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TRANSCRIPT OF DAY 1 – WURREK TYERRANG

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**TUESDAY, 26 APRIL 2022 AT 10.02 AM (AEST)**

**DAY 1**

**MR TONY McAVOY SC, Senior Counsel Assisting**  
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Yoorrook Justice Commission

  
**LAW IN ORDER**  
Where work flows.

CHAIR: Good morning. Good morning, everybody. We welcome you all present here today at the Charcoal Lane. The first hearing of the Yoorrook's wurrek tyerrang or public hearings, which we will be receiving truth-telling evidence from Elders and next week  
5 some contextual evidence from the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and representative of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria. Before we get started, I would like to invite Commissioner Hunter, who is joining us via live stream, welcome, to give an acknowledgment of country. Commissioner Hunter.

10 COMMISSIONER HUNTER: May the ancestors of the Wurundjeri, the land we are meeting on, watch over us today. Fly high in the sky as we start this historic occasion, our first ever truth-telling Commission within Australia for our people and I welcome you all to the lands of the Wurundjeri. Thank you.

15 CHAIR: Thank you, Commissioner Hunter. Counsel.

MR McAVOY: Thank you, Chair. I - my name is McAvoy of Senior Counsel. I'm Senior Counsel Assisting this Yoorrook Justice Commission. I appear with my Co-Senior Counsel Assisting, Fiona McLeod SC, and Sarala Fitzgerald of Junior Counsel. We commence  
20 historic hearings for the Yoorrook Justice Commission with our first witness, Uncle Jack Charles. He is here today. Seated to his immediate left is his sister, Zenip Charles, and then further along his brother, Grady Walsh.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr McAvoy. Welcome, Uncle Jack. We are delighted and honoured  
25 you can join us today. I now invite the Yoorrook ceremonial officer to administer an affirmation to Uncle Jack.

**<UNCLE JACK, AFFIRMED**

30 MR McAVOY: Thank you. Mr Charles, my name is Tony McAvoy, Senior Counsel. We have met already. As you have heard, I am co-Senior Counsel Assisting the Yoorrook Justice Commission. I am a Wiridi man from Central Queensland, and it is my role today to ask you questions about your statement and other matters relevant to this Commission of inquiry. Throughout your evidence today, I propose to address you as Uncle Jack, if that's  
35 okay.

UNCLE JACK: Yes. No problems.

40 MR McAVOY: Firstly, Uncle Jack, you have prepared with lawyers assisting the Commission a statement; that's correct?

UNCLE JACK: Yes. Yes, I have.

45 MR McAVOY: And it's titled the '*Balert Keetyarra of Uncle Jack Charles*'. That's correct?

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

50 MR McAVOY: And that statement, you have had the opportunity to read it?

UNCLE JACK: A couple of times over, yes.

MR McAVOY: Yes. And you are comfortable that it is true and correct to the best of your --

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UNCLE JACK: It is true and correct, yes.

MR McAVOY: Thank you. Uncle Jack, I ask you in the way of cultural protocol to introduce yourself to the Commissioners, who I understand you know some of or perhaps all of them already, but I give you that opportunity before we commence.

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UNCLE JACK: Yes, well I am a well-known Collingwood-Fitzroy bloke. A Melbournian. And I am self-proclaimed in my community as a - the local Kurdaitcha man, lore man, feather-foot of the Smith Street strip, and it has been working well with me, to be a leading light. And that's my job as an Elder with lived experiences, to be a source for people to gravitate towards in their - in their own journey of coming out of their own heart of darkness and it's been proven to be working where - working for - with me and others that - that - yes, a word here and there, it has been sufficient for people to start seriously thinking about turning their own lives around. So that's the role that I undertake. It's the best role as an actor. I'm not acting in this role. It's the best role that - as I say - to be the ultimate role model at the moment beyond reproach to - it's just us sharing the journey. So that's who I am, what I do.

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MR McAVOY: Thank you, Uncle Jack. I - I want to start this morning by asking you some questions about your family.

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UNCLE JACK: My what, sorry?

MR McAVOY: Your family.

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UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: So I firstly want to ask you about your childhood and ask, what is your earliest memory?

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UNCLE JACK: As you get older and you're doing things like this, you start reviewing your lot, you know, your history and etcetera. And I have - the earliest memory I have is being in the Box Hill Boys' Home babies' section, number 1 - no, number 2 home where the babies were, and I had problems walking. And so I was delivered, apparently, to Kardinia Park. I don't know what for, but I did arrive back into Box Hill Boys' Home in 1947. And I started my term though, my 12-year term at the Box Hill Boys' Home until I was 14. So that - my earliest memory was having problems walking and being delivered to some other place. It was Kardinia Park, I found out, down Geelong, but, yes, so Box Hill Boys' Home was my earliest memories.

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MR McAVOY: And how old do you think you would have been at that time?

UNCLE JACK: A little over four months, yes. Maybe - no, no, I was taken at four months from Daish's Paddock. That's as much as I can glean, because, being born under the Assimilation Policy, all babies were supposed to be taken from the hospital bed, from their

50

mothers and then placed into babies' homes. City Mission over in Brunswick. My mum managed to keep me for four months and I was discovered with her at Daish's Paddock on the way to Shepparton-Mooroopna, the blackfella camp there, and that's when I was taken and delivered to the City Mission babies' home.

5

When I got older, when I became older, I was delivered to the Box Hill Boys' Home with a note and I could remember the note because we have sourced it in - in '*Jack Charles v The Crown*'. We had - did some research and the note said - to my memory - I have a good memory now I'm not using white man's powders, drugs, etcetera. I have this memory of:

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*"We are sorry to see our favourite little Aboriginal boy Jackie Charles leave us. He's 2 years old. He's become too big for us so we are sending him to Box Hill Boys' Home and hope he does well there."*

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Words to that effect.

MR McAVOY: Thank you, Uncle Jack. I just want to go on a little bit further from that response. Can you tell the Commissioners who your mother was?

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UNCLE JACK: My mother was Blanchie Charles. Blanchie Muriel Charles, I think. Yeah.

MR McAVOY: Your earliest memory, do they include memories of your mother?

UNCLE JACK: No. No, I have no memories of my mother as a baby.

25

MR McAVOY: Do you have any photos of your mother that you know of?

UNCLE JACK: Not until we started researching the history. After '*Bastardy*', the doco, in 2008, Rachael Maza from Ilbjerri Theatre said can we do '*Bastardy*' the stage show. And so we researched - they are in a unique position to do some researching and that, you know, so I found some photographs of my mum up there at Cummeragunja as a schoolgirl, etcetera. Part of walkout too, she was. And also the research of that episode of the series '*Women in the Sun*'. I was in the third episode of that, and many of us actors in that - in that third episode of their story of the walkout at Cummera were the nephews and niece, sons and daughters of the people were actual of that walkout from Cummera to Barmah forest.

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MR McAVOY: So how old were you when you met your mother?

UNCLE JACK: I was going on 18. I would have been about 18.

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MR McAVOY: Thank you. And who was your father?

UNCLE JACK: I didn't know my father then. Okay. I've only just recently found out who my father was.

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MR McAVOY: And what is his name?

UNCLE JACK: He is Hilton Hamilton Walsh. Yorta Yorta, Taungurung man.

MR McAVOY: Uncle Jack we are going to play some video from the episode of *'Who Do You Think You Are?'* which was devoted to your history. If you just watch.

**(Video of *'Who Do You Think You Are?'* Plays)**

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**(Video stopped)**

MR McAVOY: Okay. Uncle Jack, you recognise that scene?

10 UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes, I do.

MR McAVOY: Can you just explain for the Commissioners that - where that scene took place?

15 UNCLE JACK: In the Edinburgh Gardens.

MR McAVOY: Yes. And so did you have any forewarning that - what was going to be in the envelope?

20 UNCLE JACK: I was a told it was going to be a surprise. The people, Helen Biggs, had rung me up some time ago and said, "Jack" - because of my DNA, they said, "There's been some anomaly with your DNA. We have to have a crash meeting before we film. So we're coming down." I said, "Well, meet at Friends of the Earth." So we met at Friends of the Earth and they said, "Yes, Jack, there's been some problems with your DNA." And I said,  
25 "What, you found out I'm not Aboriginal?"

And they said, "No, no, no, you are Aboriginal, Jack. But we have found out what the Koorie Heritage Trust told you some years ago, who may have been your father, being Phillip Burns from Leeton, New South Wales, is not so. He's not your father, Jack. But we  
30 know who your father was, Jack. And you will be surprised, Jack, when we tell you who your father was."

Okay. So I said, oh yeah, pray tell. They said, "No, you have to wait until we start filming." So I waited another fortnight and they came down and the first instance was that  
35 at Friends - no, at Edinburgh Gardens I was given this envelope, and I opened it up and there was Hilton Hamilton Walsh, and leaning on a walking stick which he carved himself. And the irony there struck me, between the - you know, in the eyes that when I found my mum at 18, on the Edwards River, between Moulamein and Swan Hill, she was carving walking sticks. Snakes around walking sticks, and etcetera. They were great carvers in  
40 those days. There was no television. So people were carving.

MR McAVOY: Thank you. And you had never --

45 UNCLE JACK: He looked - he looked dapper. He looked a real gentleman. I thought, God, have a look at that. Three-piece white suit, shoes, standing in front of the Murray there up at Cummera. He looked a million quid. And I said, "There you go. That's where I get my fine sense of dressage from, wearing good Moka, good clothing."

MR McAVOY: Yes, you can see that straightaway. So I understand from what you said a  
50 few moments ago that you never met your father while he was alive?

UNCLE JACK: No, no.

5 MR McAVOY: And so knowing who he was, was a big moment for you? You have said so on the TV program.

UNCLE JACK: It was a big moment for me. You know, to have been able to tick the box as far as completing my journey of discovering of family, etcetera. It's been a long journey. You know. Most of it has been hidden, denied from me. Stolen from me.

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MR McAVOY: Yes.

UNCLE JACK: And so it's a blessing that I'm in this unique position that people have information and they are tripping over themselves to give me this information about who I am and exactly and archival evidence, etcetera. Caroline Briggs, Maxine Briggs from the library. There is quite a few people who have now been giving me information, people off the streets. Yesterday I was having - somebody bought me dinner down at Marios down there, down in Brunswick Street, and they had a photo of my father - a couple of photos of my father that I never knew existed, and etcetera.

20

And they had stories to tell of my father. People since that episode have been contacted me on Facebook and etcetera, telling me of their relationship with my father and how he was just such a wonderful gentleman up there in the Swan Hill Pioneer settlement, the Swan Hill Hospital. And then doing that episode, we taped - gone up to the camera crew, up to Barmah Forest to meet Uncle Colin Walker, and he tells us that, indeed, my father was a mentor to him and many others.

25

And that struck me too because, you know, I am exactly like that. I am a mentor to so many people. I'm pretty proud of the fact that I am - I have been following my father's footsteps in that - in that sense.

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MR McAVOY: Yes. And - but it is the case that both your parents have passed away some time ago now?

UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes, yes, yes. I was able to bury my mum myself down there at Moe. Alick Jackomos rang me. I was living in Kew at the time at a - at a friend's place, and she - he rang up and said, "Your mum's died. She's - there's a funeral service for her today down in Moe." And so I - you know, I had to hurry up, get my brother Archie, Artie, as his real name is, but we got Archie from Eltham, and then the bloke dropped us on a highway on the way to Moe and we hitchhiked down to - to the Moe Salvation Army Hall and we got there just in time for the service.

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And so she was buried at Moe, and years later Zenip here gets to be able to talk to the - the people at the Advancement League funeral people, and they just placed a marker on our mum's grave and that. So I'm very - you know, very - very pleased that I was in that position there. Archie and I were the only ones that were able to bury mum. Couldn't find my two sisters - well, I didn't know about Zenip at that time. But couldn't find Esme and Eva-Jo at that time to inform them of their mum's passing.

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50 MR McAVOY: Do you remember what year it was?

UNCLE JACK: I can't remember the year now. No.

MR McAVOY: It was some time ago?

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UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: Now, on your mother's side, you have a number of siblings.

10 UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes.

MR McAVOY: How many?

15 UNCLE JACK: I believe 11. Two die - one died at birth, one was stillborn. So - one died a little after birth and one was stillborn. Between Esme and myself - yes, six years, I think. And I believe there is six missing. And, you know, I did get information from the Koorie Heritage Trust, Jennifer Bates, as to who these people were, and I will be going through my archives shortly to discover, because this *'Who Do You Think You Are?'*, this Royal Commission has, you know - is prompting me to write another book in the future to - to inform Victorians and, indeed, not only the nation but Tasmanians too about their history, their missing history. The history that they haven't been told. We need truth in history. So that's what I will be aiming at. This information that I've been getting, you know.

25 MR McAVOY: So, Uncle Jack, there were a number of your siblings who you learned about and knew of, there were some that died at birth or --

30 UNCLE JACK: Yes, two died - two died at a very young age. There was six missing. And as we say in *'Jack Charles v The Crown'*, six missing, never accounted for. Simple a statement as that, you know. And I have great hope that perhaps we will find them in the future and that. I could remember they had Aboriginal names, some of them. Got to remember that, you know, when Christine - Zenip was born, she has two Christian names, Zenip and Christine. The nurse, the registrar, that was supposed to register her name wasn't allowed, really, to give her her mum's preferred name, Zenip, and that. So she has Zenip and Christine. Both Christian names. It's on her birth certificate. She showed me. So I'm very pleased that we do have people, you know, in the system working against their - the desire of the system to bleed out any indigeneity as far as her name is concerned.

40 MR McAVOY: Well, we might come back to that a little bit later. So on your mother's side of your siblings, how many people are still alive today, that you know of?

UNCLE JACK: Just this one here.

45 MR McAVOY: You and Zenip.

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

50 MR McAVOY: How many siblings do you have on your father's side all up, do you know?

UNCLE JACK: Well, it was 13 -- we did comment - you see me commenting on the fact that when Grady tells me, "Hello, Jack, I'm your brother, Grady Walsh" - you know, that was a shock to the system. He's wearing an Aboriginal Health Service -- you know. He worked for the Epping - the psych unit up there, working on the bewildered and etcetera and that. So that was a real hoot. (Vision lost).

UNCLE JACK: Parents would have been the women in the Box Hill Boys' Home. The women were - were more - well, they would hug you and it wasn't in a - you know, a sexual way like the men officers would hug you. The women were - and I had a special friend up there, Mrs Johnson, who looked after me, and she would take me out on picnics. As a matter of fact before I left the home, going on 14, she took me into the studio and Swanson Street to have a photo taken of me in my Sunday best with her sitting on the couch, etcetera. Family photograph. You know. Nephew and aunty-looking photograph, you know. So I - yes, only the women in the boys' home.

MR McAVOY: But I take it you have some fond memories attached to that photograph?

UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes, I do, yes, of Mrs Johnson.

MR McAVOY: Now, you have recently though through the *'Who Do You Think You Are?'* program learned something more about your ancestors. The - there is an ancestor on your mother's side, who was named Woretemoeteyenner.

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: What you can tell the Commissioners about Woretemoeteyenner?

UNCLE JACK: Woretemoeteyenner was the fourth child of the Mannalargenna, who was the leader of the Palawa people. Five-times great grandfather. And I know that he's related to many Victorians because the evidence came to me from many people on my Facebook page from many people around Victoria, and New South Wales and Tasmania, etcetera, telling me of their relationship with the great Mannalargenna and Woretemoeteyenner.

So I - and I only found out today that George Briggs sold Woretemoeteyenner for one Guinea, etcetera. So there is further - you know, impetus, urge for me to investigate more about Woretemoeteyenner's journey, being a - you know, she was latched on to by the white people who came out, the sealers. And the sealers, I realised - they realised, the sealers realised it was women's business in Tasmania to kill the seals, the walruses that would lumber up on to the rocks, not men's business, which is pretty weird.

But they would cover themselves in - in seal fat, you know, and lie in a shallow depression. You could see me clambering over the rocks in that episode, seeing these shallow depressions where the - these women, my great-great-great-greats, would have lain in wait for a wandering seal to - to clamber up on to the rocks, and then they would all get up and dong it on the head. So these white people, you know, these sealers, realised that they had a woman and a killer of seals.

So everything was very good for them, and etcetera. So George Briggs latched on to Woretemoeteyenner and that, and they had kids, etcetera. But George Briggs, as far as I



know, was - when they decimated the population of the seals around Tassie, some of them took their womenfolk over to New Zealand and some over to an island off the coast of Western Australia - off Albany. And Woretemoetyenner, as far as I knew at that time, was left on this island.

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I only found out today - today - and you can see why I get a little bit P'd off over the fact that I just get to hear today that she was sold for one Guinea. George Briggs sold her for one Guinea. And she ended up in Mauritius. She stayed up there. And I didn't know, but I was told today she spoke French and that. So there is more to the story than I'm realising. So the point of fact is that it's a - it's obligatory for me to discover more about this if I'm going to be writing the book.

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That's the end game here, writing the book so that it can be bled on to our state school's curriculums and etcetera. It's a wonderful story about this woman, you know, being - you know, suddenly found up there in Mauritius, and the Mauritius people, "What's this woman doing here? Send her back." So she comes back, and the report is that she's wandering around three years later down around Launceston, crying her eyes out, pulling out her hair.

15

She heard that one of her children had died in a fire, a very gentle, you know, story about one of her children dying in a fire. And then I know the harsh truth about this and we won't go into that. I will leave it for the book, about bonfires and black bodies, etcetera. But that's just giving you a hint and that. That's the information that I have and that. So, yes, but as far as my mother's history, there is this wonderful famous photo of four generations of Briggs ladies after they had travelled from - from across the Tasman - from across the - the - from Tasmania to -- and come up through Bonarong country all the way up to Cummera. Up in Cummera there is four generations of Briggs ladies and the youngest Briggs lady is holding my mum as a baby up there in Cummera. It's a famous well-known photograph.

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MR McAVOY: We will come to that photograph in a little while. I just wanted to ask you a little bit for more about Woretemoetyenner. You said that she was married to George Briggs.

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UNCLE JACK: Well, as far as I know, they were married.

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MR McAVOY: He was an Englishman.

UNCLE JACK: I don't know if they married or anything like this. You know. I'm - yes, I'm not certain if they were married but they had children.

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MR McAVOY: Yes. And -

UNCLE JACK: One of them was Dalrymple.

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MR McAVOY: Yes. And do you know where Woretemoetyenner was taken to from Tasmania, Launceston, in her later years?

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UNCLE JACK: Yes. I've worked it out because of the story in *'Who Do You Think You Are?'*. I've worked it out that George Augustus Robinson who writes extensively about the blacks down in Tasmania, and who had latched on to Mannalargenna, befriended him. He

was charged with the development of a final solution to the Aboriginal problem in Tasmania, and from my reckoning, he had conned Mannalargenna into getting his people to board a ship, and there is this famous picture of Mannalargenna. He cut his dreadlocks off. The dreadlocks were - his - were tubular -

5

MR McAVOY: If I can stop you there for a second, Uncle Jack. We might show a photograph on the screen.

10

UNCLE JACK: Yes. Well, that's a famous rendition of - of Mannalargenna with his dreadlocks and those - his hair was held down with tubes of - of ceramic tubes. You know, with the hair threaded through them. So that's where the dreadlock came. And they would shake their heads at ceremonies and that and the - and the clacking noise of the - of the ceramic - the clay, the hard clay would be resound and that, you know. And it would be - you know, it would be a - you know, a - an acknowledgment that a special meeting was going to be taking place.

15

Well, he had already shorn all that off before he boarded the ship, and there is this picture of Mannalargenna shaking the hand of George Augustus Robinson and that. George Augustus Robinson, as I said, was charged with developing this final solution. Now, all those that hadn't been killed, slaughtered, hadn't married into white society, were asked and through Mannalargenna to board a ship and to be taken over to Flinders Island, the largest island, and some to Lady Cape Barron Island but most of them over to Flinders Island.

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Mannalargenna - George Augustus Robinson writes in his book that Mannalargenna was pacing up and down the deck, looking back at the disappearing coastline. Well, it didn't disappear. You can see it from - from the tops of some of the mountains on Flinders Island. Some of the ladies would clamber up the mountain and look out across the cemetery over to - over across the waters to the place from whence they came -- loyally.

25

He lasted only three months on that island before he passed away, Mannalargenna. He must have been sorely disappointed with his friend, Robinson, who conned him to such a point that he followed through. He thought that - but it was a death camp, you know. The soldiers were there to make sure that nobody left. You put a church on this death camp, it becomes a mission. They had their own - they had their own brick-making facility there, and the - cell the cells were designed for four to a cell, and it was designed for people to catch the common cold, the flu, and etcetera from. So that's why the killing - the dying was very quick for many of them.

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MR McAVOY: Uncle Jack, you went to Flinders Island and saw the remnants of that camp, didn't you?

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UNCLE JACK: I went - I saw that, I saw that, yeah, evidence with my own eyes and with people that know the story, the locals. They are all invariably related to me. They have got - you never know who you are going to meet in this episode, the filming, the two weeks filming. A week filming here in Victoria and a week over there in Tassie. But the more harrowing leg of that journey was the story that I received from Tasmania.

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MR McAVOY: I just want to ask you a question about - about Woretemoetyenner and whether you know where she ultimately passed away.

50

UNCLE JACK: No, I'm yet to discover that.

MR McAVOY: Do you know whether it was on Flinders Island?

5 UNCLE JACK: Yes. No, no, no, Woretemoeteyenner's daughter, Dalrymple. Now I  
know. Dalrymple, you see me in that episode reading this wonderful letter, beautiful  
handwriting, Dalrymple, living in a town called Perth in Tassie, asking the authorities to  
allow Woretemoeteyenner, her mum, to come back to Tassie and she will look after her.  
10 They were independent. She was married to a Briggs, she was, you know. So of course  
they allowed Woretemoeteyenner to leave the island.

So she - so I got a - I got to investigate that further, to discover more about - and I know  
where to go to in that - to finalise that end game, the what happened to Mannalargenna,  
where she buried as a free woman in Tasmania. That's very important. So, yes, not only  
15 Woretemoeteyenner, but a couple of other people, because of letters written - beautiful  
letters written to the authorities asking the authorities to allow their mum or their father to  
be delivered to them because they were independent, they had married a white person and  
they would love - and it happened for many people. Not - it happened for a few people, but  
20 not very many. It was designed as a death camp, as the final solution to the Aboriginal  
problem in Tasmania.

MR McAVOY: And so attending at Flinders Island before you knowing what had been  
there, was an emotional journey?

25 UNCLE JACK: It was, yes. My word it was, yes, yes. I spent a lot of my time in my unit  
at the hotel on the island, you know, crying there. But you know, the information I am  
getting from Emma was - was an eye-opener and particularly harrowing, you know, for me  
and I'm just grateful that I'm still here, still alive, mentally capable of receiving this kind of  
information and to put good use to this information, getting it down. Appearing in a place  
30 such as this, you know. Letting you know my thoughts and etcetera.

But it's - you know, generated towards educating the masses and trying to prompt, you  
know, State Ministers for Education - Federal Ministers for Education to seriously think  
35 about each state's unique history to be bled on to our state schools' curriculums.

MR McAVOY: I want to ask you a few more questions about Mannalargenna. You were  
given some information during the program *'Who Do You Think You Are?'* About the type  
of person that Mannalargenna was. Do you recall receiving that information?

40 UNCLE JACK: Bits and pieces of it. Yes, the more overwhelming aspect of all this  
information coming at me was that he was - you know, he was a - he was a strong man, he  
was very fit, didn't have an ounce of fat on him, etcetera, and - and he held to Aboriginal  
lore, etcetera. But there had to come a time when he had to have this conversation with the  
likes of George Augustus Robinson about the future and that. He had seen and witnessed  
45 and, you know, had escaped himself the killings, the slaughter.

So I believe that he had he had a white friend in George Augustus Robinson, and that, in a  
sense, protected him from being slaughtered along with so many others. And his people  
too, the Palawa people. That's not to say that many of the Palawa people escaped, you  
50 know, the killing fields.

MR McAVOY: Do you recall being told during the program that Mannalargenna was a leader of sorts?

5 UNCLE JACK: Yes, he was - he was leader. He was the chief, the all-powerful and that, you know. I found that - that's wonderful, my great-great-great-great grandfather, Mannalargenna, his DNA is my DNA. It's pretty ironic that - that I placed myself, once I had shunned addiction to white man's powders and etcetera, regained my indigeneity, if you will, my Aboriginality and that, you know, that search, that long search and it's still  
10 going on. You know. Leads me to reflect that I am my five-times great grandfather's five-times great nephew.

MR McAVOY: He was - I think he was also described as a clever man of sorts.

15 UNCLE JACK: He's a clever man. And I'm a clever man too, having survived, doing what I do. You know. With - so yeah, in a modern day and age, I fight the good battle with all my might, you know, with addiction, to accessing - being able to go into prison by Zoom nowadays into our youth detention centres and adult prisons and that and sharing the journey, and tweaking the consciences of those behind bars. I'm doing what he would have  
20 been doing.

MR McAVOY: So we are - we are showing Mannalargenna's image on the screen at the moment. Do you think from time to time about the language that he might have used and the culture that he lived by and those matters of life?

25 UNCLE JACK: What - I find that hard to - you know, to speak about because I really don't know. Somehow or another he had this rapport with - with Robinson and that. And Robinson embedded himself in - in with Mannalargenna's lot to, I don't know, take advantage of him. He took advantage of him, I believe, and it was a quid pro quo, you  
30 know, kind of. You know, he had to save as many people of his mob as he could. So what do you do?

So I don't know the languages that would have been used. It would have been somehow or another, at that time, Mannalargenna would have spoken fairly, you know, hesitant English  
35 but understandable English. If you're engaging with the likes of Robinson, and etcetera, he's trying to con you and that. He's a great con-artist, was Robinson, and that. So he did have this rapport. I don't know what kind of languages they would have used.

MR McAVOY: Do you think, Uncle Jack, that as Mannalargenna's descendant, that  
40 language should be something that was passed to you?

UNCLE JACK: It should have been. Yes, it is - well, I - a man of many parts, I find now. You know. And - and the first and foremost is the language of the Palawa people. So I don't know, you know. I mean, I haven't got a grip of that. I haven't got a grip on Yorta  
45 Yorta, Wurundjeri. You know. And any of my languages around. The only languages over the years is when I'm doing a play or a film or something in another country over in the west.

I know some, you know, Noongar and Yamatji words, and etcetera, and I use them in my everyday speech sometimes. I just - I just use them. "Ana", which is a - it's a Western Australian Noongar language, you know, meaning "aye."

5 MR McAVOY: Yes. Do you - I just want to come forward from Mannalargenna to your mother, his descendant. Do you know - and this might be a very difficult question for you to answer, but do you know whether she inherited any of the language or culture or lore from her great grandfather?

10 UNCLE JACK: I believe that, you know, being raised up with all those old ladies up there at Cummera as a baby, she would have got to learn language. Okay. But when she turned 15, she met Hilton Hamilton Walsh. And Hilton Hamilton Walsh would have also known language too, Yorta Yorta, Taungurung, perhaps, you know. But - so yes, she would have known languages, Blanchie Charles. When I found her, she never spoke it. She never  
15 spoke language.

MR McAVOY: So you spoke of a little while ago about a photo of the Briggs women. Perhaps we can show that photo. Is that the photo you were speaking of?

20 UNCLE JACK: No, no. No, no. But the oldest lady there with the beard - the beard is a sign of acknowledgment of Elder statespersonship or whatever, being an Elder, and that. But that oldest lady she's holding a clay pipe under her - under her - under the folds of her dress there. She's got it stooped away there. But yes, that's a - that's a great photo, a famous photograph that I know of. But, no, there is - there is one of only the four generations of  
25 women up at Cummera.

You can get that - source that through Ibijerri and the youngest, tall - they are all tall, these Briggs ladies, you know. This tall Briggs lady, young lady, is holding mum as a baby and that. And somebody said, "That's your mum Blanchie. She's holding Blanchie  
30 Charles," this younger Briggs lady there. The four generations of Briggs family.

MR McAVOY: Uncle Jack, do you recall being shown this photograph during the program *'Who Do You Think You Are?'*

35 UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes. We saw it - we discovered it also in - in developing *'Jack Charles v The Crown'*. In that show.

MR McAVOY: Thank you.

40 UNCLE JACK: And *'Coranderrk'*, the story of Coranderrk. The performance piece.

MR McAVOY: We will come to that in a moment. I want to turn now for your father's side of your family. Do you know any of your father's ancestors?

45 UNCLE JACK: Pardon?

MR McAVOY: Do you know of any of your father's ancestors?

50 UNCLE JACK: No. No. Not as yet. I'm learning through Maxine Briggs a little bit more about that. Fridays, where for a while there my intern Francesca, sitting up at the back

there, and I have been going up into the library and talking to Maxine Briggs. And she's got more work to - and stories to give unto us by about - about dad's side of the family. The Taungurung side, etcetera. And even she suggested - gave us a hint that Wiradjuri and that. So we are not certain about it yet, but -

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MR McAVOY: Do you remember, Uncle Jack, hearing of a woman by the name of Granny Annie Johnson?

UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes, yes.

10

MR McAVOY: What relationship is she to you, do you know?

UNCLE JACK: Somewhere in my great-great-greats, and that, you know. My great-greats perhaps.

15

MR McAVOY: On which side of the family?

UNCLE JACK: On my mother's side I think. I'm not certain. Yes. Yes, on my mother's side. She was acknowledged in the Ulumbarra show, when we opened up the new 1,000 state of the art theatre attached to the old Bendigo jail up there, the Ulumbarra Theatre. We had a musical storytelling event with Kutcha and other famous singers, singing songs. And I was the reader of the Dja Dja Wurrung stories and etcetera. And so we did have a story about Granny Johnson during the time of hardship for many people at Cummera and Coranderrk.

25

People were dying of - of the sickness, flu, common cold, and they used to ride with a horse and dray with a big pot of soup in the back and were feeding - you know, giving broth to the sick and by way of healing, part of the healing process and that. Warm broth. So it was a time when there was a lot of sickness throughout the blackfella camps, etcetera, in those days. So that's as far as I know about the great Granny Annie Johnson.

30

MR McAVOY: And that was from her time, in part, at Coranderrk.

UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes, yes, Coranderrk.

35

MR McAVOY: Do you remember -

UNCLE JACK: She wrote letters to Parliament and that. It was the women at Coranderrk who wrote countless letters to Parliament, to the chief secretary, the Premier complaining about conditions, the squatters pulling down the fences, destroying the crops. Allowing the cattle to roam, and etcetera. Not very happy with their situation. The same thing was happening down at Lake Tyers. Those people down there were also writing to Parliament complaining about conditions, and etcetera.

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45 So Maloga and other - the six missions around Victoria at the time, people were realising that you could write letters of complaint to the chief secretary, and lo and behold, you know, so many letters were written to the point that even today if you write -- letters to Parliament, so many letters, Parliament has to act. So in 1880 the Parliament acted on behalf of the Aboriginals. It's unheard of. But they had a Royal Commission, you know, a

special series of inquiries into the management of Coranderrk to decide upon the future of the residents and to - and of the land and that. And 47 whites gave evidence and 22 blacks.

MR McAVOY: And of the 22 blacks -

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UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: - was Granny Annie Johnson one of those people?

10 UNCLE JACK: She would have been. My great-great grandfather Johnny Charles and William Barak. I played William Barak in the stage show, the La Mama stage show and the Ilbjerri stage show of the minutes of evidence. In other words, the actors in this particular program, in this particular play, spoke only the words that were given in evidence and transcribed and written into the Parliamentary Library, and that's where we  
15 sought the script of Coranderrk, both La Mama and - and Ilbjerri theatre.

And I recall taking it up 2009, up to - no, 2015, I think, up to Belvoir St Theatre. And for a week, the kids were coming in and they were totally amazed that the blacks down in Victoria had this wonderful story to tell them and that, and how they had a win, you know.  
20 So many people gave evidence they mulled it over for three years, and in two thousand - I mean 1884, the Parliament decide - had - just said yes, this is Aboriginal land, blackfellas, this is their land.

That's - so they had a win. And there was a lot of firing of rifles and celebration up there at Cummera. I mean, up there at Coranderrk, I - I believe. And this really upset the black hats in Parliament and the local squatters. So they invented - two years later in 1886, to counteract this win, they invented the *Aboriginal Half-Caste Act 1886*. So all the full bloods were left there. All the half-castes had to remove themselves and put themselves at great risk wandering around the state of Victoria.  
25

30

If you were a blackfella, you know, wandering alone or with your family and etcetera, you were still at risk of being shot. Especially after church. After church, as they normally used to mount their horses and go hunting blacks. Like they would hunt the fox. So, yes, we were at risk. We had that win but - but then they developed the - and we are still  
35 confounded and bedevilled with the *Aboriginal Half-Caste Act* right to today.

MR McAVOY: Do you - do you know whether some of the complaints in relation to Coranderrk -

40 UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: - that led to that inquiry were about the amount of food rations that were -

45 UNCLE JACK: Yes, food rations, yes, yes, yes. Yes, yes. And blankets. Not enough blankets. And, yes, it's - it's hard being an actor, being the - playing the lead role as the elder, as - as William Barak, to be sitting on the side there listening to the evidence given by the women, particularly, as they would tell of the struggles of the - of them trying to keep their babies alive against - with only one blanket, and etcetera.

They weren't allowed to - they had a - it was running successfully, Coranderrk. They were selling produce into the town of Healesville. So that's how well Coranderrk was seen. But it upset the local squatters that the blackfellas would have this - this ability to sell produce, cheese, milk, meat, into the town of - bread, into the town of Healesville. They said, no,  
 5 the blacks shouldn't be doing this. So they did all they could to - to - to - to make it look as though the blacks couldn't work the land successfully.

But - so, yes, so we - that's where the complaints came from, and the management decided the woman, especially the missus of the management, decided to pull back on - on giving  
 10 blankets during the height of winter and etcetera. So you had people - babies were dying because of - of this - the fact that there was very little - very few blankets to spread amongst them. People were still going to school, but also there was very little meat.

You had to buy your own meat and that was - that was - that was really seriously sad for  
 15 them to struggle against, you know, after having such a good life a couple of years previously. All in one year, it was dashed.

MR McAVOY: Having performed that play, you know a fair bit - a fair amount of the Coranderrk Commission of Inquiry. Do you recall hearing anything about medicines and  
 20 people not being given the proper medicine?

UNCLE JACK: It was watered down. It was watered down. It was from - you know, from a paranoid person like myself, it was from my point of view that it was - it was better for  
 25 them to pass away and that. So if you could weaken the - the medications and etcetera, the cough syrups and that, make them more watery, etcetera, you know, as an example, then they would die quicker. You know. And there's this - these unmarked graves up there at Coranderrk on the rise there and that's where I - you know, again, you know, it reminds me of walking around the grounds of that - those gravesites over in - over in Flinders Island, reminded me of the unmarked gravesites on Coranderrk property. Etcetera. So - and my  
 30 great-great-grandfather Johnny Charles is buried - I don't know where he's buried there and that.

MR McAVOY: So when you said they thought it was better that they passed away, meaning the -  
 35

UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes, yes.

MR McAVOY: Meaning the Aboriginal people, who was the "they"?

40 UNCLE JACK: Hey?

MR McAVOY: Who do you understand was thinking it was better -

UNCLE JACK: The black hats in Parliament and the squatters who needed that land.  
 45 They would look up enviously on the hills looking down at Coranderrk, such a successful, you know, show they ran there. You know. People coming and going, visitations from people from all over Victoria, coming up from other missions to see how Coranderrk is faring. Let's take this notion, this idea and we can grow hops down there, down there.



I mean, William Barak noticed that many of the farmers around Coranderrk were growing hops for the Melbourne brewery. And so him and John Green, the overseer, he - they suggested let's grow hops and we will sell them to the Melbourne Brewery. Well, their hops must have been the most bushiest and fattest of hops. They entered it into the Royal Show in 1880 and won first prize. And, of course, this really upset - from that moment, this really upset the squatters. And they said, "How dare they have a win with the best - you know, beer making hops" and that.

You know, William Barak had a rapport with some of the local wine growers, and etcetera, so he was that kind of a man. Much like Mannalargenna, trying to have a rapport with the locals around this area and that. So - so we - you know, "We just want to survive like you have survived. You know, you are growing these - grapes, vines on - on our lands, and etcetera. You are making it a success." And he was able to have a rapport with these kinds of people, much like Mannalargenna must have had. But not only with Robinson, but with other people in Tasmania.

MR McAVOY: Uncle Jack, I just want to take you back to something that you said a few moments ago about William Barak.

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: You were saying that it was difficult for you to sit on the side of the stage and listen to the female actors reciting the lines from the Commission of Inquiry into Coranderrk.

UNCLE JACK: Every night.

MR McAVOY: How - you can just explain for the Commissioners why that was so difficult for you?

UNCLE JACK: Well, it brings back, you know, pictures in my mind's eye of how hard it would have been for them. You know, I mean, I played the part of a young 15-year-old boy, as a matter of fact, being bashed by the overseer, etcetera. And just - the stories like this brings back - I felt the pain of being punished by a white man. So that aspect hit me like a tonne of bricks.

But also the stories that emanates through all our missions and etcetera, at that time, that it was a struggle for mothers to try and keep their babies alive with watered-down medicines and not enough food. Not enough meat, etcetera. And you weren't allowed to go out and kill a kangaroo or anything like that. Or a goanna. You weren't allowed to do that. So -

MR McAVOY: And hearing -

UNCLE JACK: That really was - you know, that really gripes me, upsets me and that. But you know, I have a - a job to do. I'm playing William Barak, a strong man, and that, and so I give my evidence last and I only say the same words that this fella William Barak had said at that series of inquiries and that, that Royal Commission.

MR McAVOY: But I understand you saying that hearing those words over and over again each night, that the play is running -

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: - has an effect as well?

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UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes, you it can't - you know, can't help it because I'm intimately related to many of these people. So it's obvious that I would have a - you know, that I would - I would succumb and be affected by such stories, yes.

10 MR McAVOY: And so it doesn't matter that you didn't know them personally.

UNCLE JACK: No, no, no.

MR McAVOY: The fact that it happened to them -

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UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: - means that there is some feeling and emotion for you?

20 UNCLE JACK: Yes. And I have seen pictures of gatherings of the Coranderrk people. So I - I allow my mind's eye to wander in amongst those people, those ladies especially. "Is this the young lady that gave evidence about her baby suffering cold and dying because the medicine had been watered down? Is this her?" And that. This is - you know, do I that. That's me. That's the way I work when I see group shots of the people of Cummera - I mean, Coranderrk and that.

25

Especially at this time when I was asked to do both the La Mama production and the Ilbijerri Theatre production, because you've got all this evidence of the people, the gatherings of all the people, down in the creek down there, in the river and that, you know. I - great - at greater times you could see that the times were good because their dresses had been - big dresses were free-flowing and very clean and etcetera. And they were placed in various positions for the photoshoot and they looked - you know, real splendid.

30

They look fantastic and they're obviously feeling fantastic too. Because there were smiles. Many photos from these days, you normally would never see them smiling. But these group shots, you know, some of them you saw were smiling. They were of a time, a small snapshot of time when things were hunky-dory, where things were okay and that. And just a couple of years later when the black hats decided to pull the rug from under them and say, "No, no, you can't sell meat into the town of Healesville anymore. Your cattle have been wandering around" and all that kind of - so this evidence, you know, was going into the Parliament from the squatters saying "Look, they can't work the land. They can't make it successful."

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You know, "The cattle wandering over the wheat, and etcetera, their crops and destroying the crops" and, of course, "The fences are down", and etcetera. And further evidence in regard to the difficulties faced by the people of Coranderrk is that my great-great grandfather, Johnny Charles was shot and killed. And the story goes - and we never believed it, Zenip and I - that he was shot with his own rifle, his own shotgun, going through a fence looking for a lost child one Christmas.

50

He was a member of the Victorian Native Police Force. He knew how to handle rifles and gun, swords, nulla-nullas. He was skilled as a - you know, with weapons and etcetera. So I don't believe the story that he killed - you know, he accidentally shot himself going through a fence. I believe he spotted people pulling down the fences, pulling down the fences. And because of his duty as a - as a former member of the Victorian Native Police Force, when there was no policemen about in those days, he - he had a go at these people and the squatters got the better of him and killed him.

This is not written into the police report in Healesville and that. But my sister and I believe what I've just said. We never believed that he was shot by his own hand. Because, basically, he was a skilled member with - you know, with - with guns and etcetera. So I'm upset over that. That's really upsets me. That's part of why I'm upset with the system as it stood in those days and why I was passionate in about playing the role of William Barak, you know.

Disregarding the fact that William Barak, Simon Wonga and Johnny Charles, all three retired to Coranderrk when the Native Police Force was disbanded, when it had done its foul deed, when it had done its job, you know, of rounding up all of the blacks -- all blacks, killing some of them who wouldn't move and etcetera. They were part of - it was part of the process, the Queensland Native Police Force, New South Wales Native Police Force, Johnny Charles, the Victorian Native Police Force crosses over the border - you know, this is part of history. It's not been told. It has to be told.

Trained up to Wiradjuri country to quell the warring Wiradjuri with the assistance of the Queensland Native Police Force, the New South Wales Native Police Force, the Victorian Native Police Force gave a horrid accounting of their quelling that the mob, the warring - the last mob to be conquered in New South Wales at that time. So I believe that - that shortly after that, I think, when they came back down to Victoria, they - they were the - they were used extensively to escort the gold bullion down from the Ballarat - from the mines into the Mint. The gold bullion.

That's what the Native Police Force were used for, to be at the docks, Appleton Docks, to escort the visiting dignitaries from the mother country from the tall ships, and etcetera. They look splendid in their tunics and you know, 17 hands high bay gelding horse, and etcetera. Pistols, rifles, nulla-nullas. Swords. And they look splendid and that. And I have this picture, you know, of them leading the odd miner or two when they had misbehaved up there in the Ballarat mines, the blackfella and a high bay gelding leading prisoners, white prisoners, chained up, following him along.

It's just - it tickles my fancy just to know that - that this was the police force at the time, blackfellas and that. Hard blackfellas. It happened. It worked over in Canada, in America, it worked here in Victoria in Australia definitely, Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and that. So, you know, I know the story and, yes, many of the others were sent to the other five surrounding Victorian stations, as they were called, the missions in those days, and etcetera.

So - so that's what happened with the Native Police Force and that was Johnny Charles. He had done his job, he retired gracefully and settled the land. He was charged by the overseer for not digging up a certain patch of dirt for the - to plant potatoes. He refused to do it

because he wasn't being paid. And so he was charged with that and that by the overseer. That's in the records, etcetera.

5 MR McAVOY: Thank you for that piece of evidence, Uncle Jack. I think it might be an appropriate time, Madam Chair, for a break, morning tea.

CHAIR: Yes. Thank you, Mr McAvoy, yes.

10 <ADJOURNED 11:21 AM

<RESUMED 11:42 AM

15 MR McAVOY: Uncle Jack, I want to take you now to some more video footage from the 'Who Do You Think You Are?' Episode in which they profiled you and your ancestors. If you could just look at the screen, please.

(Video of 'Who Do You Think You Are?' Plays)

(Video stopped)

20 MR McAVOY: That obviously was a very moving time for you, Uncle. It was, from the narrator's words, obvious that you were a bit upset that you couldn't find your grandmother's gravesite there.

25 UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: It was unmarked.

30 UNCLE JACK: It was unmarked, yes.

MR McAVOY: But it was a matter of emotional resolution for you to finally stand beside your father.

35 UNCLE JACK: Absolutely. Yes.

MR McAVOY: It speaks to -

40 UNCLE JACK: A big sigh of relief, you know, that I was, you know, standing over his grave. And Grady and I have spoken that we will endeavour to have a - a proper tombstone rather than just a cross with his name on it. We have spoken about doing that, and I will be holding folding soon enough to be able to afford a proper stone marker and clean up that little area there. I also visited Uncle Doug Nicholls and Cooper and Jack Patten's as well.

45 These are other people that I - I only knew Doug well. Doug looked after me when I was younger, when I was coming into Collingwood Fitzroy. It was Doug Nicholls that kept stuck fat with me and that it was difficult times for me, and that. But yeah, he was the man. So it was great for me to be at the Cummera there, the famous Cummeragunja cemetery with all the burrs, and etcetera, and that you have to suffer. And you spend half an hour taking off the bottom of your pants and all that kind of stuff. It's par for the course, you  
50 know.

You can reflect a little bit more about what you have just witnessed, seeing those graves, etcetera, and that. So and seeing also directly behind Hilton was Glen Peters' last burial - his final resting place. Glen Peters, he was the funeral director up at - the  
 5 Advancement League, and here he lies in peace, right at the head of my father's gravesite. So I'm very proud of that, to know that such a man like Glen Peters buried directly behind Hilton Hamilton Walsh.

10 Acknowledgment of people who had worked in the system, and etcetera, like Doug, and etcetera, and, you know, he should be afforded a proper marker too because of the work that he had done, etcetera. Just not a - you know, a piece of wood with his name burnt into it, and etcetera. So I think that my niece, who is part of my - one of my nieces who now is a director of the funeral services up at the Advancement League, Stacey Hamilton, she will still - she will - I will be speaking to her about some future work on these old gravesites,  
 15 etcetera.

But, yes, to be there seeing Hilton, my father's gravesite and that, you know, is - I'm blessed that - you know, that I'm still here, alive and fairly well, and my brain is intact to be able to absorb the full meaning of being there at that time, at that place, through the  
 20 good auspices of the SBS and Channel Ten's *'Who Do You Think You Are?'* series. It would never have happened.

MR McAVOY: But after all those years of not knowing.

25 UNCLE JACK: Yes, not knowing.

MR McAVOY: Not knowing.

30 UNCLE JACK: And even Archie would ring me up, Archie Roach and say, you know, "It's quite possible that when you were floating around any of the five pubs along the Dirty Gertie Mile here, you might have rubbed shoulders with your father, you know, breasting the bar with him and not knowing who he was. Not knowing that you were actually related and that." You know. The idea that I was up at Swan Hill in those early days, you know,  
 35 you know, that he was so close by, that you know, that's - that's - that's for me is a - is something that I'm at a loss to totally accept and understand as to - I can't blame anybody, and etcetera.

I never knew. But, you know - you know, the Sergeant didn't know, the Sergeant who set me up at the back of the Federal Hotel to await - to talk to somebody to give me a lift out  
 40 to where mum lived and etcetera, on that first time when I was playing the prodigal son, etcetera, and that. I never knew that he was so close by at that time.

MR McAVOY: I just - I'm going to come to that particular part of your life shortly. But we've heard this morning and we have taken a bit of a close look at the Briggs line and the  
 45 Charles line and Walsh line, but there are other lines to your family, yes?

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: Yes. Other Aboriginal lines?

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UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes. Yes, yes.

MR McAVOY: So I just want to now take you to your childhood, back to your childhood. We've talked a fair bit about your family and your ancestors.

5

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: You said earlier that you went to Box Hill Boys' Home when you were about four months of age.

10

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: You've been told that.

15

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: And you've given evidence to another Commission of Inquiry about -

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UNCLE JACK: Well, before that, actually, it was - at four months old delivered from Daish's Paddock to Brunswick City Mission babies' home. That's what - I have got it down pat now. I know exactly what happened. So I went into the Box Hill Boys' Home at around 2 years old. Yes, so I've got that - I now know what happened. But I was - I have seen pictures of me at the Box Hill Boys' Home babies' home, at when I would have been 2 years old or something like that, playing around with the other little kids at Box Hill.

25

MR McAVOY: Just for the record, whereabouts is Daish's paddock?

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UNCLE JACK: Daish's paddock is between Shepparton and Mooroopna - and Mooroopna, on the road going up to Shepparton-Mooroopna. The Queen, when she was being escorted up to the cannery, had to pass Daish's Paddock, the blackfella camp. So they put a hessian fence along the side there so she wouldn't see blackfellas living in third world conditions. That's that. Yes. But, you know, I have got a picture yesterday, somebody gave me a picture of - of Hilton standing with the Queen, big Philip, up there at Cummera, and some other person looking like a Minister or something and that - you

35

So that was only handed to me yesterday. So, yes, people are giving me photos and information still because of that - because of that series *'Who Do You Think You Are?'*. So, yes, I'm very proud that - that - that that episode was screened and I got this information I would never, as I said, have received previously.

40

MR McAVOY: You have given evidence to another Commission of Inquiry about your time at the Box Hill Boys' Home.

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UNCLE JACK: That's right, yes, yes.

MR McAVOY: And we have that transcript and it's attached to your statement.

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UNCLE JACK: I have read it, yes, yes.

MR McAVOY: I just propose to ask you a number of questions about that particular time. I know that you've already given evidence about it, but I think I would like to ask you some questions just to ensure that it's on the record in these proceedings. So which - do you know which organisation ran the Box Hill Boys' Home?

5

UNCLE JACK: The Salvation Army.

MR McAVOY: And that was at the time you were there, it was the Salvation Army?

10 

UNCLE JACK: Yes. Yes, yes.

MR McAVOY: And what were you told - or sorry, were you told anything by the people in charge of the Box Hill Boys' Home about who your parents are or whether you had -

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UNCLE JACK: No. No, no.

MR McAVOY: What were you told?

UNCLE JACK: Nothing. I wasn't even told I was Aboriginal. I had to discover that for myself. So, yes, you have to remember, as far as I can gather, I was the only registered Aboriginal kid in that home at that time. Okay. And I don't recall any other Aboriginal-looking kids with me in that home. And in reflection, I - I believe that it would have been seen sooner as a failed social experiment, this notion of assimilation, if other blackfella kids had been moved in with me at the Box Hill Boys' Home.

25

I would have maintained - would have learnt that I was Aboriginal, I was part of a group and that, you know. So I knew nothing. Was told nothing. And I had to assimilate. And, of course, as kids, we are resilient, we adapt. And I adapted and that. I had some occasions where I would have to fight bigger kids because of my - you know, arcing up, getting upset with them over calling me Abo and all that kind of stuff. I would have to, you know, fight and etcetera. I always get trounced.

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But there was a couple of people that - I only found out, you know, this years later. I'm touring through Sale, with a group of two fellas, ex-Box Hill Boys' Home old boys came and saw the show and after the show we met in the foyer and they said, "Jack, we were at Box Hill Boys' Home with you, Jack. Do you remember us?" And I said, no, I couldn't remember them, but they could remember me. And they said, "Yes." They said, "Yes, Jack, I remember you chasing me around the footy oval at one stage."

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"What was I chasing you around the footy oval for?" "I think I called you an Abo and you were very upset, and so you chased me around." "What happened?" I said. "You bashed me Jack." And here I am, profusely apologising to this bloke for having bashed him when we were about 10 or something like that. So the idea that, you know, I did suffer because of my Aboriginality in the Box Hill Boys' Home, but also I was a bit of a - a - I forget the word. There's a word for it. But being placed in special position and that. Novelty.

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A bit of a novelty and that, as the Salvation Army Box Hill Boys' Home Aboriginal child and that. And there - I have seen the photos of the group shots of us boys at the Box Hill Boys' Home. We used one of them in *'Jack Charles v The Crown'* and I refer to it. "There's me, you know, sitting - spot the little Aboriginal kid amongst that lot. You know. I'm dead

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centre at the front. And one child here becomes a multi-millionaire, another earns a doctorate. Most get on by with a variety of trades and professions. But I'm with those that haven't bloomed, haven't blossomed. Those who will make wrong choices and be further institutionalised in prison later on."

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Great lines written by John Romeril and myself when we were developing, creating '*Jack Charles v the Crown*'. This notion - I've seen other photos of me in different sections of homes with the different age groups of kids. Again, one colour photo, me dead-set in the front there and that. So I was a bit of a novelty at the Box Hill Boys' Home and that. And further proof of that, was that, you know, I was whitewashed, if you will, by the system.

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There was a special - and we put this in the show, and I don't know if any of you saw '*Jack Charles v The Crown*', but about nine years old, there was a big Salvation Army Congress at the Exhibition Building, and I was partnered with a little girl from another home to hand over some posies to those -- on the stage. She curtsied, so I curtsied. It causes a stir and a rumbling amongst the Salvationists but me, I did enjoy the attention.

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And this was followed then by my special moment of the big stage of God, to sing a song. I was especially chosen to sing. And that I turned to my band members and say, "Hit it, boys" and we strike up this song that I have this clarity of mind that I could recall, and it goes to the - I will just sing it, all right.

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MR McAVOY: Would you please?

UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes. "One tribe the Yarra Yarra dwelling right here, mythic bush and gum trees tall. With these threw boomerangs and hurled their sharp spears, they do every bird bush call. Often went walkabout and camped far away, everybody free as here. Running in the forest trees, swimming in the Yarra stream, life went on without no care. Kookaburra laughed with gladness, kangaroo jumped for joy. Aborigine throw his boomerang, forest birds a gay, merry tune sang. There amid the bright yellow blossom, bright and wild a red gum -- everybody lives in gladness, all because the white man came."

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MR McAVOY: Thank you very much.

UNCLE JACK: That's the song I had to sing. So there you go. You can see I was a little orphan Annie, a tablet riser to be written on, washed in the blood of the lamb of Jesus Christ and that. And that. So it took me many years to drop off the notion of being religious. It happened, you know, at the time that I was jailed for coming into Collingwood Fitzroy. That's when all my Christian sensibilities were somewhat blackened when I was in - crying myself to sleep in the Royal Park Home for Juvenile Offenders for that offence of coming into Collingwood Fitzroy.

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MR McAVOY: So Uncle Jack you were taught many things while you were at Box Hill Boys' Home.

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UNCLE JACK: I what?

MR McAVOY: You were taught many things.



UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes. I had a special teacher. He was a wonderful old fella, this bloke, and the headmaster was wonderful too. The headmaster got me to grow chrysanthemums out in the garden, the Box Hill Royal Horticulture Society. I grew big, big blossoms of chrysanthemums and we won awards with them and that. But I had a special teacher who  
5 took me aside and taught - gave me elocution lessons in the Box Hill Boys' Home and he taught me the monetary systems, that 12 pennies made a dinar - a bob and shilling etcetera.

So I left the home fully aware of the monetary system and speaking the Queen's English ever so well. So, yes, so I am grateful for that and I do remember this old fella. We loved  
10 him. Some of us loved him and that, you know. But he died and it was never - it's never happened before but some of us were allowed to go to his funeral and burial down at the Box Hill cemetery. And I remember being bashed up because I cried at that - at his burial, at his funeral and at his burial site.

15 So when I got back to the Box Hill Boys' Home, the bigger kids bashed me for crying and etcetera. This was a marked memory of mine and that, you know. It's - so very - that's just - I thought this was normal to - to suffer. I didn't think it was fair but, you know, you have to cop those things sweet.

20 MR McAVOY: Uncle Jack, there were things that you spoke about in the other Royal Commission about your terrible treatment at Box Hill. Do you wish to speak about those here and now?

UNCLE JACK: Well, I never really did want to sue the Salvos, because I got to  
25 hear - while I was doing jail time at the - Port Phillip Prison, you get to hear that the Brotherhood, you know, these Catholics were being hauled over the coals for what was going on, and then, of course, your mind suddenly reverts back to - to what happened in the Box Hill Boys' Home with me and that. I said wow. And I - I had truly thought I had left all that behind me, etcetera.

30 I had a partner, a mate, Jack - Jack Houston. We were an item for five years. I had never told him anything about what happened at the Box Hill Boys' Home. I had never told anybody. But on the last week of being at the Port Phillip, a group of Box Hill Boys' Home old boys approached me. We were all collecting our methadone at the clinic there. They  
35 were from another division. And they said, "Jackie Charles, do you remember us?" And, of course, I couldn't remember them. Naturally. It's been years. I said "No, fellas. Sorry I can't remember youse and that." "Well, we remember you, Jack. Look, we're part of a class action. We are suing the Salvos. We want to have a go at Mr Sangster, O'Brien" and a couple of other names they mentioned which I had forgotten.

40 But so they said, "Jack, we know that Uncle Jimmy Berg is going to be booting you out of the jail soon. Okay. So we would like your phone number because we know that this is the first time you are leaving jail not homeless. You've got your unit still - you have got the key to your unit in your property. We know this, Jack. So we know you've got a landline.  
45 Give us the landline number and we will give it to Ryan Carlisle and Thomas. We would like to you give credence and validate the stories of what went on in the Box Hill Boys' Home."

I said, "Yeah, I can do that, you know." So already I had intended to leave that jail and to  
50 come back into my community as a leading black light, a beacon and that. To proclaim

myself as the Smith Street local featherfoot Kadiatcha man, lore man. You know, I had these great intentions. So when I got back, when I was released, on the second day I was called by Ryan Carlisle and Thomas, and I gave evidence over the phone as to what happened at the Box Hill Boys' Home.

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And in the telling, I had to admit what happened to me, because my bed was the first bed he would approach of an evening when he came out of his little bedroom off the side of the dormitory at the number 1 part of the home, for the older boys and that. 11, 12, 13, 14. So it was my bed he came to every night and that. And so then he would do his rounds after he had done with me, and etcetera. That was Mr Sangster.

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And then so I gave evidence like that to the - and - about Major O'Brien and sexual misgivings happening there. They were - so in the telling of this, it was not a relief. It was a kind of a shame job to recall these incidences and that, that I had put on - I had never divulged to anybody and that, but I was doing it on behalf of the forgotten Australians, through Ryan Carlisle and Thomas.

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They told me, that "Jack, you are a member of the Stolen Generation but we are not working for you. We are working for the forgotten Australians. But, Jack, you were hard done by as much as those fellas were." So - "And with what you've given us and what we have received from some of the other fellas about you, significantly tells us that yes, indeed you were the only blackfella there in that home but also you suffered as much abuse and some unusual cruel and callous punishments that you had to endure because the kids - these older fellas remember you as a kid undergoing some of those punishments and that. You have forgotten some of them, Jack. They have reminded us and that."

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You know, "For instance, do you remember being picked up by Mr Sangster and bashed against the wall of a gym?" "No, no, no, no." That's probably why one shoulder is down, etcetera. I said, "Fair enough, okay." And then, "What about putting on boxing gloves and fighting a bigger kid?" "Yes, well, when you were naughty that was par for the course. You had to be locked in the gym with a bigger kid and he had to flatten you, etcetera."

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I said most of the kids flattened me and that, you know, but there was one guy, twice he refused to flatten me, and I probably got my first beginnings of acting here, because he said, "Jack, they're outside listening, so they expect you to cry and yell out and that, you know. So I will hit you on the chest a couple of times" and slapping - so I'm acting and then he slaps me in the face just before asking them to unlock the door and that. This is - you know, being punished by an older boy and that. And - on trust and that.

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And so I would be a bit tearful and red-faced coming out, my first acting role crying. So it must have been convincing because he did it twice and he fooled them twice, and etcetera. But, yes - but my final - final - final piece of leaving the home, just before leaving the home, you know, half an hour before leaving the home, going into Major O'Brien's office and given six of the best for some minor indiscretion. My last sighting of the Box Hill Boys' Home, the water tower strong, which stood as a sentinel.

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I was at Box Hill Boys' Home, my last sighting of it, as I was walked out the gate. And I walked myself down to the Box Hill station, and made my own way to Blackburn Station and walked to Widow Murphy's house on Tyrell Avenue on my own - on my own bat. So,

yes, one final punishment before leaving the Box Hill Boys' Home, and that is one of the things that are uppermost in my mind, that the system had to have the last word and that.

5 So it was for some minor indiscretion that I had forgotten about and that Major O'Brien had forgotten about. He's looking in his books to find - trying to find the cause as to why I'm due to receive this six of the best just before leaving the Box Hill Boys' Home.

10 MR McAVOY: A parting gift. Now, Uncle Jack, you left Box Hill Boys' Home at what age?

UNCLE JACK: 14.

15 MR McAVOY: Prior to leaving the Box Hill Boys' Home, there were occasions when you did see some other Aboriginal children, when you were at the boys' home.

UNCLE JACK: Yes, just about a month before leaving the home.

MR McAVOY: Yes. And who were they?

20 UNCLE JACK: I don't know who the others was, but there was a young fella who said - Arthur who said his last name is Charles. And I went up and spoke to him - I wasn't allowed to, all right, but I went up and spoke to them - said to them - because he said his last name is Charles. I said "I'm Jack Charles, welcome to Box Hill Boys' Home" kind of thing, you know. Welcome to Country. I hadn't realised. And then one fella, young fella  
25 said, about nine, he said, "My name is Arthur. I'm Arthur Charles." I said "Right, good to meet you, mate. It would be funny if we were brothers, hey." And then I go and live with Mrs Murphy, full-time now, you know.

30 MR McAVOY: Mrs Murphy was a foster -

UNCLE JACK: Foster mum.

MR McAVOY: Foster mum to you.

35 UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes. And she had been taking me out of the home, or her daughter had, Mrs Nichols, Kevin Nichols, since I was a little babe and that. Matter of fact, Norma Nichols, her daughter, had taught me swimming in the Box Hill baths and that. Refined my swimming technique, as a matter of fact, at the Box Hill baths and the Surrey Dive at the time. There was a big quarry there and that. So it was - they were fond memories of being  
40 taken out of the home by this family of a weekend.

They would come into the home and a Friday, Kevin Nichols, and Norma, his wife and that, in their Austin A7 and I would be driven into the city, the colour lights, past the Skipping Girl, etcetera, every Friday night and that. You know. So it looks like I was going  
45 to be fostered or adopted by this mob. You know. This family and that. Because others had adopted - you know, tried their luck with me, a lady from Alphington, Mrs Green, used to take me out on weekends too.

50 And then some old couple from Footscray took me over to Footscray on a couple of weekends and etcetera. So, you know, us orphans and that, we were up for adoptions and

that. Fosters, to be adopted and that, and I was no exception because I was considered an orphan, etcetera. So - but before Archie came in - before Arthur came in and that, in the 50 - I don't know, '56, something like that, an old lady and her husband came in, in a big black Ford Chevrolet.

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I remember it well, very shiny. And she drove me out of the home to the Surrey Park opposite the home, on the other side of Elgar Road - Canterbury Road, I should say, and we had a picnic. And they said that they were my Uncle and Aunty, Henry Charles and Amy Charles. They were saying "How are you Jack?" and that. "We are your Uncle and Aunty and that." You know. It was a great picnic, I thought they would come back next Sunday but they didn't and that. So that was my first sighting of other Aboriginal people in that home.

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Okay. And they happened to be an Uncle, as they said, Uncle and Aunty of mine. So I never believed from that moment that I was an orphan. I railed against the idea that I had no father and mother. I always knew somehow or another that I had family and that. Because I saw other kids, their people come again and taking them out on holidays and etcetera. I admired, I - I - I ran with the Murphys taking me out to Christmas, taking me down to - down to Rosebud to the Kookaburra Flats, the Christmas holidays and spending time.

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You know, the other rest of the family would be in tents in the tea trees and that, but Mrs Murphy and I, we would be in the Kookaburra Flats, etcetera. These were good time, etcetera. But the notion that I was, was an orphan, you know, never sat well with me. Especially following that incident where Henry and Amy Charles came into the Box Hill Boys' Home. From that moment on, I never believed - and it was further compounded years later when young Archie came into the home with these other groups of Aboriginal kids came and said his last name is Charles and I totally - "wouldn't it be funny if we were brothers." Then I get to live with widow Murphy and I find out she -

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MR McAVOY: Before we go on to Widow Murphy, did you meet Esme at any time when were you young?

UNCLE JACK: As I said, this happens here at this little area. I realised that once I'm living with the Murphies, going to work every day as a glass beveller, doing my apprenticeship, as a glass beveller. Wonderful job. I like the work ethic. But on Sunday nights I happen to sneak out the bedroom window to the Methodist service in the Blackburn village. She wasn't a religious woman, Mrs Murphy, so Sunday nights I would sneak out the bedroom window and go to the Methodist service and that.

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I liked this mob down there. We had a little social group. I did try my hand at playing footy but it was too cold, being dunked in the mud and all that kind of stuff. I gave that up after only one game. But the idea was that this social group that we had, they took me out rabbiting, over to Border Town, these young men, women, and it was a great social group. We had a little entertainment group. We used to sing in old people's homes etcetera.

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And at one time, we traipsed on up to the Nunawading Girls' Home Winlaton to put on a concert, and amongst all those two children were these two small waif-like Aboriginal children, and of course I had to go up and ask them their names, and the elder of the two shyly responds, "I'm Esme and this is my sister Eva-Jo." "Well, what are your last names,

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ladies?" I inquired "Charles." "Charles? I'm a Charles too, ladies. Wouldn't it be funny if we were brothers and sisters?"

5 How ironic is that, and that years later we were - the system at Box Hill Boys' Home was not allowed to tell me that Artie - Arthur and me were brothers, and the people running Winlton were not allowed to tell me - because they had to pull me away from these two girls because I was speaking to them for so long, you know. So they weren't allowed to tell us that indeed, yes, you are brothers and sisters and that. Because it defeats the purpose of the assimilation program at that time.

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MR McAVOY: So I just want to ask you a question about that, what - what you called the assimilation program. When you left Box Hill Boys' Home, did you know anything of Aboriginal culture? Had you been taught anything?

15 UNCLE JACK: Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

MR McAVOY: Anything of Aboriginal language?

20 UNCLE JACK: No, no. No, no. I know that I was bashed because Captain Cook was killed by blackfellas and etcetera. That's all I heard at the home. So I remember being bashed for that little incident. I didn't know who Captain Cook was.

MR McAVOY: You weren't told anything of your family?

25 UNCLE JACK: No, I wasn't told. I wasn't allowed to know. It was - it would have defeated the purpose of assimilation.

MR McAVOY: And so the idea of being told about where your traditional country was, is out of the question.

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UNCLE JACK: Out of the question. Yes.

MR McAVOY: So you were talking about going to live with the Widow Murphy.

35 UNCLE JACK: And her twin bodgie sons, who treated me like I was their brother. They were great kids.

MR McAVOY: And you were working at a glass factory at the time?

40 UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes.

MR McAVOY: And so you would - Widow Murphy lived at Blackburn, did you say?

UNCLE JACK: They lived in Blackburn, yes, yes.

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MR McAVOY: And you would travel where to work in the glasshouses?

UNCLE JACK: To - down to Auburn Station and I would walk along Auburn Road down to Riversdale Road, did a hard right and into the factory there.

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MR McAVOY: And you had an apprenticeship?

UNCLE JACK: Had an apprenticeship, yes, yes.

5 MR McAVOY: What as.

UNCLE JACK: As a glass beveller, doing edge work on mirrors. And making mirrors. It was a wonderful job, you know.

10 MR McAVOY: So what age?

UNCLE JACK: 14.

MR McAVOY: 14 through to when did you finish the apprenticeship?

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UNCLE JACK: I finished 17, as you do. But it was held off for a little while, was held off. So I remember I was the favourite little Aboriginal worker there, with my boss. He would bring around people, his mates, to meet the little Aboriginal worker. And I would meet many of his friends, gentlemen and that, you know. His mates and that. Business people. At one time, he brought around this person and said, "Young Jack, I want you to meet another mate of mine. Don Bradman, meet Jack Charles."

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So at 15, I shook the hands of Donald Bradman, little realising who he was because the boys at work said "Do you know who that was Jack?" "No, no, no." "Donald Bradman." "Yeah, who was he?" I didn't know. I was not a sportsman or anything like this. So, yes, I shook the hands of - the irony is I shook the hands of Donald Bradman and years later in my second work with the ABC, I get to play Eddie Gilbert, the hotshot bowler who bowls him out twice for a duck. How ironic is that? In a television production.

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30 Never seen that, because they - I think they burnt it, you know, my first experience working in front of a camera as a professional actor and that. So - but yes. So, look, Box Hill Boys' Home, you know, was - you know, being a Box Hill boy, the par for the course was that, at 14, you left the home, you went straight into work or workhouse, you know. And there was a couple of other fellas in that RMS glass factory who were from other homes and that. One was from Bayswater and another Burwood Boys' Home and that. And we got along like a house on fire, us kids and that. So -

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MR McAVOY: So you were paid wages?

40 UNCLE JACK: I was paid wages. I never knew how much I ever got.

MR McAVOY: Why didn't you know how much?

UNCLE JACK: Because I wasn't allowed to open my pay packet.

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MR McAVOY: What would happen with your pay packet?

UNCLE JACK: I would take the pay packet every Thursday night back to - and I would give it to mum.

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MR McAVOY: Who is mum?

UNCLE JACK: Widow Murphy.

5 MR McAVOY: What would she do with it?

UNCLE JACK: I don't know what she would do it with it, pay rent, buy food and all that, you know.

10 MR McAVOY: Did you get to see any of those wages?

UNCLE JACK: She would give me some if I wanted to go to the pictures, etcetera, on the weekend. Mostly on the weekend, I was left to my own devices. But sometimes on a Saturday, I would stay at work. I would do six days' work, or 5 and a half days. I liked  
15 working overtime and that in the glass - doing you know, cleaning up the edge work on louvres and that. I was a very - you know, piece work and that. Earned a lot of money that way and that. So I never really learnt how much I ever got from - as wages.

MR McAVOY: Can I ask you this: when you were about 17, when you were 17  
20 some - you received some information from some of your workers about - about this area of Fitzroy?

UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes.

25 MR McAVOY: What were you told?

UNCLE JACK: They kept cajoling me. They knew I wasn't really happy with the Murphy family and that. You know, and so - and they had suggested that there are a lot of blackfellas over in Collingwood Fitzroy, Jack, and their words exactly said, "You know,  
30 you should go and see them. I bet you got family amongst them." So of course I had been talking with the Aboriginal Protection Board, the welfare people, the welfare board, you know, and Mrs Murphy, about the fact that I never believed I was an orphan and I had family.

35 But I didn't tell them that I would - I took it upon myself without permission. I didn't think I had to gain anybody's permission to come into Collingwood Fitzroy on a Thursday night, you know, with a pay packet, still unopened. And as soon as I jumped off the corner of the tram on the Gertrude and Napier Street, an old blackfella yells at me "Charles. You  
40 Blanchie Charles' boy?" And of course I shat myself, as you do in this situation. I'm scared. A big hairy blackfella. Well, my size, really, but he was hairy and scary. So he grabs me and he hugs me and he ushers me up the road to the Royal Hotel.

45 And every face in the place seemed to be black. He yells out, "I got Blanchie Charles' boy here." And they are all rushing up to introduce themselves to me as an uncle and aunty, you know, and a cousin and that. And then I'm so overwhelmed, I remember, with the beery hugs and kisses, I remember diving into my pay and I ripped it open. It's a criminal act. I'd never done that before. I ripped over my pay packet and I shouted a few beers and I had a lemon squash myself.

And then one old lady, she croaks, "Your mum, she's living up in Swan Hill, young fella. You should go and see her." "So I will," I tell her, "First chance I get." Well, I get home late that night to Widow Murphy. "Joy, oh, joy, mum, I just found mum." I did expect her to share my joy. But no such luck. She wrangled the story out of me, my night in a Fitzroy pub, being recognised as a Charles, but worse still my pay packet ripped open and a third of it spent.

This rolls along so glibly off my tongue because I have said it so often, this story. She said, "Those people will tell you anything, can't believe them." And I did. I raised my arm and said, "Yeah, well I believe them." And I see the fright in her eyes. "Get to bed," she hisses before backing off. No sooner had I put on my pyjamas and settled down for the night when she called me to the front door and there was a police divvy wagon parked in the drive and I'm driven over to Royal Park Home for Juvenile Offenders.

I was a ward of the state and that woman I had called mum had deemed me unruly, disobedient. So for the first time locked alone in a cell, I do remember crying myself to sleep. It's from then on all my Christian sensibilities were somewhat blackened. And it became for me a series of incarcerations, 22 of them, in fact. So that's the story, that I have told so often, it's a variation on a theme suffered by so many other people, black and white, the forgotten Australians. Suffered similar fates as I have done.

But mine in particular, you know, is - is - is that I have put it out there in a stage production of significance, in *'Jack Charles v The Crown'*. My wholesale memory, wholesome memories of what was suffered, you know, and what I had to endure and the way I came out of it.

MR McAVOY: Can I ask you this, Uncle Jack. Before that visit to the Fitzroy Hotel, did you know that you had a mother?

UNCLE JACK: No.

MR McAVOY: So you didn't know what her name was.

UNCLE JACK: I didn't know her name.

MR McAVOY: And you found that out that -

UNCLE JACK: Well, as soon as he yelled out, "I've got Blanchie Charles' son here."

MR McAVOY: You knew what that meant.

UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes, yes.

MR McAVOY: So that very same day that you find out this information -

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: How did you feel about finding that information?



UNCLE JACK: Well, you know, I - wait until I tell Mrs Murphy. Wait until I tell the Aboriginal Protection Board. Wait until the -- people, the Wards of the State people, you know. But, no, I was jailed for that offence and that. You know. They never believed me and that. They weren't allowed to believe me. The system wouldn't allow them to believe me.

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MR McAVOY: You went from one of the highest points of your life -

UNCLE JACK: Yes. And to be dashed and to be imprisoned because of it. You know. So, yes, but I remember I have got word - I heard word that my boss had inquired, rung up Mrs Murphy, "Where is my - where is Jack, where is my worker?" She said, "He's in the Royal Park Home, Parkville." So he got me out. He spoke to the Wards of the State people, the Aboriginal Protection Board, "I will look after him" and that. "Bond him to me."

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So I was bonded to my boss to finish off my apprenticeship. "He's got to finish off his apprenticeship, you know." So I did. I was let out of the boys' home and delivered - yes, he came and picked me up, as a matter of fact, the boss. And in an E-type Jag. He was that - he was that kind of a guy. Picked me up in an E-type Jag and drove me to a gentleman's residence off Glenferrie Road in Glenferrie and said, "This is where you will stay, Jack. You're not far from work here."

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And so I said, "Yeah, that's great. Thanks, thanks Alf. Thanks very much." So I did finish off my apprenticeship and that. And - but during that time after you know, staying there and finish off the - my apprenticeship with the glass bevelling industry, I wrote letters to the Swan Hill police and that. I wouldn't have been able to do this at Murphy's place but I was independent now, so I wrote letters to the Swan Hill police, and I asked the Sergeant if he knew of my mother, a Blanchie Charles. "I have heard my mother's name is Blanchie Charles. Do you know her?"

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And I got a letter promptly back from the Swan Hill Sergeant of police said "Yes, Jack, I know your mother. She's up here living on the Edwards River between Moulamein and Swan Hill." Okay. I said "Well, I'm coming up this Christmas, this Christmas holidays to see her." So that first Christmas. You know. So I - I - finishing off my apprenticeship, getting a lot of money. I forget how much it was, pounds shillings or pence and that. It was a lot of money. So I was independent and I had this money myself, you know.

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And so I - when the boss heard that I was going up and going to be playing the prodigal son, he suggested, "Jack, I will buy you an air flight to fly up to Swan Hill to meet your mum. You're playing the prodigal son, Jack. I will fly you up there." I said, "Thanks, boss, you know." And he flew me up and the Sergeant of police was at the Swan Hill airport awaiting my rival, and when I arrived he drove to the back of the Federal Hotel and sat me there.

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"I will arrange a lift to get you out to your mother's, but, Jack, I suggest - you are playing the prodigal son, Jack. I suggest you buy a carton of Melbourne Bitter for your mum. Your mum likes to drink, Jack. You will get a better reception if you buy - she likes Melbourne Bitter." I said "All right. I will do that." So I bought - had no problems in the bottle-o, the bottle shop or anything like this in the hotel. I figured the Sergeant had worded them up about me and that.

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Pity he didn't word them up about the Swan Hill City Baths because they refused to have me swim in their baths and said I had to swim in the Murray. But he arranged this lift and I got out and I met my mum for the first time, and it was quite a - quite a shock to the senses. Yes.

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MR McAVOY: Can you explain why?

UNCLE JACK: She was - she wasn't in a house. I thought it was - you know, these old people that were driving me, you know, through said, "Jack, we are up in the country here, this is property where your mum lives. And so get out and open the gate and when we drive through you have to close it after us and jump back in the car." And so I jumped - closed the gate and jumped back in the car, and I see a house in the distance and I thought "Great, a big house and that, you know."

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I said - we were going along the track there, the rice on one side, wheat on the other, and suddenly we veer over on to a rutted track, leading towards strands of trees and obviously there's a river there and that. You know. And we come closer to these trees, and there's this humpy there. And hessian and tin and wood and all that kind of stuff. And 12 whippets were tethered to a round. And there was mum wandering towards me and an old fella who happened to be Clary Pike who looked after mum and that.

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And so I met mum for the first time and we hugged. It was a long, long - very hard hug on her part. I remember. I was the firstborn, and so she hadn't heard hide nor hair of me and nor I of her. And I didn't know how to, you know, to take this. But upon the first feed on the big pot, you know, with the wild - wild fowl and rabbit and meat and veggies and all that kind of stuff, it was wonderful. I felt at home, you know. There's an outside bed with a - with a tent roof and that, you know.

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So that was my place outside, my bed. And Ian Charles also had come up from Melbourne a week later to - to help me live - to experience living with mum, meeting uncles and aunties, being - driving down from Deniliquin with their kids, etcetera.

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MR McAVOY: And so - can I just interrupt there, prior to that, you had lived all your life in Melbourne?

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UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: So it was a bit of a culture -- for you?

UNCLE JACK: Big turnaround, you know, seeing snakes and goannas and flies and etcetera. And old Clary killing the fatted calf for the families and the sheep and all that kind of stuff and me helping him and that, you know. It really - you know, you know, so something - something different, you know. I had to learn bag sewing - wheat, helping sew the bags of wheat and all that kind of stuff. Delivering them to the - there were five surrounding small farmlets, around the area, and mum and Clary were charged with the responsibility of helping clear the rabbit population at each of these farmlets.

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They had two Ford Prefect utilities, and that's where I learnt to drive my first car. We put six in one, six in another, and - of these whippets and as soon as we entered the property and breasted the rise, out would jump the rabbits - I mean, out would jump the dogs and

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chase down the rabbits and that, you know. Clary taught me how to shoot a rifle, so - so something that I had learnt from the - the guys at - sorry, at the Methodist Service.

5 So I was well equipped to handle guns and etcetera. But Clary, he didn't use a rifle, he used a nulla-nulla and he threw it and cartwheeled and knocked the rabbits off. And the sheep would bring - I mean the dogs would bring the struggling rabbits back to us and that's how I had to learn how to crack a neck of a rabbit and that, you know. It was a little bit iffy, you know. But I had to learn this. While I was in country, being a blackfella amongst blackfellas I had to learn that, you know.

10 So, yes, I enjoyed, for a time, working there. But it was the alcohol that got the better of me and that, you know. She was - not me, I wasn't drinking. But seeing her drinking and especially when I was going into the bank in Swan Hill, to get my money out of the bank and all that kind of stuff, there was problems that she was having with some of the men  
15 and women in the blackfella camp directly behind the Federal Hotel. These little wooden huts remindful of the slave quarters and that, behind the Federal Hotel and that.

20 She would be arguing the toss with these people, etcetera. And I would try and pick her up out of it. She had fallen over and she would be giving me a roast too and that. So - that put me off and that, you know. I didn't want to stay that long. So I - for a while there, I think I was a month, maybe a month and a half, experiencing this, swimming in the Edwards River, cleaning up that way, getting clean and that because I was a bit of a prude still, you know. I had to be clean. I used to wash my clothes in the river, etcetera. But I thought I would leave mum and go for work along the - along the Murray. I went to Finley - between  
25 Finley and Tocumwal I found a property who wanted something to work there.

MR McAVOY: Can I just stop you there. I just wanted to ask you a couple of questions about your relationship with your mum while were you there.

30 UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: Did your mum tell you about - anything about her background while you were there?

35 UNCLE JACK: No, no, no. She never did.

MR McAVOY: Did she tell you anything about your siblings?

40 UNCLE JACK: Well, did I ask her. I did ask her. Okay. It was the second week that I was there that I had the gumption to ask her, "Is there an Arthur? Is there an Esme and Eva-Jo Charles?" And she says, "It's not Arthur. It's Artie." Okay. Named after Artie Smith down in Moe. Okay. So I got that clear - clarified. And then Esme and Eva-Jo, "Yes, there there's an Esme and Eva-Jo. And you have a third sister, Zenip. Language for 'pretty butterfly.' You look out for them," she says. "I will mum, first chance I get." Here we are.

45 MR McAVOY: Yes.

UNCLE JACK: So they were the only ones. She didn't tell me about the six others.

50 MR McAVOY: But the Zenip she referred to is your sister sitting beside you?

UNCLE JACK: Yes. Yes, yes, yes. Sitting on my left-hand side here.

5 MR McAVOY: And so did you - do you think you developed a - a closeness with your mother during that time you were there or -

10 UNCLE JACK: I tried to. I tried to but she – “I have gotten by without you”, and all that kind of stuff. So when she was drunk, she would get into those argumentative moods and etcetera. And I had never experienced anything like this even, you know, down in Melbourne and that. I still, you know, well protected from all this. Living with the Murphies, going to work and etcetera. The only time I would hear swear words or drinking was at the local Blackburn Footy Club, and etcetera. So - at Box Hill Footy club when I used to go and see games, and etcetera. But I was always separate, on my own.

15 MR McAVOY: So it wasn't - it wasn't quite what you expected?

UNCLE JACK: It wasn't like what I expected, and etcetera. It was a good - it was good to work with Clary, learning how to spin a harp, a sheep, etcetera.

20 MR McAVOY: Clary was the Aboriginal man?

UNCLE JACK: Aboriginal man, yes. Yes.

25 MR McAVOY: I think, Uncle Jack, it might be a good time for us to have a break, if that's suitable to the Commissioners.

UNCLE JACK: Okay.

30 <ADJOURNED 12:45 PM

<RESUMED 2:00 PM

35 MR McAVOY: Thank you, Commissioners. Mr Charles, Uncle Jack, you will recall before the lunch break I was asking you some questions about your visit to your mother.

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

40 MR McAVOY: Your first visit with your mother, and Clary Pike. Did you later find out something about your mother that gave you some indication as to why she was living out on her own with Clary Pike?

45 UNCLE JACK: Yes, I found out years later - I hadn't known then, but I can understand - well understand now why she was in such a seemingly ostracised state, and that. She was suffering a form of Aboriginal payback law for an incident that happened in the 50s, mid-50s, up in Wiradjuri country at the blackfella camp just outside Griffith and that. When I first came, just as an aside, when I first came to Collingwood-Fitzroy, I accessed this building when it became an Aboriginal Health Service and was trying to speak to the aunties and uncles and etcetera, and it was very difficult.

They wouldn't engage with me, especially when I was asking about Mum, "Do you know Blanchie Charles" and that, you know. They were all related. They all worked in the beginning, in the development of Aboriginal Health Services and yet I was not afforded any information or opportunity to understand what they knew of my mother. So I heard  
 5 thereafter that there was a - that my mum was charged with the murder of a certain person in that blackfella camp, and it was a drunken brawl, I heard. And so, all right, fair enough.

So I - I thought nothing much about it, you know. I'm receiving Aboriginal payback law because of this incident and that. The person who was killed was their son, took over the Advancement League after Uncle Doug Nicholls died, and - and I thought, "Well, that's  
 10 par for the course. This is what I have to endure and that." So if I wasn't welcomed in Aboriginal Melbourne then I was welcomed in the rest of the - around Melbourne and that, especially in the wide world of world of theatre. So I concentrated on becoming an actor and etcetera.

I didn't come into Collingwood-Fitzroy, didn't have any need but I did have an occasion where I remember walking down Gertrude Street past here, wearing flushed yellow, flushed yellow flares and that, you know. I had a beautiful afro, and I was holding the hand  
 15 of a man whose name was Jack too, we were partners, and he was wearing a kaftan. I thought people were offside of me because of that, but, no, it turned out there was something about Mum being instrumental in the death of this certain person.

Now, I got to hear, as my profile rose and I was touring with various shows around the nation, and especially on this side, the east coast, and Orange and Dubbo and places like  
 25 this, people would come up to me, you know, Elders would come up to me, and said, "You should really know what happened up there in that blackfella camp, Jack." You know. "It wasn't a drunken brawl, you know." And the latest I heard was that, "Your Mum was called a Sergeant, Jack. Everybody loved her."

And she called a meeting on this man's behaviour towards the women - other men's women's, I was told, and the children in the camp. Remembering that young Artie was there in the camp, Esme and Eva-Jo were in the camp at that time and that. So truth will  
 30 out. I've been given the truth by, you know, a - many of us Elders and the Lands Council people up in Sydney about this particular incident and they said, "Jack, she called a meeting about this man's behaviour. There was a lot of opium and alcohol consumed at the  
 35 meeting, and this man was eventually afforded the opportunity undertaking capital punishment."

A knife was handed to a certain person, and he was ushered out on to the irrigation channel and his neck was slit, throat was cut, I should say, and body thrown into the irrigation  
 40 channel. And I got to hear this because I got the transcript in 1958, clearing my Mum of this murder. Jimmy Berg through the Koorie Heritage Trust gave me the evidence of the High Court, the Supreme Court in New South Wales, clearing my mum of this person's killing.

And - and so I - I - you know, I started to spread it around the people and that, especially the man running the Aboriginal Health Service. He's no longer with us, either. But, you know, it's my job, actually, is to - to correct what has gone wrong, what - awry here. You know, I will not wear the so-called sins of my mother when she was - she called the  
 45

meeting. This was the last of the Wiradjuri mob. They still held tenaciously with fingertip grip on to their lore, l-o-r-e, lore.

5 And they decided that the Griffith police would not, you know, listen at all to their complaints about this man's behaviour towards the women and the children in the camp. And, of course, Esme and Eva-Jo were in the camp and Artie. Esme remembers her coming back from that incident with blood on her dress, and the transcript reads that the knife was handed - after the body was chucked into the irrigation channel, the  
10 person - the - could call the modern-day Kadaitcha man, the lore man who, carried out the punishment, handed the knife to my mum and was told to get rid of it. She didn't.

15 She takes it back to the blackfella camp, as the transcript reads, and this High Court thing, the Supreme Court clearing Mum, reads that Mum took it back to the blackfella camp. She washes it, wipes it, puts through it through the fire, wipes it and then hangs the knife on a meat safe hanging outside her hut. They were valuable utensils, knives and tomahawks, in a blackfella camp during the 50s. So that's the evidence that I've got, you know, that cleared my mum of that - of that murder, of that killing and that.

20 And I get to hear from people, the Munros, you know, up there in Sydney, Lyall Munro and Jenny, Munro, all these people and Sol Bellear, these people were telling me these truths and that. You know, these were the Elders in Sydney. You know, there I was; they were coming to see my shows. So they could tell me tidbits of information. But I did get the full information and I got that via Uncle Jimmy Berg's Koorie Heritage Trust that transcript of the High Court clearing Mum of that killing.

25 MR McAVOY: Thank you. Now, after you finished at your mum and Clary Pike's humpy - - -

30 UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: - - - you went and did some more work in that area?

35 UNCLE JACK: Yeah, I did. Yeah, I got a job on a small farm, a young man and his wife. I think they had a baby - I can't recall now. But they give me a job and then I've said I was looking for work, you know. That's why they give me work.

MR McAVOY: Did you last there long?

40 UNCLE JACK: Hey?

MR McAVOY: Did you last long there?

45 UNCLE JACK: I lasted about six or so months up there. Every day there was sheep that were dying of some yellow fever so they had this huge dray that I had to attach a horse to, and every morning I would have to go out and pick up the dead sheep and toss them on the dray and take them to a place where the dead sheep go and that. And there was a - by - by the time 1 o'clock came, the crows had pulled apart some of the sheep, and so I had to use a coal shovel to shovel the sheep's remains onto the back of this dray which is taller than  
50 me, you know.

And - and - but it was a great job, in one sense. I liked the work up there in the bush, milking the cow every morning and that for fresh milk and that. Tending the sheep and that. And their - and their little ones. Irrigation, you know, clearing the irrigation, etcetera. Understanding snakes, you know. Coming across many snakes and getting to understand them and it's all right, okay, I will leave you alone if you leave me alone.

So I got to - and I enjoyed working there, but the - the constant, you know, shovelling of dead carcasses in bits and pieces on to - on to this huge dray stopped me from liking the job too much. So I went back down to Melbourne, took my leave and said thank you very much, and they gave me a good - quite a bit of money, got back down to Melbourne and I went to work with Brooks Robinson's Glass, I went back to my glass bevelling job with Brooks Robinson's over in South Melbourne.

So I always was, in those days, in those early days, before alcohol and addiction and real crime time took a hold of me, I got back into work and etcetera and came back to Melbourne and then got stuck into theatre.

MR McAVOY: So how long was it after you returned to Melbourne that you found yourself involved in theatre?

UNCLE JACK: 19-20, in between those years. It wasn't long. It wasn't long. It was an almost a hit and run up there in Swan Hill, you know, at the Moulamein - not Moulamein, Swan Hill and Moulamein and - and then Tocumwal and Finley.

MR McAVOY: How did you get started in the theatre, then?

UNCLE JACK: I was at the Gladys Nicholls Hostel when a group of people from the New Theatre came to the hostel, wanting to convince all us young ones to be in a play called '*A Raisin in The Sun*', written by an African-American playwright. I forget her name now. But I raised my hand and said, "Yeah, I will have a go at that, you know." And so I went around to the new theatre and they were - where the old Argus building is down there in Elizabeth Street, Lonsdale, around - going up a little bit up Lonsdale to the first lane behind Elizabeth Street there, and up the - a lane on the right and upstairs was the New Theatre.

Commonly called the Pick Theatre because of their left wing leanings, but it was the New Theatre that did latch on to Indigenous people and give them a head start in the arts and etcetera. They had been doing this for many years and that, you know. So people on the left were - were always giving opportunities here, in the Melbourne chapter, the Sydney chapter, and the Newcastle chapter of the New Theatre. So I stuck fat with learning a new trade by night, a new - you know, acting, and - and - you know, doing glass bevelling during the day. It was a wonderful time. These were wonderful times because once I got, you know -

MR McAVOY: Uncle Jack, you - did you audition for a role in '*A Raisin in the Sun*'?

UNCLE JACK: '*A Raisin in the Sun*.' That was it. Lorraine Hansberry's '*A Raisin in the sun*'.

MR McAVOY: Did you get a part?

UNCLE JACK: Yes. Yes, I played the part of Bobo. Lost the money and all that kind of stuff. And years later I find it was a Sidney Poitier movie and that, you know. So I aimed to be Sidney Poitier in miniature. No less than that. But, yes, it was very unusual to have  
 5 an Aboriginal person, you know, acting on stage. So for many years I played all different kinds of other black nationalities, never played - for seven years I worked with the New Theatre in an amateur capacity.

I liked what I was doing there, but it never entered my tiny mind that I should play an  
 10 Aboriginal. So I played African-American. I played - my best play that I ever thought I had ever done at the New Theatre was Athol Fugard's *'The Blood Knot'*. It was a two-hander with Ollie Lewinski - living in the centre of Victoria at the moment, but - a white Russian. And he was a great actor, and it allowed me to realise my potential as an actor because it was full-on, very wordy, and then I realised - Athol Fugard was under house arrest at the  
 15 time in South Africa.

So it was a great play and that's when I realised that this is where I want to be. It was intoxicating for me to be taking my bows and receiving, you know, the applause of the audience, and in those days people were always reading the words of the critics, you know,  
 20 and I do recall - it's always in the back of my mind, "There's a new light shining on the Victorian arts community in the guise of the diminutive Jack Charles. And so, go along and see Jack Charles in *'The Blood Knot'* with Ollie Lewinsky at the New Theatre." It was a great thing.

25 MR McAVOY: So while you were at the New Theatre for that seven-year period, did you continue to work at the glassworks?

UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes. Yes, yes.

30 MR McAVOY: So working during the day and amateur theatre at night?

UNCLE JACK: Yes, it was a great - great arrangement, yeah.

35 MR McAVOY: At what stage did you then become involved in the Aboriginal Theatre world?

UNCLE JACK: About seven years into working with the New Theatre. '69. I was - suggested that I go out and discover myself in the professional world here in Melbourne. So Melbourne Theatre Company picked me up to do some readings of new  
 40 plays and so I got to meet, you know, people like Frank Thring and Freddie Parslow, all these old Australian actors here in Melbourne and that, you know. I do recall hearing Frank as I was walking through the back of the green room at the Melbourne Theatre Company. I heard his distinctive voice say, "What's that?" And I heard Fred Parslow saying, "That's young Jack. He's -- joining us." You know. "Oh." Frank Thring.

45 So I was, in a sense, really welcomed, you know. Nobody had any bones to - you know, objection, but I never realised that down the track, once Bob Maza had joined in with me to develop the first Aboriginal theatre, the Nindethana Theatre, we realised that it's going to change the course in the arts community once we - we are going to be counted as  
 50 professional actors. You know. So people won't be able to black up any more to play



Aboriginal people on screen, on stage, and etcetera, because we had the real McCoy here and that. Bob Maza, Uncle Jack Charles.

5 So ABC were the first to pick up Bob, and they blind casted him as a lawyer in their long-running night serial, *'Bellbird'*, the black and white series. I was the second one cast by the ABC in their first coloured episode. I thought that was wonderful. So my first big fully professional production. But as an extra and that. So - but, nonetheless, I kicked off with the ABC. The next production was *'Behind the Legend'* playing Eddie Gilbert, etcetera.

10 And after that, you know, '75, up there in Sydney, to do nine months' work in the *'Ben Hall'* series, television series - movie I should say, 20th Century Fox, BBC, ABC, 26 million production, nine months' work up there in Katoomba, Blackheath and that. And that was wonderful to play Billy Dargin the man who shot - who was Ben Hall's mate and who shoots him at the end. So working with these professional actors like Jon Finch and  
15 John Castle from England, etcetera, and Hugh Keays-Byrne, who was in that - that - that road movie, whatever it is. One of the big bikies.

He's just died recently, Hugh Keays-Byrne, but he was a great actor. Many of these English actors that came out, you know, it was wonderful to meet them and to experience  
20 what it was like working on kind of a big Hollywood movie set.

MR McAVOY: Can I just take you back to the Nindethana Theatre?

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

25

MR McAVOY: That was something that you and Bob Maza set up?

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

30 MR McAVOY: And it was an Aboriginal Theatre Company.

UNCLE JACK: Aboriginal Theatre Company. We got a grant - we got a grant to start the first Aboriginal theatre. So we used that grant to - to develop a play. And I remember when being interviewed by Phillip Adams one time, I was in the ABC studios there at South  
35 Bank and he was up there in Sydney and that, and we were talking about the early days of the development of the Nindethana Theatre, and I remember Phillip saying, "Yes, when you first started, Jack, you were looking around for material. There was nothing written for Abos in those days," Phillip Adams said.

40 And I - it shocked me. Because this is Phillip Adams, you know. And he said it twice. And I nearly quipped back because I'm not totally, you know, the full quid at that time, you know. We were trying to, you know, talk up *'Bastardy'* the doco at the time, and I nearly said - when he said it the second time, there is nothing - there's no work for Abos in those days, nothing written for Abos in those day, I nearly said, "Nor for gin jockeys, Phil"  
45 because I knew his relationship with an Aboriginal - a Gunditjmara woman, etcetera.

So you had these problems and you are confronted with them, and this was a black voice, you know, arcing up against the - you know, notorious people of - whose thinking from in the past and that. So Phillip - I don't know if he woke up to himself, but I've seen him and

we had had good words when I've gone through the ABC studios recently up there in Sydney. Always give me a nod and a wink and "Hello Jack", you know.

5 MR McAVOY: Can I just take you back, though, Uncle Jack, to the plays that the Nindethana Theatre did conduct. Was there more than one?

UNCLE JACK: Yes, there were many, many. Many of them were political reviews, comical review, musical reviews.

10 MR McAVOY: So there was a lot of political content?

UNCLE JACK: Yes, we would be sending up Bob Menzies, Bob Dyer, '*Pick a Box*' and etcetera. Barry Jones, we - because I had the deep voice I was taking off Barry Jones and Bob Dyer. So, yes, it was great, but -

15 MR McAVOY: This was all - - -

UNCLE JACK: Yes, there were many plays, political plays where we'd - where I would be playing - I would have to black up, as much as the white actors were blacking up at that  
20 time. When we first did the Lorraine Hansberry '*A Raisin in the Sun*' I saw all them white actors blacking up. They were all workers. They all had jobs to do during the day and that. And I was grateful that I had, you know, a wonderful base foundation. You never saw the streaks in my makeup and that. But I loved the idea, this is theatre, you put on makeup and I remember my lipstick was Princess Pink and that. And - but you couldn't see any streaks  
25 in my make-up because I had this wonderful natural foundation.

MR McAVOY: So, Uncle Jack, when the Nindethana Theatre came about, in the - you said 1969?

30 UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: 1970, in operation?

UNCLE JACK: 70. Yes, yes. By the time - '71 in Melbourne, we were fully functional.  
35 The first play we did was from Brumby Innes - from Katharine Susannah Prichard's '*Brumby Innes*', a book. We employed Dennis Miller, who was playing a copper in '*Bellbird*', and many other '*Bellbird*' actors and Melbourne actors were contributing to the development. People from La Mama and the developing Pram Factory were contributing towards the show.

40 So it was the first play performed in the Pram Factory. We were the ones that paid that first month's rent at the Pram Factory. It's not mentioned in their history, in their two books about the history of the Pram Factory. But it was the beginning of black theatre and after '*Brumby Innes*', Bob had the brilliant notion to, "Let's write our own stuff, Jack" so we got  
45 about writing our own comical political reviews ourselves.

MR McAVOY: So at that time, the early 70s, was there much happening politically in the --

50 UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes. Black Panther, Black Power was all happening and that where -

MR McAVOY: Did you see the theatre as being a part of that or associated with that in any way, the -

5 UNCLE JACK: I was a little bit frightened about the Black Powers, Black Panthers and all that kind of stuff. Gary Foley, Denis Walker, Bruce McGuinness, all these people. So I said, no, I'm taking my rage to fire the stage and that, you know. So we took '*Jack Charles is Up and Fighting*' show, political review, up to Canberra at the time of the big demonstrations up there. They wanted it - us to perform at the Tent Embassy but I said,  
10 "No, no, no, no, no. Too much Black Power over there and that."

So we did it at the ANU. So Foley and all these - all the Dennis Walker, McGuinness, and all those Black Power people came to the ANU, and saw for the first time an Aboriginal theatre production via Bob Maza and myself, Ollie Lewinski and another person. And that  
15 was a great - great times and that. And Foley acknowledges that this was a time - and McGuinness, this was a time when the penny dropped that they could use such a medium to sell the message, etcetera and that.

But there was a little bit of a - you know, a hiccup there, on that first night that we  
20 performed there. Denis Walker came storming around the back and he wanted to kill me because in the 80s - no, in the - in the 60s - '68 or something like that, I was in Bendigo Jail and I wrote a song. I wrote a music to Oodgeroo Noonuccal's (Kath Walker's) '*Son of Mine*' and in jail I used to sing it in falsetto. I could do in those days.

25 And I had a band in jail called The Just Us and that, you know. And I - and we had five-part harmony. And so they were wonderful songs we sang where - you know, but I sang '*Son of Mine*' five-part harmony, and it was an Aboriginal blues kind of a thing, you know, Australian blues sounding when I sang it in falsetto. And Denis came storming around the back and he wanted to kill me because I had sung that song. I had put music to her  
30 mum's - his mum's poetry '*Son of Mine*.'

He hated his mum. He hated the poem. He hated the song, and he hated me. So Bob stood in his way and said, "If you want to get to Jack, Denis, you have to go through me." So he backed off. And then I was protected by, you know, Bob Maza.

35 MR McAVOY: Are you okay?

UNCLE JACK: So that's the development of New Theatre, that took me many years to discover that - that I could write my own material, play an Aboriginal and - but mainly I  
40 was happy and content to be reading new plays that were coming up and then eventually being cast, you know, in plays, some television series, '*Women of the Sun*', '*Certain Women*', etcetera. So I got a lot of work, you know, in those days.

MR McAVOY: Through the 70s, Uncle Jack?

45 UNCLE JACK: Yes, through the 70s.

MR McAVOY: A lot of work, television and theatre?

50 UNCLE JACK: Television and plays.

MR McAVOY: And it was paid work?

UNCLE JACK: It paid well, yes, yes. Yes.

5

MR McAVOY: And so - - -

UNCLE JACK: I was always independent. When I wasn't working, I never went for the Queen's Shilling. I never went on the dole or anything like that. I felt independent, and then  
10 I was starting to learn the fine art of - as I like to say, collecting rent on my Mum's land from the large mansions in Boon Wurrung country.

MR McAVOY: Yes, I'm going to ask you about that.

15 UNCLE JACK: No doubt.

MR McAVOY: So when - when you were working regularly in the theatre and in television, had you continued to work in the glass factory or that was - - -

20 UNCLE JACK: Off and on, yes, off and on, yes. Because there was other jobs I -- packaging for, you know. As a store person, etcetera. If there was a hiatus, like having done six months' jail time and that and then being released, getting another job, sometimes different, you know. Whatever I saw that would, you know, be attracted to me. Spare parts was one, being a storeman for that. And that was a great job. North Melbourne.

25

But Melbourne Glass employed me one time coming out of - out of jail, going straight into work and continuing to learn - you know, the glass industry. Bending glass for car windows and etcetera. That was a great job. And then right opposite the Trades Hall centre, getting to know all the - all the old people going into The Curtin Hotel and that.

30 And then many of them already knew me because of my work with the New Theatre and that. So, yes, so the New Theatre always supported, you know - they supported us, you know. Me and the development of the black theatre and that. And they supported, you know, the people over in - fighting against Vesteys, etcetera.

35 MR McAVOY: I just want to bring you forward a few years. You - you participated in a documentary about yourself called '*Bastardy*'.

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

40 MR McAVOY: Do you remember what year that was released?

UNCLE JACK: 2008. At the Melbourne International Film Festival. It was a big hullabaloo, you know, 2008 at the Melbourne International Film Festival. It was a Melbourne story about a Melbourne man, made by an - made by a Melbourne person from  
45 RMIT School of Filmmaking, Amiel Courtin-Wilson. He stuck fat with me for eight years. Two of those years I had spent doing one-year jail sentences, but he stuck fat with me and that.

50 And so by the third year, I was realising that - that we are making something here. Whether I survive to actually finish it is another thing. But the point is, I had this notion that, well,

as a member of the Stolen First Peoples and that, you know, this is what Melbourne needs to see, me at my worst under the - weakening under the pulling powder of the white powders at that time and the consequential wrong decisions making, going over to the other side of the Yarra of an evening. Sometimes after a play, even, doing a play at the Pram Factory, for instance, you know, instead of, you know - I didn't have a place sometimes.

MR McAVOY: So I just want to ask you about - about that a bit. That documentary showed, if I can put it this way, a cycle of heroin addiction, homelessness and burglary.

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: And prison.

UNCLE JACK: Yes. And a damaged state of mind.

MR McAVOY: Yes.

UNCLE JACK: Unhealthy, you know, state of mind.

MR McAVOY: When did that cycle start for you, do you think?

UNCLE JACK: 70s, some time. Sometime in the 70s. When my partner had left me. His boss - he worked in Treasury on the fourth floor at the back of Treasury Building down there, Jack did, and his boss took him away from me and that's when things went topsy turvy. I was still performing in the Pram Factory at the time doing *'Bastardy'*, doing the first theatre restaurant performance piece, *'Dimboola'*. And, of course, *'Dimboola'* was just before I was really getting into drugs and that, you know.

But in *'Dimboola'*, the first theatre performing piece - Prahran Factory was experimental theatre and that. And many of us in the - it was the wedding reception, the first theatre restaurant production. And so it was a wedding reception. And Bruce Spence was the bridegroom and Jack Hibberd had written it, and he wrote Max Gillies and I as the gatecrashers to the wedding and that. So all the actors were allowed half a dozen of those large Foster cans to drink.

And so I drank all mine very quickly and I noticed that Max didn't drink his and then he stuck on one - one what's his name and he wouldn't finish that so I drank the rest of his giggle juice and that, you know. And in character I would also con a bottle out of the audience, a member of the audience, you know, because they would come in and - it was a bring-your-own stuff, you know. And they had a good theatre restaurant feed as they were doing this production and that, you know.

But, yes, I became very alcoholic having blackouts. I rode a motorbike in those days, trail bike, 175 CZ. I don't know how I survived. But, yes, you know, I never killed myself, but I was becoming very alcoholic and really doing a lot of damage to myself. And hard after that, we - we did *'Bastardy'*, the play, written by John Romeril. We called it *'Bastardy'*, because I led the life of buggery and bastardy at the Box Hill Boys' Home, fatherless child and that. And I - I drank all through that too.

50

And then what - there was a time there on the second of the last night, I get donged over the head by Peter Cummins with a beer bottle and I'm knocked unconscious and he has a five-minute soliloquy over my body. You don't know whether I'm dead or, you know, just knocked out. But I started snoring on the second and the last night and it really upset Bruce  
5 Spence. He said he would never work with me again, you know and that. But that's - that was it, you know.

But after that, I had this incident where apparently I - I had a - a turn for the worse and it was - I was convinced by a mate of mine who had seen me in so many productions and  
10 said, "Jack, you should give up alcohol, mate", you know. "You've got to give alcohol, Jack because you knifed all four tyres on my Morgan car in my driveway opposite the Pram Factory next door to the Carlton Police Station and you can't recall knifing all four of my tyres on my sports job." "No, mate, sorry, no." "Well, you've got to give up grog" and from that moment that he told me that I had done that, the penny dropped and I gave up  
15 alcohol for eight years.

Because the notion was it could have been him I might have stabbed instead of his five - five - one on the back, you know, five car tyres and that, you know. It could have been him that I might have stabbed. So I gave up the giggle juice for five years. And then I  
20 went from the fire - from the frypan into the fire and got into heroin 1973, from that time.

MR McAVOY: And at that stage had you already commenced the life of a burglar?

UNCLE JACK: Yes, off and on. Yes, yes, yes. When I was successful I wouldn't bother  
25 so much. You know. When I was getting good money in, etcetera. But, yes, there was a time when I was busted in a Kew - in a place up in Kew, when the owners came back and saw me, you know, in a Californian bungalow in Stawell Street there, and they just - he jumped out of his Rover and yelled out. And all I had time was to duck into the wardrobe and that, you know.

30 And so he had come in and he - he - he grabbed a weapon and said, "Come out, I'm armed. I know you're in there" because the light was slowly dwindling. It wouldn't turn off immediately when I closed the door. So he knew I was in there. And he got a shock when I opened the door and came out. He dropped his broolly, which was his choice of weapon at the time, and he said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I'm sorry, mate, I'm robbing  
35 you."

And he says "What are you taking?" I said, "Well, I just got started." "Empty your pockets out." And, meanwhile, she's finished parking the Rover between the other two cars around  
40 the back and come through the kitchen yelling out, "Have you got him, love, have you got him?" And he said, "Yeah, he's in the bedroom here. Call the police." "No, I want to see him first." "Call the police." They were arguing to and fro. By the time she finished, she's up in the bedroom and she takes one look at me and she says, "You're Jack Charles."

45 So she's seen me in '*Bastardy*' and she's seen me in '*Dimboola*' and that. And so we had a bit of a conversation and that. "Well, come down the kitchen. We'll have a cup of tea and we will mull this over, Jack," you know. So we had a cup of tea and we talked. "Oh, why do you do this?" So -- yeah, look, justifications for any addict of - of the sort - like me can roll glibly off the tongue. You know, it just comes to mind you know.

50

"Well, they only use blakfellas at the Pram Factory when they want an Aboriginal" and that, you know. So - "Well, all right, Jack, we're not going to call the police. We'll let you go" and that. "We don't care what you do to the rest of the street." I didn't have the heart to tell them that I had done most of the rest of the street anyway and that. So, you know, Kew  
 5 was very - one of my favourite haunts and that. This is in the days before security and sensor and alarms and all that kind of stuff.

So people left their houses, their large mansions unlocked. They were all sleeping upstairs so I had all downstairs to - you know, to have my way with the house, have a feed, and  
 10 etcetera and look, you know, in awe at what other people possess in the bottom part of their large mansions and that. You know. Totally blown away. So I was always aware of the haves and have nots and etcetera. And I always knew basically the concept that I was breaking into other people's castles.

15 But at the same token, they have broken my country, broken into my country and that. That was always at the back of my mind as a - you know, as an objectionable - you know, objectionable character. You know. Not exactly a -- Ernesto, socialist left or anything like this, but, you know, objecting to the fact that yeah, well they overran my country, not - not mentioning about deaths and all that kind of stuff. So they - as I say, justifications you  
 20 know, are pretty easy to come by.

MR McAVOY: Yes. I just want to talk to you about the heroin. You started taking heroin in the early 70s.

25 UNCLE JACK: 70s, yes.

MR McAVOY: And did it fill a particular role for you, having heroin, in terms of - well, in the documentary '*Bastardy*', you talk about a whack of heroin lightening your burden.

30 UNCLE JACK: Yes, well it did. It did. You know - it's normally a downer, you know. It puts you down and that. But - in other words, sometimes it would - give me the impetus to move and that, you know. This was before I realised cocaine and ice - not ice - but cocaine and speed and etcetera and that. So - amphetamines and that. So this was before all that. I was just happy and content with heroin. So if I wanted to rejuvenate myself after a hard  
 35 night's work over in Camberwell, East Camberwell, I would have to - on the way, before dawn, start walking back towards Collingwood-Fitzroy and that.

And I believe, in one sense, that I may have invented power walking before it was even thought about. I had to leave that area before white people saw me and that, you know. So  
 40 I was walking real fast. There were the old railway line tracks that go all the way over to Alamein and all that kind of stuff that I would take advantage of, and no policeman ever thought of just, you know, checking these walkways and that, you know. They've made their bike lanes nowadays and that, and I ride them and have fond memories of actually walking these lanes, these old railway lanes before they were turned into beautiful left,  
 45 right-hand side bike lanes and that.

So - so I - you know, I got out of, you know, East Camberwell, fast-tracked it down through Kew, and down along the Yarra, and then up over to the bridge down at - fairly - Fairfield amphitheatre, and then up to the - up to the Gladys Nicholls Hostel or

the George Wright Hostel and have breakfast there or meander across the Collingwood Flats down to the George Wright Hostel.

5 MR McAVOY: Uncle Jack, with this period in the 70s, were you dealing with some of the things that had happened to you in your childhood still?

10 UNCLE JACK: No, no, no. That's another reason why, you know, a drug - it never occurred to me that when I did have a relationship with Jack and that, I never - we never did - I say it in the *'Bastardy'*, the doco, but we never did the full thing, you know. I didn't want to hurt him and he definitely didn't want to hurt me, because I had mentioned by way of, you know, that I experienced something like this at the Box Hill Boys' Home and I didn't like what was done to me and that.

15 And so we never buggered each other and that. And I haven't buggered anybody since that was done to me at a very young age at the Box Hill Boys' Home. I've had relationships with people but we never got around to buggery and that.

20 MR McAVOY: You say in the *'Bastardy'* documentary in many respect - respects your life was a solitary one.

UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes, yes.

MR McAVOY: What do you mean by that?

25 UNCLE JACK: It's very hard for me to commit, you know, since - since Jack had left. And I wouldn't allow myself. That's why I grow a beard and look more feral so that people wouldn't be attracted to me and that. That failed the mark and that, you know, it seems, and that. So - but the point, in those days that - we live, when we are addicted, into a world of our own. We - we live with our eyes blinkered. We - we have tunnel vision and etcetera.

30 You know, we don't see anybody else. We know they are there looking at us, and etcetera, but we're immune from their glares, the occasional snort of disrespect, and etcetera, but, you know, as an Aboriginal person first and foremost but also as a user, a junkie, you are likely to cop these things, and etcetera. So I - I have - you know, it was able to numb the pain, heroin, always numb the pain of existing and etcetera. And every time I did come out of jail, I ended up in the flats down below in the toilet there, OD'ing.

35

40 It's only because of the fact that I would - I would have somebody in tow who knew - I knew would call the MICA ambulance and my life would be saved. But on most occasions upon leaving and coming back to this area, I would have that - that final - I would give myself the final hot shot, thinking it was going to be the hottest shot but underneath, no, no, I've got him to pull, you know, to ring up the MICA and I will be okay.

45 MR McAVOY: So this is - this might be a difficult subject, but when you were saying you are organising yourself the hot shot, you were - you were - was it proposed - were you suicidal at the time or - - -

UNCLE JACK: Yes, suicidal. You come out of jail, at that point, you were - instead of going to see the Parole Board you - you leave your goods at the Spencer Street Station



luggage compartment and leave it there and you go and see the dealer straightaway and that, you know. You are were homeless so you had no place to go.

5 MR McAVOY: Can I just show you some footage from '*Bastardy*'?

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

10 MR McAVOY: Just so that the Commissioners can see perhaps what you are talking about?

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: If we could just show the next video, please.

15 **(Video '*Bastardy*' plays)**

**(Video stopped)**

20 MR McAVOY: You can show the next video, please? This is more footage from '*Bastardy*'.

**(Video '*Bastardy*' plays)**

25 MR McAVOY: Whereabouts is this?

UNCLE JACK: -- off Brunswick Street, behind - near the House of Welcome. I used to sleep in that laundry there.

**(Video stopped)**

30

MR McAVOY: So they are two examples of the types of places you slept after you were released from jail?

35 UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes.

MR McAVOY: How long did you go through that sort of cycle of living - of sleeping rough, if I can put it that way?

40 UNCLE JACK: Until the next time I'm busted.

MR McAVOY: And so - so for how many years did you go through that cycle of sleeping rough and then going to jail?

45 UNCLE JACK: I don't know, about 20 years or so, off and on. It's got to be about that. 20 years off and on. You've got to remember too, that in between all this, I could be arriving back from a series of burls going up to the George Wright Hostel for breakfast to count my - the loot, etcetera, share the loot around, but also having breakfast and then there be a message for me there, okay, that I have to go out to Melbourne airport, there's a ticket for me to fly up to Sydney or over to Western Australia. Something wants me in a play or a  
50 film, etcetera.

So plucked straight from homelessness on the streets, you know, to getting the information at a hostel and then getting somebody, you know, from the hostel to drive me over near the airport and then going up and giving my proof that I - my - who I am, there is the ticket  
 5 waiting for me, and somebody meets me over in Perth, or Sydney, and I'm placed into a beautiful hotel or a motel, etcetera, and to be told that "We will pick you up tomorrow for rehearsals." Belvoir or Sydney Theatre Company or -- you know.

MR McAVOY: Would you have to make arrangements in that location to - to get heroin?  
 10

UNCLE JACK: Yes, I knew people up in Sydney anyway. But in Western Australia, I knew nobody. So I took a pot luck when I - actually Jimmy Berg actually paroled me to do a - to do a six months' parole over in the care of Janet Holmes a Court at the Black Swan Theatre. Janet said she would take me. They needed me for nine months for a second tour  
 15 of Jack Davis' *'No Sugar'*. And they said, 'Oh, great', because I was in Won Wron jail when Jack Davis came to Fitzroy with this production and he performed it at the Fitzroy Town Hall, so I had heard great things about it, even though I was in the nick down there at the Won Wron.

So I heard about it. And it was a blessing. There I was, you know, Jimmy Berg giving me the opportunity to do one of the rare paroles that I will ever finish completely, and to get back into theatre. I hadn't trod the boards for 17 years at that stage. I had managed to do the odd film, television thing during that period but I was doing a lot of jail time. But I hadn't trod the boards. So, yes, to do Jack Davis and *'No Sugar'* brought me back - gave me back  
 20 my theatre legs, and etcetera.  
 25

And once I was back on stage and that - you know, I had a nasty Br'er Rabbit at the time, a nasty drug habit, I must say. And Neil Armfield the director said, "Well, Jack, this is provisional." And then Janet got to hear that I had a nasty Br'er Rabbit, as I like to say, a  
 30 drug habit, and rest of the card, the Noongars and Yamatjis got to hear that I had this habit and that. And there was a couple of young actors there that were using speed and cocaine, etcetera.

I was the only one using heroin. But I was a renowned actor from the far east in the wilds of the west, performing in - in their wonderful -- performance place. You know, the - the Black Swan Theatre for Janet Holmes a Court and Deckchair Theatre, working with them also, doing one play in the afternoon and another play at night, a different play at night. So I really got stuck straight back into theatre once I hit Perth and that.  
 35

Regardless of the fact that I didn't take any drugs over with me at the time and there was a little bit of a problem there, so I nearly didn't continue on with it because I said, I said to myself, "I'll have to go back to Melbourne and have another hit and then try again" and that. But no, I met somebody in the market bar in Freo there, at the market there and we knew each other. Hadn't seen each other for 23 years, but he knew that I didn't look too  
 40 well, and he said, "I will fix you up Jack." He set me on to somebody.  
 45

And within 10 minutes, I - I had something, as I like to say, up the Warwick Farm, up -- up the arms and that. So I was able to fulfil that - that season of Jack Charles - I mean of Jack Davis' *'No Sugar'*, *'Our Town'* and a couple of other plays for Deckchair Theatre. So I was

a busy boy and I was enabled because I had arranged to have - and the theatre knew of my little foibles. Matter of fact, they contributed, Janet Holmes paid me a little bit more.

5 MR McAVOY: Can I ask you this question, did the - the movie of *'The Tale of Jimmie Blacksmith'*, did that come before you went to Western Australia?

UNCLE JACK: No, after. After it. Yeah.

10 MR McAVOY: And so that was a - a fairly large movie?

15 UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes. That was a big movie. Really fantastic. I - he didn't want the likes of me, Fred Schepisi, at first. He said, "I didn't want any professionals, Jack, but - so I heard that Foley has sent you to me. Okay. All right. So, well, we will give you a choice of two characters, Jack. You can play the character - the old man who turns Jimmie on to

20 I said, "Yes, I want to be raped by Ray Barrett. I will take that role." So it was one of my best performances on stage ever, that - I felt, you know, because working with Schepisi, working with Bob Maza as the Aboriginal wrangler. He was the -- responsible from getting all the people from Dubbo and Orange and that from the big blackfella camp scenes and that, you know. And it was - it was great to be, you know, working with such a fine actors and crew in this production, the *'The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith'*.

MR McAVOY: And you are currently working as an actor?

30 UNCLE JACK: No, no. No, I'm not at the moment.

MR McAVOY: Have you got something coming up?

35 UNCLE JACK: I will have another run at - I've been asked to have another run with ABC's black comedy *'Preppers'*, a send-up about American late-night show *'Doomsday Preppers'*, and I run an Aboriginal doomsday preppers camp in the Warringah National Forest up there in the North Sydney. St Ives Showgrounds in the bush. And we had such a wonderful month of filming last time we did it a couple of years ago. I never thought anybody would - it was not everybody's cup of tea, this one, but people loved it and they were ringing me up saying, "I like you in that one." I said, "Oh, yeah, didn't you like me in anything else?"

45 They were ringing up saying, "I like you in that, playing the old fella there", Monty, the boss of the Preppers and that. And so, yes, they wanted to do it again. Another six episodes. So I'm happy that I'm - that I'm able to do my shows too. I've just come back from doing Adelaide's Fringe Festival with *'A Night with Uncle Jack Charles'*, which is developed by my manager, Patrice Capogreco. She used to manage Bombay Royale and Saskwatch and a few other rock people or musical people, but she just looks after Namila Benson, Radio National ABC presenter, and myself. She just looks after us now and that.

So she developed this show called '*A Night with Uncle Jack Charles*' normally hosted by Namila Benson, if she can make it and that. And we have guest artists that I never know who's going to be singing until I see them backstage and that. So we opened up Malthouse Theatre's season this year in February with '*A Night with Uncle Jack Charles*' at the open stage outdoors at Malthouse Theatre. And we had Cash Savage in the first act, and the  
5 second act - to actually close the show, we had Baker Boy. Well done. We had Baker Boy.

Sister girl came and saw the show. You came and saw the show and that. So, yes, to have that, you know, Baker Boy to open up the season, Malthouse's seasons, to realise that we were getting bums back on seats, you know, at long last over this COVID, you know, kerfuffle and all of that sort of stuff was a blessing and to be part of that mob to entice people to come back, make sure you've had your one shot and all that kind of stuff and that you're COVID safe and that.  
10

So, yes, and I've just come back, as I said, from doing the same kind of show over at - over at Adelaide Fringe. And in the morning on these occasions when I am not doing anything, I have other things that somebody over there has arranged and that, you know. Uncle Moogy has arranged for me to go and speak to the year 10-12 kids at Trinity College and that. And amongst that mob of kids were these four strapping six-footers, you know, preparing themselves for fine education but also to begin their football careers for - you  
20 know, following - so it was great meeting them.

And they came and saw the show, etcetera. So I've been asked to go back to Fringe Festival next year for - instead of a hit and run show, one-night stand, a full week of '*Jack Charles v The Crown*' over there - Jack Charles - '*A Night with Uncle Jack Charles*', I should say, at the Fringe Festival.  
25

MR McAVOY: And you intend to take up that offer?

30 UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes. I've got futures. Yes.

MR McAVOY: Now, I just want to change direction a bit now. I would like to ask you a little bit about the time you spent in jail.

35 UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: Over the - that period, when you started burglary, engaging in burglary, until really near the end of the '*Bastardy*' doco, you spent a lot of time in jail?

40 UNCLE JACK: Yes, I was.

MR McAVOY: But in the - in the documentary '*Bastardy*', you - you mentioned feeling relieved -

45 UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: - to be arrested and sent to jail. Can you just explain what you mean by that?

UNCLE JACK: Well, on one hand, it was always a sense of relief that I was busted, that all my aches and pain and the woes of existing, you know, with a heavy addiction and having to do a - you know, burglaries to - to support the funding of the drugs and, etcetera, came to a stop. A full stop. And so it was a kind of relief that I would - I would go back to a place where I'm pretty comfortable, a jail, and that and where everybody knows me.

I'm known to most people in the nick. Most officers know me, and so I get to sleep in a bed and eat three meals a day. And my tiny mind thinks, oh, this is probably another five years lease of my life, etcetera. Etcetera. So, you know, I'm 78 now. You know, so I believe that doing all these jail times has led me to, you know, to be fattened up and to - to settle down and to give me the full benefit of an education in the education system in our prisons and also to be - eventually, you know, to be Victorian Prisons' hot shot potter, teaching up to year 12 in ceramica.

I called my pottery shops in jail 'Psycho Ceramica' because, in a sense, you had to be a crackpot to be in the nick in the first place and that. But it worked well. You weren't allowed to be Serepaxed or Rohypnoled off your tits in Psycho Ceramica pottery shops because you would be like a bull in a china shop and that. And I had a - you know, the governor and the officers, I had a good rapport with them to the point that even the security people coming up from Melbourne weren't allowed into the Won Wron pottery shop, Psycho Ceramica pottery shop down there at - in Won Wron near Yarra and that.

So I felt that I was - I was in a unique place having a pottery shop, the education centre, the key to the education centre on myself, on my person and open from 7 - 8 until 8 seven days a week and that. And teaching people the fine art of ceramica whereby they would take box loads of crockery home at the weekends and that. And they would always leave something of - equivalent value for me and one of the other fellas in the pottery shop, Paul Chirico.

We'd go down to Yarram Footy oval and to - and place our pottery stall always next to the cake stall, cake shop stall where we would barter pots for cakes and etcetera. And we always made a profit. We always made a quid. The Castlemaine jail where we first started the pottery, it was in the time, these days, when the Office of Corrections were the clients of the Education system. So we had some fine school principals and teachers willing to allow certain, you know - well, we had a choir in Bendigo jail.

We used to go to the Ballarat Eisteddfod. They would let us out to go to the Ballarat Eisteddfod and sing with all the other choirs from around the district and that. We all came back. And then, you know, in - a couple of boys from Castlemaine jail were allowed to go out and play footy, and I was allowed to go to the school and complete my year 12 exams and etcetera at the local high school or tech school in Castlemaine.

So, yes, the system gave us a lot of leeway and that's when I became interested in ceramica to the point that my forte was the glazing aspect, because nobody was doing a long enough time to be able to glaze their pots. So it was down to me to do that.

MR McAVOY: Can I - can I just take you back a little bit. Was jail at any point a place where you felt unsafe?

UNCLE JACK: No. No, I saw a lot of bad things in F division and that, rapes and etcetera. I did have to fight one kid at one stage in F division and that. Not fight him. I just threatened to throw boiling water over him, which I did do, and that, because he kept on throwing a ball at me. Simple little things like this and that. You're in with a bunch of  
5 others, and if you don't stand your ground, you're going to be picked on, etcetera, you know.

I was only 7 and a half stone wringing wet. I'm two centimetres short of five foot. So I'm a spindly little fella. But I have a loud voice. I'm an actor, you know. And this Yugoslav kid  
10 kept throwing the ball at me. I was in the top bunk and for the first time after he hit me with that ball, I threatened him, you know, "I will throw boiling water over you if you do that one." And he did it again. So I had to get down and I had to make a show of walking to where the boiling water was and everybody makes their cup of tea, grabbing the pot, and then throwing it on him and that.

All his mates, Yugoslav mates, jumped out of bed. All the junkies jumped out of bed and there was a stand-to. They don't open the door until 6 - 6.30 in the morning the next morning. That kid was in pain all that night and that. Here was a lesson learnt. You don't  
15 know who you're talking with, or you're messing around within a jail situation. I was, you know - I wasn't shaking myself because I had to stand. You know, I had to look as though I can handle myself here and that. I'm not a puncher, you know. But I can throw boiling water over somebody after I told him I would do it. And I did do it.

It stopped him from, you know, throwing a ball at me ever again. I was removed and given  
25 a single cell after that. It's just too dangerous to be with other - other people.

MR McAVOY: Did you continue to use drugs while were you in jail?

UNCLE JACK: No. No, no, no. Except somebody would bring in a little bit of smoking  
30 dope. That wasn't drugs, as far as I was concerned. People would go out-of-bounds to the creek and bring back magic mushrooms, so I - we would be high and creative spirits in the pottery shop, in the woodworking shop, you know, on magic mushrooms and yarn there, and etcetera. So it was allowed. It was a foible that the system in those days, those early days of Won Wron, allowed.

MR McAVOY: And so you served - you have said that you served many jail sentences. What was the longest sentence you served, do you think?

UNCLE JACK: I was once given eight years outright, to do eight years. I robbed so many  
40 of the establishment that the County Court said "No, no, look, he's robbed fellow judges of mine, my friends. He's robbed QCs, barristers. He's robbed - the governor of the security jail. He's robbed him. He's robbed the Deputy Police Commissioner. He's robbed so many of us. He's robbed the church people", you know. And so - so they gave me eight years for that.

And if it weren't for John Hepworth and Oriel Gray, a playwright for the ABC who wrote plays. John Hepworth, who wrote for the Review and all that kind of stuff, the ABC. If it weren't for these people who testified for me - and I had five years taken off, so I did three  
45 with a two and I did one and a half years, you know. So, yes, I always abided by the rules and was always released early in those days. And in the latter years, in Bendigo and  
50

Castlemaine jail and that, I was the man to go to when the governors thought that somebody was suicidal, that it would be - it would be, you know, proper and decent to have - have this fella sleep - Uncle Jack sleep in the blackfella cell with this fella to talk him out of killing himself. So I had that unique spot, this position in prison.

5

MR McAVOY: I think if it's suitable to the Commissioners, Uncle Jack, we might have a break for a short period.

UNCLE JACK: Yes. I'm up for it if you are.

10

CHAIR: Yes.

**<ADJOURNED 3:15 PM**

15

**<RESUMED 3:33 PM**

MR McAVOY: Thank you, Commissioners. Uncle Jack, you've talked about your time in jail. Can we take it from your evidence that you learned a few things in jail?

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UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes, yes. I learnt a lot in jail. I learnt right from the instance - the first time entering Pentridge that there were all these other ex-Box Hill Boys' Home old boys, Bayswater old boys and Burwood Boys' home. The local gangsters from around here and Carlton were there, and we all knew each other. So, in a sense, I was given some respect at my young age, and I was kind of a person of interest, because once I start opening my mouth, they would hear this perfect English coming out of me, speaking better than the British officers, and etcetera, that the guys would latch on to me and they would ask me could I write their letters to them for their missus or their mums or their families and all that kind of stuff.

25

30

So right from the get-go, I was the letter writer for many a prisoner in D division there. And I would be paid a chocolate bar or a packet of tailor-mades for writing these letters. So I was well heeled and looked after, and I was given a kind of a measure of protection. And I - I kind of - we never broached the subject, nobody ever pulled me up or said, "Are you gay, Jack?" You know, nobody ever said that except up at Won Wron, the last time I was up there, this young fella had to ask me was I gay. And I was very cheeky. I was about to leave the jail, actually, so I said, "Give us a kiss and we will find out", you know, the old joke and that.

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40

But nobody had ever molested me or heaved me or looked at me in such a lecherous way. And, of course, I was pretty handsome for my, you know - big Afro, all that kind of stuff. I had all my teeth. My buck teeth were beautiful and all that kind of thing. I had buck teeth and that, you know. So I was pretty handsome, I thought, you know. When I looked in the mirror, I felt handsome enough and that, and nobody ever was, you know, giving me a hard time except that incident where - and that's - you know, there are little moments like that, flash moments where - where you are obliged to carry on. Carry through with it.

45

MR McAVOY: So you finished your high school whilst in jail?

UNCLE JACK: I did, yes. Third, fourth, fifth, and sixth form in Bendigo jail.

50

MR McAVOY: And you learned how to be a Potter?

UNCLE JACK: Be a potter in Castlemaine jail. So that's why Castlemaine jail is well-known as reputed to be my favourite jail and you can have favourites. Bendigo jail  
5 was my second favourite because I got all my education there, and the teachers were just wonderful. We were allowed -- after hours you were released until 9 o'clock and then locked up again and that. And so, yes, I thought I had it made, doing jail time in those days.

10 MR McAVOY: And do you - you did some time in an open prison?

UNCLE JACK: In Won Wron, the open camp down in Gippsland way. It's now been decommissioned as a jail and been handed over to Shaun Braybrook and his missus. There are wooden cottage units there, four to a unit. And it's been successful, won overseas  
15 awards for its success in - magistrates, local magistrates here, down Gippsland way and Kulin country can send people to go and do time there with Shaun Braybrook at the Healing Place, they call it.

There's an Aboriginal name, I forget, but it's Healing Place, Won Wron. And it's been a  
20 success and I've met some of the guys who have failed to come through, and they openly admit to me, when they see me down there in Smith Street - and they do - don't mind admitting - they're not shamed to admit that they did fail and that they were locked up and they had to finish off that jail time. So, yes, it's been a success, won awards and it has - is my favourite jail. I did two lots of two-and-a-half year sentences down there, and it was the  
25 best of all the jail times I had ever done.

MR McAVOY: And so is it fair to say that jail was not an unpleasant experience for you?

UNCLE JACK: Definitely. For me.

30

MR McAVOY: Yes.

UNCLE JACK: It could be for others and that, but, for me, I mean, you know, people would seek to get a measure of protection from some of the black gangsters. They would  
35 approach me in the D division yards and say that, "So and so is forcing me to give - give them their - their Buprenorphine tablet" and all that kind of stuff. And so I would have a talk to them and say, "Leave this fella alone and that." You know. And lo and behold, with no problems. All right, okay, we will leave it alone.

40 MR McAVOY: Do you think that your time in Box Hill Boys' Home might have prepared you a little bit for - - -

UNCLE JACK: I reckon it did, yes. We were all bred up, originally, to be soldiers across - to be - to go out to war and that - and that. You know, I remember I wanted to be a  
45 sailor when I left the Box Hill Boys' Home because I had learnt the flag routines and all that kind of stuff in the home and that. So I wanted to be a sailor but I was too short, I was told, for that.



MR McAVOY: Uncle Jack, is it fair to say that whilst it wasn't an unpleasant experience for you, it was a difficult experience for other inmates and particularly wasn't a difficult experience - - -

5 UNCLE JACK: In the Box Hill Boys' Home?

MR McAVOY: No, in the various jails -

UNCLE JACK: Yes --

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MR McAVOY: - for Aboriginal people?

UNCLE JACK: I did see some Aboriginal people struggle and so it was down to me, when I was there - if I wasn't there, I wasn't able to help and that. But when I was there, once I arrived, I believe the governor thought it was a blessing that I had returned, as a matter of fact. Black Jack McAlane from Castlemaine jail, when you're off the escort van, you go interview with the governor and that, and McAlane, you know, has goes his back to me when I walk into his office, and he spins around real quick and says, "Welcome back, Jack. Do you want your old cell back?"

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It was the only cell in Castlemaine with a sink and running water. "I will kick out the big boys living in there right now and you can have your - you will get the pottery shop running again, won't you, Jack?" So this was how excited the system was inviting me back into the fold, as it were. And I would dust off the pottery shop, get a couple of helpers, and then we would start creating. And then eventually making a quid or a profit.

25

And so we always went through Northcote Pottery. We got our deliveries, you know, driven up by Northcote Pottery, Castlemaine and Won Wron. And they -- a step back with the program, the program that had been working with us and that the most expensive part of ceramics is the glazing, the aspect of the glazing, the -- colourants and etcetera.

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MR McAVOY: Uncle Jack, I'm going to show you some more footage from '*Bastardy*'. This time, it's the footage of you with your brother Archie. Okay.

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UNCLE JACK: Yes. Yes.

MR McAVOY: And if you - if you want me to stop - want me to stop, let me know.

**(Video '*Bastardy*' plays)**

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UNCLE JACK: What drive him silly was the police batons around his head, on his body, you know.

**(Video stopped)**

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MR McAVOY: I want to ask you, you spoke there about your brother's time in the police cells and the police batons and the time he spent in jail.

UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes, yes.

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MR McAVOY: How did it affect your brother, that time spent in - - -

UNCLE JACK: Those batons were not police batons. And I do remember telling the police that - my mistake, I was heavily addicted when this was being made and it just floated over. I should have said the authorities at Pentridge rounded on him with those batons. The problem with Archie - I was getting messages, when I was down in Won Wron, by Phillip Motherwell, an actor, playwright from the Pram Factory, drug dealer, and - he's dead now, Phil. But he sent messages down to Won Wron to me about what was happening to Archie in A division.

Words were - every escort day, a Thursday, another note was delivered to me about what was happening with Archie. And Phil said that there were three Yugoslavs in A division that were giving Archie a combination of Ajax and heroin, and they were shooting - he can't shoot himself up, so they were shooting it up his veins, and etcetera. And they would do anything they would like to him and that. They conned him one time to king hit the bloke next to him on the muster.

"Anybody. Just king hit him, Archie." And so he did do that. The bloke was knocked unconscious, Archie was bashed objecting to being arrested for doing such a - such an act by the officers, so the bigger batons came out and he was knocked. So they were both put in the meat wagon and taken over to G Division hospital, and the bloke that he knocked out woke up in that hospital, G Division, and saw Archie in a bed right opposite him. He wanted to jump out, find a knife and shiv Archie, kill him and that.

Then he heard who - that he was my brother, Jack Charles, that I was down in Won Wron, so he got a message down to me, down in Won Wron, to say that, "Jack, if your brother doesn't apologise to me for doing that I will shiv him. I will kill him." So I had the good fortune of asking the - the head teacher, mark Margaret Finlay at Won Wron to give me a person to person call from Won Wron to A division Education Unit and that.

And I spoke directly to Archie, and I said, "Archie, you will be killed if you don't apologise for this. I want you to go to his cell. He's waiting there for you, apparently, and just apologise to him. Tell him you are very sorry, okay. You won't do it again." All right. So he did do that and so everything was good. And then I get further words that - that he was then asked by these fellas to throw a big tin rubbish box - bin through the screws box, the - where the central security box, looking at all the wings and that, which he did do.

And, of course, they were prepared because these officers know what's happening in their own little world and - as Phil did. So they were - they were prepared this time with the long batons, and they bashed him to within an inch of his life and he recuperated for a week in G Division, and then they sent him, for doing that, to H division. Archie, as you can see, hasn't the mind to do what's required in H division. You're not allowed to look at the screws, the officers.

You're not allowed to eyeball them. You have to look away. And you have to salute every time - he can't do that. He doesn't do that, never done it before. He can't do it. So what do they do with him? They bash him into the stone, into the blue stone walls. Okay. This is what I hear from somebody who was there, still alive, living in my block of flats, who witnessed this.

MR McAVOY: H division is -

UNCLE JACK: H division.

5 MR McAVOY: - high security.

UNCLE JACK: So he was bashed and he was unconscious and all that kind of stuff. So I think the H division screws realised that they had a problem here. So they sent him up to Aradale for the criminally insane. No magistrate, no judges had ever sentenced my brother  
10 to a jail for the criminally insane where he was, as I said in that document, duly raped and mucked around with by so many people, because they also have had evidence of other people in that Aradale who were there and bore witness to what Archie was going through.

MR McAVOY: So when we see you and Archie together in the video that was just shown.  
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UNCLE JACK: I'm surprised because he comes out of Aradale. But he comes down because he knows I'm at George Wright Hostel. And I get the shock of my life when I see him coming across the street like this. And you know, all of us at the George Wright Hostel were really, you know, puzzled and really angry, etcetera. I tried to see if I could  
20 sue the Office of Correction on his behalf. But, you know, I'm a man doing parole, they are not going to - you know, do me - they are not going to listen to me, you know. I couldn't do anything for him.

Then the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, you know, would place him in their too hard baskets. The psych unit on the High Street in Northcote would you know, chase him  
25 up to give him his monthly shot or his fortnightly shot and they would have to cajole him, 30 bucks for his monthly shot, 15 bucks for his fortnightly shot and that. That's the only way they could, in those days, get Archie to come along to the psych unit. They would have to pick him up from somewhere. Who knows where, but, you know, they used to  
30 chase him around, hey, that mob up there.

So, yes, I was really, you know, I couldn't do anything. I felt inadequate because I was struggling looking after myself in those days and that. You know. It's one thing to be, you know, undertaking the - you know, a period of time where you are having your life  
35 documented on various cameras by people, friends of ABL and etcetera, and then to tell Archie's story in a car - in a van like that and then down at - down at the Salvos - what's that - the Anchorage down on the Yarra down there in Richmond and Abbotsford.

That was really difficult and etcetera. Very disturbing. But you know, I was a heavy user,  
40 so, again, I was immune to actually be in a position to try and steer to intervene and have an intervention in my own right towards Archie. I hadn't intervened in my own life, or be out of my own problems then, etcetera.

MR McAVOY: So Archie had many health problems?  
45

UNCLE JACK: He did have many health problems eventually. He had tuberculosis. He was blind in one eye, deaf in one ear. He had kidney failure. His - his rectum didn't work. He had to have one of those -- nappies and all that kind of stuff. And there was many more things wrong with him, and the only way he could see through this was to go out and coal bite  
50 bite -- in this insidious medical problems. And he still would go out and coal bite.

People - he had this - because he was deaf, he would shout, as you saw, "Excuse me, could you give me a so and so." People sitting on the coffee down there in Brunswick Street or Smith Street there would hurriedly give him money to stop him from spitting into their coffees and that, you know, and send him on his way and that.

5

A lot of people loved Archie. They saw that he was in great difficulty, struggling and that, and they would go out of their way to give him some help and that. You know. But it was beyond any of our - any of us. Beyond our ken to - to develop a strategy other than me trying to talk Royal Melbourne Hospital for the psych unit to accept him and to, you know - for the first of all, you know, trying to talk the doctors at St V's when had - tried to hit himself up, he would end up with a festering toxic arm and that. Blown up and that you know.

10

They said, "You've got to give him heroin. He will stay in bed if you give him heroin." But they never did. They don't like giving heroin or some hard downer to heroin - heroin users in our hospitals. So consequently he walks away. I was in the same boat when I was hospitalised and that. You know. If I was hanging about, hanging out, I would off too and that. So I knew Archie. He would often would walk out and would never be able to be followed through with proper medical attention and medications and etcetera. And nobody would ever give him that kind of substance that would actually settle him down, to be in this a position where we could - would - there was no place set up for that.

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MR McAVOY: I just want to take you back a little bit. You used the term "cold bite". That's asking people -

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UNCLE JACK: Coal bite, you are biting coal.

MR McAVOY: Asking people for money in the street.

30

UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes, yes. Coal biting. He was one of Melbourne's best class coal biters. I mean, he was well-known. He could be - he came up to me, he said, "I was waiting for a train at Flinders Street, Jack, and this old nun came up to me and said had I read the Bible and I said, yes, I had read Bible and that. And so she gave me a Bible. And in the Bible was \$100 note." He'd love it. And the Jewish people down in St Kilda, when he goes to coal bite there or Camberwell, they love him.

35

He comes back with notes, and he would go up to the flats here and he would spend largely, and a lot of people took advantage of him. Those people that took advantage of him, there was a - it was a two-way stretch. He needed them, actually, these people that took advantage of him, that were following him around as he was coal biting on the streets. Once he got a certain amount of money to it be able to afford a hit for him and a hit for them, then they would return back here and have their what is - shove it up the Warwick Farm and out he would go again immediately.

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So, yes, a lot of people couldn't have him stay at their places for too long because he wouldn't stay too long. No sooner had you thought you had put him to bed and the night was closed off, you know, and everything is good, everybody else has gone to bed, then you would hear the door slam. He's off.

MR McAVOY: I want to ask you some questions now, Uncle Jack, about the experiences you've had with the police. You must have had many experiences with the police in Victoria.

5 UNCLE JACK: I have, yes, many. Some good, some bad. But mostly good.

MR McAVOY: So mostly the police treated you well?

10 UNCLE JACK: Mostly, yes, yes, yes, yes. Why wouldn't you? I mean, they are big fellas. I'm only a little fella and that. And - but all - all through this, you know, I had this concept that I would, on every occasion when I was busted, then I knew what was required. Okay. I'm not that tired that I can't start cleaning up their books for them before getting locked up for the night. I will do as many as I can for you, okay. Sometimes I had to convince the  
15 Prahran police to bring in the police doctor to give me a shot of pethidine, and I would be warm and flushed and I would open up and I would admit to all of - because they had the numbers.

Any house that was robbed between certain amount of time and dawn was fair game. So they would point out on the map and sometimes they would sit me in a car and we would  
20 drive around houses. I said, "yeah, did I that one. That one. And that one too." And of course they would have to stop and then go and knock on the door and ask the occupants, "Were you robbed three months ago and a large sum of money taken from your office downstairs?" And that.

25 And some would say, yes, yes, yes. "We have a culprit here then." "Okay, can we have it recorded and that." "Yes, yes, okay." And then a couple of times, some of the houses that I did admit to, you know, robbing 35 grand from the middle drawer of one office downstairs and that, you know, "We have a fellow out here in the car, he said that he  
30 robbed you twice. On the first occasion he got \$35,000 and that. A little bit over and that."

And they said, "No, no, we have never been robbed." They would say, "How long have you lived here?" "25 years." "So you - he robbed you twice." "No, no, no, we were never  
35 robbed." So they would come back to the car and say, "Jack, they tell me you never came here." I told them, you know, the insides of the place, go in and check inside. They said, "No, we won't bother, Jack. You know the land. We believe you. You have robbed the place. So obviously this is untaxed money, untaxable money, black money, fair enough. Okay we can't do anything about that. And, Jack, you know, this mob here, at this house reckon you stole furs. We have never known you to steal furs Jack. What would you need  
40 furs for? The dealers don't take furs, do they?"

Say, "No, they don't, you know. And, anyway, it would be too much for me to carry furs and etcetera. Why would I want to steal furs?" So, yes, people were taking advantage of the fact that they were robbed.

45 MR McAVOY: So I want to ask you were there occasions on which you received rough treatment or abusive treatment from police?

UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes. Yes.

MR McAVOY: Do you want to tell the Commissioners about - about any of those occasions?

5 UNCLE JACK: There was occasion when I was living with a well-known gangster up in  
Camberwell, Camberwell police picked me up, detectives, and drove me up into the bush  
and said that they were going to kill me and leave me up there if I didn't tell them, you  
know, about this gangster and what we have been up to down Venus Bay, down the bottom  
end of Victoria and that. So I said, "Well, you fellas" - my words exactly, "Well, you fellas  
10 are going to do what you fellas are going to do, you know, but I'm not going to tell you  
anything."

So it took them a while and we were driving around, you know, in the dark up there, in the  
hills, and etcetera, and I fully expected to be shot and dumped because I've heard of so  
many others that were shot and dumped around the place and that, you know. I mean, I had  
15 to hide, at one stage, because I knew another well-known detective wanted to use me to do  
some housebreakings for him. So the people at the Pram Factory said, "You had better  
hide, Jack. So and so is looking for you. He wants you to do a series of burgs. And he's  
killed people too." So I hid.

20 But the best one, I thought, of all that lot was the young red-headed police constable in the  
Prahran lock-up. He - I was having a go at him and he pulled out his 38 and he shoved it in  
his mouth - in my mouth. I tried to get him to pull the trigger and that. He fought vainly.  
You know, we fought and that. He wanted - you know, he wouldn't pull the trigger, the  
bugger. And he yanked the pistol out of my mouth and it knocked one of my beautiful  
25 buck teeth, big chip out and that.

So I was really upset about that. I was the first Aboriginal patient in the first Aboriginal  
dental clinic here. I forget his name now, who ran that. And so he was very pleased they  
had me, you know, to pull out that - the rest of that buck teeth. It started rotting and that.  
30 So, yes. So, yes, there are things like that that happened. Most times, they would be happy  
with me because I would clean up their books.

I mean, it was reported in '*The Age*' that Mr Charles, who has recently been, you know,  
arrested by the police, has been admitting to so many burglaries over a certain period of  
35 time in Toorak, South Melbourne, Brighton - not South Melbourne - South Yarra, and  
Brighton and etcetera, and Mr Charles believes that it's Aboriginal unfinished business if  
he doesn't admit to these crimes and that.

40 So, yes, I cleaned the books up for them, and I don't believe I admitted to any house that I  
didn't burglarise. Why would I? They became 700, over 700 houses in the space of three  
months at one stage, so says the jacks over there in Prahran. And we had this conversation,  
they said, "Jack, look, thanks for helping us up. You've cleared the books up, you know,  
but, look, Jack, we can't go charging you with 700 houses - over 700 houses. What about  
45 75? Would you be happy with that?" So it was a - negotiable number. "Yeah, let's do with  
that - go with that one."

MR McAVOY: I want - Uncle Jack, I want to ask you some more questions now about  
your accommodation. We have heard your evidence this afternoon that for many years you  
lived on the street. But you finally did get some accommodation.  
50

UNCLE JACK: Yes, when I turned 60.

MR McAVOY: Sorry?

5 UNCLE JACK: When I turned 60.

MR McAVOY: When you turned 60.

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

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MR McAVOY: And that, in part, is shown on the *'Bastardy'* documentary.

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

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MR McAVOY: We might just show a clip to show your unit.

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

**(Video *'Bastardy'* plays)**

20

**(Video stopped)**

MR McAVOY: So how did you come about getting that unit?

25

UNCLE JACK: The Victorian Health Service, when I went in for some reason or another, they said, "Jack, we've got a place for you, you know, opposite housing on Westgarth Street, just up the road from WT Onus Hostel where the footy oval is." I said, "I know the block, yes, yes." And so, "Would you like it?" I said, "I would love it, yes." And so I got that unit and I've been in that block ever since.

30

MR McAVOY: And had you ever -

UNCLE JACK: It was a bed-sit at first. Now I've got two rooms.

35

MR McAVOY: And so you rent that, do you?

UNCLE JACK: Hey?

MR McAVOY: Do you rent that?

40

UNCLE JACK: I rent that, yes.

MR McAVOY: Who from?

45

UNCLE JACK: Huh?

MR McAVOY: Who from?

UNCLE JACK: Collingwood Office of Housing

50

Yoorrook Justice Commission

MR McAVOY: Did you apply to Collingwood Office of Housing?

UNCLE JACK: No, I didn't, no.

5 MR McAVOY: So all those years on the street, why do you think you didn't apply for some sort of housing?

10 UNCLE JACK: The penny hadn't dropped that I should. As - as it took them a long time, my friends, my user friends to talk me into getting the dole. I wouldn't - I wouldn't do it. I didn't take the Queen's shilling until I was something like 40-something, 45 or something. It took a long time for them to convince me that I should get the dole or the sickness benefits.

15 MR McAVOY: So did it make a difference to you, having your own place?

UNCLE JACK: Well, yes, it did. You might say I kind of weaned myself off doing burglaries after that. It was on my way of pulling up and that.

20 MR McAVOY: So after you - after you were allocated this unit and you moved in, you had one more - one more stint -

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

25 MR McAVOY: - at Her Majesty's pleasure.

30 UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes, yes, after that. But the second time, I realised that I had already been on the road of redemption because I've done the Marumali program in that last prison sentence, 2005, delivered by Lorraine Peeters and her daughter Shana - Shaan, I should say. And the penny dropped for me there. And it had led me to undertake a complete reviewing of my life once I had done that program.

MR McAVOY: And -

35 UNCLE JACK: And that I - yes, as I say, you got 17 hours alone in your slot and you can turn the sound of the television down, and that's what I did. The Muramali program worked a treat for me, because it sponsored - you know, it generated within me an interest in leaving this jail this time not homeless but with a key to my unit in my property and that I intend to come out and go straight back to my unit, picked up by my sister here at the front of the jail, Port Phillip, with ABL documentary - documenting my coming out of  
40 prison for the last time.

45 Hair blowing in the wind, coming through Collingwood-Fitzroy, realising that things hadn't changed much. But coming back to number 1 Holmes Street, back to my unit, which was still a bed-sit in those days. But, yes, that was the ultimate, that I - from then on I would find a way of - of making a life better for me. And, of course, I had already been approached, as I said earlier, by a bunch of ex-Box Hill Boys' Home boys just before I left that jail, who said, "You have to wait at home for that phone call from Ryan Carlisle and Thomas."



So that's why it worked a treat for me that I would come out, you know, that I would be available for that call. I - not only that, I also did the Elders Leadership Skills course with Howard Edwards, "Choco", various destinations on the east coast, at conference centre, women in another one and that, meeting Elders or people that were purporting - wanting to be Elders in their own right at this conference centre. So it was a good thing to have undertaken and learnt from that.

Doing the - finishing off the doco, and making an effort in my own right, sharing the way I was going about it, of jumping off the methadone. All of this took two years, two years. So by 2008 I was clean. I was off the methadone. I had this clarity of mind, and I was just about to start to work on so-called dreaded -- down there in the Collingwood Flats then, etcetera, as an Elder.

MR McAVOY: And so can I ask you just to - just to go back a step. You can explain for the Commissioners what the Marumali program.

UNCLE JACK: The Marumali program delivered by Aunty Lorraine Peeters was a wonderful program that got us to - took us back to what was missing in our lives: Do you know who you are and that? Why don't you know who you are? You know. Did not your mother, your father, your uncle, your aunty, your brothers, your kinfolk tell you what mob you belong to? People were getting upset over this month-long program, the Marumali program. They were throwing chairs around because they were so upset with what they were being asked to investigate about their own lives, etcetera. So with me it was a realisation that, yes, I had had already thought, you know, about - because if I'm such a respected person that even the screws in prison are calling me Uncle by that time, I should live up to that, to that. If they are going to be calling me Uncle it's a definite sign of respect, the upmost respect. They don't know you but they call you Uncle and that. So I have to live up to that. So I had great intentions of leaving that prison, great plans and that. Contacting the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Dicky Wynne, writing him petitions during this period of jumping off the methadone. You have to have something to do when you have these sleepless nights as you are jumping off the methadone. So I would be down in the computer room downstairs and I would be writing petitions to Minister Wynne, and then I would be hand delivering them to the back of Parliament, to the security mob there, or his offices on the Smith Street strip there. That's how far I went. And I was realising, hang on, I'm doing exactly what William Barak and all that mob are doing - were doing and that. You know. I'm following in their footsteps. Perhaps I will gain entry into Parliament someday myself. You know. And lo and behold I did do, giving evidence at that series of inquiries four years ago as to the reason why certain Elders believe that certain criminal records could be expunged within the space of three, five and 10 years, and I was there for the reading that Bill in the Lower House. Then I went out and do a play, come back from New Zealand just as the borders closed and there, Fitzroy Free Legal Service rang me up they said "You have had a win, Unc. While you were away, Daniel Andrews put his own bill into the upper chamber. It's become legislated now, Victoria has a spent conviction scheme. Good on you Unc."

So, that's it. That's the kind of thing I had intended myself to be doing when I left in 2005 to be a leading black light. I hadn't realised that Dicky Wynne would not or Yarra Council, or the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service would take me seriously. How could they? It's beyond their ken, they have never had a criminal of my stature coming in saying, "Give me the old Aboriginal Health Service. I want to start a workshop here." Okay. Like the - it will

be the Nindebiya workshop mark II, like the one we had around the corner at George Street, 99 George Street but this time I will run it, you know. But, no, because that didn't happen and because the system, you know, wouldn't accept me, jails wouldn't accept me, youth detention centres wouldn't accept me, the arts community accepted me. They realised that I was talking and performing without any poo, without any drug enhancements anymore. And they love nothing better than somebody performing their pieces on stage or in front of a camera with honesty and integrity. And so I was given a lot of work. If the system, the humanities couldn't accept me, the arts community right around Australia accepted me.

MR McAVOY: But in the things that you've done in '*Bastardy*' and since, you have opened your private life up to the country. You've been very generous with some of the most difficult parts of your life. Why - what's pushed you to do that?

UNCLE JACK: Because it was a way that if I was going to, down the track, be an instrument for the change in others and that, you know, I would have to be upfront. The penny hadn't - you know, developed - the penny thought hadn't really developed then, but it was on this tack, it was on the way to become a realisation. So I thought being honest with yourself, people will see various aspects of their own lives that they find a big struggle or that they find hard to be coping with, etcetera. Well, this old fella has been struggling and he's made some move in this direction, perhaps I can go that direction. But it takes a measure of, you know, the full measure, I should say, of honesty and integrity to do that. You have to be truthful to yourself. And my basic concept, my motto was that real Aboriginals shouldn't be - shouldn't be shooting up white powder, we start behaving like white people, stealing things - bashing our womenfolk, disrespecting our culture. So that's - and I've noticed that this is bouncing off other people because they do come up to me and they say - white and black - they've been on the same pathway, they have trodden the same difficult, crooked road that I've - that I've walked.

MR McAVOY: Thank you. Can I put it this way, that you are showing them that there is still a path to redemption.

UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

MR McAVOY: No matter -

UNCLE JACK: No matter who you are.

MR McAVOY: And how ugly your pathway has been.

UNCLE JACK: No matter what you are and, you know, the idea now is that it's moving into - to youth detention centres and Malmsbury, Langi Kal Kal, Fulham and Barwon. Some of the fellas that look, we have a spent conviction scheme fellas, but are you black enough to take it seriously? Are you African-Australians, you know, black enough to take it seriously? What about you gubbers? Can you take this seriously? Is it time for you - for the penny to drop, or do you want to be a gangster with a criminal record the rest of your life? The system needs you to come in, they can't - they can't exist unless you play their game. These were the kind of words I was zooming in into Barwon, Fulham, Langi Kal Kal and Fulham jail once I heard that we had a win with the Daniel Andrews Government.

It needs kind of work like this and follow-through so there will be some follow-through down the track.

5 MR McAVOY: Did - does the cultural aspects of Aboriginal life, also play a role in helping people find their pathway back?

10 UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes, because real blackfellas should be doing what they were doing. They are behaving like white people. So that's - that's - it's inappropriate, you know. Aboriginal lore doesn't allow you to allow your feet to tread on to somebody else's land or their property. Aboriginal lore doesn't allow you to use your hands to take that to which it don't belong to you. Aboriginal lore means that you have to respect culture. Culture above all is the ability to be inclusive and open up with everybody around you.

15 MR McAVOY: Being able to deliver these messages and be involved in other people's lives, has it done something for you as well?

20 UNCLE JACK: Yes, there is nothing I like better than - I will be sitting down at Moses café, adjacent to the Friends of the Earth and someone, white or black, you know, young or old, will bounce up, super-excited and say, "Uncle, I'm off my bloody methadone." So excited and that, because they see me in the flesh, they have to - they are tripping over themselves to inform me that they have had a success, they are off the methadone and they haven't regressed and that. And there they see me sitting there, so that's why they are super-excited, they come up. It's happened down in St Kilda as I'm having my lattes and cream cakes down there. They love - they love it. They are bouncing up to me and I love it because it's fulfilling. It means that what I've been doing works.

MR McAVOY: So do you think - do you have any views about what could be done better or what other things could be done for inmates?

30 UNCLE JACK: Yes, I have. I have been discussing these things with my intern friend Francesca there, and we intend to be seeking my office space down there at - down there at Collingwood Yards where I will be writing the next book, where I will be writing a series of annotation monologues to be delivered to the youth detention centres. I want to work on them first. I have grand ideas to record a - a particular meditation monologue. Because I heard it - a little after I did come back I was picked up by a black hire car and delivered to Fox Studios down South Melbourne way, and I was to record a meditation narrative designed to calm the savage beast of many a worrywart from their great anxiety. And it has been working. I heard that voice myself and it convinced me that I should enter the trams and trains using my prowess, my voice, and get into the minds of prisoners, record these, get them to relax, breathe properly. Alright, as you do all this you know - I won't tell you, but the point is that I want them to start reviewing their lives as I had done via the Marumali program.

45 MR McAVOY: Do you think that there are a greater role for elders such as yourself - - -

UNCLE JACK: I think it is imperative and I think it should be - - -

MR McAVOY: - - - in the jails.

UNCLE JACK: I think it is imperative and I think every state should allow local Elders from around the place. Invariably we would be related to many of the prisoners that go - into the prisons that we go to. So it's obligatory and - and it's right and proper that Elders, some still may have a criminal record, still may not have, you know, gotten the gumption up enough to go to a court of law and say, "I want my criminal record expunged. I need to go back into prison." The idea is when we negotiate with the Daniel Andrews Government and the Office of Corrections that they will allow people that I want to pluck from the system to come, let's have a serious conversation, "Are you game enough to go back into that prison, okay, to start working on others. It will strengthen your own resolve if you're honest about it. And you want to, you know -" Chris Austin, a well-known armed robber, he works now with the - The Torch program. A bunch of blackfellas that go into our prisons and collect the artwork from the prisoners, and he's just come out of jail, Chris Austin. But they have allowed him to go back a fully paid member of this Torch program mob, to collect artwork, pottery, from prisoners, take them to a dedicated place where they will clean them up, frame them and exhibit them at Glen Iris Town Hall and they have a win. They sell many of these arts. Some of these artworks are \$35,000. Some of these artworks from these prisoners, you know, just generate money. So some of them are leaving bankrolled already, no need to go to the Dole office and that. And through their art they have also taken that journey of redemption and are now functioning like Chris, fully back with his family and they are doing something fantastic for the jail community and for art lovers around - Ken, I mean that Jeff Kennett had determined that any money that these prisoners get from the sale of their works be put in a special trust account in the jail and they get a cheque handed to them upon their release. So some of them are walking out, as I say, bankrolled to over 100 grand.

So there's this success, you know, just one - one person, Chris Austin. He's a fine example and that, going back to his missus, the kids love him and that. I saw him yesterday at the news - up at - up at the picture theatre up there next to the museum with his kids and that and he's telling me how successful this year's, you know, Torch program will be. And the fact that the documentary *'The Art of Incarceration'* will be screened shortly. I do the narration for *'The Art of Incarceration'*. So, yes, the idea is that we negotiate with the Daniel Andrews Government, with the Office of Corrections, and try and - get them to seriously think about reinvesting in community hubs around the state. Victoria needs to show by example, let's get some of these old derelict buildings in some of these small towns, the highway bypasses the town so there is a lot of empty buildings in say Horsham, Shepparton, Kamarooka, all these townships and that have got these empty large edifices and that. So the idea is that we go to the local councils and ask them to give us that building for - we will give you nine or six peppercorns for it, for a 99-year lease like this building and that. We want to do a workshop here. We want to start a workshop. If we get the building, we will inevitably have a lot of people donating cottage industry bits and pieces into that building; computers and that. It needs to be refunded. The notion that the State Government needs to redevelop community hubs, need to fully fund them at this time, let's have a proper review, an auditory view, you know order - order - an audit - black and white audit people, you know, auditing the finances of the building.

Let's run them with honesty and integrity this time around. And I will be saying to them, we understand why - I understand why - Daniel - why you had to close and defund many of the community hubs around the state because you saw your work getting - like I saw, we weren't getting any big black bangs out of those black bucks. So you abandoned them. And since you abandoned them and that there was a sharp rise in young ones going into

our youth detention centres and adults in prisons. So we need to reverse that. You need to trust us once more. Let's do it this time with honesty. Trust me, we are Aboriginal. You know, that's the notion and that - give us the buildings, let's have a - a - a compact with local councils in these towns. Give us these buildings and that people coming in back into that town, whether they are Somalian, whether they are gubbers or they are Aboriginal, can come to that place in the course of a lazy day. Police can drop people there rather than take them to the cells. People can do their CVO, their paroles there, etcetera. We will have meeting rooms there. Certain people in that community will be gainfully employed as special people to be working and to have these conversations, private conversations, meetings and that regarding domestic violence and that, you know. Some magistrates may have to sentence people to take - and undertake a domestic violence course with the local workshop. We call them workshops because you have to work on yourself, on your community, you know.

15 So that's the idea of redeveloping the Nindebiya workshop mark II. It won't be called Nindebiya workshop because that mob wherever we take it to, wherever that accepts it might have another name, but I believe it should be "workshop" because there's lots of work to be done for a lot of people.

20 MR McAVOY: Thank you for sharing that, Uncle Jack. There's a wealth of insight in your observations of many years within the system. I just want to - we are very close to the end now, and although we are due to finish at 4.30, I propose with the Commissioners' indulgence to continue on for another 10 minutes or so and that way Uncle Jack won't need to return. Are you happy to continue, Uncle Jack?

25 UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes --

MR McAVOY: Okay. I would just like to - I just want to show you video number - a video from the *'Who Do You Think You Are?'* episode.

30 **(Video of *'Who Do You Think You Are'* played)**

**(Video stopped)**

35 MR McAVOY: So, I mean, the *'Who Do You Think You Are?'* program gave you access to things that you might never have otherwise gotten access to.

40 UNCLE JACK: No. And people like myself with the high profile, you know, are the lucky ones who get plucked by the likes of Alan Biggs from SBS, Channel Ten, *'Who Do You Think You Are?'* mob. They have done, you know, Cathy Freeman and Goodesy and others and that, and so I feel that, you know, I'm blessed that - that they managed to pluck me and ask me my permission would I undertake such a journey. I hadn't realised the Victorian journey was easy-peasy. You know, you don't see much emotion showing with me. I'm - you know, I'm - I'm not one to be pulling my hair out and tears and sobbing and all that kind of stuff and that. Much of these, you know, I don't show much emotion, etcetera. And I believe that I'm just in that unique position, having a high profile I would never as a member of the Stolen Generation be given this opportunity. So I've used this to reach into the - the minds of prisoners, telling them that already the system has got a copy of your DNA, you know. Are you game enough to send another spit in a jar to ancestry.com and that. Can you find out how far back your generation can go? Look, I can go back five

generations, to Tasmania, just after the Invasion as the slaughter was happening. I can go back to that period of time and that, you know. That's important. Can you do it? Are you game enough to do it? Do you really want to do it? You know.

5 MR McAVOY: There is also, I detect from your evidence earlier, some resentment about not getting access to that information earlier in your life.

10 UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes, yes. I'm - I don't know, maybe the great Bunjil upstairs or something has - we like to say keeps a watch on his charges and that, you know, has determined that I should stay alive and lucid enough to be hanging around waiting for that magic moment when SBS would come along and allow me to undertake such a journey. I mean, you know, the highs and lows, the highs was the Victorian story and that. And you don't see me high, you know, high emotional and that. But, you know, my heart is beating but the last - the last part of that - that series, that last episode, the last week of that filming  
15 for me completely floored me and I have this, I like to say, profound sense of piss-offed-ness that it's come to me at such a late stage. But then again, it is never too late to be receiving this.

20 MR McAVOY: I just would like to play for you this last clip from that episode of *'Who Do You Think You Are?'*.

UNCLE JACK: Okay, good.

**(Video of *'Who Do You Think You Are'* Plays)**

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**(Video stopped)**

MR McAVOY: That ending to the episode has you achieving a state of completeness.

30 UNCLE JACK: Yes, yes. Lost and found. I wrote that in the book as a matter of fact, dedicated to the lost and found.

MR McAVOY: Is that - that information and that ability to be found something you would wish for other Aboriginal people?

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40 UNCLE JACK: I wish so many had been, you know, given this opportunity, and the idea is that, you know, keep up the work and talking to them using my fine sense of con-artistry to convince them that perhaps this is a way they could go, you know. Maybe they couldn't get as much information as - the amount of money spent by SBS, Channel 10 to research and discover that, but it's in the archives. Your story is in the archives. If you begin by going into, you know, say Maxine Briggs and the local library, the Koorie Heritage Trust, be around, have the conversations with them like I did, I had told Uncle Jimmy Berg before I left the jail, before he booted me out, he was my parole officer, but here was the man that invented the Koorie Heritage Trust. And I told him I needed to write a book down the track, Uncle Jimmy. And he says alright. So I needed to find out who my great-greats were, where I come from. "That's easy Jack, I will look you up". It's the two girls, Margaret and Jennifer Bates at the Koorie Heritage Trust. They were in King Street at the time and so I went there quite often, regularly, between doing gigs and etc, travelling  
45 around the world and around the country, you know, under the shows that I was doing. I was required to go overseas, etcetera. But when I found time come back to King Street,  
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after I come back from the mother bloody country doing *'Jack Charles v The Crown'* over there, come back to King Street, find out a little bit more and then they went, moved over to - to Fed Square. And I got lots more information there. And I can't wait to start having a conversation with those two girls about what's been recently divulged by so many through this particular little black duck.

I'm so thrilled, it's exciting, that, you know, my - I have made my mark and I'm still making my mark and it's only because I now know who I am. I was a lost child but now I am found.

MR McAVOY: Uncle Jack, they are all the questions I have for you. I want to thank you for your dedication and your perseverance today with all the questions and giving of yourself.

UNCLE JACK: Yes.

MR McAVOY: The Commissioners may have some questions for you before we rise. Chair, are there any questions from the Commissioners?

CHAIR: No questions, except to thank you and your family for sharing this with us.

UNCLE JACK: Thank you. Thank you very much.

MR McAVOY: Commissioner, I will tender as Exhibit 1.0 the statement of Uncle Jack Charles and annexed to that are Exhibits 1.1 to Exhibit 1.4 which are the attachments to that statement which include the statement from the Royal Commission to which Uncle Jack has given evidence and the material from the documentary and television program that have been referred to in evidence.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr McAvoy, for the exhibits. 1.1 to Exhibit 1.4 we thank you for those attachments.

#### **EXHIBIT 1.0 STATEMENT OF UNCLE JACK CHARLES**

#### **EXHIBIT 1.1 TO 1.4 ANNEXURES TO THE STATEMENT OF UNCLE JACK CHARLES**

MR McAVOY: Thank you, Commissioner. Now, when the Commission rises this afternoon, we will next sit on Thursday morning, 28 April. And the witness will be Uncle Johnny Lovett, taken by my learned friend co-Senior Counsel Ms Fiona McLeod. I have nothing further this afternoon but to congratulate the Commissioners and the Commission on what appears to be a very successful first day of evidence in the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

CHAIR: Thank you.

SPEAKER: Thank you for your time. We are very grateful - for Yoorrook's Commissioner Atkinson.

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5 COMMISSIONER ATKINSON: Thank you Uncle Jack on behalf of the Commission and Legal Counsel, also we -- would just like to leave with you in your presentation. And sharing the gift I just want to quote you on a couple of words that you said in regards to truth, justice, of course and that is being honest with yourself is a full measure of your cultural integrity, and as Tony added, is a path to redemption. Thank you.

10 UNCLE JACK: Thank you. It's been an honour to have gone through this process. It's very timely for me. I feel that I have lived a fulfilling life and it still continues to be fleshed out with my future engagements down the track, with all kinds of people.

CHAIR: Thank you. We thank you for your generosity and we thank you for sharing this historic moment with us.

15 **ADJOURNED 4:52 PM UNTIL THURSDAY, 28 APRIL 2022 AT 10 AM**