

Submission to Senate Standing Enquiry in Past Adoption Practices

October 2011

Introduction

We adopted two Aboriginal babies in NSW in 1970 and 1972. Both were born at Crown St Women's Hospital.

Our Son

We were told that our son's birth parents were friends for a time around a shared interest in athletics and that his father, an Aboriginal man, was a football friend of his mother's brother. His mother was white and aged 17 at his birth. However by the time of the birth she was engaged to another man and did not want the (Aboriginal) baby. Our understanding was that she willingly gave up the baby. Our son and his partner have conducted an extensive search for his mother without any success. They are quite emotionally involved in this search because they discovered some of the stories about mistreatment of unmarried mothers at the time (and first alerted us to them).

However when our son as an adult obtained the official papers around the adoption, we found that his mother alleged that the pregnancy was the result of rape in a park. This news we think has been quite disturbing to him and he is somewhat contemptuous of his birth father who he has not met but thinks he has identified. The stories of mistreatment of unmarried mothers and this information is, we believe, having a serious emotional impact on him as we write.

Our Daughter

We were told that her mother, 17 at the time of birth, was Aboriginal and from country NSW and gave the baby up because of the difficulties of raising her etc. When we met her after our daughter grew up, we found that she had run away to Sydney as a teenager. She did not tell her religious family about her pregnancy until many years later. She told our daughter that she was forced to sign the adoption papers but with no further detail. She died in about 2005.

Our daughter has no particular difficulties with her adoption now although she did suffer an abusive relationship as a young woman and is now a single mum.

Our experience

As young people in the late 1960s and 1970s, we were very aware of the stigma attached to unmarried motherhood and knew that, without family support, young women would find it very difficult to look after a child. In particular had several family or friend experiences of unmarried young women having babies. We were very pleased when financial support was introduced for them in 1972 or 1973.

We therefore thought we were doing a useful thing in society by adopting babies. We thought that the mothers had no other choice or that they genuinely felt that adoption was best for their babies future. We also understood that there were many unwanted children who ended up in children's homes. The people from the relevant government department also left us in no doubt that this was the case. Now that we realise the possibility that we were lied to, we feel deeply disturbed for the mothers and children.

Our recommendations

In the light of our experiences and the apparent treatment of unmarried mothers, we suggest that the following actions are appropriate:

1. There should be a formal apology on behalf of the relevant government to the mothers, children and all who have been impacted;
2. The full facts around each birth and adoption should be made available to all concerned;
3. There should be meaningful counselling made available to all mother, all adoptees (and maybe also to adoptive parents). This should include all present families of those concerned because there seems no doubt that these people two will be being impacted. (Our son's experience we believe may be a case in point).
4. There should be a systematic system set up to identify all parties and to non-threateningly offer to them opportunities to meet each other. (In our case, for example, we would wish that our son's mother and father could know that we the adoptive parents are not a threat to them).