

# VANISH VOICE

Winter 2019



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# From the Manager's Desk

## Dear VANISH members and friends,

Welcome to the winter edition of VOICE. We are in the middle of a cold snap here at the moment so I hope you have been able to stay warm if you are also in Victoria. At least we have turned the corner now and the days are beginning to get longer again.

This year VANISH turned 30! What an amazing achievement to provide search and support, information, counselling and advocacy for 30 years. We are extremely proud of the big impact this small organisation has had on people's lives. I would like to acknowledge all the individuals involved both now and over the past three decades. You will see on p11 we are asking for your suggestions about how to celebrate this milestone. Your ideas are very welcome.

Last month the Victorian Government announced an Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions in Victoria. We are hopeful that this will involve people affected being heard and recognised and their needs being properly addressed. We will keep you informed of this as we hear more.

All adoption and post adoption services have now been transferred from the Department of Health and Human Services to the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS). In our meetings with representatives there, we have been assured that the

Victorian government is still committed to providing search, support and information services for people affected by adoption. Core funding has been provided to VANISH at the same levels as previously but unfortunately we could not secure additional funding for our regional counselling and support groups. As a result we have wound down the Warnambool and Geelong counselling service and made our sad farewells to Jenny Conrick, Associate Counsellor in Western Victoria. You can read more about this on p3.

One of our feature articles in this edition covers Sue Green's attendance at the American Adoption Congress in Washington DC. Sue will be giving us a presentation of her findings at our AGM on the 19th September (see back cover). The other article is our interview with Peter Papathanasiou, author of 'Little One'.

I hope you find this edition of VOICE interesting and as always I welcome and look forward to your feedback.

Warm regards,

Charlotte Smith,  
Manager



## Committee of Management Update

In February this year the VANISH Committee of Management appointed Simon Pryor as Chair following Penny Mackieson's resignation. Simon served on the Committee as Treasurer from May 2017 and then as Acting Chair for five months while Penny was on leave. Simon ably managed the two roles of Chair and Treasurer while VANISH advertised for a Treasurer.



We are pleased to advise that François Petitto has taken up that role and joins Tricia Lester and Simon Pryor in making up the Executive of the VANISH Committee.

François has been a Financial Planner since 2002 and prior to that worked in accounting. He is currently Senior Adviser to private clients at a large investment company. François is an adopted person and a past VANISH service user.

### The VANISH Team:

Charlotte Smith  
*Manager*

Elizabeth Tomlinson  
*Counsellor and Search & Support Coordinator*

Mary Rawson, Patricia Navaretti  
*Search & Support Workers*

Gail Holstock  
*Community Outreach & Training Coordinator*

Lorna Sleightholm  
*Receptionist/Administrator*

Adam D'Arcy  
*Quality & Compliance Officer*

Barbara Burns  
*Accountant (Volunteer)*

Andrea Phillips  
*Legal (volunteer)*

# VANISH Services Update

## Counselling Service Update

In March 2017 VANISH established a regional counselling service in Western Victoria, offering appointments in Warrnambool and Geelong. This was provided by Associate Counsellor, Dr Jenny Conrick, who had previously been VANISH Senior Counsellor in Melbourne. Jenny's PhD research was on the experiences of adopted women being parents.

Jenny is a very experienced counsellor with a vast knowledge of adoption issues and the Committee of Management and staff at VANISH are delighted she was able to extend our counselling service to clients not only in the Warrnambool/Geelong area but living throughout Victoria, interstate and overseas via telephone and Skype. The regional counselling program was delivered during 2017 and 2018 using

additional funding from the Victorian Government, funding which was not provided for 2019 so this service has now been wound down. VANISH continues to operate a small counselling service out of the Melbourne office and provides referrals to counsellors and other therapists who have undergone the VANISH Counsellor Training.

A review of the regional service, along with our previous pilot brokerage counselling program, will feed into our recommendations to government regarding how to best meet the needs of Victorians affected by past and forced adoptions. If you have any comments or suggestions you would like to feed into this review, please write to us at [info@vanish.org.au](mailto:info@vanish.org.au).

## Counsellor Training at National Wool Museum - Geelong

To coincide with the National Archives of Australia *Without Consent Exhibition* (1<sup>st</sup> November 2019 to 26<sup>th</sup> January 2020), VANISH will be running its counsellor training – *Working with Loss and Trauma Related to Past and Forced Adoption Practices* in Geelong. The two-day training will be held on the **11th and 12th November 2019** at the National Wool Museum in Geelong and will be delivered by Dr Sue Green. This training will earn participants 14 points for Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

VANISH is planning a day trip to take a group from Melbourne to the exhibition in November. If you would like to participate please indicate your interest to [info@vanish.org.au](mailto:info@vanish.org.au) or phone (03) 9328 8611.

For further information about the Without Consent Exhibition or VANISH Counsellor Training, please call or email Gail [gail@vanish.org.au](mailto:gail@vanish.org.au) or (03) 9328 8611.

## Community Outreach

For the past two years VANISH has been invited to provide presentations at diversity forums, expos and trainings across Victoria, arranged by Home and Community Care (HACC) and Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) Diversity Advisers to raise awareness of the experiences and needs of Forgotten Australians, Former Child Migrants, Stolen Generations and people affected by past and forced adoptions. VANISH has provided information pertaining to the forced adoption period and the lifelong impacts these experiences may have on a person's emotional and psychological wellbeing. The aim of the presentations was to assist aged care workers to better understand and consider the special needs of this cohort in regard to access and delivery of aged care services.

VANISH has presented at eight forums over the past four months and of those, the one that stands out the most for me, was a presentation that we delivered on behalf of Southern Metro Regional Assessment Service to over 70 Regional Assessment Service Home Support Assessors at Keysborough on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2019. Typically, VANISH has 30 minutes to present, however on this occasion we, Liz Tomlinson and myself, were allocated a 90-minute session. We presented the twenty-minute clip of Julia Gillard delivering the National Apology for Forced Adoptions (2013) which set the scene for our audience not only understanding what happened and the impact, but gaining a real sense of the advocacy that had gone on in the years beforehand. We provided our audience with insights into the grief and loss the people we work with still experience, and the support that VANISH is able to provide. Many questions were asked from the audience about our presentation and others approached us afterwards to share their own personal stories of how adoption has affected both themselves and their family. It never fails to surprise me how the majority of people in this country are unaware of this dark chapter in Australia's history.

- Gail Holstock, *Community Outreach & Training Coordinator*



### Without our Consent: a Queensland Story

Last year the Forced Adoption Support Service at Jigsaw Qld worked with the State Library of Queensland to produce a film about the history of forced adoptions with a focus on Queensland experiences. The film was based on interviews with a mother and a father who had been separated from their child through adoption and an adopted adult. Representatives of stakeholder and advocacy groups (ALAS Australia, Association for Adoptees, Origins Qld and Jigsaw Qld) were also interviewed as well as Claire Moore (former Qld Senator) and Tracy Davis (former Qld Government MP).

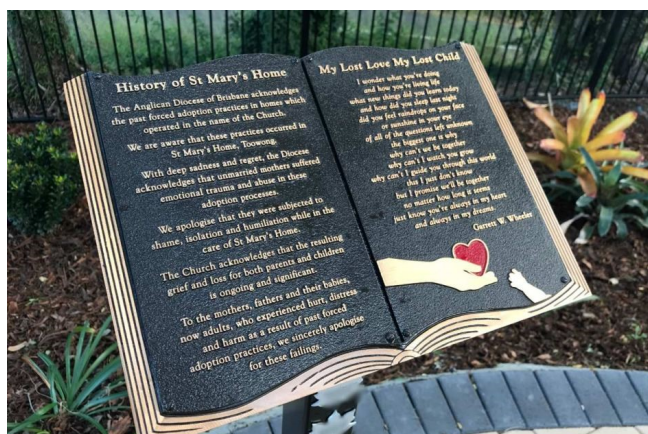
The aim of the film is to raise community awareness of the history and the impacts of Forced Adoptions. To access the film, see the link below:  
<https://vimeo.com/339875873>

### New Remembrance Garden at site of former St Mary's Home, Brisbane

Last month a service was held at a new Remembrance Garden established on the site of the former St Mary's Home in Toowong to honour those affected by forced adoption practices. The Archbishop of Brisbane, Phillip Aspinall blessed the new garden which was an initiative of former St Mary's mothers. The plaque laid in the gardens shows the Anglican Church's apology for the emotional trauma and abuse that was inflicted on mothers and the grief and loss experienced by the parents and children.

Some of the mothers interned at St Mary's have shared their personal experiences in the media in a call for justice and redress.

<http://bit.ly/MothersFightForJustice> and  
video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzh4tZsNAYI>



### Sandra Pankhurst and Friends Second Podcast with VANISH



In our Autumn VOICE we shared the link to Sandra Pankhurst and Friends Episode 4 podcast where Sandra chats with Charlotte Smith and David Cross, VANISH Support Group facilitator, on all things adoption.

You can now listen to their follow-up podcast Episode 5 at the link below:  
<https://www.buzzsprout.com/249314/1151630-sandra-pankhurst-friends-ep-5?play=true>. Sandra's book, "The Trauma Cleaner" is in the VANISH library.

### Vale Noelle Shaw

Noelle Shaw passed away on Monday 15th July 2019 after a long battle with a debilitating illness. Noelle will be remembered as a founding member of Adopted Parents for Reform which she represented on the VANISH Committee of Management (1991-1995) travelling from country Victoria for the monthly meetings.

As both an adoptee and adoptive parent, she was in the unique position to be able to relate with understanding and compassion the need for access to information for those impacted by adoption.

Noelle freely gave her time and knowledge to the cause and assisted with searches at VANISH. This enabled many people to resolve and put into place that much-longed-for missing piece in their lives, often resulting in reunion. This task gave her much joy and satisfaction. Many former committee members will remember Noelle for her quick sense of humour, wisdom and compassion. She is mourned by her husband Colin, children Michael and Andrea and families.

- With thanks to Heather Stuart for these kind words.

# Announcements

## The Monash University Adult Adoptee Performing Ensemble

Last November six VANISH members volunteered to participate in an adoption research project at Monash University. Since then they have been working with PhD candidate and adoptee Alison Ingram on the development of an original theatre piece.

The documentary style performance will be based on the content of the participants' research interviews, storytelling sessions and group activities undertaken in a series of theatre workshops. The research participants are the actors of their own stories.

*The Performativity of Adoption Trauma: Performance, Haunting and The Uncanny* is now in its final phase of development. The group will begin rehearsals this December.

There will be two performances at Monash (Clayton campus) late February 2020.

The Performing Ensemble will be offering **two free tickets** to VANISH members who will be encouraged to bring along a friend or family member who does not have a lived experience of adoption. This is because the intention of the research is to communicate the adult adoptee's lived experience through performance and to assess whether this results in a better



understanding of what it is like to be an adult adoptee.

Audiences will be invited to contribute to the study via an anonymous paper survey. Stay tuned for performance dates and booking details in the VANISH Summer newsletter.

## DNA Down Under Seminars

This August brings what is being promoted as the most comprehensive genealogy DNA program ever held in Australia.

The DNA Down Under series involves a three day event in Sydney and one day events in Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and Canberra.

Guest Speaker Dr Blaine Bettinger is an American professional genealogist specialising in DNA and is the author of the long-running blog The Genetic Genealogist.

Blaine will be joined by Australian experts presenting on a range of topics for beginners and experts alike.

VANISH staff will be attending the Melbourne event on 23rd August, and Charlotte will be presenting at the Sydney event. For more information or to book visit <https://www.dnadownder.com/>.



## News from PhD Candidate Caitlin Macmillan at Macquarie University

### PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR FAMILY STUDY!

***Were you conceived using donor conception or IVF? Or are you a parent of an adult child who was conceived using donor conception or IVF?***

If yes, you are eligible to participate in a study comparing these family types and we'd love to hear from you! Participate in the online survey (10-20 minutes) and you can go in the draw to win 1 of 12 \$100 vouchers! Participate in the 5-minute phone interview and we'll send you a \$15 voucher to say thank you! Click or copy the link to find out more.

[https://mq.edu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_7anSYRWp7Qrs9p3?fbclid=IwAR3ZykOijGcjyOhdFQk5ICyLMGi0PFRYcg1\\_g8\\_Iwldyy1Yi4iRO2--b5U](https://mq.edu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_7anSYRWp7Qrs9p3?fbclid=IwAR3ZykOijGcjyOhdFQk5ICyLMGi0PFRYcg1_g8_Iwldyy1Yi4iRO2--b5U)

or contact Caitlin at [Caitlin.macmillan@hdr.mq.edu.au](mailto:Caitlin.macmillan@hdr.mq.edu.au)

# Feature Article

## Report from the American Adoption Congress

Washington, DC *by Dr Sue Green*

In April I attended the 40th American Adoption Congress and presented on the VANISH two-day training program *Working with Loss and Trauma related to Past and Forced Adoption Practices*. As part of my presentation I gave an overview of the findings of the Senate Inquiry and the research by the Australian Institute of Family Studies which led up to the State and Commonwealth Apologies. The era of past and forced adoptions is called the Baby Scoop era in America and was between 1945 to 1973. The scale is staggering considering approximately four million mothers were separated from their children during this period, two million of these were in the 1960s and 90,000 were in 1971.

When I showed the five-minute video of Julia Gillard giving the National Apology for Forced Adoptions there were some tears in the eyes of some participants and one commented that they could never see this happening in America. There was also surprise that in Victoria, not only can adopted adults have access to their birth certificates and adoption records but that this right also extends to mothers (and fathers if named) in accessing identifying information about their adopted son or daughter (at the time of the adoption) without the consent of their child who is now an adult.

One of my aims in presenting was to find out what other training exists for health and community welfare professionals to understand the life-long consequences of adoption. There was a presentation by folks from the National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (NTI) delivered by the Centre for Adoption Support and Education (CASE). This online training is designed to enhance the competency of mental health professionals in providing services to children, youth and families experiencing adoption and guardianship. It covers topics such as grief and loss, trauma, attachment, identity challenges and the impact of race, ethnicity and transcultural class. However, having consulted with the CASE team and other attendees, there does not appear to be any other training of depth about adults affected by adoption.

### The American Adoption Congress (AAC)

The ACC was founded in 1978, this was the 40<sup>th</sup> conference. *'Honouring our Past, Welcoming our Future'* was held in Washington as was the first conference 40 years ago. Unfortunately, the conference was smaller than in the past due to the

scheduling of another adoption conference at the same time by a breakaway group. One of the key goals of the AAC is to educate and advocate for open adoption records and access to original birth certificates. Being involved in advocating for the Victorian Adoption Act (1984) which gave adoptees access to our records nearly 35 years ago, it was a shock to hear that there is still such a long way to go in America. It felt like stepping back in time hearing the presentations on the progress of legislative reform and whether a proposed bill was 'clean' i.e. would give unrestricted access to birth certificates and adoption records or 'dirty' that is, includes placing some sort of restriction on access.

### Access to Information in the US

Despite 40 years of activism the current situation is that of the 50 American States and the Federal District of Washington DC, adult adoptees can only apply for and obtain their original birth certificate without any restrictions in nine states. Furthermore 22 of the remaining States have restricted access and limit access through various measures such as allowing a natural parent to deny the release of an original birth certificate or redacting identifying information on the certificate and records.



In a workshop on the history of adoption entitled *40 year chunks - A history of adoptee rights and what may be in the future*, Gregory Luce (pictured here) an adoptee, Minnesota attorney and founder of the practice Adoptee Rights Centre (see <https://adopteerightslaw.com/>) spoke of some of ludicrous provisions that continue to exist such as, restricting access if you were a high school drop-out. In the



other 19 States, and Washington DC, records remain sealed and the only option for adoptees is to petition the court, which can be costly and has no guarantee especially where the judgement is made on the basis of if there is a compelling reason for this information.

A workshop by Tim Monti-Wohlpert (New York) and Shawna Hodgson (Texas) spoke about a) how to start and lobby for legislation, b) suggestions for a media strategy and c) how to actively debunk the arguments of adoptee rights opponents.

Erica Curry Van Ee from the Michigan Adoptee Collaborative (pictured below) also spoke of



difficulties intercountry adoptees have when they have not received United States citizenship, even after living in the America for decades. A number American adoptees like Adam Crapser, Kim Craig and Monte Haines

(South Korea), Vasulu James Redmond (India), Paul Schreiner (Brazil) and Mauricio Cappelli (Costa Rica) have already been deported and it is estimated that up to 35,000 adoptees are vulnerable to deportation because their citizenship paperwork was not completed by their adoptive parents.

## Clann Project - Republic of Ireland

Claire McGettrick from the Republic of Ireland talked about *"Illegitimate knowledge: Experts, Knowledge and the Struggle for Adoption Rights"*. They are still fighting for open records as the argument is made that a mother's permission is required before releasing a birth certificate.

For a recent article on this in the Irish Times see <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/zappone-rejects-claim-that-adoption-bill-errs-on-side-of-secrecy-1.3923060>

Claire jointly coordinates the Clann project which is a joint initiative of Adoption Rights Alliance (ARA), Justice for Magdalenes Research (JFMR) and global law firm, Hogan Lovells. The purpose of Clann is to help establish the truth of what happened to unmarried mothers and their children in 20<sup>th</sup> century Ireland. Their report can be downloaded at <http://clannproject.org/clann-report/>

## Search and Contact

Given the issues with access to identifying information in most States there were a number of presentations by search angels such as Marilyn Waugh on *'Locating your family in the internet'*. She was a wealth of information and a DNA wiz. I was surprised what some of the internet sites can do e.g. give you the names of all the neighbours for a particular address. There were also a number of presentations on issues to consider with search and contact. Sarah Burns (Editor of the Concerned United Birthparents newsletter) and her son Dave Campbell delivered a workshop entitled *Walking the walk, how to avoid pitfalls and unlock the keys to success in reunions* and Haley Redke of the wonderful podcast *Adoptees on* (see <http://www.adopteeson.com/>) and Caitriona Palmer author of *An affair with my mother: A story of adoption, secrecy and love* (Penguin 2016) spoke on *When Adoption Reunion Breaks Down*.

## Therapeutic Approaches

There was a range of workshops on various therapeutic approaches delivered by counsellors who were also adoptees. Many have also appeared on the 'Adoptees On' podcast if you want to know more about their stories and work. This included *Neurodevelopment in Loss and Trauma* with John Sobraske, *Adoption and Addiction* with David Bohl, *the Empowered Adoptee and Understanding Implicit Memory* with Dr Julie Lopez, *Expressing the Primal Wound, Poetry as Healing* with Liz DeBetta and *Disenfranchised Grief, Understanding and Healing* with Janet Nordine.

## The Future

Sharon Kaplan Rosia's (pictured on my right below) keynote was entitled *'Honouring our past,*

*Continued on p11*



# Personal Stories

## Returning to find my family, but instead I found myself *by Kate Coghlan*



Returning to Vietnam in April this year was partly to do some searching, but what I've realised since being back it was actually more to do with healing. What I didn't realise was the after effect and impact that would continue strongly three months since coming back to Australia.

I was blessed to be able to make my fourth trip back with my adoptive parents and my youngest daughter who's my biological daughter. It was a three generational shared story.

It's been 25 years since mum, dad and I made our first trip back. I recall declaring that I'd changed my mind the first time I went back and mum had to physically support me off the plane as I wept at the enormity of the situation. This time around I looked lovingly out of the plane window at all the lights of Ho Chi Minh city and was genuinely happy to be back.

We had a plan to meet with a priest who was in the same order that the priest who ran my orphanage was in. He works at the same church where Father Olivier had been the head priest at. The most amazing thing was we got to see where I was born.

I was overwhelmed with gratitude for the people I met this time around who are invested in helping me search for my family. I also got to meet the investigator that was working with ISS before they lost their funding. She has been the only person who has been able to locate a document that had my mother's name on it. She herself is a Vietnamese Australian adoptee so she understands my story and the feelings associated with my search completely.

I enjoyed eating as much like a local as I possibly could and made sure I had a Vietnamese coffee every day. But

the real surprise has been what's happened post trip for me. I have a genuine sense of peace about my search. I'm truly ok with not being any further along with finding anyone blood related. The connections I made with the people who are still searching for me were amazing. Just knowing there are people who care enough to help me is very humbling.

Since being home I have gained a real sense of being more present to my life and I have more space inside to just be me. I can't explain the feeling. But I'll try. I feel content and don't have the need to operate from a space where I'm trying to impress people so they like me. I don't care if they do or not now. I'm filling up with more self worth and know that I can trust myself to be my own keeper and take care of myself. It's been a real growth trip for me.

I'm also excited too, knowing that I'm going back again next year. I left not needing to be sad or wonder when I'll be back. I've decided that I need to make a trip back at least once every two years. To stay connected to my home land where my soul feels at peace.

Kate's story was shared in Vietnamese newspapers Tuoi Tres and THOI DAI. You can read it at this link:

<http://vietnamfriendship.vn/Vietnamese-Australian-adoptee-has-waited-whole-life-to-meet-biological-parents-04-24387.html>

Kate blogs for Intercountry Adoptee Voices <https://intercountryadopteevoices.com/about/icav-representatives/kate-coghlan/>





## Adoption - The Long Journey by Pat

I was born in 1950 and adopted at 6 weeks of age. I was unaware that I was adopted until I was about 13 years of age after asking my parents they told me it was true but very little else.

I was always curious about where I had come from and who were my real mum and dad. It wasn't until I met my husband in 1980 and we discussed my past that we decided to start looking for my real parents. This lead us in many different directions. We contacted as many agencies that we could find at the time, with the help of VANISH and my adoption papers which gave me my mother's maiden name and what we believed to be my father's name, the search began.

After many false starts I was able to find an aunty and uncle who were willing to talk to me and the blank spots started to be filled in about the same time the Dept. of Community Services had opened up some parts of the adoption laws which in time lead me to finding my sister and brother. I can't print what she said when she found out that she was an instant aunty to 7... we arranged to meet both my brother and sister which was great.

Finally, I was able to meet my birth mother even though at first very briefly, it was a start. This was followed by numerous meetings with her until her passing.

The only missing piece now was my birth father although we had what we believed to be his name we

kept coming to dead ends. We sent letters out to as many people Australia-wide with the surname we had but with no results.

We weren't giving up so we started getting onto the family history through Ancestry and again after many years and many dead ends, had almost given up all hope, when through Ancestry DNA we got a hit on a possible match. Following this lead, we contacted the person that was a possible relation and he agreed to contact a member of his family and asked if he would be willing to do a DNA test which he agreed to. When the results came back it was as close as you can get to a perfect match.

The name on my adoption papers was a false name which had lead us in the wrong direction all this time. We now know the true identity of my father and although he passed away early in the 2000's we have been in contact with his daughter who has agreed to meet us.

We are hoping this meeting goes well and I am able to at last put a lot of questions I have had to rest and can look forward to a future with my new found family.

All I can say is never give up, look outside the square you just never know what may be around the next corner. It has taken me 38 years of looking to get to where I am now and at last I can see light at the end of the tunnel.

PS Since writing this story we have been able to meet my half sister and one of my cousins. As a result we are arranging a family get together in October.

## Upcoming VANISH Support Group Dates

*Mixed Groups are for Adoptees, Natural Parents, Adoptive and Alternative Parents*

*Adoptee Groups are for Adult Adopted Persons over the age of 18*

*Mothers Groups are also referred to as Natural Mothers*

### Melbourne

VANISH office

**1st Thursday of each month  
Adopted Persons 6.30-8.30pm**

5th September  
3rd October  
7th November  
5th December

**2nd Tuesday of each month**

**Mixed 7.30-9.30pm**

10th September  
8th October  
12th November  
10th December

**3rd Wednesday of each month  
Donor Conceived Adult Network**

**7.00-9.00pm**

16th October  
18th December

### Melbourne

VANISH office

**4th Tuesday of each month  
Adopted Persons 7.30-9.30pm**

24th September  
22nd October  
26th November

### Albury-Wodonga

**2nd Saturday of each month  
949 Burrows Rd, Glenroy, Albury**

**10.30am-12.30pm**

14th September MIXED  
12th October MOTHERS  
9th November ADOPTEEES  
14th December MIXED

### Mildura

To register your interest in  
attending a support group  
contact the VANISH office

### Bendigo

**2nd Saturday of each month  
27 Myrtle St, Bendigo  
2.00-4.00pm**

14th September MOTHERS  
12th October ADOPTEEES  
9th November MOTHERS  
14th December ADOPTEEES

### Ballarat

**3rd Saturday of each month  
20 Eastwood St, Ballarat  
2.00-4.00pm**

21st September MOTHERS  
19th October MIXED  
16th November ADOPTEEES  
21st December MOTHERS

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

## On Mothers Day

Mother's Day can be a misnomer for many mothers. It is not always the celebration of motherhood as one would imagine. For some it can trigger the shame of not being able to raise their own child. For some it can bring back painful memories of their child being taken. It may be that some mothers deny their motherhood if they have lost their only child through adoption.



Mother's Day can be a reminder of inexplicable loss of a child and a day when feelings of worthlessness as a mother are revisited and re-enforced. It can be a day of hopes for some and disappointments for others; it is a day when the contradiction of separation by adoption and celebration of motherhood is impossible to reconcile for many mothers, resulting in some who are unable to let their subsequent children honour them as mothers.

Mother's Day is most likely to trigger varying degrees of emotion for mothers and their sons or daughters who have been separated by adoption regardless of whether they have since been re-united. Please remember that support is always available here at VANISH.

### What Mothers Day Means to Me *by Tricia*

Mother's day is, for me, a strange notion. I am one of the women who through the forced adoption practices lost my son and I did not, for a variety of reasons, go onto to have more children. Thus, for most of my life have considered myself childless and do not consider myself my son's mother.

Fortunately, we met and quickly formed a relationship. In order to do this we agreed (very quickly) that there was little we could do about the past and, rather than focus on the past, which for me was very painful, we would focus on the here and now and the future. Also, having found him the last thing I wanted to do was cause him pain in particular, with his relationship with the woman who cared and nurture him, loving and caring – his Mum / mother.

Further, when I met my son he was well and truly grown up – an adult. It was a difficult for me as I had held in my mind the picture of him as a baby and of course he was no longer a baby or child. He

was and is an adult and to have a relationship with him I needed to accept this.

Rather, than Mother's Day, for me the special day is my son's birthday as this was the day I first saw him, held him and was parted from him.

I do appreciate that there are women who were separated from their children through adoption who find Mother's Day difficult and sad as they grieve for a lost child. I understand that my view is possibly not the accepted image of mothers in similar situations to me, however this is my truth and I think all 'truths' need to be heard and recognised.

Adoption is complex and affects all those involved for life. It never really stops does it? And it affects us all in a myriad of ways, often when you least expect it to.



### Do you have any suggestions?

We would welcome any ideas or suggestions on how we can improve our services in search and support, providing access to our library, support groups, our newsletter or anything else.  
Email: [info@vanish.org.au](mailto:info@vanish.org.au) or post to PO Box 112, Carlton South 3053.

## News & Events

### SBS “Every family has a secret”



The new SBS show “Every family has a secret” with Noni Hazelhurst, featured two adoption stories in the second episode. One followed Li Ying Andrew as she searched for her family in Taiwan, the other covered Marie-Anne Keeffe from

Perth searching for her father after her mother had passed away.

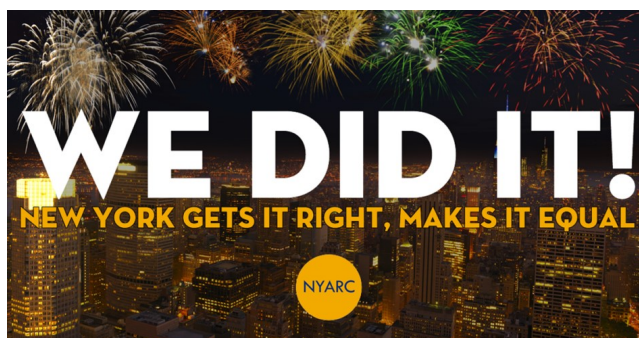
<https://www.sbs.com.au/guide/program/every-family-has-secret>.

### Online ABC OPEN project “Separated”

The ABC Open platform closed on 30th June. This includes *Separated* - a powerful collection of photo, video and written contributions by people affected by past and forced adoptions. This collection is an important record of people's lives and a powerful public educational tool. VANISH appealed to the ABC to continue to make this collection publicly available.

We are pleased to say that ABC's Acting Director Regional & Local, Warwick Tiernan, has advised us that the project has found a new home with ABC Life and will be available on the site within the next six to eight weeks. In his email he said, “We too share your views that the stories contained in the *Separated* project are too important to be lost to the public.”

Go to: <https://www.abc.net.au/life/>



follow. Given Victoria opened the records in 1984 it is hard to imagine that closed records still exist, but they do. For more information go to <http://bit.ly/NewYorkAdopteeRightsBill>

### In Search of Family

This short documentary is produced by filmmaking collective *Women of the Island* who hope its release online will help its subject, **Carol Maney**, locate her brothers. The film tells Carol's story in her own words, alongside stunning imagery of Tasmanian landscapes.

Carol was impacted by forced adoption twice in her life. As a teenager she was pressured to give up her newborn son in 1958. Then as a middle-aged woman she discovered that she was adopted as a baby under similar circumstances. Because of these traumatic events much of Carol's life has been defined by her search for answers, family and a sense of self.



*“When you lose a child, they're always with you. And because you don't know what happened to them you carry a black hole that is always empty.”*

The film is at <https://vimeo.com/327490723> .

### Adoption Records open in New York

Finally, after years of lobbying by adoptee rights groups which include natural and adoptive parents, New York lawmakers voted to overturn eight decades of discrimination. The Montgomery/Weprin bill gives New York adoptees the right to their original birth certificates at the age of 18.

Although long overdue, this is a huge win for adoptee rights in the US where 39 states still have closed records. Once Gov. Cuomo signs the bill, New York will be the biggest state to have open records and it seems likely that other states will



## Group therapy for Adoptees with Gabby Howse



Gabby Howse  
0411651094  
gabby@gabby-howse.com  
Registration

Where: 12 Wellington Pde East Melbourne

Dates: 4<sup>th</sup> February to 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Times: Tuesday evenings 6.30 to 8.00

Cost: \$400 for all 8 weeks

Please call or email Gabby to register and discuss payment options. Participants must commit to all 8 sessions. Limit of 10 participants.

The adoptee is separated from their mother before they have any understanding of concepts such as love, security or belonging. Consequently, they may start life with a basic sense of mistrust. They may not believe that any relationship will last; they may not think that there is any sense of continuity. Sometimes, to ensure they won't be abandoned again, the adoptee may put their heart and soul into making themselves into the perfect being; losing what is true to themselves in an attempt to eradicate their faults and blemishes. Other times they become so extraordinarily attuned to other peoples' displeasure that they recalibrate their entire self to be what others want - fearing abandonment. They may want someone to fix this terrible sense that further loss is around the corner. They may feel isolated, and, at times, that the burden of coping is theirs alone to carry - however it is not.

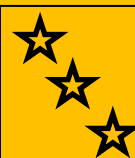
Gabby Howse is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist with over 25 years experience specialising in the area of adoption. She has an intimate understanding of the tumultuous love, the primitive loss and endless questioning of self, that is the adoptee's experience. Having worked one-on-one with adoptees, Gabby is now extending her practice to offer an eight week group therapy course. Gabby appreciates that there are common threads in the issues faced by all adoptees. She hopes that adoptees who attend group therapy will learn more about what it means to be adopted and in discussing and sharing with others - will feel less alone.

## American Adoption Congress *cont from p6*

*creating our future and setting the agenda as we evolve'. Sharon has been working in the field since 1963 and her early work was to describe the seven core issues in adoption which VANISH continues to use in training. I thought she had dropped off the radar so it was a delight to connect with her and hear that she has a new book being released next month called 'Seven Core Issues in Adoption and Permanency'. She defines permanency as any situation where the parents have a child not born to them or genetically related to them and thus includes adoption, foster care and third party reproduction. In America, this is an 8-billion-dollar business and ethical practice is still very much a work in progress particularly when agencies and attorneys base their success solely on the number of children they place or are born as in the case of third party reproduction.*

Sharon closed her address by posing the question should we be making alliances with the numerous other groups in the field of permanency and developing a vision of common intention based on human rights?

Given the predominance of profit driving third party reproduction and the demand to decrease costs with increasing numbers of children entering the alternative care system this is a heralding call for us all. *Sharon's book is featured on page 14.*



### **VANISH 30th Celebrations**

**Do you want to be involved?**

Do you have ideas or suggestions  
about how we could celebrate  
VANISH turning 30?

If you do, the 30th celebrations  
working group would like to hear  
from you. Please contribute your  
suggestions in writing by emailing  
info@vanish.org.au or post to  
PO Box 112, Carlton South 3053.



# Author Interview

## Author Interview: Peter Papathanasiou

In June, author Peter Papathanasiou was in Melbourne promoting his debut book *Little One* which describes how at 24, Peter discovered that his parents were in fact his Aunt and Uncle and had adopted him from his Mother's brother and his wife in Greece.

*Little One* interweaves Peter's own life story with that of his parents in Greece and Australia and also his grandparents who were forcibly expelled from Turkey during the 1923 population exchange. His description of their migration and belonging conveys important history to the central themes of the book, which are adoption and family.

**Q: At your book event, you said *Little One* took several years to write and publish. Can you tell us more about how the book came about?**

*Peter: When I was a kid, I liked writing a lot, writing in exercise books with biro and writing stories that were longer and longer and longer and they always had to do with space aliens and little worlds that I created and things I saw in cartoons. Then as a teenager, you tend to gravitate away from that, your interests become more about your studies if you are academically minded, and so I left all those creative juices behind. Then over the years, I started writing long emails to friends, which became how I told stories. In 1999, when I was 24 and Mum told me that I was adopted, I wrote it all down. It was only three pages but I knew I had to document this major moment in my life.*

*In 2006, I was in the US working as a geneticist and I did a creative writing course. I needed one last piece for the semester and I thought to write about that moment I found out I was adopted. So I pulled it out from my computer and turned it into a self-contained piece. It turned out to be my best received piece all semester. Everyone said: "you nailed it".*

Peter later won two short story competitions with his piece and realised his story was resonating with readers and might even have publishing potential. Over the next six months, he sat down with his mother to tease out her story, before spending three more years adding his story and completing the book in 2011. He initially wrote it in the third person as a novel, but in 2018 he returned to the book and rewrote it as a personal account. After seven more years of life, the book finally had an ending.

**Q. *Little One* opens in Canberra in 1999 with your mother telling you the truth – that she and your father had not been able to have children and so her brother and his wife agreed to have a child for them to take and raise in Australia. She also told you that your natural mother had passed away. How did you react?**

*Peter: I felt all these feelings at once: shock, deceit, anger, curiosity, excitement. I also saw the relief that my Mum felt for what she went through. The news hit me like a blow. When Mum started telling me her story, I was standing up. The next thing I knew, I felt the energy seep from my body. I was soon leaning against the wall, then sitting, and then finally laid out on the floor.*

*Growing up, I knew that I was different. I was an only child, my parents were so much older than all the other parents at school, and I was born overseas. Why was all that? I never got a good explanation from my parents. And then, in 1999, it all made sense.*

**Q. One piece of news that has a profound impact on you is hearing that you have two brothers. In your book, you write: "I wanted to shout it out, to tell everyone I had siblings. To tell them – hey, I'm suddenly just like you." Why was that?**

*Peter: Every adoptee would go through not just the shock of finding out that they've got other parents but potentially the shock of new siblings. For me, it wasn't just half siblings – it was full blood siblings, and two of them, and I grew up an only child. I had no concept of what it meant to be a brother. I missed out on what it meant to have brothers, to have siblings, which in my mind is growing up together in the same house having all that rough-and-tumble that goes on, the arguments, the fun and games, the maturing. I would love to turn the clock back and be in the schoolyard and say to my friends: "My older brother's over there and my middle brother's over there and we're a threesome."*

Peter's brothers knew about him - they were almost teenagers when he was born and he spent the first six months of his life with them in Greece. Billy, the eldest brother, developed a mental impairment as a young child; the middle brother, Georgios eventually became his carer. The two never married nor had any children, and continue to live together in the family home.



Later in 1999, Peter's Mum encouraged him to go to Greece to meet his family. She seemed concerned about the health of her brother, Peter's father. But Peter didn't go – he was busy with scientific experiments for his PhD, ironically in the field of genetics. Further, as Peter reflects in his book:

*I was intimidated, scared. I had never asked for any of this. It was the idea of meeting my other father that made me the most apprehensive. Brothers were different; they were of my generation. Plus there were two of them to share the magnitude of the moment. But a father was singular, older, and ultimately more problematic because I already had one of those.*

In 2003, Peter returned to Florina, Greece, for the first time in nearly 30 years. Despite being engrossed in finishing his PhD, he had become determined:

*It was time. I needed to see myself up close, and find out who I could have been.*

Part of this determination came from the death of Peter's father in Greece in 2001. Peter missed meeting him in person.

Peter went to Florina for one week, accompanied by his Mum. He writes of meeting his brothers, how happy they were to see him again and how the three of them discovered similarities they shared – same hands, same chin and dimples, similar tastes and habits.

On the day that Peter visited the graves of his parents, he was approached by a stranger who told him what Peter's family would never tell him - that Georgios needed help with Billy and that this was also his responsibility. Reflecting on this, Peter writes:

*I replayed the day's events in my head. I felt guilt, and a little anger. I didn't want to admit it, but there was truth in what the stranger had told me. I considered the Billy situation. Mum and Dad knew before they entered into the arrangement with my biological parents. Didn't they consider the long-term impact? ... It was ultimately a cruel arrangement. Cruel on Georgios who knew he had a normal brother but who didn't know he existed, and cruel on [my birth parents] who had to give away one of their children. And cruel on me too, who now had to live with such thoughts and feelings, which had only amplified since arriving in Greece. And for what? All so Mum and Dad could become parents. And yet, without them, and their desire to be parents, I would never have existed. I should've been thanking them, not angry with them.*

**Q: Going back to Greece seemed to result in some guilt and regret for you about not getting back to Greece in time to meet your father. Why do you think that is?**

*Peter: I feared going to Greece and finding out all manner of secrets. I was kind of on edge the whole*

*time. What else was there going on? It was a fear of the unknown. And when I got there and realised that it had all been in my head, I looked back on it with some regret. When you hear the impact that your behaviour had on other people, when your brother says to you your Dad really wanted to meet you once before he passed away, it is like they are saying: "you should have come, why didn't you come, you would have made him happy". So you've let him down and he's not here anymore, and you have also let your brothers down. That's when it hurts more.*

*My father was the architect of this whole arrangement so the gratitude I feel for him is enormous. Even though the sacrifice of giving me away was bigger for my mother, it was my father's idea.*

Regret is a theme of the book, as are love and acceptance. As Peter says to his mum when they are in Florina:

*Georgios regrets not coming to Australia, the family regrets how they've treated Billy. My biological parents regretted giving me away, you regret not telling me earlier. And I regret not coming sooner to see my father. But I don't think many people would swap shoes with our family. These were all difficult situations, and none of us are bad people.*

*Little One* provides us with an insider's perspective of a surrogacy arrangement resulting in an adoption. Peter takes us on a journey with many twists and turns as he discovers his history and identity. He ends on a note of symmetry and completion, but we decided not to include all the spoilers so you will have to read the book to find out!

Peter dedicates his book: *"For my parents, all four of them"*

*Little One* is published by Allen and Unwin in Australia and is also published in the UK as *Son of Mine* by Salt Publishing.



Charlotte Smith with Author Peter Papathanasiou

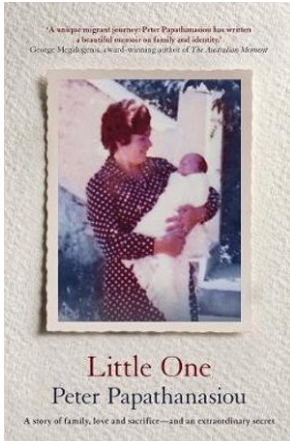


# New Books in the Library

## LITTLE ONE

*A story of family, love and sacrifice - and an extraordinary secret by Peter Papathanasiou*

A powerful story about adoption and family, and the tensions and joys between the old world of Europe and the new world of Australia.



Peter Papathanasiou is the son of migrants and grandson of refugees. His parents emigrated from Greece to Australia in 1956 but were unable to have children, a huge sorrow - and shame - for them among Australia's Greek community and their own family.

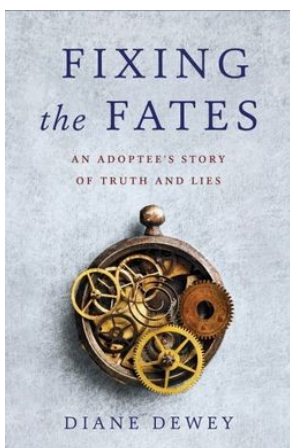
Journalist and author George Megalogenis describes *Little One* as “a unique migrant journey” and “a beautiful memoir on family and identity”.

*Little One* is also published in the UK as *Son of Mine*.

See our interview with the author on page 12.

## FIXING THE FATES

*An Adoptee's Story of Truth and Lies by Diane Dewey*



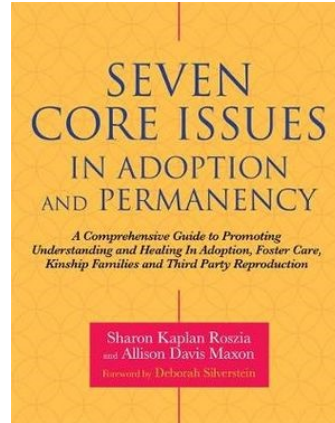
The secrets, lies, and layers of deception about Diane Dewey's origins were meant for her protection - but eventually, they imploded.

The best part about this book was the narration / the writing. There was a great flow to the words and the clarity of the conflict of thoughts in the author's mind comes across in a pretty stark manner. Diane Dewey has always known

she was adopted but that fact has always had a hold on her thoughts and actions and here she chronicles the time when she finally started to get some answers. *Anjana, Amazon review*

## SEVEN CORE ISSUES IN ADOPTION AND PERMANENCY

*A Comprehensive Guide to Promoting Understanding and Healing In Adoption, Foster Care, Kinship Families and Third Party Reproduction. By Sharon Kaplan Roszia and Allison Davis Maxon*



This book is based on the construct Sharon Roszia developed with Deborah Silverstein in 1986. The Seven Core Issues are Loss, Rejection, Shame/Guilt, Grief, Identity, Intimacy, and Mastery/Control.

...The book views the Seven Core Issues

from a range of perspectives including: multi-racial, LGBTQ, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, African-American, International, openness, search and reunion, and others. This essential guide introduces each Core Issue, its impact on individuals, offering techniques for growth and healing. *Taken from the back cover.*

## I'LL ALWAYS CARRY YOU

*A mother's story of adoption loss, grief and healing by Linda Franklin*



As a mother and a therapist, Linda Franklin writes with passion and authority about the loss of her first child to adoption, the long-term impact of that tragic separation and her resultant grief. It takes courage and insight to share this life-defining experience with others in a style which is both personal and

educational. Her book poignantly illustrates the psychological and emotional significance of appropriate grieving.

*Review by Evelyn Burns Robinson, author of Adoption and Recovery: Solving the Mystery of Reunion (2006) and Adoption and Loss: The Hidden Grief (2003,2018)*

**You are invited to our Annual General Meeting!**  
**Thursday 19th September at 5.30pm**  
**Guest Speaker: Sue Green**  
**“Adoption Reform: Lessons From and To America”**

**Date:** Thursday 19th September 2019

**Time:** Doors open at 5.30pm for 6.00pm start  
Meeting will finish at 7.30pm, followed by refreshments

**Where:** **Radisson on Flagstaff Gardens Hotel, 380 William St, Melbourne**  
*(Same venue as last year!)*

**RSVP:** By Thursday 12th September  
**Email [info@vanish.org.au](mailto:info@vanish.org.au) or phone (03) 9328 8611**

**Parking:** Metered street parking available on nearby A'Beckett, Franklin, and William (north of Dudley) Streets

**Transport:** Flagstaff train station. Trams along William St and La Trobe St



**VOTING BY PROXY**

If you are a member and unable to attend but would like to vote by proxy, please contact VANISH for proxy forms.

**VANISH Committee of Management**  
**VACANCY**

The Committee of Management comprises people who have a relevant personal experience and who have skills or experience relevant to the governance and leadership of VANISH. Members are expected to attend approximately eight meetings a year including the AGM, plus optional additional involvement for participating in sub-committees. There is currently a vacancy in the following category:

**“Biological or Natural Parent Category, namely a natural parent, a donor parent or a surrogate mother of persons eligible for the offspring category of eligibility”**

If you have personal experience as described above, possess relevant Board/Committee skills and experience and/or have a relevant skill set that will support VANISH to achieve its purpose and objectives, you are aligned with VANISH values and policy positions and interested in joining the COM please contact the Manager, Charlotte Smith on (03) 9328 8611 or email [manager@vanish.org.au](mailto:manager@vanish.org.au).

COM members are required to undergo security checks prior to appointment.

**Nominations must be delivered or posted to the Secretary at the VANISH office to be received no later than 4.30pm on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2019.**



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Email: [info@vanish.org.au](mailto:info@vanish.org.au) Fax: (03) 9329 6527  
ABN 35 582 901 627