



## **SORRY BUSINESS: FOR ALL MOTHERS**

*The Indigenous concept of 'SORRY BUSINESS' allows us to be in an ongoing, active state of dealing with our past and our hurts in a way that propels everyone forward. The concept is used here to help dispel the black cloud of negativity that can hang over motherhood. By flipping the negatives into positives, right here and now, we just might brighten every mother's day today.*

As we move from 'Perfect Mother' to 'Good-Enough Mother' we are trying to let ourselves, and our mothers, off the hook. And isn't that a relief! We don't need to constantly measure ourselves against an impossible ideal. It is inspiring, though, to have a vision of the sort of parent we are striving to be. There is still room and, sometimes, reason to feel sorry. Parenthood can be, and perhaps needs to be, one of the most challenging and emotionally demanding endeavours a human being can undertake.

How to acknowledge, and learn from, our painful mistakes and uncontrolled 'monster-moments' without beating ourselves up and thus sowing seeds for more outbursts? How to be sorry but not become stuck in the quagmire that guilt can bring? How to forgive our parents for their moments and mistakes and release them, no matter where they are or whether we are friends with them or not?

All of these questions exploded into answers when I first heard the notion of 'Sorry Business' from Australian Indigenous culture.\* 'Sorry Business' allows us to be in an ongoing and active state of acknowledging the past and dealing with its hurts in a way that propels everyone forward. We can feel regret for some of what we've done, said or been and we can feel sad or angry about treatment we have received from others. There is a vision of the perpetrators and victims coming together, of an interaction between sorry and forgiveness so all are healed and all grow from the dance, the process.

I was standing in my kitchen this morning, lighting the gas stove, as I have, how many thousand times? It was one of those mornings when the inertia was strong. The inertia that can come from always having to be the one to get the family moving, the food and clothes flowing, the day organised, the same little things done, day after day. I was feeling small, not particularly valuable or valued and

there it came in a flash. The flash of a realisation – “I created this! Or, at least I helped to create it!”

There is a cloud that hangs over all mothers and, as mums, we are drawn into it more or less, depending on who we are and what sort of day we are having. It's a heavy, dark cloud made up of all of the negative, derogatory thoughts, comments and reactions all of humanity have had towards mothers - our own and mothers in general. Perhaps thousands of generations have added to this cloud and laboured under its ethereal and unseen but very real weight.

I know so well what is in the cloud because I have helped to create it. All of my comments, judgements and reactions about motherhood; all that I have said and thought in my childhood, through adolescence, to my working life is flooding in to my consciousness right now:

*"It's all so mindless"*

*"Women who are stuck at home have nothing interesting to talk about."*

*"Who would want to just stay at home these days?"*

*"She's just a mother."*

*"What does she do all day?"*

*"It's a tedious, thankless task."*

*"Women lose themselves, their power, lose the ability to think and concentrate."*

*"I'm not going to do what my mother did."*

*"You know what mothers are like (emotional, over-involved, irrational, worriers)."*

*"You become neurotic"*

And so the list can go on.

Most of us have added our negativity to this cloud, even if only in understandable attempts to process our relationship with our own mother. We try to come to terms with her as a person as well as someone who, in all of her glory and imperfections, is, and was, absolutely central to who we are and how we handle or don't handle our life. Many of us have added to the negativity as we have deliberately, and with good reason, distanced ourselves from parenthood, reacted to rigid stereotypes and asserted ourselves in roles other than the traditional gender roles. Some of us have added to the cloud at the very time we are struggling under its weight.

In the last few decades, society as a whole has added to this cloud in very substantial ways. It has become quite a negative thing, in lots of ways, to not be out there taking your place in the wider world, in the paid workforce. And this is on top of a few centuries where, in many ways, woman's wisdom has been gradually co-opted and superseded by institutions, science or professionals.

So this cloud is thick and heavy and very dark. It's a miracle really that any mother can be positive about herself, can enjoy her life and grow and glow with her children. It's amazing that I don't start every day with this inertia I felt this morning as I stood in the kitchen.

We must be dealing with it then, this cloud. The flash that came to me this morning is certainly helping me. All in a moment I saw that this is my karma. Karma, I mean in terms of consequence, a cause and then an effect. All that I have said, thought or done over the years that has added to the cloud of negativity hanging over mothers and motherhood is now here with me. I don't need to feel bad about it or beat myself up over it. Simply and matter-of-factly, I now have an opportunity to experience the cloud fully and work through it, helping to dispel it. It's not a punishment, just a consequence, a universal reaction to my actions.

As part of my 'Sorry Business' and as a way for me to work off this bit of my karma, I'm going to flip over some of the negativity. Everything negative has a positive counterpart.

- Mothering/housework is mindless:
  - It is actually an opportunity to switch from left-brain logic and order into more fluid, creative or even meditative ways of being. Often we need to allow mothers of younger children to pause and pull their frayed or 'other-worldly' threads together before we glimpse their wisdom and love.
  - Motherhood can feel mind-numbing or, perhaps more accurately, soul-less. As mothers are able to spend more of their daily time and energy in soulful connections and places this can shift. (I noticed a distinct change in me when I started to spend more time in organic food shops that value a sense of community, than in supermarkets).
- Consumed by endless little things : the minutiae of daily life can be tedious but it also gives us a chance to become a genuine genius and capture the simple but true essence of life, love, the world and the universe.
- Valuing the invalidated:
  - Does our personal value really have to be so tied to paid work? Do we really need to grant the 'industrial market place' that much power? Thankfully we are now allowing the word **honour** to creep back into the lexicon of motherhood and domestic goddesses.
  - Our economic rationalist world ignores or invalidates many of the intangibles of daily life. There IS a lot of work involved in weaving the fabric of everyday life, building relationships and unleashing human potential. Some of the most satisfying and beneficial aspects are still the most time-consuming, even with all of our technology and services. Just compare a carefully prepared, slow-cooked, home-made soup and stock with the packet or canned variety.
- Mothers and neuroses: Any person's sensitivity, feelings and perceptiveness can be trapped by fear, lack of understanding from others and enforced insularity into worry, depression and obsessiveness. Some mothers may be more prone to this because of their role and circumstances. Yet it is one of the joys of human life to watch mothers who have the environment, opportunity and the right balance in their life, tap their limitless inner resources and channel them into their child's blossoming, their family's atmosphere and thus their own growth.
- Motherhood is isolating: We are starting to break down the rigid boundaries between home and work (private and public) that concretised our social world after the industrial revolution. As parents-with-children live more of their child-centred lives 'out there' in every day life, the sense of community we used to have in villages is returning. Local cafes, playgrounds, libraries, community centres are beginning to look more like the village well. The change is not fast enough but parenting is gradually becoming less of a solo, at-home phenomenon and circles of people are coming together around the needs of the mother-with-child and father-with-child.

- Losing yourself in motherhood: Yes some of us do lose ourselves in motherhood. Yet sometimes we need to lose ourselves in order to find ourselves. We know women can take on the whole range of roles in public and private life. Mothering is no longer the only important role. But those who become mothers often experience it as nothing short of an initiation – something that can change and challenge you to your very core. Every new challenge we face within our self can bring us closer to the person we intended to be, which may or may not be the way others want, or expect, us to be.

***To all mothers, to my mother, to myself as a mother:  
SORRY for all of my negative thoughts and judgements.***

***May we feel a release in this 'sorry business', a lightening of our load and a brightening of our day as the cloud over motherhood dissipates.***

[\*I trust this interpretation of 'SORRY BUSINESS' does justice to Indigenous culture. I am sorry to say that I did not learn about it directly from Indigenous people but value the healing it can bring and I think it can be a genuinely constructive process in many areas of life.]

Lynn Romeo, *Living Now*, May 2007