

***FROM THE DOOR  
OF THE ORPHANAGE  
TO THE DOOR  
OF THE SENATE  
MY ROOTS ARE STILL  
AND ALWAYS SHROUDED  
IN ANONYMITY***

*by*

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**SENATE STUDY ON THE ADOPTION MANDATE IN  
POSTWAR CANADA**

**FROM THE DOOR OF THE ORPHANAGE TO THE  
DOOR OF THE SENATE, MY ROOTS ARE STILL AND  
ALWAYS SHROUDED IN ANONYMITY**

***The personal account of a postwar adoptee***

***Diane Poitras, legal adoptive name***

***Jeanne d'Arc Blondin, the fictitious name given to me  
when I was baptized at the Crèche de la Réparation  
orphanage in Pointe-aux-Trembles***

***"Born to unknown parents" is my birth name under  
Quebec's law on the confidentiality of adoption records.***

***Believed born to a Polish immigrant who was pregnant  
when she arrived in Canada as a refugee, probably in  
1948 or 1949***

Hello,

Thank you very much for inviting me here.

My name is Diane Poitras.

I am speaking to you today from the heart as an old orphan.

To mark this occasion, I am wearing **my orphan number, 6076**, which I was given the day after I was born at the **Crèche de la Réparation** orphanage, where I was baptized with the fictitious name of Jeanne d'Arc Blondin.

I was confined for **139 days** in that sad, gloomy orphanage, where every second felt like a century, especially when I was crying from boredom. I wanted to die because I was so alone.

One day, I smiled as sweetly as I knew how at two strangers who wanted to adopt a little girl. It was love at first sight. I was absolutely delighted to leave that unhappy prison where I couldn't find my birth mother's loving embrace. That day, I escaped the terrible likelihood of becoming a "Duplessis orphan."

The term **Duplessis orphans** is the name given to thousands of orphaned children who were diagnosed as mentally ill by the Quebec government and confined in psychiatric institutions between 1940 and 1970. This is considered the largest case of child abuse in the history of Canada. The children were called *Duplessis orphans* because this period coincides with Maurice Duplessis's term as premier of Quebec. On a number of occasions, children who were taken from their unwed mothers were beaten, sexually assaulted and even murdered, following a massacre.

At the age of about 10, I learned of my adoption at school.

I was unable to find out anything more about my adoption because all the papers had disappeared.

In 1991, I decided to submit a reunion request.

I received the document entitled “Antécédents sociaux-biologiques” [family and medical antecedents].

From that document, I learned, for the first time at age 43, that my birth mother had arrived in Canada after the war and was pregnant at the time. Of Polish nationality, she came from a refugee camp in Germany. She was multilingual and intelligent and had a pleasant personality and an attractive face.

I received advice from the Polish associations and the Consulate. It was suggested that I seek assistance from highly skilled people to communicate with my mother in her native language. Without the invaluable assistance of a professional from that community, my reunion was sure to be a failure.

I was required to meet with a caseworker from the Centre de Services sociaux, and I was received rather indifferently. Since I was accustomed to discussions with Polish intellectuals and their encouragement in my search for my origins, I did not see that social worker reaching out to my mother.

I met with another social worker who was quite old, retro-style, sanctimonious and very distant. She told me she had worked with mothers who had had to give up a child.

A technocrat, she was obsessed with the sacrosanct duty of confidentiality.

Without saying so explicitly, she prepared me very subtly for a refusal. As I returned to my hotel, I felt intense pains inside me. Was my aching heart going to give out on me? Was my head going

to explode? I had suffered from facial paralysis nine years earlier, and I wanted to avoid a recurrence at all costs.

Subsequently, that same francophone social worker met with my English-speaking Polish mother. Afterward, she phoned to tell me about her meeting with my birth mother. The first words out of her mouth were, Your mother refused to have an abortion.

She was sure I was dead. Another shock! My medical questions were left unanswered.

My mother saw a number of photos of me at different stages of my life. I could not even find out whether I looked like her or whether any of my children resembled someone in her family. So cruel!

It really bothers me not to know about resemblances with my birth family; I feel as if I have been thrown out of my family tree.

Later, I received a refusal letter, and my Polish tears poured down my face.

The whole process of finding my mother was the most traumatizing experience of my life.

### **AN INCREDIBLE MESS THAT NEEDS FIXING**

As specified in the Act, I asked every two years whether my mother had died. Between 2004 and 2010, the reply I received was that no death had been registered.

In **2010**, I received a statutory notice indicating that my mother had passed away at the age of **84**.

According to my “family and medical antecedents,” my mother was **29 years old when I was born**. I was born in 1949. That would mean my mother was born in about 1920. If so, and if she was 84 when she died, her year of death would have been 2004. Clearly, she was not 29 when I was born.

They refused to correct this error and tell me the date and year of death.

In addition, I cannot go and visit the grave where my mother rests for eternity.

I have the painful feeling that my file is completely sealed.

### **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ADOPTEES’ HEALTH RIGHTS?**

I cannot talk to my blood relatives to find out what diseases I and my offspring might be susceptible to.

One of my grandchildren is autistic; he is five years old. After a number of tests, the doctor told us before Christmas that he has neurological problems due to a chromosomal inversion.

I urgently need to obtain some real answers about my family’s medical history to help the doctors find the correct diagnosis and provide that dear little child with the best possible care.

Naturally, I was asked whether there were any similar cases in my family. I gave the same answer I have given all my life: “I don’t know; I was adopted”!

One of my children was unable to realize his dream of having a career in a particular field because of a **genetic condition transmitted by the mother**.

This is a huge injustice: adoptees and all of their descendants are prevented from accessing valuable information that could solve their health problems, improve their health and even save their lives.

I complained to Quebec's human rights commission and the Québec Ombudsman. They could not help me because the adoption laws are outside their jurisdiction.

The principle is as follows: Adoptees are born from nothing, so nothing will be done for them. Coming from nothing and being doomed to live their whole life with mysteries and lies, that's what full adoption is.

My birth is mine, not someone else's, and my birth parents are mine by heredity and by the blood that flows in my veins. The mystery of my ancestry has gone on long enough, because it's a terrible affront to my intelligence.

I sincerely believe that a mother always leaves her child with a subtle birth scent. The child she gives up for adoption will have a child of her or his own. She or he will also leave that child with the mother's scent and his/her own scent. All of the descendants will always seek out that delicate scent of their true ancestry. All my life, I have tried to picture my birth parents, with nothing to go on. I can try to create that picture in my dreams, but when I look

in the mirror, I don't remember my birth parents, and yet my entire being expresses their absence.

Whether the truth of my birth is romantic or tragic, it belongs to me.

In Canada, everyone should be part of the same human symphony at the moment of birth.

Every birth should have a real identity, a dignity, a human value; it should not be an eternal mystery.

**From the door of the orphanage to the door of the Senate, my roots are still and always shrouded in anonymity.**

You have before you the **most orphaned of Quebec's orphans.**

Thank you for your attention and your humanity.