

Zach's Ceremony Film Premier Awareness & Fundraiser
19 MARCH 2017

Elder and Country Acknowledgement

Introduction

Waddamulli, Good Evening. I have it on very good authority that in order to engage with you all as an audience, and hopefully share ideas, observations and experiences, I must first offer you all something of myself. This sharing of myself, has not always been a comfortable reality for me. Life sometimes provides hard and damaging lessons about trust. My former reluctance has been borne of circumstances which elicit a response: *Fool me once - shame on you, Fool me twice – shame on me*. I have no doubts that I do not stand alone in this context. Tonight, I offer a story, some knowledge and something of myself.

I am Linda,

I am an Aboriginal Woman,

I am a Birrigubba Mother,

I am a learner, and

I am a contributor.

My recent family heritage is evidenced in the official colonial documentation dating back to 1845. Our family presence was first “officially” recorded in Kamilaroi Country (NSW), and further built upon by six (6) generations of family and cultural connection to the Whitsunday Coast North Queensland – Birragubba Country. My people, have of course, enjoyed an undocumented existence for many thousands of years prior to being “accounted for” in the Colonial/Eurocentric record books.

Acknowledgement

It is appropriate that I now take a formal moment in acknowledgment of the cultural authorities that provide for our safe gathering here this evening. That cultural authority rests, completely, with the traditional peoples of (that which is now) the greater Brisbane area:

The Turrbal Peoples north of the Brisbane River,

The Jaggera & Ugarapul Peoples south of the Brisbane River,

The Manangahalli, to the south east,

The Minjerriba of Stradbroke Island,

The Ngugi of Moreton Island, and

West across the mountains to the Undanbi.

As we walk, and talk, and work, and love, and establish businesses, and grow our children up on the sacred land of these First Nations peoples, I wish to fully acknowledge them. I seek safer passage on behalf of us all, here, as visitors this evening. I offer complete and due respect to my Elders, to those present with us this evening and to those who will not be joining us in person: I see you and I thank you.

Evening Address

Genuine, sustainable and productive trust relationships are quite simply – hard work, and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – harder work than for most. History reveals from the times of the early Papal Bulls of 1452 and 1455, through to the European invasion and colonisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelands, to the more recent policies of Federal and State Authorities in Australia, each have served to continually ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: *Know our place!*

The 1770s saw the invasion, 1837: Protection and Control, 1937: Assimilation, 1940: Apartheid through the White Australia Policy, 1965: so began the days of Integration, 1972: Self Determination, 1997: Reconciliation, 2007: Intervention and Punishment.

I welcome the diverse cross-section of our broader community represented here in this audience tonight, and I do so knowing that the great majority are no strangers to the appalling statistics representative of the Indigenous disadvantage in this country. Furthermore, many of you may have suffered the all too common affliction of *Aboriginal Crisis Fatigue*. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make up just 3% of Australia's general population, yet:

- 30% of those locked away in our jails are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals,
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are removed at a much higher rate from their kin – than any others,
- And 24 x more likely to spend time in Juvenile Detention,
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males are twice as likely to be in jail as opposed to attending university.

And Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women:

- The most disadvantaged,
- The most disregarded,

- The most inadequately represented,
- The most poorly paid,
- The most silenced of any in Australia across ALL sectors

In 2017 – today! But just note, we too are the most underestimated.

These statistics are often impersonal to the majority, but not to us, not to our families, and not to our communities. My younger brother lives in WA. He has a wife, and a son, and a daughter. He, his son, and his daughter are 3 Aboriginal Australians. In WA 1 out of 4 Aboriginal Australians are incarcerated. Every day that passes, I reflect gratefully that they remain Number 1, Number 2, and Number 3, and that Number 4 is not one of my immediate own. Many, many other families do not have the opportunity to be so grateful, and if and when the opportunity does present, it is often fleeting.

In the 1950s, A O Neville was the Chief Protector in Western Australia. He stated: “In 50 years we should forget that there were ever any Aborigines in this country.” My father was just six years old. Mr Neville’s words and thoughts echoed throughout the land and were reflected in the annihilation policy of White Australia. They were wrong. I am forever hopeful that both Mr Neville and Mr Leak are in that *other place* comparing notes and facing up to the reality of their deficit assumptions.

I draw attention to the work of the non-indigenous experts in Australian Indigenous Affairs and I note that while your 20 years of tenure working in this arena is very commendable and that it may have even elevated you to Executive Status, I respectfully request that you remember that your tenure can never overshadow, nor properly reflect, 40, or 50, or 60, or 40 000, or 50 000, or 60 000 years of the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in this country.

Despite all the apparent misery, the conversation is changing. I do not recall a time in days past when I ever felt excited for our future.

- Ab & TSI university enrolments are reported to be outnumbering those of the non-Indigenous enrolments,
- Ab & TSI doctors, accountants, lawyers, psychologists exist,
- We have Magistrates and Judges (albeit just one on the Federal circuit),
- We are well represented in the trades and technology and our entrepreneurs are as clever and savvy as any,
- We have more representation in our parliaments than ever before.

And whilst some may question their politics and their presence across political parties I suggest rather than being confused about their politics, you just bear in

mind these representatives know they are First Nations First and that is their politic.

Never before, have I seen such determination, unashamed accomplishment, such influence, such collegiality, and such presence. All built upon the enduring efforts of those who came before us [nod to acknowledge the Elders], and thanks to you, we *Know our place!* Thank you [directed at the Elders].

AWAKEN THE WARRIOR WITHIN: Zach's Ceremony – the film

Somewhat uncomfortably (perhaps) and albeit with permission, tonight we are privileged voyeurs, peering anonymously into the intimacy of the Aboriginal family's contemporary and traditional reality. As you each share the trials and tribulations and consider the family and cultural responsibilities shared through film, perhaps even noting the similarities in your own family – or not.

I ask that you share a well-considered thought for those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young men, women, parents, Elders, language groups and whole Nations who have been systematically denied the crucial opportunity and indeed the right to know, to experience, to practice age old traditions, language and knowing. Why is it that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture is so readily embraced and celebrated internationally, and not here at home?

Culture is the great sustainer. Once realized and embraced, it serves to be the only real constant. Culture will not abandon, will not betray. When all else fails, culture does not. Culture is not the new suit, adorned for those special occasions, or just worn to impress. Culture is a way of being, in everything you do, always.

Now having shared something of myself (and perhaps you got a little more than you bargained for – and that is Linda too), I ask you all to be humble, be gracious, and let the trust rebuild. Surely, this is true reconciliation, or at the very least, the front gate.

So Yes, 2017! [moisten left forefinger in mouth and raise high] The Winds are warning of times of further (and welcome) change ahead. I propose the whole of Australia is approaching a new dawn in our consciousness. The dawn of the Awakening. A time of true comprehension and of real and measurable rectitude. These are indeed promising times for our people and our country. Oh yes, the times they are a changing.

Welcome, it is nice to see you all here, it is nice to share these times with you Thank you for your support.

Linda M. Ryle

President

Indigenous Lawyers Association of Queensland