

Parliamentary enquiry into past forced adoptions in Western Australia.

SUBMISSION BY:

MARILYN JOY RULYANCICH (NEE NEWTON)

20 JUNE 2023

To the committee

Thank you for taking the time to read my personal account of the stressful and troubling occasion of my past and my apologies for the late submission but it is still very raw and painful to write. I do so now having to continually wipe my eyes as my emotions are uncontrollable.

It must go without saying that I fully support this inquiry and thank those responsible for finally recognising that our babies were actually stolen from their mother's. I am one of them.

This is my story.

From the age of 9 to 13 years old, I was a victim of sexual abuse from an uncle who visited regularly from the south west. We lived in Willagee during this time. He was eventually found out by my Mother and arrested and convicted. My Mother immediately went to my Nana's and all the family got involved. He served time in prison on multiple occasions for similar offences until his death as an old man whilst still in prison. Sexual education was not heard of in 1963 and I went on to being a teenager with a distorted knowledge of what you should let boys do or not do.

By age 15, finding out I could be pregnant after missing a few periods was a surprise, as I had missed them before being quite athletic. I tried to hide it from my Mother whom I was scared of, and tried to "get rid of it". I had heard that you could lose a baby horse riding or by having "too" hot baths or drinking castor oil. None of these worked and I started to have sensations in my breasts. I knew I was pregnant. Somehow my priest found out and came to see me and asked me if it was true and I denied it. I was then mentally tormented as I had lied to my priest and felt unworthy to go back to church and have never done so. I thought that I was denied by God and would go to purgatory.

When my Mother found out she completely changed and I was locked in my room while she tried to decide what to do with my shame. How could a daughter of hers get into "trouble"? I was taken to a female doctor whom I had never met before who confirmed that I was almost 6 months pregnant. I was removed from school and they arranged for me to be installed in N-Gala. I remember the sign outside the building that said "A Home for Unmarried Mothers and Unwanted Children". I never felt more unloved, unwanted, dirty or ashamed in my life.

The months in N-Gala were traumatic to say the least for a young 15 year old. I was still at school and the Junior exams were about to happen. I did my exams in the Matron's office while she guarded me from trying to leave. All the girls were great and treated me kindly. We were all made to do the laundry duties, folding nappies, do kitchen duties, including washing baby bottles. We were never allowed to see the babies but could hear them crying for their Mother's all night.

There was always a mixture of excitement and trepidation when one of the girls time came to go to the hospital to give birth, There was always talk amongst the girls that they were going to keep their babies and no-one could stop them. But the welfare department had their own ideas, and we were told that we had no right. , We were told that we were unmarried and therefore could not look after a baby. That we were disgraceful and promiscuous and should be ashamed of ourselves for getting into "trouble". I learnt a lot of new words in there.

My roommate [REDACTED] went to hospital while I was there and gave birth to a son. She came back to the home and her parents came to take her back to their wheatbelt farm I thought I would never see her again, but she came back 48 hours later to collect her son. Her parents were going to help her support him while she went back to work. Not many others did that.

My Mother and my baby's father, [REDACTED], would come to visit me every couple of weeks and I would sit in the car with them for about a half an hour so that no-one would see them with me. My feeling of shame grew. My Mother kept telling me that they (the welfare department) were going to give my baby to a married couple who would give my baby a better life than I could. How could I?, she would say? You don't have a job, you have nowhere to live and nothing to give a baby. That was how I found out that I wasn't welcome back home after I left the home.

I hated lying to my Nana but when my birthday was due on the 5th November she wanted to send me some new baby doll pyjamas she had made for me. I wrote to her and gave her an address in Kalamunda. I wrote to the Post master there and told him where I was and if a parcel arrived for me, could he please forward it to me in the home. He did that and sent a lovely note saying I was a lovely girl for caring for my Nana like that. I wasn't used to people saying nice things to me.

The other girls in the home were all older than me and took me under their wing. I even learnt how I got pregnant. I remembered that when I had to give evidence during the questioning about my uncle that I referred to both male and female private parts as penises. In the home the girls taught me what they really were and how they worked and how a pregnancy happened. I realised at that time, that none of the girls, me included, were "bad girls". Just unlucky. I knew a lot of girls who I would have termed "bad" and I was not like them.

According to the doctor's examination, I was due to have the child on 31 December 1966. On the usual night shift rounds on 10th December, the duty sister asked me why I was still awake. I told her I had "butterflies" in my stomach. She came and examined me and said that I was going in to labour and to get my bag. I told her that I hadn't yet packed a hospital

bag as I wasn't due for ages. She waited while [REDACTED] helped me pack a bag then drove me in her car to Kind Edward Memorial Hospital in Subiaco. On the way there she commented that I looked too happy to going to give birth and I remember telling her that I was happy because I was going to be home for Christmas and I could see my Nana and would not have to lie to her anymore. I had to tell my Nana that I was going away to be a missionary nurse in Innaminka because I checked on a map and it was a long way from Fremantle where she lived. My Nana loved me and had wanted to visit me for Christmas. I didn't know that the Innaminka I had seen on a map was only a road up Greenmount Hill and not far away at all.

When we arrived at KEMH, I was shown into a dark room and heard a lot of whispering going on about me. I was asked to sign some papers but after the talk from the girls in the home, I said that I didn't want to sign anything without seeing my Mother first because we were going to keep the baby. I remember I was huffed and puffed at by the hospital nurse. My nice Sister from the home had already left.

As my contractions grew, I was put into an annex at the back of the hospital facing the railway side. I remembered saying to a day nurse that I could see my feet walking on the clouds above the window. She laughed and said that it was the medication I had been given. I didn't know that I had any and certainly hadn't given permission to do so. I hated seeing my Mother popping pills for everything and said that I would never take any tablets and never have unless as prescribed by my doctor.

My contractions slowed and I was told that it was probably false labour and I would have to go back to the home but while they were waiting for my transport back they started up again. I didn't realise that I had already been there over 24 hours.

When the contractions really started and I was in a lot of pain, I was taken to a birthing suite. It was the one on the round window at the front of the hospital. I kept saying that I wanted to go to the toilet, not knowing that it was the baby coming. When I tried to look up at what was happening, I saw about 10 people in white coats all peering at my open nightgown. I was scared and the nurse told me that they were student doctors and as I was an unmarried mother they were allowed to watch. I started to cry and felt more alone than ever before. I was scared, in pain and had a hundred eyes staring in a place that I thought was private to me. I wanted to get up and run far away. My baby was delivered by student nurse [REDACTED]. Years later, when my doctor wanted to give me a pap smear, he asked if I wanted a female present and I replied that I had lost any dignity a long time ago. That was the occasion that I lost that dignity.

They (whoever it was) pulled a sheet up in front of me so that I could not see the baby come. When the baby came, I asked what it was, a boy or a girl, and I was told it was better I didn't know. I asked if it was alright? And I was told it was none of my business. I asked if it was alive? I was told that I should keep quiet now as I was distressing the other Mother's. I tried calling out to see my baby but don't remember anything more until I woke up in the morning.

When I woke up in the morning, I was in an 18-bed ward with all the new Mothers. The nurses were wheeling the babies in to be fed. My milk was pouring out of me, and my

nightgown was wet through. I asked to see my baby, but I was told that “it” had already been taken away to a new home with two parents and that I should forget it all now. I cried and cried and cried. The nurses kept telling me to be quiet as I was disturbing the mothers and babies. But I was also a mother and had nothing.

A kind doctor came to see me and asked what was wrong. I said that they wouldn’t tell me what I had, if the baby was alright or let me see the baby. He told me I had a little girl. I started to cry again, but quietly this time. All the mothers in the ward were looking at me and whispering but I knew they were condemning me. He asked me if I wanted anything. I said I wanted to go back to the home. To the other girls, my friends. I didn’t know what to feel anymore. I was truly lost. I had no-one and no-one wanted me. I was criticised for having a baby at just 16 years of age and would never amount to anything. I wanted to kill myself.

Where was my baby?

Where did she go?

Who has her now?

Did she have all her fingers and toes?

What does she look like?

What did she weigh?

Did she have hair?

What colour is it?

Will they be good to her, make her happy?

I was told that I was too much trouble in the ward, and I was being sent back to the home. While I was waiting for the Sister to collect me, some flowers and chocolates were put on my bed. I thought that it must have been a mistake but found that the kind doctor had sent them to me. I wish I had remembered to ask for his name.

I was asked to fill out her birth certificate. I filled out my details as her mother. [REDACTED] details as her father. I gave her the name [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] was a nice girl at school and [REDACTED] was my second sister’s middle name. When I went to get a copy of her birth certificate when the new law allowing non-identifying information had been released, it was missing the details of her father. What was it? An immaculate conception? Why? Why did they do this?

Four days after I gave birth, my Mother and [REDACTED] came to collect me. My Mother sat in Matron’s office and the two of them told me that now it was all over, I had to forget about it and get on with my life and be good. My Mother said I was going back to school the next year as I was a good student and got good grades. I was told not to tell anyone where I had been but that my lie of trying to be a missionary nurse wasn’t what I wanted, and I was going to finish school. I still had not signed the adoption papers and was asked to do so again. Again, I refused and said that I had not seen my baby so how did I know she existed?

How could I give someone up that didn't exist. Matron and my Mother looked at each other and Matron nodded. I was beckoned to follow her. She took me and my Mother to the baby wing and into the nursery. [REDACTED]. I was led to a cradle and the label on the cradle said "baby Newton". How? I had been told, and believed, that my baby had already been adopted and was taken away. They had all lied to me. Many times! Here she was. Thick black hair. Asleep. I went to touch her and was reprimanded. We don't wake sleeping babies until their feed time here! I looked at my Mother and [REDACTED] and screamed! Look at what you are making me give up! I ran out of the nursery; dress wet from milk leakage and ran outside. My heart and soul were truly broken, and I knew they would never be mended. My Mother and the welfare department had made sure of that. I learnt to hate that day.

I was taken back home to my room in Willagee. I wasn't allowed out with friends. [REDACTED] came to visit sometimes. I went with him one day to his house up the road. His parents were always good to me before, so I didn't suspect anything until his mother took me into her bedroom and sat me on her bed. She asked me how I was, and I replied that I was alright. She said now tell me the truth. The child isn't [REDACTED], is it? I gasped, got up and walked out of the room, out of the house and walked home. I was alone again. I felt dirty again.

My Mother eventually took me to Perth to the Supreme Court Building where I was threatened that I had to sign the documents now as the baby had gone to its new home. The welfare lady and my Mother escorted me to the clerk's desk. He was behind a glass window and showed me the papers. He said I had to read them and then say an oath and sign them. I did not read them as I had two people looking over my shoulder. My Mother's cigarette breath was making me sick. The clerk said that I had to repeat after him and raise my hand. He then said I could just put my hand on the counter. I defiantly raised my hand to full height and in the loudest voice I could muster repeated the oath under the glare and indignation of my Mother and the welfare officer. I signed it, ran outside, after yelling at my Mother "Are you happy now"? I sat on a step outside the building with all the office workers walking by and sobbed and sobbed. My Mother came and said, "what was that all about and get in the car".

In all this time, no-one had ever told me that I had any rights. I had been lied to consistently. I did not know anything of my daughter's life, existence, or anything at all.

My life was changed. I was once a good young girl. I went to church regularly. I was in the church choir, the youth club, the Girl's Friendly Society, I helped out at Sunday School. I respected my peers, worked hard at school. Was a state finalist in tennis and squash, in the interschool basketball team and participated in many sports.

After the way I had been treated by the government, my Mother and the way society saw me, I changed. I was put into a job in a packing factory which I hated and decided to run away. Or leave home as it is called now. I was over 16 years old and wise for my years. I left home and had confused attitudes to life. I started living with the first boy I liked at 17. We got engaged after 4 years, married, and divorced one year later. He wanted to have children and I wasn't ready to go there again. I met my second husband and had two children to him. Each birth was very traumatic, and I had trauma each time worrying that someone was going to take my babies away.

I had relationship troubles again and divorced him, met another man, married, had one more child and after 17 years of abuse found the courage to finally leave him.

After being alone for nearly 10 years I met and married my fourth husband and we are still happy and together. I am now 72 years old.

I have always tried to find my daughter's whereabouts. After leaving home to live with my boyfriend we lived in Morley. I did not know until many years later that my daughter lived nearby. I used to go to the shops and always peered into prams. Was it a girl? Did she have thick dark hair? That was all I ever knew.

I joined Jigsaw, ARMS and reached out to any organisations that I hoped could help me find my daughter.

I spent many hours studying the microfiche at the State Library, pouring over birth notices. I had a starting list. As the years went by and the child grew, I would put notices in the newspapers. Both in WA and over in the east as I was told that a lot of our babies were shipped over there. Like cargo it sounded. The ads always said "Happy xxth birthday to the daughter I have never seen. Love Mum [REDACTED]". I hoped that one day she would see it and contact me. I received my share of crackpot responses.

When I heard that relinquishing mothers were allowed to now receive unidentifying information I wrote to the department to see what I could now find out about my baby. I didn't think I would get a response so was pleasantly surprised when I received a letter from them.

They told me that the father had written that she was healthy and working in an office. That she had an older brother who was also adopted. She was in a relationship. She did not want to see me. I could go to their office and discuss it with them if I want to. I wanted to. I met them on a Friday afternoon and was leaving to go to Bali that afternoon. They sat me in an office and read out the letter that he had written. I had been blessed with exceptional eyesight and as they were reading it from across the room, I could actually make out the signature on the bottom. The surname I could read was [REDACTED]. I did not disclose that I could see it as I didn't want anyone to get into trouble. I had a name. I had a name. I had to go to Bali then with this news burning inside me.

When my daughter reached voting age, I started searching the Census records too. Now that I had this new information, I researched even harder, Back to the microfiche. There it was. A birth notice. Weeks after she was born.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

MY Daughter.

The census records gave me an address. [REDACTED]. I had lived in Morley too. Not now though. Of course, I drove past. A couple of times. But never saw anyone.

I had to respect her wishes that she didn't want to see me and so sat on my new knowledge for a few years. As she was in a relationship, I wondered about how serious it was. So, I

decided to hire a private detective to help me find out where she worked. I don't know what I expected to happen from there but having her home address he managed to follow her to the bus and found out where she worked in the city.

I went into the city and to her building. I thought I would go up to her level of work and see if I could recognise her. I was in the lift with a couple of people and there was a girl in an orange dress and denim short jacket. I took the lift back down to the ground floor and rang the PI to see what she had been wearing. And yes, that was my daughter. I was next to her in the lift. I waited until lunchtime in the hope that she would come down again and I could get another glimpse of her. She came out and I followed her. She went to Gilberts. A well-known craft store and bought what looked like some lace. I immediately thought that she must be getting married.

After this, I tricked a fellow staff member into giving me where she was marrying, and it was the Wesley church in Perth. I then tricked the priest into giving me the name of the photographer she would be using that day. I contacted [REDACTED] at his home and asked if he would meet with me. I said it was personal and I would tell him the whole story in person. I met with him and his wife the next week. [REDACTED] were amazing. They cried at my story, and we concocted a plan that I would pretend to be doing a mature age university course on photography and needed a wedding in a church for my portfolio. He asked [REDACTED] if she would allow this woman to attend and surprisingly, she agreed.

The day came when I dressed to go to my daughter's wedding as a photographer trainee student. I met [REDACTED] and we went to the house to do the preliminary photos at home. I spent the next couple of hours listening to her friend's chatter, her mother saying that she had her hat On Approval from David Jones and would return it on Monday saying it didn't suit her outfit. I couldn't believe that she wouldn't pay for her hat for her daughter's wedding. I spoke with her father about his azaleas blooming in the backyard. He didn't know that I was really a landscape designer with my own business.

There were so many similarities. Her cat was named [REDACTED]. My niece was named [REDACTED]. She liked champagne. Me too. She had her hair in a French roll. So did I.

I was very careful and kept mostly to myself, fiddling with cameras, lenses, lighting equipment. [REDACTED] was great and guided me through everything. We went to the church. I knew it was going to be hard for me, so I put myself in the Minstrels gallery to watch from afar.

I watched my daughter enter the aisle and walk towards her soon-to-be husband [REDACTED], her brother [REDACTED], and the other wedding party. She was on the arm of man I had just met and talked gardening with.

I could smell the perfume from the ladies, hear the oohs and aahs as she walked down the aisle and silently wept. What had they taken away from me. Why was I forced to hide at my own daughter's wedding? Why? Why so many things. It wasn't fair!

I went outside to do my job as a photographer and took loads of photos with my husband's camera and an instant camera. I snapped happily away with a big smile of my face hiding my

true feelings. I later found that I had forgotten to put film in all the cameras and only had the photos on the instant camera.

We then followed [REDACTED] to the university buildings at UWA as the weather was a bit too threatening to do them at the Harold Boas gardens as originally planned. It was at the university that something remarkable happened. In straightening out the wedding veil, I touched my daughter's arm. She was 21 years old and I just touched my baby for the first time. [REDACTED] captured it on film.

From this point on I had to step back from her life. It was her wishes. She never had to know who the strange woman was at her wedding. She would never see me again.

My story hasn't ended. There is so much more to tell. We are now in contact and love each other. Her Mother has passed away about 8 years ago and her Father just two weeks ago. She wanted me and her three other siblings to attend his funeral which we all did. It was so hard for me to sit through the eulogy and speeches and hear of a life that included my daughter's young life. I heard stories and saw pictures that should have been mine to tell and show.

That is what the government of the day decided was best for the children. But it was not the best for the Mothers. What was taken from us, was the mother child bond that is so important. My daughter was always led to believe that I did not want her. Who gave anyone the right to tell her that terrible lie? Who gave anyone the right to tell me so many lies?

To all the politicians who are involved in helping us to understand what and why this happened, hug your children and then hug them once more for me and other mothers like me who weren't given that chance.

I apologise that this is a little bit past your deadline for submissions, but it was hard to address and complete.

I give permission, and would like, for it to be published and would be available for any interview at any time.

Kind regards

Marilyn Rulyancich

[REDACTED]