

**Parliament of Victoria
Inquiry into Responses to
Historical Forced Adoption**

Re: Within my family stories told in whispers and some going to the grave

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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Some of these stories can be proven with direct names and places. Some you will have to take my word that they did happen:

1. The Great Depression.
 - a. My paternal grandmother received 5 shillings a week war pension as my grandfather was dismissed from the military in 1918 with what was described as Chronic Bronchial Pneumonia but which was really wind drift mustard gas. My father at age 12 was sent to work in a factory to supplement the income. It wasn't enough to survive on so my grandmother either adopted or fostered two girls and a boy. One of the girls I know was born to a single mother who refused to acknowledge her when she sought her out as a 60 year old. These girls came to my grandmother when they were about 13-14 and were sent out to work. The boy took the place of my father in looking after my grandfather who could never go back to work. This particular 'adopted' aunt was 19 in 1944.
 - b. My aunt from my maternal grandmother (along with my mother) was put in the Church of England 'orphanage' in Middle Brighton when she was around nine and a half years old. She went from there to a State Home also in Brighton but my grandmother was able to get her out of the Home at 11 years old to work in a factory. Lived in Collingwood. At age 16 she got pregnant and was sent to the Nunnery in Abbotsford where she worked until the baby was born. She was returned home in Collingwood two weeks later minus the baby. When asked she said she was told the baby had died.
2. World War Two.
 - a. 1942 when the American Soldiers took over Royal Park there was an arrangement with the Australian Armed Forces to supply girls to the Americans that isn't in the Army Records as far as I know. The girls were supposed to be 'escorts' or pseudo 'girl friends' to keep the Americans entertained. A lot of the girls recruited were 'innocents' and not professionals just thinking that they were helping the war effort by being friends. A cousin of my mother's was recruited for this 'work' and got herself into trouble thinking she was 'in love'. The Royal Women's Hospital newly built was taken over by the Americans so the old

Women's was still in use for Australian women. This cousin gave birth and was told the baby had died. When she recovered she again took on the job of 'war effort' and again 'fell in love' with her Yanki sailor and again got pregnant. This time she told my mother it was for real. But again her baby was taken from her.

- b. The Americans were warned by their superior officers that they should stop going out with 'Amateurs' (meaning married women on the loose or innocent girls) and stick to the 'Professionals' ones who knew what they were about.
 - c. My aunt did go out with Americans while her husband was overseas and did fall pregnant once but she gave herself an abortion that went a little wrong and she had to seek professional help.
 - d. Bendigo Base Hospital and Benevolent Home during the war had a system to help families where girls got in trouble. A lot of girls came up from Melbourne or were 'sent to the country for a holiday' and boarded with families until their time was due as 'housekeepers'. The Benevolent Home was/is in the grounds of the Bendigo Base Hospital and started off as an senile aged facility in the 1800s but in the Second World War it was a 'lying in' hospital for pregnant girls. At the same time married women were supposed to make babies or work in the munitions factory. If a married woman lost her baby it would be replaced by one of the single girls' babies -the girl being told her baby had died. If a girl within a family group got in trouble many times her baby became her brother or sister and the grandmother its mother.
 - e. 1942. My mother got pregnant but she had been date raped. Her mother told her she should make sure 'which father' she wanted for the father so she seduced a long time friend on a one night stand and forced herself to have sex with her husband on his next leave. (big story regarding this but not relevant to forced adoptions) 1943. I was a forceps baby and according to my mother was near death. The story differs but one story was she didn't see me for six weeks after that birth but suppressed her milk for my feeding. I was born in the Bendigo Base hospital. Six weeks was usually the time that the children were taken to be adopted. I was registered on 3 April 1943 but was registered a second time six weeks later.
3. Post War:
- a. 1945 there was an overload of babies born in and out of wedlock. My mother had a still born baby in this year and was given the task of wet nurse in the baby room of the Royal Womens hospital. As she tells it the babies were taken off the unwed mothers quite soon after giving birth and were not permitted to see their babies under strict instructions from the head nurse. According to my mother when the Head Nurse was out for an extended time doing the rounds or whatever my mother would bring the babies to the glass partition for the mothers to see. Because of her own baby loss she was considering taking a baby home in place of the one she lost but her husband had already told the

neighbours of her loss. Whether she would have been able to do so is not quite clear.

- b. In the meantime my aunt had had another boy which made four by her husband. She desperately wanted a girl but that would mean togetherness with her husband and they were no longer compatible. She came home from work one night and found her husband with his young slightly 'simple' cousin. This resulted in getting the girl pregnant but keeping it in the family when the girl was ready my aunt delivered the baby at her own house and being a girl my aunt took over the child as her own. Whether the girl was formally adopted is not quite clear.

4. Late 1960s:

- a. Immigrant family came out 1957. Youngest son of six siblings with a dysfunctional father with a violent disposition and PTSD. Caused problems for several of his older children regarding relationships that impacted on Youngest son's attitude to responsibility. Got a girl pregnant and disappeared for two years with no contact with the family in this time. The girl's parents sent her to Tasmania to have the child and was made to give the child up for adoption.
- b. This was a common scenario around this time – Shame and Blame. It was the girl's fault no matter the circumstances and if there couldn't be a wedding then it was off to the country or to another state and the baby removed.

Society didn't change much. In the 1940s there was a code on the registration of births that told whether you were your mother's child or a 'ring in'. If the paperwork had a '2' on it you were your mother's child. If it had a '5' then you had either been replaced or adopted.

There was an agency once that has been absorbed I think. Called Vanish. At aged 50 I was checking into all my family secrets because of my own mystery and my mother being a sort of storyteller. She used the same story but different endings depending on what I was doing 'wrong' in her eyes so I got several versions about my birth and my condition at birth. I was a forceps baby I knew that and I did have the mark of the forceps on my left forehead but the story was the same regarding the length of time it was before I was taken home. I know I am 'family' but Bendigo in the 1940s every one had a familiar look and you could tell up until the 1970s when many people started moving to the country if you were from the Bendigo region. But when I started looking to the Bendigo Freedom of Information to find out more I was told such things were not publicly available.

When I checked with Bendigo Base regarding the births in the war years they admit to the Benevolent Home to being a 'lying in' centre for mothers but not about the swapping of babies and you will not find official records in the Armed Forces regarding the girls sent out to the American servicemen.

But these stories and more are true. How you can prove them is another matter.

Sincerely

Yvonne Fix