

Association of Relinquishing Mothers (Vic) Inc

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NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN EDITION 2013

CONVENOR'S REPORT

Hi everyone

A warm welcome and I hope that this finds all well and enjoying the delights and colours of a Melbourne autumn. Recently, many of us were in Canberra for the Federal apology and we stayed a few more days. It was good to see that Canberra weather can be as temperamental as Melbourne weather - sunshine one moment and showers of rain the next.

You are warmly invited to come and be part of the Mothers Day celebration on Saturday 4 May 2013. Mothers Day can be a difficult time for many of us as it is a reminder of the loss of our children. However, it is also a time to come together and join with others who understand and empathise with our experiences and celebrate being mothers. ***This year the Mothers Day celebration will be at Ross House in Flinders Lane, Melbourne. Ross House is located in Flinders Lane, between Elizabeth Street and Swanston Streets.*** If you are unsure as to where this is please email or call the ARMS line to get full details.

Much has happened this year even though it is only April - most importantly the Federal Apology in Canberra on 21 March 2013. This was a momentous occasion where those deeply affected by the adoption practices came from across Australia to accept the Federal Government's apology for past practices of forced (including coercive) adoption. The apology was poignant and certainly emotional. The range of emotions was intense and from my observations and talking to many people attending it was a very welcomed event. Unfortunately, it was a little overshadowed in the media by the *sheenani-gans* of the politicians. Most of us did not let this distract from the healing benefits of firstly, the apology and secondly, the coming together of so many people - mothers, fathers, adopted people and family members - to support each other and to celebrate this occasion. One politician in the House of Representatives said that he had never seen the Great Hall overflowing with people.

It told all Members of Parliament how important the apology was. A thought - sometimes, with politics in particular, it is the massing of people which says to the politicians "Pay attention!"

In the meantime, the work of ARMS continues. The committee has been busy, working with other organisations such as VANISH, liaising with the recently formed Geelong mothers' group, talking to the State politicians about the 'concrete measures' being put into place in line with the Victorian State Government apology. This has not been an easy time as the State Government is having trouble listening to what is being said. It appears to have a specific view and is reluctant to change this. So, ARMS has been meeting with, and talking to members of all sides of the Victorian Parliament to try to ensure that the measures being put into place do not cause further harm to all involved in adoption and, in particular, to the mothers who lost their child through adoption.

The committee is requesting all members to make contact with your State politicians and explain ARMS' position with regard to access to information by all parties and also, how the counselling services can be accessed by mothers affected by adoption. The ARMS webpage provides an update on these matters and do not hesitate to talk to a Committee member if you would like more information. The committee would also like to hear from you if you do speak or write to your local politicians (Government and Opposition) and their responses to you.

In the meantime, we look forward to seeing you at our Mothers Day celebration.

Regards
Tricia





National Apology for Forced Adoptions

21 March 2013

Today, this Parliament, on behalf of the Australian people, takes responsibility and apologises for the policies and practices that forced the separation of mothers from their babies, which created a lifelong legacy of pain and suffering.

We acknowledge the profound effects of these policies and practices on fathers.

And we recognise the hurt these actions caused to brothers and sisters, grandparents, partners and extended family members.

We deplore the shameful practices that denied you, the mothers, your fundamental rights and responsibilities to love and care for your children. You were not legally or socially acknowledged as their mothers. And you were yourselves deprived of care and support.

To you, the mothers who were betrayed by a system that gave you no choice and subjected you to manipulation, mistreatment and malpractice, we apologise.

We say sorry to you, the mothers who were denied knowledge of your rights, which meant you could not provide informed consent. You were given false assurances. You were forced to endure the coercion and brutality of practices that were unethical, dishonest and in many cases illegal.

We know you have suffered enduring effects from these practices forced upon you by others. For the loss, the grief, the disempowerment, the stigmatisation and the guilt, we say sorry.

To each of you who were adopted or removed, who were led to believe your mother had rejected you and who were denied the opportunity to grow up with your family and community of origin and to connect with your culture, we say sorry.

We apologise to the sons and daughters who grew up not knowing how much you were wanted and loved.

We acknowledge that many of you still experience a constant struggle with identity, uncertainty and loss, and feel a persistent tension between loyalty to one family and yearning for another.

To you, the fathers, who were excluded from the lives of your children and deprived of the dignity of recognition on your children's birth records, we say sorry. We acknowledge your loss and grief.

We recognise that the consequences of forced adoption practices continue to resonate through many, many lives. To you, the siblings, grandparents, partners and other family members who have shared in the pain and suffering of your loved ones or who were unable to share their lives, we say sorry.

Many are still grieving. Some families will be lost to one another forever. To those of you who face the difficulties of reconnecting with family and establishing ongoing relationships, we say sorry.

We offer this apology in the hope that it will assist your healing and in order to shine a light on a dark period of our nation's history.

To those who have fought for the truth to be heard, we hear you now. We acknowledge that many of you have suffered in silence for far too long.

We are saddened that many others are no longer here to share this moment. In particular, we remember those affected by these practices who took their own lives. Our profound sympathies go to their families.

To redress the shameful mistakes of the past, we are committed to ensuring that all those affected get the help they need, including access to specialist counselling services and support, the ability to find the truth in freely available records and assistance in reconnecting with lost family.

We resolve, as a nation, to do all in our power to make sure these practices are never repeated. In facing future challenges, we will remember the lessons of family separation. Our focus will be on protecting the fundamental rights of children and on the importance of the child's right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.

With profound sadness and remorse, we offer you all our unreserved apology.

The Hon Julia Gillard MP
Prime Minister

National Apology for Past Adoption Practices - 21 March 2013

The anticipation and emotion were palpable in the Marble Foyer at Parliament House on the morning that had been so long coming. Men, women and children from all over Australia had come together to hear the Australian Federal Government apologise to us for the wrongs of the past. Some stood quietly, some joked and laughed with friends, others told their stories and asked questions of those next to them – people they had never met before, but with whom they had a common bond.

One woman walked around with a shoe box full of little commemorative ribbons in blue and pink and asked everyone to take one depending on which gender their lost baby was. A lovely gesture and very thoughtful.

A number of ARMS (Vic) women made the trip to Canberra, and I can say without any doubt: we were so glad we did! When we entered the Great Hall we made our way to seats which had an Apology booklet and a silk flower on them. There were over 1,000 people in the Hall, expecting great things, and we weren't disappointed. The Speaker, Anna Burke did a wonderful job of introducing the proceedings, then the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, Attorney General and other politicians made their way through the throng of journalists, cameras and microphones to the stage.

Ngambri elder Shane Mortimer and his niece performed the Welcome to Country ceremony and told us the moving account of their family's loss and strength.

Julia Gillard spoke eloquently and from the heart. She began by saying:

"Today, this Parliament, on behalf of the Australian people, takes responsibility and apologises for the policies and practices that forced the separation of mothers from their babies, which created a lifelong legacy of pain and suffering."

Many in the Great Hall cried as she spoke, many hugged, many just sat and listened.

No-one was immune to the emotion.

She finished by saying:

"With profound sadness and remorse we offer you all our unreserved apology."

Her speech was met with a standing ovation, after which the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott spoke. The politicians then left the Great Hall and some of us made our way to the House of Representatives to watch the Attorney General introduce the apology motion to the House. Mia Dyson sang a beautiful song - Jesse - to those remaining in the Great Hall.

Lunch was served on the lawns of Parliament House and we sat in large marquees with old and new friends while Anne Kirkpatrick and her band sang. There was a memorial book in each marquee for us to write our thoughts.

Hopefully this is the start of a new journey for many people affected by adoption, and has helped the healing process for them.

We think of the mothers and their children who did not live to hear this apology.

The Presence of Absence

Saudade is a unique Galician-Portuguese word that has no immediate translation in English. **Saudade** describes a deep emotional state of nostalgic longing for an absent something or someone that one loves. It often carries a repressed knowledge that the object of longing might never return. It's related to the feelings of longing, yearning. **Saudade** was once described as "the love that remains" after someone is gone. **Saudade** is the recollection of feelings, experiences, places or events that once brought excitement, pleasure, well-being, which now triggers the senses. It can be described as an emptiness, like someone or something that should be there in a particular moment is missing, and the individual feels this absence.

I attended the Live Streaming of the National Apology at the Queen Vic. On arriving there was a table laid out with badges to commemorate the event and inside tea, coffee and nibbles, as well as staff from VANISH to greet us.

I would say there were between 80 - 100 there and that it was okay except for the couple of breaks in transmission during the speeches. I sat near the back and could see the reactions of many of the women during the apology. Most, I must say, were very emotional.

Joy gave a lovely speech on behalf of ARMS.

I left before lunch was served so cannot comment any further on the day.

As an aside I will say that it was very disappointing to come home and find the Labor party leadership issues totally over-shadowed any mention of the apology in the media. It was barely mentioned on TV that night and the Herald Sun only made a small mention of it the next day.

Georgina Johnson

We applaud the Federal Government for their National apology today.

It has been a long time coming and unfortunately, for many, it has come too late.

For the rest of us - nothing can give us back the lives we could have lived - nothing can change the past - so now is the time to focus on the future.

A National Apology will finally acknowledge the truth of the cruel, often illegal past adoption practices that forcibly removed children from their mothers.

It will also acknowledge that these mothers were denied their rights and in many cases, given no option but to sign adoption papers. These mothers always loved and wanted their children.

We hope that this Apology will educate and bring understanding and change to the community and particularly all those touched by adoption.

Nothing can change the past, but our loss and grief does change when acknowledged.

We are hopeful that this Apology will bring healing, reunion and peace to the hearts and minds of all those separated by past adoption practices.

To all those who have worked so hard for the last 30 years to bring about this apology I offer my heartfelt thanks for your strength, courage and determination to expose the truth.

Thank you

Joy O'Connor

I was there – a simple statement but it was a profoundly moving occasion. Over one thousand people packed the Great Hall in Canberra. We received Julia Gillard's comprehensive, perfectly crafted and compassionately delivered Apology and responded with a standing ovation. Just before the Apology, a member of ARMS, who had attended alone, was tapped on the shoulder by her estranged daughter. They clung together with smiles and tears throughout the day.

Dorothy

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DISCLAIMER:

All contributions are presented with the aim of sharing ideas.
Views expressed by contributors are not necessarily endorsed by ARMS

Another report by Thomas Graham, an adopted person, is published in Australian Journal of Adoption, Vol 7, No 1 (2013) and can be accessed online at

<http://www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/aja>.

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National Apology for Past Forced Adoptions Parliament House, Australia – Personal Reflections

Thomas Graham

Click 'PDF' on the right of the page

The article commences with: *One of a thousand at the National Apology...*

Many of our members attended the Apology in Canberra while others saw the live screening in Melbourne or watched it at home. To view on-line or to order commemorative items, here are the details:

Video footage of the day will be used to create a commemorative DVD. If you would like to be sent a copy of the DVD, an apology parchment, a commemorative lapel pin and/or an mp3 version of Mia Dyson's song *Jesse* please email your name and postal address to forcedadoptionsapology@ag.gov.au or call 02 6141 3030.

<http://www.ag.gov.au/About/ForcedAdoptionsApology/Pages/default.aspx>

The following link will take you to the PM's speech on iview:

<http://www.abc.net.au/iview/#/program/32105>

For the transcript of the Prime Minister's Apology, go to:

<http://www.ag.gov.au/About/ForcedAdoptionsApology/Documents/Nationalapologyforforcedadoptions.PDF>

For the transcript of Tony Abbott's speech, go to:

<http://www.tonyabbott.com.au/News/tabid/94/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/9112/National-Apology-for-Forced-Adoptions-Great-Hall-Parliament-House-Canberra.aspx>

For The Australian Government's response to the Community Affairs Reference Committee Report, go to:

<http://www.ag.gov.au/About/ForcedAdoptionsApology/Documents/Australian%20Government%20response%20to%20the%20%20Senate%20Community%20Affairs%20References%20Committee%20Report.pdf>

For official photos, go to <http://www.flickr.com/photos/attorneygenerals/>

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Written 14 March 2013

Next Thursday the Federal Government will present an apology to women whose babies were put up for adoption. Initially the process of investigating the wrongs done through adoption was framed as 'forced' adoption. The focus broadened to recognize that coercion that was accepted practice in the past, the lack of support for women who enable them to keep their babies. In 1970-1971, more than 10,000 babies were taken from their mothers and put up for adoption.

It's been something of a surprise to me how much the apology has mattered to me, enabled me to see what I did in a more historical framework, released me somehow. I watched the Apology in the Victorian Parliament last year and was moved to tears and grateful that the apology was unreserved and all embracing. I know that other States have apologized, and several hospitals. Of course these apologies don't shift the hard residue of estrangement, heartbreak, depression, abuse, anger and identity chasms that adoption and relinquishment has meant for most of us. But to many of us, recognition by government is important, particularly when it is back by adequate funding for support, counselling and search.

Having said all that, I can't make it to Canberra to be there for the National Apology. With the knowledge of the national apology about to take place, I woke with Ana on my mind. 'Ana' is the name I'll give to the young woman who shared a post natal ward with me. After a long and exhilarating birthing experience, I woke from a deep sleep to find a very young woman watching me, bright eyed and expectant in the bed on my left. She was fifteen and had been in Grade 9. She boggled to find a teacher in the room and our conversation stalled as she dropped into an uncertain silence and I drifted into some sort of mind-marsh of confusion and physical recovery. Any sense of teacherly reserve dissolved as I coped with the demands of stitches and swollen painful breasts.

Over the days that followed we talked and listened. Ana's family were Catholic migrants. During all her pregnancy she had been kept inside the house so the neighbours wouldn't see her. Elaborate charades were enacted involving her sister pretending to be her, so prying eyes and suspicious minds were fooled. I too had had to hide, especially from my extended family, but my experience of living with supportive friends made the pregnancy not so much of an imprisonment. I know I was very lucky to avoid the punitive homes and shaming factories that were the lot of many women even in the early seventies.

Ana's baby was born a few days before mine, so she knew the ropes. She looked after me in those first few days, leaping out of bed to do whatever she thought I needed. She also had the skills of a rebellious but resourceful teenager. This meant she had found out where they had put our babies. We weren't supposed to know. Could we really see them? I asked. But of course, she replied. And she coached me about when and how to go there, how to avoid the nursing sisters on the way down to the floor where they were kept, and how to time it so that the most sympathetic nursing aide was on duty. She was the one that might let you hold your baby for a few minutes.

Ana's mother changed her mind towards the end of Ana's

stay in hospital, and wanted to keep the baby. Ana decided to go with what was considered 'the best solution' at the time and decided to put her baby up for adoption to a 'good home'. I thought she was brave at the time. It's not a decision I judge in any way. But it's a decision that may well have come to plague her down the years, as my decision to relinquish has done. As another relinquishing mother has said to me - the difficulty with what happened is that we had a hand in it ourselves. Not just metaphorically speaking: we must have signed papers though I have no memory of it. There was no counselling that opened up the possibility of choice. No understanding of what it would mean legally and emotionally. No financial support. With hindsight, we can see how it could have been otherwise. We know now how the world of the single mother turned on its axis with the advent of a pension for supporting parents.

So I find myself wondering how the years have treated Ana. How did she survive? Act out? Play up? Lash out? How long did she keep the secret? Did she find her child? Did she conceive again (many didn't)? What scars? What joys? I hope she will be listening when the Apology is read. I'll be thinking of Ana on Thursday, and forever grateful that she was there beside me.

Jude Newcombe



We have had a request from Meg Hale, a mother in South Australia who is writing a book on the history of ARMS (SA), which she says cannot possibly be done without mentioning the pivotal role ARMS (Vic) has played in helping women who have lost their children to adoption.

I'm trying to get hold of some consent forms from different states from different times - 50s, 60s, etc because I'm trying to prove that the forms only said that women were giving consent to adoption but that in reality (and not written on the form) they were actually giving consent to guardianship with the possibility of adoption. Mothers were not told that their babies might not be adopted and that the form was giving consent for them to be placed in an institution, foster care or elsewhere. And, (if there could be more!!!) that mothers did not know they would not be told if their babies were never adopted. If we can show that the forms didn't mention all this, and that if women weren't told it (and I know I wasn't!!) then that makes the consents invalid.

I'm also interested in talking to any mother who found out that her baby had never been adopted, so if you know anyone who is prepared to talk to me I'd be really happy to speak to them.

Were you ever told that you were signing consent to Guardianship and that your baby might not ever be adopted, and that if it wasn't you might not be told about it? I'm really interested in what other mothers are saying about what they thought they were consenting to.

Meg

If you have requested and received your paperwork (including consent form) or if you would like to do so, and are interested in talking to Meg, please email arms@armsvic.org.au or call the ARMS number 9769 0232. Also, if you found out that your child had never actually been adopted and would be willing to talk about it, contact us.



We are planning to make a series of new flags which will be made specifically to offer as a contribution to the permanent exhibition at the National Archives on Adoption history.

The next session for making these flags will be at 1.00pm on Saturday, 1st June 2013 followed by the normal Support Group Meeting at 2.00pm

Mothers to finally know their child's name

Below is the link to what should be a wonderful change in legislation - the media release by the Hon Mary Wooldridge MP.

Unfortunately we are not entirely happy with this legislation change as a block has been added to the amendment and is really a veto with another name. ARMS will attempt to have it removed.

Senator Pratt (Western Australia) during the tabling of the Inquiry Findings says:

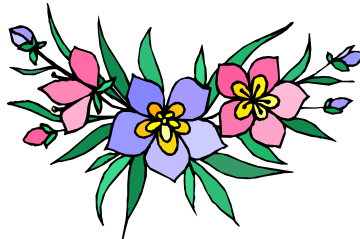
One of the issues that came to light then and still causes me distress is the continuing existence of contact vetoes that are legally enforceable and have criminal offences attached to them. The idea that, in this day and age, we continue to criminalise the desire to contact your kin seems extraordinary to me

Christine Cole wrote:

It always amazed me that when the British Migrants found out that they did have kin in Britain, they were all so eager to meet with them. I never heard any mention of legislation being implemented by either the Australian or British governments to put vetoes in place to give the impression their reunification would be damaging. And that is the impression putting these kind of vetoes in place gives – that for some secrecy should continue because either one or the other needs similar protection to what AVO gives – except of course an AVO is issued only if a person has been hurt or threatened with serious assault and is in real need of protection. I guess vetoes are a potent reminder that we as a group are either incompetent and/or dangerous.

<http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/6195-forced-adoption-mothers-to-finally-know-their-childs-name.html>

ARMS is continuing to make every effort to have the block removed from the amendment to the Adoption legislation.



GEELONG CALENDAR 2013

4th MAY	MOTHERS DAY CELEBRATION at Ross House 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne - afternoon tea will be supplied
1st JUNE	SUPPORT GROUP
6th JULY	SUPPORT GROUP
3rd AUGUST	SUPPORT GROUP
7th SEPTEMBER	SUPPORT GROUP
5th OCTOBER	SUPPORT GROUP
2nd NOVEMBER	SUPPORT GROUP
7th DECEMBER	ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by a celebration of ARMS 31st anniversary (in Melbourne)

Would all members attending support group meetings please bring a small plate of food to share

All meetings held at South Barwon Community Centre

33 Mt Pleasant Road, Belmont 3216

Contact Thelma Adams on 5243 8302 or 0430 948 923

ALL RELINQUISHING MOTHERS WELCOME

ARMS (VIC) CALENDAR 2013

6th APRIL	SUPPORT GROUP
4th MAY	MOTHERS' DAY - catered by ARMS committee ***
1st JUNE	1pm FLAG MAKING SESSION (all materials provided) FOLLOWED BY 2pm SUPPORT GROUP
6th JULY	SUPPORT GROUP
3rd AUGUST	SUPPORT GROUP
7th SEPTEMBER	SUPPORT GROUP
5th OCTOBER	SUPPORT GROUP
2nd NOVEMBER	SUPPORT GROUP
7th DECEMBER	ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by a celebration of ARMS 31st anniversary

*** *Note change of venue to Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne (between Swanston & Elizabeth Streets)*



Would all members attending support group meetings please bring a small plate of food to share

All meetings (except 4 May and 7 December) held at
Queen Victoria Women's Centre 210 Lonsdale Street Melbourne

ALL RELINQUISHING MOTHERS WELCOME