Submission to Past Adoption practices

It is now 6 weeks since the Western Australian apology to Natural mothers, I was present on that day in the Western Australia parliament.

I feel exonerated now from a crime I did not commit, a crime that was committed upon myself and My newborn daughter 40 yrs ago..

The Apology exceeded my expectations, and has given me hope that perhaps we are finally endeavouring to right the wrongs of the past in our society.

To begin with:
The term birthmother is an offence to me, it describes a clinical process devoid of any respect for the mother-child bond and the sanctity of this relationship. I see it used often in relationship to past adoption practices it is an offence, and serves to perpetuate the myth that there is no bond between a mother and a child when the child is taken immediately after birth, and "given" to more deserving people.
It is a term that should be used in relationship to surrogacy not to adoption practices, past and present.

This is my submission:
To see this issue in its full context a little of my background is essential.Now, finally after 40 years, I will not hold back on the whole truth to protect anyone. For this was my mistake, I protected, everyone else but myself and I paid a heavy price, as did my daughter.

I was raised in a family that went through difficult times both physically emotionally and financially.. So, as it is today, we were marginalized hi society, and we were a good target when my daughter was born in 1970.

My father had suffered a severe accident (burnt over a large portion of his body) when my brother and I were only 18 months old.. My father was classified as an "Invalid" and in those days my parents etched out an existence on the invalid pension.

As my maternal aunt has told me if it had not have been for my grandparents we would not have had a roof over our heads nor had sufficient food for the week. I saw my mother distressed on a regular basis, because there was no money left for the basics and pension day was several days away.

My father suffered from regular bouts of depression because of the hopelessness of the situation, and although he was able to rehabilitate to walk reasonably well again, tremendous burdens were placed upon my mother and my brother and I. My father suffered post traumatic stress disorder, and over time this also affected my mothers mental and physical health. To this day I do not know how we survived it all, and very few people knew of our Situation as we always "presented well".

I had also had the unfortunate experience of being "cornered" by my mother's brother when we were living with him,(whilst my father was rehabilitating) and on another occasion being "terrified" by my grandfathers "mate" when my mother sent me on A trip to see my aunt with him several hundred miles away, to save on the bus fare.

I believe all these experiences, contributed to the outcomes in my life, and yet in the end I was punished because of them, and worst of all, there were people just waiting to take advantage of my situation.

So, I state I was mentally, emotionally and physically Raped on 4 occassions in my lifetime, my only solace here is that I have met other women that have been through worse. The worst Rape of all was that of my daughter, by the government, the church ,the legal & medical profession and finally her adoptive parents.

I was 18 when I met my first boyfriend, and as was quiet common in those days (I had been raised in a strict religious atmosphere) I knew very little about sex. My first sexual experience could only be described as date rape. The term was not readily used as a part of the Australian language at that time. Men were accountable for very little, back in those days, and even to a large degree In the 21st century. I then found myself in a difficult situation I could not put any burden on my mother in particular and confide in her about what had happened (she was by now totally depleted from the years of what had been dealt them, she had had a nervous breakdown).

It was considered a terrible sin to have had premarital sex , even though I had not consented to it hi the first place. The relationship reluctantly continued with my boyfriend, and I became pregnant. My only option was to go away until we could work something out, I believed we Would work something out, and my child would be in my care from her birth to adulthood. I went to the eastern states, and stayed there until I was 7 months pregnant, when my boyfriend brought me back to the West.

My mother became hysterical, when she realized I was pregnant, she was bereft about the neighbours the relatives, and the church members, finding out, her daughter was pregnant Out-of wedlock... I had to hide in the house, she had contempt for me, that I should put her through this, after all that she had suffered with my father, and after all she had kept up a good standard with the little resources they had.

My father thought it was a good idea to marry. He found it difficult to accept that I did not want this outcome. My parents were good living people, the only difference between them and other couples of that era, was the fact that they were unable to generate a substancial income to sustain their basic needs and relied on the government for some assistance. They both supplemented their meager income, they were only able to earn a certain amount before their pension would be taken away.

It was decided that I go to a home for unmarried mothers," for a few weeks" so I would not been seen by others who would make judgement, on my parents and myself, they already felt inadequate. My parents felt they had failed miserably and this was compounded by the fact they were already marginalized because of my father's disability. So there lies one of the pivitol factors that determined the final outcome for my daughter and myself.

The "home" I went to was cold, clinical and isolating. It was deliberately set up that way. It was privately run, but subsidized by the government. It was called Ngala south of the river in Western Australia, I still avoid driving past that place, wondering if they are still taking babies from young women.

When my mother and I went for the interview, an officious matron greeted us....Immediately my morality was in question, and the circumstances of my daughter's conception. The sordid little story.... My mother left and I was ushered to my dormintory, I sat on my bed, looked out of the window that had cement brick guards bordering it, and then I saw the high fence with barbed wire encircling the entire back area, I was told under no circumstances was I to Go to the entrance of the building again, and I was only entitled to 1 visitor every 2weeks This did not happen.

I WENT INTO SHOCK, I WAS INCARCERATED, I WAS IN GAOL.
FACT.

When I enquired why there was such a high fence and the barbed wire, I was told that was to keep others out and keep us safe !!!!!! WHAT A LIE, IT WAS TO KEEP US LOCKED UP TO ENSURE THEY HAD OUR BABIES RIGHT FROM BIRTH. THEY ALREADY HAD DESPERATE COUPLES WAITING FOR MY DAUGHTER.

I now know this was the beginning of the process of wearing me down, and making sure I would be convinced by time I was ready to give birth, that the best option for myself and my child was CLOSED ADOPTION...

1st Degree of separation.
There was this very subtle suggestion, that I had already forfeited my rights to be my childs mother because I was pregnant out of wedlock.. .1 had committed a crime.

2nd Degree of separation
If I really cared about my child, I would be prepared to give her the best opportunities in life, and she certainly wasn't going to get that from me or my family, we were well down on the social scale. Inadequate financial security invalidates a mothers rights and love for her child.

I remember the girls that had been there for a large portion of their pregnancies, they were beginning to show signs of the wearing down process they bullied each other(in particular the younger ones,) they were also instrumental in convincing others that this was THE RIGHT THING TO DO.... They had been brainwashed. I remember thinking How grateful I was that I was only in there for a short period of time(untill my daughter was born) and then we could get out of this dreadful place and go home.

Of course the aboriginal girls from "up North" were treated worse than the white girls. I knew very little about the birth process, so I asked one of the girls when I thought something was happening, she told me to go to the nurse on duty... This truly understanding compassionate human being told me, I had better get back to my room, and not to bother her until I was absolutely certain, she did not want to be mucked around like the girl before me had done. This callous woman finally drove me to the hospital about midnight, she did not speak to me, and when I asked her questions she told me it was none of my concern, I would be taken care of at the hospital.. ..by this time, I was feeling totally abandoned and began to shake, she told me to snap out of it!!!!!!

I remember thinking when I arrived at the hospital, now this is a "Christian" place, I shall be able to talk to someone and we can sort everything out. NO, (how nieve I was) I was met with the same cold clinical attitude, I was left for hours in a room on my own. I remember getting out of the bed and leaning up against the wall, and calling out that I wanted my mother to come, no one came. I tried to find help, but I was restricted by the labour pains and no one was around. When they finally came it was to take me down to the labour ward.

My mother had arranged for the family obstetrician and she only delivered babies at this Catholic hospital St Anne's Mt Lawley. My family was preparing to bring me home and help raise my daughter, my younger sister had been told, and was very excited to think she would be an aunt and there was going to be a baby in the house. They had decided that we were not going to reveal it was my child.

I remember when my daughter was born, I could see her in the distance it was very blurred, I felt absolutely crushed by the lack of kindness and understanding, this of course was deliberate, to make me feel even more unworthy. Several nuns came into the labour ward, they were standing to the side and behind me. In a very strict tone the head nun asked me what was I going to

name 'HER" by this time I was sobbing, I would not answer, she asked me again, and as I did not answer, she said "Well we will name her".
I was in no position to argue. This was the NAMING AND CLAIMING of my daughter for the catholic faith.

The doctor began to stitch me up. The days that followed (I slept for 2 days) were insane, I could not think clearly the pressure was being applied, they were getting concerned that I was going to put up a fight, my parents were concerned they weren't doing the right thing for their grandchilds future.

I found out much later that they had 2 adoptive parents lined up (a women that had given birth to her 4 son in the same hospital he had been stillborn, she had been left in labour for a long time) and Ngala also had adoptive parents lined up, so there was this tug of war over my daughter. Ngala thought my daughter should be taken back there and the nuns were insisting "the child" was to stay there.

It was about the 4th day and a nun came to see me and said that the head nun wanted to speak with me -1 told her I wasn't going to speak to anyone.The next day, another nun came, she told me (her words) "that I had better make up my mind what I was going to do, otherwise, there would be no home for my child to go to." Contact with my parents, was nill, they had been convinced by now (because of their shame) that adoption was the "right thing to do".

I felt totally abandoned. I began to panic, and think of what I could do.. It was about the 4 day, one evening I contemplated running down to the nursery grabbing my daughter out and running down to the train station, my grandparents lived on the train line, and I knew my grandmother would help me. I went over this in my mind time and time again, but my body would just not do it. I was Drugged. I waited in the corridor in the evening for my opportunity, but I just didn't have the mental or physical strength.

About the evening of the 5th day, a nun came to me and said (as she opened her hand) " you had better take these," you will need them for tomorrow." The following day this revolting man came (the solicitor) by now I had no where to turn, I signed the papers, under the belief that I could easily change my mind over the next 4 weeks....THIS WAS AN ABSOLUTE LIE....there was no way, I would have the capacity for a least another 12 months to fully grasp what had happened when I entered that hospital and those involved knew this.

The system was a well oiled wheel that had been going on for decades. In fact it was to be decades later, that I finally realized what was done to me was illegal. I had been denied as had my daughter my basic human rights. I had been given a type of drug, that did not allow me to think clearly for the entire period I was in that hospital and
for months after..

- I had been bullied into submission, those involved in the process had contempt for me and self righteous indignation that justified their actions.
- I had not been informed about a payment that was available at the time.
- I was the legal guardian of my daughter, for the first six days of her life, but I was treated as though, I had no right to see her, hold her and feed her.
- I was a second rate citizen, because I was unwed and I was to be punished for that.

Sadly my parents, also caved in, believing they were inadequate yet again and could not escape from the demands of the system.

I did ring the hospital 3 months later, when I first began to emerge from the haze of it all, but, got absolutely nowhere. They were waiting for phone calls like mine, and had their way of dealing with them very abruptly.

It is nothing short of a miracle that I survived the next 17 years. I did, and began to fight back to get some sort of recognition. My husband supported me in this decision.

However those involved initially weren't about to Own up to any malpractice on their part, this was going to take another 40 years. I became involved in Adoption reform, the rights of natural parents to know their own Child, to know that they were alive and well and happy. To live with not knowing if my daughter was alive or dead, was safe from harm, was absolute hell, how any system could do this to me and thousands of other young women Was unbelievable, it was CORRUPT it was a CONSPIRACY.

When I wrote to St Anne's in 1985 requesting non-identifying information about my daughter, I was expected to be happy with just that, still that was all I deserved. The power these people still wielded over others lives was sheer barstardry. I was even denied the right to have my daughters original/genuine birth certificate until The ombudsman acted on my behalf in 1987. I learnt of my daughters 2nd birth certificate - a falsification, it made me just about vomit when she showed it to me years later.

The insanity of believing that every child was going to be placed into a warm loving Family, is beyond belief. Her adoptive parents, knew my daughter wanted to know of her heritage, but tried many ways and means of trying to get her mind off the subject, always something the dollar could buy.. .but it wasn't going to be the panacea forever, and they knew it deep down.

Through a series of events I found my daughter, in October, 1987 and was reunited with her Jan 1988 - THIS REUNION SAVED HER LIFE. Thank God almighty that I acted on my maternal instincts and intervened in her life....

There have been many mothers who" have done the right thing !!!!!" and waited for Their child to come to them, not wanting to upset the adoptive family.... The Truth is, the overwhelming number of adopted children, will not come looking for their mothers as they are so "grateful" for being taken in by these wonderful caring people. I know it, I have seen it happen time and time again, and for many it finally is too late.

My daughter and I have now been reunited for 23 years, she has also been reunited with her natural father and our respective families. I beat the barstardry of the system, for all that my family endured over many many years and the ongoing unjust consequences in all our lives. I am proud of that, my late father wept when I told him I had found his granddaughter and through floods of tears said "he never wanted her to go".but what could he do he was powerless.

I have also received an apology from St Anne's hospital (now called Mercy Hospital) and
From Ngala....only when pushed to do so....
St Anne's consulted with their lawyers for months before doing so.

In the end, I have been one of the more fortunate ones, however I state: -

My life here on earth WAS NOT DESTINED to supply some desperate couple a female child and to heal their grief, save their marriage while I suffered for years and years.My daughter's adoptive parents were such fair-minded people ?? when a request was made to them for a Reunion, (when my daughter was legally an adult) they reluctantly came forth.... with a few crumbs of comfort, and still continue to believe they are superior, when their own lives are far from perfect they brought the right to this adult/child forever....

On many occasions over the past 23 years my daughters adoptive mother tried numerous ways to destroy our relationship, she did not succeed.

So I come to the end of my story.
Every State in this Country should apologize for the barbarities we all suffered, a Christian country !!!!!! and the final outcome should be a Federal Apology....

Accountability from: The Churches whose doctrines condemned us and deemed that we should be punished severely, to atone for our sin... nothing was mentioned about the father's sin....or the sin's of the adoptive parents...

The government operated and privately run unmarried mothers homes who knew very well they were party to the final outcome of separating us from our babies.

The medical practitioners and nurses - who saw the abuse and trauma and did nothing to stop it for decades - who administered drugs to make us compliant and immobilized.

Some adoptive parents, who deliberately took babies, to satisfy their own wants and needs, with no thought whatsoever of the consequences for the young mother and her new born babe and who also, ignored, the problems their adoptive children were emotionally and psycologcally experiencing untill grave consequences occurred.

Post adoption agencies (government funded) who deliberately ignored the trauma natural mothers and adopted children were experiencing for decades. It revolts me to think that I went for therapy to these so-called professionals at post adoption agencies for years. They didn't have a clue, they bluffed their way through with the pretence of being empathetic, but yet again I was the faulty one. I have not made "the adjustment" after all these years.I now realise that at the time they were counselling me for my trauma, many of them were advocating for closed adoption.

I am very pleased we have received our Apology in Western Australia.

However, it does not minimalise the facts of what was done to me and my family and thousands of other women in every state in Australia for decades.

It was BARBARIC and it STILL continues in different forms today.

The hypocrisy to believe that a single woman cannot provide for her own child and raise that child to be a well adjusted individual is an affront to womanhood.

It is ironic that even after this historic Apology there is this deep seated denial in our families and society and still all manner of explanations to try and justify what we endured.

I shall continue to press for an Apology in ever State in Australia with the culmination being a Federal Apology as was given to our indigenous Australians.

Marilyn Murphy

Natural mother of Sharon

(Reunited Jan 1988)