

To:

The Members of the Committee

Inquiry into Forced Adoption Policies and Practices

Parliament of Western Australia

My own experiences are as an observer of four family members affected by the practices and/or policies of adoption, and forced adoption, spanning 3 generations.

My earliest awareness of the intricacies, secrecy and harmful nature of each of these family members' stories have varying degrees of detail due to the well-known aspect of secrecy surrounding many adoption practices.

The generational trauma caused by these practices, and the institutions that made an industry out of them, are not widely known by those of us who haven't lived the experiences. In my discussions around forced adoption, many otherwise well-educated people are still unaware of what went on during the FAE. In my case, as an observer of the adopted people within my family, there was always a shrouded aspect built into discussions about family origins. My grandmother, having been adopted due to her conception being the outcome of an affair between [REDACTED] and a lady named [REDACTED], whom he wanted spirited away. The process of her adoption was highly-secretive, informal and money changed hands. In the end, my grandmother was brought up by an emotionally-chaotic couple. The adoptive father being at once kind, then harsh. The adoptive mother was more consistent, cruel in her treatment; ranging from hurtful remarks about my grandmother's appearance, to frequent reminders of her illegitimate birth and her 'bastard' status. This treatment cemented within my grandmother a simmering anger that underpinned her every interaction with all of those around her, especially her own children and, to a lesser extent, her grandchildren. This isn't to say she was always angry at us, or didn't love us.

When visiting my grandmother as a young child, it didn't take long to know that we had to be on our very best behaviour. Whilst she would give hugs, these were very formal; kisses on cheeks were only

from us to her. Rarely would I see any affection, even in the form of a hug, initiated from her towards my mother. Smiles were likewise a rarity. I grew up thinking that all grandmothers were formal and somewhat emotionally cool. She was not unloving, we always felt welcome, she genuinely loved having us visit and help around the yard, carving the roast then watching The Two Ronnies or David Attenborough with my grandmother; memories I will always cherish. For a time, as teenagers, my sister and I lived with her, and my memories of that time are also mostly positive. What was clear and became more obvious as I grew from teenager into adulthood was that my grandmother had an emotional deficit; something she admitted to, and apologised for, when speaking with my mother in the later years of her life. My grandmother said she knew without doubt that this aspect of her interactions with us was a direct consequence of her experiences as an adopted person.

The second member is my aunty. Her situation is hazier. She was coerced to give her child up for adoption due to her unmarried status. As a result, I grew up being unaware that I had a cousin who had been adopted out of the family. My aunty eventually moved to another country very early in life and I always had the sense that she was missing something. As an added twist, much later in life, I also found out that my parents discussed adopting their little niece, but history didn't go that way.

I did eventually meet my cousin decades later, the third family member directly affected by forced adoption, for the first time in Canada. While that meeting went relatively well, there was no doubt that she held resentment at having been given up for adoption. My cousin and her mother have had next to no relationship in all these decades.

The fourth family member affected by forced adoption is my wife. Her story, experiences and trauma not dissimilar to my grandmother, aunty and cousin; indeed, my wife and my grandmother met and became kindred spirits in the last decade and a half of my grandmother's life.

Regarding extended family and disconnectedness, I have witnessed my wife's attempts at keeping some form of steady, meaningful contact after meeting her biological mother at 19. It has almost

always been my wife initiating communication and offering assistance wherever she could; as is the norm in a mother/daughter relationship.

This lack of steady contact with the family she was never given the chance to grow up with has also affected our children; having very little connection with elements of the extended family that other families take for granted; another example of the generational trauma caused by practices carried out decades ago.

While I have seen the daily drain on my wife, due mainly to the hurdles at every corner, I have also seen her spirits buoyed when interacting with other survivors of forced adoption, and the incredible support that they give each other. Most of all I have been so proud of my wife's efforts, particularly her knowledge of the complex nature and life-long trauma caused by forced adoption and similar practices, such as commissioned surrogacy; creating further generations of people who feel disconnected from a birth right that, again, most of us take for granted.

Now my wife's energies are spent in researching, reflecting and advocating for herself and others, those that were, and are, directly affected by the heinous policies enacted by institutions and individuals during the Forced Adoption Era.

I can only hope that this inquiry has the most positive outcomes possible, including educating the public about the truly dreadful actions forced upon the mothers and their newborns (now adult survivors with deep and complex trauma). We need apologies from all institutions involved, proper apologies, written by those that are trauma-informed. Lastly, a redress scheme must be implemented.

These forced adoption policies and practices were implemented in the past, the trauma, and need for addressing that trauma, is here and now.