



NEWSLETTER

WINTER EDITION JULY 2014

Association of Relinquishing Mothers (Vic) Inc.

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CONVENOR'S REPORT

Welcome to the Winter ARMS Newsletter.

Another Mothers' Day has been and gone, and we hope that it wasn't too difficult a day for many. Our own ARMS celebration was very well attended, including some of our Geelong sisters, and we look forward next year to including members from our newest regional support groups! As you read in the last newsletter, our Traralgon Support Group is up and running, and a couple of weeks ago we had our inaugural Support Group Meeting in Ballarat. There are more in the pipeline, which is very exciting. There are still so many women who don't realise that they can be supported by those who "know". We just have to help them find out about us.

There was an interesting segment on Neil Mitchells' show on 3AW recently. He played a tape of a man who rang his show in 1995, crying because he had "won the lottery...won first prize." And what was his prize? A baby girl for whom he and his wife had finalised adoption at 3.30 the afternoon before. He was very emotional and obviously very happy and wanted to share his good news. This man and his now 19 year old adopted daughter and her 4 week old baby were in the studio with Neil Mitchell, listening to the tape along with the audience. Neil talked at length about how wonderful it was and how the daughter must feel like a princess and asked how their life had been for those 19 years. Of course life is not all beer and skittles, but apparently as things go, they've had a fairly good time of it. The family also adopted a son a couple of years later.

What was interesting was that there was no mention whatsoever of the girl's mother. It would obviously have been an open adoption, but there were no questions or comments about whether the girl had grown up knowing her mother; how heartbreaking it must have been for her to put her daughter up for adoption; how she might feel now. It was as if this woman doesn't exist.

The talkback calls following the interview were varied and full of the usual clichés. You could almost hear the phrases before they said them:

- The social worker who handled the adoption in question rang in to say she remembered it clearly and how wonderful it had all been. The man had rung her after his initial call to 3AW saying he may have put his foot in it, because he gave his name and announced his new adopted daughter's full name. She told him not to worry - they would deal with it!
- A man who had adopted a child from an eastern European country also in 1995 after a "6 year pregnancy" bemoaned the fact that the Victorian & Federal Governments had such difficult regulations and the country in question made it even harder, changing their rules back and forth, and that's why it took 6 years from the start of the process until they had a baby in their arms. They adopted another child after a "2 year pregnancy" and it was "all worth it".
- A woman put her daughter up for adoption because she was only 18 and unable to cope with raising a child, but kept in contact with her and "now I have 2 children of my own." They all go to each others' birthday parties, and everything's wonderful, and she wishes more people would talk about the positive side of adoption instead of putting it down. It was the best thing she could have done.
- A very angry man blasted "these people" who have babies and then give them away. They have no right to adopt their babies out; what sort of lives are they living? They shouldn't get pregnant in the first place. Neil Mitchell gave him a blast back saying he had no right to judge people when he has

no idea what their circumstances were, and how difficult it would be to give your baby up for adoption.

Very difficult to listen to and so disheartening that so many people still just don't get it.

Hopefully everyone is keeping as warm as they can now that winter has finally hit with a vengeance. Sit back with a cup of warm something and enjoy the newsletter.

Speaking of keeping warm: Faye is on sunny Magnetic Island for her daughter's 40th birthday for a couple of weeks, so this convenor's report has been written on her behalf! (she's a bit busy!!)

Jo Fraser



'Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards'

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	





Shirley: Your comments about running out of tears reminded me about this intense description of grief. I always feel that at ARMS I can believe it when someone says 'I know':

Philomena the movie was based on a book by Martin Sixsmith called *The Lost Child of Philomena Lee*. I was given the DVD and the book for Mothers' Day - at my request. When I sat down to read the book I assumed it was pretty close to the movie of Philomena Lee - following Philomena's journey to find her son.

It's actually more the story of Michael Hess - the name given to Anthony Lee after he was adopted by an American couple. I found the book disturbing on several fronts - the fact that the mothers actually cared for their children for years after they were born and the total lack of compassion by the Church toward the mothers.

It was interesting that the Irish Government was already looking into the adoption practices in Ireland at the time Philomena gave birth, after the actress Jane Russell received massive publicity in America following her adoption of an Irish child, but the Catholic Church in Ireland obviously had more power.

Without giving too much away for those who want to read it, Michael was treated as badly as his mother was by the nuns who were, in my opinion, despicable in their dealings with everyone concerned with adoptions, except of course the ones who had the money to pay for the children. Much of the book deals with Michael's life in America. It describes his heavy involvement in politics, and the fact that he was gay and eventually contracted AIDS while working in an extremely anti-gay environment.

I wanted to put the book down many times but was so engrossed in his life that I couldn't. I did not cry watching the movie but was in tears while reading the book and totally disgusted with the behaviour of the church - who liked to preach doing God's work while behaving in a cruel and heartless manner, trafficking in children's lives.

Thank you, Georgina. ARMS will purchase a copy of the book for our library. We already have a copy of the DVD 'Philomena'.

Philomena

I saw *Philomena* with a friend and emerged to see most of the audience mopping up tears. I didn't shed one. My counsellor asked me about my reactions and I explained that to me, it's just one more story and I hear them *all* on the first Saturday of every month and I've actually run out of tears.

Shirley

"All the grief I had kept at bay for years by means of books and bookcases approached me



now. ... I abandoned myself to a sorrow that was wide and deep as the snow itself, and as untainted. I cried for ... my sister, my mother and my father. Mostly, and most terribly, I cried for myself. My

grief was that of the infant, newly severed from her other half ... When I came to myself Dr Clifton was there. He put an arm around me. 'I know,' he said, 'I know.'

He didn't know, of course. Not really. And yet that was what he said and I was soothed to hear it. For I knew what he meant. We all have our sorrows, and although the exact delineaments, the weight and the dimensions of grief are different for everyone, the colour of grief is common to us all. 'I know,' he said, because he was human, and therefore, in a way, he did".

*"The Thirteenth Tale" by Diane Settlefield
Pages 434 and 435*

The Burden of Secrecy and Shame

An ARMS mother heard that a man aged 47 received a letter from a stranger who wrote that she thought that she might be his sister. The man showed the letter to his elderly mother and asked her whether this could possibly be true. His mother disclosed that she had indeed had a daughter who was relinquished for adoption and about whom she had never spoken to anyone, except for her (now deceased) husband. She said to the son "Are you cross with me?" and then asked the man to tell her brother and two sisters.

How sad that shame and secrecy and fear had been her constant companions throughout her entire adult life. The outcome was that she met her daughter and family and they are now in regular contact.

DISCLAIMER:

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

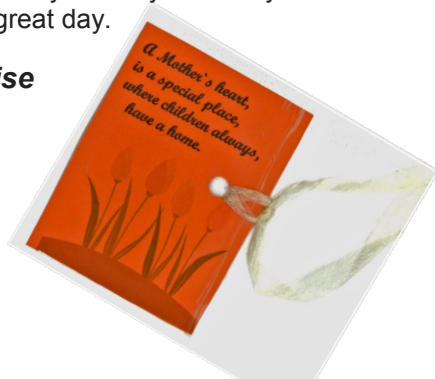
ARMS celebrated Mothers Day a week before the official date to allow us to acknowledge and remember that we are mothers and to honour each of us. We are especially aware at this time of those ARMS mothers who have not had other children.



This is a day that brings to all of us emotions of joy as well as a great sense of loss. It is shared in a supportive, happy and pleasant environment. Thus the roses, champagne and the lovely afternoon tea all contribute to ensuring that each mother has the Mothers Day that has been denied to so many of us.

I, for one would hate to think where I would be today without the support and thoughtfulness of ARMS. Our celebration on Saturday 3rd May was very well attended and was indeed a great day.

Love to all, Louise



Pat wrote: "Thanks for all you do. The Mothers Day meeting was a great success."

Grace wrote: "Sorry I am unable to attend the Mothers Day function. All the best to everyone"

Christine wrote: "Thanks for the newsletters. Very good reading. Love to all"



These cards were tied to the roses which were given to our mothers at the Mothers Day Support Group

What sustains you through all the years of grief and loss? Here's how one mother (not an ARMS member) copes:

"Imagine if you were preparing a wonderful gift for somebody, creating it yourself over time, perhaps a garment, a quilt or an intricately knitted throw, until the time came to gift it to the person whom you knew would appreciate it to infinity.

In the following years you might wonder if they still had it, if it lasted the time and if they are still getting pleasure from it.

You might even occasionally think 'Gee, it would be nice to snuggle into that throw that I gifted to them'.

But I, myself would never think of wanting it back, even to experience it from time to time. It was my gift to them and I am always happy that I could do that for a loving and deserving person.

One could ask 'What about the throw? Might it want to meet the person who created it? Might it experience a feeling of rejection by its creator, rather than feeling it was given away as a selfless and generous gift?

Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)

In January 2013 new privacy restrictions made it unlawful to use the AEC roll to track down family connections, including people searching for those they lost through adoption. This has made it almost impossible for organisations whose job it is to help in these searches to access the information held at the AEC.

After last year's National Apology the Government committed \$11.5 million over the next 4 years, some of which helps with family tracing services. Social Services Minister Kevin Andrews has written to the joint standing committee on electoral matters, asking it to consider recommending that access to the roll be restored for organisations that help put families together. Mr Andrews said the Government is committed to supporting child migrants and people affected by adoption: "Reunions are a fundamental part of the healing process for people affected by adoption."

Mr Andrews should be encouraged to continue his push to reverse the privacy ban as it affects the AEC. We are quick to criticise politicians if they make decisions we don't like – we should also encourage them if we feel they are making the 'right' decision!

If you would like to contact Mr Andrews to give your point of view you can do so on 9848 9900 or menzies@aph.gov.au

Jo Fraser



BALLARAT NEW SUPPORT GROUP

On the 21st June 2014, Jo, Dorothy, Louise and I headed off to Ballarat where our mission was to set up a new support group. We took along the ARMS banner, the flags that we'd made and the new Tree of Life banner with our individual leaves

As usual we all introduced ourselves and gave a brief overview of our individual past/present history of relinquishment.

By listening to others and learning of their experiences, we can appreciate the importance of ARMS and how we must assist others in their time of need. No matter what stories are shared, it still pulls on our heart strings. I personally sometimes feel like I'm in a time warp. We went through many tissues in the course of that afternoon.

As we all know, time ticks on by, and before long it was time to say our goodbyes, to thank each other for listening and something I find most of us do, to give HUGS of comfort.

"HUGS of, been there done that, I understand."

Gail

NATIONAL ADOPTION AWARENESS WEEK

I am a mother. I am not a "birth" mother. Birthmother is an insulting name that was created by the adoption industry to keep us in our place and make us feel as though we have no rights. I am the mother who gave birth to a very lovely and healthy daughter but was forced to lose her.

Every person has a mother and a father when they are born. No one else gives birth to them, only their mother. If another woman has the privilege of raising someone else's child then that is the Adoptive mother not, as many adoptees tell us, the "real" mother.

For any woman to become an Adoptive mother, a mother must have her heart broken and be dashed to the rocks. **This is the reality of adoption.** To lose a child is a grief that can never be finalized. To lose a child to adoption is even more severe as that child's life is not finished, but goes on. That child that you ache and long for is removed from you and cannot be grieved for because the child is alive. The mother wanders in the darkness searching for the part of her that is missing. That part of her is somewhere, but where? Not near her body when a baby, and not in her care as a child, which is where that part of herself is meant to be.

As a child, teenager and an adult that adopted person is trying to come to terms with their own loss and grief. They may not call it that but inside they know something is missing.

Who do they look like? Why do they have long toes, crooked fingers, why do they love swimming and so on. Where do they belong in history? What is their genetic connection to the earth and to society?

Watch the TV show *Who Do You Think You Are?* and see people weep for their great grandmother's suffering or their great great grandfather's pain. The connection cannot be denied any longer.

We do not need anyone acting out their own issues by trying to sink their teeth into Australian adoption laws. We do not need people who live in other countries coming to Australia and telling us what is wrong with our adoption laws or attitude.

Australian Adoption laws have been updated. Australian Adoption Laws are well ahead of those in countries like the US. Many other countries are gradually changing their own laws. Australian Adoption Laws changed because of a lot of very hard work by people who have lived the "adoption" experience, who understand the realities of adoption and don't buy into the **ridiculous**

fairytale that the adoption industry feeds society.

That **ridiculous fairytale** does not take any real feelings into consideration.

The feelings of the baby/child/adult who has to adopt someone else's reality, someone else's extended family and pretend to fit in because their very lives depend on how good they are at pretending they belong.

The feelings of the mother whose grief and pain cannot adequately be put into words as they are so primal and lasting.

And the feelings of the Adoptive parents, Oh yes, they have a lovely baby they can pretend is their own. But they all know that if they had had their own then this baby would not be with them. Does this make the adoptee second best? How does the Adoptive mother handle squashing her feelings of disorientation? Does that ignored feeling come out in other battles? They know this baby came from someone else's womb, was and is still joined to another woman physiologically. And that is only the start of that story. It goes on throughout the baby, child, adult's life.

They will never have grandchildren who fulfil their biological needs to reproduce their own image, and genetics. Their family tree actually becomes someone else's.

To celebrate adoption with an Adoption Awareness week is a travesty. It is an insult to mothers who have spent their lives in pain longing for their child. It is an insult to the intelligence of every person in the community. It is like saying the Adoption Industry can control your thoughts and make you believe anything they want.

Australia has had enough of that cruel fantasy. The State Governments have apologised for past adoption practices (Victoria - 25th October 2012). The Federal Government apologised on behalf of the whole nation in March 2013. They all acknowledged the damage that adoption practices caused to hundreds of thousands of people throughout Australia, and apologised for it.

And now because some celebrity wants to celebrate and justify her own life choices, these hundreds of thousands of people are supposed to suffer though the farce of the celebration of National Adoption Awareness Week.

This is horrible.

Faye Nyssen



Peta Jan Morrison

11.08.1959 – 08.05.2014

Aged 54 Years



Printed courtesy of the office of

Senator Gavin Marshall

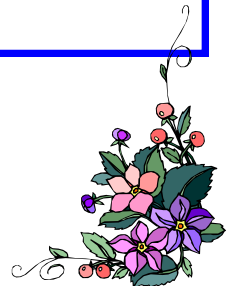
Labor Senator for Victoria

ARMS sends sincere condolences to Anne Nazari whose daughter passed away on 8th May 2014.

Anne received a phone call three days later, on the morning of Mothers Day, and heard that there had already been a private cremation service.

She was invited to a memorial service and attended with friends and some of her family.

The celebrant acknowledged Anne.



ARMS wishes Julienne Lauer a full and complete recovery from recent heart surgery, which kept her in hospital for several weeks.

Julienne wishes to thank ARMS mothers for their cards and good wishes and hopes to be at the next support group meeting.



ARMS (VIC) CALENDAR 2014



MELBOURNE GROUP

- 5th July 1pm start SUPPORT GROUP
2nd August 1pm start SUPPORT GROUP
6th September 1pm start SUPPORT GROUP

Meetings held at Queen Victoria Women's Centre 210 Lonsdale Street Melbourne
(enter from rear of building)

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

GEELONG GROUP

- 5th July 2pm start SUPPORT GROUP
2nd August 2pm start SUPPORT GROUP
6th September 2pm start SUPPORT GROUP

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

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

TRARALGON GROUP

- 19th July 2pm start SUPPORT GROUP - MOTHERS ONLY
18th October 2pm start SUPPORT GROUP - MOTHERS ONLY

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

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

BALLARAT GROUP

- 21st June First meeting held - see report in this issue
20th September 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

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

ALL MOTHERS WELCOME and those who attend the
Regional Support Groups are warmly invited to Mothers Day and
AGM/Christmas meetings in Melbourne

Very Important



Annual membership fees have been increased from \$25 to \$30. Your fee for the financial year 1st July 2014 to 30 June 2015 is now due!

Membership fees are our only regular source of income, and are vital for paying expenses of telephone, stationery, rental of rooms for Support Group meetings and Mothers Day and AGM meetings, incorporation fees and annual Consumer Affairs audit and lodging fees.

The ARMS Constitution indicates that fees are not compulsory, but that "All ordinary members are encouraged to become financial members." (Section 4b of the Constitution)

Note: ARMS will continue to provide newsletters to members, regardless of whether membership fees have been paid

Please return completed membership form, even if unable to pay



ASSOCIATION OF RELINQUISHING MOTHERS (VIC) INC.

A0040803Y

MEMBERSHIP FORM

NAME:

ADDRESS:

POSTCODE: TELEPHONE/s:

EMAIL ADDRESS:

I enclose \$30 annual membership fee for 1/7/2014 to 30/6/2015 financial year

SIGNATURE: DATE:

Membership fee \$30

I wish to make a donation to ARMS \$

Please forward to: ARMS P O Box 645 Deepdene 3103

If paying online:

Westpac Bank BSB 033 - 039 Account 732592

Please make sure you enter your name as the reference