

Murphy's Lore

A casual chat with Teresa Murphy



When former prime minister Kevin Rudd apologised to the nation's stolen generation, local artist Tracy Roach said sorry too

Are you related to the great Archie Roach?

Yes, he is my uncle, the brother of my late (birth) mother, Alma Roach. We're all stolen generations. As you know, he's just had a massive stroke just outside Broome, in the Kimberley. He's at Perth Hospital now and as far as I know he's OK. I met him when I met my mother when I was 17. Uncle Archie is responsible for bringing me and my siblings together. They grew up here on the Peninsula, in Red Hill, with a foster family.

And where did you grow up?

In Windsor, Prahran. I was born in the Royal Women's Hospital in 1964 and handed over straight away to a white family. Dad (Doug Sproule) was wonderful. I grew up known as Tracy Lea Sproule until I was applying for my learner's and they said there was no such name. That's when I discovered I was adopted. My birth certificate said Diane Roach. I was very confused. That began the search for my maternal mother.

And did you find her?

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TRACY ROACH

god, it's you'. We did look alike, but so many people tell me I look like Uncle Archie. She said, 'I'm sorry for giving you away'.

What was your reaction?

It did take a while to forgive her. Actually, it was when Kevin Rudd made that historic apology; that day I said to her, 'I'm sorry, Mum, I forgive you'. She died seven years ago. I never knew who my real father was. Mum would get angry when I asked her about him.

What about your foster mother?

She had an old-fashioned way of looking at Aborigines. She died six years ago. Before she passed on she said she was so sorry for the way she treated me and said she loved me.

What about school?

I went to Prahran High, but I didn't

enjoy it. The principal said once I had dirty tears. I swore then I would work in schools and never, ever let that happen to Koori kids. I left school at 15 but later gained qualifications in Aboriginal child care and I was one of the first Aboriginal educators to be drafted (in 1986). I worked in schools, supporting teachers and Koori kids, and non-indigenous ones as well.

How long have you lived in Tootgarook?

For about 18 months. We - my three magical children - and I moved down from Albury to be near family. Not to grow up knowing who my family was, I want my nieces and nephews to learn from my walkabout experience.

*TRACY ROACH is a director of Baluk Arts, whose latest exhibition is **Blik Land in Hosier Lane, Melbourne, until November 6. It features stencil works by a host of local artists who travelled to the Gramplains (Gariwerd) to study rock art. Roach will also exhibit at the McCulloch Aboriginal Art exhibition, Living the Land, at Coolart in Somers from October 31 to November 14.***

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Aboriginal artist Tracy Roach at Cube 37 in Frankston, where her community development course is based.

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