

Carmen Burdett

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### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

In 1970 I met a young man who I then dated. He was my first boyfriend and I thought he was my forever person. We dated for some time and although we dated I would not relinquish my intimate self, with him, (as I had been told by my mum, Bad girls have sex.) As I wanted to be a good girl and have my mums approval this became my approach to our relationship. However My boyfriend who's name was [REDACTED], was so disappointed with me and so we broke up. From then on not wanting to talk to me. It was devastating. (I had by this point in my life suffered a difficult relationship with my mother. Beatings from my father when he returned from work for something I may or may not have done during the day [REDACTED])

[REDACTED] My aunt, [REDACTED], seemed more like a mother than mum was and so I wanted to spend more time with her. After an argument with my mother, she left the house and never returned and we never saw her again, even tho we passed her house every time we went to the city.) So my boyfriend not wanting to see me any more was the worst thing that could have happened. So I decided to tell him I would do as he asked. A cold calculated decision which went ahead.

I was always telling him I was frightened of getting pregnant, and he said he had a way of making that not happen. I believed him. I had no sex education from mum except the bad girl stuff so I had nothing to draw from. I just blindly believed him.

We hung out together for some time, going to the beach hanging out at his brothers and sisters house, he was the youngest they were all married, it was nice. I liked them and seemed to fit in. I don't remember meeting his father but I must have. He was always up the back in the shed drinking. His mum was lovely and I felt for the first time in my life that I was part of this family. Then I got pregnant.

Again I don't remember what happened whether I told mum I had missed my period or what, but I ended up at the doctors. But mum was with me. The doctor was our family doctor I had seen all my life and very old. Having discussed the situation I was sent off to do a urine sample, In return to her surgery, she announced that I was pregnant. She then said what are you going to do about it. Mum piped up and said shes having it adopted. I was still trying to understand what was happening to me. Let alone thinking about what I was going to do. The next thing I know I have been kicked out of home my belongings coming flying out the front door as I walked up the drive and I moved in with a group of friends I new. I had told [REDACTED] I was pregnant. His family were so excited about it. And made room for me and said they would help me, adoption was off the table for them and I felt hopeful. Eventually I had to leave the place I was living at, and so went home again. But not for long.

[REDACTED] was a devout Catholic and worked out of Saint Anne's, in Mt Lawley. We were sent there. And I met a nun by the name of [REDACTED]. I liked her gentleness but it wasn't about me, for mum spoke up, saying I could not live at home while pregnant. I was then sent to a family to be there home help. I think I stayed there for quiet some months, when her husband who worked on a mine somewhere, came home to work in Perth, and I had to move out. It was during that time that on a visit to [REDACTED] house I noticed that he was quiet, and the visit was not the happy time it had previously been. I came back to my home help place and was upset. The lady I worked for said perhaps I should phone him. On making the call I talked to his sister, She said that there was a problem but she felt that [REDACTED] should tell me. I do not remember whether it was [REDACTED] or his sister,

but I eventually was told he could not handle the responsibility of the child and so he broke up with me. It was the worst time ever, We had already collected baby furniture and his sister had given us some clothes and things for the baby.

With the climate at the place I was staying at I had to go home. By then I was showing I was pregnant and people could see. I don't know what mum did or said I just hung around home and did my best. I cried so much during that time.

Every where I went there was shame and condemnation at my situation. I eventually put a silver ring on my finger to say I was married. Birthing classes I was sent to, where all the women had husbands and I was on my own where particularly hard. I did not return to them. I just wanted to hide. I made a friend with a young boy at the service station two doors down. He would say hi and have a quick chat. Completely innocent but it helped to have someone to talk too. Old friend from school came round to visit with me and seemed like I was on show. Or I would meet some friends in town and I felt on display hey look shes pregnant. It was not a happy time. Poor baby had not many happy vibes coming from his mum. I did used to rub my stomach and talk to him so hopefully something good crossed into his spirit.

████████ Child's father, came to visit me on Christmas day at mum and dad's place, then we planned to meet after the baby was born in the hospital and leave together with the baby and move into the house that his mum had brought next door to her. Not as a couple but as parents. He never arrived, I was heart broken. I found out 20 years later that My father had told the family they were not to come to the hospital to visit me and would be removed if they did. I felt that deep rejection once again. This was my father's first grandchild and a son, and was something he always wanted. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of December I was taken to the delivery ward to be induced for the birth of my Son. I was put in a room with a lot a curtains around me and could hear the other women crying out and making very loud noises as they delivered their babies. I was mostly alone that I remember, and very fearful. Eventually the doctor was called and she was very angry at being brought to the hospital when she was in the middle of a dinner party. She commented I hope this has been worth it. I remember she approached me angrily and said what is going on here. And took what I thought at the time were large silver scissors, but have since found out they were forceps, she poked them into my private areas and pulled. The pain was horrendous. The fear I cannot describe. I don't remember the delivery but when the child was born I was drugged and all I remember is the sense of something leaving my body. He was born on the 29<sup>th</sup> of December. No noise nothing no crying. I woke up and was upstairs in a bare room with a bed and 1 chair and in pain. I didn't know how long it was since the birth. I was just confused and overwhelmed with what had just happened. Like it was a dream.

During the stay in hospital I was alone most of the time except for meal times when it was delivered I don't remember any nurses or doctors. However you know writing this I sort of have a feeling that there was a check up of some sort to make sure I was ok. One day however a nun came by and I asked to see my baby, I was denied but cannot remember who it was that told me. I started thinking about my son then I remembered mums story that the babies were brought around in carts at feeding time in the hospital. So I started to walk the hospital going to all the nursery's I could find. Only at feeding time so it took a few days to find all the nursery's I found no babies waiting to be fed. Then I remembered there was a nursery down stairs somewhere near the birthing sweet, but it wasn't called that then, and so I search for it and found it. There in the back of the room was 1 crib with a baby in it. All on his own. I Could not see if it was a boy or girl, but I felt it was my boy. I just cried and slowly walked back to my room. However one day another partner of my family doctors visited me. I had also visited her as a child when our own ██████████ was busy or away. She was younger than the rest of the doctors, and she explained to me what I was going through, in a medical way after the birth. It was so very helpful and I felt she cared. She never returned.

During that period and the after his Birth I Was very lonely, Only one friend came to visit me ██████████, cannot remember her last name she brought with her a small bottle of perfume and we

walked through the Rose Garden, then found a seat and sat and talked she was a great girl, and I hope and pray life was good for her.

Eventually my mum and sister came to visit and the foster sister of my boyfriend, who dad did not know about. However dad was there that day I think he brought mum and sister up. She could not speak of course and so left after a short while. I never saw her again.

The signing of the adoption papers, came next with dad and the lawyer present. I did not want to sign them I think I may have needed coercing as I do not remember much about that. Once it was done everyone left. What I never understood was that mum was the one who said outright firstly that my child was being adopted but dad was the one doing all the work and stuff.

Obviously a doctor or nurse came around some time or other as it was found I was infected in my cervix and where I had been cut to allow the baby to have room to come out. I'm not sure if I had heat lamp therapy or if that was another child of mine. Thing is I came home with the need to dress the wound and sitting in the sun with my legs open to allow the sun to dry out the wound. It was so humiliating having to lay there bare with my parents and my dad someone around the place. Shame and self hatred plagued me.

The papers finally arrived for the adoption and one month later I burnt them in the fire in dad's garden. Something I regret so much. If I hadn't mum would have destroyed them (as it turned out she tried to remove all evidence of my pregnancy and the love my boyfriend and I had kept, letters gifts etc. She found them hidden in my room and binned them. Never asked or told me. Until years later after I had married, and went back to get my stuff and they were gone. I was not happy and told her so.

So life was supposed to go back to normal, but it was a new normal. My friend at the garage who would have a chat with me prior to the birth of my son would no longer talk to me other than hi how are you. My friends who lived up the road from us thought I deserved bad treatment by boys and girls, and was called a girl like you. These were really my sister's friends and I was not even hanging around them that much just talking when they visited my sister and if I saw them at shops etc.

Another work colleague, from my first job, she was a mother of 5 by the way, arranged a blind date with two Italian boys, I asked a childhood friend and she agreed to come with us. He brought his mate and picked us both up at my friend's house. Well we went to the Drive-in and it was clear very soon after arriving that they wanted more than to watch a movie. The boys went to get something to eat so we both decided while they were gone, to make an excuse that we needed the loo and then leave the drive in. So when they returned we said we had to go to the toilet, by then the movie had started so they would probably not come looking for us. We spoke to the boss at the cafe and he called a taxi for us and we escaped I am still proud of us to this day. For having the courage to flee.

After that I was looking for work, I decided to move to the country and get out of the city to run away from the problems I had. Eventually I was offered a job Laverton and so I left with mum and dad's blessing. It was great, very different and sparse but I did love being away and in the wide open spaces which is my favourite place to be even to this day I love to drive into the country, living in Manurah is perfect, it's only a short journey, and just I can sit in the open space I feel at peace, never tire of it. Thank God I found such a comforting thing.

I travelled around a bit then headed back to Perth. Straight away I went back into the agency and looked for another job. This one was a bar person, (barmaid) So off I went to a town in the southwest of WA to work in a pub. The town consisted of a few houses a shop and post office. It was ok but frightening the men were flirty and I couldn't cope with that. One time a chap celebrating the birth of his son and along with his mates tried to rape me. Once I arrived at the pub I wrote to [REDACTED] and he came down to visit me. He was broken, shattered from losing his son he got drunk and cried and cried then after sobering up left for Perth again. I contacted the union and

found out that I had rights, I did not have to serve customers who were drunk or disorderly and certainly the behaviour of the attempted rape was a reportable offence. Not long after I resigned. Moving back to Perth.

Eventually I met a man who was a Farmer but having some time in the big smoke for a few years. He was 2 years younger than me. We dated and he took me back to the farm for new years. [REDACTED] my son's adopted name would have been about 3. I saw the farm as escape, and so when he suggested we marry I said yes. He had the same last name as [REDACTED] which was [REDACTED]. I investigated to make sure there was no connection to the family I was marrying into. There wasn't. I did not tell my prospective husband that I had a child who was adopted. A few weeks before the wedding mum said if you do not tell him I will. So I told him, not wanting her to interfere. He was sad but accepted it gracefully. [REDACTED]

The first few weeks of my marriage I wrote to [REDACTED] at St Annes asking her how my son was. She wrote back a non-disclosing answer, even though I knew that, I had a sense of knowing he was ok.

In 1988 I started seriously trying to find my son. I wrote to [REDACTED] mum and asked her if she knew anything, she replied with a name and surname. I searched the micro film and found a birth notice for him. So I knew his name.

It's funny how things open up and lead to other bits of information. I joined Jigsaw and met a lady who told me [REDACTED] the lawyer, who handled our adoption had passed away but his secretary was still working and to contact her which I did, and she wrote to [REDACTED] adopted mum. Who instantly replied with a letter and then rang me. She promised so much in relationship to [REDACTED] wanting us to be a part of his life he was by then about 19. She met me at Kings Park and we talked for hours and hours and [REDACTED], whom I had met about a year earlier and was the love of my life joined me on this journey of finding my son. Right from the beginning he was along supporting me and has done ever since. [REDACTED] again, after I met [REDACTED] at Kings Park took me out to Morley to visit with [REDACTED] mum and show her the pictures of [REDACTED] and give her all the information I had. I had always felt so guilty and shameful about her grandchild and wanted to make amends to her. It was a visit of reunion. It was there I found [REDACTED] had never been able to have his own children. [REDACTED] was his only boy. I felt so very bad for him. More years of guilt and shame followed.

[REDACTED] other mum tried to build a relationship with me and called in a couple of times for a cuppa on her way home to Bunbury. She seemed so generous and I was so excited. However that didn't last long. When [REDACTED] was 20 his parents came with him to our house and to be honest I expected to see a little baby. Even though I had pictures of him I still was shocked at the vibrant young man walking across the lawn. I just froze I didn't know what to do. Eventually I went to the front door to greet them it seemed like ages but was probably only a minute. His parents left him with me and took off for a drive and [REDACTED] took my youngest son to the shops and [REDACTED] and I talked. He was lovely we were both very nervous. He had brought along with him his papers for his electrician's apprenticeship. I was asked to sign them. I thought that was lovely. I was at that time pregnant with [REDACTED] baby and after [REDACTED] left I was numb from the neck down. I thought I had found peace however it didn't go and then from a visit to the local doctors, I found I was in some sort of shock from the whole years of missing him and then finally being able to hold him and look at him. It did not move by the time I had my next appointment at KEMH. I had to have her there as I was by then 38 and classed as high risk. During that appointment the doctor diagnosed me with depression he then said I want you to go home pack your things and come back to hospital as it's not normal to be depressed when about to give birth. This I did. We made the baby's bed, packed my things and went to the hospital. I had 4 more weeks until delivery time. As I hopped into the lift at the hospital my waters broke and I had to stay until I had baby she was 4 weeks early and they wanted

me to keep her in the womb until she was 38 weeks. I stayed until baby was born , I was very fearful and and anxious during the next 2 weeks.

I had little visits from [REDACTED] over the years, he came up home one time and played footy with the boys. Our daughter was about 5 or 6 months old. However [REDACTED], Mum phoned him and he had to go home. That was the beginning of her interfering in us building relationship with [REDACTED]. She one time rang me and said we have to back off from [REDACTED] has tried to take his life, I believed her why wouldn't I, So I backed off, Never explained to him what was happening. and I Lost touch. He rang me once for medical information on the family. Which I gave him. Said he would call me back the next Sunday. I waited about six month's or so and he never did. Time went on precious time. So I started to search again. I cannot remember what happened from that search. I know I sent letters to him and I think he contacted me, but that;s all I remember.

Then I never heard form him again for a couple of years, [REDACTED], our daughter may have been about 5, and I came across a lady who new his wife's family, and new of [REDACTED]. She was able to bring a whole lot of stuff into my life, like a wedding photo of [REDACTED] and his new Wife [REDACTED] Which had been given to me by [REDACTED] wife's, grandfather, who I eventually met and is the kindest man I have ever met. He is 102 now. Quite a feet I think.

I am so grateful to his wife. She wanted to embrace [REDACTED] family and their children's grandparents. When there marriage broke up I stayed friends with [REDACTED]. She had never hurt me. [REDACTED] visited with the kids a couple of times for lunch and it was lovely. I always felt he was trying to tell me something. I never new what it was.

After the last visit he met a young women who was a chemist the same profession as his other mum, (I hate saying his other mum I , should just say [REDACTED]) .and they were friends. [REDACTED] changed. He didn't want to see me any more. He found out I was friends with [REDACTED] his ex wife still and felt betrayed. I cannot express how that has affected me. The deep regret more depression, of which I've suffered all through this whole life since I had [REDACTED]. Its not his fault its mine for not being strong enough to walk away from my parents. Thing is thou I new from experience from other family relationships that if you displeased my mum you where out, never spoken to again. I mean never, so when she said to me if you keep this child you can never ever return here. I new never was never. It terrified me. She was my mother and I so wanted her to love me for I had felt unloved since I was 4.

I know the person reading this and all the other submissions much get so exhausted reading such heaviness and I pray that somehow at the end of the day you are able to download and debrief.

So again over the years I have met people who have known my son. I became a christian in 1995. My husband in 96. We joined and Anglican Church and had a wonderful loving community of people who loved on us and accepted us. I was chosen to join the church Ministry team, which is a type of counselling and that is when all these things kept being revealed about [REDACTED]. I started to get cheeky and ask if people I met who where from Bunbury if they new the Surname of [REDACTED] some didn't but so many did, they were able to give me information about him. I was so blessed. One of the people in our church whom I've known for 27 years now. Just a few years ago I was sharing with her over coffee how I had joined ARMSWA. Any how as I talked she realised that the Child I was talking about loosing was her cousins Son. We talked about it for a while. Sadly shes left our Church and I find it very hard to talk with her now. Then again just recently, I had a conversation with a person who also knew [REDACTED] Father and was good friends with him. So I believe that my God wants me to heal and to be a voice for others who have suffered like I have. I do believe in reconciliation, however from talking with other mothers like me, who have lost their children to forced adoption, I know there are no happy endings in this story. So So sad. Below is a list of the things that have hindered me since 1971 when my son was born.

Loss of relationships.

Not able to hold onto relationships with my children. 2 other sons in their 40's and a daughter in her 30's

Being too sensitive and taking things so personal.

Major fear and anxiety.

Not able to make good decisions for my life make them more to escape and pain .

Loss of [REDACTED], over and over. Its not easy to have him in your life and then to leave again and not hear from him for years and years. I think its about 8 years this time since I last saw him. Never feeling good enough. That constant believe that I am not good enough.

Loosing trust in society, Doctors, Female friends always struggling to trust them

Possessiveness towards my children

Rage that burns inside some times and can explode into arguments.

Abandonment

Rejection, Constantly thinking my husband will leave me.

Constantly fearful My daughter will leave me or die and I will never see her again. She has lived with that since she became an adult and moved away to find her own life.

Not being close to my boys. My first born son in my marriage, had a difficult birth. I was not helpful, as I was frighten he would be taken. He was a forceps delivery and was put in a humidity crib. I found it very hard to bond with him. I had no one to talk to and ask for advise, I Couldn't tell my in laws who were my closest neighbours. We lived over the road on another farm. It was Christmas holidays and just about the whole district was away. So a very lonely frightening time. My second son was a beautifully quick birth and natural as well. Just made it for the hospital because of the long drive. I had no trouble bonding with him.

I had two miscarriages. The thing is I felt so cold, hardhearted, as I didn't have the feelings I new I should have.

When my first born son grew up and then married a lady from our church. Who basically manipulated him and caused a lot of trouble in our family. They had a daughter, I was supposed to be present at the birth but the plans changed and her mother was there. Rightly so.

I couldn't go to the hospital to visit as my daughter was home with Glandular fever,

Any how I ended up going to he hospital, taking my daughter with me and asking her to stay in the car and sleep while I was gone. However that was not good enough I was persuaded to go get her and bring her up to see the baby. Which I felt bad about because I thought it was a contagious disease. Any how an argument came once I got home over the phone and daughter inlaw said I would not see my grandchild again,. That lasted to 3 to 4 months. By then I was totally a mess which effected my whold family My daughter inlaw new of my past and so I felt she tried to hurt me the best way she could. Then when my granddaughter was about 9 my daughter inlaw started again to remove our family from their lives. She started complaining g about things I had done or not done and putting a wedge between myself and my grand daughter. Sometimes she would accsue me of not looking after her properly. Not giving her what I promised. Most time I gave my granddaughter a choice of things.

Buy the time [REDACTED] ( granddaughter ) was 10 she was saying she did not want to come over to my place. I had not seen her for the usual holiday sleep over for around six months and it was her birthday. I rang to take her to the movies. And was told that she wasn't allowed to go and that [REDACTED] did not want to go herself.

Then I made arrangements to come and see her for her birthday. My son opened the door and called [REDACTED]. I gave her her present and some money I had saved to take to the school camp in Canberra. Totalling \$100 in all. A large sum in my neck of the woods.

I never saw her again, for 7 years. By that time she was 18 and a women. Beautiful but with serious mental health issues.

Those 7 years were the hardest time I have ever been through since [REDACTED] Birth. It took me years to accept the loss. I still cannot make a connection with her. She once again has gone silent and won't try and build a relationship.

[REDACTED] children are amazing young kids all very attractive, and just lovely young people. Making a relationship with them is hard, we have no history there is no fit. Love is not enough sometimes, their birthdays and Christmas and family outings missing. The ups and downs of life to share.

[REDACTED] has been amazing letting me know how things are. With the kids. She is trying to get them to come visit. I saw the youngest one 15 two years ago at Christmas. She came with her mom and I was completely undone. She looks fair but like me as a baby. I held her in my arms at 6 weeks only and fed her so I have a small bond with her. I keep hoping. For a brighter future.

Some of the members of ARMS mention about having a redress which I am told is an amount of compensation for what we have been through for the betrayal the pain the loss of a good life with this trauma following us everywhere. For being broken in how we look at life relate to our husbands and other children for the emptiness in our heart that never goes away. For that primal cry for our babies. For the fact that there was a force working against us, in relation to keeping our babies and the government knew about it. Well on hearing this my first response was no I don't need redress. However I have recently realised that I have never felt good enough since the day I was told I was pregnant. That is the basics of me. I want that to change. I am good enough and have survived this without taking my life and I believe I'm worth a compensation payment for the pain and suffering over something that was totally wrong and not completely legal. Therefore I have decided that I would like at least \$52,000.00 to \$100,000.00. The fifty two being the age of my son at the time of this Testimony.

At the Canberra Apology to commemorate the 10 year of the Apology given by Julia Gillard, in March this year. I was sitting on the fence that this was a forced adoption problem. On hearing the speeches at the dinner given in our honour I heard a gentleman speak on this very fact that it was a forced adoption. It was then that I realised it was not my mother's force that caused the adoption but something in place other than my mother. An horrendous thing that not only changed our life but that of our children. And their children. My grandchildren want to know what tribe they belong to who their family were. The history of their family. Who do they look like. What did they do for a living etc etc. I am in a position to provide that for them.

[REDACTED] however has lost contact with his kids. After being an active parent in their lives. Now works in Africa for months at a time and only returns for a few weeks and then, off back to Africa he goes. Although people say the money for his employment is fantastic. It speaks to me that a boy who is so lost and cannot connect to his loved ones. Poor wee sole is all I can say.

Thankyou for allowing me to present this submission so I am able to bring out into the light the wrongs that have been done to us all. Mothers Fathers, children, and the wider family unit.

Regards

Carmen Burdett.