

Submission of Meryle Maxwell to the Yoorrook Justice Commission

1. I was born in 1945.
2. In 1962 I had a baby in Queen Victoria Hospital in Melbourne. I heard the baby crying, but I never saw the baby and I was told not to ask any questions.
3. Six hours after the birth my husband told me that my baby was dead and that he had signed the death certificate. This was impossible as he couldn't read or write. He told me this, walked out, and I never saw him again. After the birth the staff at the hospital told me and the other woman in the room with me not to leave the room.
4. Because I was so young, it was only the next day that I had the courage to question the staff at the hospital. They told me that they had buried my baby out under a tree in the hospital grounds, and they told me I could go home. There was no birth certificate, there was no acknowledgement at all, nobody said anything to me.
5. I know from the births of my other children that when a child is born they are supposed to give you a life certificate which is signed by the doctor. This is then sent off to Births, Deaths and Marriages so they can provide a birth certificate.
6. There was another woman in the hospital at the same time in an almost identical scenario – I wish I could remember her name. I don't know if she was Aboriginal, but she was of dark colouring.
7. They had a women's health centre at the hospital and I wrote to them later. They wrote back telling me my baby had been born at 32 weeks – but it was 37 weeks. At the end of the letter they told me "I'm sorry, we can't help you anymore."
8. About 15 years ago I took this letter to VALS. VALS are wonderful, they were so caring and understanding. VALS rang the hospital, which was by then part of Monash Health. At first the hospital told me that they had no records. They sent me a very short letter, which I still have.
9. The VALS lawyer followed up (**Attachments 1 and 2**). At first they told the lawyer that I had not been at the hospital. Then they provided a document which said that my baby had been a neonatal death (**Attachment 3**). The document looked like it had been pieced together. As a genealogist I know that it was not a valid certificate. It has bugged me for years – why is there a so-called death certificate?
10. It also says I am unmarried at the bottom of the certificate, yet the informant was supposed to be my illiterate husband, he is referred to as my husband, and there is a scribble which is supposed to be his signature.
11. A friend of mine in Healesville said that her baby had been given up for adoption and the birth certificate had been doctored so as to include the adoptive parents' names. She's since met her daughter. There are 43,000 Victorian mothers from 1960 – 1975 who are affected by this.
12. If that child survived, that's wonderful – if he didn't survive, they've still done wrong to me. I've moved on – I've had four sons now. I've tried not to let it harden me, but it is still at the back of the mind, it has affected my entire life.
13. If this doesn't help me, hopefully it will help someone else. Maybe this is why I'm a genealogist. I have located a lot of babies, and a lot of mothers and fathers, for a lot of people.
14. My life now is good, I have a good life. But this has always haunted me and has had a profound effect on my everyday living. Sometimes it would bring me to tears because I don't know. I think that everyone has a right to know who they are. That's why I try to help other people and their parents.

15. It's like it's a never-ending, taunting thing, and even a couple of times it's crossed my mind that I'll find out when I die. This has caused me pain that's indescribable. It's something that sits heavy in your heart and your stomach all the time, because you don't know. As though you're worthless – you're not worth anything, because I was so young. But there was a black market for babies then.