

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions in Victoria**

Wodonga—Tuesday, 18 May 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

#### **WITNESS**

Ms Dawn Smallpage.

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**The CHAIR:** Well, we can go straight into your evidence, Dawn. Thank you so much.

**Ms SMALLPAGE:** I have cut it down a lot.

**The CHAIR:** Have you? Okay.

**Ms SMALLPAGE:** I headed it, 'Life as a relinquishing mother'. It was in August 1969 I gave birth to a baby boy. I went through the pregnancy keeping in good health, but in the back of my mind was that, whatever happened, I would have to give this child up for adoption. Through the pregnancy I continued to live with my parents on the farm. They really supported me and of course did all they could do to help. A few weeks before I was to have the baby I left home and went to stay in a city nearby here. The birth of the child went okay for me, and I was only in hospital a few days. I did get to hold my baby for a few minutes. My words were, 'You sure will make somebody happy'.

It was back in June 1988 that I decided to apply for special information concerning my child's adoption. In September 1989 I travelled to Community Services Victoria to attend an individual interview. It was at that time I went to pieces. I was handed a copy of the consent form along with the birth certificate and information taken from the court records of adoption. Believe me, it was all a very emotional time for me. From that day of receiving the information, I now know an exact birth date and Christian name to go by. My counsellor at community services contacted me after my interview with the news that they had finally tracked my son down, who did not wish for any contact with me for now. In August 1990 I wrote a personal letter to my child, which was placed on file at community services. During the year, I find the hardest times for me to cope are Mother's Day, the child's actual birthday, Easter and Christmas. ██████—that is my son's name—tells me he tried for contact back in 1996 but was told I was too ill with losing my eye. There was a letter there for him, but he was not given that at the time.

In conclusion to this story, I would like to advise any young girl that does become pregnant: keep the child. There are now so many benefits and supports available for unmarried mothers. There were very few for us mums back in the 1960s. Having to give up a child through no fault of my own has had a terrible effect on my life. I will never forget what I went through.

This is a carry-on from 'Life as a relinquishing mother'. Mother and son meet for the first time in 48 years. My son and I had been in contact for the last 18 months via the human services, Melbourne, for information and self-help. We both had a wonderful counsellor, which helped in so many ways. In early October 2017 I received an email from my son saying that I was invited to visit any anytime that I wished. I took up this wonderful opportunity, organising a flight ticket to go to Far North Queensland, the booking being the first week in December 2017. What a lovely time ahead for us both. For me, arriving at the airport was huge. Then in the crowd this good-looking guy approached me saying, 'Here I am'. Believe me, that was the start of a wonderful reunion along with a great Christmas present for both.

The meeting at the airport went well. I was very proud of how I held together. For me, the next couple of days were not so good. I was very tearful and emotional. I was taken out for drives and enjoyed some lovely meals with my son. After a lovely week together the time came for me to leave Far North Queensland and return home to Victoria. To me that sure was hard, but being invited back another time—I give thanks for this wonderful, exciting time in our lives. For me the waiting game is over. I can only think of just how lucky I am to have my son after 48 years.

In 2018 I did that same trip to Queensland. In August 2019 my daughter and son travelled to Queensland to meet their big brother for the first time. Both were there to help celebrate their brother's 50th birthday. It was all a surprise. For now life is just wonderful. I have a photo here in my home of three lovely children that I can see every day.

In closing, I have a flight ticket booked for mid-July this year to go to Cairns for a week to have time with my son. I am very happy that I have been able to go public.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you so much.

**Ms SMALLPAGE:** Is that all right?

**The CHAIR:** Yes, it certainly is. Thank you so much for sharing that with us.

**Ms SMALLPAGE:** It is in three stages. I hope to put it all in one.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you so much.

**Witness withdrew.**