State Inquiry into Commonwealth Constitution -Forced Adoption Policies and Practices.

Pre-amble to subject:

I am a citizen of the Commonwealth, resident in the state of N.S.W. As a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia I had and still do have an inalienable right to protection under the Australian Constitution, rule of Law and the Common Law of this country, as an Australian citizen. The Commonwealth should have afforded me protection from the unlawful and harmful actions that threatened my right to life, liberty and justice from those who denied me those rights within and without the borders of Australia.

Having graduated and becoming a registered Nurse in 1967, I was working in a small Melbourne hospital and because of the difficulties involved in trying to maintain a satisfactory relationship with the man of my dreams, in Adelaide, I left Melbourne and joined him in Adelaide. When my pregnancy was diagnosed, very soon afterwards, he subsequently decided he did not wish to continue in the relationship, so I sought advice from the Obstetrician & Gynaecologist that I had chosen and consulted to care for me during my pregnancy. I believed that she would have had the knowledge and experience to be able to advise a now-single mother, about how to manage to my pregnancy and birth without the support of my fiance or family. After informing her that our marriage plans had dissolved, I had nowhere to live or a nursing position to fall back on, she advised me to attend the Outpatients Clinic at a leading Adelaide Maternity Hospital. She arranged for me to see a Social Worker at the hospital who said she had found me some accommodation with a family who needed some household help, and I could stay with them until it was time for the birth of my baby. The husband of Mrs. X was advised to meet me on the corner of one of the main streets in Adelaide and I had said I would be wearing a red dress - so it wasn’t difficult for him to find me waiting at the appointed time and place. I

spent ? 3-4weeks with this family(helping with house cleaning and care of their small children) before they arranged for me to go to another home, a Christian family who were caring responsible and very kind and understanding about my approaching motherhood . In spite of this, they and many people I came into contact with before the birth all stated that "adoption was the best thing for us both"..

My daughter was born in 1968 in the teaching hospital where doctors, nurses midwives and other health professionals were educated. Being a Registered Nurse myself, I had an awareness of what was going to happen on admission, during, and after the birth, but NOTHING prepared me for the physical emotional, psychological and very traumatic experience that I had. My patient Record and File had been stamped with the words, ADOPTION.

The birth: attended by a registrar who never used my name or spoke with me and when he did he stated, " stop shaking, just do as I say," or words to that effect. I was not offered any pain relief or reassurance that the delivery was going well, that the baby was ok, or that I was ok. There was a man standing at the end of the room in the doorway surrounded by several young people wearing white coats, I later found out he was a Professor under whose care I had been allocated to, and his team of Medical students needed to observe as many births as possible, without my consent. My daughter was was delivered and the registrar quickly handed her to a midwife who took her away . I was told nothing of her condition, whether she was healthy or even had a normal Apgar score(a measure of basic physical items like oxygen levels, skin colour, and muscle tone) or what was going to happen next. I had obviously signed a CONSENT for treatment form on admission, however, I was not INFORMED about anything relating to the care of my daughter, or my care before prior to the birth or afterwards. I was taken to a 2 bed ward, and spent the remainder of my ? 10 day stay alone, isolated from other mothers, with very little contact from

the nursing staff except when asked questions relating to basic routine Observations, pulse & Temperature or what I had been drinking or eating. I was also given the drug Stilboestrol to dry up my milk, after I asked what the tablet was for.
How did I feel: violated, isolated, useless, powerless, hesitant about my own ability to ask relevant questions about my daughter in the Nursery which left me thinking naively that they must have known best. I was informed nothing of my daughters progress or Medical status, and not encouraged to ask. Subsequently my own mother who was aware of my admission to hospital, also suffered terribly because she was not able to be with me for the birth due to lack of financial resources and support from my father.

Post Natal Care and Experience: the hospital social worker who saw me at each ante-natal visit and after the birth, never offered me counselling, advice, education, support or any discussion of Adoption, relevant to the Laws, or any possible alternatives that may have been available for myself and my daughter. It felt like she agreed with the social "more" of the time and the tenet that Adoption was probably the best "solution" for both of us. She did ask me whether I still wanted to go ahead with the Adoption and after I stated " I have no other choice", she made no comment.
I have since remembered as a student nurse a couple of years prior to my experience, feeding a baby in the nursery who was for Adoption, and wondering why this baby had no mother to feed her, and why she was left in the Nursery alone ? A friend who also worked in an Adoption Nursery as a student mid-wife in a large Maternity Hospital in the 60's &70's, to this day remembers, the long list of babies for Adoption on the wall of the Nursery with a timetable as to which baby was due to be fed next. Many times most of the babies were screaming, unattended and seemingly distressed, she now recalls.

Social Welfare & Support : There was NO social welfare system (the state or the church) that I was made aware of to

offer any financial help (except unemployment benefit) advice support, housing/domiciliary options or legal maintenance applications discussed for the babies father. There was NO permission or capacity for me to enquire let alone access or obtain any services which may have been available. This social worker at no time counselled me or offered me any advice about any alternative to adoption, nothing about any benefits available under the Commonwealth or State control until the mother was in a position to care for her child. After all I was a R.N. who had been educated trained and well placed to care for babies and small children. My training as a nurse ,experience and expertise was invalidated. I was unfortunately unaware of the laws which were already in place under the Child Welfare Act.

The officer at the Department of Family Services read out what was in the Application for the Adoption of a Child prior to me signing the Adoption Papers, I felt pressured and co-erced into doing this without proper consultation and consideration. I was offered no explanation for any possible consequences of Adoption, except to make it clear that I would never see or know anything about my daughter again, once the Adoption Order was finalised and processed in the Courts. Having signed the Adoption Papers I was given no copy of the Surrender papers, nothing to take away and process the decision I had made or opportunity to re-read the document I had signed. I was told that I had 6 weeks in which I could revoke my decision.

This attitude did not help my ability to heal and recover from my loss; I felt that I must have been an abnormal young woman who had created her own life crisis which involved relinquishing my daughter to parents who were better placed to care for her than I was. Nothing was ever mentioned about the affect Adoption would have on myself or my daughter, from the moment she was taken from me in the delivery suite placed in the Adoption Nursery, and kept there for over 6 weeks whilst suitable Adoptive parents were found. There had been studies and reports on mother/infant bonding practices and

attachment theories around and published by reputable and experienced Paediatric and Psychiatric experts and made available to the medical profession throughout the world for a long time prior to the birth of my daughter, so there was evidence at that time available for any health professional working with post-natal mothers, to be aware and to understand that removing a baby from its natural mother was a practice fraught with the possibility of dire consequences for not only the mother but the mental health of the baby ; they both could be at risk.

This practice of relinquishment was not broached or discussed with me : why was this Social Worker ignorant of the current research, or if she was aware of it and understood it, why did she neglect to provide advice and support for young women like myself, at risk?

One has to ask, 42 years on, was she simply doing her job following the Policy Practices and Procedures for Social Workers in Public Hospitals, being unaware or in denial of the tenet " do no harm" when working with patients, and in particular, post natal mothers.

Conclusion: I feel that my Legal, Moral, Ethical, Physiological, Psychological, Mental Health and Spiritual life and Rights were violated and abused from the moment I disclosed I was to become a "single parent" in 1968.

In addition, there is nothing that will ever help my daughter or myself to fully recover from the loss of Adoption but I do hope that all those in writing a submission, can feel that we have done so in the hope that in the future, mothers fathers babies and families are all treated with the care , consideration respect and dignity that they deserve.

I do not wish to be identified on the public record.