



The back entrance to Kilmany Park, from which the boys used to come and go.

October 2024

Uniting Heritage

For past residents, people affected
by adoption, and their families.



Uniting is the community services organisation
of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania.

Uniting

Founding agencies

The founding agencies of Uniting Vic.Tas provided out-of-home care in Victoria. Under each agency listed below are the names of orphanages, children's homes, family group homes, foster care and adoption providers that were run by the former denominations of the Uniting Church – Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational. Uniting Vic.Tas continues to provide some of these services today.

Connections: Methodist Babies' Home (1929-1974), Presbyterian Babies' Home (1928-1977), Copelen Street Family Centre (1974-1991), Canterbury Family Centre (1977-2000), Copelen Child and Family Services (1991-1998).

UnitingCare Gippsland: Kilmany Park Farm Home for Boys, Sale (1923-1978), Kilmany Family Care (family group homes), East Gippsland (1978-2002), Kilmany UnitingCare (2001-2010).

UnitingCare Harrison: Arthur Harrison Boys' Home, Hawthorn (1960-1977), Harrison House Youth Services (also known as Harrison Youth Hostel), Melbourne eastern suburbs (1982-1994).

UnitingCare Kildonan: Kildonan, North Melbourne (1890-1937), Kildonan, Elgar Road, Burwood (1937-1961), Kildonan Homes for Children, Melbourne's eastern and inner suburbs (1961-1993), Kildonan Child and Family Services, office in Whittlesea/Epping (1993-2007).

UnitingCare Lentara: Methodist Homes for Children, Cheltenham (1891-1953), Orana, the Peace Memorial Homes for Children, Burwood (1953-1988).

Wesley Mission Victoria: South Yarra Home (1900-1936), Tally Ho Boys' Training Farm, Burwood (1903-1986), Tally Ho Youth Services, Melbourne eastern suburbs (1986-1990s), Memorial Girls' Home, Fairfield (1922-1984), Moreland Hall, Brunswick (1936-1969), Lincoln House, Central Mission Hostel for Boys, King Street, Melbourne (c1939-1950), Wesley Youth Services, Melbourne eastern suburbs (1986-2017).

UnitingCare Wimmera: Wimmera Family Homes/Wimmera Community Care, Horsham/Stawell (1979-2000), UnitingCare Wimmera (2000-2017).

UnitingCare Wyndham: Werribee Support and Housing (also known as Bridges Foster Care Inner West), Werribee and Melbourne (1982-2017).

UnitingCare Victoria and Tasmania: Dhurringile Rural Training Farm, Tatura (1951-1964), Regent House Hostel for Girls, Elsternwick (1966-1977).



Bronwyn's message

Welcome to the second edition of the Uniting Heritage for 2024.

If you drive about 5 kilometres out of Sale in Gippsland you will come across a 'hidden gem' – Kilmany Park Estate. A beautifully restored 1840s mansion, Kilmany Park has played host to many of the region's most successful and memorable occasions, including a visit from the Duke of York in 1901.

But there is another chapter in the story of Kilmany Park Estate that is rarely told. In 1923 the Presbyterian church purchased the homestead and its surrounding 81 hectares for use as a welfare home for boys, and it remained a boy's home for 52 years.

A memorial to those boys was recently placed at the Uniting Church in the main street of Sale. Along with the Moderator of the Uniting Church Rev David Fotheringham, I was honoured to join some of those past residents and their families for the unveiling of a plaque which commemorates Kilmany Park's history. You can read more about this event on page 5.

At the end of January we will farewell Catriona Milne, who is retiring as Manager of the Uniting Heritage Service. We are grateful for her courage and compassion in establishing and leading the Heritage Service over many years. Everyone is welcome to join us in farewelling Catriona at afternoon tea to be held at Uniting's office in 130 Lonsdale Street in Melbourne on Wednesday 29 January 2025. If you would like to attend, please contact Sally Pfeiffer via sally.pfeiffer@vt.uniting.org.

We are pleased to announce that Chris Wade, whom many of you know, will take on the role of Manager of the Heritage Service from February 2025. Chris is an experienced counsellor who also has deep knowledge of records from his time working at the State Library. With his personal warmth and empathy, Chris will manage and lead the work of the Heritage Service.



Bronwyn Pike
Chief Executive Officer

Tributes

Since the last newsletter we have learned of the death of the people named below. Our thoughts go out to families and friends.

- † Evelyn Gardner (formerly Evelyn Gabel)
- † Peter Ceely
- † Andrew (Andy) Forsyth
- † James (Jim) Sherlock

If you would like to let us know about anyone who has died, please contact Catriona Milne.



Updates from the Heritage Service

Uniting to say sorry

Uniting is drafting an apology to the Forgotten Australians who lived in homes run by the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches.

We have been seeking the views of former residents about how this response can be meaningful. We did this by writing letters to nearly 600 people who have contacted our service, asking for their ideas and thoughts. We received responses in writing, over the phone, and at a workshop for which we are very thankful. At time of writing, we are still working through the responses.

We have set the date for the apology for Tuesday 26 November, to be held at 130 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne. Everyone who receives this newsletter, along with their family and friends, is welcome to attend. If you would like to attend, please let Catriona Milne know via catriona.milne@vt.uniting.org or telephone **0402 969 621**.

Uniting intends to make an apology to people affected by forced adoption in 2025.

Family searching workshop

In July, Alan, one of the Heritage Service volunteers, along with Catriona and Chris from the Heritage team, held a workshop to share some of the basics of family searching and ways to locate people and develop family trees.

We enjoyed meeting with people who were interested to learn about family searching. Some feedback from attendees included:

“Thank you. My daughter and I really enjoyed the workshop last Saturday. We have been re-enthused.”

“I found the day very informative and helpful!”

“The presentation in regard to DNA especially was a great assistance in understanding DNA and the technology.”

This was a paid event that helps support our work and we hope to run another workshop. If you are interested in attending, please let us know.

Orana reunion

The annual Methodist Homes for Children and Orana, the Peace Memorial Homes for Children, reunion took place on 25 April. Past residents and staff gathered again at Orana’s Rentoul Hall in Burwood to share stories and to celebrate a past resident’s significant birthday.



Farewell Bec and welcome Sally

On 30 April, our Records and Administration Officer Rebecca Liston farewelled the Heritage Service team. A member of the Heritage Service since the start of 2020, we are grateful for Bec's contribution, particularly in transcribing, digitising and indexing records so they are easier to locate and share. We wish Bec all the best for the future.

We are delighted to welcome Sally Pfeiffer who has joined the team as an Administration Officer on a part-time basis.



Kilmany Park commemorative plaque

On 14 September, past residents of the Kilmany Park Farm Home for Boys and their families gathered in Sale, Gippsland to unveil a commemorative plaque acknowledging the Home and the boys who lived there.

The plaque, which is located at St Columba's Uniting Church on the corner of Raymond and Macalister Streets in Sale, remembers the nearly 1,000 boys aged from 8 to 16 who lived at Kilmany Park across more than 50 years. The words inscribed were carefully chosen by past residents to allow every person to feel recognised regardless of their individual experiences at the Home.

The Moderator of the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Rev David Fotheringham and Uniting CEO, Bronwyn Pike spoke, as did some of the men who had lived there as boys. The plaque was unveiled by the oldest and youngest members of the working group that drove this project which took many years of hard work to be completed.

It's hoped the plaque will provide a quiet space for remembrance, healing, reflection and learning where people can visit and have a tangible

reminder of all those who lived at the Home and their families.

As one former resident said the unveiling of the plaque felt like a funeral that enabled him to bury the past. He said that he had waited 54 years for his time living at Kilmany Park to be acknowledged and remembered. He feels that the presence of the plaque is finally enabling him to move on from this part his life.

We are grateful to St Columba's Uniting Church for their welcome and generosity. We are especially grateful to Danny Phelan who sourced, prepared and placed the stone upon which the plaque sits for all his time and effort.

Request from Chris Ward

Chris 'Christmas' Ward was resident at Kilmany Park in the 1950s who now lives in Adelaide. He is interested in any memories or history of the Home. If you have some you'd like to share, please contact him by email on ceejay@outlook.com.au.





The children from Cheltenham

Information compiled by Heritage Service volunteer Judy.

When the Heritage Service team and volunteers toured some former sites of homes, volunteer Judy was particularly moved by a stone at Pioneer Cemetery that named the children who had died while living at the Methodist Homes for Children at Cheltenham. For many months she researched these children's history, here she shares what she learnt about them.

In 2022 the Uniting Heritage team visited the sites of former Methodist and Presbyterian out-of-home care facilities. A very poignant location was Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery, where 18 young people from the Methodist Homes for Children were buried between 1894 and 1925.

Although a bronze plaque lists the names and dates [of the death] of the children, we felt the

need to further commemorate them. We decided to search our historical records for information about each child.

The 18 children included 9 girls and 9 boys. The youngest, Ethel, died at 2 months. She was born at Carlton Refuge, a home for single mothers.

The oldest, James, succumbed to heart disease at 21. He came to the Homes, 'destitute' at aged 7. He later worked on farms and became a gardener. James also lived for a time with the family of a member of the Ladies' Committee, the group that oversaw the Homes. He had maintained close ties with them throughout his life, and the Committee ensured he had a proper burial.

Eleven children died before reaching their second birthdays. Many succumbed to complications of diarrhoea. Sadly, this was commonplace in the early 1900s; deaths of children under 4 years accounted for more than 25% of all deaths in Australia. Diarrhoeal disease was often the cause.

Tuberculosis (TB) claimed 3 of the Homes' older children. At that time TB was a major cause of death in Australia, ranking first among females and second among males. Indeed, the first child to die in the Homes succumbed to a form of TB in 1894.

Herbie, an orphan from Ballarat, was 7 when he died. He had been in care for 2 years. When it seemed he would not survive, the Committee purchased the 'piece of ground for our children' at the cemetery. As a charitable gesture, a local funeral business conducted a service for the boy and offered to provide coffins in the future.

Tuberculosis also claimed one of the older children. Ada was 11 years old when she was admitted in a 'greatly neglected' state in 1917 following the death of her mother. She later worked for a family in Ararat and was apparently well cared for.

Unfortunately, Ada contracted TB at aged 17. She spent 2 years at Janefield Sanatorium in Bundoora but died in 1925. She was the last child to be buried at Cheltenham. (A few years later the cemetery reached capacity and was no longer used.)

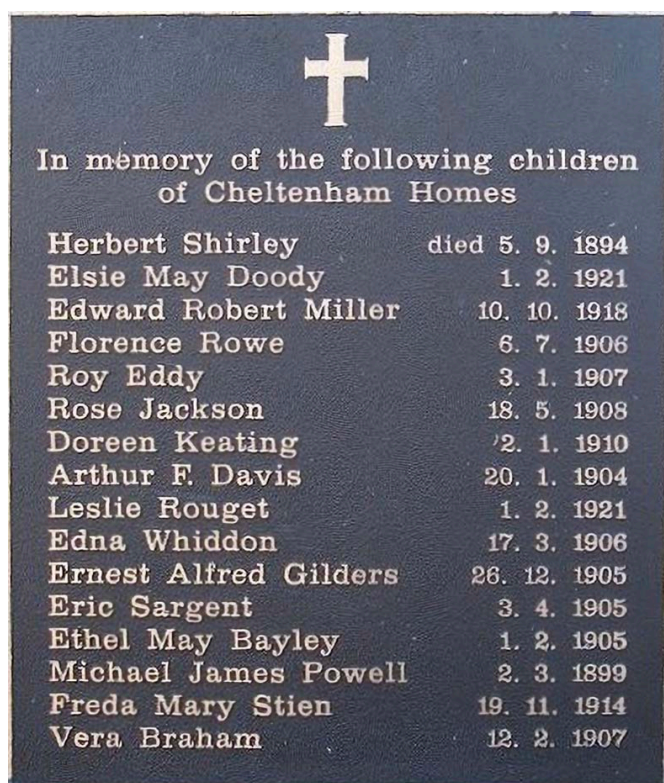
As with Ada, children were often admitted after their mothers had died. Rose (aged 2) and Arthur (6 months), both from Maryborough but unrelated, came into care following their mothers' deaths. Both women left 6 other children. Rose died of TB and Arthur of malnutrition. Another child, Elsie, was 4 when admitted with her 2 sisters after their mother died near Bendigo.

Between 1892 and 1909 the Homes cared for nearly 400 children. Many, like Arthur, were unwell when admitted. Staff diligently monitored their health, called in doctors and admitted children to hospital.

Following the deaths of several babies in 1906 the Homes effectively stopped admitting children under 2 until 1929. Acknowledging the complexity of their care, a separately staffed facility, the Methodist Babies' Home, was opened that year.

Although reading about the circumstances of the 18 children has been challenging, it has been a great honour to compile their stories, and to share some of them here. We hope our research will also be helpful in the future should relatives of the children contact us.

The former site of the Methodist Homes for Children in Cheltenham now hosts Southland Shopping Centre. A plaque at the Centre remembers the service given to children.



A note from the Heritage Service team

We have had contact already with some of the families of these children. If anyone reading this believes their relative may have died as a child there, you are most welcome to get in touch with Chris Wade, Lisa D'Acri or Catriona Milne.



Jennifer's story

Yesterday I was given carefully collected documents that illuminated a rather fragmented past. I found information about “a nice little toddler, aged two years and one month”. I learnt details about the cascade of disasters that had overtaken my family by early 1949. Of my father, still desperately ill in “Stonnington”, recovering from a major stroke, and my mother, suffering from extremely high blood pressure and requiring total bed rest.

I was handed letters that tracked my movements as a tiny child in a country town, living with parents who were no longer able to care for me, to staying in the Presbyterian Babies' Home (PBH) in Canterbury.

For the first time, I could see the efforts that were made along the way to help my family and to understand something of the trauma that had brought us to such a state. I could read the letter from the Presbyterian minister, in Traralgon, stating that, “I have good reason to believe that this family is about on the bread line ... The mother has appealed to me for help”.

I could see, listed, the 4 months my mother had waited in hospital to give me a chance at life, a daily risk to her survival and mine. Of the huge toll that this eventually took on my mother's health and the fracturing of our family. Reading my mother's letter to the matron, telling her that my father “misses Jen and talks frequently about her”; the father who died just 9 years later.

For the first time, I found out the true identity of the person who took me to the Babies' Home: the ‘aunt’ whose kindness and love sustained me until the end of her life, the person to whom my parents entrusted me. An unbroken thread of care, steadfast through many changes.

From 1982, when I first enquired about my history, until now in 2024, I have been treated with such kindness, respect, and empathy from Uniting staff. The disjointed scraps of knowledge have become coherent, understandable. Little pieces of the puzzle that have made all the difference. The sensitivity, compassion and understanding that I have been shown by Catriona Milne, Manager Uniting Heritage Service, has validated my experiences. My history has been expanded, encompassing kindness and care, not just dislocation and loss.

I deeply appreciate the folders of material that I have been given: my admission form, the letters (my mother, Matron, the Reverends – G.L. Richardson, local Presbyterian Minister, and P. L. Forster, the manager), the doctor's clean bill of health, my foster care file, and photographs from the era. All assembled with keen insight, warmth and understanding.

Catriona, thank you so much for the unhurried hours of time you gave to meet my husband, Sam, and myself, to discuss and begin to process this new information. We appreciated the delicious morning tea and lunch you provided.

My dad Leigh's adoption story

By Julie Duffus

In 1957, when my father was giving a speech at his wedding, he looked across at his parents and thanked them for looking after him for 23 years.

As it turned out, George and Gladys Chislett had adopted Dad when he was three years old and had actually only looked after him for 20 years, not 23, but Dad was one of the few people in the room who didn't know this.

Even Mum knew, having been informed by a cleaning lady at the hospital where she worked as a nurse, who thought she ought to know about the man she was about to marry. Mum chose to wait until after the wedding to tell Dad in case he didn't cope.

Dad was stoic, showing great fortitude over his life and coped, in a fashion, but that 20-year long fiction, and the trauma of abandonment and separation from his primary carer in the first three years of his life, impacted on us all in some way down through the years.

Dad didn't want to upset his adoptive parents, and my parents tried to discreetly get information about his background from government departments. Of course it was impossible in the late 1950s, the attitude being that the records were kept private for everyone's good, and that adopted people should be grateful someone gave them a home. Someone actually said that to Mum and Dad.

Mum then asked Gladys if she knew where Dad came from. According to Gladys, Dad didn't come from a foundling home, nor was he illegitimate. The story she told was that Dad's father was killed in a car accident and his mother died of a broken heart. We eventually found that none of that was true, except maybe the bit about the broken heart.

In the 1980s the Labor Party came into power in Victoria and the Community Services Minister, Pauline Toner, became instrumental in changing legislation to allow adult adoptees access to their adoption records.

Dad applied for his information and there was great excitement in our house when his records arrived in the post. Dad finally knew who he was

and where he had been for those missing 3 years. (As an aside, Dad, who was a farmer who had never voted Labor in his life, later saw Pauline Toner in a shopping centre in Melbourne and personally thanked her.)

The Methodist Babies Home nurses' notes were scant, but we mused and chewed over every word. They described a sad little boy who wouldn't eat and who was found several times at night wandering around the bathrooms crying.

Heart wrenching also, was realising Dad had a birth mother, Hazel, who loved and cared for him as long as she possibly could, despite being a single mother during the Great Depression while living in a boarding house in what was then the slums of Carlton. Hazel relinquished Dad to the Methodist Babies Home the day before she was admitted to the Greenvale Tuberculosis Sanitarium and died 3 months later.

Dad's guardian from Methodist Babies Home told the court that no one ever inquired after the said infant, despite Dad's birth parents both having large extended families. The sorrow of reading those records lingers in our family.

Admission book records recently provided by Chris at Uniting Heritage indicate that Dad's admission was at first temporary, and Dad probably was only made permanent after Hazel died.



We had always wondered if Hazel had seen Methodist Babies Home as a stop gap and had fully intended to come back and collect Dad, assuming beyond hope that she would get well enough to do so, and the records seems to show this was the case.

Back to the 1980s again, and after seeing the records for the first time we were able to establish some facts and bit of a chronology. Mum did an amazing job of sleuthing and, without the aid of the internet, found some of Hazel's nephews and nieces. Anyone in the family who were older, and who might have known Hazel better, had long passed on.

The nephews and nieces were all surprised to find that they had another cousin but were warm and welcoming and as forthcoming as they could be with what information they had. They told us that Hazel had been married to an English gardener, Charles Robinson, and had a little boy who died at 2 years of age while that family were living in Carlton.

Dad was conceived 8 months after his older brother's death, and despite Charles appearing on Dad's original birth certificate, Hazel had told Methodist Babies Home that she was separated from her husband and that he was not Dad's father. We don't know why Hazel put the wrong father on Dad's birth certificate, but she did provide some clues to the real father's identity.

Hazel's usual address of Alliance Street in Clunes, where she was living with her sister when she conceived Dad, was a clue, and Dad's name Leigh, which was unusual for the time, seemed significant. Over the years Mum and I spent hours and hours investigating and making inquiries, writing letters, always including a self-addressed envelope, ever hopeful of an informative response.



There were trips to Clunes and the Clunes Museum, the State Library and the Public Records of Victoria. Most people and organisations were as helpful as they could be, the old attitudes to adoption having mostly changed, but still no one knew who Dad's father was.

Dad died in his early 60s and never got to find out the identity of his father.

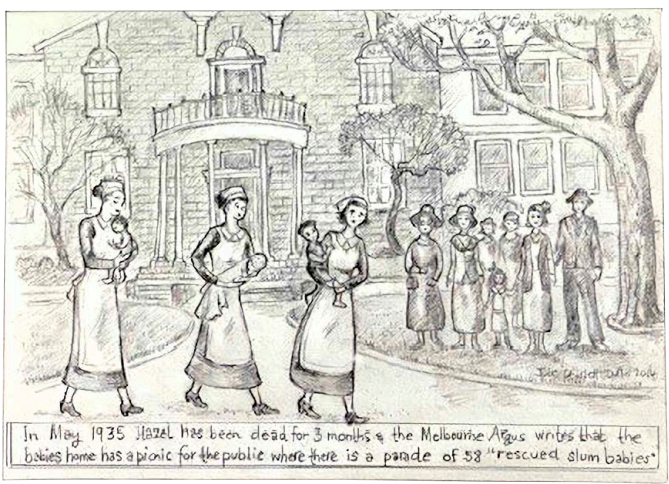
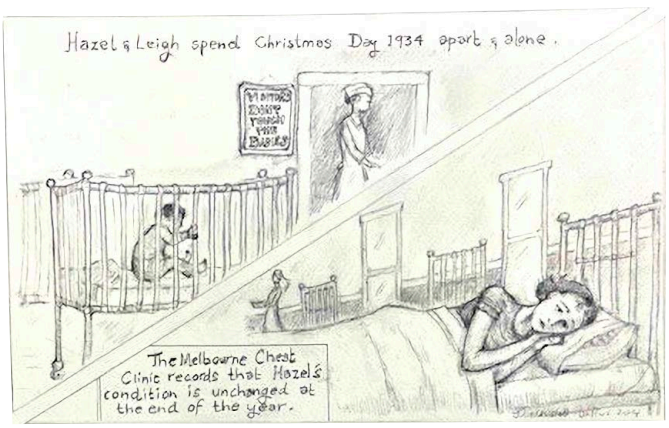
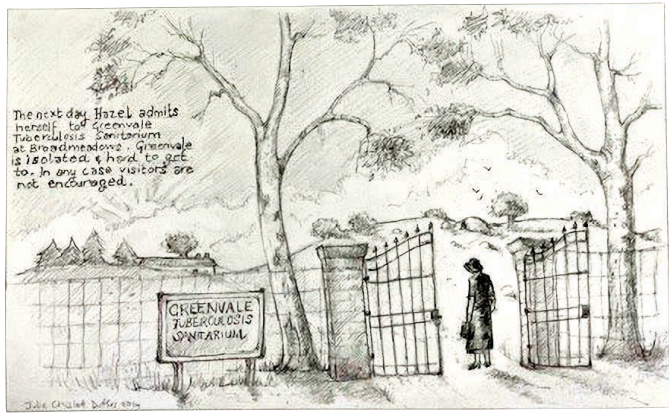
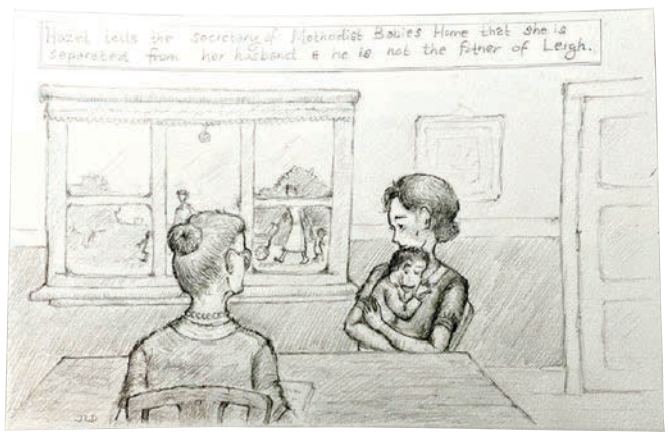
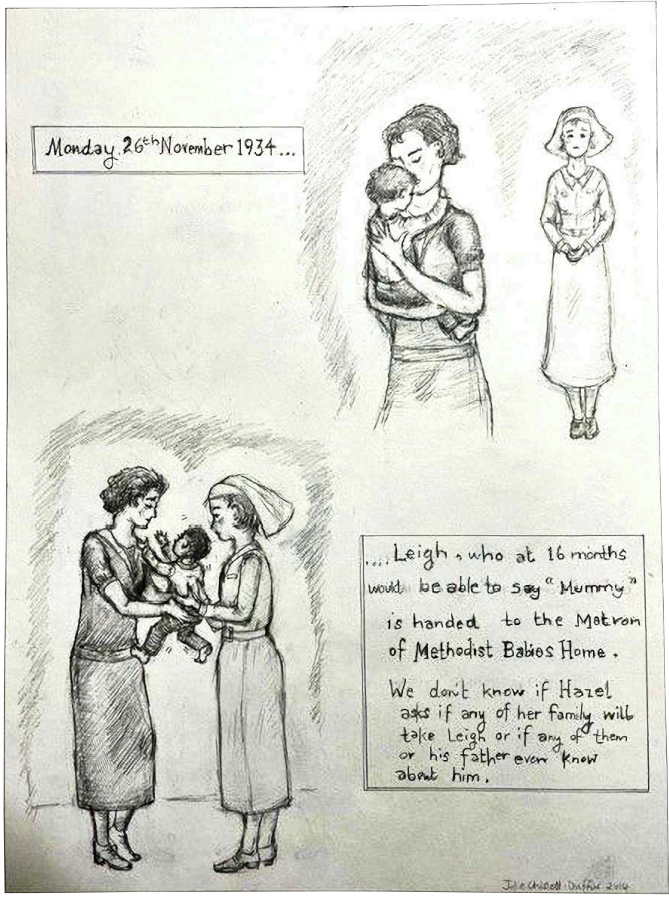
Then DNA testing became cheap, popular and widely accepted. Some of the family sent off DNA to be tested and we started trawling the public DNA websites. After a couple of years of building family trees, approaching DNA matches via the DNA websites and being side-tracked by red herrings, we kept in view anyone called Leigh, and anyone with connections to Clunes.

A man named Percy Leigh Jones who lived in Alliance Street was a possibility and when I found his newspaper obituary stating that he died in a tuberculosis facility called Dunstan Chalet, he went to the top of the short list. Throwing caution to the wind I approached Percy's niece via a public website and this gracious, elderly lady at once offered to have her DNA tested.

Two of her uncles (they turned out to also be Dad's uncles) had been killed in France in WW1. Only one body had been found, as she said, "They're still digging them up and my DNA might help". The DNA results came back, and Percy's niece was delighted that we were predicted to be first cousins once removed and that her mother's side now had more family.

For us, Mum and Dad's descendants, it's hard to describe the feelings, the relief of finally filling in that empty family tree branch after so long, a feeling of an injustice somewhat righted and a feeling of wholeness.

"With no photos of Dad from those missing 3 years and only one blurry photo of Hazel, I started work on a graphic novel with drawings of how events might have rolled out"



Other services outside of Uniting



The Care Leavers Australasia Network

The Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN) is a support and advocacy group for people brought up in care away from their family as state wards or children raised in children's homes, orphanages, other institutions, or in foster care. CLAN also assists family members of people who were placed in care. The founding members of CLAN are both care leavers who have been involved in awareness-raising and advocacy about the issues facing people who experienced out-of-home care as children.

T 1800 008 774

E support@clan.org.au



Open Place

Open Place is a support and advocacy service that provides direct assistance for people who grew up in Victorian orphanages and homes. This service helps people who identify as Forgotten Australians to deal with the legacy of their childhood experiences and provides support to improve their health and well-being.

T 1800 779 379

E info@openplace.org.au



VANISH

VANISH provides search and support services to adults affected by adoption including natural mothers and fathers, adopted persons and their family members.

T 1300 826 474

E info@vanish.org.au

Support our work

The Heritage Service mostly relies on non-government funding. We greatly appreciate any donations that help further our work and secure this service into the future.

You can donate online and specify that your donation goes to the Heritage Services by visiting unitingvictas.org.au/donate

Get in touch

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About Uniting

Uniting Vic.Tas is a not-for-profit organisation working alongside local communities delivering a range of services for over 100 years.

The Heritage Service has been established for past residents and their families who were affected by adoption or who received out-of-home care provided by, Methodist and Uniting Churches. We help people access information about themselves or their family member's time in care and support them in their journey to better understand their past.

We work in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's First Peoples and as the traditional owners and custodians of this land.

We celebrate diversity and value the lived experience of people of every ethnicity, faith, age, disability, culture, language, gender identity and sexual orientation. We welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender diverse and non-binary, intersex and queer (LGBTIQA+) people at our services. We pledge to provide inclusive and non-discriminatory services.

Learn more

unitingvictas.org.au

