

Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions in Victoria 2020

I REQUEST NAME WITHHELD

To Whom It May Concern,

Below is my submission to the enquiry. It tells my story in the best way I can, however a lot of my story I can't remember so when there are gaps, this is the reason why.

It was 1970 and I was 19, pregnant and alone.

I was in Melbourne when I found out I was pregnant. My boyfriend disappeared after I told him. At that time, the only three options for unmarried mothers, was a shotgun wedding, abortion or adoption. Being an unmarried mother was seen as terrible from all of society. What would people say? Would there be talking behind our backs? I felt a lot of shame and guilt. This was magnified when I went home and told my parents. Initially, when I was at home staying with my parents on their dairy farm, I was asked to hide, to go to my bedroom when anybody came over so they thought I wasn't home. I was something to be ashamed of. The town's population was very small, 2100, so naturally if there was any gossip, this would spread very quickly. My parent's families have lived there for quite a few generations and were well known so if any friends, relatives, communities would hear about my pregnancy this would cause shame on my parents' name.

During this early period of my pregnancy I was asked to see a psychiatrist about an abortion in Melbourne. My father took me to this appointment but I remember seeing the doctor by myself. After the consultation the doctor and I advised my father that I wouldn't have an abortion. It was expected that I would then have the baby adopted. I tried to think of other alternatives, a way I could keep my baby but there was no financial and material assistance, no support. It felt like adoption was the only option.

After this time I moved back to Melbourne for a few months where I stayed with my Auntie Bub and did a lot of temporary work. About 5 months into my pregnancy I returned home and discovered that my parents had arranged for me to go to a maternity home, through the church, for the remainder of my pregnancy. This was arranged for my parents to save face in the small township including from their friends, relatives and the church. I can remember driving to Melbourne and arriving at this home, but not much after that. Whilst at the home all the residents like myself had rostered jobs to look after the home such as cleaning and scrubbing floors, cooking meals, washing everybody's sheets and other laundry with boiler ringer washing machine. There was **no support** at this home.

When we (the young pregnant women) went out from the maternity home, we had to go in twos so as not to upset the people who lived in this area. Apparently there were complaints about us walking down the streets, that **We would cause disgrace to the locals.**

I remember catching the tram to the hospital in the city and feeling the shame and guilt as people in the community were looking at us or me (if I was alone). At health services during this time before the birth, I was treated by different doctors and nurses every time. The hospital staff were very demeaning which just reinforced the feeling of shame, guilt, secrecy and loneliness. I have very limited memories of that period of time, especially at the hospital and of the birth of my daughter. I

can only remember going to the hospital to have an induction for my baby, being in the hospital where there were rows of beds in a large ward. My mother and aunty Bub came to see me before I was induced, however they never stayed. I remember being given a pill to stop my milk coming in. But most of all I remember being scared, traumatised and alone.

I have no memory of the birth of my baby, or any visitors in hospital nor leaving the hospital after her birth. It is the “*baby*” that partially causes me the trauma I still hold. The separation from my daughter after her birth still causes me intolerable pain, psychologically, physically and emotionally.

I don't remember anything about my baby.

I have a copy of the paper I signed for the adoption to go ahead but I do not remember doing that. It was when [REDACTED] (my adopted daughter), showed me a photo of herself when she was a baby in her adopted father's arms and the date of that photo, when I realized that it was before I had signed the adoption papers, of which I do not remember signing.

The need for secrecy and the fear of people finding out, families, new and old friends has continued to contribute to my feelings of *Isolation, alienation and unworthiness*.

After the birth of my daughter I went home. From this time, my parents never mentioned the pregnancy or the birth to me again. We were told by *Society and Doctors* to never to talk about it, that everything will be OK and to get on with your life. How wrong was that!!! I felt *Blame* and *Anger*.

Within 10 days of the birth, I had returned to Melbourne, found myself a job and commenced working. I was still in a daze *and very traumatised*. From this time, for the next year and a half until I met my husband was when I was most vulnerable.....

From this time my self esteem and confidence became very, very low. In fact, I would say I didn't have any at all. I needed to feel loved and looked for it from anywhere. This need for LOVE has never diminished. Even though I have a family who loves me, I still feel very alone because of that period of my life!!!!

After her birth I was constantly wondering about my daughter. How was she? Where was she? Was she ok? Because of this, I contacted the Church organization twice and asked if they could find out for me about her and let me know any information. They did this and I was lucky to get two letters advising me how she was and what she was doing.

I told my husband about [REDACTED] before we were married. He has been very supportive to me in his way.

Throughout my life I would experience triggers for this trauma - her birthday, Christmas, mother's day, when I see a baby or child around the same age, TV shows – all of these things would trigger the trauma and feelings. I also realize now that when my husband travelled overseas in the 80's I was very uneasy, worried and scared once again when I hadn't heard from him for a period of time. A number of times when there has been a family death or our pets died, the pain and grief I felt, I automatically pushed down. This was a strategy that has helped me to survive but as a result stopped me feeling anything or dealing with anything.

I became very unwell and re-experienced my trauma after my youngest daughter moved to the UK for a year to work. This triggered my emotions and feelings about losing my baby and not knowing where she was or if she was ok.

The effect of the trauma has caused me to be very scared. When any of my family go away from me I have the thought ***"I have lost a daughter, I do not want to lose another"***. It is that terrible **physical feeling** in my stomach but there is also a lot I don't feel!!!! ***The loss of my baby has never left me and haunts me every day.***

Later in my life, in 2005, I commenced the project of trying to find my daughter. I had never told my other daughters about her, as I thought they would think the worst of me for having giving up my daughter for adoption. They would think "How can anyone do that?". At that stage my husband and I called for a meeting with my daughters and I told them. Whilst the memories never go away, it was traumatic to talk about this with my family as it was bringing back the memories again. When I told them they were supportive to me.

I requested information from the agency that arranged her adoption. I was advised that she was told about me, that her adopted mother told her of the contact I had made early in her life and that I must love her. That was a very significant event for my daughter and myself.

At the same time, I tried to start to understand and remember more about my story. I visited the Queen Victoria hospital to help me. After 15 years, I also tried to find my hospital records. I was very upset and angry when I was notified that they had been destroyed. ***What right did they have to do that!!!!***

I am very lucky to have found my daughter and we have A CLOSE relationship. I have a relationship with her son ■■■, and daughter ■■■ also. My other children also have a close relationship with them too and it continues to grow. ■■■ told me she always felt her relationship with her adopted mum was never complete.

I have spent my whole life not telling any friends about ■■■ and when I starting telling friends my story and that I had found ■■■, the usual reaction is 'Oh well, everything is OK then'. ***It isn't and it continues to be a significant personal issue!***

Whilst I am so lucky to have her in my life, it does not take away the pain. I have experienced depression, anxiety and panic attacks as a result of this experience. Since 2001, I have undertaken extensive therapy from both psychiatrists and psychologists and I have spent 3 weeks in hospital, I am still on medication. I still require therapy and ***in fact, tomorrow (march 16) my psychiatrist has arranged for me to meet with a psychologist who uses EMDR Therapy (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing) to his patients.***

I am writing my story, putting memories on paper in the hope it may help me to become a better person. I still push those memories away, as that was how we were told to deal with the trauma of losing my child and get on with my life. I still get the thoughts of shame and guilt, "how could I have done such a thing?".

I am still very angry at the Churches and Government for suggesting adoption was the only solution for married people who were unable to become pregnant and the amount of unmarried mothers becoming pregnant. ***There were no alternatives to adoption, no information about any support for after the birth. What did they think of!!!!***

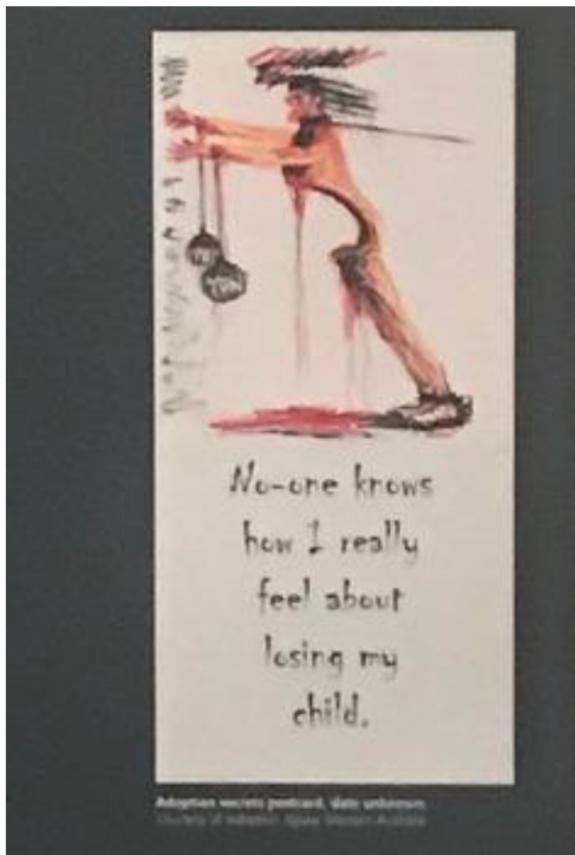
The experience of relinquishing my child for adoption is still having a long-term harmful affect on me. There were times when I felt of lot of hatred for myself for what I did, which has turned into eating or drinking too much , then feeling worse.

The loss of a child through adoption can cause very complicated reactions due to the secrecy, the grief, guilt, shame and loneliness I have had for so long.

In the situation of forced adoption, my child had not died, she is still living but not with me and I am constantly wondering how they are, where they, are they happy etc.

Recommendation:

Due to all of this, I believe the Government and churches should provide support by universal, free, appropriate, quality counseling in an ongoing way.



I am unable to explain how I feel, however this drawing reflects my true feelings.

