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Australian Story: Port Arthur

**Airs Monday, April 11 at 8pm on ABC & iview –
introduced by Caroline Jones**

On 28th April 1996, more than 500 tourists were visiting the historic site of Port Arthur in Tasmania. At lunchtime, a lone gunman armed with three military rifles and over 400 rounds of ammunition opened fire.

By the time the gunman was captured, 35 people had died, 23 were injured, and countless other lives were changed forever.

***Australian Story* looks back at the legacy of that terrible day – the impact it had on survivors, witnesses and the nation at large.**

In an ***Australian Story* exclusive**, Peter and Pauline Grenfell, the Melbourne couple who were with Nanette Mikac and her two small children as they were murdered, speak publicly for the first time.

The Grenfells had left the Broad Arrow Cafe just minutes before the gunman started shooting and were fleeing the site on foot with Nanette Mikac and 6 year-old Alannah and 3 year-old Madeleine when a car pulled up beside them.

Relief turned to terror when Peter Grenfell caught sight of the guns in the car and yelled *"It's him! Run!"*

While the Grenfells took shelter behind a tree, the gunman took aim at the Mikac family.

"A mother and her two children saved us....and I was always just so sorry we couldn't save them. Because they gave us the precious seconds to move away. So, yes, we were lucky and we were fortunate but that doesn't take away the pain of what happened. That stays with you." - Pauline Grenfell

Carolyn Loughton was a fit and healthy single mother lunching with her teenage daughter, Sarah, when the gunman opened fire in the crowded cafe.

"There is no yelling, there is no running. It's not like in the movies. Within split seconds people are either dead or they're flat on the floor pretending to be dead ... I'm whispering in my daughter's ear to stay down, to not move..." - Carolyn Loughton

Nurse Lynne Beavis endangered her own life when she ran to the Broad Arrow Cafe as soon as the gunman left. One of the first victims she saw was Carolyn's daughter, Sarah.

"One of the hardest things I remember was finding a young girl that was of similar build to my daughter and similar age to my daughter". Lynne couldn't bring herself to tell Carolyn that her daughter was dead.

Carolyn Loughton and Lynne Beavis have since forged “a *unique friendship*” that continues today.

Off-duty NSW policeman Justin Noble was picnicking with his wife when he saw the gunman emerge from the cafe with a military rifle.

“I’ve witnessed what they can do on firing ranges...The bullet hits you before you hear the sound. I said to my wife, ‘We’re in deep shit’.” - Justin Noble

Newly elected PM John Howard watched the day’s events as they unfolded on television.

“I was shocked at the magnitude and the ruthlessness of it ... [that the] capacity to take human life in such magnitude is in the hands of people who are clearly unbalanced.”

The massacre resulted in far-reaching gun reform legislation that prohibited the sale, possession and importation of automatic and semi automatic weapons.

“I still have to pinch myself that we as a country acted so swiftly, that we made change happen that benefits people who don’t even know today.” - Walter Mikac, husband of Nanette Mikac, father of Alannah and Madeleine Mikac

But some survivors point to the debate over the controversial Adler rifle as evidence that the will to maintain strict gun control is weakening. Carolyn Loughton has petitioned for a permanent ban of the rifle, which is capable of firing eight rounds in as many seconds.

“It was very, very rapid fire. You can’t run that fast. Like many Australians I thought the topic was sorted out 20 years ago.” - Carolyn Loughton

“We don’t want to turn the clock back.” - Walter Mikac

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Producer: Kristine Taylor

Executive Producer: Deb Masters

EDITORIAL NOTES:

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*** Additional images will be available on request.**

*** Interviews are available.**

For further information, please contact:

Chris Chamberlin | News Publicist | ABC TV Publicity

02 8333 2154 / 0404 075 749 / chamberlin.chris@abc.net.au

@popculturechris