Part 2 Tracing the History

C h a p t e r 4 Victoria

> *Informal and formal foster care arrangements and holiday placements supposedly for a temporary period, were frequently the beginning of a permanent separation of Aboriginal children from their family and community. Some children placed informally, were passed from one foster home to another, names were changed and the child's whereabouts 'lost' to their parents and unknown to welfare authorities. Some of these placements may have led to the granting of an adoption order with parents' consents being dispensed with on the ground of whereabouts unknown, particularly as there was no restriction prior to the 1964 legislation as to who could arrange adoptions (Adoption Legislation Review Committee Report 1983 page 59).*

Segregation – 1835-1886

From 1835, when the European occupation of Victoria commenced, until the 1880s government policy was one of segregation of Indigenous people on reserves. These were mainly controlled by missions.

Between 1838 and 1849 Victoria was the site of an unsuccessful 'Protectorate' experiment in which government appointed protectors attempted to persuade Indigenous people to 'settle down to a life of farming'. From 1837 missions established schools, attempting to wean the children away from 'tribal influences'. Protectors and missionaries alike had Aboriginal 'orphans' living with them.

In 1860 a 'Central Board Appointed to Watch over the Interests of Aborigines', the first of its kind in Australia, was appointed to consider how the government should deal with its Indigenous population. The Board commissioned reports which,

> *… disclosed a state of affairs almost everywhere which could only be described as appalling. Torn from their way of life by advancing settlement, they lived under wretched conditions, drunkenness, prostitution, and begging being apparently almost universal. Tuberculosis and other diseases were rife, and the early extinction of the race was freely predicted … The census indicated that at that time they numbered about 2,341 (McLean 1957).*

The Board was given the task of overseeing the establishment of

reserves to which Aboriginal people were to be confined. By 1867 it was managing reserves at Framlingham and Coranderrk, had indirect control of a number of missions which received some government assistance and administered a number of small reserves and ration depots. A school was constructed on the Coranderrk reserve with separate living quarters for the children. The manager of Coranderrk travelled around the Indigenous communities removing 'neglected' children for the school although he had no lawful power to do so until 1869.

The *Aborigines Protection Act 1869* established the Aborigines Protection Board and set the pattern for subsequent laws applying to Indigenous people in Victoria. It contained very few substantive provisions but instead authorised the making of regulations on a wide range of subjects including 'the care, custody and education of the children of aborigines'. As regulations do not attract the kind of Parliamentary scrutiny and publicity that occurs with proposed statutes, major decisions about the treatment of Indigenous children could go unnoticed.

One of the regulations allowed for 'the removal of any Aboriginal child neglected by its parents or left unprotected, to any of the places of residence specified in Regulation 1 [the missions or stations] or to an industrial or reformatory school'. Another provided that,

> *Every aboriginal male under 14 years of age, and also all unmarried aboriginal females under the age of 18 years, shall, when so required by the person in charge of any station in connection with or under the control of the [Board], reside, and take their meals, and sleep in any building set apart for such purposes.*

These provisions were used to separate Aboriginal children from their parents and house them in dormitories on the Lake Hindmarsh, Coranderrk, Ramahyuck, Lake Tyers and Lake Condah reserves.

'Merging' and 'dispersing' – 1886-1957

The Aborigines' Protection Board was chronically short of funds. In the early 1880s it proposed that it devote its budget and attention to 'full bloods' who were thought to be dying out and 'merge' the half-castes into the non-Indigenous community where they would have to find employment to survive.

The *Aborigines Protection Act 1886* and its regulations provided that at the age of 13 years 'half-caste' boys were to be apprenticed or sent to work on farms and girls were to work as servants. Having left, they were not allowed to return to their families on reserves without official permission for a visit. Orphaned 'half-caste' children were to be transferred to the care of the Department for Neglected Children or an institution for neglected children. All 'part-Aborigines' aged 34 and younger were to leave the stations and their families although they remained under the control of the Board until 1893. At

that time the government estimated there were about 833 Indigenous people remaining in Victoria, of whom 233 were classed as ‘half-castes’, including 160 children.

Subsequent regulations extended the Board’s removal power further to allow it to send children of mixed descent, whether orphaned or not, to the Department for Neglected Children or the Department of Reformatory Schools for their ‘better care and custody’. Families refusing to consent to the removal of their children were told they would have to leave the stations and would be denied rations.

> *The Board cannot grant rations to Henry Albert and family, as they are half castes, but every assistance will be given to place their children into the Industrial Schools and get them boarded out to respectable families (letter from Rev. Hagenauer, General Inspector of the Board, dated 9 September 1897).*

Many people of mixed descent continued to reside near the stations, visiting their relatives in secret.

Between 1886 and 1923 the number of Aboriginal stations in Victoria declined from six to one. All Aboriginal people who wished to receive assistance from the Board had to move to Lake Tyers, the only staffed institution after 1924. The number of people there fluctuated, with a maximum of about 290 in the 1930s.

By 1957 fewer than 200 Aboriginal people were under Board control at Lake Tyers. Those who were lived a highly regulated life. Their homes were inspected, they had to seek permission to leave the station and they could be expelled for misconduct or if thought able to earn a living elsewhere. Residents received low cash wages in return for work and were supplied instead with rations as late as 1966. Although the Board continued to have power over Indigenous children generally, it was only concerned with the people at Lake Tyers. Adhering to this policy the Victorian Government refused to attend the 1948 and 1951 Commonwealth/State conferences, maintaining that the Indigenous population of Victoria was too small to justify any special attention.

During the 1940s and 1950s humanitarian and religious groups made repeated representations to the government about the inactivity of the Board. The Board’s response was to demolish or remove the houses on Lake Tyers station and offer the residents housing in nearby towns.

Indigenous people who had been forced off the Board’s reserves or who chose to leave faced continuing hostility in non-Indigenous society. They were denied government welfare assistance available to non-Indigenous people. Suffering the effects of dispossession and facing discrimination in employment, access to accommodation and other fields of life, the only form of government assistance provided to them was rations distributed by the

police. Although the Board regained power over ‘half-castes’ in 1910, it refused assistance to anyone not living at Lake Tyers.

Although legislation from 1919 made it possible for a ‘destitute’ mother to seek financial assistance to maintain her children at home, the process involved going to court. Given Indigenous people’s unfamiliarity with and distrust of courts this was not a realistic option.

In the face of these difficulties, Indigenous people moved into shanty towns on the edges of country towns, on the sites of former missions and settlements and in areas that offered employment, such as seasonal fruit picking work. Indigenous communities grew up in the Goulburn Valley, East Gippsland and along the Murray River. They were joined by others from NSW, particularly from the station at Cumeragunja on the NSW-Victoria border, fleeing the removal policy of the NSW Protection Board. From the 1930s onwards Indigenous people also moved to Melbourne.

Assimilation – 1957-1970

In 1955 the newly elected Premier Henry Bolte commissioned Charles McLean to review and recommend changes to Victoria’s Aboriginal affairs policy. McLean reported on the conditions under which Indigenous people lived.

> *On these two areas [at Mooroopna] live about 59 adults and 107 children, in most squalid conditions. Their ‘humpies’ are mostly constructed of old timber, flattened kerosene tins, and hessian, usually with some kind of partition to separate bedroom from living room. They are not weatherproof, have earthen floors, very primitive cooking arrangements, and no laundry or bathing facilities except the river, from which all water is drawn by buckets and carted for distances of up to half a mile.*
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> *As might be expected in these surroundings, many of the children are dirty, undernourished and neglected, and very irregular in attendance at school. Shortly after my visit there, twenty-four of the younger children were, at the instance of the police, taken from these ‘homes’ and committed to the care of the Children’s Welfare Department by the Children’s Court (McLean 1957).*

The Aborigines Advancement League had petitioned McLean expressing fears for the physical and cultural extinction of Aboriginal people and advocating self-government for the communities. McLean rejected these claims and recommended instead a ‘helpful but firm policy of assimilation’ with emphasis on rehousing projects and improved educational and employment opportunities consistent with the assimilation policy that the other States had agreed to at the 1951 conference.

McLean found that the policy of segregating full descent people at Lake Tyers and dispersing those of mixed descent had failed, noting that most of the people remaining at Lake Tyers were of mixed descent. He recommended the establishment of an Aborigines Welfare Board with an assimilationist objective, modelled on the NSW Board.

McLean felt that the provisions of the *Child Welfare Act 1954* were generally adequate to deal with the welfare of Aboriginal children. He failed to appreciate the support networks within Indigenous communities to care for children. Shortly afterwards Barwick described a distinct culture and sense of community that existed among Indigenous people living in Melbourne. The community held weekly dances, had a strong sense of kinship and supported each other. 'Few women refuse to foster the children of close kin or to help unemployed relatives and friends for short periods'.

The Aborigines Welfare Board

Most of McLean's recommendations were reflected in the ensuing *Aborigines Act 1957.* The Act established the Aborigines Welfare Board 'to promote the moral, intellectual and physical welfare of aborigines … with a view to their assimilation in the general community'. However, for the first time in Victoria's Aboriginal affairs legislation, the Board was given no specific power in relation to Aboriginal children.

Nevertheless, comments were made in debate on the Bill on the desirability of separating Aboriginal children from what were regarded as the degenerate influences of their family. The best hope for these children was seen to lie in making them believe they were part of non-Indigenous society.

Although the Aborigines Welfare Board had no power to remove children, it could notify the police that it was concerned about a particular child and thereby initiate forcible removal action. Generally its role in relation to removed children was to examine placement options for them including 'home release' whereby children were allowed to return home and the home situation monitored.

Housing was a major focus of the Board's activities. Ironically the provision of public housing for Indigenous families brought them into conflict with government authorities and thereby at increased risk of having their children taken. For example, strict limits on visitors staying in public housing and restrictions on the number of family members that could live together took no account of Indigenous family and community relationships.

By 1961 six government institutions had been opened to cope with the increasing numbers of children removed. Until then most Indigenous children had been referred to non-government agencies.

Role of police

Until 1985 the Victorian police were empowered to forcibly remove

children under the child welfare laws. Until the mid-1950s, this power does not seem to have been used to a great extent against children in Indigenous communities.

However, while the McLean inquiry was underway, police suddenly took action to remove children from Indigenous communities in Gippsland, the Western District and the Goulburn Valley under the newly passed *Child Welfare Act 1954*. Shortly after McLean visited Mooroopna, 24 of the 107 children noted by him were taken. Many of these children were taken to Ballarat Orphanage. According to Barwick,

> *During 1956 and 1957 more than one hundred and fifty children (more than 10 per cent of the children in the Aboriginal population of Victoria at that time) were living in State children's institutions. The great majority had been seized by police and charged in the Children's Court with 'being in need of care and protection'. Many policemen act from genuine concern for the 'best interests' of Aboriginal children, but some are over-eager to enter Aboriginal homes and bully parents with threats to remove their children. Few Aboriginal families are aware of their legal rights, and accept police intrusion at any hour of the day or night without question. This ignorance of legal procedure has also prevented parents from reclaiming children committed as Wards of State when their living standard has improved.*

In 1969 the *Aboriginal Affairs Act* was amended to provide that the Victorian police were to notify the Ministry whenever an Aboriginal child was brought before a Children's Court. Thereafter the Aborigines Advancement League would be notified enabling the children to be legally represented. Prior to 1969 Children's Court care and protection cases were not usually defended, there were no duty solicitors at court and it was rare for legal representation to be provided.

Informal and private removals

Until the 1957 Act was passed and the Aborigines Welfare Board established, the main source of outside assistance available to Indigenous people in Victoria was non-government welfare agencies. The government had long relied upon non-government agencies and private individuals to tend public welfare.

Between 1887 and 1954 private welfare agencies and individuals were authorised to apprehend children they suspected were neglected, assume guardianship of them and keep them in institutions or in other forms of care. Children who had been removed by the police and made State wards were also placed in these privately-run institutions. In 1957 there were at least 68 institutions managed by 44 different non-government agencies (Leonard Tierney quoted by Victorian Government final submission on page 50) and it was not until 1956 that the first two government institutions for children were

opened. Minimum standards of conduct and treatment by non-government agencies were not imposed until the *Child Welfare Act 1954*.

The lack of welfare regulation meant that offers of temporary assistance accepted by Indigenous families from non-government agencies or individuals could be the start of an irreversible removal process. Although legislation required the registration of houses in which children under the age of five years had been 'privately placed', this requirement was largely ignored in relation to Indigenous children.

> *We left Lake Tyers [because the station was being closed down] – I think it was the early 1960s – and we went to Ararat and lived there for quite a while … And [my parents] are sort of thinking it's a new world. We can cope. But unbeknown to them they couldn't cope. I mean they weren't taught how to manage money or even live in a white society, because they only knew how to live the way that they had lived at Lake Tyers … There was a lady that came to the vestry. I was forever going to the vestry and seeking help up there because of the problems that were happening … She befriended me and said, 'Would you like to come and stay with me for a holiday'. When we were at Lake Tyers we were billeted out to people in Melbourne and went for holidays, then went back home again. Then when I met this lady and she came down and met my mum and dad … they didn't want me to go with her. But she just sort of said, 'You'll be seeing her. We only want her for a holiday'. And they sort of kept to that. And we were coming from Melbourne up to Ararat to see mum and dad all the time, and then my brother had left and lived with people that my foster parents knew, and he came down and stayed with them and my other sister M-, she came and stayed with us for a little while but then went back. And then I think it was in 1970 the government sort of stepped in and said, you know, the problems were there and mum and dad couldn't look after the kids. And they ended up taking the kids – the three of them – away.*

The informality of these ‘private placements’ has made it very difficult for removed children to discover how they were taken.

Adoption

The Victorian *Adoption Act 1928* allowed anyone to arrange an adoption. The process involved the mother signing a consent form and thereafter losing all rights in relation to her child. In a wide variety of situations the consent requirement could be waived. The child would then be matched with an adoptive couple by the agency or individual making the arrangements. In the meantime the child would be cared for by the arranger of the adoption, often in an institution associated with the adoption agency. To finalise the process the adoptive parents would go before a judge to seek the formal adoption order. The emphasis in the Act was on ‘secrecy, safety and stability’ (Jaggs 1986).

> *My Mum became pregnant in Alice Springs. She knew a minister in Ballarat. They brought her to Baxter House. She was about 16 when she had me. My adoptive Mum knew Mum was upset. My adoptive Mum was a nurse at Geelong Hospital and knew of it. My Mum signed papers. My adoptive mum says the minister told the doctor that she couldn’t look after me because she was a single mother and not working … My adopted parents are fantastic. But it would be nice to know my cousins. I would have liked to know about my Dad … I don’t think Mum had any options. I don’t know where I’d have ended up.*

In the 1960s police officers routinely investigated reports of girls under the age of 16 years giving birth. Young mothers, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous, were told that if they did not consent to the adoption of their babies the father of the child would be prosecuted for carnal knowledge.

Under the *Adoption Act 1964* adoptions were more regulated. Adoption agencies had to be approved by the Chief Secretary of the Social Welfare Department. The Aborigines Welfare Board was one of the ‘private’ agencies approved under the 1964 Act.

> *Adoption wasn’t one of the … major functions [of the Aborigines Welfare Board] but the Board was one of 23 adoption agencies in Victoria at the time. If you really wanted a baby and you were struggling and couldn’t get a baby through a normal adoption agency, you went to the Aborigines Welfare Board and you could get yourself a baby (Professor Colin Tatz).*

Although adoptions were more regulated after 1964, many procedures are still unclear. Some adoptive families simply returned children they no longer wanted. Some Indigenous parents found out that they had unknowingly agreed to relinquish children when they believed they were placing them in temporary care. Still others simply could not locate children who had been

fostered or adopted by the agency.

> *See what happened was, [my adoptive] dad served up near Darwin during the Second World War, and he seen how bad blackfellas got treated up there. So he decided if he could he would do something to help Aboriginal people. Now, back in the sixties obviously, the way society was then, they felt the best thing was, you know, adopting kids and stuff like that … On the adoption forms it's got written there in somebody else's handwriting – not [my mother's], because it just doesn't match her signature and stuff like that – reason for giving up the child is 'no visible means of support'. Now, generally that could be accurate, but in the case of [the] Aboriginal community and kids, that's on nearly every form or whatever. Considering I come from a big family – my mother had lots of brothers and sisters who could've looked after me … So, I mean, why was I different?*

The low level of financial support that non-government agencies received to keep children in their institutions meant that the agencies were keen to find permanent homes for these children as quickly as possible. Non-Indigenous parents have told the Inquiry that they responded to appeals that stressed the unwanted nature of these children and how they faced a lifetime in an institution. They feel they were deceived by not being told the circumstances under which the children were removed from their families. Some are still suffering grief and shock from unwittingly being part of a process of forcible removal.

> *In 1960 my wife and I applied to adopt an Aboriginal baby, after reading in the newspapers that these babies were remaining in institutionalised care, going to orphanages, as no one would adopt them. Later that year we were offered a baby who had been cared for since birth in a Church run Babies Home in Brunswick. We were delighted! We had been told, and truly believed that his mother was dead and his father unknown. Where we lived there seemed to be no Aboriginals around. We knew some were grouped in Northcote and in Fitzroy but the stories told about them were so negative, we felt we should avoid them at least until Ken was much older. [By the time Ken was a teenager] he was in fact an isolated individual, alienated from the stream of life with no feeling for a past or a future, subject to racism in various forms day in and day out. No wonder he withdrew to his room, and as he told me later, considered suicide on occasions. When Ken was eighteen he found his natural family, three sisters and a brother. His mother was no longer living. She died some years earlier when Ken was four. Because of the long timespan, strong bonds with his family members could not be established.*

Children from inter-State

Victoria was also a destination for holidays arranged by welfare organisations and government departments in other States. One of those schemes was the 'Harold Blair Aboriginal Children's Holiday Project' which brought groups of children from Queensland settlements, and later the Dareton area of NSW, to Melbourne for up to three months.

> *Well, I was fostered when I was 7. I was staying with my foster parents and they rang up one day and said that my mother had died and would they consider fostering me. That was over the phone. I know there was nothing signed for me and that, and I want to know why because my father was still alive, and he didn't die until I was 10. [I was with these people] through the 'Harold Blair Scheme' for Christmas holidays and when I come down me and my two sisters got split up. We used to live in Coomealla on the mission, across the border from Mildura. They just rang me up and said that my father had died, that's all …*

Abolition of the Welfare Board

Dissension within the Board and the entry of the Commonwealth Government into the field of Aboriginal Affairs following the 1967 referendum led to another reassessment of its Aboriginal affairs policy by the Victorian Government.

The *Aboriginal Affairs Act* 1967 gave the newly appointed Minister for Aboriginal Affairs very broad powers including the 'coordination of voluntary organizations concerned with the welfare and interest of aborigines'. The Act also made provision for regulations concerning 'conditions regulating the entry of aborigines to training and other institutions on aboriginal reserves and the conditions under which such aborigines may remain in or be required to leave such training or other institution'.

In its first Annual Report in 1968, the Ministry expressed concern about 'unauthorised fostering arrangements of Aboriginal children' and stated that about 300 Aboriginal children were known to have been informally separated from their parents, with possibly many more unknown. At that time the Aboriginal population in Victoria was estimated to be about 5,000.

> *[An informal placement] takes place when some person, usually with a working relationship and knowledge of Aboriginal people as well as some credibility in the wider community, considers that there are Aboriginal children in the area who are at risk. Contact is then made with some resource person who may have contact with a group of people who will accept care and responsibility for these children at a minute's notice … the children are placed informally with various other people and as has happened on many occasions, when parents request the return of their children, some cannot be traced. It is not until the*

children reach early adolescence that they re-appear – usually through the court scene. It is often difficult to identify these children as it is not uncommon for the 'foster parents' to change the name of the child (Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, late 1970s).

Despite the apparent recognition in government reports that the interests of Indigenous children were best served by keeping them in their own communities, the number of Aboriginal children forcibly removed continued to increase, rising from 220 in 1973 to 350 in 1976.

Self-management

Real change came with the establishment of Indigenous community-based services. From the early 1970s the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Cooperative Ltd (VALS) appeared for Aboriginal children in the Children's Court. VALS reported in 1975 on the high number of Aboriginal children in institutions, the number of 'adoption' breakdowns and that 90% of its clients in criminal matters had been removed from their families as children.

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Placement Agency, later renamed the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), was established in 1976. The efforts of VACCA and other Aboriginal organisations had resulted in a 40% reduction in the number of Aboriginal children in children's homes in Victoria as early as 1979. Even so, 270 Aboriginal juveniles were wards of the State, comprising 6.5% of the total ward population.

VACCA was instrumental in starting the 'Ghubbariginals', a group of non-Indigenous families who had adopted or fostered Indigenous children. The group provides support and counselling for non-Indigenous people in a similar position to enable them to better care for the Indigenous children with them. These families are also available to VACCA if it has no choice but to place an Indigenous child with a non-Indigenous family. An Indigenous child placed with them will be in touch with other Indigenous children and the foster carers will have an understanding of the needs of the child.

In 1979 the Victorian Social Welfare Department adopted policy guidelines on Aboriginal adoption and foster care. A decade later the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle was incorporated into the *Children and Young Persons Act 1989*.

Paul

For 18 years the State of Victoria referred to me as State Ward No 54321.

I was born in May 1964. My Mother and I lived together within an inner suburb of Melbourne. At the age of five and a half months, both my

Mother and I became ill. My Mother took me to the Royal Children's Hospital, where I was admitted.

Upon my recovery, the Social Welfare Department of the Royal Children's Hospital persuaded my Mother to board me into St Gabriel's Babies' Home in Balwyn … just until Mum regained her health. If only Mum could've known the secret, deceitful agenda of the State welfare system that was about to be put into motion - 18 years of forced separation between a loving mother and her son.

Early in 1965, I was made a ward of the State. The reason given by the State was that, 'Mother is unable to provide adequate care for her son'.

In February 1967, the County Court of Victoria dispensed with my Mother's consent to adoption. This decision, made under section 67(d) of the Child Welfare Act 1958, was purportedly based on an 'inability to locate mother'. Only paltry attempts had been made to locate her. For example, no attempt was made to find her address through the Aboriginal Welfare Board.

I was immediately transferred to Blackburn South Cottages to be assessed for 'suitable adoptive placement'. When my Mother came for one of her visits, she found an empty cot. With the stroke of a pen, my Mother's Heart and Spirit had been shattered. Later, she was to describe this to me as one of the 'darkest days of her life'.

Repeated requests about my whereabouts were rejected. All her cries for help fell on deaf ears by a Government who had stolen her son, and who had decided 'they' knew what was best for this so-called part-Aboriginal boy.

In October 1967 I was placed with a family for adoption. This placement was a dismal failure, lasting only 7 months. This family rejected me, and requested my removal, claiming in their words that I was unresponsive, dull, and that my so-called deficiencies were unacceptable. In the Medical Officer's report on my file there is a comment that Mrs A 'compared him unfavourably with her friends' children and finds his deficiencies an embarrassment, e.g. at coffee parties'.

Upon removal, I was placed at the Gables Orphanage in Kew, where I was institutionalised for a further two years. Within this two years, I can clearly remember being withdrawn and frightened, and remember not talking to anyone for days on end.

I clearly remember being put in line-ups every fortnight, where prospective foster parents would view all the children. I was always left behind. I remember people coming to the Gables, and taking me to their

homes on weekends, but I would always be brought back. Apparently I wasn't quite the child they were looking for.

The Gables knew my dark complexion was a problem, constantly trying to reassure prospective foster parents that I could be taken as Southern European in origin.

In January 1970, I was again placed with a foster family, where I remained until I was 17. This family had four natural sons of their own. I was the only fostered child.

During this placement, I was acutely aware of my colour, and I knew I was different from the other members of their family. At no stage was I ever told of my Aboriginality, or my natural mother or father. When I'd say to my foster family, 'why am I a different colour?', they would laugh at me, and would tell me to drink plenty of milk, 'and then you will look more like us'. The other sons would call me names such as 'their little Abo', and tease me. At the time, I didn't know what this meant, but it did really hurt, and I'd run into the bedroom crying. They would threaten to hurt me it I told anyone they said these things.

My foster family made me attend the same primary and secondary school that their other children had all previously attended. Because of this, I was ridiculed and made fun of, by students and teachers. Everyone knew that I was different from the other family members, and that I couldn't be their real brother, even though I'd been given the same surname as them. Often I would run out of class crying, and would hide in the school grounds.

The foster family would punish me severely for the slightest thing they regarded as unacceptable or unchristian-like behaviour, even if I didn't eat my dinner or tea. Sometimes I would be locked in my room for hours. Countless times the foster father would rain blows upon me with his favourite leather strap. He would continue until I wept uncontrollably, pleading for him to stop.

Throughout all these years – from 5 and a half months old to 18 years of age, my Mother never gave up trying to locate me.

She wrote many letters to the State Welfare Authorities, pleading with them to give her son back. Birthday and Christmas cards were sent care of the Welfare Department. All these letters were shelved. The State Welfare Department treated my Mother like dirt, and with utter contempt, as if she never existed. The Department rejected and scoffed at all my Mother's cries and pleas for help. They inflicted a terrible pain of Separation, Anguish and Grief upon a mother who only ever wanted her son back.

In May 1982, I was requested to attend at the Sunshine Welfare Offices, where they formerly discharged me from State wardship. It took

the Senior Welfare Officer a mere twenty minutes to come clean, and tell me everything that my heart had always wanted to know. He conveyed to me in a matter-of-fact way that I was of ‘Aboriginal descent’, that I had a Natural mother, father, three brothers and a sister, who were alive.

He explained that his Department’s position was only to protect me and, ‘that is why you were not told these things before’. He placed in front of me 368 pages of my file, together with letters, photos and birthday cards. He informed me that my surname would change back to my Mother’s maiden name of Angus.

The welfare officer scribbled on a piece of paper my Mother’s current address in case, in his words, I’d ‘ever want to meet her’. I cried tears of Relief, Guilt and Anger. The official conclusion, on the very last page of my file, reads:

‘Paul is a very intelligent, likeable boy, who has made remarkable progress, given the unfortunate treatment of his Mother by the department during his childhood.’

When Paul located his mother at the age of 18 she was working in a hostel for Aboriginal children with 20 children under her care. She died six years later at the age of 45.

- Allambie Reception Centre
- Bayswater Boys’ Home
- Berry Street Babies’ Home
- Box Hill Boys’ Home
- Catherine Booth Memorial Home
- Royal Park Receiving House/Reformatory
- St. Josephs, Abbotsford
- Tally Ho Boys’ Farm
- Winlaton Youth Training Centre