

VANISH VOICE

Autumn 2018



MESSAGE FROM JULIA GILLARD AM COMMEMORATING NATIONAL APOLOGY FOR FORCED ADOPTIONS

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From the Manager's Desk

Dear VANISH members and friends,

I am pleased to bring to you our Autumn edition of VOICE which I hope you find interesting and informative. In this edition you will find a selection of news items, updates and personal stories.

Since our last publication one of our Search and Support workers, Maire Peckett, has retired after working with VANISH for almost ten years. For those of you who knew both Marys working here, I am talking about the one with the lovely Irish accent! We all appreciated her remarkable search skills and her compassionate way of providing support. She also had invaluable knowledge of the social history and geography of Australia, the UK and Ireland and was known for her perseverance and determination which she often applied to difficult and complex searches. Everyone at VANISH wishes Maire a healthy and happy retirement.

Also since our last edition we received the sad news of the passing of former Committee of Management member and friend, Madeleine Chow. You can read more about Madeleine and her contribution to the work of VANISH on page 5.

A lot has been happening around the world in relation to adoption, donor conception and those affected. We have covered a few items in this edition, but almost every day there is a new news item revealing past practices and their impacts. More and more individuals and groups affected are finding

their voice, sharing their experiences and advocating for change. Adoption and donor conception are also more frequently featured in TV shows, movies and documentaries, some of which cover these topics very sensitively but some seem far removed from reality. Self-care is important when these matters are being publicly discussed. If you would like to talk to someone, please make contact with us at VANISH.

Alongside undertaking searches and providing support we have been busy preparing a submission to the Federal Government's Inquiry into Local Adoption, which you can read about on page 7, and developing our Strategic Plan for the next three to five years. We will bring you an update on both these matters in our next newsletter. We also arranged a wonderful event jointly with ARMS to commemorate the National Apology for Forced Adoptions. You can read about it on page 3 and follow the link there to watch the special video message by Julia Gillard AM.

I hope you enjoy reading this edition of VOICE. I often hear from readers that they benefit enormously from reading stories and poems from other members and service users so if you have something you wish to have published please send it in to us. We also always welcome your feedback about our publications and services so please feel free to make contact with me using the contact details on the back cover.

Warm regards,
Charlotte Smith, Manager



Welcome Maureen Long to the VANISH Committee of Management

In April Maureen Long was appointed to the VANISH Committee of Management as an Independent Expert.

Maureen is a highly experienced social work practitioner and academic. Her social work career began with the DHHS's child protection program in 1980, and since then she has worked for organisations including MacKillop Family Services, Berry Street and the Children's

Protection Society. Maureen has been the Social Work and Policy Course Coordinator at La Trobe University since 2010 and her Doctor of Social Work thesis topic, completed in 2012, was 'Listening to the story: Understanding the family preservation experience from the service user's perspective'.

Maureen's career reflects her commitment to working with and advocating for the most vulnerable people in our community – especially in relation to children and young people who are at risk of separation, or have been separated, from their natural parents and extended family members.

The VANISH Team:

Charlotte Smith
Manager

Elizabeth Tomlinson
Counsellor and Search & Support Coordinator

Mary Rawson, Gail Holstock, Sally Rose
Carbines, and Julie Gomez
Search & Support Workers

Dr Jenny Conrick
Counsellor

Hana Crisp
Receptionist/Administrator

Adam D'Arcy
Quality & Compliance

Barbara Burns
Accountant (Volunteer)

Canada Follows Suit: Senate Inquiry into Post-War Adoption Practices

From the 1940s to 1970s in Canada, over 300,000 unwed women were forced to relinquish their children for adoption, in accordance with Canada's post-war adoption mandate. Rejected by their families, many mothers were hidden in government-funded homes managed by church groups and were often subjected to physical and psychological abuse.

For three days in March, the Canadian Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology listened to emotional testimonies from mothers and adult adoptees that were affected. Australian Senator Rachel Siewert and Professor Daryl Higgins also spoke to the committee about Australia's similar adoption history, national inquiry and apology.



Australian Senator Rachel Siewert speaking to the Canadian Senate Committee (photo from cpac.com)

Origins Canada, sister organisation of Origins VIC, NSW and QLD, has been advocating for acknowledgement of these practices for years. Executive Director Valerie Andrews recommended following the example of the Australian government, in terms of taking input from mothers for the specific wording of the apology, the recognition of certain practices as illegal, and the allocation of funding for mental health issues.

The committee is expected to release a report on this study later this year. Video recordings of the meetings are available on the Senate of Canada YouTube page.

Valerie Andrews has also written a book about these practices entitled *White Unwed Mother: The Adoption Mandate in Postwar Canada*, currently available for pre-order through [Demeter Press](#).

Australian Government Seeks To Combat Orphanage Tourism

The federal government has recently launched a new "[Smart Volunteering](#)" campaign to discourage Australians from volunteering at overseas orphanages (also called "voluntourism"), which often exploit children for profit.

Orphanage trips have been marketed as a way for Australians to travel while "giving back" to local communities. However, research from non-government organisations shows that approximately *80% of children living in orphanages in developing nations have at least one parent or family member*. These children are known as "paper orphans" – their identities are changed with falsified documentation to grant them orphan status. Poor families are lied to or coerced by the institutions into giving up their children, in order to meet the demand created by tourists who pay volunteering fees or donate money.

The campaign against orphanage tourism has been building since last year's parliamentary inquiry into modern day slavery. In the final report published in December 2017, orphanage trafficking was featured prominently.

During the inquiry, the committee heard from Sinet Chan, who grew up in a Cambodian orphanage. "The support of orphanages has created a thriving industry in which children are separated from their families and subjected to terrible abuse and neglect, as I was — being used as a commodity to generate funding," she said. The stream of unskilled, short-term volunteers was also harmful for children who had already suffered loss and separation from their families: *"Having these adults coming in and out of our lives felt like we were continuously being abandoned."*



Ms Sinet Chan (photo from abc.net.au)

VANISH & ARMS Commemorate the Fifth Anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions

On the 22nd March VANISH and ARMS held an event to commemorate the 5th anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions at the Vibe Savoy in Melbourne. The event involved an afternoon tea followed by speeches and the screening of a video message from Former Prime Minister Julia Gillard AM especially recorded for people attending anniversary events around Australia (**available here: <https://vimeo.com/260151696>**). Jo Fraser (ARMS) introduced the speakers who were Charlotte Smith (VANISH) Marie Meggitt (ARMS) and keynote speaker Adjunct Professor Hon. Nahum Mushin.



Professor Nahum Mushin and Jo Fraser

The event was attended by 70 people most of whom were individuals affected by past and forced adoption practices as well as friends and colleagues from partner organisations.

It was a pleasure to see Julia's address in which she conveyed how the day of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions was a highlight of her Prime Ministership and how she was still frequently approached by people affected who wanted to share their experiences with her. She congratulated all those who had advocated for the apology and encouraged them to continue with their advocacy work.

Professor Nahum Mushin spoke passionately and described seeing so many VANISH, ARMS and Origins people as "like a homecoming" after all the discussions leading up to the apology. He stressed that five years later there is still so much work that needs to be done and highlighted three main issues.



VANISH worker Julie with VANISH members Jane & Jill

Firstly, he referred to the illegality of Forced Adoptions and stated that the time has come for compensation to be seriously considered for those affected. Secondly, he expressed what a pity it is that Forced Adoptions do not have a higher public profile, partly due to the political events of the same day as the apology, and argued for an annual commemoration day, which was one of the rejected recommendations of the national inquiry. Finally, he discussed the future of adoption, including the importance of integrated birth certificates and identity for adoptees and a national framework instead of state-by-state adoption laws. But more crucially, he asked whether adoption is still necessary.

Marie Meggitt referred to the apology as heralding one journey's end and flagging the march of a new journey. She read from the national and Victorian apologies and noted that both acknowledged that a system had been set up to take away "our most precious creation, for most of us, our first born child".

Marie talked about how she converted her personal experience into political action. By speaking out about the impact of her experience, she was joined by other mothers over time, and it was because of the mothers who raised their voices that the apology occurred. Their personal-made-public experiences created the political impetus for change.



Speakers Jo Fraser, Marie Meggitt and Charlotte Smith



Dr Sue Green, Pauline Ley and Marie Meggitt

Marie then spoke about the explosion of couples commissioning women to have a child for them through surrogacy, and how legal, medical and high-profile people with a vested interest in the outcome were lobbying intensely to ease the existing legislation. This multi-billion dollar business is being held at bay by legislation, but only just. She said surrogacy is creating a new generation of grieving women. She also said that deliberately creating a child to meet the needs of a couple cannot be argued to be in the best interests of the child and that governments must remember that our children deserve not to be created as a commodity.

Charlotte Smith thanked Jigsaw Queensland and Post Adoption Support Services South Australia for their role in arranging the video message by Julia Gillard. She reflected on her experience of attending the national apology and how powerful it was. But she then posed the question: what are the concrete outcomes for people affected, five years on? She noted that there is very little information publicly available and this lack of transparency makes that question hard to answer. She urged the relevant departments to be accountable for the apology funding and report on how it has been spent.

Charlotte went on to talk about one of the positives from the apology. Many connections were made, resulting in new friendships and the formation of new groups, who are now making their voices heard alongside existing advocacy groups.

We hope the event provided everyone there with an opportunity for reflection and healing.

All photos have been published with permission.



Hal from FIND with recently-retired VANISH worker Maire Peckett

Fifth Anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions: Albury Event

On Saturday 24th March the Albury LibraryMuseum organised a commemoration of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions to coincide with the showing of the National Archives of Australia exhibition "Without Consent". The special anniversary video message from former Prime Minister Julia Gillard AM was screened to those attending and short speeches were given by the LibraryMuseum Learning and Outreach Coordinator Caryn Giblin and VANISH Manager Charlotte Smith.



Caryn Giblin from the Albury LibraryMuseum

As part of the exhibition a table had been set up with materials for visitors who were connected to or moved by the exhibition to make a tissue paper flower. The flowers were then woven into a beautiful wreath by local artist Bronwyn Cossor and gifted to the VANISH Albury-Wodonga support group. Helen Nicholson, who has been our valued support person for the group ever since its inception, received the wreath on behalf of the group. Helen said that it was very powerful to see that so many visitors had been touched by the Without Consent exhibition and compelled to make the flowers, and that it was an honour to receive this gift from the community.



Caryn presenting the wreath to Helen Nicholson

Vale Madeleine Chow



In February we bade a sad farewell to Madeleine Chow–Buckmaster who passed away at home on the 19th February 2018 surrounded by her family members. Madeleine was a long standing member and fierce supporter of VANISH and was a member of the Committee of Management from 2007 to 2011.

In 1973 as a young woman Madeleine was separated from her first child and this caused her deep grief. She generously shared her personal experience of how being separated from her son affected her throughout her life in order to build understanding within the community and to educate professionals. The VANISH Counsellor Training includes frank and insightful video interviews with Madeleine.

Madeleine was a much loved wife, mother, grandmother, friend and colleague. She worked as Manager of the cancer research unit at the Austin Hospital and was also a talented artist. She was an inspiration to many who admired her honesty, courage, sincerity and humour.

Madeleine's life was celebrated by her family and her many friends and colleagues at The Boulevard Restaurant in Kew. The family requested fresh cut flowers to be placed on her wicker casket and by the time the ceremony began there was a mountain of beautiful flowers reflecting the naturally vibrant, colourful person she was. Madeleine requested donations be made to VANISH for which we are extremely grateful.

Our sincere condolences go to Madeleine's husband Des and her children William, Libby and Edward. Madeleine, we thank you for treading this path alongside us. We will remember you.

VANISH Community Outreach

Thank you to [*Family History Connections*](#) (Australian Institute of Genealogical Studies) Blackburn, for their invitation to VANISH to present to their members and guests on 'Adoption and Out of Home Care' on Saturday 5th April at the Blackburn RSL. The VANISH Search and Support Worker provided insights into how to undertake searches, an overview of the impacts of separation by adoption and out of home care, and reflections on the responsibilities of family historians when researching and recording findings.

Attendees expressed their appreciation at hearing about the services offered by VANISH, possible avenues for when searches hit brick walls, as well as information on key Victorian legislation. Warmed by cups of tea on a very windy day, questions were asked regarding access to deceased relatives' records, interpretation of adoption records and the best way to make contact with the family member sought.

The [*Bendigo Family History Group*](#) (BFHG) also recently invited VANISH to make a presentation.

On Saturday 21 April VANISH Search & Support Worker SallyRose went to Bendigo and presented to 16 group members. She spoke about the role of VANISH and why it was established in 1989 to provide free search and support to those affected by adoption. SallyRose focused on who could apply for adoption records and what they may be provided with, highlighting that individuals would be given documentation that would allow them to apply for some certificates at the relevant Birth Death and Marriages office. The talk also addressed some of the sensitivities of searching and the need to respect the privacy of all concerned. SallyRose also let them know about the monthly VANISH support groups in Bendigo.

The attendees showed lots of interest and indicated that they were approached regularly to assist people who are searching for family members. Some individuals used the time over afternoon tea to ask more personal questions.

"We all really enjoyed SallyRose's visit and learned a lot from her...Many thanks to SallyRose for a lovely informative afternoon." – *Jo Wellins, Bendigo Family History Group Program Coordinator*

Thank you to the Bendigo Family History Group for the invitation and for the \$100 donation to VANISH.

If you would like to know more about the Bendigo Family History Group you can email Jo Wellins at [*bendigogen@gmail.com*](mailto:bendigogen@gmail.com)

Side By Side: Korean Adoptee Documentary Project

"This project exists to tell many stories"

Husband and wife filmmaking team Glenn (adopted from South Korea) and Julie Morey have just released their large-scale Korean adoptee documentary project as an online video installation at sidebysideproject.com. Over the course of more than three years, the pair filmed 100 interviews, in 7 countries, 16 cities, and 6 languages, including both Korean adoptees and Korean nationals who 'aged-out' of local orphanages. Each interview has been individually edited into a single piece, ranging from 20-60 minutes in length, including 4 interviews from Korean adoptees in Australia.



Photo from sidebyside.com

Through this project, the Moreys do not represent a political agenda of any kind, but hope to promote a greater understanding of adoption out of South Korea and intercountry adoption at large. From 1948–2010, more than 970,000 intercountry adoptions took place around the world. South Korea (over 180,000) represents the longest and largest case of intercountry adoption, establishing a model for adoptions from China, Russia, India, Columbia, Brazil, Chile, Vietnam, Guatemala, Ukraine, Ethiopia and others - creating a nearly global social experiment in human migration.

Side By Side will later be released as a documentary short film, a physical video art installation, and a book of interview transcripts and photographic portraits. For more updates you can follow the project on Facebook at facebook.com/SidebySideDocumentary/, or on Twitter at [@SideBySideProj](https://twitter.com/SideBySideProj).

LGBTQ+ Experiences of InterCountry Adoptees

InterCountry Adoptee Voices (ICAV), founded by Vietnamese-Australian adoptee Lynelle Long, has created a series of perspective papers, compiled from personal



responses from intercountry adoptees from all over the world, on adoption and identity-related themes and topics. The latest paper on LGBTQ+ experiences in intercountry adoption, a relatively unexplored area of research, features 18 contributors adopted from countries including China, Vietnam, Korea, Colombia and the Philippines. This paper and all past papers are available on the ICAV website: <https://intercountryadopteevoices.com/2018/05/11/lgbqt-experiences-in-intercountry-adoption/>

Donaldson Adoption Institute Comes to an End

After more than twenty years of operation, the [Donaldson Adoption Institute \(DAI\)](http://donaldsonadoptioninstitute.org) closed in January 2018. The American organisation was established in 1996 to conduct independent and objective research, education and advocacy, serving all members of the adoption and foster care community. In particular, the institute was passionate about adoption reform and addressed issues such as importance of access to original birth certificates and the need for quality post adoption services.



The decision to close was made by the institute's board and leadership due to funding difficulties. An archive of their work, including their final report, will remain on their website. Their Chief Executive, transracial adoptee April Dinwoodie, has also created a podcast on adoption and identity, called "Born in June, Raised in April" (free on iTunes).

VANISH Submission to WA Review

This March, VANISH completed a submission to the Review of the *Human Reproductive Technology Act 5³ 5* (HRT Act) and the *Surrogacy Act 2008* into Donor Conception and Surrogacy practices in Western Australia. VANISH has long been active in promoting the rights and needs of people affected by donor conception including participating in reviews in Victoria, Tasmania, NSW and Western Australia.

In our submission we shared our position on donor conception and surrogacy; VANISH holds that any third-party method of human reproduction or family formation must meet all aspects of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). We expressed concern that the Terms of Reference were parent-centric, and therefore did not address in a meaningful way, the rights of donor conceived people to have identifying information about their family and to be raised by their family as well as having a truthful birth certificate. The submission addressed the following topics: Posthumous collection, access to information about donation, retrospective rights to identifying information, genetic parentage, management of information, research, education, advocacy and surrogacy arrangements.

Conceiving a person using donated sperm, eggs or embryos or surrogacy cannot be equated with conceiving a person conventionally. The submission stated that governments have a responsibility because of its facilitation of the practice of donor conception to enquire into and ensure the best interests of any person conceived.

More information about the review can be found here: http://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/S_T/Submissions-for-HRT-review

UN Rights of the Child obligations

The Australian government is currently preparing for its appearance before the **United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child**. This Committee monitors Australia's progress in fulfilling its obligations under the [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#), which states that in all cases of adoption, the best interests of the child must come first and that persons concerned must give their informed consent on the basis of counselling as necessary.

According to the 2012 concluding observations on Australia's progress, the United Nations Committee was "concerned that adoption proceedings are not undertaken with the best interests of the child as the paramount consideration" and recommended that all

states and territories amend adoption legislation in order to comply with the CRC and also with the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Intercountry Adoption.

The [Australian Human Rights Commission](#) will independently report to the United Nations Committee after compiling submissions from the Australian public (submissions closed on Wednesday 23 May 2018.)

VANISH Submission to Federal Inquiry into Local Adoption

The Australian Government is currently conducting an Inquiry into Local Adoption through its House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs ('the Committee'). The Inquiry is focused on adoption from out-of-home care as a "viable" permanent placement option for children removed from, and deemed unable to be returned to, their parents' care for reasons of child protection.

VANISH was invited to make a written submission to the Inquiry. Written submissions closed on the 15th of May 2018, and several submissions have already been posted on the Inquiry's website: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Social_Policy_and_Legal_Affairs/Localadoption. VANISH has given permission for our submission to also be posted on the Inquiry's website.

VANISH's submission argues strongly against the introduction of a national policy promoting non-consensual adoption from out-of-home care because of the deep ethical and moral concerns involved. *In reality, such a policy would reintroduce 'forced adoptions'.* Our submission expresses that we "do not want another generation of people impacted by forced adoptions to be created as a result of the promotion of adoption from out-of-home care – people who, like those in previous generations, had no say in adoption being chosen ahead of other options that would have preserved their identities and connections with their families of origin."

Our submission also argues that "adoption is not necessary to ensure the care of vulnerable children residing in out-of-home care and unable to be returned to their parents' care in Victoria – indeed, in Australia – as other options are available which have less detrimental impacts on the rights of the child. In Victoria, Permanent Care Orders have been used extensively for this purpose for more than 25 years and VANISH sees no reason for this to change, and furthermore strongly recommends that other states pursue similar models of permanency."

New Research on the Counselling Experiences of Adoptees by Susan Rogers

Susan Rogers has been involved with VANISH since 1993 as a member, she was editor of VOICE in 2001, and served on the Committee of Management from 2013-2015. She worked in community mental health for 10 years and has an honours degree in Psychology (Swinburne University 2009) and a Masters in Psychology Counselling (Monash 2016). Sue is now a practicing Psychologist in Melbourne. Her Master's thesis was entitled 'The Counselling Experiences of Adopted Adults and Suggestions for Counsellors' and below is a summary:

Until now there has been very little research on the immediate effects of counselling for adoptees. The purpose of this study was to explore whether adoptees' experiences of counselling had been helpful or not, and investigate what adoptees would like counsellors to understand about the effects of adoption.

Eleven adults who had been adopted prior to 1984 in the closed adoption system were interviewed about their counselling experiences and a thematic analysis was conducted. *Over half the participants had encountered unhelpful counselling experiences.* Unfortunately, this had reinforced their feelings of distress, shame, and isolation. The three main themes that emerged from unhelpful counselling experiences relate to the perceived attitudes of the counsellors: denial of the effects of adoption, idealised attitudes towards adoption, and being pathologised, which meant that the distressing aspects of their adoption experience were not validated. A significant aspect of these unhelpful experiences was the tendency of such counsellors either to be unable to put aside their preconceived notions concerning adoption or to be unaware of them.

Most participants had eventually found a helpful counsellor, although some had to change counsellors several times before this happened. The helpful counsellors validated and normalised the adoptee's feelings, and accepted the stage they were at in terms of psychologically integrating their adoption. For some of the participants, adoption was not important at the time they sought counselling but became important later.

The approaches described above are included in most counselling training, but for counsellors that participants felt were unhelpful, no such training

was apparent. The participants' experiences with such counsellors were viewed as an extension of the stigmatisation and disenfranchisement that had occurred throughout their lives. Many of these negative experiences had occurred ten or more years prior, and it is hoped that the helping profession has progressed in its understanding of adoption since then.

Most of the participants said that counsellors need to understand the concept of the 'primal wound' in terms of the profound and life-long effects of what happens to a baby when it loses its mother. Whilst some participants viewed this as the foundation of their psychological lives, some participants did not find it helpful as an explanation. To them, the 'primal wound' articulated the problem but then left them feeling stuck, damaged, and defined by a single event.

Other themes which emerged from this research related to the disenfranchised nature of grief resulting from adoption separation, and the stages across the lifespan that participants typically went through in coming to terms with adoption. In light of this, counsellors need to be aware of their own preconceived notions of adoption and to recognise adoptees as the experts on their own life stories. They should view adoption as a process of emotional integration over a lifetime rather than something that affects some people but not others.

The Australian Psychological Society currently runs online training for counsellors, and VANISH runs a two-day workshop for GPs, allied health professionals and counsellors who would like to understand the issues impacting those affected.

A longer summary of this thesis will be included in an upcoming edition of www.ipsify.com. If you would like a copy of the complete thesis you can email Sue at suerogers155@gmail.com.



Sue Rogers

Special Feature: Donor-Conceived Activism

Ethical Issues of Assisted Reproductive Technologies Discussed at the United Nations

On 6th March, the European Centre for Law & Justice (ECLJ) invited Professor Clotilde Brunetti-Pons, and donor-conceived activists Stephanie Raeymaekers from Donorkinderen Belgium/[Donor Detectives](#) and Dr Joanna Rose to speak at an intervention event on "Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART) and Human Rights" at the United Nations in Geneva. The ethical issues of ART are currently being debated in Malta, where various groups have been protesting against the government's planned IVF amendments, which will introduce embryo freezing and gamete donation.

This event was held on the same day as a larger [UN Special Rapporteur event](#) on surrogacy and the sale of children, however, no individuals conceived by ART were invited to that forum. Dr Rose noted in her speech, *"Conversations about this topic happen about us, without us"*.

Both Jo and Stephanie's excellent speeches can be found on the ECLJ website or on YouTube. Here is Stephanie's speech, reprinted with her permission:

"My name is Stephanie, I am 39 years old and a donor conceived from Belgium. My mother desperately wanted to have children. Her husband was infertile and they ended up in the private practice of the first Belgian fertility doctor who discovered that a lot of money can be made from the despair of adults longing for a child at least half of their own. In my country donor conception has been officially practiced since the early 50's. Surrogacy has been practiced since 2003.

My parents got one of the first package deals of the fertility industry: they paid a fixed price for the continuous effort to get my mother pregnant with the sperm of an unknown man. A man who would supposedly resemble my social father so that an illusion could be projected and it would be less awkward for everyone.

My mother needed to take hormones and got inseminated with sperm. In January 1979, my mother gave birth to a set of triplets.

My parents got the advice never to tell us the truth. Pretending became a new form of parenting. Nevertheless, I always felt that something didn't add up in the family where I grew up in. I had absolutely nothing in common with the man I used to call my father. Yet like any innocent child I yearned for his



Stephanie and Jo outside the United Nations

love and attention, but I never seemed to meet up with his or his family's expectations.

At the age of 25 we discovered that we were donor conceived. At first I thought it was a bad joke. Firstly: how could my parents, the two adults I trusted the most, deliberately withhold fundamental information from me and lie? But also secondly: how could a doctor enable such a kind of practice merely out of financial gain and a bit of fame? And thirdly: how could someone part from his own flesh and blood, abandoning them by giving them away to complete strangers?

*I went through an identity crisis. For over 25 years I had wrongfully reflected myself to a 'father' and a family I didn't descend from. From a false identity, I went to half of an identity. Instantly I was curious to know who my actual biological father was. It is very strange to realise that *there is someone out there with whom I share half of my being, someone who exists because I exist, someone I truly miss having in my life.**

He is important to me yet others have decided that I (and he) are not allowed to know one another. The same goes for the many (ten to hundreds) halfsiblings we could have all over the world.

We started our search but we were instantly blocked. We weren't allowed, files were destroyed, many told us we just need to be very grateful to be alive and keep quiet. And for a while we did keep quiet.

There is always a point of no return. And that point for me was reached when I became a mother.



For me this photo makes the invisible visible and the missing part undeniable. On top to the left the picture in black and white is a picture of my husband. To his right a picture of our daughter. Underneath her picture there is a picture of me when I was a child. To the left of me, you can see a picture of my son.

Being able to reflect for the first time on another human being made me realize that *my heritage and ancestry matter*. It's a fundamental part of someone's identity, this shouldn't be up for a debate.

Knowing the family where you come from is important for anyone, the same goes for having access to your own full medical history, so why shouldn't this be automatically allowed for donor conceived or children through surrogacy?

If we are not granted that fundamental human right, we are just commodities enabling adults to create restricted frames or families as they call it. We need to realize that it goes at the expense, interest and welfare of current and future generations. The implications upon us, the children, are much too big to deny or ignore any longer.

In my country, back in 2012, there was nowhere for donor conceived to turn to. So, I started an organization enabling DC to connect, I reached out to parents and donors, but I also did a lot of research on the industry, legislation, lack of regulation, and got connected with independent specialists like professors in ethics, geneticists, lawyers, politicians ... my country is on the verge of realizing that current legislation not only discriminates but also fundamentally harms the humans it tends to create.

It's a fierce fight, because we are fighting against the multimillion dollar lobby of the fertility industry. Most of the governmental organizations that get funding and should advocate for the rights of all children, lack the commitment and guts to represent us correctly. Not wanting to wait anymore for others to finally do their job, *we took our fate and rights into our own hands*.

In May 2017, the first European DC, Emi Stikkelman, succeeded in tracing her anonymous

biological father. She was able to find him through DNA testing with international DNA databanks. Because you see: the key in finding our unknown biological family lies in our DNA. And we got plenty of it.

With five other donor conceived Emi founded the organization Donor Detectives. Four of us come from The Netherlands, two from Belgium. We are a non-profit organisation. We try to help and inform those who want to look for their biological family: donor conceived, donors, legal children of donors, parents...

So far we were able to help 156 donor conceived to find a half-sibling and 23 donor conceived have succeeded in finding or tracing their biological father.

The numbers are clean cut, but behind them *there are stories of great complexity, disenchanted grief, deeply affected lives...* Donor conceived have to deal with all of this on our own with no professional help because those responsible are getting a free pass in accountability.

DNA doesn't lie and provides us finally with answers. But we are also uncovering the actual lack of morality and ethics of the industry. For example: limitations in the amount of DC were ignored, sperm of unhealthy men was used, and some doctors even used their own sperm... these findings also add up to the collateral damage donor conception and surrogacy causes.

I uncovered through DNA testing that my triplet sister has another biological father than our brother and me. The fertility doctor used a cocktail of different sperm samples. He must have thought that it was a good idea. He didn't even inform my parents about it. It proves to me that he couldn't care less how it would affect us: the children. Our integrity and dignity have been and are violated.

I urge you policy makers to take your responsibility and begin to realize that by allowing and facilitating the mass production of children without considering and protecting their fundamental basic rights, interests and welfare, you - *WE fail short as a society*.

And I also want to urge you in trying to fund DC organisations or at least give us a voice and correct seat at the table when our interests are being discussed. You should owe them that much.

Thank you for your attention."

This transcript was originally published on the Donorkinderen blog: donorkinderen.wordpress.com

Dr Jo Rose's speech at the United Nations can be viewed here: goo.gl/Ph9AY9

From Our Readers

Mother and Son Meet For the First Time in 48 Years

This piece follows on from Dawn's piece "Life as a Relinquishing Mother" (VANISH VOICE Autumn 2015).

My son and I had been in contact for the last 18 months via FIND and with the support of VANISH (Victorian Adoption Network for Information and Self Help). We both had a wonderful counsellor, which helped in so many ways.

In early October 2017 I received an email from my son saying that I was invited to visit anytime that I wished. I took up this wonderful opportunity, organising a flight ticket to go up to Far North Queensland in the first week of December 2017.

What a wonderful time ahead for us both. For me, arriving at the airport was huge. My son and partner had first approached another lady, asking her as to what her name was. Then from the crowd *this good-looking guy approached me, saying "Here I am"*. Believe me, that was the start of a wonderful reunion, along with a great Christmas present for us both.

At 93 years old, my Mum is now in a nursing home and I visit her monthly. In December 2017, Mum was interested in how the meeting went with my son in Far North Queensland. When I told her Mum's reply to me was "I am very happy for you".

The meeting at the airport went well, I was very proud of how I held it together. For me, the next couple of days were not so good - tearful and very emotional. I was taken out for drives and enjoyed lovely meals out with my son and his partner. After a lovely week together the time came for me to leave Far North Queensland and return home to Victoria. To me that sure was hard but I've been invited back another time.

Next in line to meet their big brother will be my 42-year-old daughter, 40-year-old son and their families.

I give thanks for this wonderful, exciting time in our lives. *For me, the waiting game is over.*

I can only think of just how lucky I am to have met my son after 48 years.

- Dawn

Mel's Story

I had moved office three times and each time I cleaned out my desk, at the back I found an envelope with the forms from

Jigsaw to try and make contact with my birth mother. Each time I opened and looked at the form I just had a feeling it was not a goer so I put it safely back in my new drawer...

I always knew I was adopted. My parents had told me the lovely fantasy that they got to pick me out and my mother always said she wanted a child with olive skin so I would not be so easily sunburnt when we went to the beach, a major part of her active outdoor lifestyle. My dad had green eyes and my mum had auburn hair with a touch of redness. She would say in strong sun my hair had a bit of red in it too, despite me looking like a little Chinese boy. As a toddler, they took me to Chinese restaurants and the Chinese Aussie friends they had sought out taught me to use chopsticks. *The most Chinese I knew was the names of the different yum cha dishes.* They sought out any possible connection to sources of my birth, but nothing concrete came up at that time. The Chinese community in Melbourne was small by the 1950's due to years of the white Australia policy. It included members of my birth family but their close proximity was sadly never fully realised in my mother's lifetime. A year after adopting me they adopted my sister, but I will let her tell her own story, which is very different.

My parents had collected things for me, all my papers involved with my adoption and then a lot more as my father worked in the hospital where I was born and he illegally rattled out medical records to get me a few more leads. They thought that was the best they could do should I choose to search later in life and we had an agreement that the envelope with my original birth name would remain sealed until I was 18, but if I really wanted I could open it at any time I wanted. *It was my property after all, they said.*

The Victorian access to information laws changed thanks to VANISH and other activists. Without these changes it would have been a lot more difficult and



expensive and likely only illegally would I have been able to source the information. After applying for my records I met with a counsellor who after a preliminary chat was satisfied my search would not lead to unmanageable personal distress should things not turn out well.

Mothers name...that's the start, father unknown...no surprise. Father: blonde hair, blue eyes... that's not right, but a carefully thinking relinquishing mother added those details as a parting gift, which gave me a better chance in the lottery of life by the grading of children for placement. Note I have met another child put up for adoption during the same period of time in the same hospital, and being listed as mixed race her placement took a long time as there was a low demand for mixed race babies.

My counsellor Pauline assisted me with lots of information about what a relinquishing mother's response to contact could be. We may only have one shot at this and need to make it our best one, so it was suggested we time the first letter to arrive just before my birthday. "You know, no relinquishing mother ever forgets the birth of her first child that day must be embedded in their psyche..." So months went by and then we sent it. In retrospect my relinquishing mother had no idea, as her life as she wanted had moved on and she was not consciously aware of any dates involved. So much for Theory One, but it was still a good idea.

I got a response: Ask me your questions in one letter and I will answer them, and then please essentially let us all get on with our lives. She agreed to meet me for a coffee. *What do I ask? From one thousand questions which is the most important*, what would be too much, and when I get an answer it is likely that I will have more burning questions. But the main one I needed that only she could tell me was "*Who was my father?*". So I asked a few mundane questions to get the ball rolling and then popped the question, expecting the possibility of I can't remember or I don't know, but the answer was ready and waiting and she gave me his name. I feel some of our strongest memories are when we are nineteen and starting our independent lives and our meetings that followed showed she was still thinking of the excitement of this exciting man who was my father as she could recall their adventures so vividly over our first coffee. Sadly I didn't press the record button on my camera, knowing that its presence could have changed the dynamic, but listening for 45 minutes of a teenage dalliance with an older man, *there were details that were lost forever in my emotional state*. Now twenty years later, I feel a recording might have offered me more research material and

some lovely memories, but then I remember we have our life just for a blink in geological time so perhaps the memory is enough and wanting more is just greedy.

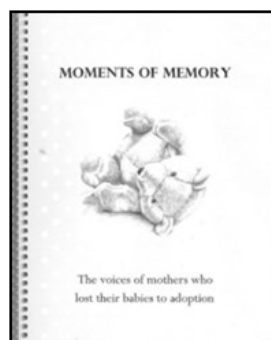
Before you get bogged down in the whole saga, I will jump ahead and say that my mother's doctor, who she always said looked and behaved a lot like me, turned out to be a full cousin. My mother's bridesmaid also married a man who turned out to have worked for my birth father and knew him well. And when I was about 20, my birth grandfather held my hand in the Victoria markets, a grip which I broke away from to do my shopping thinking I could come back later, but when I did he was gone.

In the last few years my cousin was contacted by a new relative through Ancestry.com. This woman, who turned out to be my half-sister, had never known who her father was. She asked me to do a DNA test so she could determine if my father was her father also, and eliminate both of his brothers as possibilities. I knew if I did that it would potentially open a can of worms (and as it turns out I now have 40 or so other cousins in the UK) if it connected me to relatives of my mother who sought privacy. I rang and warned her of the implications of what I was doing, and she said "What does it all matter?"

There are now six stories about the six different lives of my father - six and possibly two more in Hong Kong, from six to eight different women so far. One of my half-sisters has since travelled for a month in China and she found the ancestral temple that lists our ancestors, dating back for about two and a half thousand years.

- Mel

A Mothers' Anthology from Jigsaw



Jigsaw WA has recently compiled an anthology written by mothers who lost their babies to adoption in the 1950s-1970s, titled *Moments of Memory*.

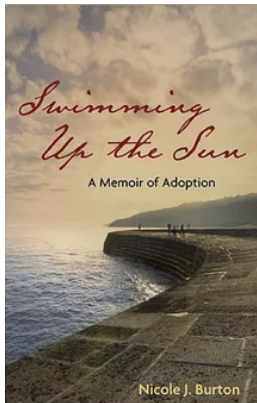
To celebrate the 5th anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions and also the 40th anniversary of Jigsaw providing services to all parties to adoption, Jigsaw is giving away a limited number of copies.

If you would like a copy, please email jigsaw@jigsaw.org.au with your postal information. Jigsaw is currently in the process of producing a digital copy also, but there will be a small cost for this.

New Additions to the VANISH Library

Swimming Up the Sun: A Memoir of Adoption (2008)

by Nicole J. Burton



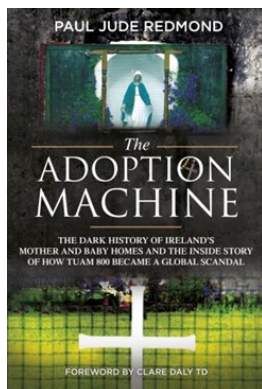
At age 22, playwright Nicole J. Burton set out to find her English birth parents, a Jewish father and a mother believed to be an artist. The adventure led to parents, grandparents, and siblings, a kaleidoscope of relationships with one dark secret at its centre.

As an adoptive child in Britain, Nicole always wanted to find her birth parents. After

immigrating with her family to the United States, she sought the elusive characters haunting her imagination. With an appointment with one of Her Majesty's social workers and her birth mother's name in hand, she returned home. There she began a search that led to more drama than any play she could possibly conceive.

Synopsis from Nicole's website: nicolejburton.com

The Adoption Machine: The dark history of Ireland's mother and baby homes and the inside story of how Tuam 800 became a global scandal (2018)



by Paul Jude Redmond

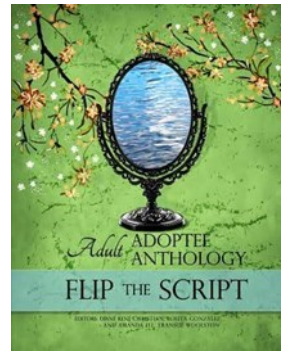
Paul was born in Castlepollard Mother and Baby Home in 1964. Chairperson of the Coalition of Mother and Baby home Survivors (CMABS), Paul produced the very first report highlighting the mortality rates and general cruelty in the Homes and called for a public

inquiry. After the Tuam 800 story broke, he was instrumental in working with the media to increase the public and political attention on the other Mother and Baby Homes and their mortality rates. He continues to advocate tirelessly on behalf of all survivors of Ireland's wider forced adoption network.

The Adoption Machine exposes the dark history of Ireland's Mother and Baby Homes, and the extraordinary campaign by survivor groups to bring its secret and shameful past into the light. Paul says, "This book is my way to bear witness, a rage against the machine and an attempt to do something.

Information from Irish Academic Press & The Independent

Flip the Script: Adult Adoptee Anthology (2015)



Edited by Diane Rene Christian, Rosita González and Amanda Transue-Woolston

"Flip the Script" began as a Twitter hashtag movement headed by Korean-American adoptee Rosita González in November 2014 for National Adoption Month. Reflecting on

how adoption books have traditionally been written by adoptive parents, Flip the Script sought to create a welcoming space on social media for adoptees to express themselves; to promote acceptance of all adoptee voices as important whether they express happiness, ambivalence, grief and loss, or anger—or all of these themes at once; and to un-label adoptee narratives as "happy" or "angry" by accepting and expecting complex conclusions from complex life experiences.

Evolving from the social media campaign, González, together with Amanda Transue-Woolston and Diane Christian from the An-Ya Project, have compiled and edited an incredible adult adoptee anthology gathering together the thoughts, experiences, emotions, art, and poetry of adult adoptees.

Information from TheLostDaughters.com

The Secret Daughter: A beautiful novel of adoption, heartbreak and a mother's love (2015)

by Kelly Rimmer



As I saw my new-born baby's face for the first time I tried desperately to capture her face in my mind—to stamp it onto my eyelids. As she was taken from me I knew I might never see my daughter again.

38 years later... 'You were adopted'.

Three short words and Sabina's life fractures. There would forever be a Before those words, and an After.

Pregnant with her own child, Sabina can't understand how a mother could abandon her daughter, or why her parents have kept the past a secret. Determined to find the woman who gave her away, what she discovers will change everything, not just for Sabina, but for the women who have loved her all these years.

Synopsis from kellyrimmer.com

Surviving Secrets: A Journey of Resilience and Courage (2010)



by Margaret Watson

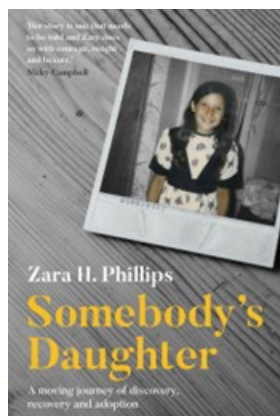
At age forty, Margaret Watson learned she was adopted. This shocking and confronting truth was previously unknown to her and turned her whole world upside down. Faced with a major identity and life crisis, Margaret embarked on a physical and spiritual journey to find her birth family and discover her

true self. By sharing her story, Margaret offers hope and understanding for those people who have discovered in their adult years that they were adopted.

'Brave, honest and inspiring, this book takes us inside the fractured heart of adoption. Like all the best memoirs, Margaret Watson's story is ultimately a healing gift. It builds a bridge of hope and courage for others to cross.'

-Alan Close, Author

Somebody's Daughter: A moving journey of discovery, recovery and adoption (2018)



by Zara H. Phillips

Singer-songwriter, writer and adoptee-activist Zara Phillips seemed to live a charmed life - backing singer to the stars with an incredible career in the UK and across the Atlantic - but her smile masked a difficult childhood and the reality that she was adopted as a baby in the 60s. Her life soon spiralled

and as a teenager she suffered from drug and alcohol addiction, as she struggled to find her true identity. After 30 years and a DNA test, Zara managed to locate both of her birth parents and a half-sister. *Somebody's Daughter* is a fascinating and revealing account of how a beautiful woman's life has been dominated by her adoption and how it has affected her and those around her. This is Zara's second memoir, following *Mother Me* (8664).

Synopsis from John Blake Books

DVD: The Lost Souls (2012)

Written and directed by Heather Waters



Sarah is 16, pregnant and unwed. In an era where this is frowned upon, closed adoption seems the only answer. Sarah is forced into the system of barbaric and inhumane treatment, only to receive a formal apology nearing the end of her life.

After reading the Senate Inquiry in early 2012, adoptee filmmaker Heather Waters was

inspired to create the screenplay for *The Lost Souls*, thus beginning her professional filmmaking career. Based on actual accounts, this film tells the harrowing tale of the policies, practices and treatment of the Australian governments' of the 1960s and the views of society.

Heather is currently working on a new feature film about adoption called *Primal Wound*.

Film synopsis from WatersProductions.com.au



Online Film: Without Consent (2017)

Directed by Diane Busuttil

Without Consent is a short experimental film about the director's personal experience of forced adoption in late 1960s Australia, with a visually stunning journey through Australian landscapes. It recounts the legal climate of

outcast unmarried women who were pregnant during these years, the systemised abuse they endured in the name of God and the stories they hid.

Director Diane Busuttil explored the concept of the filmmaker as a central 'character' as well as author in the storytelling process.

Without Consent can be streamed online at BeamaFilm.com for a small rental fee, or for free for members of participating libraries.

Film synopsis from Beamafilm.com

VANISH Art Therapy with Michele Hutchins:

New Courses for Adoptees and Mothers

"A very in-depth and powerful tool"

"I feel like I have done more self healing in 6 sessions than I have in 10 years."

"Very worthwhile. You will be amazed. Just do it."

Following excellent feedback from past participants, VANISH is delighted to offer with more art therapy with **Michele Hutchins**, qualified art therapist and adopted person.

We are offering **two separate 6-week courses:**
Adoptees Only & Mothers Only



- *NO artistic ability or experience is necessary!*
- Each session will include time to share personal insights with each other (if you wish to).
- Gentle mindfulness and meditative practices will be used to aid the process.
- Courses are free of charge.
- Each course will have a maximum of 10 participants.

To find out more, please contact Hana by phone on (03) 9328 8611 or email info@vanish.org.au

Upcoming VANISH Support Group Dates

Melbourne

7.30-9.30 pm
Level 1, 50-52 Howard St
North Melbourne

(2nd Tuesday of each month)

12th June MIXED

10th July MIXED

14th August MIXED

11th September MIXED

(4th Tuesday of each month)

26th June ADOPTEEES

24th July ADOPTEEES

28th August ADOPTEEES

25th September ADOPTEEES

Albury-Wodonga

(2nd Saturday of each month)
10.30am-12.30pm
949 Burrows Rd, Glenroy, Albury

June 9th MIXED

July 14th MOTHERS

August 11th ADOPTEEES

Bendigo

(2nd Saturday of each month)
2-4pm
27 Myrtle St, Bendigo

June 9th ADOPTEEES

July 14th MOTHERS

August 11th ADOPTEEES

September 8th MOTHERS

Ballarat

(3rd Saturday of each month)
2-4pm
20 Eastwood St, Ballarat

June 16th MOTHERS

July 21st MIXED

August 18th ADOPTEEES

September 15th MOTHERS

Mildura

159 Langtree Ave, Mildura

June 21st 7-9pm ADOPTEEES

July 19th 7-9pm MIXED

August 18th 2-4pm MOTHERS

September 20th 7-9pm ADOPTEEES

For all enquiries please call VANISH on (03) 9328 8611 or 1300 826 474, or email info@vanish.org.au



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