

# Remembering the Forgotten Australians

When Kevin Rudd stood up in federal parliament and said 'sorry' to the Stolen Generations, there was a sense that a meaningful healing process could begin for those who had suffered from past injustices. But another group, possibly as many as 500,000 predominantly non-indigenous people who were placed in orphanages and children's homes between 1930 and 1980 are still waiting for a formal apology.

They have come to be known as the Forgotten Australians and a Senate inquiry into their plight released a report in 2004 that included 39 recommendations, the first of which was an apology from the Commonwealth Government for the harm caused to children who were institutionalised through no fault of their own. So far none of the recommendations have been implemented.

The Senate report said their stories "outlined a litany of emotional, physical and sexual abuse, and often criminal physical and sexual assault. Their stories also told of neglect, humiliation and deprivation of food, education and healthcare. Such abuse and assault was widespread across institutions, across states and across the government, religious and other care providers."

The report also said governments, churches and other care providers had shown "a complete lack of understanding or acceptance of responsibility for the level of neglect, abuse and assault that occurred in their institutions."

There are many reasons as to why

people ended up in institutions including the death of parents, family breakups or the parents' inability to cope. Lismore man Nicholas Kostyn was made a ward of the state when he was just 18 months old.

He spent the next 16-and-a-half years being moved around between different boys homes and spending his school holidays with foster families. He said he could never understand why these nice families took him back to places he considered to be "like hell".

"Some of the homes were an absolute nightmare," he told The Echo. "They were like a cross between jail and something out of a Charles Dickens novel."

Nicholas estimates that he must have lived in over 40 places during that time and said, "instability has been the biggest disability" in his life.

"You never knew who to really trust as the biggest offenders of these heinous crimes were the very people trusted and paid to look after us," he said. "The assaults and abuse often occurred behind closed doors, in isolation from the public as the institutions were situated on rural properties or behind walls in the cities."

Not surprisingly there are deep feelings of abandonment and distrust amongst many of the people who were brought up in children's homes. This has led to high levels of substance abuse, imprisonment, depression and suicide.

Nicholas said he still has a serious distrust of all institutions, which he said generally show no tolerance or understanding towards him.

"No one really wants to know. DoCS (Department of Community Services) especially never wanted to know, despite repeated attempts to bring these

matters to their attention as both a child and as an adult. We were given an abhorrent burden as children and sent into the world very ill equipped. It haunts you all your life," he said.

When he was 15 years old DoCS tried unsuccessfully to track down Nicholas's mother. But when he was 21 he said he felt an urge to find out where he came from. He knew his mother's name and a simple call to Telstra's directory assistance led to him tracking her down.

"I found my mother, but there had never been a relationship in the first place and having been removed from that (Greek) culture, it didn't allow me to have a relationship in the future," he said.

Nicholas is now 44 and has a seven-year-old son, Jack, who he said is the biggest joy in his life and has played a huge part in his healing.

Last year after the apology to the Stolen Generations he wrote to his local MP, Janelle Saffin, to try and get some movement on the implementation of the 39 recommendations from the report into the Forgotten Australians.

"I congratulated the government on the apology and said hopefully it would be the first step in trying to get recognition of the recommendations into our inquiry," he said. "This is not trying to take anything away from Indigenous people, but we feel like the survivors who have been forgotten. We don't have a collective voice, no family, culture, kinship, spirit of place or identity."

Nicholas is one of the youngest people to be included amongst the Forgotten Australians and said action needed to happen before there was no one left.

Today (Thursday, July 16) Janelle Saffin is hosting a morning tea for



Nicholas and other local Forgotten Australians at her electoral office in Lismore.

"The survivors of these institutions have carried the physical and emotional scars throughout their lives, and the recognition of their suffering is long overdue," Ms Saffin said.

Nicholas has welcomed the invitation, although he said in some ways he was reluctant to meet with other survivors because it would open some old wounds that he had worked hard at closing.

"But if we keep the silence, then nothing ever gets a chance to heal... Many of the hurts are too painful for an individual to manage on their own. Having discussed the matter with Janelle over the past year-and-a-half, we came to the decision to have a meeting for local survivors of institutional abuse," he said. "This is to try and get the ball rolling for the current government to start acting upon the key recommendations to provide services for those Australians who suffered from abuse in institutions."

Apart from the formal apology, other key recommendations from the inquiry are for specialised counselling services and programs that tackle health and housing issues, as well as numeracy, literacy and other education services.

By Andy Parks

The exhibition *Selling an American Dream: Australia's Greek Cafe* is continuing its successful tour across the country and in the process is breaking attendance records at host venues.

At the National Museum of Australia in Canberra last year the exhibition attracted some 70,000 people and was applauded by the Museum as one of its most successful visiting exhibitions. Now, after only 3 months on display at the Migration Museum in Adelaide, over 20,000 more people have been attracted to the exhibition.

Staff at the Migration Museum are thrilled with the exhibition's phenomenal success, as are the show's curators, photographer Effy Alexakis and historian Leonard Janiszewski. Alexakis stated that "the exhibition has certainly drawn much broad pub-

## GREEK CAFE EXHIBITION BREAKING ATTENDANCE RECORDS



lic attention to the key role that Greeks have played in developing the Australia of today". Janiszewski agrees and adds "that not only should

Greek-Australians be proud of their achievements in this country, but all Australians, most of whom have benefited in some way because of Greek

involvement".

Both curators consider that the exhibition's success has been built on a mix of "nostalgia, revelation and inclusiveness: the public's nostalgia for the golden era of milk bars and Greek cafes; revelation that Greeks played a key role in the Americanisation of Australian popular culture; and the inclusion of not only Greek-Australia voices in the exhibition, but also of those who frequented the Greek cafes and milk bars – the Australian public."

Attendance of the exhibition will not doubt collectively total 100,000 during its stay at Adelaide's Migration Museum, which will end on 28 Septem-

ber. The next city eagerly awaiting the exhibition's visit is Darwin. With five more years of touring, the final projected attendance figures for the show look to be headed towards astronomical heights. This is without contradiction an exhibition which is not to be missed and one that audiences are rapidly being drawn to.

For further information on the exhibition view the following web sites:

<http://www.history.sa.gov.au/migration/migration.htm>

<http://www.postcards.sa.com.au/>

[http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/selling\\_an\\_american\\_dream\\_australias\\_greek\\_cafe/](http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/selling_an_american_dream_australias_greek_cafe/)

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