

Adoption Forum

18 October 1999

Legislative Council Chamber, Parliament House, Sydney

CHAIR: Thank you all for coming and thank you for the overwhelming response to the forum. We ended up receiving 67 requests to speak. We really wanted to hear from as many people as we possibly could, so we have got 25 speakers. We made sure that we included, as much as possible, anyone from a regional or rural area. In a normal inquiry we would try to travel, if we could, but in this case it has been very difficult because of the timing. The women who have written to us from rural areas are also very scattered and it is hard to say we will go to Port Macquarie but leave out Orange, so in general we have taken the view that we will try to make sure that particularly people from Newcastle and Wollongong and from other areas are given as much opportunity as possible to get here.

As you can see from the program, we are going to try to hear from thirteen speakers between now and 12.30. If you need a break, do not hesitate to go outside. We just thought if we had a morning tea break we would probably lose two speakers and it was not worth it. We are going to serve a light lunch in the theatre downstairs, more or less opposite from the Legislative Assembly.

You will notice we have got Hansard here at the end of the table and we have also got some media with us and there will be others. The media are aware, of course, of the usual rules about being sensitive with cameras, not focussing on individual faces and so on. The Newcastle Herald, however, has requested to take a photograph of the women from the Hunter district, and so that may be something that you might want to think about, particularly if you are sitting together. You may go outside and have a photo taken. That is up to you, but that request is there.

The other thing I need to say is that we are going to be fairly heavy about time limits. We are going to have an eight minute bell, a nine minute bell and a ten minute bell. We urge you to bear that time in mind. We have had written submissions and do wish to hear you, but the idea is to try to give as many of you as possible a chance to tell your story.

We start with Mareeta Pratten. When you speak, you can sit down or you can stand, it is up to you. Mareeta gave birth to her son in Queen Victoria Hospital in 1967, and in her submission she explains that she was not able to see her baby.

MAREETA LORRAINE PRATTEN sworn:

Ms PRATTEN: Firstly, I would like to thank the Committee for allowing me the opportunity to speak today, and also I sincerely wish to thank all the mothers here for their continued support of this inquiry.

On 1 February 1967 I gave birth to my son after a prolonged and drug induced labour. At the moment of his actual birth, I reached down, only to be told to keep my "grubby little hands away". This was a time of fear and uncertainty for me. I then had my hands secured to the side of the bed and a pillow was placed over my face. There I was, giving birth to my new born son, with my legs in stirrups, my hands tied to the bed and my face covered by a pillow. Add to this a drugged stupor, and I think that was a situation that any humane person would deem totally inexcusable, and my only crime was being a single mother.

I wish to table a list of the many drugs I was given, without my consent, and which included massive doses of sodium pentobarbitone and sodium amytal. I have a report from my current doctor, in which he states, "It is my opinion that the doses and combination of medication used on Mareeta were unusual and would have caused excessive drowsiness and stupor".

I was discharged on 8 February 1967, seven days after my son was born. I remember sitting in an office with my parents and a woman known as [social worker 1]. This woman was present at my son's birth, and I had always thought she was the matron from the hospital. I have since found out she was a Presbyterian deaconess and a social worker. One of my questions is: What was a social worker doing in the labour ward during my son's birth?

While I was sitting in this office with the social worker, [social worker 1], I was told I had to sign a paper before leaving. Adoption consent was never mentioned and I did not sign anything at that particular time. She was very angry with me and told me when I asked for my son that if she brought him to me he would be handed to me naked, we would both be put on the street, the police would be called and my son would be charged with being a neglected child in moral danger. She then asked me if I had heard of the word vagrancy, and she said to me if I was put on the street I would be charged as a vagrant and to just go home and

get on with my life. She also told me that I had nothing to offer my son and I was a selfish girl, and by giving him up, his family would be able to give him everything that I couldn't and his parents would be professional people, probably a doctor or a lawyer. I have since found out that my son was taken by a carpenter and a housewife, not a doctor or a lawyer.

Eleven days after his birth, on 12 February, his father and I went back to Queen Victoria Hospital in Annandale to bring our baby son home with us where he belonged. We were taken to the office of a woman [social worker 2] where she asked us to wait. We were left alone in the office and [social worker 2] returned with the social worker [social worker 1]. It was the weekend and I was very surprised to find two social workers there. We told both of these social workers that we had found out from my son's auntie that there was a 30 day revocation period and we had come to take our baby home. I had not been told of this 30 day period previously.

The social worker then told us the 30 day period was only a consideration if the child was still in the hospital and unfortunately our son had been collected by his parents. This was very damaging to me because I was sitting there as his parent, and there was this social worker telling me his parents had taken him home. This was a blatant lie, as he was still in the hospital nursery, only metres away from me. Because of this lie by that social worker, I believe my son was actually kidnapped from us. My hospital notes state plainly that the chosen couple had not even seen my son at that time. I find it alarming that the first visit from those people was the day after I had been there. His adoptive mother has since told me that she had a phone call from [social worker 1] to tell her of my visit back to the hospital.

On 14 February, two days after returning to the hospital, a Reverend [...] came to my home in Newcastle with some papers for me to sign, supposedly regarding the naming of my son. He told me that if I signed these papers my son would be able to keep the name I had given him. I now know that these papers were the adoption consent papers and they were signed under false pretences. As I was a Sunday school teacher, I always believed that men of God were honest and trustworthy people, but this minister in actual fact was deceitful, dishonest and manipulative, and as far as I am concerned he was a conspirator.

My son was taken by the adoptive parents on 17 February, three days after my signature had been secured by the minister. I was never informed of any rights or alternatives available to me in respect of keeping my baby son. It was a foregone conclusion by all the social workers, the hospital staff and all those in a position of authority and trust that my baby son would never know or see his mother.

I would like to quote from a report from Professor Wilfred Jarvis, honorary clinical psychologist from the University of New South Wales, dated 11 January 1967. This report is addressed to the social worker at Queen Victoria Hospital and dated two weeks before my son's birth. Wilfred Jarvis states:

"She wishes to keep her baby and I predict she will suffer very unpleasant repercussions after surrendering the child. This loss will be almost overwhelming to her and I think it likely she will be unable to deal with the demands of the real world when she returns to it".

I don't know where I was if I wasn't in the real world. Perhaps I was on Mars or something. I was offended by those words actually. Then he goes on to say:

"Separation anxiety precipitated by the loss of her child will add further stress to her".

I have been searching for my son all of his life and it took me 19 years to find out he was alive and another two years to actually meet him, and as far as I am concerned he was illegally taken from me. He was raised in a Dutch family. He is not Dutch. He has had his whole identity and heritage stolen from him, and I ask the question sometimes: Why should I be grateful? People say I must be grateful, but no, I am not grateful. Why should I be grateful to have my son back after 21 years, after being raised by strangers in a different culture? Why should I be grateful that I would never get to know the baby, the child or the teenager, my son, just the man he has been moulded into by strangers, not by his mother. He has three sisters who are also trying to come to terms with the loss of their brother.

I must say that I now do soak up every precious moment that I spend with him because the lost years can never ever be replaced and the pain never ceases. My wish is to hear him call me "Mum", but he has told me he can never call me "Mum". As far as he is concerned the woman who raised him is his mother. However, he doesn't call me anything. He doesn't refer to me as any particular person or any name, and I just hope that in his heart this means that he knows I am his mum.

Thank you.

(The witness withdrew)

MARGARET ROSE BICKLEY, sworn:

Ms BICKLEY: Today I am sixty-two and a half years old. The past year has been the most wonderful and fulfilling year of my life. I met my son for the first time in September 1998. He was 46 years old. The first time we met he said, "Hi, mum. At last I feel as though I'm home" and "When I first saw you it looked like I was walking into a mirror". I am here to support the

inquiry and to give my personal account of the impact that living without my son had upon my life. My story is very much the same as many of the other mothers.

In November 1951, when I was 15, I was sent to St Margaret's Hospital at Annandale, newly built quarters for unmarried pregnant girls. The rooms were like cells. We did domestic duties, which were performed right throughout the hospital, all unpaid. Throughout that time I was consistently bombarded by the nurses, matrons and doctors that I would be doing the right thing to give my child to a married couple to live with. The legal implications of adoption were never explained to me. My naivety, innocence and being totally illiterate were exploited to the hilt to the point that, at that stage, I always thought that I would be able to have my son and he would be raised within my family unit. The legality about the total separation was a very foreign concept to me. Children always had their mothers. It was very confusing.

The court case was published in the media, *Murray v Mace*. That occurred between 1953 to 1957 and had a great impact on me at the time. It was then that I started to realise the immensity of the thing that I had done. I realised that I would never be able to mount the resources for such a campaign to get my child back and remember thinking that I could never do that. I was made out to be a criminal, even thinking that I would want to have my child back. It became apparent that it was a totally hopeless situation. I started to grieve, I cried and pined, tears shed very often in the silence of my bed. I was silenced in guilt and enormous shame. I was never the same again. (That was a quote from Merrily Biggs.)

Living day to day with heavy burdens I did get on with my life. I started to strive and work hard to achieve goals so that, if I ever did meet my son, he would be proud of me, and I got very angry at times with the establishment. Did they know what they did to me and did they care?

I was married in 1957 and we have three daughters and a son. My husband was in his own business at the time. In 1970 I established my first child care centre. I built and established three more child care centres and two after school care centres, all of which are now operating. I have been involved with local government and been on many committees for a long time and helped migrant families establish their homes in Sydney.

I am surrounded by a loving and extended loving family, but I did not have my son and he did not have his rightful family. This was always on my mind. I was unable to talk to anybody about it. I buried myself in work, keeping a slim hope alive that one day I would meet him. However, I always thought: Was he alive or dead? Was he that person I just walked past? Had I met him and did not know? Did he have a good family life? Was he loved the way that was promised to me? Did he have a better upbringing than I could have provided for him? These questions swelled in my head constantly. The burden of guilt of bringing him into the world and not being able to care for him played heavily on my mind. I never had a chance to explain to him what really happened, but it really was not my fault. Could you imagine yourself in my position, always not knowing which way to go? Did these people who stole my baby really care about him or me? They told me to forget about him, but I could not.

I retired from work in 1992, at the age of 56, after 22 years of being self-employed. My life had started to deteriorate for I began to think that I would never meet him or have the chance to say sorry to him. It hurt my heart that we had never met, his family or our family, and he had never known his brother or sisters and that I was never able to support him in his life. The total lack of communication was dragging me down.

My second chance of life came when my son contacted me on mothers' day in 1998 after 46 years. I thought how brave he was to overcome his fear of rejection and the fear of what he might find, but he said that it was a drive that compelled him to do it.

In conclusion, we were both robbed of 46 years. His kidnappers should be made aware of the injustice that we endured on a daily basis so that this will never happen again. It should never be minimised, and that is why I am here.

I would like to thank the mothers of the Origins organisation for their support and their encouragement because for the first time in my life I have been able to ring and talk to understanding people and attend their meetings. I am hoping that the Government will give them a grant to carry on their good work. Thank you.

(The witness withdrew)

LOUISE GREENUP, sworn:

Ms GREENUP: Prior to starting my speech I would like to state that I will not be going into great detail about the time of the adoption of my son, although I would be happy to answer any questions.

I would like to draw your attention to the following statement, which relates to the second point of terms of reference: Whether adoption practices referred to in clause 1 involved unethical and unlawful practices that denied birth parents access to non-adoption alternatives for their children. The answer is Yes.

In 1977, at 15 years of age, I gave birth to a baby boy at Camden. My son was taken for adoption by the Catholic

Adoption Agency. My story has similarities to those stories you have already heard.

In 1977 my parents, then only in their early 40s, having supported me throughout my pregnancy, went to the Catholic Adoption Agency with myself and the father of my baby to seek help and direction for me and my baby. With the knowledge I have now, 22 years later, I have no doubt that my son was unlawfully taken by adoption. On numerous occasions it was expressed that we wanted the best for the baby and myself. My parents and family would have been happy to accept my baby into our home had we been given any advice or even an impression that keeping my baby was the best for the baby or myself, but we were denied and never offered any material or counselling that would have brought this situation about. We were advised that adoption was the best thing. As I remember, and as stated in the notes from the Catholic Adoption Agency, my mother's last words to the social worker who took my consent were, "It wouldn't take much to tip the scales for us to keep this baby". Bearing in mind the youngest child in my family home was four, it was an extremely difficult time. Believing we were doing the best was the only thing that we had to hang on to at times.

The natural father of my baby was told by the hospital that he could not visit the hospital. He was not present at the consent taking, which I was strongly requesting at the time. This was advised by the Catholic Adoption Agency. Being young and naive, I thought that my baby would have the same surname as his father. I made it very clear that it was important that the father be on the birth certificate. I was not offered any paperwork to have this wish carried out and was not advised that it was necessary. In 1980 I married the father of my baby. In 1995 I paid for a copy of my son's original birth certificate. His father was not on that certificate. I have since paid for this to happen.

It is my understanding that in 1977 the social workers and hospital personnel were well aware of the correct practices in cases of adoption and consent-taking. I can state that at no point was my treatment any better than that received by girls in decades prior. I gave birth to my son at a local hospital. During my stay in hospital, post-delivery, I was sitting with a girl I knew who was keeping her baby. I was told to go to my room and not to talk to this girl. I was watched closely. I do believe that in the first couple of days I was sedated, but my medical records cannot be located. My baby was marked for adoption and I was never offered the opportunity of seeing my son. I went home on day four; my consent was signed at home on day five.

My son, Joshua, is now 22 years old. Joshua and I communicate regularly and have spent varying amounts of time visiting each other. We have a relationship which is still growing and, with a lot of work, patience and love, will succeed in the future.

Retrospectively, nothing can change what has happened. It is the future of my son, any potential grandchildren and myself that I would like to move towards.

I have one request: I want my status as the legal mother of my son to be returned to me. I must be given this status to be able to live with the knowledge that I will always have a right to my child, to be able to assist him in the future. Access and emotional belonging to my son should never be denied to me, physically or mentally, again. I have given this request a lot of thought and acknowledge that very good people have brought my son up and that their role in his life is exceptional and personal. My intentions and actions have always been to respect this relationship within the bonds created. I have a real need to know the lady who brought Josh up. Perhaps one day I will be given this opportunity. The history that belongs within that unit cannot determine my life.

I would like now to go to the time of the reunion with my son. In 1995, just weeks prior to giving birth to my third son, a sequence of events took place which led me to be reunited with Josh. This process took six months. My son had contacted the DOCS office enquiring about contacting myself. He was told that he would have to get his birth certificate and prove his identity, as the process goes. Joshua stated that he would save the money and would be back in contact with DOCS. Josh was at school at the time. I was not advised that this contact had been made. By coincidence, I contacted DOCS office to assure myself that his records were safe as the Catholic Adoption Agency had merged its records with DOCS. Then I was informed that there had been contact.

16 October 1999 was the fourth anniversary of first actually meeting or being in touch with the baby I had given birth to 18 years prior, my baby John, who is now Joshua. On the day I met Joshua I was so nervous I could have bailed out. Had I not been with mum and dad, I probably would have. Since the reunion I have been emotionally and physically putting myself back together. I now know that all the emotion from 1977 was being released. The great euphoria that commenced with this reunion was equalled by a darkness that surrounds all true heartbreaks. Coupled with the fact that I have a six year old and a four year old son and live with a daily reminder of all the treasures that I have missed, it is truly determination and loving support that have kept me sane at times. I have resolved to let the haunting that comes from losing a child to adoption stay in the background as much as I can. I do not believe that I will ever get over this loss, but I will keep fighting to enjoy the good times for the rest of my life. The effects and the angry feelings towards the people who mediated the reunion with Joshua are still with me today. Remember being told to take things easy? He has a family. Tread very carefully. Also I would have to accept Joshua's wishes. This, of course, is true. It would have been so much easier if the idea and image presented of the birth mother resembled great joy and something special, not the interfering third party.

The stigma that surrounds the natural mother, the community's belief that a child is better off in a two-parent family, extends deep into the culture of our society. In an ideal world, this is very true. Perhaps a well documented and presented policy will enable our Australian community to acknowledge and list the status of birth mothers of the past, and in particular the young mothers bringing up children alone today.

I have lived the greater part of my life being ashamed of having a baby at 15 and all that went with people knowing this. The social sin of being 15 and pregnant is incomparable to the deliberate deception and manipulation of vulnerable young girls by so-called carers in a way that would affect the rest of our lives and those of our children.

There are two things that I am truly sure of, that there is no simple answer and that I have paid too great a price already. Thank you.

(The witness withdrew)

LISA WINDON, affirmed:

Ms WINDON: Firstly, I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to speak today. I bring to the inquiry my experience of two aspects of adoption, that of an adoptee in 1965 and that of a birth parent in 1991.

The people who became my parents were having great difficulty in conceiving another child. They already had one son, born in 1962. To the best of my knowledge they had been through the relevant processes with two or more agencies, however had not been accepted as potential adoptive parents. My father several years ago explained to me that they had sensed his apprehension. He stated that he understood that the test results had been inconclusive and did not believe that adopting a child was the solution. He was not convinced they would have no more children. He also stated that when the phone call came to tell them that I had arrived, that even at that point he did not want to pass this message on to his wife.

My adoption was a private adoption. Dr McBride at Crown Street Women's Hospital was my adoptive mother's gynaecologist. I was born at the Royal Women's Hospital at Paddington. The conversation with my father had come about following the death of the doctor at the Royal Women's Hospital who had been involved in the process of my delivery to them.

In November 1964, prior to my birth, my parents had been asked if they wanted a child that was due in January. They had accepted. My birth mother was informed by the social worker a couple of months prior to my birth that I would be going to a childless couple who couldn't have any children and would accept someone else's child as their own. She states that there was never any suggestion that she keep the baby, that she was encouraged to consider adoption. No alternatives were ever offered. She was simply told that if she kept the baby she would be dependent on herself or her family to raise and support the child. She could see no way that we would survive. She was never allowed to see me.

There were no illegal actions in the process of my adoption. My birth mother had given the consent prior to adoption. However, I believe that my adoption was a result of a collaboration in order to provide this couple with a child, to allay their distress, despite the fact that test results were inconclusive and despite the fact that after due consideration they had been rejected by the specialised authorities of the time.

The results of this adoption were not short of tragic. Another child was born to this couple late the following year and another child followed just over a year after that. It has taken many many years for me to try to understand the reasons for the constant mental and physical abuse meted out by my adoptive mother from my earliest days. I can only equate it with the prolonged torture of a prisoner, designed to prove that I was inferior and worth less than her own. I endured constant humiliation and derision. I endured a very slow death of my soul. My spirit was almost crushed.

This was a respectable middle-class family. She was a well-respected professional, a school headmistress. My only conclusion is that I was a constant reminder of a period of perceived failure in her life, a reminder too that a mistake had been made. I finally understand that I was not the problem but the idea of my existence in their lives was.

In 1980 at the age of fifteen, I was raped by the market gardener I had been doing some casual work for after school. I did not tell anyone. There wasn't anyone to tell. It would have been my fault anyway, so I believed it was. Within months I became aware that I was pregnant. I was terrified and very naive. I was finally found out when I was seven and a half months pregnant. I told my parents how I became pregnant and my mother simply asked me why I hadn't just run away from him. Even though this man was almost thirty years older than me, a husband and a father, he was never called to answer for his actions at that time. Recently, I asked the question myself. The Department of Public Prosecutions, however, regrets that they cannot proceed due to lack of evidence.

I was taken to the Royal Women's Hospital for medical attention and saw the social worker whilst I was there. Within a week I was taken to St Anthony's Home for pregnant single girls at Croydon. I requested that I use the Anglican adoption agency. Most of the girls at the home used the Catholic adoption agency. As I was not using this service, I had very little contact with the in-house social worker provided. I met with a social worker at Careforce Ashfield. I saw her on two further occasions, for the signing of the consent at the hospital and the one home visit prior to the end of the 30 day revocation period.

All in all the procedure appeared very straightforward with no complications. I understood what I was doing, as much as one can attempt to at that age, unaware of the long-term implications for myself and my child. I was aware of the relevance of the signing of the consent form and the workings of the revocation procedure. However, to the best of my knowledge there were no outside options available to me. As far as I knew my parents' word was final. Unless I had their support or blessing there was nothing left for me to do but let my child go. That is what girls who got pregnant before they were married did. I had been adopted, the precedent had been set.

At no time during the discussions with the social worker was I offered choices or alternatives that would enable me to keep my child. It was taken as fact that within my world there were no options. No information of any kind was offered. I was completely unaware of any support mechanisms, social or financial. I came from an almost rural township. I was extraordinarily unaware of anything outside the family or school. No options were ever raised or discussed. It was up to me to live with what was then termed my decision to adopt. This was untrue. These decisions had been made for me. I was not expected to be able to make my own.

If circumstances had been different and alternatives had been presented, would I have stood up and thwarted my parents expectations? I do not know. If I had known that there was community social support and Government financial support so that families could stay together, would I have chosen this? I do not know. If I had known that other girls managed without their family's support, would I have dared? I do not know. If I had known of the pain, suffering and grief that lay in store for me, would I have avoided this? I do not know. And I will never know. None of these issues were ever raised for me to even consider.

When I did fantasise about keeping my baby there was one consideration: Would I be a good parent to this child considering the nature of its conception? I did not want this child to possibly grow in an atmosphere of resentment, being a constant reminder of the chaos that was created in my life. I did not know what to do with these concerns.

There is absolutely no doubt that I would have had to leave home, but if knowledge of support mechanisms had been available to me, I would at least have had the opportunity of considering this. I left home within six months anyway due to a complete lack of acknowledgment that anything had happened in my life. No counselling had been offered or sought. I hadn't known to ask. My parents had no emotional interest regarding the future of my child. We weren't family. This was not their grandchild. I was having to surrender the only person in the world that I knew I was related to. The problem was dealt with and solved clinically. I was indeed denied any access to non-adoption alternatives.

What measures would assist persons experiencing distress from such adoption practices? Acknowledgment that mistakes were made, that deception occurred, consciously or unconsciously, assisted by society's so-called moral standards at the time. Acknowledgment that single pregnant girls and women were not granted the dignity afforded to proper married women, nor given credit for their capabilities and intelligence. Acknowledgment that these practices, despite their origins, rationales or outcomes, led to varying degrees of suffering for those involved. Acknowledgment and honesty for all concerned. These things will assist the healing.

(The witness withdrew)

CAMERON HORN, sworn:

Mr HORN: I guess it is the writer in me that wants to talk about words, words like "illegal", "unethical", "stolen white generation". These are damning words to use to describe the acquisition of children for adoption, but these are not my words. These are the words used by the Centacare Catholic Adoption Agency themselves to describe their own practices.

Craig Wilson, Centacare's Director of Youth Services, used these words, "illegal" and "unethical", to this very inquiry, and "the stolen white generation" is a phrase used quite blithely in conversation about adoption by Bill Johnson, the Chief Social Policy Researcher for Centacare Sydney. These words provide a telling self-assessment, but they are broad brush strokes. They don't refer to singular cases.

So what words do Catholic Adoption Agency officers use to describe individual cases? Try these words: "There was a problem with this adoption"; "there was a problem with this family"; "the birth mother's parents are very unhappy with this pregnancy". These were among the words used by [social worker 1], the Principal Officer of the Catholic Adoption Agency in 1980 as she handed my daughter over to the adoptive parents. So what was the problem? Perhaps it was that at no stage did we, as natural parents of the child, ever express an independent, uncoerced desire to have our child adopted. Perhaps the problem was that I had repeatedly asked the Catholic Adoption Agency worker, [social worker 2], how I could stop this adoption, but she refused to give me any advice. Perhaps the problem was that I had twice been threatened with grievous bodily harm, and possibly murder, by my girlfriend's father should I pursue any alternative other than adoption. Perhaps the problem was that I had had the temerity to resource all the necessary baby paraphernalia and baby-sitting among my family, ready for when I brought my baby home. Perhaps the problem was that my girlfriend was locked in her room from February 7 to May 12, 1980, apart from ten days isolated in a private hospital room. At seven months' pregnant she and her mother were thrown around their kitchen by her father as they tried to stop him coming at me with deadly intent as I tried to get out of the house.

This man over a number of months repeatedly pinned his daughter up against the wall and spat into her face every disgusting insult you could think of. Throughout her labour my girlfriend pleaded for someone to phone me to get me there for the birth, but nobody bothered to help her, and just hours after my beautiful little girl was born my girlfriend's father came into the hospital, forced her up against the bedhead and again threatened her and spat insults into her face as she screamed for help so loudly that members of my family heard her three floors down and ran to rescue her, thinking that she was going to be killed. All the while, not one person in that hospital came to check on what was happening.

Despite all this, my girlfriend still defied her parents by saying to me in front of her mother on the day of our child's birth, "Cam, I want us to be a family. I want this little girl to be Rebecca Horn. I want that so much", to which I replied, "So do I, beautiful, so do I. We will do it somehow."

But the real problem with this adoption was through all this [social worker 2] and [social worker 1] knew the sort of pressure that was being applied to us, yet they did not lift a single finger to help this lovely young girl in this terrible situation. This is 1980. This is not ancient history. All they ever told her was that they would find a nice couple, just like us.

To be honest, I have been unable to find even one point of similarity between the adoptive couple and us, except perhaps that they do seem nice. That hardly makes a perfect fit. It seems the agency itself doubted the fit, since they told the adoptive parents of their good fortune with the words, "We have found you a baby but it has red hair." How dare they even suggest that she was in any way blemished. It didn't matter to us whether she had two heads or fifteen fingers, she was perfect to us.

Over the years, because of the misinformation given to them by the agency, the adoptive parents told my daughter that her birth mother wanted her to have two parents. I am here to tell you, and to tell her, and to tell anyone else who asks, she always had two parents, always, before she was even born. She also had three welcoming grandparents willing to look after her, but unfortunately she had one relative who was a lunatic, and that is all the agency needed.

I actually walked in as [social worker 2] was spreading all those forms across my girlfriend's hospital bed. My girlfriend verbalised her understanding of them to me, that to sign would simply give her an extra 30 days to decide, something that seemed very attractive to someone in her situation. [Social worker 2] was there. She heard the misunderstanding. She said nothing. I replied, "This is wrong, completely wrong." [Social worker 2] was there. She listened to every word. She didn't leave the room and give us some privacy. She sat down on the other side of the bed from me and heard, not for the first time, how I felt about adoption. In fact, [social worker 2's] reaction was simply to move her pen to one of her forms and turn to my girlfriend and say, "And did you give your baby a name?" The fact is that I had named that child months before she was even conceived. I will say it again, she always had two parents. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to get there when [social worker 2] arrived at the hospital for what I believe was her third attempt at extracting my girlfriend's consent.

It has taken me over three years and a thousand dollars of solicitors' letters to retrieve some, but not all, of those documents, and the coercion is quite plain. For example, on the same document on which my girlfriend was forced to state that I did not keep in touch, [social worker 2] wrote a note, "Cameron wanted 'the girl' to keep the baby." How did she know I wanted to keep the baby if I didn't keep in touch? There is a note from another social worker stating that [social worker 2] had informed her of the dispute going on between myself and the girl's parents. On another [social worker 2] described my girlfriend as "very controlled".

It was patently obvious to [social worker 2] and [social worker 1] what was going on, yet not once did either of them offer us any of the assistance or alternatives they were duty bound to offer, despite us asking. Instead [social worker 2] added to the duress, I believe, by (1) presenting hastily and incorrectly prepared documents and (2) by not informing us of our child's whereabouts during the 30 day revocation period. I believe that is kidnapping.

[Social worker 1] and [social worker 3] have stated that adoption is "a viable alternative for children in need of permanent care". What their paper failed to say was the Catholic Adoption Agency was artificially creating situations where children appeared to be in need of permanent care. Not once did [social worker 2] or [social worker 1] bother to check my legal rights, despite my repeated requests to find some way to stop this adoption.

So what were my rights? Section 23 of the 1965 Adoption Act plainly states that I had every right to oppose the adoption. [Social worker 2] never informed me of that, despite my repeated asking. All she ever said was that they only needed one signature

for a consent. However, in 1976 the New South Wales Government passed the Children Equality of Status Act, specifically to grant an automatic legal relationship between fathers and their ex nuptial children. Even if I had to have my guardianship formally declared by a court, [social worker 2] had a duty to tell me, but she didn't. The fact is that under section 6 a father's guardianship of an ex nuptial newborn did not have to be declared by a court, it was automatic unless expressly revoked by a court. This had been precedented twice before 1980. Since the Adoption of Children Act required that everyone who is a guardian of a child must sign the consent, every single newborn adoption in New South Wales which post-dates 1976, but does not have the consent of an easily accessible biological father, is invalid.

Perhaps the Catholic Adoption Agency was not aware of the existence of this law, although the Attorney General Frank Walker stated in Hansard that his department specifically briefed the Catholic Adoption Agency. Some in the adoption agencies treat this inquiry simply as a research opportunity for their memoirs, as if they did nothing wrong. Their defence is that they were beholden to the culture of the times. Since when has treating someone with a little dignity and according to the law been a matter of culture? These consent-takers ask us not to judge them by today's standards, but the immutable higher laws by which these church entities are supposed to operate has never changed, and that is what condemns them.

As for carefully worded apologies, the only statement which would mean anything to me is one personally addressed to either myself or my girlfriend, signed by [social worker 1] and [social worker 2], admitting culpability, a breach of duty of care and regret for their practices in my personal case. I would be more than happy at any time to speak to these people and discuss with them such a statement, although I would warn them that the words "illegal", "unethical" and "stolen white generation" will feature prominently.

(The witness withdrew)

ROSEMARY HELEN CHANEY, sworn:

Ms CHANEY: I thank this Committee for giving me the opportunity to address you today. On August 16, 1965, I gave birth to a son who was deliberately kidnapped from me as I lay unconscious on the delivery table in the Women's Hospital, Crown Street, Sydney. Those responsible committed the most horrendous crime and human abuse. I was denied the chance to hold my baby in my arms, shower him with love and affection and nurture him through his life. I was robbed of being able to open his baby blanket, count his fingers and toes, smell his wonderful baby smell and breastfeed as my milk began seeping from my breast as God and nature intended it to do. I was robbed of the opportunity to watch him grow; his first tooth, his first step, his first words, his first day at school; to teach him right from wrong, help him build self-respect, self-esteem; share love with his biological family; the chance to meet his first girlfriend, to share his pain and joy while watching him grow to manhood.

My nightmare was caused by social workers who sat in judgment of me, a pregnant, 19 year old naive country girl, labelling me as unfit to raise my baby because I was not married. These persons did not ask how I became pregnant, nor did they care. I was stereotyped, as were many other girls also imprisoned with me in a ward known as Waiting Patients, as having loose morals, sleeping around and getting myself pregnant. Go and sin no more was the only advice ever given to us in the words: You must go away and get on with your life; forget about this and in time you will have another baby when you are married. I was scarred for life and scorned. I never forgot.

Although I repeatedly told everybody involved with my care that I wanted to keep my baby, once imprisoned within the hospital I lost my right to keep my child.

In 1976, while studying my medical records, I discovered the notation, "Baby for adoption (Almoner's orders)", written in big bold letters. I also found that the registration of birth forms included errors and was not the original form I had completed. The registration forms and consent for adoption form which I saw in 1973 bear a signature which is not mine.

During my incarceration I was subjected to psychological propaganda, insipid food, lack of exercise, fear from constant threats and psychotropic drugs prescribed by the honorary psychiatrist, Dr Harry Bailey, the infamous Chelmsford doctor. Dr Bailey's report states that I would be better managed on a regime of drugs that were used on Chelmsford patients.

Accused of being an unfit mother who signed the dotted line, thereby giving up my rights to my child, it has taken me years of painful and emotional trauma and persistence to uncover the reasons why I lost my son. I suffered a nervous breakdown after being informed that my son had been legally adopted and there was nothing I could do about it. I attempted suicide twice before discovering that my son had not been legally adopted until over nine months from the time I had attempted to take him home. I spent a huge amount of money and emotional energy investigating the loss of my son and trying to reclaim some dignity and self-esteem.

Not only have I pieced together a great deal of exactly what did happen, I had to fight very hard to be given access to my medical records, the court records and other paperwork held by government departments, such as Community Services, refusing to take No for an answer. I have been threatened, bluffed, lied to and empathised with in an effort to delay the inevitable or to side-

track me. It has cost me thousands of painstaking hours and dollars to discover what the perpetrators and their cohorts would have preferred to keep hidden from me, wanting me to just go away, shut up and drop dead.

I suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, diabetes, the results of an eating disorder in my determination to destroy myself, two failed relationships, very little confidence and no self-esteem. I have two daughters who have lost their fathers and been denied a relationship with their brother. Every day I live with the fear and dread that not only I but my innocent children and grandchildren may or will one day suffer from some debilitating disease, the effects of Stilboestrol DES, a drug administered to me firstly by way of injection and then in consistent oral doses to stop and prevent further lactation. This robbed me of the desire to breastfeed my daughters born later. I have a mistrust for professional providers, fearing that I will once again be manipulated and abused. I have only been able to find understanding, respect, acceptance and acknowledgment of my pain from other mothers similarly placed, those in Origins and, in the attempt to right the wrong, became a founding member of Jigsaw, now known as Adoption Triangle.

I first saw my son in 1972 when he was seven years old. It took me another 16 years before I was briefly reunited with him. During one visit his emotions surfaced. He stood in my doorway and told me that he hated my guts because I had not grabbed him when I had had the chance. He told me his adoptive parents did not approve of him seeing me and that he had had to visit me without their knowledge. I last saw him on March 12, 1992. He was still angry with me for what he felt was my abandonment of him at birth. He had grown up being told that I did not want him and he could not accept the truth.

Writing this speech has brought memories flooding back. Tears flowed and anger bubbled to the surface. I feel overwhelmed at the cruel and inhuman treatment I experienced during my pregnancy and immediately afterwards. Hopefully giving evidence in this inquiry will be another step toward healing myself, even though it rips away at my heart and soul as the wounds are reopened, as the sadistic torture is brought to the fore when I should have known only joy and happiness at the time of giving birth to my baby.

Someone once made a comment which I feel is most appropriate to finish with: If someone took a pedigree pup or kitten from its mother and tried to give it away before it was weaned, the RSPCA and animal welfare agencies would jump up and down and scream abuse, yet free-thinking human beings took innocent newborn babies from their natural mothers before they were weaned and gave them away to total strangers. Just another form of cruelty. Proof of man's inhumanity to man.

I call for some compassionate understanding, acknowledgment and justice for mothers whose babies were illegally removed. I hope that this Committee will recommend bringing to account those people responsible for illegal removal of babies from their mothers; bringing to account those persons who destroyed or tampered with medical records and birth registration forms; that adoptions that can be proven to be done illegally be acknowledged and overturned, making them null and void; a judicial or royal inquiry so that the truth can be brought to light. Very few witnesses who have testified on behalf of anyone involved in the field of past adoptions other than those personally affected have been able to give any real insight as to what and why these practices of baby stealing were allowed to happen. Hearsay evidence is not good enough. Those who took part in these practices are the only ones who can shed light on why they participated. We need to hear from them, not substitutes.

Also that every mother who has been affected by such heartbreaking atrocities as these adoptions will be able to go on record publicly and permanently to tell their stories and not only help their own healing process but the truth will be available to their children to read and the lies will be exposed once and for all time; that counselling centres with staff who have first-hand knowledge and experience of adoption be set up free of charge to assist and encourage adoptees and their natural families to reunite with photos, school reports and other important information to be shared with the natural mothers to compensate for lost years without their children; compensation for trauma suffered at the hands of the public system which resulted in the illegal removal of babies from their mothers at birth and costs incurred in obtaining official documents and other relevant information regarding these stolen babies; that all information be made freely available without cost and on request to both parents and child; information available and held by government departments, such as Community Services, Births, Deaths and Marriages and the equity court files regarding their adoptions, including reports from officers as to the family environments, and that reimbursement of moneys already paid out for such be made. Also that information withheld or blackened out be included uncensored to other parties involved.

It has taken me 30 years to piece together the truth, sighting medical records, asking questions of people in authority, delving into other records, persistent inquiries of departmental officers and visiting the hospital annexe in which I was held captive, and I still experience continuing nightmares.

(The witness withdrew)

MARIANNE HIMMELREICH, affirmed:

Ms HIMMELREICH: Thank you to the Standing Committee on Social Issues and this present Inquiry into Past Adoption Practices for giving me the opportunity to talk publicly about the experiences I went through in giving birth to my son

and the subsequent adoption.

My son was born in late March 1973, two months prior to my 19th birthday. I was the oldest of seven children of Catholic migrant parents, who had established their home in a rural coastal city. I left my parents' home at 17 to attend university in Sydney, and I became pregnant to my boyfriend of 18 months in June 1972, half way through my first year at university.

He lived in the same city that I had grown up in and I returned there each weekend to see him. He was two years older than I and locally employed and residing with his family. Although the relationship was a steady one, there had been no talk of any future commitment. We did use contraceptive precautions, but I nevertheless found myself pregnant.

I went to the student medical services and from there was directed to the nearest local hospital for prenatal care. My boyfriend left it to me to make any necessary decisions, and I was very much guided by my parents, who in turn were guided by their Catholic views.

If I did not wish to marry, then I had only one option, adoption, according to my parents, and this was reinforced by the social worker whom I saw at the hospital. There was no third option presented to me where my child and I could remain together as a family unit in our own right. I was not informed that the supporting mother's benefit would be introduced in July 1973, three months after my son's birth, nor of any of the available means at the time whereby I could have kept and raised my child myself. I was told if I loved my child then I would want what was best, and that was for my child to go to a two parent established home, to a much better life than I as a single mother with no present means of support, would be able to give my child.

The shame and stigma attached to an out-of-wedlock pregnancy was enormous and this effectively silenced me. In my family I was now an outcast to be not seen once my pregnancy became visible and to be shunned and hidden from the rest of society, as if my condition was somehow contagious and would adversely affect anyone who came into contact with me. I felt that I needed to show gratitude that I was given access to medical treatment and a chance to redeem myself by now doing the right thing, which was to give my consent for my child's adoption. In this way I could re-enter society once again, very much humbled into silence but now also traumatised and grief stricken.

I signed the adoption papers on the sixth day after my son's birth in my pyjamas, was then allowed to dress and leave the hospital. If I wanted to take my son with me, then I first would have had to find him, as he was removed from me straight after his birth and I felt that I would have had to confront the whole hospital establishment to do this. I also had no place to take my son to. I had become isolated from my peer group during my pregnancy, there was no family support for me to keep my son, no community help that I was aware of and marriage did not present a solution to me.

I left the hospital hoping and believing that what the social worker had been saying to me, that I would be able to get on with my life and leave this experience behind me would be true. I resumed my university studies immediately. I continued to see my son's father for a number of months, but found the pain unbearable and ended the relationship. I entered another relationship but the pain and grief continued unabated. The first two years after my son's birth were horrendous in terms of raw pain. Discussion of my son with a couple of friends and my boyfriend did not seem to help. I was unable to bring myself to seek professional help for fear that I would be further harmed in the process.

I now entered a new relationship just after my 21st birthday, still in tremendous emotional pain, married and had a daughter in this relationship nine years after my son's birth. I acted as if my daughter was my first born child and this also brought on a lot of emotional confusion for me. Substance abuse came into my life during this time for a period of ten years until 1985 and helped me to live with the ongoing emotional grief. The time then came about when I had to face the reality of my life. I had been so traumatised and so removed from myself in a number of areas of my life that I found it difficult to know where to start. It was now 1988. I was separated from my husband and living with my five year old daughter and it was fifteen years since I had given birth to my son.

A local radio announcement for Adoption Triangle prompted me to contact them and I was informed that I could put my name on the adoption register at the Department of Community Services when my son turned 15, which I did. This relieved me of a tremendous anxiety and concern that I had carried about his welfare during those last 16 years. I was also able to obtain non-identifying information about him and his adoptive parents for the first time. Three years later in 1991 the new Adoption Act came into being and I was able to obtain his adoptive birth certificate and a year later made contact with him.

The feeling of intense joy and relief to know that my son was okay, alive and well and no longer a figment of my imagination were enormous. I believe that he was also very much relieved to meet me and to know where he had come from. After an initial promising start to the reunion, I have not now seen my son for more than five years and the grief continues at some depth unabated. I continue to make occasional outreaches to him, but for his own personal reasons he has found it difficult to respond. The hope that reunion would provide some relief for my grief was short-lived. The fantasy that had sustained me during those years that he would re-enter my life as my son did not occur and again I had to deal with the grief as he distanced himself from me. There seems to be little resolution in this ongoing grief process around the loss of my son in my life.

I have found the inquiry to be most beneficial. A part of my life that was kept hidden for years was now being freely discussed in a public forum and the shame and stigma around my son's birth and adoption has begun to dissipate as I have been able to discuss my experiences and feelings, of which grief and rage have been the most difficult to process.

I am sure that adoptees have also suffered as a result of the separations from their mothers and their family background.

My son, along with other adoptees, has grown up believing that he was not wanted, that his mother willingly gave him up for adoption, and that is a terrible handicap for any child to live with.

I would like to bring to the Committee's attention that if any good can come out of this inquiry it would be to let the thousands of adopted people know that they weren't unwanted, that they were loved by their mothers and that it was the system in operation at the time that brought about their removal from their mothers and into the homes of their adoptive parents. This, I would feel, would enable adoptees to also start to face the reality of their lives and make any necessary adjustments.

Until I had some hope that reunion would one day be possible, I was not able to start to look at my own experience of the loss of my son to adoption. I had to use a lot of my energy to keep the experience hidden from myself, as to contemplate opening it up when there was no hope of reunion was beyond what my sanity could deal with. This I feel accounts for the long period of silence from mothers about the loss of their children to adoption. Until they were given the necessary information and the means to contact their children, they were effectively silenced.

I would like to now give thanks to those people who have gone before us and worked for the positive changes in adoption legislation and practices up until now. I feel that adoptees also need to know from official sources, and this present inquiry is one such means, that their mothers did not willingly give them up for adoption and mothers need to know that their experiences of the loss of their children to adoption have been seen, heard and believed by the wider society, and that this practice of separation of children from their mothers via adoption or some similar process will not be repeated.

My thanks go to the Committee and their staff for their time and attention here today and during this inquiry and I look forward to the Committee's report and findings. Thank you.

(The witness withdrew)

LINDA FRANCES DEVASAHAYAM, sworn:

Ms DEVASAHAYAM: As I feel my story is so similar to that of others who have spoken during the inquiry, I would like to talk about the after-effects that the adoption practices of 1973 had on me. Briefly, though, I will tell you that I signed the adoption consent form under extreme duress. My medical records show that I was given morphine for the first four days in hospital as I had a caesarean section delivery. From the fifth day, when I became ambivalent, I was given pentobarbitone daily for five days. This included the day I signed the papers and the evening before I was discharged. There is no way I was of sound mind and no way I could have comprehended what I was doing at all.

I am going to call my daughter Lisa, both for her anonymity and because that is what I named her, although I gather now that that is what I named her in my mind. The birth certificate shows the baby unnamed. All these years I actually called her Lisa and that would fit in with the fantasy I built up in my mind.

When I got home from hospital I know I hardly spoke at all. I virtually sat there like a good little zombie and did just what I was told. I recall not being allowed to open a sash cord window as it might damage my suture line or some such thing. I was in such a shocking state, crying when I was on my own. It was as if everyone pretended that nothing ever happened and nothing was wrong. I just had to get on with my life and forget that I had even had a baby. I have never been allowed to grieve for my loss, no friends or family to rally around me to help me through and no counselling.

Months later my mother found me a job at Sydney University. I was actually fired from that job because I had built up a fantasy. The reality was so painful that the fantasy felt very real and comforting. I had carried this baby for nine months and loved her from the moment I knew I was pregnant and then, to come out of hospital with nothing, your self-esteem is in tatters. You are left with a sense of unreality. It really is as if it never happened. I fantasised that I still had Lisa with me. I told people that I had a baby, but she was sick in Camperdown Children's Hospital, so whenever I needed to I could say I was going to see her when in fact I was going to sit by the pond at Sydney University or any other quiet spot and cry. I did that so often, just crying. I also told people that Lisa's father was killed in a car accident. Of course, he had not been. Someone from work rang the Children's Hospital and then found out the truth from my mother and I was sacked from the job.

It would have been very clear that there was something very wrong with me. The truth was just too hard to deal with. In retrospect, I think I was creating the artificial death of my baby to gain sympathy. Although I do not remember much, I know I went on down the spiral into detrimental relationships where I did a lot of the using of people as well. I figured no one could ever hurt me as much as I had been hurt ever again and it gave me licence to treat myself badly. Nobody mattered to me any more and I did not matter any more. A few times I thought seriously of suicide, though only half-hearted attempts, thank heavens, but I would not have cared much if I just happened to die.

Through the years I managed to find all kinds of abusive associations because I had no self-esteem. The words the social workers used on me: You are not worthy, you would be a dreadful mother, you have no rights and if you really loved your baby you would give her to a deserving couple, which meant that obviously I was not deserving, or to a family who could love my baby,

as if I could not. They made out that I was doing a good thing by handing over my baby and, once I signed the papers, in society's eyes I became a terrible woman who gave up a child. How could you give up your child? So I was condemned. Had I known I could have kept my baby I would have moved from doing something good to being this incredibly selfish woman who could not provide for my child and was only thinking of myself.

How could anyone give up a child? It is probably the worst thing one could do and I did not make that decision. That decision was put upon me, it is what I was told to do. I did not know I had the right to say I wanted to see my child, let alone keep her.

These days I feel as though I walk around with a hole in my stomach, like a cannonball has shot through my stomach, there is such a huge part of me missing. I am sort of living a parallel life where it is as if I am split down the middle, on the one hand feeling that you do have to get on with life. I have a beautiful six year old and a wonderful husband. We have a future, although I find it difficult to think very far ahead. I have to put on the facade of coping and looking confident because I am in business as well. There is also this part of me which is stuck back in 1973 where I have no self-worth and I am that 18 year old girl still waiting to love and nurture my baby and, of course, my baby is just not there any more.

Meeting new people is always a challenge these days. When I am asked how many children I have, do I tell them the truth or not? If my six year old is with me and I say she is the only child, she instantly reminds me, "No, I'm not, mummy, what about Lisa? Did you forget?" Then I have to explain or I can tell the full story of what happened, but because people do not know about it you are wrongly judged. Close friends are those who have been through similar things or who have great depth of understanding. So many people believe that I had a choice. After all, according to modern day philosophers, life is all about the choices you make. Well, I am sorry, but on this one I did not make that choice. I can say that in every other aspect of my life, but this was not my choice. They say to own your own experience. Well, I cannot do that either.

I would truly love to get on with my life, get past this and move forward, but I cannot unless there is acknowledgment. I need that acknowledgment for myself and my daughters. I want accountability for what was done and, please, never allow this to happen again.

I might just add that I am very thankful for this inquiry because since it began I have sent copies of the transcripts of evidence to my daughter. She has come to understand fully, after nearly nine years of contact, that I did not want to give her up, so she no longer directs her anger at me, and pity help the person who is now getting the anger actually. For a long time it was definitely directed at me. Now I am spoken to as a human being, although I will never be called Mum and I will never be called Grandma by her son. I have noted that my six year old is allowed to be called her sister and she is allowed to be an aunty, but I will never be Mum or Grandma and that really, really hurts.

(The witness withdrew)

BENITA RAINER, affirmed:

Ms RAINER: I have asked to speak today because I wish to convey my experience as an adopted person. I was born in Paddington Women's Hospital in 1952. Having received my medical records, I can testify to having been adopted when I was 16 days old. This occurred despite the fact that, as my birth mother told me, she had never thought she would go home without me. When she realised that she would have to give me up for adoption she became very agitated. She was told by her mother to "think of your father's career", and she always obeyed her parents. Her parents then felt that they had made a mistake after they saw the state she was in. They went back to the hospital to view me again, but as my mother told me, "It was too late. You had already gone."

The first thing that I would like to have known is that even though my birth mother's father's friend was the doctor who delivered me, Dr Kendall, none of the family was informed of their rights. So the logical thought at that time was, "There is nothing we can do. It is too late". Yet in 1952 they had the right to revoke the adoption until the court order came through, four months later in my case.

I grew up in a home where I was loved, protected and supported. I think that few people, both adopted or raised with their natural parents, have experienced love and security to the degree that I did throughout my upbringing. However, I am here today to make the following statement. Even given that I experienced the true meaning of love during my upbringing, not a day of my life has gone by that I have not experienced the affect of that adoption.

Told that I was adopted at the age of seven, I felt a coldness and a numbness that seemed to spell out the feeling that I was somehow less than other people, different, even potentially an alarming person because I was an unknown quantity. The affects deepened in adolescence. I had great difficulty making friends and always felt different to the people I was raised with. Aboriginal people, part of the stolen generation, at least knew that they were Aboriginal. To be adopted is to be in a void. It is as if you have been handed a book entitled "The Story of My Life", but when opened there is nothing, all of the pages are blank. I had no past, no history, no-one else that I was part of, and so when I left home to go up to university, I had no family to visit, which increased my inner sense of loneliness, social isolation and feelings of inferiority. But what I would like to stress at this point is that I really

thought that I was being incredibly self-indulgent. It was only one year ago that I had any knowledge that there was any more to it.

In 1975 at the age of 23, when I had completed my degree, and so when I mistakenly thought that I could handle any emotional affects, I looked up my natural mother. As my adoption had been arranged privately through solicitors, my adoptive father knew her name and I obtained her address via a sympathetic person in the medical records library at the hospital.

I am now 47 and I can report that although we stayed in contact for about eighteen years, until my daughter was about ten in 1993, the relationship was fraught with very painful difficulties. I knew nothing about support groups or the Post Adoption Resource Centre. I had done it all on my own. It has only been as a result of the media coverage of this inquiry last October, one year ago, that I came into contact with Chris Cole and Diane Welfare, who put me onto PARC, told me of the book "The Primal Wound", and as a result of the information that I have obtained and that I have worked out for myself, I now understand the following:

The after-affects of abandonment on my baby self were: feelings of anger, rage, grief, despair, low self-esteem, of vacillation between being overly independent and strained independence, rejection of others when they came as close to me as I wanted them to, extreme loneliness and hyper-vigilance.

Good relations are, a priori, that you are an equal with others, and as a result of my adoption experiences I never felt I was. I always felt less than those around me who knew who they were, where they came from, and who had grown up in that matrix of belongingness and beingness which is a wholistic and self-nurturing experience known as identity.

I over-compensated for the loss of that by achieving a persona with marked qualities of arrogance, coldness and snobbishness. It is as if I am still surrounded by that same cold numbness that I first became aware of when, at the age of seven, my mother first told me that I was adopted.

As I included in my submission to Parliament, there were affects of this experience on my health, and, indeed, it threatened my life itself. I had an abortion in 1973, rather than go ahead and give birth to a baby and then not know where the baby was, how the baby was, where the baby was. I felt I couldn't bear that and I had an abortion.

Three weeks after I told my adopted father that I had looked up my natural mother, he died of a heart attack, and six months after that I tried to commit suicide. I thought that was the only reparation that was possible for what I thought was the terrible thing that I had done. My adoption had affects on my health and threatened my life itself.

If asked what help, after the act, that I would find useful, I would answer that I strongly resented having to pay for the information which enabled me to obtain my original birth certificate and medical records file recently. In addition, I wish to trace the birth records of my ancestors and would have to pay further for this. Unlike those who already know the details, I do not.

Finally, I know that there are people who would like to trace their adopted children but who cannot afford to pay the cost for the supply authority and all of the rest. If the current governmental policy is "user pays", then I would suggest that we who have been affected by adoption have already paid and should not have the added indignity forced upon of us of having to pay financially any more.

Finally, I am receiving counselling from PARC, the Post Adoption Resource Centre. As I live in the country, I am being asked to pay the STD rates for the telephone calls and to not use their 1800 number. This is because they cannot afford to pay for all of their running costs. I consider this very inequitous. I am obviously not blaming the organisation, but unfortunately they are not funded enough to provide properly for people who need to use their organisation. I already find it difficult enough to pay the telephone bill, as I am the only person receiving a reliable income in my family of three adults and one teenager. I consider that all of these financial inequities need to be addressed.

This is what I wish to impart to you. I don't think questions are going to happen in this situation but my final sentence was I would be happy to answer any.

(The witness withdrew)

WENDY PAMELA JACOBS, affirmed:

Ms JACOBS: There are two issues I would like to address in this forum. One is the involvement of medical practitioners and hospital staff in the loss of my son to adoption. The other is the psychological damage caused by adoption, especially to adopted children. I believe there is a connection between the high rates of suicide in young men in this country and the high rates of adoption in the 1950s to the early 1970s.

On August 5, 1972, my husband drove me to Queen Victoria Hospital in Annandale for the birth of my first child. I was admitted at 10.15 p.m. under my married name and with my husband listed as next of kin. The only people who knew it was not

my husband's baby, apart from my husband and my immediate family and the baby's father, were my obstetrician, [doctor 1] and the psychiatrist, [doctor 2], to whom [doctor 1] sent me during my pregnancy. In my one and only visit with [doctor 2] he told me, in essence, that my child's life would be ruined if he was raised by a single mother and that he would be better off in a two-parent adoptive family. That was the only so-called counselling I received. [Doctor 1] did not mention adoption during any of my antenatal visits, nor was there ever any discussion of my plans for my baby. I did not ask any questions about adoption because I had no intention of giving up my baby. I had gone to live with my parents and had arranged for three months' maternity leave from my job as a biochemist where I worked full-time until a week before the birth.

After admission to hospital I was given a dose of chloral hydrate and left on my own. At 4 a.m. on the Sunday morning I was woken and given an enema. My son was born three hours later and taken from me immediately after birth. [Doctor 1] arrived in time to stitch my episiotomy. The next thing I remember is being in a ward with several other mothers and watching the babies being wheeled in for their afternoon feed. My baby was not brought to me and I had no idea why. I went searching for him and found him at the back of the nursery in a bassinet labelled "Baby for Adoption". I have no idea how he got there. My baby was brought to me at feeding time the following morning. I tried to breastfeed him, but found it difficult. A nurse took him from me and weighed him. She said, "He hadn't got any milk", and took him back to the nursery to give him a bottle. I cannot remember the other occasions when I tried to feed him. All I remember is feeling that I was a failure as a mother and that perhaps my baby would be better off without me.

I agreed to sign the consent for his adoption. I did not know at the time that because I was married my child was legally presumed to be my husband's and he was required to give his consent as well. He was not consulted. The social worker who took my consent told me I had thirty days in which to revoke my consent and she reassured me that my baby would be well looked after by a foster mother during this period.

After I got home I think I was still in shock. I had been totally unprepared for what had happened to me and, although I desperately wanted my baby, I had been made to feel I was an unfit mother who did not deserve to have him. Also I did not know how to revoke my consent, so I did nothing.

Twenty years later I got copies of my hospital records. According to my records, [doctor 1] was phoned after I was admitted to hospital. On his instructions, I was given chloral hydrate at 11.15 p.m. and the birth was induced at 4.30 a.m. These notes are written in red in my records. In my history and progress notes dated 5 August 1972, which is the day I was admitted, it is written: "[Doctor 1] said baby for adoption. Mother undecided". The words "baby for adoption" are underlined in red. There are two more entries in red: "Retaining custody of baby" on the third day and "Baby for adoption" on the day I signed the consent. My son's records contain one entry in red made on the day of his birth: "Babe to be treated as an adoption until seen by [social worker 1] tomorrow". [Social worker 1] was the hospital social worker and she did not work on Sundays. I have also seen records belonging to another mother who had her baby in Queen Victoria Hospital in 1966. "Babe for adoption" is written in red in her records too.

The only reason I can think of for making these entries in red is to alert the hospital staff to the fact that these mothers and babies required special treatment. This meant being separated at birth and kept apart at all times thereafter. This was confirmed in a letter to me from [social worker 1]. She wrote: It was the policy of the hospital that mothers of babies for adoption should not have access to their babies.

I also discovered from my records that I had been given 100 milligrams of pentobarbitone after the birth and that I had not found my baby until the afternoon of the second day when I had always thought it was the first day. After being drugged with chloral hydrate, getting less than five hours' sleep and going through a rapid and very intense labour and then being drugged again with barbiturates, I must have slept through several of the feeding times before I realised anything was wrong.

I discovered my son had not gone to foster care immediately after I signed the consent, but had remained in hospital for 30 days. He then went to foster care for three weeks as his parents were still awaiting departmental approval to adopt. I suspected that my baby may have been reserved for this particular couple, especially since the adoptive father's solicitor told me that he used to be [doctor 1's] solicitor as well and he also knew the psychiatrist, [doctor 2].

When I met my son, Andrew, in June 1993 I discovered that he did not have the wonderful life I was promised. His parents separated when he was seven and his adoptive mother took him to live in Goulburn. Andrew left home in year 11 and then moved back to Sydney after he finished school. He told me he had not spoken to his adoptive mother for two years.

I saw Andrew again briefly in January 1994 and I wrote to him for his birthday in August. My letter and card were returned with a note from his flatmate informing me that he had been killed by a train at Easter and that the police had concluded it was suicide. My son had been dead for four and a half months and I did not know. I visited the cemetery where Andrew was buried and I left a photo and a letter at his grave. After that I received a letter from his adoptive father telling me to stay away from the grave and not to add to the grief he already felt at losing a son and a business partner. He also insisted that Andrew's death was not suicide and threatened to take legal action.

Last year I tried to contact Andrew's adoptive sister and a few days later I received a letter from the adoptive father's solicitor threatening me with a restraining order if I made further attempts to contact her.

After Andrew's death I started to research the literature on adoption and was horrified to discover a large number of journal articles dating from 1943 describing the trauma caused by separation from the mother at birth and the emotional problems suffered by many adopted people. I refer the Committee to Origins' submissions 3, 3A and 3B. Nobody warned me that my son might suffer emotional problems as a result of his adoption. In an article published in *The Bulletin* nearly five years before my son was born, Wilfred Jarvis, a clinical psychologist and lecturer at the University of New South Wales, was quoted as saying that 15 years of research had shown that mothers who surrendered their children for adoption seemed to suffer chronic bereavement for the rest of their lives. Nobody warned me that this might happen to me.

I believe that adoption is a risk factor for suicide. Dr Graham Martin, Director of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service at the Flinders Medical Centre in South Australia, wrote in a letter to me:

I agree wholeheartedly that adoption may be one of many factors in the background of young suicides. In a recent article in a *Medical Journal of Australia* the authors write that the suicide phenomenon in boys and young men might be a cohort effect, a damaged generation. This is the generation born when adoption rates were very high. I have been unable to find any studies of adoption and suicide, either by researchers in suicide or researchers in adoption. I hope this situation can be remedied in the future by some research into the effects of adoption on mental health of both adopted people and their natural mothers.

(The witness withdrew)

KATHLEEN VLAMING, affirmed:

Ms VLAMING: I would like to thank the Committee for giving me this opportunity to be able to speak. I would also like to say that these pages may give everyone the impression that I dislike my mother. I do not dislike my mother. I love my mother very much.

I was sent to Queen Victoria Hospital at Annandale, which was organised by a doctor in Windsor. I had to stay at the home for six months until my baby was born in October. I had no money or moral support of any kind. While I was there I had to scrub floors and work in an ancient laundry. The only job I liked was putting the flowers in vases and taking them to the mothers - I mean the married mothers.

While my son was being born, I was told to shut my eyes until he was wheeled away. I heard him cry, but I didn't get to see him until he was ten days old. I didn't see any family either until four days after he was born. I was very lonely and confused. I was in a ward with married mothers who had their babies brought to them every four hours for bonding and feeding. I didn't know where to put myself in this time.

I was given tablets to dry up my milk. The tablets were not very successful for me. I had plenty of milk. I would have been able to feed my baby boy if I had been given the chance.

I found out a couple of years ago, when I got my son's medical records, that he was sick while in hospital. No-one told me about it. I am sure he would have felt better if I had been allowed to hold him and cuddle him in my arms, not a stranger's.

I didn't know until a couple of months later that a telegram had been sent to my parents saying that the "package arrived safely", as though he was a bundle of clothes or something, instead of a tiny human being.

I was never informed by anyone, not doctors or social workers, that there was financial help available to unmarried mothers, but I was told many times throughout my long stay that I should have my baby adopted out, so he or she could have a good life, and two parents who had money and a house and all that material stuff. I know that he would have chosen to grow up with his real mother, penniless or not.

I remember asking a social worker if I could meet the adoptive parents of my child before I signed the papers. That must really have amused her. I realise now how naive I was and so was very easy prey for doctors and social workers.

I left the hospital on 29 October after seeing my lovely son for a few seconds. I went to stay at my parents' house, but I was so distressed about leaving my baby behind I went back on 31 October to get him. The hospital staff were very reluctant to let me have my baby but I took him home anyway, even though the papers were signed.

I called my baby Paul. It was wonderful to hold him in my arms and bathe and feed him. We slept in the same room. Paul slept in a cane clothes basket, but I don't think he minded. We were together at last, but not for long. I had my baby boy with me for seven weeks.

On 9 December I was told by my mother I had to take my baby to Scarba House at Bondi. A social worker and Mum must have been corresponding without me knowing. On the 10th day of December, when he was exactly seven weeks old, we went from the city in a taxi to Bondi. There was a social worker with us, who was acting maybe as a bodyguard in case I tried to make another escape. Mum held my baby. He had hiccoughs all the way. I cried all the way to Bondi. He was handed over to a sister, but before she could whisk him away he looked at me and smiled. I got the first smile.

I was re-united with my son in November 1993. It was a wonderful day which I will always treasure, and I hope he does too. He is married and has two children, but, unfortunately, they will never know I am their grandmother. I have only seen them six times in seven years.

The last time was in April last year. I went to Wollongong with my partner and my two sons to see them. Previously I had written to them asking if I could see the school he went to and the church where he and his wife had been married. He agreed he would do that. He picked me up from the motel where we were staying at 9 pm at night. We went back to his house for a cup of coffee. I was looking forward to seeing the children, but naturally by this time the children were asleep. My son drove me around Wollongong and showed me the church and school. It was 10 p.m. and so it was dark, so of course no-one saw us together. I am very disappointed with the whole visit. Tomorrow my son will be 33 and we hardly know each other.

I request this inquiry be able to overturn the Statute of Limitations.

(The witness withdrew)

BARBARA ANNE HARDY, sworn:

Ms HARDY: Firstly, thank you for this opportunity to speak about our experiences. For many decades we have been unable to put into words the trauma of losing our children to adoption, the depth of despair and the effect that that loss has had is a daunting task to convey. The pain of being denied the right to hold and, in some cases, even see your child is indescribable.

The treatment I received at the hands of, firstly, the hospital staff and then, a few days later, a social worker has been etched into my mind. The cruelty and total lack of human kindness shown to myself and my son is something I will never forget. To be told to shut up by two nurses when I dared to cry out in pain during labour was only the beginning of my punishment for having a child outside of marriage in the 1970s. For some reason, these two nurses left the labour room, which gave me a few precious moments alone with my son, who was laying across my leg. I was heavily drugged with pentobarbitone, Pethidine and Sparine and it took all my strength to prop myself up to look at my baby. Days later I again managed to look upon my son, this time gazing at him through the nursery window. The image of his face was to become the only comfort during this traumatic time in my life.

I would like to point out that at no time during my pregnancy did I ever see a counsellor, nor any social worker. I was visited in hospital on the fourth day of my confinement by a social worker or district officer and again given more pentobarbitone before and after her visit. Surely this practice of administering dangerous sedatives must prove collusion between the hospital and staff and the various adoption agencies. The woman used all her professional training to obtain my signature, the well-rehearsed sentences that were playing with my emotions, and a natural concern as to my child's welfare, instilling into me over and over that surely I wanted only what was very best for my son. I was made to feel a bad mother to even consider bringing him up myself, what future could I offer him and how he would be better off to be raised by a stable married couple, something no one could really guarantee. Her demeanour started out in an amicable manner, but when I remained in a state of confusion she became agitated and started threatening me, saying that my son would end up a State ward if I did not tell her the name of the father, and I assume also if I did not sign the papers. Clearly she came to my bedside with only one objective: To put in progress the handing over of my son to complete strangers.

Much has been said of the societal mores of the day, a convenient excuse for the approach taken by social workers. Their covert practices are in breach of our basic human rights as mothers of our children, something that was overlooked in the haste of obtaining our consent. We had the same right as any mother prior to signing the adoption papers.

I became hysterical and needed to be sedated after the visit from the social worker. In my medical records it states how upset I was over the baby and the next six months I remember very little. Slowly, over the next two years, I somehow managed to regain some kind of normalcy in my life. I had no grief counselling and no follow-up from the social worker [...] and who also was a JP.

As I said before, it has taken many years to put this loss into words. The severing of the bonding process with our children and the lack of acknowledgment of our rights put us in 'limbo'. We knew something extremely traumatic had happened, but it was something we never spoke of to our families. My son's birthday and Christmas would be times of deep depression, never knowing where he was and whether he was being well cared for, even if he was still alive, were constant thoughts running through my mind for the next 20 years.

Before talking about our reunion, I would like to say that there was no real guarantee how well-matched our children would be with their adoptive parents. When my son's adoptive father stated to me some years ago that he could not fathom my son, that he was such a deep thinker, it saddened me to think that he had not been able to communicate his feelings to the people

who had raised him and my son also said to me that he had never spoken so much since meeting me. The issue of having no control as a baby in the adoption process has caused many problems now, decades later, during the reunion with my son. Our destiny has been decided by others. I too had no real choice after being drugged into submission and the social worker's only reason for being at my bedside was to obtain my signature. Being in control now is paramount with my son and he feels justified in calling the shots. I hope he realises I really do understand how he feels.

In the beginning our reunion started in a very promising way. He was extremely keen to find his real mother and even went to obtain his original birth certificate the very day the adoption laws changed in April 1991. Consequently, he found me first because I applied for his amended birth certificate a few weeks later. After several attempts he finally tracked me down and we talked and talked for three days, practically non-stop, on the phone, and a week later we met. His adoptive father's initial reaction when my son announced that he was in the process of finding his mother was: "Let sleeping dogs lie". Somehow from that cliché one can only assume that they were not exactly supportive.

After a few months of pure bliss everything seemed to fall apart and my son went through a series of extreme mood swings and I had to endure his angry outbursts in letters and on the phone. I felt I was being tested to see how much I really did love him.

In the eight years of our reunion there have been many important events in his life. Thankfully I do have photographs of these, but I was not included on his wedding day, nor at the birth of his first child, a daughter, and, most devastating of all, the death of his son at birth who was the image of his father.

The problems created by adoption have caused such indescribable heartache for both mother and child and to hear social workers state that, in hindsight, they would have gone about things differently is totally unacceptable. Surely anyone could see what a cruel sentence, lasting a lifetime, these actions would cause, with no rituals to honour our children at birth and no rituals surrounding the loss soon after, as in a normal bereavement, with the words "Run along now and get on with your life" the most common advice from social workers in the past. This would have to be the most unreal expectation ever to be uttered, showing no human kindness.

I left hospital on Christmas Day in 1970 without my son and he has always been in my heart and in my thoughts every day for the past 29 years. As for the past eight years, they have been extremely difficult. I still grieve the loss of my son. For 20 years we were apart and the awful prospect of possibly losing him again is something ever present in my mind. I feel we are both caught in binding situations. He feels beholden to his adoptive parents for all that they have done and continue to do. He is bound by feelings of gratitude and guilt and I, in turn, find myself in a different binding situation playing a waiting game and forever being respectful of everyone's feelings. I continue to hope our reunions will develop to a comfortable level and some time in the not too distant future to meet my granddaughter for the first time.

To conclude, not only have we somehow endured decades of unresolved grief, but also had an intolerable burden of guilt placed on us. Instead of being a social worker's client and treated with utmost respect, we were psychologically manipulated at our most vulnerable times into thinking we were unfit to mother our own babies and, the cruelest of all, thinking that we actually had a choice and that we were doing the best for our child, the main point in obtaining our consent. Hopefully this inquiry will expose these coercive practices, publicly reporting and naming them for what they are, plainly kidnapping. Our children must hear the truth. They have grown up with the all consuming 'why'. This inquiry can answer that question and finally present the history of adoption practices in Australia in its true light.

I also request for this inquiry to implement the overturning of the statute of limitations and/or a Statewide criminal investigation under the New South Wales Crimes Act.

(The witness withdrew)

PAULINE WILKIE, affirmed:

Ms WILKIE: You will have to bear with me. I have made lots of notes, but I am too distressed to put them into any order, so I will just say things.

Firstly, I would like it to be known that at no time did I insist that my baby was to be adopted, and why wasn't I consulted or represented in the Supreme Court the day the adoption order was made? Is it only the Supreme Court matter that doesn't require the legal parents be considered, as in 1962 the law stated the revocation period was up until the order was stamped by the court? Nobody bothered to tell me or my parents.

My baby was born at the Mater Hospital in 1962. I have no recollection of the birth. I was not even allowed to see her, even though now I have found out I was the sole legal guardian of my baby. I remembered nothing from being in the ambulance

to waking up in the unmarried mothers' room later, I don't know how many days later.

I think just forgetting the notes, I would like to point out that I feel that unmarried mothers were treated cruelly and differently to other people. A few instances that I have are being given a shopping list while you are in the home to buy baby clothes for your baby to supply to the hospital. I was working with children, three and four year olds. All the heavy lifting resulted in me needing a hernia operation. The night before I was to have the hernia operation, [the Sister] at the home at Waitara said that she would have to shave me instead of the nurses at the hospital. I can't go into all the details of that night, but I want to table them as extra.

The operation itself - I had to have local anaesthetic. The surgeon doing the operation wouldn't believe me that I could feel it. I was starting to squeeze another doctor's hand and I said, "I can feel it", and the surgeon said to me, "You can't possibly be feeling anything". Later, the doctor holding my hand told him that I could feel it because I kept squeezing his hand. Then they realised I could feel it and gave me more anaesthetic.

On my medical records it shows that Stilboestrol treatment was started the next day and "baby for adoption", and that was even before I had been given any forms to sign or anything. Also it shows that five hours after the birth I was given sodium pentobarbitone. I have asked a midwife about this and she thought that was very strange, five hours after the birth.

There were no other options offered. My story of the consent form is really the same as everybody else's - "If you are a good mother, you will do the best for your child and she will be adopted by good people", but I later found out she was adopted by a Hungarian couple, who even returned the boy that they were adopting because he had something wrong with him. I would worry all the time that if my child had not been perfect, where would she have ended up.

Her being Hungarian, she firmly believed that she knows the truth but she says things like, "Until we came to this country, this country was nothing, we made this country", and all this sort of thing.

I think I have completely lost myself. I will just table the rest of this. I don't think I can say any more.

(The witness withdrew)

VIVIAN LINDSAY, affirmed:

Ms LINDSAY: I have evidence of systematic abuse in the appendix to my submission and in evidence at home that I do not have time to discuss now, but I want it to be verbally mentioned for Hansard and I will go into that further at a later date.

I am a mother who had two babies taken away by adoption by means of a protracted campaign of active persuasion and coercion, threats of physical violence and various systematic brainwashing techniques which I was subjected to during four months' incarceration in the Sisters of Mercy Convent, Pacific Highway, Waitara, New South Wales. I am part of a hidden sub-class of women who have been denied the same rights as other Australian women in the period in question. We are Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal and ethnic Australians. For me it happened in the mid 1970s. I am also a registered nurse, midwife, childbirth educator and mental health worker and for three years I have been working with women who have experienced various degrees and forms of abuse at the hands of adoption workers, both in the position of group facilitator and a 24 hour telephone support service which I operated from my home in Newcastle, servicing the Hunter Valley and Central Coast. I have listened to hundreds of women, the bulk of whom are too terrified of authority to speak or write to this inquiry about the abuses they have suffered. I have presented a paper and workshops on the trauma of mothers which usually run for two hours, so you can appreciate that ten minutes is a very short time. I will raise critical points, but will not be able to discuss them in detail.

Firstly, I would like to talk about some of the psychological torture experienced by myself and many other mothers who have spoken with me. I name my torturers as the Department of Child Welfare worker [...], housed at the Mater Hospital, Crows Nest; a consent taker [...], also from the former Department of Child Welfare, now DOCS; plus a consent taker from the Catholic Adoption Agency [...] is the best I can do, I have the evidence written down, but it is hard to read a signature.

I will give you a definition of "torture": To afflict with severe pain of body or mind. That is from the 1997 Macquarie Dictionary. I would like to read out to you a list of some of the psychological torture which I was repeatedly subjected to by the nuns and social workers while I was incarcerated in the convent. This psychological abuse is reported to me by mothers across the board in all hospitals and religious institutions that housed single mothers: Villa Maria, Burnhouse and Hillcrest in Newcastle have been repeatedly named. [Sister 1's] name is mentioned with regularity, especially the way she barred mothers' exits until she extracted consents, and here are the quotations of the words said to me by all the other mothers: "The baby's life will be ruined; the baby will suffer if you keep it; it will kill your father if you keep the baby; it will kill your mother; it will ruin your life; it will ruin your boyfriend's life if you get married and keep the baby; he will hit the baby and you because he will feel trapped; if you marry someone else, he will hit the baby because it is not his; he will hit you because he will become resentful; he will go to gaol if you keep the baby; the baby is not yours, if you take it anywhere you will be found and taken to gaol; the baby belongs to the adoptive parents". As you can plainly see, some of these statements are physical threats against my person, the person of my boyfriend and the person

of my baby as well as my parents. These threats are aimed to extricate a baby from a mother for the purpose of adoption. This contravenes the Act.

I would now like to read out some further comments which I was continually bombarded with which were aimed at destroying my right to keep my own children: "You are too young; you are not married; you are selfish if you keep the child; how will you provide for the baby; it won't be a baby forever, you know". You can see that this is active persuasion and denigration of mothers' abilities, in contravention of the Act, violating the counselling relationship, forcing the mother to defend herself and her needs while deceiving her re her rights and her benefits.

They went on to depict adoptive parents as superior beings, and I really mean that in the full sense of the word: "They are superiorly entitled to the baby". That is against the Act because it promotes adoption. They are permanently placed in our psyches as our abusers. In our psychological world they are abusers. These are some of the quotes: "The adoptive parents have a house; the adoptive parents are married; the adoptive parents have money; they can love the baby more than you can". That is a very brief list and that is across the board. I hear that from mothers all the time. They tell me, and I have given you a short list of what has happened to me and a short list of what I have heard and there is a lot more than that.

Another definition of "torture": The infliction of severe physical or mental suffering usually in order to obtain information by or with consent by acquiescence of a public official. The other mothers and I were continually subjected to this kind of torture in order to remove our rights to mother our own children. We were being psychologically and physically abused to supply adoptive parents with babies.

I would now like to list some of the physical torture of mothers causing extreme anguish, agony and early death by suicide and cancer. Definition of "torture": Great mental suffering, agony. Separating mothers from their children in the first days of birth by physical force, that is physical separation, drugging them with twice the maximum dose of sodium pentobarbitone, drying up their milk with a now known carcinogenic drug, Stilboestrol (which, by the way, mothers in our situation have not been informed like the other mothers in society that they were given this drug and that it is carcinogenic. It has only been advertised as a drug for women who had miscarriages.)

Definition of "torture": To twist or turn into an abnormal form. That is what has been done to us, against mothers' will without permission and in violation of the 1965 Act and of other criminal law.

I have made a list of some of the duress and inducements that were used to sabotage the 30 day period of myself and the other mothers: Not to tell the mother about it. This was a frequent form of abuse. Threaten her with "That would be breaking a promise if you revoke the consent". Other quotes: "That would be cruel to the adoptive parents". They would state, "You will never again see this baby" and "You no longer have any rights", and this is while the mother is signing the consent document, which she cannot understand, within days of giving birth and this ignores and kills the revocation period, so it is an inducement so that the mother will not use that revocation period when she gets told about it.

They do not give the mother the address, the direction to the Supreme Court or information about the process. When the mother goes to and/or rings the adoption agency and/or hospital within the thirty day period, they tell her, "You are too late, the baby is already placed". If she complains about having her right to revoke violated and takes the matter to court, she will be erroneously deemed an unfit mother. This happened as late as 1978 to a Newcastle woman who is married to her boyfriend at that time and had three consequent children. She is writing a submission. She is one of [Sister 1's] many victims who operated in Newcastle Mater Hospital during the period under question.

The current services for mothers are run by the same institutions and people who took their babies, but in any terms that is unacceptable. I was present at an information meeting at the Post Adoption Resource Centre where [social worker 1] and [social worker 2] listened to a mother crying that she was forced to sign papers. Their response was, "That's sad". At the same meeting an adoptive parent, guest speaker, laughingly stated that she got her doctor to fake her infertility for her application to adopt. [Social worker 1] laughed along with the joke.

[Social worker 1] established and nurtured the ethos at the Post Adoption Resource Centre. I have counselled mothers who have [social worker 1's] signature on their consent forms. They are among the most deeply tortured mothers I have encountered, so much so that I am moved to name her as a perpetrator.

I have submitted evidence in my submission against [social worker 3], also of the Post Adoption Resource Centre, and a former adoption worker. It shows unethical and dishonest research that I was subjected to, which is in my submission, and I have got other evidence at home regarding that.

In the words of a DOCS worker, "An independent royal commission must be implemented to subpoena files from DOCS and other agencies, then the inquiry will clearly see the attitudes towards and treatment of the mothers".

If the Committee's approach is that the mores of the time justify and excuse criminal behaviour and violations of basic human rights, then we are in an unsafe place to expose the perpetrators and there will be no safe place for mothers.

I actually need to name - I have got about a minute and a half left and I need to name the departments that are involved because this is to let you know that it is systematic.

I want a thorough investigation into the involvement of many respected, feared and powerful departments in our society. I will now read a list of these Government and non-Government organisations, with the violations they perpetrated against mothers. Please insert into Hansard a list of mothers' rights at this point if you can.

The Police Department - threatening mothers to obtain consent in collusion with consent-takers; the Corrective Services - ditto; the legal system, magistrates - erroneously deeming healthy, young, unmarried mothers unfit as late as 1978 and disallowing return of the child before 30 days; the Department of Child Welfare, now DOCS - placing physical and psychological barriers between mother and baby, whilst pregnant, whilst taking consent and in the 30 day revocation period; Social Workers Association - ditto; Department of Health, medical and nursing staff - ditto, and by use of verbal, emotional, chemical, physical violence and entrapment. All religious institutions and their connected adoption agencies and agents - ditto; and many nuns gave mothers large doses of Valium upon return to the convent and did not tell mothers where their babies were located or allow them to see them; the Department of Education - expelling girls for being pregnant, while pregnant or when they returned to school.

I charge the above people and institutions with crimes against humanity. They have contravened the united nations mandate for protection of mother and child. They have contravened the 1965 and 1991 and preceding Adoption Acts of the Australian Parliament. I charge all people mentioned with kidnapping and abduction. And my son has written four lines that he would like me to read out to you.

"It is good to know that I am not evil, like my adoptive parents told me. Even though I am not evil, sometimes I feel it is hard to shake it. It is good to know that not all mothers have mental health problems that they inflict on others", referring to the adoptive mother. In reference to me, "I am proud of you for saying this, because I can't. I can't sum up my life in ten minutes."

(The witness withdrew)

JAMES WADE, affirmed:

Mr WADE: I am the father of a daughter born in 1954 when I was sixteen and a half and my girlfriend was 18. Her parents were very strict Catholics. They found out that she was pregnant when she was six months' pregnant and she was placed in St Anthony's home for unmarried mothers. She was imprisoned there until the time that she was to give birth at St Margaret's Hospital. I was not allowed to visit or speak with her in any way.

On 23 June 1954 our daughter was born and I arrived at the hospital later that afternoon. I was allowed to nurse our daughter and again, two days later, I visited and nursed her and we made all the plans that young people usually make. My parents had already said to me that if I was half a man I would bring them both home.

On the fourth day I visited again to find my girlfriend in quite a mess and she said to me that the baby had been taken, our daughter; that her aunty and a couple of nuns had made her sign the papers and taken the baby. I asked the nuns where the baby was, that we wanted to take her home, and I was more or less ordered from the premises.

I went back two days later with my mother and was told that my girlfriend and my daughter had been taken back to St Anthony's home at Croydon. We went there and were told that the baby had already been adopted and there was nothing we could do about it. They refused to let us see my girlfriend and became very abusive and told me that, if I did not leave the premises, they would call the police.

We went to the Department of Child Welfare in Young Street and to the Catholic Adoption Agency and just about every other place we could think of in the next two weeks and were told the same story at each one, that the baby had been adopted.

We married two years later and we tried to have more children over a six year period. My wife, the mother of the child, had four miscarriages. Each time she had a miscarriage her health deteriorated mentally and physically. All our friends were having kids; we were losing kids. Subsequently the marriage deteriorated to the extent that we divorced in 1968. The mother of my daughter remarried and was killed in a car accident in 1977. She did not have a chance to see her daughter.

I found my daughter when she was 38 years old. She had not been told she was adopted and that made it very, very awkward. It took 20 months before she agreed to meet me. I am very, very sad and very sorry that daughter and mother will never meet. I am very angry because we were not given any alternatives or options or help or direction at the time. We were told absolutely nothing. The mother was taken back to St Anthony's and treated like an animal, had her breasts wrapped up in bandages.

When I tried to find out where my daughter had gone over the years I kept getting letters back from the Department of Family and Community Services and adoption agencies saying there was no information available and in 1988 I received information back - and this has been tabled - regarding the parents of our daughter. A couple of things surprised me, if I may use that word: They already had an adopted son, one year old at the time they adopted our daughter. They lived in a home that they were renting

with only two bedrooms. I cannot understand how they were allowed to adopt a second child with two bedrooms, but that is neither here nor there. The biggest thing for me is that, if we had only been told just a few things at the time of the birth, we would never ever have given her up. We were not made aware of any options whatsoever.

38 years is a long time. When the adoption laws changed, the hardest thing for me to do was to prove that I was the father of the child because on the birth certificate and all the records was the mother's name and father unknown. I had to legitimise being the father, which took quite a lot of work and a lot of time. If the people involved at the time who did not give us any options and did not give us any help could only have realised what it is like to miss out on 38 birthdays, Christmas days, fathers' days. It is a long time and I really believe that the child was stolen and it was an unforgivable and illegal crime.

(The witness withdrew)

LYN MARIE WILLIAMSON, affirmed:

Ms WILLIAMSON: I am both an adoptee and a mother who has lost three children to adoption. I am also a sibling of an adoptee.

At no time during my pregnancies was I given any other option besides adoption. For example, advice on financial assistance, housing or mothercraft. I was not advised of any emotional harm that adoption may have caused me or my children. I was not given any counselling after the birth of each child. I believed adoption would ensure a safe and secure future for my children and I had nothing to offer as a single mum.

At least that was how I rationalised my last two adoptions. There was no preparation for the loss of my first baby. It was akin to Victor Frankle's experience as he watched his fellow Jews walk to the gas chambers and lose their lives. I watched dozens of girls go into labour wards and lose their babies, disappear and become silent.

Adoption has affected my life in a deep and profound way. My childhood was plagued by insecure attachment and a sense that I had been rescued from ending up in an orphanage. I had one adopted sister. There was never any closeness between us. She says we weren't really sisters and we have nothing in common.

As a teenager I tried very hard to get married and have children. This didn't occur. The factors that led up to me becoming a pregnant, unmarried mum were constant disapproval of my attempts to form a relationship. My pregnancy was denied, and even from the family I had to hide myself in a wardrobe if we had visitors.

The day after my 18th birthday I went to the labour ward. Immediately after giving birth, I asked the midwife to give me my baby. The nun said, "Take it away, it's for adoption." The nurse promptly left the room with my baby while I was tied up in stirrups. I could do nothing physically to stop this. I have never seen that baby again.

It was then that I thought the staff knew something about me that meant that I couldn't be a mother to my child and that I wasn't worthy to even hold him. The significance of this birth was such that I was not only robbed of seeing my child and holding him, but I was robbed of any enthusiasm for life.

The grandiose perception that I had done the right thing by providing a child for a couple who could not do what I had just done burnt a hole in my soul that did not compensate for the total loss and enthusiasm in my life. Everything appeared meaningless. The reality that I still had life after this loss was only tempered by the dream that I could one day get married and have children.

This dream would not be realised until I went through the same inhumane process twice more. I went on to have two beautiful children that I now successfully rear on my own.

I found my mother, I found my brother and I found two of my children, but I am yet to lay eyes on my first born son.

During my search for my son I initially spoke to his first adoptive father. He was very apologetic and remorseful, but they separated one year after adopting my son. He kept saying, "I know you had adopted him so he would belong to a family." My son was raised by a single mother for many years. My son's adoptive mother told him that his real father was a world famous surfer and that I was a dope smoking no-gooder. In fact, this story belonged to another girl in the unmarried mothers' home, who had gone on to become a successful business woman, but was very unfortunate not to have any more children. My son's adoptive mother also told him that his first adoptive father physically abused him in the first year of his life. This was refuted by his adoptive father, who claims that his adoptive mother put whiskey and sleeping tablets in his bottle, hit him and became excessively jealous if attention was shown to him by his adoptive father. His adoptive mother allowed him contact with his first adoptive father for four years of his life, provided that he pretended to be his uncle and not his father. The adoptive father remarried and wished to re-adopt my son. It was soon that all contact would cease by the first adoptive mother.

For my mother, her forty years' silence began giving birth to my brother with a pillowslip over her head. I met him when he was 43. He didn't know he was adopted. Six months after our reunion, he phoned to say that he had found his birth certificate and it had his name on it. He thought he may not have been adopted.

After four years of searching I found my mother. I dearly wanted her to tell me that I was of aboriginal origin. Instead, she told me my father was Klu Klux Klan. We are trying hard to accept each other's suffering and get to know each other before time runs out for us.

My two other children were raised in the same adoptive family and were never told that they were siblings. For years my daughter and I wanted to be reunited but we were kept apart. I had a request from the adoption agency on behalf of my daughter's adoptive parents that I write to her telling her of my troubled adolescence, and at this stage [a social worker] from PARC became my advocate, pointing out the implications of that request. I did send letters and photos but for months they were withheld because she would not do her homework.

During these years of yearning for reunion, I became aware of how low the status of the mother is or was. All my children's adoptive parents have always known my name. I knew only their first names and I used to read the Sydney telephone books looking for A and H anyone. I received some photos of the vicinity of my children's home and I physically searched these areas, hoping to find them at McDonalds or walking home from school.

A case conference was held, but the reunion still did not occur until my daughter turned 18. I met my daughter for the second time at Mona Vale beach. We went back to the Royal Women's Paddington, the hospital, to the part where she was born and we left together holding each other as it should have been.

My daughter was then expected to keep our reunion a secret from her brother, my son. When she was 13 years of age, her cousin told her that she was living with her real brother unbeknownst to her. She was then expected to keep this a secret from him. During reunion, I listened to the story of how my children's life began from when they left the hospital. It was difficult convincing my children's adoptive parents that it was not the doctor who named my son, as the doctor had claimed this privilege. I had named him after my father and cousin.

There were dramatic stories of how my son's hospital discharge letter had been mistakenly sent to me. He was 13 at the time and my address was still on his records. There were official complaints made, etc, as if I was someone who could cause serious and great harm to my son, that he needed to be protected from me.

The first day I spent with my son in reunion, at the end of that day, when he was getting on the train, he turned and said, "Goodbye. Thanks for having me." Those words have warmed my heart ever since. He has come and lived with me since, twice, for short periods of time, to the delight of us all.

Our sole purpose in this life is forming relationships with God, our mothers, our fathers, our siblings, our families and others. No man has the right to falsify the connection between mother and child or siblings. The false documentation of birthright or birth certificates is a defilement of human rights. It goes against our sole purpose of being. To have connections and search them out is a natural thing to do.

I recommend that Origins and such organisations helping mothers be expanded in all ways for the networking that they do and just be given every assistance by our Government to make amends for what has happened to us as mothers and adoptees, and that they always be consulted regarding recommendations for adoption practices.

I know you here today have some convictions about adoptions and we no longer need to sit here and feel sad. We can go and leave here today and try to put some of the recommendations that are put forward here by Origins and women such as Vivian, who has done all the good work, and Di, everybody, all the other mothers here. Thank you.

(The witness withdrew)

GAIL BELL, affirmed:

Ms BELL: I spent six months at St Anthony's, Croydon, from March to September 1967. I told the nuns that I wanted to keep my baby, but was repeatedly told not to be silly. I was constantly pressured to surrender my baby for adoption and received daily verbal abuse from the nuns and other staff. I was constantly told that if I loved my baby I would give him to a proper two-parent family where he could have a good life and everything else he needed. I was told I was selfish when I insisted that I would keep my baby. They said that I should forget about the baby and get on with my life. I never have forgotten about my baby. Whenever I asked for help or asked about non-adoption alternatives, I was told I was not a fit person to keep my baby and I should think of the unfortunate people who could not have babies of their own and that I would be able to have as many babies of my own as I wanted when I was older.

On a number of occasions I asked to be able to go and see my father, who I had not seen for five years due to my parents' divorce, to see if my father would help me. The nuns would not let me go. They told me my father would send me back there and when I got back there the treatment would be worse, I would be treated worse than I was already. In fact every time I asked to go anywhere, whether it be the shops or anywhere at all, the answer was always No. I think that they knew that I wanted to escape and go and find my father for help.

My rights as a mother were never considered and my baby's birthright to know, to be loved and to be nurtured by his natural family were not considered. My decision to keep my baby and my requests for help to enable me to keep my baby were persistent, but the coercion and intimidation from the nuns was equally persistent. I told [the Sister] repeatedly over the six months at St Anthony's that I wanted to keep my baby and twelve days after his birth I refused to sign the adoption consent form. My constant refusal to sign on 22 September seemed to irritate her. I was crying all over the form and when I asked to read the form she shouted at me. The forms were on the table with a heavy book over the top section and all I could see were the dotted lines to sign on. They were soaked. I was not allowed to read the form and I was crying all over it. She shouted at me: "You are not to read it, you are to sign it". I left her office without signing and after she had shouted at me, "Get out of my sight, you silly girl. Your signature doesn't count anyway, you are a minor, your mother can sign these forms". My mother did not sign those forms. I have since seen the proposed consent form with my name on it but it is not my signature. I have copies of those that I wish to table. As I left her office, [the Sister] told me that if I really wanted my baby I had 30 days to come back for him. Then she added, "I don't know why I'm telling you this, but I have to". I asked to see my baby. He was kept in a locked nursery and she denied my request.

I left St Anthony's on 22 September when my baby was twelve days old. I made frequent trips back to St Anthony's asking for my baby. I had not signed the form, so I still thought that he was legally my baby. I was told he would go to a respectable home, would be loved and given everything he needed. My repeated protests were ignored. My continual return visits to St Anthony's were treated with contempt by the nuns. On one occasion I was told to wait in the waiting room. I did, for two hours, and I went and asked the girl at the desk where [the Sister] was. She told me she had gone out and was not expected back until about 8 p.m. Another time I was threatened that she would call the police and have me removed from the premises. One time she had all the doors locked and just would not let me in, every door at St Anthony's locked.

My baby was placed in the care of the adopters on 9 October when he was 29 days old, still without my consent and against my wishes. The adopters were a Maltese couple and not naturalised Australians. They applied for Maltese passports ten days after the adoption order was finalised in April 1968. They left Australia permanently about two weeks later. I believe that, because of my mother's Maltese bloodline, my son was chosen specifically for that couple who had made their application for adoption only one month before he was born.

I was never given any counselling or any option other than adoption. I was constantly told that I was no good and that my baby was better off without me; he would never amount to anything if I kept him; he would be taken from me by welfare and made a State ward and spend his adult life in gaol if he was to grow up with me; he would be ridiculed by his peers and that I just should forget about him.

I never signed any consent forms and believe the signature was forged.

I met my son in 1992 in Malta after I had been in contact with the adoptive people for several years. They would not allow my son to know that I was in contact. He was totally dominated by the Maltese people. He suffered a severe identity crisis; he did not know who he was. On the first day I met him he said to me, "How could you have left me like a stray dog when I was born?" That is what he had grown up believing, that he was just dumped like a stray dog and that he was worthless. He chose a life of drug addiction because, I believe, of his rebellion and his identity crisis and not having anybody to relate to as his own family. He was forced into an alien materialistic lifestyle that was against basic needs. My son died on July 13, 1994, of an opiate overdose.

While I was at St Anthony's, every fortnight we had to sign a cheque, a social security cheque, and from that cheque we were given, I think, \$2 a fortnight to spend and the rest of the money was kept for our board and keep. Also, while I was there, we performed long, hard, heavy work. We were never paid for that work, but our money was kept for our board and keep, which was unreasonable.

For many, many years, much more than 20 years, I had been trying to get a copy of the request to make arrangements for

adoption of a child form that applied to my son's adoption. I had applied to all the relevant authorities and was told there was not one on my file, so I kept asking why there was not a request to make arrangements for adoption of a child form on my file. There should have been, but I was told no, there is not, and some 20 years later, or more than 20 years later, this is what they sent me: a blank form, a request to make arrangements form which is blank. I never requested anybody to make arrangements for the adoption of my child.

(The witness withdrew)

LORNA BLAMIRE, sworn:

Ms BLAMIRE: I am the mother of two adopted children, born in 1969 and in 1971. My husband and myself were told the mother could change her mind and we would have to return the babe. At that time the Salvation Army, I thought, told me six weeks. Our son was 23 days old, our baby daughter was 19 days old and we were quite prepared to hand the baby back to the mother as we were law abiding.

We were passed by the child welfare and the Salvation Army. Our home was inspected by both. We paid the Salvation Army the administration fees and we paid our own solicitor.

When the law was changed in 1991, I told them both about it and asked them not to put a veto on. As my husband had passed away when they were six and eight in 1978, I was the only one to advise them.

My son has met his mother and his half sister and brother. His mother has a good husband, and all have stayed at our house and we have all stayed with them, as they are not from Sydney, not Sydney people. We told our children they were adopted from a very early age. Until the law changed in 1991, we never knew a thing about them, nor did we ever ask. We always told the children that for some reason or another they did not fit into their parents' plans.

My son still lives at home, he has moved out on occasions, the door was never bolted, and my daughter lives next door. We have had a very happy relationship with my son's family. My daughter has at this stage only inquired at the Salvation Army, and her mother's name wasn't on that, so she has never bothered to get her birth certificate, and she is quite happy the way things are. She says she has had a good home and so has my son. That is all.

(The witness withdrew)

MAUREEN O'NEILL, affirmed:

Ms O'NEILL: I was 16 years old when my mother told me that I was pregnant. I said, "Don't be silly, Mummy, I am not married." I tell you this only so you can understand my youth and vulnerability at the time. What followed can only be described as a nightmare, from which I still wish that I could wake up.

From the moment my pregnancy was diagnosed, I was vilified by the adults around me. The family doctor berated me for my loose morals. He made a point of making my physical examination as painful and humiliating as possible and when I became distressed he scathingly told me to get used to it, as it was only a taste of what was to come true.

I was booked into the Mater Hospital, whose matron had been the midwife present at my own birth. I was examined, tested for VD and taken to see the social worker. I stated emphatically that I intended to keep my baby. From this point on I was harangued by the social worker to do the best thing for the baby. At no stage did she or anyone else indicate to me that there was any form of assistance available to me or my child. In fact, she reiterated constantly that there were only four options, marry my baby's father, give the child up for adoption, become a prostitute or take a housekeeping position with a single father. This, she informed me, always included the provision of sexual favours.

After an abortive attempt to place me in Waitara, I was sent as a mother's help to the family of one of the hospital's doctors. His wife was experiencing complications with a pregnancy and required rest. They had five young children and my job was to tend the children and keep house. They gave me one day off and an allowance of \$10 a week. They were a religious family and I was expected to work hard and participate in religious ceremonies and be present at family functions.

I used my allowance to gather a layette for my child and was fully equipped with clothing, pram and cradle. Everyone knew that I intended to keep my baby.

My labour was long and difficult and I was treated with open contempt. Every examination was performed rectally. After the birth I was sedated and kept prisoner. This became evident after I sneaked out of my room and was discovered in the unmarried mothers' ward where I was talking to other girls. After this my sedation was altered and a nun was put outside my room to guard me.

During this time the matron, the family friend, visited often and tried to persuade me to sign the adoption consent form. Finally, I was taken from the hospital during the night. My memory of this is very vague. I recall being taken somewhere in a taxi, walking up a flight of stairs. I think that I can remember being told to sign a piece of paper but I can't be sure. I was shown a signed consent form the next day and told that I had surrendered my daughter. I do remember looking at the signature and not recognising it as my own.

Shortly after this I returned home. Not one word was spoken about what had transpired, except that my mother continued to administer Stilboestrol, which had been prescribed without my consent to dry up my milk. A few days later I called the social worker and told her that I wanted my child back, that I had no recollection of giving my consent for her adoption. My daughter was about two weeks old. She told me that she had already gone to her new home and threatened that if I tried to retrieve her she would have me arrested.

Desperate and overwhelmed, I attempted suicide. The family doctor threatened to permanently commit me to a mental hospital. Terrified, I made the effort to pick up the threads of my life, but it was obvious there was something very wrong. I was constantly dreaming about my daughter, sleepwalking, I developed stress-related illnesses.

I resolved to get married and have another baby. This was the panacea that everyone had been prescribing, "There will be other babies, lots of them", as though somehow that would make everything all right. I married at 19 and shortly afterwards gave birth to a son, but my sense of loss became even greater.

I became obsessed with the need to protect our son, believing that if I was a really good mother to him I would be absolved of my previous sin. My stress symptoms exacerbated and my reunion dreams developed into nightmares. I conceived again, and this was when a particular nightmare started. In the dream I was heavily pregnant and running down a dark tunnel. I was always pursued by the same beast, a hooded surreal creature armed with a huge knife. Sometimes I would manage to escape its clutches. If it caught me, I would collapse in despair because I knew it was about to cut my child out of my belly. It would take me hours upon waking to shake off my fear and despair. At six and a half months, the child I was carrying died and I developed septicaemia. I was in labour for eight days, and at the end of this clinically died for four minutes.

Once again, I attempted to pick up the pieces of my life. What followed was 12 subsequent miscarriages always preceded by the same nightmare. Then a miracle - I gave birth to a girl. My joy knew no bounds and I told myself that God had finally forgiven me my terrible transgression. I believed that God was punishing me, not for conceiving a child out of wedlock, but for allowing that child to be taken from me, as if I had somehow had a choice. Happy as I was, I realised that she couldn't replace my first born, no matter how much I wanted it, but I managed to move forward in my life, despite a divorce. For many years I survived as a single mum, working and studying, although I always felt that I was somehow damaged, but I didn't quite understand why.

Ten years ago I married a remarkable man who showed me I was worthy of love and happiness. This was the beginning of a healing odyssey for me. Early in my marriage the adoption laws changed and I had a series of medical complications. My health began to deteriorate. I didn't connect it with the reunion process. I was surprised, however, at the mountain of grief that started to surface and I understood that I had never fully grieved for the loss of my daughter, or indeed the subsequent babies lost through miscarriage.

I was re-united with my daughter eight years ago and within a few hours of this my mother, who had been the driving force behind the adoption, died. I became very ill and severely depressed which was to last for seven and a half years. During this period, I sought every avenue of help that I could, to no benefit. I struggled daily with suicidal urges. All this time well-meaning friends and health care practitioners exhorted me to pull up my socks and recognise how blessed I was. They, as did I, seemed to think that the very act of reunion would somehow erase the trauma of the past. I fervently wish that was the case, but it isn't.

With the onset of this inquiry, my symptoms became unbearable and I became very close to suicide again. I couldn't bear to spend the rest of my life in such mental, emotional and spiritual agony. Then in January of this year, I had a breakdown and was subsequently diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. Since then I have been receiving ongoing counselling and have joined a support group for women who were also victims of the unethical or illegal adoption practices of the time. Daily I face the pain and guilt of the adoption and have been put in touch with the feelings of shame and self-loathing that were engendered in me at the time.

My health is improving rapidly and my depression has lifted. I am not on anti-depressant medication, although I have to be constantly vigilant because as soon as I attempt to suppress my feelings the symptoms return. I spend a lot of my time crying. I think that I am past personal anger, but I still react very strongly when I hear other women's stories.

This forum is my only opportunity for redress, and I suggest to you that not only was my child stolen from me, but also my life and my youth. I want my baby and my life returned to me in tact, but I know that isn't possible. The best that I can hope for is that you, as representatives of the current Government and policy-makers, will give us an undertaking that such destructive and subversive adoption policies will never again see the light of day in this country and that no other young woman will be abused and tortured in the way we were. Please give us back some hope.

(The witness withdrew)

DENISE SEYMOUR, affirmed:

Ms SEYMOUR: I have some appendices relating to my evidence and I would like to have a copy of those given to the Committee members to make it easier to follow what I have to say.

My experiences in hospital are in my submission and similar to many other mothers. I had not seen my son for two days and on the third day my father came in drunk and security had to be called to throw him out. I was screaming and was sedated again. The other women in the ward complained. They had been given their babies soon after birth to encourage breastfeeding and bring their milk in. It was upsetting for them and affecting their breastfeeding. The next day my son was brought to me and I left hospital.

After going to my parents' home with my son I naively visited the Community Welfare Department in Blacktown on three separate occasions to get help. I needed help with money and a place to live. Each time I went there I saw [district officer 1]. I told [district officer 1] about the domestic violence in my parents' home. I had also told the hospital social worker about it. Nothing was ever offered to me to help me. Not once did any social worker offer me any assistance; not once was I told of the existing benefits and help I could have had. Each time I saw [district officer 1] she used coercive language and methods to convince me to give my son up for adoption.

In desperation, and not fully understanding what I was doing, thinking that if I gave them what they wanted they would help me, I signed the consent on 17 August 1970. I never made an informed decision, I never made a choice. I was coerced into signing those documents as my free will was taken away from me through the withholding of knowledge and using my own fears and insecurities against me to discipline me into consent and secrecy. When I questioned anything I was bullied and told I was being selfish and was harming my baby by denying him a life I could never give him.

I was called and asked to go back into the CWD office on Monday, 24 August 1970. I was there for some time being convinced to complete and sign more papers, which I can only assume were the request to make arrangements, but I made excuses not to do it and my DOCS file states that "at this stage of the afternoon Denise was not in a fit state to complete these documents as she was tired and anxious to get home to care for the baby".

I would like to submit a copy of all the documents they had on file at the adoption branch in Parramatta as appendix A.

I was then told I had to appear in court the following day by [district officer 1] and [district officer 2], also an officer of the CWD in Blacktown. I have taken the liberty of typing out the sworn statement [district officer 2] made under oath at Minda Children's Court on 25 August 1970 and I have named this appendix B. It reads:

I interviewed the girl now before the court at the Blacktown District Office yesterday in the presence of the baby.

I said, 'Denise, you phoned the office this morning asking urgently for help. Why?' She said, 'I have nowhere to go with the baby.' I said, 'Last Monday you filled in papers applying for adoption of the child.' She said, 'Yes.' I said, 'And you were living at home with your parents?' She said, 'Yes, but I had to move out on Thursday.' I said, 'Why?' She said, 'There was a terrible argument with my father. He was assaulting me, hitting my head, pulling my hair and I can't stay there any longer.' I said, 'Where did you go on Thursday?' She said, 'I went to stay with my friends, the Richards in Seven Hills, but I can only stay there for a while.' I said, 'Do you have any money?' She said, 'Just a few dollars.' I said, 'Have you got a job at present?' She said, 'No, I haven't been able to arrange anything.' I said, 'And you really have nowhere to live?' She said, 'No.' I said, 'You are unable to keep the child until the adoption procedure can be finished?' She said, 'No, not really.'

That was the help I received from a social worker. In that court on that day my son was declared destitute and made a State ward. This was an aggressive adoption tactic put in place by these two social workers because I had not signed the papers they wanted when they wanted and they used the law to take my baby away from me. At this stage I had signed the adoption consent and not the request, so they had the baby, but they used the law to make sure that I could not get my son back when I revoked my consent.

A report dated 8 September 1970 (sic) from my DOCS file, which is appendix C, states that he appeared at Minda court on 8 September 1970 (sic) after two weeks remand on account of neglect, destitute, and was committed to State control and, although the adoption consent was signed on 17 August 1970, the mother changed her mind several times regarding adoption and the papers were held pending the finalisation of the court appearance today. It is understood the mother was not present when the order was made, and I was not present because no one informed me that my son was on remand until 26 September. This was another part of the knowledge I was never given.

Since I had not been told I could revoke my consent and knew nothing about it, I was devastated that I had lost my baby and told my elder sister, Marilyn, about it. She told me I could revoke my consent and took me to the place to do it. I signed the consent order on 17 August 1970 and I revoked my consent to the adoption on 15 September 1970. This was exactly 30 days. I received a letter acknowledging and validating this from the Supreme Court, and this is appendix D. I was informed that if I got married I would stand a better chance of getting my son back. In my desperation, I was going to marry a long-time friend of mine, Douglas, but he was sent to Vietnam. I kept ringing and writing to the department asking to see my son, but I received nothing back and he was not restored to my care.

My son spent the first six years of his life in and out of institutions, in and out of abusive foster care, and he has been deeply affected by this. I have listed the five different places he was in as appendix E.

I spent the next six years ringing, begging to see my son and have him restored to my care and for several months in 1972 I was allowed to see my son every Sunday from 2 p.m. until 4 p.m. at Corelli, an institution for children in Marrickville. Then he was abruptly fostered out again and I was told I could not see him any more. My son still has nightmares about Corelli and has never recovered from his experiences.

In 1976 I was approached by a social worker from the Chatswood branch of the CWD. His name was [social worker 1]. [Social worker 1] spent some time explaining to me how happy and well-adjusted my son was with the people who were now fostering him. [Social worker 1] told me I was never going to get Brian back - those were his words. He told me Brian had been fostered out and that they wanted to adopt him. He painted a picture of Mr and Mrs Right and asked me how I could be so selfish in denying Brian his chance for happiness. [Social worker 1] wanted me to sign a request and consent again, even though I had already signed them six years ago.

At this stage I was living an aimless life, I did not really care about what happened to me, where I was or who I was. I had been fighting to get my son back for six years. I signed the papers. Two months later my parents were not home for the weekend and I took an overdose of sleeping pills. A friend of the family visited unexpectedly and saved my life, but at the time it did not feel that way.

In 1991 I was contacted by DOCS who informed me that my son had never been adopted and wanted to see me. He was twelve years old. I ended up driving to Perth and entering into a bitter wrangle with [a foster parent] who had been fostering my son since 1976 and who tried to destroy me and my son in the process to get me out of his life.

During that time, in trying to sort out the mess they made, the department subjected my son and I to five case conferences, three psychological reports, an independent review, an assessment at home situation, six ministerial inquiries and five reports, but that is another part of this whole illegal story, the end result of which is that my son remained a State ward for eighteen years (appendix F).

What do I want? I want the law to investigate why adoption was promoted to me by the hospital social worker; why my baby was taken away from me at birth in hospital and withheld from me for three days when I had not signed an adoption consent and was the legal guardian of my baby; why I was sedated and given Stilboestrol without my consent while I was in hospital. I want [district officer 1], [district officer 2] and [social worker 1] to stand in a court of law and tell the world why they denied me all knowledge of my legal rights and options to keep my baby; why I was not warned of the dire consequences of adoption; why I was not informed of my legal right to the 30 day revocation period; why I was not given my legal right to make a fully informed decision; why those covert and overt methods were used to coerce me into signing adoption documents; why they took my free will away from me through the withholding of knowledge and using my own fears and insecurities against me to discipline me into consent and secrecy; why power-over tactics were used to bully me when I objected. I want these people to be found guilty of what they did to my son and I. They ruined his life and a good part of mine.

I want the statute of limitations overturned so that my case and the cases of many other mothers can be heard. I want a judicial inquiry or royal commission to be held. In the meantime I want an apology from all of the Government agencies and organisations, religious or otherwise, who participated in separating mothers from their babies. This is the very least that these people can do. I want to say to all the adopters who are here today: I was never on drugs; I was never a prostitute or a whore; I came from a good family and if you were told otherwise by community organisations then you were lied to.

(The witness withdrew)

TRACI HOLLEBONE STONE, affirmed:

Ms HOLLEBONE STONE: I want to focus on the third term of reference. My written submissions cover the first two and the third. However, it is important for me to state what I want publicly.

As I state in my written submissions, I am back in contact with my adoptive parents and my relinquished son is in gaol for attempted murder. I also want to state that it is very clear to me that I was stolen from my mother and my son was stolen from me.

To assist myself and others post adoption, these measures need to be implemented: Comprehensive research into the over-representation of adoptees in institutions, that is prisons, youth drug rehab, juvenile justice, on the street and also youth suicide; similar research for mothers, who are over-represented, and also the effect of adoption on birth fathers; appropriate training for health care professionals working in the adoption field, and by appropriate I mean honest, clear information, without the charade of the adoption myth; funding for consciousness raising and healing groups for all parties involved.

I want adoption as it is to stop immediately. I realise some children do need permanent care. However, secrecy and identity imposition are unethical and criminal. I want a written apology and public acknowledgement of responsibility from all parties

involved in the theft of myself and the theft of my eldest son, that is social workers, doctors, relevant hospital staff, consent-takers, adoption agency staff, health department, State Government, registrar, lawyers and magistrates. These acknowledgements are to be given to myself, my eldest son, my mother and father and both sets of adoptive parents.

I also want the Statute of Limitations set aside. I want all these parties to be legally, criminally charged where appropriate, the costs to be covered by the Government. These people colluded with each other for their own gain, rather than follow the best interests of the child, and they failed in their duty of care, which was a legal obligation.

I want my eldest sons and my order of adoption discharged and legal status granted to our original birth certificate. I want the legal use of my original birth certificate. I have legally changed my name from the adopted name to my birth name.

Adoptees are discriminated against in our society. Any other person in Australia can change their name on their birth certificates. Adoptees need their mother's permission to do it, or their mothers have to do it for them. I am a 41 year old woman and it is an insult to me to ask my mother to change my name on my birth certificate, and I don't have contact with her at this time. I also want my father's name on my birth certificate. While I recognise the rights of my adoptive parents, I am affronted that they are named as my mother and father on my adoption birth certificate. That is a lie.

I want stringent guidelines as to who can take on the care of children, either fostering, adoption or whatever. I want research into adoptive parents and also foster parents. From my experience adoptive parents generally have deep psychological and sometimes psycho-sexual problems.

I want reparations for myself and my eldest son and my subsequent children and my grandchildren. My adoption has affected five generations of my family at this time. I want compensation to cover the costs of the thousands of dollars and many hours I have spent in therapy and counselling and identity and family research.

I want to bring to light how few adoptees have been represented during this inquiry and ask why. My belief is that they have been brainwashed in placement to believe lies imposed upon them and are living under hostage conditions.

I have covered this in my first submission. You have probably read it. Adoption is a market-driven business, and I ask when will child slavery stop in this country? And to clarify that, by child slavery I mean the use of children to fulfil the needs of adults.

If you wouldn't clap, okay. We are all here supporting each other and I don't really need it.

I know it is a strong statement and sometimes the truth is harsh. Many adoptees would disagree with my views, which I think reinforces them.

Finally, I want to mention that when I was a child I just wanted my mother to come and rescue me. In my deepest being I still feel this way. It is very painful and it is something that will always be with me. No amount of assistance measures will remove my experience.

Thank you.

(The witness withdrew)

MAUREEN CAMERON, affirmed:

Ms CAMERON: I am grateful to be able to speak before this sub-committee about my experiences at the Royal Women's Hospital in 1966.

At 18 years of age I fell pregnant to my boyfriend of 18 months. Our parents were upset. My boyfriend was studying architecture at university and I was working as a clerk. Our parents decided that marriage was out of the question and my mother immediately made plans for me to leave home. I continued working until I was about six months pregnant and starting to show. My mother then took me to the Royal Hospital for Women at Paddington. In the basement of the hospital there is a dormitory-style set-up called Pre-Term. As I remember, this was a large room with beds either side and showers and toilets at the end. There was a kitchen at the end of the hall and the girls were all rostered to complete various duties.

We were subjected to all sorts of medical investigations by various interns and doctors. We were treated like second-class citizens, not worthy of any respect or compassion. One incident I shall never forget is being visited by a group of young interns and a resident doctor. This intern told me to lie on the bed and lift my dress, smugly adding, "Come on, you've done this before". His fellow peers, including the resident doctor, all laughed. The shame and humiliation I felt has stayed with me to this day.

I continually battle with low self-esteem. I am constantly trying to hide my feelings of insecurity and unworthiness. This also has a lot to do with my mother insisting to hide away and no one, not even my brother, to be told where I was. It has only been in recent years that I have some understanding and forgiveness towards my mother. She was also a victim of the system and carried enormous guilt of her own, so much so that she was not only estranged from myself but also from my two sons, her only grandsons.

I was married ten years after my daughter's birth and I am sure that my ex-husband and my two sons are also victims. I chose not to tell them as I had only ever told two people previously and I later regretted confiding in them. Living with such a deep dark secret for so many years causes immense pain and the only way I could deal with it was to push it down so far, as if it was a bad dream.

At the age of 21 I had taken a bottle of sleeping pills. I felt that this was a cry for help. I had heard a song at a party. The song was called A Little Ray of Sunshine Has Come Into My Life. This had been released when my daughter was born and I was overwhelmed with grief and just wanted to end the pain. I returned home and took the pills and collapsed on the couch and when my father found me I was barely breathing. The nurse that looked after me in the intensive care ward told me that all I did was call out for my baby. My mother never spoke of my daughter to me and I could not deal with what happened to me any more.

My baby girl was born on 2 August 1966 after a long labour. I was having difficulties and they sent for my mother to give consent for a caesarean section, but instead decided to administer an epidural. This was quite a new procedure at the time and the needle was very painful and quite frightening. I was numb from the waist down for days and nobody bothered to explain anything to me. I cried to see my daughter and my mother had just arrived in the labour ward and she was handed my baby and she commented that she was just like me. One kind nurse held my hand and said it would be better if I did not see her. All I could ask was did she have all her fingers and toes.

It was late at night when I was taken from that cold sterile labour ward where I had spent many hours lying apart from a quick look around the door by the staff. Later on I was mistakenly placed in the ward. The unmarried mothers were sent out on to the verandah. The next morning, the babies were being wheeled in for their morning feed and I almost had my daughter given to me until one of the staff called out, "Stop. She cannot have that baby. She is being transferred out on to the verandah". As I made my way outside I tried not to look at all the other mothers nursing their babies. I did look at one mother and she had a warm smile on her face and tears in her eyes. Her compassion almost made me feel human again.

The ten days until I signed the papers on the verandah were a blur. No wonder, since I recently obtained my medical records showing huge amounts of pentobarbitone administered three or four times daily. Notations were made each day on my medical papers: "Adoption papers still not signed". I continued to refuse to sign the papers and finally, on the ninth day, the social worker told me that if I signed the papers I could see my daughter. All I wanted desperately was to see the daughter that I had given birth to. I signed these papers and was taken to the nursery and my daughter was held up to the glass window wrapped in a bunny rug for what seemed to me to be the shortest moment in time. I felt as though I had traded my soul for that one brief moment. I was also given large quantities of Stilboestrol to dry up my milk. I make note here that I have suffered calcification of my breasts and have had examinations and biopsies. I am also concerned because I breastfed my two sons and worry about any ongoing effects to them. The following day I was released and the last notation on my medical papers was: "Patient still uncomfortable". I was so heavily sedated that I barely remember even leaving the hospital that day.

Never once was I offered any help that I now know was available to me. Instead the social workers, both at the hospital and from the adoption agency, told me repeatedly that I was selfish to want to keep my daughter without a father and financial support and she would have a life with a loving family who could give her everything. Unfortunately, she was adopted by a couple in their 40s and she tells me she has had far from a happy, loving upbringing.

My daughter contacted me through her own resources on her 21st birthday and I arranged for her to come and meet my family and myself at Christmas 1987. It was a disaster. She was so full of anger and bitterness at her being, as she saw it, abandoned by me. Everyone in my family was emotionally devastated. It is only now that she is 33 years old and has since had her own daughter that she has started, so she tells me, to understand how hard it must have been for me to have lost her.

The philosophy and ideology of the 1960s have not only destroyed my life but the lives of other generations. I fully understand my daughter's feelings of abandonment as the manipulative and systematic process of a bureaucratic system also abandoned me. During those dark and quite sinister days of illegal adoptions, the people in power were doing this for their own mutual benefit. Presently our society is outraged at the treatment of our indigenous people and the stolen generation. However, until this inquiry into adoption processes, our society was unaware of our own stolen generation. I am eternally grateful for the inquiry into adoption practices so at least the truth can now be told. Nothing can ever replace the loss of a child; no words can heal the wounds, but the truth can set you free. Hopefully this inquiry will help all victims of adoption to at least have some understanding of the suffering. The suffering now has a voice for all to hear.

In closing I would like to add that recently I endeavoured to obtain my social workers notes from the Royal Women's Hospital. The social worker there, Ms Simms, told me my records had mysteriously disappeared. She told me that she had looked through all her index cards for mine and it could not be found. I reminded her that I was in Pre-Term for three months and I hardly thought that all my records could be found on a small index card. I also pointed out to Ms Simms that I had telephoned the hospital when I was distressed after the birth of my second son in 1980 and spoke to the social worker of the day. After pleading with her to send me some information on my daughter, she kindly sent me one full page profile on the adoptive parents. This showed their age, height, occupation, hair colour, et cetera. They had also adopted a baby boy two years prior to adopting my daughter. I have that information here today to be tabled and this somehow, after my recent request for records, has even disappeared.

For many years I tried to drink myself to sleep. I tried to drink to forget. My marriage broke down and my two sons have suffered enormously, as has my daughter. I have never been able to trust and have found it hard to love and receive love. I am still suffering insecurity and I am sure that all my family and those close to me have also suffered. Thank you sincerely for this opportunity to speak of my experiences and to feel some validation of what has happened to me and so many others like me. My reason for doing this is to try to make sure that this type of thing never ever happens again.

(The witness withdrew)

MONICA PUNG, affirmed:

Ms PUNG: First I would like to thank the Committee for giving me this opportunity to speak. I have waited 29 years to speak out aloud to vent my anger, frustration and disgust at the system as it was then. Also, by giving my evidence, I am putting a face behind the submission I sent in.

In 1970, at the age of 14, I was raped by my stepfather, which led to the birth of my baby boy in August 1971. The social system at the time was based on the social values of the Dickens era. For a girl who had just had a baby at the age of 15 years, with no family support, she was alone with a sense of not belonging.

I spent most of my confinement at Villa Maria. This was a home for unmarried mothers-to-be. The whole time I was there I was told that I was not a fit mother and that my baby would be much better off with a decent married couple, Catholic of course. I was also told I would have nothing to offer my baby. I was the youngest girl at Villa and I was terrified and alone in a strange place, with no friends or anyone who cared.

I have recently found out that entry into Villa Maria meant relinquishment of my baby. I was not aware of this at the time. I was left alone for most of my labour, until everyone was aware I was about to deliver, and then the room was filled with nurses everywhere, just to witness me giving birth. Apparently, each nurse had a quota of births they had to see. It was very degrading. I did see my baby for a few seconds and he was taken away. I know the nurses gave him a name, Bruce, which I thought was quite strange later on when I met my husband to be, his name was Bruce.

Apparently, the signing of the adoption papers took place nine days after my baby was born. This contravenes the 30 day revocation period. Also, I do not believe the adoption was legal. I was a minor and I do not remember signing such papers.

After the church got what they wanted from me, which was my baby, I was of no use and taken to the Children's Court, whereby I was charged with being exposed to moral danger and taken to gaol.

The name of this gaol and another I was sent to for three weeks are etched into my mind forever, Minda at Lidcombe and Worimi Leichhardt Broadmeadow. The three weeks I stayed in these places were three weeks of hell. I thought I was going on a holiday, until I reached Minda, late at night, with a welfare officer, then I realised what the system had actually done to me. It discarded me like an old rag. "Take all your clothes off, turn around, bend over, have a three minute shower, put these clothes on and get into this bed", in a dormitory where there were 100 or more girls as well. This is what I had to do or I would have been charged. I was a victim of incest and a victim of the system.

I like to call all the people who were involved in my horror the collective profit masters, controlling everything I did. A point I would like to make is should a victim of incest be subject to the humiliation of strip searches in front of other people? I had been stripped mentally and physically of everything I owned, as well as my baby. Didn't anyone have any compassion for what I was going through? She had done nothing wrong, although the authorities thought otherwise.

Last year I accessed my so-called court records and was shocked at what had been written about me by [child welfare officer 1], the child welfare officer assigned to me. I can say it was never my welfare they were looking after. I quote this from my records of what [child welfare officer 1] said, "Her apparent lack of guilt feelings on her part would seem that if the girl feels little guilt, one wonders both whether she has an appreciation of a moral code and also the ability to form the proper relationships to form friends later". I would like to face [child welfare officer 1] and tell him that I have been married for nearly 25 years and I would like him to put that somewhere where it would fit. Also, wherever I was taken, it would be best to be away from any male influence. What did they think I was going to do? Perhaps they thought I got my stepfather to make me pregnant.

On 22 May 1996 the baby I had in 1971 found me, which was extremely wonderful at the time, although the reunion, for many different reasons, has sent my life on one big roller coaster ride of massive highs to desperate lows of depression, with thoughts of suicide my only avenue left. My whole family has been totally turned upside down. My two sons to my husband of 24 years and ten years have gone through extremely difficult times because of my major depression and uncontrollable grief. I have found it extremely hard to trust anyone, and most of the time I have felt alone inside. I firmly believe that I do not deserve a place on this earth as I was told I was a very bad girl at a very young age and that I would have to pay for my badness.

A baby having a baby. It is ironic. My stepfather could have been gaoled for a term of 14 years, but it was easier for them

to charge him on carnal knowledge. He got ten months in gaol. I got a twelve month bond and a life sentence.

I want all the people involved in the atrocities against me to be held accountable, [child welfare officer 1], [Mrs X], [Sister 1], [Doctor 1], who was the treating gynaecologist at the Mater, and I know there were others involved but I just can't remember their names.

The places that the system looked at for me to stay before they sent me to Minda, were the Good Samaritan Training School at Arncliffe, which they said they had no vacancies, other possibilities were Butler Lodge hostel at Glebe and the Marilla Centre, but apparently that was near Kings Cross and that would be unsuitable, as you can guess what they were assuming that I would most likely go down there and do whatever.

With the reunion of my son, the first day we met we sat alongside a lake, he asked me all the details of what had happened and he felt very sad for what I had gone through to have his birth, to have him, but he did call me "Mum", which I realise I am fortunate, more fortunate than some other mothers, but I only exist now from day-to-day, on medication, because I just feel that the rug is going to be pulled out from under me and I am no longer going to be able to control myself.

I know when you say you are going to commit suicide people say you don't really mean it, but people who say that can't see the pain that is on the inside and they will never know what horror has been etched inside me, and I am glad for that, and I would just like to thank the Committee for allowing me here and for all the mothers and all the support we received from you today, for all of us.

(The witness withdrew)

BARBARA DIANE MOYES, sworn:

Ms MOYES: I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to speak here today. I am here today to support this inquiry and for Blake. They said: "It's all over now, get on with your life. You will have plenty of time to have more babies". The staff at Carramar and Hornsby Hospital did not prepare me for what was to follow when I left the confines of Boomerang Street, Turrumurra, to get on with my life. I was never counselled as to how to cope with the enormous loss and feelings of grief that were to follow. Already traumatised at 17 years old, I set out on a path of first cleansing myself of the sinful thing that I had done. You see, I was not a good Christian girl according to the Bible teachings at Carramar, so I set out to be a good Christian girl.

The 17 year old woman wanted desperately to clear the shame brought by her on her family. She wanted to show her family that the father of her child was also worthy and that he did want to marry her after all. I married the father of my son at age 21. Nearly four years later I gave birth to my daughter. She was to replace my loss. That did not happen. My daughter was planned and very much wanted, but she certainly could not be a replacement. I believed that I had put everything right, but the pain was still with me, the pain of losing my son to adoption.

I have continually castigated myself over my pregnancy when I was just 17 years old. I set out on a path of emotional destruction because I wanted to be punished for my great sin. That emotional destruction has affected my relationship with the ones that I hold dear to me. I have no peace. After the adoption of my son I developed severe asthma and have suffered chronically from asthma ever since. "It's all over now, get on with your life. You'll have more babies". The social workers report from Carramar reads: "Barbara was very close to tears throughout the interview."

The report goes on to say that SW felt that I was not quite sure about adoption. I believe the initials SW refer to [social worker 1]. Not sure was right. Why was I not sure? Because I was not informed about my options. The information I received was only about adoption. [Matron 1] and other staff only advocated adoption. Adoption was the only alternative and was the best for our babies. Our babies would have financial security; they would have two loving parents who wanted them dearly; they would have a good education and lack for nothing. The people selected for adoption come from good Christian backgrounds and could not have children of their own. What a wonderful gift we could give them: Our babies. What a wonderful thing I could do for my baby in giving him to a loving family like this. The question was asked: How could you look after your baby? How could I? I did not think I could. Why did I believe this? Because I was never given any other information that would help me make an informed decision about keeping my child. Instead I was fed propaganda about adoption and how it was the only way.

Carramar was in business, the business of adoption. In 1963 the adoptions were private, money changed hands. The Home Mission Society had set themselves up in a nice locations on the upper north shore of Sydney, a beautiful old sedate building with nice gardens, tall trees, surrounded by a high fence and gate. Behind that high fence, unmarried mothers would wait in line to give birth to their babies. The very fact that you were there was for one purpose and that was for adoption. Any mother thinking otherwise was forbidden to have discussions with the others. Any mother who changed her mind was taken aside and told that they would not be able to take care of their child. Carramar was very careful to keep a nice calm atmosphere. They were nourishing babies that were growing in the mothers' wombs. They had to meet the market demand, the demand for white babies free from the trauma of conditions that would have an emotional effect on their being. These babies were in demand. The more prospective adoptive parents, the more pregnant mothers were found. Carramar even advertised their services (I refer to the Women's Weekly

of the day).

As I came nearer to the time of my confinement I remember becoming very depressed. Coping with the feeling that I thought that I had no alternative but to give up my baby to adoption traumatised me greatly. My right as a mother to keep my baby was violated. Those who had the knowledge of the means of support I could obtain if I were to keep my child kept silent. They just kept telling me it was the best for my baby.

Recently I had occasion to speak to [an agency worker] from Anglicare Adoption Services and after 36 years she asked the same question of me: How could you have looked after your baby? Their mentality has not changed.

I became a single parent at age 32. I was pregnant with my youngest son. I have reared three children as a single mum. My children have had my love, my devotion, security, a simple lifestyle, a roof over their heads, meals on the table, but not always all the material things that others may enjoy. The most important thing was that we were together. I can boast that my children have received a good education at university level. That is how I would have looked after my baby. All I needed was the information available to do it.

My confinement was at Hornsby Hospital. My baby was induced. During the birth I was given Trilene. I remember being quite drowsy, but I forced myself to take a glimpse of my baby just before they took him out of the room. I asked the nurse: What did I have? She replied: I don't know. I was given no other information about my son, nor was I allowed to see him, although on the day I left hospital they told me his birth weight and length for future reference.

During my stay in hospital, and my records state, I was systematically given pentobarb, phenobarb, Bonadorn and Stilboestrol. I was kept very calm indeed, the drugs certainly kept me in that state. This was part of the system. They could not let the mothers get upset, they might change their minds.

I was not discharged from hospital until I gave consent to have my baby adopted. I remember so well the day I signed. [Matron 1] came to the hospital and took me to a room to wait for a man to come with the papers. I always thought this man was from the Department of Community Services. I have since learned he was the solicitor, [Mr Y]. Matron started to tell me about the people who were adopting my son. I remember clearly her reassuring words that I was doing the best thing for my baby. She went on to tell me a bit about the people who were selected for my son. She said that they were lovely Christians who owned their own home and that they had been waiting so long for a baby. In my mind, I had visions of my son being chosen by these people, that he would more likely live on the north shore, have a private school education, be loved and doted on, given every opportunity he wanted. These visions were born out of the propaganda that had been fed to me during my stay at Carramar. The irony of this is that my son was adopted by a couple from Chifley who had a six year old daughter of their own and were only 28 and 29 years old.

I remember signing with my eyes filled with tears. I remember being escorted back to the ward and being given a drug to calm me down because I was quite hysterical. At the time of signing I was a minor, just seventeen and a half years of age. I certainly was under a legal disability. I question the legality of the adoption, as I was unable to sign a consent form a week before when I was admitted to hospital and yet I signed a consent for the adoption of my child. After the consent form was signed, I was allowed to leave Hornsby Hospital. I went back to Carramar to collect my belongings and returned home to my mother's house to get on with my life. As yet, I have not had contact with my son. My hope is that it will happen soon. Today I would like to thank Diane Welfare for coming out, for standing up for us and giving us the courage to stand up also.

(The witness withdrew)

PAMELA CLIFFORD, sworn:

Mrs CLIFFORD: I would like to thank the Committee for allowing me to speak. Unfortunately, I am not well prepared, I didn't bring the things I should have, but I would like to put on notice that I will provide relevant material afterwards.

Mainly, I don't know who I am, and I have no way of ever finding that out. I was born at the Salvation Army Hospital, Marrickville, on supposedly New Year's Day 1941. I knew I was adopted from a very early age. I had good parents and I was happy with them, but in 1988 I had a burning desire to find out where I came from, so I received non-identifying information about my birth mother.

She was 24 years old, her name was Freda, she was born in a country town in Tasmania. So I investigated, I looked through electoral rolls, I wrote to several 'Freda's', strange letters that only the right person would know about. I had an answer from a woman there and found out it was the right one.

I finally met her that same year and a couple of times afterwards, and as we were talking I noticed inconsistencies in the things she told me about her baby and the things that my adopted mother had told me, such as Freda, my natural mother, said she thought my new parents were wonderful people, that she had handed me to them and she had met them. My adoptive mother had told me that she had never met my parents and that I was handed to her by the matron of the hospital. She wouldn't have lied to me. The other thing was my birth mother had blue eyes. She told me that my father had blue eyes. My eyes are dark brown.

It is practically impossible to have blue eyed parents, both of them.

When my adoptive mother died and then my birth mother died, and these things were playing on my mind, I decided to have a DNA test and I contacted one of her sons, one of her legal sons, and asked him if he would have a DNA test with me. Dr Brian McDonald at the DNA labs in Sydney did the tests. It is a Mitochondrial DNA test to find out if two people share the same mother, and we did not, definitely did not.

This absolutely stunned me really, so after getting that I decided I would go and find every bit of information about who I supposedly was. So I went to the Supreme Court, where I met the wonderful [court officer], who is in charge of the adoption information area there. She was obstructive, made me embarrassed and humiliated, when I felt really bad as it was. I had to plead for information that I had a right to see anyway. She said when she gathered my information together she would put a story together from what was on the file and she would give me the story of her interpretation. I wasn't happy with that, but one thing led to another and I got what I wanted by writing to her superior and having the proper papers sent.

The thing that really upsets me is that, it is silly, but I will never know when I was really born, I will never know my correct birthday. It is obviously a day or two before or after 1 January, because there is someone else out there who has had their identity swapped with me and I will never know who that person is, because hospital records were destroyed before the early 50s. I have spoken to the Salvation Army and they say they have no hospital records. They have no way of checking any other people who might have been in hospital at the same time as my mother, so I have no way of finding out.

I went to the Salvation Army earlier this year and spoke to a man by the name of Brian Hood. He is a captain or whatever. He said he would bring this case before their committee, which meets every month. I am still waiting, and that was February, and they say they are investigating, but I don't know what they can find. I also requested the name of the matron at the time, who obviously organised this switch. Her name was [...] and she conveniently died in 1945.

That is my story.

(The witness withdrew)

MONICA HERRICK, sworn:

Ms HERRICK: I am the mother of a 28 year old daughter, Jane [...]*. Her adopted name is Jane [...], I would have named her Rachel Margaret. I am the subject, the object, of a contact veto and that is why I have asked to speak this afternoon. If I made such a clear decision to surrender my baby daughter in February 1971, why did the gynaecologist, [...], write on my hospital admission notes that I be given valium and sodium amytal on admission? If I was so happy with my decision, why, when my admission notes said I was to be induced as soon as possible, was I drugged for 24 hours before I was induced and my baby was not due for another seven days? Why, if it was my decision, was I forbidden to see her, forbidden to leave my room and kept in a drugged stupor for six days? Why, if it was my decision for her to be given to strangers, was I drugged the morning of my release from hospital prior to being given Form 9 to sign? In my submission that I have put forward I have listed the drugs that I was given.

My social worker notes that I received a couple of years ago from the hospital show the words, "When Monica saw the baby she cried and said, 'Isn't she beautiful?'" These words were crossed out and the words "Monica had a good response" were written above. If I was so happy with my supposed decision, why lie about my response and obvious grief and why was I forbidden to see my baby until after I had signed the Form 9?

To bring my grief to the present day, the same social worker, [social worker 1], from the Catholic Adoption Agency, who at that time failed to tell my daughter's father that he had a legal right to have his name on our baby's birth certificate, had perpetuated the abuse of all of our rights by telling my teenage daughter in 1986 when she was 16 that she should not be enquiring after me behind her adoptive parents' back. She went to the Catholic Adoption Agency in Bent Street in the city one afternoon and [social worker 1] phoned and told me that she looked up from her desk and she saw a 16 year old version of me standing at the doorway in a school uniform and it was my daughter who walked in and wanted to ask about her mother and she was told, "You shouldn't be here. Does your adoptive mother know?" When she said, "No", she said, "You need to go home and talk to her", and she was sent away. The social worker at Centacare could not be bothered following up on phone calls that she made to them asking about me and this was just before the change to the adoption law in the late 1980s.

What would you do if you were a child who had been told that your mother did not want you and you made three attempts to find her through the proper channels, only to be made a fool of by being ridiculed and ignored. How would you feel? I know I would lock my feelings away and put a barrier up to any further feelings I had towards my mother.

* To protect the privacy of Ms Herrick's daughter, the Committee has resolved to remove her surname from the transcript.

The barrier available to my daughter was a contact veto. She put a contact veto in place within days of it being available and with the abusive injustice of the contact veto it became my humiliating right, as her mother, to write her one letter and one letter only, which had to go via the hands of the social workers at DOCS at Parramatta. These social workers were free to open my letter and read it themselves before deciding if they would pass it on to her. This they did. They openly read my private letter before forwarding it to her. She, as I believe in her primal pain and need to know about me, replied to my letter almost immediately in October 1991 and she responded by writing a wonderful letter which included the words, which I will read from the letter, "How often do I think of you? Every night I look out my window knowing you're out there, hoping you're happy and safe". This was written by my daughter who had placed a contact veto, despite the contact veto. She also says at the end of it, "Think of you often, love, Jane [...]". That was in 1991.

Six years later in 1997 an insensitive social worker, [social worker 2], from the adoption section of DOCS at Parramatta contacted me by phone to enquire if I had received a copy of a letter in my file from my daughter. The long and the short of this phone call was to find out that DOCS had withheld my daughter's letter to me for six years, even though I enquired for any contact from here. For all of that time I phoned consistently, continually, asking if there was any contact whatsoever or any response to the letter, the one letter that I wrote her in 1991. I was told that, no, there was not, and in a tone of voice that 'we will contact you if there are any messages; don't phone us, we'll phone you', and all the time this letter was sitting in their files. It has a rusty paperclip mark where it has been sitting in my file open for anybody to read but me. When I expressed outrage that my daughter's letter had been withheld from me for six years, realising the profound injury to her soul and her emotions, this social worker, [social worker 2], said to me, "Oh, well, I needn't have contacted you".

The blatant disregard for my rights and my daughter's rights continues today. My daughter, Jane, has asked this social worker how she might remove the contact veto. She asked her that in 1997 after I wrote her a couple of letters. The answer that she was given: "Oh, take your time". [Social worker 2] told me this herself, she phoned me and told me. The contact veto is still in place. I broke the veto last December by walking up to my daughter in the street, calling out her name and saying, "Hello, Jane, I'm your mother". She looked at me and fell into my arms and we spent ten blissful minutes together and it was ten minutes out of 28 years. We are like twins. She says she wants to know me and, yes, it is time for us to be together. She was so happy and I was so happy. I walked up to her as she was waiting for the lights to change. We stepped off the footpath on to the road, side by side, and our hands went instinctively together as we walked to the other side. I stopped and looked into her eyes and just looked. We had our arms around each other as we walked down the street. She told everyone at her work and they were joyous for her and her boss said he was horrified that she had been adopted, but was pleased at how ecstatic Jane was.

Her connection with me was short-lived. My daughter has been advised to stay away from me for God only knows what reason. I am being treated like a criminal, a common criminal. Being served with a contact veto for doing no wrong other than having given birth to my daughter is like being served with an apprehended violence order, an AVO, and you could say it would be like being issued with an AVO for sitting here at this inquiry today. I am being threatened with gaol and a fine because I am a mother who had my daughter taken from me and given to strangers. I am being threatened by DOCS, in writing and verbally, to stay away from my daughter. I am being treated like a criminal because I am fighting for our rights, as mother and daughter, to know and to be with each other in a safe environment. I am somehow supposed to - as social workers [...] continue to tell me, "You'll get over it" - get over having my child taken from me in 1971, being treated like a criminal still in 1999 by those who have no concept of the grief that we are suffering. The contact veto is as injurious to my daughter as it is to me, but I do not think she realises that.

I demand that contact vetos be abolished. They serve no purpose other than to perpetuate our illegal situation.

(The witness withdrew)

ANN JUKES, affirmed:

Ms JUKES: I am afraid I am not very well organised because I wasn't actually expecting to speak today. There are just a couple of things that I wanted to wanted to bring up. Firstly, I wish to thank the Committee for allowing me to speak today. I won't go over my story because it is very similar to all the other mothers who have spoken here today.

My son was born in Crown Street. I was labelled UB minus, as that was the system in those days, all single mothers were labelled UB minus, and I was put on the conveyor belt for single mothers. I saw a social worker who offered to make me a public patient and put me into a home for unmarried mothers. When I said that I didn't want this, she replied, "Then that is all I have to offer you." I thought if that is all she had to offer, she certainly didn't.

I would just like to mention the outcome of adoption for my son. His adoptive father was an alcoholic who shot himself when Nick was six, although the adoptive couple were described as stable and happily married by the agency YACS.

The things I would like to raise today are the signing of legal forms by minors, which would not be allowable in any other situation; the witnessing of consent forms by adoption workers representing the agencies and adoptive parents - surely this would show a conflict of interest in any other situation, but it is allowed with adoption; the quality of counselling; the fact that we were not given a copy of legal forms that we signed - I only saw mine a little while ago and discovered that it actually had on it how to

revoke our consent and we did not have to go through the adoption agency. I suspect that is why we were not given copies of those forms.

I have actually written many letters over the years trying to do something about changing the adoption laws and so on. I had a letter from Mr Aquilina when he was the Minister of Youth and Community Services, telling me that the Supreme Court ensured that all adoptions were carried out according to the law, which I found laughable, because my son was adopted in 1970 and the law had been in place for at least two years and I couldn't see how the law had protected my rights in any way.

I actually wrote to the courts asking them how they did this, how they ensured that all adoptions were carried out according to the law, and I had a reply from Justice Waddell, and basically he couldn't tell me. I think they have acted as nothing but a rubber stamp.

I believe the whole system from top to bottom is corrupt and should be properly investigated and all those involved should answer for what they have done. That is all I would like to say. Thank you very much.

(The witness withdrew)

ANNA HAY, sworn:

Ms HAY: I did actually request to speak and was not fortunate enough to come out of the ballot, so I have not prepared anything, but, having listened to the people speak today, I want to make clear that it is not just when we were put in a situation with no support that we were abandoned, but now, when we are legally supposedly given the right to information, we are also abandoned in many different ways.

I had my child through the Catholic Adoption Agency, the unmarried mothers' home at Waitara supposedly called the Sisters of Mercy Family Centre, which was the most degrading, distressing situation I have ever been in in my life. I have travelled through many, many countries in the world and I have never experienced degradation like I did there and in the subsequent hospital stay at Crows Nest. The doctors and nurses felt no shame at laughing at my predicament, at leaving me during the course of the pain of childbirth, not explaining anything about what was happening, and on several occasions after the birth I was separated from my son, who is now 27. I was chastised tremendously for sneaking into the nursery to try and see him, but I was reassured that he was the most beautiful baby that had been born there at that time. I had no doubts about that; he was my son.

Over the years following that I now realise I had an extremely severe depression - very severe - which was never treated. I went to work in a hospital and became a registered nurse. I witnessed many people giving birth and supported many young women who were rushed in in the middle of the night who were single and were so afraid they did not even want to take their pants off to have their baby, did not want to open their legs so that the baby did not have to come out because of what was going on in their lives.

I had several pregnancies following the birth of my son. I had nightmares continually from the time I left my son in the hospital. I had gone back to collect him and I believe it was in the period of time that was legally my right to do so and I did not even get over the threshold of that establishment. I never saw a social worker and I believe [social worker 1] was highly influential at the time. I have not got any records of social work documentation because they do not exist apparently and I was there for a very long time. I had two abortions because I was so afraid somebody would take my children. I had another pregnancy which did not succeed. I have since never had another child.

In the 1980s I wrote letters to every department of community services that existed in New South Wales seeking help to find my son because I was told that a young man, my son's age, was searching for me in the town where I was born, even using my name, or at least he knew his mother was a Wilson and my age. I was given no assistance. I have letters piled up in a file saying, "Sorry, we can't help you in this matter". I even have one from the department that subsequently handled correspondence with the Catholic agency and they correspond with his family.

In the late 1980s I went to Waitara several times and was interviewed by a man called [adoption agency employee 1]. This man never took one note throughout the entire time. He supposedly is in charge of adoption up there. He never took one note of anything I said to him, but I foolishly thought I could trust him because he said he would get in touch with the family and help me sort this out. I had exchanges with him mainly over the phone at which time he told me my son was a very good looking young man who was exceedingly tall and healthy and very happy and I thought, well, he has had contact with him, but in actual fact he had not had contact with him. That came out later on.

When the laws changed and I went and sought my son's birth certificate I had a veto placed on my contacting him. Bob Miller was in charge at the time and I did not find him very helpful or sensitive to my situation whatsoever, so I hate to offend anyone who feels that Bob is just a saint but there are other people who have had other experiences. He told me the consequences of me breaking that veto were two years' gaol or \$2,000 or something outrageous of this nature and I just thought: I don't give a damn, this is my son and the laws have changed. I broke the veto that week, that day, by going and finding my son and I took

steps then to contact him.

My son had been told by [adoption agency employee 1], and his family, that I was a happily married lady with three children of my own; that there did not seem to be anything I needed; that I was curious about my son. "Curious", that is a good word. I have never regretted breaking the veto.

Margaret McDonald was put in charge of the legislative review over the adoption changes and there was a public call for people to ring up and say what had happened to them. I rang, I wrote and I told them how I had broken the veto, how I had been treated by the so-called system and how my son and his family had been treated, and I do not have any animosity towards those people except that they are victims as well of the system being deceitful and our society's expectation of what is needed to produce children. That was never recorded. I was very particular about having a look at the results of that inquiry. Nothing came out about anyone breaking vetos and I just feel that there has never been once that whatever I have had to say has been truthfully recorded and I have grave fears that that is going to happen here as well.

Last year I did my honours thesis at university. I went back to university four years ago, nearly five now, and I passed wonderfully, but do you know how I had to get into university, because they refused me admission because I could not prove that I was educated or intelligent enough to do it. I claimed disadvantage because I was kicked out of school for being pregnant and they said: Well, come on, we'll take you on as social reparation.

I had a breakdown last year because this brought on the depression that I was keeping a lid on for 27 years. I have no regrets that that happened and that I had to take time off, it has been the best thing that has ever happened to me. Last week was, I think, or this week is mental health week. I do not know any group of people who need more help, and I mean help. I have been sent bills by Waitara for the assistance they have given me. I have been sent bills. I cannot think of anything more disgusting and shameful for a Catholic organisation to do beyond what they have already done. All I wanted to say is that this had better be a damned honest inquiry or there are going to be a lot of people very, very distressed, and we have already been put through the mill fairly soundly and we do not want to go through it again.

(The witness withdrew)