

IAN HAMM



Ian Hamm is a Yorta Yorta man from Shepparton in central Victoria. In 1964, he was separated from his family when he was three weeks old, and adopted by non-Aboriginal family in nearby Yarrowonga.

Ian grew up just thirty miles away from his birth family, unaware of their existence. That all changed when he went to college and met an Aboriginal education officer who asked him if he knew where he came from. Ian replied his birth name was Andrew James. The person said "Yeah. I think I know who you are."

Ian went on to make contact with his sisters, brothers and other family members. But his mother had died two years after he was born.

"I have a couple of photos of my mother who gave birth to me. It's enormously frustrating when people say to me I'm like my mother. I don't know what that means."

He's described the uncertainty of identity he felt as the only Aboriginal man growing up in Yarrowonga.

"People would tell me I'm Aboriginal, but what does that mean? My only source of information was what people told me and what I saw on television. This is the '60s and the '70s, and that wasn't great."

Over the years though, moving forward has had its own challenges, especially in finding a way of getting on with things. *"When I say heal, for me, I don't think you get over it, you just get used to it. It's how I get by."*

As a young man Ian was advised to apply for a job as a council worker. Instead he became a career public servant for both the Victorian and Commonwealth governments at executive level, including as the Executive Director of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria.

Ian says on the 20th anniversary of Bringing Them Home it's important for Australia to understand the report was not just a single event in time. "You don't just do a couple of things and move on," he said.

"It's people's lives. It's their lives from birth to death, and the continuing impact on subsequent generations. This isn't over. This isn't finished. It's unfinished business and should not be neglected."



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