

# VICTORIAN MEMORIAL UNVEILING

25<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2010

## SPEECH BY LEONIE SHEEDY

A very warm welcome to everyone here today.

Thank you to all who were apart of the Victorian Working Party members of the Memorial Committee, and especially to Frank Golding, Phyllis Cremona and Caroline Carroll. Frank was the Chair of the Memorial Committee and is currently overseas. Frank will be disappointed that he is missing this event.

My thanks go to the Federal government, the Minister Lisa Neville and the Melbourne City Council. Welcome to the Lord Mayor Robert Doyle and Opposition Spokesperson, Mary Wooldridge and finally thank you to the Department of Human Services for consulting with Care Leavers on this important memorial.

Thanks to the artist Helen Bodycomb, I think your art speaks for itself.

To the most important people here today are the Forgotten Australians. Let's not forget those who are no longer with us and those for various reasons are unable to attend. You are in our thoughts this afternoon.

To each and everyone of you thank you for showing the courage to come today.

I know it's not easy to come out and disclose in a public place that you were in so called "care" and to be so open with your loss and grief.

We are gathered here at this memorial in Melbourne, to remember everyone who has spent time in a Victorian asylum, orphanage, Children's Home, foster care, industrial schools, reformatories and other institutions.

Today, we the Home children and State Wards of Victoria come together to witness the unveiling of **OUR** memorial. History is being made today; our history cannot be hidden any longer.

With this memorial comes validation, recognition and acknowledgement of our place in the history of Victoria.

This is our day today and this is our memorial.

However it's also a day for our husbands, wives, partners, children and friends. Hopefully with this memorial, people will ask question and may understand US better.

The Senate Inquiry Report Forgotten Australians was released in 2004. As a result of this Inquiry it was recommendation 34 that all states and territories should implement memorials in recognition of Care Leavers.

So many of you here today bravely submitted your stories to the Senate Inquiry and now 6 years after the report was released we finally have OUR Victorian memorial.

What a wonderful day it is today. Our history is today written in stone for all who visit this sacred site to see.

Our history and what happened is important to us and should be important to every Australian. Our history is impacting on many of us still today.

Today is a time to stop and reflect on our childhoods.

We lost our mother and we lost our fathers. Some of us lost our parents forever. Many of us still have fractured families today, struggling to heal from a lifetime of pain.

We lost our brothers and our sisters, our extended families, we had our names changed, and we were called by a number. We suffered terrible neglect, abuse and use.

We lost opportunities that our peers take for granted.

We also lost our culture, our community and our dignity. Many of us even lost ourselves.

Today I'd like to remember those who did try to make a difference to our lives.

There are far too many people to thank, but there are some that I need to publicly acknowledge and honour. We recognise those families that have stood by Forgotten Australians and supported them through the difficult years. I would like to thank my husband, Warren and our children Geraldine, Kieron and Genevieve. Also Sister Genevieve and Marie and Pat Fitzpatrick of Shepparton. Also to Pauline Piele and Kylie Longeran –former DHS employees.

Margaret Turnbull, Heather Bell and others who established the first support group for Victorian Care Leavers in the 1990s. This group was called *Innovate* to begin with and later change to *LOSS – Lives Of State Shame*. Sincere thanks to Heather and everyone involved.

Another person is Joanna Penglase OAM, without her placing the advertisement in 150 NSW newspapers in 1992, our Senate Inquiry would never have occurred and neither would this Victorian memorial.

Another special person to thank is Senator Andrew Murray and all the other senators of the Senate Inquiry who listened and believed our stories.

The late Norval Morris, from the Law Faculty at Melbourne University who was a voice in the wilderness in the 1950s. He spoke out about the appalling conditions in Victoria's orphanages and the dreadful depot which he called the "stinking sink".

How well do many of us here today understand what his words meant?

Our memorial is the beginning of the process of healing from our loss, grief and trauma of our shattered lives.

However there is still a long way to go for true healing to begin.

Justice and Redress for **ALL** Victorian Forgotten Australians is a vital part of our healing.

My hope from this day on, is that you will return and visit this Victorian memorial and bring your friends, children, grandchildren and great grandchildren and tell them about our memorial.

Stay a while at the memorial, if you need to shed some years, give yourself the freedom to cry. The Yarra could do with some clean water.

Allow yourself some personal time at **OUR** memorial.

When it's time to leave the memorial site, wipe your tears, hold your head up high, and be proud of yourself. Australia needs to be proud of us and honour us, Homies, with a medal for surviving our childhoods.

Go from this scared site and tell yourself you are a survivor, not a victim.

The Victorian Child Welfare system didn't break your spirit. They had a good try at it but now you have the satisfaction of living to see this memorial for all of us.

**Victorian Memorial – 25<sup>th</sup> October 2010**