

Anzac Eve Peace Vigil 2011

This vigil for peace was the inauguration of what is hoped will become an annual event. The dream is that over time the Peace Vigil will morph into an important part of Anzac Day itself and become another way of ensuring that we never do forget.

'Lanterns for Peace', as this project was also known to those involved, has Graeme Dunstan (of peacebus.com) to thank for bringing his vision to the ACT. Graeme was known as the 'lantern-master' and in the weeks preceding Anzac Eve many lantern-making workshops were held around Canberra with the final number produced exceeding 150.

The main focus was the lantern parade which wound its way down from the summit of Mt Ainslie at sunset, via the Australian Memorial, down the centre of Anzac Parade to end up at the grassed area at the southern end of the Parade. The parade of approximately 150 lantern-bearing men, women and children was serenaded with music at all stages of its route. A Chorus of Women was supportive and involved from the beginning and local choirs, singers and musicians added their unique contribution on the day, as did countless other citizens.

A particularly moving and important aspect of the Peace Vigil was the connection it made with members of the Aboriginal community and their deep need for true reconciliation. Some very meaningful bonds were made during the preparation for the Vigil and workers were made most welcome at the Tent Embassy with much talk around the fire and meals shared.

Apart from the comradeship that evolved during the preparation period, the Vigil itself was most remarkable for the truly peaceful and warm, friendly atmosphere that it generated. Candle-lit lanterns, brazier fires, music and song, hearts and souls all wove their magic on the day.

War Memorial personnel were nothing but cooperative, the Police were noticeable by their absence (as was the Press), there was not one unharmonious episode, not a voice raised except in song. The Vigil demonstrated what community can achieve without bureaucracy, over-managing attitudes, public-funding and hierarchical committee structures.

Created through vision, commitment, determination, hope, love and generosity of spirit it showed what can happen at the grass roots. Altogether it was a most encouraging start to what is hoped will become an annual event for the ACT and maybe beyond.

Annie Didcott.

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