



ARMS (Vic)

**Association Representing Mothers Separated
by adoption**

**1982- 2022
CONGRATULATIONS
ARMS !!**

SPRING NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2022

PO Box 645 Deepdene Vic 3103

Telephone: 0400 701 621

Email: arms@armsvic.org.au

Website: armsvic.org.au



Hello and Welcome to our Spring Newsletter

Well! Melbourne is living up to its reputation of 4 seasons in 1 day lately. We have also had an abundance of rain. Our commiserations go out to members who have been adversely affected by the heavy rainfall and floods. On a positive note the rain has stimulated plenty of growth in the garden and it's looking lush and lovely.

ARMS' website will have our newsletters up for all to read from now on. If you accidentally delete your email it can be found on the website. Or if you know someone who is interested and does not wish to be on our mailing list you can refer them to ARMS (Vic) website.

A new exhibition at Dax Centre focuses on the lived experience of adoption. The Dax Centre is at 30 Royal Parade, Kenneth Myer Building, University of Melbourne, Parkville. The Exhibition began 7th October 2022 and will finish 6th April 2023. Admission is free. *Adopted* features four contemporary artists and is a series of unique narratives that confront issues of social and emotional well-being, marginalisation, identity, belonging, and crossing cultural boundaries.

We recently held an Anniversary Event commemorating the Victorian Government's Apology and the unveiling of our memorial Taken not Given, along with VANISH. On Tuesday 25th October we met on the steps of Parliament House for a vigil then followed this with a morning tea in Parliament House.

Our support group meetings are now held at St Augustine's, 631 Bourke Street Melbourne, on the first Saturday of each month except January. For those who are unable to travel or are interstate we also have the meetings on Zoom to allow many more ladies to attend. So please email us and let Jo know that you would like a Zoom link to our meeting. No one needs to miss out on the great support shared by your fellow ARMS members who really understand your experience.

As you will be aware the Victorian Government has set up a Redress Scheme for victims of Forced Adoption experiencing exceptional circumstances or who may be terminally ill. Anyone who would like to apply for this can get help from one of our skilled experienced members. To get her contact details call Jo on 0409 442 701 or email arms@armsvic.org.au The Victorian Government is also currently working on the main Redress Scheme, which will operate separately from the already funded exceptional circumstances scheme. ARMS will keep you informed of any progress.

In 2023 we will be organising a celebration of 40 years of ARMS (1982-2022). Stay tuned for more information on where when and how. This promises to be an exciting event.

Thank you for reading my report. Stay safe and dry.

Faye Burnham
Convenor ARMS (Vic)



As well as the ARMS telephone number **0400 701 621** the following committee members are happy to be contacted (between 9am and 9pm) on their personal phone numbers:

Faye Burnham	0411 865 836
Jo Fraser	0409 442 701
Dorothy Kowalski	0411 098 773 03 9889 3583

The tenth anniversary of the Victorian Apology for Past Adoptions and fourth anniversary of the unveiling of *Taken Not Given* were acknowledged by ARMS and VANISH in a very moving event on 25th October. We met on the steps of Parliament House for a vigil, which included a display of babies' and young children's shoes, and baby clothes. Original poems written by ARMS members were read out. We then moved in to the Members' Dining Room in Parliament House where we enjoyed a wonderful meal and speeches from Ted Baillieu, past Premier of Victoria, Fiona Patten, Leader of the Reason Party, Natalie Suleyman, Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and former Chair of the Legal and Social Issues Committee, Christine Campbell, former Member for Pascoe Vale, and Jo Fraser, secretary of ARMS.

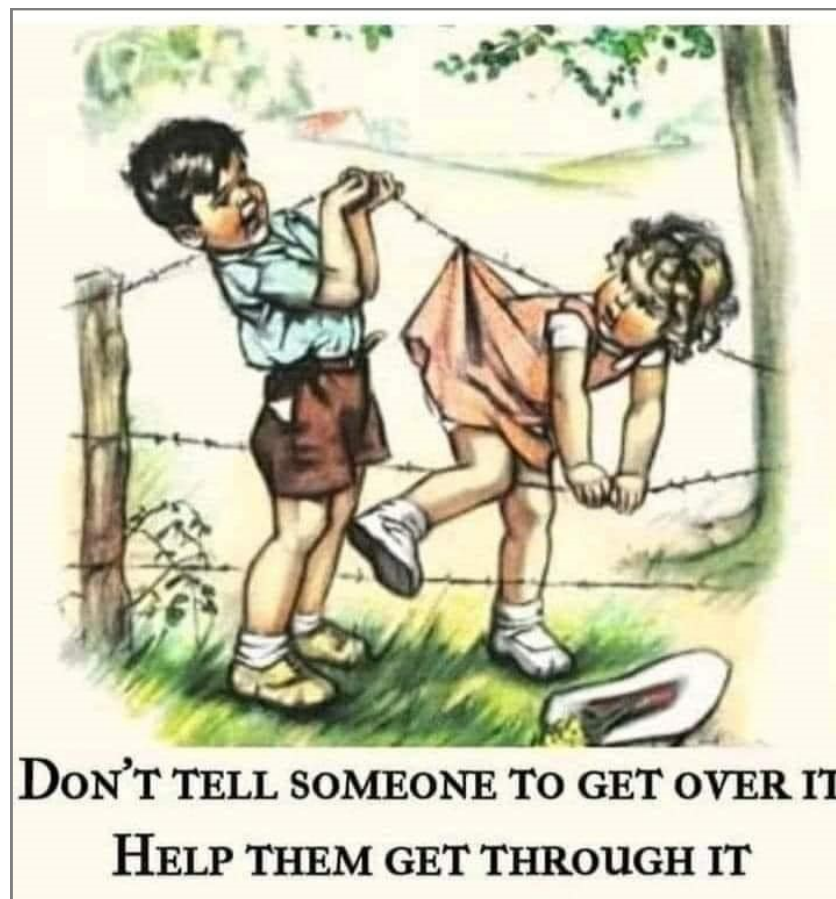
Following our time in Parliament House we walked to St Andrew's Reserve, where we laid boronia at *Taken Not Given* memorial. Marie Meggitt spoke about the importance of memorials and what the Apology has meant to us.



Our thanks to the Victorian Government for allowing us to use Parliament House to acknowledge this important milestone.



Jo Fraser, Marie Meggitt, Ted Baillieu, Charlotte Smith



MEMORIALS



Empty Arms - Broken Lives (WA)



Hidden Mothers (NSW)



Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital (Qld)



Forced Adoption plaque and seat
Daylesford (Vic)



Adoption Apology Roma Street Parkland (Qld)

Cherished Mother and Child (Vic)



MEMORIALS



The Space Between (SA)



The Tree of Hope (Tas)

At the Sydney unveiling of *Hidden Mothers Lost Innocents* Marie Meggitt spoke about the importance of memorials. Here are some excerpts from Marie's speech:

Over the last five years we have seen our movement of mothers seek to establish an expression of our grief and loss. One of the many contributors to the complexity of our grief is that it is as if this birth didn't happen. There are no photos, no baby clothes, no body, no funeral and no one speaking about the 'secret'.

A memorial, a statue or a structure is a reminder to people of a person or an event. For mothers, these memorials we have been able to have established are both. It is the event of an era of forced adoption where the State acted against its people. It is also a representation of the loss of my child and every mothers' child taken for adoption...[Memorials] are a way for us to externalise a profound and life changing experience from which so many of us did not recover.

For many women, this is still their shameful secret. These memorials help break the bonds of that secret. They speak to the world about our experience and the truth of our ongoing loss. They tell the public that the shame is not ours; it is that of the State and all those who colluded with the State to take our children from us.

Memorials are a statement to our ongoing love and commitment to our children.

Taken Not Given (Vic)



Memorial General Cemetery
(Vic)

HIDDEN MOTHERS LOST INNOCENTS



Marie Meggitt, Dorothy Kowalski and Jo Fraser attended the unveiling of Hidden Mothers Lost Innocents on 24th September 2022 in Croydon, Sydney. Mothers, fathers, adopted people and other interested parties listened to speakers in the gardens of St Anthony's Church, where many hundreds of young women lived while pregnant and had their babies adopted from there between the 1920s and 1980s. The social worker at this home was still recommending adoption to parents of pregnant girls at this home past the mid 1980s, well after the Winkler Van Kepler study found mothers were still suffering mental health issues 40 years after being parted from their children.

It was a very moving ceremony, particularly the speech given by Phil, a man who was adopted from St Anthony's. He placed a pair of baby booties at the base of the memorial because his mother was not given the chance to buy some for him.



ARMS member, Pauline Tucker, had her baby at St Anthony's in 1972. At the unveiling Jo Fraser read a poem that Pauline wrote:

1972 – 2022

Fifty years ago

This year, 2022

I was one of many

Unmarried mothers

Rejected by our families,

Our families' shame

Hidden, interstate,

Ordered not to come back

With "that bastard"

We talked to our babies

Held our bellies

Told them not to come out

Stay safewith us

No option, no-one present when

We delivered, sedated, in the

half light

Torn away, unseen,

untouched, unfed,

Unsuckled, our breasts became

swollen,

Calico bandages, drugs stole

our milk,

Stole our child,

Stole our lives.

In 1972 I was here

One of the unmarried mothers

Three hundred infants were

taken

From St Anthony's Home for

Unmarried Mothers

One Home, in one year, in

one State of Australia,

300 infants taken from their

mothers,

Without our informed consent.

23/09/2022 Pauline Tucker

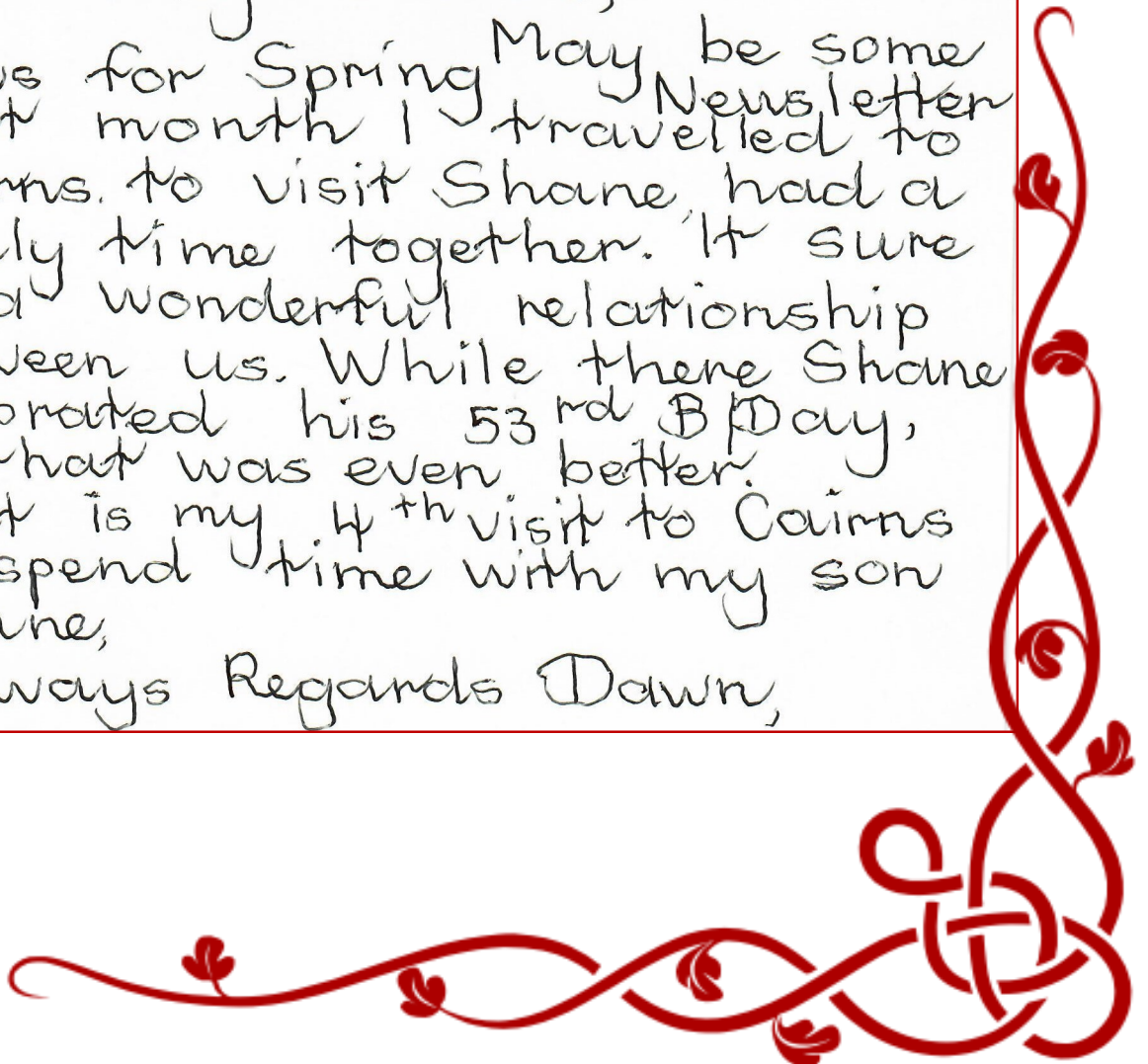


Dorothy,
 C/2 Cairns. Vic,
 P.O Box 645,
 Deepdene,
 Vic, 3103,

DLC 992-2
 00:56
 10/09/2022

6-9-2022

Hi Dorothy + Sisters,
 news for Spring ^{Newsletter} May be some
 last month I travelled to
 Cairns. to visit Shane, had a
 lovely time together. It sure
 is a wonderful relationship
 between us. While there Shane
 celebrated his 53rd B'Day,
 so that was even better.
 That is my 4th visit to Cairns
 to spend time with my son
 Shane,
 Always Regards Dawn,



An opinion piece from an ARMS member living in the USA

ARMS member Mo Ellis, a North Idaho raised woman now living in Iowa, emailed recently with these kind words: "I hope this finds you well, and ARMS Victoria thriving. I will never stop giving you and your organization credit for inspiring me to tell my story and become active on the adoption issue in the US." Mo has written some articles for the online writers' outlet "Medium" and has kindly agreed to include them in our newsletter. The first opinion piece is titled:

"If I had known I could have a baby, give him up and forty years later, get him back fully formed I'd have done it!"

My Texan friend's thoughtless response to the news that my son and I were reunited hurt deeply, even 40 years after I was forced by my parents to put him into the Idaho State adoption system.

Over the 14 years since my son and I reconnected in 2008, I became long distance friends with Genie, the adoptive stepmother to my son, and a self-described 'conservative' Catholic. During a conversation with her I shared the trauma of my son's birth and my stay at a Catholic hospital after his delivery. I revealed that I had been refused my baby when I asked for him. A nun "in charge" had lied to me. She insisted that my newborn had already left the hospital with his new parents. I explained to Genie that I knew about this lie because 'our' son had shared his hospital birth records with me. The record showed he had remained in the hospital (most likely the OB ward where I delivered him) for more than a week after his birth. Then he was placed into foster care. When I signed the adoption papers a month later I was not told any of this by anyone involved in the adoption process.



Genie's reaction was that if it had been her, "she would have demanded" her baby from the nun who refused to bring him to me. "I don't think I could ever give up my own child." Her use of the phrase 'give up' created a strong reaction in me ... and does now!

Genie was sharing a typical reaction to the loss of my son from mothers and anyone else never forced into the adoption process as a naive teen. This comment encapsulates their struggle with the reality of a mother's decision to 'give up' her child. Not mine.

Genie unknowingly got to the heart of adoption. It is an unnatural act.

I didn't "give my baby up' for adoption. No mother willingly gives up her child!

How do I and an estimated 1.5 million young mothers living in the USA, and another 3 million living in Australia, Canada, and the UK who "gave up" our babies between the years of 1949–72 defend ourselves against these

oversimplifications and

adoption tropes? How do birthmothers resist opinions based on false information still promoted in the world of adoption?

Birthmothers know that *no mother willingly 'gives' her child to another mother. Adoption is a decision forced onto vulnerable mothers whose life circumstances do not support her, her pregnancy, and her child.*

My response to what I hoped was Genie's unconscious criticism of my failure to prevent the loss of my son stuck in my throat. I tried to explain. "I was a good Catholic girl, Genie. I believed what the nun told me. I was taught that nuns don't lie. I felt I had no choice."

Our exchange left me deflated. I'd left so

much unsaid. I hadn't explained that not only was I lied to, but I had no information about any choice other than the adoption process. No alternatives from my family or from the professional medical and adoption staff who in 1968 had herded me through this process in the state of Idaho. I had no legal counsel. I was given inadequate information on the stages of my pregnancy, including the upcoming labor and delivery experience. No family was present at my son's birth. In short, I had *no support*.

At age 18 and controlled by my mother's fundamentalist Catholic doctrine I had no options after I decided not to marry my son's father.

How could I begin to explain the despair and powerlessness that had overshadowed my life? How do I share with Genie, or my son, that the natural desire and ability to stand up for myself had been crushed in childhood by years of verbal, mental and physical abuse in a home controlled by a 'take no prisoners' Catholic mother and reinforced with a parochial school education.

Healing from the loss of my son has taken years of soul searching and researching into the [Baby Scoop Era](#). I still harbor an aversion to all things Catholic. *Sorry Philomena*. If I allow it, it grips my heart, and depresses my mind and emotions.

Revisiting these traumas is hard on me, and writing about it can be arduous. I need long periods of walking away from this subject to recover.

Then, I come back by these thoughts, "If I don't write — the world will continue to demand that mothers like me who simply need hope and support will be forced to surrender their babies to strangers? If I don't tell my story, the worldwide demand for children by adoption agencies, lawyers, courts, and adoptive parents will continue

without real assurance that adoption does no harm to the adopted child and no injury to the child's birthmother."

I continue to wonder ... is America only interested in those who benefit from adoption. Adoption law has historically made those who suffer under it almost invisible. Social media and the public/private agents of adoption sanctify and support adoptive parenthood but disparage single mothers, welfare mothers, fat mothers, and non-binary mothers.

Fellow Iowa writer, Lyz Lenz explains it best in her 2020 book, *Belabored A Vindication of the Rights of Pregnant Women*, Lenz points out that it's not that you *are* a mother, it's *how* you mother that bestows virtue. In America, she finds virtue bestowed upon mothers who are white, heterosexual, and married. She concludes that the experience of motherhood in America is a political question just as much as it is a question of flesh. So, are we allowing white, married mothers a sainthood not extended to other types of mothers, including birthmothers?

Were women worldwide *given* the right to vote? No! They *fought* for it.

Do birthmothers "*give up*" their children for adoption, No f'ing way.



ARMS (VIC) CALENDAR 2022-2023



SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS

1st Saturday of every month (except January)

5 th November	at St Augustine's Church	2pm – 4pm
3 rd December	AGM - venue to be advised	1.30 – 4.30pm
January 2023	NO SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS IN JANUARY	
4 th February	at St Augustine's Church	2pm – 4pm
4 th March	at St Augustine's Church	2pm – 4pm

St Augustine's Church 631 Bourke St Melbourne

Bourke Street is in the free tram zone and trams 86 and 96 both stop at Stop 1 (Southern Cross Station). St Augustine's is a two or three minute walk from the Southern Cross Station.

There will be a yellow ARMS notice on the front gate at St Augustine's directing you to the correct entrance. Jo's and Dorothy's mobile numbers will be listed on the door notice.

All mothers are welcome to attend Melbourne support groups. If you can't be there in person, ask Jo Fraser 0409 442 701 for a Zoom invitation.