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**The Stolen Generation**

**By Terry McCarthy/Sydney**

When the welfare officers came to take three-year-old Archie Roach from his tin-lined house in Framlingham in southeastern Australia, they told his mother they were escorting him to a picnic. His aunt tried to scare them off with a gun, but it wasn't loaded. Institutionalized in a Melbourne orphanage, young Archie was told his family had died in a fire. His minders tried to force his hair straight, breaking comb teeth in his frizzy curls. It was a vain attempt by whites to make an Aboriginal child more like them. It didn't work, and the combs weren't the only casualties.

Roach, now 45, is one of an estimated 100,000 Aborigines, living and dead, who make up Australia's so-called Stolen Generation. Under a government policy that ran from 1910 to, unbelievably, 1971, as many as 1 in 10 of all Aboriginal children were removed from their families in an effort to "civilize" them by assimilation into white society. Their story of suffering, abuse, and lost identity--long Australia's dirty secret--is finally forcing itself out. It's an uncomfortable development for many Australians, especially at a moment when the country is basking happily in the spotlight of the Olympics. While a growing band of campaigners lobbies for an official government apology, John Howard, the conservative Prime Minister, has refused to say sorry and most Australians support his ungenerous stand.

The policy of "stealing" Aboriginal children, mostly those with some white blood, was devised in the early 1900s when eugenic theories were widely touted. In Australia government administrators thought that by bringing mixed-blood Aborigines into the white world, the color could be "bred out of them" over a few generations. Meanwhile the fully black population, regarded as irredeemably primitive, was expected to simply die out. The practice was not widely discussed until 1997, when an official inquiry found consistent patterns of physical and sexual abuse of the "stolen" children, of exploitation in the labor market and of social dislocation that led many into alcoholism, violence and early death.

Since then the outrage has mounted. Some 200,000 people marched across Sydney Harbor Bridge in May calling for reconciliation with Aborigines--the largest political demonstration in the country's history. In August former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser called for a national apology for the "stolen generations." Prime Minister Howard answered that modern Australians "shouldn't be required to accept guilt and blame for past actions." Last month two Aborigines lost a court case in Darwin in which they sought compensation from the government for being removed from their families as children.

Roach, who was taken from his family because he had a white grandfather, knows what they went through. His third set of foster parents treated him well, as an equal to their own three children. But his life was shattered when Roach, 14, received a letter from his sister Myrtle, who had tracked him down through welfare agencies. Their mother, supposedly dead, had passed away the previous week. Furious that he'd been lied to his whole life, Roach ran away from home and spent the next 14 years drinking, sleeping in parks, playing the guitar to earn enough for the next bottle. Finally, he dried out and began writing and singing songs, including his 1987 hit, Took the Children Away, which launched him on an upward musical career. But, he says, "I still feel the pain, every day. Sometimes it threatens to engulf me. But I'm not going to let it destroy me."

Howard, fearful that a formal apology would strengthen the case for compensation, has issued only a statement of "regret" for the Stolen Generation. Polls suggest that just over half the population supports him. Many already resent existing welfare payments to the mostly impoverished Aborigines. "The government can't even say the word s-o-r-r-y," Roach says. "Most Aborigines I talk to just want a simple statement from the heart. If you hit someone, you don't say, 'I regret what I did.'"

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,998067,00.html>

Continue to the next page and read along while you listen to Archie Roach’s song “Took the Children Away”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aywDT6yHMmo>

Took the Children Away

Archie Roach

This story's right, this story's true

I would not tell lies to you

Like the promises they did not keep

And how they fenced us in like sheep.

Said to us come take our hand

Sent us off to mission land.

Taught us to read, to write and pray

Then they took the children away,

Took the children away,

The children away.

Snatched from their mother's breast

Said this is for the best

Took them away.

The welfare and the policeman

Said you've got to understand

We'll give them what you can't give

Teach them how to really live.

Teach them how to live they said

Humiliated them instead

Taught them that and taught them this

And others taught them prejudice.

You took the children away

The children away

Breaking their mothers heart

Tearing us all apart

Took them away

One dark day on Framingham

Come and didn't give a damn

My mother cried go get their dad

He came running, fighting mad

Mother's tears were falling down

Dad shaped up and stood his ground.

He said 'You touch my kids and you fight me'

And they took us from our family.

Took us away

They took us away

Snatched from our mother's breast

Said this was for the best

Took us away.

Told us what to do and say

Told us all the white man's ways

Then they split us up again

And gave us gifts to ease the pain

Sent us off to foster homes

As we grew up we felt alone

Cause we were acting white

Yet feeling black

One sweet day all the children came back

The children come back

The children come back

Back where their hearts grow strong

Back where they all belong

The children came back

Said the children come back

The children come back

Back where they understand

Back to their mother's land

The children come back

Back to their mother

Back to their father

Back to their sister

Back to their brother

Back to their people

Back to their land

All the children come back

The children come back

The children come back

Yes I came back.