

Reunion

"The first thing I thought when he walked in the room was to see if that gap was still there between his teeth," Ken Thompson (with Andrew, before his abduction) tells WHO. "That was one of the things that helped identify him."



I rode 6,500km  
**TO FIND MY SON,**

After his wife abducted their son, Ken Thompson cycled his way across Europe in a dogged quest to track him down. Now, the two have reunited



## BACK TOGETHER

"I've been a father, but I haven't been a dad—there's a difference," says Thompson (right, in Amsterdam four days before his reunion with Andrew, left). "I want my son to have a relationship with his dad."



**W**aiting in a nondescript building in Amsterdam at 11.45 AM on Sept. 13, an anxious Ken Thompson sat quietly, his stomach fluttering, his eyes—and hopes—pinned on the door ahead. Then it opened and his son walked in, clutching the hand of a psychologist, who gently said, "This is your father. Do you want to say hello?" It had been more than two years since he had held his little boy, but Thompson stayed calm and seated, though his heart lurched to see Andrew, 6, in his "trendy" jeans and sporting a "spiky" hairstyle. "He had this big smile on his face," Thompson tells WHO. "I said, 'Wow, you've grown a lot,' and he just came straight over to me."

For Thompson, 57, the reunion signals the end of a nightmare that began in 2008, after his estranged wife, registered nurse Melinda Stratton, accused her husband of molesting Andrew—claims he strenuously denies. "It was a huge, huge shock," Thompson, who had shared a happy five years with Stratton, has said. According to reports, a psychologist found no sign of abuse and opined that Stratton may have an underlying psychiatric disorder that affects her judgment, particularly pertaining to Andrew. On April 24, 2008, Stratton absconded with their son, taking a Singapore Airlines flight to Frankfurt, Germany. From there, it seemed they'd vanished.

A year later, Thompson quit his job as NSW deputy fire commissioner and began a solitary, exhausting odyssey, cycling 6,500km across nine countries in Europe, in a single-minded quest to find his son. (He passed by Amsterdam, where his son was living, in June).

Every day, he would hand out dozens of pictures of his bright-eyed boy to motorists and passers-by. "They're all over the place; cars, in shop windows, on noticeboards and in schools," says Thompson, who cycled 100km a day with his son's favourite toy, fireman puppet Bernie Cinders, strapped to the back of his bike. At sunset, he'd pitch his tent. "This was sustainable; I could have done this for the rest of my life," says Thompson. "I didn't cycle around Europe expecting to bump into him. I was cycling around Europe so I could get the message out to millions of people. I just knew I had to find him."

The first hint that he had succeeded came when it was least expected. "I got some information on Father's Day

[Sept. 5] from an anonymous source. I wanted it to be true but I thought it was a hoax," says Thompson. The source, whom he believes is female, had spoken to Stratton in Amsterdam, who "said something that sparked—words to the effect that Andrew's father was in Australia and he was dangerous," he explains. "She had the presence of mind to put three words into Google, 'Missing child Australia.' Andrew's profile came up very quickly."

The woman alerted the police. "It was really interesting," reflects Thompson. "There was something in the email that made me think this could be Andrew. The person said that when the police took him, he was more interested in snails on the ground, and that is so Andrew—he loves nature."

As Stratton faces extradition (see box) and Andrew remains in the care of Amsterdam's Child Protection Office, Thompson is focusing

**"He wasn't frightened of me; there was no anxiety"**

—Ken Thompson

on the future. "I can feel my old self coming back—I am starting to look at life more positively," he says. "Andrew was very comfortable with me, he wasn't frightened of me, there was no anxiety, and I thought, 'There's a way forward here.'"

At the end of their meeting, the psychologist suggested Andrew pack away the toys he had been showing to his father. "He said, 'No, I don't want to leave. I want to stay,'" says Thompson, remembering how his son's gap-toothed grin lit up the room after he gave him a cuddle. "He laughed and had a giggle, but by that time he was on his way out," says Thompson. "He didn't want it to end."

■ *By Karina Machado. Reported by Emma Martin*

## WHAT'S NEXT?

On Sept. 6, Melinda Stratton "was provisionally arrested in Amsterdam pursuant to an Interpol Red Notice originated by Australian authorities," says an Attorney General's Department representative. She is "wanted ... to face prosecution for the offence of taking a child out of Australia, without permission,



Stratton with Andrew at age 1.

whilst a parenting order was in place," says the official. In Australia, which has the highest per capita rate of parental child abductions in the world, the offence carries a maximum penalty of three years jail. Stratton has the support of her family in Sydney, her lawyer Clayton Long, has said. Meanwhile, Thompson is searching for long-term accommodation in Amsterdam. "I expect to be here for months," he says