

30 April 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP
SPEECH AT THE LAUNCH OF THE ALANNAH AND
MADELINE FOUNDATION, MELBOURNE**

E & OE.....

Thank you very much Neil, to you Walter, to Tim and Alicia O'Shane, to Jenny Macklin who is here today as the Shadow Minister in the Federal Parliament representing the Leader of the Opposition, Kim Beazley. Can I say that the words that I will speak today I know have the endorsement of all three parties in Australia. This is not a party-political occasion and might I say that whatever was possible to have been done to make Australia a safer society after the events of the 28th April last year would not have been possible without the support of the Australian Labor Party and the Australian Democrats, as well as, of course, the Party that I have the privilege of leading.

This is not only an important occasion and an inspiring occasion but it can also in a sense be a very happy occasion because it is an opportunity for us to express again the tremendous awe that we feel for the capacity of young children in our community to survive terrible tragedies and to rebuild their lives with the help of the people who love them most and we, of course, honour the establishment of a Foundation which remembers the tragic death of Alannah and Madeline and all the other people who lost their lives on that terrible afternoon.

But in doing so we also celebrate the miracle of the survival of children and the central hope that they offer to the rest of us and I think Neil is right, that so often when tragedy hits a family, where there is a loss of a parent or a sibling or whether it's a dreadful accident or whatever the circumstances are, we sometimes, because of their inability to express their feelings, we sometimes fail to realise the traumatic impact that such events can have on children. And the Foundation that we honour today and the Foundation that we launch today will make a very practical contribution towards doing that. There are many ways in which a community, a society, can remember the victims of a tragedy.

I said the other day on the 28th, on Monday, and I'd like to repeat it to you this afternoon, I said that in many respects the greatest memorial we could as a nation create to the victims of the 28th of April last year was a renewed determination within our society to do all we could to eradicate different forms of violence in our midst - whether it's violence in a public place or whether it's violence in a family or whether it's violence on the playing fields, whether it's violence in a pub or violence in any other social gathering. Too often the first instinct of too many people in our community is to solve an argument or to solve a dispute through resort to violence - whether the use of physical violence or verbal violence. And I can't think of a more fitting memorial than a greater recognition by all Australians that violence is not an answer to any difference of opinion, particularly violence against the more vulnerable people in our community, including women and children.

So I am really quite touched to be here today along with, I guess, the other 18 million Australians I admire tremendously, Walter, the great courage and the inspiration that you have represented to people in life circumstances. It's hard to say to put it that way but it's difficult for us who haven't been touched by such sadness and such loss to really take on board the enormity of it and the grace, the strength and the inspiration that you have shown and demonstrated is a tremendous example. It's a humbling example of the, I suppose the survival of the human spirit and I remember once talking to one of my colleagues who had lost his wife and two children in very sad circumstances and I said to him, how was it that you were able to survive, and he said, I survived because I knew that if I didn't keep going that that really was the end of it all. And I thought it was a tremendously eloquent yet simple way of expressing the human force that is inside somebody who is overtaken and overcome by such an enormous tragedy, and I can only say on behalf of all of your fellow Australians, we admire immensely and we are inspired greatly by people who demonstrate courage in such great personal adversity and it affects so many people. Many we don't know about, many we do know about and, of course, when it touches so directly as it did in the case of Tjandamarra O'Shane - a little boy set upon in a most despicable and beastly circumstances, it does reach out and affect all of us and the spontaneous response of so many people to what happened to Tjandamarra and it is really something very encouraging about Australia.

We're very fond sometimes of saying how poor we are and how mean we are and how we can never get too many things right and we get so many things wrong. I think the public response to what happened to Tjandamarra and just the outpouring of people who wanted to be part of saying: gee, can we help?; we are so upset about what happened; what can we do to make that little boy's life a little easier and a little happier? I think that's one of the sort of shining examples of the essential decency of Australians, the essential magnanimity of the Australian spirit that I have seen for a very, very long time.

I am delighted Neil, to be the patron of the Alannah and Madeline Foundation. I am very happy to complement 3AW. I think many good things come out of the boardrooms at 3AW and I wouldn't be nearly as self-effacing as that. I want to congratulate the station for its public spirited support for this Foundation. I want to wish it well and most of all I want to complement the simple aspiration of the Foundation and that is to recognise the need for love and compassion and support of

children in particular who are the victims of crime and who are the victims of violence in our community. It is, of course, a pipedream, whoever imagined it, whatever our resolve and however well intentioned we are as a community that we can ever rid ourselves of violence and beastly behaviour but it's not a pipedream to imagine that we can from time to time in a community get together and make some contribution, not only monetary but also in terms of our time and our thoughts and our prayers and our understandings of the people who are the victims of that violence and today is a little example of that.

You are the inspiration behind the former. Neil and his colleagues at 3AW have been the driving force. Tjandamarra symbolises the very predicament but also the hope and the inspiration, the hope and the encouragement of the young that the Foundation is designed to help and designed to encourage and I am so delighted to play a very small role in being patron of the Foundation, to convey the good wishes of all of my Federal Parliamentary colleagues from both sides of Parliament to the Foundation, and wish it well and to say on behalf of all Australians, there is nothing that quite touches our hearts more than the struggle and the optimism and the laughter and the outpouring of affection of a little child who suffered, but survived, and looks with hope in facing the future.

Thank you.