

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions in Victoria

Melbourne—Friday, 4 June 2021

(via videoconference)

MEMBERS

Ms Natalie Suleyman—Chair

Mr Brad Battin—Deputy Chair

Ms Christine Couzens

Ms Emma Kealy

Ms Michaela Settle

Mr David Southwick

Mr Meng Heang Tak

WITNESS

Ms Barbara Pendrey (statement read by Ms Yuki Simmonds).

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Ms Barbara Pendrey (statement read by Ms Yuki Simmonds).

Ms SIMMONDS: I will just read this statement. It will only take a couple of minutes.

The CHAIR: A statement from Barbara?

Ms SIMMONDS: A statement from Barbara Pendrey.

I feel like I am repeating myself, as the following information is the same as my submission. I hope having the information spoken in words will heighten the impact forced adoption has had on me.

Yuki kindly offered to read this out for me.

When I was told, 'Your mother is coming for you and you can't go home until you sign the adoption papers', I thought I would ask my boyfriend if he would marry me so we could get our baby back. The girls in the home spoke among themselves about a period of time when girls could get their babies back. That plan didn't work. I had to make another plan, a survival plan. I would search for my baby/son when he turned 21. I cried my way through those 21 years, doing the best I could. Eventually the year came. My inquiry was through Victorian community services. That took 18 months. That was a no, he didn't want to know me. I consoled myself with the fact he knew I was interested in his wellbeing. Then I had to wait another 10 years for the government to allow mothers to get some information. Nothing to identify him. Then about another 15 years for the apologies. Then another two years to find out his name and was he still alive, was he married, did he have children, was his life happy, what colour are his eyes—all these things had become a huge mental issue for me.

When I was in the home, I was told I was not permitted to go out the door (the door was locked), I had to stay on the grounds of the home—after I was sent back to the home from the hospital without my baby I was allowed out to go to the shops. This describes imprisonment and kidnapping.

I was drugged and I was restrained. I was told girls were restrained so they could not reach out and touch their babies—well, I was not going to do that, as I was drugged.

I had a nervous breakdown in 2011.

I found a wonderful psychologist. Together we discovered having my baby forcefully taken from me and the barbaric treatment was the reason for my breakdown. I had suppressed all of these emotions, and that is why I had a breakdown. My psychologist encouraged me to give evidence at the Senate inquiry, which I did, and that was the start of me discovering and remembering the reality, the horror, the lies, the deceit and the brainwashing related to forced adoption.

I went to a rheumatologist, and he put me on Lyrica and an antidepressant and diagnosed me with depression, fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue. Since that time, I have spent hours asking about and researching my health. Prior to this happening I considered myself a well-adjusted strong person.

Now I had a diagnosis I was prepared to work hard and do what was ever necessary to recover. Despite all the hard work and all my researching, I have not been able to do that. I have done all I can. The rest depends on the government.

I have spoken to my GP about the pains in my legs and arms, she agreed with the rheumatologist that it was fibromyalgia.

I bought a book called 'What the doctors don't tell you about fibromyalgia'. There were sketches in the book of bodies with coloured-in sections on the body as to where the pains would be, also products people should use and not use. I also had consultation with clinics specialising in fibromyalgia.

Nothing related to me.

Back I go to my GP: could I see a psychiatrist? I had an appointment via Zoom, he changed my antidepressants and told me I had taught myself as a young person to contract my arms and legs when in a stressful situation.

I have had all the tests available trying to discover what was wrong with me. Nothing that would cause all these pains. I do not have arthritis.

One day in the car with my husband I said to him, 'Do you think it's a coincidence the pains I have are in the exact same places in both my arms and both my legs?'. If I had an accident or fell, that wouldn't happen, the injury would be in one part of my body.

I started researching mothers telling their stories, not just about forced adoption but about the treatment they received in the hospitals.

I have severe pains up the backs of my lower legs up to my knees, in the top of my upper legs from my knee up to my hips and in the inner part of my arms from my wrist up to my underarm.

After more research I started to work out what really happened to me. I asked as many people as I could who might know something. I needed to understand why I had these pains then hopefully I could deal with them.

While I was doing research, I came across the use of twilight medication. They started using it in the early 1900s. This medication was used on the mothers to suppress the pains of labour, these mothers were restrained so they did not thrash about and injure themselves. That is why I have these aches and pains in my arms and legs, the pains are in the exact same place on both my arms and legs. I could never understand how I knew there was a clock on the wall behind me, because when I heard my baby cry, I twisted to look at the clock, my body would not move. That was the only thing I could remember, and it never

made any sense to me how could I know about the clock, how could I remember the time. I have had experience with this type of medication when I had my cataracts removed. I was not restrained then. It makes 20 minutes seem like a minute.

I have had an operation on my left-hand thumb. This surgery involved a complete removal of the trapezium. The surgeon filled the gap left by the removed bone using a piece of tendon from my arm. My wrist was so painful, I believe the damage was caused when I tried to turn and look at the clock. My right wrist is fine.

I got shingles on my head the day my son turned 50—the exact same day. I have since had the shingles injection. I got a rash under my breast which was sore and itchy this year when he turned 55. I know it was a slight case of shingles.

I really want to share this information with you, so you fully understand the impact forced adoption has had on me, my health, lifestyle and financials, and my broken heart that just won't mend.

One of the things I battle with is time. All information relating to forced adoptions is managed by the government. It's 55 years since my son was forcibly taken from me.

I gave evidence to the Senate inquiry in Hobart. I was full of hope. I went to the apology in Canberra, again full of hope that something might be decided to enable me to move forward. When I was travelling to Parliament House for the apology, the taxidriver told us there was going to be a leadership challenge that afternoon. I don't have words to describe the feeling I had after that statement from the taxidriver. I need for my son to know and believe I did not willingly give him away.

Julia Gillard spoke with conviction. It felt like it was a duty that had to be performed. Mia Dyson sang a song on the lawns of Parliament called *Jesse*. I have it as my ringtone. The song *Jesse* says it all.

So back to my GP about two months ago (end of March 2021). We discussed my pains and what could I take. She told me there had been some breakthroughs understanding the brain and stressful situations. She said, 'You have brain damage'. She used her fingers to explain a part of my brain that should have a gap of about 1 centimetre. 'Yours is about 2½ centimetres. The reason for this is the treatment of you when you were so young'.

I had many years with a psychologist, and she told me what had happened is like a movie, it has a beginning, a middle and an end.

I need to discover the end of my movie. After 55 years I find now at my age every month is like a year. Anticipation, waiting, anxious to find the end of my movie, find peace, and that ending depends on the government.

I noticed in the interviews the committee asks the participants what they think the inquiry needs to take notice of.

I agree with redress, our babies do not have a monetary value, redress would acknowledge the wrongdoing.

A gold card like the veterans, the ongoing cost of medication and doctors for treatment for the damage done to our physical and mental health. People damaged from forced adoption are scattered around in different areas of our country, and it would allow people to get treatment and counselling in their area. I guess this would be a federal issue, I think it should be put forward to them.

The removal of the statute of limitations so people can deal with the organisations and hospitals, if they choose to, who imposed this cruel treatment and the stealing of their babies.

I read in someone's submission that the statute of limitations states three years. Again I shook my head, I imagined a little child three years old finding their way to a government department and saying in a three-year-old's chatter, 'I don't like living with these people. Can you take me back to where I belong?'. This probably seems like a petty comment for me to make, even if the limitations were six years, same scenario. It's a reality of what the law was and still is.

I think we need a day, I looked up special days of the year, we are all aware of Red Nose Day, Anzac Day, Daffodil Day, Harmony Day et cetera. I wonder why we are still anonymous.

Honesty, truth and time are big issues for me.

I am so hopeful of the outcome and whatever is decided is done as soon as possible, so people can have an ending to their movie and hopefully move forward with the last years of their lives. I am a mother, I was 16 when my baby was stolen from me in 1966, I am now 71, I am sure there are mothers older than me, we are in our final years of life.

It's a natural sad event in life to lose your parents, it's incredibly sad and difficult to lose a partner, to lose a child is devastating, to have a child forcibly removed from you is unbearable.

When my son turned 21 I asked my dad if he still had his cheque butts from 1966, because I couldn't remember the name of the hospital—his answer was no and then he said, 'You should not have been made to give up your baby'.

I've cried, I became dependent on wine, I've slept with chronic fatigue, I have chronic pain and I am antisocial, depressed, and I'm so sad.

Thank you, Yuki, not just for your contribution to my journey today, also for your ongoing support.

Thank you to the committee.

That is it.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Yuki, on behalf of reading that evidence for Barbara.

Ms SIMMONDS: Not a problem. I will let her know that I read it out to you. That was all she wanted.

The CHAIR: Thank you. And just a message on behalf of the committee that we truly do appreciate her contributing to the inquiry.

Ms SIMMONDS: Yes, I will pass that on. Thank you.

Committee adjourned.