

# BITS & PIECES

JIGSAW QLD INC | NEWSLETTER | SUMMER 2017

## 2017 Events

To keep an eye on Jigsaw's events for 2017 and beyond, visit [www.jigsawqueensland.com/events](http://www.jigsawqueensland.com/events).

Mother's Retreat 2018 is in planning stages. See more on pg 3.

## 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** - 11 Nov  
**Mother's Support Group** - 18 Nov  
*For mothers who have experienced separation from their children by adoption.*

**Open Support Group** - 9 Dec - also Christmas break-up (can you believe we are talking Christmas already?)

**Interracial & Inter-country Group** - TBA

**Sunshine Coast Adoptee Group** - TBA.

*"The Open Group helped me gain more insight into the experiences of others in the adoption triad."*  
 Open Support Group Attendee

## Jigsaw Queensland Inc.

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



## Sunshine Coast Adoptee Support Group

**Jigsaw's has begun running adoptee support groups at the Sunshine Coast and they have been well attended.**

The meeting's are held bi-monthly on Saturdays from 1.30pm to 3.30pm at the Maroochy Neighbourhood Centre, 2 Fifth Avenue at Cotton Tree and are open to all adult adopted persons. The final meeting of 2017 was held on 21 October. President of Jigsaw, Dr Trevor Jordan said the meetings are facilitated by trained volunteers on behalf of Sunshine Coast adoptees.

"The meetings are a safe and caring space where no one is made to contribute their story, or 'do' anything. Information will be available on how to access adoption information and how other adoptees have met the lifelong challenges of adoption.

"Each person has their own reason for coming and also their own reaction and benefit from being involved. As we listen with respect, we find commonalities and differences in our stories, we find hope that change and growth are possible."

Dr Jordan said that with sufficient local demand the meetings would continue. For further information and to RSVP please contact Jigsaw Queensland on 1800 21 03 13 (Qld only) or (07) 3358 6666 or email [support@jigsawqld.org.au](mailto:support@jigsawqld.org.au) or contact Judy Glover on 0498 434 838.

## The Colour of Time

**Review of The Colour of Time,  
Compiled by Lynelle Long,  
International Social Service  
Australia, The Benevolent  
Society, Post-Adoption Resource  
Centre & Intercountry Adoptee  
Voices, 2017, 217pp. Available  
as an eBook on iTunes, Amazon  
AU & Amazon US.**

By Trevor Jordan

In a world of power differences inscribed by gender, race, ethnicity and economic status, many dominant narratives take on a different slant when told from the point of view of the least powerful.

In the words of an African proverb, 'Until the lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter.' This is why the voices of interracial and intercountry adult adoptees in this collection are so important.

Each contributor to this volume, compiled sixteen years on from The Colour of Difference, reflects on their personal journey as an intercountry or interracial adoptee.

Thirteen contributors to the present volume also contributed to the previous one. The passage of time has brought them further connections and disconnections, finding and losing parents and siblings and in many cases the experience of forming families of their own.

Each contribution addresses the ongoing and often difficult task of

integrating an Australian identity and another cultural identity, a task faced by many growing up in a multicultural society. However, for those who were adopted there is an added layer of the trauma of separation from one's family of origin.

**'Until the lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter.' - African Proverb**



We define ourselves through our personal story and the network of relationships in which we are embedded. For all adoptees this sense of self is disrupted. They are usually missing the first pages of their story and their relationship with original family and country of origin is severed.

Where race is a factor, further biases enter an individual's story, adding additional layers of

discounted identities within a dominant white culture.

Common themes come out of the stories presented in this collection: themes of loss and grief, of the acceptance of love offered and the desire for more, a sense of belonging but also of alienation, the acceptance and celebration of difference, but also personal experiences of cruel rejection based only on appearances.

What has changed in sixteen years? Issues of trauma and attachment figure more prominently in this collection than they did sixteen years ago, for there is a 'wider understanding of the impact that early childhood trauma and attachment disruption can have on the developing brain.'

There is also a greater understanding of the complex path of identity formation, the importance of openness within the adoptive family, and the life-long impacts on interracial intercountry adoptees.

Open discussion and dialogue within the family and strong encouragement and facilitation to connect with culture helps adoptees to grow up feeling well adjusted and with a healthy sense of self.

All the contributors shared times in their life when they were challenged by themes of race, identity and belonging, yet many also described reaching a place of understanding about their

adoption and their connection to their birth culture.

Reading these insightful stories, one gets a sense that adoptees are more resilient than they are often portrayed. If this is so, it is at least partly because the current generation has been able to find a voice and they have been able to express their needs and desires in tangible ways.

While seeking to restore lost connections to family and culture, many of the contributors have also found inner resources and strengths. With time, there is often an overcoming of the sense of alienation and loss of connection through establishing loving adult relationships or finding contentment with oneself as a unique individual.

Some have written 'about reaching a positive place in their lives, and how the adoption-related issues that had perhaps felt challenging in their youth, are now considered one part of the many complexities of life.'

This book is a must-read for anyone involved in or affected by interracial and intercountry adoption.

Jigsaw members can borrow *The Colour of Time* and *The Colour of Difference* from the Jigsaw library.

\*\*\* If you are an intercountry or interracial adoptee wanting support from other adoptees Jigsaw runs a support group for intercountry and interracial adoptees on the 3rd Saturday of each even numbered month at 505 Bowen Tce, New Farm.

## Mothers Retreat 2018

FASS is hoping a mother's retreat can be organised for next year. The dates and venue have not yet been set but planning will commence soon. If you are a mother and would like to help with the planning or have any ideas about activities or topics for the retreat program please contact Jigsaw Qld on (07) 3358 6666 or 1300 210 313 (from within Qld only).

## Relationship Workshop

On Saturday the 24th of June, 16 adopted people attended a Relationships Workshop at Jigsaw. This workshop was funded by the Forced Adoption Support Service's small grants program and was run by a Psychologist called Trish Purnell-Webb.

when they are separated from their biological mother.

Jigsaw team leader Andrea Lynch and staff member Jane Sliwka were also present at the workshop and provided input throughout the day. The workshop assisted attendees to understand how the attachment style that we all develop early in life can affect our subsequent relationships with partners, friends, adoptive family, biological family and others. Importantly, the workshop focussed on the fact that we can move towards more secure relationships at any time in our life.

Trish provided attendees with practical tools they could use to understand their reactions and communicate clearly with significant others. The feedback from the workshop was extremely



Trish specialises in working with couples using a range of modalities including 'Emotion Focussed Therapy'. This type of therapy is based on attachment theory which is very relevant to adopted people who suffer an attachment disruption early in life

positive overall and we hope to run a similar workshop again in future.

*"Today was better than I had hoped. There was so much spoken about that was useful in a variety of relational contexts"*

## Voices of Adoption

### Share your experience of adoption and reunion with others.

Jigsaw Queensland are producing a series of videos from the perspective of people who have lived experience of adoption. Adoption and reunion are often portrayed in the mainstream media in glamorous ways, however the reality for many is far more complex.

We are beginning with two projects - one to raise awareness about adoption and the second about managing post-reunion relationships. You may like to record the video yourself on a webcam, mobile phone (landscape only) or digital video camera.



Stuck on what to say? We have some questions you can use as the foundation for your clip below. You don't need to answer all the questions, but rather choose the ones of most interest to you.

Video files can be uploaded to Jigsaw Queensland by using the Upload Video button below. The button will direct you to the cloud sharing website Dropbox. If you don't already have one, you will need to create a FREE Dropbox

account. Save your video file to your own Dropbox account and then share it with [support@jigsawqld.org.au](mailto:support@jigsawqld.org.au).

Uploading your video does not guarantee its use in the immediate productions, and videos may be kept for use in the future. If you are having any technical issues with your video please email [chris.mundy@jigsawqld.org.au](mailto:chris.mundy@jigsawqld.org.au)

#### Video tips:

- Be aware that your video will be used online in a public space.

adoption rather than its general practice.

- Respect other people's privacy and reputation.
- Include how adoption and reunion are different to what others think.
- Keep your responses to the point - don't ramble. Your video should only be 5 to 10 minutes long.
- Get permission from others if you are using a photo of them.

- A pseudonym may be used for yourself or others. You may want to use "my mother" or "my father" rather than other people's names.

- Video files are large. You may need to break them down into smaller excerpts or film them in lower quality. Alternatively

you can post a USB of your video files to Jigsaw Queensland and we can return it by post once we have copied the files.

*We have some questions you can use as the foundation for your clip on our website.*

- Don't be derogatory towards family members or others.
- Talk about adoption rather than talk about specific people.
- Your audience benefits from hearing how you felt or managed a situation rather than hearing about specific events.
- Frame your experience from an "I" perspective rather than a "you" perspective. Talk about your personal experience of



## Author Interview

***For a Girl* by Mary-Rose MacColl.  
Published by Allen and Unwin  
2017.**

**By Andrea Lynch**

In this compelling memoir, Mary-Rose MacColl unpacks her experience of being groomed and taken advantage of as a young girl by her teacher and her husband, resulting in a pregnancy and the adoption of her baby. For many years she maintains the secret. However, after the birth of her second child she is precipitated into confronting the secrecy and the huge emotional impacts of these experiences. Mary-Rose writes bravely and honestly about her immense pain and ongoing struggles. Her book provides hope that healing is possible.

We asked Mary-Rose if she would answer some questions for our newsletter and she very kindly agreed.

**1. Your book is a very honest account of the circumstances that resulted in a pregnancy and the adoption of your first baby and the impact this has had on your life. What was your greatest hope in publishing this book?**

*For a Girl* is my sixth book. In a way, it's a book I've been writing for most of my adult life. The other books - four novels and a non-fiction book about the state of

maternity care in Australia - point toward *For a Girl*.

When I was a teenager, a high school teacher and her husband befriended me. They became like parents and then sexualised that parenting relationship. Just after I finished school, I had a baby, a girl I named Ruth. I gave baby Ruth up for adoption or, as I put it in the book, I gave her away to strangers. I kept these enormously significant life experiences secret, first to protect my teacher and her husband and then because of



shame which welded my secret shut behind me.

But these experiences continued to have a profound impact. I did several bouts of therapy. I could become a therapy consultant if there is such a job. When I was ready, I began to tell my secrets to people from my life, my husband,

my dearest friends, others. Telling my secrets was liberating. It took away their power to harm me and my family. For most people, that would probably be enough of a journey. But I am also a writer with a responsibility to write what I know or learn about the world. So I wrote about what had happened. You've asked what I hoped for. I don't know that I hoped for any particular outcome. I was just following my heart. Since the book has been published, I am really proud it's connected with readers

who have stories like mine, people who've had to keep secrets, people who were betrayed by others, mothers who lost children and children who lost mothers.

**2. *For a Girl* - can you explain this title for us?**

There are two girls in *For a Girl*. The first is the girl I was, waylaid on the way to adult life by the relationship with my teacher and her husband. The second is the girl who was born from the relationship with my teacher and her husband, the baby I gave to strangers who I longed to reconnect with.

**3. In your book you say that the decision to place your daughter for adoption was your choice. In the National Archives "Without Consent" exhibition there is a definition of informed consent and forced adoption. Would you say that any of these factors were at play in your adoption experience?**

I wanted to take responsibility for what I'd done to my daughter. I

understand the notion of informed consent and I agree that I was not, at eighteen, presented with real alternatives, although I vaguely knew that those alternatives were as this was the early 1980s. I say I gave my daughter to strangers rather than I lost my daughter because I want to remind myself that no matter how young I was and no matter how stacked



against me the system was, I was a mother. I was my daughter's best mother and should have claimed her and didn't. Once I owned that responsibility, it wasn't so bad, to be honest. I could work through my feelings and get free of them, which meant I could approach my daughter without all that crushing guilt. I know others feel differently on this point and I also know some women had less agency than I did about what decision was made in relation to their children. And I am not in any way defending the adoption system which was so wrongheaded and which did such terrible harm to so many people, women who lost their babies, children who lost their kin. But I wanted my daughter to understand that I did this so that she doesn't blame herself, so that if she blames anyone, she blames me. I think being adopted is very tough on a child. I want to own responsibility for the harm I caused, even in the mitigating circumstances.

**4. Some mothers have talked about how the second pregnancy/birth was a major triggering event for the grief of losing their first child to adoption. In your book it is another event with your second child (stroller incident) that triggers overwhelming emotions for you. Have you any comments to make about why this was the trigger?**

I accidentally pinched my son in a stroller clip one day and went home and fell apart. My body began to shake uncontrollably. I moaned and shouted and my body began to react outside of my conscious control. Although I didn't know it at the time, baby Ruth was coming back, demanding to be grieved, and with her would come all the secrets I had kept for so long. Thus began a long, long journey to healing. I not only had a secret pregnancy. I also lived with the deep shame of what had



happened with my teacher and her husband, for which I blamed

myself. Gradually, I have come to understand that this part of the dynamic of relationships where power is unequal, that my shame was very debilitating for me, and probably served to protect my teacher and her husband and leave them free to hurt other children.



**5. When I was reading your book I felt anxious about how it would be for your daughter to read your book and also know it was going to be read by many people. It was obviously a big decision to write this story for publication. Can you comment on this decision?**

*For a Girl*, the published book, is very much my story addressed to the reader, although the original book I wrote when I first sat down to write was a long letter addressed to my daughter which I sent to her to read. She was the first and most important reader of the story and I am very glad that has happened, even if it is difficult story for her. And while I understand that many people, not just my daughter, might prefer certain things within the book remained secret, it's been my experience that secrets can do great harm and telling the truth hardly ever does. Information is

really only information. It can't hurt people. Since the book was published, this has become more true for me.

**6. Apart from writing this book, what has been the most helpful things for you in dealing with the grief and trauma you experienced?**

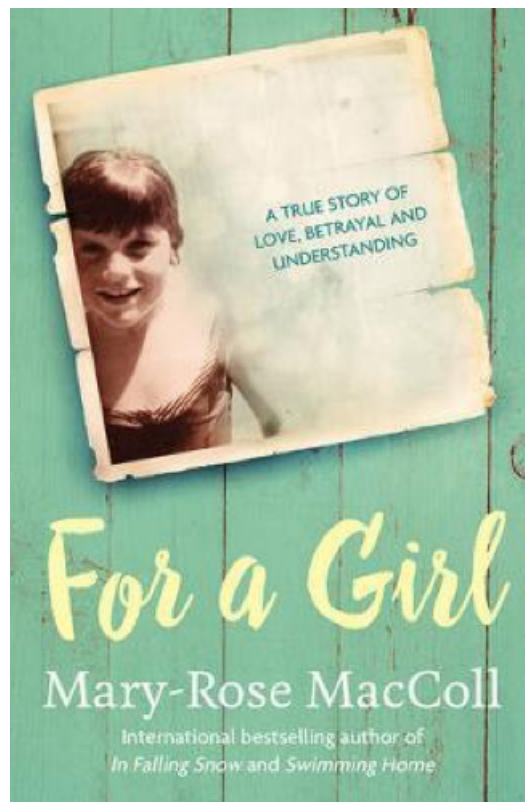


I would say that the most important thing has been learning to understand that all of my experiences happened in my body, the relationship with my body, the relationship with my teacher and her husband, pregnancy and birth. I'm a real thinker and not terribly good at coping with the bodily experience! I have had various body therapists who've helped, a ka huna massage therapist who taught me how feelings can be locked in our bodies and need to be brought forth. I also went to see a yoni-mapping therapist, which halted me understand what had happened in terms of vaginal trauma. My daughter was conceived in an act of violence and the birth was very fast and traumatic and it really helped me to heal to have someone who understood and could relate about this area - therapists don't seem to talk about vaginas much!

**7. Since writing and publishing this book would you be happy**

**to tell us about any developments in your relationship with your daughter and in yourself?**

I had done a lot of work to come to terms with what had happened to me before I wrote the book. I think the relationship between a mother who's given a child up for adoption and the child is fraught. I am letting my daughter lead the way in terms of the amount of contact we have and she doesn't want contact. As for me, I'm doing my best to come to terms with the grief of losing a child and the grief of realising that when I was a teenager, people did me harm. These are not easy things to come



to terms with, and I'm pretty lucky to have been sent such a challenging life task. It's enabled me to understand the stories of others. And I've had very good help along the way.

## Men and Adoption

**By Chris Mundy**

**Born in Germany in 1902 and migrating to America in 1933, Erik Erickson was one of the key forefathers of developmental psychology. Not much is known about Erickson's biological father except that he was no longer in a relationship with his mother at the time of his birth.**

Born as Erik Salomonsen, his name officially changed to Erik Homberger in 1911 when he was adopted by his stepfather. Perhaps because of Erikson's experience with adoption, his psychological study focused intently on issues of identity.

After his death in 1994, his daughter reflected that her father's own issues with identity were not resolved until he changed his last name from Homberger to Erikson in his adult life. The name was his own invention. However he continued to explore the psychological issues related to identity for the rest of his life.

Erikson's most memorable work was his 8 stages of psychosocial development. More recently, researchers have been exploring the 7th stage particularly when it comes to men and fatherhood. This stage deals with the notion of "generativity".

Generativity is essentially about sharing what one has with others, particularly with the next generation.



You can see it at work when a father shows a teenage son how to use a hammer, saw a plank in half or use a cordless drill. Or in the look of pride when an experienced tradesman demonstrates a building technique to a young apprentice and he does it for the first time. Or when Uncles share their wisdom with nieces or nephews when they need guidance and direction.



It is the “passing on” of oneself to further generations, the sharing of our identity with others and leaving behind the legacy of that identity in future generations. Generativity is a key factor in fatherhood.

***One of the greatest challenges for men affected by adoption is how to get a grasp on generativity when there have been significant disruptions in this “passing on”.***



This occurs with all men in the adoption triad. The separation of a son from his biological father can make the adopted male wonder what exactly they are passing on generatively to their own children as they are missing aspects of identity that are usually noticed between biological fathers and biological sons.

Birth fathers may also experience “generative chill”, a type of anxiety resulting from a father’s perceived or actual risk of losing the children he helped create.

Adoptive fathers affected by fertility issues wrestle with being unable to pass on their own biology to offspring and may experience confusion about what aspects of themselves they can pass on to their adoptive children.

Men can react in different ways when faced with such generative challenges including disengagement, despair, depression or grief, particularly when further family or relationship breakdown exists.

In the same way that Erik Erickson wrestled with issues of identity and generativity, so must men who are affected by adoption.

By incorporating generativity into existing relationships, men

affected by adoption can identify important aspects about themselves they can pass on to others.

This may not be restricted to direct family members, but can be built in relationships in the



community, at work and with extended family members.

For more information about generativity and men, check out the “working with men learning group” at <http://groupworksolutions.com.au>.

