

VANISH VOICE

Autumn 2023



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CEO's Message



Dear members and friends,

I hope this newsletter finds you well. There has been

a lot happening in the past couple of months in Victoria, Australia-wide and in other countries so this edition of VOICE is jam packed with news. In particular, the design of a redress scheme for mothers in Victoria is underway, the 10th anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions was commemorated in March, and apologies have been delivered in Scotland and Wales. You can read more about these and related media coverage on pages 4 to 8.

While in Canberra we raised some of the issues facing our service users with Minister for Social Services Amanda Rishworth and Attorney General Mark Dreyfuss. We will be following up on these in the coming months, particularly our concerns regarding the services provided by Births, Deaths & Marriages in Victoria.

Since our last bulletin we have held Writing As Therapy courses and a new textile workshop for adoptees called Common Threads which we hope to expand upon in the future. The next offering is our Creative Expression (Art Therapy) course with Michele Hutchins. You can read more about Michele's journey and work on page 3.

Thank you so much to those of you who have sent in your personal stories, poems and art. Those not featured in this edition will be included in our next newsletter.

As always, the VANISH search and support team are available to assist you so please feel free to contact us by phone or email or by coming in to our office in North Melbourne.

Kind regards,

Charlotte Smith
CEO

The VANISH Team

Charlotte Smith
Chief Executive Officer

Gail Holstock
Support Services Coordinator

Patricia Navaretti
Tracey Hudson
SallyRose Carbinas
Search & Support Workers

Lorna Sleightholm
Administrator

Hana Crisp
Program Support (Casual)

Changes to VANISH Committee of Management

At the end of calendar year 2022, VANISH Chair Simon Pryor indicated his intention to step down from his role and to continue on the COM as an ordinary member. This meant that at the beginning of this year, the Committee's first task was to appoint a new Chair.

Todd Dargan agreed to take up this key leadership role and was appointed Chair at the February COM meeting. Todd has been a member of VANISH since 2008, on the COM since 2018, and Treasurer since 2022. Todd is qualified in business management and has significant governance, compliance and leadership training and experience in the NFP sector.

Todd's appointment meant the Treasurer position became vacant - to which the COM appointed Jon Phillips. Jon has a decade of previous board experience as Treasurer, and a long teaching career in accounting.

At the same meeting, Maureen Long agreed to continue in her role as Secretary. Maureen has substantial governance experience on committees and boards in the NFP sector and a long teaching career in social work.

At the February Committee meeting, the CEO personally thanked Simon for his guidance and for generously sharing his wisdom and experience through a period of significant change, challenges and opportunities - in particular the move of adoption services to the Department of Justice & Community Safety, the COVID pandemic and lockdowns, and the Victorian forced adoptions inquiry. Incoming Chair Todd Dargan put forward the motion "That the CoM expresses its wholehearted gratitude to Simon Pryor for his excellent leadership in the role of Chair for the past four and a half years and notes that his contribution to the credibility and sustainability of the organisation is significant and lasting." This was accepted unanimously.



VANISH Creative Expression Workshops

Stitching together the common threads of adoption

On Sunday 2nd April, VANISH held the first textile workshop specifically for adoptees to come together and explore the “common threads” of adoption.

Facilitated by Melbourne textile artist Nicole Kemp and VANISH worker SallyRose, eight participants gathered at Melbourne’s Laneway Learning Centre for a day of craft and community.

Nicole, a passionate stitcher, supported each person to capture their thoughts and feelings onto a square of fabric. Nicole quickly eased any anxiety about creativity or skill by guiding participants through stitching techniques and ideas.

The diversity of fabrics, threads and memorabilia, and the rich and open conversation created a space for the needles and threads to work their magic, creating evocative words and images. The hope of building a collective visual narrative was becoming a reality.

The workshop was devised by SallyRose, who was disappointed by the lack of outcomes for adoptees in the 2021 Parliamentary Inquiry into forced adoptions in Victoria and compelled to speak out as an adopted person herself.

“But finding our voice [as adoptees] can be hard,” said SallyRose. So she wanted to provide a different medium for adoptees to express themselves, that could ultimately form a collective piece representing

the “common threads” of adoptee experiences.

Participants reported that they enjoyed the workshop, describing it as “validating of feelings about adoption” and a “safe place”. For one participant, the most valuable aspect was “the conversation [with other adoptees] whilst having busy hands – was quite surprised at my level of comfort.”

Nicole said: “It was beautiful to see the participants express their complex ongoing experiences through stitch. Again, stitch provided the safe environment needed to relax and to share thoughts and feelings.”

Not all pieces were finished on the day and once all are received, they will be sewn together and exhibited and displayed at appropriate events. We will keep you posted.

If you are an adoptee who is interested in creating your own square, like the ones shown below, please contact VANISH for more details.

Thank you to all who made it come to fruition.

— *Written by SallyRose Carbines, VANISH Search and Support Worker*

You can follow Nicole on Instagram (@nekemp): www.instagram.com/nekemp/

This project was funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services through Relationships Australia Victoria’s Forced Adoption Support Service.



VANISH Creative Expression Workshops

Meet Michele Hutchins

Facilitator of our upcoming art therapy courses for adoptees and mothers



Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

Gosh, that's such a simple and unsurprising question, isn't it? Yet as an adoptee, it is such a loaded question. My story begins, "I was born and adopted in New Zealand in 1968". Where do I take it from there? The

adoptee's stories are often so complex and layered.

If I cut to the chase, I am reminded of the title of a book that really made an impression on me when I read it many years ago, "Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self" (Brodzinsky et. al., 1992). That pretty much sums it all up, I think.

My life has been a search to understand Self. The thwarted search began in the small circle of my adopted family, expanded to incorporate a limited but ultimately adequate appreciation of my biological roots, and expanded further into the creation of my own family. Thwarted again, my first-born child was diagnosed with cancer at three years of age and died at six and a half.

During her illness, the Art Therapist we met seemed to be the only person in the whole cancer 'factory' who was able to offer her a deep sense of emotional and perhaps spiritual support. So as far back as 1995, my curiosity in this field was sparked.

Around the same time, beset with the landscape of caring for a child with a life-threatening illness and ultimately her death, I began my inquiry into the ancient wisdom traditions. Vigilant mindfulness practice became such a vital resource for me as I met the extreme challenges of our situation. Eventually, I took up a daily mantra meditation practice also.

This was a turning point, or defining time, in my life. The 'Lifelong Search for Self' began to resolve at the intersection of a therapeutic arts practice and meditative practice. I have since trained in a variety of therapeutic arts approaches.

Now I feel that my various 'parts' have been well

integrated, I have a strong and authentic self-sense (independent of external factors), and I am very blessed to have created a cherished new family.

For people who don't know anything about it, what is art therapy?

The answer to this question feels as ambiguous as the first one. I find 'Art Therapy' a frustrating descriptor for this field, but it is the most recognisable. My own training has been in Transpersonal Art Therapy, Arts Psychotherapy, and Therapeutic Arts Practice. Each approach is informed differently, and then there are the nuances of each practitioner and each client, so this does make it difficult to explain simply what Art Therapy is.

The suggestion that it involves 'Art' creates a host of ideas and can be so off-putting for people, especially when they do not feel they have any natural skill in this area. 'Therapy' can also imply the dredging up of things that one does not wish to bring to the surface and the fear that having done so, one will be left in a kind of limbo of unresolved, complex and often overwhelming emotion.

I often rebrand my offering as 'Creative Expressive' work and feel that this is more representative of the realm we work in. It is largely an embodied, playful and fun approach. One in which you can move between left and right brain hemispheres and thereby gain new insights, integrate new understandings, and embody new ways of being and engaging with the world and in relationships.

My personal approach is strongly underpinned by opportunities to move towards a greater sense of presence and self-awareness. It is trauma-informed—emotional safety is crucial to this capacity to be able to play and explore freely, so a great deal of care is taken to ensure participants feel grounded and relationally held.

Can you tell us about your upcoming courses and what they can offer for adoptees and mothers?

The programs will run one day a week, over six consecutive weeks. Each week we use different creative materials such as oil pastels, collage, clay, painting, textiles, etc. We engage with these materials with a phenomenological attitude, attending to what arises in the subjective consciousness without judgement. It is not uncommon for participants to be surprised by what emerges in the creative work, or more accurately 'in awareness', and to feel a sense of moving through something which had previously felt stagnant.

VANISH Creative Expression Workshops

No artistic experience or capacity is necessary for this to be a profoundly healing experience. The program has been designed with great care to ameliorate any sense of exposure or self-consciousness.

What is your favourite thing about facilitating these courses and/or working with people affected by adoption and family separation?

I love the sense of community and safety that develops in the groups. There is so much isolation in the adoption experience, whether you are a mother or an adoptee. It is rare to experience this kind of opportunity to feel emotionally met and understood. The challenges we face are normalised through a deep sense of shared knowing and we feel less alone in our struggles.

This project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services through Relationships Australia Victoria's Forced Adoption Support Service.



VANISH 2023
Art Therapy for Adoptees & Mothers

WITH ADOPTEE & ART THERAPIST MICHELE HUTCHINS

6 weeks | Thursdays 10am to 2pm
For Adoptees: 8 June to 13 July
For Mothers: 5 October to 9 November

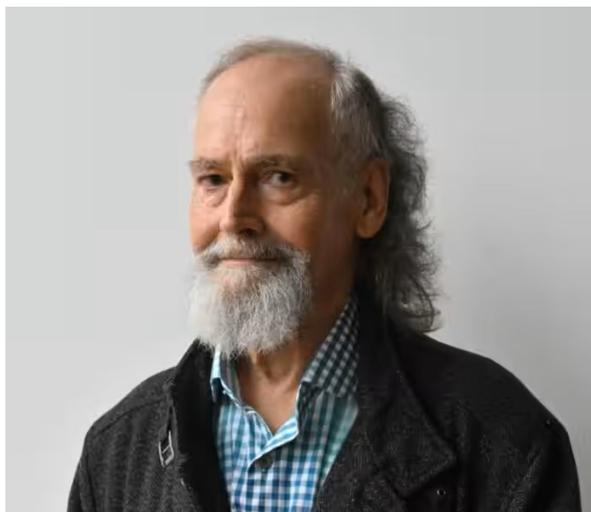
📍 MacLaren Hall, 45 Riversdale Rd, Hawthorn

Register Now

www.vanish.org.au/news-events
Or contact us on (03) 9328 8611 | info@vanish.org.au

News & Events

Victorian adoptee Robert Mauger reflects on 10th anniversary of national apology



Source: AAP/Mick Tsikas

VANISH member and adopted person Robert Mauger, 69, has reflected on the 2013 national apology and the recent 10th anniversary events, both of which he attended in Canberra, in an article for the AAP/SBS News.

When Julia Gillard delivered the apology, Robert felt relief and hope, but later disappointment when the prime minister's leadership challenge overshadowed much needed media coverage. Ten years later, he believes there has been little progress.

To read the full article, visit: <https://bit.ly/SBSRobert>

Inquiry Recommendations Update

During the last few months the Forced Adoption Redress Design and Delivery Team at DJCS has been undertaking consultations with mothers about the design of their redress scheme. This involved circulating a survey to mothers who expressed interest in being consulted, and holding individual meetings with mothers who preferred to provide feedback this way. The team asked questions about which aspects of the redress scheme were felt to be a priority - financial payments, a personal apology and/or therapeutic counselling. They also asked about who a personal apology should come from. The outcomes of these consultations will be shared when the redress scheme is launched, which we hope will be soon.

The Forced Adoption Implementation Team is still accepting applications for the Exceptional Circumstances Fund which you can read more about here: vanish.org.au/news-events/forced-adoption-exceptional-circumstances-fund

We have recently been in touch with the Attorney General's office to find out when consultations will commence for the new Integrated Birth Certificates, due to be available on or before October this year. We are waiting to hear back and we will keep you informed of this and any other inquiry recommendation updates in upcoming bulletins and newsletters.

10th Anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions

Canberra events

The 21st March marked the tenth anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions, delivered by then-Prime Minister Julia Gillard. To commemorate this milestone, the Commonwealth Government held three events in Canberra on 21-22 March which gathered individuals directly affected by forced adoption, support and advocacy organisation representatives, and those who worked to bring about the National Apology in 2013.

A group of VANISH representatives and guests attended to participate in the events and advocate on behalf of our community.

On the evening of Tuesday 21st, the National Archives of Australia (NAA) hosted a panel discussion called *Saying sorry: Do national apologies change the world?*, moderated by Paul Barclay from ABC's Big Ideas, with guests former minister the Hon Jenny Macklin, the Hon Nahum Mushin AM, Professor Michelle Arrow, and Ms Rosemary Baird. You can watch the event here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9zGFNBd7G0 or listen to the audio recording here: www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bigideas/do-government-apologies-for-historic-wrongs-make-a-difference-/102144554

The panel discussion was followed by a commemorative dinner for representatives nominated by support and advocacy organisations from all states and territories, hosted by the Hon Amanda Rishworth, Minister for Social Services, held in the National Portrait Gallery.

On the morning of Wednesday 22nd, Minister Rishworth read a Statement of Significance in the House of Representatives. Though the Minister acknowledged that there is more to be done to meet the needs of those affected, we were disappointed that the only concrete measure announced on the day was an additional \$700,000 in funding for training for aged care, allied health and Forced Adoption Support Service providers. You can read Minister Rishworth's full statement here: <https://www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children-programs-services-family-relationships-forced-adoption-practices/national-apology-for-forced-adoptions-10th-anniversary-transcript-0>

During the morning tea in Parliament House that followed, Minister Rishworth was approached by many guests to share their experiences and express their views about what policies and services are required.



VANISH will write to Minister Rishworth conveying our disappointment regarding the lack of announcements and what needs to be done and encourages our members to do the same.

VANISH & ARMS Melbourne event

On Saturday 25th March, VANISH and ARMS Vic held a commemorative event at the Taken Not Given memorial statue in St Andrew's Place Reserve, Melbourne, attended by about 35 guests, including members of ARMS, VANISH, and Origins.

The guest speaker was the Honourable Nahum Mushin AM, a former professor of law, who led consultations around Australia in the lead up to Julia Gillard's apology and remains a highly influential person in the adoption space.

"I've spent nearly 11 years in this sector now," Nahum reflected. "And I have to say that it's been by far the most challenging but rewarding thing that I've done in my career. Challenging because I see the pain and the grief of so many people who have suffered—not only unreasonably, but illegally, at the hands of institutions."

Nahum began by sharing in our disappointment that the event in Canberra did not involve any meaningful announcements. He also noted some of the challenges facing the adoption sector, including the number of different representative groups without a coordinating body/unifying voice and the seemingly confrontational or aggressive ways in which views are sometimes represented—which he can understand but believes to be damaging to the cause.

With regard to Minister Rishworth's commitment to engage the Commonwealth and state governments in discussions about redress/reparations, Nahum expressed concern that it will be complicated, particularly in terms of how to attribute responsibility

10th Anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions



The Hon. Nahum Mushin AM

to the states and to the institutions which are not state based.

Nahum concluded by talking about the need to increase the profile of forced adoption, suggesting that the Stolen Generation could serve as a kind of model for community organisation and societal recognition, and that “a national day [for forced adoption] would increase awareness enormously”. He encouraged us to continue to raise awareness and advocate more for our community.

Jo Fraser from ARMS, sharing a speech written by ARMS founder Marie Meggitt, and VANISH CEO Charlotte Smith also reflected on the anniversary and what is yet to be achieved.

In Marie’s speech, delivered by Jo, she acknowledged that while the apology has deepened the public’s knowledge and understanding of adoption, ten years later, adoption is

still a highly contested issue and our community’s experiences have not yet attained the legitimacy that we seek. She also expressed disappointment in the lack of concrete measures—“the other part of an apology”—in Minister Rishworth’s announcement, but pointed out the opportunity to further inform the Minister and her public servants about what proper redress should look like. “In so many cases, it is ignorance, not conspiracy that has well intentioned leaders making poor decisions,” Marie wrote.

Charlotte talked about the recent apology for historical

adoption practices in Scotland, which was driven by activists inspired by Julia Gillard’s apology, and expressed hope “that the ripple effect of the Australian apology continues across the world”.

She also acknowledged the disappointment of having to continually educate policy makers and professionals, but reminded us that there is strength, too, in providing our own inspiration and validation for each other. Charlotte concluded by encouraging everyone to keep moving forward as a community: “May we be stronger and louder together. May we realise that it is safe to ask for and receive support from one another.”



Jo Fraser from ARMS

Scottish activists achieve national apology for historical adoption practices

On 22nd March, Nicola Sturgeon, the leader of Scotland's government, issued an apology for the country's practice of forced adoption, in one of her final acts as First Minister. Ms. Sturgeon said the injustices carried out against these mothers from the 1940s to 1970s were among the worst in Scotland's history.



Scotland First Minister Nicola Sturgeon

Scotland's apology follows apologies from other countries, beginning with Australia in 2013; the government in Flanders, Belgium, in 2015; and Ireland in 2021. It is the result of a long campaign led by Movement for an Adoption Apology (MAA Scotland) (<https://movementforanadoptionapology.org/>), which has worked closely with mothers here in Australia. Campaigners travelled to Scotland from far and wide, including Australia, to witness the event.

The apology is accompanied by measures to ensure that those affected will receive the trauma-informed support they need and access to the information they have previously been denied, including adoption records and family medical history.

In her heartfelt speech at the Scottish Parliament, Ms. Sturgeon said:

"To the mothers who had their babies taken away from them;

To the sons and the daughters, who were separated from their parents;

To the fathers who were denied their rights;

And to the families who have lived with the legacy;

For the decades of pain that you have suffered, I offer today a sincere, heartfelt, and unreserved apology. We are sorry

No words can ever make up for what has happened to you.

But I hope this apology will bring you some measure of solace.

It is the very least that you deserve – and it is long overdue."

To read a transcript of the full speech, visit: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/apology-historical-adoption-practices-first-ministers-speech-22-march-2023/>

To watch the speech, followed by questions from members of parliament, on YouTube, visit: https://youtu.be/Bdd2_0AfMNg

To watch a special report from Scottish current affairs show Scotland Tonight, featuring a brief interview with VANISH CEO Charlotte Smith, visit: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=gI9xUhPFP1k>

Welsh Government makes formal apology for historical forced adoption practices

The Welsh Government has formally apologised to all those affected by historical forced adoption practices in Wales.

The official apology was delivered by Deputy Minister for Social Services Julie Morgan in the Senedd chamber on 25th April, following the Minister's personal apology made at the Big Adoption Conversation event in January and one month after the national apology in Scotland.

Speaking in front of a group of mothers and adopted people affected by forced adoption, Minister Morgan said:

"I know the effects of forced adoption and forced family separation are still very much part of the lives of the many people involved.

The impacts are diverse and long-lasting, not only for the women separated from a child by adoption, but also for the adult sons and daughters who were adopted as babies, and their extended family members. I want to acknowledge the father's experiences when it comes to these historical practices too.

Many still find it extremely difficult to open-up and talk about the life-long heartbreak they have bottled up for

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fear of still being judged.

The feelings of loss, grief, anger and pain remain.

Regardless of the societal pressures or social norms of the day, such cruelty should never be an acceptable part of our society in Wales.

I would like to convey my deepest sympathy and regret to all affected, that due to society failing you, you had to endure such appalling historical practices in Wales – for this the whole of the Welsh Government is truly sorry.”



Deputy Minister for Social Services Julie Morgan: BBC News

The apology comes after the UK Joint Committee on Human Rights published its recommendations following an inquiry based on the experiences of unmarried women whose children were adopted between 1949 and 1976 in England and Wales. The recommendations included an official apology from Government leaders and to address the shortage of counsellors able to provide post-adoption support.

To read more, visit: <https://bbc.in/40FiLuT>

UK Government declines to issue formal apology for adoption

UK ministers are facing renewed pressure to formally apologise for the practice of forced adoption after the recent apologies in Wales and Scotland. Campaigners, including representatives from Movement for An Adoption Apology (movementforanadoptionapology.org), are now calling for the UK government to follow suit.

Earlier in March, the UK Government responded to the UK Joint Committee on Human Rights report about historical adoption practices between 1949 and 1976 in England and Wales. The report, published in July 2022, argued that the Government bore ultimate

responsibility for the pain and suffering caused by public institutions and state employees, and called on the Government to make a formal apology.

While the UK government acknowledged that what happened to mothers and children was wrong and said it was sorry to all those affected, it decided not to formally apologise.

Both the chair of the Joint Committee, Joanna Cherry, and the UK Adult Adoptee Movement, a group of adoptees who gave evidence to the Joint Committee's inquiry, expressed their disappointment in the Government's response. In a statement issued on 3 March, Adult Adoptee Movement said:

“There is nothing new in the government's response and even less of value...To say we have had the opportunity to have our voices and experiences heard and to then do precisely nothing to listen to our needs is a repetition of exactly what has happened to us in the past.

...One reason the government is too cowardly to offer an apology for state involvement in adoption—in their response they give many examples while simultaneously denying it happened—is that it would shine a light on today's adoption practices, which still trample over the rights of parents and children.”

To read more, visit: <https://bit.ly/UKpressure>

To read more about the Inquiry and the UK Government's response, visit: <https://bit.ly/UKGovresponse>

To read the full statement by UK Adult Adoptee Movement, visit: <https://bit.ly/AAMstatement>

Adoptee Rights Australia (ARA) fights to end “contact veto” restraining orders

Although current adoption legislation supports the right for adoptees to know their identity and have the opportunity to develop a relationship with natural relatives, more than 8,000 contact vetoes are still in place across the country, according to 2021 figures.

So-called “vetoes” operate like restraining orders between those involved in adoption, despite the availability of actual restraining orders to protect people who are in danger. Adoption laws differ by state, and in some states, breaching a contact veto is considered a criminal offence.

Adoption lobby groups including Adoptee Rights Australia (ARA) are pushing to abolish all vetoes, arguing that they are “cruel” and “outdated”, and treat adoptees and mothers like “criminals”.

To read more, visit: <https://bit.ly/contactvetoes>

Personal Stories

Adopted for 32 years and now FREE!

by Lynelle Long, Vietnamese ex-adoptee raised in Australia and Founder of Intercountry Adoptee Voices (ICAV)

Article republished with permission from the ICAV blog: <https://intercountryadopteevoices.com/2022/12/29/adopted-for-32-years-and-now-free/>



I can officially now say, “**I WAS adopted.**” It is of the past. Now, my identity changes once again and I am no longer legally adopted. I am my own person, having made a clear and cognitive adult decision that I want to be legally free

of the people who looked after me since I was five months old.

The biggest lie of plenary adoption is that we are “as if born to our adoptive parents”. My Australian birth certificate reflects this lie. I grew tired of the untruths of adoption so I decided to take matters into my own hands. Mostly, I wanted to be legally recognised as my biological mother’s child and for the truth to be on my birth certificate, flowing into all my identity documents for the future. This also impacts my children and their future generations, to ensure they do not have to live the lie of adoption either, but are entitled to the genetic truth of whom they are born to.

On 13 December 2022, **I was officially discharged from my adoption order**, which had been made when I was 17 years old. Prior to this, I had been flown into Australia by my adoptive father at the age of 5 months old in 1973 and the family kept me with them for 17 years without legally completing my adoption. So technically, I was legally under the care of the Lutheran Victorian adoption agency and Immigration Minister until my adoption was completed in April 1990. These institutions however didn’t seem to follow up on me nor did they create a State Ward file for me, even though they knew quite clearly that my adoption had not been finalised.

My case is very unusual in that most adoptive parents want to quickly legalise the adoption. I have no idea why my adoptive parents took so long and what baffles me is how they managed to pass as my

“parents” at schools and hospitals, etc., when they had no formal paperwork to prove their “parenthood”. It’s quite obvious I can’t be their “born to” child when I am Asian and they are white Caucasians. We look nothing alike and they raised me in rural areas where I was often the only non-white, non-Aboriginal looking person.

I can celebrate that my year of 2022 has been a year of empowerment in so many ways. In November 2022, I was also recognised for my years of suffering by being offered the maximum compensation, counselling and a direct personal response under the Royal Commission for Institutional Sexual Abuse Redress Scheme by the two entities responsible for me—the Lutheran Church (the Victorian adoption agency) and the Department of Home Affairs (Australian Immigration). After the past five years spent talking to countless lawyers, I am finally able to hold these institutions somewhat accountable for my placement with a family who should never have received any vulnerable child.

What I want them to recognise is the significant responsibility they hold to keep children safe. It is still hard to fathom how any country can allow children in with parents who look nothing like them, clearly having no biological connections, no paperwork, and yet not take all precautions to ensure these children are not being trafficked. I am highly suspicious that my own adoption was illegal, if not highly illicit. Our governments need to be on higher alert, looking out for all signs of trafficking in children and ensuring that these children have indeed been relinquished by their parents before being allowed into another country with people who are nothing alike.

My case in the *Redress Scheme* also highlights the many failings of the child protection system that is supposed to protect vulnerable children like me. If the family had adopted me as they should have done, I would never have been allowed this compensation or acknowledgement through the Redress Scheme. **It is a significant failing of the system that those who are deemed legally “adopted” are not considered to be under “institutional care,” when these very institutions are the ones who place us and deem our adoptive families eligible to care for us.**

I wrote about this some years ago on the ICAV blog when I was frustrated that I hadn’t been able to participate in the Royal Commission for Institutional Sexual Abuse. Thankfully, a kind lawyer and fellow sufferer as a former foster child, Peter Kelso, gave me free legal advice and guided the way through the Royal Commission labyrinth. He helped me understand my true legal status as “not adopted” at the time of my sexual abuse and it is this truth that helped my case for redress via the free legal services of *Knowmore*.

Personal Stories

So it's a bittersweet outcome for me as I know of too many fellow adoptees who have suffered sexual abuse at the hands of their adoptive families. Most will never receive any sense of recognition for their suffering and the pathway to hold individuals criminally accountable is tough if not impossible. In most other countries except Australia, the statute of limitations prevents most victims of sexual abuse from seeking justice. I know from personal experience that it can take survivors 40-plus years to feel strong enough to take this route of fighting for justice. More so for an adoptee who lives their life being expected to be "grateful" for adoption and being afraid of further abandonment and rejection should they speak their truth. For some, they never ever talk about their truth as the trauma is just too great and they are busy just surviving. I know of others where the abuse played a major role in their decision to take their own life.

I am two years into the midst of criminal proceedings against my adoptive family. In 2023, the court contested hearings begin and who knows what the outcome of that will be or how long it will go for. I talk about this only to **encourage other victims to empower themselves and fight for that inner child who had no-one to protect them!** For me, this is what it is all about.

I finally realised the only one who would ever stand up for myself was myself. Yes, it has meant that I end the relationship with that family, but what type of relationship was it anyway? They were more interested in keeping things quiet and protecting themselves than protecting or creating a safe space for me. I eventually realised I could no longer continue to live the multiple lies both adoption and sexual abuse required within that family.

I hope one day to also hold institutions accountable for the illegal and illicit aspects of my adoption and once I'm done with that, then I'll feel like I've truly liberated myself from adoption.

Until then, I continue to fight with the rest of my community for this last truth of mine. So many of us should never have been separated from our people, country, culture, and language. We lose so much and there is absolutely no guarantee we get placed with families who will love, nurture, and uphold us and our original identities.

I agree there will always be the need to care for children who can't be with their families, but it is time we learn from the harms of the past and make things better for children in the future. The model of *plenary adoption* needs to be outlawed, and *simple adoption* (which allows children to have legal ties to both their adoptive family and their original family at the same time) should only be a temporary solution for a

temporary problem. And any form of adoption should allow the adoptee the choice to have their adoption undone, if that is what they want.

May we continue to bring awareness and much needed change to our world so that vulnerable children will be given a better chance in the future and to empower our community of adoptee survivors!

In Australia, the process and costs involved to discharge (undo) an adoption differ by state. In Victoria, applications to discharge an adoption are made to the County Court. If you would like support on this topic, please contact us on (03) 9328 8611 or info@vanish.org.au

Late discovery adoptee shares story

Born in Canberra in 1975, Newcastle-based radio host and dance studio owner Louise Wilkinson discovered that she was adopted at 34 years old, when she received an unexpected letter from her mother, who had spent years trying to find her.

"It was just 10 minutes before I was due to start teaching, but as soon as I sat down to read it, I started crying.

"She said she was very respectful of my privacy, but she included her contact details and wanted me to get in touch.

"It was inconceivable to sit there and read that, but at the same time, a lot of things immediately clicked into place. I knew in my bones that what I was reading was true," said Louise.

Now ten years later, Louise reflects on the impact of this discovery and her subsequent reunion for Mamamia magazine. To read the full article, visit: www.mamamia.com.au/secret-adoption/

The New Yorker centres the adoptee experience

The New Yorker magazine has recently published a thorough longform piece that focuses on the adult adoptee perspective, written by distinguished journalist and profile writer Larissa MacFarquhar. "Living in Adoption's Emotional Aftermath" (10 April, 2023) follows the stories of three adult adoptees in the US: Deanna Doss Shrodes, a domestic adoptee, Joy Lieberthal Rho, a Korean intercountry transracial adoptee, and Angela Tucker, a Black transracial adoptee. It is one of the most nuanced and powerful adoptee-centric articles in mainstream media to date.

You can read the full piece here: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/04/10/living-in-adoptions-emotional-aftermath>

Music & Film

Telling the truth of adoption through song



Queensland adoptee Kerri Saint was born in 1962 and adopted into an abusive family who told her that her mother died during childbirth. When she turned 18, Kerri searched for her mother's grave only to discover that her mother was alive and well. Shortly thereafter, she founded Association for Adoptees with two other adoptees in 1982 and has since advocated for adoption awareness, highlighting the ongoing trauma, grief and loss of adoption.

Kerri has always dabbled in poetry and loves music. As one of the organisers of federal and state apology anniversary events, she became inspired to write some songs about forced adoption. "I realised that there was not a great deal out there in music," she said, "And I just felt that we needed to add music and song to our events."

Two of Kerri's songs were played at the commemorative dinner for the tenth anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions, hosted by the federal government on 21st March in Canberra.

A Crime Not Known was written one night during Covid. "It just poured out," Kerri said. The song encapsulates not only Kerri's adoption story, but "the story of those who have been affected by adoption Australia wide and across the globe...mothers and adoptees alike."

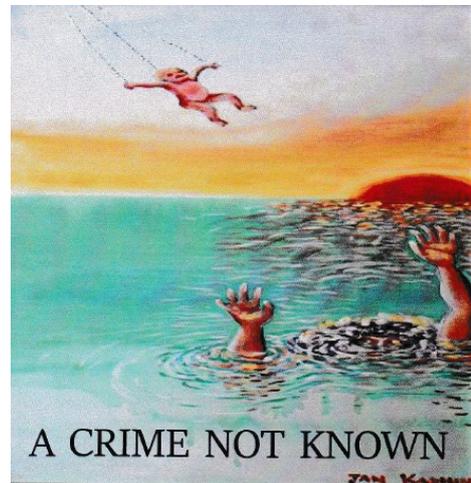
Chasing Rainbows reflects the storm endured by adoptees in search of their biological family and true identity. "We often do not feel good enough and feel like giving up," said Kerri. "We do not understand our

true worth, until we meet our biological family and then we realise what was stolen from us."

"[But] for many, we find our mother and father late in life and we have very limited time to spend with them."

You can listen to and purchase both songs for a very modest fee (as little as \$1 each) at <https://kerrisaint.bandcamp.com/>. A third song, *Sunshine in the Rain*, is due to be released soon and Kerri is working on an upcoming album.

Kerri has also created an accompanying educational booklet, in collaboration with artists Jan Kashin, a mother, and Victoria Fitzpatrick, an adoptee. You can request a copy of the booklet by emailing Kerri at kezadopt62@gmail.com



Album artwork by Jan Kashin

Feedback on *Reckoning with the Primal Wound* documentary film

Thanks to filmmaker Rebecca Autumn Sansom, VANISH was able to offer a limited time free viewing of Rebecca's film *Reckoning with the Primal Wound*. Here is some feedback from one of our members:

"This movie needs to be watched by everyone as it connects to who we all are as human beings.

From the start I sat in my emotions as I connected with the fact that I was taken from and not given from my birth mother.

I have connected with my birth father's family just recently...so for me this side of an adoptee's life was missing from the movie.

Whilst we all have our own story, the basic understanding of adoptees trauma shines through in this documentary/film.

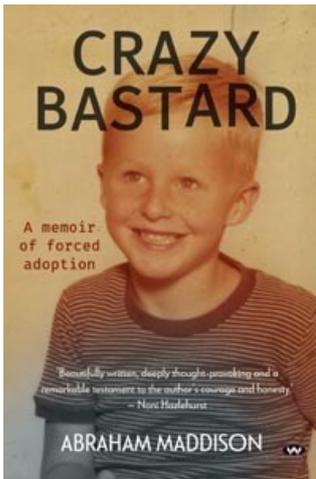
Thank you for sharing.

-Alison"

New Books in the Library

CRAZY BASTARD: A MEMOIR OF FORCED ADOPTION

Abraham Maddison

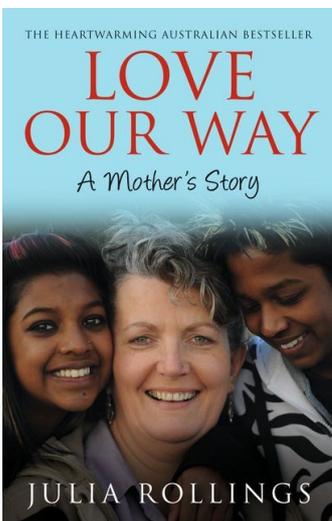


Derek Pedley abandons his 30-year journalism career on the brink of a breakdown, haunted by addiction, compulsion and obsession, and carrying the heavy baggage of a boy who found his adoption papers at 15. When an anguished letter his mother wrote almost half a century earlier arrives five years after her death, it raises more questions than it answers. The man who was

born Abraham Maddison embarks on a quest to find the truth, uncovering a story of heartbreak and lies that echoes the pain of tens of thousands of mothers and children, robbed of each other by Australia's Forced Adoption era. It is also a spiritual journey, and Derek must find a way to bridge the visceral disconnection of adoption, reunion, estrangement and death to achieve peace with his mother, Joye Maddison, who was allowed to hold her newborn just once before he was taken away in Perth, in 1972. *Crazy Bastard* is raw and harrowing, brutally honest, and beautifully vulnerable. It is one man's search for identity, for love, and for the truth. - *Wakefield Press*

LOVE OUR WAY: A MOTHER'S STORY

Julia Rollings



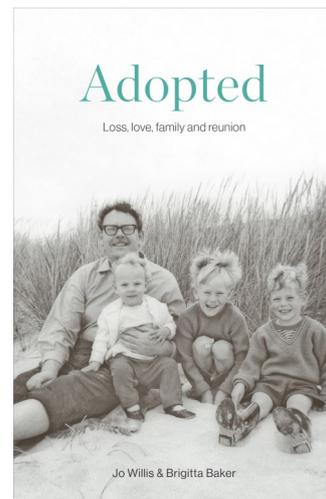
First published in 2011, *Love Our Way* is a memoir by an intercountry adoptive mother who learned that her two children adopted from India were trafficked—stolen away from their mother while she slept, and sold by their father. With her family's support, Julia Rollings ultimately decided to reunite Akil and Sabi, then aged 13

and 12, with their mother Sunama.

Julia Rollings is a Canberra-based writer who works for a community-based child and family service and has served on the National Peak Overseas Adoption Support Group. She and her husband, Barry, have eight children, six of whom were adopted.

ADOPTED: LOSS, LOVE, FAMILY AND REUNION

Jo Willis & Brigitta Baker

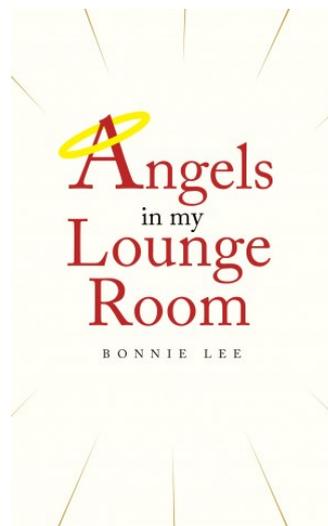


To not know your family story is a huge loss of your sense of self, with the potential to undermine your wellbeing and your relationships across a lifetime. *Adopted* is the powerful and honest account of two of the thousands of children adopted during the era of closed adoption in Aotearoa New Zealand, from 1950 to the mid

1970s. Jo Willis and Brigitta Baker both sought and found their respective parents at different stages of their lives and have become advocates for other adopted New Zealanders. They share the complexity of that journey, the emotional challenges they faced, and the ongoing impacts of their adoptions with candour and courage. Closed adoption also exacts a physical and emotional toll on natural parents, partners and children. Their stories are also told in this compelling book. - *Massey University Press*

ANGELS IN MY LOUNGE ROOM

Bonnie Lee



"I've read many accounts of the outcomes of adoption, but I've never read anything quite like this book." - Evelyn Robinson, OAM

There is a notion that spiritual health and wellbeing may play a part in a holistic partnership that sustains us from childhood memories of trauma. *Angels in my Lounge Room* invites an

exploration into a life torn from the experience of adoption and a transformation of renewal of the soul, body and mind. (*blurb*)

Bonnie Lee became a social researcher and life science professional while living in Australia. She now lives and works on the east coast of the United States.

Upcoming VANISH Support Groups

All groups are for adults 18+

ALBURY

Albury Library Museum, 540 Kiewa Street

ADOPTED PERSONS 10.30am—12.30pm

May 13, August 12

MIXED GROUP 10.30am - 12.30pm

(Adopted Persons, Natural and Adoptive Parents)

June 10

BALLARAT

Eastwood Leisure Complex, 20 Eastwood Street

ADOPTED PERSONS 2pm—4pm

May 20, June 17, July 15, August 19

MELBOURNE

VANISH Office, 1st Floor, 50 Howard Street,
North Melbourne

ADOPTED PERSONS 7.30—9.30pm

May 23, June 27, July 25, August 22

*Please register to reserve your place

ZOOM

ADOPTED PERSONS 6.30—8.30pm

June 14, August 9

*Please register to reserve your place

To register or for more information, please call or email us (see details below)



An Invitation from ARMS (Vic)

MOTHER'S DAY CELEBRATION

Saturday 6th May from 2—4pm

Queen Victoria Women's Centre, 210 Lonsdale St Melbourne

(Please enter via the rear door and take elevator to the Wayi Djerring—Us Together Room on Level 4)

With guest speaker Marie Meggitt, founder of ARMS

As part of this special day, we will be celebrating the 40th anniversary of the founding of ARMS (Vic) and the new backing on the ARMS (Vic) banner will be unveiled.

There will also be a performance by the Willin Wimmin choir.

Please RSVP to ARMS as soon as possible

Phone 0400 701 621 or email arms@armsvic.org.au

ARMS is very grateful to the Queen Victoria Women's Centre Trust for generously providing the use of the Wayi Djerring—Us Together room for our meeting.

VANISH

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WE ARE HIRING

Search and Support Worker (Genealogy)



VANISH is looking for someone with experience in family tracing, genealogy, and analysis of DNA results to join our small, dedicated team.

For more details and a position description, see our job ad on Ethical Jobs:

<https://www.ethicaljobs.com.au/members/VANISH/search-support-worker-genealogy>

Applications close on Friday 5th May

