

Vanish Voice

Winter 2014

**FORCED ADOPTIONS
HISTORY PROJECT**

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FROM THE MANAGER

Our warm thanks to our members who have shared so generously from their past and present experiences to enrich this edition of VOICE. The VANISH Committee of Management is comprised of committed members who share both their professional and personal experience to enhance our work. This VOICE brings you comment from Anne Sullivan, Trish Lester, Ian Smith, Dominic Golding and Sue Rogers from the VANISH Committee, and member Hana Crisp.

VANISH has been busy hosting events for the first anniversaries of the State and National Apologies to mothers, fathers, adopted people and their extended families and members who attended these two events have asked that we bring some of the speeches to you.

VANISH highly values and welcomes contributions from members and friends and we invite you to send contributions for future editions of VOICE at any time.

Thank you, Coleen Clare, Manager.

Anne Sullivan, Mother and VANISH Committee of Management Secretary - The First Anniversary of the National Apology

Welcome everyone to the first anniversary of the National Apology for previous forced adoption practices in Australia. I am a mother who was separated from my first born child at birth. At that time I was told many things: I was doing the best thing for my child by agreeing to the adoption, that I would never see my child again, and that I was to go away and forget about this shameful event in my life. Some 17 years went by and mostly I never spoke to anyone about what had happened in my past, feeling ashamed, scared and scarred by the whole experience. I did my best to get on with life and put all my trust, in the hope that my lost child was alive and was loved.

My story is like but not the same as many mothers'. I would never assume that I knew or understood entirely how another mother felt. I

mention 17 years went by because that's when I noticed things were beginning to change; this was in the mid-eighties. Some very brave people had begun to lobby on behalf of mothers, sons and daughters about their need to know what had happened to their children. Were they alive, were they happy, would they forgive them? And for the children: the need to know who they were, where had they come from, what was their original family medical history, what was written on their original birth certificates, to know who their natural parents were, and why their mother could give them away to a stranger?

So here we are, another 25 years further along this road I have been travelling since the age of 18. And last year on this date I was sitting in the Great Hall in Parliament House Canberra and I was being formally acknowledged, for the first time as a mother of my first born child. The mothers, fathers, sons and daughters grandparents, adoptive parents, half-siblings the list goes on and on, were all in that Great Hall. We were the representatives, the witnesses to the consequences to this shameful social experiment that had taken place and affected so many people, over so many years in Australia.

What it felt like to be present in that Great Hall and listen to the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard was incredibly overwhelming, her words were so comforting, it was as though she had personal knowledge of the adoption experience herself. As I sat there, I could not help but think of how far this road had been for me and others. Although so grateful to be experiencing this monumental occasion, I sat, silent and could not help but feel how sad it was for those many women and men, sons and daughters who had gone before me. Who had passed, and would never be acknowledged, would never know that society would change its view of them, would never hear that what was done to them was now being acknowledged as wrong.

Now today we are here acknowledging how far we have all come and I am so grateful that in my life time I am here to see these monumental changes. But this gratitude is tinged with a feeling of despair at the new ways people are continually developing to get a child. Donor-conceived, intercountry adoptions, surrogacy, all these practices are still treating mothers and children as a commodity to be manufactured, manipulated to meet "the need".

How can a fail proof system protecting child and mother be established in countries that have such

little knowledge, debilitating poverty, lack of support agencies, moral and ethical guiding principles, strict record keeping and regulating infrastructure agencies? How can children know themselves fully if they are not able to learn who their genetic mother or father is? How can they deal with the fact that they have a genetic mother and a birth mother? How can they keep their cultural identity, something that is taken for granted by most Australians? I can't help but despair to think that today somewhere in the world another young mother is starting on a journey that is similar to mine. No warning signs are up, no one is saying turn back. We really should have learnt by our mistakes, there is no excuse to say in the future ... we didn't understand.

Until the current Prime Minister Tony Abbott can guarantee absolutely that each internal or intercountry adoption, donor-conceived or surrogate child will know all of the above then there should be no fast tracking of adoption in Australia. His and our responsibility must always be to the most vulnerable citizens of this world and each child's fundamental and guaranteed rights to know where they come from.

This road I have travelled will not end until the day I die, it is my story, part of my history. I have been helped along my travels by many people, that is, once I opened up to others. I have always felt comfort in leaning on and being a part of the VANISH family. I have met so many wonderful people who are despite experiencing great personal trauma, living good lives. Time and the human spirit can indeed be our greatest ally.

I have mostly made peace with myself and that very young innocent and naïve 18 year old girl. I am grateful beyond words to those people who were much stronger and braver than I was who kept pushing and fighting for us people; the mothers, fathers, sons and daughters, caught up in Australia's Adoption practices and whose determined work has ultimately lead to the National Adoption Apology this time last year, the difference it has made is immeasurable.

**Trish Lester, Mother, VANISH
Committee of Management and ARMS
member -
First Anniversary of the State Apology**

The importance of this commemorative occasion to mothers, fathers, their adopted children and extended families.

How do you create a situation whereby a mother and possibly a father surrenders their child for adoption? One important factor to ensure forced (closed) adoptions were secure was to create a gap between mother and child to ensure that there was no way possible they could meet, and certainly not to have contact with each other. The break was to be permanent and secure.

This created a void between in particular, mother and child. A void which was fed with "she won't remember you, she got on with her life and had her own children", "they have their own family they won't need to hear from you as you are not relevant to their life." To both parties it was often said "don't disturb them (either mother or child) the sacrifice was for the best and they (mother, father, child) don't want to have their lives disturbed – you are the past". The void was often dark, bleak and toxic, possibly wide and deep with toxic fumes.

Many have over the years stretched a hand out seeking the other; some have been successful, some not. For some the pain and anguish has been too much and for others a connection of sorts was made. Some unable to make it to the other side, for others the fear is too much and they don't try. There were many organisations such as Jigsaw, VANISH, ARMS, FIND which sought to assist as people reached across the void to each other. I think of when I visited Nepal and on occasions had to cross deep ravines by walking across rope bridges that all too often were fragile and rocked and shook in the wind. I never felt secure or safe when crossing these bridges and crossed them in fear of my life as those who reach across the void did so with trepidation and fear of what they would find.

Parliaments both State and National, are formal mechanisms of power, in fact they are two of the most powerful organisations in Australia today; only the legal system is equal to them. So, when the Senate Standing Committee's report on Forced Adoptions was tabled it brought into the light recognition of the injustice that had taken place. When both State and the National Parliaments took on the issue and apologised it gave a voice to those subjected to this practice. It allowed those involved to speak and be heard

and further, to come out of the darkness, from behind the veil and to speak about the experience. It was recognition of the injustice that had taken place.

It also told Australia today that not only had the injustice taken place that by accepting responsibilities for its role in the injustice and seeking to repair the damage the Parliaments sought to right a wrong. Or at least repair some of the harm.

One result has been that the tenuous bridge across the void is now being secured, and becoming strong, safe and a welcoming bridge seeking to support and encourage people to reach across and find the 'other'.

The Apologies go a long way to change the dynamic of people feeling powerless, unheard, unvalued to becoming stronger, less silent and less fearful of the consequences of seeking their child or their parent. The emotions and feelings these Apologies have raised have ranged from anguish and pain as for some the Apologies brought back to the surface the old feelings of anguish, pain and powerlessness. Some carrying the load, often safe and hidden, find that it has become heavier as with the Apology as it is harder to ignore and pretend it did not happen. For others it is has been more positive as the public recognition has meant that this is no longer a hidden secret but rather, a public acknowledgement of the injustice.

Recently, I was talking to a young woman who is the child from her mother's subsequent marriage about how the Apology had affected her family. Her mother has contact with her adopted daughter and she is, to some degree, part of their family. With regards to the Apology and the affect it had on her (the mother) and her family her response was "it was a relief" as the Apologies brought the issue of adoption into the light of day. She feels that she is no longer part of a small, little group of people sitting alongside the broader community. Rather, now this whole issue is part of the main stream of society in Australia.

The bridge has also been with the wider community educating it as to what happened and the lifelong consequences for those involved in the forced adoption practices. This coming from Parliament gave those subjected to forced adoptions whether mother, father, adopted adult or extended family a level of public recognition.

We are hearing about women in particular, who are speaking in public about their personal experiences of adoption.

There has been a spike in the number of adopted adults applying for their records in hope of making contact with their mothers which may bring contact with their fathers. These adults are seeking to understanding what happened, why and know that it was not their fault, and that is, in most cases, that they were not unwanted or unloved rather, there was a process in place which meant that their mother was not allowed to keep them.

It appears that the feelings of powerlessness maybe are lessening as the public acknowledgement of hearing what was being said and the concrete measures being put into place are strengthening the bridge so, those travelling along it are finding it safer, that they are being heard and supported as they venture into the unknown – and a venture into the unknown it certainly is!

The Bus Journey

By Liz from **VOICE** Summer Edition 2004

I bought my bus ticket a few months ago. I had spent a number of years thinking about when and if I would like to take this bus ride. Time to read other people's accounts of taking similar bus rides, time to perhaps peruse a timetable, time to look at a few brochures and wonder about the journey ahead.

When I finally hopped on board I was pleasantly surprised to see a number of other people on the bus already. They got on and off at different stops from mine but we seemed to go by the same scenery and the driver's commentary was often the same. I found myself liking the ride but I would look longingly out the window as we approached each bus stop. Was the person waiting to board the bus a face I could see myself in?

It is only now I begin to realise that the passenger I am hoping will alight and join me for the ride, still hasn't bought their ticket yet. They have spent most of their life avoiding buses altogether, after all weren't they told they were never ever to think about taking such a journey. Whilst I am enjoying the ride and finding the roads slightly pot-holed but generally good, they are terrified that the ride

will be along a narrow, dark and winding road, in a bus with no headlights and that at any moment they could be plunged into a steep, dark ravine. They are worried the ride will be too expensive, that they will have to mortgage everything they have and feel, just to buy the ticket.



I am slowly beginning to understand why I am still waiting on the bus, and why even buying a ticket could be a traumatic experience for my birth mother. Hopefully she will find out that I am not such a bad travel companion when you get to know me.

Sue, an adopted person's view of 21st March 2014 - Does the commemoration of the Apology for past forced adoptions actually mean anything in practice?

One year ago the government apologised for the suffering caused by past forced adoption practices; now we are commemorating that significant event. There is a growing awareness of the existence of a 'white stolen generation.' A television show representing the experiences of mothers at that time called "Love Child" is aired at prime time. Yet in contrast the government announces it will apply itself to make easier the process by which children can be obtained from overseas. White domestic adoption is now seen as mostly a thing of the past, rife with practices the government is ashamed of and now apologises for, however ever since the numbers began to decrease, intercountry adoption has increased and so has both donor-conception and surrogacy. Yet, why have the parallels not been made between the harmful experiences in adoption and other fertility practices? The lessons of separation from genetic family and secrecy have not been learnt and are being repeated.

Adoption has been viewed as an acceptable way for infertile couples to create a family. Women's magazines and the media have aided the perception that adoption is a way of "rescue" for the "unwanted child." This attitude flies in the face of the pain and suffering experienced by relinquishing parents and adopted people. In many cases adoptive parents have been left

unsupported and bewildered by the issues that emerged in adoption, expecting that adoptive parenting would be no-different than parenting a biologically related child.

More recently a more realistic and informed view of adoption is entering the public consciousness. This view recognises the existence of a 'white stolen generation.' What was once viewed as a 'rescue' with sometimes bewildering effects i.e. adoptive family breakdown and overrepresentation of adoptees in prisons and mental health services is now recognised by some as a system based on a baby supply market. Babies were matched for their physical characteristics so as to 'pretend' to be genetically related to the adoptive parents but often the personalities between the two did not match well. Adoption was characterised by secrecy and denial which is now empirically shown to be not conducive to a psychologically healthy family and particularly not healthy for the adopted person.

Whilst decades ago the secrecy of adoption was declared as a way to protect the child and mother from the stigma of illegitimacy, this secrecy continued even after attitudes began to change. It was maintained as an attempt to live the illusion that adoptive families were no different from non-adoptive families. Records stayed sealed and the lobbying for them to be opened was vehemently opposed. Adoptees who fought for their right to know their origins were labelled as maladjusted and part of a vocal minority. However they successfully gained legal access to their records in Victoria in 1984. Since then thousands of adopted people have searched for their natural parents and in the present day this is now considered not only normal but important for their adjustment and sense of identity.

Recently the State and National Apologies acknowledged that the period that marked the greatest number of adoptions 1950s - 1970s was a period that is now called "Past Forced Adoption Practices." During this period, mothers who were usually unmarried and young were coerced into giving their babies up for adoption, and in some cases the babies were forcibly removed by illegal means. For many, the absence of presented alternatives and social pressure meant that they had no other options available. In contrast to public opinion, they were not abandoning their babies but rather society was not supporting them to do anything other than have them adopted out.

This push was particular the case in their dealings with social workers and the hospital system. Despite this, adoption has been synonymous with the term “abandonment,” and adoptive parenting has become synonymous with “rescue.” The adopted person has been expected to be “grateful.” Currently we can overtly see the same concept to the term “adoption” being newly applied to homing lost animals. The animal has been abandoned and is need of rescue by way of “adoption.”

In more recent times and with progress of the feminist movement and single mother’s pension, mothers with alternatives have not been adopting out their babies. As a result the number of domestic ‘white’ baby adoptions has decreased. But as the government promises that a generation of stolen babies should never happen again, it aims to increase the ease at which people can obtain babies from overseas.

The decline in ‘white’ adoptions has led to three main alternative avenues for people who want children: intercountry adoption, donor-conception and surrogacy. Many practices that characterised the era of the forced adoptions are now criticised or acknowledged as harmful** not only to the natural mother but also to the child. Yet these can be seen being repeated in donor-conception and/or surrogacy and include:

- Secrecy and the absence of information about the original biological parents.
- The dynamics of living within a familial and societal system that denies the importance of the fundamental human right to know one’s origins and identity.
- Children raised by their biological parents have the experience of seeing themselves reflected in their parents and other family members. The mother who gives birth is hormonally primed to be the best attuned to the baby. A baby who grows without its own mother will not have the same level of attunement and mirrored reflection of itself as it develops as will a baby raised by its own mother.

As these aspects have been allowed to finally come to light, domestic ‘white’ adoption practice has undergone much reform and its future has been questioned. However, I believe it is not ‘adoption’ necessarily that is the ‘evil’ but rather the way adoption has been practised including the adoptive family, society and the media.

Whilst adoption sometimes created good outcomes, its dark side is its use as a baby supply market. The degree to which the initial need to have a baby supplied takes precedence over the best interest of the child which may determine the degree to which the child’s needs or the parent’s needs come first in all aspects of the child’s life. For example the sealing of adoption records was held in place to ‘protect’ the parents. Similarly it is now evident that sealing the records of donors (those that donated gametes) is not in the best interests of the child. In addition research has shown that one third of parents who conceived with a donor do not tell their child the truth about their origins.

Donor-conception and surrogacy practices create a situation where the child is *intentionally* separated from at least one biological parent, sometimes both biological parents, and with surrogacy the baby is also separated from a birth mother. As a result of the lobbying from donor-conceived offspring (and adoptee allies) more recently efforts have been made to maintain and allow access to records (that identify their biological parents) for donor-conceived people once they reach adulthood.

In my view (as an adopted person) it is not that we need to all suddenly ‘shun’ adoption. All this does is blame one thing as being “bad” while allowing the main problems to be maintained in another form. We need to condemn the use of babies and children as commodities. To strive to maintain children’s ties to their genetic parentage, to support parents to keep their children wherever possible. Does creating a family via donor-conception or surrogacy achieve this?

** *The actual experience of separation of the baby from its mother, this has been referred to as the “primal wound” by Verrier (an adoptive parent who wrote a book called the Primal Wound (1993). Verrier argues that this is a fundamental aspect of the difficulties faced by adoptees. She also notes the effect the very early separation has on the developing brain. Contrary to popular belief that babies don’t know who their mothers are (particularly argued when related to adoption and surrogacy), Verrier applies evidence as found in the field of psychological research that includes the baby’s preference for its own mother over others and that a bonding process begins in utero and a trauma occurs when a baby is separated from its mother at birth.*

Attachment and trauma :
an adoptee's perspective

It's for the best they told her
You know you cannot provide
Took her to a home
Where she must reside

Filled her with shame
Worked to the bone
Awaiting the time
To once more be alone

Inside her womb was warm
Until that time I was torn
Away from her womb
Away from her arms

An obedient child was I
Constantly terrified
Not wanted once
Dirty, secret, a sin

Rebellion soon hit
The pain it was real
Teen angst they said
Didn't let me feel

Disconnected, Reality, what's that?
No-one listened, no-one cared
I screamed, I cut, I swallowed
No-one came, no unconditional love for me

Pushed people away
I was dirty you see
Not worthy of love
Not fit to be seen

A child I conceived
Gestated in fear
History to repeat?
Shed many a tear

Depression inherited?
Confusion about
How can I parent
Till the truth was unwound
My mother I sought
My mother I found
Rejected again
Fear rebound

Now mother of four
Many years of pain
Marriage breakdown

Rejection again
Attachment is rare
Trauma is real
Adoption a wound
Never to heal

Nicole Robinson

VANISH has also been busy writing a submission to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet with reference to Prime Minister's Abbot expressed intent to change Australian policy to make intercountry adoption 'freer and easier'. This submission was enriched by testimonials from those with personal experience of intercountry adoption, two of which we share with you here.

Dominic Golding, VANISH Committee of Management Member - a Vietnamese Adoptee's testimonial

I am an 'Operation Babylift' adoptee from Vietnam. Following the example set by the USA government and Daily Mail (UK) of airlifting thousands of "orphans" to a number of different countries for adoption, I was "lucky" to be on the last plane to Australia. It was in April 1975, and the Communist tanks were rolling into Saigon.

I was brought up in rural South Australia and have since gone back to Vietnam three times. On the face of it, it's an ideal outcome and in many ways it was, growing up in middle class white Australia surrounded by gum trees and sheep. This hid the struggles that my adoptive family had with race and whiteness, my experiences of racism, and the loss of my heritage, 'family', native language, and culture. And I have by choice been trying to achieve some seminal balance of reconciling the external 'other' of being physically South East Asian and internally being white Australian.

'Operation Babylift' is as it appears a neat bookend to an ugly conflict and a culturally divisive period in Australia. Yet it was the clearing out of orphans, many without proper documentation and a third who had known, living parents. The orphanage was supposed to be a site of care until the parents returned. In order to evacuate the children, many children's

records were made up, including birthdays. This practice continues today in Vietnam and in many other countries. War, dire poverty, and family and cultural pressures were the main drivers of relinquishment during the 1960s and 1970s. Today it is same in countries like Ethiopia, Korea, El Salvador, Russia, China, Cambodia. These are countries that Australia and other Western countries have had or continue to have adoption agreements with.

What really struck me when I returned to Vietnam and visited a number of orphanages, is that many of the older teenagers were left behind in the airlift. A tiny number of orphanages continued post takeover. Today they have staff who were orphans from that time. And 10% of the total numbers of children from these orphanages became homeless, stateless and suffered social stigma and a further 15% of birthmothers are still looking for their children, who were airlifted.

Hana Crisp, Member. A South Korean Adoptee's experience

My recent trip to Korea and the International Korean Adoptee 'Gathering'

As soon as I step off the plane at Incheon International Airport, I happily lose myself amongst the sea of millions of other Korean people. It is somewhat illogical, but Korea also feels like home to me. Each time I return, my body reconnects with the distinct sights, smells, tastes, and climate of the country on a deeply understood level. Each time, I try to experience as much as I can, almost desperately soaking up every moment before my imminent 're-departure'.

At the age of three and a half, I was adopted to Australia from South Korea, during the peak of Korean international adoption in the 1980s. Unbeknownst to me, I thus joined the worldwide community of approximately 200,000 internationally adopted Koreans.

In July of last year, I attended the 'IKAA (International Korean Adoptee Associations) Gathering' in Seoul, supported by a grant from the Australia-Korea Foundation (AKF) and a donation from the 'KAF-Han Ho' Victorian organisation of Korean adoptive families. This conference for adult Korean adoptees is the

largest of its kind and occurs once every three years, drawing hundreds of adoptees from the US, Europe and Australia.

The jam-packed program began with a formal opening ceremony, during which I sang the Korean national anthem, and a welcome reception sponsored by the Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare. Some adoptees attended with their partners and children (there were about 40 families) and there were also a few adoptees under 18 who attended with their parents.

During the week, there were numerous colourful activities on offer, including an 'Adoptee World Cup' soccer tournament held at Yonsei University, an Adoptee Poker Tournament (the winner was a female adoptee who pocketed over \$5000 USD), and a Korean 'Cook-off' with two competing teams led by successful Korean adoptee chefs. For me, some of the highlights were the Research Symposium on Korean Adoption Studies, in which adoptee researchers presented pioneering work on topics such as inter-cultural birth family reunion; the one-woman play by American adoptee actress Sun Mee Chomet; and the 'Age Break-out Sessions', in which we were split into groups to discuss personal experiences with adoptees of a similar age.

There was also a documentary film program where accomplished adoptee filmmaker Deann Borshay Liem and other adoptees presented their films about the Korean adoptee experience. Identical twins Samantha (adopted to California) and Anaïs (adopted to Paris), separated at birth and only reunited months prior, introduced their documentary project 'Twinsters'. Another American adoptee, rapper Dan Matthews, who was reunited with his birth family and his biological twin, is also creating a documentary about his story. Unbelievable stories such as these, and many more, are readily accessible on the internet and form part of the often sad and



diverse history of Korean intercountry adoption.

The rest of my visit to Korea was filled with catching up with Korean friends, eating at my favourite restaurants (Korean food in Korea is incomparable to Korean food here), stocking up on clothes and products which more aptly suit my body and skin, and visiting the maternal side of my birth family who live in the city of Jeonju, three hours south of Seoul by bus. Since reuniting in 2010, I have visited my family many times, in an attempt to maintain some kind of relationship, despite the vast geographical, cultural, and linguistic barriers between us.

During the conference, I was also fortunate to be able to network with members of the IKA committee and the leaders of other international adoptee organisations. They encouraged the other Australian attendees and myself to establish an adult Korean Adoptee organisation like those in the US and European countries, in order to connect Australian adoptees with each other and with the international community. Since then, I am pleased to announce that the Korean Adoptees in Australia Network (KAIAN) has been officially incorporated as a non-profit association and we are currently working on our website, with kind support from VANISH.

As I continue to navigate this lifelong journey as an intercountry, transracial adoptee, my involvement in the adoption community and with organisations such as VANISH has been very rewarding. For any further questions, comments, or information regarding Korean adoption, my contact details are available upon request from VANISH.

VANISH has also been lobbying the Victorian State Government to amend the Assisted Reproductive Treatment Further Amendment Bill 2013 to preserve records related to donor-conception and to open access to records for donor-conceived people: we bring you comment on this important area of our work.

Ian Smith, VANISH Committee of Management Treasurer.

Ian is a former sperm donor at the Prince Henry's Hospital in the mid 1980s. He has seven donor offspring. He hopes to one day meet them all.

Contact: iwsmith@netspace.net.au

Donor-conception – access for donor-conceived people to information about pre-1988 donors – still waiting for reform.

In March 2012, after much anticipation, the Victorian Parliament received the report of the Parliamentary Law Reform Committee (PLRC) regarding access to information about donors by donor-conceived people.

<http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/lawreform/article/1468>

Clem Newton Brown, Chair of the Committee, said that, at the beginning of that Inquiry, most members of the Committee were of the view that the total anonymity promised to sperm and egg donors prior to 1988 (of which this writer is one) should be maintained. By the Inquiry's end however, the unanimous opinion of the Committee was quite the opposite. A key recommendation was that the Victorian Government introduce legislation to allow all donor-conceived people to obtain identifying information about their donors. To ensure that donors are not unreasonably affected by the release of identifying information about them, the Inquiry also recommended that donors have the option of placing a contact veto if they do not wish to be contacted. Newton Brown spoke of the enormous effect of anonymity on donor-conceived people, the considerable distress and anguish which they experience as a result of being denied information about their identity, a right that most of us take for granted.

Predictably, lobbying against this recommendation began quickly. John McBain for example, <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/society-and-culture/why-the-promise-to-sperm-donors-must-be-honoured-20120410-1wmus.html>, emphasised the importance of keeping the promise of anonymity and the rights of donors to remain unknown if that is what they wish. He also speculated on the danger of breaches of donor's privacy. These arguments are closely analogous to those made when changes were made to adoption laws to enable adopted people access to information about their parents. That change was achieved without the predicted consequential breaches of privacy, and with safeguards built in for all parties. VANISH have argued this line in our persistent lobbying of many Members of Parliament, encompassing Ministers, backbenchers and others from both sides of the Parliament. Perhaps with some success?

The State Government proceeded slowly and cautiously, including undertaking a consultation study to gather the views of former sperm and egg donors <http://www.varta.org.au/secure/downloadfile.asp?fileid=1005518>. Despite that caution, the Government has now moved another step forward, with legislation now waiting to go before Parliament. Broadly, this legislation follows the Government response to the Inquiry http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/lawrefrom/donor-conceived/Response_to_Donor-conceived.pdf

Several aspects of the legislation are worthy of particular note.

The anxiety of many in the Government about removing the anonymity of pre-1988 donors has won out in this legislation and the Bill stops short of allowing all donor-conceived people equal access to information about their biological parents. The legislation will enable donor-conceived people born before 1988 to make an application to receive information and/or seek contact with their donor, but this will only be fulfilled if the donor is still alive and responds to a request to obtain his/her consent. On this point in particular, it is disappointing that the legislation baulks at enabling the key recommendation of the Law Reform Committee –which was to enable all donor-conceived people the opportunity to find identifying information about their donors

Attention is also paid to the important issue of records relating to donor-conceptions carried out prior to 1988. Records currently held by assisted reproductive treatment clinics will be added to the existing post-1988 donor register administered by Victorian Births Deaths and Marriages. In the case of doctors who hold private practise donor records, the legislation ‘invites’ doctors to add those records to the donor register. However, it is not mandatory for them to do so

The legislation invites clinics to pass on hereditary health history between donors and donor-conceived people, but once again, clinics are under no obligation to pass on important or potentially life-saving information.

The timeline for the Legislation coming into the Victorian Parliament is still unclear. So, still we wait for the next steps along the path to change. Meanwhile, in New South Wales, a Parliamentary Committee examining similar issues made recommendations which are largely convergent

with those of the Victorian Inquiry. It is encouraging that both Inquiries are headed in the same direction, and that momentum for change is building.

Last year Narelle Grech, who had for half her life sought out her biological father (sperm donor), finally met Ray Tonna just weeks before she died <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/suddenly-shes-there-daughter-and-donor-dad-united-20130316-2g7mv.html>. Intervention by the then Premier, Ted Baillieu, had freed-up the log-jam and enabled Narelle to meet Ray. It should not, though, be as hard for others as it was for Narelle to find her father. The path to change has been frustratingly slow. However, change is coming. Victoria has been a world leader in taking action on this important issue, and it still is. As the experience of achieving change in adoption laws shows, achieving change can be a long slow process. While progress is slow, and the changes which are coming are less than those hoped for, these are steps along the way. We wait now on the Sate Government to take those next important steps.

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In particular we thank VANISH staff for donating their time and expertise in getting this newsletter prepared and distributed

Everyone for their contributions to VOICE

Bernadette, Jo, Judith, Mary, Tara and David for their contributions to the Ryerson Index

Our helpers at Support Groups

Thank you for donations from Valerie, Max B, John B x 2, Suzanne, Carol Ann x 2, Elizabeth, Trish, Joanne, Isabel, Rodney, Andrew, Michael, Gwen, Jim & Grace, Gabrielle x 2 plus stamps, Catherine, Jacana (stamps), Gary W, Simon, Neil, Todd



forgotten Australians

Boys no more

*We were but small children who come from afar
To be educated to have a good start.
Australia the land of the free
Oppression not heard of and respect for all creeds.
We were brothers and sisters together from birth
We knew not our parents we were told they were
dead.
In the hands of religious we were placed to look
after our welfare and show us the way.
We felt separation as we drifted apart some to the
bush some stayed in town.
Things sure look different from our homes afar, the
language the people and the towns so far.
Some longed to go home some run away but the
police would soon catch them and bring them all
back.
We longed for some closeness some love and
affection
But all that we got was the strap and rejection.
No one believed us when we told the truth
Instead they chastised us and said we are rude.
We labored in paddocks
In mud and in heat
To build bigger buildings
We sure earned our keep
No school was forthcoming this we soon learnt
As day labor finished
Home still brought more work
We were mere children who loved to play
For this we were beaten again and again
Come night time we're tired can't stand
On our feet.
But night was when true fear begins
For you knew that soon be your turn
To go with the Brother alone in his den.
With limbs that treble a mouth with no voice
The pain so instance
You wish it to stop
With no one to turn to
There is no hope
Oh mother where are you
I need you with me
To hold me and tell
Dear boy you are free.
Now we are men and frightened no more
We are fighting for justice and let the world know
That we have been victims of sexual abuse
Of physical beatings and slave labor too.
Our childhood was stolen our faith suffered too.*

Vanish Voice

*Yes they stole us from our parents and twisted the
truth.*

*Its time that they paid for the wrong they have
done*

*No counseling no meetings all this we have done.
We want justice for being used as slaves and not
to go through the whole nightmare again.*

*So many life's ruined so many have dead
Knowing that justice is no were in site.*

*We who still living fight for them now
So in peace they may rest*

We will not let them down.

The living still suffering a life of regret

*The trauma still vivid
we can never forget.*

It is important that the

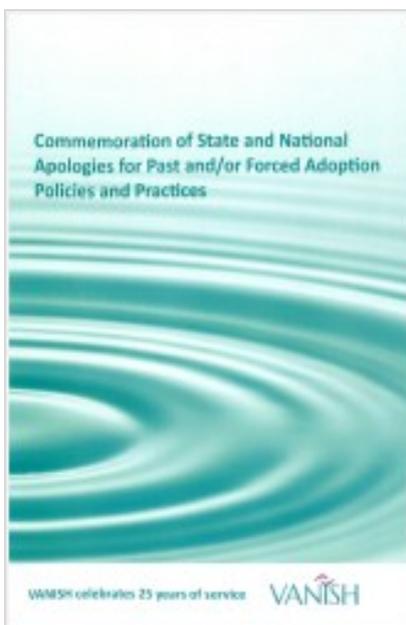
Truth be know

And justice be done

For we're boys

No more.

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**IF YOU WERE
UNABLE TO
ATTEND OUR
EVENT
COMMEMORATING
THE FIRST
ANNIVERSARY OF
THE NATIONAL
APOLOGY AND
WOULD LIKE THE
SOUVENIR
DOCUMENT
PLEASE EMAIL OR
POST YOUR
REQUEST, WITH
YOUR NAME AND
POSTAL ADDRESS,
TO VANISH**



Note: Any changes to your details can be advised by email to info@vanish.org.au Please mark the subject as 'Change of Membership Details'.

ADDITIONAL DONATION IDEA:
You could receive your newsletter by email – this would save VANISH funds in both time and dollars

VANISH support group dates 2014

To verify dates and/or time or find out about new regional support groups please see our website www.vanish.org.au or telephone 9328 8611 or 1300 826 474

MELBOURNE METRO

Held at VANISH, 1st Floor, 50 Howard Street, North Melbourne
(in the block between Victoria and Queensberry Streets)

Adoption Triangle – Mixed Support Group

Adoptees, Mothers, Fathers, Adoptive and Alternative Parents
2nd Tuesday of each month from 7.30 – 9.30pm

Adult Adopted Persons

4th Tuesday of each month from 7.30 – 9.30pm

Donor-Conceived Adults

Last Thursday bi-monthly (next group 29 May) from 7.30 – 9.00pm

GEELONG

Held at South Barwon Community Centre, 33 Mt Pleasant Road, Belmont

Adult Adopted Persons

3rd Saturday of each month from 2.00 – 4.00pm

Mothers' group (natural)

1st Saturday of each month 2.00 – 4.00pm

see ARMS www.arms@arms.org.au or contact Thelma Adams on 5243 8302 or 0430 948 923

TRARALGON

Held at Traralgon Neighbourhood Learning House, 11/13 Breed Street, Traralgon

3rd Saturday of the month on a quarterly rotational basis

Adult Adopted Persons

21 June, 20 September from 2.00 – 4.00pm

Mothers' group (natural) contact Shirley Corin 0429 698 367 or 5174 4889

19 July, 18 October from 2.00pm – 4.00pm

Adoption Triangle – Mixed Support Group

Adoptees, Mothers, Fathers, Adoptive and Alternative Parents

16 August, 25 November from 2.00 – 4.00pm

FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS' SOCIAL and SUPPORT GROUP

There are 13 Social and Support Groups (S&SGs) throughout Victoria.

These groups meet monthly

Check the *Open Place* website www.openplace.org.au for support groups in your area plus other activities 9421 6162 or 1800 779 379