

# Triumphant tale of love

More than 30 years after she last saw her son, an Auchenflower woman has written an inspiring story of their efforts to be reunited, writes *Westside News* reporter **Reshni Ratnam**.

LORI Cartagena is a woman filled with strength and determination.

At the age of 19 Ms Cartagena, from Auchenflower, was forced to give her son up for adoption after a brief affair with a "handsome and charming" Toronto businessman abroad.

The Australian singer/dancer said she survived ambushes and mortar attacks when working as an entertainer in South-East Asia during the Vietnam War, only to later find herself in an even more desperate situation after fleeing to Canada.

Ms Cartagena has written a book about her experience, *The Heartbreak Option - An Inspiring True Story*, aimed at guiding those who have had similar experiences.

"There was no support for mothers back then and falling pregnant when you're not married was looked down upon," she said.

"I moved to Miami, Florida, to join a new stage show where I found out I was pregnant, then I had to make one of the hardest decisions in my life."

She said that at the very moment when the nursing sister in Florida snatched her newborn son she made a solemn vow that one day she would find him again.

Ms Cartagena said that through a private investigator her son, Stephen Doniger, was able to find her after 34 years.

"In 2005 I told my friend about my son (Stephen) and wanted to try and find him again. At the same time my son was telling his friend about finding his (birth)

mother too... it all happened on Mother's Day," she said.

"My son told me that the next day he contacted three private investigators in Melbourne. Within the hour I received a phone call from one of the investigators saying they wanted to put me in contact with my son.

"I was so excited and over the moon."

Previous attempts to reunite the pair were unsuccessful because Ms Cartagena was living in Australia not America.

She said five weeks later her son flew to Brisbane and they spent the next eight days together swapping stories.

■ **On Sunday November 15, Ms Cartagena will launch her book at La Dolce Vita at Park Rd, Milton from 1pm. Visit [www.loridcartagena.com](http://www.loridcartagena.com).**



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AMAZING JOURNEY: Auchenflower author Lori Cartagena. Picture: Chris McCormack

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