

WHAT MADE IT LEGAL FOR THE 14 YEAR OLD ME TO SIGN AWAY MY BABY?

SADNESS and GUILT are two words that first come to mind when I think about the last 46 years of my life.

In 1973, I was an innocent 14 year old girl, pregnant and in hiding, I grew up in a family with three brothers, a fairly happy family but one which was always on the move with my father being in the Army. I was so small and petite, I was not sure if I was pregnant or not for 6 months until my mother was suspicious, she asked me and I denied it – my father then asked me and I admitted it – we went to the doctor and found out I was over 6 months pregnant. From then on I felt I became the little girl over in the corner while everyone made the decisions – I was never sure what was going on.

My boyfriends father was in politics at the time so we were bullied and threatened into silence – it was very crucial this information was not leaked to the public (I was told it would make front page of The Truth Newspaper).

My boyfriend's family arranged for me to be sent to an un married mothers home where I became very homesick and much to their disgust, my family brought me home. I spent the remainder of my pregnancy in my bedroom (the door was locked if anyone visited), lonely, scared and hidden from the world. They told my mother they could have us transferred out of Geelong in which my family refused, they even offered to pay for my medical expenses but my father wasn't having any of it, I was his daughter and he would look after my expenses.

Their position was much more important (Parliament) than my beautiful brave father who according to them was ONLY a Warrant Officer in the Army having only just come home from doing 12 months in Vietnam in the highest decorated unit in the Australian Army (AATTV).

I only went out when I had to go to the doctors and even then I had to bob down in the car – I never went into the waiting room, I had to go through the side door and straight into the doctors room because my mother was so worried someone would see us.

I was dropped off at the hospital by myself, my family were down for my brother's wedding and they were all told that I was away with friends.

A few days later I was induced and then sedated – I have no memory of my babies birth, I was only ever told that I had a boy that I was never allowed to see.

I was alone and scared, I still remember the nurse coming in, stood against the wall and verbally abused me and told me I was a bad person. I spent Christmas Day alone, It was awful, I was scared, alone and felt like I had ruined other people's lives.

I never saw a social worker until it was time to sign the adoption papers, I remember sitting with my head down and the social worker telling me to sign and I didn't want to, I wouldn't answer her so she said to me If I didn't sign the form, I would go to a girls home and my baby would go to a home anyway – I signed the paper. This is the biggest question I want answered – How could this possibly be legal?

I got home and my mother said to me, we will just get on with life like it never happened. We never spoke about it again – My mother died suddenly when I was 27, taking it to her grave as I was supposed to do.

I did not go back to school for fear of being questioned and worried what everyone would say – I knew they all knew and I was not allowed to talk about it – I decided I would get a job – I wasn't a

little girl anymore! With very little education I took the first job offered to me working in a deli. If I could be responsible as a 14 year old to work, why was I not allowed to be responsible to have a baby?

For the first year after [REDACTED] was born, every day I got home from work, I had tea and went to bed, I cried myself to sleep.

At 16 years old, I started to socialise with a family relative and went on to meet my now husband, we have 3 children and after each child I became more depressed – I had anxiety, panic attacks, I went to my doctor and he said I needed to deal with the baby that had been given away and diagnosed me with PTSD, depression, anxiety, panic attacks, social anxiety and I was then put on a lot of medication. He sent me to a psychiatrist which unfortunately treated me with more medication in which I slept the days away setting the alarm to pick up my children from school, when my doctor found out about this, the treatment was immediately ceased. My doctor then went on to counsel me himself and put me in touch with his friend Pauline Ley from Geelong Adoption Program (GAP).

I couldn't go to the supermarket on my own, I couldn't go out for dinner, my children missed out on so much, I just was not well enough to go anywhere for a very long time. Of a day, I would drop the kids at school and I would sit outside the doctors in the car just in case something happened to me. I felt I needed to be close.

I had no friends, I never joined social groups, I was so anxious all the time, now looking back, I have no idea how I functioned. I have been on anti-depressants for longer than 40 years and will be for the rest of my life. The huge amount of guilt I feel because of the cost of doctors' bills, counselling, medication and being unable to hold down a job – to this day and for the rest of my life no amount of medication or counselling could fix what was broken, I just get through each day.

For a very long time I have suffered from the severe secrecy that my family had to endure because the paternal grandfather was a politician and so the adoption became all about keeping the secret safe – we were threatened and bullied because of the stake of his job.

Even to this day when I see the paternal grandmother in town, I hide! It is still affecting me on a daily basis. I scan the shopping centre when I walk in not wanting to see her!

You would think with them being in politics they would be able to help by being in touch with the legalities of the process (unmarried mothers pension).

I was asked what the governments apology meant to me – they are just hollow words – it meant nothing – it feels like we are the minority because we are still in hiding, we are not heard. I can never, ever give back the time and love which I feel I have lost during the years with my children, I can never remove the guilt. I can never replace what they have missed out on because of the multiple medications that made me unable to function as the parent I wished I could have been.

I don't want to keep the secret anymore, it has been years of misery not only for me, but my family I am happy to name names if required – I want to be heard!

I honestly believe we deserve compensation and then maybe more mums will come forward for the help they truly deserve.

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