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## The man behind the murals

*Tuesday, 17th May, 2016*



Cousins Vicki Picton, Judy Beyer with local cousin Lee Johnston in front of Gordon Waye's murals.

After finding that they had an artist in the family, two cousins travelled to Broken Hill to see his renowned works.

Judy Beyer and Vicki Picton came from Adelaide and met with their cousin Lee Johnston, all of whom are part of the Waye family.

Judy said that she wanted to know more about her family and, after some research, discovered that Aboriginal artist Gordon Waye was part of her family.

It was Gordon who painted the enormous landscape murals on the walls of the Palace Hotel.

In the early 1970s, Italian migrant Mario Celotto bought the hotel and painted his version of Botticelli's Birth of Venus on one of the downstairs ceilings.

Later, Mario wanted someone to paint murals on the walls and Gordon answered the call. He started in the front bar and finished the job in eight hours.

Then, over a period of years, Gordon painted all the other murals, the only stipulation being that they show scenes of water so that the hotel would feel like an oasis in the outback.

"I recently did a little bit of questioning and found that one of our relatives, Frank Way, had two Aboriginal sons," Judy said.

"It was hard to trace them but a cousin of mine found a friend who knew a 'Waye' in Port Augusta.

"Then it was revealed that this woman, Bernina, her father was Gordon."

Gordon was part of the Stolen Generation. He was put in Colebrook Home in Eden Hills in Adelaide at the age of six and grew up there, according to Judy.

It is believed that this is where the "e" was tacked onto Way.

Gordon also painted murals at the Pitchie Ritchie Railway, and in hotels and landmarks across South Australia, New South Wales and at Alice Springs.

Judy said she asked Lee to take photos of the Palace murals to put in a family history book they made and titled "The Way Back - Descendants of Samuel and Rosanna Way".

"Lee said she knew Gordon was part of the family because he visited her grandparents and wanted to reconnect with the family.

"A lot of the older relatives knew about this but no one talked about it."

Judy said people she has spoken with told her that Gordon was an amazing artist, even as a child.

"Port Augusta resident Faith Thomas knew Gordon and said as a child he would sit in the sandpit and create art.

"She said he had an artistic flare.

"I don't believe Gordon received the recognition that he should have.

"He did an amazing effort. We are quite pleased we took the trip to come and see them."

Lee said she hoped the visit would help promote Gordon and the majesty of his art.

"We know the Palace is well-known from Priscilla Queen of the Desert, but we would love to see these murals have an identity of their own," she said.

Gordon now lies in a basic grave in Port Augusta with only a rusty cross bearing his name.