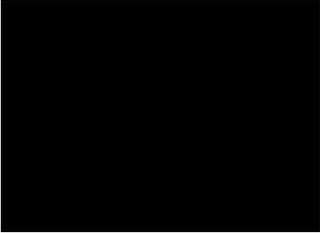


26 February 2020

LA LSIC - FORCED ADOPTIONS INQUIRY  
SUBMISSION NO. 32  
RECEIVED 24 FEBRUARY 2020 - NAME WITHHELD

Please find below my submission for the Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions in Victoria. I am not seeking confidentiality however it may be detrimental to those mentioned in my submission if my identity was made public.



I was born in the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne in 1964. The hospital social workers organised my adoption and I was removed from my 15 year old mother against her wishes a few days after my birth. According to my hospital records I remained in the hospital for approximately two months prior to being collected by my adoptive parents. As a psychologist, I am aware that this is a critical developmental period for a baby's brain and nervous system, especially in the establishment of psychological, affective and relational functioning. The lack of a consistent caregiver with whom attachment and bonding could occur during this timeframe would have had potential long-term effects on my psychological and emotional functioning. This causes me anger and grief to think that professionals subjected me so early in life to circumstances likely to create developmental delays throughout my childhood.

The assessment done on my adoptive parents was less than a page long, detailing a neat house and nutritious food in the fridge. My future was apparently determined by a clean floor and the contents of their fridge. What this assessment didn't reveal was that my adoptive mother has a family history of child sexual abuse and my adoptive father comes from a family filled with hostility and high expressed emotion. This meant neither of my parents were well equipped to parent a child, let alone a child who was not theirs and who had experienced such a traumatic start in life.

There were no further checks done on my welfare and no support offered to either my adoptive parents or my biological mother once I was removed and rehomed. When it was found that I had congenital hip displacement I have been told that the hospital simply offered to swap me for another baby. All of this shows me what little regard there was for the welfare of all parties involved. It seems a problem was solved and the case closed.

As a result, I grew up being subjected to physical and verbal abuse and emotional neglect. I was an only child (although I actually had 5 half-siblings unknown to me) and we moved constantly because my father was in the military. As an adoptee, the need to establish long term relationships is paramount to overcome the early and permanent separation from the biological family. I was not given this opportunity, so I bonded with my pets instead. Due to my parents' profound lack of understanding of my needs, two of my childhood dogs were given away without my consent or knowledge. These continual changes and losses contributed to my experiencing separation anxiety, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, social anxiety and feelings of abandonment.

Eventually I had to leave school early because I was unable to keep up with the curriculum due to the constant relocations along with my declining emotional state, but I was unable to hold down a job due to the extent of my anxiety and growing depression. I left home as soon as I could and struggled for a long time with no-one to turn to for emotional or financial support. I did seek therapy but the majority of therapists, paid for out of my own earnings, were keen to absolve my parents of any responsibility which amounted to victim-blaming. This made me feel further isolated, faulty, and increased my anxiety and depression, which impacted my ability to work and support myself.

Reunion occurred when I was 21, at the request of my biological parents, and it was profoundly mishandled. I was not protected by either social workers or my parents, instead I

was pushed into something I did not ask for and experienced further harm. I believe both biological parents have personality disorders and were unable to take my needs into account. I experienced further blame and rejection during the years that followed from both biological and adoptive parents, again with no further follow-up from the Royal Women's Hospital who organised the initial reunion.

I now have no connection with any parents, adoptive and biological, or four of my half-siblings, and have had to navigate the world alone. When I attempted to access my hospital file to try to make sense of my life, the majority of it was redacted and I am told I will need to go to court to obtain any further information through the Freedom of Information Act. This entails expensive lawyer's fees and considerable stress. This is an insult given the substantial amount of money I have already spent on therapy and other supports in order to create a functional life for myself without relying on other people, welfare or substances.

From very early in my life, my adoptive mother has created a dynamic where I was made the family scapegoat, insidiously turning her entire side of the family, along with others, against me. She has told lies in order to avoid responsibility for her poor parenting and this culminated in my not being informed by any of them when my adoptive father died (although his side of the family did contact me). I was not included in his will or his gravestone plaque and at times it has felt like I don't exist.

I have missed out on opportunities, both personal and professional, as a result of my battle to survive and the energy this has taken. My physical and mental health has suffered, leaving me with chronic fatigue and complex posttraumatic stress disorder. I believe my removal and subsequent placement were unethically handled, as was my reunion. The resulting cost to me emotionally, physically and financially has been enormous and until recently I have had to bear it alone.

What has been helpful in recent years is the Post Adoption Support Queensland service which has provided a forum to meet others with similar histories and offered trauma-informed counselling specifically for adoption-related issues. The validation and healing I have experienced in this setting has been significant. I have also received practical and emotional help from FIND and VANISH in my home state of Victoria.

At the very least I would like to be compensated for the amount of therapy I have had to attend at my own cost in order to cope with the consequences of my adoption, and be provided with access to the entirety of my hospital file. I am writing this submission because I survived but I know there are those who didn't and they no longer have a voice. We were abandoned twice – once as a result of being forcibly separated from our ancestral line and again by the system that did not address the issues this created. Thank you for this opportunity to share my story.