


VANISH VOICE

**COMMEMORATING
25 YEARS
OF SERVICE**

1989 - 2014

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Twenty five years of dedication and advocacy

Happy birthday VANISH!

It has been 25 productive and challenging years since three separate organisations, representing mothers, adopted people and adoptive parents respectively, came together to form Victorian Adoption Network for Information and Self Help (V.A.N.I.S.H.) in 1989. In these contributions we pause to acknowledge and say thank you to the hundreds of members, volunteers, staff and supporters who have made our work both possible and effective.

To pretend that life for VANISH has been easy would be myth-making. There have been ups and downs, highs and lows, financial struggles and little crises that have rocked our foundations. But looking from the clouds an impartial observer would probably say “Despite all of that VANISH has prospered and, most importantly, has continued to advocate for and support those affected by adoption.”

Of course our founding organisations had worked together previously as they had battled to win a new and, at that time, world-leading Adoption Act 1984. It provided the model for other state and territory legislation which modified and in many cases improved on the Victorian precedent.

The new Adoption Act marked the end of the era of closed adoptions and gave adopted people a chance to find out about their mother and father. Unfortunately, as we are all too painfully aware, the legislation did not afford the same right to the mother and father to find out the adopted name or whereabouts of their child. The battle to achieve information rights for mothers and fathers continued until amendments were made in 2013 but that positive step was undermined by the introduction of a Contact Order which an adopted person can put in place to prevent contact.

Which is really a way of saying that what was once new inevitably becomes old and what was once considered modern is always in need of improvement. That is why the advocacy that VANISH provides will always be needed. The Adoption Act needs a review.

Together with many other groups around Australia and others within Victoria we can be

proud that the voice of those affected by adoption has continued to be heard. We have achieved much collectively. The Victorian and Commonwealth Apologies in 2012 and 2013 were a huge step forward and, for many of us, almost unimaginable only five years ago, let alone 25 years ago.

By my calculation VANISH has undertaken more than 20,000 searches across those 25 years, many of which have been successful in providing an answer or resolution because of the dedication of our search staff. In human terms that is at least 20-30,000 people (plus their rings of connected relations) who have been given an opportunity to know more about their family of origin and each other. And in each year there are thousands more inquiries, briefings, education sessions and meetings that go unremarked.

And with each search goes the countless instances of support – whether in formal support groups, by phone or by email – that help each person on their ‘journey’, especially that emotional roller coaster that goes with searching, finding and connecting. As we know ‘finding’ simply solves part of the jigsaw puzzle and helps close the circle. However, it rarely solves the underlying issues which often resurface at the most inconvenient times. That is why the need for support services and counselling resources remain a priority as we press state and federal governments to do more.

VANISH will continue to have an important advocacy, policy and support role, as new forms of adoption or new technologies which facilitate the trade in babies are introduced or ‘streamlined’. The machine or system that gave us 40 years of closed adoptions relied on the demand for babies by those who could not have their own. With the ending of closed adoption we have seen the emergence over the last 30 years of intercountry (IC) adoption, donor-conception and surrogacy as ways to satisfy this demand for babies. In each case the rights of the child and what is in the best interests of the child are either absent or a mere footnote compared to the needs and desires of the prospective parents.

While intercountry adoption has become harder, as developing countries become wealthier and the stigma of being a baby exporter makes them tighten their rules, the adoption industry has certainly had a persuasive

impact with the current Abbott Government. We now see proposals for a new federal agency – an adoption friendly NGO – to oversee and ‘streamline’ the IC adoption process. There are no guarantees that the Hague Convention will be respected or complied with in the future. Our work here is ongoing, as is our continued support for our IC adopted members and activists.

So too is our support for our donor-conceived members and their biological parents. Like the 1984 Adoption Act, Victoria is leading the way in recognising and modernising the rights to information for donor-conceived people. The 2014 legislation didn’t go as far as we would have liked but it was a step in the right direction. Simply having Parliament, both through the Law Reform Committee process and the debate on the Bill, recognise the seriousness and importance of this issue was success in itself. However, our work isn’t finished.

We have long known about but only recently seen exposed the behaviour of both the commissioners and providers of overseas surrogate children. But the backlash against surrogacy has had perverse effects. We now see the response by some senior judges as being “Let’s legalise and regulate commercial surrogacy here in Australia so we can avoid these situations”. VANISH is playing a role in constantly reminding politicians and the community of the lasting impacts of separation from family of origin. We don’t want to legalise and expand an industry which will inevitably have negative effects on so many of the people it produces.

We have to remind the community that in IC adoption, donor-conception and surrogacy we are likely to repeat the mistakes of the past – something that the Parliament said it would try and avoid in the March 2013 Commonwealth Apology in relation to traditional adoption.

VANISH has played such a valuable role in the last 25 years but that role is not fading. If anything it is growing - it isn’t hard to imagine us reporting in 2039 on the occasion of our 50th anniversary! Happy birthday VANISH!

Leigh Hubbard
Chairperson, VANISH Inc 2010 to Current

A History of VANISH

“VANISH despite its somewhat ephemeral name is here to stay”, Judy Courtin, Chairperson and ARMS member at the first VANISH AGM September 1989.

In the mid-1970s an organisation called JIGSAW was formed which represented all parties to adoption. Individuals in the group developed well-honed search skills and lobbied hard for many years for adoption reform against significant resistance. JIGSAW members were actively involved in media debate to promote the need of adopted people to know their origins and for mothers to know about the well-being of the child (now adult) and for the damage done by closed adoption practices to be recognised and redressed. During this time, the media helped spread community fears by criticising members of the adoption community who wanted their experiences validated; adoptees were described as ‘disturbed’ and their desire to search for family members was seen as ‘dangerous’.¹

The first Australian Adoption Conference held in Sydney in 1976, and subsequent conferences held in Melbourne, 1978 and Adelaide, 1982 resulted in the growing voice, advocacy and support of the experience of those affected by adoption. The

Association of
Relinquishing
Mothers (ARMS)

was established in Victoria in 1982 to support and advocate for women who had lost a child or children to adoption and in 1983 Pauline Ley formed the Geelong Adoption Program (GAP) whose members were adoptees, as well as women and men whose children had been placed for adoption, and adoptive parents. A good outline of the role of JIGSAW, ARMS, GAP, the National Council for Single Mothers and their Children (1969) and researchers at the time such as Cliff Picton in highlighting the needs of adoption community throughout the 1970s and 1980s has been documented elsewhere.² Activities during this time included the Commonwealth Human Rights Commission in 1984 writing a discussion paper on the rights of relinquishing mothers to access information



¹ Australian Women’s Weekly, *Letterbox*, Feb 27, 1980. Retrieved from trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/51197777

² Cuthbert, D and Quartly, M (2012), ‘Forced Adoption’ in the Australian Story of National Regret and Apology’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 58, No. 1, pp 82-96, March 2012. Retrieved from <http://researchbank.rmit.edu.au/view/rmit:15845>

regarding their adopted children.³ This is interesting reading not only in its content but as it is a copy of a report written on a typewriter. It is important to remember that advocacy and education about adoption issues occurred at a time without access to all the means of communication available today such as PDF documents, email and social media.

The cumulative efforts of the advocacy for change were enacted in the 1984 Adoption Act (Victoria). The pivotal role of Pauline Toner is covered in this edition and many of those involved at the time recall that the Adoption Act, 1984 (Victoria) would not have occurred if not for her dedication and skills of inclusion. As Mark Birrell acknowledged in Parliament:⁴

“Many honorable members remembered how she handled the Bill. It was a long and exhaustive consultative process, not just within the political system, but with a whole range of interested groups whose interests were conflicted. All the political parties were involved in her drafting that landmark legislation, and it resulted in the changes that have been of benefit to society and will continue to do so”.

The 1984 legislation was indeed a landmark. Victoria was the first state in Australia and the first place in the western world to move towards open adoption; guardianship and custody orders were alternatives to closed adoptions (Children and Young Persons Act 1989). Most significantly it allowed for the first time, adopted people over the age of 18 to gain access to their adoption records and to outreach to their family of origin.⁵ Sadly it did not give the same rights to mothers and fathers as they could only receive non-identifying information. In 1988, amendments were presented to parliament aimed at providing an automatic right to identifying information for natural parents but as Marie Meggitt noted these failed to pass due to pressure that the “community was not ready”.⁶

Rose Cooper noted that as the 1984 Adoption Act allowed those who had been adopted to

legally search for their biological family, JIGSAW had effectively ceased to have a reason to exist.⁷ However, the need for advocacy did not diminish. Within the three years prior to VANISH's establishment, the waiting time for accessing information was at least seven years.

A review of the Adoption Information Service (AIS) in 1987 concluded that change was needed. The lengthy delays in providing assistance occurred not only as a result of the unprecedented demand for service from the adoption community but because ‘clients’ were expected to attend many counselling sessions before the release of their information. This review concluded that the legislation required only a single mandatory interview, with people having the choice between a group or individual session.

I recall that David Hirt who was both an adoptee and a Ministerial Advisor also assisted the campaign for change to reduce an intolerably long waiting list.

VANISH evolved during this campaign from a dream shared by members of JIGSAW, ARMS and GAP who saw the need for an independent organisation to provide understanding, support, search expertise and relevant services to anyone affected by an adoption experience. That is, a special contribution to an adoption information service could be made using the self-help model involving those with the lived experience.

It was recognised by the then Government that an independent search and support service would help to facilitate an efficient and speedy AIS, thus reducing the long waiting list. It was also accepted that adopted people could conduct their own searches for their families of origin when they felt the time was right and that the adopted person could do his or her own outreach. Support groups were also acknowledged as playing an important role as an adjunct to the mandatory interview provided by AIS.

In October 1988, members of JIGSAW, ARMS and GAP were approached, together with APAV (Adoptive Parents Association of Victoria), to submit a funding proposal to the then Minister.

³ MacDermott, K (1984). ‘Rights of relinquishing mothers to access to information concerning their adopted children’, Human Rights Commission, Canberra. Discussion paper No 5, retrieved at https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/HRC_DP5.doc

⁴ Victorian Government Hansard, Parliamentary Dedication to the Hon. Pauline Toner, May 1989.

⁵ *Adoption: Myth and Reality*, (2009). Adoption and Family Records Service: Melbourne, p 1 Retrieved from http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/585497/myth-and-reality.pdf

⁶ Meggitt, M, To know one's child: the relinquishing mother's dilemma, p 52 in Swain, P & Swain, S (eds) (1992), *To search for self: the experience of access to adoption information*, The Federation press, NSW.

⁷ Rose Cooper (2012), *Embodying Adoption - A source of understanding and support for those affected by past adoption practices*, retrieved from <http://embodyingadoption.com/about/>

Interim funding from February to June 1989 was provided by Community Services Victoria (CSV) and initially managed by VCOSS (Victorian Council for Social Services) whilst V.A.N.I.S.H. was formed with all that involved, such as developing a constitution and associated aims and objectives and becoming incorporated, which occurred on 1st July, 1989. Margaret Campi volunteered much of her valuable time in order to physically establish V.A.N.I.S.H. She found the building, negotiated the lease and organised its furnishings and contents in order for the commencement of operating at 167 Drummond Street, Carlton on the 13th February 1989.

With additional assistance provided by Carol Neal and Phillip Swain participating on an interviewing panel the initial team of 4.5 EFT staff were appointed. The team comprised Barbara McHenry (full time Manager) Margaret Campi and Ann Farrell (part-time Telephone/Search workers), Yvonne Maartensz (full time secretary and Office administrator) and Deborah Lee (part time Co-ordinator of Volunteers).

The inaugural meeting of the Committee of Management was held on 27th April, 1989. This was an historic occasion as it brought together the three arms of the adoption triad working for the first time as a well-knit team. Three groups were each equally represented by three members: Judy Courtin, Christine Hannigan and Robyn Morris representing ARMs, Amanda Weinstein, Rose Cooper and myself from Origins, Advocacy and Kinship (OAK) which was formed to represent adopted persons and Derek Hale, Barbara Moriarty and Josephine Dunin from the APAV. Gerard McPhee and Jan Aitken were co-opted to the Committee as additional independent members. The ethos of collaboration and openness was highlighted in the AGM minutes of 1989:

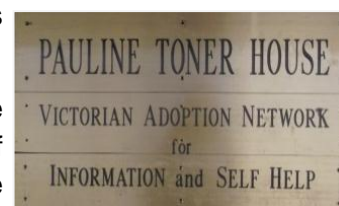
"Our committee represents the three arms of the adoption triad, the perspectives and needs of which will differ from time to time. Each arm and in fact each individual, has a real and legitimate story to tell. Our aim is for any resulting differences between us to be respected, and for the process of dealing with

these differences to form the basis of a relationship of trust and understanding, not fraction and division" p 4.

The interim management committee was formed in November 1988 with Marie Meggitt, Pauline Ley, Peter Neil, Margaret Campi and Marilyn Howlett with the Inaugural Committee meeting being held on 27 April 1989 at Pauline Toner House, 167 Drummond Street, Carlton.

The VANISH building dedicated to the memory of the Hon. Pauline Toner was opened on the 20th May, 1989 by the Hon. Peter Spyker, the then Minister for Community Services. He was

memorably introduced as recalled by the then Chairperson, Judy Courtin as 'Mr Speter Pyker'. More than 100 people attended, including Pauline Toner's family.



In the first three years, members of the Committee dedicated

numerous hours to establish the service with the formation of sub-committees in the areas of finance, monitoring and evaluation, service provision and policy issues to ensure a high level of governance. In the policy arena, ongoing advocacy on community education matters occurred for example with

- the V.A.N.I.S.H. brochure being distributed to over 1500 sites
- ongoing representation on the Victorian Standing Committee on Adoption and Alternative Families (VSCAFF)
- ongoing representation on the AIS Forum
- an information pack on adoption developed and distributed to students studying adoption as a VCE unit
- submission to Standing Review into proposed changes to Medical Procedures Act of 1984 entitled Human Identity-Reproductive Technology Records, Information and Honesty
- input into the development of adoption legislation in other Australian States
- submissions concerning the Hague convention on intercountry adoption
- various national, state and regional media activities e.g. to the Peter Couchman ABC TV program on adoption
- presentations at adoption conferences, including the 1993 National American Adoption Conference at which Margaret Campi and Pauline Ley gave the keynote address entitled "Adoption law reform in Australia: from darkness to light".

- presentations at forums on the future of surrogacy.

For staff, there was an unprecedented demand for service. For example the search service so ably and tirelessly delivered by Margaret Campi and Anne Farrell and numerous 'search room' volunteers handled a total of 6,394 enquiries during 1989-90 and this number increased to 9137 in 1990-1. In 1990-1 this included search assistance on 5292 occasions including 2449 of these being new enquiries. It was noted that whilst the majority of the user base was adopted individuals, the numbers of natural parents and adoptive parents doubled in the second year of service. There was also an increase in the number of natural fathers contacting the services and adopted people deciding to search for their natural fathers after having contact with their natural mothers.⁸

There were also five support groups regularly meeting at VANISH: one for adoptees, one for mothers and three mixed. The employment of a community worker, Jacoba (Coby) Watson in December 1990 also facilitated the development of further groups by VANISH and CSVs AIS service working together. This occurred with the dedicated VANISH Community Worker attending mandatory group interviews in order to offer participants ongoing support.

In 1998 V.A.N.I.S.H. changed its Constitution to broaden the categories of eligibility for membership to include adults who as children had spent time in out-of-home care in institutions, foster care or de facto adoptions. Hence Forgotten Australians and their families were welcomed as members of the VANISH community. Subsequently VANISH was allocated brokerage funding by the Victorian Government to provide a range of specific services for Forgotten Australians and continued to do so up to the 30th June 2009.

In line with the overall philosophy of VANISH, the Constitution was also amended to include adults who are donor-conceived. VANISH believes that many of the issues confronting people with an adoption experience, such as the life-long effects arising from being separated from their family of origin, apply equally to Forgotten Australians, donor offspring and those born of surrogacy arrangements. **By Sue Green**

Dr Sue Green, Convenor of O.A.K. (Origins, Advocacy & Kinship), 1988 - 1996 and member of the VANISH Committee of Management 1989 - 1993 and 2012 - 2013

Victorian Representatives having dinner with Betty Jean Lifton at the National American Adoption Conference in 1993



VANISH

**When I need someone to listen,
When I need some to care,
When I need someone to lean on,
I know that you are there.
Thank you for the time you've listened,
Thank you for showing you care,
Thank you for being strong from me and
finally
Thank you for being there.
Sharon Lewis - December 2010**

Adoption Advocate by a friend of VANISH

Pauline Ley describes herself as an adoption advocate. As 2014 marks VANISH's 25th Anniversary, I wish to record a personal history of the Victorian adoption community as remembered by Pauline Ley.

Pauline has lived in Melbourne since 1997. She lived in Geelong for many years before that, and with her husband lived in the UK from 2000 until 2002. Pauline is an adopted person and has been closely involved in the Victorian adoption community for more than 40 years.

⁸ VANISH Report to the 1991 AGM, p 3

Like many others of her generation Pauline was not told she was adopted. She sensed that she belonged in her family in a way that was different and inexplicable. During her childhood, she had an unconscious awareness of her adoptive status. Having established (at the age of 16) that she was adopted, Pauline said she felt like a 'freak' when she expressed a need to know her pre-adoptive history. Pauline presumed that others just got on with being adopted and weren't concerned about their natural family history

With difficulty, at the age of 25, Pauline searched for and met her mother and, soon after, her two half-sisters and her grandmother. It was a traumatic experience for all.

It was some years later that she shared with her adoptive parents the knowledge that she was in contact with her first family. Her adoptive father never spoke with Pauline about her adoption, the subject was taboo. Her adoptive mother's reaction was ambivalent. Pauline was her adoptive mother's comforter, as she struggled to understand the need for her daughter to establish a relationship with her other family.

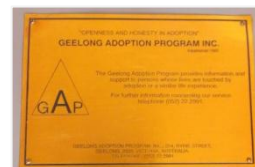
Pauline described her deep need to know her natural family as being related to a need to know herself; to have a whole sense of personal identity; to know she was a real person and that she had been born and not landed from outer space.

Throughout her search for her first family and after she found her mother, Pauline had no support; there was no counselling nor written material available at that time to assist her on this journey. She felt very alone.

This changed for Pauline in 1974 when Time magazine ran a feature story about the Adoptees' Liberty Movement of America (ALMA) founded by Florence Fischer, an American adoptee. This was the first article Pauline had ever seen written about adoption from the perspective of an adult adopted person. For the first time, she realised that she was not alone, that other adoptees had similar needs to know their origins.

In 1978 she read an article in *The Age* about Victorian adoptees coming together to provide mutual support and to lobby for adoption reform. This made a deep impression on Pauline and encouraged her to reach out to others affected

by adoption. It was at this time that JIGSAW Victoria was established. JIGSAW was based in Melbourne, Pauline lived in Geelong, so she and others started an adoption support group called the Geelong Adoption Program (GAP). Pauline became the first Convener of this group in 1983 and remained in this position until 1997. GAP's members were adoptees, as well as women and men whose children had been placed for adoption and adoptive parents.



One of the great strengths of GAP was that all parties in the adoption triangle came together to support each other. This shared experience promoted open communication and created the opportunity to build trust between the parties involved. In this regard, GAP was unique.

GAP very successfully reached out to inform the wider community about issues relating to adoption as well as building friendships between the different parties in the adoption triangle. Members realised, in sharing their experience with others, that they were not alone. Support, individually and in groups, was an important much valued role of GAP.

Pauline on behalf of GAP led the significant liaison with JIGSAW, ARMS and the Adoptive Parents' Association, to achieve reform of adoption laws in Victoria. The first priority was to legislate to allow access for adult adoptees to their pre-adoptive birth certificates and other records relating to their adoption. There was considerable opposition to this push, not least from factions within the adoption community itself.

Finally, in 1984, Victorian Adoption laws were reformed to allow adult adoptees to access their adoption information. Victoria was the first State in Australia to legislate for this right. This was a MOMUMENTAL event in the history of Australian adoption.

During the early 1980s Pauline participated in adoption education programs for prospective adoptive parents at several adoption agencies. She contributed to the change in attitude from 'closed' to more 'open' adoptions. This was not a quick or easy process, as some practitioners felt that such change would adversely affect those in the adoption process and would bring into question the promises of confidentiality that had been given in the past.

Of course a similar debate has recently taken place in Victoria regarding access to birth information for donor-conceived people. Pauline has been prominent in this debate.

When VANISH began 25 years ago, it was the first time that the Victorian adoption community had its own government funded organisation; a place where they could come and call their own.

Following adoption law reform there was an urgent need to help adoptees searching for their birth origins. The Department of Community Services was deluged with applications for adoption information. The primary role of VANISH was to assist and support those who wished to search for their natural families and to facilitate group support where people were able to come together to share their stories; and individual support for some. Pauline played a role in the establishment of VANISH in the Victorian community.

When asked about her desire to become an adoption activist, Pauline says she had a strong belief that there needed to be a new understanding of adoption.

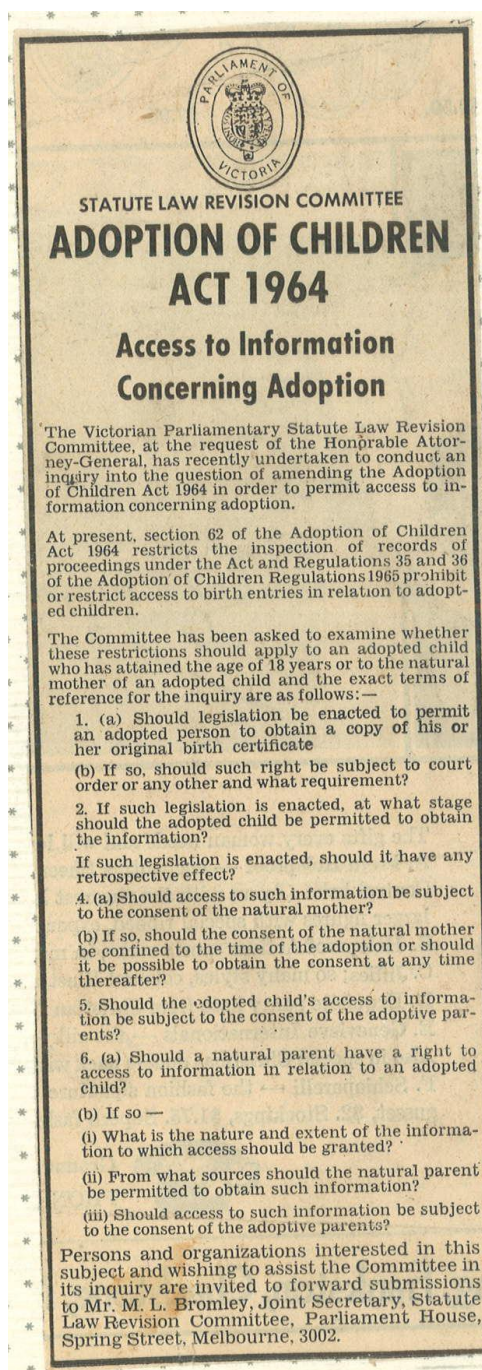
She saw the need for a more compassionate process that would ensure that those who are separated from their family of origin still retained a sense of connection and belonging to their natural family. Pauline believes this is fundamental to the physical and emotional wellbeing of all involved in adoption.



Pauline has a deeply held belief that when she has had challenges in life it is best to take constructive action to affect change in some way. She believes it is essential to remain true to oneself and to be ready actively to seek social justice when necessary.

Pauline is closely involved with the donor-conception community in Victoria. She is a founding member of Tangled Webs, a voice of advocacy for donor-conceived persons. She is delighted to see the involvement of the donor-conception community at VANISH and believes that in the decades to follow, VANISH will provide support and enlightenment to many people whose lives are affected by donor-conception practices.

If you have been fortunate in your life you will have met someone like Pauline. Pauline is one of those rare treasures who are selfless, caring, supportive and generous. I have no doubt that countless adoptees, natural mothers and fathers and adoptive parents, who when thinking of Pauline will smile. Many people have had a private and personal experience of her gracious and understanding nature and her genuine compassion. The comfort that she has given to so many is priceless. How fortunate for VANISH that one of its foundation members was Pauline Ley.



The Adoption Legislation

All legislation change takes time. But the amazing accomplishment of Pauline Toner was to guide the process from initial policy development to passage of the Adoption Bill, whilst bringing the community with her. We can only imagine how difficult it must have been at times producing change in the tense, emotional area of adoption with so many competing expectations.

How did she do this? People have said to me she continually maintained contact with all groups involved in the adoption process, keeping everyone up to date. She met with representative of these groups regularly. Pauline was also watching to ensure that the proposed legislation reflected the desires and needs of people affected by adoption and was transmitting those expectations to her parliamentary colleagues and to the community.

Finally, with Pauline's sure hand having guided the legislation's page through a 'hostile' Upper House, Victoria passed an Adoption Act in 1984 which led the world and was the Australian state to create "opportunities for people affected by the adoption experience to access personal information and to make outreach to natural families." (The VANISH Resource Book).

Following Pauline's death in March 1989, it was recommended that the Victorian Adoption Network for Information and Self Help Group's (VANISH) newly opened building in Drummond Street, Carlton be dedicated to her memory. It then seemed only appropriate that when VANISH moved to the current building in Cardigan Street, Carlton that it should also be called *Pauline Toner House*, to continue reminding us of her commitment to justice and equity and also to remind us that the seemingly impossible can be achieved. **Mary Murray, VOICE Autumn 2002**

Note: Until 1st July 2013 in Victoria, access to identifying information from adoption records, was only available to adopted people and their children unless the adopted person themselves gave consent to the sharing of identifying information. The 2013 amendments to the *Adoption Act 1984* now means that natural parents who are listed on the birth record of their child, can receive identifying information that was recorded at the time of their child's adoption, including a copy of the adoption certificate. This is providing that the adopted person is over the age of 18 years. Information available to other parties remains the same.



2012

**Victorian Parliamentary
Apology for
Past Adoption Practices**

2013

**National Apology for
Forced Adoptions**

VANISH's constitution has changed over the years - 1998, 2001, 2005, 2006, 2013 to reflect the changing membership and its advocacy requirements

This article was written for VOICE, Autumn 2002 by Mary Murray (dec'd 3rd July 2012) Chairperson of VANISH from October 2002 to October 2003.

Who was Hon. Pauline Toner? Why is she seen to be so important to VANISH?

Pauline Therese Toner was born in 1935 in Horsham, Victoria, and prior to her election to State Parliament, had been a school teacher and then a lecturer in Education at Deakin University. She was elected as the Member for Greensborough (Legislative Assembly) in 1977 and remained in Parliament until her untimely death in 1989.

Following her election to the Victorian Parliament, Pauline was given the position of "Shadow Minister for Community Welfare Services and Women's Affairs. At the same time the Status of Women Policy Committee (Australian Labor Party) had commenced to identify areas in society, where women were particularly affected by legislation, which had not been altered for many decades. One of these areas was the law as it related to adoption. In the preparation of a Community Welfare policy platform prior to the 1982 election, Pauline was able to persuade her parliamentary colleagues to see that reform of Adoption procedures was a priority for the Labor Party if elected to government.

When the Cain Labor Government was elected, Pauline became Minister for Community Welfare Services—she was also Victoria's first woman cabinet minister—from 1982 until 1985. During her time as minister there was a dramatic shift in emphasis from institutionalisation to community programs in the provision of welfare services. Apart from the Adoption Act of 1984 Pauline Toner

- oversaw reformation of the prison system;
- initiated the first review of Children's Welfare legislation;

- backed funding for neighbourhood houses;
- supported the setting up of refuges for women.

When I was asked to write about Pauline I reflected on how to portray a sense of the woman, not just the politician. Then I realised I should let those who knew and worked with Pauline tell that part of her story:

"She encouraged and supported people to try new directions, to take responsibility....to fulfil their potential. She made people feel good about themselves and gave them confidence and courage to cope and achieve." Sherryl Garbutt (Current State Minister for the Environment and Conservation).

"The 1984 Adoption Act....is an enduring tribute to her negotiation skill as Community Welfare Services minister. The many patient hours she spent around the table with Liberal and National Party MPs, working out compromise amendments and allaying their concerns, enabled her to get the controversial bill through the upper house. As a colleague pointed out, a more adversarial minister might have failed". Rosemary West (past member - VANISH Committee of Management).

"I was a member of the Status of Women's Policy Committee which identified reform of the Adoption procedures as a priority for the incoming government. Changes were already occurring under the Liberal Government, as a result of community pressure, but I believe that the work done by Pauline Toner as shadow minister....in Victoria in many ways lead the work, because it was so firmly based on principles of justice to all the parties involved in adoption ." Heather O'Connor (a Founding Director of the Victorian Women's Trust).

And finally, a friend Barbara Worcester, said in Pauline's eulogy: *"She was a sincere, compassionate person...A tower of strength."* and *"Pauline had a strong sense of justice and her actions were always based on concern for others."*

Postscript: Pauline Toner passed away on 3rd March 1989.



ARMS and VANISH On being 25

By Marie Meggitt

ARMS was young and still full of hope and idealism when VANISH was born. Perhaps it is a symptom of our previous experiences to hope for a world that would support our dreams – of reunion with our child.

But context is everything. In enabling the 1984 Adoption of Children Act, ARMS had been able to turn the tide of the debate about giving rights to adopted adults, then a hotly contested notion in the adoption community, the wider community and within political parties. The strength of adoptee arguments about the rightness of their entitlement to knowledge about their families of origin was undeniable, but still many influential people and organisations were resistant. By then, JIGSAW had been fighting the good fight for close to 20 years. The last seemingly irresistible argument from those opposed to change, was that natural mothers had been promised secrecy and to resile from that would be a travesty of justice to we women who had been promised the golden cloak of having our sins hidden.

It was our voice, proclaiming clearly that we did not ask for secrecy and did not want it, that disarmed the social workers, politicians and those in the adoption community who were resistant to allowing access to information in the adoption triangle.

Back then, we were in the process of establishing a new world. We had stepped aside from our push to have equal rights to identifying information, because it was clear that the whole legislation was at risk if we didn't. The adoptees had agreed that in return they would support our renewed action after the initial legislation was bedded down – and after the tales of disaster and despair had not come to pass.

So the legislation was passed and being implemented but with significant problems. The task of connecting adoptees with their families of origin was being clogged up by regulation and red tape which saw a waiting list develop that was out to seven years. At the same time, the demands on ARMS for support had grown exponentially and our small committee was drowning in the level of need and the number of women who were coming forward for support. It was clear that we needed financial support from the government to meet the demand that the legislation and the media coverage had

generated. We were also incensed at the waiting list, and the controls adoption agencies were exercising over mothers who were seeking the non-identifying information we had become entitled to through the legislation.

We applied for a small grant for several years in a row and each time were told that it was politically impossible to give financial support to us. This was an interesting approach by government, because the Adoptive Parents Association of Victoria had been financially supported by agencies and the government for several years by then. Pauline Ley, a Geelong based adoptee had established a support group and was facing the same difficulties of needing financial support to meet the demand the legislation had generated. She and I (a founding member of ARMS) had been friends for a number of years and met to work out a strategy to manage our joint problem. We came to the view that the best way forward was as we had approached the legislation. A united approach, supported by all parties to adoption, with a proposal that met a political difficulty the government was grappling with. The government needed to provide additional funding to cover the seven year hold up that regulation and practice had imposed on applicants. We believed that people's interests were better served when they were in charge of their own destinies and wanted to see the self-help model promoted as a way of responding to the legislative freedom of access to information.

It was out of this background that a small handful of activists, Margaret Campi, Pauline Ley, David Hirt and I gathered to discuss the idea of seeking funding for a self-help organisation that would provide search resourcing and supporting, skilled search staff, who were part of the adoption triangle; and support groups for all parties to adoption. It was to be managed by a committee of all three parties, whose brief was to demonstrate how we all could work together for the common good of each of the parties to adoption. Staff, volunteers and management all were to have had an adoption experience, and what we hoped was that the organisation could heal some of the pain that had been generated through the passage of the legislation and the process of bringing about significant social change. We also hoped that it would provide a stepping stone to finally achieving rights to identifying information for natural mothers.

History has shown that our vision was good and proper and was very important in consolidating self-help as a professional and valuable path to healing wounds. VANISH has been at times an untidy vehicle: at risk of being overtaken by personal agendas; at times ignoring the vision and being partisan in the way it managed its core business of search and support; and so often, because of the legislative constraints and politics, unable to truly support the natural mother group of its membership. We are now in a new phase. VANISH is a very settled organisation, well held by its management and able to implement the new dimension of the adoption legislation, which has finally allowed for the rights of the natural family. (Sadly, that legislation has come at the cost of a veto, something to which ARMS has been strongly opposed.) Despite this, VANISH and ARMS are now enjoying a productive relationship and that now 25 year old organisation has matured and has an important place in the world of adoption and alternative families.

A Father's Story

Reflections with a silver lining

by Gary Coles

In 2014, we are celebrating 25 years of VANISH. I have been a member of the organisation for the majority of this time. Possibly uniquely, I have been involved as a service user (for part of the first decade), a member of the Committee of Management (for much of the second decade) and Manager (at the beginning of the third decade). The following ruminations relate to these specific periods. My focus is on the 'A' (for Adoption) in V-A-N-I-S-H; I acknowledge that the organisation has served other cohorts, including, currently, the donor-conceived.

I discovered VANISH by chance when I met Margaret, the then Manager, whilst holidaying in China in 1993. I had just come to terms with fathering a child 26 years earlier and encountering Margaret seemed perfect timing. I told her my story thus far and she asked if I wished to find my adult son. I did and she explained the steps I needed to take, starting with adding my name retrospectively to his birth records. Subsequently, after I had tried to make contact with my son via official channels and encountered a veto, I again turned to VANISH.

Margaret explained that under New Zealand law, the veto prohibited approaches being made via the Department for the release of identifying information that is the adopted name and current address. There was no prohibition on an individual locating this information himself. In practice, this would be difficult, for I was in Australia and the data sources were in New Zealand. Margaret suggested that I employ the services of a South Island professional, adept at locating birth and adoption records, which are in the public domain, but require skill to locate and interpret. She gave me the researcher's name and a fortnight later, I knew my son's adoptive name and address. It was during this period that I began attending the VANISH mixed support group meetings in Melbourne. I was apprehensive at first, thinking that I might be judged harshly, not only for my timidity in 1967, but also, when I saw that I was the only father in attendance, becoming the butt of an anger directed at all fathers, who through perceived negligence had caused an adoption to occur. My fears were misplaced. I became comfortable telling my story and answering questions put by other participants. Then and since, I have never experienced the projected anger I had anticipated*. Most of all, my participation in the VANISH support groups allowed me to hear the narratives and views of mothers and adult adopted persons, a portal into what my son and his mother may have experienced and felt. These insights were invaluable and I treasure their contribution to the search for my son and myself. My sole misgiving? On all but one occasion, I was the only father present at the support group meetings I attended. Fundamentally, I maintain that support groups are a key element of VANISH's success. It is pleasing that support groups are now being held in not only Melbourne but also regional centres.

In 2000, I was approached to fill a mid-term vacancy on the VANISH Committee of Management. Thus began a long association with the arm of the organisation responsible for setting the strategic direction and ensuring good governance. At the core of this oversight was and is monitoring the budget, a frustrating task because of the limited funds allocated by a succession of state governments. That VANISH is essentially a business (accountable to the Department of Human Services) operating in a particular niche within the social services sector was not always appreciated beyond the

Committee. Some programs and projects had to remain on the wish list, because of an incapacity to implement them. Regrettably, there were times when the Committee of Management's focus on governance and long-term planning was usurped by a requirement to address issues that threatened VANISH's welfare. An effective board is essential to the health of an organisation. Having worked within and with the Committee, I know they have always put VANISH's best interests first.

When I was appointed Manager, I discovered that the respective roles of the Committee and Manager were not well-defined. With the help of a pro-bono consultant, this was rectified. My time in the operational role confirmed the strengths and weaknesses of VANISH. That the organisation serves all who have experienced adoption separation, both directly and collaterally, including those who relate today to 'forced adoptions', means VANISH was and is known for its inclusiveness. On the downside, the services that have been provided were, until recently, limited, with the focus on search and support, underpinned by the laudable self-help philosophy, through which VANISH did not provide in-house intermediary and counselling services. Whilst this left a gap and put us at odds with sister organisations in other states, minuscule funding and service scope restraints imposed by legislation represented the day-to-day reality for VANISH. Historically, there has been an overwhelmingly positive response by service users to the mandated search and support provided by VANISH, which can be attributed to the skills and dedication of the front-line staff.

In 2010, starting in Western Australia with the *Removal of Children from Unmarried Mothers – Apology*, the landscape changed. The subsequent Senate Inquiry, which resulted in the release of the *Former forced adoption policies and practices* report, followed six months later (August 2012) by the publication of the AIFS study, *Past adoption experiences: National Research Study on the Service Response to Past Adoption Practices*, culminated, in this state, with the *Apology for Past Forced Adoption Practices*, delivered two years ago this month. With the Victorian bi-partisan Apology came the allocation of one-off supplementary funds, which VANISH is charged with expending, on behalf of persons separated by adoption. The

organisation could win further specific-purpose funds following the March 2013 *National Apology for Forced Adoptions*, which it is well-equipped to manage and spend.

Aged 25, VANISH has at last both the capacity and the means to fulfil its potential.

Congratulations, VANISH and happy silver anniversary!

* According to the recently published book *Mothers in ARMS*, by Meg Hale, I should not be nonplussed: *"If you asked mothers who they blamed for having to give up their babies for adoption you might be surprised by the answer. Fathers did not appear to feature very highly on the responsibility register, and although many mothers blamed their parents for not supporting them it was often believed that social workers had betrayed them the most."*

VANISH Search and Support Service

From the time VANISH was established in 1989 search, support and adoption information have been the main reasons for its existence and remain so today. However, there have been some changes in the past 25 years.

As mentioned in A History of VANISH above, VANISH was established as a self-help organisation: it was believed that adopted persons could conduct their own searches for family members when they were ready to do so and at their own pace with the assistance and support of staff members and volunteers who had a personal adoption experience, and if they so wished, service users could make outreach to family member they had found. In the first year, 1989/1990, 349 adopted persons came in to VANISH to use resources to conduct their own searches; however for a variety of reasons, that was beyond many people and in that first year VANISH conducted searches on behalf of 803 service users⁹.

Due to lack of space and limited resources, over time service users ceased coming into VANISH to conduct their own searches; this remains the situation today. However, service users are encouraged to participate and contribute to the search process; in 2012,

⁹ VANISH Annual Report 13th September 1990, p 6

search and support workers wrote *A Post-adoption Guide: how to search for adoption records and birth relatives* which can be downloaded from the VANISH website. VANISH is still based on the self-help model with most search and support workers having a personal experience of adoption. Service users are encouraged to make outreach to the relative found but occasionally VANISH will provide an intermediary service in a very complex situation.

As expected, the number of service users seeking assistance with the search for a natural relative has decreased; in fact these numbers have plateaued but the searches themselves have become increasingly long and difficult. Another change was the amendment to the Adoption Act 1984: since 1st July 2013, a mother, (and father if named on the original birth certificate) has been able to access her now adult child's adoption record and so has been able to obtain identifying information to conduct a search herself. VANISH has established a sound reputation as offering a comprehensive search service and has reciprocal arrangements with comparable organisations interstate and overseas.

"I would like to thank you for your care and compassion in assisting me with my search. Your professionalism and sincerity has made the difficult situation of learning about my mother's short life and tragic death an easier process to deal with." O

Search and Support for mothers and fathers

VANISH search and support services have been accessed by adopted people and mothers and fathers from the time VANISH was established however the capacity to provide a search service for mothers and fathers equal to the search service provided to adopted people has been strictly limited by the Victorian Adoption 1984 Act.

Until the recent amendment to the Victorian Adoption 1984 Act which came into effect on 1st July 2013, VANISH has only been able to search on behalf of mothers and fathers if the name of their son or daughter was known to them due to earlier contact or if their son or

daughter was born outside of Victoria where access to identifying information was available.

Despite the July 2013 Amendment, searches on behalf of mothers and fathers for their son or daughter whose adoption occurred in Victoria continue to be difficult and hindered, particularly by the fact that mothers and fathers do not have the same rights as an adopted person to records held with Births Deaths and Marriages in Victoria.

For example, an adopted person is able to make an application for a mother's marriage certificate but a mother is not able to apply for her daughter's and/or son's marriage certificate. As a result searching for a daughter can be long and difficult. In one case the person sought was not listed on any Australian electoral roll at any time so it was necessary to search for her adoptive parents first to see if there was a connection. A record of death was found for the adoptive mother and further research found a death notice which fortunately included the married name of the person we were looking for. This enabled the search worker to go back to the electoral roll and find a listing in the married name of our service user's daughter.

The above is an example of the steps necessary to

complete a search without marriage details and reiterates how marriage details are essential if the search is for a daughter. Marriage details are also helpful if the search is for a son, especially if he has a common surname as it can mean the difference between guessing one has found the correct

person, having a list of ten or so same names or being reasonably confident about the result of a search.

As VANISH strives to maintain professional standards and find conclusive evidence to support our search result, limited rights and access to information means the search process on behalf of mothers and fathers is more difficult, it can take longer than necessary, be

"Hi, I'm writing to thank you for your help and support when I came to your office a while ago. I also wanted to let you know that I was successful in my search for my son, and he agreed to a meeting with me last week and it was wonderful. I met his wife and we will be in contact with each other from time to time so THANK YOU." RM

frustrating and disheartening and so support becomes a crucial aspect of the search process.

In the face of search restrictions placed on mothers and fathers by the Victorian Adoption Act 1984, VANISH has provided support and assistance throughout the 25 years to many mothers and fathers who have approached us. For example, support when contacted by a son or daughter, support with information and record applications, support with relationship difficulties following a search and support when feelings of grief and loss are overwhelming.

Support can be provided in a number of ways and often goes hand in hand with the search as is seen in the following story.

A Mother's story

I contacted VANISH at a time when I was experiencing an acute grief reaction. I had just abruptly learned that my adopted son who I had given birth to 40 years ago had died as a child. I discovered this in a public library in a huge crowded search room as I logged into the "ancestry" site and typed in his name. When the response was a listing on a "Victorian Death Index" I stared at the computer screen in horror and within seconds I was stifling sobs and with tears streaming. I hurriedly packed my things and rushed towards the exit. I somehow found my car and had some privacy to vent my anguish.

My reaction was both physical and psychological and I struggled to integrate what I had learned and deal with my distress. I feared all sorts of horrors, I worried he had suffered, I again felt guilty and remorseful that I had not cared for him, there were another series of unanswered questions and nowhere to turn. I had always hoped for a reunion and had imagined him growing up and his life as an adult. I had thought he might be overseas as I had been unable to trace him on electoral rolls since his 18th birthday. Now all I knew was that he had died aged 10 in Victoria.

Once I reached home I went on line to try and discover how to find some answers about my son's life and death. VANISH came up as a Victorian support service and I wrote a brief email to ask for advice and support. I lived in a different state and he had been born and adopted in yet another state. I felt very alone

and lost between all the various state regulations and agencies. This was a repeat of a sense of illegitimacy and no right to information and the many dead ends I had experienced when trying to make contact in the past.

To my surprise and relief VANISH replied immediately to my request and very quickly was able to provide both psychological and practical support. Following a phone interview I felt very reassured that I was understood and respected. The advice and support I received was both warm and professional and very responsive to my needs. For the first time I felt that my situation and reactions required no explanation, that this was familiar territory for VANISH and that the resources and knowledge and experience VANISH possessed was at my service. This level of competence gave me enormous comfort and confidence as we continued to work towards obtaining and reading my son's inquest report, visiting his grave and tracing some of his life in Melbourne. It was wonderful to visit the VANISH office in Melbourne and receive counselling and support as I learned the details of his death, VANISH continued to advise and support me as I pursued a search for my son's adoptive mother. VANISH was able to tread the delicate path between the different state regulations and despite my worry and trepidation I was soon able to make successful contact via a carefully worded letter. Now I have the bitter sweet but very precious privilege of sharing memories and many photographs of a baby and growing boy as I gradually get to know his wonderful and loving adoptive mother

I would like to thank VANISH for the complex and painstaking work it performs. During the worst of my journey I would sometimes send several emails in a day and was invariably rewarded with a prompt and helpful response. I am usually very independent and not skilled at asking for help. VANISH offered just the help and advice I needed often even before I could put the need or request into words. I have no hesitation in recommending VANISH to anyone who needs and deserves support as they deal with all the complex issues surrounding adoption. It has been a rare pleasure to feel so validated, respected and cared for.

Maggie

Mothers' Memorial at Melbourne General Cemetery



Persistence pays

I was born in 1963 and was adopted out at six weeks old. I also have a sister born in 1964 who my parents also adopted. In 1972, my parents conceived naturally and my younger sister was born. By the ages of five and six respectively both of us (adopted children) were told of our adoption. To me it didn't really matter at the time, as I was so young.

As I went through school and other kids found out that my sister and I were adopted, I suffered deep humiliation and embarrassment and started to feel different from other kids. This, however, didn't affect my sister as it did me, because she had quite a feisty personality.

As I developed into a teenager, I was still quite reserved. I went into denial and tried to convince myself that my adoptive parents were my "mum and dad". Although I didn't know it then, I had a sub-consciousness that always knew the truth and wanted to know where I came from.

During my childhood and early teen years, I was closer to my mum than my dad. That changed in my later teen and adult years, as I believe my mum always felt under pressure that she hadn't been a great mum, whereas my dad was just himself. My belief in that is my mum also had a sub-conscious thing about my sister and I, which I find now to be quite sad for all of us, as the "genuine love never seemed to flow naturally".

I started dating my now wife when I was 20 years old and although my mother never said

so, I knew she didn't approve, whereas my dad was happy for us. We had a daughter when I was 23 and the natural feeling of being a parent prompted me in 1988 to look for my "birth mother" so I approached VANISH. I had no luck with my search, although I did receive lots of information about my birth name and my birth mother's name etc. This went on for about six months before I stopped looking. We then had a son six years later and I re-approached VANISH, with similar results - "nothing more than the first time".

I went through the next 16 years still wondering, albeit most of the time sub-consciously, every day wondering about my birth mother. I then contacted VANISH again in late 2008 and received a phone call from a case worker named "M." in early 2009. There were positives and also some negatives, but this time I was very determined not to give up, so I did my own research through electoral rolls, cemetery searches, whilst M. did searches through BDM Victoria. M. was very encouraging and I felt very positive. Through this, finally I had a name and I wrote a letter, then a second letter. I received a very inquisitive phone call from a gentleman who turned out to be an ex-husband of my auntie. We met and I was given a contact for my birth mother's sister.

After I wrote her a letter I received a phone call and she told me that my birth mother had passed away three years earlier, but we decided to meet anyway. Apart from my own children, meeting 'blood relatives' is the most life-fulfilling thing I have ever done, and this action filled a 45 year void in my life.

This is my brief story and I encourage anyone in my position to never give up looking, as it is so fulfilling to know where you came from.

M, I thank you with all my heart for helping me on my journey and although we have never met face to face I sensed your determination to help solve my mystery. To anyone of you who is thinking of trying to find lost loved ones, I recommend that you do, as it fills a void in your life that finding this information only can fill.

Thank you, Mark

A long and difficult search – adopted person

(Names, places and dates have been changed)

Betty has always known that she was adopted and in about 1997 applied for and received her adoption records. But it wasn't until September 2006 that she decided to search for her natural parents. Information on her original birth certificate and adoption agency records indicated that she was born in South Australia in 1940 and adopted five months later in Victoria; her parents were Violet Rose Windsor and Gordon Brown, a married couple, and she had two older siblings.

A search of Birth Death and Marriage (BDM) Indexes Australia wide soon found a birth registration for Violet, born 1911 Jerilderie in NSW. But no record could be found of Gordon Brown born c1879 anywhere in Australia, New Zealand or in the UK. However, a marriage was found for Violet and Gordon but the relevant BDM Registry refused to release the marriage certificate as although it was 'an historic record' it was a 'bigamous' marriage. Not deterred VANISH applied through that state's BDM Registry on-line service and obtained the marriage certificate where a hand-written note recorded the date and details of the court hearing and the true identity of 'Gordon Brown', he was born Percival Cholmondley. It was soon revealed that Percival was born in West Australia but in his youth had come to Victoria where he had fathered eight children prior to marrying their mother in 1916 on the eve of his departure for the First World War. He passed away under his birth name in SA in 1962. On his death certificate it was recorded that he was divorced and had two daughters, names not recorded.

A search for a second marriage and/or death for Violet Rose Windsor/Brown/Cholmondley was requested in Victoria, NSW and SA but each time came back 'No Result'. Betty did a great deal of family history research and made contact with a living relative of Violet but no one in Violet's birth family knew of her existence – so who had raised her after her own mother married in 1913? Betty made Freedom Of Information applications to each of these states to see if her birth mother had been placed 'in care' but again 'No Result'. Searching on-line cemetery and death notice indexes Australia wide under her given names of 'Violet Rose'

helped narrow the search. So it was back to the BDM Registries with the surnames of nine women with the given names of 'Violet Rose'. Eventually in SA a match was made with a Violet Rose Jones born 1 January 1911 in Jerilderie, NSW who had died in 1983. The SA Registry released her death certificate; no certificate could be found for a marriage. The names of children are not recorded on SA death certificates so death notices for Violet Rose Jones were read and Betty at long last learnt the given names of her two older sisters, and those of her three younger half sisters

Betty by now was very anxious to make contact with her sisters and through them to learn about her birth parents. Through the intermediary service of an interstate post-adoption agency contact was made with Betty's sisters, each of whom responded positively and warmly. It has been a long journey for Betty, one filled with surprises, much grief and many disappointments. And eventually, Betty travelled to South Australia and met with April and May, both in their late 70s.

This search highlights how essential it is to go back to the beginning to establish the identity and location of the persons being sought. For the service user this can be a very long and involved process and an expensive one as at each stage relevant BDM certificates have to be obtained to enable the search to proceed but in the end very worthwhile.

"I remain indebted, and so grateful, to the staff at VANISH who helped me when I searched for my birthmother ... and found her ... almost four years ago. Your staff helped fill in the final pieces of the jigsaw, and I remain indebted to those who helped me.

I am delighted to report that our/my story is one of the good outcome stories - I have a happy, healthy relationship with my birth family, which gives me much delight." C.A.

An example of a difficult but successful search – Forgotten Australian

(Real names not used)

Tommy, born in the mid-1920s in Queensland, was brought to Victoria by Beryl Anwyn Lloyd, his birth mother. Here he was placed in the care of the state under the Infant Life Protection Act when he was just two years of age; he was never legally adopted. Tommy was placed with a foster family and when in his late twenties his foster mother revealed to Tommy his birth name. It was in 1953 that Tommy began the search for Beryl when he applied for and received his birth certificate. Over the years he employed many researchers to find Beryl and her relatives but without success until he came to VANISH in September 2012. It was essential to start at the beginning and to establish the true identity of his birth mother.

A search of Queensland birth indexes found there had been two birth registrations for Beryl Anwyn in Queensland; one registration in 1908 in the surname of 'Lloyd' that of her own mother and another, six years later in the surname of 'Davis' that of her step-father. The search was made more difficult by the fact that Beryl's mother became a war widow in 1916 and then remarried twice; and she and her daughter had the same surname and the same given names but in the reverse order.

In **January 2002** the Privacy Act was changed denying people affected by State Wardship the right to apply for marriage certificates ... Why is it that bureaucracies have decided that people affected by State Wardship should not have the same rights as people affected by adoption? Those rights being to obtain copies of marriage certificates. From VOICE 2002

As Tommy is not an adopted person he does not have the right to apply for a marriage search for Beryl anywhere in Australia unless her marriage was old enough to be an historic record; in Queensland that is 75 years after the event! So then a variety of Australia wide genealogical resources/public records were used until a number of Beryl's living relatives had been identified but not Beryl. Then with the assistance of an interstate post-adoption agency that acted as an intermediary, Tommy's male

cousins were contacted and welcomed him into the Lloyd/Davis family. He learnt his birth mother had married and had two daughters but she had passed away in the 1987.

Tommy is yet to meet his sisters Una and Melba both in their 80s but he speaks frequently with them. With financial assistance from the Open Place (see below) travel reunion fund available to Forgotten Australians Tommy plans to travel to Queensland later this year to meet Una and Melba and other birth relatives. Sixty five years is a long time for a search for family but for Tommy now in his 90s it has certainly been worthwhile.

"I was in the State Library and happened to mention what I wanted and was given a brochure for VANISH.

I rang ... and this lady found out information within days; what I wanted to know years ago.

A very special congratulations to VANISH for employing such caring people with excellent communication skills.

May I say from the bottom of my heart a simple THANK YOU."

MH Child of Forgotten Australian

Forgotten Australians and VANISH

Upwards of and possibly more than 500,000 Australians experienced care in an orphanage. Irrespective of how children were placed in care, it was not their fault. It is not just the impact that tragic childhood experiences have had for care leavers. Their children and families have also felt the impact which can flow through to future generations.¹⁰

Forgotten Australians¹¹, who, as children were impacted by poverty and the welfare policies of the 20th century, were people VANISH advocated on behalf of and supported for many

¹⁰ Senate Committee Report Forgotten Australians. A Report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children. August 2004.

¹¹ Forgotten Australians, a term officially used for the first time in 2004 in the Senate Report which replaced the earlier term 'care leavers' refers to those adults who as children were removed from their families and placed in institutions or various forms of 'out of home care' such as foster care and de facto adoption situations; many of these children were made 'wards of state'.

years. In 1982¹² they were given the right to access the records of their “lost childhoods” but there was inadequate provision of appropriate support and assistance with the search for family members. Without a formal organisation¹³ in Victoria to provide these services, many Forgotten Australians unofficially found their way to VANISH soon after its establishment.

After much lobbying, in 1994 a submission was made to the Victorian government to fund and provide a similar service to that already available for people who had an adoption experience. This occurred in 1995 when VANISH agreed to extend its search and support services and so the constitution was changed; V.A.N.I.S.H. ceased to be an acronym¹⁴ so as to include Forgotten Australians (and later donor-conceived people). The first Forgotten Australian representative on the Committee of Management was Caroline Carroll who was elected in December 2001. In recognition of the very complex issues experienced by so many, and the lifelong consequences of their traumatised childhoods, Dr Alex Agius, became the counsellor Forgotten Australians were referred to; he addressed the Annual General Meeting of that year. Finally in 2003, to assist those individuals to deal with the trauma arising from their childhoods, the government¹⁵ provided funding to VANISH to broker a counselling service.

VANISH continued supporting Forgotten Australians. In 2003, Caroline Carroll was employed as a search and support worker and support groups were established; in 2004 the manager and Caroline attended the handing down of The Senate Report on Forgotten Australians; in 2005 Caroline travelled¹⁶ to Ireland to investigate services there; in 2006; the Victorian Parliament apologised to the Forgotten Australians; in 2007 the Alliance for Forgotten Australians¹⁷ was launched and in 2008 *Forgotten Australians: supporting survivors of childhood institutional care in Australia*¹⁸ was published.

The Senate Report recommendations and a Victorian government grant lead to the establishment of ‘Open Place’¹⁹, a new service for Forgotten Australians which offers a very wide range of services; this occurred in January 2010. It signified a great achievement as it was a strong desire of many Forgotten Australians to have an organisation that exclusively addressed their needs and interests.

The effect of ‘out of home care’ has impacted enormously on a significant number of adopted people; some

experienced this prior to being adopted and/or after being adopted due to the break-down of their adoption, and many adopted people discover in the course of searching for

1995: VANISH was asked by the State Government to extend its search and support services to former state wards or careleavers, another group of Victorians who had been separated from their families of origin often in very traumatic circumstances. (The term ‘careleavers’ has been replaced by Forgotten Australians as a result of Senate Report 2004

family members that they have siblings and/or parents who were placed into ‘out of home care’. The relationship between VANISH and many Forgotten Australians continues for the above reasons and also because VANISH has had since 2010 an agreement with Open Place to provide some of the family tracing service.

History of ICA and VANISH

“In December 2002 we received the phone call from the social worker informing us that they had a file for us, for a child from India. We had a 24 hour window to make this decision...he was 7 and a half years old” (Hans and Catherine van Wilgenburg).

Intercountry adoption (ICA) in Victoria commenced in a formal sense in the late 1960s and early 1970s when a small number of

¹² The 1982 Freedom of Information Act gave former wards of state or those who had been in institutional care/foster care as children the right to apply for access to their records.

¹³ CLAN (Care Leavers Australian Network), a support, advocacy, research and training network was established in New South Wales in 2000.

¹⁴ VANISH Inc became incorporated in 2001.

¹⁵ Through the Department of Human Services.

¹⁶ Courtesy of an Ian Potter Travelling Scholarship.

¹⁷ Caroline Carroll was a foundation member of this organisation.

¹⁸ This booklet aims to inform and assist those professionals working in the medical, dental and welfare sectors and to provide the background

information they need to recognise, relate to and assist people who are experiencing long term trauma because of a childhood spent in orphanages or Homes.

¹⁹ It was during the period from 1 July 2009 to January 2010 whilst the service for Forgotten Australians was with an interim provider that the National Apology for the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants occurred on November 2009.

children who had been orphaned or abandoned due to the war in Vietnam, were adopted by Australian families. Following the 1975 'Operation Airlift'²⁰, the adoption of children from overseas gradually expanded. By international standards the number of intercountry adoptions (ICA) in Victoria has been low, although since 1990/91 over 1,500 children have been adopted from overseas in this State (AIHW Adoptions Australia 2012-13).

In the Minutes of the first VANISH Committee of Management (CoM) meeting (April; 1989, item 7.4) it is recorded that the intention was for intercountry adoption to "be the first policy issue" and this commitment to the intercountry community has persisted throughout the life of the organisation.

As these children have grown to adulthood more and more studies have documented the deep lifelong consequences of separation from birth family and country; along with the need for access to responsive ongoing services for the adopted person and ongoing education and support for adoptive parents.

"One of the difficult things about being an intercountry, transracial adoptee is that you are not surrounded and supported by family members of the same race, in the same way that other non-white Australians would be. My parents didn't know how to help me deal with racism - how could they when they had never experienced it? In the same way, they can't teach me how to exist as an Asian woman in contemporary society" (Hana).

Over the past 25 years VANISH has participated in ICA discussions and forums and has advocated for the best interests of intercountry adopted people around such issues as the ratification of the Hague Convention; Amendments to the Adoption (Amendment) Bill 2000 and the recent Citizenship Amendment Bill (ICA) 2014. VANISH has also participated in the AIS forum since its inception, contributing to discussion of intercountry matters.

In the CoM Minutes of July 1990 it was recognised that there were difficulties assisting intercountry adopted people to conduct searches, due to questions about the existence and accuracy of records in countries of origin.

However VANISH offers assistance regarding the search process, and provides literature and other resources, including access to a meeting space.

Intercountry adopted adults have joined our support groups and accessed our recently available in-house counselling service and

VANISH is a current supporter of the newly established Korean Adoptees in Australia Network (KAiAN Inc).

Intercountry adoptions were discussed at the first Committee of Management meeting in April 1989.

Our first COM member representing Intercountry Adopted Persons was Simon Keogh in 2009.

"Adoption must be about the rights of the child to be safe from harm and live in an environment that maximises the developmental potential of the child, through a close familial connection, strong culturally supportive community and professionals... like VANISH" (Dominic).

VANISH remains committed to continuing to provide information, raise awareness, build a supportive community and advocate on behalf of all those with an experience of intercountry adoption in Victoria.

Donor-conception in Victoria – lessons learned from adoption?

It is hard to know precisely when to place the beginnings in Victoria of assisted reproduction using donated gametes. Pioneers of IVF Carl Woods, John Leeton and others were involved in conception using donated gametes, both egg and sperm, from the mid-1970s. That early period of unregulated donor-based assisted reproductive treatment (ART) can be said to have finished in 1988 when legislation came into place which imposed regulation, and which began the task of encouraging openness and honesty about donor-conception.

Looking back at that early period of donor-based ART it seems that many of those involved were enthralled by the science – the possibilities of what could be done. Sadly, they seem to have failed at the time to see or acknowledge the social impact of what they were doing. Despite sometimes referring to donor-conception as 'pre-conception adoption' the

²⁰Over 600 children were airlifted from Vietnam to Australia over the course of the conflict, in 'Operation Babylift'. There were three flights two to Sydney and one to Melbourne.

doctors and scientists in those early days seemed not to see, or at least not to pay attention to, the lessons already by then learned from the experience of adoption. Separation of people from their family of biological origin, however it is done, is known to have major impacts on those involved. This is so, just as much for donor-conceived people and former donors as it is for those impacted by adoption.

The early days of donor-conception were characterised by a pervasive culture of secrecy and denial. Donors were encouraged to donate their gametes and to then forget about the end result of their donation. Donors were discouraged from viewing the children created as being their own offspring. Anonymity was promised and agreements were signed to that effect. Similarly, recipient families were encouraged to forget about what had happened, and to not tell donor-conceived children of their genetic origins. The parallels with adoption are stark. In particular, the clean-break theory which held that babies' characteristics are formed by their environment rather than their genes – seems to have influenced the common advice at the time to pretend that what had happened had not really happened. Such advice, while well intentioned, was a fundamentally flawed deceit. As was found to be the case with adoption, maintaining such deceptions long-term is all but impossible. Children, later adults, do ask questions. Because of the deceit and the secrecy, well-intentioned as it may have been, damage is done which is hard to undo and to redress.

The impact of that early period of donor-conception lingers in the lives of many, both donor-conceived people and those who willingly gave their gametes (eggs and sperm) in order to help others conceive. One such is Ross Hunter, whose personal story of the impact on him of not knowing his 'donor'/ natural father/biological father, (how do we describe these relationships? the terminology seems so inadequate), appears below in this issue of VOICE. I am another – a sperm donor from the mid-1980s and with seven 'donor' offspring. None of these people have I ever met. Despite making myself open to contact, and joining the Voluntary Register of pre-1988 donors, I have no idea if this will ever happen. As a young man, wanting and willing to help others, I essentially gave away seven of my children. I

hope that I gave those children to loving and caring families and that their lives are happy and healthy. However, I may never know.

Ross' story and mine are replicated for thousands of others – both former donors and donor-conceived people. Importantly, people like Ross and me, and many many others too numerous to name, are working for change – change which is coming. In August this year the Victorian Parliament passed legislation which will, with safeguards and support services, enable many pre-1988 donor-conceived people to know the identity of their donors, to know a key element of their genetic origin. This is not a perfect solution to the problems of the past. It is though a major step along the way. Victoria was at the forefront of donor-based ART. Now we are at the forefront, worldwide, of legislative change to make amends for the errors of the past.

Ian Smith

A donor-conceived person's story

My name is Ross Hunter and in 2009 I discovered that I was donor-conceived (DC) at Prince Henry's Hospital in the late 1970s. I discovered this as my non-biological father succumbed to the throes of early onset Alzheimer's Disease just over four years ago. It was a terrible way to see such a vibrant and lively man degenerate.

At the time my wife and I attended as many information sessions about Alzheimer's disease as we could to see if there were genetic implications to the disease; which led us to question whether we should have any more children. Ironically, through some questioning and deductive reasoning on behalf of my inquisitive wife, this led us down to the path to discovering that my father and I were not, in fact, genetically related.

This news was greeted with a sense of relief, but also with significant guilt. At least from one perspective, the fact that my children and I were not biologically related to this man, who had done his best to raise me as his own child over the last three decades, meant that I was less likely to encounter such a cruel disease. On the other hand, I had lost someone who we all loved, and until only a few months before, thought of as my flesh and blood.

I obtained some non-identifying information after putting my details on the Voluntary Register through the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. I was somewhat deflated after finding out my biological father was not also on the Register. However, I was very glad and excited to receive my non-identifying information, scant though it is, along with my donor code, S2. Yet it is not enough, I desire to acquaint myself with this person who has had such determining influence in my life despite his absence. What I do know about my donor is that he was young when he donated, and that we have the same colour eyes, hair, complexion and frame.

I am not deluded into thinking that finding my biological father is going to be a panacea for all the hurt and disappointment that life dishes out, but I think it would be reassuring and interesting to meet my donor, someone I resemble, on mutual terms, in the near future. The prospect makes me slightly nervous, but in my mind it's high time for a 37 year old to meet his biological father.

Since the discovery of my DC status, I have joined the DCP support group started by VANISH and VARTA, moderated by Lauren Burns and Kate Bourne. I have found this group to be immensely supportive in my journey forward as a donor-conceived person.

Myf Cummerford née Walker was the first DC representative on the Committee of Management commencing in 2006 followed by Lauren Burns and currently Ross Hunter

2014 - Where is VANISH at now?

I have had the privilege of being the Manager of VANISH for the last three years and it is with pleasure I present a snapshot of the present – to complement all the wonderful preceding articles on our shared history, legislative outcomes, our work with ARMS, a father's viewpoint, search and support, Forgotten Australians, donor-conception and intercountry adoption.

I was humbly able to be present and share with our community for both the Victorian Parliamentary Apology for Past Adoption Practices in 2012 and the National Apology for Forced Adoptions in 2013.

Search and support continues to be the core of our business and we have four expert and dedicated workers serving our community with intelligent and forensic attention to searching, and wisdom, experience and compassion in support. All workers bring their own experience and their own commitment to what they do. VANISH has always provided telephone and face to face support to mothers, fathers and adopted people and families.

VANISH has updated and launched a new informative website that has resulted in lots more conversations with potential service users and includes a Register of Adoption Counsellors.

Support groups have always been offered by VANISH and we have now been able to outreach to regional areas. It is a slow and challenging process but support groups are already established in Geelong, Traralgon, Albury/Wodonga and Bendigo; in 2015 VANISH plans to extend this service to Ballarat, Mildura and western Victoria. VANISH has been delighted to be able to work with ARMS in some locations.

Following a counselling brokerage program that ran over two years, VANISH now has a small in-house counselling capacity funded following the Victorian Parliamentary Apology for Past Adoption Practices under a The Workforce Capacity Development Project (Department of Human Services). This funding also provides for the development and implementation of training to enhance the clinical understanding of mental health professionals in the delivery of adoption sensitive services and the establishment of regional support groups. The counselling service is available to those living in both city and rural areas. The VANISH counselling model is strengths-based and recovery-focussed. Demand for the counselling service is high and as well the counselling service has had over 100 community contacts since June last year. The training development played a major part in increasing access to the ATAPS funding for forced adoption provided by the Federal Department of Health. The training has also been very well received by counsellors, DHS FIND and Adoption and Permanent Care workers.

We have been pleased to provide several new publications over the last few years: A Post Adoption Search Guide, Support Group

Facilitators' Manual, Counsellor Training Manual, Commemoration Document and Information Booklet – all of which will help mental health practitioners, members and service users make more effective linkages.

VANISH continues to see working with others as a priority and we keep an 'open door' to all our colleagues in the community and work with staff in Ministers' offices and Departments. Most of all we value consultation with our members so that their experience can inform all that we do.

VANISH is currently actively involved in advocacy to reform the Adoption Act 1984, the Assisted Reproductive Treatment Further Amendment Bill 2013, The Australian Citizenship Amendment (Intercountry Adoption) Bill 2014 and in reforming the implementation of the Federal Intercountry Adoption Review 2014; it has also demanded a Federal Inquiry into surrogacy related to both altruistic and commercial surrogacy in Australia or from overseas.

As we 'go to press' VANISH is anxiously awaiting the announcement of federal funding for training and for local services – with these funds we will be able to continue our exciting forward trajectory.

My thanks to all those superb people who have supported VANISH over the past 25 years – we look forward to working together in the future.

Coleen Clare,
VANISH Manager, 2011 to current

VANISH acknowledges the Department of Human Services for the funding and support of the work of VANISH and in particular the team at FIND and Southern Region

List of Chairpersons

27.04.1989	Judy Courtin
12.10.1989	Amanda Weinstein
11.10.1990	Josephine Dunin
13.08.1991	Jan Aitken (acting)
03.10.1991	Amanda Samuels
12.12.1991	Sue Green
10.12.1992	Marie Meggitt
11.11.1993	Lorrie Hendrata
13.10.1994	Jane Van der Stoel
13.10.1995	Jane Van der Stoel
10.10.1996	Cas O'Neill
09.10.1997	Isabell Collins
01.10.1998	Marie Meggitt
14.10.1999	Cathy Smith
30.10.2000	Debra Dogson
06.12.2001	Cathy Smith
17.10.2002	Mary Murray
23.10.2003	SallyRose Carbines
24.11.2003	Hugh McKenzie
25.11.2004	Denis Muller
11.10.2007	Ken Virtue
22.10.2009	Denis Muller
21.10.2010	Leigh Hubbard

List of Managers

1989 - 1992	Barbara McHenry
1992 - 1993	Margaret Campi (Interim Mgr)
1993 - 1997	Margaret Campi (Co-ordinator)
1997 - 1999	Margaret Campi (Director)
1999 - 2001	Mary Riley
2001 - 2005	Wendy Gale
2005 - 2006	Jill Parris
2006 - 2008	Maureen Cleary
2008 - 2009	Patricia Lauria
2009 - 2009	Maureen Cleary (Acting Mgr)
2009 - 2011	Gary Coles
2011 -	Coleen Clare

Disclaimer:

Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy of information in this document.

Additional information welcome.

Love's Dominion

**I asked my heart the seasons and confines
Wherein I loved you
Came the answer straight:
By star and moon drift; when the land sun shines;
Through sharp-edged winter's storms; early and late -
From Polar snows or slopes of shivering pine
To tropic shores: in each coordinate
Of East and West, of North and South.
No lines mark anywhere a frontier to that state
Not earth's horizons, the bright curve of heaven,
Not planets, suns, nor all the singing spheres
Outrange that love. No measurement of days,
No seasons sequence, not the strong moon driven pulse of the oceans
Love, as dreams or prayers
Defines the laws alike of time and space.**

For Timothy - 20 October 1987

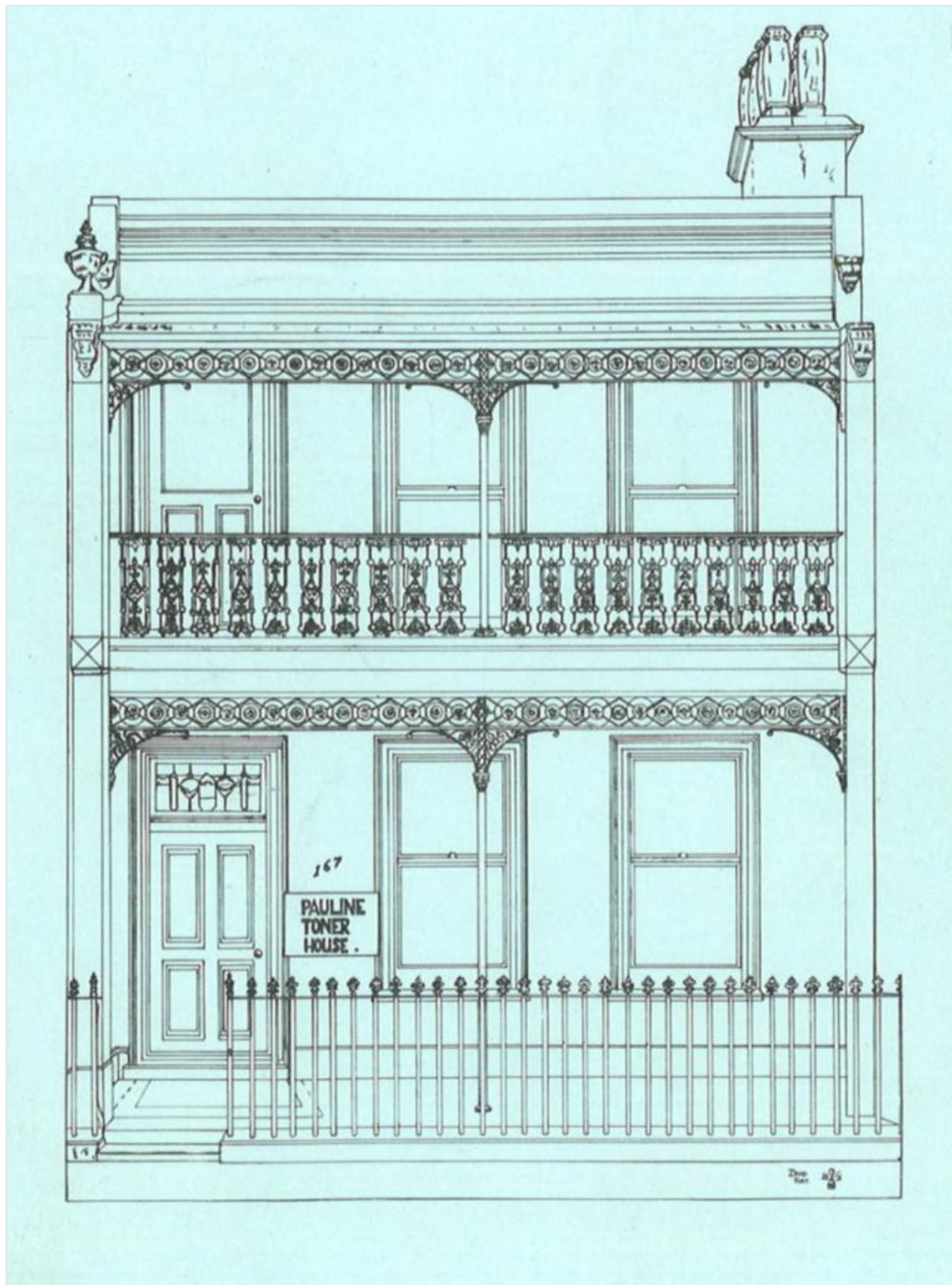
Polly - Natural Mother

(VOICE Autumn 2004)



25th October 2014

**The original drawing of 167 Drummond Street, Carlton dated 21.4.1989
by David Kenneth Hirt (29.5.1937 - 14.02.2005),
adopted person, artist/teacher, adoption rights activist/pioneer,
former VANISH member and committee member, continues to be
displayed at VANISH.**



**VANISH welcomes voluntary donations at any time to enable us to extend our services
GIVE NOW at www.givenow.com.au/vanishinc**



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