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M: [REDACTED]

4 June 2021

Yuki Simmonds
Parliament of Victoria
Legislative Assembly, Legal and Social Issues Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Yuki,

Below is my submission to the Inquiry into responses to historical forced adoptions in Victoria.

I would appreciate for my name to be redacted (shown as name withheld) and any other names redacted.

I would be happy to provide further clarification to anyone involved in the Inquiry.

Regards,

[REDACTED]

Approaching middle age, my emotions around being adopted have never been stronger. Obviously, I never had a say in being adopted out. It is my fervent hope that this Inquiry gives a voice to the forgotten victims of adoption (forced or otherwise), us adoptees.

It was only May 2019 and thanks to DNA that I found out who my father is and he had died late in 2017. I also found four half-siblings the same day and met them within a week. It was such a joy to meet these four beautiful souls and since then I have been ecstatic to know where I came from. I feel whole for the first time in my life and also perplexed trying to piece it all together.

In summary, being adopted causes feelings that are hard to understand, behavior's that don't make sense and complexity of relationships.

This submission includes my view of the relevant people in my life and what has happened for me. It is not their viewpoint.

This Inquiry into 'Forced Adoptions'

When I found this Inquiry, I thought it didn't apply to me.

My mother did not have a gun to her head. Her life was not threatened if she didn't give up her children and sign on the dotted line. What I now realise is the 'forces' at work at the time, which for my mother included:

- A grandmother and mother who themselves had a child out of wedlock that they were able to keep, and they wanted to 'break the pattern'.
- Country town "small mindedness".
- A local Catholic priest in a country town who 'guided' my grandmother as to the 'right and only thing to do'.
- My mother being 15 when my older brother was conceived and 18 when I was conceived, having no means to support herself as a single mother.
- The fear of God drummed into my mum by the nuns all the way through her Catholic schooling.
- The lies when my mother tried to pick up both her children before the six weeks was up, she being told we had already gone to new homes.

Being adopted, I felt that I was not worthy of making a submission because I was not the child of someone who had their baby ripped from their arms. Like so many things in my life, I don't feel 'worthy' because I am adopted. Of course, I am an adoptee and what does it matter how I came to be one? If you want a submission from adoptees well, yes, I qualify.

My point is, the term 'Forced Adoption' may mean that others who fit within the scope of this Inquiry excluded themselves from making a submission.

My father

It seems the male perspective is missing with the published submissions so far to the Inquiry and in particular the fathers of children who were adopted. My father was raised (mollycoddled) by his mum after his dad died when he was 9. He got married the year after I was born to a woman other than my mother, moved over 500km from country Victoria to the coast near Melbourne and had a daughter less than 2 years after I was born. This may have been by coercion by his older brother, to get away from the drama of what had happened.

By all reports, my father was generally selfish, making sure he had cigarettes and booze before looking after his family. His wife asked him to leave when the four kids were aged 16 and under, resulting in them moving to public housing and having just enough money to get by. 3 out of 4 of my siblings have mental illness and have struggled with relationships, issues with their children and money.

It seems he never took responsibility for the children he created, starting with me. Perhaps my father was overwhelmed. Perhaps he had feelings of guilt at offering the money his mum had given him, to my mother, to have an abortion. Perhaps he felt he should never have listened to his mum when he broke it off with my mum. I will never know and can only try to piece things together. In my mind, I like to think he missed his first-born daughter and this was the cause of a life of self-destruction.

Despite not meeting him, I have unconditional love for him. His photo is beside my adopted father's picture and my hubby's dad picture, all of them having died in recent years. When my adopted mum comes over, I put my father's picture away so as to not risk upsetting her. One of my brothers recently gave me a framed photo of my father with my father's handwriting and I cling to these precious items (and cry as I write this).

My mother

I met when I was 26. I had an image of a bedraggled woman with her hair held up in rags and a mop in her hand. She was anything but. She was a beautiful, slender lady, very elegant living in a lovely home on the other side of Melbourne. I have always loved her unconditionally.

She had a son at age 16 who was adopted, then me at age 19. We have different fathers. She married the year after I was born and never had any more children. Her husband blamed her, but he was obviously the one who couldn't have children.

Despite our love for each other, my mum and I have had some rollercoaster rides.

I will summarise some of the events, characterized by outright lies, hidden memories and family secrets buried long ago:

- When making contact, her mother (my grandmother) asked 'what does she want?'. I understand this is common for adoptees making contact with family for the first time. She also thought I was a boy! They hadn't even talked about my gender after my birth.

- My mum saying that I had 'big hips' like her, the first time we met. I had never thought about my hips until then. I was probably a couple of sizes bigger than her, and I felt she was disappointed with my weight and clothes.
- My mum becoming ill and could not get out of bed for several months after I met her. My mum said it was caused by her memory of a childhood abuse. I sought counselling and was told it was common for the mother to try to 'draw in' the lost child, and had some further counselling from the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau who suggested I withdraw from the situation for a while.
- She claimed she did not know who my father is. She said she did not know anyone with the occupation of my father on the original record of birth details I was given. She said she had been with several men, they were "party times". She did not know timeframes. At one time, she said she would give me some names once her mum passed, saying that she remembered them all.
- At other times, she said she can not reveal the name of my father as he was married and it would destroy his marriage and her reputation.
- She finally gave me a name after I'd known her a few years. I searched for him for ten years (Vanish helped me find him, but I was not aware of any other services they provided), only to be told by him, my mum was pregnant when she met him. He was lovely when I spoke to him, and I longed for him to be 'the one'. When I told my mother, she was shocked and suggested she had also hoped he was the one, as he was a lovely man in her memory.
- When my current husband pushed my mother to tell me who my father is, she said that when I made contact, her relationship with her nieces and nephews had been ruined.
- At the same time, I discovered she had told her brother and husband my father had died, so as to stop the questions.
- When my initial Ancestry results arrived, I contacted a female who I thought may know my father, but who was my mother's father's sister. I never knew my grandfather's name, and he disappeared many years ago. When my mother found out I had contacted his sister, she wrote a scathing text that meant we didn't communicate for a few months. How dare I contact anyone out of the blue, what about the impact on them? Whilst she was aware of my need to find my father, it was prioritized below the needs of her and her mum. I always downplayed it with her, not mentioning it for years on end, not wishing to hurt her or increase her pain further.
- In 2019, she gave me 3 names that may be my father and within a month the DNA came through for me to confirm which one. It was only when I said that I felt I knew who it was, that she started to remember things and tell me about my father. Over the last couple of years, she has told me more details about their relationship.
- My mum said she didn't want me to feel the rejection she had felt when my father broke up with her, hence had buried the details deep inside her and kept his identity a secret from me.
- I have spent a few days with my mum in May 2021 in the country town where she grew up. As usual, she is telling me stories about people and places and events that

have happened during her life, which is great. I realise now, I never had a context, and for me, the stories were of random people and events I could never piece together. Since finding my father and during lockdown in Victoria, I have had the mental space, time and mental capacity to do family trees. Now, I am starting to piece together who these people were and their stories.

- I can see the trauma that my mother lives with every day about those times when she gave up her son and then her daughter.

Where was the counselling for my mum? Where is it now? I can only imagine the guilt she feels at having kept me away from my father and beautiful siblings for all those years. When I told her about this Inquiry, she said it's too late now to fix anything or mend.

Me

I was lucky and had beautiful parents. I had lovely holidays, went to a private girl's secondary school and went on to study part-time for different qualifications.

I have always known I was adopted. The book 'Mr Fairweather and his family' is still fondly remembered.

I had always been curious about my birth parents and went to an initial interview with Catholic Welfare Bureau in 1989, then contacted my mother and met in 1992, then finding her son (my half-brother) in 1995 and then in 2019 my natural father and four half siblings.

I feel I have fumbled through, not understanding how adoption has impacted me. I have tried to do some research but not finding a great deal of relevant information. I had counselling initially when I found my birth mother with the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau and at different times in my life and can now perhaps put my feelings and behaviour under common headings of belonging, acceptance, rejection, fear, identity, loss, guilt etc. Beyond the initial year of finding my mum, I was not aware of any services, counselling or groups offered specifically for adopted people.

Some of the events/behaviours that have occurred include:

- Fear of rejection and fear of abandonment are constant undercurrents for me.
- In my 20's and 30's after initially meeting my mum and her wider family, having confusing images and fantasies about the new people in my life and where they fitted, and resulting in one unfortunate experience.
- Mixing with cousins on my mum's side in my late 20's and 30's. They all knew each other growing up and I did not feel like I belonged, no matter how nice they were. I guess I seemed 'needy' and unsure of myself.
- Trying to have events with my adopted and natural sides of the family, particularly for the kid's birthdays. There were emotions, behaviours, instances of disrespect and rudeness that meant this was not viable. Some of these are still coming to my attention many years later. It means you have to think how to navigate each significant event, trying to include everyone without having multiple events. I know this has favoured my adopted parents over the years, because I feel more responsibility to include them.

- Navigating all the relationships all the time. I always said I wanted a big family and now I have two big families. I have significant responsibilities with my adopted mum, whilst trying to go to country Victoria as often as possible to visit my natural mother, as well as keep track of my adopted sibling, half-brother and his family, other four half siblings, all their children, cousins, aunties and uncles. It is overwhelming and exhausting.
- Piecing this together my adopted aunty was a Josephite nun, working at a school but staying at the Broadmeadows babies home. My natural mum tried to come to the Babies home to take me home before the six weeks was up, but was told I had already been taken (which I know now to be untrue). My natural mother assumed my adopted aunty had special favour and had negotiated my early release to my adopted parents. No wonder they didn't get along later when I reconnected with my mum!
- Only a few weeks ago, celebrating my younger half-brother's important milestone birthday, I burst into tears and couldn't stop crying for a long time. It was a culmination of many things including:
 - o Having confirmed from a cousin that day my dad gave my mum money for an abortion. I was told unceremoniously with a laugh that I was lucky to be alive, in front of other people
 - o I was trying to fit in with my brother's lifelong friends, most of whom I had just met
 - o When I asked one of my brother's friends for coffee because he worked near me, he questioned my motives for offering to catch up for a coffee (thinking I was trying to sell him something), reminding me of my grandmother asking what I wanted, when I first made contact
 - o The sadness of so many birthdays missed with my siblings
- My adopted father died in January 2019, only 4 months before I found my natural father. I felt they (both my dad's) spiritually 'worked together' to help me work out who my father is.

It is only since knowing my father, that I have pieced some things together and thought about a lot of the issues.

My name

I was born [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] In 2008 when I requested a Certificate of Interview, I was also sent a poor copy of my original birth certificate. I was named after my mother's youngest sister, who is only 2 years older than me.

In 2020 I ordered my original birth certificate and was surprised it was stamped 'Adopted' and said 'This record has been superseded due to Adoption', unlike the poor copy. It was also missing other information that was on the 1st copy.

My father's name or details are not listed.

I am glad to have all the copies of my birth certificates. I am not sure if I need my natural parents and adopted parents on the one birth certificate. Perhaps for completeness and to

help fit the pieces together this would be helpful, but I would still want my other certificates. I don't want to have to explain my story each time I have to use my birth certificate.

My adopted sibling

My parents adopted another baby 2.5 years after me. They were also 6 weeks old when they brought her home, with the same excitement and joy they had bringing me home.

My sibling's story is also complex and quite different to mine. I hope they also make a submission to the Inquiry.

My half siblings

My mother's son is great. When he first contacted Family Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, they suggested he meet me before our mum, as I already knew her. We met in a pub near Melbourne around 30 years ago and have never looked back. I know his kids and grandchildren, but we all have busy lives and don't see each other much. He does not see his adopted sister, apparently, she was maltreated by their adoptive parents, even though he was treated well. My brother is quite blasé and does not reach out often, but I know there is a connection and I love him dearly.

My father's four children are beautiful souls and I feel a connection to each of them. They welcomed me with open arms and we have seen each other regularly since we met in 2019. One of my brothers reached out within an hour of me contacting the four of them. He phoned me, told me that our father had told them about me in the year before he died. He was gentle, warm and loving. I could not believe my luck to have such an ally for life! Since then, he visited my mum with me, 'stood in his father's shoes', listened to her story, showed her love, understanding, empathy, acceptance. It was incredible for all of us.

As my father's ashes were scattered in 2018 before I met them, we organized a memorial plaque for my father to be placed on our grandparent's grave. Of the children, I was listed first and really touched by the recognition of this gesture from my siblings. I briefly thought of having my original name on the plaque but opted for my lifelong name.

Moving forward

In regard to some of the issues I have read about as part of the inquiry, my opinions are:

- It would be great if a counselling service could reach out to all people who were involved in the adoption process in the 50's, 60's, 70's (birth mothers, birth fathers, adoptees, adoptive parents, other siblings etc etc.) to see how they are going and identify if they need some counselling services or other support.
- The option to have birth certificates with natural and adopted names on the one certificate, for those who want it.
- Support groups for those who prefer this format.
- A library of books written by anyone involved in adoption, to understand their story and relate to your own.

- A library of resources available, with research on all the issues associated with adoption so people can research and read up for themselves.
- I recently did a Family Constellations session with Rosey Meads, also an adoptee. It was greatly helpful in seeing my place (where I belong) in my different families with my parents and siblings. As she states in her 'About me' - 'As a healed adoptee I carry the intergenerational trauma and wisdom of two sets of families! It's a burden and an honour'.