

Dan Rather Reports

Episode Number: 715

Episode Title: Adopted or Abducted?

Description: An investigation into claims by women that they were forced to put their babies up for adoption, many with the knowledge and support of Catholic Charities. It has been a little discussed practice for decades but this special hour-long program will remove the veil of secrecy that has led to emotional trauma for unwed mothers around the world.

TEASE:

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TONIGHT, A GLOBAL INVESTIGATION INTO A DARK HISTORY WHEN BABIES WERE TAKEN FROM THEIR MOTHERS...

RICKIE SOLINGER

Having a baby without having a husband, rendered a woman an illegitimate mother. She had no right to be a mother. She had no right to keep her child.

CARLA CLARY

Just the thought of them taking her away from me... It was hard...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

STORY AFTER STORY OF HEARTBREAK AND LOSS...

CHRIS LAPLUME

I didn't even know what was happening to my body, never mind counseling about giving up the child and what was gonna happen to her.

ANGELA BARRA

We never had any choice.

KAREN WILSON-BUTERBAUGH

It was always this daily mantra of, "You can't keep your baby."

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AFTER DECADES OF NOT KNOWING, MIGHT THERE BE HOPE?

CARLA CLARY

How is that even possible?

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WE'LL BRING YOU THE NEWS, TONIGHT ON DAN RATHER REPORTS.

ACT 1: ADOPTED OR ABDUCTED?

DAN RATHER (ON CAMERA)

GOOD EVENING. TONIGHT WE WILL INVESTIGATE A PRACTICE THAT HAPPENED IN A VERY DIFFERENT TIME IN AMERICA...ALTHOUGH IT WASN'T SO LONG AGO. THE 1950s THROUGH ROUGHLY THE EARLY 1970s WAS ESPECIALLY TRAUMATIC FOR AS MANY AS 1.5 MILLION WOMEN WHO WERE UNMARRIED...AND BECAME PREGNANT.

THESE WOMEN, MOSTLY IN THEIR TEENS AT THE TIME, WERE OFTEN FORCED...MINUTES AFTER GIVING BIRTH... TO HAND OVER THEIR BABIES FOR ADOPTION. IT WAS A DECISION THAT THEY SELDOM MADE ON THEIR OWN...MOSTLY IT WAS PREORDAINED BY THEIR CHURCH, THEIR PARENTS AND THE SOCIAL CUSTOMS OF THE TIME.

PREGNANCY OUT OF WEDLOCK WAS SEEN AS A DISGRACE TO A FAMILY. BUT MANY OF THOSE WOMEN, NOW IN MIDDLE AGE AND FULL OF QUESTIONS, ARE BEGINNING TO COME FORWARD...TO TELL OF THE HORRORS THEY SAY THEY WENT THROUGH...AND TO SEARCH FOR THE CHILDREN THEY'VE NEVER KNOWN.

TONIGHT WE DEVOTE THIS PROGRAM TO THEIR STORIES.

CARLA CLARY

It was kept a secret from my entire family and, you know, friends of the family. My best girlfriend at the time knew about it. But I believe the story that the family was told at the time was that I was in the hospital with a kidney infection. Because it was 1967 and my father was a prominent doctor. He knew lots of people.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

DECADES HAVE PASSED BUT CARLA CLARY REMEMBERS IT LIKE IT WAS YESTERDAY. SHE'S 61 YEARS OLD NOW. BUT HER LIFE WAS FOREVER CHANGED WHEN SHE WAS A 16-YEAR-OLD SOPHOMORE AT THIS SUBURBAN LOS ANGELES HIGH SCHOOL. CARLA'S PARENTS FOUND OUT SHE WAS PREGNANT... AND MADE A DECISION THAT WAS COMMON IN THE DAY. THEY SENT HER TO A CATHOLIC HOME FOR UNWED MOTHERS.

CLARY

I can't think of anything more traumatic than being dumped off at a facility where you know no one, and no one really cares about you...no sympathy, no counseling, no, "You'll be okay, we'll get through this, we're here to help you." No.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

EVEN THOUGH HER PARENTS WERE NOT CATHOLIC, THIS IS WHERE SHE WAS DROPPED OFF...IT'S CALLED ST. ANNE'S. IN DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES. IT'S STILL IN BUSINESS...OFFERING DAY CARE AND OTHER SOCIAL SERVICES. CARLA SAYS IT'S A VERY DIFFERENT PLACE THAN IT WAS IN 1967.

CLARY

Concentration camp. That's the way I felt. I was – had no control over anything. You were told when to get up, when to eat, what to eat, where to go and when to go to bed.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ST. ANNE'S AND OTHER CATHOLIC AFFILIATED HOMES WERE NOT FREE...CARLA'S PARENTS PAID FOR HER STAY...SHE WAS NEARLY EIGHT MONTHS PREGNANT WHEN HER PARENTS DROPPED HER OFF. AND SHE DIDN'T LEAVE THE CAMPUS UNTIL AFTER SHE GAVE BIRTH. CARLA SAID THE TREATMENT FROM THE NUNS AND THE STAFF DURING DELIVERY WAS QUOTE "BARBARIC."

CLARY

That was the most horrifying experience. Going through labor in a room by myself. I don't recall ever being given any medication, there was nobody there, like all the TV shows they show you today, it's, it's a wonderful, happy, pain-free experience...it was...it was hell.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SHE GAVE BIRTH TO A DAUGHTER...BUT WAS ONLY ALLOWED TO HOLD HER ONE TIME.

CLARY

I remember it being maybe 30 minutes I was allowed to have her in a room, just the two of us, and I unwrapped her, and counted fingers and toes, and just told her how much I loved her and how sorry I was.

I even thought about trying to break out of the hospital with her...I didn't know where I would go...just the thought of them taking her away from me... it was hard.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ACCORDING TO CARLA THERE WASN'T MUCH IN THE WAY OF COUNSELING PROVIDED BY THE SOCIAL WORKERS THERE EITHER...

CLARY

Just move on, just go finish school, grow up, you know, you'll have more children. I could have 15 children. You don't forget your first that was stolen from you.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

CARLA EVENTUALLY MARRIED AND HAD ANOTHER CHILD...A GIRL AGAIN...BUT SHE'S BEEN SEARCHING FOR HER FIRST DAUGHTER MOST OF HER ADULT LIFE ... WITH VERY LITTLE ASSISTANCE, ESPECIALLY FROM ST. ANNE'S, THE INSTITUTION THAT HELPED ARRANGE THE ADOPTION.

CLARY

They are not at all helpful. As far as they're concerned once I left there I don't exist, my child doesn't exist. I was told that all records are sealed. Even a court order couldn't get them opened, which in this day and age I find hard to believe.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WHAT CARLA ENDURED WAS COMMONPLACE FOR PREGNANT, UNMARRIED WOMEN IN AMERICA AFTER WORLD WAR TWO.

THE COUNTRY WAS CHANGING FAST...FROM MUSIC TO MORALITY. THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION WAS COMING ... BUT IT WAS A TIME BEFORE ORAL CONTRACEPTIVES WERE WIDELY AVAILABLE, BEFORE LEGALIZED ABORTION... THE BABY BOOM WASN'T JUST BUILT ON MARRIED COUPLES.

THAT LED TO MATERNITY HOMES...PACKED WITH UNWED YOUNG MOTHERS... ALL OVER THE UNITED STATES. THE COMMON REFRAIN FROM THE MOTHERS WE INTERVIEWED WAS THIS: THEY SAY THEY WERE FORCED TO GIVE UP THEIR NEWBORNS FOR ADOPTION...WITH NO ALTERNATIVES.

IT'S BEEN CALLED THE "BABY-SCOOP" ERA. THE SENTIMENT AT THE TIME, FROM PASTORS TO PRIESTS TO SOCIAL WORKERS TO MANY PARENTS WAS THIS...BABIES OF UNWED MOTHERS WOULD BE BETTER OFF TAKEN AWAY AND GIVEN TO A TWO-PARENT HOUSEHOLD.

ANN FESSLER, AUTHOR OF "THE GIRLS WHO WENT AWAY"

In the United States between 1945 and 1973 a million and a half women surrendered children for adoption. I see that period of time as a kind of perfect storm of circumstances that led to all these surrenders. Number one, during the war and after the war there was a change in what was considered acceptable sexual behavior. So you'd have a rise in the number of people engaging in sexual relations before marriage.

After the war you have a tremendous economic boom. And many people who are from working class families gained status and they were solidly middle class. And about the worst thing that could happen to you was to either have a boy who was in juvie hall or something, or to have a young woman, a daughter who became pregnant.

There's no question that many illegal tactics were used in, you know, getting the baby away from the young woman. Certainly-- there was coercion-- and-- and I would-- I would say that many of these women did not really consent.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PRIOR TO WORLD WAR TWO, THERE WAS NO WIDE-SPREAD AND INSTITUTIONALIZED ADOPTION SYSTEM. WHEN CHILDREN WERE BORN OUT OF WEDLOCK, BOTH THE BABIES AND THE MOTHERS WERE CONSIDERED UNDESIRABLE. THEY BORE A STIGMA-- GOT LITTLE OR NO HELP. BUT AFTER THE WAR, THAT CHANGED. BABIES BECAME PART OF A HUGE NEW ADOPTION INDUSTRY...WHILE THEIR UNWED MOTHERS WERE STILL SHUNNED BY SOCIETY...

RICKIE SOLINGER, AUTHOR "WAKE UP LITTLE SUSIE"

Becoming pregnant without having a husband, having a baby without having a husband, rendered a woman, or a young woman, an illegitimate mother. She had no right to be a mother. She had no right to keep her child, according to psychologists, social workers, clergy, teachers and many other authorities in the community. Any woman my age or a little bit younger and certainly older knows-- young women who got pregnant in high school and suddenly they were gone. Suddenly their lockers were cleaned out and they had been sent away.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

GO BACK AND READ THE LITERATURE FROM THE TIME AND YOU'LL SEE PAMPHLETS LIKE THIS ONE TITLED, "WHEN YOU'VE MADE A MISTAKE: ADVICE FOR UNWED

MOTHERS.” INSIDE THERE ARE QUOTES LIKE, “IF A COUPLE IS WAITING FOR YOUR BABY TO COME ALONG, DON’T STAND IN THE BABY’S WAY. GIVE HIM UP TO A NORMAL FAMILY LIFE.”

THE BOOKLET, FROM 1968, ALSO LISTS PAGE AFTER PAGE OF MATERNITY HOMES ACROSS THE COUNTRY. MANY, BUT NOT ALL PUBLICATIONS FROM THE TIME ARE COURTESY OF GROUPS ASSOCIATED WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

SOLINGER

The Catholic Church was very powerful and-- and it absolutely saw adoption as a reform. As a way to protect all parties. The Catholic Church stood side by side with a number of other religious organizations that were providing the service and felt that it was an absolutely legitimate and kind and humanitarian service. They did institute it coercively.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT FOR MANY OF THE MOTHERS, OUT OF SIGHT HAS NEVER MEANT OUT OF MIND....TODAY CARLA IS STILL SEARCHING FOR THE CHILD SHE HAS NEVER KNOWN.

CLARY

Is she alive? Is she healthy? I remember specifically asking to be told when she was adopted so that I would know, you know, that she had a family. She was with people that would love her and take care of her and that never happened. It’s the not knowing that rips your heart out. Not knowing.

TROY DUNN, PROFESSIONAL LOCATOR

This story has needed to be told for decades. I think it is going to bring great peace to many, and probably shock and horror to others.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TROY DUNN IS A PROFESSIONAL LOCATOR, REUNITING SEPARATED FAMILIES, PARTICULARLY ADOPTED CHILDREN WITH THEIR BIOLOGICAL PARENTS.

RATHER

How many times have mother’s come to you saying, “I feel my baby was, quote “stolen.” or, perhaps or/and “I think I was forced to give up my baby to adoption.”

DUNN

When I first heard a birth mother say that to me years, and years, ago, I will be really honest with you...I felt like she wasn't being completely truthful. Then I heard it again. And each girl kept sharing with me similar stories about emotional manipulation, about being scared, about being told all the horrible things that would happen if you don't do this. And as I began to chart these and see these patterns, I began to realize, "Oh my gosh, people are actually tricking these girls into giving up their babies."

RATHER

When this was done, who was doing it and for what purpose?

DUNN

Over the years I have seen cases, that I refer to as 'psychological abductions,' from all, all sorts of places. Private attorneys did it. Parents would be a part of it. Adoption agencies. Hospitals. I've seen it in lots of places.

RATHER

In churches?

DUNN

In church organizations, absolutely. If I had to look back over the last two decades and say, "Is there a clear leader in frequency?" Hands down -- and it's probably difficult for some to hear, but in my experience, nobody has been a part of more of these types of abductions than Catholic charities.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

WE SHOULD POINT OUT THAT DUNN NOW IS JUST ONE OF A NUMBER OF PROFESSIONAL LOCATORS NATIONWIDE WHO HELP FAMILIES RECONNECT. LATER ON...TROY'S ATTEMPT TO FIND CARLA'S DAUGHTER...45 YEARS LATER. BUT FIRST, IN REPORTING THIS STORY WE WERE SURPRISED BY HOW MANY WOMEN WANTED TO COME FORWARD TO SHARE THEIR PERSONAL ACCOUNTS FOR THE FIRST TIME. SO THROUGHOUT TONIGHT'S PROGRAM...YOU WILL BE HEARING SOME OF THEIR VOICES...

LESLIE PATE MACKINNON

I am so thrilled that you're gonna give us a voice and "The Girls Who Went Away" was the first time birth mothers were ever heard from in a group. And I'm so thrilled that somebody wants to hear our stories now and might tell the rest of the world.

PAT TAYLOR

I don't remember a lot of it, but I do remember that the nun said to me, when-- the-- "You do realize that you're gonna have to give this baby up," in the middle of the labor. So, I mean, they didn't even leave me alone then. Actually, she left the room, and one of the other women that was in there said, "She can't even leave you alone now."

CAROL SCHAEFER

Very often, they'll move you a state away, or s-- several city-- or a few hundred miles away because that was to keep you from the shame and the stigma of everybody else knowing.

ACT 2: ADOPTED OR ABDUCTED?

JEANINE BIOCIC

I hope with this type of interview and this type of cataloguing of our experiences that when people start to understand that, you know, I'm not someone who used drugs or dropped out of school or all the stereotypical things that we think surrendering mothers are in this country. People will start to understand, 'Oh wait a minute, she could be my neighbor, or my co worker, or my sister,' and start to understand that it's not as simple as a stranger is going to take their child and everyone's going to live happily ever after. I can tell you that from experience, that ain't the case.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

TONIGHT, WE ARE SHARING ACCOUNTS FROM WOMEN COURAGEOUSLY COMING FORWARD FOR THE FIRST TIME ON AMERICAN TELEVISION WITH THEIR ACCOUNTS OF COERCION, MANIPULATION AND FRAUDULENT ADOPTION PRACTICES.

SINCE LAST OCTOBER WE HAVE INTERVIEWED NEARLY ONE HUNDRED WOMEN -- SPANNING SEVERAL GENERATIONS. THEY SAY AS YOUNG MOTHERS THEY WERE LIED TO, DENIED THEIR RIGHTS, AND DUPED INTO HANDING OVER THEIR BABIES FOR ADOPTION. THEY SAY IT IS TIME TO LIFT THE VEIL OF SECRECY.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO WORKED IN THE ADOPTION INDUSTRY DURING THE BABY SCOOP ERA? WE TALKED TO A WOMAN WHO CORROBORATES THESE MOTHERS' CLAIMS.

MARY

I started working in adoptions as a clerical person in 1960. And over the next 50 years I worked for two different agencies.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

HER NAME IS MARY. SHE ASKED US NOT TO REVEAL HER LAST NAME OR THE ADOPTION AGENCIES WHERE SHE WORKED, OR THEIR RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION. SHE SAYS SHE MET THOUSANDS OF YOUNG WOMEN WHO WERE UNMARRIED, PREGNANT AND SEEKING HELP.

RATHER

Well, today, most adoptions are, quote "open adoptions." But that wasn't the case some years ago. What was the situation?

MARY

In 1960, when I started, adoptions were very closed. The emphasis was on keeping the secret of the birth mother and providing-- a child to parents who might otherwise not have one. And that was the entire emphasis.

RATHER

Many people who are alive today can't imagine or can barely imagine the situation. What led to this? Was it the fear of stigma?

MARY

Very much so. At that time, unwed mothers were very much looked down on. It could even rub off on their whole family. The gossip was terrible.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MARY IS RETIRED NOW...AND HER FEELINGS ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO ALL THOSE YOUNG WOMEN...AND THEIR BABIES... HAVE CHANGED.

MARY

They may not have had the best practices, but usually the intentions were good.

RATHER

Your contention is while the intentions were good the practices were at the very least open to question?

MARY

We learned over time that we had made some mistakes in how we handled things. And what changed our mind was when we started hearing en masse the stories of adult adoptees and birth mothers who had relinquished their children years earlier.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MANY OF THOSE BABIES WERE BORN IN MATERNITY HOMES. THERE WAS A TIME IN AMERICA...ESPECIALLY IN THE 1950s AND '60s BUT ON IN TO THE '70s...WHEN THOSE HOMES WERE SO CROWDED, THERE WAS OFTEN A WAITING LIST TO GET IN... AND THERE WAS ALSO THE COST... SO SOME UNWED PREGNANT WOMEN WERE SENT TO LIVE, AND OFTEN WORK, WITH FAMILIES THEY DIDN'T KNOW. THESE WERE CALLED "WAGE HOMES."

AND THAT'S WHERE LAURA BEALL FOUND HERSELF WHEN SHE WAS 16 YEARS OLD AND PREGNANT IN 1972.

LAURA BEALL

In these Catholic homes you would become basically the maid, the nanny, the cook and um, for about \$10 a week. And the deal was that you would get one day off a week and after you had the baby, you got a two week recoup time at the house without having to work. So that's where I was basically hidden away.

KAREN WILSON-BUTERBAUGH

The people who lived there were terrible to me. I really hated being there.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IN 1966 KAREN WILSON-BUTERBAUGH WORKED AT A WAGE HOME FOR A PROMINENT CATHOLIC FAMILY IN WASHINGTON, DC.

WILSON-BUTERBAUGH

They actually made me serve drinks, mixed drinks at their parties. You know, 17-years-old and very pregnant, wearing maternity clothes and I was serving drinks to their friends at parties that they would host and they would talk about me, I was their conversation piece. Their little unwed mother. It was humiliating.

RATHER

We spoke to a woman-- who was in a wage home when she was pregnant. And she described an almost indentured servitude at this wage home where she went to live with-- what she described as a wealthy Catholic family and was their-- this is her word, 'their slave' of sorts during her pregnancy. Now, based on your knowledge and experience what runs through your mind when you hear that kind of description?

MARY

I would not be surprised if there weren't a significant number that did meet that description.

RATHER

Well it doesn't take much imagination to understand that at least the pregnant girl or very young woman is at the very least vulnerable.

MARY

Vulnerable.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MATERNITY HOMES STILL EXIST TODAY, BUT BACK IN THE BABY SCOOP ERA, THERE WERE HUNDREDS SCATTERED ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

IN 1972, KATHY ADERHOLD WAS SENT TO A SALVATION ARMY MATERNITY HOME IN OMAHA, NEBRASKA.

RATHER

Now when you got to the maternity home, the home for unwed mothers, how were you treated?

KATHY ADERHOLD

Like cattle. We were just, you know, told what to do and pushed here and pushed there and eat here and lights off at 10:00. It was like being in jail. It was-- it was-- we were prevented from making phone calls. We were-- all of our mail was censored. We could only have visitors from our family.

RATHER

It's hard for me-- even at my age-- and I grew up during this era, knew next to nothing about what you were going through. But it-- these places, these home for unwed mothers, where was the compassion? Where was the--

ADERHOLD

There was none.

RATHER

--where was the understanding and the love?

ADERHOLD

There was none. We were-- like I said, we were cattle. We were-- you know, just pushed here and there and-- and there and we-- they were waiting for the product.

CHRIS LAPLUME

The nuns were very strict. Nobody could know our names. We had to get fake names.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

CHRIS LAPLUME SPENT TIME AT A MATERNITY HOME IN DORCHESTER, MASSACHUSETTS CALLED ST. MARY'S.

LAPLUME

We were put into a separate room, were never would-- were never allowed to be with other pregnant women, especially married pregnant women. I don't know if they thought it would wear off-- but-- we were put in a room by ourselves and labored by ourselves.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TYPICAL OF MANY WOMEN WITH WHOM WE SPOKE, CHRIS SAYS THE ONLY COUNSELING SHE RECEIVED WAS THAT ADOPTION WAS THE ONLY ANSWER.

LAPLUME

Never. Not one minute of counseling. Ever. I didn't even know what was happening to my body, never mind counseling about giving up the child and what was gonna happen to her. This was the right thing to do, that I should give this child for adoption. This is how it was done.

RATHER

Were you and others who did your kind of work, were you counseling women on the options other than adoption?

MARY

It was mentioned. They would always say that they could keep the baby and sue the father for support. It was mentioned, but it wasn't expected that you were gonna pay attention to that.

RATHER

But fair or unfair to say that the-- the undertow, the direction was, "Probably best to put the child up for adoption?"

MARY

That was the belief of the persons who did the counseling, I think. And I don't think they made an extra attempt to be totally objective.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MARY ACKNOWLEDGES, THOUGH, THAT MOTHERS WERE NOT THE ONLY ONES BEING MISLED. SOMETIMES THE FAMILIES THAT GOT THE BABIES WEREN'T GETTING THE WHOLE TRUTH.

RATHER

I've heard reports about falsifying records-- enhancing the education background of the mother--

MARY

Okay. That-- that wasn't so much to get highly adoptable babies. But there was a period of time, a brief period of time when there were more babies than there were adoptive families. And if the babies didn't match the adoptive families, their backgrounds would get colored so that they would match the waiting families.

RATHER

Colored meaning falsified to some degree?

MARY

Yes, to the least degree possible, but still nationalities were changed, educational backgrounds were changed--

RATHER

To make them quote, "A more attractive—adoptee?"

MARY

To the-- to make them fit better with the families that were waiting. If we had a Swedish baby and an Irish family that baby might suddenly become Irish or vice versa.

RATHER

One woman we've been speaking to said the agency made it, "Very difficult," quote/unquote for her, by withholding information. What about these sorts of practices?

MARY

My agency, to my knowledge, did not lie. There were cases I felt they withheld information that should have been shared, but that was my personal opinion. And because I was in a position of no power I kept that opinion to myself for the most part.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MUCH HAS CHANGED IN THE WAY AMERICANS FEEL ABOUT SINGLE MOTHERS...AND ADOPTIONS. DURING THE ADOPTION PEAK NEARLY NINE PERCENT OF SINGLE MOMS GAVE UP THEIR BABIES...TODAY THAT FIGURE IS CLOSER TO ONE PERCENT. AND FOR ALL THOSE WOMEN WHO GAVE UP THEIR BABIES AND NOW WONDER...WHAT IF? MARY SAYS SHE CAN'T TURN BACK THE CLOCK, BUT LESSONS HAVE BEEN LEARNED.

MARY

We didn't know that adoptees would grow up to have an empty space in their life because they didn't know their heritage. We didn't know that every member of the adoption triad has their own grief issues to deal with. We didn't know that genetics are more powerful than just what a child looks like, that much more is inheritable. We'd-- and that knowing those things can matter, we didn't know any of that. When we began to hear stories by the hundreds, and I do mean that literally, we changed how we did adoptions.

RATHER

Thank you.

MARY

Thank you.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

IN REPORTING THIS STORY, WE REACHED OUT TO THE LARGEST MATERNITY HOME PROVIDERS IN AMERICA OF THE "BABY-SCOOP" ERA -- INCLUDING CATHOLIC CHARITIES. THESE ORGANIZATIONS HAD OVERSIGHT ON THE POLICIES AND PRACTICES THAT LED TO SO-CALLED FORCED ADOPTIONS.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IN A WRITTEN STATEMENT, CATHOLIC CHARITIES USA STATES IN PART...
"WHILE SOME OF THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCES REPORTED BY BIRTH MOTHERS IN THE 1950s AND 1960s ARE HEARTBREAKING, AS THE SOCIAL STIGMA OF BEING AN UNWED MOTHER HAS CHANGED, SO HAVE ADOPTION PRACTICES."

FOR THE COMPLETE STATEMENT FROM CATHOLIC CHARITIES AND RESPONSES FROM OTHER ORGANIZATIONS...PLEASE SEE OUR FACEBOOK PAGE OR GO TO OUR WEBSITE AT HD.NET.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

COMING UP NEXT... ONE FOREIGN COUNTRY COMES TO TERMS WITH ITS OWN HISTORY OF FORCED ADOPTIONS. THAT PART OF OUR INVESTIGATION IS NEXT.

CYNTHIA

They were explaining everything to me. For five hours I said no. I said, "I will not sign this paper and I will never sign this paper. I love my baby. I want my baby." So, after much verbal coercion, the social worker stood up, called me a "little slut", took my hand in her hand and signed the adoption papers.

LESLIE PATE MACKINNON

When I went for my six week check up with my OB/GYN, at the end of the check up, he said I was good, everything was fine, but he wanted to counsel me. And he wanted to let me know that I should never tell the man that I married that-- that I was going to marry, that I had had a child. He said, "No one wants damaged goods." So I got the message.

ACT 3: ADOPTED OR ABDUCTED?

KATHY ADERHOLD

I was completely alone for my entire labor, which was very long and very difficult. It was 29 hours. They—um, didn't answer the call bell when I rang for help. They pretty much ignored me. And that's what they did with all of the girls. And if we did cry out they would say, you know, "Be quiet. Nobody wants to hear you."

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

Tonight we've been hearing the stories of some of the more than one million American mothers who gave up their children in the Baby Scoop era. But as we started looking into this, we realized this practice wasn't limited to the United States.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

OUR INVESTIGATION TOOK US TO AUSTRALIA WHERE SOME OF THE MOST HORRIFIC ACCOUNTS OF FORCED ADOPTIONS HAVE BEEN UNCOVERED. THIS IS CANBERRA...AUSTRALIA'S CAPITAL CITY. AND HERE FOR EIGHTEEN MONTHS, A

COMMITTEE IN PARLIAMENT GATHERED TESTIMONY FROM HUNDREDS OF WOMEN...AND MEN...WITH GUT WRENCHING ACCOUNTS OF NEWBORNS TAKEN AWAY.

AUSTRALIAN SENATOR RACHEL SIEWERT

Sometimes I'm-- I'm sure there wasn't a dry eye in the room when we were having the hearings. These women and the adoptees and the families have been living this their whole lives. So imagine what that has done to them? It's had life-long impacts and it's ongoing.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

RACHEL SIEWERT IS AN AUSTRALIAN SENATOR...SHE'S HEADING THE COMMITTEE THAT HAS LOOKED INTO FORCED ADOPTIONS. AUSTRALIA IS BELIEVED TO BE THE FIRST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD TO OPEN A FORMAL INVESTIGATION.

SIEWERT

The overall thing that stands out for me is these women were tricked, coerced, duped out of their child. But it's the fact that they never had contact with their babies. They didn't get to touch them, see them, smell them, cuddle them.

JEANIE ARGUS

We were looked upon as being sluts, prostitutes, you name it. Where it was about the family unit. You know, the mother, the father and a child. And that's what it was about.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

JEANIE ARGUS WAS 21-YEARS-OLD IN 1971 WHEN SHE WENT TO CATHOLIC SOCIAL SERVICES SEEKING HELP TO KEEP HER BABY AFTER AN UNPLANNED PREGNANCY.

ARGUS

No matter what I was going to do, my child was gone from the minute I walked in those gates. Nine months growing in our stomach. Kicking, moving. And that baby's taken straightaway at birth. The trauma the child goes through must be unbelievable. You can hear the crying. I'll always remember coming out of the hospital and the nun carrying-- my basket with the baby in it with a nappy over her head telling me to look straight ahead. I was not to see her.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ARGUS WAS JUST ONE OF THE MANY WOMEN TO TESTIFY...ONCE THE FORMAL GOVERNMENT INVESTIGATION BEGAN, MOTHERS CAME FORWARD WITH EGREGIOUS ACCOUNTS. JAN KASHIN'S TESTIMONY, QUOTE: "THE DRUGGING WAS MANDATORY FOR

ALL UNMARRIED WOMEN, AS WAS...THE BINDING OF THE BREASTS, AND IN MY CASE, THE SHACKLING TO THE LABOUR WARD BED.” LINDA MAY BRYANT’S TESTIMONY, QUOTE: “I BEGGED, I PLEADED AND I DID EVERYTHING -- ‘PLEASE CAN I SEE HER?’ ‘NO, YOU CAN’T. SHE’S MARKED FOR ADOPTION.’”

AND THEN THERE WERE THOSE WHO WERE TOLD THEIR BABIES HAD DIED, WHEN IN FACT THEY WERE PLACED FOR ADOPTION.

SIEWERT

So for all those decades that mother thought the baby was dead. Imagine then getting a-- contact to say, "Actually, I'm-- you know, I'm-- I'm your child." Again, how-- what would-- that just-- it boggles my mind to think of how you could cope with that.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND THEN THERE WERE THE CHILDREN...SOME WHO SUFFERED ALMOST UNSPEAKABLE ACTS...LIKE MICHAEL O’MEARA. HE CAME FORWARD TO TELL THE COMMITTEE HIS STORY.

MICHAEL O'MEARA

I'm an adopted person. I was born in 1961 in Melbourne. What happened with me was that I was a test batch guinea pig.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

O’MEARA WAS PLACED IN A FOSTER HOME....HE LATER FOUND OUT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT CONDUCTED SEVERAL MEDICAL EXPERIMENTS ON HIM INCLUDING EXPERIMENTS WITH NEW INFERTILITY DRUGS.

O'MEARA

So before these batches were actually approved, they were injecting it into us and seeing what reaction it would have. Unfortunately for me and-- and-- quite a number of others in Melbourne, we were injected into this-- these test batches that what happened was it hyper-stimulated. Effectively we were castrated as kids. By the time I was 17, I'm diagnosed with prostate disease. And this is unheard of in this age group. So we've got these disabilities that have been inflicted upon us.

ANGELA BARRA

Our identities, our heritage, our names, were stolen. We never had any choice. Never any choice. And thank you very much for finally recognizing us.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THESE HEARINGS ALSO SHED LIGHT ON ANOTHER DARK SECRET...WOMEN WHOSE CHILDREN WERE CONCEIVED THROUGH RAPE.

17-MONTHS AGO, ANGELA BARRAWAS REUNITED WITH PAMELA O'BRIEN, HER MOTHER.

BARRA

I knew that-- I was conceived of rape, and that she had no choice, I really didn't know to what extent until I read her submission in the inquiry, how badly she was treated by the hospital and by the people she was sent to from the hospital while she was pregnant.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PAMELA WAS 18 WHEN SHE GAVE BIRTH AT A CATHOLIC HOSPITAL, BUT FROM THE BEGINNING, SHE SAYS, THE FACT THAT SHE WAS RAPED DID NOT CHANGE THE WAY SHE WAS TREATED.

PAMELA O'BRIEN

I was never, ever, ever informed of my legal rights-- about any financial assistance. I was never counseled. I was told, it was dinned into me, that, "Your baby needs to go to a proper family where there's a mother and a father, where she will be loved and taken care of. You need to just get past this, have your baby, have her adopted, or have the baby adopted, and get on with your life. Put it behind you."

BARRA

You know, the damage of adoption is, I know, I know she was forced to give me up, but you always wear that unwanted insecurity. And that will never go. And now I will always forever carry an insecurity. But at least I can see her and know I-- that's my flesh and blood. I-- I grew inside your tummy.

SIEWERT (Before Parliament)

These accounts have had profound effects on committee members and I'm sure on all that heard them.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AFTER TESTIMONY FROM HUNDREDS OF MOTHERS ALL ACROSS AUSTRALIA, IN FEBRUARY SENATOR SIEWERT PRESENTED THE FINDINGS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S INVESTIGATION.

SIEWERT (Before Parliament)

It is undoubted that past policies and practices have caused great harm and hurt to mothers, fathers, adoptees and their family members.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA APOLOGIZED LAST JULY FOR ITS ROLE IN FORCED ADOPTIONS. SENATOR SIEWERT SAID IT WAS TIME FOR EVERYONE INVOLVED IN FORCED ADOPTIONS TO DO THE SAME.

SIEWERT (Before Parliament)

The damage caused by these past policies and practices is overwhelming. It happened. We cannot deny it happened and we need to apologize and put in place a framework that addresses it.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

FOR THE RECORD, THE AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH SAYS IT BELIEVES IT'S UP TO THE GOVERNMENT THERE TO MAKE FINANCIAL REPARATIONS TO THE VICTIMS. NOW WE'LL BE BACK IN A MOMENT TO SEE THE RESULTS OF ONE MOTHER'S LONG SEARCH FOR HER DAUGHTER...BUT FIRST, MORE FIRST-HAND ACCOUNTS OF FORCED ADOPTION.

LILY ARTHUR

One night when I went to bed...I was woken up in the middle of the night and the police got me out of bed, questioned me and took me off to jail-- had me locked up there-- you know, overnight and then brought me for the-- the children's court the next day and committed me to-- a home that was-- we now look at it historically as a Magdalene laundry, where I was committed there and forced to work for, you know-- five days of the week, you know, from morning till night. And then when-- when it was time for me to-- have my child it was removed from me.

ELIZABETH EDWARDS

The authorities and the church groups redefined-- the family. And a family-- defined as being a mother, a father and the baby. So our rights, our legal rights were negated.

ACT 4: ADOPTED OR ABDUCTED?

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

FOR THE MILLION-AND-A-HALF MOTHERS WHO WONDER WHAT HAPPENED TO THEIR CHILDREN...THERE'S OFTEN NO ANSWER. OUR REPORTING FOUND THAT THEY SEARCH FOR YEARS TO NO AVAIL... EVEN WITH THE INTERNET...FINDING CHILDREN FROM THAT TIME CAN BE IMPOSSIBLE...BUT NOT ALWAYS...

CLARY

Wishing for the answers to the 45-year-old question, 'Where's my child?'

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

CARLA CLARY, WHO WE MET EARLIER IN THE BROADCAST, HAS BEEN SEARCHING FOR THE DAUGHTER SHE SAYS WAS TAKEN FROM HER AND PLACED FOR ADOPTION IN APRIL 1967.

CLARY

I've registered online for every adoptee search organization I could find. Posted messages. Searched different websites. Before the computer there was really no way to do that, but the computer has definitely opened up more avenues for researching and tracing and tracking. It's funny every time I see a woman with red hair, I think that could be my daughter. It sounds crazy, but you have this urge to go up to people and say, "What is your birthday?" But you don't because you're afraid they'll put you in the nuthouse.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PROFESSIONAL LOCATOR TROY DUNN HAS HAD THOUSANDS OF REQUESTS FROM WOMEN -- INCLUDING CARLA -- TO HELP HEAL DEEP WOUNDS. HE BELIEVES MOTHERS ARE TOO OFTEN UNSUCCESSFUL IN FINDING THEIR CHILDREN BECAUSE OF ALTERED ADOPTION RECORDS.

RATHER

During our investigation we spoke to any number of birth mothers and adopted children who talk about, quote, fraudulent paperwork. Has that been your experience?

DUNN

Fraudulent paperwork in the adoption process is so common it's almost standard practice for some places. I think the people who are doing it have rationalized the reason they are doing it. They believe that they are protecting everybody. But the fact is...it is falsified documents. And Dan, I am telling you, they falsify dates of birth, places of birth. I can't tell you how many times I had to call someone up and tell them, "Guess what, you're eight-months older than you think you are." Or, "You are one of a set of twins." Or, "You weren't even born in Toledo, you were born in Cincinnati." It's incredible. And some of that, I'm afraid to say and ashamed to say, still happens today.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

DUNN SAYS CARLA'S PAPERWORK FROM 1967 WAS ALTERED.

DUNN

She is one of those cases where paperwork didn't reflect exactly what happened. She was in a situation where the unwed mother's home and the adoption agency were very close in proximity and I suspect staffed by some of the same people or at least strong relationships there and so there was a lot of cover-up in hers.

RATHER

Why do mothers insist on searching for the children they gave up, or were taken from them years ago?

DUNN

Many of them are searching for peace because they're seeking a child that was taken from them. They didn't relinquish the child, they didn't believe they were relinquishing. – that they relinquished the child. And they are seeking answers.

CLARY

She's part of me. She's my child. I gave birth to her. And having had another daughter and knowing how precious she is to me-- I have another one out there someplace that I would like to be a part of my life before I die.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

CARLA DOESN'T WANT TO CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY OF NEVER FINDING HER FIRST CHILD.

CLARY

I try not to think about that. I try to believe that there is hope that one day I will. I can't accept that I will never find her.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SHE'S HAD SERIOUS HEALTH ISSUES MOST OF HER ADULT LIFE, AND CARLA WANTS THE DAUGHTER SHE LOST TO KNOW EVERYTHING.

CLARY

It was at age 31 that I suffered the first stroke. And it paralyzed the right side of my body. I was diagnosed with cervical cancer two years ago, and went through the surgery to remove everything. And

this is pretty serious stuff and if somebody has that in her family history, I would love for her to be aware of it so she would know what precautions to take.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TROY DUNN HAD INFORMATION ON CLARY'S SEARCH SO WE MADE SURE TO BE THERE -
- AT A PARK NEAR HER HOME -- WHEN HE SHARED THE NEWS WITH HER.

CLARY

Hello?

DUNN

Carla?

CLARY

Yes?

DUNN

Hey, Carla, Troy Dunn.

CLARY

Hi, how are you?

DUNN

I'm good. I've been tryin' to reach you. You're a hard girl to get a hold of. Let me just take a second and--

CLARY

Okay.

DUNN

--chat with you for a moment.

CLARY

Okay.

DUNN

Carla--

CLARY

Yes.

DUNN

I found your baby girl.

CLARY

No you didn't.

DUNN

I did.

CLARY

How is that even possible? Are you serious?

DUNN

Yeah. Yep.

CLARY

Y-- y-- you don't sound like it's good news, though. Is she alive?

DUNN

Oh. Well, let's go down the list of what is good news.

CLARY

Okay.

DUNN

Good news number one, I found her. Good news number two, she is alive. And good news number three, she's anxious to talk with you.

CLARY

Are you serious?

DUNN

Yeah.

CLARY

Are you serious?

DUNN

Yep.

CLARY

Oh, my God.

DUNN

Yeah. She's alive!

CLARY

Where is she? Where is she?

DUNN

She lives up in the XXXX area.

CLARY

Oh, my God. Oh, my God.

DUNN

Congratulations.

CLARY

And she's okay?....Oh, my God.

DUNN

Your baby girl's name--

CLARY

Yes?

DUNN

--is XXXX. Yeah. See? She's real, and she has a name.

CLARY

Oh, my gosh. I'm-- oh, my gosh. I'm in shock. I never, never, in a million years—I can't believe...

DUNN

I'm grateful that she could even be found, and that she was alive. I mean, that's-- that's the blessing of the day.

CLARY

My God.

DUNN

Now, I have not told her anything, because I feel like it's not my place. It's your place, and your opportunity to explain to her whatever it is you want her to know about-- about her beginnings. And about the-- the challenges that you went through in your life.

CLARY

Okay.

DUNN

Okay.

CLARY

But she knows I've been looking for her?

DUNN

She does. Yeah.

CLARY

Oh, Lord. I-- oh, my gosh. I just-- this is so unbelievable. Excuse me. I--

DUNN

It's okay. I've made no mention to her about the pressure that was put upon you or your deep desires to keep her, and all those things that you and I talked about at great length.

CLARY

Uh-huh.

DUNN

That's just gonna be your opportunity to do that.

CLARY

Okay.

DUNN

Now, my only real advice for you, before you go to the next step--

CLARY

Yes.

DUNN

--is to remember that when you reenter somebody's life, or--

CLARY

Caution.

DUNN

--enter somebody's life, it is, it-- it-- it's kinda like when the space shuttle, you know, re-enters the earth's atmosphere, it's important that it comes in at the right speed, or--

CLARY

Yes.

DUNN

--things can burn up.

CLARY

Yes.

DUNN

So you are gonna be so overwhelmed with joy and enthusiasm and-- anxiousness, that you-- you could potentially s-- smother her.

CLARY

Yeah, yeah. I--

DUNN

As moms do.

CLARY

--I--

DUNN

So really--

CLARY

Yeah, I'm good at that.

DUNN

--you know, get-- well, we all are. We love our-- our babies, and this is the baby that you've been waiting to hold for many, many years.

CLARY

Oh, my God. I can't believe-- okay.

DUNN

--she has asked me to give you her home phone number--

CLARY

Okay.

DUNN

--in-- in hopes that you'll give her a call tonight after, you know, the day is done.

CLARY

Yes. Write some-- write this down, Shannon. Oh.

DUNN

Who's Shannon?

CLARY

My daughter. My other daughter.

DUNN

Oh, she's there with you?

CLARY

Yes.

DUNN

Oh, my gosh, so--

CLARY

Yes.

DUNN

--Shannon now knows that she officially has a new sister.

CLARY

Oh, she-- she's known she's had one. She just didn't know where she was.

DUNN

Wow. I wish you much success and joy in this new relationship. And understand you've been on this journey for some time now. But my phone call to her just came out of the blue. So she's still having to deal and cope with all of that. Okay?

CLARY

Thank you so much.

DUNN

You betcha'.

CLARY

I will-- I'll be in touch.

DUNN

Okay. Bye now.

CLARY

Thank you. Bye-bye. Sorry.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

SINCE THAT LIFE CHANGING MOMENT, CARLA HAS SPOKEN TO HER DAUGHTER OVER THE PHONE FOR HOURS AND HOPES TO BE REUNITED IN PERSON SOMEDAY. SHE'S KNOWS TO TAKE IT SLOW.

AND THAT'S OUR PROGRAM FOR TONIGHT...WE'LL HAVE MUCH MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ADOPTIONS ON OUR FACEBOOK PAGE AND ON OUR WEBSITE AT HD.NET.

THANK YOU FOR JOINING US...FROM NEW YORK, FOR HD-NET, DAN RATHER REPORTING.
GOOD NIGHT.