

# Survivor story

STOLEN GENERATIONS RESOURCE KIT FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

## TONY HANSEN



Tony Hansen is a Wardandi and Pibleman man from the Karri Karrak region Wilman/ Koreng and Kaneang man from the Wagyl Kaip and Southern Noongar region.

'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 where he noticed something unusual near the train railway crossing in the main street of the town, where the traffic would stop for a moment as required.

'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.'



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## FLORENCE ONUS



Florence Onus is a descendant of the Birri-Gubba and Kairi/Bidjara clans of north-east Queensland.

She is the fourth generation of women from her family to be forcibly removed from land, culture and family.

'My grandmother and my mother were both trained and sent out as domestic servants on properties. They weren't allowed to speak their native language or practice cultural ceremonies, or they would be severely punished,' Florence said.

'And then I became part of the Stolen Generations when I was removed from my family to be raised in a white foster home.'

Her two older sisters were sent to Rockhampton to live with nuns, while Florence and her two other siblings went to Townsville foster homes. There, Florence spent most of her childhood.

'I embarked on my healing journey when at 21 my mother attempted suicide and I became her full time carer and together we began the journey of healing.'

'It wasn't until I started doing my own research and had access to policies that I truly realised that my mother was suffering from the impacts of Intergenerational Trauma.'

Florence has four adult daughters and she is a grandmother. She is passionate about breaking the cycle of trauma through healing, education, cultural identity and spiritual nurturing.

Florence is an educator and an advocate for social justice. Her maternal grandfather died in custody in the early 1960s following his arrest as an agitator.

Florence has carried on his fight for social justice, with a particular focus on the impact of Black Deaths in Custody and Stolen Generations issues.

'There needs to be an increase in healing resources for the Stolen Generations and our families to heal from the trauma, pain and suffering that we're still dealing with today,' she said.



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## 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. He grew up just 50 kilometres away from them, unaware of their existence.

That 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. I'll get back to you.'

Six months later a worker from the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency visited Ian in Bendigo. She told him his birth family, the James family, was a big Aboriginal family in Shepparton. Ian then realised he'd already met some of his birth family, but was unaware of their relationship.

'It blows you away. She told me I was one of five, "You have two sisters and two brothers." And I asked about my mother. She said my mother died in 1966, when I was two,' he said.

'I've only got a few photos of my mum. It's enormously frustrating when people say to me I'm like my mother. I don't know what that means. It puts into perspective where you fit in. Or don't fit in as the case may be,' he said. 'The hard part of this is I didn't meet any of them until I was in my twenties. You've only known each other as adults,' Ian said.

'It will be the same for anybody who's been through this experience, the thing that's the most confronting, the one that you live with every day—that you've had to start a relationship as an adult. How do you create those relationships? How do you make them work?'

He 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, 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.'

Ian says he's largely made peace with his past, but it's more like a cessation of hostilities than a lasting peace.

'There are days when sometimes it just gets to me. I get this overwhelming sense of sadness. And I know exactly what it is. It's that "Where do I fit in?"'



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## MICHAEL WELSH



Michael Welsh is a Wailwan man from Coonamble in New South Wales. He was eight when he and his brother Barry were taken from his mother and five of his siblings.

Michael was told that his other brothers and sisters would follow on the next train. He knew it was a lie.

He was taken to the notorious Kinchela Aboriginal Boys Training Home. An institution near Kempsey on the New South Wales mid north coast, Kinchela was renowned for its physical, sexual, psychological and cultural abuse of Aboriginal children.

The children weren't allowed to use names. Instead they were given numbers. Michael was number 36.

Michael said the aim of Kinchela 'was to degrade us and set us up for reprogramming our brains.'

For decades afterwards, Michael struggled with the trauma he experienced at Kinchela. He finally reached a stage where he couldn't hold the pain back any longer.

He made contact with the Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation (KBHAC), an organisation established by Kinchela survivors to support them and their descendants.

'When we get together as a group of brothers who've gone through that place, it feels good. The fear that was there is not there anymore,' Michael said.

Michael is passionate about ending the cycle of Intergenerational Trauma in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. He also serves on the Board of Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation.

'I'm not the only one who feels this pain, I've got eight children and they all feel the same,' he said.

'We do not want this hate to go to our children or to our grandchildren and great grandchildren.'

'Our children need to be connected to this healing process too. Our journey's almost over, our children's journeys are only just beginning.'



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## RICHARD CAMPBELL



Richard Campbell is a Dunghutti/Gumbaynggirr man from Bowraville on the New South Wales mid north coast.

At Richard's Catholic School the nuns thwarted several attempts by the Aboriginal Protection Board to remove the Aboriginal kids. Then on October 12, 1966 the school was caught unaware.

'All of a sudden they grabbed our younger sisters. Threw them in the back of the car, you could hear them screaming,' Richard remembers.

He and his older brother were also forced into the waiting police car. The five children were taken to court, where they were charged with neglect.

'We weren't neglected! We had a life. We had culture, we had language. We had a way of living.'

Richard and his brother were taken to the notoriously cruel Kinchela Aboriginal Boys Training Home where their identities were systematically stripped from them. Richard said they were given numbers, not names, and were severely punished if they used their Aboriginal language.

'We were told not to speak it. And not to look for your parents because they're dead. And they sayin' you're not Richard Campbell, you're now number 28. And you are not black, you are white.'

Richard suffered physical, psychological and sexual abuse at Kinchela. He says trauma followed all the boys out of the institution.

'So the next step for us was incarceration in a bigger jail ... straight into Long Bay, Goulburn, Grafton Gaol ... you could see them travel through their lives, through drugs, alcohol, stealing, things like that.'

Richard is now a Board Director of the Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation and has only recently begun to tell his story. He is deeply distressed about the continued removal of Aboriginal kids into out of home care, including four of his own grandchildren.

Richard wants governments to stop taking Aboriginal children away from their families, and to offer more support to Indigenous parents. He says Intergenerational Trauma must be better understood.

'Time is not on our side. We have lost four men this year alone and this ... means they cannot be part of their families' healing ... who are left living with the pain of questions unanswered.'



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## EILEEN CUMMINGS



Eileen Cummings, a Rembarrnga Ngalakan woman, was born in Arnhem Land in 1943. She was raised at Mainoru, a cattle station where her mother and stepfather worked, until she was about five years old.

Life there was good. Until Native Affairs came to take her away.

'They told me they were taking me for a ride in the truck. So, being a child I thought, "Alright, that sounds like fun." I remember Mum was sort of saying "yes" and waving but she thought I was just going around the yard and back to the station house. But no, they just kept going and they didn't stop.'

As it started to get dark, Eileen realised she was going further and further away from her mother and home.

'Mummy wasn't there and I started to cry. I was crying all the way.'

Two days past before her cousins arrived at the police station where she had been taken. From there they were put on a truck bound for Darwin.

'We stopped briefly in Pine Creek, maybe not even enough time to go to the toilet or wash, so by the time we got to Darwin we looked like kids that were neglected. I think that was their way of justifying why they'd picked us up. But that wasn't right. I was happy at home with my mother.'

They stayed in Darwin for about a week before they were put on a boat called the Larrapan and sent to Croker Island. That was a scary experience in itself, as they had never seen the sea.

Eileen and her cousins tried to protect each other. Her cousin Lorraine became like her mother and looked after the younger ones. She was only eight years old.

'If we didn't have Lorraine, me and the two other little girls wouldn't have survived. She used to talk to us all of the time in language—who our mothers were (both their English and Aboriginal names) [and] what country we came from. She kept teaching us about our culture and reminding us who we belonged to.'

Eileen was 19 when she saw her mum again, but the experience wasn't quite what she'd hoped for: 'You know when you're going to get to meet someone you get really excited? Well, with Mum there was nothing. She just didn't know how to react. So I was thinking that my mother didn't want me.'

Years later she asked her mother about that day. 'I asked her if she was happy to see me. She said of course but she didn't recognise me because I was taken as a little girl and came back as an adult. All of us children taken at that time were clean, healthy, happy. Why did it happen? I still don't really know.'



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