

VANISH VOICE

Summer 2023



Artist: Hank Romyn

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CEO's Message

Dear members, friends and colleagues,

Welcome to our final edition of VOICE for 2023.

I hope you are keeping well. The weather has been very erratic in most parts of Victoria recently and our thoughts are with those of you in Gippsland and other areas affected by fires and floods. We hope you stay safe over the holidays.

In this edition of VOICE we report on some events that have taken place over the past few months as well as sharing members contributions and news from around Australia and the world.

Since our last issue we have said farewell and thank you to Cheyne Bull (volunteer Support Group Facilitator), Hana Crisp (contracted Program Support Officer) and Maureen Long (volunteer Committee Member). We are extremely grateful to each of them for their contributions and wish them all the best for the future. We have also welcomed two new Committee Members - see p8.

You will also see on p8 that VANISH is seeking a new CEO to take the helm when I finish up early next year. It has been an incredibly rewarding six years and an honour to engage with so many of you. I will sign off properly in our next bulletin. In the meantime I wish you peace and joy this holiday season.

Warm regards,

Charlotte Smith
CEO



The VANISH Team

Charlotte Smith
Chief Executive Officer

Gail Holstock
Support Services Coordinator

Patricia Navaretti
Tracey Hudson
SallyRose Carbines
Adelaide Tapper
Search & Support Workers

Lorna Sleightholm
Administrator



Please note the VANISH office will be closed from 25th December to 1st January inclusive

Parliamentary Apology to Victorians who experienced historical abuse and neglect as children in institutional care

We have been advised by the Victorian Government that on the morning Thursday 8 February 2024 a Parliamentary Apology will be offered to Victorians who experienced historical abuse and neglect as children in institutional care.

Attending the apology at Parliament House

Attendance at Parliament House is by invitation only. If you are interested in attending and have not expressed your interest through another organisation, please contact VANISH by phone, email or post no later than 5th January. If you call during the holidays, please leave us a voicemail message, we will return your call when we are back in the office. All our contact details are on the back cover of this newsletter..

Regional gatherings – Ballarat, Geelong and Sale.

Individuals impacted by historical abuse and neglect as children in institutional care and their families, carers and support people are invited to come and watch the Apology at venues in Geelong, Ballarat and Sale. Arrival time is 11.00am for an 11.30am start. The streaming of the Apology will be followed by refreshments. Counselling support staff will be available.

To register to attend a regional viewing please use one of links below, or email dffhevents@dffh.vic.gov.au, or call 0487 353 831 Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.00pm. Please advise if you have any accessibility requirements and if a support person will be coming with you.

Geelong: Kardinia Room, Rydges Hotel, corner of Gheringhap & Little Myers Street, Geelong. Please click on this link to [Register to attend the Geelong live stream](#) or call the number above.

Ballarat: Conservatory Room, Mercure Hotel and Convention Centre, 613 Main Road, Ballarat. Please click on this link to [Register to attend the Ballarat live stream](#) or call the number above.

Sale: Wellington Room, Port of Sale, 70 Foster Street, Sale. Please click on this link to [Register to attend the Sale live stream](#) call the number above.

Watching the Apology online

The Apology will be live streamed on the Parliament website so that anyone with internet access can watch it on their computer or mobile device. The link to watch the apology is <https://new.parliament.vic.gov.au/> and it will go live at 11.30 am.

There is more information about how to watch the apology online at this link www.dffh.vic.gov.au/Apology-live-stream

Contacting the organisers:

To contact the organisers about the Apology at Parliament House
email StateEvents@dpc.vic.gov.au or
call 0427 498 750 Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.00pm.

To contact the organisers about the regional gatherings
email dffhevents@dffh.vic.gov.au or
call 0487 353 831 Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.00pm.

Support

If reading or hearing about this apology causes you discomfort or distress, you might find it helpful to connect with one of the support organisations listed below.

Open Place is a Victorian specialist service for Forgotten Australians (Care Leavers). Open Place has a drop-in centre in Richmond and provides state-wide services including counselling, redress support, financial assistance for health needs and support to access records and search for family. Call 1800 779 379 to speak to someone at Open Place or for more information click this link [Open Place](#)

Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN) is a national, independent, peak body which represents, supports and advocates for Pre-1990 Care Leavers. CLAN offers support to people who have grown up in Orphanages, Children's Homes, Missions and Foster Care in Australia and New Zealand, or whose parents or other family members had this experience. For more information call 1800 008 774 or click this link [CLAN](#)

You are also welcome to contact us at VANISH using the contact details on the back cover.

News & Updates

New legislation and donor register in the ACT

This update is from a ACT Government media release:
<https://bit.ly/NewLegislationToBetterSupportDCCanberrans>

On 28 November the ACT Minister for Health Rachel Stephen-Smith announced the introduction of the *Assisted Reproductive Technology Bill (2023)*, a new legislative framework to regulate Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) in the ACT.

Under the new Bill, donor-conceived people will be entitled to access information about their parent/s' donors from ART providers in the ACT. A new donor register will be created to provide people who are donor-conceived with easier access to information about their parent/donor, medical information and any siblings they may have.

The ACT donor register will be implemented across two stages. The first, established under this legislation, is a prospective register that will allow donor-conceived individuals conceived following commencement of the Act and their parent/s to access information about their parent/s' donor, including identifying information.

Stage one will also include the establishment of a voluntary register that will allow for donor-conceived people and past donors to voluntarily register their details on the register.

The second stage will be implemented after further consultation in 2024 and will include a retrospective register for all donor-conceived people to access information about their parent/s' donor, irrespective of when they were conceived or born, if those records still exist.

Aimee Shackleton, National Director of Donor Conceived Australia said:

"DCA welcomes any legislation that legalises donor-conceived people's right to access information and provides a mechanism to do so. Early and efficient acquisition of basic information about identity is paramount to managing mental and physical health and assists in normalising donor conception."

"The donor-conceived community has been advocating for change for many years. We support progress towards removing shame and secrecy for our community and our families and encouragement of more openness and acceptance."

In a news article by the ABC about the announcement *"Proposed legislation could see ACT donor-conceived people gaining access to information about their genetic heritage"* 35 year old Canberran Kirrily Walmsley shared some of the main challenges she faced as a teenager and young adult being donor-conceived.



"I'd never met another donor-conceived person, and I felt that I didn't really have anyone to talk to about my own personal experiences, about

my feelings, what I was going through.

"It was really hard to navigate that on my own, not being able to talk to anyone who had experienced the same kind of situation as me."

Then as Mrs Walmsley entered adulthood, another challenge rose up: romance.

"Entering the dating world and looking at starting romantic relationships, I was always highly cautious in who I allowed myself to be intimate with, or who I allowed into my dating world, just for fear that they could possibly be a half-sibling that I didn't know about," she said.

"It took a long time for me to work through that." But Mrs Walmsley said the biggest challenge she and the majority of the donor-conceived community faced had to do with accessing their genetic history.

"Trying to locate information in early adulthood was extremely difficult," she said. "It was all just a file that I wasn't able to access, or it had been lost, so it was tricky for me to actually find out where to start."

Link to the article

<https://bit.ly/abcNewsProposedLegislationDCgeneticHeritageAccess>

Link to Donor Conceived Australia: <https://donorconceivedaustralia.org.au/>

News & Updates

Protection from hacking of genetic genealogy testing providers

Genetic testing company 23andMe reported that they were hacked in October this year, after which stolen data was allegedly leaked on cybercrime forums. According to the company, the hackers may have used “credential stuffing” which means they used username and password combinations that were already made public from other data breaches.

In response, 23andMe, AncestryDNA and My Heritage DNA are introducing two-factor authentication (2FA) which adds a second step to signing in to your account. If you are a customer of one of these genealogy companies, you may already have received notification from them about this new security feature. At the time of writing, you need to actively enable 2FA. The process is slightly different for each company, but will involve something like a one-time code sent to your mobile phone or email address, similar to when doing online banking or using websites like MyGov.

Tips to keep your data safe:

Check if your email address and/or usernames and passwords have already been part of a data leak. For example, try <https://haveibeenpwned.com/>; or type “have I been pwned” into a search engine

Do not use the same username and password for genealogy websites as you do for other accounts

Periodically change your passwords for all your accounts, or use a password manager.

To read more about the 23&me data breach see <https://bit.ly/Guardian23andMeAdmitsHackers>



Jigsaw Western Australia closes its doors

It is with a heavy heart that we report that Adoption Jigsaw WA will be permanently closing at the end of this month. We understand there are a few factors for this decision including a decline in demand for search and mediation services due to the emergence of DNA testing and online search angels.



Isabel Andrews, Manager of Jigsaw WA. Source: ABC

For four decades WA has had two post adoption services – Jigsaw WA and Adoption Research and Counselling Service Inc (ARCS), and in 2015 a third service was created by the Commonwealth Government - the Forced Adoption Support Services.

Due to limited state funding Jigsaw has needed to charge a modest fee for search and support services which has led some people to opt for alternative ways of searching. Jigsaw was also responsible for the management of the Donor Conception Register for the Department of Health since 2019, however last year the Department decided to bring that service back under its remit.

It is incredibly disappointing to see an organisation with such a wealth of experience and wisdom wind up at the same time a state inquiry is underway. Based upon VANISH's experience, the need for support will increase significantly when the inquiry findings are announced and up until the recommendations are implemented.

VANISH has worked closely with Jigsaw since our establishment in the late 1980s and are very appreciative of the collegiate working relationship with the team there. We congratulate Manager Isabel Andrews, Researcher Ann Allpike and the rest of the team on their tireless efforts on behalf of the adoption community, and wish them all the best in their retirements.

News & Updates

Secrets and lies: Why a full government apology is needed for the victims of forced UK adoptions *by Arwen Noble*



UK adoptee Arwen Noble writes in *Perspective Magazine* about the need for a UK apology.

“...the UK Government – which, let’s remember, was responsible for adoption policy across all home nations at the time – responded to a separate parliamentary report by

admitting that adoptees born

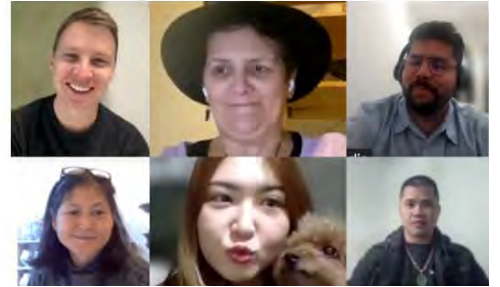
between 1949 and 1976 *had* been subjected to a breach of their human rights, but stopped short of issuing a full apology, instead opining that: “We are sorry on behalf of society for what happened.” For those of us caught up in this, that’s not nearly enough.

“Aside from any compensation for the wrongs done, it’s taken me thousands of pounds to date to try and find out who I am: subscriptions to ancestry sites, DNA testing, counselling, certified copies of documents to unlock further secrets and lies. Adoption is state-mandated identity stripping. An apology is the very least the adoptee community deserves.”

<https://bit.ly/PerspectiveMagSecretsAndLies>

Adoptee Presentation to New Zealand: Lived Experience of Transracial and Intercounty Adoptees in New Zealand

Earlier this year a panel of 6 transracial and intercountry adoptees from the InterCountry Adoptee Voices (ICAV)



network presented to the New Zealand Oranga Tamariki Ministry for Children.

ICAV founder Lynelle Long led the presentation with Alex K, Alex G, Bev, Gabby and Mike generously sharing their lived experiences and insights on a range of topics including:

- the distinct stages adoptees go through
- the need for post adoption support services
- understanding racism
- search and reunion
- key messages for workers in adoption
- main issues for Central Authorities to think about

To watch this e webinar click here <https://intercountryadopteevoices.com/2023/07/26/adoptee-presentation-to-new-zealand/?fbclid=IwAR1-hPMQ9oCbtstADg8mXD0SojgHVHW9dOfvwnIF6EO9LjvU79cOPdKnTk>

Adopt Perspective Podcast interview with Thomas Graham

The most recent podcast Interview from Jigsaw QLD is with Thomas Graham and it comes in two parts.

Thomas is a South African born adoptee, who migrated to Australia 25 years ago and in 2009 started the *Australian Journal of Adoption (AJA)*, an online journal providing an independent, open access forum for people affected by or involved in adoption. He published 16 volumes focusing on adoptee experiences before hanging up his hat.



After *AJA* he published an adoption blog called *Ipsify* for three years, offering shorter and personalised interviews and commentary on adoption matters.

Thomas was also part of the grassroots adoptee groups that helped set the path for what is now known as *Adoptee Rights Australia*. In addition, Thomas once ran a Canberra-based adoption support group, sat on the government committee to oversee the implementation of some key recommendations in the Senate Report into Forced Adoption and then, by his own account, disappeared and withdrew from any involvement in the adoption community.

To listen to part 1 go to <https://www.jigsawqueensland.com/podcast/episode/2616936f/thomas-graham-part-1>



Personal Stories

An Intergenerational Experience

I feel I am in both a unique and delicate position to write about adoption. I am the child of an adoptee and have witnessed my mother's search for and reunification with her natural paternal family. Watching her pursuit of identity and belonging has undeniably impacted me. Distinguishing which parts of the story are solely hers to tell, and which bits of the story also belong to me is difficult. My mum is generally a private person, who is happy to discuss her adoption story with those she trusts and with a narrative that she can control. Wanting to also tell my side can feel like an invasion, and I have a deep desire to protect her from anymore hurt or heartache.

I've known my whole life that my mother was adopted. By the time I was born, she had already met her maternal family. Born in the 1960s, hers was a typical closed adoption hidden from any of her first mother's network. It wasn't until I was entering my 20's that I began to realise how much my mum's adoption had hurt her. I remember having a saddening realisation one day when she commented that I was her first natural and legally recognised relative. My mum swears I was on her chest for the first six weeks of my life – the same amount of time she lay at St. Joseph's Babies' Home in Glenroy without a primary care giver.

At the beginning of COVID-19, my mother's evident desire to find her natural paternal family exponentially grew. Her kitchen table always had quickly scrawled notes, family trees, and a laptop open on Ancestry.com. She was sure she had more siblings, and she knew there was a chance her father was still alive. An Ancestry DNA test led her to five half-siblings, all sharing the same father. Two brothers who were raised together without their father, and three sisters who were raised with him.

Although my anxiety was incomparable to my mother's, I was terrified of the consequences of these discoveries. I knew there was the chance she could be rejected, and I did not know how she would cope with that. Knowing my paternal grandfather seemed to be a womanizer with selfish tendencies, I feel guilty to admit that I was relieved when I found out he was deceased. The grief of a dead parent seemed kinder than the grief of a parent who denied your existence.

My Mum is "anti-facebook" but "pro-using-her-daughter's-facebook-when-not-having-an-account-proves-inconvenient". I already received messages from

her friends to pass onto her, so contacting her paternal sisters who had been unaware of her existence for the past 55 years on her behalf seemed the natural next step. We sat and constructed a first message together and sent it to all three sisters. I waited for a Facebook notification that would have life-changing consequences for my mum. How on earth would I tell her if they wanted nothing to do with her? I knew she had a right to every piece of information available to her, but how would I have that conversation?



Skipping over a big chunk of the story for brevity's sake, my fears were alleviated. My mum now has a healthy relationship with one big brother and three older sisters, all of whom have accepted her as their little sister. I cried after leaving my Mum's house one day when she told me she had been invited to one of her sister's weddings. My mum had communicated concern to her about not wanting to have to lie about who she is. Without hesitation, my Mum's sister assured her that there would not be one person at the wedding who did not know her connection to the family. I felt so grateful that they could acknowledge that she had been a secret for so long, and that they were going to do what was necessary to change that.

Throughout this whole experience, I would update my own psychologist in fortnightly sessions. I worried deeply about what the outcome may be for my Mum.

Continued on next page

Personal Stories / News

An Intergenerational Experience continued ...

'My Mum has three sisters and two brothers and they are all brilliant' I excitedly told my psychologist one day. After some discussion, she posed to me 'You have three aunties and two uncles and a bunch of cousins that all sound wonderful. I wonder what this means to you'? I had briefly considered this, and my Mum had mentioned it, but I never did give myself time to consider what this meant. I felt multiple things. I felt excited because even though I rarely see my family, I love them dearly, and now I had even more family to love! But I was also hurt, because I sat with the discomfort that my Mum's adoption that had taken place thirty years before I was born had also taken away my right to information about my natural family and my origin.

I am thankful to have discovered such positivity in my newfound natural family. I do not underestimate how difficult it would have been to discover that your father had hidden children. Like my Mum, I feel a lot of anger towards the system that abused so many vulnerable women and their babies. I certainly feel the impact of intergenerational trauma. I also know that my experience and my anger has ignited a need in me to continue advocating for adoptees and their natural families, and to ensure we continue to learn from past adoption practices. The effects are felt through generations, and that is something that our government and the systems they serve need to be reminded of throughout all our lifetimes. I sincerely hope that other children of adoptees begin to tell their stories, so that we can continue the advocacy efforts of our parents and our grandparents and ensure history is never repeated.

This story has been published after being read and approved by my mother. AC

Community Event for the 11th Anniversary of the Victorian Parliamentary Apology for Past Adoption Practices

On the 21st October members of ARMS Vic, VANISH and friends and colleagues gathered at the statue *Taken Not Given* to commemorate the 11th anniversary of the Victorian Parliamentary Apology for Past Adoption Practices.

It was a lovely event with the weather holding out for the 40 of us attending and ARMS Committee members providing platters of food and drinks to share.

Speeches were provided by Marie Meggit (delivered by Jo Fraser), Pauline Ley and Jude Hudson, followed by guest presenter Jeannot Farmer from Scotland who was visiting on a Churchill Fellowship.

It was uplifting to hear Jeannot talk about how the Australian inquiries and apologies laid a pathway for the Scottish apology. We truly are a global community!



The backdrop for the event was a new banner created by ARMS which includes their logo, a picture of the statue and the wording from the plaque which describes the meaning of *Taken Not Given*. This attracted a lot of attention from passers by, including an adopted person who then joined us !



Jo Fraser



Pauline Ley



Jude Hudson



Jeannot Farmer

Position Vacant Chief Executive Officer



VANISH is seeking a strategic leader with strong stakeholder engagement skills to lead our small, experienced team in delivering high quality services, policy advice and advocacy.

Reporting to the Committee of Management, the CEO plays a critical role in achieving the VANISH's mission and goals and amplifying the voices and rights of people with lived experience of adoption, childhood institutions and donor conception.

The successful applicant will:

- be a dynamic leader with excellent policy and advocacy experience
- have a demonstrated passion for ensuring the delivery of person-centred, evidence-based services
- have a background in social work, mental health, community welfare or in leading not-for-profit organisations.

Relevant lived experience is not essential but would be well regarded.

The position is FTE 0.9 (nine days a fortnight), ongoing.

For details see our advert on <https://probonoaustralia.com.au/jobs/2023/12/ceo-71/>

or call 03 9328 8611 or email vanishexec@vanish.org.au

Welcome new VANISH Committee of Management members

Anne Donnellan and Claudia Lassetter



Anne is an adoptee born in Adelaide. Her mother was sent from Melbourne to Saint Joseph's Refuge for the latter six months of her pregnancy.

She has 10 years of experience in social work and over 30 years of involvement in the trade union movement as a representative of workers and advocate at the national level.

Anne also has substantial experience as Director and member of Boards and advisory committees and a sound understanding of governance, risk management, legislation and compliance.

Anne has a strong interest in the ongoing pursuit of the rights and support for all impacted by forced adoption and a longstanding and demonstrable commitment to equity and social justice principles.



Claudia is an adopted person with Australian natural parents adopted into a British-Australian family.

She speaks six languages, holds a Master of Business Administration, a Graduate Certificate in Communications and is now undertaking a Masters in Global Health Policy.

Claudia works in brand, marketing, and communications, helping organisations define, and execute the way they promote themselves.

She describes herself as a truth seeker and evidenced-based person with an interest in influencing the romanticised narrative about adoption that persists in popular media.

Annual General Meeting 2023

VANISH's 35th AGM held at the Radisson in September was an exceptional event bringing members, friends and colleagues together to acknowledge the years' challenges and celebrate our achievements.

Todd Dargan, VANISH Chair, commenced proceedings by thanking Simon Pryor for his leadership of the CoM over the last four years.

Todd noted that September 2023 marked the second anniversary of the tabling of the Inquiry Report and urged the Victorian Government to make haste in implementing the recommendations. He also highlighted VANISH being under-resourced and his intention to ensure that the organisation is properly funded to meet the continuing demand.

Jon Phillips, Treasurer provided his report noting VANISH achieved modest surplus this year. Maureen Long, Secretary, then conducted the nominations of new COM members Anne Donnellan and Claudia Lassetter.

Charlotte then shared some of VANISH's achievements this year, including a significant amount of advocacy and education through the media. She said the advocacy had focused on issues with Births, Deaths & Marriages Victoria, and on the Forced Adoption Inquiry implementation, noting our anticipation of the redress scheme for mothers being announced and Integrated Birth Certificates for adoptees becoming available.

Charlotte thanked and farewelled Hana Crisp, Program Support Officer and Cheyne Bull, Support Group facilitator for their wonderful contributions to the work of VANISH. She also acknowledged the very generous bequest from the late Sandra Pankhurst which assisted VANISH maintain staffing levels.

VANISH members then voted in favour of a Special Resolution to change the Rules.

Following the formalities, our special guest speaker from Scotland, Jeannot Farmer spoke about the advocacy work of mothers and adoptees to tackle historic adoption

injustices and described the journey to Scotland's formal apology. Jeannot speech is published in full on p10.

On display at the AGM were the results of the Common Threads workshop for adoptees, designed by SallyRose Carbines - a patchwork of textile squares with words that represent their lived experiences. These were stitched together alongside an embroidery by the late Frances Livingstone (Granny Franny). We hope to expand on this initiative so that more adoptees can add their words and art to represent their lived experience.

Also at the AGM paintings by benefactor Hank Romyn were sold to raise funds for VANISH. There are still some of his very modestly priced paintings available so if you are interested in owning one, please contact Lorna on (03) 9328 8611 or by email to info@vanish.org.au.



Clockwise from top left: Jeannot Farmer presenting, SallyRose with Kerry and Linda with their textile squares, Maureen Long presenting, Charlotte Smith presenting, Cheyne Bull receiving flowers, Jon Phillips presenting, Hana Crisp receiving flowers, Todd Dargan and Aimee Shackleton.

Guest Presentation by Jeannot Farmer

The Scottish Adoption Apology - Tackling Historic Adoption Injustice



In 1978, I was a student at Glasgow University and just about to take a final exam that would have gained me a science degree, when I discovered that I was pregnant. My mother died of cancer when I was 14, and although there was a degree of disappointment at home on the part of my father, there was no question of me being forced into any

particular course of action, be it adoption, abortion or raising my child. I had no intention of spending my life with the baby's father. However, I had a wonderful aunt who had raised my three cousins on her own, and I was confident that I could follow her example, so I declined the abortion that I was offered, and looked forward to a life with the baby that I loved already. When, I found out that I had failed my exam, I had a wobble and on a whim, approached the local council to ask about adoption. I quickly realised that, it wouldn't work for me. I would have to put my child into the care system for at least 6 weeks.

However, about a month later, a social worker visited me and continued to talk to me about adoption. I was interested to learn more, but never at any point consented to adoption. When I went into labour, I soon realised that a decision had been made that I wasn't keeping my baby. I was treated brutally, and my baby was pulled out of me with forceps and removed as I was stitched up with no anesthetic. I thought that it was a mistake, and it would all be cleared up when I could speak to the social worker. When she appeared, early the following morning, it became clear that, there was no mistake, and if I resisted adoption, my baby would remain in care for as long as I fought them.

Many years later, I learned that my baby was given to a teacher who had been seconded to the same social work department. She told me that at a pre Christmas lunch, she had been given strong and unmistakable hints that she was about to get a baby to adopt. My son was born on New Year's Day. This was how forced adoption looked in Scotland in the late 70s.

My story is far from unique for that era, as I discovered when I began to make contact for the first time with other mothers. For many of us, societal judgement and parental disapproval played no role in what happened to us. We and our sons and daughters were victims of actors who were state funded - local authority social workers and medical staff of the National Health Service.

In earlier years following WW2, family doctors commonly referred single pregnant women to mother and baby homes. These were run by church and voluntary organisations, but evidence of how these were funded by the government and how they collaborated with government departments to develop adoption policies and practice, is coming to light. There was a different brand of cruelty in allowing mothers limited access to their babies in nurseries for six weeks before separating them, often with no notice. These stories will be familiar to this audience. As the maternity homes started to close in later years, adoption agencies needed a system to separate the babies from mothers, and the NHS and local authority social work departments were already equipped for the task.

Throughout these times, the law stated that a mother could not give consent for her baby to be placed for adoption until 6 weeks after birth. While a law was in place that ensured that mothers could take time to make an informed decision about adoption, the government simultaneously collaborated with charitable organisations in the development of policies and practices that trampled on the rights of mothers and family members. The government backed up the collaboration with funding, and made sure that a model was developed that integrated the functions of adoption agencies, medical staff and social workers.

There are differences between Scots law and UK law, but this social engineering strategy was common to both. While the Scottish government has acknowledged responsibility, as the successor to the non devolved administration of the time, the UK government in Westminster, who are responsible for adoption in England and Wales, have claimed that they played no role and that only society bears responsibility. Adopted people in Scotland have always had access to their original birth certificates. When the Act of Union took place in 1707, Scotland already had established and separate systems of law and education, and that remains the case. Adoption law, when it was being developed in the early 20th C, was under the purview of the Scottish secretary of State, a cabinet minister of the

Presentation continued...

UK government. However, attitudes to illegitimacy and inheritance rights were always different in Scotland from the rest of the UK, and I suspect that this is what caused the difference in the rights of adoptees.

I always knew that, if my son had any of me in him, that he would search, and we were meeting regularly within weeks of his first Facebook message in 2010. Of course, beyond the period of initial euphoria, the difficult questions arose. Why was I adopted? Why didn't you keep me? It was time to look for some help.

Australia has had an enormous influence on the progression of activism in the UK. There was an organisation formed in England in 1995 called Natural Parents Network, and one of the mothers involved in that was actually a Scottish woman who lost her son through past adoption practices in Australia. I can't begin to list the names of the brave, resilient people – mothers and adoptees – who worked for a long time to bring help to those affected by historical forced adoption. In recent times, I have had a number of people mention the support that they received from the online forum run by Origins in Australia, in the early days of the internet. The first mother that I met was Marion McMillan who had formed Origins Scotland. Marion, together with a number of mothers and adopted people in England, had been fighting for an adoption apology for many years. I wasn't involved in those days, but everything that we have achieved today was built on the foundation of those efforts.

In the early 2010s, Veronica Smith, Jean Malloy, Helen Jeffries and others formed MAA, the movement for an adoption apology, and in 2011, Marion and her stalwart husband George, took me to London to meet with them as they held a meeting to discuss petitioning parliament to debate an Early Day Motion on the need for an adoption apology. There was also encouraging support from care experienced and adoptee activists including Phil Frampton, Josie Pearse and Rosie Canning. Personal support at that time, was non-existent and another Australian influence on me came through reading Evelyn Robinson's books. She gave me the language that enabled me to reflect upon my own turmoil. I had never heard of disenfranchised grief. Things began to make some sense. It was gratifying to see Evelyn at the Scottish apology earlier this year.

The most influential event had to be the formal apology delivered by Julia Gillard in 2013. I had been happy to talk to my MP about an apology, to write letters and emails raising awareness of what had happened to myself and others, but until that point, I don't think that I actually believed that it would ever happen anywhere. I could not bring myself to believe that it might. It wasn't long before Marion succeeded in getting a meeting with the Scottish Children's minister. In 2015, she was invited to the parliament building to discuss the need for an apology, as well as mental health support for those affected by adoption.

I was working abroad at that time, however, we learned much later through an FOI request that the minister had been briefed not to agree to an Australian style apology. We also learned that Birthlink, the former adoption agency and holder of the adoption contact

register, had undermined Marion's suggestion that bespoke support services were needed for historic adoptions. The government instead took up their suggestion of holding a couple of training sessions for social workers involved in current adoptions.

In 2016, there was a documentary released that gathered a lot of attention,

and in July 2018, an adjournment debate on The Practice of Forced Adoption in the UK was held in the house of commons. In spite of a lot of emotive words spoken by the small number of MPs attending, there could be no binding vote in such a debate.

The 2013 Australian Commonwealth apology had been covered by Duncan Kennedy when he was the Sydney correspondent for the BBC. In the Spring of 2021, he decided to put together a news report about the movement for an adoption apology in the UK. Veronica Smith wrote to all the mothers and adoptees on her email list, asking them to write a summary of their experience. Duncan selected a representative handful of the stories and requested interviews. I believe that he selected my story because of the clear lack of family or societal pressure. All of the coercion in my case, came from government funded institutions. I wasn't included in his first bulletin report that went out in late May of 2021. However, I was asked to comment on a local BBC Scotland news programme. The following day, an official from the Scottish government contacted Veronica and asked her to arrange a meeting with the Children and



Marion McMillan with First Minister Nicola Sturgeon

Presentation continued...

Families minister, a successor of the minister who met Marion.

When the First Minister was questioned in parliament later that week, she was able to comment that the government was meeting with the campaigners to determine what they were looking for. A number of other individuals then contacted the directorate to request meetings with the Children and Families minister. When Veronica asked me to step in for her at the meeting, I and the other Scottish mothers had to put together some recommendations very quickly. Fortunately, we had the 20 Australian Senate Inquiry recommendations as a starting point. We also had the VANISH submission to the Victorian Inquiry from June 2020 which suggested opportunities for improvement and identified some refinements which were particularly resonant for us. We didn't want services to be delivered by bodies with connections to past or forced adoption either. It is also worth noting that the UK, Scotland included, is one of the few countries that still enforces adoption without parental consent, albeit in cases of child protection and with clear legal safeguards.

Soon after the meeting with the Minister in June, 2021, our small group was invited to meet with a newly appointed Historical Adoption Policy Manager. It was clear that the Scottish government was taking our recommendations seriously and wanted to have ongoing discussions about implementing some or all of them. We still didn't know if an apology would be one of them. There had been no formal inquiry, but we had given the government a roadmap, as if there had been one. There was a need to verify that our experiences and positions were represented more widely than our small number. The government then set up an online consultation for individuals to submit evidence. Within a few weeks, they already accepted that action would be necessary and without waiting for the consultation to complete, they allocated funds to pay for the setting up of bespoke peer support and a scoping study to research the availability of services and training requirements for medical professionals.

The peer support is almost ready to go live, and we are expecting to see the scoping study report published

imminently. At that stage we will know how much work will be needed to craft person-centred policy going forward. We are hopeful of being included in negotiations. Mothers in Scotland are keen to lobby for identifying information to be made available. We have elderly mothers and fathers who have never found the child that they were separated from. They are burdened with fear and suspicion that they might be dead.

Scotland actually led the world on making original birth certificates available to adoptees. In the Senate Inquiry evidence, there is a submission of a Human Rights Discussion paper, dated July, 1984, in which there is discourse about the lack of complaint from Scottish mothers about privacy when their adopted children

contact them. Now Scotland is behind Australia in discriminating against mothers by refusing to allow them to know what happened to the baby that was taken from them. Adopted people in Scotland are keen to discuss having the option of discharging their adoptions.

The purpose of a Churchill Fellowship is to travel to other countries, which demonstrate good practice, and then bring that knowledge back to influence policy development. In

Scotland that would look like an examination of how concrete measures were implemented following the Commonwealth apology. Finding what hasn't worked being just as important as finding out what has worked well.

At the UK level, our friends are still waiting for an apology. When Scotland opened the online consultation, the JCHR initiated an inquiry into the violation of the right to family life in England and Wales between 1945 and 1976. The Committee found that the rights of mothers and adoptees had been violated, in spite of the fact that the test case in the European Court of HR took place in 1979. They made a number of recommendations including that the UK government should issue a formal apology. Further recommendations were made to improve some of the intermediary services that are currently available.

In terms of mental health provision, access to records and other areas, those recommendations fell



Presentation continued...

considerably short of the ones that we took to the Scottish government. However, the UK government has refused to give a formal apology, stating that it bears no responsibility as society caused the abuses. This has caused hurt and deep disappointment. While there is no obvious next step to challenge this position, some are hopeful that a general election next year may bring about a changed approach. Meanwhile historians such as Michael Lambert at Lancaster University are vocal in their support and are already identifying evidence that counters the UK government position.

As we seek to walk in your footsteps, I have been honoured and privileged by the generosity that all of you have shown me and my peers. The knowledge that was shared with me at last year's 10th anniversary commemoration has been passed back to officials at the Scottish government. They really wanted to know about it. Scottish mothers have been invited to online support meetings and AGMs. As I prepared for this Fellowship, I read about the journey of the Mothers in ARMs in the book by Meg Hale. So much of the content mirrors our own experiences of learning how to navigate the corridors of power, to alter long held perceptions about adoption.

Thank you all for your kindness, and please feel assured that you have had an impact beyond your state and national boundaries. After all, last year, my son and I were the only people in the Victorian parliament dining room who hadn't received an apology. That is no longer the case.....

On 22nd of March this year, our First Minister Nicola Sturgeon offered a formal apology. She said...

"So today, as First Minister on behalf of the Scottish Government, I say directly:

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."

Redress, Limitations Act and Civil Cases in Victoria

Following the redress scheme announcement in October we have received many calls from members and service users asking for more details about various aspects of the redress scheme and what is happening with regards to the statute of limitations, a legal advice service, redress for adoptees and other inquiry recommendations.

We have also been receiving calls from individuals who are pursuing civil cases against the institutions responsible for their forced adoption, seeking independent legal advice. We have been concerned about these callers, particularly those who are vulnerable, however VANISH is not able to provide legal advice.

In November we met with Judy Courtin who some of you may know was the first Chair of VANISH. Judy is now a lawyer representing victim/survivors of childhood institutional abuse. We were joined by Natasha Crowe, a barrister also working in the area of institutional abuse. Judy and Natasha both lost their only child to adoption and have a keen interest in justice for those affected.

VANISH quoted Judy in our submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoption in Victoria.

When discussing the status of the law around forced adoptions, Judy and Natasha said that someone may be eligible for redress and still bring a civil claim for compensation for the psychiatric harm caused by a forced adoption.

The hospital the mother gave birth in, the agency arranging the adoption and the mother and babies' homes all owed a duty of care to mothers and their babies which may have been breached by practices such as removing the child immediately following birth, administering medication without consent, obtaining the mothers' consent when she was not yet 18 or by duress for example by withholding medical treatment from the baby.

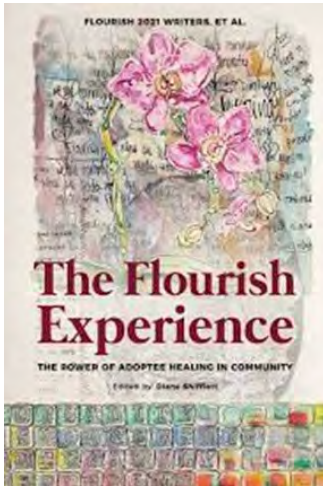
Judy and Natasha said there is a need to run cases, to test a legal challenge in these civil claims, noting that the challenge is the Statute of Limitations, which can be overcome when a Court determines it is just and reasonable to do so. At the same time as running cases, they said it is important to put pressure on the government to change the laws such that there would be no time limit for these claims.

VANISH will continue to advocate and encourages individuals to advocate to their MPs, the Attorney General and the Premier.

New Books in the Library

The Flourish Experience - the power of adoptee healing in community

Edited by Dianne Shiftlett



This book contains a collection of writings and artwork by a community of adopted people who participated in a class with Anne Heffron and Pam Cordano in 2021 called Flourish.

The driving force behind the book was to both create a record of our time together and to say to other adopted people...You are not alone. We see you. After a year of hearing the commonalities at the root

of our experiences as adopted persons, feeling the power of writing and sharing our truths, we recognize the potency and capacity for growth, healing and a greater sense of agency generated in community. Just as we shared them over a year together in Flourish, here we offer you our stories, thoughts, feelings and experiences to educate, inspire, spark discussion, and offer connection.

Source: theflourishexperience.com

Sunlight on Shards: Adoption From the Inside Out

by Bernadette Rymer and Thérèse Curtis



In 1969, Naomi Morrissey, the sixth of eleven children raised in a traditional Australian Catholic family, became pregnant at age 19. In order to hide their shame, her parents uprooted their family and moved to Canada for six months, where Naomi was placed in a home for unmarried mothers. After being forced to relinquish her baby for adoption, the family returned to Australia as if this event never occurred. She and her family didn't talk

about this for decades.

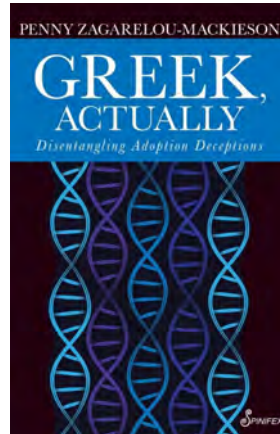
SUNLIGHT ON SHARDS is Naomi's account of her life-long struggle to emerge from this silence, guilt, and grief about the loss of her child.

Bernadette Rymer is a mother who lost her only child to forced adoption. Thérèse Curtis is a mother of five children including two intercountry adoptees.

Source: [Bernadette Rymer](http://BernadetteRymer.com)

Greek, Actually

By Penny Zagarelou-Mackieson



All I've ever wanted is the deep sense of belonging associated with knowing and being connected with who and where I've come from.

Penny Zagarelou-Mackieson always knew she was adopted. But she didn't know she was swapped at birth.

After a lifetime grappling with issues of identity and belonging, Penny discovered that her natural mother, according to her adoption

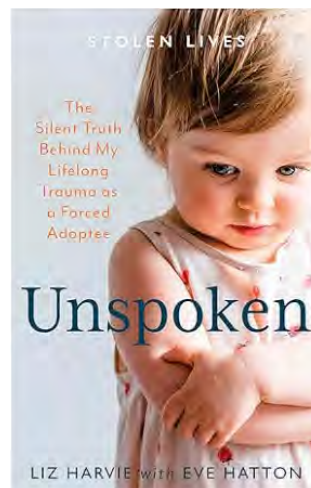
records, is genetically unrelated to her. Penny's family reunion of two decades was based on falsehoods. Her ancestry is Greek, not Celtic-Anglo as she was led to believe.

So begins Penny's new quest to learn about her origins. This remarkable story of one woman's determination to uncover the truth and restore her dignity reveals human rights violations inherent in adoption.

Source: Booktopia

Unspoken

By Liz Harvie with Eve Hatton (UK)



In 1974, at just eight weeks old, Liz Harvie - born Claire Elaine Watts - was adopted and renamed Elizabeth. Although brought up in a 'perfect' household, the trauma of being taken from her biological mother never left Liz.

Aged twenty-eight, Liz reconnected with her birth mother and finally learned the shocking truth. Yvonne had not abandoned her. A social worker had snatched her ten-day-old baby from her arms. Liz became one of

185,000 victims of forced adoption between 1949 and 1976 in England and Wales. As a young, unmarried mum, Yvonne was deemed unfit as a parent by the government, churches, adoption agencies - and her father. Liz and Yvonne are still struggling to cope with their devastating separation. As Liz says, 'The trauma of being a forced adoptee is lifelong.'

Source: Goodreads

Upcoming VANISH Support Groups

All groups are for adults 18+

ALBURY - WODONGA

Albury Library Museum, 540 Kiewa Street

ADOPTED PERSONS 10.30am—12.30pm

February 10

MIXED GROUP 10.30am - 12.30pm

(Adopted Persons, Natural and Adoptive Parents)

March 9

BALLARAT

Eastwood Leisure Complex, 20 Eastwood Street

ADOPTED PERSONS 2pm—4pm

January 20, February 17 March 16

*Please register to reserve your place

MELBOURNE

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

ADOPTED PERSONS 7.30—9.30pm

January 23, February 27, March 26

*Please register to reserve your place

ZOOM

ADOPTED PERSONS 6.30—8.30pm

February 14

*Please register to reserve your place

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

Support over the Holiday Season

For support when VANISH is closed, please call one of the services below:

Lifeline - Telephone crisis support and suicide prevention services - 13 11 14

Beyond Blue - Telephone counselling - 1300 224 636

Men's Line Australia - 1300 78 99 78

Respect - Sexual assault, domestic and family violence phone counselling service 1800 737 732

Suicide Call Back Service - 1300 659 467

SuicideLine Victoria - 1300 651 251

FriendsLine - for a friendly chat (not a crisis line) 1800 424 287 (1800 4 CHATS)

Would you like to contribute to an upcoming edition of VOICE?

If you would, please submit your original pieces to info@vanish.org.au

- POEMS
- LETTERS
- NEWS ITEMS

- BOOK & FILM REVIEWS
- ART
- PHOTOGRAPHS

We will then reply letting you know if and when it will be published



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