**

“The foundling is an infant whose mother conceived him between love and faith, and gave birth to him between the fear and frenzy of death. She swaddled him with a living remnant of her heart and placed him at the orphanage gate and departed with her head bent under the heavy burden of her cross. And to complete her tragedy, you and I taunted her: ‘What a disgrace, what a disgrace!’” – Kahlil Gibran

I, Margaret June Singline, am a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia resident in Tasmania.

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.

My baby died at 7 months of age and I did not know for 18 years. This is my story -

I became pregnant when 17 years old in 1967. My parents decided that I was to continue with the pregnancy and have the baby adopted. My father was an Honorary Deacon in the Anglican Church and the social pressures of the time and lack of support for unmarried mothers left me with the options of following my parent’s demands or bringing up my child in isolation and penniless. My only “choice” was to give my baby up for adoption.

I remained at home for my pregnancy. My father told me I could tell one friend of my pregnancy and to slowly stop seeing my other friends. During the last three months I was not allowed to leave the house (except to be driven to doctor’s appointments) and when visitors came I had to stay in my room.

I gave birth in the Queen Victoria Hospital in Launceston. The attitude of the staff was cold, unfriendly and I was looked down upon. In the labour ward I was shouted at to “keep my noise down because I was disturbing the other ladies”. I am sure I was drugged because I was not aware, and it came as a surprise, that I had been making a noise.

When my daughter was born someone screamed out that I wasn’t allowed to see my baby and the gas mask was pushed onto my face. I was not asked if I wanted to see my her. Fifteen minutes later I woke up and she was gone. They refused to tell me what sex she was. All they would tell me was her weight and that she was well. My doctor told me it was best that I didn’t see my baby, not know the sex, and that I would have other babies. And to get on with my life!

The next afternoon, about 24 hours after giving birth, a woman from the Department of Community Welfare arrived with the adoption papers. I now understand that this should not have happened until at least 5 days after the birth. I was not provided with any information about financial provisions or foster care. I received no counselling or support, and I was not warned of the lifelong implications. The worker was very cold and hard toward me and showed no empathy – nor do I believe she had any.

The implications of surrendering all parental rights were not explained to me and this was to have dire consequences later.

The adoption papers were placed in front of me to sign. A lot of thoughts and emotions raced through my mind but I knew I didn’t have a choice, so I signed in disbelief that that was all there was to giving up a precious baby – my baby.

I had turned 18 a week earlier. I was not old enough to sign legal documents. Yet the legal profession and the Department let these contracts go through.

Some days later I was given a drug to suppress lactation. I was not asked to give consent for this drug to be given to me.

Nothing could take away the love I felt for my baby and still do. Birthdays, Christmas and Mothers Day were always difficult and remain so. I hoped that she was loved, well, happy, well treated and I wanted her to know that I loved her and I wouldn’t have given her up had I had a choice.

I was silent and ashamed for eighteen years because it was not to be spoken of because of the stigma attached to unmarried mothers. I was not able to imagine a picture of her because I did not know her sex.

After eighteen years I approached Adoption Jigsaw. What a wonderful organisation and what a relief to finally talk to other people who had been in the same situation. I found out that I had had a daughter and words cannot express the joy I felt at finally knowing.

Shortly afterwards my world fell apart when I learnt that she had died when she was 7 months old. I felt as if the foundations of my soul had been rocked. I was heartbroken. I had lived for those years thinking I had a child somewhere, and even though the

possibility of death went through my mind a few times, nothing prepared me for this reality. It was cruel. It was like she had fallen far, far away down the middle of the black hole which was left when I gave her up.

It was grief upon grief, compounding the grief I still had from giving her up. For me she died in August 1986 not in May 1968 because she had lived in my heart all those years. I did not see her, nor hold her and I never will. I had no body, no funeral – nothing. At that stage my friends were still unaware of the adoption and I felt very much alone, except for the wonderful support from Jigsaw.

She died because she had a genetic disease called spinal muscular atrophy. There was no prior knowledge that it existed in my family and it was another issue to work through and deal with.

I felt worthless because I hadn't been told of her death. I met with an officer of the Department of Community Welfare to discover *the reason I hadn't been told of her death was because I had signed away all parental rights to her when I signed the adoption papers and therefore I didn't have a right to know.* I understand that the Department may not have been advised of deaths of adopted children, but in this case they had been visited by the adoptive parents sometime after they found out about the disease wanting to know how she had passed the medical check. Would they have taken her if they had known when they adopted her? Also it is my understanding that if babies did not pass the medical check they were given back to the natural mother because they were not good enough.

I had a lingering doubt that there was a mistake made about my baby's death – how could I be sure that she died? It was arranged for me, by Jigsaw and Centacare, to meet with her adoptive parents so I could learn what little there was to know of her life. They had worked out from the surname on her birth certificate that they knew an uncle of mine (I had an unusual surname). This at least put an end to the doubt. However I would have been so easy to find, and still have some anger that I wasn't given the opportunity to see and hold my baby. To this day I feel denied of a mother's unalienable right to hold her sick and dying baby.

For twelve months afterwards I wanted to pick up and cuddle babies I saw in prams. I could not watch movies with babies in them for about 3 years.

I have suffered from depression long term. The grief of giving up a baby is long term. Although I "got on with my life" it was/is always in the background. With time and counselling the pain and grief have lessened but have not gone away.

In Summary

No alternatives to adoption were given to me by the Department of Community Welfare. I was not provided with information of any sort of foster care or financial assistance for unmarried mothers.

I believe that the adoption "business" was in place as a service to infertile couples and the professions involved knew they were breaking the law.

The practice was immoral, unethical, cruel and inhumane. There is no doubt that counselling and support should have been offered to relinquishing mothers. Instead we suffered in silence for many years and to further add to our suffering society was told we willingly gave our babies away.

I was treated with disrespect and looked down upon in the hospital whilst being admitted and in labour.

My baby was whisked away at birth. I was not asked if I wanted to see her and I was not given the opportunity to ask to see her because the gas mask was pushed onto my face. This was a breach to my human rights.

They refused to tell me the sex of my baby.

The adoption papers were brought to me the day after my baby was born which I believe was in breach of the law.

I signed a legal document as a minor, which is a breach of the law. Therefore the consent form was not legal. I was told I was not informed of my baby's death because "I had surrendered all parental rights and had no right to know". However if the documentation was not legal then I had not surrendered all parental rights.

It is my belief that all the professions involved broke the law.

It is my dearest hope that the inquiry will bring forward the truth of what happened, not only to relinquishing mothers but also to adoptees, to enlighten the population of the injustice of it all and to absolve relinquishing mothers. In my experience the majority of us were young, scared, and naïve.

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