

My story is an important one because it crosses two states, Victoria and Queensland, and two hospital systems, both public and private and covers 5 adoptions (2 babies that were returned because they weren't good enough) over a 13-14 year time span.

I had a baby son taken for adoption in Queensland in 1967, however I also have two adopted brothers who were adopted privately in the 50s and 60s in Victoria.

My first experience of adoption was when I was only 3 years old. I can remember it quite clearly, but I suspect a lot of the finer details that I can recall are because my mother told me the circumstances at a much later date. I can remember our next door neighbour babysat my sister and I one day and when she brought us back home we had a new baby brother, Peter. But my mother decided she didn't like Peter as she said he had eczema and would most probably develop asthma so she took him back to the hospital where he was born, the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne. I can't quite remember if she brought Claire home the same day or not but the next thing I know is that we had a baby sister called Claire, but my mum didn't like her either as she said she had 'big feet and would grow into a big horsey woman' so she took her back as well. She'd been born at the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne also.

After that my parents decided to adopt privately, where the prospective adoptive parents pay for the mother's hospital bills in exchange for the baby. It was all arranged privately through a solicitor. This is now banned in Australia. My father used to work for the Commonwealth Employment Service which is now called Centrelink, so he came in contact with women who had unplanned pregnancies who were seeking suitable work or benefits.

My brother John was adopted in 1954 when I was 4. It wasn't until he was about 18 months old however that I realised he was going to stay, because mum had taken the other two babies back. I can remember quite clearly going to pick him up from the Private Hospital where he'd been born. My mother and I went in a taxi at night. Mum had brought me some new clothes and when we walked up the stairs to a big shiny black door and the matron opened it, she and mum made a big fuss of me and then the Matron took us into a room where there were wire bassinets with babies in them. The Matron gave mum a baby and the next thing I knew we were walking down the stairs and got back into the waiting taxi. We only drove a short distance up the road to a park where my father and big sister were waiting in our car, my sister was asleep. Even though I was only 4 it all seemed very clandestine.

It wasn't until John met his mother over 40 years later that I found out the significance of that night. John's adoption was quite illegal. His mother's basic human rights were abused. She screamed twice when the solicitor came to take her signature and refused to sign, but they coerced her into signing by promising that John would have a private school education and have everything she couldn't provide, and they also used the hospital bill as leverage. Since she didn't have any money she couldn't afford to pay. The solicitor concerned said he would never again be involved in an adoption where the mother was forced to relinquish her baby to pay the hospital bills. John's mother had electric shock therapy after he was born no doubt because she was grieving and depressed. She never married or had any other children and stayed in the same tiny unit for over 40 years so that John could find her if he wanted to.

My second brother Troy was adopted privately as well. My father once again met his mother at the C.E.S. Troy was born in 1964. My mother was 50, menopausal and depressed when she adopted him; she was addicted to Valium, Codeine and Pentobarb, a sleeping tablet that is now classed as a Dangerous Drug as it destroys R.E.M. sleep. Troy was slightly autistic and my mother neglected him horrendously. He was left in a cot all day and he wasn't toilet trained until he was 5. I think my mother thought a baby would cure her depression which of course was also impossible. She used to belt Troy to make him go to sleep and in a bizarre way it worked because he'd just whimper himself off to sleep. My mother blamed him for everything that went wrong. He was called 'stupid' nearly every day of his life. My parents were far too old to adopt a baby and they dressed him in old fashioned clothes and he was laughed at and ridiculed at school. My mother hated sport so she used to write letters up to the school to excuse Troy from sport, so he was ostracized. He has been unemployed for most of his life and is now living in a Housing Commission unit and is on a disability pension, he's been an alcoholic and used drugs, has never married or had any children or any worthwhile relationships.

In 1967 my parents decided to move to Qld, most probably because we had an unusual name and my mother was worried my brother's mothers would try to find them. I'd had a 2 year platonic relationship with my boyfriend, but because I was moving to Qld and I thought I'd never see him again our relationship became more than that and I had an unplanned pregnancy. In Qld my parents put me in a Church run Home for unmarried mothers, St Mary's Toowong.

Unmarried Mothers Homes served a purpose, they isolated us from family members and friends who might otherwise have encouraged us to keep our babies, and they instilled a feeling of shame and secrecy in us and conditioned us to relinquish our babies when they were born.

When I went into labour I was sent off to Corinda Maternity Hospital in an ambulance in the middle of the night to give birth on my own. Corinda Maternity Hospital was a private hospital, it no longer exists. When I was giving birth they left me on my own, and only rushed in at the last minute when the doctor arrived just in time to push me down and hold me down when I tried to see my baby when he was just born. I never saw my baby son, nobody asked me if I wanted to see him, not even the doctor or the nurses, or in particular the social worker who came after 5 days to take my signature and I was too frightened to ask. I can't even begin to tell you how terrible it is to not be able to see your own new born baby and to be treated so harshly and brutally.

I was placed in a ward right next to the nursery and I could hear my baby cry. At feed times each baby was wheeled out to be fed by their mothers, but there was always one left screaming it was my son, I could tell his cry it was a strong lusty cry, and he was screaming for me, I felt like smashing through the wall to get him. Nobody gave me any advice whatsoever, they didn't show any kindness or compassion; they treated me like I was a nuisance as they said they weren't taking any more unmarried mothers. Nobody even knew I'd given birth until 3 days later when I was well enough to walk down to a public telephone booth that I could see from my window where I rang the girls up at St Mary's and told them. I was just left to rot by everyone, I had no visitors and every visiting time I could hear the other mothers visitors arrive with flowers and gifts and the oohs and aaahs as they looked through the nursery window, and I felt like I wanted to join in.

When the social worker came to see me to get my signature I started to cry, so she told me to sign and that I had 6 weeks to change my mind. I didn't know that I didn't have to sign then and there

and that I could have walked out of that hospital at any time with my baby just like every other mother there. I didn't know that I was supposed to be treated like every other mother UNTIL I signed the papers. I didn't know that I could have held, cuddled or fed my baby just like everyone else. I didn't know that how they were treating me was illegal. The social worker didn't give me a phone number to call or any advice whatsoever as to how to contact her, and she didn't give me any other alternative other than adoption. I was totally demoralised and felt shamed by everyone especially those in a position of power, nurses, the doctor, the matrons both at St Marys and the hospital and also by the social worker. Not letting me see my baby was a breach of my human rights, they exploited my youth and my innocence so that they could play God by providing a baby to an infertile married couple whom they saw as more deserving.

When I went home I phoned the Dept of Family Services on or about the 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> day and asked if I could have my son back but they lied to me and told me he had already gone. I didn't find out until over 20 years later when I sent for my information via FOI that this wasn't true. My son wasn't legally adopted until he was 19 days old.

I've grieved for my baby son for almost my entire life. I've never been able to get over the brutal way they treated me and it has made me feel worthless, ugly, helpless and apologetic for being alive. It has seriously impacted on my other relationships, with my children, my former husband and friends. What they did to me was not only immoral it was illegal. I think it was social cleansing and punishment of the much vilified and hated unwed mother and I believe they knew what they were doing to us. They shamed us so I've lived with a sense of shame for over 40 years and was unable to speak out or ask for help. It's barbaric to take newborn babies off their mothers. It was a social experiment that went horribly wrong and both mothers and their children were the guinea pigs that had their lives destroyed by it.