

Department of the Senate,
P.O. Box 6000
Parliament House
Canberra. ACT

SENATE INQUIRY INTO COMMONWEALTH CONTRIBUTION TO FORCED
ADOPTION POLICY AND PRACTISES.

I would like to state that the consent to the adoption of my child was given without information of my legal rights.

- I was not allowed to see my child after birth.
- I was not given information in regard to foster care for my child.
- I was not informed of any future psychological consequences if I relinquished my child for adoption.
- I was given no counselling after the birth to deal with my depression, guilt & shame.
- I was not informed that there was any financial assistance available to help struggling parents like me to support my child.

As a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia, currently residing in Tasmania, I had an inalienable right to protection under the Australian Constitution and 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.

Please accept this as my submission.

CONTACT DETAILS

CHERRY BLASKET nee CROUCHER

In December 1963 when I was 15 years old my parents were informed that I was pregnant. Coming home from work that fateful night, holding hands with my boyfriend and father of my child, I was not expecting to have my life threatened. I thought we were going to talk about what was to be done. Instead my father chased my boyfriend off and then tried to strangle me, and had my sister not pulled him off I would have certainly died. Gathering my wits together I ran for my life into the darkening night, around to my boyfriend's house. Within hours the police arrived and took me away to a police station. I can't remember where it was.

I was kept there for several hours, and then the police took me to the Convent for the Good Shepherd, in Beaconsfield Pde, Albert Park, Victoria. This convent no longer exists and is now beachside apartments. Once inside the convent I became very frightened and was screaming in terror. The nuns gave me a sleeping pill to knock me out. This began my stay at this horrific prison, which lasted for a few months.

I was informed that I could not see anyone from the 'outside' for 6 weeks, and then only my family. In the meantime I was inducted into the cruel and exploitative practises of this place. We worked 12 hour days in a commercial laundry washing and ironing the linen for big hotels eg The Chevron. There was no air conditioning and the big driers heated the sheds up to unbearable temperatures.

The food we were given to eat was often rotten and there were weevils in the food as well. I was pregnant and could not eat that food yet they refused to give me anything else that I could eat.

On a regular basis I was taken down into the courtyard and made to throw a heavy medicine ball back and forth to the Nuns, in the hopes that I would miscarry! And there were many other cruel punishments perpetrated on me. For example I was often made to kneel and put my hands behind my head, on a stone floor, for hours on end. There were many other cruelties and tortures perpetrated by the nuns and especially on me because I was pregnant and not married.

Eventually I collapsed and woke up in another section of the Convent where mentally unstable people, and old people whose families wanted their money and so had them declared mentally unfit, were kept under lock and key. Once back up on my feet I was sent back to the Laundry to work.

After six weeks my family came to see me, and I was able to whisper to my sister what was happening to me. And she believed me because I had lost so much weight and looked very ill. She talked my parents into getting me released.

I went home for a few weeks, and then I was taken to the Social Services Dept by my mother because I was not wanted at home and because they were ashamed of me and didn't want the neighbour's to see me pregnant. I was assigned to an unmarried

mother's home at 43 Station Street, Fairfield, Victoria, and within a week I was living there. I think it was run by a Presbyterian Matron but I can't be sure.

This was a big old house which held up to at least 20 pregnant and unmarried, young girls. The rooms had been arranged dormitory style with 10-15 girls in each room. It was full to capacity. And part of the house was set aside for mothers after they had their babies. They were kept separate.

We cleaned and cooked for ourselves, and once a fortnight we were allowed a visit. It was made clear to us on a regular basis that we were "sinful", and that we were "bad" and beyond redemption. We were shamed for our condition and blamed for being in that condition. We believed that we were wrong and bad for being pregnant and not married.

We were all depressed, but our emotional health was ignored, because we "deserved" to be unhappy and suffering because we had gotten pregnant. There were no counselling services available at all. The fences were high and we were not allowed out, except for once a fortnight when we could go to the shops in Station Street if we had a visitor. We also were taken to the Royal Women's hospital for check-ups, but not often, and when we did go we were handled roughly and verbally abused. We had to be hidden away for shame.

I had my baby girl at the Royal Women's hospital on _____, and I was now 16 years old. I'd had my 16th birthday while I was held at the Convent. Sweet Sixteen!

The Unmarried Mother's ward was another nightmare with its own forms of torture. While in labour we were punished by the nurses because we had gotten pregnant outside of marriage and therefore were shameful and bad girls.

The nurses told us that we were not in pain even though we cried out for help. They ignored any request for water or help with moving around on the bed. They did not converse with us, as though we were invisible. They just barked instructions at us, and threatened to hit us if we didn't follow their orders.

For example, I was made to walk up and down the dormitory while in 2nd stage of labour, for no other reason than to make me feel more pain, and when I collapsed on the edge of the bed I was slapped in the face and yelled at "you're not in pain, you don't think you're getting any help do you?" I grabbed for support onto the head rail of the bed and the nurse ripped my hands from the rail. She forced me to stand up and shoved me across the room and into the shower. I had to take a shower while I was in the final stages of labour!

They left my labour so late, telling me that I wasn't in pain and that I had no right to be looked after, and ignoring my calls for help, that when a doctor finally showed up to examine me, I was rushed to the delivery room and delivered within 5 minutes of being there.

My baby was taken immediately and I was not allowed to see her at all. My sister and mother were refused viewing of the baby and were told that 'these' babies were being

adopted out. That is what they told my sister even though there had been no discussion of this with me or my parents. My sister argued with them telling them that no decisions had been made yet and that she had a right to see my baby. They consulted with a Matron apparently and then came out and gave my sister a quick peek of my baby and then quickly took the baby away. I tried to see my baby by going to the Viewing Room and putting up a card with my surname on it, but the nurses shook their head and refused, and then ignored me. I had no power to do anything to change this, and by then I was so beaten down with shame that I didn't return to try and see her. There wasn't anyone to talk to about my feelings and there wasn't anyone else who understood. The whole world was against me and the other unmarried mothers. We lay in our beds depressed and crying by day, and having nightmares and calling out in our sleep at night.

I was taken back to the Unmarried Mothers home in Fairfield, Victoria, where they kept the relinquishing mothers for a couple of weeks before releasing us.

On just one week after the birth of my baby, I was taken into an office and given a tablet which made me very drowsy and foggy. They said that this was to calm me down and relax me. Then after a while the Matron and another woman came and asked me to sign a paper which gave permission for them to keep my baby.

I was told by them that I had no rights to keep the baby, that I had no income, and no where to go. They told me that there was no help available. They told me that the baby would be better off with a family who were married and decent and could bring her up properly. They told me that my parents didn't want the baby and that I was not welcome to go home with a baby, and that they would put me and my baby out on the streets. They convinced me that I could not look after a baby, and that the only way to make up for my sin was to give the baby a good home. I signed the paper.

I went back to my parent's home. They had moved to a new neighbourhood so that the new neighbours would never know what had happened to me. I was very depressed for at least 6 months. I had no motivation to do anything and I was confused and bewildered by what had happened to me and my baby. It was never allowed to be spoken about at home. It was as if none of it had ever happened yet I knew that it had because I had all of the memories which kept playing round and round in my head.

There was no-one to help me and I had no money so I decided to get a job and leave Australia. I believed that if I left then I wouldn't feel so ashamed and depressed and I could start again in a country where no-one would know what I had done. I also felt that Australia had rejected me and didn't want me here.

I got a job as a delivery girl in a legal firm in the city and moved away from home and into a shared flat with other young people who also wanted to leave Australia, although for different reasons than me. I didn't tell them anything about what had happened to me. I threw myself into working in an office by day and waitressing by night until I had enough money to leave Australia for America.

Just after my 19th birthday I sailed away from Australia and returned six years later.

To try and find my daughter.

Nothing was ever said about what had happened and although they were still my family, inside I felt guilty and ashamed and estranged from them. It was during this period after returning to Australia that I tried to find my daughter.

I met a man and got married and had another daughter who I brought up and love dearly. I always told her that she had a sister somewhere, and about what had happened to me. I was open about it because of the emotional damage that keeping it secret had done to me and I knew that someday I was going to find her.

My marriage didn't last, at that time I didn't trust anyone and had no communication skills. I would just cut and run because I believed that no-one would understand me. Also, that I didn't have a right to be cared for or to have my needs listened to and fulfilled.

Although I had survived what had happened to me, I was also full of anger, shame grief and loss. I spent the next 10 years in therapy and other learning environments resolving those feelings gaining some perspective on what had happened to me. I needed to transform myself and become a useful member of society and contribute to the lives of others. I returned to school and graduated as a teacher, and later became a psychotherapist and counsellor.

I did not see my baby again until 1991 and she was 27 years old, and I was 43 years old and practising as a psychotherapist. During the intervening years I had tried to find her but was told that I had no rights to the information of what had happened to her. That it was illegal for me to enquire and that I could be charged if I continued.

The adoption laws were then changed and made it legal for the relinquishing mother and adopted baby to be re-united. Even then the child's permission was required and the relinquishing mother had no rights to see or know about her child if the child refused.

Previous to meeting my daughter, I met with the adoptive parents. My daughter was overseas at the time and it was the adoptive Grandmother who had contacted me after speaking with my daughter. The adoptive mother and father wanted to meet with me. The adoptive mother told me that she had received a phone call from the baby's home informing her that a "beautiful baby girl" had come in for adoption.

My reunion with my daughter was very painful. She had become a prostitute and a drug addict with no self-esteem because she had been abandoned. She had always known that she was adopted, her adoptive family had told her, but she had no information about me.

When I had applied to the Department of Community Services, Victoria to attend a group session to find out about my baby, they told me that she had also come through a group session looking for me. They would not give me her address because she had not signed the paper giving consent, even though she had come looking for me. She then went overseas and it wasn't until nine months later that I finally met her.

Initially we were very pleased to meet each other, but after a year or so she became very angry with me and began to blame me for all of her problems. She experienced herself as abandoned and this had affected her ability to form an identity in a very negative way.

She had always felt as though she didn't belong to her adoptive family and that she was different from them. She felt a great emptiness within herself, and that she was lost and a nobody. Consequently when she was about 18 years old she ran away and became a prostitute working in a brothel and also she was drug and alcohol addicted. Contributing to the psychological damage caused by the abandonment that she had suffered through the adoption she was raped by her maternal uncle. This information has come from a recovered memory whilst working with a professional hypnotherapist who attempting to help her with her emotional difficulties. This memory has only been recovered in the last 18 months, and explains why she was so frightened during her childhood. She used to hide in the wardrobe and under the bed. These charges have never been legally substantiated because she has chosen to not pursue the paternal uncle because he is now dead. I have witnessed how frightened she was and she has told me that her adoptive brother, who is now dead, protected her. She also had a difficult relationship with the adoptive mother because they had nothing in common.

She does not have anything to do with her adoptive mother, or other members of the extended family. Her adoptive father, brother and grandmother are dead.

This contradicted what I had been told about the "nice family" who could give her everything that I couldn't. And from the adoptive mother's account of the minimal vetting that they had undergone for selection to adopt a child it is no wonder that there was very little in common between them, or that they were even suitable adoptive parents.

My daughter was an absolute mess when I met her and fortunately, because I had become a psychotherapist, I had some idea of how to help her psychologically. For the next nine years I re-parented her until she was no longer a prostitute or a drug addict. She did a course in sound engineering and became a sound engineer and opened her own business which organises the sound for public events, such as concerts and festivals.

I am still in relationship with my daughter, but it has been fractured because she has experienced abandonment by me and holds me responsible. The relationship is also fraught with her emotional/ psychological damage caused by what was instigated in the experience of being abandoned and adopted.

This has expressed itself in our relationship by the emotional difficulty she suffered when becoming a mother herself and the surfacing of her own traumatic memories around motherhood. Consequently, she refused to let me see my grandchild, a boy, for three years and by refused to allow me to be involved in her pregnancy. She also has a learning disability which is now preventing her from doing some retraining for her future working life. She is unable to retain information or to concentrate for an extended period of time.

We continue to try and build a fulfilling relationship with each other, but because of her deep emotional trauma this is like a roller coaster ride. For a while it works and then it comes apart again.

It's hard to put into words the effect that this experience has had on me emotionally. My family has been negatively impacted because I also have another daughter who has chosen not to be in relationship with her half sister. The dysfunctional behaviour which expresses itself as envy and anger from my adopted daughter to her half sister because she had me as a mother and my adopted daughter didn't has destroyed their relationship.

I have little respect for "authority" or "Institutions". I have spent many years coming to terms with what has happened to me both in therapy and in myself and although I don't consciously think about it anymore, and I have moved on with my life since that terrible time, the consequences of what happened 47 years ago, continue to enter into my life in a negative way .

Since the age of 15 years old I have suffered from the shame of being an unmarried mother, and the guilt of having abandoned my child, and consequently of being rejected by my daughter. As a rational adult I know that I was not supported or protected and that I am not to blame for what happened. However, the cruelty, shame and condemnation were so vigorous and widespread in mainstream society that I had no option but to internalise those viewpoints and opinions which led to self-condemnation and self-hatred.

I have told very few people about the details of this experience because I am so deeply ashamed of having gone through it in my life and I don't want to impact others emotionally with such harsh tragedy. Also, because this issue has not been addressed within society, and people educated about what really happened, there are still attitudes and opinions which are capable of re-abusing the victims. This must be addressed by Government agencies and others who were involved in this abuse and the opportunity given to them to be accountable and the means to make amends for their part in this tragedy. This way the silence will be broken and we can come out of the shadows of shame and stand tall.

It is very clear to me as a professional psychotherapist that one of the priorities in addressing this terrible crime against humanity is counselling for the victims. I am sure it is not just my daughter who is psychologically suffering but many others as well. Good counselling with specialists who understand the themes of this type of trauma is very expensive and also there are not many who are qualified and able to do this work.

I have recently told my daughter that I am submitting to this Senate Inquiry and that there may be counselling available. She broke down in tears of relief that she may be able to get some help. This assistance would go some way to healing what has happened.

As a mature adult I know that I had no choice, yet I still feel guilty and responsible for what happened to me and my daughter, and I am still fighting to right the wrongs of that terrible time. The memories of the torturous treatment, the deception and the stigma, and withholding official information from me, both in the Convent for the Good Shepherd, The Home for Unmarried Mothers in Fairfield, and the Royal Women's Hospital have emotionally scarred me. I have no trust or belief in institutions and I have learned through this experience that government and those in positions of power cannot be trusted to advocate for the dignity and best interests of those that are vulnerable. I am ever hopeful that this past crime will be addressed properly and that I and all the other women involved will be exonerated.

Understandably, I remain self-reliant and self-protective and I don't assume that I will be supported by government institutions because I am always mindful of what has happened to me in the past at their hands. It is a surprising and pleasant experience when I am supported in a positive way.

Please accept this as my submission.