

The Apology

Contributed by Matt Bell
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When the Prime Minister began to talk a hush fell over the crowd. A lot was riding on the next few minutes. Would the apology be done properly? I was very aware that this was history in the making. For 10 years the Stolen Generations had been asking for an apology, for 10 years myself and others like me had supported this call, and for 10 years a stubborn, heartless government had denied this necessary precondition for healing.

It very quickly became evident that this apology was not a political stunt, nor was it an attempt to push issues aside. This was a genuine, passionate and powerful statement on behalf of a Parliament ready to move forward. This was what our nation had been waiting for with such thirst.

My feelings at the time were powerful. I felt pride in Australia. I mean real pride, in a way I had never felt in my 31 years so far. I felt vindicated. Often I, or the organizations I work for, have felt like we were wasting our time pushing the apology agenda. Now it had been taken up by the Parliament and taken to heart by many Australians I felt like all the work was worth it. Finally, I just felt emotional. Emotions that are hard to articulate but are formed in part by relief, happiness, inspiration, passion and compassion. In short, it was a punching the air kind of feeling.

For me the apology was the achievement of social and political goal that I had invested heavily in. For Indigenous people this was so much more. A validation of their stories and of them; an acknowledgment of the impact of the Stolen Generations, and a genuinely empathetic response to these truths. Talking to one of the performers who performed a song about stolen members of his family, he felt like he might never play that song again. Its job had been done, the story had been heard, and now it could be let go.

The apology opened doors that had previously been nailed shut, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. What happens when we walk through that door is up to us. My heart's desire is that we walk through the door on a journey of healing that builds on the apology and the huge swell of public support for healing in this country.