

the moment:

Parliament House, Canberra – February 13, 2008



ON FEBRUARY 13 THIS YEAR, I WAS ONE OF 10 PHOTOGRAPHERS INVITED TO document the delivery of the apology to Australia's indigenous peoples. That morning, we arrived at Federal Parliament early and were given our instructions: during the delivery of the apology we could photograph through the spaces in the back wall of the gallery. When people rose to applaud, two by two we could race forward to photograph from the steps of the gallery's front row.

As the Prime Minister read, there was an atmosphere of sadness and regret. I could hear the sound of people sobbing quietly. Wherever I looked through my lens, the faces I saw were sombre and sad. No one moved at all, so intense was the attention given to every word spoken by Kevin Rudd on behalf of the nation to its first people.

After the apology, all members of the House of Representatives stood up in support of the apology motion. It was an emotionally charged moment. The

applause was thunderous. In the gallery, people were cheering, and many had tears running down their faces. I was unsure how to adequately frame this moment without intrusion.

My eyes came upon Netta Cahill, Lorna Cubillo and Valerie Day, who were comforting each other. Theirs was a deeply moving embrace, expressing the strong sense of relief that was felt throughout the gallery after this important event in Australia's history. It was difficult working during such an occasion, though I managed to keep my emotions in check for the entire day. My tears came later, when the work was done.

When I look at this image now, it reminds me of the intense feelings of that day, particularly the immense sense of sadness – and of relief. It is my hope that these powerful emotions will now be harnessed towards continuing respect and compassion for indigenous Australians and our shared histories. **GW**