

**1957 als Kind seinen Eltern gestohlen: Der australische Ureinwohner Bruce Trevorrow erhielt im August 2007 per Gerichtsentscheid 525'000 australische Dollar Entschädigung.**

BBC-News

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**BBC** NEWS

## The agony of Australia's Stolen Generation

**Bruce Trevorrow, who was taken from his Aboriginal family as a young child, has become the first of Australia's Stolen Generations to win compensation.**

*BBC correspondent Nick Bryant heard his story.*

Bruce Trevorrow's journey into legal history began on Christmas Day 1957. Then just 13 months old, he was suffering from stomach pains and his father, Joseph, asked neighbours to take him for treatment to the Adelaide Children's Hospital in South Australia. On admission, the hospital recorded that Bruce had no parents and that he was neglected and malnourished, three untruths that were to change his life forever. They meant that Joseph Trevorrow, who died some eight years later, would never see his son again. That same Christmas, a local woman called Martha Davies answered an advertisement in the local paper. It sought white foster parents for Aboriginal babies. On 6 January 1958, she and her husband visited the children's hospital, and decided to take Bruce home.

Thinking he was still in hospital, Bruce's mother Thora tried to keep track of her son's progress by corresponding with the local Aboriginal Protection Board. The family did not have a car or telephone. "I am writing to ask if you will let me know how baby Bruce is," she wrote five months after he was taken away, "and how long before I can have him home."

Even though Bruce had already been fostered, and was being raised by his new family, the Aboriginal Protection Board responded that he was making "good progress", but needed to remain in hospital for further treatment. It was the cruellest of lies. Bruce had by now become an unwitting victim of what later became known as the Stolen Generation - or, more accurately, the Stolen Generations. Growing up in a white family was the most disorientating of experiences. "I kept on asking my parents why I was different to the other kids," he told the BBC. "They said they had dark relatives." His school life was miserable. "Being the only black person, I was bullied at school. That was very traumatic. I got called names like nigger and black."



*Bruce Trevorrow grew up surrounded by white children*

## Compensation

It was not until 1967, when Bruce was 10, that he was reunited with his mother, Thora. Even then, the reunion proved short-lived (just 14 months) and thereafter he spent much of his adolescence in and out of institutions. Now, almost 50 years after being taken from his family, Bruce Trevorrow has not only discovered the truth of his upbringing, but become the first Aborigine to win compensation for being taken from his family. Back in June 1998, he launched legal action against the government of South Australia, arguing that his alcoholism, depression and inability to hold down a proper job stemmed from being "stolen". He also claimed he had lost his cultural identity.



*"We've won a case. but you can't put a value on what happened. Most of my life has been lost to me." (Bruce Trevorrow)*

The judge agreed, ruling that he had been falsely imprisoned. By way of compensation, Bruce was awarded A\$525,000 (£220,000, \$447,000), the first such payout to a member of the Stolen Generations in Australian legal history. "I never thought I would win, but just wanted some answers in my life," said the father of four. "I just wanted to know who I was and where I came from." In a decision which has earned plaudits from Aboriginal groups, the South Australian government has decided not to appeal the award of compensation, despite arguing in court that the now defunct Aboriginal Control Board was not part of the government. Unchallenged, the ruling could pave the way for hundreds of further cases.

Bringing Them Home, a landmark study published in 1997, found that at least 100,000 Aborigines had been taken from their parents and placed in the care of institutions, religious missions or white foster parents. They were part of a nationwide ethnic assimilation programme, now discredited, which started in the early twentieth century and lasted until the beginning of the 1970s.

## Unique case

So will this open the floodgates? Not necessarily. Bruce succeeded where others have failed partly because there was a clear paper trail: the letters exchanged between his mother and the Aboriginal Control Board, which documented the deceit. "It was unusual to have that amount of evidence," says Claire O'Connor, who was part of his legal team. "We could prove that the Aboriginal Control Board had been negligent." In other cases, much of the paperwork has been destroyed.

In claiming his life had been destroyed, Bruce could also compare his experience with that of his three Aboriginal siblings, all of whom have enjoyed very successful lives. "We could make such a stark contrast because his Aboriginal brothers were such high achievers," says Claire O'Connor, "and they had stayed with the parents."

In the legal pantheon, she claims the ruling can be placed alongside the famed Mabo decision in 1992, when the Australian High Court delivered an enormous boost to Aboriginal land rights by overturning the doctrine of terra nullius - the notion that Australia belonged to no one before being colonised by the British.

Flushed with victory, Bruce hopes that others will tread the same legal path. "We've won a case, and

there are lots of people out there who lived the same life as me. Hopefully, they'll get some compensation. "But you can't put a value on what happened. You can't put a dollar sign on that. Most of my life has been lost to me."



*Bruce Trevor says his life has been blighted by being 'stolen'*

*Story from BBC NEWS:*

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