

BITS & PIECES

JIGSAW QLD INC | NEWSLETTER | 2018 NEW YEARS EDITION

2018 Events

To keep an eye on Jigsaw's events for 2018 and beyond, visit www.jigsawqueensland.com/events.

* A Mother's Retreat is planned for 15th to 17th May at Maleny. If you are interested in attending, contact support@jigsawqld.org.au for more information.

* 5th Anniversary of National Forced Adoption Apology 21 March, 2018.

Upcoming Groups

Jigsaw's support groups have experienced an increase in numbers since late 2015. Meetings are held on the ground floor of SANDS House, 505 Bowen Terrace, New Farm from 1.30 - 3.30pm.

Participation at the groups is free for members (suggested \$5/head donation for non-members).

Adoptee Support Group - 10 Mar, 12 May, 14 July, 8 Sept, 10 Nov

Mother's Support Group - 17 Mar, 19 May, 21 July, 15 Sept, 10 Nov
(For mothers who have experienced separation from their children by adoption).

Open Support Group - 14 April, 9 June, 11 Aug, 13 Oct, 8 Dec.

Interracial & Inter-country Group - 21 April, 16 June, 18 Aug
Sunshine Coast Adoptee Group - TBA.

Jigsaw Queensland Inc.

Understanding, Support & Information for all those with adoption in their lives.



5th Anniversary of the National Forced Adoption Apology

Invitation and call for objects or pictures for the "My Adoption Experience" Exhibition.

You are invited to an event to commemorate the 5th anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions to be held on 21 March, 2018 at Riverside Reception Centre, New Farm from 10.30am to 12 noon. The event is organised by Jigsaw Queensland, in association with ALAS, Association for Adoptees and Origins Qld. We hope you will note this event in your diary. A formal invitation flyer is available on the website and Facebook. RSVP is essential as the event is catered. Following the success of the "My Adoption Experience" art exhibition at the 2017 anniversary event, we are mounting a different exhibition at the 5th Anniversary on the 21 March, 2018 in Brisbane.

This time we are asking for contributions of objects or a photo of an object (not artworks) with a short statement / story (maximum 300 words) about why that object is significant in your adoption experience. To give you some ideas, Jane Sliwka from Jigsaw Qld has contributed an object and story in this edition. If you wish to contribute to the exhibition please contact Jigsaw Qld before



Feb 14th, 2018 by email: support@jigsawqld.org.au or phone 1800 210 313 (Qld only) or 07 3358 6666. Objects will need to be posted or delivered to Jigsaw Qld at New Farm before 7 March, 2018.

If your object is too precious or expensive to be posted, you could send a photo of your object instead. If you need help with writing the short story (max 300 words), contact Jigsaw on 07 3358 6666 or 1800 210 313 (Qld only).

Please only send one contribution per person.

Jane's contribution (pictured)

This is a Willow Tree angel titled, 'lots of love'. It was a gift from my twenty-three year old brother on

my twentieth birthday in May 2017. It is special to me because it is the first gift I ever received from him and to me, it symbolises the



reciprocal relationship we have built over the past twelve years since our reunion.

When I found my birth family at the age of eighteen (my birth parents married three years after my birth), my brother was only eleven and my sister, ten. Prior to

this, I had been an only child within my adoptive family. I feel extremely grateful that despite the pain and grief I have experienced as a result of my adoption, I have been able to be a part of my siblings' lives as they grew up. Now that we are all adults, we have a genuine relationship as siblings that is valued by each of us. I feel that the three hearts represent the three of us as siblings.

I keep this angel on my desk at Jigsaw as a reminder to be hopeful when working with clients affected by adoption. When our office was broken in to in 2017, my manager, Trevor found it amusing that my angel was the first thing I asked about. Fortunately it was okay.

A History of Intercountry Adoption in Australia

By Chris Mundy

Intercountry adoption in Australia began at the conclusion of World War 2. European nations had been in the grip of war leaving thousands of children without homes.

These children were adopted to other European nations including Australia as part of humanitarian efforts. Further conflicts in Korea and Vietnam would see a change in intercountry adoption in Western nations from European children to Asian children. US Air Force Chaplain Russel L Blaisdell

arranged for nearly 1000 children from Seoul during "Operation KiddyCar" in 1950, sparking a



long history of intercountry adoptions from Korea. Some of these children had lost their parents during the conflict while others were conceived from relationships between Army servicemen and local Korean women. However, significant

numbers of intercountry adoptions did not commence in Australia until 1975 when "Operation Babylift" commenced in Vietnam. 292 Vietnamese children orphaned by war were packed on to planes and arrived in Australia amidst a media frenzy. By 1977, government sanctioned intercountry adoption programs in Australia had been institutionalised. The focus of intercountry adoption in these early days was humanitarian, however, it legitimised a "rescue" approach to adoption that would continue over the next few decades.

As intercountry adoption gained momentum and fewer children were available from Asia, Australia followed the United States' lead in sourcing children from orphanages in other parts of the world. Orphanages in Latin America and Romania were identified during the 1980's. At the same time however, concerns were being raised that children were being trafficked by groups and individuals. This led to the establishment of the Hague Convention of the United Nations. Participating nations to the convention would agree to protect vulnerable children from being laundered and kidnapped. It must be noted that not all nations agreed to be signatories of the convention and some of those countries that did sign up continued to find it difficult to enforce the Convention's mandates. An uneasy tension around intercountry adoption continues to exist in countries such as the USA, where adoptive parents pay significant amounts of money to adoption agencies to find a child for them. These children sometimes come from countries where corruption occurs leading to a "baby trade" of children marketed to adoption agencies.

As the era of forced adoption subsided in Australia, the demand for children from overseas increased during the closure of the millennium. Intercountry adoption advocacy groups, particularly from religious and celebrity sectors, increased. In 2005, Senator Bronwyn Bishop led a parliamentary committee to explore the increase of

intercountry adoption into Australia. At the same time fellow parliamentarian Tony Abbott publically stated he was the putative father of an ABC cameraman (a DNA test later confirmed he was not the father). It has been suggested by researchers such as Murphy, Quartly and Cuthbert (2009) that Abbott and Bishop's motivations to increase adoption were driven by the religious right. In 2015, the Abbott Government announced a new government department to assist in the coordination and timely processing of intercountry adoptions to Australia.

Australia saw a slight increase in adoptions in the past year (from 278 to 315 adoptions). However, intercountry adoptions have dropped from 82 to 69 adoptions (Australia Adoptions, 2015-16, 2016-17, AIHW). All intercountry adoptions in 2016-2017 were from Asian countries - the most common of them being Taiwan, Philippines, South Korea and Thailand. The processing time for intercountry adoptions has decreased to an average of 2 years and 9 months. It must be noted, however, that these figures do not include expatriate adoptions (Australians living overseas who have adopted children in another country and will return to Australia). Globally, intercountry adoption is in decline for a number of reasons:

- There's increasing welfare initiatives such as family support and fostering in the sending countries and a movement away from orphanage models.

- Intercountry adoptions prioritise children with special needs and few prospective adoptive parents are interested in adopting these children.

- A reduction in child trafficking.
- The time it takes to adopt a child is lengthy and the number of people wishing to adopt is disproportionate to the number of children adoptable.

- Sending country restrictions.

While intercountry adoption is in decline globally and current adoptions to Australia are minimal, the potential to increase these numbers exists, based on new government infrastructure and the continued lobbying of intercountry adoption advocacy groups.

Mothers Retreat 2018



FASS is organising a mother's retreat for 2018, to be held on 15th to 17th May at Maleny. If you would like more information, please contact Jigsaw Qld at support@jigsawqld.org.au.

Review of Betty Jean Lifton's Journey of the Adopted Self

By Jane Sliwka

Many of those affected by adoption are aware of Nancy Verrier's ground-breaking

books, "The Primal Wound" and "Coming Home to Self: The Adopted Child Grows Up".

Many, including myself, are less familiar with Betty Jean Lifton's book "Journey of the Adopted Self", which was first published in 1994. I have learned a lot from reading and reviewing this book for you.

Journey of the Adopted Self has less of a scientific approach compared to Verrier's books, but similarly it explores the psychological effects of adoption on adoptees, acknowledging the separation between mother and child as a trauma that impacts both parties. She also provides in-depth exploration of the psychological and spiritual themes experienced by adoptees prior to, during and following a search and reunion. It is based on Betty Jean Lifton's own experience as an adoptee, as well as in-depth interviews with adoptees and fifty questionnaires completed by birth mothers (Lifton's terminology).

The key premise of Lifton's book is that the closed adoption system is grounded in secrecy and that this is mirrored in many adoptive families. She comments on how damaging this is for all parties involved because secrecy cuts off authentic communication and authentic relationships. She states that adoptees have to grow up living 'as if' their natural families were not an inherent part of their identity.

As a result, many adoptees completely repress their need to know where they have come from and at the same time deny the

curiosity, grief and pain related to their adoption. Others, she says, withdraw into fantasy, imagining different scenarios about where they have come from. She suggests that for many adoptees, these feelings remain closed off until triggered by a life event or crisis. Lifton also highlights that all the while adoption continues to impact the adopted person's life whether they are consciously aware of it or not.



Photo of Betty Jean Lifton courtesy Penguin Random House.

Lifton likens search and reunion to a heroes journey, just like those we have seen depicted throughout our lives in fairy tales and movies. This journey assists adoptees healing as it empowers them and allows them to integrate their adopted self and the part of themselves that has been repressed (or pushed aside), into one cohesive whole. However, adoptees often feel that if they choose to search they are choosing their biological parents over their adoptive parents. She asserts "the adoptive mother who loves and cares for the child is the real mother and the birth mother

who never forgets her child is the real mother. They are both real".

She goes further "For me, a real mother is the one who recognises and respects the whole identity of her child and does not ask him to deny any part of himself. This is hard to do in a closed adoption system that requires the child to cut off from their heritage and pits the original mother against the replacement mother".

Lifton also highlights that, in reality, many adopted people grow closer to their adopted parents as a result of their search and reunion. She says, "Adoptees often find their adoptive parents when they find their birth parents. Once the barrier of secrecy has been lifted, they are able to see their adoptive parents in a new way. They can share their feelings with them and open up communication channels that had been clogged by secrecy".

She is under no illusions, however, about how complex and challenging search and reunion can be and reminds us that this is just the beginning of a new journey. She writes,

"Adoptees are often perplexed after reunion: They thought that just the sight of the birthmother or father, or a member of the birth family would render them whole. Instead, they may feel more fragmented than before. They have lost the self that they started off with and have not yet found the self for which they searched. Adoptees must weave a new self-narrative out of the fragments of what was, what might have been, and what is.

They must accept that they cannot be fully the birth parent's child any more than they could fully be the adoptive parent's child. They must claim their own child, become their own person, and belong to themselves".

Lifton recognises the importance of having a support network throughout the journey. She highlights that as well as or instead of knowledgeable professionals, support groups can be invaluable:

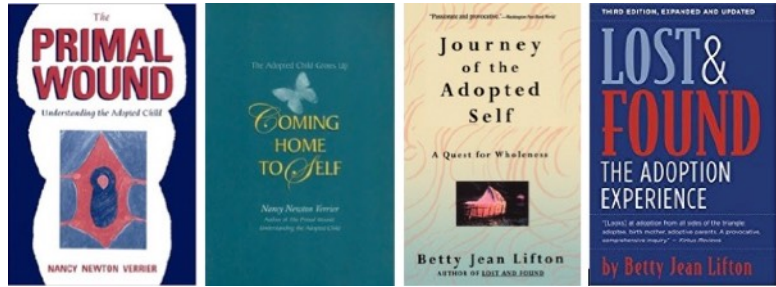
"They come into contact with other adoptees who intuitively understand them. They have a lot in common, for, though they are not from the same family, they are not crazy, that other people think and feel as they do. They are validated.

"By listening to other birth mothers, adoptees begin to glimpse the psychological complexities involved: a mother does not believe she is abandoning her child when she places it for adoption; she does not forget the child or forgive herself; she may not feel she is entitled to search for her child; and she worries about the feelings of the adoptive parents".

I would recommend this book to adoptees during any stage of their journey.

Recommended Reading List

This reading list has been compiled by Jigsaw staff. The list is not exhaustive, but intended to highlight key readings that may assist those wishing to gain a



greater understanding of adoption issues or to learn about other's adoption experiences. Many of these resources can be purchased online or ordered through book stores. Those items with an *asterisk beside them are available for loan for through the Jigsaw library for those who are members. (Jigsaw membership is \$40 per year.)

Books

Adoption and Loss - The Hidden Grief by Evelyn Robinson (2000). Evelyn Robinson is a social worker as well as a mother who lost her son to adoption. In this book she comments on her personal experience as well as her professional experience regarding how adoption loss has affected all members of the adoption triangle.

Adoption and Recovery by Evelyn Robinson (2004). This book extends upon Evelyn's previous book 'Adoption and Loss'. She explains the dynamics of reunion within a grief framework and the challenges, lessons and opportunities for growth brought about by adoption.

*Coming Home to Self: The Adopted Child Grows Up by Nancy Verrier (2004). This is a sequel to Nancy Verrier's previous book 'The Primal Wound'. It offers a more detailed summary of how adoption affects an adoptees psychological development and relationships. It also provides suggestions for how adoptees make positive changes in their lives and relationships.

*Ever After - Fathers and the Impact of Adoption by Gary Coles (2004). Gary Coles is a father who lost his child to adoption. In this book he integrates his personal experience, those of other fathers and comments on the repercussions of adoption for all members of the separated family, particularly fathers.

*Journey of the Adopted Self: A Quest for Wholeness by Betty Jean Lifton (1994). This book explores the psychological and in some instances, spiritual journey that is unique to adopted people. It also addresses how adoptees may move toward a more integrated sense of self in various ways.



*Lost and Found: The Adoption Experience by Betty Jean Lifton (1979). This book identifies the harmful psychological effects of secrecy and adoption and how through reunion, adoptees may learn to know themselves in a fuller sense and navigate their place in two families.

*The Primal Wound by Nancy Verrier (1993). This book was revolutionary in conceptualising the separation of mother and child at birth as a trauma that has a life-long impact on both parties.

The Adoption Reunion Handbook by Liz Trinder, Julia Feast & David Howe (2004). Based on a large-scale study in the UK, this book offers an overview of the common experiences in reunion and provides practical advice.

*Transparent: Seeing Through the Legacy of Adoption by Gary Coles (2005). This book extends upon Gary Coles' first book 'Ever After' and explores importance of honesty and openness in integrating our adoption experiences within our lives and future, with an emphasis on the father's experience.

Lifelong Journey

By Jo Sparrow



My eighty-nine year old adoptive father is dying from a heart condition and my adoptive mother is ageing rapidly. And because of this, I've never been more aware that adoption is a lifelong journey.

Death is a forgone conclusion for us all; however, I wasn't prepared for how deeply my parent's impending demise would impact me. I was adopted at three weeks of age into a family with three existing, biological children. There were eighteen years between my sister and I, and the huge age gaps in the family meant I only lived with one brother.



Pic 1: The Gallaghers, Pic 2: Jo and her adoptive father.

My family was a hall of mirrors that only reflected each other, and growing up identity was an enormous issue for me. I watched them closely, particularly my sister, who everyone adored, and tried to mimic her behaviours and personality so that I might blend in and avoid another abandonment.

The age gap and geographical separation between myself and my siblings made it even more difficult to bond with them. I was acutely aware from an early age that the decision to adopt me was one my parents made alone. My siblings had no say in it.

Now that my adoptive parents are drawing closer to death, I find two questions constantly churning

through my mind. Who am I to this family without my adoptive parents? Will my siblings still want me to be a part of their lives without my parents to connect us?

Part of me (the logical part), knows that of course they will still see me as a part of their family. However, the other part of me, the one who looks at the world through adoption tinted glasses and keeps tabs on every single perceived slight, feeds on the negatives.

Each time my siblings plan an event without my input, arrange joint accommodation for a wedding without thinking to ask me or if I find out news about them through our parents, I am cast into a state of panicked doubt.

This merry-go-round is fuelled by the truth that at various times in my life, when adoption has messed with my head, I have deliberately distanced myself from my family. That old 'get them, before they get you' mentality. I fear this has widened the gap between us.

When these thoughts and questions take root, I am dismayed. I like to think I've come far on my adoption journey. I've spent years researching and soul-searching...working to understand how adoption moves me like a puppet master, so that I might keep one step ahead at all times. And then one comment or action makes me feel like I am back at

square one. I'm a little girl again, whose greatest fear is that her family doesn't feel about her the way she feels about them, and that they might abandon her. My parents ill health has only served to amp up my sensitivity to these triggers.

I recently read *The Trauma Cleaner* by Sarah Krasnostein and one quote in particular resonated with me...

“The way the glass shatters, hints at the cause.”

As an adopted person, my first experience in life was loss. Abandonment is my boogie man. My parents are bound by the laws of life and death and will leave me in due course. This is a certainty that is poking me in the ribs, reminding me that I will ultimately revisit the trauma following my birth...sooner rather than later.

And I find myself at a precipice of choice. I can choose to falter and slide back on the line that is my adoption journey, or I can take hope from the ground I have gained and be certain in the knowledge that I can make it through this loss too.

Years ago, before I spent time working to understand how adoption has impacted my life, I would've knee-jerked at this point –distanced myself before I could be hurt. At the moment, the primal urge to do just this is a near daily event. I once would've reacted without awareness or consideration of the alternatives available to me.

Now, instead, I find myself using the healthy tools I've accumulated over the years. I write down what I am feeling and why, so that I can be clear about it. I take a moment, and breathe through the anxious feelings. I explain to my family how I am feeling and they are genuinely shocked, because I have a lifelong habit of pretending nothing upsets me. In short, I'm actively working to avoid the patterns of my past and find new ways through. And this feels great.

It's not perfect, but I no longer feel like I'm hopeless and at the mercy of the adoption tsunami coming my way. I feel empowered, and able to find higher, safer grounds.

When I make these choices, the fact that adoption is a lifelong journey feels like an opportunity rather than a curse. My parents will leave me, and I will find a way through.

Film Review Just to Be sure

By Andrea Lynch



Erwan and his biological father.

During the Xmas break I attended this French Movie, “Just to Be Sure”, which was billed as a comedy. I went looking for something “light” to entertain and relax me. What I didn't know was that the film would contain a

theme very relevant to my work here at Jigsaw Qld. The main character, Erwan, a middle aged widower has an adult daughter, Juliette, who falls pregnant after a “one night stand”. She is reluctant to acknowledge who the father is and intends to raise the child on her own.

When Erwan has routine DNA testing done to check on any inheritable conditions that may affect his grandchild, he finds out that the man who raised him is not his biological father. This is shocking and disturbing news for Erwan and he embarks on a search for his biological father. This film explores themes relevant to adoption such as how “late discovery” impacts on identity and relationships, and the importance of knowing who your biological father is. Erwan tries to reinforce the latter to his daughter, Juliette. Even if the father, as in Juliette's case, decides he does not want a role in the child's upbringing, having his name recorded on the birth certificate and the child knowing their biological history is very important.

The film also reinforced for me the importance of early DNA testing after contact is made with a potential biological father as, in Erwan's case, the person he found and established a relationship with, turned out not to be his biological father. The latter scenario has also occurred in our experience here at Jigsaw Qld. We therefore recommend that those adopted people who make contact with a father should get a DNA test done early so that paternity is established prior to

relationship building. For more information about searching for relatives or DNA testing contact the FASS team on 1800 210 313 (Q Id only) or 07 3358 6666 (Mon to Fri 9am to 5pm) .

Review of The Trauma Cleaner - Jo Sparrow

Book written by Sarah Krasnostein



Sarah Krasnostein writes that the opposite of trauma is not the absence of trauma. Rather, the opposite of trauma is order. I'm not sure I entirely agree with her, however, trauma can certainly fragment memory and self and a sign of healing would be the re-ordering of both, with a flow-on affect on our everyday lives.

In the biography, *The Trauma Cleaner*, Krasnostein examines the incredible life of trauma cleaner, Sandra Pankhurst. In this debut book, Krasnostein, a legal academic takes a scalpel and explores trauma and themes of belonging, identity and connection in the lives of her subject and those she helps through her work. She also turns the spotlight on herself and examines her own traumas.

I wasn't aware that adoption figured in this biography until I started reading, and yet, adoption trauma was, in my opinion, at the very heart of the book. I could only wonder if adoption had not factored in Pankhurst's life, whether everything would've been different.

Pankhurst is a woman who creates order for people who have experienced trauma, a woman who has experienced her own deep traumas. Sandra's childhood would not be out of place in a Dickens novel.

She was adopted through the Catholic church to a family in West Footscray, Melbourne, who following the death of their first son, were told they couldn't have more children. Following Pankhurst's adoption they went on to have two more sons and told her she was a mistake.

Pankhurst's adoptive father was a violent and sadistic alcoholic and both parents were physically and emotionally abusive. She was forced to live in a shed in the backyard that her father built and she was excluded from the family home. They would deny her food and access to the bathroom.

Pankhurst was born male, and as a little child, Krasnostein believes she would've been very gentle and effeminate. As fervent Catholics, the mother developed a hatred of her for being what she believed to be homosexual. So she was stigmatised by the people who were meant to be including her, experiencing a second rejection and abandonment.

Through the course of her life, Pankhurst has worn many hats; husband, father to two sons who she eventually turns her back on, drag queen, recipient of full sexual reassignment surgery, sex worker, funeral director, trophy wife, step-

mother, and finally a trauma cleaner. She saw her pregnant partner die as a result of an assault and later her husband die, and experienced sexual violence, turning to drugs and alcohol for relief.

As a result of her trauma and drug and alcohol use, Pankhurst has experienced huge memory loss. Throughout the biography, Krasnostein alternates chapters about Pankhurst's past and descriptions of her life today, with stories of her clients to great effect.

Sarah Krasnostein first met Pankhurst at a forensics conference and was immediately drawn to the immaculately groomed woman showing slide shows of crime scene clean ups. The two women got to know one another and Sarah first wrote an essay about Pankhurst's life and work, before penning the biography.

While Pankhurst has seemingly not explored her own past and traumas, she draws on those experiences to provide compassionate and non-judgemental services to her clients who include severe hoarders and the families of terrible death scene clean ups.

Krasnostein occasionally examines her own life, and reveals she was abandoned by her own mother as a child. She discovers through her writing that she has therefore felt unloveable and needed to feel loved and that she belonged. She believes this is also what Pankhurst is seeking through her work with her clients.

The Trauma Cleaner is an incredible story of resilience and determination to survive and I thoroughly enjoyed reading it.