



HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

Joint Committee on Human Rights

Oral evidence: [The right to family life: the adoption of children of unmarried women 1949-76, HC 748](#)

Wednesday 16 March 2022

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Members present: Harriet Harman MP (The Chair); Lord Brabazon of Tara; Lord Dubs; Florence Eshalomi MP; Lord Henley; Baroness Massey of Darwen; David Simmonds MP; Lord Singh of Wimbledon.

Questions 13 - 17

Witnesses

[I](#): Ann Keen and Judy Baker.

Examination of witnesses

Ann Keen and Judy Baker.

Q13 The Chair: Good afternoon and welcome to this oral evidence session of the Joint Committee on Human Rights. We are taking evidence in person today for our inquiry on the right to family life: the adoption of children of unmarried women 1949 to 1976. Our evidence session today will look at the experience of unmarried mothers whose children were adopted between 1949 and 1976, and at the experience of those children. We are the Joint Committee on Human Rights; half our members are MPs from the House of Commons and half are from the House of Lords. You will see some of us are here in person and some re contributing to this committee session virtually.

Our concern, as our name suggests, is human rights. One of the human rights that has always been recognised in the European Convention on Human Rights is the right to family life. It is hard to think of a more important part of family life than the right of a mother to have her baby with her and the right of a baby and a child to be brought up by their mother. That is why this committee is taking up the issues that you have raised and looking into what happened to your right to family life at the time when you became a mother. We have already received evidence in writing from many people who responded to our calls for evidence, and we have heard from experts. There is no exact figure, but we know that hundreds of thousands of mothers were affected by this process of unmarried mothers having their children taken for adoption, and it affected hundreds of thousands of children who were given for adoption.

The first panel of this session consists of those who were mothers, and in the second panel we are very grateful to be hearing from somebody about their experience of being adopted. On 27 April, we will also have a round-table event in which mothers and children who have been affected by the issues that we are discussing today will be invited to take part and share their experiences in order to help us with our inquiry. Information about how to express an interest in taking part in this round table will be available on Twitter and on our website. I am very pleased to announce that on 25 May we are hearing evidence from the Secretary of State for Education, Nadhim Zahawi, on behalf of the Government. We are very grateful to him for committing to that. It is very important.

At the end of this process and by the summer—very importantly, after taking your evidence, after the round table and after hearing from experts and people who have written to us and emailed us, and filled in responses to our questionnaires—the committee will produce a report on behalf of this Parliament about the issues concerning this investigation.

To our first panel, I am extremely grateful for your attendance here today. We have with us, and offer a very warm welcome to, Ann Keen. Ann was born in 1948, became pregnant and was sent to a mother and baby home at the age of just 17 in 1966. She went on to work in the NHS as a nurse

before serving as a Labour Member of Parliament for Brentford and Isleworth from 1997 until 2010. During that time she was a government Minister. She is involved with the Movement for an Adoption Apology. Ann's son found out about the adoption and reunited with her when he was 27 years old, and they have stayed in touch since. Ann, we are looking forward to hearing this very important evidence from you.

We also welcome Judy Baker. Judy was born in 1949, became pregnant at age 18, was sent to a mother and baby home and gave birth just before her 19th birthday. Her baby was adopted just a week later. Judy has supported organisations for adults affected by adoption, such as the National Organisation for Counselling Adoptees and Parents, and later set up her own support group. Judy reunited with her daughter in 2000.

I have to say that I am the same age as you and I can remember so well that it was a time without sex education or contraception, with what we would regard as very old-fashioned attitudes. I remember the absolute fear and dread of what would become of you if you got pregnant. It is really important that you have come forward to tell your stories, and I wonder why all this was not brought forward many decades ago. Better late than never, though, and it is very important that we hear from you.

Bearing in mind that many people are not as young as you and me and do not have first-hand experience and memories of this time, I would like to start by asking each of you what it was like to find out that you were pregnant and how it came about that your child was to be adopted. Was that your decision? People talk about giving a child up for adoption. Is that what actually happened?

Ann Keen: When I discovered, by the method that women are familiar with—by missing a menstruation period—that I could be pregnant, I was absolutely terrified, because I was constantly aware of the saying at the time, certainly in my culture: "Don't bring any trouble to this house". That expression meant, "Don't get pregnant. Don't be one of those young women", whatever that meant. I realised that I had become one of those young women and I was absolutely terrified about letting anybody know.

Eventually, as you would expect, I had to. I was almost three months pregnant when I had to tell my mother. She was horrified and in so much shock that I could do this to the family. Those were the words that she used: "How could you do this to us? You've brought great shame on us. We'll have lost all respect. You'll have lost all respect. We don't understand. How will I ever tell your father? How will anybody ever respect us again?" It is pretty awful to hear from your mum that you have caused this.

My dad had angina. This was 55 years ago, and there was not really any medical treatment for angina. I was constantly told, "You do realise that hearing about this could kill your dad?" and "Whatever are we going to do?" There was this huge burden, but it did not feel like a burden; it felt like fear. I was terrified. The pregnancy was confirmed by a GP who I had

known since I was a little girl. It was terribly embarrassing, for both of us. He confirmed that I was pregnant. We did not have a telephone in the house or anything like that, but my mum was constantly going to the phone box, which was in the village I was being brought up in.

The Chair: This is in north Wales.

Ann Keen: Yes, in north Wales. It was all about, "What can we do? How can we get around this? How can we stop this?" Nothing was ever said, and I was not put in any harm with anybody, but it was all, "This is just a disaster". When my dad found out, it was horrific. They were proud people and good parents; my dad was a steelworker but was expecting more for us, and more for his children, than he had had the opportunity to have. He said that I had let him down really badly and said, "You must be sent away. Nobody must find out. We must cover this up as much as possible. The baby must be adopted, and then you'll come back and it'll all be forgotten and you can get on with your life". That was not all that was said. An awful lot of cruel things were said to each other, and I realised that I had really shamed my family.

The Chair: Quite a lot of young unmarried girls and women in this situation hastily got married to the baby's father. Was there any suggestion that that was what you should do?

Ann Keen: There would have been no doubt that that is what would have happened. I did not really know the young man; he came from an organisation that worked around the country and he was a sales representative. I only went out with him the once. I did not know, but my father tracked him down. He was so furious. I am sure that that would have been the case, that I should be married, until my father found out that he was married with two young children. That made it even worse for me, because it was my fault that I had gone out with a married man, which I can honestly and truthfully tell you nobody knew. He actually called for me at the house. I was going out with somebody who was 26—I was 17—and was much more worldly wise than I was. I was very innocent and it got out of control.

I was told that it was my fault, which I started to believe because I had said yes to going out with him. If he had not been married, I am sure that is what would have happened, because it would have brought respectability back to this working-class family. My dad, a steel worker, a very proud man, was ashamed of and shamed by me.

The Chair: Your mum was going to the phone box. What arose out of that?

Ann Keen: All sorts of things were being discussed, but not with me. They were trying to do their best to find a solution, but the only solution they could find was, "This baby will be adopted". I was never sent anywhere; nor was it suggested that I would go anywhere to somebody who might harm me or attempt to terminate, as we would say today. Nothing like that was ever mentioned. It was just despair, because my

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mother wanted to put it right and she could not. The only way this could happen would be if I was sent away. Ironically, I was sent away to a very well-respected

person who was known to the family while I was waiting to go to the home.

I want to say this, because many of the other mothers who are not able to speak today have also said the same. That man abused me very badly, because he said that nobody would believe me. He could abuse me because I was a bad girl, I was a wicked girl, so he could do what he wanted to me because he was able to, because nobody would believe me. I only told my mother about that man 12 or 15 years ago, because, again, how do you do that? If I had the wisdom and knowledge that I have now, of course I should have exposed him, but there was a wife and two children and I was terrified that nobody would believe me. Why would they believe me, because look what I had brought to people? That is drummed into you so regularly that you believe it, and there are parts of me that still believe it.

The Chair: You were sent away from home before going into the mother and baby's home.

Ann Keen: Yes. To stay with a relative who lived away.

The Chair: Why were you sent away from home at that early stage?

Ann Keen: Because somebody might find out. I was starting to show. It was very quick. With whom I do not know. By the time I had got to the home and into south Wales from north Wales it was obvious that there was a plan. It was not obvious to me at the time, because I was still in this terrified state, but when I look back now as an older and wiser person, I know that somebody had already instigated the adoption process. There were no questions for me, there was no consultation with me. Remember that the age of majority then was 21. I was treated as a young teenager and nothing was ever discussed with me other than, "There'll be a time when this baby will be born and you'll not be allowed to have it". Then others would use words like, "You are not worthy to have it, because you are a bad girl. If you were to love this baby, you would definitely want it to be cared for by somebody else".

I also knew that my mum and dad counted the pennies, so an extra baby would have been a burden. I understand that, and I understood it then but I did not totally accept it. It was my baby and it was very difficult to please everybody, but that is what you tried to do: please everybody except yourself. The only time I was allowed to love the baby was when he was with me and before he was born. I missed my family, missed my mum. My goodness, I wanted my mum then, I wanted my brothers, but I had the baby. I was not alone, because I had the baby. That is how it felt; I felt this very strong bond then with the baby.

The Chair: Even before the baby was born?

Ann Keen: Yes, especially the first time the baby moved.

The Chair: It was you and the baby against the world.

Judy Baker: Yes, absolutely.

Ann Keen: Yes. I was always planning what I would do and how I could do this. Then somebody would soon come and tell you that you were not very worthy of anything, you were not a nice person. You are constantly telling yourself, "If you love this baby, it has to be taken away from you. Even thinking about it is wrong, because you are bad".

The Chair: In what you have said, you have made it clear that there was no sense in which you made the choice or took the decision. You discovered that wheels were in motion, but you had not set those wheels in motion; it was done without you?

Ann Keen: Yes, they had. I was in a conversation with a form of a social worker from the Church of England about what was happening, but I was not in a decision-making conversation as to what was happening. It was not done without me knowing that I was going to be whisked into hospital, have the baby and it would be gone. I knew what was going to happen. In fact, I was asked to buy a layette, as they called it then—two cardigans, lots of nappies—for the baby ready for when he was taken away. It was a very strange way of managing you. Then moving into the home was a real shock.

The Chair: Where was the home?

Ann Keen: In Swansea. The organisation was the Swansea and Brecon Diocesan Moral Welfare Association. What the name of the home was I do not know. I never saw the name of the home. There was such a mixture of discipline. Scrubbing steps is something that I have heard so many mothers say they did, and that is what I was told I would do. When I got to the bottom I could go back to the top and scrub them again, because it was about obeying an order. That is to get you to comply. That is what people do, don't they? In one way, if you want somebody to do something, you can look after them and care for them while you are wanting them to do something. That was not the case. It was about reinforcing this, "You've wronged yourself and your family. This baby is entitled to a decent life, and it is not with you because you cannot afford it anyway, because you will have no money". I believed that.

I knew the predicament my parents were in. My parents did not know how badly I was treated because they were not with me. The only people who knew how badly I was treated was me and the people doing it, because that treatment did not take place in the open world. It was so awful for lots of us who were in there, and we were all just young women. Today, I can say that the crime was that we were not married.

Q14 **Baroness Massey of Darwen:** I am a Labour Peer. Thank you for those very honest replies. Did you have any support of any kind—from siblings,

grandparents or friends; you have mentioned your father already—or religion? You said that you were sent from home, which sounds like a horrendous experience. Presumably you got no support of any real kind there. Could you just say a bit about support? Did you get any at all or would you have liked some? What was going on?

Ann Keen: I would have loved to have stayed at home. I would have loved to have had that type of support, but because I was away and things like telephones and modern communication did not exist there was not the opportunity. The cost involved in having regular visits from my parents meant that they could not take place because it was too difficult. The answer is that the only support I could have would be with the social worker who was coercing me into agreeing with her all the time. There was no religious support; I did not have anything like that.

Baroness Massey of Darwen: What about friends, grandparents or siblings? When you found out that you were pregnant and you told your parents, was anybody sympathetic and not wanting you to go away from home?

Ann Keen: No, because nobody knew. My siblings were brothers who were much younger than me. No, there was nobody. It might seem strange, but the only thing that was important was to get me away, get it over with and return, and then everybody would be satisfied.

Q15 **Angela Richardson:** I am the Conservative Member of Parliament for Guildford. Are you able to tell us about your birth experience? What was it like giving birth? Where did you give birth? Could you tell us about the placement of your baby afterwards and the final stages of the adoption process?

Ann Keen: I went two weeks over the date. That date and every day I went over it was in my head. By then I had come back to my relative; I was not in the home. When nobody was looking, I got to the bottom of the stairs, quickly went into the office and managed to ring my relative, who fortunately answered the telephone, and I said, "I can't stay here. I'll go". They came and took me back. Then, in a very short period of time, I went into labour. I had a room at the very top of the house in what is commonly known as an attic room. I stayed there. I was in total denial that these pains were labour pains. Then it became so bad that I had to tell somebody and I was taken into hospital.

I was terrified, because, again, I wanted my mum; I wanted somebody. I had an idea of what was going to happen, but I did not fully know. I never expected it to be another punishment, but the people who were caring for me during my labour were telling me that I could not have any pain control, because: "This will stop you from ever getting into this situation again. You'll remember this, so you'll never do it again". I had an episiotomy and every time I moved the lady doctor who was stitching me slapped my leg to say, "Keep still". As a nurse now, I know I could have had a local anaesthetic and things. I had nothing of the kind. It was a horrific ordeal. At the end of labour, a mum gets rewarded with the

child. I was not even able to see him. I was told, "No, no, no. You know that this baby is for adoption". I was in a really bleak NHS labour room with equipment in it and I was taken eventually to the ward.

Angela Richardson: Were you reunited with your baby at any point?

Ann Keen: Yes, by chance. The nurse midwife who was saying that I could not have anything for pain was not, shall we say, the most approachable. There was another midwife nurse who I thought had a kind face. I asked her and she kept saying, "Oh, Ann, you know it's for adoption and I can't". I said, "Please, please, just let me see". She was amazing. She came back and said, "Yes, for 10 days, but please don't get close because you'll be discharged on the tenth day and the baby will go to his new mum".

I thought that was a victory, but on the eighth day, like on the date of the birth, he was not there. The nurse midwife who was there said, "We told you not to get close and you did. You've taken the wristband off him and we've had to put another one on. That is telling us that you can't see him anymore". Then she pointed to another building and said, "He's in there. His new mummy is coming for him and you'll never see him again. Now you come with me into the bathroom". In those days, NHS bathrooms were not the most luxurious of places—they still are not, probably—and it was horrible. In the bath she got my breast and said, "I'm getting rid of this milk because you'll not need it".

Angela Richardson: During those eight days when you were not allowed to get close, were you able to breast feed or were they bottle-feeding?

Ann Keen: No.

Angela Richardson: You were given no advice as to how to deal with your breast milk?

Ann Keen: None whatsoever. I was in a ward with other mothers with their babies, with their visitors, with people bringing them flowers. I cannot tell you how that was. We have learned so much, but we still get it wrong with mothers today. It was just what happened. The phrase constantly used is "for the best"—"This is for the best. Come on now, this is for the best. Best for the baby. You can't do it. It's best for you". Just that phrase: "It's for the best". It is impossible to say that it was for the best.

Angela Richardson: How long after your baby was taken away to the other building on day eight did it take them to sign off on the final adoption process?

Ann Keen: Six weeks. I suppose I was more fortunate than other mothers. I have heard that some had to have their baby with them for some time and then hand the baby over. I did not have that. I understand that my son's adopted mum—who I have never shown anything other than absolute love for, because she had my baby, so why

would I not love her?—was there on the tenth day, and she started the fostering and then the adoption. It is hard. All I know is that I was invited to a vicarage and a form must have been signed by someone else other than me because of my age; I guess that would have been the relative. But I had to be there and I had the notice sent back to me from the court stating that this was official now and that the adoption had taken place.

That piece of paper, that letter, which I kept and which I believe I submitted to the committee—I do not know whether you were able to see it—says to me, now that I am older, better educated and wiser: “This is a photograph of the baby. You will see how well he is looked after, and now you know that he’ll never grow up with the stigma of illegitimacy”. The bottom line was that babies go to married people, and not to have illegitimate babies. There are words in life that you have to come across and sometimes say out loud. I have said it now, but it is very hard to say: “He did not grow up illegitimate, thanks to me”.

That was to reconcile you. That was it—no grieving, no nothing, nobody to talk to. I wanted to talk, but I was told that nobody would ever respect me. Nobody would care for me because of this wickedness. You believe it. My mother wanted to take me to church to have my body “churched”, and I did not go. I did not want to go. That was the only time I stood up and said, “I can’t do that”. I suppose that was me trying to think, “I’m not that bad person” and, “I’ve been wronged but I can’t do anything about it”.

Q16 Lord Dubs: I am a Labour Member of the Lords. Before I ask my main question, can I ask: did nobody show you any kindness at all in all this? Was there no kind person who you could relate to?

Ann Keen: There was the nurse I spoke with who allowed me to see my baby. When I think about that, it took a lot for her to do that, because it was not to happen. It was said most clearly to me, “The baby’s for adoption, so you don’t see them. It’s for the best”. The social worker was not cruel to me, but she was the only person who wanted me to do what she was asking, and she was not asking in a bad way. It was the structure around her that was about getting me to comply. If I had been shown a lot of kindness, maybe I would have said, “I don’t want this to happen”, and it would have all gone wrong.

Lord Dubs: What happened after the adoption? What role has the experience you have gone through played in your life subsequently?

Ann Keen: It is still there: the moment in the bath when she expressed the milk. When I was reunited with my son—and I had a very short period of time before I met him—it was like something happened to my body. It got me back to being alive again. That sounds dramatic, and I do not want it to be like that, but there is a feeling of numbness that you have and then there is a feeling when the numbness goes, and that is what happened.

I was determined to be a nurse. I was 26 when I trained, and I was determined to do everything I could to make sure that everybody in my care had dignity and respect. I believe I achieved that as much as it was humanly possible to do so. I am still on the nursing register today trying to make sure that patients have respect.

The Chair: How old was your son before you got reunited with him?

Ann Keen: He was 27 years old.

The Chair: Did you, as they said, feel that "This is for the best. I've done something terribly wrong, but now I can put myself on the right path, have this moral welfare surrounding me and get on with my life"?

Ann Keen: I did get on with my life. I had a very bad marriage and I left that to come to London to train as a nurse. I saw that almost as an opportunity to be different, but you cannot possibly forget. There is a Natural Parents Network logo of an elephant and a baby elephant, and it is because elephants never forget and the elephant always looks for its young and searches. It is so true, because you cannot forget having a child. To try to demonstrate this, I wrote in my evidence about a Christmas when I knew that my son would be six in January and I bought him a bike. I had been looking at this bike in the shop and I was so pleased to buy it. When I got back to where my car was parked, I knew I could not take it anywhere, so I just left it there. In my heart I had bought him a bike.

You do all sorts of things. When he is 17, is he having driving lessons? Did he do well at school? Did this happen? Did he fight in the Falklands? I was going insane thinking of all sorts of things that he could or might have done, the age he would be. My second husband, my best husband, was constantly saying to me, "Ann, you're torturing yourself with this" and I said, "But what is the alternative?" There was no alternative, because you cannot forget. You do not say, "Well, let's get on with our life now". It is impossible. I know I am not alone. I know I stand by thousands and thousands of other women all over the world who have lost their children. It is no different for anybody in a famine or a war to lose a child, but when it comes to losing it by it being taken off you and then being told or it being written that "She gave him up for adoption", we should be able to clear our name on that because we did not. Yet the lady that adopted him did not steal him either; there was a process.

It is very difficult not to be on everybody's side, in a way. At the same time, we were separated. There is a book called *The Primal Wound*. My friend Judy only told me about it last week. I should have known about it a long time ago. It so relates to that elephant looking for the young elephant—the animal looking for its young and wanting to care. The wound is felt by the child all through their life. I did not know. This book is well researched and, if I can say it at this stage, this is an important book for the committee.

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The Chair: You were condemned to be in a situation of for ever feeling a loss.

Ann Keen: Yes, I still do.

The Chair: You were still the mother.

Ann Keen: Yes.

The Chair: But you just did not have your son.

Ann Keen: Yes. My son did not know he was adopted until he was 27 and found out by accident. His parents had divorced when he was three and he had spent his entire life until then trying to have a relationship with the man he thought was his father but did not really want to know him. He could not understand why he did not want to know. There is a lot of damage everywhere. A lot of people have been really damaged and the consequences are still ongoing.

The Chair: There was a lot of secrecy and a lot of lies.

Ann Keen: Yes.

The Chair: A lot of everyday suffering for you because of the separation.

Ann Keen: Yes. To be self-indulgent and say, "Poor me" is not my way, but I did feel it. I felt it at family times. I felt it when I went to be with my friends who had had their babies, because when I was in my 20s they were of an age when they were having babies. I was a godmother and holding a baby to be a godmother. It was really hard.

The Chair: Tell the committee whether you went on to have other children.

Ann Keen: No, I did not. I did not want any. I only wanted him. I hardly ever had anger; I suppressed the anger. The anger is with me more now and more since the reunion because of other things I have heard and learned about other mums, about other children and about the particular research in this book. The feelings that the children have are so strong because they know their mother too. They know that this is not their mother. It is very hard to read that you have damaged somebody and some of our children are damaged.

The mothers are damaged because of the secret that you mentioned, Chair. Nobody could talk about it. The secrets and lies—even the dirty little secret, as it is sometimes referred to in the family—were so awful. Although this went across different classes and backgrounds, it was predominantly working-class women. Women who did not conceive did not have diagnostic testing like now. They did not have IVF, they did not have anything, but there was an answer. We were fulfilling a need and we were told that it was for the best—for us, for the baby and for the mum who was going to be the new mum. You were fulfilling a need.

The Chair: As well as there being no fertility treatment then that we know about now, there was a very big pressure on women to have a family to fulfil their role as a woman, much more so even than now, although it is still quite prevalent. That was the situation; as well as there being virtually no sex education, contraception or abortion, there were these parents waiting for adoptive children. That is the situation that you got caught up in.

Ann Keen: Yes. I would like to know who funded the homes. What arrangements were made? I do not know the answer to that. I know that there have been various novels, films and true-to-life stories.

The Chair: In terms of the right to family life, did it interfere with your relationship with your mother, with your siblings, with other people? We have talked about the total interruption of your right to family life with the most important person who was your son, but what about other family?

Ann Keen: As in most families there would be gatherings, whether it be Christmas, celebrating parents' birthdays, wedding anniversaries, celebrations that happen throughout life, and there was always somebody missing. Even relatives who did not know, or I assume did not know, would say, "Oh, you never wanted children, Ann? You just wanted your career in nursing, did you?" I would never deny him, but I would say, "It's not always as it seems". In other words, do not ask me anymore. But I did not say, "No, I don't not want children".

The denial of him by my parents hurt me so much. My younger brothers did not know about my son until the early 1990s. They did not know I had had a baby and I felt I wanted to tell them. There was big controversy that I should not, but I did.

The Chair: It created a huge barrier between you and your siblings.

Ann Keen: A massive barrier, and it still does. I do not watch it, but in "Long Lost Family" the reunion is so wonderful. I do not know what happens weeks or months after that, but it is so difficult to manage. Again, I refer to *The Primal Wound* book. I tried to integrate my son with everybody in the family. That was not what he wanted; he just wanted me. He wanted the closeness to me. The psychology of all of this, or whatever the right term to use is, is very complex. That is why I hope that at the end of your inquiry—I thank you so much for having it—we get some proper counselling that is specific to this, because this is a very specific emotion that needs addressing. I keep mine inside and busy myself constantly. I do not want meditation time to think about it, because it brings up so much, and even preparing the evidence has brought so much back that I had forgotten. What I am saying today has brought up so much that I did not think I would ever say out loud, let alone here. It is very traumatic, but I still appreciate the fact that you are listening to this.

The Chair: Thank you very much for what you have said and for being

prepared to tell us about it. Can we turn now to Judy? Judy, could you go through the same issues that Ann has told us about? Then, at the end of your session, we will hear from you both what you think, besides from counselling, should be done at this point, and what you think about an apology? Judy, would you like to say what happened to you?

Judy Baker: Thank you very much for the chance to talk. One of the things that handicaps us all is that adoption is like a secret society that nobody admits to being a member of. It is based on loss; we have all lost something through adoption. I lost my child, my beloved baby who I nurtured for nine months in my womb and who I nurtured for seven weeks once she was born. My daughter lost me. She lost her heritage. She lost her family, her wider sense of herself in the world, and her parents lost the

child that they never had. We start from a point of loss, but it is not a loss that you can grieve because the person has not died. It is not like there is a funeral, a cemetery that you can go to, a grave. There is none of that; it is like a living death. Your grief is disenfranchised; it has nowhere to go.

In 1976, the law changed allowing adoptees to search for their families. Until then, adoptions were closed and there was no right for anybody to search for each other. There were 484,000 adoptions. That is 484,000 mothers who lost children and children who lost mothers. That is an inexcusable amount. Even if you take it that some of those adoptions were perhaps because of ill treatment or because of death, there was still a substantial amount—thousands of us who were unmarried mothers, forced by a system to give up our children.

Unlike Ann, I was treated fairly kindly, but in the kindness there was always a hidden agenda. I was 18. This was 1967, the swinging sixties, and we were all being encouraged to go out and have fun. I was a young woman setting out on life. I met a man who was a lot older—he was 30 and I was 18—but he was fun, he was handsome and he was charismatic. I fell in love and then I did what was fairly natural; we had sex and I became pregnant. I had no idea to start with that I was pregnant, because my periods at that point were very erratic anyway. Then it started to dawn on me. You have to take into consideration, if you would, that these are memories from 50-plus years ago. A lot of things I have locked away because they were traumatic for me.

Eventually I talked to a girl who I met in hospital. She had had an abortion and I had had an appendix out. I confided in her that I thought I was pregnant. She said she knew somebody who could do a backstreet abortion. I considered it for a little while, but it terrified me and I did not want to go down that road. I worked with a chap whose girlfriend was a nurse in the VD clinic. She had connections. She made me an appointment at the hospital and I went along. I saw a doctor who said—his words to me were very in your face—“You don’t want to kill your

baby, do you?" No, I do not want to kill my baby. He said, "I think we'd better get the almoner along here". I have clear memories of that.

The almoner was like a hospital social worker. She came along and she was a very nice, very kind, woman who was very comforting, but immediately mentioned adoption to me. It was not, "We can do something about it; we can support you". At that very first moment of being in the system, adoption was the first thing that was mentioned. She painted it as something wonderful. All the way along everybody painted it to me as something wonderful: that I would go on to live my life, my child would have this wonderful life with these wonderful people who were married, who could provide her with everything that I could not. I already felt shame, because I was pregnant at a time when everybody was doing it, but you were only shamed if you were caught.

Then the almoner called my mum, who came in and gave me a great big hug. I felt so sorry that I had disappointed her and she was just lovely. I did not have anything that Ann had; there was no stigma attached. She wanted to protect me and do the best for me and, like me, she was coerced into believing that the best thing would be to give up my baby. She was a mum herself. She knew how that would be, but there was this pressure to believe that this was going to be the best thing. The almoner then got in touch with the moral welfare worker—that tells you everything that you need to know—who was a Miss, who had never had children, and she arranged for me to go into a mother and baby home six weeks before the baby was born.

The Chair: Why could you not stay at home?

Judy Baker: I could have stayed at home. My parents would have had me at home, but I felt that it would have been too much for them. I was so conscious of having disappointed them.

The Chair: Were you ashamed?

Judy Baker: I was ashamed, yes. Also, they wanted to protect me from the stigma that would be attached to me as a single girl.

The Chair: You had to be disappeared somewhere, out of the local community.

Judy Baker: I had to be disappeared. The mother of the girl who I had been in hospital with was moving out of the area to a bungalow and the girl was apparently going to live with her. That turned out not to be the case, so I went to live with this woman who was a very staunch church-going woman who was obviously being very charitable looking after me. She gave me eggs and bacon for breakfast every morning and I have not been able to eat eggs and bacon for breakfast ever since. It was awful. It was horrible. I was on my own. My parents did come and visit. We would meet at a weekend and go into the town and have a meal. I was on my own. I missed them dreadfully, and my baby was growing inside me. Chair, you said it earlier: it was as if it was my baby and me against the

world. I loved her. I did not know she was a she then, but I loved her. It is natural. It is a natural reaction.

I went to work for a fairly big company. I bought myself a ring in Woolworths. I told them that I was married. I suspect that they knew I was not, because one of the girls asked me, "What was your name before you were married?" I thought it was a very strange question—I still think it was a very strange question—but I told her that I had married somebody with the same name as me but with a different spelling, because I did not want anybody to know and I did not want the questions about what was going to happen to the baby. I do not think I had any antenatal care. I do not remember that. I do not remember anybody explaining to me what was going to happen.

I then moved into a mother and baby home in Wimbledon. This was

probably one of the better homes because of the people who ran it. The woman, who I think was the matron, was single, the assistant matron was a married woman, and we had a cook. They were decent; they were not unkind. We had jobs. I remember—this seems to be a very common thing—that I was in a big house with a very big staircase that swept round and one of our jobs was to scrub the staircase. You had this great big belly, and you were kneeling down on your hands and knees scrubbing this staircase. We also helped to cook. We seemed to have a lot of cheese and potato pie, so we were always peeling spuds. The cook used to say, "Come on, you naughty girls". We were viewed as being naughty girls. The saving grace was that we were all in the same boat. All the inmates were similar; most of us were young, all of us were unmarried and the majority of us were expecting to give our babies up for adoption. That was the scenario.

At the same time, we were also teenagers. We would want to listen to "Pick of the Pops" on a Sunday and have a little dance about, again with our great big fat bellies. Being in the mother and baby home was probably the best part of the experience for me, because there was that camaraderie, the same camaraderie that there is now between Ann and me because we share an experience.

The Chair: You were there so as not to bring shame on your family in the community. What happened afterwards? You then went to hospital?

Judy Baker: Yes, I went into labour. I had no idea what was happening. I thought I had got indigestion. It was night-time. I got up and went to the loo and my waters broke and I did not know what that was. I thought I had wet myself. I had these pains, but I thought that was indigestion. Nobody had prepared me for it. The assistant matron was on duty and she was a fussy spot. She called an ambulance straightaway. I went in the ambulance with nice, kind ambulance men. I did not have time to put on any underwear, and I was in my nightie. It all felt so rushed. I did not

know what was going to be waiting for me. I had no idea what was going to happen.

The Chair: You did not think at this point you were keeping the baby, did you?

Judy Baker: No, absolutely not.

The Chair: That was already water under the bridge.

Judy Baker: I was going to do the right thing and I wanted so much to do the right thing. It is very hard to explain, but it had been drummed into me that the right thing would be to give my baby to somebody else to raise, because they could give her the advantages that I never could, and consequently she would never be called a bastard. Her illegitimacy would be wiped out. She would never have stigma attached to her. There was never any question that I was not going to lose her.

In hospital, when she was born, they did not say anything nasty to me. I do not know if this memory is right, but I remember lying on a slab and just being left there. When somebody came in to check on me I asked if I could have pain relief and she said, "No". She did not say, "No, because you're unmarried" or "No, because you're too far along". She just said, "No". I was left there to get on with it. It was a Sunday and the courtyard was below me and there was a Salvation Army band playing. My memory is that they were playing "Onward, Christian Soldiers", but that could be a trick of my imagination. Eventually they took me down into the labour ward and they were kind to me there. I gave birth, and I was so concerned that she was going to be okay. I said, "Has she got all her fingers and toes?" They said yes. I looked at her little face and I just fell in love. That is what motherhood equips you for, all these hormones—oxytocin equips you to be a mother—and that was what happened.

I was then in hospital for 10 days. It was obvious that I did not have a husband, because only husbands were allowed to visit in the evenings and I never had any visitors, but my mum and dad came to visit. My dad was effusive: "This is the most beautiful baby I have ever seen". They were really happy and proud. It must have been just awful for them. This was their first grandchild. We were all brave, we wanted to do the right thing. I then went back to the home. I had been cut, I had been sewn up. I had had to sit with my feet in stirrups for goodness knows how long, but I did not mind because I had this wonderful baby. I could not walk properly. I was in a lot of discomfort. I had to have salt baths. But I had this baby. During the time we were in the mother and baby home we could do normal things. We could go out for a walk. We used to go up to Wimbledon Common. We had a big garden, so we would go outside and I was enjoying being a mum.

Then a week before I lost her, I got the letter from the adoption agency saying, "We've found the perfect parents for your child. Please bring her

along next Wednesday with her milk coupons, and I'm sure you'll be pleased to know that they have a wonderful family. He's financially stable and this is a wonderful family that she'll be going to". I do not remember getting her ready. I do not remember even how I got to the adoption agency. My mum had offered to come with me but I did not want that, I wanted to do it on my own. I took her in and I put her in this little pink dress that my mum had bought her. It was really pretty and it had cost a lot of money, because we did not want anybody to think that we were lower class or that we were not proper people.

I do not remember all of it, but I remember that when we got there, it was upstairs, so I went upstairs and she was asleep in whatever I had put her in. I do not know what it was—a basket? I do not know what she was in, but she was asleep. Presumably the social worker or the adoption agency worker came in and took her from my arms and she did not wake up. I never got to say goodbye. They took her into the next room where her new parents were waiting for her and that was it. No counselling, no nothing. I was just shown the door and "Go on and get on with your life".

The Chair: Put it all behind you.

Judy Baker: Put it all behind you, you can go on now. No stigma is attached to you, and your child will have this wonderful home with these wonderful people.

The Chair: Did you put it all behind you?

Judy Baker: No, never. You can see that. This is 53 years later and here I am, a wreck because of what happened to me and my daughter. I may be fortunate with what happened, what I did, but I did not forget. I never forgot, but I built a wall around myself because, if I had not, I would not have survived. It was only when my daughter found me again, 22 years ago, that the walls started to come down. In fact, they fell down, in one great big catastrophe of a collapse, because then I recognised all the grief, all the feelings that I had put away for so long.

It has been an enormous battle ever since to regain my sense of self, to recognise that I deserve to have compassion for myself, to recognise that I am not and never was a bad person, to recognise that my motherhood should have been honoured and was not, to recognise that I have never been bad and that I am so sorry for what happened to me, but that we are a sisterhood of women that this happened to. We have been quiet for so long, because we sit under this awful cloak of shame that has been put on us that we never, ever deserved.

The Chair: You had to carry that secret and that shame and suffer that loss for decades.

Judy Baker: Absolutely.

The Chair: Did you have any other children after your daughter?

Judy Baker: I have no other children. I had a chequered life, you could say. With hindsight I recognise that a lot of my behaviours were because I felt so bad about myself. I got married at the first opportunity because I wanted to have a home and a family. I convinced myself it was love but it was not. It was looking for something that would soothe me. I lived a dangerous life; I did not look after myself. Then I got a job and the job was my saving grace. Through that job my boss was my greatest friend and eventually my love. We got married, he was my husband and he allowed me a voice, which I had never had before.

The Chair: That is right.

Q17 **David Simmonds:** I am the Member of Parliament for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner. Having been a lead member for children's services in the local authority for a long time, it has been very moving to hear the testimony that you have given the committee today.

I wanted to ask you a question that has two elements to it. One is about the role of this committee and the respects in which the treatment that you

experienced breached your human rights. Secondly—this has been touched on briefly—clearly nothing will compensate or make up for what has happened, what you have experienced, but it would be really useful for me to hear from you what measures you think might help you or other people who have been in the same position, or anything that has happened along the way that has been helpful in dealing with some of the things that you have experienced.

So the two questions are about breaches of your human rights and things that you think it would help us to know that perhaps we would wish to take up with Government or others which might at least ameliorate some of the harm that has been caused.

Judy Baker: Okay. First, I believe that the right to family life is in Article 8 and the Human Rights Act. Is that right?

The Chair: Yes, Article 8 of the European convention.

Judy Baker: Where is my right to family life? My daughter is with another family. My family life has been totally disrupted by this. I have not had a normal family life. I could never talk about this with my parents afterwards. My brother, who is a lot older than me, viewed it as something very distasteful that could not be talked about. I only have a very small family, but I have a difficult relationship with them because of it. Surely a human right is for a mother to be able to raise her baby without outsiders putting pressure on her to convince her that she is not the best mother for the child? There is a book by Judith Viorst that quotes a case of a child who has been burnt with cigarettes. The mother has burnt him, but he still wants the mother. It is inbuilt in us; we want our mums. I want my mum right now. Does that answer your question?

The Chair: Could you deal with the second part of David's question which is: what would improve the situation now? What would you want to see now?

Judy Baker: I have had a lot of support. I consider that I was very fortunate to find help in America with an email group of reunited mothers. The Americans are so much more open about these things than we are. They talked a lot about what had gone on, and because of them I was able to start forgiving myself, to have compassion for myself. We are inhibited in this country because we are British; we have a stiff upper lip and we do not talk about our emotions a great deal. As I said at the very beginning of this, adoption is a bit like a secret society where we probably all in this room know somebody who, maybe not directly, is affected in some way by adoption. We have no real understanding of the trauma that it causes for all parties. We are fed programmes like "Long Lost Family" that show reunions as being a piece of cake. All that happens is the mother apologises, the child says, "You have no need to apologise, I love you", and they walk off together holding hands in the sunset. I tell you, I have been in reunion for 22 years and it is not like that. It is hard work, because you have a deep love that connects you, a bond that connects you, but you

have no common experience, you are like intimate strangers. I would like to see less of "Long Lost Family" on the television and a bit more reality of what actually happens after.

I do not really know what can be done, because this is such an emotive subject. We have spent so long hiding in the shadows that to come forward now and speak about our experiences is terrifying. The grief that it unleashes is also terrifying and the shame that we felt is terrifying, so all around is fear. Our children's adoptive parents, from my era certainly, never expected their children to be able to search because adoptions were closed until 1976. The advent of Facebook is now bringing people out into the open a bit more. I am internet savvy, but a lot of us mums are not internet savvy. They are in their 70s and 80s, and they do not know how to access this stuff. I went to a therapist for a few weeks until I found out that I knew more than she did about what was going on with me, and I was paying £50 for the privilege. That was 15 years ago, and it got me nowhere.

The Chair: There has been a proposal of an apology. Just talk us through that, bearing in mind that the people who are in government now were not in government at the time and you cannot turn back the clock on have happened. What would the apology do? Do you want an apology? What difference do you think it would make? Perhaps you could say something about this as well, Ann?

Ann Keen: This is a question that I get asked so many times when people know about the television and radio broadcasts and how the BBC have helped us so much. It is not, of course, for the present Government or the previous Government to apologise. What I believe, have been

informed and understand now is that only a Government can apologise for society's attitude towards us at the time.

Society varied, as was obvious in the two nurses I was dealing with. One was adamant and was verging on cruel to me, and the other did her best. Were we accepted in the 1950s? No. In the 1940s? For goodness' sake, women were put into mental institutions and work houses when they were pregnant. In the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s it was still a stigma in society. In the 1970s the unmarried mother wanting a council house syndrome became the words of the day. In the 1960s we were either unlucky or we were fallen women who had no right to anything. A Government can only look back on the way society is viewed, as has happened with other exceptionally serious situations that Governments have apologised for. The striking factor to me was when Australia apologised. I know we all listen to it and watch it. When I was guided to it I could not believe how women and mothers were being freed from their shame. I want to clear my name. I did not give him up.

Do I think adoption is wrong? No, I do not. I am sure people today have good reasons for why this happens and hopefully have a lot of support and guidance and that it is more open and not a secret, as Judy so rightly said. The reality now is that a stigma is still attached to me, and to my child in a way, and to many other children—hence the letter: "What you have done has saved him from growing up with the stigma of illegitimacy".

The Chair: You want an apology to set the record straight. That you were not bad people, that you were not unfit and that what happened to you caused suffering to you.

Ann Keen: Absolutely, yes. The Movement for an Adoption Apology must take masses of credit, and I would not have known about it but for the fact that I was travelling to Manchester for a conference the next day and reading the *Sunday Observer* and came across it. My reaction was

immediately to fold the paper and put it in my bag, because I did not feel I could openly read it.

The Chair: Because it was so important.

Ann Keen: Yes, but also, what if somebody saw me reading this? Ridiculous. I took the newspaper back to the hotel I was booked into, and the first thing I did when I was in the room was to get the newspaper out. I sat on the bed and thought, "These women are asking for an apology. There are women who are speaking about it". I was not an ill-informed person. This was after I was in Parliament, but I still felt I had to hide the fact that I had discovered people campaigning for an apology. When I met with these women, I could not believe that I, at last, could talk openly and listen. Some of them were saying, "That happened to me". There are too many similarities in the treatment for it not to be correct. Why did we have to be forced almost into submission? Why were we treated badly during labour?

Oral evidence: The right to family life: adoption of children of unmarried women 1949-1976

My story is only one of many, and people in this room today who are not giving evidence who are mothers have different experiences and they are horrific. Why? I actually kept thinking all through my nursing, "How did the NHS tell them to do this to us?" They did not. It was the individual's personal beliefs, and it was society's beliefs at the time, that one nurse thought I was wicked and bad and another nurse felt sorry for me. It is how society viewed us outside of the labour room.

The Chair: You have done a tremendous amount to set the record straight, and it is incredible that it has taken so long, decades, before we have faced up to the truth of what was happening, as you say, to hundreds of thousands of mothers and their children. We read today about terrible things such as babies being taken away and we are shocked and horrified, but that is exactly what was happening to hundreds of thousands when I was a young woman in this country. It is very important that you have come forward and given your evidence, which will play a very important part in our report. We now conclude this part of the evidence session with our sincere thanks.