

COERCION IS FORCED ADOPTION.

I am a mum who wasn't allowed to raise her son. In 1975 I was 16 years old, unmarried, unsupported and pregnant. When I was 17 my baby was separated from me. I felt worthless, useless and I knew that was how society viewed me. I had to live with the shame of "giving" my baby away.

SUPPORT - I had NO family support during my pregnancy and was told to leave home before the baby was born. I had previously held down a job from the age of fourteen when my mother's partner insisted I leave school and start paying rent. A job was arranged for me at a supermarket in Subiaco. After about three months of this and now fifteen I applied for, and got another job working in a fashion boutique in the city. My boss, aware that I had a steady boyfriend, and concerned I may become pregnant, took me to the Dr's to arrange for me to get on the pill. The Dr said because I was under sixteen I would need my parents permission.

I worked until my pregnancy became obvious and my boss said she had to let me go. At this time I was living with my mother and her partner in her partner's home. My mother was suffering from alcoholism and was unable to care for me and asked me to leave their home. My father then arrived in Perth after being estranged from me for many years and walked me all over Perth to try and get me an abortion. I was distraught at the thought of this but my objections fell on deaf ears. He was determined. We ended up at a "women's health clinic" where I was finally asked what I wanted. At last I felt like I was being heard "I WANT TO KEEP MY BABY" I cried.

My father disowned me and said "from now on [REDACTED], you are on your own".

SERVICES - There were few, if any services to help a pregnant, unmarried and homeless 16 year old girl in 1975. No housing assistance, no support for a struggling teenage mother which augmented the already feeling of alienation and abandonment. I discovered I was entitled to receive "Special Benefits" due to both my parents in writing to the powers that be, withdrawing all support financially or otherwise. I was living in poverty with my baby for three months before I became eligible to receive a benefit of \$49.75 per week. The only "assistance" I was ever offered by the welfare department was fostering (which I had to pay for) or adoption. I was 16 too young to vote, get a drivers license, take out a loan or obtain contraception for myself. My parents had clearly disowned me and were offering no support at all. Looking back I feel the 16 year old me was bullied and harassed into submission. Even though I was under legal age to sign a document at no stage was I advised by an independent person to act as a guardian and who could have attended meetings with me to support and advise. The system took unfettered and aggressive advantage of the predicament I was in. When I was six months pregnant I found a bed-sitter in Subiaco. I was never offered any help to find somewhere to live from the social workers and was even advised to go back home? I had no home.

COERCION BEGINS - The manipulation and control began at my first antenatal visit to KEMH and was overwhelming! I was not prepared or advised as to what the examination would involve. I was surrounded by unsympathetic adults wearing clinical attire who clearly saw me as a lesser person, a problem. The curtains were drawn around me and the examination began. I found the attitudes from the nurses and Dr's far more painful to endure than the physical examinations during which time I was instructed, "you won't be keeping this baby will you".

I felt powerless and ashamed. I was ushered to a social worker within the facility who echoed the same sentiment as her colleagues and the coercion continued in that order for the remainder of my

pregnancy and beyond. The powers that be at the time saw me as an unfit mother and the system was far more powerful than a 16 year old unsupported pregnant teen could ever be.

LABOUR - There had been no preparation for what labour is about. My labour was induced and I was in so much pain I thought I was going to die. My boyfriend [REDACTED], the 19 year old father of my baby, became very distressed witnessing the birthing process, I recall him asking "what are you doing to her" which was followed by a threat to remove him from the birthing suite, my only support. To my knowledge I was not offered any pain relief or even gas. On the 24/2/1976 I gave birth to a healthy 6lb 8 ounce baby boy I named [REDACTED]. During my baby's birth there was so much damage done to my cervix that my subsequent three other babies had to be delivered by Caesarian section. The hospital attempted to keep me away from my baby even bandaging my breasts holding back my milk. I was given medication that made me drowsy. The social workers kept visiting me in the ward to tell me how much better off my baby would be with a married couple. I couldn't seem to convince them that I didn't want to give my baby up. I recently emailed KEMH for my medical and social worker records. They said they have no record of my medical treatment on their files and that all their systems had changed long ago. I did receive copies of notes written by my social worker who worked at the Department of Community Welfare and upon reading this I can clearly see how difficult things were for me. I also received some documents from the social worker that I saw at KEMH saying that I agreed to put my baby up for adoption before he was born and while there was plenty of discussion with me around this subject it was never intended to be seen as my consent to adopt. I was 16 and doing what I was told by the adults around me and didn't want to be perceived to be obstinate.

YOUR BABY WILL BE BETTER OFF WITHOUT YOU - My mother came to visit me with her partner. I could smell her toxic alcoholic breath, and can still hear the words that slid from her mouth "You've made your bed, now you lay in it, don't expect any help from me".

I was also visited regularly by the social worker who continued to shame me about being unmarried and keeping my baby. I was told that I'd never be able to provide for him or support him and that there were many married couples who would take much better care of him and provide him with more than I ever could. I was repeatedly told "if you REALLY loved your baby you'd give him to people who could afford to give him everything he needs". I began to feel selfish for wanting to keep my baby. How was I going to convince my social worker that I did love my baby without him thinking I was being selfish.

DO THE RIGHT THING / Coercion continues - I was a people pleaser, it was important for me to be seen to be doing the right thing. While I was confused and frustrated at things being so incredibly difficult I was NEVER confused about loving my baby. I loved my baby so much and desperately wanted to keep him. It was a very difficult time financially, mentally and emotionally and all the time I was being hounded to DO the 'right' thing "GIVE YOUR BABY UP". I was raised in a strict religion where a lot of importance was placed on doing the 'right' thing so it was very hard for me to feel that I was a disappointment. I wanted to please people and to be seen as a good and decent person. I was desperate to be loved and approved of.

HELP AT LAST? My baby's paternal grandmother facilitated my baby, his father and me to move into a flat together but it wasn't long before life between us in our new flat became very difficult as there was a lot to navigate with us both being so young and ill equipped with a little baby. [REDACTED] started to see another girl and I found out. I decided to end the relationship. I was at a very low point now feeling I had lost everything. I called my social worker in tears saying that [REDACTED] and I had broken up and I couldn't take care of my baby by myself. I pleaded for help. I could not stop crying. I felt completely broken and alone. The department of community "welfare" never offered me assistance

or counseling of any kind. The only assistance I was offered was fostering or adoption. My social worker recommended that I had no other choice but to place my baby up for adoption and that there was a couple ready to take him right now but I was still "too selfish" to completely let him go. I just needed a break and some help. I was exhausted emotionally, physically and mentally and completely alone.

TAKEN - My social worker finally made a suggestion that seemed a better option to me than adoption. He suggested I place [REDACTED] in foster care so that I could look for a part time job and a decent place to live. He convinced me of the benefits and an appointment was made in West Perth to discuss my situation. I asked [REDACTED] father to come with me, which he did. I don't think either of us understood or prepared for what was to happen next. I remember feeling intimidated, ashamed and embarrassed that now they could all see that I wasn't coping and I felt that everyone looked at me as though I WAS a selfish spinster. Upon arriving the girls in the office seemed friendly and offered to look after [REDACTED] while we had our meeting. We were lead into a room and sat across a large desk opposite an elderly stern looking woman who seemed to have a very hardened and intolerant attitude toward us. She did all the talking (which was a blur to me) placed a pen and form in front of me and told me where to sign. I neither understood nor had it explained to me as to what the implications of signing were and I knew not to question this impatient lady. When we came out of the meeting [REDACTED] and his bassinet were gone and I was left holding his nappy and bottle bag.

NGALA - When I asked where he was they said he had been taken to Ngala. I had absolutely no understanding that this was to take place on that visit. Nothing of that nature was discussed with me. I was distraught and confused. I thought we were just there to talk about the options. I had no idea of how to get to or find this place that now held my baby. I called my social worker who reminded me of the "fostering option" and that this is what I had signed and agreed to in that office. Why didn't anyone explain that that was going to happen and that they would be taking him on that day? He continued to reassure me that I was not to worry and that I had 28 days before anything I signed would become a legal document. He reminded me how I could use this time to put things into place for [REDACTED] and me and to focus on finding a job and place to live. I asked when I could visit my baby and he said it was best I didn't as it would cause him too much distress. During the time [REDACTED] was in Ngala and I was looking for a job and a home. I was discouraged from visiting him because I was advised "it would cause him too much distress". I now know that the distress would've been caused the moment he was taken from that office without me even being able to say goodbye or cuddle him. Many times I saw the anxiety and pain in my little baby boy's face each time he was apart from me even for a short time. My son had to grow up with strangers and denied his entire family. I wasn't allowed to bring up my own child because I was young and unmarried. Thoughts of suicide began to occupy my mind.

NEW JOB, NEW HOME - Within a few weeks I found a part time job in the city and a place to live. I went to collect [REDACTED] from Ngala and was greeted by a very gruff lady who told me that I had signed a document agreeing to adopt [REDACTED] and that being a long weekend the time to revoke my consent would have run out. I said that I would sleep in the foyer if they did not give me my son. The rest is a bit blurry but I did get him back and we rode the bus home to our new little one bedroom flat in Wembley we shared with a girlfriend. I soon went to work and enrolled [REDACTED] in a child care centre right near where I worked in the city for a couple of hours a day. The battle to keep my baby began in earnest. I was visited regularly by my social worker who continued to shame me about keeping my baby saying I was very selfish to keep him in my little flat when he could be enjoying a home with a big garden to play in. He said there were many married couples who would

take much better care of him and provide him with more than I ever could. I began to feel guilty and selfish for wanting to keep him. How was I going to convince my social worker that I really did love my baby without him thinking I was being selfish. While I was confused and frustrated at things being so incredibly difficult I was NEVER confused about loving my baby.

FOSTER PARENTS - Feeling I had no other choice I agreed to meet these people who were going to foster my child. Their home was beautiful and the lady was nice and told me they wanted to adopt because they wanted a 'playmate' for their son but were considered too old to adopt. I felt safe. I now cringe at the thought of why they really wanted to adopt MY baby. I visited often and spent hours playing with my little [REDACTED] and their little boy. I felt intimidated by the foster mother. I wanted her to see that even though I was young and unmarried I was still a good person. I could see how nice it was for [REDACTED] to be in such a beautiful home and how much he loved the swings and the big backyard. I could clearly see they had a lot more to offer in the way of financial security than I presently could. In the early days of his fostering I used to bring [REDACTED] back to my flat in Wembley on rare occasions where we would have so much fun until my social worker told me how selfish I was to take him from such a beautiful home to my flat. The coercion to adopt my baby continued and started to take on a whole new intensity. I was determined to continue my plan to somehow provide for my baby. I continued to visit my baby in the beautiful new foster home as often as I could and spent hours playing with my little [REDACTED] and their little boy. He seemed happy enough but I desperately wanted to find a way of keeping him. On one of my visits to see [REDACTED] I wanted to summon the courage to ask the foster mum if she could foster me too. I never did find the courage to ask her but did tell her of my feelings many years later. I loved seeing my baby but stopped bringing him back to my flat mainly to please my social worker and the foster mother who didn't approve either. On one of my visits to [REDACTED] and to my absolute horror he called his foster mother "mummy". I was gutted. I felt utterly devastated and was made to feel that my continued visits would only cause my baby more confusion. I spoke to my social worker and he said the only and best thing to do now is to allow these foster parents to adopt my son. I didn't want to cause my baby any more trauma in his little life. I had no intention of continually disrupting my baby's life and wanted only the best for him. I was now acutely aware that I was not considered the best thing for him and started to believe the elders around me that I would be doing the right thing by giving him up to the system that was so powerful against me. I continued to write and ask for photo's until it became too painful for me. The pain that keeps on giving continues until this day. Over the years I've had people ask me "How could you give your baby away"? I never knew how to reply. It is the hardest and most unnatural thing for any mother to give up a child. I lived and still live with the guilt and shame of that decision everyday of my life and believe I will carry this shame forever.

PROMISE - The only thing left to do was to sign the adoption papers but I still could not face giving my baby up or sign the papers and without informing anyone I went to Melbourne and stayed with my sister. The department located me after I contacted the foster mother to ask how [REDACTED] was and if I could please have some photos. She replied to my letter explaining how disappointed she was with me for not signing the adoption papers and said that I need to do the right thing and get them signed. I reassured the foster mother that I would go ahead with the adoption and finally signed on the condition that they promise he always know who his real mother is, how much I loved him and tried to keep him. I now believe that the foster parents were a part of the plan to keep him from me as their priority was to acquire a play mate for their little boy.

DEFEATED - Exhausted and defeated I remained in Melbourne. The adoption was completed. I sent birthday cards and wrote letters asking for photographs and was given a few updates up until

he was 4 years old . The letters and photos stopped coming. There was to be no more contact with my son for 20 years apart from the odd letter sent to me asking about family health history.

I was told to GET ON WITH YOUR LIFE, "you will have other children and forget all about this"? How can a mother ever forget that she had a child? How can a mother 'get on with her life' and not be affected by the forced adoption of her first born child? I believe the loss of my first child had a negative effect on my ability as a mother to be truly present for my subsequent children and that they have also suffered because of this.

REUNITED - I reunited with my son just before his 21st birthday and we enjoyed a fantastic reunion. He adored meeting his siblings, nephews and nieces and delighted in being a part of his natural family. We continued to enjoy a close relationship for many years even being invited to his wedding. I attended his adopted mother's funeral about 9 years ago. Everything was beautiful for many years until his wife gave birth to their first child six years ago. Initially I was included and acknowledged as his grandmother but when my grandson turned three my son's wife decided she didn't want to explain "adoption" to my grandson and that if I were to remain in their lives I was to be known only as a "friend" of the family and in no way to be thought of as grandmother. My second grandchild was born three years ago and I've never met him. The pain of adoption has found root again and the shame I have lived with of being forced to "give up" my child continues.

NO RIGHTS - After reuniting with my son I thought all the horror of that time was now behind us but here it is again being played out in my son and his children's lives. I am being told by my son's wife I do not deserve and have NO RIGHT to be given the title of grandma since I "GAVE" up my son for adoption. I find myself battling these self destructive thoughts again with my grandsons now being separated from me. I suffer and live with depression and anxiety and my son and I will NEVER get back the lost years. I am hoping that my son's wife will allow me to be a "friend" of their family and allow me into my grandson's life. The system changed our lives forever and denied my son and I the most important relationship. I am now being ostracized from my grandson's lives. My son has expressed dismay by his wife's decision and whilst the lines of communication are still open with my son our relationship has taken a turn for the worst. He is now placed in a confused and compromised situation. If only the energy had been spent on assisting us, my son wouldn't be in such a difficult situation feeling the need to lie or cover up to his children about me.

THE APOLOGY - I listened to Julia Gillard's apology speech. A few weeks later in the post I received a written apology for the wrongs of the past and the treatment of my son and I at the hands of a punitive, moralistic self righteous system. I lost my son, he lost his entire family. I have spent thousands of dollars on counseling sessions, seeing psychiatrist's who are not trained in the long term effects of forced adoption with one even telling me "You do know you did the right thing though, don't you". I have had counseling at ARCS and numerous other facilities, joined self help groups, and am currently a member of ARMS where we are united in our grief. The support received from each other as victim survivors of the evil practice of forcing / removing children from their natural mothers has been both helpful and heart breaking. The impact of removing a child from its natural mother, whether by gunpoint, caused by a mothers death, or by coercion and manipulation of the mother, the trauma is the same.

AMENDMENTS

- 1) LIABILITY - I would like a formal letter of apology to my son admitting his adoption was forced and NOT my choice. The government was fully liable.
- 2) FREE FAMILY COUNSELING - I would like free family counseling with counselors fully trained on how these forced adoption practices affect the whole family.
- 3) COMBINED BIRTH CERTIFICATE - I would like my son to receive a combined birth certificate acknowledging me and his father as his birth parents and the adopters as the adopters. This would be evidence on record for future generations to the truth..
- 4) COMPENSATION - How can anyone put a price on the relationship between a mother and her child. I would appreciate being compensated for the many wrongs that were done to my child and me and would like to think that the government will follow in the ways of Victoria.

This terrible chapter in our history can only be considered a crime against humanity.

Sincerely

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the author.

25. 2. 76

S.W. at KEMH:-

Baby Boy born at 2.76. 9.25 a.m. [redacted]
 39 weeks +.
 3085 gms.
 49 cms.

P.F. and mother been visiting — all been nursing the baby!
 [redacted] now talking of keeping baby; H.B. discussing with
 her again tomorrow.

(I endeavored to see [redacted] on Wed 11 but she was asleep
 and I did not disturb).

2.3.76

[redacted] definitely decided to keep babe,
 started breast feeding Friday — went home over weekend
 with babe. [redacted] feels, however, that she may yet change
 course again and re-open question of adoption.

10.3.76

Quered with [redacted] any further contact — none.

28.4.76. Attempts made at F.U. visit to see how managing and
 whether confident of her decision, but I could not locate a
 flat at [redacted] — the address she had given.

S.C.C.E. Accounts

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] mother is a 17 y.o. unmarried mother. At present she is unemployed. Has little family support. [REDACTED] is very run down and has sought placement for her son for 6 mths until she can establish herself.

[REDACTED] was placed with [REDACTED] is an approved foster mother.

[REDACTED] has said she is prepared to reimburse our Department for private foster rates, but efforts to obtain this over the last few weeks have failed.

SOCIAL WORKER
MT HAWTHORN DIVISION

1 February 1977 NP

~~1550/76~~

Records Officer
Please file on 1550/76 &
return to S.C.C.E

not
debent Not at this addn

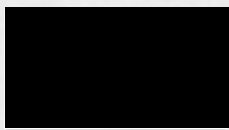
Telegram

- 20/2/77

Urgent you contact C.W.D. ~~OK~~

210 244 EXT 5328.

(at 22/2/77). W. Schult.



FILE COPY

D.C.W. 172

DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITY WELFARE

CR

RELIEF BRANCH

No 70105

File No [Redacted]

Re [Redacted]
of [Redacted]

ACCOUNTS OFFICER, please (Pay, Discontinue, Reduce, Adjust)

Special/Pending Payment of

Old Rate NIL New Rate 49.75 as from 11.8.76
and New Rate as from

Allow for Payment Slip No.

Category UM (UN MARRIED MOTHER)

Names and D.O.B. of Children Scale Applied 2 Unit 52.75

C.U/E 2.00
Rent 5.00
TOTAL 59.75

Less Earnings \$ Ass

Maintenance \$ Ass 10.00

Other \$ Ass

TOTAL 49.75

Counter Fortnightly cheques.

S.M.E. 24.8.76



I still had [Redacted]

7

File

RENEWAL & VARIATION FORM

(For use in cases where: (1) Monetary Assistance is re-instated after having been discontinued for less than three months, or (2) Assistance is increased beyond the previously approved limit.

File No. [redacted]

Reg. No. NR 521...

NAME OF APPLICANT... [redacted]

ADDRESS ... [redacted]

TEL. NO. NO Qual. Date. S.M.B. 24/3/76.

C/R. [redacted]

RELIEF OFFICERS NOTES OR CIRCUMSTANCES:

Applicant states that she couldn't care for the child where she was staying when she first applied so she gave the child to Adoptions to look after until she found new accomodation at above address. Now that child is again in her care she is approaching us to reapply. Mr. [redacted] is paying her \$10.00 pw mtkc for the child applicant is sharing the house with a friend named [redacted]

② P.I. \$20.00

③ I/O Please wait 4/6/76

* Where was the support?
* The only help offered was to put my baby in foster care to be handed from home to home or adoption - NO ONE CARED
NO ONE HELPED ME
I WAS 17 yrs old

RATE PAID. \$49.75 from 2/6/76

RELIEF OFFICER...
DATE... 3/6/76

Case considered. Action taken - endorsed. Assistance granted subjected to condition of RECOVERY/POSSIBLE RECOVERY/NO RECOVERY.

Determining Officer
Date... 11/6/76

Circumstances noted & necessary Action instituted.

S/Debtors Clerk
Date.....

FILE COPY

D.C.W. 172

DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITY WELFARE

C/R

RELIEF BRANCH

No 67672

File No

[Redacted]

Re

of

[Redacted]

ACCOUNTS OFFICER, please

(Pay, Discontinue, Reduce, Adjust)

Special/Pending Payment of

\$20.00

Old Rate

New Rate

as from

and New Rate

as from

Allow for Payment

Slip No.

Category

4/m

Names and D.O.B. of Children

Scale Applied

Unit

C.U./6

Rent

TOTAL

P.I

Less Earnings \$

Ass

Maintenance \$

Ass

Other \$

Ass

TOTAL

Counter Fortnightly cheques

RELIEF OFFICER

DATE

3/4/76

S.M.B.

24/8/76

NOTED

I was living on 'Special Benefits' of \$20 per week !!! & was expected to care for my baby, rent, food, bus fares- etc etc