

# The Miracle of Hope

The Port Arthur massacre and the establishment of  
The Alannah and Madeline Foundation

## A Memoir

Dr. Phil West

With a foreword by The Hon., John Howard,  
OC, AM

Prime Minister of Australia, 1996-2007



# Memoriam

In Memory of Nanette, Alannah and Madeline Mikac and the 32 others who died on April 28, 1996, in Port Arthur, Tasmania.



# Dedication

This small Memoir is dedicated to my daughters Gabriela and Caitlina and to my grand-children Amelia, Teila, Laila and Nixon

It is also dedicated to my Father Alan and late Mother, Doreen.

Their strong values of empathy and of caring for others that were imparted to my siblings and I, are in part, also responsible for the establishment of The Alannah and Madeline Foundation.

I am proud that my daughters are instilling the same values of love and care onto their own precious children.

# Table of Contents

Preface	5
Foreword by Hon. John Howard. Prime Minister of Australia, 1996-2007	6
'Dear Walter...' Dr Phil West's Letter to Walter Mikac, December, 1996	7
Introduction	9
The Pictures Said It All	9
A Letter to Walter	10
From Little Things Big Things Grow	11
The First Public Donation	12
Radio and TV	12
A Letter with a Smile	13
The Launch	14
The Boy Who Was Burnt	15
A Surprise for Walter	16
An Ordinary Person can Make a Miracle	16
Conclusion	17
Photographical and Documentary Archive of the Establishment of The Alannah & Madeline Foundation	18
Epilogue 1: The National Firearms Agreement	23
Epilogue 2: The Alannah & Madeline Foundation	24

## PREFACE

This Memoir is about the most tragic event in modern Australian history. However, it is also about love, passion, healing and building something positive from heartbreak and pain.

This Memoir also pays tribute to the many who were involved in helping to set up the Foundation.

However, I must mention some very special people whose energy, passion and hardwork has remained unrecognised.

Brownyn Hibbert is the sister of Nanette Mikac. She lost her sister and two nieces. Her children lost their cousins.

Linda Wanders was shot at Port Arthur and almost died as she lay bleeding on the ground. When the ambulance officers arrived, she asked 'who were the two little girls who helped me'. 'There was no one here', explained the paramedics, 'you have been here alone, almost bleeding to death'. Linda believes that the spirits of Alannah and Madeline comforted her as she lay there almost dying.

Ben Beekman's son, Michael, was seated outside the café on that quiet Sunday morning. The gunman sat next to him and spoke to Michael for a few moments before entering the café to start his shooting spree. Michael saw and heard what happened next. He was of course very traumatised and his father, Ben, who attended the launch, was very active in the following few months which was a way of taking action on behalf of his son and helping to heal the family trauma.

Linda, Bronwyn and Ben worked tirelessly and with passion and energy for many months helping to establish the Alannah and Madeline Foundation.

**This memoir, is chiefly to honour the commitment and hard work of Bronwyn, Ben and Linda.**

I trust that they, along with Carolyn Laughton, Walter, Gaye and John Fidler, and the others who survived or who lost loved ones, have been able to feel some peace and have mostly been able to heal from the hurt in all its forms.

Most simply, this memoir is a tribute to empathy. A bit of empathy can move mountains and has a deep healing affect.

I trust this memoir will be of benefit to researchers, school-children and others interested to learn more about how an organisation such as the Alannah and Madeline Foundation comes into being.

The establishment of such an organisation does not just happen of its own accord.

This memoir details how a simple dream of one man combined with the hopes, energy, passion and sense of mission of the many Port Arthur Massacre survivors who became involved, led to the establishment of a dynamic and nationally known Foundation in just twelve weeks.

The establishment of The Alannah and Madeline Foundation is truly an inspiration for all Australians.

For young Australians, it demonstrates that anything can be possible with love, hope, empathy and passion.

This was my dream.

Phil West. April, 2016

# Foreword

By The Hon. John Howard, OM, AC

Prime Minister of Australia 1996-2007

National Patron of the Alannah & Madeline Foundation, 1997-2007

---

I am pleased to write this memoir related to the establishment of the Alannah and Madeline Foundation.

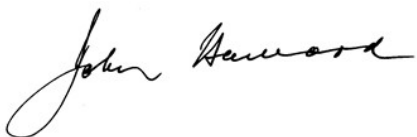
Dedicated to the protection of vulnerable children, the Alannah and Madeline Foundation is a fitting reminder of the terrible loss suffered by Walter Mikac in the Port Arthur massacre of the 28<sup>th</sup> April 1996. His wife Nanette and his two children, Alannah and Madeline were amongst the 35 people murdered on that terrible day.

Their vulnerability continues to remind us that circumstances can (often unexpectedly) expose many children to danger, harm and abuse of various kinds.

Those who work for and support the Alannah and Madeline Foundation contribute to the protection and guidance of children in multiple ways.

There is no finer manner in which to honour the memory of Alannah and Madeline Mikac.

Dr Phil West's memoir describes vividly how something so positive was created out of tragedy.



Hon. John Howard, OM, AC

April, 2016

## Dr Phil West's letter to Walter Mikac

This letter was written in December, 1996, eight months after the Port Arthur Massacre.

*Dear Walter,*

*Firstly...excuse me for using your Christian name, but due to the tone and content of this letter, I would feel a bit funny writing "Mr Mikac" I think you will understand.*

*Like thousands (I hope millions!) of other Australians, the massacre at Port Arthur made a deep impression on me. Of course, I can never know - or understand - how yourself or others who lost family or friends were affected or how you feel. I have never lost family in a war zone - and that is what really occurred that day. I imagine that even losing family in a car accident would be easier to comprehend than in the situation of a violent, war-like situation.*

*For whatever it is worth, I extend my sympathies and love - especially at this time of the year.*

*I am writing this letter for a very specific purpose. Firstly, I will explain a bit about myself.*

*I am 32 and have a wife and two children - two girls - 9 and 6. I am completing a PhD at La Trobe University in Latin American Studies. I also contribute freelance articles to The Age.*

*My thesis concerns the civil war in El Salvador, in particular the study of a series of massacres which occurred. I have been involved in peace issues for a long time and am a member of a gun control organisation. For your interest, I enclose an unpublished article about the gun issue.*

*A few days after the massacre, I was a studio guest on the Steve Price program (3AW) and spoke about the gun issue and took calls. I thought a lot about the massacre over the following days and an idea came into my head which I haven't been able to shake - so I thought I'd try and make the idea a reality, especially in light of some other events over recent months.*

*The idea is to form a Foundation which would be known as the "**Alannah and Madeline Foundation**". The foundation would serve various purposes:*

- 1. To honour the memories of Alannah, Madeline, Nanette and the other victims of the massacre.*
- 2. To ensure the massacre - and the meaning of the massacre - is never forgotten.*
- 3. To educate and lobby over peace, violence and related issues - especially as related to children's welfare.*
- 4. The major practical aspect of the foundation would be to raise money (and thus give out money) for people caught in similar situations of sudden violence and death - particularly concerning children.*

*For example, funds from such a foundation could support people such as the boy burnt at the Queensland school.*

*Cont.../*

*In Victoria a few months ago, there was the case of a car accident in which a whole family was killed - with the exception of one of the children. Such a fund could provide support to the relatives who gained custody of the child.*

*Of course money - or trips to Disneyland - can never bring back deceased family or take away the pain of death, being burned or whatever, but it can help in a practical way, plus is a sign that the community "out there" is a caring community.*

*I believe that the foundation as envisaged - in the memory of Madeline and Alannah - and for the purpose planned - would be well supported by the community. I would envisage that the arts community such as actors and musicians plus the "celebrity" community in general - sports stars etc - would strongly support the foundation and be willing to participate in gala fundraising events and so on.*

*I envisage that the foundation would also publish small documents, including appropriate publications/kits about Port Arthur for schools and other educational purposes.*

*If you agreed, I think that it would also be very fitting to fundraise by selling blank greeting cards featuring drawings and paintings done by Alannah and Madeline. Even posters could be produced - if you agreed. In this way, the drawings and paintings of Alannah and Madeleine, symbolising their love for their parents and the joy and colour of childhood plus - to some small extent - their memories, could be passed on to other children via posters on bedroom walls, school hallways etc.*

*I realise that it may still be too early for you to decide about such an issue - not to mention all the practicalities involved. I just wanted to write to you to let you know of my idea and to hopefully gain your "in principal" support.*

*My idea for the foundation stems from my involvement with children over many years, my study of war and violence and - as an historian - the importance of the massacre never being forgotten. Most simply, the idea stemmed from seeing some of your children's paintings flashed on the TV screen and looking at my own children's paintings on our walls.*

*If you would like me to meet with you, or with a relative on your behalf sometime in the new year, please contact me at the appropriate time.*

*Sincerely,*

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Phil West', written over a horizontal line.

*- Phil West*

*Mitcham, Victoria. December, 1996*



## Introduction

The news reports were horrifying. "It's now believed 35 people have been murdered at Port Arthur, including a mother and her two young daughters..."

My heart almost stopped. I remember exactly where I was at that moment on April 28, 1996. More details later emerged; names, faces.

The two children whose lives were so mercilessly cut short were Alannah and Madeline Mikac aged just 6 and 3 years of age. Their mother Nanette died trying to save their lives.

A few days later, their grieving father and husband, Walter Mikac, fronted the media. He was calm, dignified but his words almost unreal and his eyes could not hide his pain. Walter was sitting on the grass holding his deceased daughters' teddy bears and pyjamas. Although grief-stricken and still in shock, he knew he was the public face of the tragedy and he bravely shared his heart with the nation. How amazing.

Walter was a true hero – especially to Australian men. No public words of anger, violence or hatred, but rather, simple heartfelt words of his love for his murdered family – especially his two little angels.

The strength and dignity of Walter, the image of a simple but beautiful child's drawing and an expression of empathy and love from another ordinary Australian father of two little girls, led to a miracle that forged hope from the horror of Port Arthur.

## The Pictures Said It All

A few days after the massacre, I was watching news of the memorial service for Nanette, Alannah and Madeline and was incredibly moved by a drawing done by Alannah Mikac which was flashed on the TV screen for just a few seconds. The beautiful drawing was of her family: "Mum, Dad, Me, Sister". I shed tears as I looked at my own children's art-work which filled the walls of my house. My own two little angels - Gaby and Caity – were almost the same ages as Alannah and Madeline and I was the same age as Walter. A drawing by my eldest daughter Gabriela, was almost identical to Alannah's drawing.

The raw emotion I felt the split second I saw Alannah's drawing, combined with a passionate empathy I felt for Walter inspired a vision.

I felt that Alannah and Madeline could have been my own two girls Gaby and Caity. The Port Arthur massacre could have been the Puffing Billy or Penguin Parade massacre. An everyday family were caught up in a horrible act of violence in an ordinary tourist attraction.

"But for the Grace of God go I..."

At that very moment, I dreamed of setting up a charitable foundation to be named in honour of Alannah & Madeline. I felt so strongly that they should not be forgotten. If it happened to my girls, I would not want them to be forgotten.

My mind raced with energy and passion over the next few days and months. I envisaged that the Prime Minister would be Patron, of gala fundraisers with TV and sports stars and of Foundation posters in every school in Australia. My idea was for a Foundation that would eternally honour Alannah and Madeline by helping other children hurt by violence and tragedy.

It was an 'idea' to be sure. However, it was also truly a vision, because I saw everything very clearly in my mind. I saw the future and dreamed of things that actually became real.

Time passed. A month, two, three, six and then eight. I continued to intellectually develop my idea for the Foundation, but hadn't done anything to make it happen. I was at some moments full of idealism and told myself 'you can make it happen, just go for it!', and at other moments I expressed self-doubt: 'How can I do something like this? How would I even start?'



**The two drawings that inspired Phil West's vision for The Alannah & Madeline Foundation. The drawing on the left by Alannah Mikac and on the right by his daughter, Gaby.**

## The Letter to Walter

'Contact Walter re Foundation idea' was in my electronic organiser until December, 1996. It was then that I finally plucked up the courage to write the letter to Walter in which I outlined my dream for a Foundation to be named in memory of his children. I had finally taken the first step!

A few days later, I heard an answering machine message from Walter: "Hi Phil, I received your letter with the idea for the Foundation. It has real merit, let's meet up soon".

Walter and I met at his parent's house early in the new year of 1997. I outlined my basic vision for the Foundation and explained many other related ideas that had developed over the previous eight months. I also met Walter's parents Danny and Milka. They were such warm-hearted and kind people. Of course they had been devastated by the death of their grand-children and daughter-in-law, but I could straight away see from where Walter's strength was derived. When I told Milka how Alannah's drawing played such a role in my idea for setting up the Foundation, she showed me to a cupboard and pulled out one of the original memorial brochures featuring the full-colour 'Mum, Dad, Me, Sister' artwork and pressed it gently in my hands with a warm smile. I still treasure that gift today.

Walter and I spoke for a couple of hours. I didn't ask anything about the events in Port Arthur. I knew what had happened and I certainly didn't expect him to re-live his own pain and heart-ache. I simply stressed that the central idea for the Foundation was to forge something positive from the sadness and tragedy of Port Arthur; that the memory of his children would live on through a Foundation in their name that would help other children for years to come.

At his parent's home that day over a coffee and cake, discussing children, love of family and Walter's loss, Walter gave me his blessing to go ahead and set-up the legal requirements for a Foundation to be named after his children.

My little idea had been transformed into a reality. The Alannah and Madeline Foundation was born!

## From Little Things Big Things Grow

I suggested to Walter that it would be great to launch the Foundation to coincide with the first anniversary of the massacre. However that was only 3 months away! Walter explained that he would be returning to Tasmania to write his book 'To Have and To Hold' and although he would not be able to do much to help out, his parents Danny and Milka and brothers John and Steve were keen to be involved. He also put me in touch with survivors John and Gaye Fidler and an old friend of his, Debbie Couttie. Of course, I appreciated that by simply supporting my idea in the first place, Walter was doing more than enough after what he had been through and the trauma he was still living.

The next twelve weeks were a whirlwind of hyperactivity. I set aside my Ph.D studies and worked 10-12 hours a day setting up the basics such as incorporation, the bank account, a PO Box, receipt book, letterhead and organising the launch. Even tax-deductibility, known formally as Deductible Gift Recipient status (DGR), was organised for the Foundation in just two weeks. The wonderful man with whom I dealt at the Box Hill ATO said it was the quickest DGR approval that he had even seen! It usually takes many months he explained.

I began to realise that this willingness of people to help out was something special about the Foundation. Once I explained to potential supporters or bureaucrats the Foundation's aims, their support was free-flowing. In simple terms, the ideas for the Foundation combined with the still fresh memories of the massacre, inspired people to want to help or be involved.

For me, just an everyday young father, I could not, at the time, truly sense what I had begun. That a little idea I had was an inspiration to others and led to people who I had never met to help so deeply, was humbling. On reflection after 20 years, I suppose it is fair enough to say that it was, in fact, awesome!

I asked Australia Post for a national common PO Box and gently hinted that this would be great if provided free of charge. Done. We had no office or telephone (this was pre-mobile days). So I asked Telstra for a 'virtual' message bank, which was State-of-the-Art technology at the time. Done, no cost. The bank account... done, no fees. A computer? Provided free by NEC. The new receipt booklet was also printed free of charge and, as stated above, tax-deductibility arranged within just two weeks.

While for me the process was exhilarating and exciting, Walter and the other victims and survivors of the massacre were still feeling deep pain and sadness, especially in the lead up to the first anniversary.

However, Walter, Gaye and John Fidler, Walter's parents and brothers and other survivors who were involved slowly began to grab on to the Foundation as a stepping stone to their healing and recovery. Again, I didn't really imagine this when I was turning the idea over in my head for those eight months and dreaming of the PM being patron and gala fundraisers. In my head, I was seeing an ideal. Success, colour, gala balls, newspaper articles, fundraisers, posters in schools and so on. I was not a victim or survivor and could not understand what it was to be one.

Walter and Gaye and John Fidler have commented often on this aspect of the Foundation. It really helped them deeply. Walter has stated that the only two good things to come from the tragedy were the national gun law changes (of which Walter and Gaye and John were also instrumental in lobbying for) and the establishment of the Foundation. The Foundation, he has said, helped him to 'thrive and survive'. Indeed, due to the Foundation, he also met his wife, Kim with whom he now has a beautiful daughter.

At the launch, Carolyn Laughton, who was severely injured and lost her 15 year-old daughter, Sarah, was in a wheelchair, still recovering from major surgery. She certainly appeared in a very fragile state - physically and emotionally. At the end of the launch, I remember her grasping my hand for a few seconds and saying 'thankyou, this is just absolutely wonderful'.

The realisation of what we had achieved in just twelve weeks and the positive impact this was already having for massacre survivors was a bit overwhelming but also a great honour.

What many of the victims and survivors expressed to me about my commitment to start the Foundation, was great surprise that I had no personal relationship to anybody affected by the massacre. People assumed I was an old friend of Walter or a relative or friend of someone who had died.

Most centrally, my idea, passion and commitment was all related to what is possibly the most important part of the human 'heart-space': empathy.

The establishment of the Alannah and Madeline Foundation demonstrates that empathy can move mountains. We certainly need much more empathy in our nation and in the world in these times.

Walter, his parents and brothers, Gaye and John Fidler, Debbie Couttie, my father, Alan West and of course Ben Beekman, Linda Wanders and Bronwyn Hibbert, all did a huge amount of work and together we built something special inspired by energy and passion derived from love, empathy and hope.

## The First Public Donation

'From little things, big things grow'. These words ring true with the development of the Alannah and Madeline Foundation. When I opened the first bank account at the Commonwealth Bank in Mitcham, the teller who assisted me said she had to leave for a few seconds after setting up the account. "I'll be back in few ticks", she said. She went into the staff area and came back with some small change. "This is all I have in my purse at the moment, but I wish to make a donation". The amount was \$3.80 and was the first public donation to the Foundation – a small but kind gesture that is part of history.

## Radio and TV

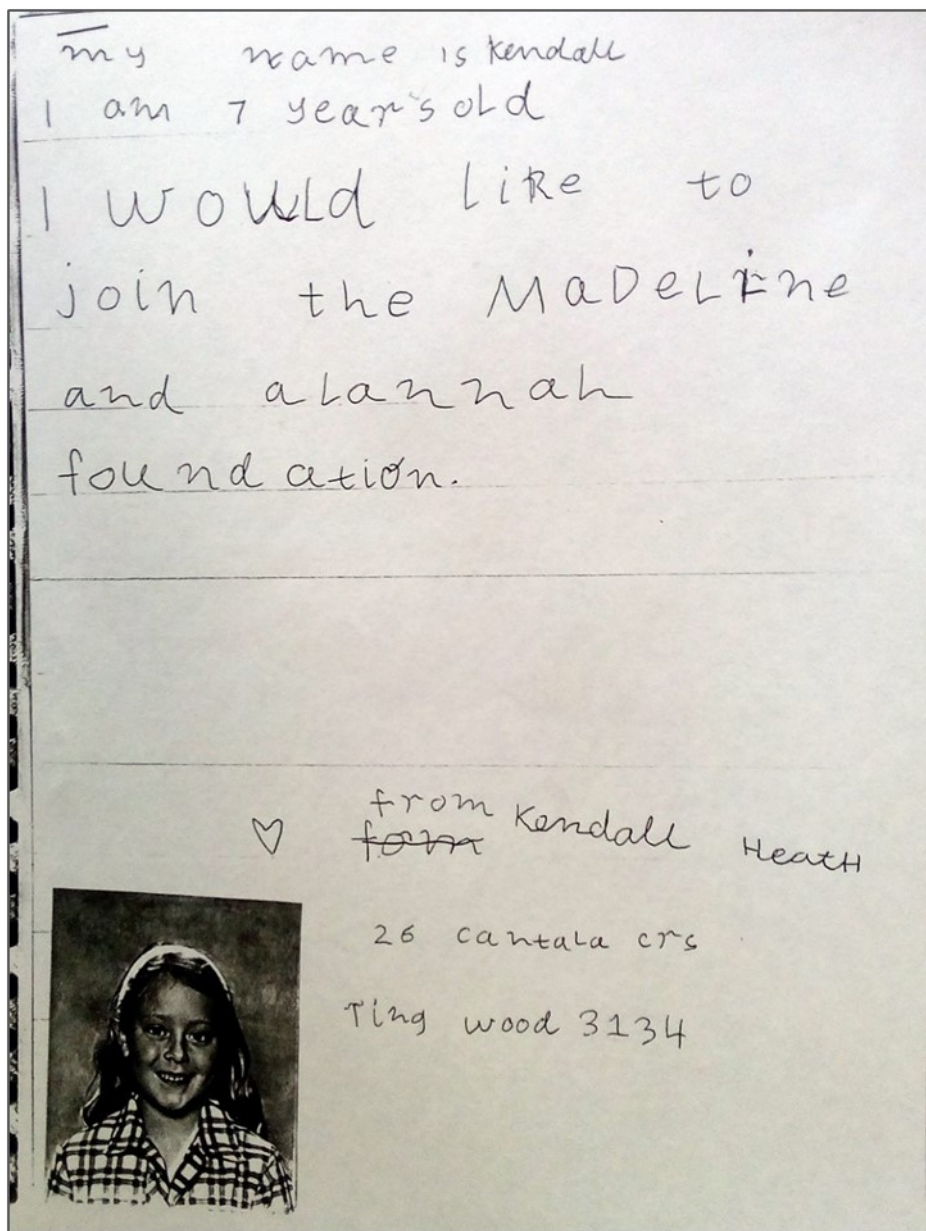
I had heard Walter interviewed a number of times by Neil Mitchell on Radio 3AW and I could sense that they had a strong connection. So I suggested to Walter that we ask Neil if the station would support the Foundation. Walter agreed and so I sent off a fax to Clarke Forbes, Neil's producer. They were happy to come on board and their support helped enormously. They arranged the launch venue, the printing of the first Foundation brochure and other 'in-kind' support. Subsequent meetings were held in the 3AW Board Room and were chaired by Neil – our first 'famous' supporter. It seemed that anything was possible!

However, in the spirit of dreaming big that had overtaken my emotional and even physical energy, I felt that a TV program about the establishment of the Foundation would be also be fitting. So I contacted a producer at the Channel 7 'Witness' Program and asked if they would consider presenting a feature about the Foundation. They agreed. And so a 20-minute segment about the establishment of the Foundation went to air on national TV just prior to the launch. This resulted in thousands of dollars in donations, dozens of letters from well-wishes and even one letter from an anonymous donor with \$1,000 cash enclosed!

## A Letter with a Smile

A simple letter that that was sent to us by a 7-year-old Primary School student was a symbolic of how far we had come in such a short time. Her name was Kendall. In her letter she attached a photo of herself with a beautiful smile and wrote "I would like to join the Alannah & Madeline Foundation". Nothing more. That was all that was needed.

The memories of Alannah and Madeline were already stirring the hearts of other children in an affirmative manner through the Foundation (which hadn't even been launched!). This letter from a little girl expressing solidarity and love in a simple, heart-felt way, confirmed that the Foundation was on its way to achieving all Walter and I could have wished for.



Walter and I then received great and exciting news. The Prime-Minister of Australia, John Howard, had accepted our invitation to be the inaugural National Patron and to officially launch the Foundation. How amazing! This proved that if you dream boldly, bold outcomes are possible!



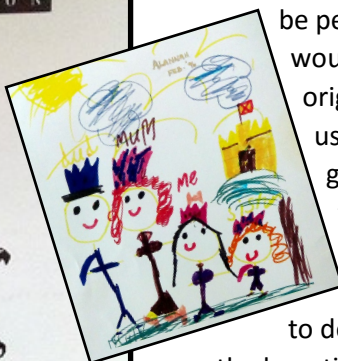
## The Launch

The launch occurred at the Melbourne Sofitel on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1997. In just 12 weeks, the Foundation changed from being a little dream of an ordinary person to a legal entity with the Prime Minister as Patron and \$40,000 in the bank.



The cover of the first brochure featuring the logo created and adapted by Founder Dr Phil West based on the original artwork by Alannah Mikac.

Another important symbol of the Foundation was also inaugurated with the launch – the Foundation logo. After looking many times at Alannah’s drawing, I realised that the most wonderful logo for the Foundation was staring me in the face. The ‘me, sister’ part of the drawing would be perfect I thought. So I asked Walter if it would be OK to separate that part from the original ‘Dad, Mum, Me, Sister’ artwork to use as the official logo. Continuing the generosity of spirit he had demonstrated from the onset, Walter agreed. At the Mitcham Newsagency, near my house, I made some photocopies, used white-out to delete some extraneous parts and in this way the beautiful Foundation logo was also born and was used in the first brochure which was produced in time for the launch.



To see all my little dreams, ideas and creativity actually turn into a beautiful and amazing reality was humbling.

I’ll never forget the words of the Prime Minister whom I met upon his arrival outside the lift in the Sofitel. After a few initial pleasantries and some talk about the Ashes cricket, the PM said to me: “Phil, millions of Australians were moved by what happened at Port Arthur, but only one person decided to actually do something about it and that was you. You should be very proud what you and Walter have achieved today”.



Alannah & Madeline Foundation Founder and establishment CEO, Dr Phil West, with his wife Gloria and daughters Gaby and Caity with the Prime Minister, John Howard, at the launch, April 30, 1997.

## ‘The boy who was burnt’

When organising the launch. I thought that it would be great for publicity and media purposes if we could also have a child survivor of violence in attendance who could officially receive our first pledge of support. Usually, this would not be feasible for practical or ethical reasons. However, an awful random act of violence had occurred a few months before in which a little boy in a Queensland school-ground was splashed with petrol and set alight. His name was Tjandamurra O’Shane. He had become known as ‘the boy who was burnt’. I mentioned his case in my letter to Walter as an example of a child victim of crime the Foundation could support.

As he was already in the public arena and the violence was not family related, I thought that perhaps he could attend. Our gift for Tjandamurra would be a trip to Disneyland – as a symbol of the Foundation helping child victims of trauma and violence through simply doing something kind and to show that the community ‘out there’ is a caring one. This was the central philosophy of the Foundation as outlined in my original letter to Walter. This also matched perfectly with a personal item of Alannah’s that Walter found on one of her drawings. She wrote: “I’m special because I care for others”. This was another example of the wonderful synergy between my ideas for the Foundation and Walter’s lived family experience.

I contacted Tjandamarra’s family through his Aunt - well known NSW Magistrate - Pat O’Shane and they were very happy to participate. Another idea that had just been theoretical a few weeks before was coming true! Although Tjandamurra could not attend at the last minute due to medical reasons,



**Co-founder Walter Mikac, Tim O’Shane and Prime Minister John Howard at the launch.**

his father and sister attended on his behalf. However, Tjundammara recorded a ‘sorry I can’t be there’ video which left most people at the launch with teary eyes.

Finally, it wouldn’t have been fitting to not have a child participate in the formalities. So my 10 year-old daughter, Gaby, agreed to help out. She read the poem used at the memorial service and which was Nanette’s favourite.

Do not stand at my grave and weep.  
I am not there; I do not sleep.  
I am a thousand winds that blow.  
I am the diamond glints on snow.  
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.  
I am the gentle autumn rain.  
When you awaken in the morning's hush  
I am the swift uplifting rush  
Of quiet birds in circled flight.  
I am the soft stars that shine at night.  
Do not stand at my grave and cry;  
I am not there; I did not die

It was wonderful to have a child involved in the launch and there were more tears shed as she read the poem to the audience. She did a flawless job and was very proud. 'Show and Tell' in her classroom the following day was no doubt a bit special!

## A surprise for Walter

Not long after the launch, Walter left for three-month overseas trip. At this same time, the Committee of Management, made up of Gaye Fidler, Ben Beekman, Bronwyn Hibbert, Linda Wanders, Debbie Couttie, Milka, Danny and John Mikac, my Father, Alan and myself, was organising the Foundation's very first fundraising event. I suggested that it would be fitting for this to double as a surprise send-off for Walter. The Committee agreed wholeheartedly.

In his book 'To Have and to Hold', Walter described how all his family were great fans of singing sensation Tina Arena. In fact, Walter and Nanette had attended a concert just weeks before the massacre. I knew Tina lived in Melbourne, so I contacted her management and asked if she would consider attending the event as a special surprise guest for Walter. She agreed at once! So half way through the evening, the MC announced her arrival. Walter was blown away and I remember them having a little conversation at one stage about footy, as they both barracked for Carlton. Tina generously donated some CD's and her attendance was a great highlight of the evening. Needless to say, our first little fundraiser was a great success!



Photos from the Foundation's first fundraising event in which Tina Arena attended as a surprise guest for Walter.  
L: Walter with Tina Arena. R: Phil West, his wife, Gloria and eldest daughter Gaby with Tina Arena.

## An ordinary person can make a miracle.

In his book, Walter describes the launch of the Alannah & Madeline Foundation. He wrote:

*When it's my turn to address the crowd, I tell them that the idea for the Foundation came from another Melbourne father, Phil West, who just like me had two daughters... To me this illustrates how an ordinary person can make a difference and it is an ability that is in every one of us.*



I also vividly remember words Walter said to me after the Fundraising event with Tina Arena. We were discussing how unbelievable it was that the Foundation had developed so fast. He then said: "Phil, it was your baby, your little miracle".

In some ways it was a miracle.

Miracles occur through commitment, passion, courage, idealism, lack of fear and love.

While I'm proud of how my vision in the wake of the awful and violent tragedy led to the creation of something wonderful and positive, it must be reiterated that my idea principally occurred due to the beauty of children's artwork and the heartfelt and innocent expression of love for their families of both Alannah and Madeline Mikac and my daughters Gabriela and Caitlina as expressed through their drawings and paintings. If not for the children's artwork, the Alannah and Madeline Foundation would not exist.

Of course, I am eternally grateful to my co-founder Walter, for trusting and believing in me and garnering the support of many people who helped out in those first few months. Most centrally, Walter displayed an ability to reach into the depths of resilience at a difficult time to help build hope from the tragedy of Port Arthur and to ensure the memory of his children (and indirectly all the victims) would live on in a positive way.

Walter and I started an organisation that for eight months was simply an idea in my imagination that appeared far-fetched and impossible. A simple letter was a spark of hope and combined with Walter's strength, courage and dignity, a little idea became real and inspired a nation.

## Conclusion

I encourage everyone out there who has a little idea niggling away in their mind, no matter how difficult or far-fetched it appears, to not be afraid. Let your passion explode, commit time and energy and this will inspire others to follow and want to be a part of something wonderful.

The ideals I expressed for a Foundation that could forge hope from sadness in honour of little Alannah and Madeline combined with the sense of purpose and energy demonstrated by Walter and the others who helped out during those remarkable, early days of The Alannah and Madeline Foundation, inspired little Kendall to write her simple letter, a Prime Minister to show support as Patron and a famous singer to turn up to a small fundraising event in a community hall.

From little things, big things certainly can grow. From imagination, dreams can take shape and with passion, energy and belief, dreams can be turned into reality.

If it's in your heart and soul, you can make it real!

Walter was an ordinary person caught up in a tragedy. I was an ordinary person with a dream.

Thanks to the support of Walter and the hard work of many, my little dream came true. Together, we made something special.

**Phil West, Ph.D**

**Founder and Establishment CEO: *The Alannah & Madeline Foundation***

**April, 2016, 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Port Arthur massacre.**

---

Photographic and Documentary Archive relating to the establishment of  
The Alannah and Madeline Foundation

---



Phil West and his family at the launch with Walter, his Mother Milka (far right) & brother John (rear right), Gaye Fidler (next to Milka), Nanette's sister Bronwyn (left rear) and Debbie Couttie (middle rear)



With Walter at the launch of his book 'To Have and to Hold', 1997



With Walter at the 10th Anniversary celebration of the Foundation, April, 2007

Letter of Apology from the Premier of Tasmania, Tony Rundle, who was unable to attend the launch

PREMIER



Tasmania

23 APR 1997

Mr Philip West  
Acting Executive Officer  
The Alannah and Madeline Foundation  
P.O. Box 151  
MITCHAM VIC 3132

Dear Mr West

Please accept my sincere apologies for being unable to attend the official launch of the Alannah and Madeline Foundation.

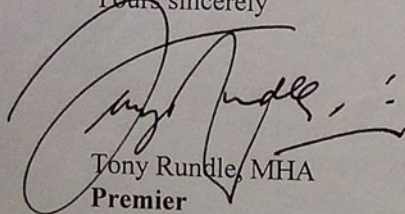
I commend the efforts of yourself and Mr Walter Mikac in establishing this Foundation to support child victims of violent crime and sudden loss throughout Australia.

That such a worthy concept should emerge from the tragedy visited upon not only Walter and Port Arthur and Tasmania but the whole of Australia last year is encouraging for the future of our nation.

Australians have shown they are a caring people, and I have no doubt the Alannah and Madeline Foundation will be overwhelmingly supported.

Congratulations on the work you have already done in establishing this Foundation, and I wish you both every success.

Yours sincerely



Tony Rundle, MHA  
Premier

Executive Building,  
Level 11, 15 Murray Street  
Hobart 7000

Telephone: (03) 6233 3464  
Facsimile: (03) 6234 1572



Editorial Page article by Dr West, published in the Herald Sun concerning the establishment of the Foundation, May 1st, 1997

# Why we must never forget

By PHIL WEST

A PICNIC in a park. Children playing "chasey" and doing cartwheels. Running and laughing. A mother relaxing in the fresh air, lying on a blanket. An ordinary family. An ordinary day.

But instead of enjoying sandwiches, fruit and a muesli bar or two, relaxing for a while and then returning home, Nanette, Alannah and Madeline Mikac were slaughtered.

As well as remembering how they died, we should remember the ordinariness of what they were doing and the normality of their lives.

The Port Arthur massacre could easily have been the "Puffing Billy massacre" or the "Big Pineapple massacre".

Nanette, Alannah and Madeline could have been any Australian mother and children. Walter, the grieving father and husband left behind, could have

been any Australian father and husband.

This is what we must never forget.

Like any Australian children, or children anywhere, Alannah and Madeline played, laughed, sang . . . and even annoyed their parents.

Tragically, their lives were cut short before they had the chance to reach their full potential as adults.

Of course, the lives of children who die on the roads or from illness are similarly cut short.

But the manner of Alannah and Madeline's death was different. They were hunted like animals.

Alannah was killed with the muzzle of a gun having been placed against her throat. She had just seen her mother and

baby sister shot dead and was trying to hide behind a tree.

We cannot even envisage the horror of the last moments of her life.

Civilians in a country at war can expect to be caught up in such violence. That does not make death better, but does make it easier for those left behind to understand.

The victims of Port Arthur were far from any war. They were visiting one of the most peaceful spots in Australia, yet were caught up in violence as bloody as in Bosnia, Rwanda or El Salvador.

To be eating a muffin one minute, then see your loved one or friend blown to eternity the next would be an episode so psychologically haunting that only a person who has been through it could ever understand.

The Alannah and Madeline

Foundation, launched yesterday, is intended to honor the lives of Alannah and Madeline Mikac, not only to remember their deaths.

Funds raised will support children who suffer violent crime or the sudden loss of family. The foundation will also produce posters, cards and writing paper featuring the drawings of Alannah and Madeline.

In this way, something positive for children in tragic situations will be achieved in memory and honor of two murdered youngsters.

And if the foundation still exists in 50 or 100 years, it will ensure Port Arthur, and Alannah and Madeline Mikac, are not forgotten.

PHIL WEST is a co-founder and acting executive officer of the Alannah and Madeline Foundation

The first Foundation receipt booklet, featuring the logo adapted by Dr West from Alannah's drawing

0598


*The*  
**Alannah & Madeline**  
**FOUNDATION**

Received with thanks:-

Name: .....

Address: .....

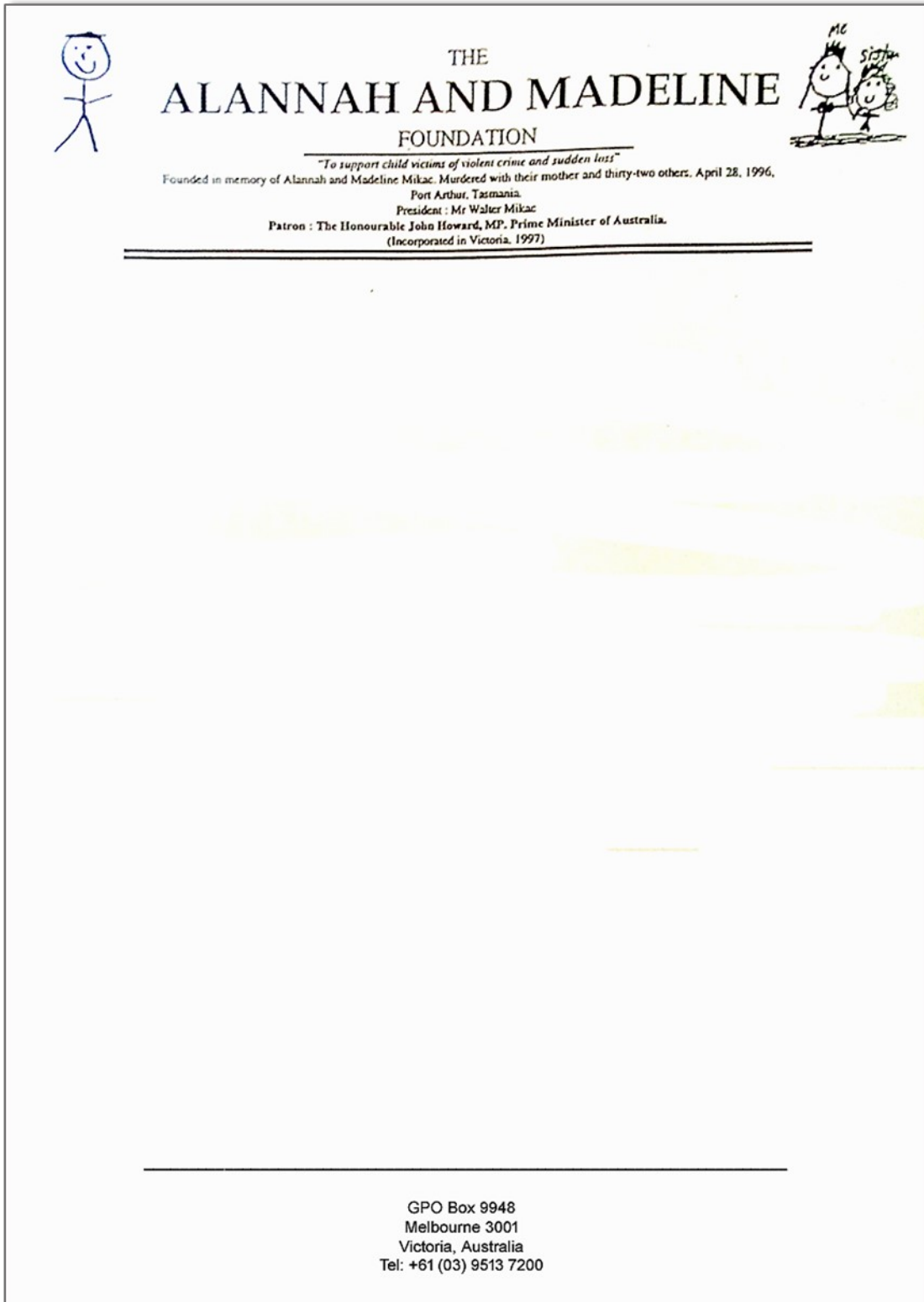
.....



\$ \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / 19

ATO Ref: DGR 900 434 594      Donations of \$2.00 or more are tax deductible  
GPO Box 9948 Your Capital City or Telephone (03) 9513 7200

The first Foundation Letterhead, designed by Dr Phil West with the help of his daughter Gaby. While not a brilliant piece of graphic design (!), Alannah and Madeline's artwork made it very special.





An early newspaper article about the establishment of the Foundation published in  
*The Nunawading Gazette*

ALANNAH AND MADELINE'S LEGACY

# A special dream

by ALISON  
McCLELLAND

IT WAS the haunting images of drawings by little Madeline, 3, and Alannah Mikac, 6, the youngest victims of the Port Arthur gunman, which inspired Mitcham resident Phil West to set up a foundation to honor their memories.

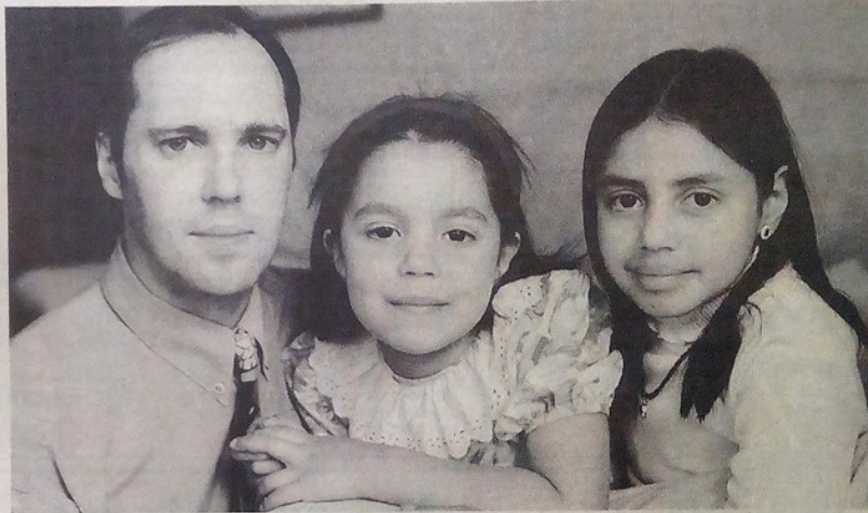
Mr West said the images, shown on national television a few days after the massacre, struck a chord, reminding him of his own two young daughters, Gabriela, 10, and Caity, 6.

He wrote to Madeline and Alannah's grieving father, Walter Mikac, who also lost his wife Nanette in the tragedy, with his idea of establishing a charity in memory of the Port Arthur victims.

Mr Mikac agreed and after several meetings with other victims and sponsors, the Alannah and Madeline Foundation was officially launched last week by the Prime Minister John Howard, the foundation's patron. The launch coincided with the first anniversary of the massacre.

The foundation will provide financial and other support to children who suffer the sudden loss of their family or who are victims of violent crime.

Tjandamurra O'Shane



Empathy: Phil West with daughters, Caity and Gabriela. Picture: JO PATTERSON

745p304

who was shockingly burned when doused in petrol and set alight in a Cairns school yard last year was the first recipient of money.

Mr West, the foundation's acting executive officer, said the foundation hoped to raise money through donations and special charity events, supported by a number of media identities.

He said a number of

businesses and people from both sides of politics had already pledged support to the foundation.

"And many of the people involved in the last couple of months have been victims of the massacre," he said. "It's been really good for them to grab hold of it. It is the next step of their recovery."

The foundation will also produce posters and greet-

ing cards with messages of hope, featuring the paintings and drawings of Alannah and Madeline.

Mr West, who is completing a PhD on human rights abuses in El Salvador, said although it was important not to dwell on the massacre, it had significantly affected thousands of people and impacted on Australia's gun laws.

"In 10 or 15 years time, if a child is looking at an

Alannah and Madeline poster in their school, they may not know about the massacre and it might prompt them to ask their teacher, 'What's that about?'. It shouldn't be forgotten," he said.

Anyone wishing to donate to the foundation can write to GPO Box 9948, Melbourne, 3001. For more information about the foundation phone 9513 7200.

Contact your

## Epilogue One: Gun Law Reform

The Port Arthur massacre led to calls for major reform to Australia's gun laws. The Port Arthur gunman had been able to purchase high-powered military-style assault weapons over the counter without adequate checks.

The Prime Minister at the time, John Howard, had only been in office for six weeks. However, Walter and other victims and survivors of the Port Arthur massacre wrote to him and met him in the weeks and months after the tragedy.

The Prime-Minister not only personally came to understand the grief of the victims but also sensed that the Australian people has a whole were ready for drastic reforms.

In Australia, the national government has limited powers over firearm law, so Mr Howard convinced the States to support nationwide reform while the national government would ban the importation of specific weapons. If the States were not willing to cooperate, the Prime-Minster made it clear that his Government would counter with a referendum to alter Australia's Constitution and give itself the power to regulate guns.

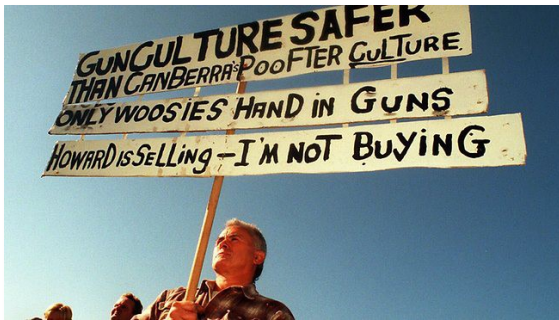
In a New York Times Op-Ed article seventeen years after Port Arthur, John Howard wrote:

*The fundamental problem at the time was the ready availability of high-powered weapons, which enabled people to convert their murderous impulses into mass killing. Certainly, shortcomings in treating mental illness and the harmful influence of violent video games and movies may have played a role. But nothing trumps easy access to a gun. It is easier to kill 10 people with a gun than with a knife.*

The Prime-Minister correctly read the mood of the Nation and bravely enacted radical change under a new National Firearms Agreement with the States. This was in the face of sometimes ugly protests from sectors of his own Conservative heartland. Certain semi-automatic and self-loading rifles and shotguns were banned and a massive gun buy-back program was enacted. This resulted in almost 700,000 of the newly proscribed weapons taken out of circulation in Australia.



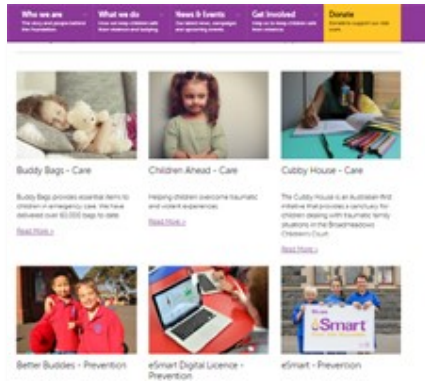
**There has not been a mass shooting in Australia since the buyback and implementation of the new laws.**



## Epilogue Two: The Alannah and Madeline Foundation

Since 1997, the Alannah & Madeline Foundation has helped over 1.5 million children through prevention, direct care and advocacy programs.

### Buddy Bags



The Buddy Bag program has provided 60,000 children who reside in emergency care with a backpack of personal items including toiletries, pyjamas, a book, photo frame and teddy bear. Receiving a Buddy Bag helps restore a sense of safety and security into a child's life during this time of trauma - which a vital first step to recovery.

### National Centre Against Bullying

The Foundation has also established the *National Centre Against Bullying*. This is a peak body working to advise and inform the Australian community on the issue of childhood bullying and the creation of safe schools and communities, including the issue of cyber safety.

### eSmart Initiative

This is a program that supports schools and the community to improve cyber safety, increase digital literacy and reduce cyber bullying across Australia. The e-smart Framework is found in over 50% of libraries across Australia.



### Better Buddies

*Better Buddies* is a curriculum resource for primary schools designed to enhance or introduce buddy systems in schools. It allows teachers to implement a Buddy program that suits their particular school.

Better Buddies works by pairing new primary school students with an older buddy. This helps students entering their first year of primary school to feel safe, valued and connected to the school community. This program is now in almost 2000 Australian schools.

### Words from Walter Mikac

*...While I have lived through a great loss, whenever I see the Foundation's logo my heart soars, knowing that Alannah and Madeline are not forgotten. They are still loved and vital work is being achieved in their memory. I said at the girls' funeral, I truly believe the power of love and creation will always triumph over the power of destruction and revenge, and I still believe this 20 years on.*

\*\*\*

**For further information about the Alannah & Madeline Foundation see: [www.amf.org.au](http://www.amf.org.au)**



# Images Symbolising the Power of Empathy and Love

'...it could have been the Puffing Billy massacre... it could have been my children'  
- Dr Phil West

**Walter Mikac with Alannah & Madeline and Dr West with his two children, Gabriela and Caity.**



**Photos of Alannah and Madeline Mikac and Gaby and Caity West taken shortly before the Port Arthur massacre**



**The beautiful drawings by Alannah Mikac and Gaby West that inspired Dr Phil West's vision for establishing The Alannah and Madeline Foundation**

