

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions in Victoria

Kangaroo Flat—Tuesday, 30 March 2021

MEMBERS

Ms Natalie Suleyman—Chair

Mr James Newbury—Deputy Chair

Ms Christine Couzens

Ms Emma Kealy

Ms Michaela Settle

Mr David Southwick

Mr Meng Heang Tak

WITNESSES

Ms Lyn Kinghorn, and

Mr John Kinghorn.

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The CHAIR: Clearly my name is Natalie; we have met before. We have Meng Heang Tak, MP, the Member for Clarinda; Christine Couzens, MP, the Member for Geelong; and Michaela Settle, MP, the Member for Buninyong. Thank you so much again.

Ms KINGHORN: Thank you, all. I want to start off with a letter that I wrote to Marise Payne, and then I have written more stuff that I want to have a rant about. I wrote a letter to ask whether Marise Payne—I know that she is a Senator, and I do understand that this is Victoria, but she is the Minister for Women, so I wrote and asked if she could just contact this inquiry and say, ‘Yes, I support what’s going on’, but anyway. I wrote it just at the end of last year, but you will pick it up from the letter:

Thank you for your email dated 6 November 2020 to the Minister for Women, Senator the Honourable Marise Payne, regarding the Victorian government’s Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions in Victoria.

I have been asked to reply on the minister’s behalf. I was deeply saddened to learn of your personal experience of forced adoption. I commend you on your ongoing advocacy on behalf of people who have had similar experiences.

I understand that in August 2019 a representative from the Department of Social Services responded to your similar request for Minister Payne to contact the Victorian government about raising the statute of limitations on forced adoption. It is still the case that the commonwealth is unable to intervene in matters of state government legislation. Legislative change is a matter for each state and territory to determine.

Should you require support, you may like to contact the Forced Adoption Support Service. The service can provide information, counselling and services. I appreciate you sharing your personal experience and again commend you on your ongoing advocacy for this.

You know, that is what we have been dealing with—just sort of saying, ‘Oh, you’re doing a good job’, but you know, it is just so frustrating. I wrote back—it was Clancy who wrote the letter—and I said:

I find your answer outrageous. Isn’t Marise Payne also Minister for Women? Isn’t this a women’s issue? The Victorian inquiry is looking into responses to the Senate inquiry. I believe Marise Payne is a Senator. All I was asking was that Marise could speak of her support to the recommendations of that Senate report—the Senate report given on 29th of the 2nd 2012 into the principles and practices of forced adoption. I did not suffer forced adoption. I suffered the principles and practices—example, abduction of my new baby daughter, who suffered forced adoption. We are still trying to have action and recognition of this injustice. It was recommended by that report that the statute of limitations be removed. My abducted daughter will be 57 next week. Please recognise that many mothers who suffered having their newborn baby ripped from them while clearly screaming ‘No’, deserve justice. Please send me the supportive reply and action I asked for.

Yours sincerely,
Lyn Kinghorn

But I have heard nothing. That has been our battle for too long.

I just want to read. I am better at reading—this is my wish list. Society needs to comprehend the vicious crimes committed against unmarried mothers and their children in the mid 1950s to the mid 70s—I know there is a bit of discussion about that, but there was a direction from the government in the late 50s about withdrawing support to the homes if they did not put this into practice, so I am sure people had horrendous experiences, and that is why we keep pressing into those dates—and to confront the agony of the single mothers from whose arms these children were taken. That agony is real and debilitating. Society held the single mother different—an aberration. If it were believed she had the same degree of love for her child as all other mothers, abduction to feed forced adoption should be overwhelmed and overwhelmed and overwhelmed by the tragedy, but it is underwhelmed.

The book by Nancy Verrier, *The Primal Wound*, widely sourced and acclaimed in Australia as a sound, informed discussion of adoption, chapter 1, page 1—quote:

It seems to me that most authors of works on the clinical aspects of adoption, after acknowledging the fact that the child was initially abandoned by his or her biological mother, then ignore that this is an integral part of the problems demonstrated by the child.

Unquote. So this book throughout continually accuses mothers—as abandoners. The author is an adopter. She has a wide audience who continue spreading this lie. She ignores the integral problem demonstrated by the child, which is the loss of the mother through the abduction.

Young, vulnerable, single expectant mothers were groomed by abusers with, 'This isn't your baby. You will have one of your own one day. Don't be selfish. Your baby needs a mum and a dad'—and then denying the fathers access to the mothers and children—'You can't give this baby what it needs. We have a married couple more deserving than you, and they can give this baby all it needs. You're bad, and your baby will be ashamed of you. You should be ashamed of yourself. Don't let anyone know how bad you've been. Tell no-one about this'. Some mothers have told me they had to use false names with each other while in the homes, so that is a great plan to protect the crimes. Then when they rip your child off you, when you are screaming 'No', they physically drag you away still screaming. Everyone who should be caring for you tells you, 'This is what you deserve. This is what happens to bad girls like you. I hope you've learned your lesson'. This is how mothers were left and expected to begin their lives. I was told, 'If you marry, don't even tell your husband'. The matron at Berry Street told me that. This led many young women to begin their lives on a lie, directing the construction of their own prison and life sentence.

Then came the label of abandoning or relinquishing mothers, thoroughly shaming and blaming mothers, locking that prison securely. Some mothers, so damaged and traumatised, are then unwilling or find it impossible to break out of that prison and accept reunion. What if Grace Tame, Australian of the Year, was identified as a slut when she at 15 was groomed and raped by a 58-year-old paedophile? That is shocking, absolutely. It was shocking how mothers were groomed for the adoption plan of being told constantly they were unsuitable and blamed and identified as abandoners and relinquishing and then told, 'Get over it'. What if Grace Tame was just told, 'Shut up and get over it'? I have even had my church tell me to get over it and let God help me and to forgive and forget. Would they say that to Brittany Higgins? It seems that is what would have suited Parliament, but thank God it did not suit Brittany. Grace Tame was groomed by a trusted schoolteacher paedophile. Malka Leifer, a trusted school principal paedophile, groomed the sisters. Mothers were groomed in hospitals and mothers homes and by social workers, abduction as their primary plan, with their shame and inability, and accused as unworthy, just like the trusted untrustworthy predators above. I am sure we all screamed 'No'. Mothers are wounded and disabled just as profoundly as those sexually abused, but with the added trauma of our wounded, unprotected children.

In the *Herald Sun* on 7 February this year I was amazed to read Thelma Adams describe her distress, needing to sit outside the doctor's after she had dropped her kids at school. I had mentioned during the counselling how I was so distressed while my kids were young—that I would die. I said, 'I suppose all mothers must suffer that', but the counsellor said, 'No, that's not normal'. I was laughing with embarrassment, telling June the silly things I would need to confirm with the doctor that I was not going to die from, and June said, 'Oh my God, Lyn, I was like that too'. So Thelma suffered the same. I can only explain it this way: because we had no say about our children's abduction, we were then dead to them, and we could easily die and be taken from our following children. Once my kids were safely grown, the fear of dying left. There must be many mothers who experienced the same.

What is the diagnosis for mothers, when raising their family after the abduction of their precious baby, suffering continued trauma that they might die of any minor illness, that would prevent them from loving and protecting their family? A culture of cover-up, to ignore the trauma of the victims, for mothers the abduction of our newborn, the culture was to focus on the infertile. This far outweighed any response or compassion to us. The culture of silence and blame condemns women to the fact that they do not matter, a culture of turning a blind eye because it suited their chosen outcome. The blind eye is even in our Parliament when a young woman is raped in an office next to the Prime Minister's office and it is shoved aside so as not to make grubby the federal election.

Please let us experience a new culture by dealing with a dirty past. Mothers began their lives in tatters, and we have lived for decades with accusations of abandonment or relinquishing. This is a very severe wound to us and our children. Our children were devalued and traumatised for life in the belief that they were unworthy of the love and protection of their own mother. I would welcome the focus the rape allegations are receiving. I think in comparison it is easily more devastating to have your child abducted and then be accused and blamed as not a real and loving mother but an aberration. This made it easier for those abducting, those receiving and those turning a blind eye. Then for our children, their mother denied them and then they were treated as having to be grateful that they were chosen or rescued, and the shame they suffered of either them or others believing they did not really belong. I watched the *Q&A* program on consent, and I am happy there is such a focus now proceeding right through the intimate contact between people of 'is it still okay?', yet for us just the fact that we

were in their institutions meant 'yes' for them to shower our abuse and claim our babies—no process of legal consent, ever.

This is Saturday, the 13th of the 3rd, just this year. John and I are driving home from a birthday party. One of my daughters is a nurse and just finished her shift. It is after 10.00 pm, and she is on the phone to me, and she is crying. 'Mum, I had a client today in severe pain and distress, a 77-year-old woman'. My daughter explained all her observations were good. She asked her, 'Can you share any traumas you've suffered?'. The client said, 'Yes. I was pregnant at 13. I had a baby boy. I looked after him for six weeks, and then they took him away from me. My mother said I was not allowed to talk about it, so I used to stand in the shower and cry'. My daughter rang her client's doctor, and he did not know this part of her history. He said to my daughter, 'I didn't know she was Indigenous'. My daughter said, 'She isn't. This happened to white women too'. And the doctor said, 'I didn't know that'. My question to this is: shouldn't this history be widely publicised so our doctors do know what might be affecting our now elderly patients? We, the mothers, and our children have not lived a life of health and peace due to the trauma of abduction. We have been refused and ignored over many years in asking for support to expose these crimes.

I also wish to comment how inquiries so far have not aided our cause. How can we have recommendations that truly give hope and then hope is dashed because nothing is done? I sincerely hope this time we experience results. For mothers, time is running out for us to truly experience the cultural reckoning we need and deserve. This is my wish list now: remove the statute of limitations that will open the opportunity for truth, justice and exposure. I think the suggestion that other mothers have made—I did not think of this one myself—of a medical gold card is a good idea, and that will cause medical people to become more aware that we exist and why. Widely publicise this so mothers and their children know and understand what happened to them. I know you have met another mum today who is just coming now to talk. It is just heartbreaking to think people have had this locked up for years. And the last one is a truthful memorial. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much, Lyn. Thank you for sharing your experience again and for taking the time to present again to us. It means a lot. As you know, we have got a few more public hearings to go until we then finally deliberate as Committee members, and we are planning to table the report before 1 July.

Ms KINGHORN: Great. I am really grateful. I am sorry I have been teary, but I am really, really grateful that you are all willing to sit and listen to me again.

The CHAIR: We are pleased to be here, and thank you for sharing that with us again. I know it is difficult and challenging.

Ms KINGHORN: It is absolutely my drive until we get this over and done with.

The CHAIR: I totally understand.

Ms KINGHORN: And I can do it. It is just a big day.

The CHAIR: Of course.

Ms KINGHORN: I really appreciate. It must be horrible listening to all these horrible—

The CHAIR: No. We thank you for being here and sharing. As I said, it is challenging, and you are courageous for continually sharing your experiences.

Ms KINGHORN: I am so lucky that I have got a husband that has lifted me up, because before I was with him I could not have even said anything. I could not talk for gasping and crying. He has had to listen to it for the last 40 years, most days.

Mr KINGHORN: Part of breakfast.

The CHAIR: Thank you again, and clearly we will be in touch before 1 July.

Ms KINGHORN: Okay. Thanks so much for being so patient with me. I really appreciate it.

The CHAIR: No, not at all. All the very best.

Ms KINGHORN: Thank you. All the best to all of you.

Committee adjourned.