# Association of Relinquishing Mothers (Vic) Inc

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NEWSLETTER
SPRING EDITION 2013

## ARMS (VIC) HAS JUST RECEIVED A COPY OF THE APOLOGY MADE IN OCTOBER 2012 BY THE AUSTRALIAN NURSING FEDERATION

25 October 2012

The Australian Nursing Federation (Victorian Branch) today joins the Victorian Parliament in unreservedly apologising, on behalf of the nursing and midwifery professions, to the mothers and fathers and their children, for the part nurses and midwives played in giving effect to the unacceptable policy of forced adoptions.

During the period from the 1950s to the 1980s thousands of unmarried mothers were forced, pressured and coerced to relinquish their newborn babies. Vulnerable new mothers were denied information about their legal rights, the support available to them and the alternatives to adoption. Fathers were denied the opportunity to be a father. Children were robbed of their identity, their parents and their families.

This policy and these practices were ethically and morally wrong, in many cases unlawful, regardless of the social mores of the time.

Nurses and midwives provided care to women during labour, birth and the days after birth and were involved in the intimate process of separating mothers and babies for the purpose of forced adoptions.

We apologise to mothers who were not treated by nurses and midwives with dignity and respect. We apologise for instances where nurses and midwives did not advocate for their patient, especially where parents expressed a determination to keep their child.

It is with deep regret that ANF as an organisation did not speak out against this practice and did not advocate for policy changes that were in the best interests of the mother and the child.

Today's nurses and midwives take their role as patient and client advocates very seriously and are acutely aware of their legal and ethical responsibilities and the trust vulnerable people place in them.

ANF deeply regrets the incomprehensible harm caused to individuals and to families and we call on other organisations and professions to issue a public apology for the past. We call on State and Federal Governments to commit resources and services such as free counselling, support, information and family-search services. The ANF supports further legislative and regulatory reform, such as integrated birth certificates, to make amends for taking away identities and family bonds.

We hope the symbolism of a formal apology and acknowledgement that what happened was wrong, together with practical measures to assist those affected, are the start of making amends.

**Contact details** 

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ANF (Vic Branch) Media Officer
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#### Hi everyone

Hope this finds you all well and looking forward to the warmer weather whenever it gets here, which may mean that the windy, stormy weather will pass and be replaced with sunshine.

First and most important, the first Saturday in December – this year being 7 December 2013, is the ARMS Annual General meeting. Details of where this is being held, time and directions to get to the venue are in the newsletter and invitations will be posted or emailed soon.

As you know all members and any women who lost their child/ren to adoption, no matter the circumstances, are warmly invited to come along and be part of the meeting. The aim of this meeting is to come together, catch up and to acknowledge our mutual support of each other and, of course, to have an interesting and vibrant afternoon.

In general this year has been an eventful one building on the work done in previous years by previous ARMS committees which culminated in the Federal Apology in Canberra on 21 March 2013. Since that time the ARMS committee has been working with other organisations such as VANISH, actively involved in the design and implementation of the 'concrete measures' promised by both the State and the Federal Governments in their apologies.

As the year ends ARMS looks forward to 2014, although one issue of concern is the lack of members on the ARMS Committee. ARMS encourages all members to be actively involved with the management committee in any way you choose, and should you wish, you are more than welcome to be involved in one of the working groups such as the outreach working group or the fundraising researching group. ARMS runs on the 'smell of an oily rag' so any grant funds are greatly welcomed as these provide financial support for specific projects such as writing workshops, art workshops. So, if you would like to be involved with the committee or a working group, or if you have any ideas of other sub committees to assist in raising awareness of ARMS and the unique issues for mothers who have lost their child/ren to adoption – remember all offers of assistance will be gladly welcomed.

Please consider becoming involved. In particular to those of you who come from regional Victoria - consider if it would be useful if a support group was in your area. If you are interested just talk to a committee member at the AGM or contact ARMS either by phone or email.

Spring

Take care.

Tricia Lester

VANISH is a very valuable resource for information on all aspects of adoption. They are funded to provide training for GPs and counsellors about the many issues which affect the long term physical and emotional health of mothers. Cousellors who have undertaken the course and are eligible, can apply to be listed on the VANISH Register of Adoption Counsellors which will be available on the VANISH website. It is hoped the outcome will be that mothers can be confident that their issues will be understood.

VANISH works in all areas of search and support in adoption and has the skills necessary to locate children searching for mothers and mothers searching for adoptees.

**WE ENCOURAGE MOTHERS TO BECOME MEMBERS OF VANISH** – there is no joining fee and VANISH produces an informative newsletters every month, as well as interim bulletins when anything important comes up during the month. Newsletters and bulletins are posted or emailed, whichever a member prefers. ARMS mothers will then receive important information first-hand.

#### Postal address for VANISH Inc Street location

PO Box 112 1st Floor, 50 Howard Street
Carlton South Vic 3053 North Melbourne Vic 3051

Phone: (03) 9328 8611 Toll Free: 1300 VANISH (1300 826 474)

Fax: (03) 9329 6527 Email: info@vanish.org.au

VANISH has good quality information sheets from DHS/FIND (Family Information Network and Discovery) available on the recent amendments to the Adoption Act 1984.

Summarised below are recent articles from VANISH:

#### **FUNDING FOR COUNSELLING**

VANISH understands that the Federal Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) has funding available for counselling sessions for those people impacted by past adoption policies and practices.

You can access this funding by asking your General Practitioner (GP) to refer you to a counsellor in your area. If your GP is not aware of the funding tell them that it is definitely available through their Medicare Local, under ATAPS Access to Allied Psychological Services.

VANISH understands that your General Practitioner will need to develop a Mental Health Plan for you to access this funding but that this should be discussed with your GP. If you wish to access this funding and are uncertain how to do so please do not hesitate to contact VANISH.

Liz Tomlinson or Jenny Conrick, counsellors at VANISH will be happy to talk you through the process.

VANISH believes the funding is available through every Medicare Local nationally so that should mean there is counselling available near where you live.

VANISH has not been involved in this funding roll-out but we are happy to do all we can to help you access this opportunity – just give us a ring on (03) 9328 8611 Tuesday – Friday.

## OTHER OUTREACH EVENTS ORGANISED BY VANISH:

#### **Bacchus Marsh**

Saturday, 2nd November

1.00pm to 3.00pm

Lerderderg Library, 215 Main Street

#### **Adoption Awareness:**

The Personal Effects Join us to explore how adoption affects different people, in different ways.

Gary Coles who is a father will consider the impact of adoption, based on his and others' experiences.

He has written three books about the topic and will discuss the delivery of post-adoption services.

Charlotte Smith is an adoptee and a passionate advocate for post-adoption support. She will talk about why adoption might affect different people in different ways, and the role of mutual support.

#### **Traralgon**

Saturday, 9th November

2.00pm to 4.00pm

## Information Session: After Adoption - Search and Support

Come and hear from VANISH (Victorian Adoption Network for Information and Self-Help) and local people about the impact of adoption, how to search and the role of mutual support.

Venue to be confirmed.

For more information and other events visit: <a href="http://vanish.org.au/newsevents/events">http://vanish.org.au/newsevents/events</a>

NEXT SOCIAL MORNING TEA at VANISH premises 1st Floor, 50 Howard Street North Melbourne

Friday, 29 November 2013
OPEN TO EVERYONE – NO CHARGE

Printed courtesy of the office of Senator Gavin Marshall Labor Senator for Victoria

#### RELINQUISHMENT

By Anne C. Jones

The aftermath of relinquishment ls a heavy load to bear.

A Product of the establishment Now who is there to care?

Not knowing all rules of the game Feeling cheated, robbed and barred This woman's loss is another's gain, My heart is forever scarred.

If at that time, had I been shown,
For myself and mine an option,
I know now, as I knew then,
The solution was not adoption.

Because this process in many ways
Can only be labelled theft
I, and many such as I,
Have been left forever bereft.

In retrospect, with knowledge gained
Of human rights, laws and such,
I feel the procedure has been stained
with many wrongs, pain and suffering much.

I strongly urge society, try to compensate, For adoption wrongs past done. Professionals, Laymen, Clergy and State They should co-operate to have justice done.

August 1980

#### **KEDESH**

Does this ring bells? (or nightmares)
Were you a KEDESH girl, and did you sneak
out without permission?

Eat oranges from the tree next door, wash dishes in the scullery?

Some of us Kedesh girls are looking to get together, have a coffee, reminisce, laugh, swap stories?

if you are a KEDESH girl and are interested in joining us just send an email

(subject matter KEDESH) to Shirley Corin -

shirleycorin@hotmail.com.au

Tricia Lester - tricia.lester@vu.edu.au

#### FEDERAL GOVERNMENT FORCED ADOPTIONS HISTORY PROJECT

Following the national apology by former Prime Minister Julia Gillard on 21 March 2013, the National Archives has established a project to deliver an education program for individuals affected by forced adoption.

The aim is to firstly establish a website and later an exhibition where interested parties can share their personal and diverse experiences respectfully and thoughtfully.

The website is to be launched in March 2014. It's hoped that this website will become a permanent memorial of personal stories from those affected by forced adoption policies and practices in Australia.

If you'd like to share your story, you're invited to submit letters, photos, artworks, song lyrics – anything you like to help the wider community gain a better understanding of this issue.

(All submissions will be treated in confidence and will only be used for this project. No information received will be passed on to other parties.)

You are also invited to share your thoughts on what you would you like to see on the website. For more information, you can go to <a href="http://www.naa.gov.au/about-us/partnerships/forced-adoptions.aspx">http://www.naa.gov.au/about-us/partnerships/forced-adoptions.aspx</a>.

ARMS (Vic) has offered a series of flags which members have designed and made specifically for this project.

Contact details are: Jane McKnight, The Forced Adoption History Project Team National Archives of Australia, Queen Victoria Terrace, Parkes ACT 2600 PO Box 7425, Canberra Business Centre ACT 2610 t +61 2 6212 3669

e ForcedAdoptionsHistory@naa.gov.au www.naa.gov.au

Some poetry to share: The Great Spirits

Do you hear the whisper behind the glistening dewdrops in the morning dawn?

Do you listen to the secrets of the stars as they dance around the moon?

Can you hear the silence of the night when midnights colour paints the skys?

Do you feel the tingle of the mist as it settles in among the trees?

What about the laughter of the leaves as they smile in the sun in seeing the day?

Can you feel with your heart the roar of the waves and the bubble of the brook?

The stillness of the lake mirroring the many faces of the clouds?

Ponder the gentle rising of the new born day And the quietude of the Sun's setting in the dusk Where from do the colours of the rainbow rain and the rays of the sun shine out upon the day? Per chance Your Angel can help

If not to answer with the language of words Then perhaps to light the way for us to discover ourselves

The shining ones do shine How beautiful it is As beautiful as we are

Christine Hannigan

The 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1971 at 5.04µm changed my life forever.



A week after my daughter was born, I was told I had to sign adoption papers. I was told I had no choice and no other options. I was sixteen years old.

Since then it has been a life of looking at girls, wondering their ages and even asking people their birth date.

In later years before my Mum passed away, she told me she was so sorry for what had happened, but she also went by the advice of professionals.

No one knows the hurt and sadness I have carried for all these years.

Robyn McIvor 30.8.2012



#### **MOTHER AND CHILD**

They denied me the beating of your little heart against mine.

They denied me your first breath and
The feeling of your warm perfect little fingers
The right to count your toes

My breasts were denied the right to nourish you
My eyes to watch you grow
My legs to run and play with you
My arms to hold you close
My face to see your smiling eyes

My womb was our safe haven
But sadly I couldn't protect us
During our separation
Planned by others for another's gain

But they failed to see our invisible cord Our lifeline cord attached to my heart That only you and I can share

Nobody can ever break our connection As we are joined by our cord Unbreakable by man's plans to separate us

> I am your Mother You are my child and My love is yours always -Your heart broken mother

(Composed by Brenda Coughlan 2004 for all mothers and children separated at birth – around the world)

Winner of International Poetry award 2004

#### RENAE-JOY

was the 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1977 the day Renae-Joy announced Her arrival into the world.

'Twas a grand day in some ways but not in others.

Decisions!!

Yes, decisions?

I loved her and will ALWAYS love Renae-Joy,

That is why I had to make the final decision.

Moments!! The bad ones I try to forget.

Yes, beautiful moments too.

The first time I felt her alive in me.

The morning she kept me awake.

The afternoon she was born "TO ME".

There were times I loved her an extra lot. Times I held, kissed, hugged, sang and even prayed to her.

Beautiful moments, that I shall cherish forever.

Her first smile, even if it was with wind, she smiled.

Her, holding my fingers, so very, very tight.

Her, soft cry, ringing in my ears.

I LOVE YOU Renae-Joy, and always will. 29<sup>th</sup> December 1977

29 December 1977

The day has come. How time flies past? Oh! God, am I, have I done the right thing.

To me the signing of those papers was like signing a Death Warrant.

At times I wished I was dead.

At times I wished we could have gone far away together.

The two, or three of us?

Oh! Lord, the emptiness I feel at losing

"TWO" people I shall always love.

Renae-Joy my little daughter.

Your mummy shall ALWAYS LOVE YOU.

Gail Cuddihy-Glasl

### TREE OF LIFE BANNER

The quilted banner commemorating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ARMS (Vic) is in Tree of Life format. The banner is almost complete, and the quilter and embroiderer are waiting for final details.

If you'd like to be represented on a leaf, please give details to Dorothy on landline 03 9889 3583 or mobile 0411 098 773 or email to dosh68@gmail.com.

There is room on each leaf for 3-4 items – eg name/s, date. The leaves are approx. 75mm long. Here's a photo of some leaf detail to give you an idea.

DOROTHY NEEDS TO HAVE YOUR INFO BY THURSDAY 20TH OCTOBER.



## Thelma's life now full of happiness

At just 14 years of age, Thelma Adams was forced to give up her baby boy. But after decades of searching for him, he is now back in her life and she is using her experience to encourage other birth mums to search for their long-lost children.

HELMA Adams was just a child when she was forced to give up her own child.

At 14 years of age, Thelma's son, Matthew, was taken from her while she lay under sedation following his birth.

She never got to hold him, hear him or even see him.

That was back in 1973, when being unwed and pregnant was not accepted, and young mothers were forced to put their babies up for adoption.

"I hid my pregnancy until I had 10 weeks to go - no-one knew." Thelma says.

"My mum was all about, 'Oh my god, what are the neighbours going to think?

"I was told if anyone found out it would destroy jobs and the lives of the parties involved."

So to keep the pregnancy a secret, Thelma's mum sent her away to an unmarried mothers home in Kew before she returned home to give birth in Baxter House, Geelong Hospital.

"The awful thing is, I've only thought about it now, is that at 14 years old, I signed my first legal document, which is illegal," Thelma says.

"... to sign away my child. So a child signed away their own child?"

"The woman said if you don't sign it, you'll go to a girl's home and he'll go to a children's home.

"I thought it was true."

Thelma, of Geelong, says the only way she knew how to cope following Matthew's birth, was to try and block out the experience.

"I was told it didn't happen and move on, so I blocked it out," Thelma says.

"It was never ever spoken about in my home.

"It made me very sick, I had anxiety, panic attacks, the whole works."

While Thelma says the pain from losing her son never left her, she felt comfort when she married and later welcomed three more children, John, Alisha and Shane.

And it's thanks to her daughter Alisha, who helped bring Matthew back into Thelma's life.

"I got some information and did my own investigative work and found Matt," Thelma says.



Thelma's son John, with his wife Tracey, blessed his mum with three grandchildren - Ella, Will and Dylan.

"I made contact for 13 years and got nothing.

"But then Alisha made contact with him when she was 21, and one year later he replied to her in a text.

"I remember when she got the text, she was just standing there going 'oh my god!'

"...she read it out to me and I went to my room and fell to my knees and cried."

Thelma says Alisha met up with Matthew a week later in Melbourne and he now remains in contact with her family.

"I can understand he has other parents and I can never fulfil that role, but I think he really likes what he has with the kids,"

"He likes his siblings and our relationship is like a friendship. "We try to include him in everything."

Thelma first shared her story publically in the lead up to Prime Minister Julia Gillard's national apology to victims of forced adoption practices that were in place in Australia from the late 1950s to the 1970s.

She is again sharing her story with Kids' Voice, following the introduction of the Adoption Amendment Act 2013 on July 1.

Thelma says the biggest change to the Act is that natural parents can now obtain identifying information about their child without their consent, which was previously needed.

But Thelma says while this change is a welcome one among parents seeking their adopted children, it also presents some challenges.

"This could actually be scary for a few mothers who are unsure whether to make contact, because now if they make contact and their child says no, they know who they are," Thelma says.

"And some of these adopted children may not know they are adopted if their parents have not told them, but will now if the birth parents make contact."

Thelma says things are pretty good in her life at the moment, which includes chasing after her three grandchildren, Ella, Will and Dylan.

She says she is moving forward by helping other birth mothers who have never spoken about or searched for their child.

Thelma is the spokesperson for the Geelong branch of the Association of Relinquishing Mothers (ARMS), and hopes her story will encourage other women to come forward and join the support group.

"My baby in our group was in '73 - I'm the youngest, so there are all these other ladies out there who had babies in the 60s and have never had any contact, so they are still dealing with that today," she says.

"There are probably hundreds of women out there who haven't told their husbands, so they will take it to their grave.

Thelma says when she gave birth, people thought you could have a baby and move on, but that isn't so.

"In death, babies die and you grieve, you can go to the grave site and you know where the baby is," she says.

"But this is a baby who is alive and out there somewhere, but you don't know in what condition.

"When we search, we want to know that they are happy, and then when we find them we want to know what they look like, but it just goes on, it's human nature."

Thelma encourages other birth mothers to search for their child.

"It's on your mind everyday and you need to deal with it to move on," she says.

"If they want to come along to the groups, they don't have to talk, just sit there and listen and build up the courage and then we can help each other."

Ring Thelma on 52438302 for more information about ARMS.



Thelma with her daughter Alisha (left), daughter-in-law Tracey and granddaughter Ella.

My daughter was born in 1962 at Frances Perry House. Now I live in Munro, south west of Bairnsdale, and would like to meet other mothers in the Bairnsdale/Sale areas. Elaine Legg 0427 458 375

#### JOY SHARED

Giving up may be, easier to bear If women like me, and others Could have news, or photos to share.

If some compassionate, adoptive Mother Would share a little news.

From one Mother to another.

A little information, passed on thru the years.

This would help alleviate

The worry, grief and tears.

Lu Anne C. Vones

#### BENDIGO SEMINAR REPORT - MAGGIE MILLAR

The seminar was held in the beautiful banquet room at the Theatre Royal Bendigo. Speakers included Jo Fraser from ARMS, Coleen Clare Manager of VANISH, and Maggie Millar, who organised the Seminar with help (and funding!) from Cobaw Community Health. Those who attended included all sides of the adoption triangle, and as is often the case, stories of heartbreak and hope, despair and remarkable courage were shared.

The intention of the seminar was to encourage country people, many of whom still feel shame and guilt to come together, share their stories and realise they are not alone. For those who attended, much comfort was provided, by others in similar situations, and especially Jo and Coleen. Maggie is still trying to organise an ongoing group, and will be in touch with those who left their contact details in the coming weeks. (She apologises for the time lapse but there have been changes happening at Cobaw, and she has been hit with the dreaded winter lurgie for the past two weeks!) For those who wish to contact Maggie her email address is: <a href="www.womankind@australiaonline.net.au">www.womankind@australiaonline.net.au</a> Mobile: 0435 398 860 Thanks to all those who attended, and especially to the speakers, and Cobaw Community health services. Stay tuned for more!

We are three girls from the Geelong support group who spent part of our confinement at the St Joseph's home in Grattan St Carlton, and would like to make contact and perhaps catch up with other girls who had also spent their

time there. Anyone interested please call.

We are: Karen: 0408 293 559 or 03 5229 3559 (1966)

Catherine: 0409 954 735

(1968)

Merilyn: 03 5281 1257 (1959/60)

#### GEELONG SUPPORT GROUP UPDATE

Hi Ladies,

It is hard to believe it is only 13 weeks to Christmas.

We have been very lucky to have had a visit from two of our Melbourne sisters, Tricia in August and Dorothy in September. We love having you come and visit, and we are looking forward to our visit to Melbourne in December.

Our library is now up and running, the books are in the very safe hands of our library lady, Karen.

The meetings are going very well, with an average of 6 ladies per meeting, with one new lady last month.

Any ladies who would like to come along to our meetings will be most welcome, for more information please contact me on 0430 948 923 or 5243 8302.

Looking forward to seeing you all at the next meeting.

Thelma

arlier this year I was one of the any women who attended the National Apology in Canberra. That event changed my outlook on life and it was then I realised that after 43 years and the wearing of the "disgrace" label I was not alone. I no longer felt that disgrace to society or my family, instead for the first time I felt a sense of pride in myself.

Come the time of the year for the annual women's dinner for our local farming communities, I had arranged with the organisers if I could be one of the guest speakers for the night. I had never spoken a word to anyone about my teenage pregnancy (except my husband) and had this something bottled up inside of me all those years so I had to speak out. Nervously I stood before 100 women and spoke about the heartache, anxiety and depression of my teenage pregnancy during the 1960s. I spoke of the loneliness and rejection by my family and friends and the humiliation by the local community - no one wanted to know or have anything to do with me, what a disgrace I was in their eyes.

I spoke of life in the institution I was sent to, the long and lonely time in labour, the non understanding and non compassionate nursing staff and after all that there was nothing, just emptiness, loneliness and heartache just knowing I went through all this for someone else to take my son home.

During my speech I could hear gasps of disbelief and some women even cried and when I finished I was given a standing ovation. I felt relieved and very proud. One lady whispered to me "that was my story" and another said "that could have been me". There were lots of hugs and they seemed to be quite compassionate and said what a brave person I was to speak out about this.



I wanted to let the young mothers know how fortunate they are today with so much support and understanding, financially and emotionally.

It doesn't bother me any more what people think of me, I walk tall and I am at peace with myself now and I am very happy. I am happily married and we have two grown up sons together.

I have since met up with my adopted son – although strangers there is something very familiar about him. He has had to deal with a few identity issues but it sounds like he has had a happy childhood. I often wondered where he was, what did he look like, was he still alive and healthy and most of all was he adopted by loving and caring people. I find it extremely difficult to accept the fact that he calls another woman MUM.

Bless you all #elen



#### "Philomena"

A movie starring Dame Judi Dench

#### in Melbourne theatres from 26 December 2013

Based on the 2009 book written by BBC correspondent Martin Sixsmith, Philomena traces the story of an aging Irish woman as she's aided by Sixsmith to track down the son she had to give up 50 years earlier when she was only a teenager at the convent in Roscrea, County Tipperary. The search follows a path you won't soon expect and as each page of the story is written you find yourself increasingly invested in what they find.

Google "Philomena" to read several reviews and see the trailer.

#### SAVE THE DATE!! MAKE A NOTE OF THE VENUE!!

The Annual General Meeting of ARMS (Vic) will be held on Saturday, 7th of December 2013 1.30pm - 4.30pm

at The Centre For Excellence, 5th Floor, 50 Market Street (near corner of Flinders Lane) Melbourne *Melway 1A G9* 

Invitations will be posted or emailed later in October

#### **ARMS (VIC) CALENDAR 2013**

2nd NOVEMBER SUPPORT GROUP

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by

7th DECEMBER a celebration of ARMS 31st anniversary - catered by the

ARMS committee



Would all members attending support group meetings (except 7 December 2013) please bring a small plate of food to share

All meetings (except 7 December 2013) held at Queen Victoria Women's Centre 210 Lonsdale Street Melbourne

Note: No Support Group meeting in January 2014

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Note: No Support Group meeting in January 2014

All meetings (except 7 December 2013) held at South Barwon Community Centre 33 Mt Pleasant Road, Belmont 3216

Contact Thelma Adams on 5243 8302 or 0430 948 923

