

I, Mandy Louise Edwards hereby provide my permission to publish this four-page letter and all three attachments thereto as my submission to the Parliamentary Committee - Inquiry into responses to historical forced adoptions in Victoria.

E-signed *Mandy Louise Edwards* on 11 November 2020.

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**LA LSIC - FORCED ADOPTIONS INQUIRY
SUBMISSION NO. 80
11 NOVEMBER 2020**

Ms Mandy Edwards
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

To whom it may concern: Victoria Government Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry – Inquiry into responses to historical forced adoptions in Victoria

RE: FORCED ADOPTIONS IN 1959 (VICTORIA)

I write on behalf of my Late mother, Helen May Greengrass, (nee Sinclair) (12.10.1943 – 19.7.2015)

In about 2007, my Mum told me of a horrific story which was entrenched into her memory about a time when she had a baby at just 15 years of age in 1959. Immediately, I could hear the issues stemming from her story and I could gauge a real sense of her sincere expression of her deep pain and sorrow following this terribly barbaric and negative experience which she had endured. It became quite apparent to me that this was a woman, who at that time was a very vulnerable young person who had been deprived of humane care and any opportunity to obtain proper legal advice before she signed a legal document whilst under the influence of drugs given to her at hospital. From my mother's story, it seems that both her and her baby had been stripped of their basic Human Rights.

Soon after my mother shared her story with me, we both embarked on a journey in an endeavour to find her lost son, who she named David Sinclair born on 16 July 1959, as she always believed he had been swapped at birth, after being told he was stillborn.

Mum told me that at the time when she fell pregnant, she lived in a small Victorian country town which I believe was, Murchison. She told me that after consulting with her local Doctor about her pregnancy, he requested to see her together with her mother and she heard him say to her mother, *'Your daughter has been a naughty little girl, she's pregnant.'* He then advised that it would be best for her to go away to the city, in Melbourne, and stay in an unmarried mother's home for a few months until her baby was born; that way, no one in the town would know that she was pregnant and he advised, *"this was best."*

Mum told me that she was sent off to an unmarried mother's home which she called, Albion House. She told me it was located in Albion Street, Brunswick (my later research shows this home was possibly, *Harnett House*). Regardless of its name, Mum told me that she met a number of other unwedded and young expectant mothers who were in the same predicament as her. She stayed in this home for a couple of months before her babe was due to be born. Mum said that she was a quiet and polite young lady and as a result of her pregnancy and being shipped off like this, she felt such shame by the medical and nursing staff and social workers at both of the Royal Women's Hospital and at the unmarried mother's home. She felt so ashamed that she had to keep her dilemma, all in secret until she told me in about 2007. I asked Mum if she could remember any of the names of the staff at the home in Brunswick where she stayed and she told me there was a Sister [REDACTED] (she pronounced as, [REDACTED]). She also recalled a Doctor [REDACTED] at the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne, and I think she made some mention of Dr [REDACTED]

Mum told me that a few days before her baby was born, she was taken to the Royal Women's Hospital. When she went into labour, sometime towards the end of her labour she was drugged. Eventually, she was shipped out on to a balcony where she was isolated. She told me that when she delivered her baby, she heard her baby cry, but recalls being told that she had given birth to a baby boy, but he was stillborn. Mum told me that she never got to see her baby as he was immediately taken away from her, and she never saw him again. Although, she never saw him or held him, she has NEVER believed that her baby was stillborn.

Mum said, that whilst she still felt groggy from the drugs they gave her, she was presented with a form to sign which the nurse told her was a 'Burial Certificate' to bury her baby.

She told me that she cannot recall seeing the content of the form which she was told to sign because it was simply just put in front of her and whilst the staff member held onto it, she was told to sign it, which she did. She told me that she has always believed this form was a Burial Certificate. Some approximate 3-days later, she was discharged from the hospital and was told to forget about it all, and just get on with her life. At that time, she had no idea what had happened to her alleged, 'stillborn babe.'

After this, Mum said she received some short-term payment from Social Security which she recalls was some form of Maternity Allowance. I found that to be difficult to comprehend, since if she did not give birth to a live baby, how could she be entitled to receive a payment from Social Security for Maternity Allowance? This made me more curious as to whether her babe had actually been adopted without her knowledge.

In about 2007, I assisted Mum on her journey to locate her records from the Royal Women's Hospital, via a Freedom of Information Application. We soon discovered that our hopes were dampened when we were told by the Records Officer, that due to a fire where the hospital records were stored in 1959, that all the records during the 1950's were destroyed, however some scant records from the Labour Ward were located. Eventually, we received a copy of three pages from the Labour Ward Casebook notes, which I have annexed hereto and are marked, "Labour Ward Casebook Page 1; Labour Ward Casebook Page 2 and The Women's Hospital - Birth Register." I have also annexed hereto a copy of a Letter dated, 6 March 2007 from the Royal Woman's Hospital, Melbourne, which is addressed to my mother in response to her request regarding birth information.

In an effort to locate the burial place of my mother's presumed stillborn babe, we subsequently contacted all of the surrounding cemeteries and discovered that there are some remains of a babe Sinclair buried at the Melbourne General Cemetery. This babe has been laid to rest in the Presbyterian General section (M1) along with a number of other babies (about 20 infants) who were buried on that day. I have annexed hereto a copy of document which we received from the Administrators of the Melbourne General Cemetery which confirms there is a record showing that a baby Sinclair was buried on 28 July 1959 ("the baby").

We were provided with the name of the Funeral Director, [REDACTED] who apparently took instructions to collect and bury the baby, however we found that his business had since been taken over by another Funeral Home, namely Joseph Allison. We eventually found the Funeral Home who might have some records, but unfortunately, our search for more documents was fruitless. However, following our enquiries, we received an invite from W.D Rose & Joseph Allison Funerals to attend a memorial service later that year, for family members to remember their "*special children*."

At the ceremony, we gathered with many other families and together we prayed and remembered the many special children who were lost in similar circumstances. At that ceremony, I saw that my Mother placed onto a Christmas Tree of Remembrance, a little card for her lost baby. On that card, she wrote these words:

"DAVID SINCLAIR, STILLBORN 16-7-1959
MY FIRST BORN BABE
NEVER HELD, NEVER FORGOTTEN
WILL HOLD YOU WHEN WE MEET IN HEAVEN, ALWAYS LOVED.
BROTHER TO JAIMIE, KAREN, RONALD (DECEASED) AND MANDY
LOVE MUMMY"

Right up until the day that my mother passed away on 19 July 2015, not only did she continue to believe that her son was alive and had been swapped with another woman's stillborn babe in an effort to help that woman grieve her own loss under the alleged Rapid Adoption methodology which she believed occurred in those days, but she still believed the words which were entrenched into her when she was 15 years old; that she was '*A Naughty Little Girl*' who had a baby when she was young.

Those words were entrenched into Mum's memory and I know this is true because when her cousin came over from Victoria to visit her in Adelaide and have her last cup of tea with Mum in 2015 when she was dying in hospital, I heard her say to her cousin in a very teary voice, "*Gail, I have to tell you a story about when I was young.*" Mum's next words were, "*Gail, when I was really young, I was a very Naughty Little Girl because I had a baby*" I was horrified to hear Mum say this as it confirmed to me the significant impact that this negative experience had on her for her whole life!

In my view, this is terribly sad as the impact of what these so called 'do-gooders' which my Mum used to refer to them as, and the medical professionals did to her all those years ago had a lasting negative impact on her for the rest of her life. This issue has now flowed on and affected surviving family members from my own generation and that of my children as we will never know if we have a family member out there somewhere who does not realize that his Mother, who loved him so much was never given a chance to even hold him, let alone a choice to keep him or not, or even grieve for her presumed loss, particularly, if he really was stillborn.

On behalf of my mother, it is my submission that the following things occur:

1. There be an appropriate response by the Victorian Government to provide those persons, including the parents, the subject child or children, and their extended family members who continue to suffer as a result of Forced and/or Rapid Adoptions with information that is truthful and honest to enable some form of closure to move forward. From listening to my Mother's version of events about what happened to her, we are all entitled, and particularly her son, if he is alive today, to know the TRUTH of what happened to her baby (my half-brother). Up until my mother's last day on earth she desired to know the truth of what happened and now I am continuing her journey on my own to try and find out what happened. I would like to be able to confirm that the babe who has been buried, is in fact my family member, and if so, at least be given an opportunity to ensure that he has had a proper burial with some acknowledgement of his existence.
2. There ought to be a formal apology provided to our family, and to all persons so affected by this outrageous practice of that era. An apology ought to be both in verbal form from a representative of the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne and also in writing to acknowledge what happened to our mother and her child. This apology ought to express some regret, remorse and acknowledgement for how wrong this was, and how she was made to feel such shame and as an outcast in society. There needs to be an apology extended to both parents, mothers and fathers as well as their own child (if possible) and to their extended family members. Also, there ought to be an apology given for the failure to provide her with an opportunity to obtain appropriate legal advice in relation to her position. The indignity of such ill-treatment and poor care (or lack thereof) which my mother told me that she received from the hospital staff including the social workers, doctors and nurses, and from the staff at the unmarried mother's home in Brunswick at that time, including her own General Practitioner is unthinkable barbaric and disgraceful, to say the least.
3. A formal Statement from the Victorian Government, that is widely published about the illegal and unethical practices which occurred for women during the periods of time, when Forced and/or Rapid Adoptions were happening, is essential.

4. Since it seems from my mother's own story and my own research that many of the mothers were under the age of majority and hence unable to provide legal consent, there needs to be recognition that that they could not have truly given proper consent in signing any legal document. Moreover, there must be recognition that they were not given an opportunity to obtain legal advice or have a legal guardian sign a legal document on their behalf. Accordingly, it is my submission that these women (including the fathers and children) ought to be duly compensated for their trauma and the ongoing pain and suffering this has caused. Compensation ought to be substantial, and must be adequate and sufficient enough to also cover the costs for them to receive proper mental health counselling and support.
5. In addition, there ought to be compensation available for those to surviving family members who now bear the costs involved in attempts to locate records and lost family members and where necessary, to pay for the costs to obtain an Exhumation Licence and for the costs involved with the exhumation of a body to confirm the identity of the child who is buried and to ensure that a proper burial and service is carried out.
6. Since those who are in power say what the law is, the Limitation of Action (if any) as a probable defence to any such compensation claim of this nature, ought to be set aside to enable any person who is or has been so affected by the actions of those involved with the Forced Adoptions (including Rapid Adoptions) to make good, as best as possible, of a terrible situation that ought never have happened in our Australian society.
7. Since those who were in power in the days gone by when these alleged barbaric crimes occurred, enabled these things to happen, then the only remedy is for those who are in power today to be part of the solution, and offer practical support by offering a formal apology both in verbal and written form; access to information; assistance with locating and connecting missing family members; mental health support to those persons who continue to suffer and to provide proper and adequate compensation.

Yours faithfully,

Mandy Edwards (Daughter of Helen).

On behalf of the Late Helen May Greengrass (nee Sinclair).

Attachments:

- Ltr from The Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne re: Birth Information, Ltr dated. 6 March 2007.
- Labour Ward Casebook notes (3 pages in total) July 1959: Labour Ward Casebook Page 1, Page 2 and The Women's Hospital - Birth Register.
- Melbourne Cemetery – "Instructions for Graves" to [REDACTED], dated 28.7.59.