

Yokai – Healing Our Spirit

On 10th January The Yokai Documentary was screened in Northcliffe and one of the two main narrators of the film, senior Noongar man Jim Morrison, attended the film and hosted an audience discussion afterward which kept us riveted until the CRC closed its doors for the day.

“Between 1910 and 1970 thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were forcibly removed from their families and communities by churches, welfare organisations and governments. The exact number is not known. However, it is estimated that, anywhere from 1 in 10 to 1 in 3 Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and fostered or adopted by non-Indigenous families or raised in institutions.” Bringing Them Back Home 1997.

While the content in Yokai was grim and gut wrenching, Jim’s warm heart shone through in his presentation and helped us connect with the challenges of seeing a path forward.

Jim told us that the numbers listed above were much worse in Western Australia, with over 50% of Aboriginal people being either descendants of Stolen Generations survivors or themselves amongst the 17,150 living survivors of the practice.

Jim’s own mother, father and their 21 siblings were all stolen and separated as children.

As someone who was an adult throughout the Stolen Generations Enquiry in 1995, the *Bringing Them Back Home* report in 1997, and the Labor government’s apology in 2008, I was personally surprised by my own ignorance of some key points from Yokai. My prior knowledge was mostly based on media stories of Stolen Generations children who were adopted by white families and later began to explore their roots.

Yokai was really about a different and much larger phenomenon—the placement of Aboriginal children in institutions after

they had been taken away from their families. Children of all backgrounds were abused in some of these notorious institutions—a fact which has become clearer in subsequent Royal Commissions. The majority of these ‘wards of the Chief Protector’ were never adopted out but simply released onto the street with few resources while still teenagers, after a decade of being kept in an institution.

This mass institutionalization of children felt a lot more sinister to me than the white family adoptions I had heard about, perhaps because it feels more like social engineering at an industrial scale, away from the eyes of society, and akin to incarceration. Activists highlight the practice as part of an attempted genocide which continued from Australia’s colonial into much more recent history. Jim also said he saw echoes of these failed policies in the 2007 NT “Intervention”.

According to Jim the Western Australian government is the last state government in Australia which has still failed to make reparations on the basis of the *Bringing Them Back Home* report. He highlighted the efforts to progress these reparations as well as the attempts to get historical redress for the unpaid historical labour of Aboriginal stockmen and domestic servants, many of whom worked in Western Australia.

We didn’t really get around to talking about Australia Day much. I sense it is low on the list of priorities for Jim and the policy victims he represents.

Our thanks to Jim, to Keith Bodman and to Dallas Phillips, a Noongar-Balladong woman who participated in the film (Dallas was due to attend our screening but had to cancel due to illness). This was an unforgettable learning experience.

Thanks to Patti Ferber for initiating this event. Jim and partners are making a new film and we’ve ask Jim to present it in Northcliffe. We’ll keep you posted.

Graham Evans



Monday–Friday 10 am to 5pm