

## Parliamentary Enquiry 2021 into Forced Adoptions in Victoria

I was conceived in The Port of Melbourne in 1951. My natural father was a merchant sailor. My natural mother blocked out most memory of the event, and cannot remember his name. When I was born my natural mother did not believe she would have to go home without me. She created such a fuss about wanting to see me that the matron herself rang the doctor who told her she had to take me to see her. My file had been marked 'for adoption' as her parents didn't want her to bring me home. She nursed me for 15 minutes before I was taken away. After she went home she was so distraught that her mother worried that they should have taken me home with them, and rang the hospital. Her mother had said "What would the neighbours think?" But my natural mother told me she replied, "Who cares what the neighbours think?" She wanted to keep me, but hadn't been told about the supporting mother's allowance, which was the same as the widow's pension in 1952. This was within a week to a fortnight of me having been born. But they were told they were too late, she had already been taken. This was a lie, as my adoptive parents didn't take me home until 19 days after I was born.

This is how I found my natural mother. My adoptive father told me it was a private adoption arranged by the Rural Bank's solicitors. Dad was a bank manager. When he was signing the adoption papers he saw the name of my birth mother. He told me that, reluctantly. I also knew that I had been born in Paddington Women's hospital.

So I wrote to the hospital asking for information. They said nothing was available. This was in 1975. Undeterred, I went in person to the hospital, up to the medical records library, and asked the woman if I could find out my time of birth from my birth card, as I was interested in Astrology and needed my birthtime. She had a look and came back and said she couldn't find it. Then she said that there was one more place she could look, and came back with it. I think she was a supportive person. She held the card in her hand and told me my birthtime. I asked if I could see the card and she handed it to me. There was the address of my mother at her parents' home.

I checked the telephone book for the phone number in The Mitchell Library, which had all of Sydney's old phone books. I compared it to the 1975 phone book, and I could see that the address was the same for the family. I did not want to ring up, as I thought it better to arrive out of the blue in person, which I did. My grandmother answered the door, in Cremorne, and gave me my mother's address and phone number and advised me to just go around there and knock on her door. The suburbs were adjoining. I did that, and met my birth mother who readily accepted me, as did all of the family. I have written a book of poetry entitled "Life Poetry of an Adopted Baby." Its purpose is to give the inner mentations of an adoptee through the course of her life. It will be published by July. Here is my book's introduction:

### Foreword

"When a newborn baby is permanently separated from its mother, nodes in the brain to do with attachment and the ability to form natural relationships do not develop as they should. This causes lifelong difficulties for that infant, which may manifest as: depression, anxiety, loneliness, difficulty in forming the bonds of relationship, or suicidal ideation. An innate difficulty with all connectedness is born; an existential angst and corresponding difficulty in seeing the meaning in life.

You have lost all sense of who you are, where you come from, where you belong. Perhaps It is the same as losing part of your soul.

At an enquiry into the effects of adoption on newborns, I heard a midwife state words to the effect that on the day the mother went home without them, and even if they had not cried before, and even if they had never been allowed to see their mother, the cry of the separated infant would start, first in fearful distress, then going to rage, and then, finally, the whimper of apathy. And then to the silence of grief and forced acceptance. The midwives would say to each other "The mother must be going home," and rock the baby gently in a special chair reserved for comforting them. **I was adopted by lovely, loving parents. So I have been strong enough to never stop crying."**

I may never be able to track down the family of my natural father, as his name is unknown. There is potentially one way I could find this out. My father was a merchant sailor and I was conceived in the Port of Melbourne. I have a list of all of the ships in the port at that time. The lists of sailors on those ships -their names- is apparently available in England...a maritime museum it might be (?) I have it written down somewhere in my files. If I could compare DNA match names against those lists then I might have a chance of resolution. I am on DNA websites to try to find a paternal match in this way. ***Adoptees are under a lot of financial pressure when it comes to trying to locate their natural families.*** I went to Denmark to meet one candidate for my father, and am now beginning to wonder if I should really just pay for a DNA expert to untangle all of the threads that may or may not be paternal matches, as I can't get my head around the websites and how to use them. There is a difficulty in confronting how to do this, for me. Perhaps it is because I have been wanting to know for so long and have tried so many times to know.

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## Selection of Poems from "Life Poetry of an Adopted Baby"

### Untitled

Life sings, surges, flows?  
But no, I know it does not;  
But bleeds, bleeds, bleeds,  
And drops away  
Tear by Tear.  
O for the bright fangs of eternity.

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1970

A Prosaical Thought  
-Reflections on Gail's Friendship-

The taste of a good friendship  
When it is dying,  
Is the saddest thing  
Left to experience.

New faces, new things to do,  
To fill in and make more varied  
My life  
Pale most frighteningly,  
When I feel a life-pulse  
Gradually flicker and fade.

For, in my mind,  
A friendship that formed as I  
Formed,  
...Seemingly long ago,  
Becomes deeper than just  
Part of my life.  
...It is one of my largest,  
And last,  
Ties to myself;  
And with its death  
I might die a little.

\* \* \*

September 1970

## If I were to Die Today

If I were to die today, oh where could I lie?  
On what sweet chariot vehicle  
    Could I fly to Thee?  
And as the night sky fades,  
And dawn's rooster cries,  
    I feel my life-pulse  
        Beat apace,  
        And feel  
            The  
        Emptiness.

\* \* \*

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### Fishing with an Empty Hook

A flock of sailing ships cutting and turning.

A line of them in Sydney Harbour,  
Spaced out like a string of broken pearls.

Ten ibis fly in V formation,  
Eight to the south east where I was born,  
Two veer off to the south west.

They in their element, but who am I ?  
A misbegotten fool.

Here I am, replete with privileges:  
Well fed, educated, loved  
By Mum and Dad;  
With no cause to complain...to,  
With no blood ties to belong ...to  
That have invested in me their future.  
I feel big, awkward, clumsy...  
Like a baby that has to be contributed  
to.

It is something set in concrete...  
An evil spell.

It is called a generational thing.  
It is stalled, malfunctional energies;  
An imprint going nowhere in time.

Meanwhile, purposeful life  
Goes on all around me:  
Lithe, connnected, with mums and dads,  
Aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews and  
nieces.

Alive and interconnected  
In a breathing blood net...  
A sparking, living thing,  
Invested in the present and future  
Because knowing its past.  
It has a breathing matrix of  
connectedness  
To its soul.  
And by its own momentum can sweep  
In its in-born protection  
On to the future.

I, on the other hand,  
Sadly free of that,  
Like a country bumpkin,  
Free to stumble into  
A 19<sup>th</sup>. century industrial city...  
Free to get lost,  
Having claimed its right  
To be alone  
In the unrelieved grind  
Of the meaningless material...  
A shag on a rock.  
Conspicuously malaprop.

I am every century's exile.  
No, even less than that.  
For an exile's pain is in  
Knowing what he has lost....  
And mine is in not knowing  
As never having had.

Even the one who bore me  
Said to me "What are you griping  
about?"  
You had parents who adored you!"  
"That's not the point," I responded.

And, having done so,  
I become the ungrateful lucky one,  
The spoiled cuckoo in the nest,  
Not accepting gracefully,  
In a state of no grace.

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20<sup>th</sup>. Dec. 1998

## Praedatorius Innat'us

There is a predator in the heart of everyone,  
Big or little, weak or strong.  
It'll stop you from feeling free,  
Prevent you from hearing your song.  
It is the beast within, the beast without;  
It senses weakness with its snout.  
Of the exquisite rapture it has no doubt.  
It's in for the kill as your blood flows out.

It's spite, revenge, jealousy,  
Sudden cruelty – the dreadful hegemony,  
Lunging from where- no conscious form;  
Circling pressures within the dome,  
Ready to strike when weakness displays  
Its love for you; the tremulous gaze  
Of trust and hope for closeness,  
Of deepest bonding...in Love's remoteness,  
But also its wild and most frozen space.

So remember, when you get sufficient clout,  
What is within is also without;  
What you can give you can also get;  
Luminous tentacles around your neck,  
Sucking strongly your blood away,  
Eating you up 'till the break of day.  
(It's called Jabba's place- just a breath away!)  
It's making sure your dreams have all gone;  
Your essence extracted...you're all alone.

What you will get is the predator's lunge  
Striking into the heart of you;  
Using your weakness as its grace,  
Clawing the egg quite off of your face,  
Stripping your essence of every trace  
Of naïve trust in the human race.

When it's through you can have its chant –  
You'll take it on as your own recant:  
LIFE TO ME IS VERY SWEET,  
WHEN I GET SUFFICIENT MEAT

\* \* \*

2000

## Let Me Not Be a Bad Baby

Let me not be a 'bad baby.'

Let my cries

Reach, to the skies,

That I

Am

I

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1<sup>st</sup>. May 2005

## I Have Turned 58

I have suddenly grown old  
And a small cry gestating in my mind  
Seeks the person I should tell.

But there is no-one.  
My mother... but no;  
My cry rang out half faulted  
For she is gone.

And my cry reached out to empty space  
With just the shadow trace  
Of a half-life  
Presence.

\* \* \*

27/4/2010

## How Can the Child be Me?

How can the child be me?  
I was once that foetus child  
Already netting memories  
To make up me;  
Most sticky memories,  
Papier-mache  
Do not make me,  
However prettily  
Stuck together like magazine patchwork  
On a New Age artwork.  
Electronic impulses  
Imprison me  
In a salty sea;  
But I am not me,  
As I am not free  
But only free to move.  
But each pulse of outward movement  
Circumscribes  
To the end of its tether  
And each return  
A pulse of terrified abandonment.  
  
Curled into that foetal shape,  
Inside or outside;  
Your womb  
Shall not manage me.

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12<sup>th</sup> July 2010

## Friday Voyeurism

A couple knitted together  
On the shores of Lake Macquarie.  
That love bond they're creating,  
Instilled in their mating,  
Will ensure  
They fall in love  
With their babe in arms.  
The adopted child knows none of this.

\* \* \* 24/8/2012

## I Remember

I remember a trip to the city,  
Somewhere near DJs,  
In the proximity of The Rural Bank.  
My father, and a safety deposit box  
In trust...for a bank customer.

I, by his side,  
And happy to be so.

I wonder now  
If I was like some  
Treasured object  
To be kept safe...  
In trust.

Only I  
Was never  
To be  
Given  
Back.

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18/10/2012

## Homeland

I am a banker's daughter,  
I've been with him so long,  
He is my bricks and mortar,  
And to him I do belong.

He caught me as a little fish,  
Swimming helplessly;  
A little golden baby,  
And nurtured me.

He took me from my mother,  
Who'd lost me right or wrong.  
They'd told her not to bother,  
To go home and be strong.

Away, away, the keening cry,  
Pierced to the bones the newborn one;  
Away, away and far begone,  
To never know where is my home,  
To ever be the golden one.

Eleanor, she loved me;  
Held me close, I guess;  
Yet memory knows well,  
It was only tenderness.

From another woman I was born;  
I knew her smell so well;  
As infant eyes and fingers sought  
She to whom I once was brought  
And from her arms then torn.

I am a banker's daughter,  
I've been on Earth too long.  
My blood is overheated,  
But I am strong.

Send to me the coolest water,  
To splash upon my face.  
To find where homelands do not falter,  
And vanish without trace.

Some scrying pool would that be,  
As deep within I know;  
There is nothing can be seen,  
And nowhere, now, to go.

Uprooted from my native earth,  
And never more to part,  
My spirit home, my soul's true turf,  
Is in my father's heart.

Though he is dead and gone,  
And buried in their grave,  
I seek him, all forlorn;  
His memory, still, I save.

And I will always search for him,  
'Till universes die;  
'Till stars collide, and in their din,  
I'll take advantage of their spin,  
Careering all awry,  
To jump right in and search for him,  
Who loved me best and true,  
When daughters of his own were me,  
And soundings found that true.

\* \* \*

8<sup>th</sup>. September, 2015

End of Submission by Benita Rainer

