

**“REACHING OUT”
MESSAGES OF HOPE
EDITED BY MARIAH KENNEDY**

TUESDAY 2 JULY

Congratulations, constructive, forward looking, optimistic,
thoughtful.

Collection of stories from a diverse group of people:

Michael Morpurgo – Dear olly

David Nyuol Vincent – The pain is never over

Michale Leunig -

Bette Green – The Chinks

Hugh Evans – A global citizen

Any Griffiths - Literacy

An extraordinary group of authors many of whom have found a
world market for their words, for their writing.

The forward, by the head of Unicef Australia, Norman Gillespie, talks
of something that strikes a chord with me. The right of children and

of young people to be heard, to express their views and their right to a voice.

Well I am older than most of you, and certainly older than Mariah Kennedy, without whom this book would not have been published and whose efforts and vision in bringing it all together is wonderful to see.

I was brought up in a different age. When adult people used to say that children should be seen and not heard, they should only speak if spoken to, then reply briefly and with appropriate deference. There has been a continual evolution. My own children did not follow those dictates and my grandchildren most certainly do not. The youngest at the age of 3 or 4 if we were in a restaurant and if he got bored with our table, would go to other tables and introduce himself and then say *“and who are you?”* and strike up a conversation.

Mariah underlines the importance of reading. In nearly every book you read there are messages to be learnt. Stories come alive. I noted in particular that Mariah said she had discovered ethics and that her view of the world has been challenged. That means she is prepared

to challenge her own conceptions and ideas to check whether they are alright. We all need to do that throughout our lives. Ethics is so important, not only in the words of a book, but in all areas of activity.

In some ways that phrase struck me more sharply than anything else in the book, about ethics, because I have to look extraordinarily hard to find any sense of ethics in today's public life. It is not only in political life, which has been most of my life, that ethics seems to have flown out the window, but corporate Australia has also changed from an older day. Getting what one can for oneself is too large a part of the activities of the older people who once used to say that children should be seen and not heard.

Michael Morpurgo wrote a heart wrenching piece called "Dear Olly". The family were looking at the television of one of Africa's perennial tragedies. Matt decided he was going to be a clown and he wanted to go to Africa. He wanted to make them happy. Everyone tried to persuade him not to do so. In Africa they need food, medicine, peace no jokes. It is ridiculous. But Matt wanted to be clown. He wanted to go to Africa to make people smile, where people had never smiled. One day when the family arose, Matt did not arrive for breakfast, he

was not there, his bed was made, his rucksack was gone, he had left letters he had gone to Africa. He found an orphanage and there he found while he did practical things, he could also make people smile. He was a clown. He was also a great fixer. A handy handyman. He had found a vocation.

The story does not end there of course. There was one victim who had lost his family. It took Matt 2 months to make him smile and so a relationship developed. Then one morning they found that the victim Gahamire had disappeared. He had gone to see if mother could possibly be alive. Matt knew where he had gone. He had gone looking for his family. Matt found him. Gahamire was rocking back and forth in tears. "It is alright, it is the funny man, the clown". Then the story started to come out. How people had come to the village and killed everyone. His mother had hidden. Matt did not realise he had one foot on a landmine. It was Gahamire's time to save him. He went home, to where he had come from. Back to Olly. He could walk on two legs, one his own and one not. Then he told his family he was going back to Africa. That was where he could make people smile.

Leunig is famous for his cartoons. In this book one of his cartoons is crafted around a poem “a Prayer for the Strengthening Alliance and the Deepening Split”.

God save us from the bad guys
God save us from the good guys
Good save us from the madness
That carves up the world
Into us guys and them guys

David Nyuol Vincent wrote a piece saying that “*the pain is never over*”. He was a boy soldier. His toy was an AK-47 which he knew how to use from an early age. He came to Melbourne. He was in nightly torment because he could not forget his own past. He tried to do different things to avoid the flashbacks. He was saying he jumped, he ate, he switched on the television. He remembered his training, he remembered his colleagues who had been killed. He remembered burying them, but in the morning they had been dug up by the hyenas, he remembered when he had nothing to eat and was forced to steal. Then he decided that he had to overcome his problems about the past and had to live in the present. Perhaps he had forgotten his

past and his childhood with the AK-47 but he now finds joy in helping others who might have had a similar history, similar story and forgive those who caused him such unbearable pain.

Then there is Bette Green who wrote about "The Chinks"

Hugh Evans speaks of the need for global citizenship living in one world and how from a very early age has tried to contribute to a better world and how he co-founded the Oaktree Foundation of which I am a Patron. It is a great organisation. Which has given education to more than 40,000 young people around the world

Andy Griffiths speaks of "Literacy" and of efforts to bring literacy to remote communities in Australia, an essential capacity if on the road to equal opportunity.

The diversity of the stories is enormous. From the nature of a book they seem to inevitably concentrate on things that are wrong but on things that young people want put right. Bringing all this together, selecting the authors to contribute, getting it published, is a tremendous effort for a girl still at school. How many children have

the passion, the commitment, the energy and the enterprise to accomplish such a task.

While many of the stories are about the darker side of human nature, there are still light and joy in this book because of the underlying strength of the commitment of people trying to make the world better. If we think hard enough there are many ways in which we can all contribute to making a better world.