

Forced Removal Inquiry – Teresa Margaret Tholstrup (adopted person)

[REDACTED]

Chapter 1 – In the Beginning

I was adopted by a married couple from the wheatbelt in WA. Perhaps the Salvation Army thought that these people would be better parents than my original mother, they weren't. My adopted mother was cruel, abusive, promiscuous, nasty and mean. In hindsight, I can almost definitely say that she had a narcissistic personality disorder or she had borderline personality disorder. She was an unfit mother. If the churches and the state thought they were doing me a favour – they got that wrong. They did succeed though, in punishing my birth mother.

My birth mother left my adopted father when I was 6 years old. By this time, she had adopted another child, a boy. The three of us left Dad on the farm and moved to Perth. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I went to 12 different schools and moved house more times than I can count. She prevented me from seeing my father and filled my head with hate toward him.

Just before I turned 11 my birth mother told me that I was adopted – that this was nothing to worry about because I was 'special' because I had been 'chosen' by her. Not all kids get to be chosen she said. I asked her what she knew about my birth mother and she told me that she was a prostitute and her parents were her pimps. She told me that my birth mother had a cleft pallet and she was mentally unwell. A great start to developing healthy self-esteem for a young girl.

The state has a lot to answer for in regards to how they chose 'fit' parents for innocent children. The woman who adopted me was not a fit mother

Chapter 2 – Fast Forward 25 years

I married a man in 1986. We were thinking of having children and I wanted to know if there were any abnormalities in my genetics that I needed to know about. I sent a letter to the appropriate govt dept seeing information about my birth mother. They sent a letter back saying that my birth mother was also looking for me. I took this opportunity to meet my birth mother – she lived in Albany. I met her in 1988. I also met my 5 aunties, my grandmother and many of my cousins.

I was shocked by the physical and mental state of my birth mother. She was painfully thin, lived in a room that was about 1.5 metres by 3 metres. She lived in this room all day, listened to the radio and smoked. She was supposed to be taken care of by her mother. My grandmother collected her

daughter's social security and my birth mother lived in squalor and poverty. She was barely able to speak and stood with her head in shame for most of the time. My birth mother was so overjoyed to see me. She kept repeating "you're my baby" and would pat her tummy to signal to me that is the only time she had been with me, when I was inside of her. It was heart breaking. I felt overwhelmed by the tragedy that was being laid out before me.

As I discovered, my birth mother had been institutionalised in Graylands, homes for 'wayward' girls and other mental facilities in Perth – after my birth. In these places, she was administered ECT and fed a cocktail of drugs to treat her 'schizophrenia'. As a result of this abuse, my birth mother lost her ability to speak, to write, to use many of her cognitive abilities and basically became a vegetable. My aunts have shown me examples of her letter writing and needlework prior to her incarceration into mental institutions. In later years, her then treating psychiatrist, retracted the diagnosis and said she never had schizophrenia. Too late, my birth mother was irreparably damaged.

I also discovered that my birth mother had given birth to another baby, 18 months before me. I have subsequently met her and she has led a horrible life as a result of the people she was adopted by.

My birth mother was forcibly sterilised after my birth.

Chapter 3 – My Birth

My birth mother [REDACTED] called me Sandra [REDACTED], born on 15 November 1960 in Hillcrest Maternity Home. Run by the Salvation Army. I have asked for my records from this institution and have been told that the records were destroyed in a fire. I have now found out that this is often a story told to people seeking their records, by many of the institutions. I have subsequently contacted them again and have been told that the records from the hospital were given to the State Govt and I have to **The State Records Office of Western Australia**. I will in due course do this but I have been told by other adoptees that this is an arduous process and can take a long time. I first applied for this information to Salvos in 1996 – why is it taking so long to get my own information!!!!

I spoke to one my aunts and she told me that she visited my birth mother the day after I was born – the only person to do so, from this so-called Christian family. My birth mother was very distressed and was crying for her baby (me). The nurses did not allow her to even hold me for a minute, I do not have my birth records, but I assume that she was drugged when she gave birth. This is yet to be confirmed.

My second birth certificate shows that I was adopted by [REDACTED], 3 months after I was born. I can only assume that I was held in the hospital for those 3 months. It is my right to know what was done to me and how I was 'cared' for during this time, who gave the state permission to take me from my mother and what happened to her after my birth.

Chapter 4 - And now

I got to know my birth mother, my sister and the extended family over the last 30 years. It has not been an easy life for me and while I have managed to go to university and have a home and friends. My mental health and well being have been damaged by the trauma that I suffered from my forced adoption and by the family that took me. I suffer from faulty attachment (ie I find it very difficult to love and feel loved – as a result of pre natal and post natal trauma), a lifetime of anxiety (as a child obsessive nail biting, licking my lips until they were raw, inability to focus, etc,) bouts of severe depression and some suicidal ideation.

Who's to say if I hadn't been forcibly removed if I wouldn't have encountered similar conditions, but the evidence suggests that the removal from my mother at birth, the isolation for the first 3 months of my life in a ward with no dedicated care giver, the handing over to a woman who had no way of knowing how to love me – and the ensuing poor choices she made that affected me – have had a severe impact on my life.

The least the state could do is release my birth papers

Chapter 5 – further evidence

Please see attachment one for an account by my cousin who lived with my birth mother for the first 17 years of her life

QUESTIONS I WANT ANSWERED

- **Where is my original birth certificate and when will I have access to something that is mine?**
- **Where are my hospital records – they are also mine and I would like them please.**
- **What were the circumstances that meant I was forcibly removed from my birth mother – where are the records that indicate the process that was used and what the conditions for this heinous decision to be made?**

Statement by [REDACTED] Niece of my birth mother who lived with her for 17 years

As Aunty [REDACTED] (Teresa's birth mother) niece I often lived at [REDACTED] along with my Nanna [REDACTED], from my birth until I was 17. During this time I formed an extremely close bond with [REDACTED] as a niece/ almost as a daughter she never had, and also as I grew older (9 yrs on-wards) a helper. We had a deep love and connection and I would spend time walking to the shops, dressing up in her clothes, playing the piano and taking her into town in my car when I was older and generally being around her.

When I bathed her I would notice a cesarian scar across her tummy, and she would clutch it and yell to me 'They took my babies away - those Doctors' and then burst into tears. The pain was choked down by chain smoking Peter Jackson Super Mild cigarettes, truck loads of coffee and junk food and at times dissociating from life.

'They took my babies away - those Doctors' This phrase I still recall now at 45 years as it occurred weekly. Another phrase would be 'My girls - where are they' in distress and crying often at night as I slept in a room adjacent to her and would hear her cry out in anguish, anger, grief and helplessness at the loss. She would also write stream of thought and consciousness letters and pages of writing in her room, some of which I read and they mentioned the loss and anger at the removal. These were either lost or burnt. Sometimes she'd sit and just cry.

'The Family' consisting of her Mother and [REDACTED] sisters never spoke of the babies and adoptions, as a child I heard no mention of what had occurred but I did realize what had happened.

She was often picked up at night by passing vehicles on the busy thru way into town [REDACTED] [REDACTED] A beep of a horn in the night would see her picked up and taken out, 'Oh that Dirty Man' was a phrase I sometimes heard. This was allowed to occur, rumours swirled as to who the possible 'fathers' men from the radio man or the pub.

Her visceral grief and anguish at her loss physically and mentally was palpable and apparent in her body, words and demeanour. Crying, clenching her tummy, writing, whaling and sleepless nights, sorrow and anger at her mother and sisters who mostly all kept their babies and married.

[REDACTED] was positioned through abusive language as a 'slow learner' as a woman unable to cope and to be controlled and dealt with by marginalizing language, physical aggression and cigarettes, coffee and limited options for progression within the family and the medical system. Often saying to me 'I'm not like them am I?' pointing at disabled people.

These myths and vile derogatory statements still pop up now in 2023 even after her death 'Oh she was disgusting she conceived her in the bush' only a few weeks ago about her pregnancies from her sister.

I think she saw me in a way as a surrogate daughter as my mother had several late term abortions and the family met to decide whether I could be born, She often said to me 'I saved your life I did'.

When [REDACTED] daughters were reunited the relief and emotional download was tremendous, but the pain and suffering until that point was daily and multi layered through the patriarchy system of Doctors and the women who denied her the voice to decide and express her loss.