

To Whom it May Concern,

I would like to tell my story, about the experience I had at the end of 1972 through to February 1973.

I was 13years old, and turned 14 in the January. I understand I was very young and back then you did what you were told and my parents went by the advise given by our local G.P.

I didn't realize I was pregnant until 10weeks, I wasn't offered a termination as the Dr said it was too late, he recommended to my parents the options; send her away (overseas) to family elsewhere to save face, bring the baby back and bring it up as another sibling, or the better option of sending me to a nice place run by the Church of England at Turramurra, NSW. "Carramar". There they would care for me and help to have the baby adopted to a lovely Christian family, that would love and care for the baby because I couldn't.

The father of the baby and I, were in a relationship, his thoughts or feelings were not considered in this decision.

It was the first time I had been away from home for any length of time and went there with a suitcase of a few items.

It was strange as I couldn't see anyone else around, I was given a tour of the place and shown to my room, given a list of "do's and don'ts" my parents filled out the relevant paperwork to sign over my care and left, we were allowed visitors, but they had to make arrangements with the Matron for me to go outside on a day trip. The fees for this accommodation were paid by my parents and the babies fathers parents, he was sixteen. Your personal washing of clothes was your own responsibility.

The lunch bell was sounded, at the several dinning tables seating 6, I was astounded, where were all these girls before, I later found out why, when one of the resident girls was from my home town and known to my family and so they didn't see her, they were told to make themselves scarce.

They said grace and didn't talk to me for some time, I cried while trying to eat and was told by Matron to grow up, I was old enough to make this happen, so I should stop crying and not upset anyone.

They had a routine, everyone was given chores for the week, your first week was to cook the evening meal for everyone. The local Minister came every Wednesday night for dinner, so it was a roast dinner and it had to be perfect. It was Wednesday. I was quickly shown what had to done and left with another new girl, and we cooked for 30 people, dinner and dessert. Then washed and cleaned up.

My introduction to home life for the next few months.

In the days there you had specific exercises to do, so when you went back to a normal life, it wouldn't look like you had been through pregnancy. We did these twice a day, no excuses.

Jobs were washing everyone's linen, breakfast, lunch, taking out the garbage, everything needed to run a large hostel with 30 residents. They had a special time for us to visit the prenatal clinic at Hornsby Hospital, so we did not come into contact with real mothers. If we went into the shops for personal

items we were only allowed to go in two's, so as not to upset the home owners in the area how had complained about us "walking the streets in our state", we were a large blot on their pleasant society and the church did not want any trouble. Shop keepers commented that we were from the local "baby factory".

They had the police come and talk to us and have my boyfriend charged. I had to make a statement and described a "typical sexual encounter".

We had lectures about what would happen to the baby, we were told that this was the best for us to lead normal lives afterwards, and we were doing a "Blessed" thing in giving a married couple the chance at being parents. They would be good Christians and matched in as many ways as possible, so the baby would look like theirs. They would have to disclose to the child before they went to school that they were adopted, so they wouldn't find out from strangers. The days passed and girls had their babies and went home, they were from all over the state. We were told that the baby would be in the hospital for 6 weeks, should we change our mind and return for the baby, but this was not advised. We were allowed to see the baby or leave a toy for it, and if you were brave enough you could hold the baby before leaving the hospital under supervision, but this was definitely not recommended.

We were allowed to have phone calls and make them but not too many, too often as this was not seen to be best for our welfare. Contact with family had to be pre arranged with the matron. My brother would do this for me and come to collect me, to spend some time with my boyfriend. He too, was told that this was the best for our baby. Seeing the father of your baby was strictly forbidden. They believed this would influence us to keep the baby, when they were already in the process of finding suitable parents for our baby.

The days went in a blur, and the lectures continual. Shows and talks on childbirth were given, to prepare us. Television was timed and supervised, reading was preferred. Mixing with other residents was not frowned upon, but they did not want us to form friendships as we would never see each other again, and if we did we would not be able to tell anyone how we knew each other, and this would cause a lot of embarrassment for all concerned. And our parents paid for this privilege.

At the time of delivery, I was driven during the night to hospital by the Sister on call that night. She walked with me to the reception desk and left. The nurses were not friendly, they had a job to do and knew the circumstances regarding our admission. I was shaved by a nurse who commented on my age and status and that I should be disgusted with myself and that she prayed I will have learnt my lesson after this. I laid on my side and delivered with one leg raised in a stirrup. This was so I could not see anything when delivering and it would be easier to forget it ever happened. They gave me an injection to stop me from lactating. I had a relatively short labour 4-5 hours. I was very tired and slept through most of it.

I delivered a girl, 10lb 3oz on February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1974.

I stayed for 7 days in a ward of 4 beds, alone, in a special area, away from the maternity ward. That way we could not hear the new babies and have any interaction with the new mothers.

At the end of my seventh day, I asked to see my baby, I was only allowed to look through the glass at her for a few minutes. I left a small teddy bear with her and named her Janet.

I was picked up and taken back to the home to await my parents. The matron was very pleased that I had a healthy bouncing baby, that would make her new parents very happy. I had to sign the paperwork to have her adopted, and I was free to leave.

My parents came and picked me up to go home, my boyfriend was there to meet me.

My parents, at the time only did what they were advised to do, by professionals.

My sister in law had given birth to a girl 2 weeks before me, life was cruel to see this new mum and her baby so happy. My mother was advised not to put me on the new pill as I had learnt my lesson. I went back to school to finish 4<sup>th</sup> form. I fell pregnant again before the year had finished, and at 16 and married my boyfriend(18)and we had a son, 18 months after giving her up. The decision was never discussed with anyone, not even between my husband and myself for fear of anyone finding out.

When the laws changed, regarding adoption and access to the original birth certificate was allowed, I did not veto access for my details. I did not look for her, but left it free if she wanted to find us.

In 1993, I received a "jenny letter" addressed to my parent's house, my brother gave it to me, before my Dad saw it. My mother had passed away years before.

I responded to her, thinking it might have been one of the girls from the home.

The next letter I got was from a young lady 20 year old named Michelle, my daughter. I was also a grandmother at 36years old.

We spoke on the phone, she was excited to find out that I had married her father and we were still together and she had full blooded siblings.

I then had to tell our children, parents, my dad being the hardest to tell, everyone.

Until then the subject was never spoken about, even between my husband, her natural father. We were sworn to secrecy, to hide the shame.

Meeting her was a horrible mixture of excitement, nerves, you name it.

We drove for hours to see her. We stayed nearby at a caravan park for the weekend.

I met her mother and father. Her mother told me how they were rang on the day and drove to pick up their baby, she was in there arms the same day I left hospital. The mother was told that would probably have more and they would get the first offer of the next baby, even though they were nearly over the age of adoption, she believed me to be a tramp.

My daughter gave me a photo album of her growing up. It was surreal, to say the least. She looked so much like her brother.

I was invited to her wedding 2 years later.

I was disturbed on the way there. I had no idea what to feel, or why I was feeling weird.

The minute I turned around to see this beautiful young woman walk down the aisle, with these different people claiming this proud and beautiful young woman.

I cried uncontrollably.

I cried to mourn the years lost.

I cried to mourn the years taken from me.

I cried to mourn the lost years of her grandparents.

I cried for the lost years that she never had growing up with her brother and sisters.

I was introduced to the reception as her special family, considering she was from a small town, everyone knew who I was, and I felt their stares.

They never thought to the future when they were telling us that adoption was the best thing to do for the baby. They didn't care that the children would ask questions about us, and want to find out us. They didn't care how we would cope with any of these feelings of loss. They were happy to have us believe through constantly telling us, this was the only way, you will not be able to mother your own child as good as these people who were grateful to be given a life to care for.

They didn't tell us how to grieve or that we should.

They never told us of our options.

What they did promote was secrecy, forget the whole experience ever happened and be grateful that you have given the gift of life to a family more deserving to bring up a child than you.