

# Reunion Registry makes the connections

**E**mma May Vilardi, 61, has helped reunite more than 1,000 persons and has a registry that contains 16,000 names.

She is doing it for her mother.

"My mother is an adoptee who just celebrated her 82nd birthday," Vilardi says during a telephone interview from her home in Carson City, Nev. "I have seen the problems that occurred during her life due to a lack of information — especially about medical history — and I wanted to help other people."

So, for the past eight years, Vilardi has been serving as a link between birth parents and their biological offspring, aged 18 and older, as well as other blood relatives scattered by other reasons.

The retired historian and genealogist is performing this service through a private, non-profit organization called International Soundex Reunion Registry, which she founded and runs from her home.

The name, Soundex, comes from the method used to tabulate the information Vilardi receives. It converts the alphabet into a numerical code.

"We are not a search agency, although adoptees beg for it," Vilardi makes clear from the start. Both the adoptee and the birth parent must register with Vilardi in order for a reunion to occur.

"It works by both sides writing in," she says. "It takes two to tango."

In addition, Vilardi honors only the requests of

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adoptees who are over the age of 18 or 21, depending on the age at which the state they reside in permits adoptees to learn the information in previously sealed files.

She will accept information from younger adoptees, but holds it until they reach adulthood. If medical information is urgently needed, however, it is passed on without revealing identities.

Ninety percent of the 1,000 matches Vilardi has made have involved adoptees and birth parents. At least two people are usually involved, so that is about 450 actual matches.

Others who sign up with the reunion registry include children who were separated from one parent by divorce and siblings lost to each other during war or Depression eras.

Just recently, Vilardi received a call from a woman who grew up in foster care and was searching for 12 siblings. "They may already be in the registry; there is no way of telling," says Vilardi, who won't know until the woman's

information is translated to the Soundex code. "I've had five matches since Jan. 1. All were for siblings looking for siblings.

"For me, it is personally satisfying," says Vilardi. "It is hard work, though, and tedious."

Vilardi charges no fee. Applications are available through some public and state-licensed private adoption agencies as well as by writing Vilardi directly.

"We have never had, to date, a rejection by anyone matched, but we are aware emotional problems could arise in extended families," says Vilardi, "so we have set up a post-match consultation service."

That service provides five to 10 hours of free consultation by well-known professionals in Los Angeles and elsewhere.

Right now, Vilardi is building Soundex' bank account to buy a computer. She only gets donations from one out of every 100 registrations received.

"But they always say thank you," she reports, "and we've been very lucky in that many have continued to write us once a year after the match."

*For more information, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to International Soundex Reunion Registry, P.O. Box 2312, Carson City, Nev. 89702.*

— Mary Kasdan