

TONY HANSEN



Tony Hansen is a Wilman man from the Wagyl Kaip and Southern Noongar region, about 350 kilometres south of Perth, and South-West Boojarah. He was taken from his family at the age of three.

'I will never forget the day I was removed from my grandmother, grandfather and my mother's care. I remember sitting in a car looking through the back window as we drove away,' he says.

'I was with complete strangers, white people I didn't know, and all I was doing was crying. That vivid memory is always with me. It is stuck in the back of my mind and I guess it will never go away until the day I leave this world.'

After he was removed from his home, Tony was taken to Marribank Mission, formerly known as the Carrolup Native Settlement. He always wondered where his mother was, why he was in a place with a 'bunch of other Aboriginal kids.'

Tony says life on the mission was tough: 'We got flogged every day and I had to learn very quickly not to wet the bed, because if you did you would get hosed down in the backyard like a dog and left near the fence with the cows.'

By the time Tony reached school age, he travelled into town each day and noticed something unusual near the school bus stop.

'There was a group of people that would always sit at the park near the railway crossing in Katanning. They would gather there in the mornings as the bus came into town to take the kids to school and again in the afternoon when school finished for the day,' he recalls.

'It was a moment in time where things stopped. For 10 seconds or so, us kids had visual contact with our families. We were all living in hope just to have those small glimpses every day.'

At the age of 16 Tony was finally reunited with his family. But the meeting was clouded by mixed feelings and doubt.

'Being able to hug my mother and grandmother for the first time was a strange experience. It was scary, uncomfortable and unknown but also very exciting,' Tony explains.

'I was quite unsure; I was afraid of them and I think they were afraid of me.'

Family is very important to Tony and he now has a large family of his own: 'I don't want this to happen to my kids. I always share this knowledge with them. I take them home to country and the mission. Love for my people, family and culture empowers me to be who I am today.'