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Adoption News and Views 2013-1

February 2013

Adoption News and Views is a quarterly e-newsletter which aims to provide information about adoption of children and about any legal and policy developments affecting adopted children, parents who surrender a child for adoption, and people who adopt a child. It also provides progress reports on any proposed changes to adoption law, and to efforts by individuals and groups pressing the government to give a higher priority to enacting new legislation. This is urgently needed to replace the out-of-date Adoption Act 1955 and other adoption laws, so as to bring them into line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the anti-discrimination provisions in Human Rights Act 1993 and NZ Bill of Rights Act 1990. Adoption developments overseas will also be covered.

The Newsletter is sent out three or four times a year. Back issues can be viewed on the Adoption Action website: www.adoptionaction.co.nz The main purpose of the newsletter is to provide information on current NZ adoption laws, policies and practices and on any proposed changes. Adoption reform developments overseas will also be covered.

Adoption News and Views is sent to you because you are believed to be a person interested in adoption. If you do not want to receive further issues, please email Robert Ludbrook at the address below. If you know of others who would like to receive future issues, or you or others would like to submit news or views for inclusion in the next newsletter email Robert or ask interested others to do so.

It is hoped the newsletter will provide a forum for people to discuss adoption issues. Contributions are invited including reviews of books, films etc touching on adoption. While the aim is to provide an open forum, the editors reserve the right to decline or abridge any contributions offered.

Robert Ludbrook and Anne Else - Editors
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EDITORIAL

Family Court Proceedings Reform Bill 2012

This Bill implements the decisions made by government as a result of the Ministry of Justice Review of the Family Court. The purpose of the proposed changes is said to be “to ensure a modern, accessible family justice system that is responsive to children and vulnerable people and is efficient and effective.” The Bill would amend five family law Acts but makes no change to the Adoption Act 1955 or other adoption laws which deal with access by adoptees to information about their parents and family members, and with intercountry adoption.

The Bill has been criticised by lawyers, counsellors and children’s rights advocates because:

- it places strict limits on government-funded counselling for couples in disputes over their children;
- it would bar such couples from having a lawyer to assist them at Family Dispute Mediation or court hearings except for cases involving family violence or other exceptional situations;
- couples will, before going to court, have to attempt to resolve their disputes through out-of-court mediation (Family Dispute Mediation) with each partner having to pay a sum (estimated at \$450) to cover their share of the cost (but with a subsidy for low income earners). Many couples will be discouraged by the cost from seeking to resolve their differences through counselling or mediation;
- there will be fewer appointments of lawyers to represent children in Family Court cases and the changes in the role of lawyer for child are likely to add confusion rather clarity over whether they are to act as a “child’s best interests” advocate, or an advocate for the child’s views.

To claim that the proposed changes will make the Family Courts more accessible, more responsive to children and vulnerable people, and more efficient and effective is empty rhetoric. The failure to update the archaic Adoption Act 1955 and other adoption laws means that, in adoption matters:

- Children who are the subject of adoption proceedings will continue to be denied the opportunity to express their views about a process which will sever their relationship with their parents and other family members and will impose on them new parents and a new wider family (including, in some cases, new siblings). This is in breach of their rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC);
- The Adoption Act (unlike other laws relating to the care of children) will continue to treat the welfare and interests of the child as just one of several considerations and not as the paramount consideration as required by UNCROC;
- The mother of a child will be able to give an irrevocable consent to the adoption of her child ten days after giving birth and without the benefit of counselling, independent legal advice, or information about other options available to her should she keep the child. She is likely to be still affected by hormonal changes resulting from childbirth and lactation and often may have her ability to make decisions affected by medication.

- The section of the Adoption Act which can be used to allow the recognition of adoptions by New Zealanders of children living overseas in countries which are not parties to the Hague Convention will mean there can be no certainty that the consent of the child's parents has not been obtained by fraud or deception. The overseas adoption will have the same effect as a NZ adoption order despite not having been vetted by the NZ authorities nor approved by the NZ Family Court.

In the area of adoption, the changes will do nothing to improve the situation of children and vulnerable people. The main motivation of the changes has been to cut the cost to government. Adoption has for decades been the Cinderella of family law and has been left to languish in the back room, partly because it is a low cost area of family law and so any reform would increase government outlay.

Robert Ludbrook

NEWS

Adoption terminology

In New Zealand, the biological parents of an adopted child are usually known as the birth mother and birth father (or sometimes as the natural mother or father) to distinguish them from the deemed (or legal) parents of the child who are described as the adoptive parents. The child is usually referred to as the adopted child until he or she becomes an adult, when the usual practice is to use the term adoptee. Under NZ law, on the making of an adoption order, the child's parents cease to be parents of the child and the adoptive parents are deemed to be the child's parents "as if born to them in lawful wedlock". The term "birth mother" has been criticised as offensive because she will always be the child's biological and gestational mother whatever legal changes are made to her status. To describe her as the "birth mother" is said to be misleading as it defines her relationship to the child as being simply reproductive and denies her post-birth bond and ongoing emotional connection with her child. Adoptive parents may reject that label and can point out that from the moment of the final adoption order they are the child's only legal parents and the child is deemed to have been born to them and not the woman who gave birth and the father whose genes the child carries.

Other adoption terminology that has attracted criticism are the terms "placing a child for adoption", "adoption reunion" and "adoption triangle" or "triad". A thoughtful paper on adoption terminology has been written by Karen Wilson-Buterbaugh in the Journal of Law and Society. The author places the blame for the current accepted terminology on what she describes as the "adoption industry" which thrives in the United States where adoption has become commercialised, it being estimated that, in 2012, the usual cost to the adopting parents of adopting an American child ranges from US\$20,000 to US\$40,000.

For a copy of the article go to:

<http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/topTen/topTenResults.cfm?groupingId=936052&netorjrnI=jrnI>

News - International

Australia

Commonwealth government

Apology by Prime Minister for past adoption practices

Prime Minister Julia Gillard will formally apologise to those affected by forced adoption practices from the 1950s to the 1970s on 21 March 2013. The apology comes after a landmark inquiry by the Federal Senate, which found that up to 250,000 babies were forcibly taken from their mothers, who were mostly young and unmarried. The apology will acknowledge the pain and suffering caused by the practice and is designed to help in the healing process for affected families. The ceremony will be open to victims including mothers and fathers who were forcibly separated from their children, now-adult children who were adopted, affected siblings, and extended family members.

In February 2012 the Senate Committee recommended that the Government formally apologise for past forced adoption practices, which it described as barbaric and a "horror of our history". The inquiry, conducted over 18 months, received hundreds of submissions and spoke to dozens of witnesses. Some said they were drugged and restrained before giving adoption consents. Others claimed they were given no choice but to surrender their babies for adoption in the face of family and social pressure. The Australian state governments of Tasmania, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia have already apologised to those affected in their states.

Australian Journal of Adoption

Thomas Graham, editor of the Australian Journal of Adoption, a publication sponsored by Canberra-based Australian National Library, spent some time in New Zealand after Christmas on holiday with his wife Bobby. Our chairperson, Fiona Donoghue, and several members of the Adoption Action Committee met with Thomas and Bobby as they passed through Wellington and were able to exchange information about the adoption scene in our respective countries.

The Australian Journal of Adoption is a peer-reviewed e-journal free to those who register. It contains a range of articles on adoption topics in Australia and internationally. To register go to www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/aja/user/register

New South Wales

Adoption to be used as a fast track to permanency

A discussion paper, *Child Protection Legislative Reform*, issued by the NSW Minister for Family and Community Services in November 2012 proposed that adoption be viewed as the preferred option for providing a permanent family for children in care. It argued the case for a fast track to enable foster carers of children in care to adopt the child with a minimum of restrictions and delays. Assessment and approval processes would be streamlined and more liberal criteria for selection of adoptive parents applied. The requirement that couples must have lived together for at least two

years before they can adopt a child might be removed where the applicants are authorised carers of a child in care.

Currently, only the New South Wales Supreme Court (the equivalent to NZ's High Court), can make adoption orders. The discussion paper proposed that the Children's Court (which deals with care and protection and youth justice matters) should be given sole jurisdiction to make adoption orders or, at least, should have concurrent jurisdiction where there are care and protection issues in respect of the child to be adopted. Each Australian State and Territory has its own adoption laws and different courts have jurisdiction in adoption matters:

Australian Capital Territory: Supreme Court
New South Wales: Supreme Court
Northern Territory: Local Court
Queensland: Children's Court
South Australia: Youth Court
Tasmania: Children's Court
Victoria: Supreme Court or Local court
Western Australia: Family Court

South Australia

Move to remove right of adoptive parents to veto access to information

The South Australian government is reviewing the Adoption Act 1988 and has indicated its intention to harmonise its adoption law with that of other Australian states. South Australia is the only Australian state in which parties to an adoption can apply for a veto preventing release of information that would identify a child, birth parent or adoptive parent. Under s27B of the 1988 Act, an adopted person, birth parent or adoptive parent of a child adopted before 17 August 1989 can lodge a veto preventing any identifying information about themselves from being disclosed. At 30 June 2012 there were 417 vetoes on identifying information in place in South Australia. Adopted children lodged the most (231), followed by birth mothers (153) and a small number were lodged by adoptive mothers (16), adoptive fathers (10) and birth fathers (7).

Source: Lauren Novak *Sunday Mail* 5 January 2013

United States

Reuben Pannor has died. He was one of the first to write about the issues of fathers of children placed for adoption in his book *The Unwed Father*. He also co-authored *The Adoption Triangle* and *Lethal Secrets*. Reuben contributed a great deal to our understanding of adoption and its effect on those involved.

Russia

Russia and the United States are squabbling over whose human rights abuses are more serious. After the USA signed the Magnitsky Act (which blacklists any Russian deemed to be a human rights violator), Russia retaliated by barring US couples from adopting Russian children. It is estimated that 60,000 Russian children have been adopted by American couples since 1992.

Opponents have accused the Russian authorities of using vulnerable children as political pawns. "For disabled children, being adopted by Americans is their only chance, because in Russia services are not well organised," said Nastiya, a protester who took part in a picket at the Duma.

There are said to be 23,000 children in the USA awaiting adoption but these are mainly older children, many of whom are black or Latino. Prospective adoptive parents often prefer to adopt a younger Russian child. Russia is not a party to the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption and so, in the past, there have been few controls on Russian adoptions. The excellent Russian film *The Italian Boy* highlighted some of the scams and corrupt practices that prevailed in one Russian orphanage.

This latest dispute between Russia and the USA is described by the *Guardian Weekly* as "not being about the rights of children [but] about the pride of once-great nations". It concluded that "The international adoption trade urgently needs an overhaul – but playing politics with children's futures is no way to start the process."

Sources: Laurie Penny, *Guardian Weekly*, 4 January 2013; Jennifer Rankin Moscow Correspondent *Irish Times*, 31 December 2012.

Ethiopia

In recent years, Ethiopia has become one of the most popular countries providing children for international adoption, with 4,500 children being placed in intercountry adoption in 2009. It is estimated that 3.8 million Ethiopian children lost one or both parents to AIDS related conditions in 2009 and that there are some 10,000 such children in institutional care. This has spawned a proliferation of child care institutions and adoption agencies, but there have been increasing concerns about the standards and practices of some of these agencies. A review showed that nearly half of the institutions were operating without a valid licence, and several agencies were more concerned with their own private benefit rather than the best interests of the children. A number were deemed unfit to continue operating. Ethiopia is not a party to the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption and so the strict requirements of the Convention do not apply to these adoptions.

The Bureau of Women Children and Youth Affairs has been working with UNICEF and regional authorities to find placements for these children within their own families and communities.

Information provided by Indrias Getachew, Ethiopia, 10 December 2012.

Recent case on validity of intercountry adoption

New Zealand Court of Appeal rules Philippines adoption cannot be recognised in NZ

Ms U emigrated to New Zealand from the Philippines in the late 1990s and became a NZ citizen in 2001. In 2008, she obtained an adoption order in respect of her six year old niece from a Philippines court. She brought the child to NZ and cared for her here for three years. Although both NZ and the Philippines are parties to the Hague Convention on Intercountry adoption, the Philippines court had not obtained a child study and home study report as required by the Convention. Immigration NZ had refused NZ citizenship to the child on the grounds that she had not been legally adopted. U was unsuccessful in the High Court and appealed to the Court of Appeal.

The Court of Appeal confirmed the decision of the High Court that the provisions of the Convention were mandatory, and failure by the Philippines court to meet Convention requirements meant that its adoption order could not be recognised in New Zealand. It noted that, by reason of s4 Adoption (Intercountry) Act 1997, the Hague Convention has the force of law in New Zealand and, taking into account its child protection purpose, an adoption from an overseas Hague country cannot be recognised here unless it complies with all Hague requirements.

It remains open to Ms U to apply to the New Zealand Family Court for a domestic adoption order so that the NZ Central Authority can request the Philippines Central Authority to make the necessary enquiries and to prepare a report. She would have to obtain valid consents from the child's mother and father. *U v Attorney-General* [2012] NZCA 616, 20 December 2012.

Research on adoption

Manu is my Homegirl: Navigating the Ethnic Identity of the Maori Adoptee

Thesis submitted by Emma West to Auckland University of Technology for the degree of Master of Philosophy 2012. Emma West carried out in-depth interviews with eight Māori adoptees born between 1955 and 1979 and adopted by non-Maori parents. Her research analyses their narratives to determine how they interpreted their social and emotional experiences and how they navigated their ethnic identity. Her conclusions included an assessment that:

“The Māori adoptees felt that they were viewed as second-class citizens. They also felt whakamā or ‘less of a Māori’, because they were missing whakapapa knowledge and at times were attacked because of their adoptee status. Such assumptions were embedded in ideology promoting a narrow and taken-for-granted perception of Māori identity. In some cases, this was internalised further to encompass their ethnic identity, with some of the Māori adoptees preferring not to be called Māori or Pākehā, but rather a *New Zealander* or *just me*. This perspective of the ethnic label might be viewed as a coping strategy resulting from past negative experiences where they felt excluded from the Māori social identity.”

Social Influences

While *being* an adoptee had both positive and negative influences on the Māori adoptees’ sense of self and their attitudes towards Māori, being raised as a transracial adoptee did not necessarily result in psychological maladjustment, although some had experienced behavioural and emotional issues to do with identity (and other factors) in their youth. Such issues may be because at that age the adoptees were experiencing an ‘identity crisis’ (Santrock & Bartlett, 1986). For those who had possessed such feelings and had experienced a reunion with biological Māori whānau, the adoptees believed there had been healing and an increased embracing of their Māori social identity. For others, a dismissal of their Māori heritage correlated with ambivalence toward the Māori social identity. A further investigation with a larger cohort would be needed to determine the strength of this correlation. Determining the level with which participants embraced, denied or were neutral about their ethnic identity was complex and was dependent on who the adoptee was interacting with and the value they placed on the Māori ethnic identity for shaping their personal identity.

The Epiphany and Te Reo and Tikanga Māori Acquisition

An example of an epiphany that resulted in life transformation was found in Mark’s dialogue at the point when he realised that te reo Māori was valuable to his sense of self and integral to his connection with Māori. Consequently his choice to pursue his Māoritanga had an impact on other facets of his life.

Other Māori adoptees in this study also described salient experiences, but rather than being transformational, they enabled constructs to be established. For example, Nadia and Charlene decided learning te reo or tikanga Māori could result in judgment or rejection from Māori. Therefore, they chose not to pursue such learning. However, despite this type of hesitation, all of the Māori adoptees agreed that te reo Māori was integral to being Māori.”

Emma West can be contacted at www.waikato.ac.nz/education

Views

Book and film with adoption theme

***ORFAN* a novel by Corie Skolnick. Mannequin Vanity Publishing**

Corie Skolnick is a psychotherapist and teacher who believes that our deepest knowledge is acquired from story and metaphor, She was moved to write this novel after hearing the personal story of a birthmother who surrendered her bi-racial child but later found that her daughter had been abused, and neglected by her adoptive parents and had ended up in foster care.

One reviewer commented:

“*Orfan* portrays growing up as a bi-racial adopted child and deals with the themes of racial prejudice and cultural diversity. The book is tightly written with a gripping style and an intense subject. Her writing lets you get into the subjective experiences of characters. I was amazed at her authentic portrayal as she takes the reader through scenes of a birth-mother giving up her child for adoption. This is recommended reading for anyone interested in adoption, birth-mothers, coming of age as a bi-racial person, the development of the individual's creative potential despite prejudice and adverse cultural, social and economic circumstances. It enables you to see life through the eyes of a main character, a bi-racial boy as he comes of age, who may have experiences entirely alien to your own. It is an excellent mind-opening book.

Author: corie.skolnick@gmail.com

Reviewer: Doctor George www.amazon.com/Orphan-Corie-Skolnick

***On Air (Parlez-moi de vous)* 2012 a film directed by Pierre Pinaud now showing**

This French comedy/drama starring Karin Viard is about a successful radio advice host, Claire Martin, who seeks out her birth mother, employing a private detective to track her down. She discovers her mother is living with her son in a working class Paris suburb where she helps as a volunteer in a charity shop. Claire joins her mother working in the charity shop but does not reveal who she is, even when she is invited to her mother's home to meet her son and grandson. Jack White, reviewing the movie for the Hollywood Reporter praises Viard for “Offering up a terrific performance that's at once subtle and slightly outlandish, (she)d manages to transform Claire's hypersensitive, antisocial personality into a source of laughter, yet never shies away from her character's darker inner traumas.

“The Bells of St Mary’s” by Maggie Wilkinson - BACKGROUND

This is a story about a girl growing up in New Zealand circa 1960-64. It is about hopes, dreams and downfall. It is about a fate/a-dug ditch into which many young girls of that time stumbled. I have endeavoured to write the story in the present tense as the person I was at the time. I have not tried to analyse what happened or given reasons from a retrospective or adult point of view. I was not capable of analysing ‘why’ at the time (that came later). I have used letters that I wrote to my friend ‘Ellen’ (not her real name) from the time that I left home at the age of 17.

The fact that ‘Ellen’ had kept the letters and was able to return them to me was an opportunity to present a ‘time capsule’ of the social attitudes present during the late 1950s, 1960s through to the early 1970s and may be of interest as a historic document. During 1993 I sent Renee Taylor an account of my experience, which was the catalyst for her novel ‘Does This Make Sense to You’

I consider that it is important for students of New Zealand social history to know what actually occurred to me and many other young women who found themselves incarcerated in homes for unwed mothers in that era. I have copied verbatim the letters I wrote about my life before and during that devastating time.

“The Bells of St Mary’s” by Maggie Wilkinson

I had to move, just had to move or just breathe ... God ...I had forgotten to breathe, I sucked in a stifled gulp of air and shuffled my bottom. Somewhere within the innards of the bed a spring twanged, I froze and listened.

Far off early summer sounds filtered through my thoughts a lawn mower and kids playing and closer the clink of crockery and polite tones of subdued afternoon tea conversation.

I was not there ... I was in Wellington for Gods sake.

‘Margaret’s gone to Wellington.’

‘Oh has she?’

‘Hmmm.’ Vaguely as only Mother could. Not really lying is it?

Oh just go home, I pleaded to my bedroom. Let Mrs Callum go home, she is just being nose-y and Mum knows it. I gaze at the Modigliani print I had pasted onto a wooden slab. I had fallen deeply in love with Modi at the age of fifteen ...I had come home.

‘Don’t go home.’ My work mate in the Shortland St. Accountancy had said ...but no ... he had said ‘come on home,’ did I love him? I adored him!

I had climbed out of this small town and sprinted into the future but at the moment of re-entry I had allowed it to suck me back into its sad pathetic underlay.

Small town stuff, taking up the role, the part you play in the family of players, why? Back to the job in a Pharmacy as if I had never left, the rough Friday night parties after work and him ... did I love him? Of course I did!

Did I love him? I thought I did! Wasn’t the person you love, supposed to love you right back?

‘They can look but not touch.’ Strict instructions from Mum, who sat on the

kitchen table, kicking an elegant leg and puffing at a cigarette. Waiting and worrying about 'her gels'. Was this 'the' talk?

But why would anyone want to 'touch' me I wondered. What a dreamer ... my life was not meant to be sordid, such a dreamer... I would wave royally to my fans, in my pre sleep fantasies when I drove into town a 'famous model/actress?' I was going to do great things. Oh please go home ...

At last I could hear the sounds of farewell, the last overture of a small operatic drama of inquisitive deceit. I could hear Mum going through the motions of her goodbyes, she'll have a headache after this. 'That woman!' Mum began as she opened the door of my bedroom. 'I hate pretending and I know she knows ... you'll want to go to the bathroom.' She announced all in one breath.

Since I had 'left' for Wellington Mother's eyes had become objects of pained accusation, she was carrying the burden, after the tears there was no discussion just a dull 'how could you have done this to me' look. Dad had simply said 'Well that's what makes the world go round'. And had retreated back behind the newspaper.

I resided on this island of disbelief. The joys of the impending summer were gone, the reedy newsreaders voice telling of the assassination of a President sounded empty and disjointed and became one with the new music of the Beatles. Tinny echoes from the plastic transistor ... my link to the disconnected world. I felt ill, not just morning sickness, I felt wretchedly wounded but didn't dare to voice my stupid feelings I was not supposed to be this way I had no right to FEELINGS.

So yes I came back, to beery parties and fumbling on a stinky bed, please love me. Those words were not said ...ever. 'I love you.' Tentatively
No response.

'I think I'm pregnant'. I whispered to Pam.
'Jesus' she replied. 'Are you sure?' Her eyes were wide with concern. 'Jeees Mags.'

We were being watched by our boss, he whipped out from his small office where he had been peering, even putting up a row of tall hair spray cans in front of his observation window did not appear to stop his constant mathematics that were tuned to the ringing of the till. He trotted past us, through the dispensary and out the back door to the stock room where his supply of whisky awaited him. Pam and I looked at each other and laughed. 'Seriously Mags,' she continued, 'have you been to the Doctor?'
'No ... I just know.'

It was the first time that I had spoken my fears out loud, was this me saying those words? 'You can do something if you're quick.' Pam hissed as she hurried to a customer. 'Hi, can I help you'. She called to the customer, huge helpful smile abounding.
Do WHAT???

Don't think about it deny, deny, it cannot be. Carry on as usual it will go away. I left that pharmacy, was offered a job with better wages and buying conditions down the road as if a career as a pharmacy assistant was one I coveted and strove for! Right next door to this pharmacy was a takeaway, fried food and evil pies cooked in a haze of torrid blue fumes, it stank and when mixed with Elizabeth Arden 'Red Door' and other associated smells of the pharmacy it was the pits. Eyes watched curiously as I made my way through a vomit filled day.

My romantic lover had 'come off' a motorbike and was neatly wrapped in hospital (couldn't run)?
The time had come dear friend Ellen said to 'tell him'. Skulked into the hospital feet dragging vomit
rising. Ellen was brisk. Waited forever while visitors hovered and took their time leaving.
Choked and got it out (not the vomit)! Not much response really,
Left.

Cried bitterly for the first time.

Ellen said its time your family knew. Reality blasted me.

So there I was hiding like a rat. Breasts swollen and tight. In a gormless empty
trance crouched on a bed.

'I've got pains Mum.'

Mum couldn't quite disguise a hopeful look.

'A' Doctor was called, not 'our' GP.

Doctor Manu gave a look of bemused understanding ... he had never been called to our address
before, was he used to being so used?

'Bed rest and call me if you show.' he kindly said. SHOW???

'She would be happier in a place where there are others like her

'Get up and exercise.' Mum ordered when she came back from seeing the Dr
to the door, an address clasped in her hand. Hot bath and exercise but the symptoms
subsided.

Mum's face slipped into sad resignation.

'Oh well.' She sighed.

It was awkward remembering to duck as I passed the kitchen window, Mrs Hall was often at her
kitchen sink directly opposite ours and there was no way a person who was in Wellington could
continue to be seen at the window, getting to the tap for a glass of water became a mission.

'Does she always have to be standing there?' commented Mum.

That evening after I had failed to co-operate by miscarrying I heard murmurings of a discussion
between Mum and Dad, I realised that the address given by the Doctor was at the heart of things.

Shame hung like a damp towel.

My brother in law visited.

'They are talking about you in the pub.'

Oh great! Now I was one of those girls, I had got myself into trouble. A dirty
girl. I could guess who *they* would be.

'I can pay for you to go to Sydney.' He offered

Mum's eyebrows rose. 'What for?' what's he saying, my head hurt, what's he saying.

'You can get an abortion at a place in Sydney, I will arrange it if you want.' Rod
answered with real concern in his eyes.

'I can't.'

'What do you mean? You've still got time haven't you?' His eyes did not
understand.

'I can't ... I can't do that.'

I can't. I want to love this baby, why doesn't *he* love me? Why is it being suggested that I get rid of
this child? A miracle ... I want a miracle

'Have you talked with him?'

'No.'

'It's time you did.'

Arrangements were made, day and time. The invitation sent.

The time arrives.

I am silently standing in my room willing him to come. The gate latch clicks,
my insides drop through the floor my head roars, and I pass out. I haul myself up and

onto the edge of the bed, there is a knock on the back door.

Mum opens my door.

'You've got a visitor.' I hear her invite him into the kitchen then I hear her leave and go back to the sitting room. I get out to the kitchen, he stands by the bench, I sink onto a chair.

'I can't marry you I want to do more with my life ... I want to travel.' He mutters.

Christ sakes ... I want to as well, I think as I force myself to look at him.

'How do I know it's mine?' he adds.

A silent empty scream echoes within me.

He offers me some money ...

I am choked ... MONEY!

This is the person I have dreamed of for so many young years. The one I love?

On the very early morning of the 16 January 1964 Mum, Dad and I crept furtively out to the Citroen, the morning is damp with dew, no curtains moved next-door.

'That's a relief.' Mum murmured as she settled into the front seat.

'All ready?' Dad shrugged himself into a comfortable position and gave me a quiet smile from the revision mirror.

Away we went, no Sunday drive this, straight severe countenances facing due west towards my beloved Auckland but this time there will be no Aunty Rae and no dear sister to hug on arrival.

We purred across the Hauraki Plains, Dad is very proud of the Citroen, you could eat your dinner off the engine it is so spotlessly shiny.

'Billie works around here.' I ventured My brother was herd testing in these parts.

'Hmmm.' was that Mum replying or simply clearing her throat?

Bill my big brother and idol. I used to follow him around so much that he devised ways to keep me out of his way. One time he tied me up to the trellis arch then took the supporting bike away, another occasion he helped me on to the roof of the shed then disposed of the ladder. I didn't take the hint.

'There's his car.' Couldn't contain the excitement. I pointed. 'Look look over there, Mum - look.'

I watched, screwing around gazing out the back window as 'his car' grew smaller and disappeared.

'This looks like the place.' Mum with directions peers through the gates.

We have driven blithely past this place so many times, cramped on a PK and banana scented Road Services bus after near eight hours of monotonous gear changes and 'are we there yet.' This is The Great South Road, shortly before Otahuhu, you really knew at this point that it was not long to go before you could see One Tree Hill and then Auckland ... And the holiday had begun!

We drive up to the front of a beautiful villa large bay window and big verandah (a grandma's house). Large trees shelter it from the hustle of the busy highway. A charming chapel to the right lends a feeling of peace and security.

A sudden movement disturbed the serenity, someone had leapt away from our sight, a broom fell with crack.

We were ushered in to an office (once the sitting room)? by a pleasant faced grey haired rosey sort of a woman with a subservient manner. She announced our arrival and a diminutive woman rose smiling from behind a desk.

I'm Rona Patterson she introduced herself. I could tell Mum and Dad were relieved and impressed with this kindly looking woman smartly kited out in full nursing sister gear.

The interview was short and before I could take it in, Mum and Dad were

being shown to the door we had just come in by ... I was escorted to another door into the interior of the 'home'.

The door was shut firmly behind me a dull thud of finality I was shown to the dormitory and the bed that I would be occupying, the realisation hit. The punishment had begun. Matron's smile had transformed into a forced grimace as the rules were intoned. No leaving the premises, visitors must be approved, get out of those clothes. I was handed over to a young enormously pregnant girl whose name disappeared in a haze of disbelief. I followed blindly as I was shown the communal bathroom and loos, the work timetable, rules, clothing, chapel times. There are few rooms off the long verandah that ran along one side of the dorm, one held our smocks a box of well worn garments was pulled out and some that seemed to be my size were handed to me.

'We are only allowed to wear our own clothes on Sundays'. I am told.

Pregnant girls bustled, toting bucket and mops.

'You will be in the kitchen.' Matron told me.

A damp musty odour prevailed, wet mopping, but listen to the rules, the water in the bucket is to be a precise temperature, the mop is pulled through the rollers twice, a precise number of washes left and right and then up and down for each square of the floor.

'You are in charge of the kitchen fire.' Another task which came with inflexible instructions, the number of kindling sticks and which way they had to laid, and the way to screw the paper that went under the kindling. Gosh, I had been raised by a Naval Officer and was used to routine and strictness but I was not used to this feeling of terror that accompanied my every moment of every day.

Matron's soft-soled shoes enabled her to swiftly creep up on an unsuspecting girl and scream recriminations if a fault was found. Within hours I had turned into a nervous case, constantly peering over my shoulder.

The next morning after an endless night of staring into the unfamiliar darkness of unhappy sounds and shapes I heard a patter of quickly moving feet. It is a sound to which I will become very used.. Matron was running past from her 'cottage' behind the hospital. Running to start another fear filled day.

I sit up and try to look friendly. I couldn't speak yesterday, my voice didn't work. They all seem to know what they are doing and I realise our schedule is ruled by a bell there is also a bell monitor. 'The Bells of St. Marys'

Morning duties and breakfast prepared, then chapel. Matron read the lesson from 'Ecclesiastices', there was a suppressed snigger from someone who knew a little better. A silent pause as Matron's eyes darted around to identify the offender, revenge would follow. Not me, I really don't care how the bible is read.

A small girl whose duty seems to douse the candles nearing the end of service fainted as she was about to get up from her kneeling position.

'Leave her there'. Rapped out the command from Matron.

After chapel we filed into breakfast, porridge, toast and a miniscule of scrambled egg.

I am in the kitchen with Nar. She does not talk much, she is a Pacific Islander, and runs the kitchen, she just gets onto the job, I do not ask any questions I get on

with my jobs. I make the porridge in the mornings dipping the cup into the weevils

and oats, stirring but not looking in case I see the dying throes of the small creatures.

'Don't eat the porridge.' I whisper to the girls I have come to care about. I am washing the pans they are pretty big.

'You filthy girl.' A scream from behind.
I cringe toward the sink. What have I done?
'Is that a plaster on your finger?' Her finger points accusingly.
'Yes.' Pitifully
'Get away from the kitchen.' Matron's contorted face orders me.
'Get over to the laundry.' Matron continues. 'When THAT heals you can come back.'

30/1/64

Dear Ellen,

*Did you get my letter I wrote to you before I went away? I hope so. Oh my God Ellen its awful here. I hate every minute of it nothing except a concentration camp could be worse. It is how I would imagine a women's prison to be. I would like to see HIM here a minute just one minute and he wouldn't be able to get out fast enough. There are about sixteen of us here at the moment, we do all the work. There is a wing for children (the orphans). A hospital annex for married women. A nurses home, a laundry, a huge kitchen and our block so we are the wards maids, kitchen maids nursemaids, we do all the laundry etc. etc. etc. unpaid labour that's all. Start work 6.55, have breakfast 7.25, Chapel 8am, Work until 10am, Morning tea then work to 12.00, lunch then back to work until 1.30pm have until 4pm off in this time we have to bath do our washing etc. Then work again. Tea at 5pm, Work until 6.30, then chapel. Then lights out at 9pm. That is our charming day wouldn't you love to spend a few months here? By the way when I mean working I MEAN WORKING. If you slack for a minute the Matron is down on you like a ton of bricks and every thing is in such huge sizes and amounts Thousands literally thousands of dishes. The copper, furnaces and dryers and things in the laundry are huge. Thursday: didn't get time to write yesterday. My Dr came (we are all allotted Drs). I am due in May mind you so that makes it 3 or 4 months I spend here. I just can't stand the thought. Mum and Dad came up to see me Saturday, I just howled all the time but I was really pleased to see them. I don't think I could have bear it if they hadn't come, they are going to try to come up every three weeks or so. That is all I have to look forward to. Oh Ellen you should see the children they are put out to play every day in a small playing area enclosed by a wire fence. They look like little animals and when you walk past they all run to the fence. I can hardly bear it. I would never leave my child here and the wing they live in is dreadful, it's a horrible old building & cots & bassinets are everywhere they can possibly be put. And all the babies are lying there almost all day and the flies are terrible crawling all over them it makes me sick to go in there. We have films every 2 weeks- last night we saw Darby O'Gill and the Little People,' of all things but I think the ones coming are a little better. The only time we see the rest of the world is when we risk sneaking out which I have done twice, we usually post letters we don't want read by Matron for she has a habit of opening our letters (I shall have to sneak out to post this). And once we went down to the nearest shops to get chips and other eats, some one goes, the others all place orders and we arrive back laden with fish and chips and the dorm smells for hours. Please write if you have a chance - address it to M Patterson 671 Gt South Rd Otahuhu. Don't put St Marys Homes
With my love Margaret
PS could you please put Margaret on the envelope because there is a girl called May here and it gets mixed up. We are all Miss Patterson.*

'God I'd love a feed of fish n chips.' Sarah sighed and gazed longingly out the window.
We were folding our washing.
'Me too.' I confirmed
'Don't say that.' Ruth sang out from across the dorm, 'I have dreams of fish n chips.'
Prue rubbed her tummy and licked her lips in a caricature of a starving person.
We looked at each other... could we do it?

Carla walked in carrying an armful of dry washing. 'What's going on?'

We began to plan.

Sarah started. 'I'll go, how about you Margaret?'

'I'll come with you.' It was good to be making a plan.

'I'll tell the others and start collecting, they just have to go without barley sugars this fortnight.' Said Jan getting into it.

'Is Matron on tonight?'

'No, it's Sister'

'But Matron will be in her cottage.'

'How do you know?'

'She's got a visitor.'

'HmMMMMMMMMM.'

We would have been good escaping a prisoner of war camp I thought.

When it is dark Sarah and I set out. Ruth was stationing herself at the top of the tradesmen's driveway to be the 'lookout' the others promising to cover our absence.

'This was not the best idea, the fish n chips are getting cold.' I said to Sarah as we trudged our way back along the highway. We turn into the drive way and to our horror a ghostly figure is waving frantically from the top. Shit!

Sarah grabs me and we throw ourselves into the hedge sobbing. We lie there, hearts beating still hugging the newspaper of greasies. 'God Sarah what are we going to do?'

I slowly climbed out only to find Ruth standing there (in her nighty). 'What are you doing?' she whispered hoarsely. 'I gave you the all clear.'

Steam from the coppers and the fire of the furnaces make the laundry a hellhole, sweating girls swing from the ends of long poles (two girls to a pole), struggling the dead weight of wet washing from one copper into the rinsing copper. It is something out of a Dickens. I am thrust towards a pile of wet washing piled into a basket.

'This has to be hung out.' A head nods in the general direction of the lines that stretch across the land by the garden (of curly kale).

I see that the girls already out there have sack pinnies with pockets for the pegs, I grab a pinny and tie it round the expanse of my growing baby and start to heave the basket outside, Carla and I march the washing toward the lines.

'We've got to get this lot hung before morning tea.' Carla started. 'How long have you got to go?'

'May I think.' I answered, thinking how long I had to be here. It seemed forever.

Trucks thundered past on the Great South Rd and the Truckies waved and beeped their horns. How embarrassing, some of the more unembarrassed waved gaily back.

Carla looked at me and grimaced, 'Hate being out here.'

'I think I'd rather be in the kitchen, at least I can steal food.' I stated before I realised what I had said.

Carla widened her eye and looked at me in disbelief, and then she laughed.

'Do you?' still laughing.

'I'm so hungry I could cry.'

'I think we're all hungry.'

I felt awful, my hurried snatched mouthfuls of anything edible were opportunistic and degrading but at least I got the opportunity.

'Speaking of hunger it's morning tea, hope Naa has made scones.' Carla looked at me sideways and laughed again.

'Haven't they told you it's better to have a smaller baby for an easier birth? - they don't want us to eat too much.' Carla's laugh was cynical this time.

Matron was making an announcement. 'A missionary from the Islands has consented to come and speak to you all, he will be at chapel this evening.' The visiting missionary with an eye for breasts and swollen tummies arrived to reinforce our sin. Stuttering his sermon he tried to pry his eyes from our offending anatomy.

'God that was horrible.' I felt angry and dirty.

'Yes.' Replied Carla her face was white and her eyes wet.

'You're not allowed to do that.' Prue told me with authority.

I am holding the small brown hand of a wee boy, he had pushed it through the wire net. I had stopped briefly on my way to the laundry.

'Matron said we are not allowed to bond with them.' she said without concern.

'What happens to them?' I look down at the snotty faced child with the big brown eyes.

Prue stood there with a child on one hip jiggling it. I looked at her.

'Oh we're just about to feed them.' Understanding my gaze. 'They have never been adopted ... mostly twins or half-castes ... people don't want them' she said in an offhand way. 'Come on Trevor.'. She called to my hand-holding mate.

'I think they stay here until they reach five, then they go to a state orphanage.'

Carla said sadly. 'Just pray that you don't have twins or ... I gently rub my stomach. "We'll be OK baby.' I whisper.

I cut out pictures of food, it has become a hobby I suppose, I look forward to the breaks so that I can flip through magazines and find beautiful pictures of food. I've got quite a stack in my suitcase under my bed. Mum bought a cake with her last time she visited, chocolate and a bit gooey. I hide it then invite some of the girls to share it with a cup of Cocoa after tea. We are caught! Screaming accusations, on and on. I feel so stupid and guilty.

'May I have a packet of barley sugars and some red wool.' I am going to knit.'

February 21st 1964

Dear Ellen

Thank you for the letter and all the news. My god those boys are the limit, they make me damned sick the lack of pride in them is terrible. Fancy Jim going around with HIM I wonder what has been said between them. How is Maureen getting on with the wedding preparations? Please give her my regards, I hope she has got over the let down and has forgiven me. I must tell you about our 'bottling' we have done almost 500 quart jars of tomato pulp a couple of dozen apples, plums beans and we are in the middle of doing pears now, literally tons of them (Harvest Festival from the churches). I have started to pop out in front all of a sudden, because I have been holding myself in from habit. I have not decided about keeping baby I want to with all my heart and have worked out a few plans that I can put into action. In fact that's all I think about all the time. I lie awake at nights just worrying and planning. I want to keep her Ellen I really do and I shall do everything I can to do that. I have been knitting madly for the past few days, a child's cardigan.

Mum thinks I'm going home after all this, I shall have to tell her that I can't. I never shall. Could you in my position? I don't think anyone with any pride or feelings could stand it. I think as long as I'm out of it I shall be forgotten don't you? I hate to hurt Mum because all I really want is to be with them, but I think it would be harder for them if I did go back. My life is such an utter mess.

Sometimes I could just give up. If it wasn't for my baby I think I would. Oh well Ellen it looks like I'm moaning now. Your photo is sitting on my locker, please stay by me.

All my love duck

Margaret

Glenda is standing at the door of the first aid room,

'I've burnt myself.' she explained. She is still standing there as Carla and I walk back at lunchtime, tears slowly drip off her chin.

'Why are you still here.' We ask with concern.

'Matron told me to wait here.' Glenda gulped as another tear rolled down her face,

'But you've been here hours.'

'Yes.'

Tears and snot drip off her face but no sound accompanies the torrent.

It's good to be in bed, it's my own time. I look forward plugging the transistor earpieces in and pulling the blankets up and disappearing into the world of Simon Templar, jingles for toffee pops and the odd bit of news from out there. The Beatles are going to tour NZ and I learn that the Bassett Rd murder trial continues.

'We'll get there.' I whisper to baby.

A few of us are sitting in the common room. I'm looking for food pictures. Ruth comes in and sits down at the piano, tinkles a few notes then begins to play, it sounds lovely what is it? Ave Maria ... Carla walks over and stands by Ruth and softly sings ... I stop tearing out pages.

'That's beautiful sing it again?'

Carla and Ruth put their heads together then Carla turns to us and in full voice sings ...

The beauty of it draws more girls into the room ... we quietly listen.

Matron was rushing about (more than the usual). An air of excitement hovers.

'An important visitor is coming.' Prue says with relish.

Orders are shouted and inspections are being held, every nook and cranny is examined for offending dust, wet mops are sloshing.

'Wonder who the visitor is?'

Who the hell would want to come here?'

Puzzled speculations become the only source of conversation.

At morning tea Matron hushes us and with a beaming face informs.

'The Wife of the Governor General ... OUR Patron is paying us a visit, I want you all to check that your beds are neat and tidy then go to the children's play area.'

She tells us with much importance. We are herded into the wire enclosure with the children, we jostle trying to get behind one another (except for Prue who seems to be pretty excited).

Matron steps out from the shadow of the dormitory door hands clasped in front graciously smiling, leading the way, talking and bobbing her head, pointing and showing.

The tall gaunt kindly figure of Lady Fergusson beside her showing signs of genuine embarrassment, trying not to actually look at any of us while keeping up a friendly veneer. An entourage of what feels like thousands follows them. I feel humiliated.

'God how humiliating.' Ruth is also in shock.

Matron reappears claps her hands twice.

'Right - back to work.' She orders.

Ruth, is tall willowy and fair she is having trouble carrying the buckets she is in pain.

'I think baby is sitting on a nerve.' She tries to smile as she limps back to work.

I was plucking up the courage to talk to Matron. Naa, I realised, was one of us. In order to keep her little girl she lived over at the nurse's home and ran the kitchen, if she could do it so could I.

The plan that ran through my head every night was more than a possibility. I loathed this place but if it meant I could keep my child I decided I could do it.

'May I speak with you Matron?' I am hesitant and submissive. My 'plan' tumbled out incoherently. I reassembled it and started again. After a long pause.

'If this is what you really want I suppose I can support you Margaret.' Matron was sitting behind her desk looking at me, a long impenetrable stare.

'Thank you, oh thank you.' My heart was in the stars.

I could barely contain myself but it's not the sort of thing that you could rush into a dorm full of girls who were about to give up their babies and hoot and shout about at the top of your voice.

I went to bed with a smile. 'We'll be alright baby we'll get there.' I am walking up and down the grass outside the dorm, talking to baby, I rub my stomach and chat.

'Just you and me baby we are going to be alright,' I repeat this over and over.

I look at the trees and realise that it is autumn is on its way, then I realise that I can smell autumn, I feel that I have been in this place a long time.

'Rata's waters have broken.' Prue likes to be 'first with the news.'

'Poor little girl.' I reply

We are all concerned for Rata she is so small and looks as if she is only about fourteen.

'Who the hell got her this way?' I had said to Carla during one of our many talks.

'Whoever he is should be in prison anyway.' Carla had replied.

We worry but very little news filters from the hospital to the 'home.'

'Rata is still in labour.'

'Oh god is she.' ... three days have past.

'Any news?'

'Any news yet?'

We don't see Rata again.

Carla and I meet before lights out, we sit on the verandah around by the utility rooms, it is a quiet place to talk away from the dorm and the chatter. We talk about the events that 'got' us into this place and realise our stories are not much different. We talk about food ... crayfish is a big topic ... we talk about what we might do after this is over.

'I'm pleased for you Margaret,' Carla told me when I gave her my good news I'm sent to work in the nursery.

'We'll see how you get on looking after the babies.' Matron tells me. I hate it. It's awful pushing food into little mouths, trying not to look into their unloved eyes.

Six kids sitting on potties because it says on the schedule pinned on the wall that's what they do at precisely this time.

'Lift them out of the cots and put them on the rug, don't cuddle them.'

'It's cot time, put them back.'

Matron does an inspection: 'coo coo.' she tickles a tummy and leaves.

Easter finally comes. Mum and Dad and my eldest sister arrive. I've been so looking forward to this visit because I am going to tell them my plans. I am going to be able to tell them that I've solved the problem.

'No you're not' Mum says decisively. 'Matron says that you're not the type to cope.'

'But ... But Matron said she would help.'

'Matron is not going to help she called us into the office when we first arrived and told us about your plans, she said you are not the type to cope.' Mum repeated. We are sitting in the Citroen overlooking green fields, the four of us. Panic hits me.

'But Matron ...'

6th April 1964

Dear Ellen

I feel so utterly tired like an old rag dripping on the line, I have about six weeks (I think) to go so you can imagine what I look like ugh! Like a basketball in front of me. Last night I really thought I was 'going over' I was awake from about 9.30pm until 2am with violent contractions and pains, backache the whole works in fact. But ... they were gone in the morning and I'm still carrying on rewardless. The big horror of all for us girls is to go over to the hospital and to get there to find it is a false alarm and then have to come back to face everyone again, if you know what I mean? But we are not told anything about what's going on inside us so therefore we don't know what to look for in the way of symptoms and just have to guess for the right ones... so much for that. Well Ellen I don't know how to feel. Mum Dad and Mary were up at Easter weekend for a family conference. Oh my God I don't know what to say - well anyway Mum looks dreadful and has to have an operation very soon. I am worried and she is getting very upset about me not going home in fact she is going down hill rapidly. She says that I can go home with the baby to live. But Dad won't allow me to do that because he says it would mean Mum looking after the baby while I worked. Dad gave me a long talking to regarding having more consideration for them. Oh Ellen, why on earth did my life have to turn out like this. I would do anything in the world to be able to take my baby home to her father and her home...why can't I? Why on earth was I such a damn fool. I can't hurt Mum and Dad anymore than I have - I owe them a lot they have been wonderful about the whole thing. I need them very much I would never forgive myself if anything happened to them, excuse me for going on like this but I have to sometimes. They say that hell is on earth - now I'm positive it is. Well I shall be home in about eight weeks to hide my head.

Much love to you duck

Margaret xxxxxx

30 April 1964

Dear Ellen,

Sorry I haven't written for a while. Thank you for the details of Maureen's wedding, she sent me a piece of wedding cake, which was rather nice I thought. Also thanks for seeing about Jan's letter.

Mum and Dad came up, we had two hours together, drove out to Mangere harbour the surrounding countryside is fenced with stone walls, very English looking, quite beautiful. Don't mention the baby subject. Mum said she saw you not long ago. I'm so glad. I hope you realise Mum didn't mean to sound cross the last time, you should know and understand my Mother by now!!

Thank you for the 'symptom chart'. Time is creeping on. Oh gosh I hope I'm not overdue, I just don't think I could stand it. I'm so much of a hurry to leave this contemptible place but I'm not in a hurry to have my baby because it will mean it will be the last time I shall have any contact with her. I love her so much. I hope and pray the people who adopt her will love her as much. Oh Ellen I don't know how I'm going to give her up. I just can't believe this is all real, can't believe I have to give my own baby away. I'll never forget it. I am beginning to hate HIM for it is because of him that I can't keep her. You know I bet he has almost forgotten the episode. It happened last year for him and will be past history, while it's only just beginning for me. I'll never want to see him again. I can't bear the thought of all those gossipy people's eyes at home. I feel like a real slut going home from being 'away'.

Please pray that my child is a girl because there is only a 'demand' for girls in the adopting field. If it's a boy there's a chance it won't be adopted at all. Isn't it all so horrible to even have to think like that about your own child. I'm sorry you have to hear about my troubles every time I write, but there's not a soul other than you whom I can tell.

All my love Ellen

Margaret xxxxx

One by one girls leaves the dorm ... another empty bed in the morning. I am lying in bed, I feel a tap on my arm.

'I'm having pains.' Carla tells me.

'I'm going over'.

'Good luck.' I whisper.

I watch the shadow of her walking hesitantly down the dorm a lonely figurmaking her way out the door, and then she was gone. I am the last of the girls with whom I have become friends. New girls arrive almost daily but I am alone I have been here longer than any, almost a curiosity really. They arrive with news of the world.

'Went to the Dave Clark Five concert the other night.' announced Deirdre.

Deirdre has the face of a china doll and cheeky smile.

I look at her and wonder if she realises what she is in for. Another new arrival looks for all the world like Danny Kaye. I stare rudely at her: she does not appear to understand and looks around under her eyebrows in a slow goofy non-comprehending manner.

'What bastard got her in the family way?' Chris hissed nodding at over at the table where the 'new' girl sat.

'Poor bitch' answered Deirdre.

19 May 1964

I'm sorry I have got you all worried. Actually I just couldn't be bothered writing to anyone. I'm impatient, bad tempered and morbid just waiting for something to happen, so near and yet so far. I shall be seeing the doctor in a few minutes so I'll be able to tell you something later on. Mum is in hospital as you probably know I haven't had any word from home, so I hope everything is alright. Val sent me some little baby bonnets, she thinks I'm keeping baby. I don't know how to write and tell her I'm not because as soon as I start on the subject I get tearful and it takes days to get over it. I have tried to put my mind a complete blank and look upon myself as if I am someone else quite different. Another reason why I haven't written, I have been in bed for a week with something called 'Devils Grip' quite appropriate don't you think? But nothing to laugh about. Really, it was quite painful and I was damned uncomfortable. Oh Ellen you should glance around at the motley collection of females we have here now. It's just awful, but I try and make my mind a blank to that too.

My godfathers, this can't go on much longer it just can't. I loathe people crunching and chewing around me and that's all the girl in the bed next to me seems to do ugh! Look and this frightful page ... sorry duck I'm getting worse instead of better. If one more girl crackles or crunches I'll go stark raving mad. Pray for me Ellen because I need it. Thanks for keeping up the letters it has really helped me a lot.

My love Margaret xxxxx

I am laying the fire I hear the crunch of a footstep, my heart stops. I slowly turn my head. Someone is watching me. Standing is a laborious task now; I reach for a broom and slowly creep down the steps. SHE is standing there head hanging mouth open staring ... I raise the broom up over my head and charge ... I think I am in the hospital wing. I am in a room by myself I'm in a fog, I don't understand, can't think.

'We are going to bring you on.' Matron whisked in and stood by the bed.

'We are going to give you these nasal drops - they will bring on contractions' she added brightly.

I am prepared ... what a term to use because I am not prepared at all, the contractions are fast and furious the Doctor lounges against a bench on the other side of the room while Matron delivers 'her'

baby. I don't dare make a noise, she is very matter of fact it's all over and she leaves the room. The kind Sister leans over me and says, 'you have a little girl dear.'
I place my arm over the bundle lying beside me in a plastic cot.
'Please don't take her away yet.' I pleaded.
'Well, just don't let Matron know, we'll leave her here a little while, OK?'
I try desperately to stay awake but can't. When I wake she is gone.
The grief I feel is beyond anything ... it fills my body and mind.

The 'unwed' mothers are kept away from the married women but I can hear laughter and muffled conversation. I crawl down the corridor to the windows of the nursery, peeping over the ledge to try and find my child but I'm not successful. Bound up and medicated to stop 'milk' I slink about keeping out of the way. I am taken to an upstairs office in Otahuhu to sign my child away. I place my hands on a bible and swear not to try and find her. My head swims with grief.
'You may go and say goodbye to baby.' I stand over her cot and gaze down at my daughter, her eyes are open and she squints back at me, her eyebrows are arched, she is beautiful. I memorise her, I frantically take mental pictures of her. I think ... I could pick her up and run ... now ...but I don't know where to run, only the hedge out the front. Standing with her hands clasped behind her back Matron sways on her heels.
'I've explained to the mother that you are reluctant to give baby up...she says she understands and will take great care of her.' Matron's face grimaces into a tight unemotional smile. I am empty.

I sit in the back seat of the Citroen, it slides out of the driveway and on to The Great South Road, I am in choking pain, my limbs have been torn away ...a piece of me has been left behind.

Maggie Wilkinson

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Acknowledgments

Special thanks to

Maggie Wilkinson

Emma West

Joss Shawyer

Bill Atkin

Chrissie Hamilton and

Evelyn Robinson

for their contributions to this issue.