

A JOINT STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF JFM RESEARCH, ADOPTION RIGHTS ALLIANCE AND THE CLANN PROJECT



Mari Tatlow Steed, 1960-2024

It is with profound sadness and deep regret that we share the news of the passing of our beloved friend and colleague, Mari T. Steed. Mari passed away at home after a short but serious illness and in the warm and loving embrace of her cherished family. She was 64 years of age. Mari was immensely proud of her children, Kerry, Jessica and Alex, and of her seven grandchildren. We ask that you hold Mari's memory and all who loved her in your hearts at this sad time.

Since the 1990s, Mari has been involved in adoption and Magdalene activism in Ireland and the United States. She was the co-founder of Justice for Magdalenes Research (JFMR) and Adoption Rights Alliance (ARA), and she served as the Coordinator for the Banished Babies group and Vice President of the US-based Bastard Nation: The Adoptee Rights Organization. Previously, Mari served as US Coordinator for AdoptionIreland: The Adopted People's Association until the organisation's disbandment in 2007. Over thirty-plus years, she worked tirelessly in her spare time to help reunite families forcibly separated by Ireland's institutional 'care' and closed, secret adoption systems, and to obtain redress and the access to information that is their basic human right. To those of us privileged to work alongside Mari for many decades, we will remember her as a fiercely-committed advocate, a strategically-minded activist, a deeply courageous leader, and a loyal, fun-loving and selfless friend. Words cannot adequately convey how much we will miss her, and how much we owe to her.

Ní fheicfid a leithéid arís / There will never be the likes of her again.

In the near future, Mari's family will announce details of memorial services in the US and Ireland to celebrate Mari's life. If you would like to contribute towards the family's expenses at this time, details of the GoFundMe are available here: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-mari-steed-get-the-care-she-deserves>

Image credit: Paul Sherwood



Mari Tatlow Steed, 1960-2024

Mari T. Steed (née Mary Therese Fitzpatrick) was born at St. Finbarr's Hospital in Cork on 8 April 1960. She spent the first eighteen months of her life confined with her mother Josephine (Josie) Fitzpatrick in the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary Mother and Baby Home at Bessborough in Cork. The Sisters permitted Josie—herself a survivor of an Industrial School and Magdalene Laundry—to care for Mari for only 18 months before separating mother and daughter. Mari was sent to America for adoption on 1 December 1961 as part of the Ireland-US adoption scheme. While confined in Bessborough, Mari was subjected to a series of medical vaccine trials without Josie's consent.

Mari grew up in the Philadelphia area. She began her search for her mother in the late 1980s. Initially, she met with little success and was denied access to personal information by the Sacred Heart Adoption agency in Cork. But, with the help of the internet in the early 1990s, and generous support from Judy Campbell, a London-based volunteer researcher and dear friend, she finally reunited with her beloved Josie in November 2001, almost forty years after their separation. There followed twelve happy years of meeting up and getting to know each other and introducing Josie to her grandchildren. When Josie passed in 2013, Mari was by her bedside, holding Josie's hand as she departed this life. Mari proudly gave the eulogy at Josie's funeral in Swindon, and we can just as easily attribute her words on that occasion to Mari herself at this difficult time:

Josie taught me much about dignity, forgiveness and keeping joy in our lives. Her gracious and giving nature were a wonder to behold. All who met and knew her found delight in this tiny but forceful and determined woman, who gave so much of herself to others. Even the sorrows and secrets she held close to herself could not defeat that spirit. She would rather worry over others than herself. While many of her generation and experience could never properly find solace or purpose in life, my mum did. To use an American expression, wherever she found lemons, she would make lemonade.

Taking the lessons she learned from her own search process, Mari endlessly sought to help others achieve the same objective. She fought to ensure that her fellow 'Banished Babies' receive the acknowledgement they deserve and the access to information that is their basic human right. Mari also fought for justice for women like Josie who were arbitrarily detained in Ireland's Magdalene Laundries and helped lead the JFM political campaign from 2009-2013 that contributed to bringing about an official state apology and redress scheme. Similarly, she worked with colleagues in ARA and contributed to the CLANN Project that assisted witnesses who wanted to submit statements to the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes. Mari was deeply committed to ensuring that all survivors and affected people obtain the redress to which they were entitled, in particular that they gain access to all personal information held by the State or religious and other private bodies. Likewise, she felt strongly that Ireland and its diaspora should grapple with the lessons handed down through the nation's history of institutional provision, and in particular that this history form part of the national educational curriculum. Mari was a driving force behind the [Dublin Honours Magdalenes](#) gathering in Dublin in summer 2018, which brought hundreds of Magdalene Laundry survivors together to be acknowledged, celebrated, and consulted on the question of memorialisation. In 2021, along with seven other witnesses, including Philomena Lee and Mary Harney, Mari took judicial review proceedings to challenge the findings of the Mother and Baby Homes Commission, and in December 2021, the Irish High Court [declared](#) that the Commission had denied fair procedures to these survivors. Mari was also enormously invested in our ongoing work to help inform the building of the proposed National Centre for Research and Remembrance, as a memorial, as a repository of records, and as a research and education centre that might bring about truth-telling, support survivors' and affected people's rights to their personal information, and serve as a bulwark against forgetting these elements of our nation's story.

Mari's legacy will unfold for decades to come. Her human rights advocacy, so effective in national and International arenas, was allied with generous and constant personal support and wisdom she gave to so many affected by adoption and Ireland's carceral welfare system. She was a kind, constant, bright and powerful ally and dear friend to so many of us. The loss of Mari will always be keenly felt.

For anyone who would like to learn more about Mari's story, it is captured in this 2013 article from [The Philadelphia Magazine](#) and in the '[Foreword](#)' which Mari wrote for our 2021 book *Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries: A Campaign for Justice*.