

*** As you are reading this hastily composed rewritten submission, please believe that regardless of the time I have had to finish the one I had worked on up until one week ago - when my desktop HDD crashed and I lost the lot – that what I've included is basically to have my words on record for this Inquiry, that I have contributed to it even in this random method due to lack of facilities to rewrite, but mainly that I believe that this West Australian Inquiry is most important for the future of those of us who have been affected by the adoption practices of the past that can never again cause so much misery and heartache for so many.*



My first submission was written in 1998 very soon after I had been totally shocked and amazed, but also relieved to learn I was not mentally unbalanced, but quite normal! *Well, normal ... for a once 'unmarried mother' who had carried guilt and shame for so many years while trying to hide it, and to appear 'normal?'*

I wrote it shortly after viewing an ABC TV 'Lateline' exposé of Adoption Practices - from the 1940s to the 1980s - titled "Birthrights", then immediately joining a Mother's Adoption Separation Support group, then learning so much more than was ever revealed in that initial bombshell that then altered my life's story!

Since that very first submission, as my knowledge and understanding of what had occurred during the so-called 'Forced Adoption' era has increased, I have written and revised others over the years with much more detail and content than that very first naïve rendering of my story. I don't accept it was 'Forced Adoption': no one was 'forced' to adopt our babies! The 'Force' evolved because of the coercive practices that 'forced' mothers and families to sign those consent papers simply because they felt they had no alternative! Yes, that was a 'force' or compelling power used by those who had the knowledge and control and used it for gain for the Adoption Industry.

Now putting together this latest - and very last - submission I will ever write, I initially attempted to merge them all, but couldn't as it's impossible to include all I need to say, so will simply tell my story as I first did so long ago then close, summarizing my complete ordeal, while trying to cut the emotion that dominates and controls my thoughts, even after so many years, as I recollect it all and put it into words again. (There also maybe duplications, and errors I haven't had time to locate, due to the date and time, if so apologies.)



My-Our story began in late 1956. I met [REDACTED]: he is/was the love of my life. He was my first real boyfriend. We liked each other first as friends, then lovers: we could talk about anything and everything, laugh at the same things, loved the same music, and had the same dream of the future while spending every spare moment together down by the river near my home in Como with our friends. We were very much in love and despite our youth were planning our marriage in the near future, as soon as we had saved up enough to set up a home together, and had our parent's permission.

[REDACTED] was mature, intelligent and sensible for his age. He was still attending High School, but worked nights driving a utility, delivering milk. I worked as an 'Office Junior', a clerk in an accountant's office in Perth. Months later the inevitable happened, then soon after we realized I was pregnant. My mother suspected I might be pregnant, so after an urgent visit to, and confirmation by the family doctor, Mum and Dad visited [REDACTED] parents to discuss the problem. We

weren't asked how we felt, or what we wanted, we were simply told of their joint decision that neither family could afford to help support us with a baby, married or otherwise, and as they all thought we were too young, we were told we would have to have 'it' adopted. We didn't understand the social implications or the financial obligations for our families of my pregnancy at that time. We worried and planned together, wanting to marry and keep our baby.

Abortions were all 'backyarders' then, and we didn't even consider it. We wanted our child despite the inopportune timing, and now knowing our son I'm so glad. But now, given the same choice: I don't know!

Our family doctor conveniently knew of a couple who wanted to adopt a baby. [REDACTED] also knew [REDACTED] family, as the three families lived in the immediate vicinity. He arranged for me to go to the "Alexandra Home for Mothers and Babies", a Mothercraft Nurse training school, where unmarried pregnant girls lived and worked away from the public eye, until their babies were born and adopted out.

I was told to keep away from [REDACTED] but we disobeyed meeting secretly until we were found out, then reluctantly our parents allowed us to continue to see each other. [REDACTED] and I still planned and dreamed of being able to keep our baby, to find somewhere to live as he decided to leave school, get a job, maybe we could find someone to look after the baby during the day and I could also work! A lovely impossible dream, never to come to fruition.

A government sickness benefit payment partly paid for my board and Mum paid the balance. All the girls at the home in the time I was there (about ten of us?) slept in a dormitory. I don't remember much about any of them, only a couple of the girls - [REDACTED] - and a couple of student nurses. I was in a vacuum while I worked in the kitchen during my time there. My father didn't want anything to do with me, or the situation, even to the extent of making my mother use public transport to visit me instead of driving her, although he did drive me to the home the very first day in his van. The shame of it all!

[REDACTED] was a formidable, cold person, with a nasty temper and a sharp voice who ran the home very strictly. It was a given your child was for adoption for you to stay at the home and you were never allowed a second chance to go there if you became pregnant again. She also made it clear that my baby was not 'my' baby - there was no way I was going to keep 'it' if I wanted to stay in the home, 'it' was to be adopted out. She spoke as if the babies we were carrying were illusory. It was a rule of the Home that no contact was allowed with the father of the child. I realised that unless our plans came to fruition before the birth I had nowhere else to go, so still planning with [REDACTED] I meekly complied with her directives, except for 'no contact with the father of my baby'.

It was a rule of the Home that no contact was allowed with the father of the child. [REDACTED] was fully supportive throughout my pregnancy despite us not being allowed contact, which we did by mail. We wrote to each other each week: my mother took my letters to [REDACTED] and brought his to me. When I visited the KEMH Outpatients for our check-ups I'd use the public phone to ring [REDACTED] next door neighbour - a newspaper reporter with a phone, as in those days not many families had phones at home - he'd call [REDACTED] who took days off school on Clinic days to the phone, we'd talk discussing possible plans, but becoming aware as time passed that our plans were not making progress and the fate of our baby appeared inevitable.

In the early days at the home, [REDACTED] said that it would be explained what to expect closer to the time of the birth, but I heard nothing from her except to criticize or reprimand and no advice or information was given by the medical staff at the Outpatients Clinic who supposedly

explained to the girls, as expectant mothers, what to anticipate up to and after birth, but they didn't either, so I remained ignorant until the end: a distressing shock. There was little privacy in the home apart from each of us having a cubicle to store our cases and in which to dress; keeping to yourself was discouraged by Matron.

Because the adoption was prearranged privately by [REDACTED], I never saw or heard from any Social Workers. At the time I was relieved, because they were from the "Child Welfare Department". The threat of 'The Welfare' questioning you was extremely frightening as they interrogated you to learn if you had done 'it' too many times which meant you'd be put into a home, generally the Sisters of No Mercy's "Home of the Good Shepherd", until you were eighteen. Totally inappropriate and immaterial voyeurism? It was obvious that they had been sexually involved with a male, so why the necessity for detail?

Another fear was that your boyfriend could be charged with 'Unlawful Carnal Knowledge' then have to face Court and possibly gaol. We loved each other, so were dreading the day they came to question me, as I didn't want [REDACTED] to suffer any punishment. Naively I was relieved I had escaped the inquisition, by giving birth before they did interview me, as I dreaded going into another 'Home'.

Not one person ever explained any of the options available to us to keep our child. I never knew until forty years later there was any assistance available to help us keep our baby. Nor were we told that after signing the consent papers we had thirty days to change our minds! Change our minds? We were still planning ways we could take our baby home and manage by ourselves, until the end.

On November 2nd 1957 on the evening I was admitted to King Edward Memorial Hospital, I had been having back pains all day but didn't realise it was a precursor of labour. Later that night when I felt the need to push even after [REDACTED] examined me, she refused to believe I was in labour as it was a couple of weeks before my due date, telling me to go back to bed, despite the pain. Fortunately, later I was able to convince the night sister and was sent to the hospital in the final stages of labour two and a half hours before the birth of our son in the early hours of the following morning.

I was left alone for ages it seemed, in a dully-lit passageway lying on a cold, hard, narrow trolley with no covers, told to keep my legs bent up at the knees, no privacy but bugger the embarrassment by then, as I was in so much pain I didn't care what they did or said to me. Lying on a trolley up against a wall, nurses and orderlies rushing past, not even a sidelong glance at me in my terror and ignorance.

Then more probing and poking from a harassed looking nurse, who gestured for another one to come and look at me, saying, "You're coming too soon. Try and hold on, we're not ready for you yet. You haven't even been shaved!" I couldn't answer, the pain was so intense. I was close to tears; living a nightmare. I badly wanted some of that gas the girls said they'd give you towards the end. And I desperately wanted someone here with me to tell me what was happening to me. Then a long steady blur of pushing, and pain. Worse still, when someone put their hand inside me to stop the baby coming out – they pushed him back in: the most terrible, excruciating sensation!

Then bright lights blinding me, white tiles, lots of loud voices, rattles of metal clashing ... echoing. More probing and poking at the source of my pain. Then suddenly the trolley was moving fast, bashing against wide swinging doors into a into a large, white tiled room. Now, dumped onto another bed with a huge white light above me, my legs unceremoniously poked through some

straps at the sides of the bed. When would it stop? I wished then I would die, as I thought I couldn't take any more of this pain! Pleading to get some of that gas soon!

Then a kindly voice through the fog! "Just a while longer, dear. No, you can't have the mask. Don't push. No! I don't want you to push until I tell you. You're doing nicely - [REDACTED], bring those [REDACTED]'s, she'll tear! Why didn't they send her in earlier?"

I had no control over the next urge, and didn't care, and gave an almighty push - then splat! Heat, right in the core of me, and wetness! Water ... all over my legs! The pain not quite so intense now, it was like a heavy clamp on my belly pushing me down. I was on a roller coaster; everything was an uncontrollable blur, like a nightmare. I didn't care any longer I just wanted to die and wondered when I would. Then, groaning and pushing as hard as I could, feeling as though I was ripping apart, the strongest pain of all. A sharp, white hot tearing pain ... and then suddenly I felt the most exhilarating feeling of relief, as he slithered hotly and wetly out of me. All wet and warm.

I thought I heard someone say "It's a boy." I cried. "Is it? What is it? What did I have?" Great gulping sobs. "Don't ask me," another voice, cranky sounding, "ask someone else!" I cried harder. A nicer soft voice, "Come on, don't be silly dear, it's all over now." I lifted my head to see him, to get my first glimpse - where was he? The nurses stood, their backs to me doing something, when I finally heard him; his first cry, a little mewling, squawking cry, that particular, unique wailing sound I cannot, nor will ever forget.

His first call to me - he wanted me then - and they denied us both. Even now when I hear the cry of a newborn baby, the memory still brings me out in goose bumps. A large dark haired nurse stood deliberately obstructing my view. Then he was gone... gone before I could see anything of him. At first, she didn't even want to confirm whether 'it' was a boy, or a girl? My pleas were brushed aside, "No, not now. Ask someone else later". (Bitch!) Another brusque nurse tells me, "Pull yourself together, no need for tears, you'll be in the ward in no time and you can have a nice sleep. It is all over now." Ha! Little did she know the pain was just starting - this was merely the beginning!

I was badly torn, as he came out too soon - in too much of a hurry, his little elbow at the wrong angle. They said they couldn't give me gas as I was too far advanced, and they didn't have enough warning ... I should have been there earlier when they weren't as busy! The spiteful old cow - wouldn't believe me because the doctors at the clinic said I wasn't due for another couple or three weeks! She who caused me this extra pain and suffering - I loathe her even today. Some student doctors had fun, or practice, stitching me up. It was a cobbled up mess, luckily something that is rarely on view and even then not for general exhibition.

Then I was wheeled into the ward with the married, respectable mothers. Next came days of torture - the longest days I have ever spent in my life - empty, torturous days. Days that should have been a glorious and joyful experience! The pale yellow curtains hastily whisked closed around my bed each time the babies were brought in at feeding time, every few hours. 'Squeak, squish' heralded rubber soled shoes on the shiny floors, nurses carrying little pink or blue wrapped, wailing bundles which were handed over to outstretched arms and smiling faces. We'll just close these." Whisk, whisk, so efficient! Those curtains hiding my heartache, but after I'd seen the babies given to their mothers! I doubt whether it was to save my feelings, probably to avoid embarrassment for mothers feeding their babies, me watching them with an aching heart and empty arms!

(Speculation as to why no baby for me to feed? Whispers behind hands ... ssshhh ... averted faces!)

I had to have my breasts bound to stop my milk coming in to feed my baby, my baby who was now being fed on formula. No medication, when it came gushing in like a spring stream filled with melted snow. This was a strange mysterious part of giving birth that not one of the staff bothered to explain could happen! Just a binder and pins thrust impatiently into my hands: wide strip of material to tightly bind around my chest, squashing my breasts up hard against the rib cage to discourage further production of the precious milk I had for my son, that I couldn't manage to pin up by myself having to suffer the assistance of the hard-faced black-haired nurse, as though she was sewing up a bag of potatoes, although she did give up when I gasped in pain. (In hindsight I was lucky as it's now been proven that the diethyl-stilboestrol contained substance that could later cause cancer in both mothers and their children.)

I made sure I did it myself after that, whether it was tight enough, or not. I was an extremely prolific cow! It was very difficult putting the binder on, even after a shower, trying to tighten it as my breasts were huge, and engorged: very tender and full of hard painful rocks, just to move my arms was excruciating. I couldn't lie on either side as my breasts would drag down, worse pain lying on my back because then they would slip sideways – both painful positions.

I was chastised because I avoided rolling over to lie on my stomach, as it was only achieved with great difficulty due to the pain of stitches pulling, also into the shaved pubic hair re-growing, and my painful breasts. I was later told that as I was not breastfeeding, my uterus was not contracting to expel the residue from the birth, so to lie on my stomach for some time each day, a towelling covered pillow pressing firmly up into my belly helped it come away and would firm my stomach. After that welcome advice, I managed it as I didn't want a large, floppy stomach: a dead give-away that I'd had a baby! The stretch marks were proof enough, at least they could remain unseen.

Even at the hospital, I had been told to keep away from the Maternity Nursery. It was forbidden ... to those like me! Another distortion of the truth; more deceit, I found out years later. Our son was legally ours until the adoption order was ratified in the Supreme Court, and they lied to us! They denied us our only chance of holding, cuddling and kissing him. How could they be so cruel? It was not much to ask, particularly as they were keeping him to give to someone else!

█████ and I saw our son only once. I regretfully but obediently kept away from the nursery viewing window, but just before I was due to be discharged █████ insisted we would try: our last chance! "What have we got to lose? What can they do? Throw you out? You want to get out, so let's just go and have a look!" So there we stood, his arm protectively around me, both nervously peering through the nursery viewing window trying hard to see my name on the cards on the rows of white covered bassinets on stands, one holding our baby son.

A nurse looked at us, and after hesitating and looking cautiously around, lifted a baby out of a bassinet and carried him over to the window and furtively held him up for us to see closely. We stood gazing at him. I could feel █████ hand on mine, his thumb gently stroking the back of my hand, soothing and calming. His arm holding me close, whispering to me, 'If I try to talk, I'll cry. He's so beautiful. He's just like you.' We stood staring, throats tight. The lump choking me moved enough for a husky, 'No, he's handsome, just like you'. Silly, trite words just enough to hold off the tears, my lips could barely form even those few they were wobbling so much; it was either laugh or cry. I was overwhelmed, staring, trying to imprint the image of that little face on my mind. I was desperate to capture it before he was gone ... I can see that tiny face even today. I have the picture of his little face engraved on my memory forever and will always be grateful to that unknown nurse

and would love to thank her for that gift; one of the most precious I have ever received! Our little baby boy, we weren't allowed to see, or touch, kiss or hold in our arms ... at least just once!

The nurse smiled at us, then carried him back placing him in the bassinette as some other nurses walked into the nursery. I hope they didn't notice. If it wasn't for her compassion, and the risk she took disobeying orders to show one of those babies (Name cards marked "A" for adoption) we would have had absolutely nothing to take with us. As it was, I never received even a piece of paper to show I had given birth to a child, until I was able to make application for the proof, thirty-five years later! My only proof; stretch marks, stitches and engorged breasts ... and a broken heart!

Later, lying on my bed in the ward, the nurses would pull the curtains closed around my bed, not taking particular care, leaving gaps. My backside on a pillow, my legs wide open, bent up at the knees, with the healing, heat lamp casting its warm glow on the tears and stitches to heal the cobbled-up mess. The doctor would walk past during inspection time then with no warning, the curtains were rudely pulled aside for anyone to see me in a most unbecoming position, to enable the student doctors to see the progress of their handiwork. I heard one of them make a derogatory comment about the position of my legs, the reason I was in that hospital and my marital status as though I did not exist, as the others laughed. Like an exhibit in the zoo! When I compared notes later, we were treated like second-class citizens: less than animals.

At the time for the completion of the Birth Registration form the Almoner came and took all my details for the registration of his birth. To her annoyance and against her wishes and advice, I insisted that his father's name be put on the birth certificate/registration papers. But it she never recorded them so that they were never on the original birth certificate. Left off apart from a question mark - as though he had no father! What right did she or anyone have to make such a decision, not to include the name of his father on his birth certificate? I gave her all his details that she kept but did not follow up, to get his signature on the form. Vital though as he had to sign the consent to adoption papers!

Many years later as [REDACTED] had signed the consent – albeit against his will - I was able to apply and have his father's name added to his birth certificate. It cost quite a lot, but it was worth every cent as I knew [REDACTED] would know that his son had his real father's name on his original, genuine birth certificate: that sadly and ironically is not a legal document! When I was discharged from the hospital, I was given nothing, not even slip of paper, any type of certification to prove I had actually given birth to a baby boy. No proof for nearly forty years. We entered that place together my child and I, I walked out alone. I have no memory of leaving there, how I got back to the Alexandra Home, but I remember that my baby was not with me, as though he had never been, or existed.

Not knowing just how illegal and unethical their actions were then, I am extremely angry and frustrated even now over sixty-five years later. They had no rights, until I had actually signed the papers; because until then he was mine! And I didn't know my rights, because they lied to me ... and all the other mothers like me. We could have taken his picture, kissed his soft cheeks and touched his face and hair, felt the shape of his head, seen his tiny limbs and kissed his little fingers.

At least said 'goodbye' ... I was to forget about my baby and ... get on with my life! Stupid, useless, empty words reverberated down through the years! It was impossible to forget him - so simple to say, impossible to do. Better still, let them all give away their first-born child, to all those poor infertile people who couldn't have their own, and then tell me how they managed to forget. "You can have more when you get married ... there's plenty of time ... you're only young"! More brain-washing as though there were fears we might buck the system; you can replace him! – Like an old dog with a puppy? This authoritative indoctrination, with firm opposition toward anyone who

tried to object to their collective wisdom, came under the guise of advice, from all levels, the doctor, matron, sisters and nurses. I was told, "You will forget about it", and "get on with your life! - Everyone does." "You can have another one - when you get married, one of your own."

One of my own? He was my own! Not only was I his mother, [REDACTED] was his father: he was our son. This is fact and can never change whatever laws were in place and whatever papers signed. They were a false reality for someone else!

After approximately nine days I left that most inhospitable hospital and sent back to the home to wait another eon in a vacuum for orders to sign away my rights to our son. I was feeling totally isolated and strange as though I was in another world, and after three/five (?) days waiting around was called into [REDACTED] office where she told me I had to go into Perth to the solicitor's office and sign the papers, and after I did I would be allowed to leave and go home and get on with my life!

I felt a little bit brave, but more scared and sick as I replied that I didn't want to sign any papers to have my baby adopted! We wanted to keep him! Matron was furious. Her face flushed alarmingly as she hatefully spat the words at me, "You will do as you are told! You will go in there and sign those papers. If you don't sign them 'it' will end up in a home ... a ward of the state! You don't want that do you? No! Just do as you are told. There is nothing you can do about it. Now go." I was almost in tears repeating that we were still trying to find a way to keep him, but she spoke over the top of me, her face becoming alarmingly red, saying, "Just do as you're told. You'll forget about it and get on with your life, everyone else does. You can have another one when you get married, one of your own!"

Have another one? One of my own? I had a baby son, why would I want another different one later? Not only was I his mother, [REDACTED] was his father: he was our son. This is fact and can never change whatever laws were in place and whatever papers signed. They were a false reality for someone else!

I went. Fighting back tears, and wondering why she hated me so much. Why was she so angry? If we didn't sign the papers our son would end up in a home? Neither of us wanted that even if we couldn't keep him.

[REDACTED] and I met on the steps of the G.P.O. in Forrest Place and walked together to the solicitor's office ([REDACTED]), (learned many years later: the documents we signed had NO business name or address.) and, with the stroke of a pen, 'consigned' a tiny human being to a life with strangers, as though we were sending a parcel through the mail. Easier in fact, we didn't have to pay a penny for the transaction! I just had to face some blank faced men who handed me a pen and a piece of paper and told me where to sign. No explanations afterward or if there were I cannot remember. I was numb and in disbelief. [REDACTED] was upset and trying to comfort me as I felt so ill and it felt as though my stomach was falling out from between my legs, my stitches were itchy and painful, my breasts were leaking through my summer frock, not hidden beneath the cardigan I wore to hide it, even though it was a hot day. A totally miserable experience frozen in time, but in parts still so clear. I still remember walking down the hill after we walked through London Court and over the Terrace, [REDACTED] was holding my hand and we were planning for the time when I would be home again.

We were both legally minors - underage, still children in the eyes of the law. [REDACTED] was a very mature sixteen and a half and I had my seventeenth birthday in the home one month before our baby's birth. At that age we could not take out hire-purchase unless a responsible adult co-signed;

drink liquor in a hotel; buy or drive a car; hold a driving licence! Yet we could do this: sign the life of another human being away, change their name and send to live with another family!

My signature had not one adult member, or adult representative of my family, in attendance witnessing or co-signing my signature! Not my father, as they tried to tell me many years later - only █████ accompanied me. I have copies of the documents/papers – no letterheads - absolutely nothing to indicate which legal firm handled the transaction. I only learned who it was from the Social Worker from the government who handled the adoption information we were later allowed to have. When █████ signed his Consent to Adoption– his father accompanied him and witnessed his signature. I cannot comprehend just how this was ever allowed, and wonder how it could possibly be legal.

We walked out of that office in silence, aware that something momentous had taken place in another's life and that it was our fault. We walked up the Howard Street hill, feeling empty and numb, but dumbly accepting, I was crying silent endless tears. █████ was grim and with his tear-filled eyes tried to comfort me as I was trying to hold back the sobs in St. George's Terrace, the main street of Perth, full of people who might guess why I was crying and what had I done? I felt shame, anger and defeat.

Days stretched into nights, and more nights ... never-ending pain. I hated my life, waiting for the pain to go away. It didn't - not for thirty-seven years did it merely abate. It will never go and cannot, ever. I am a mother - I will always be his mother – one who was separated from my child and told to *'forget about it and get on with your life!'* Not to mention his existence to anyone. Just to pretend 'it' never happened. 'It'? 'It' was a human being! How to do the impossible? That my leaking breasts and stretch marks and aching belly were quite normal! If we had been respectably married and our child had died, we would have been inundated with sympathy and caring. If I had been respectably married and pregnant, and my husband had died, I would have been supported; they wouldn't take a child from a widow? Or would they? I've heard since then that was sometimes an alternative offered to those who were not financially secure.

My sin - our sin - was having had sexual intercourse without the blessing of marriage. Like many others had before and after us, but we had been caught out! But we loved each other, how could that be a sin? The proof we had sinned was a child! A child is a blessing not a sin. One of those many bigoted, religious, moral decisions: made by man. How then are non-Christian peoples on this earth, whom God is supposed to have created, not separated from their children at birth? Absolute hypocrisy!!

I was devastated. We were devastated. For a long time after his birth, months blended into a void for me. I was very depressed and disoriented, even with █████ loving support. I had been forbidden to speak to, or even see him after I came home, but orders we still both disobeyed as we loved each other even more so with the bond of our son between us. Our futile plan was that one day we could be all together: we would get him back!

Reluctantly our parents accepted that we still saw each other and we fell into a pattern, not of not the old love, but a new type of love: we still loved each other with a strong need, but with sadness hanging over us and my depression was dragging me down. It was also affecting █████.

Now, I understand that I either suffered from Post Natal Depression aggravated by the loss of our baby, or vice versa, the process of his loss, and suppression of the grieving process. It was considered abnormal if you 'didn't put it out of your mind'. The problem was compounded by the fact that the subject was also forbidden to be discussed at home. I was told to forget that I had

given birth to a baby; that I was an 'unmarried mother'; not to tell my brothers, and as only [REDACTED] and a few close friends knew the truth, the secret was not to be leaked, tension made my life intolerable. From that time in 1957, the moment I woke in the morning it was foremost in my mind, even while I was at work until I finally fell asleep at night.

Thankfully, after going back home I found work within several weeks with a large, new retail company not too far from home and I loved my new job. No precedent to follow, as it was a new department in a new company, so I structured a system as I worked out what was required: ordering furniture and bedding, coordinating the delivery of the goods, including electrical, with the installation of floor-coverings etc. It required a lot of concentration that was what I needed to stop me thinking about my life outside of my working hours. During those years after the war, in the 1950s there were a lot of new government homes being built on estates in our area south of the Swan River for young couples starting families. Our company supplied all they required to set up a home.

Many couples, with babies in prams, would come into the showroom situated close to my office desk making it difficult to ignore the sound of babies crying, or the salesmen and women talking 'babytalk' to sweeten the parents and I had to force myself NOT to look into the prams, searching for little baby boy's faces that might be familiar. I learned to turn off, get on the phone to place orders, or walk out through the dispatch for several minutes if it got me down. At first my grief was very hard to control, but as I had to keep it a secret (a fear to possibly lose my job if it became known, as was the social stigma in those days?) I managed to conceal my feelings and get on with my work. It was agony but also a lifesaver! At work, as it was demanding and interesting, I was a different person, even sharing jokes and laughing with new girlfriends, but after hours I'd walk the several miles home just to be on my own and think.

An extraordinary coincidence: I found out many years later, our son's new parents lived within half a mile from where I was working, and often after work I would walk home the several miles when I felt depressed, passing the street where he lived - only four doors up from the road on which I walked - while dreaming and wondering where he was. So near, yet so far!

[REDACTED], still at High School, was also still grief-stricken and we often shed tears together wondering where he was, and talking about him. [REDACTED] said he felt guilty that he was unable to care for both his child and me, regardless of the fact we were both considered too young to marry.

Grief, depression and the growing feelings after about 18 months that I was 'unnatural' (because I couldn't forget about my baby I'd been told I would forget about that everyone did) caused me to make the worst decision of my life; I broke off my relationship with [REDACTED], leaving him heartbroken. As much as I loved [REDACTED], one side of my brain/heart was, [REDACTED] and our baby' equals pain. The other side was that if I didn't see him it would help me to forget our baby and would mean no pain. I also thought that I was not normal; I was unnatural, I was unbalanced, as I'd been told that all the other girls forgot and I simply couldn't and the thought of our baby preyed on my mind too much for too long. It didn't work! I told him I didn't love him any more.

Grief and depression grew together with the growing suspicion after about 18 months that I was 'unnatural' because of my continual thoughts of 'where is our baby?' (That baby I'd been told I would forget about, that everyone else did) caused me to make the worst decision of my life: I broke off my relationship with [REDACTED] leaving him heartbroken. As much as I loved [REDACTED], one side of my brain/heart was, [REDACTED] and our baby' equals pain. The other side was that if I didn't see him it would help me to forget our baby and would mean no pain. I also thought that I was not normal: I was unnatural, I was unbalanced, as I'd been told that all the other girls forgot and I simply couldn't

and the thought of our baby preyed on my mind too much for too long. It didn't work! I had to tell him I didn't love him any more. I did - but he couldn't understand that if I loved him, I wouldn't want to stop seeing him - so I said I didn't! I have never stopped loving him. I loved him then, and have all my life – even now he's gone from this life - but even then I didn't blame him, it was because seeing him reminded me of that time at KEMH when they took our baby from me, not telling me what 'it' was, not letting me see him.

I had only found out I had given birth to a son after, when my mother came to visit me and told me, as she had asked and had been told. My mother was very lady-like and respectable; the nurses weren't rude to her!

█████ told me just before he died, that he cried for months after I left him. I did too, after my decision, for many weeks after, and many times for hours after I went to bed I'd cry myself to sleep. I felt guilty knowing it wasn't his fault, but didn't know what else I could do. I wanted and needed him but wasn't happy, he reminded me of our loss, me knowing it wasn't his fault, but didn't know what else I could do. I withdrew into myself too much and was so restless and unhappy.

So then for a couple of months I ran wild, out too often with girlfriends from work, drinking, parties and staying out late, coming home at all hours. I was withdrawn, restless and unhappy and not enjoying this new life of ... was it escape? Now, more unhappy feelings, especially when seeing █████ in the distance: wanting him remembering what we had together, wanting our lives back to normal. What was normal now though? Life dragged on until my father told me to 'shape up or ship out'! That was the impetus needed: I had to get far away from the memories.

So after my father told me to shape up or ship out. I left my life, I left the young man I loved, left my family, left the home I'd lived in since I was born, resigned from the work I loved (the best job I've ever had) packed my cases and 'trained' out across the Nullabor in 1959 at the age of eighteen to Melbourne, Victoria where I have lived for the rest of my adult life and never went 'home' again - apart from a couple of attempts to return to live in the West, and visits in the tourist sense - but now forever away from that city of pain. I had to start a new life in Victoria where I would no longer peer into prams, and staring at baby boys, wondering if that little boy with blonde hair and grey eyes looking like my son's father would have, was my son? Where hopefully I could try and forget, as everyone else did!

I began my new life: alone, apart from the casual friendship of the sister of a recent, short-lived boyfriend - the first one after █████, and so sadly lacking – in a life in a strange new city, in unfamiliar surroundings and full of strangers where I would try harder to forget, and hopefully become a normal person again.

Within year I met and married the first man who asked me, one who accepted 'used goods': such as I was! I did tell him my dark secret of my shameful past, before I said yes to his proposal, and heard his then acceptance of that 'bastard' who was in my thoughts, but not my life. At the time he sympathized, but later it became sneering references to 'Your bastard', then the marriage became more abusive after alcohol, but then he started using drugs that were the cause of the long-term beginning of the end of that next disaster.

Back then I thought I as was happy as I could expect to be, particularly with a beautiful baby son for my first Wedding Anniversary. Then came a gorgeous baby daughter: two babies within four years! Was I in a hurry to fill the great empty hole of my lost loves, to again have some one of my own to love, and to be loved? I had reconciled myself to this unhappy life with him, as then I felt I didn't deserve any better: I was respectable and lucky to have my children and I tried to be the best

wife I could be, to keep him happy. After a particularly bad time, once I did try leaving with my children, but he threatened to kill everyone except me if I didn't return, so I did, as he was most convincing in his rage, and even then the police could not help until he did 'something': another beating or session of psychological abuse that I was not prepared to risk. Thankfully he left our home, his children and marriage when he found another woman, who later suffered the same abuse. Our marriage broke up after nine years, eight of them painful abuse, despite my subservience believing I deserved no better.

'Not respectable' again: now a Divorcee and a Deserted Wife! Later on a part pension while working in a Hotel! How low on the social scale could I sink?

I brought up my two children by myself, then aged eight and five years, working in a hotel kitchen washing pots and dishes to keep a roof over our heads and food on the table. The Deserted Wife's pension was a great relief, when it became available after the first six months after desertion. Prior to that there was no government support, but when I did receive it, although not a great amount, it was enough alleviating the worry and dire threat of the 'Welfare' again, of their taking my two children from me – my greatest fear - as then I could afford to pay rent and keep enough food in the cupboard to remove the threat of putting them into foster care as apparently was a common threat for single mothers.

I have never remarried, nor lived in a marital relationship since, despite having several relationships that could have gone further, but I never met anyone I would have lived with, let alone married, as I never dared risk it. My children were my life! One relationship lasted seven years, each of us with our own home and children, but it wasn't meant to be. I didn't love him, not like the love I'd had for [REDACTED], and if I couldn't have that again I didn't want it, it was not love. Nothing less would do.

From the 1970's onwards I was anxiously searching for information of my son. My two children of my rash, failed, only marriage, were finally told of their brother's existence in 1985 and originally were supportive. *Later my daughter was hostile and never wanted to know anything about him. But then she decided she didn't like me either and I have not (now in 2023) seen her for ten years despite her living half an hour from my home.* But my son has met him several times, and they have very similar interests.

Prior to that time, I could not speak of him; his birth and loss, to anyone without extreme distress. My jaw would literally freeze up and tremble. Not until I told my story for the first time to the other mothers who had experienced the same pain and loss that I had believed only few 'not-nice-girls' also felt, not the as it's calculated over 250,000 girls and women all over Australia had experienced from even before the 1940s to the 1980s, gradually the numbers lessening as humane support grew and societal attitudes changed.

Back then it was generally believed that your chances of finding your child were more remote than winning Tatts, but for the hard work of those who have fought the system and had the government's release the information that was necessary for even a part healing for a dark part of the history of this country. The government department in Perth who provided the information I did finally receive were helpful to the extent of their abilities at the time, but NOT like KEMH who were deliberately evasive and withheld information. I wrote to them many times and have correspondence from their responsible departments but have received very little information apart from a handwritten entry in the birth register that I now believe that I am extremely fortunate to receive even that miniscule piece of information, as I left that place without any proof whatsoever

that I had given birth to a child. Many years ago after The Deputy Premier Kim Hames intervened on my behalf I did receive a further confirmation for which I am grateful.

But I have never learned just who received the 'Baby Bonus' that a mother receives on the birth of her child? Hopefully not the adopters! Also who received the 'Child Endowment' while he was still mine? Mine at least by law, for thirty days!! At least until the 'transaction' was ratified by the courts.

It was impossible to ever know if our son was dead or alive, loved and happy, or living in misery or the better home that we were told we could not provide, or anything of his life or fate. I wrote my futile letters, searching, knowing I could be disillusioned and more hurt. But I had to try. My greatest fear was that he was unloved and unhappy. All I needed to know at that time was that he was well and happy - I just had to know! To confirm that he had had a better life than one that his parents could have given him! For all I knew he may not have been alive, I may have been grieving for a dead son.

I finally found and met him in 1995. A dream finally come true; a dream far surpassing any I ever imagined. My son was 37 years of age before I touched, kissed, and spoke to him face to face! I could finally give him a birthday gift. He hadn't known he was adopted until the rigid adoption laws, not only in Western Australia, were finally unlocked to enable me to initiate inquiries. We have seen each other over the years, visited each other's homes, write and telephone. He is a son to be proud of - his adoptive parents have given him a good, happy, stable home and upbringing. He is in long-term relationship and is the father of two beautiful daughters he has acknowledged as my granddaughters! I am so fortunate he does not hold it against us like so many adoptees full of anger or resentment for the parents they believe rejected, or abandoned them.

For this I have to thank Glennis Dees of Jigsaw, Perth, W.A., for letting me know that change was then in the near future. I am forever in her debt for her advice and the result that followed. I also have to thank the mothers of the adoption support group I joined shortly after watching that eye-opening exposé, they had known of the adoption industry and had been working together for reform for some years prior and from those wonderful women I learned so much. I was with this group for quite a few years until sadly egos turned the group toxic and quite a few of us left it.

I had phoned █████ a few years prior to finding our son, just in case he had heard anything about him, as I had believed that our son would have known he was adopted - and hopefully - might be looking for either of us – he wasn't looking for us and didn't, as he had never been told he was adopted until I wrote searching for information!

█████ told me he had married twice and had five children, three sons and two daughters. His first wife had died after the birth of their fourth child – sadly their first child, a daughter, was stillborn - and the second marriage with another son had ended in separation. As we were both single again, we spent quite a lot of time writing and phoning each other. He was about to visit me here in Victoria when he learned that he had inoperable, terminal cancer, and phone me on Xmas Eve 1996 to tell me. I hastily arranged to fly to Perth to see him where we caught up again. I had to return home as I was still working. Then as his condition worsened I visited him for the last time in Perth, where he was living with his brother and sister-in-law at their home.

We found that time had stood still as far as our feelings were for each other. It was most distressing that we had lost the chance of finally being together; that we had met up again too late because of his illness. But at least we did have time to say those words, that both of us needed to hear, and tell of many things we needed to say to each other. █████ was adamant that had we had

support and advice, temporary financial and moral at that time we would not have separated; our son would have been ours and we would have been together still. I also believe it and had he survived we would have resumed our relationship. The blessing we both have had is all our children which we have had with our other partners.

█████ died on 12th. October 1997. But father and son had met and talked, and knew each other, albeit briefly. Not deeply enough, because time was too short, but █████ was extremely happy in the knowledge that he had finally met his son, and liked and admired the man he had become. I know his son is glad that he had the opportunity to know his father before it was too late.

█████ last words to me were, 'I love you Barb, and I always will.'

<>

The memory of his words to me have been a great comfort over the years, but I have never been able to get over the repercussion/impacts of my/our experience, as to this day I still have dreams I cannot forget, dreams that awaken me, then I can't go back to sleep for hours as they keep returning the minute I start to drift off again. I have to sit up and read or clear my mind with something irrelevant and I always wake up tired after these dreadful dream nights.

The most persistent dream is when I'm walking around inside a big empty, oppressive dilapidated building, grimy white tiles falling off the high walls, carrying a little crying naked baby in my arms. I'm unable to find the way out, but I'm also scared and hoping no-one will catch me because of the echoes of my crying baby, but also knowing I've got nowhere to go if I did get out, so I keep on wandering ... up and down staircases, into passageways and empty rooms and searching ... for what? For help or to get out? I still have dreams of wandering in that building to this day.

Then other nights the face of █████ is right in front of me, red and angry, and in her harsh, strident voice in my face keeps repeating: *"Just listen to me. You have to forget about it and get on with your life. Do you hear me? Stop that sniveling nonsense, just get on with your life. Forget - you'll get over it ... he's not yours now ... never will be, so forget about it ... forget ... forget."*

But the very worst dream is hearing the never-ending crying of a new-born baby so close by but just beyond my reach; I'm searching trying to find him. Never close enough, and I seem to wander alone for hours, locked in the labour ward unable to get out to comfort my baby. That one will wake me in tears!

Other consequences relate to the stress of regaining trust in doctors and going into hospitals, let alone the legal profession. I have difficulty sleeping, and frequently over the years have had to resort to using anti-depressant medication for short periods of time, that I kept a secret from everyone as I assumed I would be judged as being weak and not in control of my life: the life I had made for myself by myself. I have never been able to seek counselling advice from Social Workers as I simply don't trust them.

This next is a talk I gave as a member of our local U3A in a conservative country town in 2005. It was greeted with silence and polite applause, but afterwards several members spoke to me thanking me for enlightening them as to events that had occurred in their families, but never discussed.

"How could anyone give up a baby?"

As a result of the Tony Abbott soap opera, there has been quite a lot of discussion on adoption – a subject often concealed and in some families, never mentioned. Last month [REDACTED] spoke on her experience as an adoptive mother, during which the question was raised, “How could anyone give up a baby?” in an amazed voice!

(I was horrified and aghast but held my tongue...at that time!)

I will tell of what I know, from the perspective of a mother of a child who was taken from his parents, and adopted into a new family in 1957.

In Australia from the 1940s to the 1980s there were thousands of babies adopted. The ‘bumper crop’ years were from 1965 to around 1972 when approximately 40,000 babies were adopted. For every one baby, there were 2 parents, and generally 4 grandparents, and however many siblings – so adoption has touched many more people than is generally realised.

As you all know when a girl, ‘got herself pregnant’, if she was fortunate, and the father of her child stood by her, and her family decided to pretend all was above board - and hope that the baby came late or was small - ‘Shotgun marriages’ were common, but whispered about as a keen eye was kept on the bride’s waistline over the next months.

Some fathers walked away from their responsibilities – some were never told.

Some grandparents were too concerned about what people would think, that they refused to allow their generally underage daughter to marry, preferring that the cause of the shame and possible scandal in their family disappeared forever.

How many grandparents gave away their first grandchild?

Some mother’s pregnancies were the result of rape, or non-consensual sex and the child was a reminder of trauma and pain. But surprisingly many of these babies resulted in the mother loving and wanting them, despite the manner of conception.

Most were the result of a loving relationship.

Some like Tony Abbott, had other priorities, and simply gave up their babies.

(Tony Abbott’s partner at that time was Kathy Donnelly - while he was studying for the priesthood - and assumed he was the father of her child that later proved not to be his. But at the time that story broke he admitted that he could be the father of her child.)

But now as we have discovered there are many women who were coerced into signing away their rights to care for their child. Sadly in too many cases babies were not ‘given up’, or ‘relinquished’, as much intimidation, covert or blatant, was used to influence the mother that it was in the ‘best interests of the child’.

Time and again, mothers, under duress, made the decision after being told, “If you love your baby you would give him/her up to a better life than the one you could give him/her.” The defining argument was, “How can you afford to keep and bring up a baby?” This was part of a constant pressure by family, churches, doctors, those who ran the “unmarried mothers homes”, and the social workers. Healthy white babies were, and still are, a much-valued commodity.

The hospital files of single pregnant girls files were often marked ‘BFA’ assuming that the child of an unmarried mother would be adopted.

But what the majority were not told, a fact that was known to the almoners and social workers of the times, was that there WAS a Special Benefit to apply for, that was available to assist a mother to bring up her child: This benefit is fully detailed in **T.H. Kewley's book – Social Security in Australia, 1900-72 [2nd ed.] Sydney University Press. - ISBN/ISSN: 0424066203 (pbk.) 042405020X** :

“Financial assistance to families with children was first introduced by the Fisher Government in October 1912. It took the form of a Maternity Allowance of five pounds (over two weeks wages for an unskilled worker) paid without a means test to both married and unmarried mothers. The measure was presented as an anti-poverty measure paid as a universal payment to avoid the stigma of charity. A similar payment had been introduced in 1911 in the UK, but it had been less generous and insurance based. The allowance received considerable public support and was claimed automatically in practically all cases of confinement by the late 1920s. It survived the cost cutting by Government during the Depression but was paid at a lower rate and subject to a means test from 1931 until 1943. The allowance was eventually abolished in 1978 by which time other child payments were considered to have made it unnecessary.

Assistance Extended to Sole Parents

Single women with children who were not eligible for Widow Pension because they were deserted wives who had not been deserted for six months, or who had not been married, or in a de facto relationship for the required three years, were given varying amounts of assistance by state government payments. In 1968 the Gorton Government began to partially fund that assistance under the States Grants (Deserted Wives) Act 1968. This form of assistance was the main income support for this growing group who were not catered for by the Widow Pension. Commonwealth expenditure under this Act increased from \$1.9m in 1969-70 to \$9.7m in 1972-73. Sole parents numbered 124 000 at the time of the 1966 Census. Their numbers had grown to 183 100 in 1974 when the first ABS Family Survey was conducted.”

The Whitlam Government introduced the Supporting Mother's Benefit in 1973 to provide support for single mothers who were not being adequately catered for by existing arrangements. The rate of payment for this benefit was the same as for pensions in spite of the name it was given. Eligibility for Supporting Mother's Benefit did not commence until six months after the date of separation or birth of a child. As a result the States continued to provide assistance to single mothers until 1980 when immediate eligibility was introduced by the Fraser Government. That Government also extended eligibility to male sole parents and renamed the payment Supporting Parent's Benefit in 1977. By 1980 DSS payments were finally available to all categories of sole parents.

Some fortunate mothers WERE told of this Special Benefit and kept their babies. It had to be claimed and was not a generous amount but which obviously was enough, with support, to be able to help the family stay together: a much happier choice than the alternative. Not all families rejected the unmarried mother; many supported their pregnant daughters enabling them to keep the child within the family.

Small state benefits were also available: layettes, formula, foster care until parents or a mother got on their feet financially. None of this information was freely made known, as it should have been, as many in positions of power deemed that these girls had sinned against society and should be punished by having their child taken and given to others more deserving. A particular view held by the religious sections of the adoption industry.

Quite a few mothers later married the fathers and went on to have other children, often mourning the loss of their first child, a full brother or sister to the children of their marriage.

Many mothers were so traumatised by the loss of their baby they blanked out the memory of their grief at the time, forever denying even to themselves the very existence of the child.

Some mothers, jilted or betrayed by the fathers of their children, and having no family support suppressed the experience. Many later found later that they were infertile and never had another child, some even ended up adopting to replace the child they'd lost.

Many married, and never told their husbands or subsequent children of their first child, due to the shame that they were told they had brought upon themselves and their families, then years later when threatened by the existence of their child, refused to acknowledge them, and risk the consequences of the revelation of their deception.

Some women admitted the existence of their first child and were forbidden by their husbands never to mention it again, and to also deny their motherhood if the child came looking for them, necessitating the choice of recognising their child, or risking their marriage, and the wrath of their husband and possible disapproval of their subsequent children.

Some mothers, fully expecting to take that child home with them had their babies physically torn from their arms. I have been told that the most common perpetrators of this offence were nuns, full of punitive reproach for the sin that girl had committed. Girls who "got themselves pregnant"?

Some babies were taken by what is called "Rapid Adoption", mostly in Tasmania and Queensland. This occurred when a married mother whose child had not survived birth, accepted an unmarried mother's baby to adopt, to help ease her grief, readily signing Adoption papers. The natural mothers were told that their children had died during or after birth and signed documents purporting to be Death Certificates but which were in reality a 'Consent to Adoption' and were shocked and severely traumatised years later when their child contacted them.

Sadly some babies were considered 'unadoptable' and left languishing in homes, their mothers never advised that their child had not been adopted, nor had gone to the home that she was told she could not provide for it. That child usually ended up a ward of the state and was on its own when it came of age to support itself. Given up, never loved and never adopted because they were 'faulty'! Disgusting!

Some adopters are gratified when the parents of 'their' child do not want a reunion, thus validating their role as parents. There are some mothers or fathers – generally in the minority - who simply don't want to know about a child they had relinquished: to some adoptees a heartbreaking rejection supposedly yet again.

It was 1957, [REDACTED] and I had been going together for quite some time and to our horror and shock we realised I was pregnant. We planned on marrying within a couple of years and were hoping that our parents would help us keep our child. But because his four grandparents, rather than braving the shame and whispers, preferred to save face and give him away. Dispatch him to a life with strangers. So I was sent to an unmarried mothers' home to wait for our son's birth.

Being under the then legal age of 21 years we were told to sign consents for his adoption. His father and I signed away the rights to parent our son, not our parenthood, particularly as we desperately wanted to keep him. If we had refused to sign the consents, we were told he would be made a ward of the state - and we wouldn't be able to keep him, as they'd put him in a home.

It was not much of a choice.

Mothers were often discouraged from giving the name of the father for the Registration of Birth. In my case I was told it would 'cause a bit of a problem.' This didn't make much sense but I gave her the details anyhow. The reality was that the almoners or social workers could not be bothered to follow up the 'putative' father to obtain their signature for the Consent to Adoption; hence many children when they finally see their original true birth certificate are dismayed to find that against "Father's name" it is left blank or 'unknown' casually scrawled in.

To my anger and distress, my son's was the same - except for a question mark in the appropriate area - but he was very happy to learn that his father did want him, and also despite being left off his Birth Registration, had been named and had signed the Adoption Consent – albeit also unhappily and unwillingly.

My son only learned of his adoption ten years ago at the age of 37! "They were going to tell him, but the opportunity never arose."

Before he learned of the circumstances of his birth, and we met, he had wondered aloud to his partner if he was adopted 'as he had nothing in common with his folks', as he calls them. But despite not being close he tells me he respects them; they have given him a good life. Every family is different in the way they relate to each other. No doubt he was wanted, but as can be in natural families, his parents were rather aloof, detached, with no displays of affection. He is not close to his adopted sister.

His adopters resent my re-emergence in his life and reacted with anger when I appealed to them for a baby photo. I had only seen him once through the nursery window of the hospital and for years carried a picture of that little face in my memory.

Our son happily met his father and his siblings, and has been unreservedly accepted. He was also a pallbearer at his father's funeral. He had also worked for his uncle for many years, their relationship unbeknown to them.

My son has his Mum and Dad. I can never be Mum to him. But he refers to me as his mother. With his two little daughters, my granddaughters, he calls me their Granny. I don't 'own' my other two children or him; any more than any parent, natural or adoptive, 'owns' their children.

[By the way, in Victoria, the legal term is 'natural' mother or father.]

There are many support groups worldwide of women, and some men: mothers and fathers who have been separated from their children by adoption.

There have been Inquiries into the Past Practices of Adoption in other states of Australia, than Victoria, revealing that many immoral, and unlawful acts have deprived parents of their children.

The support group, to which I belong: Origins Victoria Inc., an international group of people separated from their children by adoption, has been lobbying for an Inquiry, so that the truth behind many fraudulent adoptions can be revealed and the iniquities exposed, so that our children can fully understand that many/most of us did not willingly 'give up' or 'relinquish' our babies! So that they can understand that they were not unloved, unwanted and rejected!

The present Victorian Government came to power promising an Inquiry in the lead up to the election that put them in office, but has since bowed to pressure from a politically affiliated minority and reneged on their promise.

We were told to 'forget about our babies' and 'get on with our lives'. How? How could a mother forget a child she had carried and given birth to?

But after a lifetime of not knowing, many parents need to know whether their child was alive, was well and happy, and had lived the life we were told we could not give them, that we owed to our children, had in fact transpired. In fact as we age, the need to know intensifies not lessens, and so it is with adoptees. Both sides have said they hoped they did not die without knowing either their origins, or the welfare of their child.

Stories of abuse and cruelty to adoptees anger us, especially those who have been denied access to information, particularly here in Victoria, which is not as advanced in Adoption Law Reform as other states of Australia.

There have been many suicides by mothers and adoptees separated by adoption. Those children's identities were obliterated, and false birth certificates issued to cover up a very lucrative market during the 1950s to the 1980s for white healthy babies for infertile couples, and to hide the shame and scandal for 'respectable' families.

Many adoptees feel guilty and do not want to offend or hurt their adoptive parents and conceal the search, or and suppress their intention of searching, and wait until they die, before they seek out their families of origin. They search to find their own identity.

Adoption, in theory, was regarded as the answer to a social problem; infertile couples and children who for some reason or another were unable to remain with their family of origin, but due to the secrets and lies it has engendered in the past, sadly for many it has not provided the solution, but a lifetime of regret and grief.

Echoing my own thoughts, Kathy Donnelly recently said, "*... someone flippantly said to me the other day, "Oh, you know, it was all for the best!" But I said to them, "Okay, You choose one of your children - and I'll make it easy on you, you can choose whichever one you like - and give them to a complete stranger." Yeah, there's nothing easy about that? Nothing!"*

For over 65 years, since November 1957, I have been traumatised by the loss of my baby son!

Back then I was totally devastated, and even now still cannot forget - that memory still overwhelms me at times; small details can bring me to tears - of that indescribable pain felt by the cruel and insensitive practices and morals by which my baby was pitilessly excised from my life immediately after his birth ... as though he had never existed! Vengeful and spiteful nurses refused even a glimpse of the child I had just given birth to, the only proof he was still alive was hearing his first cries. The sound of a newborn's cry, even now, is still distressing to me.

I have experienced a lifetime of a mother's grief. His loss also caused a lifetime's distress to his father who sadly never revealed his pain to very few, until we together, 37 years later, finally saw our son again but then as a grown man ... strangely familiar... but sadly, still a stranger after all those years apart!

Our tiny baby - that little face we had seen only briefly during a few extremely stressful moments while frantically trying to record that vision in our memories - was never ever to be seen again by

us! Like a mirage, sadly only fading as the years passed. Our tiny baby son was taken from us both, never to be seen ever again by us: his mother and father!

The one memory to relive our recollection of my/our pregnancy to sustain us was a precious thirty-second glimpse when as a tiny baby - that memory that neither of us ever forgot - that baby we'd loved as he grew in my womb; both of us feeling his kicking feet, seeing him rolling over, his father listening with his head on my stomach to his heart-beat, that baby we wanted and dreamed of who had finally and forever gone from our lives! We knew that our baby (*or the 'it' as he was later scornfully depicted as an 'inanimate object' by [REDACTED]*) who we lovingly called [REDACTED], was a boy! That baby we had dreamed of and worried about during those months of futile planning had finally gone forever!

Unseen, unknown and nowhere! Was he loved, cared for, was he even alive?

Finally our *'only ever dreamed of miracle'* after 37 years of wondering and waiting we believed was in vain, we met our son but now as a grown man ... a total stranger! Our joy was tinged with regret and sadness.

In the years after his birth we would - in our separate lives - walk the streets of Perth, eyes eagerly searching crowds for a familiar face, hoping beyond hope that one day we would see and possibly recognise the face of our son – as we both later fled the city, the source of our grief no longer able to live in a place from where our son had been taken from us.

[REDACTED] privately grieving the loss of our son asked himself the same questions. Many years later he told me that he had always wanted to know just who and where he was, if he was alive and loved, but mainly did he have the wonderful life that we were told we could not give him?

Through all those 'secret, wondering' years, rarely relating the source of my secret shame, finally in 1997 while viewing ABC's TV 'Lateline' programme "Birthrights" I finally learned that my shame was not mine alone. I learned that it was not me, nor all the other mothers whose babies had been stolen from them, I learned that the shame belonged to those who deliberately took our babies, denying us our rights to parent our own children, giving them to those deemed more worthy of parenthood.

Lies were told, information withheld, so that our babies would be easily procured to give to more deserving people, is part of Australia's social shame, together with those other those other societies and countries who created the same misery, for so many, for so long and fought, and still do, deny the truth of their inhumane crimes.

Having heard prior to going to air that this particular 'Lateline' programme was a controversial exposé of adoption, I was stunned as the facts were being exposed, clarifying what had been done to us, revealing so much more than I had had ever realised to so many other young mothers and supporting fathers. I could not reconcile the fact that our son was somewhere out there in the world, not knowing where he was, was he happy, or even if he was alive.

Watching and learning from that TV programme has changed my life! It was with tears and excitement, and although causing much distress, it exposed so much more information than I had had ever realized existed about adoption, and the fact that so many other mothers had been treated the same way. I was finally aware of the rationale of the cause of my long-time grief and stress. Learned why all those dreams that haunted me still; learned that the suffering we experienced was completely unnecessary; learned that many lies were told, the truth evaded or

omitted so we would be deprived of our baby for the advantage of infertile, married, respectable people mainly because we were unmarried and/or considered too young to parent our own child!

Fortunately I taped it, unable see parts of it through my tears when the content was so much more than the generally predictable, but popular, reunions, but one that connected the real issues: lies, lies and more lies being exposed, now out in the open, revealing so much deceit by persons I had been brought up to respect in the community: doctors, solicitors and churches! They were the worst of the insidious perpetrators of a cruel crime; their greedy solution to a social problem, capably achieved using their influence and standing in the community. It exposed an adoption industry that was thriving and productive, creating paid positions to achieve an evil, unjust social cleansing over many years: Legal practitioners, Social Workers, adoption procurers etc. etc.

This also alleviated the burden of welfare payments on a supposed growing underclass of single mothers. 'Unmarried mothers' were frequently described as feeble minded and immoral, not taking into account that the fathers of these children were from the same social strata, but authorities alleged that removing them and placing them into a respectable home would make decent adults from these 'mistakes'.

It also satisfied the needs and desires of unfortunate infertile couples who desired to, but were unable to have children of their own. Much infertility had been the result of botched abortions, venereal diseases etc., but those couples were only too willing and able to solve that problem by taking other people's babies into their childless homes by using the adoption system. This also alleviated the burden for governments of providing welfare payments on a possible growing underclass of single mothers.

It is reliably documented that 'Unmarried Mothers' were frequently described by social workers as 'feeble-minded and immoral', not taking into account that the fathers of these children were generally from the same social strata. Authorities determined that removing the children of 'these people' and placing them into a 'respectable home' would raise upright normal adults from these 'mistakes'.

Young pregnant girls were frequently sent away from the family home to avoid the shame and scandal they would bring to the family, usually sent to relatives, often interstate and so-called 'Mother and Baby Homes'. Some punitively sent to prison-like Roman Catholic punishment homes where the girls would labour unpaid long hours (often a government sickness benefit went towards their internment) in the laundries and kitchens. The bulk of the domestic labour provided to run them was another problem solved. After their babies were born and taken from them, they would return home - if they were welcome - forget all about it, and get on with their lives!

After learning so much that was revealed in that programme, I believe because it is fact that there were State and Commonwealth Sickness Benefits, and other available options from the 1940's (contrary to popular belief, Gough Whitlam's pension was **not the first to assist families in need!) of financial, moral and humane assistance, that accessibility and information was deliberately withheld, not made known to most of us to enable us to keep our babies - unless the mother or her family had been made aware of it - and many did enabling them to keep their children - that we, and most mothers, did not frivolously "give our babies away"!

(Refer T.H. Kewley's "Social Security in Australia. 1900- 1972 (2nd ed.) Sydney University Press – ISBN/ISSN: 0424066203 (pbk) 042405020X)**

Most/many (?) mothers did not “relinquish” their babies willingly because they were unwanted or unloved, nor did we feel that we couldn’t care less about caring for them, or keeping them despite a struggle, BUT because we were under the deliberately contrived misapprehension that there was simply no choice for us! We were not care-less parents, we were despite our youth, desperately sad and deprived parents.

All who doubt and question need to accept the facts of the illegal and immoral adoption methods commonly practiced then, and how we were coerced, and forced to accept the decisions made on our behalf. We had no say, despite the fact that as a mother I was guardian of my child at that time - a fact I did not learn for many years - we did ‘as we were told to because we were under twenty-one: the legal age of consent’ in Western Australia in 1957.

I feel that nothing, not even the wonderful West Australian Government’s Apology in 2010, whilst an exoneration of our supposed ‘indifferent’ lack of action, followed by the Federal Government’s Apology in 2013, could ever compensate me for the grief suffered by the loss of my child. As much as the first apology from my home state was a solace - but never a panacea - and that magnificent Federal Apology reinforced the facts that we did not simply “give our unwanted children away”, the pain of that loss and the years of wondering, grief, nightmares, the effect it has on my self-esteem that affected future relationships, is still with me every single day.

The loss of my son and his adoption, was privately encouraged and arranged by both our family’s local doctor (and I believe mutual to the adopters) that legally took place in Perth, Western Australia in 1957. He was taken from the Alexandra Home at about three weeks of age to their home to live as their child, later complete with a falsified birth certificate. That adoption was ratified in the Supreme Court early in 1958.

I believe the laws in each state differ, which seems fundamentally flawed – a strange state of affairs for something so elementary: birth, marriage, divorce and death in the one country that has one passport for all Australian citizens. These regulations regarding adoption: the removal of a human being from their family of origin (a fact of life that cannot ever be changed) to be declared legally part of another family of no connecting origin, is almost beyond belief, and is not, to the best of my knowledge, the same in each state Australia wide!

The chance of finding your missing child then was remote as the files had been sealed to safeguard the privacy of adopters also many families of the babies adopted were ashamed of any scandal. Vetoes against contact or exchange of information were signed by many adopters and mother’s families.

When legislation was finally amended in W.A. in 1995 and I was able to access the information I had been trying for years to obtain, first from Jigsaw, The Salvation Army Missing Persons, and the electoral rolls (in the extremely remote off-chance his name had not been changed) I was euphoric! The chance of knowing who and where he was, the Information and/or contact now a real possibility!

When I told my son and daughter - joy turned to pain hearing my daughter’s hurtful, accusing words , “Mum! How could you have done it? How could you give a baby away?”

I tried to explain the family circumstances, the lack of support and information of the assistance that was available, that had been withheld from us that may have given us the opportunity to parent our son. As social welfare had changed substantially by then, she could not understand how

it was not possible - not unless you had support - unless you were told of the options that were available in that era, that valuable information that was withheld from us!

How many carelessly catastrophic decisions were made by others, affecting so many lives and altering the course of other lives back then? Mine and [REDACTED] – as events proved to be many years later!

I believe that primarily, the superficial moral values of that era, the insistence of forced separation of children from their mothers and some fathers taken for adoption was often to save the social standing of the pregnant mother's parents. . Many grandparents gave away their grandchildren to save face. By sending away their recalcitrant daughters to the "unmarried mothers' homes", to provide labour in the Mothercraft training centres was a nice neat solution: out of sight and out of mind. Adoption also concealed the stigma of 'bastard' from 'nice' society, except those hidden away - hopefully happily in supporting families - those families who had knowledge of the assistance provided, that was available to keep families together.

Secondly, to provide a nice neat solution of the problem of infertile couples who desired to, but could not have children of their own. They were only too willing and able to solve that problem by taking the 'so-called unwanted' babies of others into their homes as if born to them, as recorded on the falsified birth certificates that followed the child into another family's home. These certificates often forever concealing the truth of many people's original identity, that others simply took for granted.

The adoption of our son was a private adoption (not through the Government's Social Welfare Department, some years later then not lawful in W.A.) I assume now, never ever having discussed the birth of my first son with them, that my parents were advised by [REDACTED], who had probably often organized similar situations, who possibly also put the potential parents in touch with the legal firm as was apparently common in those times. I'll never know and didn't think to ask back then.

I never had a Social Worker speak to me regarding the welfare of the child to which I was about to give birth, to advise me of my rights as his mother, or of any assistance available to help us to keep our baby. Many years later I learned that there was, even more than State and Commonwealth assistance for families in need. I was very angry when that knowledge was revealed, but at that time I was relieved I did not have to see a Social Worker because they were from the Child Welfare Department.

The threat of "Social Workers" was frightening - much information from girls who had 'got into trouble' and told their friends, was passed on as gossip did get around back then. The Social Workers questioned girls very callously and insensitively until they 'confessed' how many times they had been intimate, where they had done it, and the names of all their partners - even if there was only ever one - simply to get them to admit to having had sexual intercourse prior to marriage! Totally irrelevant voyeurism? It was obvious that they had been sexually involved with a male, so why the necessity for detail? If they admitted it they could go into a 'home' until they were eighteen, and at worst, the "Home of the Good Shepherd" which was rumoured to be run by the most the vindictive of all, the Roman Catholic nuns: "The Sisters of NO Mercy". Those Social Workers often also quizzed the boyfriend, who could, or would, be charged with 'Unlawful Carnal Knowledge' and possibly be charged and have to go to Court if the girl was under sixteen years of age. Possibly gaol! For what crime if it was a loving relationship?

I dreaded having to face one of them. [REDACTED] and I loved each other and there was no way that I could have let that happen, so was scared of the idea of them questioning me. Naively I thought I'd escaped the 'Welfare', as no social worker came near me and was relieved. Later I discovered it was because the adoption was being arranged privately not through the government.

But in hindsight we were kept in ignorance, as no-one ever explained any of the options available: e.g. a special assistance from State and Commonwealth Governments for a benefit available for a female to stay at home and look after a relative, together with help with a layette, food assistance, baby bonus and child allowance and/or an additional benefit. Not wealth by any means, but at least a chance for us to get on our feet and stay together; for us to keep our child. Nor was I advised that I did not have to sign any papers particularly if I did not want to sign any adoption consent papers. Or if I did sign under duress, or even without duress, I had 30 days to change my mind, to revoke that decision. No one ever told me, that my child to whom I gave birth was my child, that as I was his mother he was legally my responsibility and mine - until a consent to which I had put my signature permitting the adoption of my child on those adoption papers - was ratified by the courts.

Naively, I was so relieved I had escaped the inquisition by giving birth before they caught up with me and never questioned that I had not been interviewed by them as I dreaded going into another 'home' [particularly the infamous Roman Catholic "Good Shepherd" Home] after being in the Alexandra Home for several months. We were still planning ways we could take our baby home and manage our lives ourselves, until the end.

Those hateful punitive King Edward Memorial Hospital nurses, the Almoner, Matrons had no reasonable or lawful reason to refuse my contact with my son while we were in hospital together, nor that of his father with his son. The Almoner, despite being given his father's name and details, refused to include them on his birth certificate, but due to her slyness she kept the information, as later his father was advised he had to sign a 'Consent to Adoption' of his son, but one good thing that came out of her underhanded deceit was that I was able to have it legally recorded in Births, Deaths and Marriages in the West Australian Directory that my son was born to a named mother and a named father. Not like his original birth certificate that only showed a "Question Mark" in a blank space. (ANGER!)

After the birth of our son at King Edward Memorial Hospital, I was in a maternity ward with the 'nice married' mothers, but unlike them, a guinea pig for the trainee doctors. Those doctors who after rudely and suddenly pulling back the curtains surrounding my bed situated next to the main door of the ward, were busily inspecting the sutures of episiotomy repair being healed with a lamp, my legs open, buttocks raised up on a pillow. After which, one commented on the position of my legs and the reason for my being in that ward much to the amusement and sniggering of the others. Then after their witty comments they walked away, while speaking deferentially to the mother in the next bed, contemptuously leaving the curtains open. Later when I was respectably married and in a private hospital for the birth of my second son, it was a completely different experience.

I still loathe the "King Edward Hospital" as most of the nurses and even Ward Sisters were very unsubtly rude and condescending, making sure I felt I was a second class citizen.

[REDACTED] told me before he died, in 1995, that he cried for months after I left. I did too, but didn't know what I could do - I was so restless and unhappy and decided I had to get far away from the memories. I loved him, but he was part of the sadness. This is the worst decision I've ever made in my life.

I met someone else not connected with the painful memory, married within a year, had two babies within four years, my violent, cruel marriage broke up within nine painful years. I think that I was in a hurry to replace both my lost loves ... to again have some one of my own to love, and to be loved.

I was anxiously searching for information about my son from the 1970's onwards after finding a missing persons advertisement in the paper that I believed was him looking for me as it named the name I had given the Almoner when she wanted details for the Birth Registration. I contacted Jigsaw in WA and it turned out to be a dead end. But I still hoped and dreamed. Prior to that time I understood it was impossible to ever know if he would be dead or alive, loved and happy, or anything of his fate. Searching, I realised that I could be possibly very disillusioned and more hurt, and was told I could cause possible upset to the adoptive parents. My hurt was supposedly unimportant, but I had no intention of causing disruption to his new family.

As long as he was well and happy - I just had to know. For all I knew he may not have even been alive. I may have been grieving for a dead son, as well as a stolen baby.

Thanks to the generous and wonderful advice of Glennis Dees of Jigsaw WA, and the law changes in W.A. I finally found and met our son in 1995. My dream finally had come true - far exceeding my wildest expectations. Our son was 37 years of age before I spoke to, touched and kissed him for the first time!

We still keep in touch by phone and occasionally meet when we are in each other's state. Instead of the token gifts I bought and gave to the Salvation Army Xmas Appeals over the years, finally I could, on his fortieth birthday, give him a birthday gift. His adoptive parents have given him a good, happy and stable home. That was my greatest fear for him, that he would be unloved and unhappy. He had never known he was adopted until I initiated inquiries, and I am so fortunate that he is the person he is and does not hold it against me, as so many do against their mothers and fathers. Sadly, unlike his adoptive parents who would not even allow me a baby photo: too Personal!

I had been in touch with [REDACTED] prior to this to find out if he had ever heard anything of our son. He hadn't but said each time he came down to Perth, from where he lived up in the north of the state, he would look at faces and wonder if he had passed him in the street. [REDACTED] had married twice and had five children three sons and two daughters. His first wife had died after childbirth at KEMH, with their fourth child, the first child, a daughter, sadly was stillborn. The second marriage with one child had ended in separation.

When I learned he had an inoperable terminal cancer, we spent a lot of time writing and phoning each other. I visited him twice in Perth while he was living with his brother and his wife before he died. We had time to talk over the past and our lives and knew then we still loved each other after all these years, but were sad we would have no chance of being together forever because of his illness, sad that we had met up again too late – but at least we had. And had time to talk.

[REDACTED] was also adamant, and I also believe that had we had the support and counselling in 1957 to 1959 we would not have separated, and our son could have been ours. Had [REDACTED] survived we would have resumed and continued our relationship. I had always loved him, and never met anyone who I felt so completely connected to as I did with him. He told me before he died that he had always loved me all his life.

The blessing we both have had is our children we have had with our other partners. Sadly, [REDACTED] died on October 12th 1997 fighting to the very last. He was determined to live but it was not to be.

But they, father and son, had met and talked and knew each other, albeit briefly. Not deeply enough, because time was too short, but █████ was happy in the knowledge that he had finally met his son, and liked and admired the man he had become. His son has said that he glad that he had the opportunity to know his father before it was too late.

In closing, it's my belief from internet research of archived newspapers, past verifiable research papers, past Hansard reports that were illuminating in their recording of the parliamentary speakers crude disregard of the mental health and welfare of pregnant unmarried women and subsequent removal of their children, together with recent, well-researched books on the subject that Eugenics practitioners influence was great and together with the Commonwealth Treasury budget, played a large part in the forced removal of our children.

I believe that the State Health and Welfare Departments were controlled by the Commonwealth Health Commission that laid the ground rules in the intensification of the politicians' enthusiasm for Australia's 'White Australia Policy' by assisting respectable, white Anglo-Saxon married, but infertile, couples to acquire by other means, babies to complete their perfect Australian families; increase Australia's population and also reduce the financial burden of funding orphanages and foster homes.

Because unmarried mothers were considered unintelligent, feeble-minded and socially unacceptable and were extremely vulnerable under those circumstances, they and their children were supposedly better served by separation at birth; therefore the child would benefit with nurturing by reputable married parents; then (in the eyes of the law) the mother of the child would no longer be that child's mother; would find employment to support herself, and have a baby of her own, if and when, she married.

All State and Federal Governments by conspiring in their infinite wisdom had neatly solved an unsavoury problem: no budgetary outlays for orphanages, foster homes, supporting illegitimate children and their carers, but also completing the ideal of that typical Australian family to populate Australia, supposedly to ward off the threatening yellow peril from the north.

The facts were that a mother - who expressed a desire to keep the child she had given birth to - was considered irrelevant so most were coerced into signing consents, and in many cases consents were forged when a mother proved 'difficult', or left the hospital before the consent was signed within the five days. Very few were told that the consent could be revoked, and even if they returned within the 30 days to retrieve their child, often after arranging accommodation etc., they were told their babies had already 'gone to a good home' and they were too late! Often the babies were still in the building. Pleading and begging was futile, so feeling powerless and being ill-informed most accepted the lies and cruelty and went on to live without their children in their lives, but always in their hearts and minds.

This master plan was readily backed and executed by the educated upper-classes of doctors, lawyers and the nursing fraternity who had no qualms in separating mothers, fathers and their children all for the advantage of Australia and the children's welfare of course!

These benevolent works were also carried out with a strong sense of punitive reprisal, mainly by the Matrons, nurses and doctors who believed that these low-class morally deprived girls who "got themselves pregnant" (?) deserved no better!

This attitude was encouraged, as it made the removal of the babies much easier by reducing with less resistance the possibility of a supporting family suffering scorn and condemnation by society, should they want to support their wayward daughter.

Social workers, who deliberately concealed the special benefit and other advantages which may have assisted mothers and parents to financially keep their child, were fully trained in indoctrinating families and mothers with this attitude which served their purpose; making many babies available, so that some adopters when there was a glut of babies during in the 1970s, did not suffer the scrutiny they should have undergone, and consequently many babies went to homes that were totally unsuitable - marriages that were barely held together; a baby being the bonding mechanism. Needless to say this often did not succeed, some parents divorced and the child was then brought up by a single mother, albeit married and respectable, or as respectable as a single Mrs. could be.

Some of the married partners did not want an adopted child, and made their feelings known to that child by ill-treatment or other means. Some marriages in name only were molesters and paedophiles, as paedophiles gained access to children legally – both male and female.

But the bottom line was that the Government had kept within the budgetary restraints and the figures for Family Welfare were looking good.

Of course there were babies that for some reason or another weren't adopted out straight away due to ill-health or some if disabled, were regarded as unadoptable, and some were returned as 'unsuitable'.

It has been reported that if babies had not gone to their new home within a certain period of time they became institutionalized, unable to bond with their new 'parents' so were returned, some never to be adopted spending their lives in orphanages and foster homes until they were old enough to be put out onto the streets with a suitcase and a small amount of money to 'get on with their lives' courtesy of Australian Government Policy.

The irony of course is that some of these homeless fourteen year olds making their own way in the world with no family, only an orphanage background, had mothers out there often wondering how their baby was living the life that they were told they could not give them because they were single, unmarried and immoral!

Strangely (?) many of these 'immoral and feeble-minded' mothers had been in loving relationships and later married the fathers of their first child, and had subsequent brothers and sisters to the one who was making a life alone by themselves.

The anger and hurt when that first child discovers the family to which he or she belongs – but doesn't belong - because they were ripped from their mother's arms at birth – can create the most painful, horrific trauma seeing their brothers, sisters, parents belonging together knowing that they can never be part of the family circle; that wound never heals. Many ended up taking their own lives or living drugged, or in and out of gaol.

Many others after benefits were made available and publicly revealed, being unsupported had children as lone parents, simply to have family: someone of their own to love and be loved by.

All this has been common knowledge to those who have worked with and seen the effects of forced separation, and has been accepted by Adoption Separation Support Groups, Forgotten

Australians and the Stolen Generations and it beggars belief that the State and Federal Governments over the years were (apparently) not aware of these crimes against humanity.

Many letters have been published in all states of Australia in the newspapers, television documentaries from as far back as the 1970s, newspaper articles and also in magazines. Social workers have known and received many complaints about their handling of adoption matters. All these crimes and offences against society have been ignored by those who were elected to support ALL the citizens of Australia.

Several governments, N.S.W., S.A., and Tasmania were pressured to, and held inquiries into past adoption practices; their committees - supposedly educated persons - read and made decisions on the information received! What action has been taken by the Federal and other State Governments following these recommendations? (or if there was, very little publicity to enable participation by mothers who needed help ... THEN!)

Many mothers (together with Care Leavers and others) affected by adoption placed submissions (over 600 in total) to the Senate Select Committee on Mental Health in 2006 and I believe that a recommendation was made that counselling be made available without charge to those who needed it ... yet to hear anything further.

Federal Community Services Minister Jenny Macklin called for a review, but much doubt was cast because it was reported that there was no empirical evidence:

"...But it says there is no reliable data on the number of women coerced into adopting out babies, or how many report continuing negative effects." MELBOURNE AGE - April 22, 2010

Following the Higgins report, the initial official response seemed to be dismissive and negative.

What empirical data was presented AND acknowledged to support the claims of both Stolen Generations and the Forgotten Australians, when the government had over the years denied any wrong-doing or moral obligation?

To date (date on which this submission was written) the only state in Australia is Western Australia, whose government on October 19th, 2010 with bi-partisan support in parliament apologised to those mothers and children and families separated by forced adoption.

Some hospitals have also admitted their practices were unethical: the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital in May 2009, The Sisters of Mercy, St. Anne's Hospital in Perth in March, 2010. Out of all the hospitals in Australia who participated in those immoral practices only those have had the integrity to acknowledge their actions. Crown Street in Sydney was renowned for its baby farming activities, known as the leader of the gang of thieves.

Many believe it is merely (another) wasted effort of time and emotional stress to be bothered to put their stories on paper again after spending hours, days, weeks sleepless nights, and many tears writing down the pain and hurt from the past - and not so past if reunions (a term very inaccurately used as many mothers and their children have never seen each other at all) have been unsuccessful, and bringing it all up again just to have another politician trivialise their trauma, is just not worth it.

It's a very sad, but completely understandable attitude, when you consider that in the past there were several hundred submissions for the N.S.W. state inquiry alone – that were to be made available online, but which the N.S.W. Government has refused to do - and if you count those from

the Tasmanian inquiry, that shows that they were keen to be heard, but as there has virtually been nothing done by the Federal or State Governments following recommendations by the committees (or if there was, very little publicity) to enable participation by mothers who needed help ... THEN!

I believe the Federal Government of Australia has a duty of care to ensure that those who need help by counselling etc., by sensitive, humane and educated to the fullest extent of the knowledge of this historical blot on Australia's history – A fair go for all Australians?

But definitely not counselling by the consent takers; that is akin to attending a rapist for a pap smear – and having to attend these sessions in the very buildings that they were forced to sign away their children. Also reparation and mediation for those whose children are so damaged they refuse to accept that they were wanted, that they were given away without a care, also separation conflicts.

I have no doubt that past governments HAVE known, have been fully aware of these practices - the proof is in the documentation that mothers and researchers have located – they have willfully disregarded, ignored all emerging stories and complaints, and disparagingly brushed aside all calls for the truth to be exposed as most of these occurred from the 1950s into the 1980s – some before and after – and we believe that the governments have probably hoped that before our voices gained power and strength to be heard, we would all die off and our stories with us and their liability for moral judgment would fade into the mists of time.

Mothers, fathers and children of those years are ageing - many are now in their 60s, 70s and older and dying, many 'suiciding'*, totally bereft at the cold callous attitude of a supposedly Christian government (opening parliament with prayer!) by ignoring their pleas to be heard openly and honestly without bias.

** the catalyst for West Australian mother – [REDACTED] - to launch the campaign for an apology for another mother: her now deceased friend.*

I have attached a copy of a thesis by Joan Groves of Perth W.A. of which I had no knowledge of its existence until recently.

Barbara Maison

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Chapter One - Introduction.

In February 2008, the Federal Labor government, as one of its first acts in office, apologised to Indigenous people for the hurt caused during the long period when Aboriginal children were removed from their families under the guise of welfare, and institutionalised. It was a momentous occasion and gave rise to hopes that social conservatism and a rigid defence of past practices might now be coming to an end. Within days, the *West Australian* gave prominence to the stories of two non-Indigenous women who had suffered emotional trauma during the time when unmarried mothers were virtually forced to relinquish their babies to adoption.¹ It was, claimed the newspaper, as if "a different kind of stolen generation has emerged", thereby to some extent ignoring the ongoing work of organisations like Jigsaw WA and ARMS WA, and a number of already published works on adoption and relinquishment in Australia.² part of the 20th century, the treatment of unmarried mothers right across Australia was harsh and created great suffering. But equally harsh treatment was suffered by children in institutions during the same period. Some single mothers tried to keep their babies, only to be forced through lack of finance to board them in orphanages, along with those children considered through physical or mental "defect" unfit for adoption. The horror of what happened to these and other children institutionalised through family poverty or breakdown, in either government or religious-run organisations, was investigated by a Senate Committee of Inquiry in 2004 and the results published as *Forgotten Australians*.³

This thesis was inspired by one of the submissions to that inquiry, submission 97, from a woman who had her baby taken from her at birth and put up for adoption.⁴ The submission, a copy of which is attached as an appendix, is from a young woman who details events in her life when she was seventeen. Barbara Maison was not institutionalised, although at seventeen and pregnant, she feared being subject to the full force of the *Child Welfare Act of 1947*. She particularly feared being sent to the Home

¹ *The West Australian*, February 16, 2008.

² For example, Robin Winkler and Margaret van Keppel, *Relinquishing mothers in adoption : their long-term adjustment*. (Melbourne : Institute of Family Studies, 1984); Kate Inglis, *Living Mistakes: Mothers who consented to adoption*. (North Sydney: George Allen & Unwin Australia Pty Ltd, 1984); Shurlee Swain with Renate Howe, *Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment and Survival in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Audrey Marshall and Margaret McDonald, *The Many-Sided Triangle. Adoption in Australia*. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001).

³ *Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children*. (Commonwealth of Australia 2004). Available at:

http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/inst_care/report/index.htm.

⁴ Submission 97, *Forgotten Australians*.

of the Good Shepherd for being sexually active. Although in a stable, loving relationship with her boyfriend, her parents refused her permission to marry. Instead she went reluctantly to a home for unmarried mothers, the Alexandra Home, to live under restriction and in seclusion until the birth of her baby. A private adoption was arranged through the family doctor and the baby whisked away after birth at King Edward Memorial Hospital, with only a quick glance at it allowed to the youthful parents. This young woman was never informed of any possibility of keeping her child, nor of any rights she might have; she felt unsupported by the Alexandra Home, and humiliated as a single mother at King Edward Memorial Hospital. Almost fifty years later she detailed her treatment, and her anguish, in her submission to Senate Inquiry. This thesis researches various aspects of the young woman's experience: the culture of the institutions she discusses, the *Child Welfare Act of 1947* under which she became a potential offender, and the types of offences for which girls/young women could be institutionalised in the 1950s. It also examines the social environment that accepted and ignored the cruelties outlined briefly in the *West Australian* and detailed in *Forgotten Australians*. The research has emerged from my ongoing interest in the issues of child institutionalisation in Western Australia, social attitudes towards women and more specifically, sexually active girls/young women designated as delinquent. This was in response to the past Coalition government's constant promotion of "Australian values" and then Prime Minister John Howard's claim that inherent in these values was the "the equality of men and women and...tolerance, fair play and compassion for those in need".⁵ Personal memory reminded me that there had been little tolerance and compassion for many in the past, mainly women and children, and that these claimed values had not existed in the 1950s. For Barbara Maison there was little compassion or tolerance, and certainly none of the equality trumpeted by John Howard. This was the period fondly remembered by older generations and conservative politicians as a time of innocence, when there was full employment, prosperity and a homogeneous society.⁶ John Murphy describes scholarship on the 1950s as being divided between a focus on "the dominant image...(of) cultural conformism...quiescent suburbanisation...repressive nuclear family" and the turbulent political struggles within Australia against a background of fear of nuclear war.⁷

⁵ John Howard. Prime Ministerial address to the National Press Club, January 25, 2006.

⁶ John Murphy and Judith Smart, Introduction "The Forgotten Fifties: Aspects of Australian Society and Culture in the 1950s" in *Australian Historical Studies*, V28, no. 109, October 1997, 1-5.

⁷John Murphy, "Shaping the Cold War Family: Politics, Domesticity and Policy Interventions in the 1950s" in *Australian Historical Studies*, v.26, no.105, Oct 1995, 544-567, 544.

These contrasts are highly visible in the pages of the *West Australian* newspaper in the 1950s. The cartoons on the *Letters* page regularly feature distant political events connected with the cold war. But the *Letters* themselves demonstrate the every day concerns of Perth citizens, with an on-going debate about the use of King's Park and the location of a swimming pool within its environment.⁸ A reading of Perth's major daily newspaper leads me to the conclusion that in Western Australia, suburban quietism ruled. Those who read the *Law Reports* in the same newspaper might see that not everyone enjoyed equal status or participated equally in the benefits of the post-war good life. Children were institutionalised as "neglected" when the term had a different context to that accepted today: a young woman already working could be institutionalised for a minor offence, and a mother publicly castigated for being in paid employment rather than staying at home with her children.⁹ There was however no public concern at such occurrences and few would have known of the daily living conditions in institutions.

While much detail of institutional life in the 1940-1970 period emerged in the 2004 Senate Inquiry in submissions received from people who as children had suffered in care, there has as yet been little academic discussion of the topic. In Western Australia, this is not surprising. An existing doctoral dissertation on the treatment of children under eighteen in Western Australia in the years to 1949, could only be completed under an agreement that the thesis was embargoed.¹⁰ Records of children institutionalised, for whatever reasons, and held mainly by the Department of Community Development are not available for general research. Requests for information have to be made under the Freedom of Information Act that is so restrictive as to make research virtually impossible, since each item requires an application fee of \$30, whether or not any information is released.¹¹ Most children/young people who were in care were in religious-run institutions. Those institutions which still maintain control of their own records, such as the Home of the Good Shepherd, and Mercy Care, declare that little information about children was recorded at the time.¹² Further, the Home of the Good Shepherd, the only industrial school and reformatory for girls for many years in Perth, refused access to its admission records.¹³ The history of young

⁸ *The West Australian*, 1957.

⁹ *The West Australian*, August 6, 1957.

¹⁰ Rosemary Kerr, "The State and Child Welfare in Western Australia 1907-1949". Doctoral dissertation, Curtin University of Western Australia, 2005.

¹¹ Department of Community Development, letter March 7, 2007.

¹² Letter from archivist, Home of the Good Shepherd, May 21, 2007; Mercy Care email, April 18, 2007.

¹³ Home of the Good Shepherd, letter May 21, 2007.

people in 20th century Western Australia then is somewhat restricted and it is to be hoped that the Redress enquiry announced in December 2007 by the then state government will provide information on the 55,000 children estimated to have been under state care since 1920.¹⁴ It was during my efforts to uncover the background to child institutionalisation in Western Australia while avoiding the restrictions on information that I read of the events in Barbara Maison's life in 1957. I decided to research aspects of those events in the context of the 1950s, and in their setting, Perth.

A booming Australian economy in the 1950s, providing increased employment opportunities, and inviting all to participate in consumerism, saw the emergence of a distinct youth culture.¹⁵ This created some alarm across the country. The adult population, having survived a depression and a world war, were both anxious for and envious of young people. The decade had begun with the non-partisan but deeply conservative clarion call to the Australian people warning of danger: from abroad, at home and from "moral and intellectual apathy".¹⁶ 'The Call', without being too explicit, insinuated that resistance to communism abroad was somehow strengthened by a renewed emphasis on moral values at home, and was strongly supported by religious leaders. Keith Moore describes a sort of "moral panic" sweeping the country as the decade progressed, with concerns about adolescent behaviour ranging from adult condemnation of rock and roll music, to censorship of comics – curiously in all states except Western Australia.¹⁷ Citing Cohen, he describes how bodgies and widgies became cast in the mould of "folk devils":

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests...¹⁸

The alarm spread into media concern "with the morals and safety of young women", female delinquency and "the many unwed mothers" discussed in the 1957 issues of *Australasian Post* and *People*, both major magazines in their time. Young women, and their behaviour, were the subject of great scrutiny, particularly if they did not conform to society's demands that they confine their sexuality to marriage. They too were seen

¹⁴ Redress WA, available at www.redress.wa.gov.au Of the estimated 55,000 children, 2,921 were child migrants and up to 3,000 were Aboriginal children.

¹⁵ John Stratton, *The Young Ones*. (Perth: Black Swan Press, 1992), 9.

¹⁶ 'A Call to the People of Australia', cited by David Hilliard, "Church, Family and Sexuality in Australia in the 1950s" in *Australian Historical Studies* Vol. 27, Issue 109 October 1997, 133-146.

¹⁷ Keith Moore, "Bodgies, Widgies and Moral Panic in Australia 1955 – 1959". Paper presented to the Social Change in the 21st Conference. Centre for Social Change Research, Queensland University of Technology 29 October 2004, 1-13.

¹⁸ Keith Moore, 2.

as a "threat to societal values and interests".¹⁹ Jon Stratton further describes how traditional working class behaviours, including sex before marriage, translated to the 1950s youthful enthusiasm for rock and roll, milk bars and motor bikes and came to be defined as deviant by the dominant middle-class who had always attempted to impose their values on the working classes. His discussion of street behaviour and "larking about", publicly visible in the 1950s milk bars, inform us as to the patrolling patterns of women police in metropolitan Perth in their relentless pursuit of "misconduct".²⁰ Although many young people were working and earning at the age of fifteen or sixteen there was an ambivalence of public attitudes towards youth, visible in the daily paper: pages of advertising illustrate fashion and make up for young women. But rock and roll music, American films and the existence of bodgies and widgies were cause for alarm and repression (the Mother Superior of the Home of the Good Shepherd, for example was particularly concerned about widgies).²¹ Madeleine Hamilton has explored the 1950s media obsession with the teenage girl and her role as both desired object/forbidden object, and the contradictions posed in an economy which encouraged young girls to buy products to enhance sexual allure.²² At the same time, female sexuality if acted upon was regarded as a threat to society through possible unmarried motherhood, and disruption to the stability of the family upon which overall social organisation was based

Lesley Johnson explores these contradictions in greater depth in *The Modern Girl*. Girls between twelve and eighteen were increasingly defined as "adolescent" and adolescence was seen as a stage in life, a period in which to learn, under guidance and supervision, to prepare for an adulthood that conformed to society's expectations.²³ But in spite of the growth of the availability of secondary education, the strong demand for cheap juvenile labour meant many young people were working full time by the age of sixteen or even younger and so became autonomous consumers and participants in the democratisation of access to goods.²⁴ In a discussion of women's magazines in the 1950s Johnson asserts that participation in consumerism gave girls control over their

¹⁹ Stratton, 23.

²⁰ Stratton, 58.

²¹ Geraldine Byrne, *Built on a Hilltop* (Leederville: Sisters of the Good Shepherd, 2002), 136.

²² Madeleine Hamilton, " 'Delilah aged 14!': *The Melbourne Truth and the 1950s teenage girl*". [online]. *Lilith*, no.13, 2004: 38-50. Availability: <<http://0-search.informit.com.au/library.ecu.edu.au:80/fullText;dn=200502096;res=APAF>> ISSN: 0813-8990. accessed November 27, 2008, 39.

²³ Lesley Johnson, *The Modern Girl* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 62.

²⁴ Johnson, *Modern Girl*, 91.

own image with the possibility of changing their appearance.²⁵ However given the very low female wages of the era, and the parental restrictions universally supported by the same women's magazines, I suggest that for young women under eighteen, the degree of agency would have been very limited if it existed at all.

Jill Julius Matthews has written in her seminal work *Good and Mad Women* that by the mid 20th century adolescence was a period of transition, a "clearly identified stage in the lifelong pursuit of femininity".²⁶ During adolescence the girl's parents were a major influence on her behaviour, since most young women lived at home through economic necessity. Her parents' "moral stance" set the parameters of her behaviour because her "behaviour and reputation and femininity reflected upon her parents".²⁷ She argues that since the 1890s:

The maintenance of the specific Australian gender order, the relations among and between women and men, demanded that woman's sexuality must be severely limited. The gender ideology allowed only one legitimate expression of feminine sexuality: in heterosexual, monogamous marriage.²⁸

It was a period when the state, the churches and the medical profession imposed upon women "a regime of great severity which lasted virtually unchallenged until the 1960s".²⁹ Further, she states "Negative attitudes towards women's reproductive self-control, women's self-definition of sexuality, and women's economic independence were shared across the religious and political spectrums for the first half of the twentieth century". The formation of the Catholic based Democratic Labor Party in 1955 with its insistence on even greater social and sexual purity for women broke this religious and political consensus and "gave legitimacy to opposition and reformulations of sexual issues".³⁰

David Hilliard explores religious adherence in the 1950s and its effects on notions of family and appropriate sexual behaviour.³¹ He portrays the period between the late 1940s and the early 1960s as a time of religious expansion with numerous religious events, Catholic and Protestant "often using military metaphor".³² In 1951 there was an Australia-wide statement, in such military terms, issued by leading

²⁵ Lesley Johnson, "The teenage girl: the social definition of growing up for young Australian women, 1950 to 1965" in *History of Education Review* 1989 18(1), 1-12.

²⁶ Jill Julius Matthews, *Good & Mad Women* (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, 1984), 120.

²⁷ Matthews, 120.

²⁸ Matthews, 111.

²⁹ Matthews, 111.

³⁰ Matthews, 89.

³¹ David Hilliard, "Church, Family and Sexuality" and also "God in the Suburbs: the religious culture of Australian cities in the 1950s", in *Australian Historical Studies*, V24, October 1991, 402-419.

³² Hilliard, "Church, Family and Sexuality", 135.

churchmen and entitled “A Call to the People of Australia”. It linked the threat of communism to a decline in moral values and was praised by Prime Minister Menzies.³³ This renewal of religious vigour by the churches could be seen variably as a response to the previous decade of war and the anxieties of the cold war, to the increase in the birth rate and to fears about changes in Australian society itself. These changes concerned family, family life and “the emergence of a youth culture associated with what was seen as a breakdown in sexual morality among the young”.³⁴

The consensus between church and state, as represented by the governing Liberal Party, is confirmed by Judith Brett’s statement that “the Protestant churches continued to support central Liberal values, underpinning the moral middle class’s political convictions with religious belief”.³⁵ Brett’s work *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class* explores the values promoted by the ruling political party in the 1950s. The party saw the middle class as based on “an aristocracy of virtue”. At the core of the Liberal Party tradition was the belief that “all aspects of the life of the individual, the work they do, the homes they build, the children they raise have political implications”. The implication in the “Call to Australia was that only a virtuous citizenry could build a state strong enough to withstand external threat. Murphy continues this idea of the family as a bulwark against the threat of Communism in “Shaping the cold war Family”.³⁶

Nor was the Australian Labor Party of the era likely to contest notions of “family values” or seek a relaxation of the harsh laws that regulated the availability of contraception, legal abortion, or welfare benefits for single mothers. It was engaged in a desperate struggle to maintain its integrity against the deviations of both Communists and socially conservative Roman Catholics. Its deputy leader in the 1950s was Arthur Calwell, a devout Catholic himself who described proposed divorce law reform as “giving some sort of smelly, secular sanctification to barnyard morality”.³⁷ For the greater part of the 20th century, over a third of federal Labor parliamentarians were Roman Catholic and Brett cites figures suggesting that between 1946 and 1954, 70% of Catholics voted for the ALP.³⁸ Where the two major political parties differed was on the issue of class. While the Australian Labor Party saw itself clearly as representing the

³³Hilliard, “Church, Family and Sexuality”, 134.

³⁴Hilliard, “Church, Family and Sexuality”, 135.

³⁵ Judith Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 131.

³⁶ Murphy, “Shaping the Cold War Family”.

³⁷ Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties, Private sentiment and political culture in Menzies’ Australia*. (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2000), 214.

³⁸ Brett, *Australian Liberals*, 35, 37.

working classes, the Liberal Party, while promoting the ideal of the middle class family, was at the same time “arguing explicitly for a classless image of citizenship.”³⁹ This issue of the perception of classlessness in conjunction with middle-class family values will be discussed further in the conclusion, where I contend that ideas of conforming to those values and maintaining respectability were responsible for the way in which female behaviour was policed.

According to Michael Gilding, who gives an overview of the history and development of notions of the Australian family in *The Making and Breaking of the Australian Family*, the nuclear family reached its “highwater mark” in the postwar years and was the basis “for classless images of the family in advertising”. This was the concept of classlessness he states that was “played upon so skilfully by the conservative parties”. As the Australian family came to be rigidly defined, it was marked by exclusion, and permissiveness and juvenile delinquency were perceived as threats.⁴⁰

There is a similarity across Australia in the experiences of young women who were seen as threatening the boundaries of the nuclear family by becoming unmarried mothers. Such works as Kate Inglis' *Living Mistakes*, Shurlee Swain with Renate Howe's *Single Mother and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment and Survival in Australia*, and Audrey Marshall and Margaret McDonald's *The Many-Sided Triangle: Adoption in Australia*, all provide detail of grim and unfeeling practices over a long period of time.⁴¹ The most incisive and detailed work about illegitimacy, relinquishment and adoption is Swain and Howe's *Single Mothers*, intertwining as it does birth mother stories from the 19th century with those from the 20th century. Both Inglis, and Marshall and McDonald, give an historical background to adoption, although Swain and Howe possibly provide greater insight into the stigma associated with illegitimacy, arguing that it was a cultural import from Britain, based on Christianity and British Poor Law: “an attempt to safeguard the institution of marriage while minimising the cost of transgression for those who had an obligation to maintain the poor”.⁴² Other sources of information citing birth mothers' experiences were the submissions received by the Tasmanian Joint Select Committee on Adoption and

³⁹ Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, 14.

⁴⁰ Michael Gilding, *The Making and Breaking of the Australian Family*, (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991), 121.

⁴¹ Kate Inglis, *Living Mistakes: Mothers Who Consented to Adoption*. (North Sydney: George Allen & Unwin Australia Pty Ltd, 1984); Shurlee Swain with Renate Howe, *Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment and Survival in Australia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Audrey Marshall and Margaret McDonald, *The Many-Sided Triangle: Adoption in Australia*. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001).

⁴² Swain with Howe, 3.

Related Services, 1950-1988, and Merryl Moor's dissertation "Silent Violence: Australia's White Stolen Children".⁴³ Moor makes the claim that working class babies were relinquished to middle class infertile couples in a deliberate form of class redistribution. Her argument is based on 68 responses from birth mothers across Australia (five of whom gave birth in Perth) over a twenty five year period of adoption, and is therefore somewhat problematic. Conversely, Marshall and McDonald, admitting their data on New South Wales experience is generalised, conclude that middle class women were most likely to relinquish their babies. Some difficulties arise in any discussion of how wide-spread the practice of adoption was when Moor quotes a figure of "almost" 300,000 adoptions Australia wide from the early part of the 20th century, and Marshall and McDonald claim there were "well over" 200,000 adoptions since 1896. Confusing the issue further, and perhaps illustrating the difference between public belief about unmarried mothers in the past, and what actually happened, Marshall and McDonald assert that in spite of a socially conservative climate and ostracism "a majority of these mothers kept their children".⁴⁴ What all the cited sources agree upon however is the emotional (and sometimes physical) cruelties involved in the relinquishment of a baby by an unmarried mother.

In spite of these Australia-wide similarities of experience, in the 1950s, Perth, still isolated from the rest of the country, was satisfied with the belief that it was a society separate and different. Indeed Jenny Gregory describes it as tending to "look inwards", with a "fear of the unknown and of change".⁴⁵ The contradictions between public complacency and private misery evident in the leading newspaper, the *West Australian*, and the lack of reference to the state generally in academic discussion, leads me therefore to confine the thesis to Perth and Western Australia.

The punitive attitudes still held towards young people in the 1950s may well reflect such a fear of change. Under the original *State Children Act 1907* which became the *Child Welfare Act of 1947*, young people were classified as children until the age of eighteen, and a later examination will show that they were often treated harshly.⁴⁶ Leonie Stella's thesis "Policing Women: Women's Police in Western Australia 1917-1943", traces the initiatives and the thinking that saw the first women police appointed in 1917. In spite of Colonial Secretary Hal Colebatch's intention in 1917 that women

⁴³Parliament of Tasmania. Joint Select Committee. Adoption and Related Services, 1950-1988, Available at <http://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/Ctee/reports/adopt.pdf>; Merryl Moor, "Silent Violence: Australia's White Stolen Children". Doctoral dissertation, Griffith University, Queensland, 2005.

⁴⁴ Marshall and McDonald, 11.

⁴⁵ Jenny Gregory, *City of Light. A History of Perth since the 1950s*. (Perth: City of Perth, 2003), 61.

⁴⁶ *State Children Act 1907*(Western Australia), *Child Welfare Act of 1947*.(Western Australia)

police should become “welfare workers protecting and assisting women and children” the police department annual report that year described their role as being:

for the better safe-guarding of the moral welfare of women and children, particularly of girls between the ages of 14 and 21 years and...the prevention of misconduct that often leads to disaster in the lives of young women and girls.⁴⁷

In 1954, Sergeant Ethel Scott, head of the women police unit, similarly described the role, “The main object of Women Police is to safeguard the moral welfare of women and children, particularly of girls between the ages of 14 and 21 years”. Almost forty years had passed, during which two world wars and a major economic depression had occurred, not to mention changes in education, social conditions and employment opportunities. Yet the concept of young women needing to be policed for their own welfare had not changed, although it will be argued that the reasons for this continued focus on “moral delinquency” changed from concerns about venereal disease during both wars, to social anxieties about maintaining family stability against a rise in consumerism and a new youth culture sweeping the country. Stella concluded:

The actual numbers of girls brought before the Court and institutionalised throughout the interwar period were ridiculously few, considering the furore over how to deal with the ‘problem’ facing the State”. Staff from the Salvation Army home and the Home of the Good Shepherd complained that they had insufficient numbers to keep their institutions running.⁴⁸

She notes the manner in which both the *Daily News* and the *Western Australian* sensationalised court cases involving sexually active girls: my own findings based on research of 1957 are depressingly similar. These similarities support the notion of “moral panics”. I would go further and suggest that young women were being “scapegoated” in the manner described by Brett in *Robert Menzies’ Forgotten People*.⁴⁹ Scapegoats have been a feature of Australian media and political tradition for quite some time and have ranged over the last thirty years from “boat people” to “dole bludgers” to the more recent “Asylum seekers” as a diversion from social anxiety about change. Inherent in the notion of scapegoats are misconceptions, several of which became clear during research and which will be discussed more fully in Chapter Seven.

⁴⁷ Leonie Stella, “Policing Women: Women’s Police in Western Australia 1917-1943”. Honours thesis. Western Australia, Murdoch University, 1990.

⁴⁸ Stella, 217.

⁴⁹ Brett, *Robert Menzies’ Forgotten People*, (Sydney: Macmillan Australia, 1992), 98.

In setting out to explore aspects of Barbara Maison's submission to the Senate enquiry I broadened my original interest in the institutionalisation of children to include young women. I wanted to discover something about the culture of institutions such as the Home of the Good Shepherd and the Alexandra Home, which had been Perth icons for a long time, but about which little was known except through official histories like Geraldine Byrne's *Built on a Hilltop* or Jean Lang's "*The Open Door: a History of Loving Care for Families, House of Mercy-Alexandra Home-Ngala, 1890-1980*".⁵⁰ I was curious to see if the fears expressed in the submission about the Child Welfare Department and its power were valid, and whether or not Barbara Maison's treatment was exceptional for the era. Female images from the 1950s are often those of the married woman, bound by the role of housewife and mother. But images of the 1950s girl are images from a faded *Women's Weekly* of a radiant smile, full skirts and shining bobbed hair. Was it all about pretty dresses and demureness? If unmarried mothers were the exception to this image, and given porridge for dinner in King Edward Memorial Hospital while married patients alongside them were served "a proper meal", what sort of community attitudes accepted this without question?⁵¹ What punishments were handed out to others who were not demure? Would detail from my research provide one coherent underlying explanation for the disparity between the pretty, feted teenager and the girl eating porridge for dinner?

I began my investigation by reading the historical background to the formation of child welfare legislation in this state, and moved through the original *State Children Act of 1907*, some minor amendments and then the major revision of the legislation *Child Welfare Act of 1947*. I also read Annual Reports of the Child Welfare Department for a period of about ten years.⁵² The analyses of both Rosemary Kerr and later, Robert van Krieken regarding childhood, provided a background to the official record, and a search was commenced of the Perth Children's Court charge and evidence books for the period January to June, 1957.⁵³

⁵⁰ Byrne; Jean Lang, "*The Open Door: a History of Loving Care for Families, House of Mercy-Alexandra Home-Ngala, 1890-1980*", Batty Library.

⁵¹ Beryl Grant interview, June 23, 2008. Beryl Grant worked at the hospital in the 1950s and later become matron of Ngala Mothercraft Training Centre.

⁵² Report of Child Welfare Department for the four years ended 30th June, 1951, and subsequent Annual Reports reports ending 30th June 1952, 1953, 1954, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958. Batty Library.

⁵³ Rosemary Kerr, " 'Inefficients at best and criminal at worst': Juvenile Delinquency in Western Australia During the Interwar Years", in Charlie Fox (ed) *Studies in Western Australian History* (Nedlands, WA: University of Western Australia, 2007), 98-115; Robert van Krieken, "State intervention, welfare and the social construction of girlhood in Australian history". Paper prepared for TASA '92 Sociology Conference, Flinders University Adelaide 10-13 December 1992, 1-26. available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/2123/902>.

Two of the institutions mentioned in the submission, the Home of the Good Shepherd and the Alexandra Home could be defined as “total institutions” as described by Erving Goffman in *Asylums: essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*.⁵⁴ Correspondence with both the official archivist and the Province Leader, Good Shepherd Provincialiate produced some minor information about the Home of the Good Shepherd, although access was denied to more detailed material, such as daily admission records which have been removed to Abbotsford, Victoria.⁵⁵ Admission numbers were gained from the Department of Community Development’s publication *Signposts* and first hand material was gathered from several submissions to *Forgotten Australians*, as well as Perth Children’s Court Evidence Books.⁵⁶ A large collection of material relating to the Alexandra Home, which commenced as the House of Mercy and later became Ngala Mothercraft Centre is held in the Battye Library in Perth.⁵⁷ Permission was granted from Ngala to access the collection, which comprised a variety of material going back to the 1890s. There is also a collection of oral history from the Friends of Ngala Oral History Program. Some material has been used from these for which the Battye Library requested indemnification, as although the transcripts were on open access, interviewees’ permission was required to cite material but some interviewees did not respond to contact from the Battye Library. In one case permission was granted on the condition that the interviewee’s name was withheld. I was able to interview Beryl Grant who had been Matron of Ngala from 1959 until her retirement and had also, as a young woman, visited the home often with the social reformer, Dr Roberta Jull.⁵⁸

Legislation on adoption in Western Australia was examined, from the original act of 1896 through various amendments to the Act as it would have applied in the 1950s. First hand experiences of mothers relinquishing babies in the mid 20th century were discovered in submissions to the Tasmanian Joint Select Committee on Adoption and Related Services, 1950-1988, as well as in Meryll Moor’s dissertation “Silent Violence: Australia's White Stolen Children”. The secondary material backgrounding these experiences is discussed above.

⁵⁴ Erving Goffman, *Asylums: essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. (Middlesex, U.K.:Penguin Books, 1968).

⁵⁵ Home of the Good Shepherd letter, May 21, 2007.

⁵⁶ *Signposts. A Guide for Children and Young People in Care in WA from 1920:* (Perth WA: Department for Community Development); *Forgotten Australians*; Perth Children’s Court Evidence Books 2495/62/63/64/65, State Records Office of Western Australia (hereinafter referred to as SROWA).

⁵⁷ Ngala Mothercraft Home and Training Centre records, ACC1796A; 5679A, 6093A, Battye Library.

⁵⁸ Dr Roberta Jull was Perth’s first practising woman general practitioner and the first medical officer of schools in the Public Health Department of Western Australia. Australian Dictionary of Biography online edition available at: <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A090528b.htm>

Perth Children's Court Charge Books were searched to identify charges against children and the sentences handed down.⁵⁹ The search was confined mainly to charges involving girls and young women which were then cross-matched with detail of the circumstances surrounding the charge recorded in the Perth Children's Court Evidence Books. Material on Perth's women police, who operated as a separate force from the main body of police from 1917 to the 1970s was difficult to obtain, as according to the police historian, much of it had been destroyed during the 1970s for lack of archival space.⁶⁰ However material remaining in State Records Office such as annual returns of work and internal memos provided both information on the type of work performed and insight into the culture of the unit. This specific detail was read in the context of an earlier history of the women police, Leonie Stella's thesis "Policing Women: Women's Police in Western Australia 1917-1943", and also the Annual Reports of the Police Commissioner held in the Battye Library.

The "Law Reports" from Perth's major daily newspaper, *The West Australian*, were scanned for the year 1957 to see whether offences by juveniles were reported, and if so, in what manner. "Letters to the Editor" in the same paper were perused to gain insight into people's daily concerns. To discover what expectations were placed upon young people, and particularly young women, a search was made of the weekly advice column written by Louise Hunter in *The Australian Women's Weekly*. Spot checks were made of Perth's *Weekend Mail* and *Daily News*. For comparison with *The Weekly*, the advice columns of those issues of the *Australian Home Journal* still available were searched.

As the thesis is organised around aspects of Barbara Maison's submission to the Senate enquiry, Chapter Two: Child Welfare, the Legislation and the Department begins with an examination of the legislation that officially governed her behaviour until she was eighteen and still classed as a "child". It gives an overview of how childhood came to be defined, legislation developed to regulate that childhood, and how these laws were implemented through the establishment and operation of Children's Courts: a process which saw the emergence of the Child Welfare Department as a powerful bureaucracy with multiple responsibilities, and the only source of welfare and support available to the non-Indigenous population. It became an arbiter of moral behaviour, able to remove children from their parents and institutionalise them for lengthy periods in institutions run by the major religions with which it had a comfortable and uncritical relationship.

⁵⁹ Perth Children's Court Charge Books 2493/70, 2493/71, SROWA.

⁶⁰ Personal communication from Peter Conole, police historian, January 12, 2009.

Chapter Three: The Institutions, is concerned with two institutions mentioned by Barbara Maison, one, the Home of the Good Shepherd which she feared, and the other the Alexandra Home in which she lived for some months. Both institutions had their origins in the 1890s and were developed as initiatives to aid and assist women and young girls. Both were highly regarded although their high standing was at an official level and little was known about the daily life of the residents, except for occasional rumours about the severity of the regime at the Home of the Good Shepherd. The contrast between official histories, and data detail revealed in my research, partly based on accounts from residents, show that a culture of repression and discrimination existed in the guise of “doing good works”. In the case of the Home of the Good Shepherd, under the imprimatur of an ideology as powerful, and occasionally as ridiculous, as its arch enemy, Communism.⁶¹

Following the path of Barbara Maison’s experience, Chapter Four: Adoption, outlines the legislation and the social context under which adoption occurred in Western Australia. The lack of welfare provisions for single mothers and the lack of child care services, combined with social and community disapproval of unmarried mothers deterred women from attempting to keep their babies. At the same time, adoption had high levels of community support and acceptance, and pressure was maintained on young women to relinquish their babies in the belief that it was in the best interests of the child. Pregnant single women were ostracised and kept hidden, often by their own families, and treated with scant regard for their emotional well-being, leaving them with lasting grief over a lost child.

The fifth chapter, Policing Bad Girls, investigates whether Barbara Maison’s fear that her boyfriend could be charged with unlawful carnal knowledge was well founded. Other female juvenile misdemeanours of the day show that working and earning, for girls, did not bring independence. Young women might be permitted the responsibility to earn a living, but not the responsibility of defining their own behaviour. Their sexual behaviour was of the greatest interest to the law and to the women police; the possibility of becoming sexually active before the age of sixteen was dangerous enough to court institutionalisation. Offences such as having negligent parents, or being a truant carried the same threat for a small and frequently harried section of the juvenile community. Older women ran the risk of “being spoken to” by the women police about the way they cared for their children, or even their homes, and in spite of assisting the

⁶¹ Byrne 144. In 1959 when new trees were planted in the convent grounds, the nuns named each one “after personalities connected with the Congregation, such as John for Monsignor Wallace and Michael for the Mother Provincial”.

elderly and the sick, the women police still saw their role in the mid 20th century as being mainly concerned with “moral delinquency”.

Chapter Six analyses the social and community attitudes in the era in which Barbara Maison was a teenager. It shows that a variety of media sources subscribed to the grooming of young women for a womanhood devoted entirely to pleasing others, mainly men, and not themselves. Young women were constantly cajoled and exhorted to look, act and behave in a certain way: to be attractive, but not sexual, to be consumers, but also to be thrifty, to have a job but not a career, and most of all to marry and, in having a husband and children, contribute to society through maintaining the stability of the family unit.

In the final chapter I conclude that although the actual numbers of young women institutionalised for sexual misbehaviour were quite small, and disproportionate to the amount of media publicity and community concern, that the emphasis on “moral delinquency” served the purposes of the state. The 1950s were a time of social change, and consequent social unease. Churches and political parties were united in their social conservatism, but the dominant political ideology was that of the middle class Liberal Party, which promoted the image of a classless society and the nuclear family as the bulwark of that society. To be part of this classless society meant maintaining family boundaries and maintaining respectability. Those young women who deviated from the promoted ideal path to womanhood and motherhood within that family were the young women who, in the modern vernacular, pushed the envelope by experimenting with pre-marital sex, alcohol, staying out late and leaving jobs they hated. They were scapegoated by society and often by their own families. Scapegoating played a role in repressing women’s behaviour in the 1950s, together with the misconceptions about the degree of “moral delinquency” in the community, and the belief that all illegitimate babies were relinquished to adoption.

Chapter Two - Child Welfare: the Legislation and the Department.

Barbara Maison feared the Child Welfare Department. "The threat of 'The Welfare' was enough to make your blood run cold" she said of the period. She believed the Department had the power to send her to the Home of the Good Shepherd until she was eighteen for having had sex with her boyfriend and her fears were justified.⁶² At seventeen she was still classed as a "child" and so came under the provisions of the *Child Welfare Act of 1947* until she turned eighteen. Young people detained under the Act could, if they were over sixteen at the time of being charged, under Clause 39 be detained until they were over eighteen. Although the Act designated children as male, as we shall see in the next chapter, females were consistently "quizzed until they 'confessed' how many times they had been intimate" as Maison states.

In this chapter I will consider the evolving legal definitions of childhood in Western Australia and those categories under which children could legally be defined as neglected and so come under the control of the Child Welfare Department. The Department's changing role and professionalization in the post war period is discussed. I outline the financial support available to women, particularly single mothers, who were vulnerable to the possibility of having their children removed and made wards of the state. The provisions of the Act were such that the clauses under which children could be charged were broad and therefore open to interpretation by both the ruling Children's Court Magistrate, the Child Welfare Department and the police. Take for example Rosemary Kerr's statement that in the period 1908-1924 those girls charged as being "neglected" and "likely to lapse in a career of vice or crime" were often girls "who associated with prostitutes....frequented coffee houses, theatres, Chinese dens or whose family members included a Chinese male".⁶³ The charges reflect the concerns of the era with both newly popular forms of entertainment and old preoccupations with race. The same provision for charging children as being neglected or destitute, saw Mary Goss brought to the Children's Court by her relative (either her mother or grandmother) in 1951. She lived in a respectable working class suburb, and with family, but her crime was to have sex with a neighbourhood boy just before her sixteenth birthday. Under definition 7, Section 30, she was declared neglected, put on probation for two years, and

⁶²Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children, submission 97. (Commonwealth of Australia 2004). Available at: http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/inst_care/report/index.htm.

⁶³Rosemary Kerr, " 'Inefficients at best and criminal at worst': Juvenile Delinquency in Western Australia During the Interwar Years", in Charlie Fox (ed) *Studies in Western Australian History* (Nedlands, WA: University of Western Australia, 2007), 98-115.

forbidden to see the boy again. Her "neglected" status reflected one of the prominent anxieties of the 1950s: sexual activity by young single women.⁶⁴

The Child Welfare Act of 1947 was a continuation, an amendment and consolidation of previous legislation that had begun with the *State Children Act of 1907*. Penelope Hetherington's examination of how childhood came to be defined during the nineteenth century in Western Australia gives the legislative background to the period before the *State Children Act*.⁶⁵ Kerr has given the philosophical background to the operation of the original Act, citing a number of dissertations on juvenile delinquency and legislative control of young people in Western Australia, particularly young women, up to 1950.⁶⁶ Although I believe one aspect of Mary Bosworth's examination of Child Welfare legislation up to 1990 in "‘Dependent’, ‘Neglected’ and ‘Delinquent’ Children in Western Australia, 1907-1990" is misleading, the topic generally has been well covered.⁶⁷ What I would like to comment upon are some of the similarities of ideas in legislation going back to the nineteenth century, some of the continuing ambiguities, and the incongruity of the application of sections of the Act in 1957.

By 1845, there were already women and children without financial support in the small colony of Western Australia and an ordinance was passed attempting to ensure that relatives, rather than the state, paid for their maintenance.⁶⁸ A hundred years later clause 68 of the 1947 Act similarly attempted to make "near relatives" pay for the support of children institutionalised as wards. A "near relative" of a legitimate child included not only the mother and father of a child, or step parents, but also any grandparent, and brother or sister. For an illegitimate child, on the other hand, the definition of "near relative" included only the mother and father of the child, and the husband of the mother if the child was "born before their marriage".⁶⁹ Such near relatives could be summoned to the Children's Court and the cost of maintaining the child divided between its relations, according to their ability to pay. This group financial responsibility for the care of a child declared neglected, destitute or uncontrollable, may well have in some

⁶⁴ Perth Children's Court Evidence Book, Consignment 2495/34, State Records Office of Western Australia (hereinafter referred to as SROWA); Perth Children's Court Charge Book Consignment 2493/59, SROWA. Used with permission. Real names not used.

⁶⁵ Penelope Hetherington, "Australian colonial law and the construction of childhood", 118-132 in Dianne Kirkby (ed) *Sex, Power and Justice* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁶⁶ Kerr, 98-115.

⁶⁷ Mary Bosworth, "Child Welfare and the Law", 255-264 in eds. Penelope Hetherington and Phillipa Maddern, *Sexuality and Gender in History*, (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Centre for Western Australian History, 1993), 258. Bosworth states that only parents or guardians could charge a child with being uncontrollable. However in Perth Children's Court Evidence Book Evidence Book 2495/63, the police are listed as charging a 15 year old girl with being uncontrollable.

⁶⁸ Hetherington, 120.

⁶⁹ *Child Welfare Act of 1947*, Clause 68 (Western Australia)

cases, given the wider family a vested interest in imposing standards of behaviour that would be acceptable to both the women police of the day and the Child Welfare Department. This however was not the case when Ann Smith was charged with being "neglected": her parent was fined £25 for contributing to her neglect.⁷⁰

In the evidence against Ann Smith, charged in 1957, the police stated that she "has been seen around the streets and milk bars".⁷¹ Still on the statute at that time was sub clause (2) of the definition of a "neglected" child, part of which read: "wanders about, or frequents any public place,..." Ann was out of work and had been "kicked out" of her home by her father; she admitted having been drunk on several occasions but defiantly declared she would go where she pleased. The magistrate thought otherwise and committed her to the care of the Child Welfare Department until she was eighteen. The incongruity of the charge against Ann lay in the fact that she was considered old enough to work but too young to drink and socialise independently. At the time of the charge, she was living in a middle class suburb and doing housework in return for her board. The ambiguities about age, the legal age defining childhood, and the appropriate age at which various activities could be undertaken continued.

In colonial Western Australia, by and large, the official age of adulthood commenced at twenty one years of age. From 1845, both males and females under that age required a parent's or guardian's permission to marry (and in 1957, this was still the case, Barbara Maison's parents refusing to allow her to marry at 17).⁷² In 1845, children as young as 10 could be indentured, by the authority of a magistrate, in an effort to overcome the problem of lack of economic support. By 1871, fathers of illegitimate children could be forced to provide maintenance until the child turned fourteen; later this was raised to sixteen.⁷³ Compulsory education in 1871 determined that children between six and fourteen should attend school. As Penelope Hetherington points out, there is a contradiction here in that children had to be maintained until the age of sixteen, but could legally leave school at fourteen (and by 1899, with special permission, could leave between the ages of twelve and fourteen).⁷⁴ Penalties were imposed for non-attendance at school. In the nineteenth century a child not attending school could be sent to an industrial school until 14 years of age. In 1957 a child truanting from school could, under Clause 42 of the Child Welfare Act, be detained for at least two months in an institution but no longer an industrial school.

⁷⁰ Perth Children's Court Charge Book, Consignment 2493/70, SROWA. Real names are not used.

⁷¹ Perth Children's Court Evidence Book Consignment 2495/62. ^{SROWA.}

⁷² Hetherington, 120; Submission 97, *Forgotten Children*.

⁷³ Hetherington, 121-122

⁷⁴ Hetherington, 121-122.

Truancy formed part of the concept of the "neglected" child which also developed in the nineteenth century when the *Industrial and Reformatory Schools Act of 1893* was passed, and deemed a child to be under sixteen. When the *State Children Act of 1907* was enacted, there were eight clauses in the description of a neglected child. Many of these were ill-defined and therefore subject to value judgements from the ruling magistrate. As we have seen "wandering about" was still a cause for some concern fifty years later. Other clauses which were vague were (4) "Associates or dwells with any person who has been convicted of vagrancy, or is known to the police as of bad repute, or who has been or is *reputed to be a thief or habitual drunkard*" (my italics). But most open to interpretation was Clause (7) "Is living under such conditions as to indicate that the child is lapsing or likely to lapse into a career of vice or crime."⁷⁵ This clause as we have seen could be used to control the behaviour of young girls. At the same time, the definition of "ward" was tightened to ensure that there was no challenge by those committed to the care of the Department but not institutionalised. So a young person put on probation for a set period, and recommended to remain living with parents, still became a ward of the state.⁷⁶

"Neglect" under the *Child Welfare Act of 1947* was defined by nine clauses, including what would be considered today the true meaning of neglect: (6) "is not being maintained properly or at all or is deserted".⁷⁷ Other provisions which were offences for which children could be charged and perhaps institutionalised related to the child's status. A status offender, according to the Senate Inquiry in the Institutionalisation of Children, *Forgotten Australians*, "is a term used to describe a person who has committed a status not a criminal offence. These offences are so designated because of the offender's status as a juvenile".⁷⁸ In 1952 Amendment 16 added another definition to the description of a neglected child. It was Clause 10: "is living under such conditions as to indicate that the mental, physical or moral welfare of the child is likely to be in jeopardy". The then Minister for Child Welfare explained that although a child could be living "a life of vice and crime", it was not always possible under the existing definition to remove the child from its environment and commit it to the care of the Department.⁷⁹ The new definition could be used to protect children who were the subject of abuse. It could also be used to further restrict behaviour. Just as Mary Goss was declared neglected under Clause 7 in the early 1950s for having under-age sex, in

⁷⁵ *State Children Act 1907*. (Western Australia)

⁷⁶ *Child Welfare Act Amendment 16 of 1952*, Section 4(d). (Western Australia)

⁷⁷ *Child Welfare Act 1947*. (Western Australia)

⁷⁸ *Forgotten Australian*, 66.

⁷⁹ *Parliamentary Debates* (Western Australia) Vol. 131 of 1952, 879.

1957 Ann Smith was declared to have the same status. She had lost her original job and been forced out of home. But it was her behaviour, drinking on two occasions and going to milk bars, and the possibility of further transgressing societal expectations that now brought her under Clause 10 and the care of the Child Welfare Department.⁸⁰

Amendment No. 16 of 1952 also added to the definition of a destitute child in Section 4. Any child who had been placed in a subsidised institution (that is one which received government subsidies), and whose near relatives had failed to contribute towards its maintenance, could be officially declared "destitute". The child was then committed to the care of the Child Welfare Department, becoming a state ward. This happened to the very young Lawson children. Their parents had separated two years previously, and the maintenance being paid by their father for their upkeep in a children's home had ceased when he disappeared. Although their mother was in court, the children were charged with being destitute, and committed to the care of the Child Welfare Department until they were eighteen.⁸¹ In the era before equal wages for women, and restrictions on widow's pensions, which will be discussed below, the mother was doubly punished for a failed marriage. She could not afford to keep the children at home in the first place, and then lost control of them completely when they became wards of the state.

Another amendment to the *Child Welfare Act* in 1957 illustrates the position of young females in society at that time. *Amendment No. 2 of 1957* restricted the powers granted to the Children's Court two years earlier. The Court Special Magistrate had been given exclusive power to hear cases in which adults were charged with offences against children.⁸² The object of this was to "give more protection to children and also to save them from the embarrassment of appearing in higher courts to give evidence".⁸³ A man charged and convicted of incest under these provisions appealed to the High Court. The High Court ruled that the conviction should be set aside as the defendant "had not legally committed an offence against the child but with the child".⁸⁴ The then Minister for Child Welfare, A R G Hawke, explaining the Amendment in its second reading, expressed his belief that an offence *had* been committed against the child. The Amendment restored the right to trial by jury, giving an adult offender the choice of being tried by the Special Magistrate alone, or having the case heard by a jury. The Magistrate's sentencing power was restricted to imposing a maximum sentence of 18

⁸⁰ Perth Children's Court Charge Book, Consignment 2493/70, SROWA. Real names are not used.

⁸¹ Perth Children's Court Evidence Book 2495/62, SROWA.

⁸² *Child Welfare Act Amendment 45 of 1957* (Western Australia)

⁸³ *Parliamentary Debates* (Western Australia) Vol. 148 of 1957, 3859.

⁸⁴ *Parliamentary Debates* (Western Australia) Vol. 148 of 1957, 3805.

months gaol with hard labour. However if the case was warranted serious enough, either case or sentence could be referred to a higher authority. In the debate surrounding the amendment, little was heard of how the changes would affect children. One member asked if the original offender would have the case brought against him again, and was relieved it would not, as "he had already suffered a great deal in dignity".⁸⁵ Another speaker, while respecting the role of the Magistrate in the Children's Court, suggested "his qualifications would be limited...under no circumstances could he be expected to possess the combined wisdom of a jury, comprising 12 men of the world".⁸⁶ Offences dealt with under *Amendment 2 of 1957* were concerned with unlawful and indecent dealing, and unlawful carnal knowledge, and were gender specific. Unlawful and indecent assault and unlawful and indecent dealing with girls under sixteen was an offence, but the age for boys for unlawful and indecent dealing was fourteen. Girls under seventeen were protected from predatory behaviour by their guardians, employers and teachers. Boys were not. However, a subsidiary paragraph suggests that a person over 18 dealing with either a boy or girl under 18 could be charged in the Children's Court. This is possibly the basis of Barbara Maison's fear that her boyfriend could be charged with having sex with her, if he had been several years older than her. At this time, a male could still be charged under the *Police Act Code 43* for having "evil designs" towards a female as evidenced in the Children's Court Charge Book for January 1957. The offender received a sentence of two months.⁸⁷

The Child Welfare Act provided the legal basis for the specific establishment of Children's Courts and there were eighty six Children's Courts in Western Australia, noted the Secretary of the Department to the Minister for Child Welfare in the annual report of 1951.⁸⁸ The Act was administered by the Child Welfare Department, which had responsibility for many functions since taken over by Centrelink or the Family Court. For example, the Maintenance and Relief Branch of the Department gave aid to the sick and aged poor, provided transport to Perth for medical appointments, provided pauper funerals, arranged the legal adoption of children and supervised arriving migrant children. It oversaw the distribution of bedding provided by a grant from the Lotteries Commission. It also gave financial assistance to women with dependent children, including unmarried mothers and legal assistance to an unmarried mother attempting to

⁸⁵ *Parliamentary Debates* (Western Australia) Vol. 148 of 1957, 3860.

⁸⁶ *Parliamentary Debates* (Western Australia) Vol. 148 of 1957, 3859.

⁸⁷ Perth Children's Court Charge Book 2493/70, SROWA.

⁸⁸ Annual report of the Child Welfare Department for the four years ended 30th June 1951, Battye Library; *WA Votes & Proceedings of Parliament*, 1952, Vol. 2.

gain maintenance in the Children's Court for her child. As we shall see later, this assistance was limited and not as munificent as the Department's report would have us believe.

There were eighty-six staff at the end of June 1951, with marginally more women than men, the greater percentage of whom were located at the Government Receiving Home, where children were held temporarily before being sent to one of the 22 private institutions overseen by the Department.⁸⁹ In 1951 the activities of the Welfare Branch, apart from issuing licences to children to either "perform in public" or engage in street trading, were concerned with data on the numbers of children in subsidised institutions, the numbers of offences they had committed, the number of foster children boarded out, those on probation, those in work and unaccompanied migrant children. The numbers on parole were recorded and the numbers of visits by the seven probation officers (5 male, 2 female) to the various groupings, including 82 visits, all by female officers, to unmarried mothers. The total number of wards in institutions for the year was 489, which included 59 neglected children and 10 destitute children. Those imprisoned were listed separately from those committed to the care of the Department, or committed to institutions. One adult and 51 children were imprisoned.

The 1957 Annual Report is more detailed than in previous years showing a break-down of figures on the numbers of children in various institutions and the numbers of adoptions since 1939 amongst its many schedules. In this report, the Department explained it had undertaken "Lectures and talks to citizen groups" in an effort to dispel public perceptions that it was "ever ready to snatch children from their parents".⁹⁰ A Field Branch consisted of both Inspectresses and Probation Officers. Inspectresses investigated cruelty and neglect of children, their numbers had recently been increased because of unemployment affecting "marginal families"; Probation Officers collected information for the Children's Court and supervised those delinquents in the Department's care. A "Family Rehabilitation" section with departmental psychologists worked with these staff to avoid removal of deprived children from their families and attempted to rehabilitate those families where children had been removed. Yet in spite of these measures, there were still 394 wards of the state in institutions, 384 boarded out on subsidy and 253 under the supervision of Probation Officers, out of a

⁸⁹ Annual Report of the Child Welfare Department for the four years ended 30th June 1951, Battye Library; *WA Votes & Proceedings of Parliament*, 1952, Vol. 2.

⁹⁰ Annual Report of the Child Welfare Department for the Year ended 30th June 1957, Battye Library.

total of 5,040 state wards.⁹¹ The population of Western Australia in the following year was 700,214.⁹²

That girls and young women were regarded differently from young males is noticeable in the charges for being destitute and neglected. One hundred and seventeen girls were charged with either being destitute or neglected, 105 of whom were in the age group 13-17. The Department committed 104 to institutional care saying in "the majority of cases action was taken on moral grounds". In the same period 14 boys were charged with being destitute or neglected. The figures for children under seven, which are separate, show that 18 girls and 102 boys under that age were classified as destitute or neglected and reflect total overall difference in numbers between boys and girls. Boys were the main offenders: 1,136 boys offended compared to 215 girls. The Department categorised the type of home all offenders came from. Such categories were:

Father Deceased: Mother Deceased: Both Parents Deceased: Liquor: Poor Home: Broken Home.

How they reached these conclusions is not known. A worker who joined the Field Branch in 1957 stated "in those days there were no qualified social workers doing this work. Most of those employed by the department were nursing in most cases".⁹³ Indeed there was no social work training available in Western Australia until 1960.⁹⁴

The numbers of children institutionalised as a result of charges (394) are much smaller than the overall number of institutionalised children in Perth in 1957. The high numbers of children in "orphanages" reflect the era's general lack of support, particularly financial support, from both state and federal governments for families needing help. A random sample across the metropolitan and surrounding area of Perth, selected from the Department of Community Development's own publication, *Signposts*, shows that the highest number of wards were at the Parkerville Children's Home where there were 70 wards compared to 41 private admissions. The one female industrial school, the Home of the Good Shepherd, had 39 wards at the end of June 1957 and only 10 privately admitted children. But other institutions held a much greater proportion of private admissions to state wards. The largest girls' orphanage, St Joseph's, run by the Sisters of Mercy, had 92 girls in residence, 63 of whom were private admissions. The Anglican Swan Boys' Home and the Salvation Army Boys

⁹¹ Annual Report of the Child Welfare Department for the Year ended 30th June 1957, Batty Library.

⁹² *Statistical Register of Western Australia for 1957-58*.

⁹³ Friends of Ngala Oral History Program OH2631/6 Batty Library. Name withheld by request.

⁹⁴ *The Hackett Foundation Bequest Newsletter October 2003*: University of Western Australia.

Home in Hollywood held the highest number of boys as voluntary residents, 67 and 55 respectively, whereas the Anglican Perth Girls' orphanage and the Salvation Army Girls Home in Cottesloe had smaller overall numbers, including 24 and 37 private admissions. The greatest number of children under six was at St Vincent's Foundling Home in Wembley, where out of 152 babies and toddlers in residence, 46 were wards, 14 were female migrants and 92 were private admissions.⁹⁵

These figures suggest that although children under 18 were treated harshly by the law, so too were those children whose parents were unable to support them. In recognition of their suffering in institutional care, the Western Australian government is currently accepting applications for compensation from people who were abused as children in state care.⁹⁶ The Tasmanian state government has recently re-opened its scheme for people who were abused while in care.⁹⁷ A reading of the following extract from *Forgotten Australians* shows that conditions in Western Australia in the 1940s and '50s were as bad as in any other Australian state:

As a child I'd been, along with 3 younger brothers, tossed between several homes in Western Australia. My brothers got to the Catholic home too. Salvation Army home, Cottesloe, Parkerville [Anglican], Methodist and there's other government receiving homes. Presbyterian at Byford. Now I'm 60. I was abused, bashed, starved, tortured, disregarded as either a child or human, ie, one instance due to bed-wetting due to STRESS. I was undressed. Naked. Stood on one dining area table so all the children could jeer! I was 8 or 9 (Presbyterian). Parkerville. Anglican. children's potties were tipped on me to revive me.⁹⁸

Forgotten Australians concluded that although there were many reasons why children ended up in homes either as private admissions or through state intervention and wardship, "These reasons were shown to be strongly interwoven however the lack of finances often led to problems and fragile situations which in many cases, contributed to a child or children being admitted to residential care".⁹⁹

In the period being discussed, the federal Department of Social Services was responsible for the payment of a number of allowances which should have supported families with children. The Department itself had its beginnings in 1939 when welfare

⁹⁵ *Signposts*. A Guide for and Young People in Care in WA from 1920: (Perth WA: Department for Community Children Development).

⁹⁶ *The Western Australian*, May 24, 2008.

⁹⁷ *The Western Australian*, April 5, 2008.

⁹⁸ Submission 363, *Forgotten Australians*.

⁹⁹ *Forgotten Australians*, 65.

provisions were separated from Treasury. A referendum in 1946, followed by the *Social Services Consolidation Act of 1947*, strengthened the powers of the Commonwealth in its ability to legislate for and administer a wide range of benefits. These included maternity allowances, old-age and invalid pensions, child endowment, unemployment, sickness and hospital benefits and widows' pensions, some of which were already federal responsibilities.¹⁰⁰ But the widows' pension which could cover women other than actual widows, and was introduced in 1942, was discriminatory. A clause in the 1947 Act cited by Jill Roe declared that a widows' pension would not be granted to a woman "(a) unless she is of good character (b) if she is not deserving of a pension".¹⁰¹ Widows' pensions could be granted to women who had been deserted, or divorcees. De facto widows were eligible, and women whose husbands were institutionalised with mental illness. But pensions were not available to women deserted by de facto husbands, or whose husbands were in prison. Most notably, single mothers, women who left their husbands and wives who agreed to separate from their husbands, were not eligible. The mother of the Lawson children above, once her husband stopped paying maintenance, had little chance of retaining custody of her children.

Roe's tart comment that "new benefits did not necessarily mean adequate benefits" following the 1947 federal act, describes welfare recipients, then as now, living on the fringes, even when they could obtain welfare.¹⁰² It was expected that various state governments would supplement some federal payments and make payments available to those who would otherwise have no income at all. In Western Australia there was unemployment in 1957 and the unemployment benefit of £2 10s a week for single men and women was topped up with an additional 12/6d. from the state Child Welfare Department.¹⁰³ Through the same Department, in the case of widows' pensions, payments were made to those who were 'deserving', that is, mostly those who were ineligible for Commonwealth benefits, or needed supplementary benefits. The 1957 Child Welfare Department Annual Report shows that assistance was granted to 155 widows and 333 deserted wives, with an amount of 12/6d granted for the first dependent child with 10/- for each subsequent child.¹⁰⁴ These amounts were not generous: the Children's Court magistrate was regularly awarding payments of 15/- to a

¹⁰⁰ Jill Roe, "Never Again? 1939-1949", 217-225, in Jill Roe (ed) *Social Policy in Australia: Some Perspectives 1901-1975*, (Stanmore NSW: Cassell, 1976).

¹⁰¹ Roe, 224.

¹⁰² Roe, 224.

¹⁰³ Annual report of the Child Welfare Department for the year ended June 1957, Batty Library.

¹⁰⁴ Annual report of the Child Welfare Department for the year ended June 1957.

£1 week for the upkeep of an ex-nuptial child in affiliation order cases in the early 1950s.¹⁰⁵ The federal allowance for the first child of a Class A widow was 17/6d. per week and the 10/- per week for subsequent children had only been introduced in 1956.¹⁰⁶ The general lack of support for children contributed to the problem of family poverty and for lone women raising children the difficulties must have been almost insurmountable. The civilian widow rate which was lower than for war widows was £4 5s per week in 1955, rising to £4/12/6d. in 1957.¹⁰⁷ Maternity allowances paid on the birth of a child were £15 for a first child, with no means testing.¹⁰⁸ This amount equates with the £15 'confinement expenses' often ordered in affiliation cases cited above. Child Endowment, also paid by the Department of Social Services, was 10/- a week for the second and subsequent child, the first child being 'endowed' with 5/- a week from 1950.¹⁰⁹

The utmost stringency of all was reserved for the unmarried mother and her child. Barbara Maison, having eluded the provisions of the *Child Welfare Act*, managed to receive 42/- per week sickness benefit from that Department but her mother still had to pay extra to the Alexandra Home.¹¹⁰ Usually unmarried mothers were supported by the Department for six weeks before pregnancy, on an amount increased in 1956 to 35/- per week before the birth of a child, and 45/- per week after - for another six weeks.¹¹¹ She was not eligible for a widows' pension from the federal government. This makes somewhat of a mockery of Tay's statement that after the birth "every possible assistance is rendered by the Department to unmarried mothers....the mother is encouraged by the Department to bring up the child herself".¹¹² In the event of inability to do that, and if there was no support from family, she could have been helped to pay foster fees, providing of course that she was judged competent to look after it. The Child Welfare Department in 1957, reported that among its many responsibilities, it had made enquiries "in all instances of ex-nuptial children, so that the Department is satisfied that these children are reasonably cared for".¹¹³

¹⁰⁵ See for example Consignment 2493/55 Perth Children's Court Charge Book, SROWA.

¹⁰⁶ T H Kewley, *Social Security in Australia 1900-72*. (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1965), 221

¹⁰⁷ Kewley, 221.

¹⁰⁸ Kewley, 257-259.

¹⁰⁹ Kewley, 201.

¹¹⁰ Submission 97, *Forgotten Australians*.

¹¹¹ Annual report of the Child Welfare Department for the year ended 30 June, 1956, Battye Library; F Tay, "The Administration of Social Service Provisions for Under-privileged Children in Western Australia, 1947-54", 295-319 in Jill Roe (ed) *Social Policy in Australia: Some Perspectives 1901-75* (Stanmore NSW: Cassell, 1976), 308.

¹¹² Tay, 308.

¹¹³ Annual report of the Child Welfare Department for the year ended 30th June 1957, Battye Library.

The state has acknowledged the existence of impoverished children, since 1845 but been miserly in its attempts to provide for them. From early white settlement children were encouraged to work for their own living, and the state attempted to extract financial payment from relatives for the support of orphaned, neglected or destitute children and continued to do so. The actual physical care of such children was handed over to the major religious denominations under legislation implemented by the state. This legislation, while designed to care for and protect children, at the same time carried within it certain moral standards which were imposed rigidly. Contradictions continued between the age at which children were expected to work, and the age at which they could make decisions about their own behaviour.

In the 1950s pregnant single women were subject to moral judgements and no provisions were made for their financial support. Other women were disadvantaged financially and as such also often subject to moral judgements. They had no access to equal wages, or even employment if they were married, and no access to child care services if they could obtain work. Income support for divorced women, deserted wives or widows was limited and more difficult to obtain than it is today and it too rested upon value judgements made by the administering state Child Welfare Department. The network of federal benefits did not exist in the 1950s, and the Child Welfare Department, although boasting a "Family Rehabilitation" section, did not have any trained social workers. Under these circumstances, the state's only response to family difficulty or breakdown was to take children into institutionalised care. The numbers of children put into care for their entire childhood, either by the state, or by mothers unable to provide for them, were quite high. The next chapter looks at two institutions that provided care, one, the Home of the Good Shepherd was under direct government auspices. The other, the Alexandra Home, run on voluntary lines, provided one of the few avenues of care available for the unmarried mother.

Chapter Three – Institutions.

This chapter considers two institutions mentioned in Barbara Maison's submission, one which she feared, the Home of the Good Shepherd, and one in which she lived for some time, the Alexandra Home. These institutions reflect the social attitudes of the time in their treatment of the young women who were sent to them or through force of circumstances entered them.

Jill Julius Matthews has written that by the mid 20th century adolescence was a period of transition, a "clearly identified stage in the lifelong pursuit of femininity".¹¹⁴ During adolescence a girl's parents were a major influence on her behaviour, since most young women lived at home through economic necessity. Her parents "moral stance" set the parameters of her behaviour because her "behaviour and reputation and femininity reflected upon her parents".¹¹⁵ These attitudes are exemplified by the treatment of the pregnant seventeen-year-old, ordered from the family home by her mother, who then reported her missing to the police. Although the young woman went to the home of her boyfriend's mother, who stood by her, she was nevertheless charged with "living under such circumstances as to indicate that the mental, physical or moral welfare of the child is likely to be in jeopardy" (she being "the child"). Her mother, on being notified that her daughter had been found, stated "I am not interested...don't want her here and want nothing more to do with her".¹¹⁶ This prejudice is echoed by Beryl Grant's explanation for the residents of the Alexandra Home being kept hidden from public view: pregnancy "was a blot on the girl...a blot on the family".¹¹⁷ Beryl Grant became matron of the Home in 1959 during its move from Highgate to South Perth and subsequent development into the Ngala Mothercraft Training Centre.

The concept of family being based "on the lifelong monogamous fidelity of a Christian heterosexual couple whose sexuality was dedicated to procreation, ordained for the glory of God and the advancement of the nation" was, claims Matthews, one held in common by both Catholic and Protestant religions.¹¹⁸ Single mothers became demonised in the media. The *Weekend Mail* portrayed unmarried mothers in the Alexandra Home as needing rehabilitation after the birth of their baby. They also became, through relinquishment of that baby, "a girl who is extremely hard to

¹¹⁴ Jill Julius Matthews, *Good & Mad Women* (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, 1984), 120.

¹¹⁵ Matthews, 120.

¹¹⁶ Perth Children's Court Evidence Book Consignment 2495/62. State Records Office of Western Australia (hereinafter referred to as SROWA).

¹¹⁷ Interview with Beryl Grant, 23 June 2008.

¹¹⁸ Matthews, 80.

handle”.¹¹⁹ The status of other girls and young women was demeaned through trivialisation. The same newspaper depicted residents of the Home of the Good Shepherd as either “sub-normal” or “emotionally unstable”, their instability arising from such causes as being “unwanted by a stepfather” or “because the girl is an ugly duckling among pretty sisters”. As a result many were, upon incarceration, (not surprisingly) “vindictive and uncontrollable”.¹²⁰

The churches were united in their positions on sexual morality in the 1950s; they opposed information on contraception, sex education in schools, and favoured “strict punishment of abortion”.¹²¹ Matthews also suggests this consensus on “social purity” began to break down with the split within the Labor movement in 1955 when the breakaway Democratic Labor Party established itself, and took the moral high ground in favour of the “authoritarian, patriarchal family”. Opposition to such a stance opened the way for disagreement on social values.¹²²

Matthews is not alone in suggesting that political parties influence community attitudes on social values. There is a symbiotic relationship between governing political bodies and the community in that a government may utilise social anxieties to drive policy agenda, arguing that it is acting in the best interests of the electorate. This occurred during the debates over asylum seekers during the Howard government's reign. It is not a new political tactic. John Murphy has suggested that in the 1950s, the era of the Cold War, “Alongside the enthusiasm for the modern...stood an unease with modernity's anomie and impersonalisation”.¹²³ The rhetoric of the conservative leader, Menzies, “shrewdly positioned the values of the middle-class suburban family at the centre of political discourse while, at the same time, arguing explicitly for a classless image of citizenship”.¹²⁴ He portrayed the family as free and independent, in contrast to the “regimentation of the communist world” and the family as defence against the feared intrusions of either internal or external threats.¹²⁵ Further, citing Brown, Murphy states that:

¹¹⁹ *Weekend Mail*, March 30, 1957. This description led to a mass exit from the Alexandra Home of legitimate babies in respite care who presumably might have been contaminated by such a presence. Ngala Mothercraft and Training Home records, 6093A/169, Matron Mathew's Report 1956, Battye Library.

¹²⁰ *Weekend Mail*, August 25, 1956.

¹²¹ Matthews, 80.

¹²² Matthews, 80.

¹²³ John Murphy, “Shaping the Cold War Family: Politics, Domesticity and Policy Interventions in the 1950s” in *Australian Historical Studies*, v.26, no.105, Oct 1995, 544-567, 548.

¹²⁴ Murphy, 547.

¹²⁵ Murphy, 547.

Conservatives worried about the containment of the social forces unleashed by postwar prosperity and Cold War tension, and so emphasised the reconciliation of personality with social stability. If citizenship was, in effect, being a well-adjusted civic personality attuned to social structures, the family was central to this process of reconciliation because it was seen to provide an antidote to the mass society, by shaping a role in maintaining social stability, by regularising sexual relations and by socialising children.¹²⁶

With regard to the difficult question of interpretation and privileging voices I have tried to present a balanced narrative. The official versions of the histories of both the Home of the Good Shepherd and the Alexandra Home, tend to be triumphalist in nature.¹²⁷ The broader picture has only been obtained through careful scrutiny of the Children's Court Evidence Books and submissions to *Forgotten Australians* in the case of the Home of the Good Shepherd. With the Alexandra Home, although some detail was discernible in the collection of records held in the Batty Library, none of it revealed the rather grim picture that emerged from Beryl Grant's pithy responses to my questions.¹²⁸ Yet if the official records of both institutions are torn apart and their stories shown to be shabby fakes, the efforts and intentions of many people who believed they were helping society's unwanted are ignored.

There were similarities between the Home of the Good Shepherd and the Alexandra Home. They were well-respected organisations at the time, and acted in part as refuges for women in an era when there was little state support for single women unable to earn a living. The Home of the Good Shepherd accepted intellectually disabled women, alcoholic and homeless women. The Alexandra Home took in single pregnant women, some of whom were pregnant as a result of incest, at a time when the single mother was viewed as a miscreant, and incest was a taboo subject.

Both could be classified as "total institutions" which Goffman describes as being "symbolised by the barrier to social intercourse with the outside and to departure that is often built right into the physical plant, such as locked doors, high walls...".¹²⁹ In an encompassing world where inmates spent their entire time in the institution, and there was a "basic split between a large managed group, conveniently called inmates, and a

¹²⁶ Murphy, 549.

¹²⁷ Geraldine Byrne, *Built on a Hilltop* (Leederville: Sisters of the Good Shepherd, 2002); Jean Lang, "The Open Door: a History of Loving Care for Families, House of Mercy-Alexandra Home-Ngala, 1890-1980", (Perth: Ngala Mothercraft Home & Training Centre Inc. 1980).

¹²⁸ Beryl Grant interview.

¹²⁹ Erving Goffman, *Asylums: essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. (Middlesex, U.K.:Penguin Books, 1968).

small supervisory staff", there were not only physical restrictions for inmates, but restrictions on information between staff and inmates.¹³⁰ "Two different social and cultural worlds develop, jogging alongside each other with points of official contact, but little mutual penetration".¹³¹ Institutional staff tended to "feel superior and righteous" with the inmates tending to feel "inferior, weak, blameworthy, and guilty".¹³² Such a model explains in part the distance that arose between the ladies of the Alexandra Home management committee and the unmarried mothers. The committee although voluntary, was made up of socially notable women who made all the decisions for the running of the Home, even attempting to force Beryl Grant to say grace before each meal.¹³³ These were women who were "influential people...who had standing in the community", but as Beryl Grant described them "for all their good intentions they put a distinction between themselves and the girls they were there for".¹³⁴

Both organisations claimed to protect the recipients of their good intentions by keeping them from public gaze and keeping identities and records secret, while at the same time instilling in them certain virtues that would presumably fit them for a better life. But in their long histories they had developed restrictive practices and judgemental attitudes towards those that they claimed to care for. Each total institution has a goal which, according to Goffman, "seems admirably suited to provide a key to meaning - a language of explanation that the staff, and sometimes the inmates, can bring to every crevice of action in the institution".¹³⁵ The goals of institutions could include "accomplishment of some economic goal; education and training; medical or psychiatric treatment; religious purification; protection of the wider community from pollution".¹³⁶ The Home of the Good Shepherd pursued all these goals and the ruling 'language of explanation', that of the staff, applied to two distinctly different groups, the cloistered nuns and the "rescued women". Goffman states that this process "lets loose a doctrine, with its own inquisitors and its own martyrs....there seems to be no natural check on the licence of easy interpretation that results."¹³⁷ The recollections of Ivy Campbell, forty years after her time at the Home of the Good Shepherd, illustrate this point. A present she received was confiscated by a passing nun, as was a second present. Ivy had

¹³⁰ Goffman, 18.

¹³¹ Goffman, 20.

¹³² Goffman, 18.

¹³³ A move tactfully resisted. Beryl Grant interview.

¹³⁴ Friends of Ngala Oral History Program OH/2631/6 Battye Library, name withheld by request; Beryl Grant interview.

¹³⁵ Goffman, 83.

¹³⁶ Goffman, 83.

¹³⁷ Goffman, 84.

become a "martyr" to the doctrine of a religious life that frowned upon personal possessions.¹³⁸

Institutions in the 1950s were not subject to demands for open scrutiny and accountability. But internal debate occurred regarding the treatment of those who were being "cared for". The hierarchy of the Leederville Good Shepherd Sisters eventually split in 1972 as differences developed over the way juvenile delinquency was treated: time and changing social policy saw the collapse of their institutional monopoly over the lives of young women, constructed either different or 'delinquent'.¹³⁹ The Alexandra Home, on the other hand, was already in the 1950s developing and broadening its mission to women. By 1959 there had been a conscious decision to implement change with the appointment of Beryl Grant as Matron and the shift to South Perth for the development of Ngala ("we two") which remains today an organisation working in a broader role to support and assist families.¹⁴⁰

The Home of the Good Shepherd

In January 1957 the Home of the Good Shepherd admitted four girls and the day book showed that one of them was a "widgie", about whom the Annalist wrote "they are becoming an increasing menace to the city".¹⁴¹ The sentence reveals that the sisters were quite confident in their value judgement yet the Perth Children's Court Evidence book for that period does not record the details of any charges relating to being a widgie. The only possible candidates were four girls convicted of various minor stealing offences in December and committed "to an institution".¹⁴² The Home of the Good Shepherd was an industrial school, or reformatory, and had been for many years. It operated a commercial steam laundry where the inmates worked and it was the place that Barbara Maison feared as a "reputed hell-hole"; where you were sent "if you had done 'it' too many times".¹⁴³

¹³⁸ *Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children*, submission 483 Ivy Thomas. (Commonwealth of Australia 2004). Available at: http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/inst_care/report/index.htm.

¹³⁹ Catherine Kovesi, *Pitch Your Tents on Distant Shores*. (Caringbah N.S.W.: Playright Publishing Pty Ltd., 2006), 308

¹⁴⁰ Beryl Grant interview.

¹⁴¹ Byrne, 136.

¹⁴² Perth Children's Court Evidence Book Consignment 2495/62. State Records Office of Western Australia (hereinafter referred to as SROWA)..

¹⁴³ Submission 97, *Forgotten Australians*.

The founding motivation for the order of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd had begun with concern for delinquent girls and "those in moral danger". But the ideology had its origins in the upheavals of post-Napoleonic France in the 1820s and 1830s. The nuns were cloistered, sending special sisters called "Touriers" to deal with the outside world and attend the courts.¹⁴⁴ They regarded the residents and inmates of their convent as "Children" and "penitents", whatever their age or reason for admission, and in turn each nun was called "Mother". What teenagers of the 1950s thought of such ritual can only be imagined. The purpose of the laundry was two-fold: to help make the convent self-supporting and to provide disciplined work for the inmates. There was also a hint, said the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 2003, of "symbolic cleansing...the washing of sheets suggesting a search for purity".¹⁴⁵ The order operated laundries in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. In Perth an imposing convent was built in 1904, surrounded with a high brick wall, in what was then bush overlooking Lake Monger: the building is now the Catholic Education Centre. In the 1950s in spite of encroaching suburbia, the convent still had an aura of secrecy and seclusion, and, at anecdotal level, an ugly reputation as a place of strict incarceration.¹⁴⁶

Geraldine Byrne's institutional history of the convent, *Built on a Hilltop* is mostly history from the top, fulsome and peopled by wise priests and devout nuns. Nevertheless it gives a useful outline of the order's work in Western Australia, starting with the arrival of a number of nuns, several from the head house in Abbotsford Victoria, in 1902.¹⁴⁷ From the beginning, the sisters engaged in laundry work and set up a close relationship with the police in order to "rescue" those young women they saw as being in moral danger. But the whole concept of their rescue work is problematic. In 1902 the Mother Provincial stated "Those who submit themselves to the compassionate guidance of the Sisters do so fully....And they leave just as freely as they enter".¹⁴⁸ Byrne then relates the story of a young woman sent from Adelaide in 1903, presumably by her parents, and who left the ship with a man, avoiding the waiting nun. The police immediately offered to meet any one arriving by ship in future.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Byrne, 8.

¹⁴⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 24, 2003.

¹⁴⁶ John O'Brien, "The Founding and Early Years of the Convent of the Good Shepherd, Leederville" in John Tonkin (ed) *Religion and Society: Studies in Western Australian History Vol. 9*, 45-53. (Nedlands WA: University of Western Australia, 1987), 49.

¹⁴⁷ Byrne, 17.

¹⁴⁸ Byrne, 22.

¹⁴⁹ Byrne 27.

The number of girls institutionalised at the Home by court order in the industrial school, or reformatory, section, which had been subsidised by the government since 1927, was always much smaller than the overall number of residents.¹⁵⁰ Byrne cites the numbers in 1943 as including two boarders, 164 'penitents' in the Sacred Heart Class, and 26 in the reformatory section.¹⁵¹ The Department for Community Development record shows that 58 wards were admitted that year, and 48 were discharged, leaving a total of 44 wards at June 30¹⁵². 1943 was also a year in which the laundry operated at such a level that Midnight Mass was not held: no wonder there were six abscondings. Byrne also cites correspondence to the Archbishop in this period that claimed 80 percent of the inmates were of "weak and unstable mentality" and therefore machinery was used for most of the laundry work.¹⁵³ Her comments are at odds with those of an ex-resident. Irene Harrison, admitted to the Home in 1941 as a twelve year old when her mother died, said the girls dragged baskets of laundry so heavy that the delivery men could only watch in wonder.¹⁵⁴

In 1956, the *Weekend Mail* wrote a story headlined "This laundry for troublesome girls is no sweat shop". The opening sentence likened a mother having a "troublesome and unpredictable child" to the "140 girls of this type" cared for at the Home of the Good Shepherd.¹⁵⁵ The article stated that perhaps they are there because they were "unwanted by a stepfather, or misunderstood by their mother" and so "bear a deep-seated grudge against the world". Later, the *Weekend Mail* allowed the home contained many "sub-normal" girls.¹⁵⁶ In the 1950s there was no residential care for intellectually disabled girls and the Home of the Good Shepherd had traditionally accepted them as residents¹⁵⁷. They often worked in the laundry..."for these girls, learning to fold sheets neatly is quite an accomplishment, and they take pride and pleasure in their work. In this way they are kept occupied" continued the *Weekend Mail*. One such resident spent fifty years of her life with the sisters, emerging in her sixties to live independently. She did not remember being paid for her work, was used

¹⁵⁰ *State Children Act Amendment 22 of 1927*, (Western Australia) second schedule.

¹⁵¹ Byrne, 117.

¹⁵² *Signposts. A Guide for Children and Young People in Care in WA from 1920*: (Perth WA: Department for Community Development), 249.

¹⁵³ Byrne, 113.

¹⁵⁴ *West Australian*, April 27, 2004.

¹⁵⁵ *Weekend Mail*, August 25, 1956.

¹⁵⁶ *Weekend Mail*, August 25, 1956.

¹⁵⁷ Christina Gillgren, " 'Once a Defective, always a Defective': Public Sector Residential Care 1900-1965," 53-91, in *Under Blue Skies*, Eds. Errol Cocks, Charlie Fox, Mark Brogan and Michael Lee (Western Australia: Centre for Disability Research and Development, Faculty of Health and Human Sciences, Edith Cowan University, 1996), 59, 77.

to wearing old clothes and had not been equipped with any skills for life outside the Home.¹⁵⁸

In 1956 and 1957, as compared to the *Weekend Mail's* claim of 140 "troublesome" girls, *Signposts* lists 18 state wards mid year and 39 residents in 1957, of whom ten were private admissions. The Archives of the Good Shepherd Sisters show that in 1955 they admitted 38 females, two of whom were over thirty, and one over forty. In 1960 they admitted 45. The figures do not show whether admission was voluntary or court-ordered. Not all ages were recorded, and the archivist stated that 1960 was the only year "in which we have details about the reasons for admission".¹⁵⁹ *Signposts* notes that in 1960 there was a total of 17 state wards mid-year and 47 private admissions. Throughout the decade, the number of private admissions was always much higher than the number of girls in the reformatory section. But the Province Leader, admitting that their records do not show anything more than generalisations, states that reasons for admission would "have been categorized as: in need of care and protection, or exposed to moral danger".¹⁶⁰ The work the residents were engaged in was "practical industrial training such as needlework, washing, ironing and general housework", enlarging somewhat on the Child Welfare Department's report the girls were given training, "mainly in all aspects of laundry work".¹⁶¹

The idea that a parent, or guardian, had the power to consign a girl or young woman under 21 (and sometimes over that age) to an institution, for whatever the reason, is today abhorrent to us. While many children were put in homes because of family breakdown, the death or illness of a parent, or destitution, the Home of the Good Shepherd was known for its commercial laundry, and not as a children's home or orphanage. While some admissions may have been because of an intellectual disability too burdensome for a family, others were perhaps for different reasons and it is hard to avoid the conclusion that many were placed there deliberately by their parents. This position is supported by the Good Shepherd Archivist that "most non-CWD girls were placed by one or both parents, or another family member or guardian".¹⁶² Parents seeking government assistance to "control" their children, and colluding with the authority of the Child Welfare Department to do so, was not confined to the 1950s.

¹⁵⁸ Disability Services Case available at: [http://www.disability.wa.gov.au/dscwr/assets/main/agenda/documents/doc/CC_Case_Studies_\(ID_1175_Ver_1.0.0\).doc](http://www.disability.wa.gov.au/dscwr/assets/main/agenda/documents/doc/CC_Case_Studies_(ID_1175_Ver_1.0.0).doc). Accessed 8 July 2008.

¹⁵⁹ Good Shepherd Sisters Archives, letter dated May 11, 2007.

¹⁶⁰ Pamela Molony, Province Leader, Good Shepherd Provincialiate. Letter dated 14 March 2007.

¹⁶¹ Pamela Molony; *Signposts*, 249, citing Annual Child Welfare Department Report of 1953.

¹⁶² Good Shepherd Sisters Archives, letter dated May 21, 2007.

Rosemary Kerr states that "Parents often supported departmental measures to control girls' behaviour", citing pre-1930 evidence from both Children's Court Charge Books and the memoirs of one of the magistrates, to support her argument.¹⁶³ In 1941, the middle class parents of the writer Dorothy Hewett charged her with being an uncontrollable child (at 17) after reading one of her poems containing sexual references. Fortunately, the matter was soon hushed up at the prospect of "all that unpleasant publicity".¹⁶⁴

Then too there were those girls who, surprisingly, admitted themselves in the belief they would find the sort of refuge that is today provided by officially designated women's refuges, but which did not exist in the 1950s. A young girl who had admitted herself to the Home at fourteen because she didn't get on with her parents, left two years later after a nun had accused her of talking, which she denied. Accosted by a boy late at night in the city, she went to the police for help. As a result she was declared neglected, and put on probation for 12 months. One of the conditions of her probation was that she remain at the Home for twelve months; the other condition was that if she was found a job, she was not leave it.¹⁶⁵ For disagreeing with a nun, she lost her voluntary status, and became a state ward. Kay Bright also left home and admitted herself to the Home because she did not get on with her sister and had been recently expelled from school. She left the Home because she did not like being there and came to the attention of the police. At 14, they decided she was too young to be out at 11.15 at night and charged her with being neglected. She too became a state ward on probation for twelve months with the condition that she was not to leave the Home, nor leave any job found for her.¹⁶⁶ That both girls had admitted themselves voluntarily to the Home, and left because they did not like it, was irrelevant and there is nothing in the written evidence to suggest there were attempts to re-unite them with their families. Their parents are not mentioned.

The *Weekend Mail* and the Child Welfare Reports of the 1950s, and more recently Byrne's history, reflect the official attitude towards the work of the Home of the Good Shepherd. In 1952 "excellent facilities are available for the female inmates there", and in 1953 "Facilities for the care of the female inmates here are good" reported

¹⁶³ Rosemary Kerr, "'Inefficients at best and criminal at worst': Juvenile Delinquency in Western Australia During the Interwar Years", in Charlie Fox (ed) *Studies in Western Australian History* 98-115, (Nedlands, WA: University of Western Australia, 2007), 103.

¹⁶⁴ Dorothy Hewett, *Wild Card. An autobiography 1923-1958*. (Ringwood Victoria: McPhee Gribble, 1990), 81.

¹⁶⁵ Perth Children's Court Evidence Book Consignment 2495/61, SROWA. Real names are not used.

¹⁶⁶ Perth Children's Court Evidence Book Consignment 2495/61, SROWA. Real names are not used.

the Child Welfare Department.¹⁶⁷ By 1957, a school had been added for the "mal-adjusted girls", so they could train in basic subjects and typewriting - in addition to sewing and laundry work.¹⁶⁸ It is not surprising the Child Welfare Department held the Home in such high regard: James McCall, appointed Director in 1957, was "a consistent visitor at 'Tara' and he had great admiration for the Sisters and their work".¹⁶⁹ He attended social occasions and when abroad, visited the Mother House in France. The suspicion lingers that the Sisters' methods of treating delinquency and difference had been at one with the Child Welfare Department for a long period. The Western Australian economy could not provide for the delinquent and the disadvantaged: the state relied upon religious institutions for the provision of services.¹⁷⁰ The conditions that resident Irene Harrison described in the 1940s when the inmates were working overtime to wash the laundry of American servicemen were reported on by the Child Welfare Department to a 1943 Royal Commission on delinquency. The Department depended on the Home of the Good Shepherd, and was "satisfied work is of the highest order".¹⁷¹ That such thinking was outmoded in 1957, is evidenced by the continuing emphasis on laundry work at the very time when every housewife either had a washing machine, or planned to buy one.¹⁷²

What is missing from official reports and histories of the Home are the experiences of those who were actual residents. In an article in the *West Australian* in 2004, there are references to physical abuse by the nuns (strictly forbidden, according to Byrne and the Rules of the Congregation).¹⁷³ There were long working hours in silence, deprivation of food for minor infringements, isolation as punishment and "corns on my knees" from hours of prayer. Several formal submissions to *Forgotten Australians* relating to conditions at the Leederville Home in the 1960s are in similar vein, although more detailed. They are disturbing: "I remember always being cold and hungry at night": "For the two years I was there, all I did was iron": "I received a hard slap across

¹⁶⁷ Annual reports of the Child Welfare Department for the years ended 30th June 1952 and 1953.

¹⁶⁸ Annual report of the Child Welfare Department for the year ended 30th June 1957.

¹⁶⁹ Byrne, 137.

¹⁷⁰ Kerr, R. (1998). 'Potential inefficient at best, criminal at worst': The girl problem and juvenile delinquency in Western Australia 1907-1933. *Proceedings Western Australian Institute for Educational Research Forum 1998*. available at: <http://www.waier.org.au/forums/1998/kerr.html>, 3.

¹⁷¹ Select Committee on Juvenile Delinquency – Appoint as an honorary Royal Commission, Consignment 5761, Item 1943/091, SROWA.

¹⁷² For example the share of households with washing machines increased from 20% to 79% between 1950 and 1965 according to Pierre van der Eng, Consumer credit in Australia during the 20th century: Working Paper 489, ANU: 2008, available at: www.ecocomm.anu.edu.au/research/papers/pdf/wp489.pdf. Accessed July 2, 2008.

¹⁷³ *The West Australian*, April 27, 2004; Byrne 8.

the face".¹⁷⁴ These submissions allege withholding of pension monies, hard work without remuneration and confiscation of gifts. There was also the custom of re-naming inmates upon admission, many of whom became dependent and ill equipped to live in the outside world. The complaints are similar to those made by former residents at Abbotsford, Victoria, which was the Mother House for the Order, and from which nuns were sent to other Homes around Australia.¹⁷⁵

Some of the girls admitted were pregnant, a detail only revealed in oral history transcripts relating to Ngala:

"(W)e used to get them from the Good Shepherd Convent...they used to go to the courts in those days...they'd take them back there and when they were well advanced in pregnancy they'd bring them over to us and we'd look after them. Then they'd go back there afterwards"¹⁷⁶

That the nuns' ideology could be damaging is allowed in Catherine Kovesi's account of the Order in Australia and New Zealand.¹⁷⁷ It led eventually to a split in the Leederville Congregation in the early 1970s over methods of handling delinquent girls.¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless the Catholic Church declined to comment in response to the allegations made in the *West Australian* in 2004.¹⁷⁹ Research enquiries regarding details of admissions and daily notes (the "Annals") over the seventy-year period of residential care at Leederville were met with the statement that such records, although cited by Byrne and Kovesi as official historians, were not available to "general researchers".¹⁸⁰ The secrecy, like the high brick wall, remains.

The Alexandra Home

The home where Barbara Maison was sent by her parents to await the birth of her child was the Alexandra Home in Highgate. There the expectant mothers lived in a single dormitory, worked in the laundry or kitchen all day, were not allowed out, and were not allowed contact with the father of their child.¹⁸¹ For this they were charged a

¹⁷⁴ Submission 490, *Forgotten Australians*, Submission 483, *Forgotten Australians*.

¹⁷⁵ For example, Submissions 166 and 146, *Forgotten Australians*.

¹⁷⁶ Friends of Ngala Oral History Program, OH2631/4. Battye Library. No response to request for permission to use.

¹⁷⁷ Kovesi, 281.

¹⁷⁸ Kovesi, 308.

¹⁷⁹ *The West Australian*, April 27, 2004.

¹⁸⁰ Good Shepherd Sisters Archives, letter May 21, 2007.

¹⁸¹ Beryl Grant interview. Beryl Grant, while not appointed as matron to Ngala until 1959, spent some time at the Alexandra Home before the move to South Perth, and had visited the home often as a girl with Dr Roberta Jull's Ross Memorial Bible Class.

fee: in 1959 it was 6/- a day.¹⁸² While some families kept their daughters at home living a normal life, Barbara Maison's parents did not. Parents placed their daughters in the home deliberately and expected they would not be allowed out in case they were seen. Pregnancy was a "blot" on the girl, and more importantly a "blot on the family".¹⁸³ A story would be circulated that the girl had gone to Melbourne: "all sorts of things" to cover the pregnancy.¹⁸⁴

The home had its origins in the 1890s when women representatives from all the major churches in Perth met to form a committee with the aim of setting up a home for unmarried mothers. The home was to be called the House of Mercy, reflecting the belief of committee members that "girls and women who had strayed from the path of moral rectitude, ...had done wrong, but were to receive the help of which they stood in need".¹⁸⁵ The committee consisted of four representatives from each major religious denomination and ran the home on Christian and voluntary lines.¹⁸⁶ Early rules insisted that only first-birth mothers were admitted, but there was no preference towards adoption. Rather girls were to be admitted for at least six months. This was because "the long association of mother and baby induced her to love and care for it, to wish to continue to be responsible for it".¹⁸⁷ That the home ran on donations and bequests is reflected in the emphasis on fund raising and social activities in the annual reports. While initially the government gave a grant of land, the institution was not listed as government subsidised until 1955 although according to Child Welfare Department reports of the 1950s it received monies from the Lotteries Commission.¹⁸⁸

The House of Mercy became the Alexandra Home for Women in 1916, and then simply the Alexandra Home. It continued to take in pregnant single women to await the birth of a baby. The numbers of women admitted each year seem to have varied between 30 and 50, with less than that in residence at any one time. In 1933, 33 girls were admitted and in 1937-38, 34. Jull estimated that in its first fifty years of operation about 1,000 girls and babies had passed through the home.¹⁸⁹ By June 1954, the numbers of unmarried mothers had risen to 44, and 49 in 1955. The percentage of adoptions might seem to have remained constant: while in 1933, 9 out of 33 girls took

¹⁸² Lang, 61.

¹⁸³ Beryl Grant interview.

¹⁸⁴ Beryl Grant interview.

¹⁸⁵ Dr Roberta Jull, "Beginnings of the Alexandra Home", Battye Library PR2036, n.d.

¹⁸⁶ Ngala Mothercraft Home and Training Centre Records 6093A/180. Battye Library.

¹⁸⁷ Ngala Mothercraft Home and Training Centre Records 6093A/180. Battye Library.

¹⁸⁸ *Child Welfare Act Amendment 45 of 1955*, (Western Australia) second schedule; for example Annual Report of the Child Welfare Department for the Year ended 30th June 1957, Battye Library..

¹⁸⁹ Ngala records 6093A/180, Battye Library.

their babies home, in 1957/58 there were 22 adoptions out of the 30 confinements at King Edward Memorial Hospital.¹⁹⁰ However, some babies remained at the home for a period of time until a decision had been made regarding their future, and in one case it was eight months before the birth mother, living interstate, sent for her child.¹⁹¹ Maison stated in her submission that "It was a given that you had to give up your child for adoption to stay in the home. She (the Matron) made it clear that my baby was not MY BABY - there was no way I was going to keep "it", if I wanted to stay in the home".¹⁹² The home claimed in its annual report for 1956/57 "The decision is made by the girl herself after being given every opportunity to discuss the problem from all aspects with the social workers, and Matron and her own parents. Some change their minds after the birth of the babe."¹⁹³ But the demand for babies from prospective adopting parents was high. Women wrote directly to the President of the Committee asking to adopt a baby, and a local doctor asked for help for a patient to adopt a child, since she "has no possible chance of adopting a child through the normal channels".¹⁹⁴ Given this view of babies as commodities, the many difficulties which faced single mothers (examined in the chapter on adoption) and the *Weekend Mail's* claim of a 90% adoption rate, it is not hard to privilege Maison's statement.¹⁹⁵

By the 1950s the Alexandra Home had expanded its role. It began training mothercraft nurses in 1949, and looking after babies whose mothers were ill. In the year Maison was in residence, care was provided for 103 babies.¹⁹⁶ Most of these were from families where the mother was ill, and a daily fee was charged - it was 15s a day in 1959.¹⁹⁷ Toddlers and babies also came from the Government Receiving Home where they were awaiting court decisions as to their status ("destitute" or "neglected"). Some were classed by the Director of the Child Welfare Department as "mentally or physically defective".¹⁹⁸ The annual reports increasingly reflected the change of focus with a great deal of detail about the young trainee nurses and their activities. The unmarried mothers became "inmates", with little reference, except to their numbers, and highlights such as a trip for them to see the 1954 Royal Tour decorations, or a

¹⁹⁰ Alexandra Home Annual Reports, Battye Library 362.71.

¹⁹¹ Ngala records 6093A/169 Matron Mathew's Report 1956, Battye Library.

¹⁹² Submission 97, *Forgotten Australians*.

¹⁹³ Ngala records 6093A/36, Battye Library.

¹⁹⁴ Ngala records 6093A/174, Battye Library.

¹⁹⁵ *The Weekend Mail*, March 30, 1957.

¹⁹⁶ Friends of Ngala Oral History Program OH2631/4, Battye Library, source unable to be contacted; Ngala records 6093A/36 Battye Library.

¹⁹⁷ Lang, 61.

¹⁹⁸ Ngala records 6093A/79, Battye Library.

Christmas Party held, separate from the nursing staff.¹⁹⁹ Fund raising and thank-yous were an important part of the annual reports. The home relied heavily upon donations for everyday items such as cots and blankets for the children it cared for. Because the committee members had high social profiles they were able to attract support from other sections of the community and place the work of the Alexandra Home in a favourable public view.²⁰⁰

Public acceptance of the work of the Alexandra home could change rapidly. When the home's activities were reported in the *Weekend Mail* in an article which focussed on its role of caring for unmarried mothers ("a place of no return...for first offenders only"), the numbers of babies in respite care dropped.²⁰¹ "[T]here was quite an exit of children from the Home," reported Matron Matthews, "I do feel that the article did untold harm to the Home, and will probably take a long time for the public to forget".²⁰² This perception of the unmarried mother as "the other", her coming child to be distanced from the babies of the respectably married, explains the home's increasing emphasis on its work in mothercraft training. As Beryl Grant explained, mothercraft training was more acceptable in the public view than were unmarried mothers.²⁰³

"The girls" who came to the Alexandra Home were described as being, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, "from about thirteen to late 30s" and of different nationalities in the era of post-war migration. Some were separated women, some were divorced, one a war widow frightened of losing her pension. There were no Aboriginal girls but this changed later. The babies were often the result of "one night stands"; the numbers of babies from incestuous relationships were "no different to now, about the same". Girls from the Convent of the Good Shepherd, possibly as state wards, came to the home late in their pregnancy and returned to the convent after the birth of their child.²⁰⁴ Grant stated that in her view there were very few older or separated women and that in her period as matron, 1959-1980, the girls were young: "15, 16, 17 and they would come perhaps from other States".²⁰⁵ Girls arrived at the Alexandra Home from the eastern states, their absence from home explained with the same pretext used by Perth families - they were away on holiday.²⁰⁶

¹⁹⁹ Ngala records 6093A/36, Battye Library.

²⁰⁰ Friends of Ngala Oral History Program OH/2631/6 Battye Library, name withheld by request.

²⁰¹ *Weekend Mail*, March 30, 1957.

²⁰² Matron Mathew's Report 1956, Ngala Records 6093A/169, Battye Library.

²⁰³ Beryl Grant interview.

²⁰⁴ Friends of Ngala Oral History Program OH/2631/4, Battye Library, source unable to be contacted.

²⁰⁵ OH/2795, Beryl Grant, Battye Library.

²⁰⁶ Friends of Ngala Oral History Program, Florence Cooper, OH/2631 Battye Library.

The home itself made every effort to keep the secret that single girls could become pregnant. Residents were referred to only by their first name. Their records were destroyed when they left the home.²⁰⁷ Staff made a point of never recognising a girl without her permission once she had left the home.²⁰⁸ Girls who had been sexually active under the age of consent of 16 were breaking the law and could be the subject of police investigation. Barbara Maison was right to fear such investigation. The women police constantly questioned young girls about their sexual behaviour ("have you misconducted yourself?"), as did the CIB on occasion.²⁰⁹ The Alexandra Home protected those it cared for from both the community and the authority of the Child Welfare Department. At a time when it was almost obligatory to report sexual activity in the under 16 year olds to the Department, the home decided it would not report such matters unless the girl requested it. The home was "very protective...it was very hard to get any information from them... any co-operation either, for that matter."²¹⁰

The Alexandra Home was the forerunner of modern day Ngala, now an Early Parenting Centre operating other centres across the state, and providing a range of support services for families and young children. Its past has now been cast in a benevolent aura. In the institutional history "The Open Door", the records held in the Battye Library detailing the hard work of the voluntary committee and their social activities, and descriptions by the Child Welfare Department officer of the secrecy and protection of residents, there is little to be discerned of what those residents actually experienced. The Child Welfare officer believed that in its day the Alexandra Home set a "standard for facilities that were available to give assistance...it was the beginning of the development of welfare". There are few voices to oppose that view.

One is Barbara Maison's description of her miserable time there. The Matron, she submitted, was "a formidable, cold person", who never prepared her in any way for the birth, and refused to believe she was in labour when pains began.²¹¹ This delay caused unnecessary suffering later at the maternity hospital. Her view may be supported by an undated letter signed by five girls (their surnames not recorded, in keeping with the practice of the home). It was addressed to the President of the Committee, Mrs Picton-Warlow and complained of their treatment by the Matron. She was "continually on our backs handling us like handmaids...has a frightful

²⁰⁷ *Weekend Mail*, March 30 1957.

²⁰⁸ Friends of Ngala Oral History Program OH/2631/4, Battye Library, source unable to be contacted.

²⁰⁹ See for example Perth Children's Court Evidence Book 2495/62 and 63, State Records Office of Western Australia.

²¹⁰ Child Welfare Department officer, OH2631/5 Battye Library. Name withheld by request.

²¹¹ Submission 97, *Forgotten Australians*.

temper...throws the wrong we have done in our faces".²¹² Moreover, the girls stated, they were given countless tasks "very strenuous to a pregnant woman".²¹³ Since Mrs Picton Warlow became president of the committee in 1952, this treatment very likely occurred under the same formidable matron. Although the home provided a refuge for some girls, the shelter came at a cost. There was no privacy in the lone dormitory. The wing for the expectant mothers was separate from the mothercraft section and the girls even ate different, lesser quality food.²¹⁴ There was no heating in their dormitory in the winter, although the matron requested a radiator in 1958. This was at a time when the committee discussed hiring a portable dance floor for the nurses' Christmas party.²¹⁵ The home itself was in an old building, described as dreary and unattractive.²¹⁶ The girls worked five full days a week, and probably six, according to Grant, who also stated that "they (the girls) *were* the staff", funds being so short, there was not enough money to pay for domestic help.²¹⁷ Outings were few during a stay that might last for months, and needed permission; the girls did not even travel to King Edward Memorial Hospital alone when they had check-ups, but were transported by the Red Cross. No contact was allowed with the prospective father of the baby - Barbara Maison's mother smuggled letters to her daughter's boyfriend.²¹⁸

Beryl Grant, in an interview in 1997, described some of the rules that governed the lives of girls within the Alexandra Home and later at Ngala as "really very archaic". She found it hard herself to live within those rules and tried to change things little by little once she had been appointed Matron in 1959, explaining "it was what happened in that day and age".²¹⁹ In recording her public apology she said:

Adoption is a very difficult thing...when we think about stolen children. We're not only thinking about Aboriginal children. It was a culture that was very hard on some young girls: there was no other thing for them but the babies to be adopted. I always had a feeling for that land I still do, and I understand the cries of some of those people.²²⁰

²¹² Ngala records 6093A/84.

²¹³ Ngala records 6093A/84.

²¹⁴ Beryl Grant interview.

²¹⁵ Ngala Records 6093A/169 Matron Matthews report 1956, Battye Library.

²¹⁶ Friends of Ngala Oral History Program OH2631/6 Battye Library, name withheld by request; Beryl Grant interview.

²¹⁷ Beryl Grant interview; Swain with Howe detail similar regimes of hard work and isolation in Victorian homes for single expectant mothers, 78-80.

²¹⁸ Submission 97, *Forgotten Australians*.

²¹⁹ OH/2795, Beryl Grant, Battye Library.

²²⁰ OH/2795, Beryl Grant, Battye Library.

Both the Home of the Good Shepherd and the Alexandra Home had their origins in the charity of the Christian religious impulse. Their mission was to rescue and succour women, particularly “fallen women”. In the many years of their good works, they each developed a particular ethos that demanded obedience and penitence in return for the care they provided. Both the state and the community were content to accept without question whatever services religious organisations provided. In the 1950s such organisations were still felt to be the appropriate bodies to minister to women (and children) in need: the drain on the public purse was minimised and whatever problems existed were kept from view thus contributing to a culture of public denial. If petty tyrannies were imposed upon the residents of such institutions they went unchallenged in the light of the high standing of both Homes and the belief that they were, no doubt, well deserved. The next chapter continues to examine punitive attitudes towards young women and issues of denial in the discussion of the adoption process in Western Australia in the period.

Chapter Four – Adoption.

The trauma of relinquishing her baby to adoption in 1957 remained with Barbara Maison for many years. She felt she had been forced into giving up her child and denied information that would have enabled her and her boyfriend to keep it. This chapter explores some aspects of adoption in the 1950s, the problems posed by pre-marital sex and the difficulties single women faced in keeping a child once it was born. The reality, for Barbara Maison, was that without the financial and physical support of her parents, it would have been almost impossible for her to keep her child.

Western Australia had enacted legislation on adoption with the 1896 *Adoption of Children Act*. According to Rosemary Kerr, the Act was modelled upon New Zealand legislation and in turn became a model for other Australian states.²²¹ Adoption applications were ruled upon by a judge of the Supreme Court who decided if the prospective parents were suitable to adopt a child. The consent of the relinquishing parents was required in writing unless the child was designated as “deserted”, that is, was not being maintained by its parents or guardian, or its mother in the case of an illegitimate child. Initially the provisions for adopting male and female children were different: a husband and wife, or a married man or woman could adopt a female child. A male child could be adopted by a husband and wife or any unmarried man or unmarried woman. This anomaly was corrected with *Amendment No. 5 of 1916*. That the complexities of the process of adoption have increased over the one hundred years between the 1896 Act and the 1994 Act, including the major revisions of the 1964 Act, is noticeable when examining the legislation: the 1896 Act has four pages, the 1964 Act nineteen, and the 1994 Act over 150 pages, with subsequent amendments.

The era under discussion has been described by Kate Inglis as one of “sexual repression and rapid social change”.²²² A 1949 amendment to the original Adoption Act might now designate the children of unmarried mothers as “ex-nuptial” rather than “illegitimate” but public attitudes towards pregnant single women had not changed:

(we) knew all about her, but we rarely saw her. She disappeared. Either into a hasty marriage or away to that vague place girls said to be “in trouble” went to. She had to go away. This was both a statement of fact and a

²²¹ Rosemary Kerr, “The Appeal of Blue Eyes: Adoption, Citizenship and Eugenics in Western Australia During the Interwar Years”, 3-12 in *On the Edge: Refereed Proceedings of the 4th Annual Curtin Humanities Post Graduate Research Conference, 2000*. Eds. Gemma Edeson & Cathy Cupitt (Perth: Black Swan Press, 2001).

²²² Kate Inglis, *Living Mistakes: Mothers who consented to adoption*. (North Sydney: George Allen & Unwin Australia Pty Ltd, 1984) 9.

euphemism. She was invisible as a pregnant woman and her motherhood was described as ‘unmarried’ to indicate it was not like the mother-hood of other women.²²³

Government policy in Western Australia after the First World War encouraged adoption as a solution to the economic problem of maintaining single women and their babies. By contrast, Swain with Howe claim that in Victoria the distinct shift towards adoption took place from the 1930s onwards, emphasising the welfare of the child alone, rather than both mother and child in unmarried pregnancies. There were correspondingly changes in the attitudes of:

doctors, clergymen, social workers and the mothers of the single mothers themselves, all of whom advocated the relinquishment of the child. Adoption had become *the solution* to the problem of the single mother and her child.²²⁴

Adoption legislation in Western Australia being the first enacted in Australia, these changes in attitude from concern for both mother and baby, to the promotion of adoption took place much earlier. In the 1890s the initial House of Mercy rules had demanded that girls admitted stay for at least six months in order to become close to their babies and want to keep them.²²⁵ By 1927, Kerr cites a state government report as claiming that Western Australia, with regard to “The placing out of young children for adoption” was, in proportion to its population, doing more “than any other similar public authority in any part of the world”.²²⁶ Kerr lists the four factors that drove the adoption policy. They were “national efficiency”, a belief, with eugenic undertones, that a large white population would protect the country in future. There had been heavy loss of male life in the war which affected population growth. Infant survival rates had improved, and adoption was seen as contributing to that improvement. Finally there was the economic factor. Kerr states that the annual reports of the Child Welfare Department regularly listed the savings in maintenance costs by the adoption of children.²²⁷ During the Second World War Western Australia was still described as a “poor community”, with a small population providing a limited revenue base.²²⁸

²²³ *Amendment to Adoption of Children Act No. 22 of 1949*, Clause 3(b); Inglis, 9.

²²⁴ Shurlee Swain with Renate Howe, *Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment and Survival in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 140-141.

²²⁵ Ngala Mothercraft and Training Home records 6093A/180, Batty Library.

²²⁶ Kerr, 3.

²²⁷ Kerr, 6.

²²⁸ Penelope Hetherington, “Families and Children in Wartime Western Australia”, 94-105, in *On the Homefront: Western Australia and World War II*, ed. Jenny Gregory, (Nedlands, UWA Press 1996).

By the 1950s the first three imperatives for state encouragement of adoption had lost their impact. But the economic factor remained.²²⁹ The niggardliness of government support for children was mentioned in the 1953 Hicks report cited by the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 2003 in an article on the work of children in religious-run laundries. The report itself was commissioned by the Labor government of the day but never tabled in spite of persistent Opposition questioning, suggesting its findings were detrimental to the government. Penelope Hetherington argues that the lack of spending on children's welfare could be seen as "reflecting a non-interventionist ideology".²³⁰ This is supported by Inglis' contention that the philosophy behind welfare provisions "of which adoption was and is a part, was drawn from the British Poor Laws practice and philosophy" of previous centuries and based on the idea that "poverty and social vulnerability sprang from innate defects in the needy."²³¹ Inglis terms this "residualist" policy, that is, an ideological belief that society consists of individuals and responsibility for support resides with the family.²³² State assistance is only provided under extreme circumstances for a limited period of time and to limited categories of people.

Economic factors as well as lack of social acceptance pressured young women into relinquishing their babies. There were no provisions in employment for maternity leave. Girls who left a job because they were visibly pregnant might enter one of the three homes then open to unmarried mothers, that is the Alexandra Home, the Salvation Army Hillcrest Home at North Fremantle and St Margaret's Home then in Subiaco (now Wembley)²³³. But they then had the problem of finding employment again after a gap of some months, and there were no equal wages for women. As has been seen in the chapter on the Child Welfare Act, with no widow's pensions or supporting parents' benefits, state financial support was limited to the six week period before and after the birth of the child. It was not until 1961 that some financial assistance became available to mothers over 16 years of age, under the *Welfare and Assistance Act*, but the amount of money was reduced proportionately if the mother was aged between 16 and 21 years.²³⁴ Under Clause 4(a) a woman who satisfied the Minister that she was without adequate support and had no means of subsistence, could claim financial help, as could

²²⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 24, 2003.

²³⁰ Hetherington, 99.

²³¹ Inglis, 5.

²³² Inglis, 5.

²³³ Friends of Ngala Oral History Program OH2631/6. Battye Library. Name withheld by request.

²³⁴ Friends of Ngala Oral History Program OH2631/6. Battye Library. Name withheld by request.

any child in the same position (clause (b)).²³⁵ However, moral judgements remained enshrined in welfare law. Specifically excluded were children “born to the wife as a result of any act of adultery committed by her during her marriage” unless the child had already been accepted by the husband.²³⁶

Since 1941 the Child Welfare Department had helped women to gain maintenance for their child from its father.²³⁷ But this involved an application to the Children’s Court for an affiliation order, which might be granted after court discussion of when and where sexual intercourse took place, and whether it was likely that the man was the father of the child.²³⁸ If the man accepted responsibility, or was adjudged to be the father of the child, maintenance was then granted. In the early 1950s this was usually at the rate of a £1 per week.²³⁹ Court ordered maintenance was miserly: the Child Welfare Department was paying foster mothers £1.15 a week to support a foster child in 1956.²⁴⁰ But in 1957 at a lengthy hearing in the Children’s Court where the young man willingly swore to paternity of the child, £1.10 was deemed to be sufficient out of a wage of £16 per week.²⁴¹ Though the parents were discussing marriage, the sexual details of their relationship were still aired in court.²⁴² Since these amounts of maintenance awarded were insufficient to keep both mother and child employment was still necessary, and some form of child care. The only type of employment available which accepted mother and child together was domestic work. Child care facilities hardly existed. Beryl Grant could only remember two: that run by the Children’s Protection Society in Beaufort Street, and the Esme Fletcher Centre in Fremantle.²⁴³ If the child was put into full foster care, the mother still had to pay the cost, which would have been impossible unless she had a very well paid job.²⁴⁴

Several local sources testify to the great desire women had to keep their babies rather than relinquish them. The Child Welfare Officer responsible for adoptions from 1957 stated “most of the girls made the decision not because they didn’t want to keep the baby but because they wanted to give the baby an opportunity, and this is the way

²³⁵ *Welfare & Assistance Act No. 22 of 1961*, (Western Australia) Clause 4 (a) and (b).

²³⁶ *Welfare & Assistance Act No. 22 of 1961*, (Western Australia) Section 12, Clause (3).

²³⁷ Hetherington, 98.

²³⁸ Perth Children’s Court Evidence Book 2493/30, State Records Office of Western Australia, (hereinafter referred to as SROWA) for example.

²³⁹ Perth Children’s Court Evidence Book 2493/30, SROWA.

²⁴⁰ Annual report of the Child Welfare Department for the year ended 30 June 1956. Battye Library.

²⁴¹ At this time the state basic wage for men was £13.12.9d. *Statistical Register of Western Australia for 1959-60*.

²⁴² Perth Children’s Court Evidence Book 2495/65, SROWA.

²⁴³ OH2795, Beryl Grant, Battye Library..

²⁴⁴ Ngala Oral History Program OH2631/6. Battye Library. Name withheld by request.

they felt that it was best to be done”.²⁴⁵ A Mothercraft nurse who started her training in 1949 at the Alexandra Home described the struggles of girls who tried to keep their babies:

usually it was one room in a boarding house and they couldn't...they tried to work but they couldn't support them. The babies used to come. Honestly it would be like a...the police would bring these little babies in like Belsen camp...there were ribs sticking out, grey and they had that terrible starvation smell about them....I don't blame the girls, they were desperate to try and keep them. They used to put them in drawers in their rooms and everything to try and hold on to them, but they couldn't...²⁴⁶

These then were the crucial pressures forcing women to relinquish their babies to the waiting arms of prospective adopting parents. At the end of June 1957 the Child Welfare Department reported there were “still very few babies becoming available for adoption and the number of applicants desiring a baby or older child...is still increasing”.²⁴⁷ At this time there were 131 approved applicants on the waiting list with the Department, more than half of whom wanted to adopt a second child.²⁴⁸ But this was the official Departmental waiting list, which does not take into account the adoptions likely to be arranged through solicitors (as occurred in Barbara Maison's case).²⁴⁹ Prospective adopting parents were often notified of an available baby by their local doctor (again, as in Barbara Maison's case) or local maternity hospitals, and the Alexandra Home arranged its own adoptions.²⁵⁰ There seems to have been some competition to adopt babies as the later amendments to the *Adoption of Children Act 1964* added a clause under Section 9 that withdrew consent to adoption being given before the birth of the child. Another clause prohibited consent being given within seven days of the baby's birth although this could be circumvented if it was the opinion of a doctor or registered midwife that the mother was in a fit condition to give consent.²⁵¹

When adoption had high levels of approval at both government and community levels, and the so-called best interests of the child were seen as paramount, the relinquishment of a baby became simply a process of transfer in which the physical and

²⁴⁵ Ngala Oral History Program OH2631/6. Battye Library. Name withheld by request.

²⁴⁶ Ngala Oral History Program OH2631/4 Battye Library. Source unable to be contacted.

²⁴⁷ Annual report of the Child Welfare Department for the year ended 30th June 1957, Battye Library.

²⁴⁸ Annual report of the Child Welfare Department for the year ended 30th June 1957, Battye Library.

²⁴⁹ Submission 97, *Forgotten Australians*.

²⁵⁰ Ngala Oral History Program OH2631/6 Name withheld by request. Battye Library.

²⁵¹ *Adoption of Children Act No. 100 of 1964*, (Western Australia) Section 9,4F(f); Section 94F(2).

emotional effects on the birth mother were irrelevant. Barbara Maison described signing the documents as being like consigning “a tiny human being to a life with strangers, as though we were sending a parcel through the mail. Easier in fact, we didn’t have to pay a penny for the transaction!”²⁵² Lack of information regarding rights preceded this transfer. No one informed her of what little financial help there was available, such as the baby bonus and help with the layette. It was not explained to her that it was not compulsory for her to sign the papers. When the hospital Almoner brought Barbara Maison the birth registration form, against advice, she defiantly filled in the father’s name.²⁵³ On the final birth certificate this was omitted. This inhumane treatment of unmarried mothers during the birth process and the subsequent relinquishment of a child were not specific to Western Australia. Barbara Maison’s experience is mirrored by the experiences of women in Victoria and Tasmania: both medical and nursing staff were callous, displaying a degree of cruelty during the women’s labour.²⁵⁴ New born babies were hidden from their mothers: Barbara Maison’s view of her child was deliberately obstructed by a nurse; in Victoria a woman had a towel thrown over her face to prevent her from seeing her baby. Tasmanian women reported that a sheet was used to block any view of the baby. Submissions to the Tasmanian Joint Select Committee on Adoption and Related Services, 1950-1988 told of documentation being covered when they signed authorisation forms and one young couple, similar in age and commitment to Barbara Maison and her boyfriend, found that their baby was adopted out without even their consent.²⁵⁵ Nor were the 1950s the era of the highest number of adoptions in Western Australia. The Child Welfare Department field officer suggested that the number of babies adopted increased in the 1960s and peaked around 1971.²⁵⁶ Government economic inadequacy alone cannot explain the social conservatism which accepted and condoned the experiences and practices detailed here and which continued for some decades after the Second World War.

Amendments to the original 1896 *Adoption of Children Act* progressively made the details of adoption more secret and undermined the rights of the natural parents. *Amendment 57 of 1926* to the Act enabled amendment of the relinquished child’s

²⁵² Submission 97, *Forgotten Australians*.

²⁵³ Submission 97, *Forgotten Australians*.

²⁵⁴ see particularly Swain with Howe, 88 where instructions were given that no pain relief be administered, during birth, and no episiotomy performed.

²⁵⁵ Parliament of Tasmania. Joint Select Committee. *Adoption and Related Services, 1950-1988*, 7. Available at <http://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/Ctee/reports/adopt.pdf>

²⁵⁶ Ngala Oral History Program OH2631/6. Batty Library. Name withheld by request.

original birth certificate to record the adoption, with details of the process “not open for inspection unless with the approval of the Registrar General”.²⁵⁷ *Amendment 22 of 1949* provided for the re-registration of the child with a new birth certificate.²⁵⁸ The original birth certificate was not open to inspection. The 1949 amendment allowed the judge to dispense with the consent of the “putative father of an ex-nuptial child”. It also stated that the judge:

may, if of opinion that any parent or legal guardian is for any reason unfit to have the custody of the child, including badness of character, unsoundness of mind, or aversion or apathy towards the child, and that notice of the application for the order of adoption has been given to the parent or guardian, dispense with the consent of that parent or guardian.²⁵⁹

Children adopted through the Department for Child Welfare had to be medically examined before adoption. Some children were made unavailable for adoption, for example, those born as a result of incest, or with hereditary mental conditions. The Department reported in 1952 that “Where the parentage is at all doubtful and the health of the child in question, legal adoption is not considered”.²⁶⁰ Kerr has argued that eugenicist views led the insistence that only perfect children be made available for adoption in the inter war period.²⁶¹ But we have seen that the language of eugenics was still used by the Department in the 1950s in its request to the Alexandra Home to consider taking more “defective children”.²⁶² Indeed, the 1964 amendments to the *Adoption Act* made it an offence to transfer the custody of a child in adoption unless it had been medically certified within the previous three weeks as in good health and free from physical and mental defect, or alternatively, specifying any complaint or physical or mental defect. The fine for this offence was fifty pounds.²⁶³

The Act makes no limitations or specifications on the all important issue of revocation of consent, only acknowledging that revocation did occur. Barbara Maison believed she had 30 days in which to withdraw her consent. According to the Child Welfare Department adoption officer, until the 1964 amendments “there was no period before 1964 the mother's consent was final”.²⁶⁴ The 30 day period during which the

²⁵⁷ *Adoption of Children Act Amendment No. 57 of 1926* (Western Australia).

²⁵⁸ *Adoption of Children Act Amendment No. 22 of 1949* (Western Australia).

²⁵⁹ *Adoption of Children Act Amendment No. 22 of 1949* (Western Australia).

²⁶⁰ Annual report of the Child Welfare Department for the year ended 30 June, 1952, Battye Library.

²⁶¹ Kerr, 7.

²⁶² Ngala Mothercraft and Training Home records, 6093A/79, Battye Library.

²⁶³ *Adoption of Children Act No. 100 of 1964*. (Western Australia)

²⁶⁴ Ngala Oral History Program OH2631/6. Battye Library. Name withheld by request.

birth mother could revoke her consent to the adoption was in fact introduced in 1964 in order to “remedy the present situation where the mother of the child can revoke her consent at any time and verbally up to the moment when a judge grants the order of adoption”.²⁶⁵ The adoption application for Barbara Maison’s child was processed by a private solicitor who obviously never mentioned to her that her consent could be revoked.²⁶⁶ The Child Welfare Department officer on the other hand claimed that it was departmental policy to be “non-committal. It was to try not to influence the girl either way, either to keep the child or place it for adoption”. At this time the sole adoption officer was untrained and not legally qualified herself, although she had access to legal advice within the department. She reported on each application to the Director who forwarded his decision on the suitability of applicants together with the report to the Court for judgement.²⁶⁷

There were 277 applications for adoption granted to the 30th June 1957 and a total of 309 for the entire year.²⁶⁸ Of these only 50 were arranged through the Department for Child Welfare, the remainder were arranged through private solicitors. The Department complained bitterly that although the number of adoption orders had doubled in the seventeen years since 1939-40 from 133 to 277, the number of applications handled by the Department itself had continued to decline, dropping from 122 in 1939-40 when only 11 were arranged by solicitors. In the seventeen years listed by the 1957 report, the number of adoptions had risen steadily, only faltering in 1942-1943, (140) possibly as a response to the uncertainty surrounding the war and the fall of Singapore. The waiting period for a child adopted through the Department was then three years. Nurses and doctors were a much quicker source of information on available babies and solicitors were “on the door getting consents signed pretty soon after the baby was born”.²⁶⁹ In spite of the fierce competition to adopt a baby, statistics show that a total of 795 ex nuptial births occurred state wide in 1957 to the end of December and the number of applications for adoption processed in the same period was 309.²⁷⁰

It is difficult to correlate adoption figures with ex-nuptial birth and total birth statistics, including percentages. Information from Child Welfare Department reports is based on June to June figures. Statistics from the *Statistical Register of Western*

²⁶⁵ *Parliamentary Debates Volume 169 of 1964*, 2376 (Western Australia).

²⁶⁶ Submission 97, *Forgotten Australians*.

²⁶⁷ Ngala Oral History Program OH2631/6 Battye Library. Name withheld by request.

²⁶⁸ Annual report of the Child Welfare Department for the year ended 30 June, 1957, Battye Library; Family Court of Western Australia, letter dated January 30, 2008.

²⁶⁹ Ngala Oral History Program OH2631/6. Battye Library. Name withheld by request.

²⁷⁰ *Statistical Register of Western Australia for 1957-58*; Family Court of Western Australia, letter dated 30 January 2008.

Australia are based on a January to December year, and categories may change over the periods under study. Adoption applications, where available, are divided between those arranged privately and by the Child Welfare Department with its lengthy waiting periods. Nevertheless some rough conclusions may be drawn. The ex-nuptial birth numbers seem to mirror the yearly total births. For example, in 1930 total births were 9,200, which included 374 ex-nuptial births.²⁷¹ When total births dropped in 1934 to 7,801, ex-nuptial births dropped also to 291. By 1939 after a period of decline, total births had recovered to 9,036 and accordingly ex-nuptial births, although more uneven in their rise and fall during the decade were 333.²⁷² The ex-nuptial birth rate per 1,000 women ranged from 2.93 at the beginning of the decade to 2.12 at the end.²⁷³ Kerr has stated that adoption became so popular during the interwar period that the highest number of applications for adoption was processed during the depression years 1932-33 for 121 babies.²⁷⁴ However this high peak may have no connection with the lower ex nuptial birth rate of 333 for 1932 and 345 for 1933 (both years being January to December) since Kerr also intimates that the greatest demand was for girls aged one to two, that is those possibly born in 1930 or 1931 when birth numbers were higher (a total of 8,549 for 1931, including 368 ex-nuptial).²⁷⁵ The preference for girls over boys was similar in Victoria in the same era with Swain with Howe quoting that “Girls were ‘snapped like star bargains’ and the boys left behind”.²⁷⁶

In the 1950s total births rose steadily from 14,228 in a population of 572,649 in 1950 to 17,111 in a population of 726,489 in 1959 and the ex-nuptial numbers rose accordingly from 521 to 904.²⁷⁷ The rate, however, of ex-nuptial births per 1,000 women aged 15 and over increased from 2.7 in 1950 to 3.33 in 1955 (the only years for which these figures are available).²⁷⁸ The nuptial and ex-nuptial birth rates were higher in Western Australia for 1954 than in the rest of Australia, being 74.40 per 1,000 women aged 15 and over, compared to 63.47, and 3.33 compared to 2.52 respectively.²⁷⁹ Adoption figures are available for 1950-1958 for years ending 30th June and ranged from 275 for the year ending June 1951 to 290 for the year ending June 1958. Once again, although there are some fluctuations, the number of adoptions is

²⁷¹ *Statistical Register of Western Australia for 1930-31.*

²⁷² *Statistical Register of Western Australia for year 1939-40.*

²⁷³ *Statistical Registers of Western Australia for 1930-31 and 1939-40.*

²⁷⁴ Kerr, 9.

²⁷⁵ Kerr, 9; *Statistical Register of Western Australia for 1935-36.*

²⁷⁶ Swain with Howe, 139.

²⁷⁷ *Statistical Register of Western Australia for 1959-60.*

²⁷⁸ *Statistical Register of Western Australia for 1955-56.*

²⁷⁹ *Statistical Register of Western Australia for 1955-56.*

always less than half the number of ex-nuptial births.²⁸⁰ In the 1950s the youngest mothers of ex-nuptial children were aged 13 but the greatest number of single mothers were aged 21-24 with the exception of 1950 and 1953 when the highest concentration was in the age group 25-29.²⁸¹ The youngest married mothers were aged 14, and in the year Barbara Maison was refused permission to marry at 17, ages ranged from 14: there were 3 married women aged 15, 34 aged 16, 96 aged seventeen and 345 aged 18.²⁸² These ages suggest that early marriage was seen as a solution to the problem posed by single pregnancy.

As has been noted above, less than half of all ex-nuptial children in Western Australia were relinquished for adoption in the 1950s. Although this sample is from a short time period, the figures are in keeping with Audrey Marshall and Margaret McDonald's conclusion that "during the decades of social conservatism and condemnation of ex-nuptial pregnancy....a majority of these mothers kept their children".²⁸³ For women to retain their babies, family support was crucial.²⁸⁴ Of the many children who were not relinquished, some were institutionalised, becoming either wards of the state, or going into "private care".²⁸⁵ In 1957, St Vincent's Foundling Home, the largest institution in Perth for under six year olds, had a total of 152 children in residence, of whom 92 were noted as "private admissions" which included 36 "private foster children".²⁸⁶ The numbers of private children in the Foundling Home remained high during the 1960s, as did the rate of ex-nuptial births and the numbers of adoptions. It cannot therefore be argued that the 1950s were exceptional with regard to the practice of adoption and relinquishment of babies, or the treatment of unmarried mothers. What distinguishes the 1950s perhaps is the repression and restriction of young women.

The 1950s have become in public perceptions of an imagined past, as John Murphy discusses in the introduction to *Imagining the Fifties*, a sort of metaphor for more contemporary political values, and viewed either as stultifyingly dull or as a time

²⁸⁰ For adoption figures, see Annual reports of the Child Welfare Department for the years ending 1957 and 1958; for numbers of births and ex-nuptial births, see the Statistical Registers of Western Australia for 1950 to 1959.

²⁸¹ *Statistical Registers of Western Australia for 1950-51 to 1959-60*.

²⁸² *Statistical Register of Western Australia for 1957-58*.

²⁸³ Audrey Marshall and Margaret McDonald. *The Many-Sided Triangle. Adoption in Australia*. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 46.

²⁸⁴ Marshall and McDonald, 48; OH2631/6. Battye Library. Name withheld by request. .

²⁸⁵ The field adoption officer for the CWD stated that the babies of state wards who became pregnant could also become wards of the state but were institutionalised separately. Ngala Oral History Program OH2631/6. Battye Library. Name withheld by request.

²⁸⁶ *Signposts: A Guide for children and young people in care in Western Australia from 1920*. Perth: Information Services, Department for Community Development, 2004.

of domestic stability and security, according to the ideological viewpoint. The discourse then elaborates on the connection made during the '50s between the role of the family, independent and self reliant, and the responsibilities of good citizenship. Contradiction lay in Menzies' promotion of the image of a classless society: but it was a society based on conservative middle-class values.²⁸⁷ At the same time, organised religion flourished, there being major Australian religious revivals in 1953 (Roman Catholic) and 1959 (Protestant).²⁸⁸ In Perth at the 1954 census, 88.87 percent of the population defined itself as Christian.²⁸⁹ Linking the increase in the birth rate in the 1950s to the increase in churches built and baptisms recorded, David Hilliard states that marriage, home and family were at the "centre of Australian life". They were reinforced by the political culture of the Menzies government, which saw the private and domestic sphere – the home – as a barrier against alien and radical influences and a secure basis for conservative political values.²⁹⁰ The strength of organised religion, a dominant ideology of social conservatism and an emphasis on the traditional family were the factors that underlay the rigid prescription for acceptable behaviour for women. And the political emphasis on notions of self reliance and independence made it unlikely that pensions or allowances would be made available to those who deviated from prescribed roles.

This focus on home and domestic life in the 1950s meant that women were expected to marry and have children. In 1954 less than one in three women aged 15-64 were employed (and only 31% of these women were married).²⁹¹ The marriage age dropped. In the first half of the decade, the median age at marriage was 25 for men and 22.1 for women. By 1961 the ages were 24.2 and 21.3 respectively.²⁹² At the same time births increased, and women gave birth at a younger age, although the highest number of children born to married women in Western Australia was in the age group 25 to 29.²⁹³ A prevailing culture emphasising the role of women as stay-at-home wives and mothers led the expectation that being married included having children; children were a necessary part of participation in mainstream society. For those who were

²⁸⁷ John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*. (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2000), 1-30.

²⁸⁸ David Hilliard, "God in the suburbs: the religious culture of Australian cities in the 1950s", in *Australian Historical Studies*. Vol. 24, October 1991, 399-419.

²⁸⁹ Hilliard, 401.

²⁹⁰ David Hilliard, "Church Family and Sexuality in Australia in the 1950s", in *Australian Historical Studies*., V28, no. 109, October 1997, 133-146.

²⁹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 4102.0 - Australian Social Trends, 1998.

²⁹² Marriage and family in Australia. Australia Now: A Statistical Profile. available at: www.aph.gov.au/House/committee/laca/Famserv/chap2pdf- accessed 29 November 2007.

²⁹³ Hilliard, "God in the suburbs", 404; *Statistical Registers of Western Australia for years 1950-51 to 1959-60*.

unable to procreate, adoption must have been seen as a logical, even necessary step, and one which was approved and to some degree regulated by governments. Marshall and McDonald, writing in 2001, estimated that since the first legislation in 1896, over 200,000 children had been adopted throughout Australia. The majority of these children were ex-nuptial, although at least a third was adopted by natural parents and relatives.²⁹⁴

Women were giving birth at a younger age in the 1950s and despite social conservatism, sexual activity before marriage was taking place, since the figures cited previously on the ages of girls under 21 married in 1957 are taken from a table in the *Statistical Register of Western Australia for 1957-58*. This recorded the period of time, up to six months, and the duration of the marriage before the birth of the first child, a curious statistic indeed to record, but one which shows clearly the reason for such youthful marriage. Gordon A Carmichael suggests that there was indeed a change in sexual behaviour from 1947 onwards, one which cannot be passed off as due to changing marriage patterns, but rather was a result of “substantial loss of parental control over dating and courtship”.²⁹⁵ Moreover full employment gave greater access to cars – “makeshift bedrooms”, and “privacy...certainly beyond the capacity of parents to exercise physical oversight” factors which contributed to increases in the non-marital birth rate in the 1960s.²⁹⁶ Jon Stratton, on the other hand, argues that pre-marital sex was traditionally part of working class culture, more usually as a pre-cursor to marriage. Condemnation of pre-marital sex came from the middle-classes who believed that the family and marriage were at the centre of social order and sex outside marriage threatened the stability of society.²⁹⁷

But pre-marital sex came with the possible consequence of pregnancy, since access to birth control, or even knowledge about the possibility of using birth control was so limited. Nicole Moore has noted that even the word “contraception” was banned on Australian radio until the 1960s.²⁹⁸ Moreover for much of the first half of the 20th century, literature on birth control was banned under a system of censorship which classed information about sex and sexual practices as ‘obscene’, and which focussed on the “targeting of non-professional, cheap and easily accessible publications whose

²⁹⁴ Marshall and McDonald, 46-47. Inglis, Introduction x, suggests a figure of 250,000.

²⁹⁵ Gordon A Carmichael. “From floating brothels to suburban semirespectability: two centuries of non-marital pregnancy in Australia”, in *Journal of Family History*, July 1996, 281-316.

²⁹⁶ Carmichael, 5.

²⁹⁷ Jon Stratton, *The Young Ones*. (Perth WA: Black Swan Press, 1992), 170.

²⁹⁸ Moore, Nicole, “Treasonous Sex: Birth Control Obscenity Censorship and White Australia”, in *Australian Feminist Studies*, Vol. 20, no. 48, November 2005, 319-342.

evident potential market was large". The Customs Department also banned the importation of contraceptive devices, a ban which had no legal basis but which went "unchallenged for fifty years" and was only dropped in the 1960s.²⁹⁹ For married women contraceptives and information about them was difficult to obtain, for single women the situation was far more difficult.³⁰⁰ Stratton states that before use of the contraceptive pill became widespread, contraception developed as a mainly male responsibility in the 1940s and 1950s, in contrast to earlier working class behaviour when sex before marriage was accepted as leading to marriage when pregnancy occurred. The main methods of birth control used were withdrawal and condoms, often difficult for young men under 18 to obtain, as chemists refused to supply them.³⁰¹ Abortion had also been used by the working classes as the principal method of birth control in the period between the two world wars, but was not an easy option for girls "in trouble".³⁰²

It is unlikely that Barbara Maison and her boyfriend would have thought of abortion as a response to her pregnancy. They were in love and wanted to marry. If they had considered the possibility of what was then an illegal operation, it is unlikely that Barbara's partner, young enough to be at risk of being charged with unlawful carnal knowledge, would have had access to the sort of networks of information that Suellen Murray suggests existed amongst men regarding access to abortionists.³⁰³ Murray also suggests that there is some evidence that undetected networks of information existed amongst women in the period 1920-1950 and that chemists were key links in the chain of information.³⁰⁴ It is impossible to estimate the numbers of women who ventured both legally and illegally to obtain abortions in the 1950s since information on the subject was so cloaked in righteous indignation. Charges of abortion were laid in the courts in the years 1951, 1952, 1954, 1956 and 1958. Nineteen people were charged in that period, including one juvenile, and ten convicted in the Higher Courts. In 1956 one male and three females were charged and all convicted in the District Court, no doubt making unpleasant reading in the daily paper and the prospect even more terrifying for

²⁹⁹ Moore, 321-323.

³⁰⁰ For example, the Family Planning Association of NSW did not make contraceptive advice available to single women until 1974 see Marshall & McDonald, 2.

³⁰¹ Stratton, 177-180.

³⁰² Stratton, 177-180.

³⁰³ Suellen Murray, "Breaking the Rules", 223-241 in *Sexuality and Gender in History*. in Eds. Penelope Hetherington and Philippa Maddern. (Nedlands: U.W.A.: Centre for Western Australian History, 1993), 230.

³⁰⁴ Murray, 231.

young women contemplating the procedure.³⁰⁵ Murray cites Reekie who states there were 1,643 abortion cases admitted to the Perth Public Hospital between 1937 and 1939.³⁰⁶ This is a very large number of cases indeed. The Alexandra Home Mothercraft nurse cited earlier, in praising those girls who had their babies, recollected what she had seen as a nursing aide “abortions were shocking in those days, the things that used to happen with abortions...I used to see the deaths from abortions...”³⁰⁷ For the single mother, without the emotional and financial support of family, relinquishment of her baby to adoption was the only socially and medically approved alternative.

³⁰⁵ These statistics are taken from the *Statistical Registers of Western Australia* for the years between 1950-51 and 1959-1960 which lists charges and convictions only.

³⁰⁶ Murray, 224.

³⁰⁷ Ngala Oral History Program OH2631/4 Batty Library. Source unable to be contacted.

Chapter Five – Policing Bad Girls.

In order to place Barbara Maison's experiences of being young, pregnant and unmarried, within the milieu of the 1950s, this chapter examines the disproportionate, punitive emphasis placed upon other girls who stepped outside society's moral boundaries. At that time, many groups of women struggled under disadvantage. There were for example, widowed and divorced women, discussed in Chapter 2, who lacked adequate financial support. There was discrimination in the work force, no equal pay, and restrictions on married women working. Child care services were virtually non-existent and there was no support for families struggling with the chronic illness or disability of either a parent or child. If relatives were unable or unwilling to help, children were often institutionalised as a result. But none of these conditions aroused public sympathy at large. What did engage public interest and then condemnation was the behaviour of young people, but in particular young women, the girls discovered to have "done it" and regarded as moral delinquents, but who were in the language of the era, often more sinned against than sinning. If we consider that the female population aged less than 18 years was 109,142 in 1954, it is noticeable that the proportion of young women written about in the *West Australian* or the Perth Children's Court Evidence Books was actually quite small.³⁰⁸ But the attention devoted to this group can be understood by reading Madeleine Hamilton's analysis of the Melbourne *Truth's* similar preoccupation with adolescent female sexuality in the 1950s, which she claims reached an "obsessive peak" in the mid 1950s and highlighted "the dominant position the sexually active teenage girl occupied in Western Culture during this period: as an object of immense desire, but by law untouchable and officially sexually unavailable".³⁰⁹ Official responses to the behaviour of young women who came to the attention of the law were severe. This was a time when even a mother's admission of drinking wine could be used as part of evidence to convict her teenage daughter of being neglected and milk bars could be placed out of bounds to teenagers by court order.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ *Western Australian Year Book 1974*, Battye Library.

³⁰⁹ Madeleine Hamilton, "Delilah aged 14!": The Melbourne Truth and the 1950s teenage girl". *Lilith*, no.13, 2004: 38-50. <http://0-search.informit.com.au/library.ecu.edu.au:80/fullText;dn=200502096;res=APAFT> > ISSN: 0813-8990. (accessed November 27, 2008).

³¹⁰ Perth Children's Court Evidence Book 2495/62, State Records Office of Western Australia (hereinafter referred to as SROWA).

Records of Aboriginal girls were still marked “native” and could be referred to the “Native Welfare Department”.

The total number of offences committed by Western Australian children in 1957 was 4,966: 4,760 by males and 206 by females, showing that male offenders overwhelmingly outnumbered female offenders. The majority of offences for which “children”, that is, those under the age of eighteen were charged were minor theft and petty traffic offences, some of which were very petty indeed, such as riding a bicycle at night without a lamp. The ages of boys ranged from 6 to 17 and included twenty 8 year olds. Girls’ ages ranged from ten (one charged with stealing and receiving) to 17, which was the age group with the highest number of female offenders (49). The greatest number of offences was, as stated above, traffic offences committed by males, (2037), with a much smaller number committed by females (56). Four boys and two girls were charged with being “uncontrollable”.³¹¹ There were 511 charges laid in the Perth Children’s Court in January, approximately twenty of which related to custody and maintenance matters and a further small number were against adult males, including one charge of “having evil designs”, which still left a considerable number of children and adolescents undergoing court proceedings.³¹² Most of these charges did not leave a record in the Evidence Books, whose pages are filled with the details of application for maintenance of children, or custody of children, or offences by children (and occasionally against them) and which illustrate an extraordinary pre-occupation with sexual activity. Nowhere is this more noticeable than in those cases where young girls were charged with being neglected under Section 4, definition 10 of the *Child Welfare Act of 1947*: “living under such conditions as to indicate that the mental, physical or moral welfare of the child is likely to be in jeopardy”. The *Statistical Register of Western Australia* specifically excluded those charged as neglected, but these were the cases I have researched over a six month period, since the law showed such an interest in the behaviour of girls from as young as eleven ranging through to seventeen.³¹³ Their innocence (“Asked if she had misconducted herself, said she thought so”) and occasional defiance (“she said she will go where she pleases”) speak clearly from the pages of the Evidence Books.³¹⁴

In January 1957, nine girls were charged with being neglected, four of whom were “natives” and three girls were ruled to be “destitute” and committed to the care of

³¹¹ *Statistical Register of Western Australia for 1957-58*.

³¹² Perth Children’s Court Charge Book 2493/70, SROWA.

³¹³ *Statistical Register of Western Australia for 1957-58*.

³¹⁴ Perth Children’s Court Evidence Book 2495/65, SROWA; Perth Children’s Court Evidence 2495/62, SROWA.

the Child Welfare Department.³¹⁵ In the period researched the number of girls who were committed to the care of the Child Welfare Department because they were judged to be “neglected” and living in jeopardy was relatively small. However, the circumstances of the offence, the evidence statements of women police who had questioned the offender and the details of who had attended court for the hearing, as well as the frequent involvement of the Criminal Investigation Branch, signify that these cases were taken far more seriously than their numbers warranted. Sexual activity before the age of sixteen, for a girl, was viewed more gravely than theft, a charge of which might be dismissed without recorded evidence.

This certainly was the view of the Sergeant of Women Police, Ethel Scott, who as late as 1959 wrote in a report to Inspector Broun:

In many cases inquiries into the conduct of girls reveal that sex offences have occurred... there is a moral delinquency just as real and just as serious as the other form. If the youth of this country is to properly assume the role of citizenship, then every aspect of delinquency must be covered, and I contend that not the least is the moral delinquency which is essentially the province of Women Police...³¹⁶

In spite of rigid and unrealistic community attitudes regarding the social behaviour of young women who were working and earning, there was at least an acknowledgement that juvenile pastimes were changing in 1957. Churches were holding rock and roll dances, and the Police had enabled the establishment of an outdoor dance floor for teenagers at Scarborough known as the Snake Pit.³¹⁷ There was ambivalence towards such activities, as is shown in Chapter 6, when participation in a rock and roll contest was used in the evidence which proved a 16 year old girl to be “neglected”.³¹⁸ Court charges against girls and young women continued to reflect a stern and uncompromising paternal attitude, as did the punishments. At the same time, crimes *against* girls and young women received sentences that would be regarded as lenient by today’s standards. There were for example, two charges against adult men in January for unlawfully assaulting girls, one of whom was a child, and the sentences were a fine of £5 and a good behaviour bond of £50 respectively.³¹⁹ Then there was the eleven year old girl, reported for being seen in a car with a man, and interrogated as to sexual activity. She had escaped his advances by getting into the back seat of the car.

³¹⁵ Perth Children’s Court Charge Book 2493/70, SROWA.

³¹⁶ Consignment 430 Item 1958/ 3284v2 Women Police Policy and General, SROWA.

³¹⁷ *The Weekend Mail*, March 23, 1957; *WA’s Defining Moments*, Part Three, 1933-1958. (Perth: The West Australian), 2004.

³¹⁸ *The West Australian*, April 30, 1957.

³¹⁹ Perth Children’s Court Charge Book 2493/70, SROWA.

Unfortunately during the interrogation she admitted to having previously had sex with two boys, and this coupled with her mother being a wine drinker saw her committed to the care of the Child Welfare Department until she was sixteen. The man involved entered into a bond of £50 for contributing to her being a “neglected” child.³²⁰

Hamilton states that in 1950s Victoria the penalties for unlawful carnal knowledge were potentially severe but were likely to be less so if the girl involved had a previous history of sexual activity. Accordingly, girls were ruthlessly cross-examined with a view to proving their promiscuity.³²¹ It is difficult to make a comparison with what occurred in similar circumstances in Western Australia, since the Evidence Books from the Perth Children’s Court (the court in which adults were charged with offences against children) focus on the details of what happened to the girls who were charged with being “neglected” and living in moral jeopardy, and information on male offenders is not available. In the case of 15 year old Sally Bray, we can read of her picnic outing to a National Park, with a group of boys and girls, from which she returned home at 8 pm, smelling of beer, so alarming her mother that she sought help from the Child Welfare Department. The discovery that Sally had also had sex led to her being declared “neglected”, committed to care until she was 18 (pending another home being found for her), and her outing reported in the *West Australian*.³²² Of the male we know only that he was charged with unlawful carnal knowledge and discharged upon entering a bond of £50.³²³ In a similar case, the girl was committed to an institution until 18 (to be released after 3 months on trial), but the two adult males concerned were merely charged with contributing to her neglect and discharged upon entering bonds of £50 each.

More severe penalties were handed out to two young men who were gaoled for having sex with four girls aged 12 to 14 whom they had known for some months.³²⁴ In this instance the penalties may have been more severe because of the young age of the girls and hints of group sex, but there is also the suspicion that their ethnicity influenced the sentencing, since the evidence referred a number of times to their being Italian. What is clear from these cases is that questioning of young girls by women police was rigorous and intended to reveal any recent or past sexual activity, and that girls

³²⁰ Perth Children’s Court Charge Book 2493/79; Perth Children’s Court Evidence Book 2495/62.

³²¹ Hamilton, 39.

³²² Perth Children’s Court Charge Book 2493/70; Perth Children’s Court Evidence Book 2495/62, SROWA (real names are not used); *The West Australian*, February 12, 1957

³²³ Perth Children’s Court Charge Book 2493/70, SROWA.

³²⁴ Perth Children’s Court Charge Book 2493/70; Perth Children’s Court Evidence Book 2495/63, SROWA.

apprehended by women police, or reported to the Child Welfare Department, were charged and their sexual histories made available to the court before charges, if any, were brought against males involved.

The women police unit in 1957 was small in comparison to similar units in other states, even given the smaller population of Western Australia. While New South Wales had 36 women in plain clothes and 18 on school lecturing in 1954, even South Australia had 19 women police. Given the wide ranging nature of the work, Sergeant Ethel Scott, the head of the Western Australian unit, made repeated requests for extra staff to increase the numbers from ten to twelve in 1959.³²⁵ Women police wore plain clothes and until the end of the decade, worked 48 hours a week over six days. They were drawn from the nursing profession, but it was expected that “daughters of good type police should also have a predisposition to the work”. Married women were regarded as unsuitable, being “unable to give undivided attention and loyalty to police work”.³²⁶ Duties of the women police included investigating and following up reports of child neglect, assisting lone elderly women, the “mentally afflicted” and “inebriates” into institutions, being present in court when female witnesses or prisoners were present and searching female prisoners. They also responded to lost children enquiries: parents appear to have been much more careless about their children in the 1950s, since there were 453 lost children enquiries in 1957. In the same year, 171 women and children were “assisted”, in contrast to 18 men. There is little doubt however that the women police saw their principal role as moral police. “The work is essentially preventive and the chief concern is the prevention of misconduct rather than the prosecution of offenders” wrote Ethel Scott in 1949. And again in 1954: “The main object of Women Police is to safeguard the moral welfare of women and children, particularly of girls between the ages of 14 and 21 years”.³²⁷

Safeguarding women and children was carried out through surveillance, that is, the behaviour of women and girls was scrutinised during patrols. Women police patrolled streets, parks and gardens, and also dance halls, hotels, coffee shops and milk bars. They questioned any young girl seen out after 10 o’clock at night and if they suspected “misconduct” the girl was warned and her name recorded. If she was under 18 years of age, her parents were notified. Research has not uncovered a specific definition of what the police considered to be misconduct, but from the use of the term

³²⁵ Consignment 430 Item 1958/3284v2 Women Police Policy and General, SROWA.

³²⁶ Commissioner of Police to Melbourne Commissioner of Police, 16 December 1957, Consignment 430 Item 1958/3284v2 Women Police Policy and General, SROWA.

³²⁷ Consignment 430 Item 1958/3284v2 Women Police Policy and General, SROWA.

in evidence it is obvious it was a euphemism for sexual activity. The first question asked of young girls appears to have been “Have you misconducted yourself?” followed closely by questioning about any absence from employment or breaks in employment. Sometimes the language varied but the intent was always clear. A policewoman stated of Thelma Downs, aged 15: “I asked her why she was not working. She said she left White’s Store on Monday at lunch time. I said have you been going to milk bars. I said have any of those boys interfered with you?” This hapless young woman admitted to paying for “milk drinks” for unemployed male friends and was declared neglected and committed to the care of the Child Welfare Department.³²⁸ She was released to the care of her parents, who had initially reported her. In this instance the state, by way of the police force and the judiciary became involved in reinforcing parental control.

Robert van Krieken has stated that not only is childhood a social institution but that it is now regarded as a social construct, moulded by external rather than internal processes, and that the state has played a major role in the determination of childhood.³²⁹ He argues that during the period he examined, 1890 to 1940, in Australia this construction was a gendered process in which misbehaviour was defined for boys as stealing and disobeying authority figures. Girls’ misbehaviour however was defined in sexual terms, so that:

This meant that if they engaged in sexual activity before marriage, appeared likely to do so, or seemed to encourage other girls to do so, they were regarded as heading towards either permanent promiscuity or prostitution, and defined both as being in ‘moral danger’ and a moral threat to society.³³⁰

Delinquent girls were treated more harshly than boys. Historically, “sexually active girls were regarded as especially dangerous”: they were the youthful mirror of the adult “fallen woman” and the opposite to the only other possible image of woman, “the angel in the house”.³³¹ The future of the nation’s development depended upon population growth and children produced in stable, healthy families, were seen as essential to that growth. The eugenics movement in the first third of the 20th century, with its emphasis on healthy minds and bodies, and the regulation of reproduction, saw the linking of

³²⁸ Perth Children’s Court Evidence Book Evidence Book 2495/63, SROWA. (real name not used)

³²⁹ Robert van Krieken, “State intervention, welfare and the social construction of girlhood in Australian history”. Paper prepared for TASA ’92 Sociology Conference, Flinders University Adelaide 10-13 December 1992, 1-26. available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/2123/902>, 1.

³³⁰ van Krieken, 4.

³³¹ van Krieken, 8.

mental deficiency with so-called moral deficiency. Female delinquency therefore had the potential to harm the nation. There were also moral concerns:

The threatening breakage of the link between sexuality and marriage aroused fears that it would lead to the decay of girls and women's homemaking and mothering capacities, and men's commitment to children and dependent wives on the other. This latter aspect lay behind the support of feminist groups for social purity, which focused primarily on prostitution and raising the female age of consent to sixteen.³³²

Indeed, concerned women's groups continued after the second World War to lobby for an increase in the number of women police.³³³ Van Krieken has given the historical background to the perceived image of youthful female sexuality as both deviant and dangerous. What is so surprising is that the language and attitudes that created this image remained entrenched into the 1950s, long after the war (with its fears of epidemics of venereal disease) had ended and anti-biotics were in general use. When the oral contraceptive was in the process of being developed, and when, with the rise of consumerism women were being told that "being sexy brought happiness".³³⁴

Moral concerns also arose from "notions of appropriate familial relations more broadly accepted in society", so that disputes between mothers and daughters about proper behaviour played a part in the designation of pre-marital sex as sinful.³³⁵ Van Krieken cites examples of parents reporting their children to the authorities from the early part of the 20th century. Fifty years later parents continued to seek re-enforcement of their control over their children. Apart from the examples cited above, and in Chapter 3, there were a number of other occasions when parents reported their children, either because they had left home, or were misbehaving. In one case a mother complained to the women police that her 14 year old daughter was disobedient, kept late hours and went out with boys. The women police asked the girl "Why can't you get on with (your) parents at home?" She replied that she didn't love her father: he used to interfere with her. A statement was taken, but no information is available on whether or not the father was charged. The girl, however, having been warned previously, was committed to an institution for 12 months, with release after six months if she was of "good

³³² van Krieken, 15.

³³³ For the example, the Country Women's Association and the Australian Labor Party's women's section, see Consignment 430 Item 1958 3284v2, Women Police Policy and General, SROWA.

³³⁴ The first oral contraceptive was submitted to the US Food and Drug Administration in 1957: <http://www.fda.gov/oc/history/makinghistory/enovid.html>; Hamilton, 39.

³³⁵ van Krieken, 20.

behaviour”.³³⁶ In this instance, and others over the six month period researched, girls reported missing and noticeably reluctant, sometimes even fearful to return home, were declared neglected. This may have been for their own protection although the evidence emphasises their misbehaviour and does not elaborate on the reasons for their leaving home. Sometimes committal to the Child Welfare Department carried the proviso that “a suitable home be found” indicating an acknowledgement that family conditions were not ideal and institutionalisation not necessarily appropriate.

Of other youthful behaviours, such as truancy, there seems to have been little acknowledgement that an existing problem might require deeper investigation or family support. One parent was summoned over a daughter’s continued absence from school, and the issue was addressed by institutionalising the girl until the age of 14. On another occasion two migrant children were investigated for missing school because other children taunted them. Their mother worked, and their father beat them, but they were only released from committal to the Child Welfare Department after a neighbour intervened with offers to help the family. Emphasis was placed on the *child’s* behaviour, rather than that of adults and this placing of responsibility on children’s shoulders is noticeable in Ethel Scott’s comments. In a report to her superior she wrote:

In working for the protection of minors Women Police may, and often do, charge persons whose conduct has brought about a moral lapse in a child, with contributing to the neglect of the child, or to the commission of an offence, as the case may be.³³⁷

Yet as we have seen, the punishment of adults was relatively minor in comparison to the punishment handed out to the children who had committed “moral lapses”.

The women police were particularly zealous if they suspected sexual activity had taken place, regardless of the initial reason for questioning a girl. This supports Barbara Maison’s claim that girls “were quizzed until they ‘confessed’ how many times they had been intimate”. The questioning too has an element of the “totally irrelevant voyeurism” that she also claimed existed.³³⁸ In the pursuit of “moral delinquents”, on occasion there is almost a sense of farce. When the women police noticed one young girl outside the Cuban Coffee shop at 1.15 am, their questioning revealed she had been drinking beer at a party in Wembley (then a respectable middle-class suburb). Five girls and seven boys had attended (“Were there boys at the party? Did you have your

³³⁶ Perth Children’s Court Evidence Book 2495/63, SROWA.

³³⁷ Sergeant Scott to Inspector Culleton, February 9, 1954. Consignment 430 1958 3284v2, SROWA.

³³⁸ *Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children*, submission 97. (Commonwealth of Australia 2004). Available at: http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/inst_care/report/index.htm.

mother's permission to be out late?"). Discovering the old alibi of staying at a friend's house had been used to evade parental consent, the police set off in hot pursuit of the four other girls. The chase ended only when at 5.15 am, they awoke the inhabitants of a house in West Leederville to demand where the girl had been that night, and if she had "misconducted herself". This lively group of 14 to 15 year old girls were charged with being neglected and put on probation for a year. A number of coffee shops and the Regal milk bar were declared out of bounds for that period. The one girl who refused to give the names of her friends was put on probation until she was eighteen, no doubt as punishment for her independence.³³⁹

This additional penalty for lack of co-operation may explain why so often girls appear to have given full statements of their past activities to women police and meekly (according to the evidence recorded) agreed that the statements were a true record of their behaviour and indisputable. The women police built up files on the girls they questioned which included "full particulars...including her associates, both male and female, and this system has proved to be of great advantage, not only to Women Police officers but also to other branches, in particular the Criminal Investigation Branch, when full information regarding some particular girl has been required".³⁴⁰ The numbers of girls "spoken to" increased throughout the 1950s. In 1953, 250 girls over 14 were questioned, and 198 in 1954. But by 1959 the number had jumped to 1,342. At the same time, responses to inquiries rose from 2,205 in 1953 to 5,567 in 1959. The number of women "spoken to" regarding their children, or their mode of living went from 146 in 1953 to 513 in 1959. Women police took on both the duties that were not performed by the limited welfare services of the day and the duties of the Child Welfare Department at night and weekends when no officer of that department was available.³⁴¹

The Women Police and the Child Welfare Department often worked closely together. The Child Welfare Department was aware of the problematic nature of male Departmental personnel and police officers interviewing young girls regarding sexual activity. In 1950 the Department requested that a woman police officer be stationed in Bunbury to assist with such enquiries, since in that year seven girls had been investigated for sexual misconduct.³⁴² In 1957 the request was repeated. A senior probation officer reported that he intended to "work in close co-operation with the Police in this District to try and stop the blatant promiscuity of the teenagers" which

³³⁹ Perth Children's Court Charge Book 2493/70; Perth Children's Court Evidence Book 2495/63.

³⁴⁰ Sergeant Scott to Inspector Broun in 1959. Consignment 430 1958 3284v2, SROWA.

³⁴¹ Consignment 430 Item 1958 3284v2, SROWA.

³⁴² Child Welfare Department "Juvenile delinquency among females", March 27, 1950 Consignment 1031, Item 712/1924, SROWA.

continued despite “adequate Youth organisations in this town to cater for all tastes”.³⁴³ One young girl had been diagnosed with venereal disease after having sex with seven youths. However the District Officer reported that he had decided not to proceed with charges of neglect against the girl. She had complied with medical treatment and was no longer allowed out without a “responsible person” with her. Besides, she had lost her job, all her friends and was the scandal of the town. That and a threat of action in the future if she misbehaved were deemed to be sufficient punishment.³⁴⁴ By now the police department had agreed to send Sergeant Scott to Bunbury to assess the situation and the Director of the Child Welfare Department announced that a woman probation officer would be in Bunbury for a month from the beginning of January 1958, as a result of “reports which have been received regarding the doubtful conduct of girls in the district between the ages of 16 and 18 years”.³⁴⁵ In December 1957 Sergeant Scott reported to Inspector Wass that Albany, Bunbury, Geraldton and Northam had all been visited in response to concerns over juvenile behaviour, and meetings held with leading citizens. Surveillance of the towns had been carried out through patrolling. There was no bodgie-widgie “element” in Geraldton and the local detective had curbed the “cult” in Northam. There was concern over teenagers congregating at a milk bar in Albany, and an “undesirable rendezvous” (a cafe) for teenagers in Bunbury. A number of boys were charged with unlawful carnal knowledge in Bunbury, possibly in association with the case above, but apart from that, no under-age drinking was discovered and no girls had been charged with being neglected. The main problem reported was the neglect of children left alone while their parents drank. However it was concluded that each town would benefit from a police woman’s presence for a month at Christmas, and in the case of Northam, whenever a military camp was in operation.

An examination of statistics from the Police Commissioner’s Annual Report for the year ending June 1957, which gives figures from the Children’s Courts for 1956, shows the total number of both male and female children, including Aboriginal children, declared either neglected or destitute and committed to the care of the Child Welfare Department was 92 males and 134 females, with ages ranging from under 1 year to 17 years (and including, inexplicably, 40 whose ages were not stated at all). Of this total number, none were cautioned, 16 were given probation and 17 charges were dismissed.

³⁴³ Child Welfare Department report “Juvenile Behaviour”, 23 August 1957, Consignment 1031, Item 712/1924 SROWA.

³⁴⁴ Inter department correspondence, Child Welfare Department, Consignment 1031, Item 712/1924, SROWA.

³⁴⁵ Director of Child Welfare Department to Public Commissioners, 19 December 1957, Consignment 1031 Item 712/1924, SROWA.

The highest number of committals were for females aged 15 (21) and 16 (14), with the third highest female age grouping being 8 year olds.³⁴⁶ Placing these figures against the combined numbers (1210) of female high school students alone cited by Sergeant Scott for three of the four country towns visited gives a different perspective on the degree of juvenile misbehaviour occurring and support her findings. But they also put into question the reasons for her later warning of the potential dangers to citizenship from “moral delinquency”.

What explanations can be given for this discrepancy between perceptions of youth (particularly female youth) running wild and actual statistics? Hamilton argues that economic growth facilitated the emergence of a youth culture in Australia in the 1950s claiming the position of sexually active girls was “premised on two contradictory economic factors”.³⁴⁷ Young women were encouraged to buy products to enhance their sexual attractiveness through the message that “being sexy brought happiness and fulfilment”. But overall consumption was based on the stability of the family unit and “Sexually precocious girls threatened this stability because they disrespected parental (patriarchal) authority, ‘corrupted’ married men and sometimes gave birth to illegitimate babies...(they) significantly disrupted the structure of the ideal family unit.”³⁴⁸ Sexually active young women therefore were unproductive “because, unlike their married mothers, their sexuality was not channelled into the useful arenas of monogamy and family”.³⁴⁹

She goes on to argue that parents and other authority figures lost the power to shape youthful identities with the surge of new fashions, music and leisure activities and re-acted with “resentment towards teenagers” and “hostility towards their leisure interests”.³⁵⁰ Hence the alarm over cafes and coffee shops which attracted young people in large numbers and that most innocent of gathering places, the milk bar, often attached to the local picture theatre. Young people simply being together in groups, away from the family home, the work-place or the high school, particularly at night, were viewed with suspicion. This visibility, which also came under the scrutiny of the media, according to Jon Stratton, meant:

a new awareness of working-class customs and an atmosphere of threat as such behaviour was taken out of

³⁴⁶ Annual Report of the Police Commissioner for the year ended 30th June, 1957. Police Department Annual Reports 1927-64, Batty Library.

³⁴⁷ Hamilton, 39

³⁴⁸ Hamilton. 39.

³⁴⁹ Hamilton, 39.

³⁵⁰ Hamilton. 40.

context and perceived as a series of breakdowns in an accepted moral and social order.³⁵¹

Hamilton places the sexually active young girl as a threat to the stable family unit and thus a threat to consumption. Stratton suggests that the middle classes viewed the new consumption patterns and the visibility of working class youth at leisure as a “threat to moral order”. Bodgies and widgies were perceived as representative of all youth, and some youthful leisure activities were viewed as a “manifestation of a wave of predominantly working-class deviance among young people”³⁵². The women police, patrolling the milk bars and coffee shops where young people gathered, sought those “in moral danger” from amongst the young girls who were visible, either there or in the streets after 10 pm at night, or in city streets during the day, when it was believed everyone should be at work. Part of the evidence police gave which convicted Leslie Jones of being neglected was that she had been seen “around the streets and at milk bars.”³⁵³ The milk bar had become for working class youth “an extension of the street, providing an institutionalised version of the street”.³⁵⁴ But young girls seen often at milk bars with groups of boys offended middle class values both by their presence and assumed sexual activity.

It would be too simplistic to suggest that the police efforts to prevent “misconduct” and “moral delinquency” were directed specifically towards the working class. The issue of class in the 1950s in Perth was perhaps more complex than Stratton would have us believe. It is true that the few female occupations mentioned in the Perth Children’s Court Charge Books are shop assistant, factory worker and domestic, and no mention of the then middle-class occupation of junior secretary or trainee nurses. Rather those who were questioned were the girls seen frequently at favourite youth haunts mentioned in the Evidence Books, La Rosa, the Cuban Coffee shop and Rick’s Barn. All of these appear to have been in the inner suburbs and there was an unwritten curfew on young girls. Those seen out late at night would be questioned again and again according to references in evidence to “repeated warnings”. The girls who drank beer and had sex at a party in Wembley were an exception. They came to the attention of the police because one of them was seen, and questioned, at the Cuban Coffee Shop at 1.15 am. The police women focused their attention on other girls who often came from vulnerable home situations, and the girls became scapegoats for their families. Their

³⁵¹ Jon Stratton, *The Young Ones* (Perth: Black Swan Press, 1992), 157.

³⁵² Stratton, 190.

³⁵³ Perth Children’s Court Evidence Book 2495/62, SROWA. (real name not used).

³⁵⁴ Stratton, 110.

convictions were categorised in the Child Welfare Department Annual Reports under headings such as “Liquor” or “Poor Home”.³⁵⁵ One wonders what the home classification would have been for fourteen year old Brenda Mackay, however, since home was an Anglican Children’s Home. She was raped by two boys in a local park while staying with a family for several weeks. She disclosed the rapes six weeks later to a friend and eventually the information was passed to the manager of the home. Brenda was questioned (“did you scream out or were your clothes torn?”), charged with being neglected and declared to be in moral jeopardy. Brenda was put on probation for two years. Charges against the boys involved were eventually withdrawn.³⁵⁶

According to Sergeant Scott, extended patrols were introduced early in 1957 as a response to community concerns over juvenile conduct. Friday and Saturday night from 10 pm to 2 am, a policewoman accompanied by a plain clothes policeman patrolled juvenile haunts. The number of girls over 14 “spoken to” accordingly jumped from 286 in 1956 to 602 and the number of boys rose from 23 to 80. The number of convictions for unlawful carnal knowledge rose from eight in 1956 to sixteen in 1957, confirming Barbara Maison’s fears about the possibility of her boyfriend being charged for having sex with her.³⁵⁷ This increase in juvenile numbers was accompanied by a decrease in the numbers of women and girls assisted (171 compared to 202 the previous year) and fewer cases referred to the Child Welfare Department. Nevertheless, Sergeant Scott reported at the beginning of 1958 that “there does not appear to be an alarming increase in juvenile delinquency in this State”.³⁵⁸ The Deputy Commissioner writing to the Acting Police Minister in March 1958 concurred, adding “The actual offenders in real delinquency, ranging from vandalism to car stealing and other criminal offences, are sought and apprehended by male police.” His continued comments downplayed both the moral policing and the welfare role of the women police:

So far as preventive police work amongst young people is concerned, most of that is also performed, and more ably, by male police...The role of the Women Police is essentially supplementary to that of the male members of the Force...though they do perform some preventive work by patrolling places of amusement, supervising the conduct of girls. Practically all of the girls who might be classed as delinquents have been brought before the court and are wards of the State, so that the supervision of their subsequent

³⁵⁵ See for example Annual Report of the Child Welfare Department for the Year ended 30th June 1957, Battye Library.

³⁵⁶ Perth Children’s Court Charge Book 2493/70 ; Perth Children’s Court Evidence Book 2495/63 , SROWA.(real name not used).

³⁵⁷ *Statistical Registers of Western Australia for 1957, 1958, 1959.*

³⁵⁸ Sergeant Scott to Inspector Wass, 30 January 1958, Consignment 430 Item 1958 3284v, SROWA.

conduct is more rightly the province of the Child Welfare Department.³⁵⁹

The importance the male police hierarchy placed upon the work of the women police is reflected in the decreasing amount of space allocated to them in the Police Commissioner's Annual Reports. From 1953 to 1956 the unit is acknowledged in flattering terms and shrinking space, overshadowed by reports from the Police and Citizens' Boys Clubs and the Schools Lecturing Staff. By 1958 the report of the women police was reduced to three and a half lines. No women's police report appeared for 1959 when Ethel Scott was still pleading for the policing of "moral delinquency" and no mention is made of the section in the 1960 report although the women police remained a separate, plain clothes unit within the force well into the 1970s.³⁶⁰

Some changes in official attitude towards the behaviour of young females occurred in the 1960s. Although the Return of Work Performed by Women Police for 1966 showed that complaints and inquiries had risen to 9,909, and 1,818 girls had been interviewed with regard to their conduct, Children's Court cases cited in the return for the metropolitan area had dropped to 108.³⁶¹ The police report for 1967 carried no statistics for juveniles.³⁶² By contrast, the Child Welfare Department was still simplifying the problems of children by classifying their home and parentage conditions as Father Deceased: Mother Deceased: Liquor: Poor Home Conditions: Broken Home.³⁶³ Of a total of 232 girls aged from under 7 to 17 charged as neglected or destitute, 222 were committed to the care of the Department. Ten years after Barbara Maison's depiction of welfare authority as having a prurient interest in female sexual activity, the Department claimed that for 101 girls aged between 14 and 17 appearing neglected or destitute, "promiscuous behaviour was the major reason".³⁶⁴ The female population aged less than 18 years had risen 152,855 in 1966 as a consequence of the post war baby boom and the women police and the Child Welfare Department were no longer in a position to contain youthful sexual behaviour.³⁶⁵

³⁵⁹ Deputy Commissioner of Police to Acting Minister for Police, 25 March 1958, Consignment 430, Item 1958 3284v2, SROWA.

³⁶⁰ Consignment 1919 Item 1962 3721 Women Police Policy and General, SROWA.

³⁶¹ Consignment 1910, Item 1962 3721 Women Police Policy and General, SROWA.

³⁶² Annual Report of the Commissioner of Police for the year ended 30th June 1967, *WA Votes & Proceedings of Parliament for 1967, Volume 4*.

³⁶³ Child Welfare Department, Annual Report for the year ended 30th June 1967, Battye Library.

³⁶⁴ Child Welfare Department, Annual Report for the year ended 30th June 1967, Battye Library.

³⁶⁵ *Western Australian Year Book 1974, Battye Library*.

The introduction of increased patrols of women police in 1957 had seen the behaviour of an increasing number of young women scrutinised by the law. Punishments seem harsh by today's standards: a young woman who damaged two blouses and a clock was committed to an institution for a year (although allowed home on weekends).³⁶⁶ Truancy was dealt with by institutionalisation.³⁶⁷ Girls were regularly ordered by women police to get a job, or be questioned because they had left a job. A young girl could go to a party on Saturday night and end up in court, on the following Tuesday, charged with being neglected. The evidence: an admittance of drinking six glasses of beer and some wine. The consequences: institutionalisation until the age of eighteen.³⁶⁸ These punishments and any accompanying publicity were not only a reflection of existing social and community attitudes, but also acted as a warning to all young women that their position in society was subject to the authority of their parents, the Child Welfare Department and the police.

³⁶⁶ Perth Children's Court Charge Book 2493/70, SROWA.

³⁶⁷ Perth Children's Court Charge Book 2493/70, SROWA.

³⁶⁸ Perth Children's Court Charge Book 2493/71, Perth Children's Court Evidence Book 2495/65, SROWA.

Chapter Six – Social and Community Attitudes.

The restrictions under which teenage girls and young women lived in the 1950s were exemplified in the pages of the popular women's magazine, *The Australian Women's Weekly*. While the Perth Children's Court evidence books detailed the harsh reality of what could happen to girls under sixteen who stayed out late at milk bars with boys (and sometimes had sex with them), the *Weekly's* advice column, presided over by Louise Hunter, regularly laid down prescriptive advice on behaviour for young people by way of answering letters, most of which were written by girls. Louise Hunter's column, with the addition of inserts from "Debbie" aimed to groom young women emotionally and physically for the ultimate success of becoming a wife. It set middle-class standards for all teenagers, although the comments were often unrealistic and out of touch ("Starch your cotton brassieres").³⁶⁹ But at a time when sex was not discussed, relationships were uncharted territory, information on contraception, if available, was confined to married couples and euphemisms were used, even by nursing staff, to describe genitalia, women's magazines and advice columns were a forum for information.³⁷⁰

A search of the advice column "Here's Your Answer" each week for 1957 shows that young women wrote in with many concerns about their appearance and how to improve it. They also showed anxiety at quite a young age about their ability to attract boyfriends, as one lone fourteen year old complained: "most of the girls in my class have boyfriends, even the very plain ones".³⁷¹ Louise Hunter herself declared in the February 13th issue that apart from social dilemmas, "the main problem, common to girls from 13 to 19, is a misery about their bosom and its stage of development".³⁷² From physical appearance to behaviour amongst family and friends and with potential "boy friends" the exhortations were always the same: girls and young women needed not only to improve themselves but also to change themselves completely in order to please those around them and become acceptable members of society. At the beginning of the year, "Debbie" decreed that no boy would date a girl unless her hands, elbows, ears, hair and eyebrows were cared for to his liking. If a girl didn't pluck her eye-

³⁶⁹ *The Australian Women's Weekly*, February 6, 1957 (hereinafter referred to as *The Weekly*).

³⁷⁰ Senior Citizens Classic bus tour group, personal conversations, October 31, 2008.

³⁷¹ *The Weekly*, June 26, 1957.

³⁷² *The Weekly*, February 13, 1957.

brows, it indicated she was “lazy”, if on the other hand, they were “too plucked” she was “obviously a good time girl”.³⁷³

Lesley Johnson has presented this emphasis by women’s magazines in the 1950s on female appearance and “glamour and charm” as a shift in the definition of femininity. Although essentially initiated by commercial interests looking for new markets, “glamour and charm” broadened the concept of what was regarded as feminine so that being feminine no longer meant “that a woman had to be seen beside the kitchen sink with a baby in her arms”.³⁷⁴ Glamour and charm could be classed as skills to be used in a variety of situations, particularly the work place. Johnson describes this as one area at least in which young women had some control, that over their own image. In the period of adolescence control of their lives was maintained by their parents and then later in adulthood, handed to their husbands.³⁷⁵ But at the same time, the persistent urgings to “Check up on yourself” and “take honest stock of yourself, your habits and appearance, and set about improving yourself”, suggest that attempts to change personal image were at the instigation of others.³⁷⁶ They were also circumscribed by the sort of parental restrictions frequently advocated by *The Weekly*, and by lower female wages. This was a very limited degree of agency.

Barbara Baird states in the prologue of *Who Was That Women?* that *The Weekly* was renowned for its representations of “ideals of Australian womanhood and domestic life”. It “packaged” femininity and addressed a wide range of topics while retaining the sponsorship of major advertisers.³⁷⁷ This tension between addressing a range of topics while at the same time illustrating and promoting a range of goods inveigled the reader into the new role of consumer and broadened the definition of what was feminine. It was no longer enough for a woman to be a good housewife, she must also look attractive while cooking, and use the latest household appliances when doing her housework. The mixture of news and advice, with lavish illustrations and advertisements for consumer products that comprised the published *Weekly* was not directed to a specific type of reader, but rather invited all women to participate in what Baird describes as “an imaginary world”.³⁷⁸

³⁷³ *The Weekly*, January 2, 1957.

³⁷⁴ Lesley Johnson, “The teenage girl: the social definition of growing up for young Australian women, 1950 to 1965” in *History of Education Review* 1989 18(1), 1-12.

³⁷⁵ Johnson, “The teenage girl”.

³⁷⁶ *The Weekly*, August 7, 1957; *The Weekly*, February 20, 1957.

³⁷⁷ Susan Sheridan with Barbara Baird, Kate Borrett and Lyndall Ryan . *Who Was That Women? The Australian Women’s Weekly in the Postwar Years* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press Ltd., 2002), 4.

³⁷⁸ Sheridan et al, 4.

While the Weekly made its contribution towards incorporating consumerism as a legitimate part of femininity, particularly for women who were housewives and mothers, it also helped create great anxiety over appearance and behaviour among younger women. Take for example *A Word From Debbie* in Louise Hunter's column:

What sort of pretty girl are you? Pretty-all-the-time, or public pretty? Pretty-all-the-time girls are the nice ones. They arrive at all family meals clean and tidy with their faces looking attractive, they don't only ice the cake for guests. The public-pretty girls do. They treat their family to soiled, crushed blouses, hair in naked bobby pins. They generally have ugly habits, untidiness, and unpunctuality³⁷⁹.

The implication here is that not being pretty at all times indicates character faults. Not a good prognosis for husband catching when *The Weekly* was encouraging women to see marriage as the ideal career for a woman. Baird cites an editorial of 1946 claiming "Marriage is the best career" and twenty years later "marriage and homemaking is still the preferred and idealised vocation for women" in *The Weekly*.³⁸⁰

Much of the advice given in the magazine "For Teenagers" is concerned with advising young girls on how to look attractive and behave in a manner that attracts the opposite sex. A shy girl of 15 is advised to read the newspaper for an hour each day and to study football in order to have something to talk to boys about. Louise Hunter accepts as natural the constant queries from younger teenagers about how to behave with boys. But her advice to eighteen year olds shows she regards such young women as still dependent adolescents: "I, of course, quite agree with your parents when they won't let you go out alone" she advises one 18 year old questioning her parents' restrictions. Louise Hunter lectured another girl, almost nineteen, who complained her mother beat her for fighting with her younger sister. "You should use your head with your little sister, and make yourself into the kind of character she likes. If you can't get on with a 10 year old you're not going to get on very well with older girls and boys".

Johnson has explored the contradictions present in the 1950s depiction of teenagers. A demand for cheap female labour meant that young women were courted by employers and the majority were still leaving school at 15 to enter the workforce. As workers they were also potentially, autonomous consumers. At the same time adolescence had come to be viewed as a distinct interval between childhood and adulthood, a period when young people were defined as "dependent, in need of

³⁷⁹ *The Weekly*, August 7, 1957.

³⁸⁰ Sheridan et al, 12, 113.

supervision and regulation”.³⁸¹ Louise Hunter was not troubled by this conflict in adolescent identity. Her column regularly advised teenagers that they were undergoing a period of training for adulthood, and needed supervision: “(problems) are essential training for adult-hood, which you enter with added poise, one of the rewards of the solved social situation” and “you will have to do exactly as your parents wish until you are 21”.³⁸² She strongly supported the parental stance whenever letters described family conflict, even to the extent of avoiding comment on the physical violence mentioned in the example above. On two occasions Louise Hunter herself advocated physical violence (“I would smack you firmly...you all want a thorough spanking”).³⁸³ Such advice passed without comment from the public in the following issues, indicating that physical chastisement of adolescents was accepted as a legitimate form of discipline for girls.

Not all women’s magazines in Australia prescribed codes of behaviour for young women as rigid as those of *The Weekly*. The *Australian Home Journal* published two columns of advice, both located in the opening pages of the magazine indicating their importance to readers. The first answered a wide range of queries on subjects from bust improvement to gardening. The second column, *Heart to Heart* answered letters about emotional problems and although receiving letters from an age group older than that addressed by Louise Hunter in *The Weekly*, also answered teenage queries, tending to suggest compromise solutions when parental authority is causing angst.³⁸⁴ *Home Journal’s* responses to women were much more robust and surprisingly down to earth. “Stop being sweet and tolerant. Try a little arsenic for a change!” the anonymous columnist advised a girl who wrote about a jealous, possessive fiancé.³⁸⁵ A complaint about a sister’s boyfriend who pinched her arm so hard it hurt, brought the advice “pay Harry back in his own coin”.³⁸⁶ “A house should be a home, not a prison” was one response telling a woman not to become “an animated duster”.³⁸⁷ The *Home Journal* was referring to “teen-agers” as early as 1949 and often took side against parents, referring on one occasion to fathers as “mid-Victorian” and advising one girl to “get an older friend to talk to your father and bring him out of his dream world”.³⁸⁸ Ultimately however in 1957 advice bowed to social norms of the day. One young woman who

³⁸¹ Lesley Johnson, *The Modern Girl: Girlhood and Growing Up*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 91.

³⁸² *The Weekly* June 5, 1957; July 24, 1957.

³⁸³ *The Weekly* September 11, 1957; August 14, 1957.

³⁸⁴ for example, *Australian Home Journal*, August 1, 1957.

³⁸⁵ *Australian Home Journal*, March 1, 1957.

³⁸⁶ *Australian Home Journal*, March 1, 1957.

³⁸⁷ *Australian Home Journal*, April 1, 1957.

³⁸⁸ *Australian Home Journal*, September 1, 1949; May 2, 1949.

drank and smoked at parties, wore make-up and slacks, all to her boyfriend's disapproval, asked: is he right? Yes, she was told: "wear slacks when you are on your own...femininity makes a strong appeal to him, so if you want to make sure of his interest, you know how".³⁸⁹

Comparison between the two magazines is problematic owing to the irregularity of archived copies of *The Australian Home Journal* which was scanned over a greater period than *The Weekly* because of this difficulty. The difference in tone of columnist's response may well lie in the perception of the target reader. As stated above, *The Weekly* was not aimed at any specific reader but rather invited participation in an "imaginary world". Conversely the *Australian Home Journal* was aimed at readers living in the real world. There is less emphasis on consumption, (although both carry advertising from the same sponsors) and more emphasis on do-it-yourself. The *Journal* carried pages of knitting patterns and dress design, including attached paper patterns. It had no index, no by-lined columns until 1958, and a drab and anonymous appearance: its publishers were simply "The Proprietors".³⁹⁰ Clearly the power to shape ideas of femininity and influence female behaviour lay with *The Weekly* which was brightly illustrated and well laid out. Regular columns, by-lined by people such as Louise Hunter, invited a sense of the personal and intimate. *The Weekly* was the leading women's magazine of the era, with a circulation of nearly 750,000 in 1950, a figure which rose to 835,000 in 1960.³⁹¹ In the 1950s it was found in one in four homes and according to Denis O'Brien, had a particularly loyal readership in rural areas.³⁹² By contrast, the *Journal* was not listed amongst the "big four" which comprised *The Weekly*, *Woman*, *Woman's Day* and *New Idea* and the mild independence that it advocated would not have had great influence.

Susan Sheridan's introduction to *Who Was That Woman?* charts the changing (and often conflicting) models of femininity displayed by *The Weekly* in the period 1946-1971. It discusses early feminist interpretations of female subjectivity which saw "the construction of women as consumers as an ideological process imposed by women's magazines" and the historical construction of femininity which "emphasised the regulation of women in the 1950s and 1960s...without giving much weight to the pleasures of consumption as a key part of this construction of femininity."³⁹³ Women's magazines took on the role of educating women as consumers in a number of ways, and

³⁸⁹ *Australian Home Journal*, September 2, 1957.

³⁹⁰ *Australian Home Journal*, January 1, 1958.

³⁹¹ Denis O'Brien, *The Weekly*. (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1982), 102, 143.

³⁹² Sheridan et al., 56 ; O'Brien, 111.

³⁹³ Sheridan et al, 7.

in an argument with echoes of Johnson, cited above, regarding agency, the suggestion is that “women’s role as consumers placed them at the centre, not the periphery, of capitalist societies in the second half of the twentieth century”.³⁹⁴ Underlying this placement of women in consumerism was the profit motive: the print media relies heavily on increasing its circulation and pleasing advertising sponsors who in turn expect increased demand for their products. In the case of *The Weekly* there were ongoing struggles as the demand for advertising space attempted to encroach upon editorial content.³⁹⁵ And if in the struggle, women were dazzled with the possibility of becoming Johnson’s “autonomous consumers” editorial policy ensured that notions of autonomy were confined to the domestic field. The owner of *The Weekly* in the period under discussion was Frank Packer, an admirer of Robert Menzies. His control of *The Weekly* was “like...a very strict father guarding the chastity of a virgin daughter”: he objected to even the mention of abortion in an article.³⁹⁶ The editor of the magazine during the peak years of the 1950s and 1960s was Esme Fenston, described by (Sir) Garfield Barwick as ‘ladylike, gentle, pure minded, quiet and confident. She did not like anything improper....’³⁹⁷

There were issues which were not regarded as suitable material for discussion in the pages of *The Weekly* in the 1950s. “Once again I have received a flood of letters asking for personal replies to problems...Please save your stamps and stop sending problems that cannot be answered on this page” wrote Louise Hunter, without actually specifying what topics were unmentionable.³⁹⁸ Occasionally a distraught and pregnant teenager wrote for advice. Louise Hunter’s answer was always brief: she either advised the girl to tell her parents, or gave the address of an appropriate institution for unmarried mothers.³⁹⁹ Given the article in *The Weekly* stating that one in every three of all first babies was conceived before marriage, issues such as pre-marital sex, contraception and abortion might have comprised the problems that could not be answered by Louise Hunter but such subjects were not addressed by the magazine until much later.⁴⁰⁰

The circumspect behaviour prescribed by *The Weekly* created the illusion that young people grew up in a decorous world where problems could be solved by obeying one’s parents, or being patient. Family violence, unemployment, poverty and

³⁹⁴ Sheridan et al, 7.

³⁹⁵ O’Brien, 133

³⁹⁶ O’Brien, 95.

³⁹⁷ Australian Dictionary of Biography on-line edition available at: <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/adbonline.htm>

³⁹⁸ *The Weekly*, April 17, 1957.

³⁹⁹ for example, *The Weekly*, February 6, 1957 and November 20, 1957.

⁴⁰⁰ “Going Steady?” by Louise Hunter in *The Weekly*, October 2, 1957.

drunkenness as a background to that growing up were not acknowledged. These harsher realities emerged in the reporting of *The West Australian*, which took a particular glee in detailing under 18 year old behaviour in its daily column variously headed Law Report or From the Courts. However the publications mirrored each other in their attitudes to male predatory behaviour: it was either ignored, or treated lightly. One sixteen year old who wrote to Louise Hunter of her discomfort at the ongoing attention of her male, married school teacher was disbelieved. She was accused of enjoying the attention and told to “stop paying court to the teacher”.⁴⁰¹ *The West Australian* reported the abduction of a ten year old girl from a wedding reception by the photographer, ostensibly to photograph her in his own studio, but the offender was merely warned and put on his own bond of £50.⁴⁰² The law acknowledged that predatory behaviour existed, charging two men with having “evil designs” towards children. However the first case which involved a twelve year old boy brought a gaol sentence of one month and an order for psychiatric assessment.⁴⁰³ The second, involving a 57 year old man with “evil designs” against a fifteen year old girl, brought a five year bond, which suggests that sexual intentions towards a young girl were regarded less seriously than those involving a young boy.⁴⁰⁴ The perception that predatory behaviour was part of inherent masculinity remained strongly entrenched in the 1950s, as was the notion that female sexuality was linked with deviancy. Madeleine Hamilton’s work on the Melbourne *Truth* of the 1950s cites an example from that newspaper reporting the comments of a judge who deemed an eleven year old girl to be a pervert, and a “menace to men”, when two adult males were charged with having sex with her. The charges against the men were dismissed.⁴⁰⁵

Some Perth newspapers of 1957 joined in the national “moral panic” over bodgies and widgies as letters criticised “Guy Fawkes” clothing and advocated the ban of all things American in an effort to control the craze.⁴⁰⁶ The Acting Police Commissioner wanted a parent imposed curfew on teenagers who had bodgie or widgie

⁴⁰¹ *The Weekly*, April 10, 1957.

⁴⁰² *The West Australian*, October 16, 1957.

⁴⁰³ *The West Australian*, October 26, 1957.

⁴⁰⁴ *The West Australian*, September 24, 1957.

⁴⁰⁵ Madeleine Hamilton, 'Delilah aged 14!': The Melbourne Truth and the 1950s teenage girl. [online]. *Lilith*, no.13, 2004: 38-50. Availability: <<http://0-search.informit.com.au/library.ecu.edu.au:80/fullText;dn=200502096;res=APAFT>> ISSN: 0813-8990. accessed November 27, 2008.

⁴⁰⁶ *Daily News*, January 22, 1957; January 31, 1957. For a discussion of “moral panic” see Keith Moore, “Bodgies, widgies and moral panic in Australia 1955-1959”. (Paper presented to the Social Change in the 21st Century Conference, Centre for Social Change Research, Queensland University of Technology, 29 October 2004) 1-13.

“inclinations”.⁴⁰⁷ *The West Australian*’s letters focussed on more serious issues. There was some unemployment, particularly among the young and migrants, and a newcomer from England wrote in amazement at married women not being allowed to work.⁴⁰⁸ While married women comprised 30.8 per cent of the Australian female workforce in 1954 (and their participation increased to 38.5 percent in 1961), in Perth, the Children’s Court magistrate castigated the mother of a nine year old boy for having paid employment. He declared her son neglected and committed him to care. “There is plenty to do at home for a mother with three children”, he warned, threatening the committal of her other two children.⁴⁰⁹

If obtaining and keeping a job was difficult for a married woman, it was a necessity for other women, complained a widow to the editor of the *West Australian*. She found that even with a job and pension, her income of £8/13/6d. a week, was insufficient to keep herself and two children.⁴¹⁰ Young single women were expected to be employed, and remain in the same job. *The West Australian* reported that a sixteen year old migrant girl, declared neglected in the Perth Children’s Court, had not only taken part in a rock and roll contest but also never held a job for longer than six months. Her release from committal to the care of the Child Welfare Department was conditional upon her taking up suitable employment.⁴¹¹

Cases involving children and reported in the newspapers inform us that physical violence by parents was acceptable in the community.⁴¹² Moral judgements about the behaviour of young women, regularly made in the Children’s Court, were reported in *The West Australian*. Penalties for status offences were more severe than for other offences and were accepted without comment by the public. Indeed, Moore citing Cohen suggests that the press could generate “concern, anxiety, indignation or panic” by “their very reporting of certain ‘facts’.”⁴¹³ The community at that time must be seen to be acquiescing with the official stance which saw young people charged and punished for offences we would now regard as trivial. Public demonstration as a form of protest against perceived injustices or concerns was not yet practised and five

⁴⁰⁷ *Sunday Times*, January 20, 1957.

⁴⁰⁸ *The West Australian*, January 28, 1957.

⁴⁰⁹ Jill Julius Matthews, *Good & Mad Women*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984), 54; *The West Australian*, August 6, 1957.

⁴¹⁰ *The West Australian*, Letters to the Editor, May 13, 1957. The male basic wage in 1956 was £13/5/2d. see Official Year Book of Western Australia for 1957.

⁴¹¹ *The West Australian*, April 30, 1957.

⁴¹² see for example *The West Australian*, January 20, 1957 where a father clipped his son’s hair and thrashed him for the offence of stealing a carton of cigarettes and wearing bodge clothes, also October 10, 1957 where a father asked that his son (apart from being institutionalised for 3 years for car theft) be given “a good hiding”.

⁴¹³ Moore, 4.

women, early anti-nuclear protesters in the city, who wore aprons and scarves printed with slogans, were each fined £1 under the Traffic Act.⁴¹⁴

Status offences reported in the newspaper show how limited the State's services were in the areas of housing, welfare benefits, child care and family support services. A fifteen year old girl from a migrant family was declared neglected and committed to the care of the Child Welfare Department on the grounds that she had come home very late from an all day outing, and had been drinking. The family of four all lived in one room. She would be released back to her family when her parents could "provide better accommodation".⁴¹⁵ In two cases involving quite young children who were declared neglected, the toddlers were taken from their errant mothers and committed to care until they were sixteen years old. In the first instance, the mother had left the baby alone in a locked room while she looked for other lodgings.⁴¹⁶ In the second case, the child had been left outside a wine saloon while its mother and a friend took turns inside drinking, and outside minding the baby. At first glance the latter two cases seem to involve genuine neglect but closer examination shows that moral judgements were also involved. The baby left alone had been left alone before and the father was in gaol. In the second example, the Law Report recorded that not only was the baby dirty, but the mother was known to the police, was separated from her husband, and had once left the child in an *Italian* (my italics) man's room.⁴¹⁷

Despite the involvement of both the police and the Child Welfare Department, the best solution provided here to the problems posed was the removal of children to care – a sentence of fourteen years institutionalisation for both toddlers. In two of these three examples of behaviour regarded at the time as morally aberrant, and punished severely, relatives were instrumental in reporting the offences. In the first case of the fifteen year old girl committed to the care of the Child Welfare Department "until the parents could provide better accommodation", lack of appropriate housing would seem to have caused family problems, according to a reading of *The West Australian*. But details of the offence revealed in the Perth Children's Court Evidence Book suggest that the girl was declared neglected because she had also had sex with a boy during the day out, and her mother had sought help from the Child Welfare Department.⁴¹⁸ While the girl was committed to care, the boy involved was put on a bond of £50 with surety of £50 to come up for sentence if called upon with next 12 months. In the instance of the

⁴¹⁴ *The West Australian*, October 11, 1957.

⁴¹⁵ *The West Australian*, February 12, 1957.

⁴¹⁶ *The West Australian*, June 1, 1957.

⁴¹⁷ *The West Australian*, April 27, 1957.

⁴¹⁸ Perth Children's Court Evidence Book 2495/62.

baby left alone in a locked room while its young mother went house-hunting, the child was brought to the Child Welfare Department by its grand-mother who, rather than acting as baby sitter, reported her daughter's behaviour. The kindest interpretation that can be put upon such actions by close relatives that resulted in the drastic penalty of institutionalisation is that family situations had arisen with which a mother and a grandmother could not cope, perhaps for lack of financial and emotional resources. They then sought assistance from the only welfare bureaucracy they knew to be available: the powerful Child Welfare Department with its variety of responsibilities and abilities. The alternative view that can be taken of family members who reported their daughters' offences is that their desire to maintain the family facade of respectability was all important. Beryl Grant referred to the perception that unmarried pregnancy was seen as a "blot" on the whole family and John Lack has described the concept of family reputation in his memoir of a 1950s Footscray childhood when:

Family reputations rest, however, not only upon the behaviour of the immediate family but of one's extended family too. The local papers cover the court and police news in detail, naming names, and families live in trepidation lest they be tainted by association.⁴¹⁹

In an era when people lived in the same locality for many years there was a genuine fear of what neighbours might think and say. Reporting transgressions would be seen as putting one's own house in order, and harshness preferable to laxity.

The community's attitude towards young people is illustrated in the pages of *The West Australian* with its framing of adolescent behaviour as both newsworthy and detrimental to young people. In spite of minor grumbles, by 1957 there had been a number of years of increased employment opportunities. Young people were less impacted by fears of depression and outright war, having little memory of these events, unlike their parents. *The West Australian* focussed heavily on the cold war and fears of communism, but its pages were also sprinkled each day with illustrations of clothing to be bought and goods for sale. For the first time adolescents were being enticed to establish themselves as individuals through their choices of clothing and entertainment and when they did so a great number of the older generation ridiculed them and resented it. Young women were both courted and denigrated: *The Weekend Mail* apparently saw nothing incongruous in publishing pictures of adolescent bathing beauties and then an article on unmarried mothers which featured the Alexandra Home and was entitled

⁴¹⁹ Grant interview June 23, 2008 ; John Lack, "Reminiscences. Melbourne. In and out of my class" in *Australian Historical Studies* Vol. 27, Issue 109 October 1997, 158-165.

“Place of No Return”. Masculine desire was to be catered for; the consequences of female desire were irretrievable. Similarly, *The West Australian* law court reports of the sexual behaviour of adolescent girls were regularly preceded by pages of advertising for female clothing, including the elaborately engineered undergarments of the day, all designed to enhance feminine allure. For girls and young women in the 1950s notions of choice and autonomy were beginning to emerge but the law and the community were slow to accept change and continued to respond with repressive measures.

Chapter Seven - Conclusion

The fears Barbara Maison felt when she was seventeen and pregnant were valid. My research has shown that the Child Welfare Department was indeed capable of exercising great control over the lives of young people and often did so, in conjunction with the women police. Girls were questioned again and again over their sexual activity and this could result in charges of “neglect” being made in the Perth Children’s Court. Such charges usually brought punishment: strict probation, committal to the care of the Child Welfare Department or institutionalisation in the state’s only reformatory for girls, the Home of the Good Shepherd. Rehabilitation under the Home’s austere regime consisted of long hours of hard work in the commercial steam laundry. Those young men who had sex with girls under sixteen, the age of consent, were on occasion charged with unlawful carnal knowledge, although imprisonment was rare. Barbara Maison was unfortunate. If her parents had agreed to her marriage, she would have simply joined the one in three mothers whose first child was conceived before marriage, and the ninety-six 17 year olds who were married in Perth in 1957.⁴²⁰ Although she was not charged with any offence her punishment was severe: lifelong grief at the relinquishment of her baby. Statistically small in numbers compared to the overall female juvenile population, unmarried mothers and “delinquent” girls suffered disproportionately for the breaking of society’s rules.

This examination of the treatment of girls and young women, and the social and community attitudes towards them in 1950s Perth demonstrates the gendered nature of society in that era. The dominant ideology of the time promoted marriage and motherhood as the only rewarding careers for women and the period before marriage was beset with both expectations and restrictions on young women. They were expected to work, often in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs, and to buy consumer products, particularly those that made them attractive to prospective husbands. Once married they were expected to become housewives and mothers, but with limited access to the means of controlling their own fertility. If women were widowed or deserted, employment outside the home might be sanctioned, but was fraught with difficulty since there were no childcare services. Children could be lost to institutional care through family poverty. If a couple separated by agreement and the husband paid no

⁴²⁰ “Going Steady?” by Louise Hunter in *The Weekly*, October 2, 1957; *Statistical Register of Western Australia for 1957-58*.

maintenance, the wife had no option but to surrender her children to the care of the state since she was not eligible for a widow's pension. This was the fate of the very young Lawson children, committed to the care of the Child Welfare Department until they were 18.⁴²¹ Widows' pensions were dependent upon being of good character and denying sexuality: a war widow relinquished her baby from the Alexandra Home because she feared losing her pension if it was discovered she had been living with a man.⁴²² Girls encountered by the women police in their patrols of "city streets, parks and gardens, hotels, wine saloons, dance halls and places of amusement and other public places" could be questioned at any time about their sexual activity and work attendance and were subject to an unofficial curfew and constant surveillance at such places.⁴²³ Those children and young girls subjected to sexual abuse were put into the care of the state, which meant being incarcerated in a religious-run institution, while their abusers were fined or went free.

The repression and restriction of women and girls had historical roots in the 19th century. According to Jill Julius Matthews, a western obsession from the 1870s onwards with the size, health and composition of population, became at the turn of the 20th century in Australia "directly involved in the construction of modern Australian femininity" through various campaigns relating to public health, education, child welfare, and social purity.⁴²⁴ In these campaigns:

a new gender ideology of femininity, a new ideal of the good woman, was forged. The core of this ideal of the good woman was mothering. Before the 1880s, a woman's social value was judged at least as much from her activity as wife, as sexual partner, economic assistant, companion, servant. In the 1960s, this aspect of woman was returning to high valuation. In the years between, mother reigned.⁴²⁵

Accompanying their mothers into this new and corseted definition of womanhood, young girls discovered that youthful delinquency had also become increasingly gendered. Delinquent behaviour for boys was marked by disobedience and petty theft; for girls delinquency centred on concerns about their actual sexual activity, or potential

⁴²¹ Perth Children's Court Evidence Book 2495/62, State Records Office of Western Australia (SROWA). Real names are not used.

⁴²² Friends of Ngala Oral History Program OH 2631/4, source unable to be contacted, Battye Library.

⁴²³ Consignment 430 Item 1958/ 3284v2 Women Police Policy and General, SROWA.

⁴²⁴ Jill Julius Matthews, *Good & Mad Women* (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, 1984), 75-85.

⁴²⁵ Matthews, 87.

sexual activity.⁴²⁶ Constructions of the “good woman” and the juvenile female delinquent both served various purposes of the state. Since these archetypes of female behaviour still existed in the 1950s it should not surprise us that they then served a different purpose. Fears in the first half of the century surrounding the issues of population growth, health and venereal disease had given way to concern about possible threats to the stability of the family which was both an important consumption unit in an increasingly consumer oriented society, and a bastion against the perceived threat of communism.

The dominant political ideology of mid 20th century Australia was that of Robert Gordon Menzies’ Liberalism. It was an ideology of social conservatism promoting two very clear views of society and the place of the family in that society. Firstly, Menzies had positioned women and “the virtues of the home as central to non-labour ideology”.⁴²⁷ Every aspect of an individual’s life had political implications, and a strong nation and good government rested upon a virtuous citizenry, one which subscribed to middle-class values.⁴²⁸ According to John Murphy:

Conservatives worried about the containment of the social forces unleashed by postwar prosperity and Cold War tension, and so emphasized the reconciliation of personality with social stability. If citizenship was, in effect, being a well-adjusted civic personality attuned to social structures, the family was central to this process of reconciliation because ‘it was seen to provide an antidote to the mass society’, by playing a role in maintaining social stability, by regularising sexual relations and by socialising children.⁴²⁹

and further, citing May, “Suburbia would serve as a bulwark against Communism and class conflict”.⁴³⁰ However if “ways of seeing the family were equally ways of seeing society and citizenship”, “the family” (a term that has resonated periodically ever since in the media and political rhetoric) meant, in conservative ideology, the nuclear

⁴²⁶ Robert van Krieken, “State intervention, welfare and the social construction of girlhood in Australian history”. Paper prepared for TASA ’92 Sociology Conference, Flinders University Adelaide 10-13 December 1992, 1-26. available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/2123/902>, 4.

⁴²⁷ Judith Brett, *Robert Menzies’ Forgotten People*, (Sydney: Macmillan Australia, 1992), 56.

⁴²⁸ Judith Brett, “Australian Liberals and the moral middle class”. [online]. Sydney Papers; 15 (3 and 4) Winter/ Spring 2003: 126-134. Availability: <<http://0-search.informit.com.au.library.ecu.edu.au:80/fullText;dn=20040998;res=AGISPT>> ISSN: 1035-7068. [cited 15 Mar 09], 139; Judith Brett, *Australian Liberals and the moral middle class*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 133.

⁴²⁹ John Murphy, “Shaping the cold war family: Politics, Domesticity and Policy Interventions in the 1950s” in *Australian Historical Studies*, v.26, no.105, Oct 1995, 544-567; 549, 560.

⁴³⁰ John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties Private Sentiment and Political Culture in Menzies’ Australia*, (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2000), 16.

family.⁴³¹ These visions of the family and society were based on exclusion. That is, there was no legitimate place for “moral delinquents” or unmarried mothers until their status was reformed. Nor were these visions seriously contested by the opposition of the Australian Labor Party, with its pre-occupations with internal divisions and masculine wage structures.

The second image promoted by Menzies’ Liberalism of how Australians should see themselves was that of belonging to a classless society. He had at one point in the 1940s declared that there were no classes in Australia while at the same time Liberals were formed from, and adhered to, values which were based on 19th century Protestantism and ideas of the middle class as bearers of virtue.⁴³² Being middle class was a social rather than an economic category:

seeing oneself as “middle class’ was less a matter of occupational position than of attitude. Being middle class was a self-conception of being independent, sturdily individual, self-reliant; the middle class had no real boundaries, and any who shared its values could belong.⁴³³

As *The Australian Women’s Weekly* invited all its readers to participate in an imaginary world and subscribe to an idealisation of femininity, so too did the dominant political ideology suggest that by subscribing to certain values and behaviours, any one could participate in the strong, classless society that withstood all threats. The contradictions between the concept of a societal vision that was both classless and middle-class were effortlessly bridged by an ideology that was open through the practice of certain virtues, and particularly appealed to women, with its emphasis on home and family.

I contend that families’ attempts to maintain respectability were attempts at inclusion into this middle class, or at the very least, not to be excluded from mainstream society. The concerns of the first half of the 20th century about social purity, population growth and women’s sexual behaviour, particularly before marriage, causing venereal disease now centred on the behaviour of young women in the context of the respectability of the family in an era of new unease about changes in society. Being respectable also has early origins in the white settlement of Australia. Renate Howe and Shurlee Swain assert the concept was imported from Britain, began with differentials between convict and free arrivals, was influenced by the imbalance

⁴³¹ Murphy, “Shaping the Cold War Family”, 551, 560.

⁴³² Brett, *Forgotten People*, 38; Brett, *Australian Liberals*, Sydney papers, 129.

⁴³³ Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, 66.

between the sexes and “increasingly came to be measured in relation to marriage”.⁴³⁴ Respectability, as time passed, also became “increasingly repressive”. In the 1950s although prosperity was increasing (a change in itself) other less comfortable changes were taking place giving rise to new fears. There was migration affecting the composition of the population. *The West Australian* for example, emphasised this by designating ethnicity wherever possible (“migrant”, “Italian”). Column after column of the newspaper was filled with news of the Cold War and Communist activities. At the same time there were daily pages of fashion illustrations for women’s clothing, bewildering an older generation used to “making do” and “going without” during the Depression and second World War. Customs and clothing imported from America were alarming and the prohibition of American music, songs, literature and films might solve all youth problems.⁴³⁵ The Acting Commissioner of Police recommended a “parent-imposed curfew on any son or daughter with bodgeie or widgie inclinations” as a way of dealing with that most troublesome age group between 14 and 19.⁴³⁶ Not surprisingly in this overheated climate of general alarm about change, clinging to respectability was one way in which the family could negotiate change. When the family was promoted as the central unit of society, and its stability as all important to both the country and consumerism, being respectable was also a way in which the family could participate in that society. Individuals as part of the family could maintain their place in a changing world.

Barbara Maison described herself as coming from an ordinary working class family. She and her boyfriend behaved in what Stratton would describe as a traditional working class manner that is, they had sex before marriage, confidently believing they could marry when pregnancy resulted.⁴³⁷ But then arguably events more closely resembling middle class patterns of behaviour ensued. Her parents refused her permission to marry and ensconced her in the Alexandra Home with the family doctor arranging adoption of the relinquished baby.⁴³⁸ Barbara Maison said upon leaving King Edward Memorial Hospital “We entered that place together my child and I, I walked out

⁴³⁴ Renate Howe and Shurlee Swain, “Fertile Grounds for Divorce, Sexuality and Reproductive Imperatives”, 158-174 in Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (eds) *Gender Relations in Australia, Domination and Negotiation* (Marrickville: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Group (Australia) Pty Ltd, 1992), 159-160.

⁴³⁵ Letter to the editor, *Daily News*, January 31, 1957.

⁴³⁶ *Sunday Times*, January 20, 1957.

⁴³⁷ Jon Stratton, *The Young Ones*. (Perth WA: Black Swan Press, 1992), 170.

⁴³⁸ Adoptions at the Home were arranged variously, either through the Child Welfare Department, the Home itself, or privately as in Barbara Maison’s case.

alone. As though he had never been, or existed".⁴³⁹ This denial presumably enabled the family unit to avoid social condemnation and exclusion and maintain the family's reputation.

A number of authors have commented on how mothers reported their daughters' behaviour, either to the Child Welfare Department or to the Women Police.⁴⁴⁰ This is confirmed by my own research of Perth Children's Court Evidence Books but it is unclear if families sought assistance and advice from these sources or whether they were prepared for their daughters to be put under the care of the Child Welfare and perhaps institutionalised.⁴⁴¹ In 1957, the women police responded to 4,124 enquiries and complaints, some of which were about run-away daughters. This figure excludes lost children enquiries, "women assisted", "women and girls located" and girls returned to institutions after absconding. Girls over 14 "spoken to" by the women police totalled 602: it was this group whose details were kept on record and whose behaviour was monitored, sometimes resulting in charges of neglect being laid.⁴⁴² But against these numbers, and a female population under 18 which in 1954 was 109,142, the numbers of young girls actually institutionalised, for whatever reason, was extremely small. In the year ending 30 June 1957, 134 girls aged 1 to 17 were charged with being either neglected or destitute and of this total, 35 were in the 15 to 16 year age group.⁴⁴³ Of those charged, not all were institutionalised: some were released to the care of their parents or recommended to be placed in foster homes.

What purpose then was served by the hard working women police knocking on suburban doors at 5.45 am to demand if a young girl had "misconducted" herself, or the involvement of the C.I.B. who might decide that a girl was "likely to lapse into a life of vice"?⁴⁴⁴ Or the detail of sexual activity recorded in court evidence, even in an affiliation case in which a man willingly admitted paternity and wanted to marry the

⁴³⁹ Submission 97, *Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children.* (Commonwealth of Australia 2004). Available at: http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/inst_care/report/index.htm.

⁴⁴⁰ Robert van Krieken, "State intervention, welfare and the social construction of girlhood in Australian history". Paper prepared for TASA '92 Sociology Conference, Flinders University Adelaide 10-13 December 1992, 1-26. available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/2123/902>, 20; Rosemary Kerr, "Inefficients at best and criminal at worst": Juvenile Delinquency in Western Australia During the Interwar Years", in Charlie Fox (ed) *Studies in Western Australian History* 98-115 (Nedlands, WA: University of Western Australia, 2007); Leonie Stella, "Policing Women: Women's Police in Western Australia 1917-1943". Honours thesis, Western Australia, Murdoch University, 1990.

⁴⁴¹ See for example Perth Children's Court Evidence Books 2495/62 and 2495/63, SROWA.

⁴⁴² Consignment 430 Item 1958/ 3284v2 Women Police Policy and General, SROWA.

⁴⁴³ Annual Report of the Police Commissioner for the year ended 30th June, 1957. Police Department Annual Reports 1927-64, Batty Library.

⁴⁴⁴ Perth Children's Court Evidence Book 2495/62, SROWA.

young woman?⁴⁴⁵ *The Weekend Mail*'s article on unmarried mothers in the Alexandra Home emphasised that girls were "hard to handle" because they had given birth. The *Western Australian*, in the pages between the Cold War and Boans' Fashions, devoted space to details of minor juvenile misbehaviour. All these factors point to a prurient interest in young women and sexual activity. This was the "totally irrelevant voyeurism" Barbara Maison alleged in her submission.⁴⁴⁶

There are connections between respectability, which I contend was inherent in attempts to regulate young women's behaviour, and which Howe and Swain suggest were imported from Britain, and ideals of femininity. Beverley Skeggs traces the changes in Britain from eighteenth century upper class images of a lady showing "ease, restraint, calm and luxurious decoration", images intended to show difference from other classes of women, to the nineteenth century development of the feminine ideal where visual indicators and values combined in an ideal "always coded as respectable" which was the province of the middle class.⁴⁴⁷ In this owning of femininity and respectability:

White middle-class women could use their proximity to the sign of femininity to construct distinctions between themselves and others. Investments in the ideal of femininity enabled them to gain access to limited status and moral superiority.⁴⁴⁸

They could then judge those who were "lacking in femininity, hence respectability". Since working class women were seen as being inherently "dangerous, disruptive sexual women", being overtly sexual was not respectable.⁴⁴⁹

Ethel Scott, head of the women's police unit, expressed her concern about moral delinquency, linking female behaviour with responsible citizenship and conflating old ideas of respectability and proper femininity with current political ideology. She toured country towns in response to the worries of citizens about the "doubtful behaviour" of young women aged 16 to 18, meeting local dignitaries and visiting youth haunts in an unproductive search for "misconduct".⁴⁵⁰ The State Labor Party central executive wrote to the Minister asking for more women police to prevent delinquency, and as late as 1960 the Women's Service Guilds, in another request, were expressing alarm over the ages of young women ("practically schoolgirls") spending the night with service

⁴⁴⁵ Perth Children's Court Evidence Book 2495/64, SROWA.

⁴⁴⁶ Submission 97, *Forgotten Australians*.

⁴⁴⁷ Beverley Skeggs, "Ambivalent Femininities" 311-325, in Stevi Jackson & Sue Scott (eds), *Gender. A Sociological Reader*. (London: Routledge, 2002), 311. 312..

⁴⁴⁸ Skeggs, 312.

⁴⁴⁹ Skeggs, 312.

⁴⁵⁰ Consignment 430 1958 3284v2 Women Police Policy and General, SROWA.

personnel.⁴⁵¹ Statistics have shown these fears were much exaggerated. This is verified by comments made in 1958 by the Deputy Commissioner of Police “It is not considered that there is any very marked increase in delinquency, although the Press seem particularly anxious to exaggerate any misbehaviour amongst the youthful section of the community.”⁴⁵²

The constant surveillance of a small group of young women at youth haunts, mainly located in the city area, served as a warning to all young people to not only restrain their natural ebullience but to maintain an older generation’s standards of behaviour in a changed political and social environment. As such, these young women served as scapegoats. Judith Brett describes what happened in the 1950s war of ideology between capitalism and communism:

In their attempt to rid society of conflict and disorder by ridding it of communists, anti-communists were re-enacting the ancient ritual of the scapegoat, in which collective beliefs and social cohesion are affirmed above the principles of social division. Just as the psychological mechanism of projection rids the self of its disturbing, hostile, unwanted parts, so the ritual of the scapegoat banishes from society those who come to symbolise society’s irreconcilable conflicts and insoluble problems.⁴⁵³

In the 1930s women had been “used as scapegoats to ‘explain’ the consequences of economic depression, as they were commonly accused of taking men’s jobs”.⁴⁵⁴ In the Second World War the demand for labour involved the state “both structurally and ideologically, in orchestrating women’s participation” in the war effort.⁴⁵⁵ By the 1950s marriage was promoted as the ideal “career” for a woman, in keeping with the political emphasis on the nuclear family. Over a period of some twenty years, women’s place in society had undergone significant manipulations. In addition the 1950s was a decade in which the pursuit and classification of deviation from acceptable norms were quite ruthless. Struggles between capitalism and communism also exemplified struggles between good and evil and respectable and disreputable: the divisions were sharp.

⁴⁵¹ Consignment 430 1958 3284v2 Women Police Policy and General, SROWA.

⁴⁵² Consignment 430 1958 3284v2 Women Police Policy and General, SROWA

⁴⁵³ Brett, *Forgotten People*, 98.

⁴⁵⁴ Joy Damousi, “Marching to Different Drums, Women’s Mobilisations, 1914-1939” 350-397 in Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (eds) *Gender Relations in Australia, Domination and Negotiation* (Marrickville: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Group (Australia) Pty Ltd, 1992), 371.

⁴⁵⁵ Kay Saunders and Geoffrey Bolton, “Girdled for War, Women’s Mobilisations in World War Two” 376-397 in *Gender Relations in Australia, Domination and Negotiation* (Marrickville: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Group (Australia) Pty Ltd, 1992), 395.

The misconceptions built around the degree of existing “moral delinquency” enabled the scapegoating of a small number of young women. In a small and isolated city like Perth where the community feared change and the unknown, particularly from external sources, there was reassurance that old certainties still existed. More importantly the misconceptions served to obfuscate the state’s lack of revenue and political will to tackle the problems of family dysfunction, poverty and drunkenness. It was far more expedient to place expectations on children and young people to carry the responsibility for their own status as neglected or destitute children. Any obligations to provide care and support were off-loaded to religious and private organisations which received inadequate supervision and which frequently had their own individual ideologies. At a federal level, policy initiatives were either directed towards the welfare of the middle class nuclear family or were still imbued with conservative notions of self-reliance.⁴⁵⁶ For example, in 1957 “widows”, a term which also covered divorced, separated and deserted women, struggled to survive solely on pensions. A widow with children received £4/12/6d. per week, having recently been granted 10/- a week to provide for second and third children – an amount substantially less than that awarded in affiliation cases against adjudged fathers in the Perth Children’s Court. Women over fifty without children received £3/15/0d, a week - a very miserly amount indeed.⁴⁵⁷

Misconceptions about “moral delinquency” were paralleled by misconceptions about adoption and served the purpose of the state in one aspect, that of finance. Rosemary Kerr cited economics as one of the factors in state promotion of adoption in the inter-war period: illegitimate babies, if relinquished to adopting parents, were not a charge on the state.⁴⁵⁸ If retained by their mothers, and subsequently, through poverty, placed in state care, their upkeep was an economic cost to the state. State revenue remained low in Western Australia in the 1940s and in the 1950s adoption was still being promoted as the solution to problems posed by an illegitimate baby. In keeping with the stigma of illegitimacy there was a belief that all such babies were relinquished. Barbara Maison alleged in her submission that under the Matron of the Alexandra Home:

⁴⁵⁶ Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, 81-84 for example, discusses the tax benefits directed to this section of the community.

⁴⁵⁷ T H Kewley, *Social Security in Australia 1900-72*. (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1965), 221; I use the word “miserly” because I started work in 1951 as a junior on £3/5/0d. a week. The female basic wage in the metropolitan area in 1956 was £8/12/4d – see *Official Year Book of Western Australia 1957*.

⁴⁵⁸ Rosemary Kerr, “The Appeal of Blue Eyes: Adoption, Citizenship and Eugenics in Western Australia During the Interwar Years”, 3-12 in *On the Edge: Refereed Proceedings of the 4th Annual Curtin Humanities Post Graduate Research Conference, 2000*. Eds. Gemma Edeson & Cathy Cupitt (Perth: Black Swan Press, 2001), 6, 10.

It was a given that you had to give up your child for adoption to stay in the home. She made it clear that my baby was not MY BABY - there was no way I was going to keep "it", if I wanted to stay in the home. I had nowhere else to go.⁴⁵⁹

Yet in spite of the universal belief that it was the only solution, and in spite of the enormous difficulties that faced single mothers, statistics from 1957 show that in Western Australia, from a total of 795 ex nuptial births, adoption applications processed through court numbered 309.⁴⁶⁰ These figures are consistent with Kerr's findings relating to Western Australia in the period the period before the Second World War, and Audrey Marshall and Margaret McDonald's conclusion that Australia-wide, 60 percent of unmarried mothers kept their babies.⁴⁶¹

These erroneous beliefs held about "moral delinquency" and adoption in the 1950s were essential to the scapegoating of a very small section of the community. In turn scapegoating was the rationale for blame and control and held wider ramifications for other women to adhere to society's current ideals of femininity. If they did not, for whatever reason, their needs and wants were ignored. Like Barbara Maison they did not receive tolerance and fair play and there was no compassion.

⁴⁵⁹ Submission 97, *Forgotten Australians*.

⁴⁶⁰ *Statistical Register of Western Australia for 1957-58*; Family Court of Western Australia, letter dated January 30, 2008.

⁴⁶¹ Audrey Marshall and Margaret McDonald. *The Many-Sided Triangle. Adoption in Australia*. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 11.