



Art From The Extended Region Black Saturday Memorial 7.2.2010

Words spoken by Kathryn Portelli on the first anniversary occasion.

Unveiling accompanied by Alan Taylor, CEO of Cobaw Community Health.
Also present, Rob Guthrie, Mayor Macedon Ranges Shire and
Councillor Christine Henderson, Mount Alexander Shire.



Welcome to you all and thank you for coming out on this sombre occasion today in support of the fire affected residents of our region.

I'm Kathryn Portelli, a local professional mosaic artist and I've made memorials in the past because I hold dear to my heart the importance of commemoration and reflection.

It has been a great privilege and an honour to represent members of my immediate community and many people from further a field in this poignant Black Saturday memorial.

In my mind, knowing that we'd get to this anniversary day, and we would come together to reflect on our own personal stories, I am very pleased to be able to explain to you how the concept of this memorial was created by the community itself and how I only had to interpret that energy in the mosaic medium.

I watched, like we all did, in the hours, days and weeks following Black Saturday, an overwhelming generosity of spirit in people who wanted to help those who now found themselves in desperate need.

Having a husband in the CFA fighting fires on the day gave the AFTER project an added dimension. I witnessed the impact of the event on him personally and on the buildings he and hundreds of his colleagues tried to save. They had watched 14 homes and a church explode and melt before their very eyes.

I understood the power that the distorted remains from those fire affected sites would have to be able to tell *their very own story* – the molten glass, the twisted metal and the blistered ceramics all had their own unique voices.

I knew that all I needed to do was to become a facilitator.

So the memorial was to be created from contributions from anyone who felt compelled to be involved.

I would create a tiny little snapshot of their life by using their own precious materials in a clear visual statement that symbolised a community that got behind those whose lives changed forever on that day.

I would like to thank all the people who joined me in this year long project, and then I want to give you a few insights to best understand the layout.

There were 45 other volunteers who contributed their time and skills to the project to various degrees, from making one or two tiles to a core team who met weekly, devoting hundreds of hours all up. Two local mosaic groups were involved, as well members of the Mosaic Association of Australia & NZ from Victorian and Queensland. Alan will later thank all the generous contributors in more detail.

It is very important that you know who made your tile, as I made only 100 of them and a list is on the table so that you can look yourself up and thank the appropriate volunteer who did. There are also maps of the entire layout on the tables to help you find yourself by surname and location.

These wonderful volunteers not only made the task a shared experience, but by including their networks we engaged the extended community which was the essence of the project's vision.

The concept of the mural is very simple.

The firescene on the top left opens the dialogue from a distance, setting the theme with intense colour as it depicts the method by which we could all be involved – a forest wildfire and flying embers.

The tiles in the body of the work all contain a gumleaf design to symbolise how these embers tumble on the wind. It was thanks to a previous project at Kyneton Bushland Resort, that the tile was already cut when Black Saturday occurred, and I am grateful for their kind permission to use their logo symbol throughout this entire project to unite all the participants..

The striking black tiles represent the most severe damage – home loss, and the dark grey tiles next to them represent properties that lost stock, fences, outbuildings and plantations.

Inside every gumleaf are contributions the home owners collected themselves. Each transformed offering holds inside itself the memories of its previous life and it has not been easy for some of these folks to give them to an artist to put on display. I am very sensitive to the fact that they are incredibly loaded with emotion.

The coloured glass material for the firescene was created in the Barfold winter bonfire where the community gathered to share their survival stories with each other a few months on. I felt I needed material that had the signature of a positive healing flame and so I seeded the massive pile with sheet glass a few days beforehand and together with my family, searched for whatever the fire had created a few days afterwards. It certainly has a profound impact.

As your eye travels along the project, one black and white row will stand out. These are the tiles that connect our local fire affected families with other fire affected families across the state.

When you read in the dedications: Marysville, Kinglake, Callignee, Bendigo, Churchill, Koornalla these are the tiles made for people who are connected in some way or another to members in our region.

The tiles become lighter the further they are away in relation to the fires to our immediate north.

The white tiles in this row carry the vision of the project forward
FIRE BINDS & BURNS A COMMUNITY.

Now that leaves the remaining four fifths of the project. This colourful collection includes all the supporting community, from next door neighbours and friends in the district to townsfolk here in Kyneton and beyond.

The middle of the mural's length is rich with Kyneton landmarks, like a 'you are here' arrow and then expands over the kilometres to incorporate other towns in this and the next and next shires.

There are also contributions from Ash Wednesday here, so there is a connection back in time as well as in geography.

The tiles become lighter and lighter along the 11 metre length the further and further away they are from us here.

After maybe fifty tiles you will arrive in Melbourne and then venture to the outskirt suburbs on the other side of the state.

Toward the far end you will have travelled to every state in the nation, and then even gone on to visit NZ, Japan, England, America and Europe.

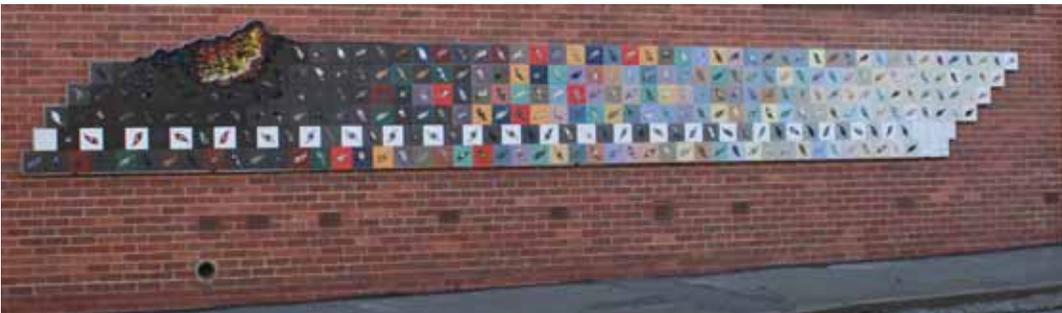


The very, very last tile is special.
It's in memory of my own mother
and anyone's mum for that matter
as it's just called Mum in the dedications.
It's made from glow in the dark tiles, and
I'm hoping it gets enough charge during the day
to shine on for a few hours after sunset,

emanating the kind of guiding light
we all sometimes need to take us away
from the black situation we might have been placed in.

So there you have it –
lots of very sentimental and emotional little snapshots
of members of a broad connected inclusive community.
Such a variety your mind will marvel at the diversity
and the similarities of contributions,
both in the fire affected tiles and the supportive tiles.

Every one of the 280 tiles here tells a significant tale
in the individual sense like voices in a choir,
and together they all combine to create the melody
of the song of a very meaningful mosaic.



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