

# BITS & PIECES

## JIGSAW QLD INC | NEWSLETTER | 2019 WINTER EDITION

### 2019 Events

Jigsaw's support groups have experienced an increase in numbers since late 2015. Participation at the groups is free for members (suggested \$5/head donation for non-members).

#### **Adopted Person Support Group**

- (2019 Dates) 13 July, 14 Sept & 9 Nov. Held on the ground floor of SANDS House, 505 Bowen Terrace, New Farm from 1.30 - 3.30pm.

#### **Mother's Morning Tea** - (2019

Dates: 10am to 12pm on the ground floor of SANDS House, 505 Bowen Terrace, New Farm on 17 July, 18 Sept and 20 Nov. (An informal gathering for mothers who have experienced separation from their children by adoption).

#### **Open Support Group** - (2019

Dates) 8 June, 10 Aug, 12 Oct, 14 Dec. Held on the ground floor of SANDS House, 505 Bowen Terrace, New Farm from 1.30 - 3.30pm.

#### **Sunshine Coast Adoptee Group** -

(2019 Dates) 15 June, 17 Aug, 19 Oct & 21 Dec at Maroochy Neighbourhood Centre, 2 Fifth Ave, Cotton Tree from 1.20pm to 3.30pm.

**Jigsaw Queensland  
Inc.**

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



## Discharge of Adoption A personal story.

by Dorelle Downs (Costello)

My son Michael started the process of trying to regain his birth name more than four years ago, when he first made contact with the Department of Child Safety, Youth & Women. It was suggested to him that he contact Caxton Street Legal Centre, which he did and a lawyer was assigned to his case. As mothers, we all know the trauma we went through regarding the signing of forms to release our babies for adoption. Michael was eventually placed in foster care just prior to his first birthday, and despite several attempts to regain him, he was eventually adopted at nearly five.

Michael was subjected to terrible physical and emotional abuse as a child. He left home as soon as he was able and cut all connection with his adoptive parents. As an adult, Michael and I were reunited when he was twenty-three and have developed a strong relationship. Michael wished to apply to have his adoption order discharged in order to have his original birth certificate reinstated and to legally recognise me as his mother.

With the assistance of another barrister, Michael applied to the Supreme Court to have the adoption order discharged. After a day in court, Justice Wilson discharged the adoption order and reinstated Michael's original birth certificate and birth name.

I was with Michael in court at the time the order was made. It was a very emotional moment for both of us.

It was then approximately six weeks for the chain of events to occur before he could apply for his birth certificate - another emotional moment.

Don't give up hope, it takes time, but it is well worth the long drawn out process.

## Without our Consent: a Queensland Story



Forced Adoption Support Services

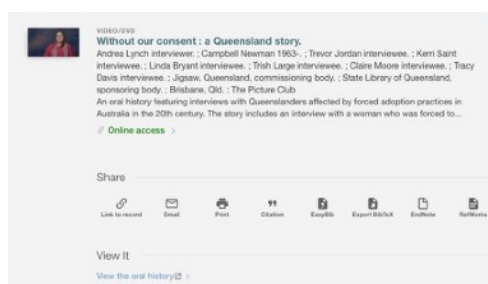


State Library of Queensland

Last year the Forced Adoption Support service at Jigsaw Qld worked with the State Library of Queensland to produce a film about the history of forced adoptions with a focus on the Queensland experience. The film was based on interviews with a mother and a father who had lost a child to adoption and an adopted adult. Representatives of stakeholder and advocacy groups (ALAS Australia, Association for

Adoptees, Origins Qld and Jigsaw Qld) were also interviewed as well as Claire Moore (former Qld Senator) and Tracy Davis (former Qld Government MP).

The aim of the film was to raise community awareness of the history and impacts of forced adoption.



To access the film, see the link below:

[http://onesearch.slq.qld.gov.au/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=slq\\_alma21226543510002061&context=L&vid=SLQ&search\\_scope=SLQ&tab=slq&lang=en\\_US](http://onesearch.slq.qld.gov.au/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=slq_alma21226543510002061&context=L&vid=SLQ&search_scope=SLQ&tab=slq&lang=en_US)

Once on the page, then click "View the oral History".

Please note that you can only access this link on a laptop or PC (not on a phone or tablet) at this stage. And if using an Apple device you will need to use a browser other than Safari, such as Google Chrome.

## Lecture for Social Work students at the University of Queensland by Jane Sliwka

On the 12th April, I delivered a two hour lecture

to Social Work students at the University of Queensland. The content of this lecture included:

- Information about the history of forced adoption in Australia.
- History of Queensland's adoption legislation from the 1930s to now.
- The history of inter-country adoption and how Australia must ensure that the children being adopted into Australia are not being trafficked. Also, that we learn from Australia's history of forced adoption and do not replicate these practices in other countries.
- How permanent guardianship can ensure children grow up in a safe home environment, without needing to change a child's legal identity and legal relationship with birth parents, as occurs with adoption.

The social work students were very responsive to this content and through their questions, demonstrated their understanding that adoption is extremely complex.

Through case studies that I had written, students had the opportunity to explore these issues in depth and discuss how they would respond to a client who was presenting with issues relating to an adoption.



I was very impressed and reassured by the way the students responded with sensitivity and acknowledgement of the profound loss and trauma associated with adoption.

This was the third year I have delivered a lecture on adoption to Social Work students at the University of Queensland and hope be invited back in future years.



## Anniversary Exhibition



**At the 6th Anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoption, an exhibition was held where those affected provided entries based around the theme**

### **'words that have helped me'. Below is Lois Buch's response to the film Philomena based on the novel by Martin Sixsmith.**

It had been 12 years since my (birth) mother had passed away, when the secrets she'd kept from me were revealed by her sister. I slowly realised that my mother had shown me great love during our reunion 20 years earlier, by keeping the abuses and traumas of her childhood secret from me. She was shielding me from horrors that I would not have been able to handle in my 20's.

I was struggling with the grief that was her life, and angry that she'd been continually let down by those around her; parents, siblings, medical and law enforcement. I didn't know how to move on. I was exhausted all the time and overwhelmed at the lack of justice that had prevailed during her lifetime. But then I realised she had found a pathway to forgiving others in order to move on with life, and by default had maintained the core of who she was; a forgiving and compassionate human being.

This quote towards the end of the movie Philomena, perfectly summed up the example that my birth mother had set for me; forgiveness is not the easy option, nor is it weak. Forgiving is hard work. But it's the path that will lead to healing. I sat in the cinema and cried when Philomena spoke these words:

Philomena:  
*Sister Hildegarde, I want you to know that I forgive you.*

Martin Sixsmith (journalist):  
*What? Just like that?*

Philomena:  
*It's not 'just like that'... it's hard. That's hard for me. But I don't want to hate people. I don't want to be like you... Look at you.*

Martin Sixsmith:  
*I'm angry.*

Philomena:  
*Must be exhausting...*

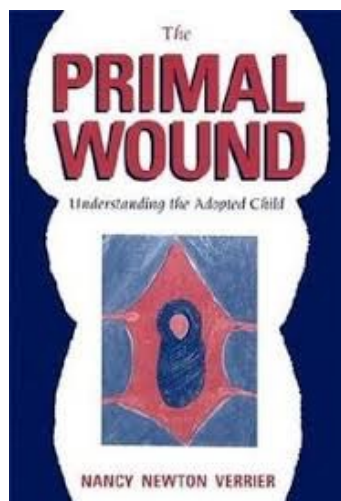


Judy Dench and the real Philomena Lee

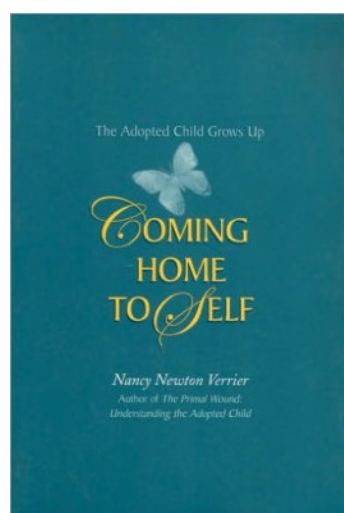
## **Nancy Verrier Article on Identity and Relationships (intro by Jane Sliwka).**

Nancy Verrier is an adoptive mother who adopted a daughter in 1969, before giving birth to another daughter two years later. As her daughters became adolescents, she began to notice key differences between them. This led her to conduct research into the lifelong impacts of adoption as a part of her Masters in Clinical Psychology. Nancy Verrier now works as a Marriage, Family and Child Therapist and a large part of her practice is supporting adult adoptees. She





has also written two books that have become well known and



respected amongst the world-wide adoption community. These are 'The Primal Wound' and 'Coming Home to Self: The Adopted Child Grows Up'. Nancy Verrier's website, also contains a number of articles that provide a summary of her work. We have included one of these articles below.

## Identity and Relationships By Nancy Verrier, MFT

What is identity and what makes it so crucial when speaking of

adoption? I believe it is something that makes adoptees feel a kind of alienation all their lives, beginning with their adoptive families.

Adoptees call it genetic confusion. This confusion begins when the baby is separated from the first mother and begins his life with his adoptive mother. At birth a baby knows his mother through his senses: smell, touch, sight of mother's face, tone of voice, heartbeat, resonance. No matter how wonderful the adoptive mother, she doesn't pass the sensory test. The baby is confused, terrified, angry; then sad, helpless, hopeless, alone. Where is mom?

Although the cutting of the umbilical cord separates the mother and child physically, they are not yet separated psychologically. They are what Eric Neumann calls "the mother/baby." The psychological separation is an intra-psychoic process that happens gradually during the first year of life. So the relinquished baby feels, not only the loss of the mother, but also the loss of part of the Self.

From the moment the baby is separated from the first mom and gives up hope of connecting with her again, she begins to cope with that loss. These coping mechanisms are outlined in my first book *The Primal Wound*: the effects of separation trauma on her attitudes, feelings, and behaviour.

Those behaviours, which emanate from the child's early experience

of separation and loss, do not give an accurate picture of who the child is. Many adoptees have written to me after having read *The Primal Wound* and said something to the effect: "You know me better than anyone." Yet, I don't know them at all. What I do know is how they may have responded to being separated from their first mothers. What I know is how they coped. This coping behaviour is most noticeable in the adoptive home.

Sometimes others—neighbours, teachers, strangers—actually see more of the true identity of adoptees than their own families.

Why is this? It seems crucial for the adoptee to fit as well as possible into the adoptive family. Since he doesn't have any genetic cues, he has to find all his cues from his environment. In many cases adoptees are basically so different from their adoptive parents, it is a wonder they survive in those families.

However, to survive is to adapt, so every day the adoptee tries to figure out how to be in that family. But because he is basically different, he always may feel somewhat of a failure at this. First of all he failed to keep first mom, and now he is failing to truly fit into this new family. What do you suppose this does to self-esteem?

Life goes on and the adoptee is struggling on two fronts: trying to figure out how to be a part of her

adoptive family without any genetic cues, and how to deal with all the feelings she has about what has happened to her, while trying very hard not to be abandoned again.

Fear of abandonment is a driving force (or a paralysing agent) in the life of every adoptee. Although not consciously remembering that devastating event, the experience is imprinted on every neuron/cell in her body. Something happened which changed her life forever and she has to make sure that it doesn't happen again. Because she doesn't know exactly what that event was, she has to be very, very vigilant.

The crucial event of separation happened before most adoptees achieved long-term memory, so they begin to believe that their coping

mechanisms are who they are: They are "bad kids," acting out all over the place without understanding why; or they are very good, trying not to rock the boat. Often parents define them this way and they begin to do the same thing, even though they may know that someone else dwells inside.

There are some parents who seem to understand that their children may not be like them. They support and encourage the child's unique interests and talents.

However, there are some parents who, because of their lack of understanding or interest in their child's talents, fail to go to the track meets or the piano recitals.

Even though some biological parents are just as blind or uncaring, there are other ways in which these children know that they belong: what they look like,



Nancy Verrier - [www.nancyverrier.com](http://www.nancyverrier.com)

how they stand, how they walk, mannerisms, gestures, tone of voice, shape of lips, height, weight, smile, eyes, etc., etc. Something reminds them that they belong. Adoptees, however, are super observant. They notice every discrepancy. They are trying to find likeness, but notice every difference. They notice this much more than their parents do. Unlike

children in biological families, who go from sameness to difference, adoptees go from difference to sameness, as they adapt as best they can.

It should be noted that this isn't easy for the adoptive parents either, especially the mother who from the beginning was the one who failed the sensory test. She, too, has to figure out how to be with her child without any genetic cues. In addition, she is dealing with a child who was traumatised by the separation from the first

mother. So it is indeed a dance that goes on between the adoptee and her mother over and over again. The general public doesn't understand how difficult it is to interact with someone where there are no genetic cues to help with the understanding of what is needed,

or how to interact with someone who is afraid to get too close (or afraid to let go).

The discrepancy between what the adopted person thinks he must do to fit in and how he feels inside is a dilemma for him. As one adoptee put it, it is like being a dog in a family of cats. This genetic confusion is evident even for

adoptees who found out they were adopted late in life. The feelings are there; the confusion is there; something is wrong.

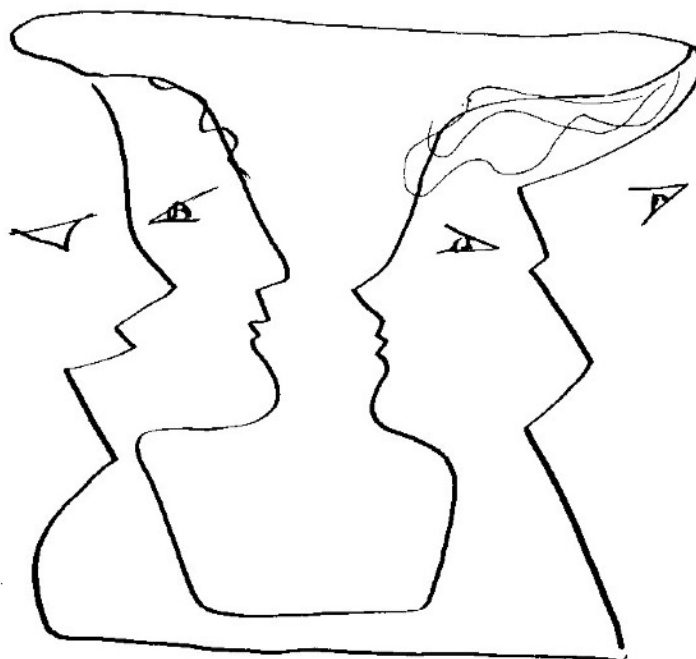
However, there is no context for their feelings or confusion. Remember that the initial confusion of wondering what happened to mom was the first identity problem for the adoptee. The second crucial time is adolescence when again the adoptee feels alienated from her family. In most families at this time, the child identifies with either mom or dad, then pushes off into being somewhat different. It is difficult for adoptees to do because they haven't yet achieved that sameness that seems to be required. After having blamed themselves most of their lives for

not having done so, they now seem to turn the blame around and blame their parents, especially mom, for this problem.

Of course, they don't know they are blaming her for this; they are just blaming her for everything else. So, in order to avoid the constant reminder of those

differences, many adoptees try to stay away from their parents during this time. They spend lots of time with friends, stay in their rooms, try to avoid family get-togethers, and so forth. This causes problems, unkind words, and hurt feelings. Some kids will delve into drugs and alcohol as they try to anaesthetise themselves from the pain of it all.

Because this causes such pain and consternation in the whole family,



the parents may feel helpless and send the child away to a treatment centre, triggering another feeling of abandonment in the adoptee, further alienating her from her family.

I believe many of the problems between the adoptee and his parents are rooted two things: the parents' ignorance of their child's

loss and the differences in their DNA: their identity. And I believe this problem of identity and of feeling misunderstood causes the adoptee to be secretive with the parents. Adoptees become very withholding and accuse the parents of being intrusive if they ask a simple question such as "How are you doing?"!! (Adoptees, be honest!)

Unfortunately, some of these resentments last into the adult relationship because neither parent nor child realises that many

of the problems between them are caused by the natural differences between them. If this can be recognised and acknowledged by both sides, the relationship can flourish even if they are quite different from one another. If not, resentments continue and the relationship continues to be problematic.

During his 20s, when the adoptee has moved out of his parents' home and is more independent, he should be able to explore his own identity. However, he has to be careful not to be the chameleon, whose tendency is to adjust his personality, values, or opinions to whatever group he is in. After all, he is so used to doing this in his adoptive family that it is

the familiar thing to do and seems like the right thing to do to be liked, to fit in, to belong. He doesn't know how to look inside for the answers even to questions about personal preferences. I used to believe adoptees were afraid of being wrong, but they corrected me: "It is because we don't know!" This not knowing who they are is a huge problem when forming adult relationships.

As an adult she will need to blend the nurture and nature aspects of her life in order to become more authentic. As the adoptee moves into new relationships in adulthood, this becomes crucial.

How can one have a relationship with a false self? In the beginning of a relationship the two are still strangers and the adoptee can be more authentic (because it doesn't matter). He can take the risk of allowing more of himself to be seen—coming from within.

The other person genuinely likes or falls in love with the essence of the adoptee. However, as the relationship progresses and the friend or partner becomes more important to him, fear takes over and sabotaging begins. The expectations of being abandoned by the important person in his life cause behaviour which will lead to that very thing. The adoptee becomes the scared, frustrating

child. (See the top of page 324 of Coming Home to Self for testimony to this.)

If a mature, adult relationship is desired, a constant vigilance is required to answer: "Am I acting as an adult or as a child? What is true about me? How can I truly know?" The coping mechanisms the adoptee believed would keep him safe while growing up are not very helpful in adult relationships.

They are just that: coping skills, not true personality. Each adoptee is a unique individual, yet those



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coping skills are quite predictable. Gradually replacing coping skills with the true self should be a goal. If some of the principles and values from the adoptive family seem congruent with what they believe about themselves, adoptees can adopt them, while bringing forth the genetic truth available in their DNA. Although difficult to discern, the DNA is all there. It didn't go anywhere. It can be accessed.

This is often easier if it is possible to meet biological family members because the mirroring and sensory aspects of oneself are available. But what if this isn't possible? What if the adoptee came from a different race, culture, or country? Although this adds another dimension to the puzzle of identity which needs to be addressed, all adoptees deal with identity issues.

For foreign-born adoptees an added burden is that, although their parents don't understand it much of the time and just see

them as their children, the rest of society identify them by their nationality, and they have to deal with the fallout from that. When minority adoptees, who are adopted by Caucasian parents, move away from the home, they have to deal with cultural identity for which they

may not have been prepared. Parental support, rather than denial, is needed.

For many adoptees, the environment in which they were reared may have been very different from that of the biological parents, so finding bio families, although helpful, doesn't completely answer the question: "Who am I?"

There are many roads to an authentic identity. After years of



adapting and denying the true self, it is not easy to find that road. However, remembering that coping skills, childhood behaviours, and the false self do not qualify, the search must change from the environment to within the self. Do I like, dislike, feel neutral about that? What feels true? How can I blend nature and nurture to become complete? It is time to begin!

To read more,  
visit: <http://nancyverrier.com>



### ***Carramar "Graduates"***

All women who passed through the home called Carramar at Turramurra, Sydney, run by the Church of England (Anglican Church) in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s are welcome to join a group of women with similar history with a view to justice. Contact Janice Benson. Ph: 0419 022 764 (please leave a message if no answer).

**The Anglican Church Southern Queensland and Anglicare Southern Queensland cordially invites**

to attend the opening of the Remembrance Garden  
in acknowledgement of past forced adoption practices,  
which occurred at St Mary's Home, Toowong.

**19 June 2019**  
24 Mount Street, Toowong

Please arrive at **2.45pm**, for a **3pm** commencement  
You are welcome to join us for Afternoon Tea

RSVP by **12 June 2019**  
Please email Angela Broomfield  
**abroomfield@anglicaresq.org.au** or phone **(07) 3838 7551**  
Looking forward to seeing you on the day

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