Nothing is more authentic than stories by those who were taken.

By Jens Korff | Last updated: 6 March 2013

The stories that have been shared with us of some of the Kinchela boys have left memories in our hearts that can never be erased.

—Marie Bashir, NSW Governor [1]

They don't [talk to their old people] anymore; it's all iPhone, iPad, there's no eye-to-eye contact.

—Leah Purcell, Aboriginal actor and director [14]

Bill Simon’s story: “I saw her hammering her fists into the road”

“It was winter 1957, seven o’clock in the morning. The sun was up and the sounds of birds drifted down into our small kitchen. My brother Lenny was sitting on the floor, eating toast; my brothers Murray and David and I, rubbing our eyes in a state of half sleep, were waiting for mum to smear Vegemite on our bread before we dressed for school. A routine day in the Simon household.

Someone rapped loudly on the door. My mother didn’t answer it. We hadn’t heard anyone come up the path. The knocking got louder, and finally my mother, who was reluctant to answer any callers when my father wasn’t home, opened the door and exchanged words with three people. We strained to hear what they were saying. Three men then entered the room.

A man in a suit ordered my mother to pick up Lenny and give him to me. My mother started to scream. One of the policemen bent down and picked up my brother and handed him to me. My mother
screamed and sobbed hysterically but the men took no notice, and forced my brothers and me into a car.

My mother ran out onto the road, fell on her knees and belted her fists into the bitumen as she screamed. We looked back as the car drove off to see her hammering her fists into the road, the tears streaming down her face…” [2].

Simon was ten years old when he was taken to Kinchela where he remained until he was 17 years old. The abuse he suffered left him unable to have healthy relationships and trying to numb his rage and violence with drugs and alcohol [10].

Simon was in his 30s when he finally met his mother again. But it was too late, his mother, re-married with other children, rejected him.

Check out Bill’s book: Back on the Block - Bill Simon’s Story.

I'm still getting healed now and I'm 62, but thinking about it still makes me angry and I'll never forget the pain and suffering.

—Bill Simon [10]

Netta’s story:
For 30 years she thought her mother had died

When Netta was about five years old, a policeman tried to tempt the young girl away from her mother with a tin of apricot jam. He put her on a truck headed for an institution in Alice Springs where she would be trained as a domestic servant.

Her mother tried to get Netta back. The child fell asleep on the truck and awoke to find her gone.

At the institution she could not talk to the other kids who were already there because she could only speak her Aboriginal language, not English. The little girl started to scream, asking for her mother.

It wasn't until an older girl who could speak her language explained to her what had happened:

“You're going to be here for the rest of your life, like the rest of us. You are going to be here all the time now. You won't see your mother anymore.”

Netta would later describe her treatment at the institution as that of ‘inmates’ and ‘like bullocks in a paddock’.

For more than 30 years Netta thought her mother had died. Married and a mum herself, she was in for a surprise.

An office worker rang her up and told her he was with her mum. Netta didn't believe him, but then her
mum called her by her name.

Taken away so young Netta had never really gotten to know her mother, so now she had no feelings about her. The other girls Netta had grown up with were much more of a family to her.

When Netta met her mother again it confused and overwhelmed her. She didn't even know what her mother looked like.

When her mother finally recognised her, both of them broke down and cried, the mother saying “my girl has come home”. [4]

Poem: Love You My Sweet Nanna Molly

My grandmother was born Molly Lennon at Eringa, 
Her mother, Indulkulta, was of the Uluru Luritja people and lands, 
Her father was an Irish man named Ted Lennon, 
born upon the northern south Australian sands.

The problems began when her mother died, 
all because nanna was of mixed descent, 
taken away from her family was she, 
into Oodnadatta United Aborigines Mission home she went.

From Molly Lennon her name was changed to Ruth Selah, 
names from the Bible to hide her real true identity, 
but family knew she was incarcerated there, 
so away she was taken again to Quorn, far away from her family.

In the newly established Quorn Colebrook Home in 1927 they took her, 
the missionaries beat out of her language, culture and identity, 
but by biting her tongue she maintained what was most precious to her, 
her real name, her mother’s name, and the names of all her close family.
Despite all the bad things that the missionaries at Colebrook done to her, my nanna has long kept a faith and belief in Christianity, she is a part of the Australian Aboriginal Stolen Generations, across Australia was played this sad part of Australian racist policy.

If you ask some Colebrook Home Aborigines about life at Colebrook, many would say it was a good institutional life remembered fondly, but if you were to ask my nanna, upon her face a look of hurt would come, for her it was a time of pain and loss for she was separated from her family.

The only good that came from nanna ending up in Colebrook was this, she met my Adnyamathanha Kuyani Yura grandfather Malcolm McKenzie, they fell in love, got married and had a big family from whom I am descended, I always say to my nanna that all that had happened to her was meant to be.

Love you my sweet nanna Molly.

Poem by Walha Udi Marvyn McKenzie Snr, Port Augusta, South Australia [3]. Read more Aboriginal poems.

My grandfather was a member of the Stolen Generations but he was taken as a little boy and put into a circus. He was put into a cage for people to laugh at and, when the circus finished with him, they dumped him in Victoria.

—Reverend Aunty Alex Gater [8]

Joyce Injie’s story: A lucky escape

Not all Stolen Generation stories end in tragedy. Joyce’s father had his own strategy to deal with Native Welfare and the police. Joyce remembers [5]:

“One day the Native Welfare lady came with her husband named Don. My father saw them coming to the holiday camp where we were staying. He said to me, ‘You’ll have to run or they’ll catch you up. And if they grab you they’ll never let you go.’

When she came close I ran and then she started to run after me. My mother and father said ‘You’d better hurry.’ I ran—not to let her catch me up. It was about sundown and I ran a long way. She never caught me, but made her intentions quite clear.

She told my parents, ‘I’ll get the police on to you. You won’t have that girl for too long, I’ll report you. She’s got to go to the settlement.’ She did report me. But we moved to Rocklea Station.

While we were at a meeting there my father heard of a job as a station hand at Wyloo Station. He got that job and I got a job there doing housework. One day the police came there looking for me, but the
station manager said, ‘She’s all right, she’s working here, we’ll look after her.’ So finally the police left me alone.

Within a few weeks I had my cousin brother and sister picked up from Mulga Downs and at Mount Florence. Ronnie Mills, his sister and cousin were taken away to Mogumber. They were younger than us by perhaps four or six years. Native Welfare picked up another two kids from Hamersley. They were the younger cousin brothers of [Aboriginal elder] Nelson Hughes. They never returned to their home country.”

![Hope Beyond the Window by Jacqui Stewart](image)

*Hope Beyond the Window by Jacqui Stewart.* The painting represents children from a Stolen Generation. The church symbolises religion and the window represents ‘hope’ looking through to the sky. The children are portraying despair but also at the same time hopefulness and belief for a better future. The old tree beside the church symbolises an Aboriginal Elder who is protecting and watching the children while the leaves illustrate “free spirits” flying through the wind. The painting was influenced by photographs of the Moore River Native Settlement in WA and the movie Rabbit Proof Fence. Image reproduced with kind permission from the artist.

Philip may never know his mother’s family

Philip Coller comes from New South Wales and sent the following story as a reader’s letter to an Aboriginal newspaper [13].

My mother, deceased, was taken from her family. She had an Aboriginal father and English mother and was subsequently adopted out. Unfortunately, this information about the adoption was hidden from my brothers and myself (and we assume also from my mother).
It was only recently, thanks to Link-Up, that we found out about our true family heritage. We found out what we thought was our family history on my mother’s side was a lie and that we have been denied our Aboriginal heritage.

At age 50 I have no idea who my grandfather was and no contact with any other family members on my mother’s side. We have searched for the past couple of years but to no avail as we are tracing events from 80 years ago.

This has left us angry, confused and saddened that we may never know my mother’s family. How do you put a price on that? It has left an empty feeling and a longing for family.

This disgraceful government policy was so effective in ‘assimilating’ my mother that my two brothers and I had no real connection to a wonderful culture that as middle-aged men we are eager to engage with, but with no known relations.

The impact of a policy, enforced in 1926, will impact on my brothers and myself many years into the future.”

Poem: Who am I?

Happy and cheerful with my family one day
With tears and screams I was taken away
Put into an Aboriginal children's home
Who was I to turn to? Where was I to go?

The sisters were nice and looked after us
Until the sad day my friends were put on the bus
The bus took them away from me because they were too dark
They were sent to be slaves, because our skin leaves a mark

I was so lonely and so sad
Just because of our skin colour we are judged as bad
Then my day came to leave Bomaderry
To turn white and to be put in a white family

As I got on the train I couldn't stop crying
Why did the matron make me leave? Why am I still going?
As I got off the train I felt like everyone was watching
Watching the dark girl that was approaching

Now I lived in Sydney with my white family
Why do I have to be white? Why can‘ t I be me?
To white people I am introduced as the coloured child
Why do people act like that? It's like I've been pulled out of the wild.

On Australia Day I am going to fight
Against the government for our Aboriginal rights
Fight to be with my real family and fight to be free
For I am an Aboriginal and proud to be me
Poem by Kate Hughes, Fauconbridge, NSW [17].

Greg: “My birthday has always been a mystery”

Gregory Tucker, a Punjima man from Western Australia, tells what can happen if your birthday is not properly registered [6], a problem with many members of the Stolen Generations.

“The date of my birth has always been a mystery. The old Native Welfare Department’s records have my birth recorded as 1 July 1952 and 8 May 1953. They had my brother Archie’s birth as 2 July 1954 and 3 April 1954. The Department of Social Security, when I was going to school, believed that my birth date was 8 May 1953. The Nullagine Mission records show me as being born on 1 July 1952.

Last year I applied to the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages for registration of my birth. The office investigated the matter and found that I was born on 3 May 1953. This information was found in the log book of Winning Pool Station, Carnarvon, where I was born.

This discovery has made me ten months younger.”

Seeing the mother for the first time

Missions separated children from a very early age. In the next extract, Gregory recounts how it felt to meet his mother for the first time [6].

“The time came when the mission was told to close. They had taken me and my brother Archie, he was three years younger, from our parents years before. Now because they couldn’t get their act right, we were a burden, and they didn’t know what to do with us kids. One of the white missionaries decided that the thing to do with us was return us to the parents.

I had never seen my mother in my life. My life in the Christian mission completely cut my ties to her. It did not even let me know who she was, let alone tell me if she missed me. I did not know that my mother was an Aboriginal mother.

Never mind, they took us back to Mulga Downs Station where she lived. There was a reserve at Mulga Downs where the Aboriginals lived. It was separated from the white people. So off we went, me and my little brother Archie, to go to Mulga Downs and the white European homestead. But they didn’t take us to the homestead. They stopped at the reserve and told us to get out. I was speechless. Then they pointed to an Aboriginal woman and said, ‘That is your mother.’ And I went, ‘Oh-oh,’ I could not believe it. No one had prepared me to understand my past. ‘No,’ I said, ‘she’s not my mother, the skin is different, darker, black, not the right colour.’

It was a big shock, first time I ever see my mother.

I think it was a shock for her, too. She knew who we were. But she was really waiting to see what we gonna do.

Well, I cried. I didn’t want to stay there, I wanted to go to the homestead. Archie was the same but
there was nothing we could do, we had to accept it. That was our mum and that's where we had to stay. I was fourteen years, I had to learn all my Aboriginal culture. I knew nothing. I didn't know about Aboriginals. I didn't know about the culture, colour of skin, nothing whatever. I had to really learn.

In fourteen years at the mission I had learned nothing about my own culture, I had been taught little in the white education matters. But we had to say grace before every meal, prayers at night, and attend Sunday School each week.”

Maree Lawrence’s story: “My school mates called me ‘Blackjack’”

When Maree Lawrence was growing up in country New South Wales, she would often wonder where she really came from. “I knew I was adopted, but kids at school used to say I was Aboriginal because I had dark hair and eyes and my skin was also dark,” she said. “My school mates called me ‘Blackjack’. I would often ask my parents if I had Aboriginal blood in me but they said I was probably just a mix of Spanish. “But I felt I had more in common with the Indigenous students and would often mix more with them than anyone else.”

Later, when Maree married and moved to Brisbane, her husband encouraged her to trace her background and find out who she really was and she contacted the hospital where she was born. “The hospital confirmed I had been put up for adoption shortly after my birth—I then realised I was a member of the Stolen Generation,” she said.

It turned out her mother’s family had been packed up and moved from their riverbank camp in country NSW and taken to a mission near Sydney. Her mother went on to have six children and all were removed from her at one stage or another.

“A family friend can remember being in the hospital after I was born and watched as a nurse took me away from the arms of my mother as she fed me,” she said. “Eventually I was adopted by a white family and raised as a white.”

Maree's research also uncovered that her mother died in tragic circumstances about five years after the birth and was buried in an unmarked grave. “An aunty told me where she was buried and took me there, where I just collapsed on the grave and sobbed for about an hour,” she said. “I was crying because I thought maybe if things were different, I could have changed things for her—I could have turned her life around.”

Today, Maree is working and raising a family in Maryborough where, with the support of Centrelink Indigenous Services Officer Brenda Williams, she has returned to university to obtain her Bachelor of Human Services (Counselling). “Brenda has been very supportive in letting me know what assistance I am eligible for while at university and continues to give me on-going support,” Maree said.

“I want to help people and I especially want to help the grandchildren of the Stolen Generation—and there are many of them.

“It doesn’t stop with those of us that were taken. There are many people who haven’t healed and
whose anger and tears carry through to other family members.”

Maree believes her life experience has brought her to where she is now. “I feel like I've come full circle - I've been able to heal and move on with my life and now I have the opportunity to help others heal,” she said. [7]

Poem: 1899

I wished I'd have known you
I'm so proud you were my Aunt.
I wish I could have been there
But you know I couldn't Aunt.

It was well before my time
A long, long time ago
Gran told us girls your story
And you are my hero.

I wished I could have been there to
protect and keep you safe
It breaks my heart to hear how many
times that you were raped.

They took you from your children
your husband and your tribe
God granted you mercy
and they called it suicide.

Your story passes on to me now,
And I'll share it carefully
You're safe and protected now Aunt
You and your family.

I feel your spirit gently brush past me
and visit me sometimes
And I know I am protected
from the evil kind!

Poem by Sandra McBride [9].
Read more Aboriginal poems.

Deb’s personal journey of sadness and survival

For Stolen Generations survivor Deb Hocking, the long road towards healing began at the age of 20, when an innate sense of belonging told her it was time to find her mum.
“Mine has been a personal journey of sadness and survival,” she said. “When I finally got access to my Government file, I read the letters written from my parents begging for my return. What nobody realised at the time I was taken was that I would never go back to my family again.”

Fostered out when she was a baby, Ms Hocking said the daily abuse started when she was five and continued until she got the courage to run away from home as a teenager.

“When I was 20 I decided I needed to see my mum. It took me almost two years. I went into the office every day for two weeks and every day they said they couldn't help me. Finally they gave me access to my file for half an hour.”

Ms Hocking said looking at the file for the first time was a surreal experience, like looking at the life of a stranger with names that made no sense. “The hardest thing was being told as a child that your parents don’t want you. I went to where my mum lived and waited in the car for so long, you can't describe the feeling. When my mum opened the door she said ‘I knew you'd come’.”

“She died two weeks later. I have to lay some things to rest. There are just some things as a Stolen Generations survivor that you might never find out. You must set about restoring your cultural identity.” [11]

There are just some things as a Stolen Generations survivor that you might never find out.

—Deb Hocking [11]

Blind Eye: Documentary on the Stolen Generations

Three members of the Stolen Generations remember their experiences.

Video:
More info about the film Benny And The Dreamers.

Poem: Djhuma

Young girl, walking, three or four years old,
Adelaide River, small town, hard living,
Refuge from flooding rains,
Strange wonderment for the girl,
Big Wet dominating,
Mother is busy, unconcerned, preparing a meal.
Walking along the road, astonished by nature,  
Flowers everywhere, verdant hues and lushness prevail,  
Carefree, she walks, happy in awe,  
She bends to pick flowers,  
Colours so bright, yellow and gold.

Dress not fitting properly, but clean,  
Bare feet, strong, small pebbles under foot,  
Walking proud, even at this young age.

Rumbling, grumbling, something behind her,  
She looks around, but sees nothing in the distant shimmering haze,  
She stares blankly as pregnant seconds go by,  
Still nothing, what can it be?

She continues wandering along the road,  
Engrossed, she doesn't see the Government truck,  
The policeman sits stiffly, alert,  
The government driver, studying the road, in the distance, a young half-caste girl.

Brown children in the rear, ovine-like,  
Huddled together, frightened,  
Hugging each other for strength,  
Finding small comfort in embrace.

Truck stops noisily, dust enveloping the young girl,  
Startled, she looks around, eyes squinting,  
Suddenly, hoisted from the ground.  
Another time, this would be fun.

She smells the strangeness of the policeman,  
Roughly, she is placed in the rear of truck,  
Unknown faces staring, she begins crying,  
Loudly, mew-like; she is in a strange place,  
She cries for her mother, her siblings, familiarity,  
The truck lurches forward, rumbling, it builds speed.

Hands reach out to her, strange, offering comfort,  
She continues crying, standing alone,  
Familiar language, 'Come to us',  
She stands firm, proud, alone.

Many hours pass, she is exhausted, hungry, cold,  
She sleeps alone, weak, thirsty,  
Finally, strong brown hands comfort her, soothing.

Unrelenting, the truck lurches on, ever on,  
The older children stare, blankly,  
The younger children sleep, fitfully,  
Rumbling, the truck lumbers on bumpily.

A mother weeps uncontrollably, she screams, 'Why?'  
She begins hitting her head heavily with a rock,
Rumbling, the truck lumbers on bumpily.

Poem by Ted Dean [12]. This poem relates to the author’s mother, a member of the Stolen Generations taken from Adelaide River in the Northern Territory. Read more Aboriginal poems.

It wasn’t my journey

The following story was published anonymously in an Aboriginal newspaper [15].

Like many of our mob, my first label was ‘abandoned’, then ‘ward of the State’ which was the start of a journey that for many years I felt wasn’t mine to have.

Years later, when I found my way home, both parents had passed on, although the stories and labels that I grew up believing were a misrepresentation of the actual truth.

More fitting words would be ‘stolen’ and ‘assimilation’ though - as sad as my story may be -I wouldn't change a thing, even if I could today because now it's my story and it's me who is steering the canoe.

Yeah, I spent a lot of my life wallowing in self-pity, blaming everyone else and everything else for the way I was - until only a few years ago when I realised that this is what they wanted.

I remember the early days of going to court and the continuation of the brainwashing process that kept me for years on the journey that wasn't mine.

The courts, once they heard my story, just said it was expected that I turned out the way I did.

Instead of teaching me to take responsibility for my actions, I was taught to blame and be ashamed of my Aboriginality, which in many ways paralysed me and prevented me from finding the strength and courage to find my own way home.

Like too many of our brothers and sisters, I have spent too much time locked up for crimes that I was expected to commit anyway because of my Aboriginality.

When I did start finding my strength, pride and courage and started to man up, taking personal re- sponsibility for my behaviour, only then was I handed the full extent of the law.

Even while in prison, while trying to stand up for not only my rights, but also the rights of our people, I was dealt with harshly and spent a lot of time in management units being very closely watched.

They didn't like to see a brother doing the right thing. After all, it even goes against what most of them were taught about our mob.

But even in bad times, my spirit was growing and over time, they started to say that this time I wasn't going to give up or myself like I did so many times in the past.

The difference for me was that when I did give up on life, it wasn't mine to begin with. So why would I
take responsibility for something that wasn't mine to begin with.

I never owned that part of my life and was never given a real choice, like the policies of the day, their theories were a huge gamble and everything was based on chance, assumptions and labels.

A Stone Cast Into Still Waters

Nellie Egan is a consultant in Aboriginal Studies. Here is her story [18] which takes you to the time of the government's assimilation policy.

In the 1920s my grandfather purchased an old, two-bedroom, stone cottage at Goolwa where my parents spent time with myself and other siblings.

They met in their teens in Adelaide where my father was sent for schooling (my father is from the Gurindji, Wave Hill, NT; my mother, Ngarrindjeri). Because both parents were working away from home, we were left with grandparents.

My first few years were spent in a typical Aboriginal family with parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins; some living with us, others neighbours. They, particularly older cousins who are classed as brothers and sisters, shared the role of caring for children.

My memories are filled with their love, care and warmth. There was a sense of belonging which is only experienced when surrounded by family, especially brothers and sisters.

This was stolen from us by the Law of Assimilation. Conflict and trauma followed - feelings I hadn't experienced before being taken away.

Terrified and distraught, myself, my younger sister and brother were driven by police (who enforced that law) from Goolwa to the Aboriginal Affairs Department in Adelaide where welfare assessed us.

Our younger brother, a toddler, was placed in a boys home. We never saw him again until he was ten.

My sister and I were placed in Fullerton Girls Home, then a foster home for a short while, and later Warrawee Children’s home.

During this time we were forced to deal with what was happening. Our feelings of fear and anger were acted out in different ways. My sister was angry towards other children and the authorities, and so was considered ‘rebellious’.

I internalised these feelings and become withdrawn, untrusting and afraid to form any relationship with anyone else other than my sister. My greatest fear was that the authorities had the power to control whatever we did and I didn't want us to be separated too.

There was no thought that we may have been normal children trying to cope with the trauma of being taken away from our ‘family’.

Later Aboriginal Affairs advertised in The Advertiser - ‘home wanted for two Aboriginal girls, approxi-
mately seven and nine’.

Mr and Mrs McLennan, who were mature aged and childless, replied and became our foster parents. For six years we lived in an environment considered materialistically as white middle class. They provided for all our material needs but had difficulty with the emotional and cultural needs of two Aboriginal individuals displaced from a culturally inclusive family environment into an isolated white nuclear family.

We were searching for identity. Ours is not an isolated case, many thousands of Aboriginal people have similar stories to tell.

After we were taken away our grandmother died of grief. Our older brother is still suffering from the feeling of hopelessness he felt when he was unable to help her through her grief. At 14 he was too young to understand and deal with it.

My mother died in 1976 and I never really got to know her. My younger sister, however, was relocated back to her when 15 because the authorities considered her an uncontrollable child and used our mother as an ‘appropriate’ solution to their problem.

In reflection my sister suffered the culture shock of being taken away to a white environment. She was also expected to fit back into an Aboriginal family without counselling and support.

A stone has a direct impact when thrown into still waters but its rippling effect goes far beyond.

The Assimilation policy was the stone cast by the government of the day. Its ripple is being felt today by our families, children and people.

Media reports abound with the negative psychological and emotional effects of this policy on our people. Many Aboriginals, including members of my immediate family, are struggling with the antisocial behavioural patterns brought on by alcohol and drug abuse as a way of coping with the disorientation they feel because of this policy.

To come to terms with these wide ranging effects, I believe a program established and controlled by Aboriginal people is imperative. It needs to give the wider community a basic understanding of our traumas and struggles. It should include Aboriginal Studies for the wider community and specific cultural enrichment programs for Aboriginal people affected by assimilation.

Read more Stolen Generations stories

Stolen Generations Foundation
The [Stolen Generations Foundation](http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/stolen-generations-stories) website offers over 30 stories from members of the Stolen Generations, people who did not usually speak in public about their history [16].

Each person shares what they wished to share, making every testimony unique. All stories are accompanied by photos, maps and a transcript.

**Us Taken-Away Kids**

*Us Taken-Away Kids* is a moving collection of Aboriginal peoples' stories of removal and their hopes for the future published to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the *Bringing Them Home Report*.

It is a testimony to their resilience and the ability to overcome adversity and look to a brighter future.

The Australian Human Rights Commission offers a [free PDF download](http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/stolen-generations-stories) of the document.

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### Footnotes

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