

Inquiry into past forced adoptive policies and practices

Firstly, let me say how grateful I am to the Committee Members for conducting this enquiry.

I met a young lady in the 1980s who I was greatly attracted to and began seeing her. Before we got to know each other very well she said, 'there is something about me that I need to tell you'. When she explained that she was adopted, I had no idea of the consequences of her circumstances and that it would have any impact on our relationship.

I recollect making what is now obviously a clumsy response along the lines of 'well, that doesn't matter, I like you...'.

We married five years later and further along had three children who are now adults.

Once the onerous responsibilities of parenting and being a wife to a senior public servant lessened, my once happy, effervescent and bright wife and best friend became overwhelmed by the tidal wave of grief that she had blocked out for years. No longer preventable thoughts of ill worth came flooding back. These thoughts had plagued her throughout her childhood and teenage years as, in her mind, she must have been worthless or at least unworthy as a baby for her mother to have abandoned her at birth.

The feelings of abandonment were reinforced by the experience of giving birth to her own children, accompanied by the emotions of fearing that some person or institution would take our babies away.

My wife appears to be still regarded as an adopted child by legislation and departmental procedures, rather than an adult. She is in her late 50s, a capable business woman who assists clients with problem solving and risk management. Strangely though, she is not able to answer re-occurring questions and find the solutions to many problems.

For example:

- What to say when a doctor asks, 'do you have any family history of this apparent illness?'
- How to advise our daughter on the risks of pregnancy when we don't know which drugs were administered to her grandmother at birth and for post-natal anti-lactation treatment.

- Why it remains illegal for her to use her birth name.
- Why, even though she has been abandoned by her adoptive mother, she must retain the legal status of being adopted.
- What, if any, options are open to her as a Western Australian citizen to revoke her adoption.
- Why won't the government agencies, in particular King Edward Memorial Hospital, give her the written records that could possibly assist in finding solutions.

To deal with the effects of trauma that forced adoption has brought, my wife has sought counsel from doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists and adoption counsellors. I am fortunate to remain healthy and able to manage our business in a way that we can make trauma repatriation a high priority, including funding this expensive process.

To recall my clumsy response to my then girlfriend's revelation of being adopted, I now have a greater appreciation of why it matters to be adopted.

I hope this enquiry can achieve the following results:

- WA Government and private sector (including religious) organisations who had anything to do with removing babies from mothers to be legally obliged to release all records to both the mother and the adopted person over the age of 18. This should be without the consent of either party as they are now adults.
- Free, qualified medical advice to granddaughters of mothers who were treated by WA Government and private sector (including religious) organisations who had anything to do with removing babies from mothers so that they can be informed about any lingering consequences of drugs used around the time of birth.
- A simple, cost free system of annulment of the adopted person's court imposed birth certificate.
- The right for a person forcibly removed from their mother to use the name of their choice.
- Free, qualified trauma counselling for those whose lives remain impacted by past adoption practices.
- Legislation to support the raising of children within families in circumstances where the mother is unable to support a new baby alone - in place of adoption that should be an absolute last resort.

Your efforts in achieving these outcomes will be greatly appreciated by those suffering from the trauma of past adoption practices and hopefully also reduce the risks of re-occurrence for future generations of Western Australians.

Yours sincerely

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