

On 22nd February, 2023, WA announced an inquiry into the forced adoption of children. The practice was common across Australia between the 1940's and early 80's.

The non-contact law, whereby children/ biological parents are banned from contact if a veto has been taken out by either party is cruel and outdated. The contact veto is preserving a secret. Adoptees need to know who they are. Many experience great shock when finding out for the first time, that "they are not who they thought they were."

This is my submission.

I don't consider I was forced, per se, to give up my child for adoption. However, I was coerced, bound by attitudes and, quite simply, given no choice.

I was a teacher in Marble Bar in 1969 when I became pregnant. I was very naïve as far as birth control was concerned. The father accepted responsibility. However, his parents, who owned a large, remote cattle station, made it clear that their son would be disinherited if he married me. They considered that he was too young take on the responsibility of a wife and baby and that I wouldn't cope with station life.

I had to resign from the education department, as was required in those days, and go to Perth where my mother had arranged for me to stay with an Aunt. Dad was the manager of the [REDACTED] and both he and mum were shocked, saddened and ashamed when they found out. They didn't want my pregnancy becoming known, so I wasn't allowed to return [REDACTED]. Dad had been there since the 1940's. It was where he met mum and where both my brother and I had grown up. It was my home. Neither was I allowed to stay at our holiday house in Perth.

Mum and Dad made it very clear to me from the outset that I had to give the baby up for adoption for the following reasons:

Unwed mothers were frowned upon.

The child needed to be raised by a husband and wife.

They would not support me in any way.

There was no government support for unmarried mothers.

I needed to continue with my teaching career at the earliest opportunity

I was made to feel very ashamed.

It was hard for me living with my relatives, as although [REDACTED] was kind and understanding, my very stern uncle, not so and I felt uncomfortable in his presence. I don't know how I got through those months. I was frightened and confused with limited information on what lay ahead.

On my return to Perth a friend suggested I see his doctor, who also happened to be [REDACTED]. It was not a good choice. It was obvious that the doctor disapproved of unmarried, pregnant girls and it certainly showed in his cold, clinical, manner towards me. He gave me very little information. I was subsequently booked into St. Anne's hospital. During the last few weeks of my pregnancy mum came up to Perth to be with me and we stayed at our holiday house. My brother who had just finished an apprenticeship moved in as well. Mum avoided talking about my pregnancy, or 'predicament' as she called it, so I was thankful that I had the support of my brother. Whenever a visitor came to the house mum made me go to my room, or outside where I couldn't be seen. If we felt it was going to be a long visit my brother would get his car and meet me at the back fence and we would head

off on a drive. On one occasion I overheard mum talking to [REDACTED], "It should be a joy when your daughter has a baby..."

The day came when I was admitted to St. Anne's to be induced. I really had no idea what was going on. I just did as I was told. A seemingly kind nun was escorting me to a ward. She had her arm around my shoulder and said, "You are such a tiny little thing. Is your husband very big?" "I don't have a husband," I replied. She immediately removed her arm and her manner towards me changed completely.

[REDACTED] was born on the afternoon of the 19th March 1970. I asked the doctor if my baby was a girl or a boy. He told me it was a boy. I then tentatively asked what the colour of his hair was, to which he replied, "He doesn't have any hair and that's all you need to know." That was to be the only bit of information I had for 29 years.

After the birth I was put into a ward with 6 other women, where I had to watch and listen to babies coming and going, being nursed and cooed over. **Was this my punishment?**

I was discharged from hospital and returned to the North Beach house. Over the next few days I became increasingly unwell. The site of the tear, which had occurred during the birth, had become infected and I was in a lot of pain. Mum finally called a local doctor who attended the house and immediately had me transferred to Osborne Park Hospital where I was treated by compassionate and caring staff. I overheard a comment by a nurse who referred to the St. Anne's Doctor as 'a bit of a butcher.'

Some weeks later, a [REDACTED], from the adoption agency phoned and instructed me to be at the Supreme Court the following day to sign the adoption papers. I was bewildered and asked about my son and the people who were adopting him. I was told that no information could be given. The woman was very abrupt **and I felt that this was further punishment.** I hadn't allowed myself to think about keeping my baby until this point. It was a very sad and emotional time for me.

I returned to teaching during the second term of that year. Life must go on. I struggled with day to day tasks, both at school and at home. I realized later that I was suffering from post natal depression, which I also experienced after the birth of my other two boys.

During the early eighties, at the urging of my husband, I tried to find my son through Jigsaw, but was told the family did not want any contact.

Fast forward 29 years:

One day in 1999 I received a phone call from a lady who said that my son wanted to make contact with me. She was a friend of [REDACTED]. His adoptive mum had passed away. He knew I was a teacher and had traced me through the Education Department. I met him for the first time that year and over the following years we kept in contact through phone calls, emails and visits. We shared an interest in football and race horses and were able to chat easily about these. I discovered that he loved the outdoor lifestyle and adventuring...just like his biological father, with whom he also made contact. Unfortunately, after meeting with him just the once, his father made it clear that he didn't want any further contact.

About six years ago I attended a Readers and Writers Festival in my home town. One of the sessions I went to was a book promotion about an author's adoptive journey and his quest to find his biological mother. Not long after that an exhibition, entitled, "Forced Adoptions" came to the Museum here. There were several stories very similar to mine. It was, once again, an emotional time for me.

Right from my first meeting with [REDACTED], I longed to hear his story and to tell him mine. The above exhibition was touring the state and was to be in Albany, not far from where he lives. I now wanted us to share our stories more than ever, so I wrote to him and told him about the exhibition and the book session that I attended at the festival. I suggested that maybe we could spend Christmas together and have that long await talk. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

We are no longer in contact.

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