

Looking back, we still have a long way to go

May 29, 2021

While some progress has been made on relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Aboriginal peoples, injustices continue. These members' accounts illustrate why your support is needed to help make significant headway towards reconciliation.

Glen Cook

As a child growing up in the 1960s on an Aboriginal Community attending a "School for Aboriginals" at Cabbage Tree Island, we were denied access to a public school 5km from home. We had to travel 20km to attend a public school.

In 1967, the year of the Referendum, we became Australian citizens. I was turning seven and was totally unaware of the impact this would make on me personally, as a Nyangbal-Bundjalung /Dunghutti man.

During my time at Cabbage Tree Island I witnessed two of our cousins physically removed by the police. I remember a black car pulled up next door and the police forcibly removed the brother and sister. I vividly remember my cousins' mother screaming and yelling to "leave my kids alone" and running after the car as they drove off the island. From that day on we (all of the other kids on the island) would run into the sugar cane paddocks when a black car would drive onto the island.

Thirty years later those two children returned to the island but their mother had passed on. They had no connection and seemed lost, disengaged with family and mob.

I am one of 11 children and my mother was always looking behind her. Our house was always kept immaculate and she would ensure that we were always safe and well kept. The Aboriginal Welfare Board would inspect our house each fortnight and she would have a checklist until one day my mum told her to "get out you know my house is clean and my kids are clean".

Sorry Day to me is remembering those life experiences and all those individuals who were removed and disconnected with their communities.

Glen Cook is a member of the Aboriginal Members Committee

Russell Honnery, Murri Gomerio giwirr

ngaya giir ngaangu dhuurran ngay Gamilaraay- gal nhama yalagirrmawu ngaragay yilaadhu nhama yalagiya wurruga nhyalay dhawun-nha ngiyani gara-ga yilaadhu (I would like to acknowledge my Gamilaraay people.



The past and the present Traditional owners of the land that I live on)

I would like to acknowledge the Traditional owners of the land you are reading this article on today.

For me and many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people Sorry Day is when we remember the 100,000 plus Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were taken away from their families due to policies that were enforced/endorsed by the Government at that time.

In 2008 when then Prime Minister Mr Kevin Rudd delivered the official apology, I was teaching kindergarten at Moree East Public School and watched it in the school library with students and their families.

It was also a time to reflect on the stories that my grandmother told me (who passed before hearing the apology):

- The stories about Slaughter House Creek. It was from Gravesend to Pallamallawa that they used to line up the Aborigines and shoot them, men, women and children, for no other reason other than who they were.
- The story of the Myall Creek Massacre, which involved the killing of at least 28 Aboriginal people by 12 colonists on 10 June 1838 at the Myall Creek near the Gwydir River, in northern NSW. Seven stockmen were hung for their crimes and it was the first time there had been acknowledgement of frontier atrocities and pursuit through the courts.
- The Aboriginal children in Moree not being allowed on the bus to school. They lived the furthest away, but the bus was for the white children. Not being allowed in the local swimming pool; instead only having access to the creek, which was often dry.

Thirteen years after the apology we still have our children being removed, Aboriginal deaths in custody, and still not being recognised in our own Constitution.

For me it is a time to remember all those who came and fought before me, reminding me that we still have a fight ahead.

Russell Honnery is the Acting Aboriginal Education Coordinator

Peter Horsley

In 2008 I joined our kids in the library to watch Kevin Rudd deliver the national apology.

You could have heard a pin drop. We felt an overwhelming sense of optimism that now, at the highest level of government the cultural genocide that was policy for so long was finally recognised.

In 2021 very little has changed, the optimism has long gone.

In the end, talk is cheap.

Peter Horsley is a non-Indigenous member of the Aboriginal Education Restricted Committee

Learn more about how you can help support the journey towards reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous peoples [here](#).