

# Post Adoption News

Autumn Edition  
2022

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# Welcome to Post Adoption News

As we all embark on a New Year that seems fraught with continued uncertainty we can only stop to acknowledge and admire how adaptable and flexible this new world order has encouraged us to become. It is a real sense of achievement that we have managed to stay connected to family and friends despite the barriers and complexities.

PARC and PASQ made changes to our programs, groups and resources to increase accessibility to clients, pooling resources across the NSW/QLD border to ensure we continue to reach people who need assistance. It has been wonderful to see the uptake of online materials and groups by so many people.

This edition, we pause to remember Vikki (a well-known member of the adoption community in NSW) and acknowledge her recent passing.

In the following articles, we're exploring "Secrets". This is a recurring theme for families affected by adoption, perpetuating feelings of shame and worthlessness. We share client stories on Secrets and the latest PARC video featuring adopted people who discovered the secret of their adoption later in life. We also reproduce an article on secrets that still rings true today.

As well, we share the events and program for the Post Adoption Services planned for this year.

Happy reading!

PARC and PASQ Teams

## Secrets and Adoption

It is clear that all people in the adoption constellation bear the costs of secrecy. There are so many ways that people who are impacted by adoption are beholden to the secrets of others.

There are those who were never told that they were adopted and there were those who were told but it was never spoken of in the family. One adopted person described it as "I feel like a child keeping a big secret for lots of adults that has nothing to do with me". Many adopted people talk about never telling friends and family when they were growing up because it felt shameful to them. Secrets continue in adoptive families as so many adopted people do not share their search and reunion journey with their adoptive family. They are complicit in the secrecy in an effort to protect adoptive parents from feelings of rejection. How do you reassure parents when you are an adult, that their place in your life is not at risk by your need to find your biological roots?

Parents have truly paid the heavy price of secrecy. They were vulnerable and isolated through secrecy, and for many, their rights were violated. Not only did they suffer the loss of their child, but many have also had to bear this loss in silence and secrecy. It was not until secrets were exposed and records were opened that the true cost of adoption was revealed. In the era of secrecy, it was believed that a child's needs were met through adoption and there was only further involvement when something went significantly wrong in an adoptive family. Now we know that all adoption comes with needs, questions and feelings that warrant validation and exploration.

For a mother who lost a child to adoption, the secret of having had a pregnancy and a child – can weigh them down for years. Some mothers who later married the man who fathered their child, have never spoke of it again with him. Many disclose that they were never allowed to speak of it to their mothers and fathers who had insisted on the adoption. When is the right time to tell a new husband or family that you have had a child before them?

When the records opened in the early 1990's some people felt the burden of secrecy as a betrayal by government who assured them that their secret would be safe forever, whereas others felt it lightened the load of having kept a secret for so long. Children in families, whose mother lost a child through adoption, often feel that they were not entitled to talk about the secret as it is not theirs to share. Of course, the advent of DNA testing is revealing the holes in families that have never been filled.

Secrets can create a deafening silence and rather than protecting people from a difficult truth it instead burdens them with a silent barrier.

## Your thoughts on: "Adoption and Secrecy"

We'd like to hear your views on "adoption and secrecy" for our next Newsletter. In 100 words or less **have you been affected by an adoption secret?**

Submissions will be considered for publication (anonymously) in our next edition:

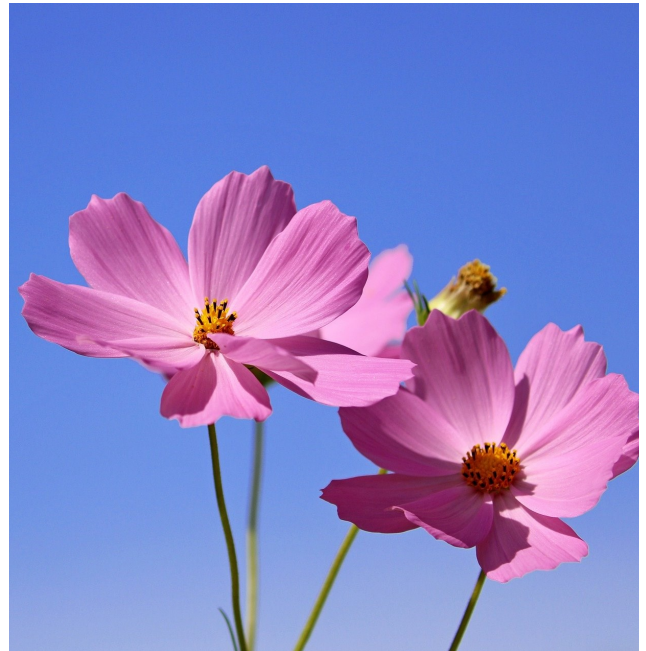
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## For Vikki

It is much sadness that PARC acknowledges the death of a well known member of the adoption community, Vikki Fisher. Vikki was a staunch advocate for adoption reform and worked tirelessly as a volunteer online to help people on their adoption journey making connections for people and guiding them with support and resources. She went on to be a Lifeline counsellor and supported the NSW Forced Adoption Support Service and Origins NSW as well as being a regular contributor to PARC meetings and groups.

We extend our condolences to her son and to her many friends in the Adoption community.





## 32 Years Down The Track ... Surviving Secrets

Marg Watson, PARC Counsellor, is well-known in the adoption community both for her professional skill and compassion and for the way she has shared her personal experience of late discovery of adoption for the benefit of others. Marg published her book, *Surviving Secrets*, in 2009. Here Marg writes about learning of her adoption 32 years ago and her long journey to hope and healing.

12 February 1990 is burned in my brain as if it were yesterday. A hot, humid day with cornflower blue sky, sulphur crested cockatoos screeching mixed with the shrilling sounds of cicadas. Into this picture-perfect day the tsunami of adoption revelation slammed into my life and derailed it.

The deliverer, revealing my adoption for the first time in my life, was my then husband who had kept this information from me for 12 years of our marriage. He had chosen to leave the marriage 2 weeks prior to his delivery. By the time this revelation came to me, my adoptive parents and beloved grandmother had died. A quick ring around to my cousins revealed they had also known this truth about me. All said it had been my parents' role to tell me, rather than relieve themselves of that duty by passing the secret on to my husband, with which I agreed. In one fell swoop at age 40, my identity, marriage and family were destroyed.

This occurred a year prior to the establishment of the Post Adoption Resource Centre in preparation for the new Adoption Information Act 1990, enacted on 1st April 1991. I was referred to a social worker at the Benevolent Society who became one of the first staff members of PARC. On hearing my story, the social worker remarked, "what a betrayal". Her words were affirming and validated the trauma and response I was experiencing.

In the year between the revelation and the legislation changing, I applied for my adoption records which I received post 1st April 1991. Now I had my mother's name and my original birth certificate, and I began a 2-year search to locate my mother. I became PARC's first Late Discovery Adoptee client attending whatever groups were held to feed my voracious appetite for other's adoption stories. On behalf of PARC, I provided publicity for ABC radio interviews and Sydney Morning Herald articles on the impact of late discovery.

All the while, I grappled with emotional upheaval while working full time and emotionally supporting my two young sons. They faced the challenges of their father abandoning them and a mother who was largely emotionally absent, trying to survive and cope. We had limited close family and a wonderful band of close friends who provided infinite support, meals, listening and compassionate ears as I repetitively talked over

my situation. Sadly, for unsuspecting strangers adjacent to me on a bus or in a supermarket queue, they were the surprised recipients of my story – something I still cringe at in embarrassment.

Between 1990 – 1994, I engaged in weekly counselling and then somatic therapy with two wonderful female practitioners. One was a former midwife who understood the impact of broken attachment and bonding at birth, the first life experience for adopted people removed from mother.

In 1992, I had a miraculous reunion with my mother and her husband in Melbourne with the added bonus of learning I had a sister, brother, brother-in-law, nieces and nephews. For a person who grew up as the only child of older parents, finding and being accepted by people who mirrored me was the sweetest gift.

**“...finding and being accepted by people who mirrored me was the sweetest gift.”**

In 1994, PARC invited me to write an article for this newsletter. In it, I spoke of the emotional roller coaster ride of the first few years post discovery – *“feelings of rage, anger, terror, disbelief, powerlessness, shame, fear, grief, pain, loss, despair, depression. Any or all of these would flood me leaving me feeling worthless and exhausted. The edge of the “black hole” felt like one menacing step away and suicidal thoughts often came to taunt me”*.

Eventually the supportive counselling and therapy made its mark. I decided to take back my personal power and focus on creating a new life, believing I had wallowed too long as a victim of my adoption revelation. I couldn't change my (hi)story, however I did have choices and new possibilities. I engaged in several personal growth courses with a spiritual/Buddhist component while continuing therapy. One of my mantras travelled with me – *“I am not what happened to me. I am what I choose to become”* C.G Jung

In 1994, I commenced a Master of Counselling. After a year in this course, I realised that somatic psychotherapy and the existential nature of that work was where I really wanted to be and practice. So, in 1995 I commenced a somatic psychotherapy course - the modality of how we hold trauma and all life experiences in our somatic and character structures.

Shortly after, I began a new relationship with Robert, my first since my marriage ended. He was a loving, caring man, one who lit up a room with his energy and charisma. My sons and I were warmly welcomed into his family of 3 adult children, grandson and wide extended family. Three years into our relationship, Robert was head hunted by an American firm. He accepted their position with reservations, as it involved overseas travel and a relocation to Melbourne. The latter he did not want to do, fearing it would damage our relationship. None of my reassurances could settle him. Nor those from his boss to be who promised him the bulk of Sydney work while the other staff worked from Melbourne. We were to travel to USA in January 1998 so he could meet his American work colleagues. A week prior, Robert took his life.

I intuitively knew there was something amiss. Robert adored his children and family, and deeply loved myself and my sons. His former wife and I were on good terms, and she disclosed that very early in their marriage, Robert had been diagnosed with bipolar in the 1960's at a time when medication was not developed to treat the condition. He told his wife of the diagnosis, stating his doctor had said there was no available treatment and he had to live with it.

When medications did become available, Robert's life could have been greatly enhanced. His shame at being seen to have a “mental illness” robbed him of a future and us of his uniqueness. Such a sad loss for him and all who loved him.

Once again, another secret-keeping situation created more trauma for myself and my sons. So back into therapy I went. This time, while feelings of abandonment were present again, they were not as strong as previously. I did not hold myself responsible for Robert's actions. I knew I had done all I could to support and love him. I read

vociferously on the topic of suicide and found an anonymous saying – *“Suicide is not chosen. It occurs when the pain of suffering becomes too much to bear.”* One of my former University lecturers living with bipolar, told me *“When a person takes their life, people are quick to judge. No one understands the struggle for such people to stay alive”*. This moved my heart into compassion for Robert and his action.

Then 8 months after his death, a routine mammogram discovered an early diagnosis of breast cancer. Hardly surprising, following 8 years of turbulent and traumatic times. Once again, I was surrounded by much support, love, positive thoughts, practical actions by so many and high-quality medical treatment.

So here I am.... 32 years down that often terrifying track and what have I learned.? My short list is: resilience, compassion, harmony, self-reflection and understanding, forgiveness, expansiveness, trust, self-belief, contentment, worthiness, hope. Life has given me a marriage of 6 years .... we are Ying and Yang, right and left brain, continuing to learn from each other, loving and living with a lot of laughter. My mother died in 1999 and we shared a 7-year reunion. My brother and brother-in-law have also died and my sister, her family and I share close bonds. Thanks to the wonders of DNA testing, I located my paternal cousins, learning I was my father’s only child, my father dying 6 years prior to my adoption revelation. In 2009 I published my memoir *“Surviving Secrets”*, hoping my story would assist others.

Since 2013, I have been fortunate to work part time as a counsellor at PARC with skilled and caring colleagues, committed to PARC clients. My understanding and training in trauma and trauma - informed work has been illuminating for trauma’s impact on myself and others affected by adoption. I believe I have healed and integrated much of my traumatic experiences.

**“I believe that adopted people hold internal answers to their life challenges...”**

I believe that adopted people hold internal answers to their life challenges. They were robbed from controlling their destiny at birth and their inner and outer sense of belonging. Holding hope and healing was for me, the way forward to a happier, more integrated life

*“The soul usually knows what to do to heal itself. The challenge is to silence the mind”* - Anonymous

**Margaret Watson**

[www.survivingsecrets.com](http://www.survivingsecrets.com)

[www.facebook.com/SurvivingSecrets](https://www.facebook.com/SurvivingSecrets)

## Need Support?

PARC and PASQ both offer counselling and intermediary services for people separated by adoption. If this article has raised anything for you, or you would like support around the impacts of adoption, then please contact your local service:

PARC: **02 9504 6788** (NSW)  
PASQ: **07 3170 4600** (QLD)

## Follow us and stay connected

Did you know that both Post Adoption Support Queensland and the Post Adoption Resource Centre have a Facebook Page with adoption related stories, posts, updates and events?



**/postadoptionssupportqld**  
**/benevolentsocietyNSW**



## From our readers

### The Secret

Sandra Martin writes powerfully of her experience as a young mother and the impact of the secrecy surrounding her pregnancy and the loss of her son through adoption. (Updated/First published in 2007 in *Branching Out*.)

As I sit down to write a piece on adoption I am asking myself what part should I write about? The pain, memories, guilt, regret or excitement and confusion experienced on the path to reunion – heart wrenching and exhilarating as only one who has experienced it can truly comprehend? There are many less-often discussed life-long complexities resulting from losing a child to adoption. One of the most devastating, painful and relentless aspects of relinquishment is The secret.

I am a “relinquishing” mother. Tony was born in 1965 and unlike the majority of teenage unwed mothers of that time I managed to fight the system and keep my baby. His Dad and I were briefly married after his birth. Sadly as little more than children ourselves, without sustained outside assistance, hands-on parenting was beyond our ability. He was adopted by another family at 17 months.

I honestly didn't understand how you got

pregnant. Sex education in the early 1960's was virtually non-existent. I was told that you had sex after you were married and had decided to have a baby. It involved your private parts and a man and a woman who loved each other being very close (that is honestly how sex was described back in those days). This description was so different from what Kevin and I did, that I could not seriously believe that was how you got pregnant.

My mothers' lesson on sex created an image of a very serious and calculated event, requiring considerable thought and planning. We hadn't done that, so I wasn't concerned. Not for a few months anyway. Slowly, however, reality came upon us, fear quickly followed. That was when the secret began along with that heavy, sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. You can't concentrate, constantly alert for symptoms of a period. Was that a cramp? Dampness? Yet another trip to the toilet, eager with hope. But no, and no. These weeks are perhaps the worst weeks in your life, particularly if the outcome is negative (or positive as it turns out). You're quiet, not your chirpy self, wracked with nausea and dread. 'What's wrong?' ask friends (and you wished they wouldn't) 'What's up with you?' asks your brother (and you cringe). There is now a huge secret you share with one another. You talk in abbreviated sentences. Sentences to be repeated over and over.

How are you? Anything?

What will we do?

It draws you both closer with breath-holding fear.

Will he leave me? Does he love me?

And. What will my parents say?

When my parents found out (I didn't have to tell them, my mother took one look at my stomach and pronounced me pregnant) the sky fell on my head along with a great many short, loud statements, threats and laments about what the neighbours would say. It was decided that no one would be told and I would be sent away to hide my shame, adopt the baby out and keep the secret, secret.

*"It was decided that no one would be told and I would be sent away to hide my shame, adopt the baby out and keep the secret, secret."*

But people love to gossip and watch when something is amiss. They knew something was happening, a dark cloud surrounded my family, it was obvious we had a secret.

I was sent away to a 'bad girls' home in a distant city, shrouded in shame. I can't remember the excuse they gave the curious, but being far away and in an anonymous environment allowed us to focus on ourselves rather than everyone else. Kevin followed me and we were together, pregnant, but together. Free of parents, we were wonderfully happy together and excited about having a baby. Two children playing happy families. We didn't comprehend the 'shame'. We were in love and proud of our baby. We decided to get married and keep the baby. We were 16 & 17.

Much to my parents horror, we arrived back at the crime scene very obviously pregnant. The secret was out and we didn't care. But here is the interesting thing. Almost without exception everyone else in our family, neighbourhoods and even friends were very uncomfortable with the truth. When I walked down the street in my conservative suburb, people crossed to the other side to avoid me. I can't recall one person outside my family speaking to me during those months. My best

(and only remaining) friend was forbidden both phone and personal contact with me. (Fear of contamination?) My parents confined me to the house and back yard, no contact with the world. I was excommunicated. The misery and rejection I suffered as a result of this still effects me today. My self-esteem, once strong enough to stand up and fight the system, suffered lifelong debilitating damage. Would it have been better to have kept the secret?

We married and separated and in an attempt to keep Tony, I asked my mother to look after him until I could manage on my own. She withdrew her assistance after 8 months and we lost our son to adoption.

I travelled as far away as I could, to England then back to Australia where I settled, remarried and had two more children – but there has always been the issue of the secret.

"After my initial boldness and the subsequent repercussions I became cautious about revealing what had again become my secret."

When applying for an au pair position in London I noted as my experience with children I had looked after my own child for 6 months. She understood how difficult it must have been for a 16 year old but could not understand how my mother would allow her grandchild to be given to another family. This cast doubt on the standard of my family background and I felt embarrassed and inferior. I should have kept the secret. I became very selective about who I told. Whilst Tony was never a secret in my mind and I was proud to be his Mum, I learned that prejudice was present in many places.

I consciously did not mention him to work colleagues in my years as a business executive to avoid jeopardizing my promotion prospects. I told only special, close friends and boyfriends who I thought had long term potential, making a point of mentioning it early in the relationship so as not spring it on him down the track to test the waters on his attitude towards the adoption. One long term boyfriend made me promise never to tell his family as it would destroy our relationship.

When, 20 years later, I had my second child, Jacqueline, I thought long and hard about the best



way to approach telling her about Tony. I was concerned, as I am sure other birth mothers are, that if I said I had given a child away, that my subsequent children would fear the same could happen to them. I also feared I would appear to be a bad mother. There was a real temptation to keep the secret based on these concerns. However, I told Jacqueline and my third born that they had an older brother who lived overseas when they were very young, long before they understood or were interested in the details. This way they grew up knowing about Tony and on meeting him, when we were reunited 20 years after his adoption, it didn't seem strange to them at all.

These days, being an unmarried mother is not frowned upon. I do suspect, however that putting a child up for adoption would still invite questions and judgment. Thankfully the subject is no longer taboo.

Now in my late 50's I am very open about my adoption story. I discuss it with anyone interested and it is surprising how often I am approached by long time acquaintances and strangers who confide. 'I did that too. I had a baby who was adopted' and sometimes they say 'Please don't tell anyone, it's a secret'. I am honoured that they trust their secret with me and hope that it has helped to share with someone who understands.

I have been fortunate to discover PARC and the wonderfully caring people who are part of their community. At last, a safe place for a secret. I urge anyone involved in this triangle to come to an evening and meet others who truly understand even if only to listen.

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## Stitching Universes

Mandy penned this poem after watching the film *Reckoning With The Primal Wound*. Everyone recognized the feelings she captured when she shared her poem with the post-film discussion

## Stitching Universes

My lives exist in parallel universes so tangled together and so far apart that the language I have cannot adequately describe this phenomenon.

Since I was born and drew my first breath, I have resided in two realities. My presence manifesting differently in each. In one I am invisible, a secret but still there. In the other I am seen, known, felt and loved but not quite belonging.

Nonetheless, I exist. I am here, and there. I exist as grief and trauma. Love and desire. Wanting and abandonment.

I am adopted. An adoptee.

A wanted child. A lucky child. A gift. A loss. A lost child. An abandoned child. A traumatic event. A secret. A dead child. A living child. An identity formed from parallel realities. An enigma. A wrecking ball. The first and last of my kin.

A full-stop.

In one universe I have a name, a family and a story that is not mine, but is mine. Given to me with no choice, by those who wanted me so badly.

The other is my place of origin, my blood lines, my genetic heritage, my language, my culture and family. I do not live there however, only in my imagination and through the unspoken stories never told beyond my birth to another.

This story is heavy. Not for the fainthearted. It is also light and liberating for I live like other humans, and unless I told you, you would never guess about the grief I carry a Planck length below the surface of my skin.

My universes are stitched together by messy, long and loose threads. The stitching of a child learning to sew. The thread is mustard, and made of thick rope that will never break.

I will guard my heart with the intensity of a lioness, but oh I will be so loyal to you if you share your love with me.

I will only leave you if I sense you will leave me first.

I will never be abandoned again.

# DIRTY LAUNDRY

## Book review: Dirty Laundry

Jenny Rollo, reviews *Dirty Laundry – The crimes that a country tried to hide* by Lily Arthur. Through the lens of being adopted herself, Jenny writes a thorough and thoughtful review of this important book about adoption in Australia, hot off the press.

Abuse, false imprisonment, assault, fraud, breach of care, kidnapping – each would be seen as a serious criminal charge in a court of law. It therefore seems unfathomable that all six crimes could be perpetrated against one person, let alone a vulnerable 17-year-old girl whose guardianship had been entrusted to the State of Queensland in 1960s Australia. Under what circumstances could the young Lily Arthur, or Lily McDonald as she was known at the time, have possibly been in to be laid vulnerable to such abuse from the system that was designed to protect her?

Like many girls before her, Lily had fallen in love and then found herself pregnant, in a time when society frowned heavily upon unmarried mothers. She hadn't done anything illegal. The age of sexual consent and legal marriage was 16 years of age, but one night just shy of her 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, an event occurred that would irreversibly change the course of Lily's life – the ultimate and most pro-

found injustice that would have crushed most people, and which ended with Lily and her boyfriend, Steve, losing their baby boy, Shane, to forced adoption. Yet Lily survived. Her strength and resilience are remarkable and jump out from every page of her story as she recounts the days, weeks, months, and years following from 'that' night when she was arrested by the Queensland Police for being "exposed to moral danger." Lily's story makes you want to keep turning the page, and then the next, and the next, silently encouraging her on her journey of sheer determination to seek justice and accountability not only for herself, but for the estimated 150,000 other Australian women who from the 1950s to 1970s had their babies forcibly removed and adopted out to complete strangers.

In 1959 Lily's parents and family of seven children embarked on a six-week journey by sea from London with nothing but three large tin trunks, a few suitcases, and the promise of work from a distant cousin in Townsville. Like many other families at that time, they hoped to escape poverty and their "miserable surroundings still scarred by the debris of the bombed-out buildings of the Second World War" in the poorest parts of London, with a fresh start and new opportunities in Australia beckoning. Lily's autobiography begins with her 50-year-old self in the psychiatrist's office

in a hypnotherapy session to help her uncover long repressed memories from her early childhood. We don't know how much the recollections of the first nine years of her life in London's East End are thanks to these sessions, but Lily gives a clear account of these formative years, introducing her close family in the first chapter of the book. Her mother, also named Lily, and daughter of East End Jewish newsagents, who was "highly suspicious of anyone she met until she found out if they had any ulterior motives." And her father, Maurice, an Irishman and "a good Catholic – when it suited him" who fought in World War Two and came back an alcoholic, like so many others.

Their new life in Australia wasn't what the family planned, largely due to Maurice drinking away the family's money and never settling into a job where he was happy. Lily and her two sisters, Jenny and Bridget, hatched a plan to run away to Sydney, which resulted in the authorities being contacted and regular check-ups made on the children. This was too much for Maurice. Just over two years after their arrival to the 'promised land', he sailed back to the UK, as Lily recounts, "leaving our mother and nine children under the age of twelve with no family, no friends, and no money. We were alone." It was hard not to feel angry at Maurice for deserting his family, but we see through Lily's eyes later in life that he had been broken by the war, and like herself, was only human and had made mistakes. The family began to prosper after Maurice left. Lily leaves school and begins a string of firsts – her first job, boyfriend and the heartbreak and angst of first love. It all seemed too good to be true, and unfortunately it was. Lily's mother was in a new relationship with a man who was controlling and abusive, forcing Lily and her older sister to leave home. At age 16, Lily now had to fend for herself, which led her into the path of her new love interest, Steve, and the nightmare which was to shape her life from then on.

The remainder of the book took me on a roller-coaster of emotions – mostly anger at the injustice of Lily's treatment by so many people in her life. Anger at the sadistic treatment by Sister Isabel and other nuns from the Holy Cross in Brisbane, where Lily was incarcerated for nine months before and after the birth of her son. An-

ger at the violation and humiliation meted out by the nurses and doctors at the women's hospital where Lily was taken to give birth. Anger at the controlling, abusive behaviour of Lily's first husband, Geoffrey. Anger at the legal system for defending the heinous adoption practices of the past, which were described by the psychiatrist, Dr Geoff Rickarby, as "the single mother's holocaust." But there were also moments when I was silently cheering for the breaks that Lily received in her life. When she finally found the strength to leave Geoffrey and proclaimed herself, "no more the victim, at last, I could be free. I had finally rid myself of my worst abuser". The nurturing friendship of Russ and Des, which turned into love in the case of Des, who finally gave Lily the love and support she so richly deserved, and the encouragement to find something to do with her life. The moment Lily found and was reunited with her son, Shane. The purpose Lily found by joining and being such an integral part in the not-for-profit adoption support group, Origins, which became her springboard to take the State of Queensland to court and confront the nuns at Holy Cross. It also enabled her incredible journey within the Aboriginal community, finding people she describes as the "family I chose" and being part of the process that ended in the apology led by then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, to the Stolen Generation.

Lily's voice strengthens as the book progresses. She is like a boxer in a ring – every time she is knocked to the ground, she picks herself up, dusts herself off, and goes back into the fight. I felt equally sad at what Lily has had to endure throughout her life, but unbridled admiration for this strong, authentic woman who has such an incredible fighting spirit despite all she has suffered. The book has an epilogue entitled, "Final Word: Lily's Lament", where her continued pain is very raw. She says, "I have questioned myself countless times over why I have lived to fight battles that could never be won and suffered the futility of defeat." The defeat she describes is not yet being able to achieve a legal win that would hold someone accountable for the crimes committed against her and the 150,000 other Australian women: "... those who are still waiting for justice, hoping for justice that will never come. Our babies and countless generations are still stolen from us, and the rivers of tears that have been

spent can never be dried." Yes, there has been a national apology for forced adoption, but incredibly, nowhere in our justice system has there been any accountability made for such a fundamental human injustice.

While it is a challenging book at times to read, particularly for anyone involved in the adoption triad of birth parent, adoptive parent, or adoptee, this dark period in Australia's history (actually, around the world, as forced adoption was not only practiced in Australia) is a story that needed to be told as its effects continue to reverberate down the generations. I don't believe this is the end of this remarkable woman's story.

*Dirty Laundry: The Crimes a Country Tried to Hide* by Lily Arthur, is published by Ocean Reeve Publishing (\$19.95). Order your copy at [www.lilyarthur.com](http://www.lilyarthur.com).

## The Book Launch

On Friday the 25th of March, PARC was pleased to attend the launch of Lily Arthur's book launch, "Dirty Laundry, The Crimes a Country tried to Hide" at NSW Parliament House. The presenters all spoke to Lily's resilience, courage, honesty and integrity. Lily paid respect to the "silent army" of women who worked tirelessly to have this part of history brought to light. Lily shared that the book took 30 years to write and thanked the many people who supported her on this journey. We wish Lily every success with her book and know that her words will particularly resonate with mothers, who want the truth to be told.

## PARC Update

Contact us on 02 9504 6788 [parc@benevolent.org.au](mailto:parc@benevolent.org.au)

Like everyone, PARC has continued to be impacted by this changing world and we are aware that many of our clients are feeling the same. We have been busy providing support – via email, the phone and online video sessions - and also collaborating with PASQ for our online groups.

We are transitioning back into the office and are pleased to be able to provide face to face sessions (currently with masks) for those who can access our office. This is an exciting prospect and we have been preparing to ensure that our client experience is positive and familiar.

## PARC Groups and Events

### PARC Client End of Year Catch Up

In December, the PARC Team ran our annual Christmas catch-up with clients online. It was a very different occasion to previous years, but it was lovely to see familiar faces and be able to wish them well for the year ahead.

### PARC/PASQ Mothers Group February 2022 and Upcoming, April Group

PARC and PASQ have continued hosting an online space for mothers to come together in 2022 after

the group's feedback from last year, asking for more opportunities to connect. The group will run throughout 2022 every 2<sup>nd</sup> month.

The first group for the year explored the challenging theme, 'Gifts from Trauma' and was hosted in late February, with 12 mothers in attendance. A couple of newcomers were welcomed to the group and we hope they found it a safe space that offered a sense of comfort and recognition amongst others who have walked a similar journey.

**The next group will be held on Tuesday, 26th April and will focus on "Parenting after loss". To register your interest to attend or if you would like to be kept updated on our future events, please contact PARC 02 9504 6788 or [parc@benevolent.org.au](mailto:parc@benevolent.org.au)**

### **Therapeutic Parenting Refresher Evening 1<sup>st</sup> March 2022**

On a Tuesday evening amid the worst floods in northern NSW and South East Queensland history, PARC and PASQ held an online Therapeutic Parenting Refresher. This is an evening for parents who have attended the six week program over the last ten years since its inception by PARC in 2012. Parents used the opportunity to connect and re-view their experiences of parenting with each other in a warm online environment. They spoke about how helpful it was to be able to meet with other adoptive parents and learn more about how to support their children.

The full six week programme will be run later in the year.

### **Federal Apology for Forced Adoption 21<sup>st</sup> March 2022**



On the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, the Forced Adoption Support Service held a commemorative High Tea for the 9<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 2013 Federal Apology for Past Forced Adoption Practices. Two PARC counsellors attended to mark the occasion and provided support for those who needed to chat or seek out assistance.

## **Upcoming Groups**

### **Connections Meeting 12th April 2022**

While we are still transitioning back to face to face events, we continue to run our meetings as best we can online. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of April PARC will be holding an online Connections Meeting from 6.30pm – 8.30pm. While we would normally travel to the regions, this meeting will offer the opportunity for people to come together to discuss the positives and challenges of residing in regional NSW, access to services and availability of connection with others in the adoption community.

This online Meeting is open to anyone who is adopted and living in regional NSW and will be facilitated by two PARC counsellors.

#### **Booking is essential and places are limited.**

For further information please call PARC on 02 9579 6002 or email the team at [parc@benevolent.org.au](mailto:parc@benevolent.org.au).

## **PARC Resources**



### **PARC 2021/22 Client Film Series**

PARC's new film series can be viewed on YouTube by clicking the links below

- **Adoption:** [Adoption—Our voices, our stories—30 Years of the Post Adoption Resource Centre](#) 10 minutes
- **Late Discovery:** [Adoption: Our voices, our stories – Late Discovery](#) 10 minutes
- **Intercountry Adoption:** [Adoption: Our voices, our stories – Intercountry Adoption](#) 5 minutes



## Participating in The Colour of Difference: the long term outcomes

Lynelle Long, Founder, Intercountry Adoptee Voices (ICAV) writes about her involvement with PARC and The Colour of Difference some 20 years ago - a springboard to Lynelle's huge role in supporting intercountry adoptees.

In the late 1990s, I was in my mid 20s and searching for support as an adoptee born overseas, outside of Australia. At that time, I didn't even have the language to understand how adoption had affected me, I only knew that I had struggled and was reaching out to try and find support somewhere. I had initially tried the AA type programs, thinking there must be an "Adoptees Anonymous" somewhere. There wasn't, so when I found the NSW Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC), led by Sarah Armstrong, I joined one of their adoptee days where you meet face to face and talk.

PARC took us through guided sessions. I found it really useful but the biggest thing I noticed was there was nothing about: looking different to one's family/community; nothing on searching and returning to an overseas country, and certainly nothing on racism or the issues I lived as a

person of colour adopted into a white society. I spoke to the PARC team afterwards and asked if there was anything available more specific to my experience. I didn't even know the term "intercountry adoption" then. All I knew was that I enjoyed meeting the adoptees but they were all born in Australia. So, I still felt different and quite alone. I enquired about whether there were other adoptees like me reaching out to PARC. They told me yes, occasionally. I said, "Well if you ever run something for us, I'd love to know about it and if you have those adoptees wanting to connect to someone like them, please share with them my name and contacts."

Sometime later, PARC did contact me. They asked me if I wanted to be involved in their new book project where we, as transracial adoptees, could share our stories to help people better understand our lived experience. I jumped at the opportunity. I remember trying to figure out what I'd write about, but once I started, it all flowed.

It was quite a lengthy process to get the book completed. But during that process I ended up being honoured to meet the fellow adoptees who also shared in our book, The Colour of Difference.

Participating in the book changed my life and PARC had been sharing my name/contacts to adoptees just like me, so over time I made decided to form a network to support each other.

So, with the almost 30 adoptees from those early days, I built what was then known as the Inter-Country Adoptee Support Network (ICASN). We focused on sharing our stories, connecting to each other, and meeting face to face in capital cities. We also participated in education events, utilising our lived experience to help inform future adoptions.

PARC is funded by Department of Communities and Justice and at the time Mary Griffin headed up Adoption and Permanency Services. I connected with Mary Griffin and her team of social workers and was asked to share my story with their team for training. It was the most vulnerable day of my life but the lovely PARC social worker, Petrina Slaytor came as my support and I told my story for the first time to people who were not adoptees, but professionals. Wow, it was such an empowering experience to receive their validation and encouragement to keep doing what I was doing - sharing my story, connecting to fellow adoptees, providing a peer support space. I still have the lovely Petrina and Mary in my life today and they have been some of my most incredible supports throughout my life.

After a break to have my own young family, ICASN was renamed InterCountry Adoptee Voices (ICAV) in 2014 to reflect a new focus in addition to peer support. ICAV is active in advocating for our needs and rights and for our voices to be included in all policy and legislation discussions. I could no longer ignore the very visible global issues and that our experiences were replicated all over the world for intercountry adoptees.

In 2016, after a Federal government consultation, my idea of having a sequel to The Colour of Difference was funded by the Australian government via International Social Services Australia who had been funded to provide our much-needed Search and Reunion service. In 2017 The Colour of Time

was published and demonstrates how our stories changed over the 15-year time span since we published The Colour of Difference.

Fast forward to today, ICAV is now representing intercountry adoptees from all over the world at international levels - the Hague and the United Nations (UN). So, from a book project that PARC initiated 24 years ago, ICAV has grown to become one of the leading intercountry adoptee advocacy networks in the world.

Who would have thought that connecting into PARC and sharing my story in the book The Colour of Difference, would have made such an impact on me, and then flow onto all the adoptees who have joined into ICAV today. What a ripple effect!

Huge thanks to PARC and to Sarah Armstrong and Petrina Slaytor, PARC editors (Colour of Difference) for making this all possible! I'm so excited to see The Colour of Difference being republished and available in hardcopy! It's incredible to have adoptive parents share what a difference it has made for them and their adoptee to read our books - The Colour of Difference and The Colour of Time - which helps to normalise our journey and educate those who want to understand it better.

[www.intercountryadopteevoices.com](http://www.intercountryadopteevoices.com)



Inter Country Adoptee Voices



**Copies available!**  
**The Colour of Difference**

To enquire about your copy of The Colour of Difference, please contact PARC or PASQ.

# PASQ Update

Contact us on 07 3170 4600 or [pasq@benevolent.org.au](mailto:pasq@benevolent.org.au)

Whilst the beginning of 2022 has been as tumultuous as its predecessors, we're hopeful about our ability to continue to support the adoption community to the best of our ability. World and local events has meant we have once again been given the opportunity to respond with resiliency.

We've enjoyed starting the year by joining with PARC in co-facilitating a number of online groups and look forward to continuing to collaborate. As well as our online groups and direct client support, much of PASQ's time this quarter was dedicated to the Human Services and Quality Framework audit that concluded mid-March. The audit serves to ensure our service is upholding the rights and needs of our clients first and foremost, whilst meeting compliance and legal requirements. Initial feedback has been very positive with no recommendations for improvement made. Continue reading to find out more about PASQ and our upcoming events and groups.

## Milton Offices

Whilst our Milton offices were impacted by the recent Queensland floods and we are currently unable to hold face-to-face sessions at the Milton site, **we are still continuing to provide support including face-to-face sessions, elsewhere.**

Please discuss your options with your counsellor if you have any concerns.

## Online Mother's Group



Joining with PARC, PASQ co-facilitated an online Mother's Group in late February. The 12 attendees along with counsellors created a safe online space to discuss "The Gifts of Trauma". Another group will be held in April and details will be shared in the coming weeks. Newcomers are welcome.

Please contact PARC or PASQ to register your interest in attending.

## Gold Coast Adoption, Belonging and Connections

On 23rd March, the PASQ Manager, Team Leader and a PASQ Counsellor facilitated the year's first Gold Coast Adoption, Belonging and Connections group. Attendees from varying adoption backgrounds gathered at The Benevolent Society's Labrador site to share, discuss and support each other. The PASQ team are looking forward to meeting together throughout the year and welcome any returning and new attendees at any time. For more information, please contact PASQ.

## Online Therapeutic Parenting Refresher



In March, PASQ co-facilitated an online refresher Therapeutic Parenting course in partnership with PARC in NSW. The refresher was for those who had previously attended Therapeutic Parenting courses.

We will be running the full six-week Therapeutic Parenting course later in the year.



## 9th National Forced Adoption Apology

The PASQ Manager & Team Leader attended the National Apology for Forced Adoption anniversary event on Monday, 21st March at The Queensland Gallery of Modern Art. The event marked the 9th anniversary of the apology for Forced Adoptions made in Parliament by the then Prime Minister, Julia Gillard and offered those in attendance an opportunity to commemorate and reflect.

## Parent Information Sessions

Information sessions for prospective parents of adopted children (run by Adoption and Permanent Care Services) were delivered by a PASQ counsellor and the PASQ Team Leader. The presentations focussed on providing realistic information about adoption, adoption trauma and its impacts, and how adopted children may encounter these throughout their lives. Prospective parents were also made aware and encouraged to access the support services available to families of adopted children. Two sessions were conducted, one focussing on intercountry adoption, the other on local adoption.

## HSQF Audit

The PASQ team underwent an external Human Services and Quality Framework audit in March. The audit serves to ensure the service is continuing to act in the best interests of those it works with. The audit focussed on examining and documenting:

- organisational processes for responding to harm, abuse or neglect experienced by our clients.
- compliance with relevant legislation and upholding people's legal and human rights
- mechanisms that ensure continuous improvement
- mechanisms that protect client privacy and confidentiality
- support of client's strengths, needs and goals as a part of our work and opportunity for review with clients
- support of client diversity (identity, gender, sexuality, age, culture, religious beliefs)

- collaboration with other organisations and groups
- empowering clients to make decisions about their own lives

## Upcoming Events

### Online Mother's Group— 26th April

Coming in April, we're focussing on "Parenting after loss". The group is an opportunity for Mothers who have lost a child to adoption to meet and chat with other mothers in a supportive online environment. Please register by Wednesday, 20th April to PASQ [here](#) or contact us on 07 3170 4600 or [pasq@benevolent.org.au](mailto:pasq@benevolent.org.au)

### Gold Coast Adoption, Belonging and Connections— 11th May

Join us again at Labrador for our Gold Coast Adoption, Belonging and Connections group for any one impacted by adoption. To register your intent to attend please contact PASQ [here](#) or contact us on 07 3170 4600 or [pasq@benevolent.org.au](mailto:pasq@benevolent.org.au)

## Quote Corner

**"Each person's grief is as unique as their fingerprint. But what everyone has in common is that no matter how they grieve, they share a need for their grief to be witnessed. That doesn't mean needing someone to try to lessen it or reframe it for them. The need is for someone to be fully present to the magnitude of their loss without trying to point out the silver lining."**

**David Kessler, Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief**

# Adoption in the news

## My Unknown Truth—The Australian Adoption Podcast

Episode 6 Kat's story (37 mins)



My Unknown Truth.

Kat shared her story with readers in this Newsletter last year. Kat shares her earliest memories, significant events and reflections on her life to date, in this podcast. Adopted in NSW in the early 1970's, Kat grew up

feeling loved and safe but always felt a need to know more about her origins and identity...

Listen [here](https://www.open.spotify.com/episode/2rtJHAd9gZRmsJbtmH8UB?si=VTtiHlnsSO0tehbLrw5oBQ&nd=1): [www.open.spotify.com/episode/2rtJHAd9gZRmsJbtmH8UB?si=VTtiHlnsSO0tehbLrw5oBQ&nd=1](https://www.open.spotify.com/episode/2rtJHAd9gZRmsJbtmH8UB?si=VTtiHlnsSO0tehbLrw5oBQ&nd=1)

## 'I never felt right' DNA test reveals Melbourne woman introduced to wrong 'biological mother'



"Penny Mackieson finally has the name that feels right to her, nearly 60 years after she was inadvertently swapped with another baby when the infants were placed for adoption."

To read more, click [here](#) or visit: [www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/15/i-never-felt-right-dna-test-reveals-melbourne-woman-introduced-to-wrong-biological-mother](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/15/i-never-felt-right-dna-test-reveals-melbourne-woman-introduced-to-wrong-biological-mother)

## Redress for Victorian Mothers announced by the Victorian Premier on 10th March 2022

"The Victorian government will spend more than \$4 million designing a redress scheme to support those affected by historical forced adoption practices, but some survivors say the move may have come "too late"."

To read more click [here](#) or visit: [www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-10/redress-scheme-for-victorian-mothers-forced-adoption/100897768](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-10/redress-scheme-for-victorian-mothers-forced-adoption/100897768)

## Philomena on ABC iView



Philomena is a British drama based on a true story of a journalist (Steve Coogan) meeting Philomena Lee (Judy Dench) and their journey together trying to find her son who was adopted when she was a teenager. The film was nominated for 4 Academy Awards in 2014 and is now streaming on [ABC iView](#).

## How adoption rights activist Susan Lohan fought the Irish establishment

"Adopted as a baby, denied any information about her natural parents, Lohan has spent years fighting for the church and state to reveal what they know – about her and the thousands of others in the same position"

To read click [here](#) or visit: [www.theguardian.com/society/2022/mar/09/a-nun-called-me-a-destroyer-of-lives-how-adoption-rights-activist-susan-lohan-fought-the-irish-establishment?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/mar/09/a-nun-called-me-a-destroyer-of-lives-how-adoption-rights-activist-susan-lohan-fought-the-irish-establishment?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)

# Adoption in the news

## Adoptee Literary Festival Zoom Webinar 9th April—USA



This all-day online and free festival offers a series of panels covering journalism, poetry, memoir, youth and fiction. The Keynote Speaker, Nicole Chung wrote the highly acclaimed book *All You Can Ever Know* – an adoption memoir. For more information click [here](#) or visit [www.adopteelitfest.com](http://www.adopteelitfest.com)

## One Donor Conceived person's battle for her biological truth



“When Lauren Burns discovered she was a donor-conceived baby, she was shocked and wounded. Then she began to fight.”

\*This article is free but requires registration to read.

To read click [here](#) and register or visit:  
[www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/mar/05/why-did-i-need-to-know-who-my-father-was-one-womans-battle-for-her-biological-truth?](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/mar/05/why-did-i-need-to-know-who-my-father-was-one-womans-battle-for-her-biological-truth?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)  
CMP=Share\_iOSApp\_Other

## Parental guidance: Rights of people conceived from donors under review

“The rights of people conceived through donated sperm, eggs or embryos to access information on their biological parentage will be assessed by a Queensland parliamentary inquiry.”

To read more, click [here](#) or visit [www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/queensland/parental-guidance-rights-of-people-conceived-from-donors-under-review-20220224-p59zev.html](http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/queensland/parental-guidance-rights-of-people-conceived-from-donors-under-review-20220224-p59zev.html)

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