

Thank you for allowing me to tell you my story.
I am 69 years old and grew up in Ballarat with a catholic upbringing.

I found out that I was pregnant in 1966, my boyfriend Kerry stood by me during my pregnancy and he paid for everything I needed. We shopped for baby clothes and nursery furniture. We married in 1968 have been married for 52 years till he passed away in 2018 .

During my 8 months carrying our baby I was fit and healthy, we didn't tell our parents about the baby until I was 4 months !

Kerry's mother met with my father and told him about a home in Broadmeadows -St Joseph home for unmarried mothers- they thought it a good idea to save the shame so arrangements were made for me to go to Melbourne to have our child, neither myself or Kerry were given a choice in the matter.

I was so unhappy in that place , I think I was there for 3 or 4 weeks and in that time I was given kitchen and cleaning duties. Kerry came to visit me every weekend and we missed each other terribly .

Kerry bought my mother(who did not agree with dad's decision), down to sign papers so that I could return home.

We continued to look forward to the birth of our baby who was due in September . At 7 months I went to book into the Ballarat base hospital for my confinement .

I went into hospital when I was 8 and a half mths pregnant where I was given drugs to start labour. I was placed in a four bed ward with other young unmarried girls. I eventually started labour on Friday 26 of August, Kerry wasn't allowed to stay with me and he didn't hear about our baby till the next day. I was taken to the labour ward at 10 o'clock Friday night, I remember being in a lot of pain till my baby was born.

I asked whether it was a boy or girl and I was told it was a girl .I must have been given something to knock me-out because I woke about two hours later then told our baby was stillborn. I became upset and started crying and asked if I could see our baby. I was told "No, to stop crying and to go home and forget about it ". The nurse was very nasty and had no compassion at all.

I was taken back to the ward with all the new mothers where I stayed for the remainder of the time in hospital. Mother's were brought their babies to feed them every four hours, I found being in that ward very hard considering I had gone through the birth but had no baby to feed cuddle or show off to Kerry or my family ,I did what I was told and never cried in front of anyone but cried only at night when no one could hear me.

Over the next week I became more depressed and sad and when my doctor came to see me ,he asked what was wrong .I said about my baby and he said to me "but you were going to give the baby up for

adoption ,weren't you?" and I said no, that we were keeping it and we had bought a pram, a bassinet and all clothes and nappies for her.

His reply was "I wish I had known that before!"

I thought this a bit strange ! Two days later I was told I had to meet someone who would like to talk to me, I was taken to a room where a man was sitting at a table. He said I had to organise to bury my baby.

I signed the paper and he said he would send a bill for\$4 .00 which I never received, he did not give me any other information and that was it.I went back to my ward.

When I was discharged from hospital, I received a birth registration form to fill out. I filled it out with Kerry's name and other information and took it to the hospital to find out who the doctor was that delivered the baby. I was told that I had made a mistake, that the baby was not a girl but a boy so they gave the form I had filled out back to me and said that they would take care of that for me. Kerry and I never spoke of our baby and no one else did either but from the day she was born we have not forgotten her, birthdays anniversaries and Mother's Day have been particularly hard .As the years went by i started to wonder where her grave was. After making inquiries, I was told that it was in an unmarked grave with a hundred other babies! Years went by again and I decided to ring the births deaths and marriages to ask why I had not received a birth certificate for my baby and was told I could apply for one.

When I did receive it ,It had none of Kerry's details on it .It said the baby was a boy ,nothing bout being stillborn. I felt that was a bit strange so after some more time had lapsed I decided to ring the births and deaths again, this time I spoke to a man who told me if there was a birth certificate then there should be a death certificate if the baby had died ,which he could not find. He suggested I try to get my hospital records and try some adoption agencies. So the next thing I did was ring the hospital. I spoke to a man who told me there was a record of my stay- to ring back in two weeks and he would see if he could find them - that was legally entitled to them under F O I act . I rang again and they told he was on leave so I said I would call back in a few weeks which I did only to be told he was on permanent leave so I would not be able to speak to him and that person told me that my records had been destroyed so I gave up trying to find any information.

A psychologist I was seeing after battling with depression helped me to get my records from the hospital. After giving me lots of reasons why they could not let me have them (everything from "they were destroyed, we only have one line in a book stating it was a boy and was stillborn, it was-on microfiche film but you cannot have them because there are other peoples information on it). Eventually ,I did get to access my records but had to view them with a employee of the hospital. After viewing two pages from my records, I saw My Baby was a girl, so I asked the man who was with me how they could make this mistake, he

said he did not know, and then told me that if I had found what I needed to know he would destroy the other records. At my baby's birth , I was told it was a girl, they then changed the registration papers to a boy saying the mistake was mine.

My husband and I always felt our child was still alive, Kerry always saw her as a hippie and very close to us. I only hope that if she is alive she will meet her 3 sisters and I will get to meet her too but if that is not to be then she has been in our thoughts all our lives and dearly loved as much as our Three other beautiful daughters .

Christine Poulton