

MISSING PERSON Family turns to AI to find man headed for Canberra almost 50 years ago

A last, high-tech roll of the dice

Petlee Peter

THEY lined up a photo as he stepped onto the boarding ramp, seconds before he walked onto the plane,

Antti Kalevi Maki was boarding a British Airways flight in Helsinki, bound for Sydney and intending to head to Canberra in pursuit of his Australian dream.

That was the last time the Finnish family would hear from or see one of their youngest.

It will be 47 years on September 18 since young Mr Maki was waved off by his family, including his brothers.

Heart-rending decades have passed, during which the Makis made multiple attempts to reach their beloved family member, whom they believe settled in Canberra. His parents died still grieving for him, and so have some of his siblings.

As a last strand of hope in their remote search, the younger generation of the Makis has turned to Artificial Intelligence to generate present-day images of Antti, who would have turned 70 in July.

The trio of images, posted on social networks, show three impressions of how Mr Maki might look today: bald, with a goatee, and with a similar hairstyle to that in fashion when he flew out in 1978.

Nearly 15,000km away at their family home in the town of Kauhajoki in western Finland, Mr Maki's nephew Johannes combs through his own father's files, which include Australian immigration documents and the final photographs taken at the airport.

"When I see these documents and photos, I have all

kinds of feelings. I am sad, angry and devastated. We all wonder what the reason was for him to stay disconnected from the entire family," an emotional Johannes told *The Canberra Times*.

The 43-year-old health-care IT specialist has been key in generating the AI images, hoping for closure regarding his father's young sibling.

A construction worker, Antti Maki, was 23 when he landed in Sydney on September 21, 1978. He informed his family he would be settling in Canberra. The eighth of nine children of farm truck operator parents in rural Finland, Antti knew a relative lived in Wollongong, but it seems he did not make contact with her.

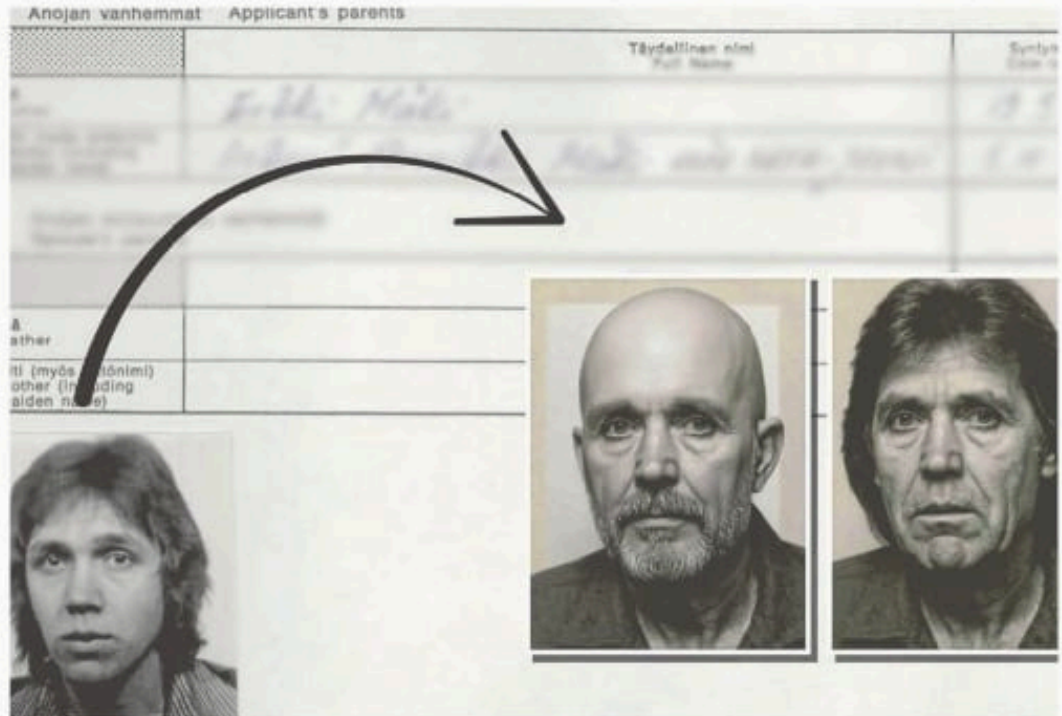
She had, in fact, made futile attempts to find young Antti in the 1990s through the Yellow Pages

telephone directory.

Through the 1980s, '90s and 2000s, the Maki family made several attempts to locate their youngest in Australia, but everything hit a brick wall. Mr Maki's father died in 2009 and his mother in 2018, both without answers about their beloved boy.

"My family contacted the Finnish embassy in Australia and the Red Cross, but were told that privacy laws in Australia are very strict, and therefore, we can't reach my uncle if he doesn't want to contact us," Johannes said.

More than four decades have passed, and the family in Finland is yearning for that miraculous "one phone call" or "one meeting" with their loved one. Relatives in Finland, including Johannes and an uncle who is extremely invested in finding Antti - this time with



AI images generated by the family using Maki's last available portrait from 1977. Pictures supplied



Antti Kalevi Maki photographed, leaving the Helsinki airport in Finland on September 18, 1978. Picture Supplied

the help of AI - know that, given his age, time may be running out.

The Canberra Times contacted the Embassy of Finland in Yarralumla regarding Antti Maki.

"The Embassy of Finland does not keep a record of the Finnish people who have moved to Australia, and the Australian privacy

laws are tight, so there is not much information available, unfortunately," it said.

Johannes, however, remains hopeful of closure, if not a long-awaited reunion.

"It has been a heavy burden for our family for years. We are looking for answers and closure about him, possibly for one last time," Johannes said.

Our sincere thanks to Petlee Peter, Canberra Times, for reaching out and allowing us to help assist in finding Antti.