

In from the cold



Eugene, left, Luba and Nick Milogrod finally have closure after 44 years.

New hope shines for a Melbourne family after a 44-year missing person's case is resolved.

It's every parent's worst nightmare. Tamara Milograd was just a few months shy of her 16th birthday when she left her Newport home in 1971, telling her mother Luba that she was heading out to the Royal Melbourne Show with a girlfriend.

This would be the last time Luba saw her daughter.

The next four decades would be full of endless torment for the Milograds, a time Luba referred to as a "living nightmare without end" as the family searched for answers as to what happened to Tamara.

At the time of her disappearance Tamara, according to relatives, had become a rebellious teenager and was actively pulling away from her strongly traditional family.

Reliable confirmed sightings in the months following her disappearance gave the Milograd family hope as Luba searched areas where Tamara had been seen, desperately asking locals if they recognised the young woman from a photo.

The case would go cold until an astonishing 44 years later when 39-year-old Corinna Russell, by way of a simple Google search, came across the AFP's Missing Persons website.

Corinna was searching for clues to complete what little information she knew about her mother, a woman she knew as Pauline Tammy Russell.

It would transpire that Corinna was just 8 months old when Pauline died in a car crash at Lake Bolac, Victoria, in June 1976.

Mother of two, Pauline had been travelling from her home in rural Penshurst in Victoria to Melbourne. Her partner, Corinna's father, Leonard Wells, was also in the car but escaped with minor injuries.

Corinna and her younger brother, Lee, were sent to live with their father's mother, with Lee later returning to live with his dad.

As Corinna got older she began to ask more and more questions about her mother, finding few answers. Her digging revealed peculiar information that only led to more questions; such as the fact that her parents never married as Pauline was unable to obtain a birth certificate.

“When Alex told me how crucial our website had been in connecting Corinna to her mother, the hairs on the back of my neck stood up.”



The aged progressed photo of missing 16-year-old Tamara Milograd ended a 44-year cold case.



She clung to the few pieces of the puzzle that she did have; that her parents met in Castlemaine 1972 and that her maternal grandfather’s name was Alexander.

Every year on March 6 (Pauline’s birthday) Corinna would reignite the search for answers, desperately trying to find a trace of her dead mother.

2015 would be different. Corinna, by chance, clicked on the AFP Missing Persons website where one profile caught her eye. The coincidences became too great to ignore. She found details of a woman who bore a striking resemblance to her mother. The profile she found was that of Tamara Milograd.

Not only did the two women look alike, they also shared the same birthday. Pauline’s middle name ironically was Tammy, both women had a father named Alexander, but most importantly both Tamara and Pauline were of Russian descent.

Corinna took this information to Victoria Police with the strong belief that Tamara Milograd could in fact be her late mother. Following DNA analysis, it was confirmed Pauline Tammy Russell and Tamara Milograd were the same person.

Progress at last

National Missing Persons Centre Team Leader Rebecca Kotz is no stranger to the case. In 2010 the AFP’s National Missing Persons Coordination Centre (NMPCC) worked with the Milograd family, profiling Tamara’s story for National Missing Persons Week.

In 2013, the NMPCC once again worked with members of the family when launching the second ever long-term missing persons ‘aged–progressed’ poster.

The Milograd family requested that Tamara’s profile be considered for one of the digitally transformed images. Tamara’s brother Alex also assisted, performing media interviews alongside Ms Kotz during launch activities.

Then, in May this year, Ms Kotz received an astounding phone call from Alex alerting her that the case of his sister had at long last been solved.

“I was absolutely shocked,” she said.

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on the back of my neck stood up, just knowing that lives had been changed by what we do day to day was an amazing feeling.”

Often the important work done by the Missing Persons team constitutes one piece of a larger puzzle, where those involved rarely get to see the final picture that’s formed.

“This case is a great example of how our efforts can make a difference, even when it comes to ‘cold cases’,” Ms Kotz says.

Having been in communication with the family throughout this journey the case has a particular personal connection for Ms Kotz, a case she describes as both sad in its realisation but also fantastic and heart-warming in its outcome.

“At the National Missing Persons Week launch held in Melbourne, Luba Milograd held my hand. She told me that when her husband passed away he made her promise that she would continue to do everything she could to find out what had happened to Tamara, at which point she pleaded with me to ‘please help her find the answers’.

“I can’t explain what a relief it is to know that she now knows.”

It has been a long, tough road for the Milograd family and although the sadness of losing Tamara will remain, Ms Kotz believes there is also hope as the Milograds welcome Corinna and her family into theirs.

“With missing persons cases there’s never closure but there is the next chapter and a chance to move forward.

“Tamara’s mother, now 90, and her family can begin to mourn the loss of Tamara but they can also celebrate the gain of Corinna, her daughter and Corinna’s brother, Lee, three members of their family, until now, they never knew existed.”

Eugene Milograd
(above centre) speaks at
a missing persons event.

Luba Milograd (right) can now
rest more peacefully knowing the
fate of her daughter, Tamara.

