

1973 I found myself at a Home for Unmarried Mothers in Brunswick Victoria – Hartnett House.

I had in 1972 completed my Year 12 studies and had gained my matriculation. I had secured a Studentship to be a teacher majoring in English and Mathematics.

I had set my sights on becoming a Teacher from the Age of 5. I had been in a year long relationship and discovered at this time also that I was pregnant. I was scared

having never been talked to about contraception and communicating to my parents was extremely difficult.

After a family meeting between both lots of parents it was determined that I be sent away to Melbourne to a home for unmarried mothers and that my pregnancy was to be a secret.

I have looked back constantly as to why I had no voice in the decision made and why I did not protest loudly but I had been brought up to be seen and not heard. My boyfriend did not consider any alternate support.

And was heavily focused as was his parents on furthering a football career. I had never travelled before and having given up my education was completely lost and scared.

I arrived at the Home and had to settle into a life of early morning risers, working including looking after Wards of the State and sleeping at night in a cold dormitory. I remember being so cold and asking for another blanket but was told no. I remember us being taken off to the Royal Women's Hospital for our check-ups. Marched in as a group of unmarried mothers. I was subjected to internal examinations instructed to be performed by each of six interns. I was surrounded by them. Again, I was voiceless and felt completely shamed and degraded. When it came to delivery, I was uninstructed on birthing and when the pain came, I was thrashing in my bed uncontrollably. I was laughed at by the nurses, then apparently heavily drugged. At the time of delivery, I remember hearing the baby cry, but I was in complete darkness – later suspecting I had been blind folded. I apparently slept for 2 days (due to the drugs) and woke to find my breasts firmly bound and a massively bulging bladder. I called to get out of bed to relieve myself but was not allowed out of bed and instead a bed pan was brought to me. I completely overflowed the bed pan which brought the immediate wrath of the attending nurse and I was told I was disgusting. I recall that the only person who was to some degree nice to me was the Registrar for Births Deaths and Marriages. My whole experience over this time in Melbourne lead me to feel worthless and my only purpose was to provide for a childless couple. Society at the time scorned unmarried mothers and we were viewed and treated with so much disdain.

I came home soulless with a completely damaged self-esteem. I gained employment in the Public Service/Public Works Department as the first female appointed clerk. I married the father of my adopted son to prove to my parents that I really was a good girl. After 5 years we subsequently had another 3 children - 2 girls one boy and I became a much- valued mother. There was and always will be a void from not knowing my first son. The marriage was not a good one but managed to survive 24 years.

I have lived my life having to overcome the pain of separation from my child – a pain hard to quantify and the memories of my treatment. I am sure I have at last overcome post- traumatic stress disorder not officially diagnosed but as a well-educated woman I know.

I have made continual enquiries over the years to connect with my son but unfortunately contact has not come to fruition.

I was extremely disappointed that I was not informed and therefore unaware that legislation which would allow for the support of unmarried mothers was to be brought in at the end of 1973. Up until that time you had to have been married person at some stage (a widower) to qualify for any Government support.

I made a submission to the Senate Inquiry for Forced Adoptions and now to this Enquiry and I know that nothing will be able to turn back time. I have continued education over many years became a businesswoman and then a local politician. I now exercise my voice using it as a Voice for Women Issues.

I will never regret giving life and have so much love to offer!