

# Ken Thompson's reunion with his abducted son

## OUR MAGIC MOMENT

The overjoyed father opens up to FRANK THORNE and GLEN WILLIAMS about his long, exhausting cycling mission to find his little boy Andrew

After criss-crossing Europe for thousands of kilometres, shedding tears of exhaustion and anguish as he searched for his son, the first thing Ken Thompson did with his little boy – at six-year-old Andrew's request – was play a board game called Maze.

The whole world has read about Ken's two-and-a-half-year search for Andrew after his wife, Melinda Stratton, abducted him from their Sunshine Coast home.

Now, talking to *Woman's Day* from Amsterdam about his joyous reunion with his son, Ken, 57, says he had no idea what to expect, what his wife had told his son about him, or whether Andrew even remembered who he was.

He didn't know what words he wanted to hear when they were introduced, but what he heard made his heart melt.

"I want you to help me with some toys," Ken recounts Andrew saying at the start of their 40-minute meeting under the watchful eye of psychologists. Andrew then asked him to play Maze.

"He's a very bright boy. I showed him how to play the game once, where you build a pathway through a maze, and the second time he beat me," says Ken, a former NSW Fire Brigades Deputy Commissioner. "It was a wonderful moment."

The exhausted dad says he could not sleep following that first meeting with his son. Although Andrew was three last time he saw his dad, Ken recognised him immediately.

"I'm ecstatic that I've found my son and I'm ecstatic that he recognised me – and that Andrew wants to be with me.

"I was choking up, but I couldn't let it show, for Andrew's sake," says Ken, whose meeting was facilitated by psychologists.

"Andrew was in charge. He drove the meeting. I did not want to put him under any pressure, just let him be himself.

"The psychologists told Andrew when he came in at first, 'Say hello to your father.'

He came right up to me and he seemed to just accept it. But he didn't call me Dad or anything. He just accepted it.

"It must be really difficult for him to take all this in."

Ken hadn't seen his son since April 2008, when Andrew was taken by his mother following a heated custody battle.

"Who knows what damage has been done?" Ken says. "He was probably told he would never see me again. But there I was. He managed it all remarkably well. In fact, I'm amazed at how well he coped with the reunion."

Ken says he will be working closely with a team of psychologists to gently coach Andrew – who is in foster care – into spending more time with him as each meeting progresses.

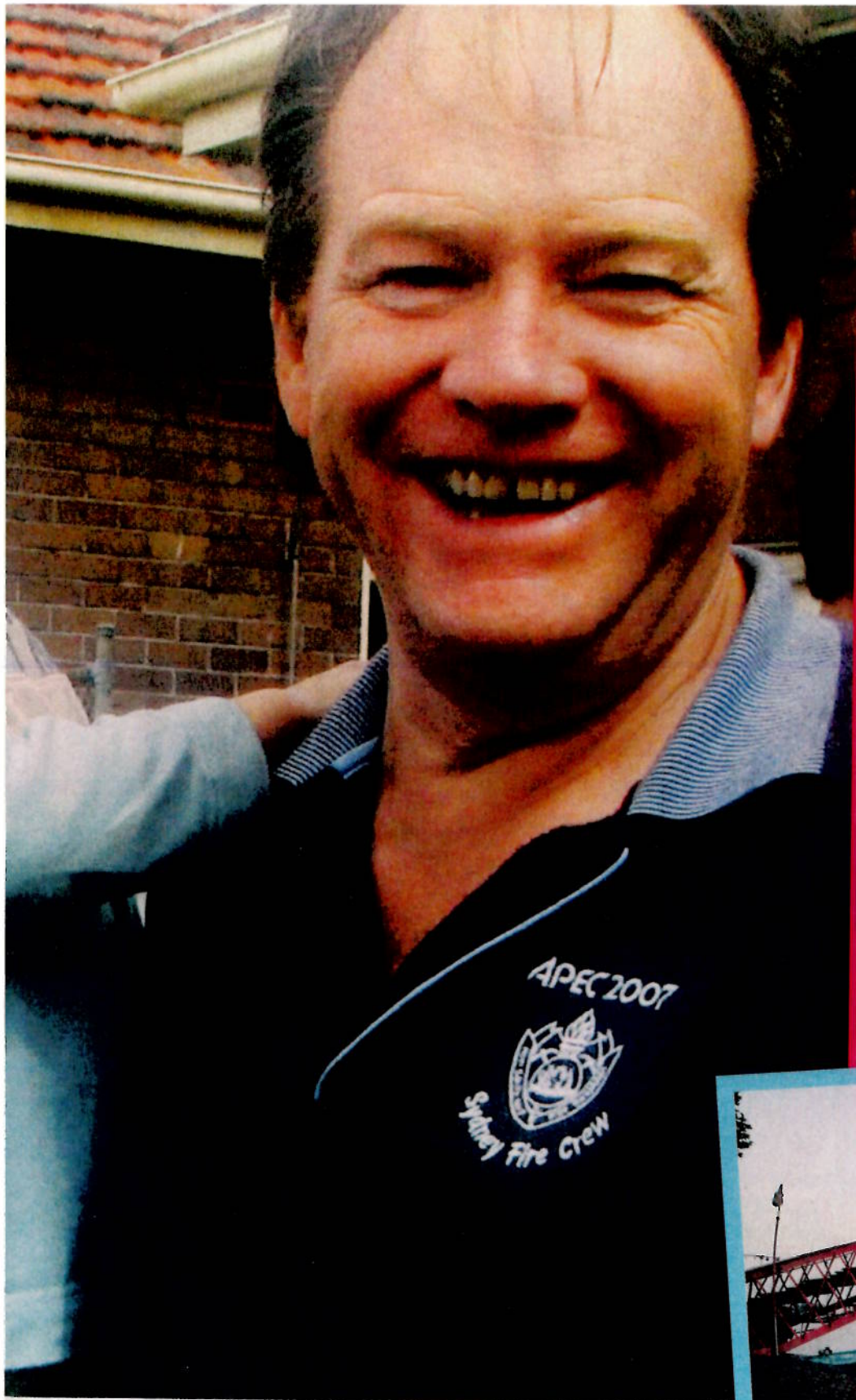
*"He was probably told he'd never see me again. But there I was. He managed it all remarkably well."*



"Eventually we can manage any damage that has been done to him. I hope because Andrew was so young when he was taken, the healing process will be not so difficult."

Ken pauses mid-thought, before adding, "He's not afraid of me, for which I'm relieved. I don't know what Melinda's told him about me in the past two-and-a-half years, but it's not good.

"I'm happy he's not scared of his old man. In fact, when it came time for him to go after 40 minutes, Andrew wanted to stay with me



Left: Andrew was three last time Ken saw him, but there was no mistaking that same gap-toothed smile. From top: Melissa and Ken in happier times; details from Ken's bike; Melissa with Andrew in Australia; Andrew during his marathon bike ride.



"So I'm happy about that and looking forward to the next time I can see him."

Ken has spent the past two-and-a-half years on his bicycle, covering 6500 kilometres while campaigning for the rights of abducted children and searching Europe for Andrew.

He admits to having dark thoughts during his marathon ride, saying, "I'm very grateful that he's still alive. I have had low moments when I thought I'd never see him again."

He has now taken advice from psychologists in Holland and Australia about the hidden

trauma that's bound to be lurking in the back of his little boy's mind.

"Andrew now speaks more than two languages. He has been moved from country to country. Who knows how many towns and villages he has stayed in for short periods before Melinda moved them on?" he wonders. "That's not good for any child."

Ken is determined to remain in Amsterdam as long as it takes to rebuild his relationship and go through an exhaustive legal process to regain custody of Andrew, but he also wants

to support his estranged wife through her extradition process. Melinda, who is said to be suffering ongoing mental problems, was still in prison in Amsterdam as we went to press.

"The psychologists don't think it is a good idea for Andrew to be visiting his mum in prison, but I don't want him to lose touch with her, either," says Ken. "The immediate future is going to be very difficult."