



50TH ANNIVERSARY OF LITTLE BOY LOST

L to R Dorrie Walls, Johnny Ashcroft, Steven Walls and Gay Kayler reunite in 2005

February 2010 marked the 50th anniversary of an event that caught the hearts of Australians, and the subsequent release of a classic song that did likewise. Australian country music legend and Roll of Renown member **JOHNNY ASHCROFT** recorded the timeless *Little Boy Lost*, following the search for four year old Steven Walls near Guyra NSW.

"The missing boy triggered the biggest land and air search in Australia's history," remembers Johnny. "5000 people searched the wild New England Ranges, and three nights and four days later Steven was found alive and well.

"I then wrote Australia's first country-rock song, *Little Boy Lost*, as a tribute to the searchers. It topped the Top

40 charts for six weeks – the biggest-selling Australian record of its time."

But then came a tragic twist, vividly recalled by Johnny. "Five months after Steven was found, and at the height of *Little Boy Lost*'s success, a totally unrelated, distressing set of circumstances arose. The song's title became a tragic reminder of another little boy, eight-year-old Graeme Thorne, Australia's first kidnap victim. He

was held for ransom in early July 1960.

"Because I felt my song must cause suffering to the Thorne family every time they heard it, I appealed to the Australian broadcasting authorities, with the approval of EMI who produced the record, to seek the co-operation of all Australian radio stations to remove *Little Boy Lost* from airplay. And every radio station complied. It subsequently disappeared from the airwaves for nine months, although it was still listed on the charts – unplayed."

By that act of compassion, Johnny Ashcroft became the only singer/songwriter, at least in Australia, to deliberately kill the airplay of his own hit song.

Released world-wide, *Little Boy Lost* earned both Australia's and New Zealand's first 45rpm Gold Records, spurred **SIR SIDNEY NOLAN** to create his painting *Little Boy Lost*, and spawned the idea for the *Little Boy Lost* movie in which **GAY KAYLER** provided her emotive vocals.

"But how could I have envisaged then that on the 50th anniversary of the day Steven Walls was lost, 5 February 2010, I would be involved in numerous radio broadcasts across Australia about an event which is now part of Australia's modern folklore."