



# Today, our ancestors, your ancestors, they sit together

In August 1863, 67 South Sea Islanders were landed near Brisbane (one had died on the voyage) and walked the 45 kilometres to the Townsville property near Beaudesert, where they worked as “indentured labourers” to clear the land, build drains, and plant and harvest cotton.



At the ASSI commemoration (l-r): Lesley Bryant, Helen Stacey Bunton, David Bunton (descendant of John G Paton), Kathleen Fallon, Isobel Paton.

They had little idea what indentured labour meant or how long they would be there.

Over the next 40 years, more than 50,000 islanders were “recruited” to Queensland, some willingly, but others through deception or violence (known as “blackbirding”); their pay and working conditions were far worse than for white labourers; their death rate was over 25%; and it ended in 1904 with the deportation, under the White Australia policy, of most of those who remained.

150 years later, on August 24, 2013, Australian descendants of island

labourers walked arm-in-arm with descendants of the Walker family who had managed, then owned that plantation; together with chiefs from the islands they walked a short distance along the original homestead driveway.

They carried palm branches, they beat kastom drums and sounded conch shells; they carried the flags of Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, Australian South Sea Islanders, Loyalty Islands, Torres Strait Islands... and the Aboriginal flag. They asked for and were granted permission to enter the land by representatives of the traditional owners, the Mununjali community; Elder Graham Blanco said “Today, our ancestors, your ancestors, they sit together”. (See video link below.)

Taking part from Vanuatu were Chief Richard Fandanumata, Paramount Chief of the Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs, and Paramount Chief Hendon Kalsakau of the island of Efate, where some of the original 67 labourers came from. Vanuatu’s Prime Minister, Moana Carcasses Kalosil, has recently called on Australia to apologise for its role in blackbirding.

## Missionary campaigner

My wife Helen and I were invited to take part in these commemorations after one of the initiators, Lesley Bryant, heard that my great-

grandfather was Rev Dr John G Paton, a missionary to the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) from 1858 to 1881 and a fierce campaigner against this “labour traffic”.

So I wrote a “letter to ancestry” in the spirit of narrative therapy: that letters can bring to light historical injustices in ways that may lead to healing; and a song, *Islander Tribute*, that tells the tragic history but honours the islanders for their contributions to Queensland’s economy and infrastructure and to Australian society as a whole.

Helen, a visual artist, digitally layered a number of historic images and texts for the ASSI 150 *Echoes* art exhibition in the Scenic Rim Regional Gallery, including detail from Tom Roberts’ portrait of John Paton, and two 1860s-1870s watercolour paintings of the islands by my great-grandmother, Maggie Whitecross Paton.

As we were leaving, Lesley said: “It’s been a journey of discovery for all of us. I can’t put into words the spiritual dimension it all had.”

*David Bunton*

This is Our Story: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMFUj5hkUvY&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMFUj5hkUvY&feature=youtu.be)

Islander Tribute: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=2V1ABZEXtCO](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2V1ABZEXtCO)

## Honouring Australian South Sea Islander (ASSI) history

**“In my quiet times I realised ASSI history is being forgotten,” wrote Lesley Bryant (see *Newsbriefs*, December 2012), “so I began to plan to have it honoured.” Launching**

**the exhibition “Memories from a forgotten people” at the State Library of Queensland in August, she spoke about the origin of this year’s 150th anniversary commemoration**

### in South East Queensland:

ASSI 150 SEQ had its genesis in a very personal story. My mother was born into a sugar labouring family in 1922 in North Queensland.

# South Sudan marks International Day of Peace with IofC 'mobilizers'

**David Nyuol Vincent, one of the "Lost Boys" from Sudan, first came to Melbourne as a refugee. In April David returned to South Sudan as one of the core IofC team training 200 "Peace Mobilizers" in partnership with the government. This is taken from his reports from Juba where national reconciliation is going forward supported by those Peace Mobilizers:**

16 September was a great day as IofC South Sudan volunteers started a five day forum on "Initiating Solidarity and Trust in South Sudan".

Two Peace Mobilizers were recruited from each of the 10 States; another 20 representatives of youth organizations attended and delegates from faith-based groups; 58 took part altogether.

The Minister for Culture, Youth and Sports, Dr Nadia Arop Dudi, officially opened the forum, which was reported on both English and Arabic national TV news. Urging the youth to take their role in nation-building seriously, she asked them to send her recommendations for peace-building and reconciliation, particularly among youth in insecure rural areas.

Celebrated peace-maker Bishop Paride Taban spoke on behalf of the National Committee for Healing,

Peace and Reconciliation. The Peace Mobilizers reported enthusiastically from seven States on progress in implementing the action plans they had developed during the IofC training in April.

On 21 September, South Sudan celebrated the International Day of Peace for the first time. It was an initiative of IofC South Sudan, but it was great seeing the government's Peace and Reconciliation Commission taking the lead on this.

## UN peace keepers

The Minister of Education, Science and Technology, Hon. John Gai Yoh, officiated at the occasion which started with a two kilometres procession from John Garang Memorial.

A multi-national force of uniformed UN peace keepers joined the procession, along with students from six schools and many citizens, supported by the Council of Churches and Islamic Council. Victims of land-mines joined in.



IofC Workshop for Africa speakers at South Sudan forum (photo: David Vincent)

The day was marked by dancing and singing led by the Peace Mobilizers, using songs they had learned during their training. Their IofC South Sudan T-shirts were highly visible, as they led the singing of a song on forgiveness by Khamis Kenedy, one of IofC's Workshop for Africa team. National TV covered the event.

Also being organized is a football match between members of the National Legislation Assembly and under 15 year-olds from the Dr John Garang International School. We have asked for the Red Cross ambulance to be on stand-by with lots of ice cubes!

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Her father was born in Fiji and arrived in Queensland in 1898 with his Cornish father and Samoan mother. But my mother hid her Samoan heritage because she feared being labelled "Kanaka".

It was not until her eighties that she spoke about it, when she simply said, "Nobody knows what racism has cost me!" and burst into tears. I decided then to look into her background. We were able to connect with extended family in Fiji and Samoa, and now my mother is proud of her Pacific heritage.

In 2007 I met Joe Sanegar who I assumed was Fijian. But he shamefacedly told me he was labelled "Fiji Melanesian" because his ancestor was a Solomon Islander who had laboured in Queensland. Rather than be deported back home, he chose to work in Fiji, but then was trapped

there. Now his descendants live in Fiji in disadvantaged circumstances.

I took Joe to an indigenous museum in Tweed Heads which has a small South Sea Islander display too. It was the first time he had ever seen his people valued. When he saw it he just wept. At that stage, I didn't know anyone in the local SSI community, but managed to find Auntie Hazel Corowa (of the Togo/Tuku family). She welcomed Joe like a long lost relative.

When Joe and Auntie Hazel discovered that they actually had family connections it was as if Joe was born again - he was radiant! Now he works to help the disadvantaged in his own community in Fiji, and has a new energy and purpose.

## To help others

Having seen the impact of racism and silence on my mother and Joe,

and how being valued and connected gave them a pride in their history, I was determined to help others. This was when I became aware of the 150th anniversary of SSIs in Queensland. I connected with many Australian South Sea Islanders and Fiji Melanesians; anthropologists and librarians; artists and historians. The ASSI 150 SEQ committee was formed in late 2010.

I have seen ordinary Queenslanders discover about and admire the sheer hard work and dogged survival of ASSIs. I have seen people who knew little about their ASSI heritage proudly discover their roots. I have seen descendants of traditional owners, plantation owners and SSI labourers come together with respect for each other as equals in 21st century Australia - so different from 150 years ago!

## Who said fundraising was a walk in the park?!

As part of my ongoing commitment to raise funds each year to send Afghan orphans from Kabul to Asia Plateau, India, for training in leadership and peace-making, a Walkathon was held in August at Kent St Weir Park, Perth.

The title on the flyer was “A Walk in the Park”- to convey the ease of such a fundraiser.

My faith slightly faltered when the forecast was at first “Storms”, then “Showers increasing”! I hurriedly reminded potential walkers to bring an umbrella “just in case”.

The second chink in my faith appeared when I realised that few of those I’d invited were planning to collect sponsors and actually *walk*. Nevertheless, nearly everyone I asked was willing to sponsor me or to give a donation.

It was decided to go ahead in spite of the forecast. We had arranged to pick up my godson, Geoffrey, from the train station at 11am en route to the park but received a call at 9.30am to say he was already there! Neither my husband, John, nor I was ready, as we were packing gear into the trailer and doing last-minute cooking and picnic-making. (Gone was my relaxing late breakfast and cuppa.) Geoffrey was co-opted into decorating a sign,

and in spite of protesting that art was not really his *forte*, he had fun doing it. And in spite of his brain injury and pins in his leg and elsewhere (from a collision on his bike with a truck at age 15), Geoffrey was so thrilled to have been invited. He completed 13 laps of the park, to my utter amazement!

Apart from a brief sprinkle at the outset, it had turned into a mild and even *sunny* day—perfect for walking. Among those who participated was an Afghan friend and a few of her extended family members. Several brought donations from those who couldn’t attend, including Middle Eastern friends of my sister.

### Ailments

When planning this event I mainly had in mind (as walkers) all our fit young nephews and nieces and children of our friends. Apart from my two nieces, and three children under 12, the majority comprised those with a variety of ailments: MS (two in wheelchairs), brain injury (two), several with arthritis and muscular problems (plus a 17 year old dog called Jessie), one cancer survivor and a few struggling with depression. It occurred to me that God has different priorities to mine.

When I did the figures that night, with money collected prior to, during and still to be collected from sponsors, the total amounted to \$1,885 (the goal was \$2000 for the next two interns). At that precise moment, another email came, promising a direct deposit of \$200, bringing the total to \$2085!

It was lovely to see new friendships being forged during the long walks around the park. For friends and family members it was a great way to catch up while fundraising and relaxing over a shared picnic together at the end.

**Note:** The training of Afghan orphans is an ongoing project. So far six have received internships at Asia Plateau. The interns return to Kabul and mentor many others in the ways of peace. It has already transformed lives and given hope and in some cases even led to paid work (hard to find). The vision is to send 30 orphans - one at least from every ethnic, cultural and religious group in Afghanistan. If you would like to contribute to this ongoing venture, please email: [cedwards@tpg.com.au](mailto:cedwards@tpg.com.au)

*Caroline Edwards, Afghan Interns Training Fund Manager, Perth, WA.*



Listening to the inner voice. Tianethone Chantharasy, former Laotian Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and his wife, Viengxay, spoke recently at a meeting in Sydney about their miraculous escape from Laos at the time of the 1975 communist takeover.

See [www.forachange.net/browse/?id=2360&print=1](http://www.forachange.net/browse/?id=2360&print=1)  
(photo: Orada Abhay)

## Book talk

Jim Beggs’s long awaited memoir, *Proud to be a wharfie*, will be launched at Armagh on 24 November at 2.30pm.

It will also be launched at the Maritime Union’s Christmas dinner by Labor elder Barry Jones.

Beggs worked on the Melbourne waterfront for 42 years and retired in 1992 as National President of the Waterside Workers Federation and a life member of the Australian Labor Party.

In those years he and his colleagues helped to achieve peace and stability in an industry with a dramatic and turbulent history. His connection with MRA and IofC is well known.

The book’s discount price (at launch events) is \$20. Postal orders within Australia cost \$29. It is published by Arcadia.

## CoP women at work across Sydney



Sydney CoP facilitators' training  
(photo Trish McDonald-Harrison)

- » Over three days in the Auburn Community Centre, ten women from Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, India, Kenya, Nepal, New Zealand and Australia formed a dynamic group, learning how to facilitate CoP circles. (see photo.)
- » A monthly meeting of Somali women is also taking place there.
- » Trish and Fatma continue to meet regularly with women from an earlier Auburn Circle. They

watched a movie discussing myths and truths about asylum seekers. 'Welcoming asylum seekers and playing my part' is the next topic.

- » In Mosman, Shoshana spoke about her visit to a reunion of CoP women in Kenya. Trish, the retiring CoP International Secretary, introduced the incoming Secretary, Pari Sanyü from Melbourne. Pari reflected on how Sydney CoP has recently led the way. She was one of the facilitators of the first Peace Circle 27 years ago.
- » In August, Maria arranged a multicultural concert in Kiama with refugee organisations. An enthusiastic party of IofC friends from Sydney and Wollongong attended.

Zobra Aly

### Ladies, please join us for the Creators of Peace Annual Celebration

Explore what it means to be a creator of peace! Share a multicultural lunch & meet like-minded women

- » When: Sunday 3 November 2013
- » Time: 12 noon – 4.30pm
- » Where: Lao Buddhist Temple  
Wat Phrayortkeo Community Hall, 711-715 Smithfield Road, Edensor Park NSW 2176

#### No entrance cost – donation welcome

RSVP by 25 Oct:  
Joyce 9559 2301, or  
Shoshana 0411 179 547  
Email: [peacecircles.sydney@gmail.com](mailto:peacecircles.sydney@gmail.com)

## War torn countries and pathways to healing

At the Caux conferences in July I was asked to be a keynote speaker at the interns' workshops on forgiveness and letting go. The 70 young interns were from the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Europe and America.

I talked about my family loss during the Holocaust, the painful memories, and the building blocks we have used towards a life of meaning and purpose.

A discussion followed around concrete pathways to conflict resolution, anger management, acceptance, and life affirming processes.

Many interns expressed anger and frustration about their war torn countries.

"How can the Jews do to us what was done to them?" "How can we

forgive while our families are being murdered and displaced at the very moment?" (a Lebanese)

"How can I as a young German girl ever get over the shame of my heritage?"

"How can I ever forget the Chinese/Japanese war that has torn apart my family?" (a Chinese)

"How can I ignore the atrocities in my home in the Cameroons?" (an African)

The conversation was animated and at first accusatory. As individuals shared their grief, pain, and at times horror, in a safe supportive environment, more and more individuals spoke their truth. Eventually there were acts of reconciliation between the most unlikely people.

A girl who had been silent stood up and said: "I'm a Jew and I am happy to discuss anything you would like about my culture and religion." A Lebanese girl who had been previously irate stood up and ran to hug the Jewish intern.

The documentary *Beyond Forgiveness* (South Africa) was also shown, followed by discussion.

A third workshop was held at the request of other interns. They had seen the change in many of their fellow interns and wanted to know how it had happened!

Young people are thirsty for change, passionate for truth, and eager for practical informative processes and tools to create this change.

Liz Brumer

### Creators of Peace – engaging women in peace creation

*'None of us lacks the vision for peace, what we often lack is the first step in action'*

Yukika Sohma, pioneer of a Japanese initiative to care for refugees. [www.iofc.org/creators-of-peace](http://www.iofc.org/creators-of-peace)

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# Learning from the past and present

*The following statement of acknowledgement by Dr Omnia Marzouk, President of IofC International, was made on behalf of IofC's International Council at the annual Global Assembly in Caux, Switzerland on 14 August, 2012, when representatives spent a full day reviewing 80 years of Oxford Group, MRA and IofC history. The statement is a public document and is posted on the IofC website.*



The 24 hours which all 100 of us attending this Global Assembly spent reviewing lessons from the past was a moving and inspiring experience for many of us.

Which of us can remain untouched by the vision, commitment, vocation and sacrifices of those who shared with us on Monday evening – and thousands of others like them who devoted their lives to serve the cause of a better world? The achievements were remarkable, and the history of the twentieth century would have been a more painful one without them. We are all privileged to follow in their steps trying to discern what that vision, commitment and vocation means for us today.

As we walked through our 80+ year history this morning, in the light of what was happening in the world at the same time, we clearly saw how a movement like ours cannot be immune to the times and cultures in which we live and work. Both this morning and this afternoon, some have shared personal insights and learning from specific moments, past and present, that impacted on them during their personal journey.

In our collective history, there clearly were times of profound community and extraordinary heights of selflessness, as this movement for transformation impacted individuals and nations. There have also been times when we have experienced division, dysfunction and distortion.

So our review provided on the one hand awe and celebration at the extraordinary audacity and achievements, but also awareness that the cost of taking on a large task or calling can be considerable.

Behind the public stories sometimes lay hidden, painful ones. Hurts were inflicted, rarely deliberate, but real nonetheless. These were often the transgressions of individuals, but which of us can pass judgment on

others, knowing our own frailty?

There was however a further dimension, an organizational culture, which has not been properly understood or acknowledged. As in many institutions, servicing the structure at times was made more important than the growth of the individual. A culture of conformity at times stifled freedom and creativity. Dissenting voices were sometimes suppressed, making learning difficult.

There was over-intrusiveness in people's personal lives. A balance was not struck between the needs of the world and the needs of families and children. The best of our message and practice, such as inner listening, honest sharing and the four moral standards as guides to our living, has been and still is both liberating and inspired – but also has been and can still be misused out of fear or in the interests of control.

## **Mistakes**

Not all the mistakes are from the distant past. Some of our recent – even current – history contains hurt, pain and divisions that block our team-working and potential.

As President of Initiatives of Change International, and on behalf of the whole International Council, I acknowledge that mistakes were made which in some instances had a profound impact on people's lives. We do not seek to apportion blame. In the same circumstances we might well have made the same mistakes ourselves. And in different circumstances we have made plenty of our own!

Yet our past must be acknowledged if the lessons are to be learned and if the healing we long for is to be found. By acknowledging and learning from the past, we also embrace the present more fully and can shape our future tasks with renewed confidence, passion and commitment.

There may well be people whose stories still need to be heard, whose

pain needs to be acknowledged. As part of our commitment to 'start with ourselves', we in the International Council would like to invite such story-telling, and to establish some clear processes for it.

We will also seek to deepen our understanding of why certain things happened, so that key lessons can be identified and applied.

For Initiatives of Change needs to have a commitment to the culture we seek to promote and demonstrate – one of openness to constant learning, changing and care for the individual as well as compassion and generosity towards each other.

We look for new ways of being a 'movement', becoming more of a 'community', which will enable us to address more quickly and carefully the wrongs we are bound to commit while sharing in the joy of the new life that seems to happen in spite of us! We need to work as diligently to build trust across any of our own team divides, as we do to work for, facilitate and promote trust across the world's divides.

Our task continues: to bring to the world, in partnership with others, the hope of personal transformation and an inspiration beyond human capacity alone that impacts on social and global issues. Everyone is needed and we urge that any healing or liberation or fresh insights outstanding may be sought and given in the spirit of acceptance and forgiveness for which our hearts most deeply long. Can each one of us discover deep in our spirits compassion, generosity, forgiveness and grace to move forward together to fulfil our shared mission?

[www.iofc.org/acknowledgement-statement-dr-omnia-marzouk](http://www.iofc.org/acknowledgement-statement-dr-omnia-marzouk)

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