

Tireless campaigner for missing persons

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GEORGE Colvin was just 21 when police found his wrecked motorbike near the banks of a fast flowing river - the river they feared had taken his body away. It was 1970, and at the time, they thought the young spray painter had committed suicide.

Forty years later, a woman perusing the Australian Missing Persons Register website recognised a photograph of a young man.

She picked up the phone and dialled the website's administrator in Queensland, Nicole Morris.

"That's my husband," she told her.

Mr Colvin, now a father-of-four and the mayor of a country town in the Northern Territory, had told nobody in his new life that he once had an old one.

"She said to him 'are you meant to be dead?'," Mrs Morris said.

"He never thought anyone would find out. He'd staged his own disappearance.

"I think he was in a situation that he needed to get out of when he was young.

"He ended up getting back in touch with his family - it was very emotional for him.

"That was a story with a happy ending."

Mrs Morris, a mother-of-two from regional Queensland, started her website seven years ago after watching a documentary on the disappearance of Newcastle woman Susan Isenhood.

The doco told how Ms Isenhood's 19-year-old nephew Dylan, who was studying at university, conducted a research project into her disappearance 17 years after she was reported missing in 1985.

His research led to her being identified as a woman whose skeletal remains were found in the Kiwarrak State Forest in NSW.

"In the program, it said there was no national database for missing people, which is why it had been so difficult to solve the Isenhood case.

"I decided to create a site that was a central database where people can look up all the info.

"With my website, I update it each day and if a family contacts me asking for my help, I can post the information."

For Mrs Morris, 42, a stay-at-home mum, the website is a full-time occupation.

She does not earn money from it and says her database often leads to cases being solved.

It is her tireless work in helping others that has seen her nominated by several people for a Community Spirit Medal in this year's Pride of Australia awards.

She was also nominated by UK couple David and Lesley Goldsmith, whose son Steven disappeared in Brisbane in 2000.

"She has, on our behalf, assisted us in dealing with the police, missing persons' unit, press and other relevant organisations all of which has been invaluable," they wrote.

"She is our 'eyes and ears' in Australia and since we have known her she has made a very sad situation slightly more bearable for our family just by knowing that she supports us."