

I am a Registered Nurse and until 2016 I was also a Registered Midwife. My midwifery training was undertaken at St Anne's Maternity Home Mt Lawley which at the time was also a private adoption agency. There was an Annexe to which unmarried pregnant women could come to await their confinement and they received free antenatal care from various obstetricians mainly [REDACTED] through the hospital's antenatal clinic which also catered for less well off women.

[REDACTED] was the Tutor and also managed the adoptions. She was a very humane woman who had done her nursing training before entering the Convent and so she was very much in touch with the difficulties which faced women both married and unmarried. As a student I learned a great deal about compassion, and understanding and learned not to be judgemental.

[REDACTED] made herself available to maintain contact with both the relinquishing mother and the adoptive parents, and although she could not give any identifying details to a relinquishing mother she was able to assure them that she was in contact with their child and that they were doing well etc so a relinquishing mother did not completely lose contact with their child.

We hear now a great deal about the pain of relinquishing mothers, about "forced adoptions" and some women are seeking compensation for their pain. I am not at all unsympathetic towards these mothers but it is also important to remember that it was a very different time then.

- 1 At that time pregnancy outside marriage was a very big shame for the girl and her family.
- 2 There was, at that time, no financial assistance as in a supporting mother's pension etc. A girl could claim an allowance under a sickness benefit from 6 weeks before the birth to 6 weeks after, so it was a very difficult choice for a girl if her parents or the father did not support her to keep the baby
- 3 We also need to remember that, at that time, the age of majority was 21 years so a girl was technically in the care and control of her parents until that age, thus if the girl was under 21 years the decision about the baby was

generally made by the parents and they usually chose adoption.

4 No one really understood in those days how deep was the bond between a mother and her baby so we had no idea of the depth of grief that giving up the baby would inflict; we all thought the girl would be able to move on and make a new life and the baby would have a good home. I am not sure that the girls themselves realized how deep would be their sense of loss. I recall finding on my ward a girl with whom I had done my general nursing training who was about to deliver her baby. When she went home (without her baby) she wrote me a letter which she headed "Sanctuary" She explained that that was how she felt about St Anne's at that time, but often we do not experience the real sense of motherhood until after the birth; before it, the girls is pre occupied with fear of exposure, often the devastation of being abandoned by the father of the baby etc,

5 When women now talk about never seeing their baby, of it being taken away immediately after birth, they perceive it as cruelty but in fact it was the opposite. While such a girl was in labour we were all aware that her baby was being adopted and she was treated with compassion – most of us knew that it could so easily have been us in that situation. It was felt that if the mother saw the baby or held it, it would be very much more painful for them to be parted, so the baby was taken to the nursery straight after the birth and the mother did not see it.

I do not recall ever seeing a case of "forced adoption", and certainly never a separation forced, or even persuaded by the institution or the staff.

It is very easy in hindsight, while experiencing the pain of separation from your child, to forget what the circumstances were at that time, and to want to blame someone and to want to make someone pay; this is very natural, but it is not necessarily the role or responsibility of society in general to take the blame or to feel that they should compensate these women for their loss. They need healing, they need to understand that there was no guilt on them for having to have the baby adopted out.

At this point in time, women experiencing an unwanted pregnancy have easy

access to termination of their pregnancy and it is presumed that this has only a beneficial effect for the mother. As a midwife I know this is not so; many women experience severe trauma, often delayed for years, and it is very hard to help a woman through this because we cannot bring back her baby, we cannot tell the mother that their baby has gone on to have a happy successful life.

The Rules surrounding adoptions have been modernised and made more humane and thus is a good thing, pregnancy outside marriage is no longer frowned on, there are benefits to assist single mothers to bring up their children.

I think that while being compassionate, we need as a society to remind people that it was a different time, with different rules, and that society as a whole cannot be held responsible, and be required to pay compensation to women who had the misfortune to succumb to the persuasion of some man, become pregnant and often be abandoned by him, or “forced” by their parents to give up their child.

It seems to be a feature of modern thinking that no one needs to take responsibility for what happens to them, that someone is to blame and someone should pay them compensation for their pain. This is not so, and it is kinder to acknowledge their pain and help them to move through it to acceptance of what happened, why, and try to find some happiness.

If society thinks it should pay compensation for the adoption of the babies of unwed mothers, will society also be responsible for paying compensation to all the mothers who choose to terminate their pregnancies and many years later realize that it was not a solution but a source of pain?