



OUTLINE OF EVIDENCE OF DONNA, TINA, JOANNE AND SONNY WRIGHT

FEBRUARY HEARINGS 2023

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I INTRODUCTION

1. Our names are Donna, Tina, Joanne and Sonny Wright.
2. We are proud people of the Kerrupjmara clan of the Fighting Gunditjmara people from Lake Condah in the Western Districts of Victoria.
3. Our parents are Jimmy Wright and Eunice Wright (nee Foster), and our grandparents are Lyall Foster and Charles 'Monty' Foster.
4. We share this story with the Yoorrook Justice Commission on behalf and in honour of our family. We share this story to continue their fight for justice to expose the government, the agencies, the 'protection' board and the perpetrators who hurt, exploited and abused them.

II FAMILY HISTORY

Our grandparents and great-grandparents

5. Our great-grandmother, Eleanor (Nora) White, was stolen from her family Albany in Western Australia and taken to the Lake Tyers mission. She was taken to the mission by boat, along with well-known writer Bessie Flowers, who has written about Eleanor in her works. Eleanor was placed into an arranged marriage with our grandfather, Charlie Foster, a man from the Lake Tyers mission.
6. Our grandfather, Charles 'Monty' Foster, was a Gunditjmara man from the Lake Condah Mission. He was known for catching eels among the stones in the Darlot Creek and bringing them to the Heywood pub to sell. He also trapped rabbits for meat and sold their pelts stretched on wire. He also worked on farms, carting, splitting posts, felling trees and building fences for farmers. Grandfather had been a champion runner until his leg was ripped open by a block of wood he was splitting. He had also travelled around boxing in the tents run by Jimmy Sharman at the shows; he stood on board by the big bass drum, calling challenges to the local boxers.
7. Our grandmother, Lyall Foster, was a Gunditjmara woman from the Lake Condah mission. She was a hardworking woman; she worked very hard domestically and raised her children the same way. Mum remembers that she would drag the children's mattresses down to the creek to wash them clean, and she would get on her hands and knees to scrub the floor of their home. Gran would collect logs of wood for the fireplace with a horse and cart. She was an excellent horsewoman; she could ride a horse very well. She would also go down and get water in kerosene drums to wash our clothes and boil them up on a fire near the big well by the church. She would hang our clothes over the bushes to dry them on a nice day.
8. Our grandparents had five children, Valetta, Gloria, Eunice, Ronnie and Glennis. Glennis tragically fell ill and passed away when she was three months old.

9. Mum and all the other families on the Lake Condah Mission lived good lives. They were well clothed and fed, and the kids always played outside. They had a big mob of cousins, aunties and uncles. There was also an orchard on the mission. Their lives were tough, but they were very happy. Mum once described her life growing up on the mission in her own words:

“Our life was happy there, we lived off the land. Dad used to catch eel, tarpon and trout, anything, black fin. They used to make nets for the old men and put them down where the water ran. Sometimes you’d get some fish and sometimes you wouldn’t. But another thing is too, we shared a lot, a lot of people we shared a lot. If one family were running short, they’d send over feed. They’d send a feed over for the family that didn’t have much and share that way. If they didn’t have flour to make a damper, they’d send over a damper or they’d send over the flour.”

10. Mum remembers that the family lived in a big old dormitory with a beautiful big stove in the kitchen and a big open fireplace in the front room that would be stoked high with big logs that Gran collected. She also remembers that her parents would decorate the house for Christmas with ferns, wattles and bush fires, and a big Christmas tree in the front room. There is a photograph of Mum and her siblings outside the dormitory on the mission, which clearly shows how happy and healthy they are. We are so lucky to have this photograph. A copy of the photograph is at **Annexure 1**.
11. In 1954, the authorities came to the Lake Condah Mission and removed three of their children, Gloria, Eunice and Ronnie. At the time, Gran was in hospital being treated for tuberculosis, and Grandfather was working in Yambuk to earn money for the family.
12. Our grandparents were never the same after their children were taken away from them. They were quiet and gentle people, and their spirits were broken.
13. Grandfather, the man who had laboured hard and fought in boxing tents, became stricken with grief. He had always lived and breathed for his children. He would hitch-hike to Ballarat to bring the children gifts whenever he could raise a bit of cash, but he could never persuade the authorities to release his family.
14. Grandfather’s grief eventually resulted in an emotional breakdown. A man named Tony Wright, who is now an editor at The Age, visited the town of Heywood in 1957 or 1958 with his father, where he witnessed Grandfather dancing in the street. In 2021, Tony published an article in The Age titled ‘Monty’s last dance tells us about his home – and ours’, which captures his perspective of Grandfather’s dance. A copy of the article is at **Annexure 2**. Some extracts of the article are as follows:

“He danced as if there were no tomorrow. His legs pumped and his arms whirled. His body jerked and he seemed unable to stop. The people of the little town of Heywood in far south-west Victoria turned out to watch this wild show in their main street, hooting and laughing and urging the dancer on.

I was a mere child on that day in the 1950s, in town with my Dad for supplies, but the sight of this man’s abandon never left me. I was frightened and saddened, for I looked at the dancer’s face and saw that his wide fixed smile held no humour. I would come to understand over the years that it was no more than a rictus: a crazed spasm of the facial muscles. His eyes brought to mind those of a terrified horse.

I was among the people of Heywood who witnessed Monty Foster’s final, desperate dance. If he appeared crazed, it was because that is what he had become. He was dancing as if there were no tomorrow because for him, there really was no tomorrow.”

15. Following his emotional breakdown in the main street of Heywood, Grandfather was transported to the psychiatric ward of Prince Henry's Hospital in Melbourne and placed in a padded cell. He was then moved to Kew Mental Hospital, where he passed away on 22 January 1959. He was only 53 years old.
16. Nobody told our Gran that Grandfather had passed away. She had just come out of hospital herself, and when she returned home, she didn't know where her husband was. She was his wife and next of kin, and had left an emergency number with the Kew Mental Hospital so that she could be contacted. Nobody had bothered to call her. She arrived at the hospital and was then told that Grandfather had died and had been buried within a pauper's grave with no ceremony, and no one there from his people. Gran was in shock; she was unable to speak and went and sat under a tree for a long time to try to cope. It is hard to imagine how distressing and traumatic this must have been for her. They asked her whether she wanted Grandfather to be dug up and repatriated, and she said "*no, let him rest.*" She was just in shock at the time.
17. In the period before his death, Gran knew that Grandfather was being neglected in the mental hospital, as she had noticed that they had stopped letting him shave his beard. We have seen a 1 page Coroner's report which recorded that Grandfather had died of "*malnutrition and bed sores*". From this report it's clear that he was kept in a cell and mistreated. We know that he really died from a broken heart because his children had been taken away from him, where they meant everything to him.
18. After Grandfather passed away, Gran moved away from the Lake Condah mission. She tried to live there with Aunt Letty, but the conditions had become unliveable because of the government's efforts to move everyone off. Gran also could not bear to return to the emptiness of her family's home; that beautiful house had been the family's happy place. She was a mother who had just lost three of her children, and then her husband only a few years later. The heartbreak she suffered from that is unimaginable. The only reason she survived this is because she still had Aunt Letty and had to hold it together for her.
19. Gran moved to Melbourne and lived with her sister in Collingwood. Gran was a hardworking woman – she worked numerous jobs to prove to the authorities that she was 'fit and capable' to look after her children. She did everything she could to try and get them back. She worked cleaning houses, trying to please white people. She was also working as Richard Pratt's family's domestic servant. She wrote numerous letters requesting to live with her children, but none of these requests were ever granted. She would try and visit her children in the orphanage, but it was difficult because there was no bus to get to Ballarat.
20. In 1992, our parents took out a loan to have Grandfather repatriated at Lake Condah Mission Cemetery, years after his burial as a pauper by the Kew Mental Hospital. We had a huge family funeral for Grandfather's repatriation, all the grandkids and great-grandchildren attended. It was a proper burial with love, dignity, respect and honour. Our dad was a qualified undertaker, so he did the repatriation. He was shocked to discover that Grandfather's body had been mutilated, chopped up and put into the cheapest and smallest box. The desecration of his body, and the findings of the Coroner's report, show how inhumanely he was treated in both the final stage of his life, and his death, in a facility where he was supposed to be looked after. Gran was 75 years old at the time of the repatriation, but she passed away two weeks later on the same day as Grandfather, 22 January. Mum believed that Gran was waiting for Grandfather to come home and couldn't die before he was returned to his Country. She is now buried with him in the cemetery at Lake Condah.

Opening and destruction of Lake Condah Mission

21. Lake Condah Mission is located in south-west Victoria. It was built on the Country where the Eumeralla Wars were fought in the 1830s and 1840s between the Gunditjmara people and white settlers. These wars led to more

than 6,000 Aboriginal deaths. It is no surprise that south-west Victoria is the most densely concentrated area of known massacre sites in Australia.

22. The Lake Condah Mission was opened by the Church of England in 1867. It became a safe place for the Gunditjmara people who had survived the massacres. It was a terrible place to build it, amongst major massacre sites. But our ancestors had nowhere else to go, and if it weren't for the mission, we would have lost more people.
23. In 1883, funds were raised for the construction of the church on the Mission, St Mary's Church of England, which was consecrated in 1885. It was a beautiful bluestone building with a 23-metre tower.
24. Only one year later in 1886, Australia introduced policies under the guise of "protection" that were designed to force Aboriginal people to assimilate with the white community. Families were split up and many people were removed from the mission. After World War I, the land at the mission was split up for soldier settlement. Although many Aboriginal men from Lake Condah had fought in the war, not one Aboriginal soldier received a parcel of land.
25. In 1919, the Lake Condah mission was officially closed. Nevertheless, a number of displaced Gunditjmara families moved back onto the land. There had previously been many stone houses on the mission, but they had all been pulled down, so the people lived in a small number of tents and huts, or the dormitory where our grandparents and their children lived. At the time Mum grew up on the mission, the only buildings that were still standing were the dormitory, the school, and St Mary's Church.
26. Following World War II, the small number of families still living on the mission were forcibly removed as part of the government's efforts to force Aboriginal people to assimilate into the white community. The farmers who acquired the land at the mission drained the big lake that the Aboriginal people had used for water supplies and catching wild ducks for food.
27. In 1957, the authorities argued that St Mary's Church had developed a lean and was a "public danger". They brought in contractors who placed destroyed it with dynamite. It was all part of their plan to force the Aboriginal families off the mission.

III EUNICE WRIGHT'S STORY

28. Our Mum, Eunice Wright, was a highly respected and well-known Gunditjmara Elder, activist and advocate for Stolen Generations survivors. She was born on 12 November 1944 in Hamilton, Victoria and grew up at the Lake Condah Mission with her four siblings, Valetta (Letty), Gloria, Ronnie and Glennis.
29. Mum was forcefully removed from her family when she was 9 years old. She was forcibly stolen from her land, family, culture, lore and Country and taken to a foreign land. She was taken from her mother, father, sister, brother, cousins, aunties and uncles. Her siblings, Gloria and Ronnie, were also taken. Letty was not taken because she was a few years older than the other siblings, around 17 years old at the time.
30. The authorities had deliberately chosen their moment. At the time of Mum's unlawful removal, Gran was in hospital suffering with tuberculosis and Grandfather was away working, rabbiting on a property at Yambuk, to earn money to provide for his family.
31. The children were being cared for by extended family. Mum and her sister, Gloria, were going to Whittlebury State School which was around two kilometres from the Mission.
32. On this particular day, they were having a snack of bread and jam and a cup of black tea at their Aunty Ollie and Uncle George's house, which was at King's Corner just down from the school. Mum remembered that Aunty Ollie looked out the window and saw a car pulling up, and she recognised it as the local policeman. He knocked on the

door and asked if the Foster children were there, and Auntie Ollie said yes. The police officer told them he had come to pick them up and take them into Heywood. So, Mum and her sister Gloria got in the car.

33. Mum's brother, Ronnie, was down at our Auntie Phyllis and Uncle Chris' house, playing with his cousins. Auntie Ollie had sent one of the kids down to tell Auntie Phyllis that Mum and Gloria had been picked up by the police. As Mum and Gloria were in the police car on the way down to get Ronnie, Auntie Phyllis attempted to hide Ronnie under a bed in her house. She told the police officer that he wasn't there, but he walked in and looked around and said, "*Mrs Saunders, if you don't give me Ronnie, I'm going to take your kids too*", so she was coerced to get Ronnie from under the bed and hand him over. It hurts to think about how awful this must have been for her. Coercion was a common tactic; the families tried to hide children away so they wouldn't be taken, but the authorities would threaten to take their own children away, so they were left with no choice.
34. Mum, Gloria and Ronnie were then taken to Heywood Police Station and locked up in police cells for the night. As young children, they must have been terrified. Uncle Ronnie was only 6 years old, and Mum was only 9. It is despicable that children could be incarcerated in a cell overnight at such a young age. It is a breach of human rights, and nobody has ever been held accountable.
35. The next morning, they were taken to appear before a judge at the Heywood Court. Many members of the family, including their Auntie Emma, Uncle Herbie, Auntie Fanny and Uncle Angus, came to insist to the court that the children were receiving proper care and would continue to receive it. Their uncles, the famous Lovett brothers, stood along the walls of the court dressed in their military uniforms that they had worn to the Western Front and Palestine during World War I and on the battlefields of World War II.
36. The family had sent an urgent message to Grandfather, but by the time he reached Heywood, the court was already adjourned. The court rejected the family's claim and denied custody for all three children. They were charged with being neglected. The police form dated 3 June 1954 records the "offence" against Mum as "neglected child (unfit guardianship)". A copy of the police form is at **Annexure 3**. The court order of the same date also record that Mum was a neglected child and that her father was unfit to be her guardian and made orders for Mum to be committed to the 'care' of the Children's Welfare Department. A copy of the court order is at **Annexure 4**.
37. The children were taken across the road to the train station, escorted by a police officer. Everyone was standing around looking at them, and all their aunts and uncles were standing there crying because they couldn't help. Our Mum remembered it as a "*degrading*" experience and that they were treated like "*three little criminals*". They were escorted by train from Heywood to Hamilton, and from there to Melbourne, where Mum was taken to Melbourne Royal Park Receiving Centre for Children, where she and her sister Gloria were separated from their brother Ronnie. In mum's own words:

"When the police came, I don't know what happened, but I ended up in a Heywood cell for the night. The next morning, I was walked across to the courthouse and sat there for 40 minutes then next thing, I was on a train going to Hamilton, then from Hamilton straight through to Royal Park and that's where we got separated from our brother."
38. Girls and boys were kept separated at the Receiving Centre, so they would only see him at 4 o'clock for around an hour a day during play time before they'd have to go back to the boys' and girls' sections. They were at the Receiving Centre for around a month; they arrived on 3 June 1954 and were there until 30 June 1954. They were then transferred from the Receiving Centre to Ballarat Orphanage, escorted on the train by a police officer. A copy of the admission form from the Receiving Centre, which records admission on 3 June 1954 and transfer on 30

June 1954 is at **Annexure 5**. When they arrived at the orphanage, they met their cousins Lloydie, Ivan, Nancy and Norah Clarke. They were Auntie Gracie and Uncle Norris' children, who also lived at Lake Condah Mission.

39. The orphanage was a horrible place where the children were treated cruelly. It certainly was not a boarding house; they were put to work as soon as they came home from school, doing chores to help in the kitchen. Mum would go to school during the day but because she was experienced with babies, she would come home and be put to work caring for them at night, bathing them and putting them to bed. She would also hide the sheets for young children that wet the bed, so they wouldn't get into trouble.
40. On Saturdays they had to polish and scrub the floors on their hands and knees. They weren't allowed to talk at mealtimes; there was a man that walked around with a long stick and would whack the children with it if he caught them talking. The girls would whisper in their dormitories at night, at the risk of getting in trouble with the orphanage workers that supervised them. The children were constantly punished for things like being a few minutes late to tea. They also cut Mum's beautiful, long hair off. Our mother had grown up with long ringlets of hair, which our grandfather had loved. When she was at the orphanage, they cut her hair so short that her ringlets were gone.
41. Nevertheless, Mum considers herself to be one of the 'lucky ones' because she had grown up around her family and was able to maintain her connections to community and extended family. There was a big mob of Aboriginal children at the orphanage, and they would stick together and look after one another. Mum was very resilient and always tried to reflect on the few positive memories of her time at the orphanage, like the annual trips to Queenscliff over Christmas, and the block of chocolate she received every birthday.
42. Gran had also visited the orphanage a few times, after she underwent two years of tuberculosis treatment at the Hamilton Chalet. She stayed in Ballarat for three weeks with some friends and got the train up to see Mum on Sundays when she could afford a fare. A couple of Mum's uncles and cousins also came to visit, which helped her feel connected. She knew that there were kids that had been in the orphanage for longer than her that never got a visit, so she felt lucky for the few visits she had. Mum would share the packets of biscuits she received during family visits with the other girls in the orphanage, because she felt sympathy for them. She said that sharing was the '*Koori way*'.
43. Mum left the orphanage once she 'came of age'; they had tried to find her work in a shop, but employers always came up with excuses not to take Aboriginal people. Mum worked in a laundry for around a year in 1960 to 1961, however the orphanage would take most of her wage. The Acting Director of the Children's Welfare Department wrote a letter to the Superintendent of the orphanage in relation to Mum's wages, a copy of which is at

Annexure 6:

"All payments to the ward on account of wages, inclusive of the office portion referred to in the next paragraph, and tax instalment stamps, must be entered in the wages book weekly and signed for by the ward.

It will be observed that 10/- per week is to be retained from the wages and forwarded quarterly to this office where it will be held in trust as savings. The office credit will be paid to the ward on discharge from the departmental control or it may be drawn upon from time to time for any legitimate purpose before discharge."

44. We do not know if Mum ever received those wages after she was discharged from the orphanage. Mum wrote a letter to the requesting her wages after she was discharged, and received the following response from the orphanage accountant:

"I acknowledge receipt of your letter and wish to advise that your savings has all been sent to the Children's Welfare Department in Melbourne as requested by them and on application I feel sure that some of it, if not all, will be paid over to you."

45. A copy of that letter is at **Annexure 7**.
46. Mum's connections with her extended family eventually enabled her to reunite with her mother in Collingwood when she was 15 years old. Her cousins told her stories and sat her down to fill her in on what she had missed while she was in the orphanage. They told her stories about her Dad so that she would not lose it all.
47. In April 1960, the orphanage considered that Mum and Uncle Ronnie had *"reached an age when they should move on."* The Director of the Children's Welfare Department wrote a letter to the Healesville Police Station to this effect and requesting that they interview Gran to *"ascertain if she or other members of the family have any proposition for the children's welfare."* A copy of this letter is at **Annexure 8**. It took the Department over 12 months to locate Gran, who was residing in Collingwood. In May 1961, the Acting Director wrote to Gran requesting her to call the orphanage *"for the purpose of discussing the welfare of your daughter."* A copy of this letter dated 12 May 1961 is at **Annexure 9**.
48. Within only three days, on 15 May 1961, Gran sent an Application for Custody of a Ward of the Children's Welfare Department to the Director, formally requesting that Mum be placed in her care. A copy of the application is at **Annexure 10**.
49. On 20 May 1961, Mum was discharged from the orphanage and moved to Collingwood with Gran and her aunty. A copy of the letter from the Superintendent of the orphanage advising the Children's Welfare Department of Mum's discharge is at **Annexure 11**. Mum got a job in a factory nearby and worked there for two years until she met her husband, our Dad, Jimmy Wright. He was from Sydney, and he was a brickie's labourer, so he worked all over the place. They met in 1963 at the local town hall at one of the dances they used to have every Saturday night, which were organised by Alick Jackomos. It was love at first sight with our mum and dad. A photo of them together is at **Annexure 12**.
50. Donna was born in 1964 and Tina was born in 1965, then Mum turned 21 and our parents moved to Sydney and got married. Sonny was born in 1966 and Joanne was born in 1972. The family moved back to Melbourne and lived in Collingwood, then Preston for seven years, then Reservoir.
51. When our parents retired in 1995, they moved home to Country and bought a house in Branhholme, just up the road from Lake Condah mission. It was important to Mum to return to and live on her Country.

IV IMPACTS OF REMOVAL (INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA)

52. Life was very difficult for Mum and her siblings after they were removed. The way they were treated in the orphanage hurt and broke them. They were traumatised, beaten and hurt. It was so bad that Aunty Gloria kept running away from the orphanage to try and escape.
53. Uncle Ronnie had to go to a farm after he finished school every day to milk cows and things like that. He was worked very hard at the farm; he didn't usually finish up there until around 7 o'clock before returning to the orphanage. One time when he returned from the farm, he had a broken jaw. Clearly, he had been mistreated, although we don't know the specifics. He was only 13 years old at the time. It is child slave labour to have children who are 12 and 13 years old working farms in those conditions. We also know that Mum, Uncle Ronnie or Aunty Gloria never received their full wages for the work they were forced to do. Most of it went towards 'administrative fees', and we don't know how much of their wages they ever actually saw (if any).

54. They never spoke to us about what had happened to them as children. It wasn't until we were in our 30s that Mum told us that she had been removed from her family, which was around the time that she gave evidence to the Australian Human Rights Commission's National Inquiry into the Removal and Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children. Up until then, we had never known her story, or Uncle Ronnie or Aunty Gloria's stories. They all hid it from us so well.
55. Mum's experience of being removed from her family had a huge impact on her life. She was very protective over her four children, and always kept her family close to her. We were always well looked after, fed and clothed. House was always cleaned spotless, and we were never allowed out of our parents' sight. We were always surrounded by family and heard all the stories of our ancestors, including our Grandfather – we heard loving family stories of how hard he worked, how he was so proud of his beautiful children. We now know that Mum had done everything she could to make sure we were never taken away from her the way she was taken from her family. The fear of losing us was always there.
56. Mum always made us go to school. One time, a truant officer came to our house and asked mum why Sonny wasn't at school. Mum went ballistic at the officer and told the officer to get out of the house; nobody would ever be taking her kids off her. It is because of Mum's protection that there are now many beautiful grandchildren and great-grandchildren in our family.
57. The land at Lake Condah was finally taken back and is now Aboriginal land, so we make sure we always go back there and let our kids run around. It is important that they know the truth and all the stories about our dear grandparents, how they loved their children and were proud of them.
58. In the final weeks of her life, Mum had a chance to connect with [REDACTED] that we only found out about when we were organising a big family reunion. It was through a birth certificate found by Link Up. [REDACTED] had lived his whole life raised by foster carers, not even knowing he was Aboriginal. He lived right near [REDACTED] but never had a chance to meet her. Our Mum, when he met her, [REDACTED] they only had 6 weeks together, but their bond was huge. We welcomed him back into the family here, at Lake Condah. We put paint on his face and put a possum skin around him, and he walked down the hill to greet Mum in the Dormitory. It was such a special day. Mum's family were always loved and cherished, and very precious to her.
59. Mum's siblings were not as fortunate as her, and sadly passed away very young. Aunty Gloria was only 50 years old, and Uncle Ronnie was only 37 years old. They both tried to drown their trauma by drinking, and we never looked down on them for doing that because we knew how sad they were about what had happened to them. They were quiet and gentle people, just like their parents.
60. It is extremely clear that they were all once happy, healthy children raised by loving parents at the mission. After being removed from their family, mistreated and abused in the orphanage, they came out the other side completely traumatised and broken. Our Aunty Letty also passed away very young, at around 40 years old. She spent her whole life suffering with the trauma of having all her siblings removed; her family was torn apart, and she was left behind on her own. As a result, she had also had her three children taken away from her [REDACTED]
61. Aunty Gloria's three sons all died by suicide as a direct consequence of the impact of her removal. They had nervous breakdowns from being separated from their mother. Two were only 17 at the time of their deaths, and the other son was around 30. They were traumatised from being removed from their mother, and none of them survived.

62. It is very clear that the government had a hand in the murder and destruction of our family. They destroyed the beautiful, happy lives they were living, raising their children on their Country. It was a deliberate, calculated murder of our family heritage, culture, songlines, connection to Country, and our future. They stole our land, created laws to prevent us from speaking our language, took our children and disconnected us from Country. It is the definition of genocide. Why have there been no charges ever brought against the government for this? Nobody in our family has ever received justice for this, especially our mother.
63. The murder of our family has impacted on all our lives from a very young age. They were dispossessed of their lands, robbed of the opportunity to know their family, to know their culture through them, and to learn their language. They were kidnapped, incarcerated and forced into systems of oppression, terror and death. We had to grow up witnessing our Mum, our Aunties and our Uncle suffer from the abuse and trauma they experienced. We were deprived of having connections with our first cousins because they were taken away, when instead we should be growing old with them. We are the only ones left to tell these stories today. We hope that other family members that we have lost connections with learn from this, and add to it.
64. We are left with ongoing heartbreak and trauma; the devastation has never stopped.
65. If it were not for the government, many more of our family members would all still be alive today. Where was the duty of care? Our Mum was a survivor of murder, and genocide, and so are we.

V OUR MOTHER'S ADVOCACY FOR STOLEN GENERATIONS SURVIVORS

66. Our Mum fought a long, hard battle for justice for the total destruction of her life as she knew it. She advocated tirelessly for all Stolen Generations survivors to receive compensation and justice for the pain and suffering caused by the forceful removal, kidnapping, from their families. She protested on the steps of Parliament House in Melbourne in 2019 at a time when she was terminally ill. A photograph of this is at **Annexure 13**. She met with politician after politician to have her voice heard on behalf of her family and all Stolen Generations survivors.
67. Our dad was from New South Wales and did not have the same experience as our mother. But she shared her story with him, and he fully supported her in her fight for justice. He went through everything with her and made her strong. All her life, people had treated her so cruelly, but he was always there by her side. It was true love.
68. Mum's experience as a survivor of the Stolen Generations influenced her to be involved in community services and to advocate for human rights. She completed a Certificate in Childcare through the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and went on to work at Yappera Children's Service Co-Operative Limited for over 12 years. She was the first worker at Yappera to join the union and helped pave the way for childcare workers' rights, including better pay and working conditions.
69. In around 1996, Mum testified at the Australian Human Rights Commission's National Inquiry into the Removal and Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children. Her testimony then became evidence and is included in the Bringing Them Home Report, which was released in 1997.
70. On 13 February 2008, Mum was one of two representatives from Victoria invited to Parliament House in Canberra, along with many other Stolen Generations survivors, to witness the Apology given by the former Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd. She joined Kevin Rudd and former Prime Ministers, Gough Whitlam, Bob Hawke, John Keating and Malcolm Fraser for morning tea after the Apology. A photo of Mum with Kevin Rudd that was taken at the morning tea is at **Annexure 14**. I asked her what she said to Kevin Rudd when she was talking to him, and she said she asked if she could give him a hug, and he said, "*of course you can*".
71. This day was extremely important to Mum. She kept saying, "*I can't believe this.*" Donna, who flew up to Canberra with her, recalls that a white man sitting behind Mum on the plane asked her, "*are you going up for the Apology?*"

and Mum turned around and responded, “yes I am”. That was a complete turn-around for Mum, who had never trusted white people and usually avoided speaking to them where she could.

72. In 2019, Mum was inducted into the Victorian Aboriginal Honour Roll. A copy of her Honour Roll profile, which is published on the First Peoples Relations website, is at **Annexure 15**. An extract from her Honour Roll profile states:

“Eunice is a true inspiration to the Victorian Aboriginal community. By sharing her story with younger generations and the wider community, she demonstrates remarkable courage, selflessness and resilience. She continues to inspire the next generations with her ongoing strength and resilience.”

Eunice Wright is the epitome of the Fighting Gunditjmara; a warrior for her people.”

73. Mum’s death is what brought about the announcement that all Stolen Generation survivors would finally have justice for the forced and unlawful removal of our people. Only three days after she passed away, the Victorian government announced that it was introducing the Stolen Generations Reparations Package. Mum had been fighting for this compensation scheme for Stolen Generations survivors her whole life, only to be denied her justice.
74. After he heard the news about Mum passing, the then Gavin Jennings MP, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, called us and told us that the government was going to announce the scheme. We were back at the mission organising Mum’s funeral at the time. We think he wanted us to be happy for her, but it was gut wrenching. It was too little too late. Gavin knew our family well, and Tina had emailed him in January, two months before Mum passed, to let him know that mum had a fall and was unwell. They knew Mum was unwell, and they knew they were going to announce the scheme. But despite all Mum’s hard work and advocacy that lead to it, she was forgotten. To us as a family, this felt like a deliberate act and a clear example of strategic racism.
75. The government started consultations with Stolen Generations survivors as far back as December 2019, more than three years before Mum passed. The Bringing Them Home report (published in 1997) also clearly documents the impact of the unlawful removal of children and sets out heads of damages calculating the compensation that should be paid. The government already had all the information they needed to inform the redress scheme. They formed a Stolen Generations Steering Committee, which gave people hope. They send members of Parliament out to meet people in Aboriginal communities and build connections. They shake your hand, tell you they’re going to do all of these things, but then they go away, do nothing, and break their promises. They gave our Mum so much false hope, and then left her with nothing.
76. We do not believe that the government ever actually cared about Stolen Generations survivors. Mum attended an Assembly meeting at Parliament House, and the first question that was asked was “*what is happening with the Stolen Generations redress scheme?*”. There was silence. Premier Dan Andrews handed the question over to his “learned friend”, Gavin Jennings MP, who got up and ranted about Aboriginal history and culture. But there was never an answer to the question. We will never forgive the government for the way our family was treated.
77. To this day, our family have not seen a cent from that redress scheme. Because of the ‘rules and regulations’ of the scheme, our family cannot apply on Mum’s behalf. The Government has never offered to make us a payment, in recognition of her enormous contribution. We know that Mum’s fight for justice was not for herself, but she often stood alone in that fight. She fought so hard and received nothing. She deserved better than that. We, as her family, now carry our Mum’s suffering and trauma. We must live and survive it, as many people have not.
78. Mum’s motto was “*speak up against wrongs and injustices among your people, fight the good fight, always listen to your mob, and help others less fortunate.*”

79. We are so proud of our Mum and honoured to share her story with Yoorrook. We know that she would want us to continue her fight for justice, so we will never stop fighting.

Annexures

Annexure 1	Photograph of Eunice Wright and her siblings outside the dormitory at Lake Condah mission.
Annexure 2	Tony Wright, 'Monty's last dance tells us about his home – and ours', The Age, 30 January 2021.
Annexure 3	Victoria Police Form dated 3 June 1954.
Annexure 4	Order of the Committal to the Care of the Children's Welfare Department dated 3 June 1954.
Annexure 5	Receiving Depot admission form dated 3 June 1954.
Annexure 6	Letter from the Acting Director of the Children's Welfare Department to the Superintendent of the Ballarat Orphanage dated 24 October 1960.
Annexure 7	Letter from the Ballarat Orphanage accountant to Eunice Wright dated 8 June 1961.
Annexure 8	Letter from the Director of the Children's Welfare Department to the Officer in Charge of the Healesville Police Station dated 11 April 1960.
Annexure 9	Letter from the Acting Director of the Children's Welfare Department to Lyall Foster dated 12 May 1961.
Annexure 10	Application for Custody of a Ward of the Children's Welfare Department dated 15 May 1961.
Annexure 11	Letter from the Superintendent of the Ballarat Orphanage to the Children's Welfare Department dated 22 May 1961.
Annexure 12	Photograph of Jimmy and Eunice Wright.
Annexure 13	Photograph of Eunice Wright protesting on the steps of Parliament House in 2019.
Annexure 14	Photograph of Eunice Wright with Kevin Rudd at the morning tea after the Apology.
Annexure 15	Victorian Aboriginal Honour Roll profile of Aunty Eunice Wright.