

## **Annual Report for Queensland Branch Feb 2011**

Hello everyone and welcome to the report from 'Sunny' Queensland – The Great state!

**Confucius** once said "Our greatest glory is not, in never falling, but in rising every time we fall." And Queensland is a Great state as we are united in 'getting back up'.

As I write this report, there is significant turmoil in this state, with a mix of tragedy, hope and great news. With tragedy comes the stories of victims, with hope is the unknown and the gruesome hunt for bodies with dozens of people still not accounted for and the great news relates to the many who are safe or who were rescued. There are also many defining images of the disaster's brave professional rescuers and citizens alike putting the lives of others before their own safety. More on the disastrous floods later, but first I will reflect on the year just passed as it too provides great news.

2010 saw four state Bravery Investitures held in May. At these ceremonies, nine deserving Queenslanders received awards.

These consisted of two Bravery Medals, and seven Commendations for Brave Conduct. It was very touching to meet the rescuers and to hear their stories of courage.

While all were deserving Queenslanders, their brave acts were not restricted to this state. The recipient's deeds ranged from responding to the terrorist bombings in Mumbai to rescues from the rivers and seas in other states. One such rescue involved a young man called David Marek who, regardless of his valiant effort, was unable to save the life of his brother in Western Australia. Still, it was a very brave act that deserved recognition. While supported at the investiture by his three sisters, like most if not all, David's story was one that involved tragedy. The experience of trauma, grief or loss is a complex process guided by each individual's unique circumstances. It is great to be able to be there and provide that essential support as a representative of the ABA when needed. It is great to be able to be there!

This year, as always, I was not alone in providing support. While many members of the Qld ABA were there to help, we have been very fortunate to be well supported by our honorary Psychologist Pamela Davidson BM. Pamela attended the investitures that I could not, and she was also very generous with her professional experience and time, discussing the many issues that arise with from award recipients and their family.

Cricketing great Matthew Hayden attended the May 5 investiture along side some Qld bravery award recipients. He was appointed a member of the Order of Australia in the General Division. Later that night Matthew was on the news commenting on his admiration for the bravery award recipients he met on the day. His response has encouraged me to write to him, and offer an opportunity to support the ABA and become more involved.

*Matthew replied – "None of what I have ever achieved even comes close to the levels of bravery, sheer determination and the generosity of a selfless spirit demonstrated by all the members of the Australian Bravery Association. As I said to David Coker and Bradley Edwards at the awards ceremony, I am completely in awe of*

*what each of you has achieved. The fact that an association has been created to support such heroes is testimony to the reality of the effect such acts of bravery would have on them and their families. I would love to be able to support the Association and would be delighted to provide a signed bat for use in your Qld bravery dinner raffle, so could I make the promise that I will personalise a message on a bat for the winner when I return from the T20 championship league”.*

Linton Jones and John Thurgar battled it out in the bidding at the Qld dinner. Linton was victorious, reaching a bid of \$810 so we thank Linton and John for their enthusiasm and generosity too. The bat is yet to arrive, but I've asked Matthew Hayden about the possibility of it being collected by Linton in person so that he can get the stars photo too. What a great photo opportunity that will be for an ABA newsletter eh?

The 2010 QLD ABA dinner was again well supported and raised over \$2000, taking the regional bank account to \$3376.14 and Queensland's' overall fundraising efforts nearing the \$10,000 mark.

Our guest speaker for the evening was one of our staunchest Queensland members – Mark N. Mark gave a presentation on his book *Cop Undercover* which tells the story of him being taken hostage by drug dealers when his cover was blown whilst working undercover. I found this story to be quite frightening, so much so that I could not read the entire book, and had to hand it back. The experiences of our members are so extraordinary that one finds it hard to comprehend the danger that some of us have faced.

I received some excellent news in August with the announcement of a Commendation for Brave Conduct being awarded to fellow Queenslander Jason Sorohan. Jason is the son of our much loved members Alicia and Bill. We have all marvelled at Alicia's extraordinary story of courage and compassion in rescuing her friend from the jaws of a giant crocodile, but many of us did not know that it was in fact Jason who saved Alicia's life by terminating the crocodile with a skilfully placed bullet to the brain. So I'm sure you would all like to join me in congratulating the Sorohans on this much deserved honour.

And speaking of brave young men, it has been my pleasure once again to Chair the Geoff Boyce Brave Youth of the Year award, and to have the honour of introducing Andrew Sampsonidis CBC to you all. He joins our favourite sons GB award winners for 2008 - James Foley BM and 2009 - Daniel Johnston BM. These fine young fellows are now connected through a unique bond of experience and brotherhood, and it is my hope that they will keep their friendship going throughout the years that follow.

Those of you who are on Facebook, I recommend that you join the ABA group. In this way, you can be notified as soon as new information comes to hand. The ABA face book membership is growing each year, and the value of that growth lies within unique Aussies doing remarkable deeds for no payment other than, pride and compassion.

Unfortunately this report does not end on a happy note. First we saw the an asylum seeker boat known as SIEV 221 crash on rocks off Christmas Island on December 15. Customs, Navy and Christmas Island residents put their own lives at risk in extremely dangerous circumstances to rescue 41 people from extremely treacherous water. With its horrifying footage, one could be excused for thinking it could not get worse. Then it started raining in Qld.

Across the state we saw homes, farms and businesses slowly flooded 'Then we saw the two metre wall of flood water, with less than 10 minutes warning for many, and no warning for others, crash through the city leaving death and devastation. But then the 'big Wet' got bigger and the devastation got worse - the Lockyer Valley was next. With such tragedy come stories of both extraordinary acts of heroism and victims and tragedy.

There are stories of professional rescuers and citizens alike putting the lives of others before their own safety. But I would like to make special mention of the amazing Runham family who with their fleet of 3 small runabouts performed a staggering 57 rescues to flooded residents in the Ipswich area. Now known as Grantham's Noah and his ark, Mr Raymond Van Dijk's rescued dozens of stranded townspeople from rooftops, trees and homes. As he said, "The adrenaline just kicked in and away we went. It's just the natural thing that happens when someone's life is in danger." And few would forget Jordan Rice, a 13 year old boy, has become a hero because of his selfless act of courage and love for his little brother that ultimately cost him his life. Trapped in a car in rising flood waters, when rescuers arrived Jordan yelled, "Take my brother first". Sadly, Jordan and his mother perished.

There are too many acts of heroism to repeat here, as space could not do their deeds justice. I can recommend that review the many Queensland flood heroes tell their story at: <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/special-reports/queenslands-flood-heroes-tell-their-story/story-fn7kabp3-1225987728596>

Even with the valiant and best efforts of many, the **Queensland Floods** have taken lives and livelihoods of many, with the death toll having risen to 23 and grave concerns exist for people still missing. Either way, the floods and the devastation of cyclone Yasi have been a series of traumatic events. As a result, I anticipate a significant increase the number bravery awards issued, and a significant increase in the number of recipients who require assistance. You can now see why I keen to improve the support we provide.

I have been in, under and around water all my life, and understand the dangers posed by such volumes, currents and power associated with both the floods in Queensland and rough seas of Christmas Island. I can assure you, those who went near these torrents well and truly put themselves at risk. For the victims and survivors, it can only have been traumatic. In fact, many of the stories bring tears to my eyes as I listen to them. Our thoughts and best wishes are with all involved.

The devastating floods have served to remind us of the need to pull together in wake of this and any traumatic event. I am very pleased that Australia has a system to recognise the brave efforts of those put the lives of other before their own, and pleased to provide support to those who do in my state. We have much work do to do in the following years, so your ongoing support is appreciated. Thank you for the privilege of being your

representative. To finish, I would like to repeat the words of Anna Bligh who recently said:

*“We are Queenslanders. We are the people they breed tough north of the border. We’re the ones that they knock down, and we get up again.”*

We’re the ones that ‘rise every time we fall’, particularly if we pull together!

– Sally Gregory

National Vice President – Queensland Branch.

P.s Mark in your diaries – August 20<sup>th</sup>, it’s the date of the 2011 Queensland Bravery Dinner at Currumbin RSL, here on the Gold Coast. It’s a weekend not to be missed.

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