



NEWSLETTER
SPRING EDITION
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CONVENOR'S REPORT

Hello and welcome to all of you amazing ladies of ARMS. I am finally organised enough to write my convenors report. Thank you Jo for the wonderful job that you did last newsletter along with all of the vast and amazing things you do for us.

My ankle is now working again and I am back to my life. Of course I could grumble about it being a bit useless still, at times, but I won't!!! I have had a lovely winter with several visits up north to see my cherished daughters (my baby turned 40 this year OMG!) along with my delightful and lively grandchildren (of course we all know that they are the real reason for my visits). I was even put in charge for a few days as the mums had work trips. There is nothing like a chance to do things "my way" in my daughters' homes. Ha Ha!

I would like to remind everyone of the opportunity that we all have at the moment to tell our story and have it go on into the future with the National Archives. They need more contributions. The National Archives Forced Adoption History Project Website is going to be filled with personal accounts of our experience of the era of Forced Adoption. Of course the word **forced** is often found to be too strong for some and not strong enough for others. It does however represent coercion, bullying, withholding of facts, subtle manipulation, as well as the more obvious such as tying up, drugging, and ignoring wishes, and all other methods used to ensure that single (and in some cases, married) women did not keep their babies. So those of you who do not feel they were forced to lose their child, this does also include you.

Please write your account of your experiences and submit them. Remember historians and future generations may wonder what this was all about and without enough submissions on record, they may not realize the enormous impact of this adoption era. Each and every ARMS member has an invaluable contribution to make for the future.

To help those who are not computer literate or don't have a computer, or who simply would like help putting their thoughts together, ARMS is starting our October and November support groups an hour early (1.00 pm) to assist anyone wanting help with their writing. If you have already written one on paper and realized that it has to be submitted electronically please bring it along or just post it to ARMS address: PO Box 645 Deepdene Vic 3103 and we will scan it and email it into National Archives for you. *Confidentiality is assured.* The support group part of the meetings will begin at 2.00 pm.

I think it is extremely important that everyone contributes - it doesn't have to be flash, just something in your own words is perfect.

Support Group meetings have been well attended with an earlier start time for Winter. As many travel quite a distance we aimed to get people back home before it was too dark and cold. I think this was a good idea and if members are happy we will do the same next winter. Now we are into Spring we will go back to the 2.00 pm start for support group meetings with a 1.00 pm start for October and November for the NAA Forced Adoptions Project submissions Workshop. I haven't completed mine yet.

Traralgon and Ballarat meetings are settling in and in the future we are looking at Mildura and other regional centres.

I have been receiving updates from the Attorney-General's Intercountry Adoption Website. I am trying to keep the ARMS website up to date with all and any changes being made. If you would like to be updated, find the links on our website.

JIGSAW in Western Australia is setting up a National Adoption & Family Separation Register as a means of letting another person know that you are interested in some information and/or contact. People separated by adoption, foster care, raised by one parent/relative, reproductive technologies, Forgotten Australians and UK Child Migrants can register. All details are confidential and will not be given to another party without your consent. There is a registration fee of \$15. If you are interested or would like more information go to www.jigsaw.org.au or ring (08) 9384 0222.

As many will remember, one of the recommendations from the Findings of the Senate Inquiry was the establishment of a true and honest Birth Certificate for adoptees that states who gave birth to them, when and where, who was their genetic father and who adopted them and when. It is time to find out what, if anything, is happening with these birth certificates. I will endeavour to keep you all updated.

As I recall there were 20 recommendations made by the Committee back then. I wonder how things are progressing with their implementation. Next Newsletter I will do a recap. I also recall Senator Rachel Siewart saying that they would fight to get all recommendations implemented but realistically we would be lucky to get half of them. That was before Tony Abbott became PM.

For those of you who missed seeing Insight last week, the topic was Surrogacy. I thought it was a good attempt to show all views on the topic. I did find some of it quite frustrating. The story of the sisters was well done with their doctor making some excellent comments - the pain of the sisters was apparent. Well worth watching the internet catch up. Insight is on SBS.

Remember this is your newsletter and we would love more contributions from members for everyone's enjoyment or commiserations.

So far I have dodged nomination for the ICE BUCKET CHALLENGE, but have had great enjoyment watching friends and family's experiences via Facebook and YouTube. Motor Neuron Disease is a devastating disease and it is fantastic to see the growing donations. I have lost an Auntie, a cousin and a dear elderly friend to this disease. I am more than happy to donate without the freezing water bath.

Welcome to our Spring Newsletter and the lengthening days. I look forward to the blossoms and daffodils, the new growth in the garden, the Melbourne Cup, the baby birds, and I even quite like the swiftly changing 4 seasons in a day Melbourne spring weather. May you all be safe and well .

Faye Nyssen

As well as the ARMS telephone number 03 9769 0232 the following committee members are happy to be contacted (between 9am and 9pm) on their personal phone numbers:

Faye Nyssen	0411 865 836	03 5985 8833
Jo Fraser	0409 442 701	03 9882 6319
Dorothy Kowalski	0411 098 773	03 9889 3583
Louise Watkins	03 9772 0094	



National Archives Forced Adoptions History Project

The National Archives of Australia's Forced Adoptions History Project Team has recently been travelling to each state and territory to undertake stakeholder engagement to support the project development process. On 13th August they hosted an evening Q & A session, at which Brenda Coughlan from Independent Regional Mothers, Coleen Clare from VANISH, Elizabeth Edwards from Origins, Brendon Carroll from FIND and Jo Fraser from ARMS spoke, outlining the work the different organisations do in the adoption arena. Kathleen Anderson from NAA also gave an update on the website and upcoming exhibition. This was followed the next day by a workshop attended by various people in the adoption community, at which we discussed ideas for the exhibition and how it could be promoted. It was a group consultation designed around consensus building and working together and will be used directly to inform the exhibition content development.

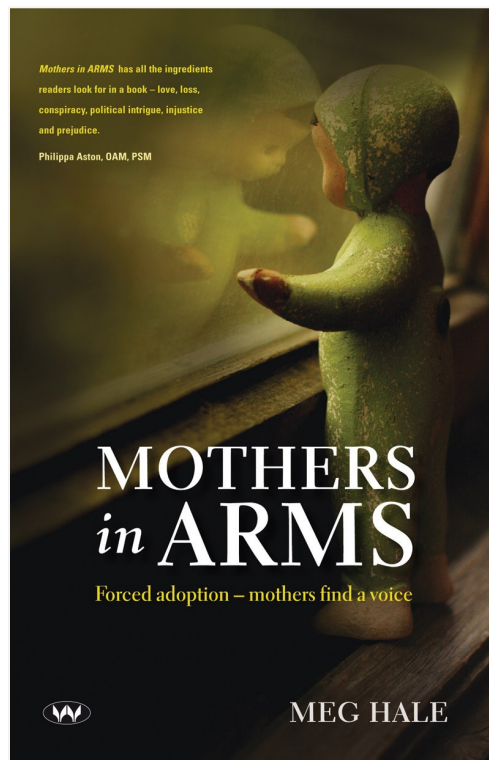
The NAA and FAHP Team are very keen to have more input from those affected by adoption and would love to have more accounts, stories, poems, drawings – whatever anyone feels they would like to contribute – on the website. The National Archives of Australia are only able to accept digital contributions (ie emails and attachments) and they understand that many of our members do not use this form of communication. They have therefore very generously given ARMS a portable scanner to use with our members.

We would encourage all our members to contribute something to the website, and if you do not use a computer, please feel free to write something and post it to PO Box 645, Deepdene 3103 and we will scan it and email it to NAA to be included on the FAHP website. If you're not sure what to write or need any help call any of the numbers below and we will help you. It's very important that our accounts are made public (they can be anonymous) so that everyone can understand what we have been through, and in fact go through all our lives.

We will be having a short workshop before one or two of our monthly support group meetings for anyone who would like to put pen to paper (similar to the flag making workshops we have done in the past).

Please don't feel you are not 'creative' or 'literate' or 'educated' enough to make a contribution. What comes from the heart is much more important than any of that.

Jo 9882 6319
Dorothy 9889 3583
Faye 5985 8833

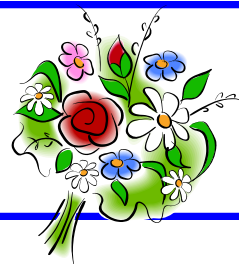


Meg Hale is a former social worker and government investigator who lost a child to adoption in South Australia in 1968.

See *Meg's comments on the proposed Memorial in South Australia.*

There are now two copies of Meg Hale's book in the ARMS library.

*Hi to all,
Thanks for a
great newsletter
Cheers, Kaye Hart*



As part of "Live with it: We all have HIV" exhibition, a sufferer wrote that, for a decade after he was diagnosed, he did not talk about it. This bottling or silence, he says, is characteristic of experiences with HIV and it affected him deeply. He said "When I [eventually] started talking about it, I realised I had never talked about it to myself. In the telling, I was actually able to understand what had happened to me"

Talking to myself and with others about the loss of my baby has helped me to put into perspective and understand "what had happened to me"
Dorothy

MOTHERS who lost their children to the forced adoption policies of the 1950s, 60s and 70s will for the first time have a physical memorial to what they endured.

A grant of \$50,000 for the memorial - likely to be a statue or other art work - has been made available to an adoption support group at the personal behest of Premier Jay Weatherill.

The money was made available after a memorial was suggested to the Premier by mothers who were present when, in August 2012, he apologised on behalf of the State Government for the forced adoption policies of the past.

Nikki Hartmann is the manager of the Post Adoption Support Services program at Relationships Australia, which will manage the building of the memorial.

"It's very early days yet," she said. "We haven't even begun community consultation yet."

A steering committee would be appointed, she said, and input would be invited from members of the adoption community.

"It might be a statue or an art work, and it would be in a public place yet to be decided."

Meg Hale, who gave up a child in 1968 and helped lobby to change the law to allow relinquishing mothers access to secret adoption records, welcomed plans for the memorial.

"It will be a place where people can go and reflect on what happened," she said. "It will be a lasting and tangible thing."

Ms Hale was the first social worker for the Australian Relinquishing Mothers Association (ARMS) which in the 1980s campaigned for adoption records to be opened up so that mothers could find the children they had been forced to give up from the 1950s through to the '70s.

Thanks to their efforts, in 1988 South Australia became the first government in the English-speaking world to give mothers the same rights to information as adopted adults.

Hale has chronicled the campaign in a new book *Mothers In ARMS* to be launched on September 13. The launch will also double as a reunion for the mothers who joined the fight to help find their lost children.

"I wanted to tell the story of this amazing bunch of women who were resilient survivors," said Ms Hale. "Not victims, not women who'd done a terrible thing or bad girls or whatever the expression was for us, but as a group of really gutsy women who in spite of their own fear pulled together and made history.

"And if society learned something about that, about what happened in the past and please let us never do that again, that was a bonus."

The South Australia ARMS group was disbanded after 20 years in 2010. However Ms Hale fears that our continuing obsession with providing solutions to infertile couples may set back the gains made by groups such as ARMS.

"We now have a Federal Government that is taking back control over overseas adoptions and fast-tracking local adoptions, and there's a concern within the adoption movement that we may go back to some of those old ways of thinking about adoption," she said.

Ms Hale said that even as far back as the '80s, women in the adoption movement regarded surrogacy and donor sperm programs as secret adoptions under another guise and believed that, in years to come, those children would come forward — just as adoptees had — to argue they had a right to know their genetic backgrounds.

Their prophesy proved correct, said Ms Hale, citing a recent ABC Australian Story program which documented the ultimately successful search by a young woman conceived using donor sperm to identify and make contact with her biological father.

Children, Youth & Families (Permanent Care and Other Matters) Bill 2014

The State Government recently debated an amendment to the Children, Youth & Families (Permanent Care and Other Matters) Bill in which they have prioritised the care of children who are at risk in the following order:

Keeping the family unit

Reunification with family

Adoption

Permanent care

Out of home care

As usual, there was no consultation with ARMS or other groups supporting those with adoption experiences, so the ARMS committee, along with other relevant groups, contacted Mary Wooldridge's office, the Shadow Minister Jenny Mikakos and The Greens to voice our concerns at adoption being given a higher priority than permanent care. Our letter said in part:

"While we agree that children in need of protection should be helped in a timely manner and in the best way possible, adoption should be considered as a last resort only after all other options have been fully explored. If adoption is found to be the only valid option, the preference is for children to be adopted by extended biologically related family members. Adoption is a permanent severing of family. The proposal that adoption be placed as a higher priority than permanent care orders and out of home care, when these two allow the same result without the need to change a child's identity, is of huge concern.

We have seen the results of the adoption of many of our own children: the lifelong feelings of lack of identity, extreme loss and grief, disenfranchisement and blame. These feelings can arise even if the adoptee has had a "good adoption experience".

One of the causes of lack of identity is the changing of a child's name given at birth. All children's identities should be preserved, whether they are ultimately in out of home care, permanent

care or adoption. It is extremely important that connection to the family be continued wherever possible, and that appropriate support services are in place to help the children and their parents work through the separation. The case workers responsible for such pre- and post-placement support services would need to have their numbers and skills increased as a matter of urgency."

After the Bill was considered in the Lower House and passed we attended a meeting with Mary Wooldridge's representative to discuss our concerns.

The Bill went to the Upper House and was passed on 2nd September.



I have a story to share.....



In 1971, I was forced to adopt my baby son out. (Before the 30 days were up, I applied to get him back but I was told he had died.)

In 1973, at a routine Drs appointment with the same Dr I had for my pregnancy, I asked if my child was alive. His records indicated that I gave birth to a live baby boy.

In mid-1996 I applied for information about my son and I received scant information but at least it was something. Neither my son nor his adoptive parents were looking for me, so really I couldn't do anything else but wait and if information came through, it would be censored through the Adoption Information service.

Late in 1996 I was given my son's Christian name and some vague, non-identifying information about his parents. I also used FOI to access my medical records which showed I was given sleeping medication so that's why I have no memory of hospital; although, I do have a memory of my son being born as he was born really quickly and my doctor wasn't present; therefore, a doctor who was there for another patient assisted with the birth. He announced I had given birth to a healthy boy. I also saw my son had black hair. A midwife, in a very loud voice announced that he was an **A** baby and that was the end of dialogue and memory.

The information given to me in late 1996 was enough for me to start looking at archival records, looking for a surname. The family lived on the west coast of Tasmania and the father was a shift boss. I searched every archival record of mining on the west coast of Tasmania and came up with my son's surname. I didn't

know whether I had the correct surname - I was just convinced I had it. I sat with the information for years and years. I went through phone books and rang everyone who had the same name ... all to no avail. (Now I know more, I am pretty sure I did ring my son's adoptive parents!)

I just lived in hope that my son was trying to contact me. I joined a small adoption support group, where the women had found their children (I think because their children were females). Not all reunions were happy but I was certain my reunion would be perfect!

I received one letter from the adoption service and it was a copy of my son's adoption order. It came in 1999 ... 3years after I began my searching. I think it was about this time when forced adoptions were being scrutinized and public apologies started.

The internet was born!

I did search after search for my son and one day, I had a hit! The information had his full name, birth date and address and then I found he had a business, with a phone number!

I waited for ages before I made the phone call. I made the call in 2006.

Yes, I can still remember how I felt and where I was standing etc when I made the first phone call. I was ecstatic. I thought we would stay in contact and he would email me and we would meet really quickly - (Don't all mums think like this?) Reality was, he wasn't ready and we didn't meet and he didn't really stay in contact. I had read where adoptees may need time and may never want to meet, but I was certain my son would want to meet me. I think all mums who have adopted a child out would think like I did.

Time marched on and I made a couple of phone calls to my son and I sent a few text messages. He was happy and pleasant. In 2010 he sent me a "Happy Mother's Day" text. I was ecstatic!! No more communication for a year or two.

Facebook:

Yes, I found him on Facebook and sent a request to be added as a friend. He reciprocated. He didn't post much but I could see he had a partner and I added her and I could also see he had a sister. Really, there wasn't much contact.

I wasn't happy staying in the background year after year but I had read enough about other mums to realise it was something I just had to do.

Moving right along to Saturday 20th June 2014. I received a text message from my son saying he was thinking of coming down to see me on Tuesday 24th June! I wasn't even at home! I was in a different state caring for my sister, but I was on my way home. I was ever so excited and nervous.

I think I was guarded to some extent. My life hasn't

really been easy and many people have been 'taken' away from me and I was protecting myself from any more hardship. My daughter wondered why I wasn't more excited.

He arrived on Tuesday afternoon and both my daughter, (his sister) and I greeted him. It really wasn't overwhelming ... it seemed like we had always known him.

He is nearly 43 years old!

I gave birth to him 43 years ago and I was brain washed into thinking I was evil, bad and his life would be better if he was brought up by another woman and man.

43 years ago!

I'm amazed. He came into my life just like he had 43 years ago ... suddenly - with little warning. He just walked right back into my life.

We chatted over dinner and everything felt just right. I said a few things about why he was adopted out. I didn't want to bang on about how sad the whole thing was. I asked about his mum and dad and adopted sister. The conversation just flowed from one thing to another; nothing grand, just normal conversation with a person who seemed to be like my daughter and me.

My daughter spent the next day with him and really bonded with him as he did with her. We had another dinner with great conversation and another really lovely evening together. I could feel that I really loved him. I didn't want him to go. On his last day, I spent the day with him and my love for him grew.

Just writing this makes me feel sad as he has gone home and I really miss him. I haven't had contact with him today and that's the first day for a week that I haven't had any contact. I really miss him.

I think this is an amazing story and I think it's amazing enough to share with other women and men who have been scarred by past adoption practices.

PS

My son was 32 when his mum told him he was adopted. He was traumatised. When I asked why she didn't tell him when he was a lot younger, he replied, because his mum said she always thought I would take him back - that I would find a way to take her baby away from her. That's sad too. He loved his mum and dad and they were really good people and they treated him really well.

I love my new found son.

He calls me mum!

Carolyn

DISCLAIMER:

All contributions are presented with the aim of sharing ideas.

Views expressed by contributors are not necessarily endorsed by ARMS

If you or anyone you know lives in the general area of **Ballarat, Traralgon** or **Geelong**, please remember that we now run support groups in those areas.

The second **Ballarat support group meeting will be held on Saturday, 20th September at 2.00 pm** (see support group calendar for the address).

Of course any mothers are more than welcome to attend the Melbourne group as well as their regional group if they like!



I have finally finished reading "The Other Mother" by Carol Schaefer. Quite a good read. Gets one thinking. One section really touched me and had me thinking. I'd like to share with you all.

*"I overcame my earlier resistance to a female therapist when I realized I actually did not trust women and myself as a woman.
When I gave up my son, it was women who had facilitated it:
my mother, the social worker, the nuns at the home, the nurses at the hospital.
Not one woman came forth for me, expressed concern for the great female power that I was being asked to deny, keep secret, and give up.
I had been outraged by this betrayal by my own sex.
Women should have known better what real damage they were doing to another woman.
It wasn't that impossible to function in society as an unwed mother.
Any one of the women that touched my life back then could have shown me another way.
Why didn't they?"*

SOUNDS A LITTLE FAMILIAR?

Gail



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

WOES

or as others call it,

Walking On Egg Shells

There comes a time in your relationship
with your relinquished child, now adult,
that you face the dreaded WOES.

Careful what you say
Too much information
Too little information
Not what they want to hear ...

I could go on (and on)

You know where I am going on this?

Careful how you show your affection.
Too much, too little – do they actually want to be hugged or kissed?
There is no rule book for them or for us.
We often learn the hard way.
We can both be on that slippery slope.

Unfortunately, rejection can be the end result for some.

There is ARMS. Mothers there know what you are going through.
Ready to listen to you and maybe offer a few suggestions.
Never there to judge.

Hang in there if you are in the WOES period.

Gail ♥

Michael Leunig's cartoon WOES of the Whirled just happened to be published recently. When we asked for permission to reprint his cartoon, Michael generously replied . . .

"I was greatly touched and informed by your thoughtful letter. Thank you, and of course you may use my cartoon as requested. All good wishes with your work in this difficult, delicate and profound matter. I imagine there is much sadness involved but I trust there is joy and healing in it also. Good on you and keep up the good work." Cheers, Michael Leunig.



ARMS (VIC) CALENDAR 2014



MELBOURNE GROUP

- 4th October 1pm start SUPPORT GROUP
1st November 1pm start SUPPORT GROUP
6th December AGM - invitations with all venue and time details will be sent out in mid November

*Meetings held at Queen Victoria Women's Centre 210 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne - enter through door at rear of building*

GEELONG GROUP

- 4th October 2pm start SUPPORT GROUP
1st November 2pm start SUPPORT GROUP
6th December AGM - invitations with all venue and time details will be sent out in mid November

*Meetings held at South Barwon Community Centre
33 Mt Pleasant Rd Belmont Contact Thelma Adams on 0430 948 923*

TRARALGON GROUP

- 18th October 2pm start SUPPORT GROUP - MOTHERS ONLY
6th December AGM - invitations with all venue and time details will be sent out in mid November

*Meetings held at Traralgon Neighbourhood Learning House 11/13 Breed St
Traralgon 3844 Contact Shirley Corin on 0429 698 367 or 03 5174 4889*

BALLARAT GROUP

- 20th September 2pm start SUPPORT GROUP
6th December AGM - invitations with all venue and time details will be sent out in mid November
20th December 2pm start SUPPORT GROUP

*Meetings held at 119 Lydiard St North, Ballarat 3500 (opposite the
railway and bus station) Contact Jo Fraser on 0409 442 701*

ALL MOTHERS WELCOME and those who attend the Regional Support Groups are warmly invited to Mothers Day and AGM/Christmas meetings in Melbourne. Of course any mothers are more than welcome to attend the Melbourne group as well as their regional group if they like!

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