

# **Western Australian Inquiry into past forced “adoptive” policies and practices.<sup>1</sup>**

**From: Alison Ingram, b. Feb 1961, New South Wales.**

**Placed with strangers, aged 13 days**

**Adopted by said strangers, aged 27 days, NSW.**

**To: The WA Environment and Public Affairs Committee**

Thank you for the opportunity to make this late submission: 27/10/2023. I directly address the committee’s stated intentions to *understand the lived experiences of those affected by historical forced adoption practices*, and to *examine the role of the State Government, health services and private institutions in these practices*.

In 2019, Ancestry DNA testing led to finding I had a Western Australian-born paternal sibling. My sibling, born in 1949, was separated from our single father and adopted by strangers under closed-records adoption legislation in about 1954. I have been advised that to be given access to my sibling’s adoption file – to which I am entitled - I must apply for my “putative” father’s name (he died in 1987) and IF my “putative” father’s name is anywhere on my NSW records then I may apply to WA CPS for my sibling’s file. I have been advised this will take approx. 18months in total. I hope the anticipated time-frame of 12 months, to obtain WA records, if indeed I am able to provide the required “proof” of our blood-relation, will soon be improved.

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<sup>1</sup> Re: my email of 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2023. I note, of late, that the noun/verb ‘adoption’ is often being replaced with the adjective ‘adoptive’ which normally defines/describes positive actions performed by those who “adopt” other peoples’ children. It is also becoming common to define the child/adolescent adoptee as “the adoptive child” which is a powerful socially constructing shift in language, directing the “adoptee” to perform “adoptively” and redirecting social discourse about “adoption” as if in an attempt to eliminate utterance of the word and thereby alter social comprehension of what Adoption is and what it does. The committee is investigating past ADOPTION policies and the practices of state and church-run institutions, which produced thousands upon thousands of infant-stranger Adoption Orders and with them, by repetition and secrecy, social “belief” in adoption as a “social good”.

It is also my hope that you will take up my invitation to listen to the testimony of seven adult adoptees. I am offering the committee access to my doctoral research performance project – an Audio-Drama – which provides insight into the lifelong impacts of “past” adoption practices upon an incalculable number of Australian citizens. Adoption is a legal construct which I argue allows the state to relinquish all responsibility for the welfare of adoptees and the trauma inflicted by infant/maternal separation and adoption.

You will not find “proof” of illegal practices in medical and adoption records – you will not find evidence of doctors and others working to facilitate adoptions admitting to stealing newborn infants, treating unsupported single mothers as subhuman, or expediting adoptions on behalf of “friends”. Indeed, my own adopting father, shortly before he died in 2014, admitted that he ‘knew a doctor’. We already have the testimony of hundreds of Australian mothers, who may have signed as my mother did, in 1961, a “preliminary application for the adoption of a child” and like my mother, then attempted to revoke what is conveniently called her “consent”. My mother was poor and unsupported not young. She was denied information - denied her legal rights when she attempted to prevent my Adoption Order proceeding, and I was adopted by people who used illegal/unlawful means to “legally” adopt me. No-one can ever know my lived experience unless people begin to listen to me speak of it.

For the last 25 years Australian mothers of loss to adoption and adult adoptees have been attending and/or providing testimonials/evidence for state and federal inquiries. We have ample evidence from all of them: the NSW Inquiries; the 2010-2012 Senate Committee Inquiry and its Recommendations; the AIFS 2012 Report and 2014 Scoping Study; the 2021 VIC Inquiry - all of these inquiries provide evidence of systemic corruption and the performative power of language which conceals the lived experience of those most affected. Language of the past continues to be used in the present, as if we are not talking about hundreds of thousands of

mothers who were ‘manipulated by a system that gave (them) *no choice*’ (Gillard, 2013). The language of the past – the dominant narrative of adoption - is inaccurate/erroneous, yet it prevails in social and professional discourse, suggesting social comprehension of the truth of history remains suppressed and social belief about “past” adoption continues to assume it was “the time” and mothers were given “the option” to “choose adoption” – that millions of women across the western world, turned against human nature and willingly/altruistically “relinquished” their babies to the state for the benefit of others. How does “the time” justify the social violence of “past” adoption practices?

I witnessed the Hon. Peter Foster’s attempt to address the language created by past practices, “correcting” the witness about repetitive use of old language (a representative from the WA Dept of Communities), when he stated, ‘not all the mothers had the option to give their baby up for adoption’ (Foster, 18/09, 23:40). However, what I hear in this statement is the prevailing belief that thousands upon thousands of Australian mothers *were* given “options” and “choices” when it has been established - over and over again – across the western world - that the very invention and existence of 20<sup>th</sup> century Adoption legislation, produced ever increasing market demand for supply of new-born babies, which in turn produced convert abuse of power and development of the adoption industry. Repeating language such as ‘mothers who gave their babies up for adoption’ supports prevailing social belief that it is ethically and socially acceptable to deny human mammalian instincts and to separate/take new-born human beings from their mothers.

The core tenet of modern Adoption is and always has been that an Adoption Order is performed “in the best interests of the child” yet the law itself then prevents child welfare checks. It is time the lived experience of those permanently separated from their mothers, kin and ancestry, who have not been asked, ‘So, how did it go for you?’ were seen and heard.

## **My Research**

I recently completed my doctoral ‘Applied Theatre as Research’ project and accompanying thesis. The completion of my doctorate marks the culmination of a lifetime of searching and ten years of researching the history of adoption in Australia. My research focuses on the lived experience of Australians like me, who were permanently separated from their mothers, at or soon after their birth for the explicit purpose of facilitating their adoption, and were held in institutional care for varying though commonly brief periods of time, before being “placed” with and adopted by strangers, under closed-records legislation.

I developed an original art-work with six volunteering research participants who had all searched for and achieved reunion with their mothers. Together as co-researchers and a performing ensemble of seven, including myself, we are the speakers/actors of our own stories. All participants were born during the closed-records/forced adoption era. The eldest was born in 1947 in VIC, and the youngest in 1977, in NSW. When COVID-19 forced me to redesign the performance project, the result is Audio-Drama, *Infans*, VOIC’D. The play runs for 90mins without an interval. *Infans* is Latin for ‘one who cannot speak’.

As a representative of many thousands of Australian adult “adoptees” I offer the play as testimony to commonalities, similarities and differences in the lived experience of an incalculable number of Australian citizens, who are perpetually defined as ‘children who were adopted’. We are adults who are asking to be heard.

Please email me at [REDACTED] for access to the audio file/s of *Infans*, VOIC’D

Thank you

Alison Ingram