

Yoorrook Justice Commission

Statement of Barry Jacobs

My name's Barry Jacobs. My grandmother was originally from Naracoorte, South Australia and my mob is Jindali.

I grew up in Geelong. I'm 59 years old and trying to connect with my past.

In my supported statement, I talk about my experiences growing up, my attempts to learn about my culture, and my experiences with police and the mental health system.

My experiences growing up

I was the oldest of five siblings. I used to help my mother by cooking and cleaning, looking after my brothers and my sisters.

I was sexually abused as a child by a neighbour from the ages of eight till 10. I still remember the house. I still remember his bedroom. I still remember what he did to me. But I moved forward with my life. I didn't let it get me, didn't let it beat me down.

I spent most of my life in Geelong. I swam. I started swimming at the age of six. I joined the local swim club. I used to swim a mile every morning. I got into diving, got asked to train for the Olympics when I was 13, but I lost my nerve. I played footy from the age of seven. Always been sporty.

I love both my parents even though my dad did some terrible things. The drink was his demon.

My mother has spoken about the fact that my grandmother had twins that died at birth. There's no record of a birth certificate, there's no record of a death certificate. We don't know who the father was. She never really spoke a lot about her past. I think she had a tough upbringing. I think that's why the drink got her as well.

My father had a hard life. They were all put in an orphanage. My grandmother couldn't feed them. She went walkabout, disappeared. My father spent most of his childhood in the

orphanage. He got out when he started high school. He went to the army, did five years in the army as a gunner. I never even knew about that. It was never even talked about when I was a kid. He had a medal from doing service. I never even saw it.

My connection to culture and community

It's later in life that I've tried to find a connection. Not just for me, but for my children and my grandchildren. It's important that they are proud of their past. I've identified as Aboriginal. My children identify as Aboriginal. My grandchildren identify as Aboriginal. I'm proud of it.

My mum said that she never ever registered as being Aboriginal on her birth certificates, because they were still taking children up to 1974. She was scared that that they would take us. She didn't even know she could get any help if she had have declared that we were Aboriginal. She just didn't know there was services out there to help her, you know?

So, I'm desperate to find out more about my past. I'm desperate to find out more about what happened, how my grandmother got from Naracoorte in South Australia, to Geelong. I want to know more about my past.

From the research I've done they talk about the Aboriginals being down the road, by the creek. There were 12 different mobs from the ocean up through, into the mountains. A lot of them were run out of town, a lot of them were killed. It must have been a horrible place, it must have been.

What's good is connecting, like I have with Mullum Mullum Indigenous Group, feeling a part of a group, being recognised as being Indigenous. Being able to learn about my culture, you know? We've made didgeridoos, we've made boomerangs. We've done a smoking ceremony; we've done a fire-starting ceremony. I want to absorb more, I want to know more about my culture, you know? I want to know more about my past. I want my children to know more about their past. I want my grandchildren to know more about their past and I want them to be proud of their past.

Because the injustices alone, you know, just because of your skin colour or because of your history that gives people the right to chase you out of a town, to kill you. That side of things eats at me. Because I can't find out anymore.

I wasn't there when they gave out the stamps on our foreheads to declare us as Aboriginals and, you know, people look at you and they expect you to somehow justify. Because I'm not black-black. My past is my past. I know my father's mother was Aboriginal. I can show you a photo. You can see it in him, you know? His nickname growing up was "Blackfella".

I just want to be able to find out about my past and try and put the pieces together. So, I hope that someone can help me put the pieces together. From the Indigenous side of things, I'm getting connected with that now. I'm getting connected with people. But it's a mystery, it's a bloody mystery. So many records were destroyed.

My experiences with police and the mental health system

It started with a bit of harassment, just kid stuff and it got constant. I lost the plot a bit, because of the deaths that had happened in the family. And the police, I'd rung the police one day, because I believed there was someone in the roof.

The police held me and my daughter at the back of the property for 30 minutes, waiting for another police or two police officers to show up. So even if they had been in the roof they had the opportunity to get down and walk out the fucking front door and out the front yard without anyone seeing them, because we were held at the back of the property.

Why they treated me like that, why they didn't go into the house and just check right from the start I don't know. I can't explain it. The next thing I know, two hours' later I'm in my workshop and four police show up with an ambulance. I was spoken to by a nurse or I think she was a nurse. She suggested that I should go to hospital and have a rest. I didn't argue. I agreed. I went along peacefully. I got in the ambulance. The police got in the ambulance to make sure I didn't take off. They stayed at the house the entire time. I was under arrest. I wasn't free to go anywhere. I certainly wasn't free to decide not to go.

So as far as I'm concerned, I was under arrest. They didn't ask about my Aboriginality. They didn't ask nothing. They were just gung-ho on getting me in the ambulance and getting me up to Box Hill, up to Upton House. We got to Box Hill. While I was waiting to get admitted I'd had a spinal injury. I used to have back spasms. I couldn't control them and stress used to induce them. I would hit the floor; I would jerk uncontrollably until I decided to stop. I had no way of stopping it. It would just sit there and ride it out or lie there and ride it out. I took one of those fits, spasms before they admitted me. They never asked

me about my spinal injury even though there was a record at the hospital. They never asked me about anything. They thought I was putting it on.

The police came at the hospital. They said nothing about me ever being done under a Section 10. I didn't find out any of that until four or five days later. I was knocked out for the first two and a half days. I was held in the cells for three days. It wasn't until I told them I was going to go on a hunger strike. I would not eat until they let me out. The police never said anything about being under arrest. I felt compelled. I felt I had no choice, but to go with them.

So those two police officers stayed at the house while I got my stuff together. One police officer got back into the divisional van and one got in the ambulance. I wasn't free to go anywhere. I had no choice. They never mentioned anything about sectioning me, nothing. It wasn't until 20 days later, as I said, when I got to speak to the Aboriginal liaison officer who was a female. I can't remember her name. And I got to speak to the ombudsman and even he was disgusted by what happened to me.

The next thing I know I'm led into a room, a concrete cell. I looked, there was six to eight people. All I heard was, "One, two, three. Get him". I saw people running at me. I threw my arms out. I don't know, like, I got hit front on, taken to the ground, rolled over. I had a security guard jump on my back. I had another security guard twist my arm, my left arm. And the more I told him to get off, because I couldn't breathe; the more I told him to get off, because I've had a spinal injury he turned around to me and said, "You can get fucked, cunt".

He got me a headlock and he dug it in. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't breathe. Someone come up behind me, stabbed me in the back with a fucking needle of whatever it was he gave me. All I know it was a black, African – I don't know if he was a doctor or a nurse. I think he was a nurse. So, he wasn't even a doctor.

They never even spoke to me beforehand other than they said, "We're going to give you an injection". I said, "I don't like injections. Give me a tablet". That was my mistake. That's when they rushed me, that's when they jumped on me, that's when they kneed me. That's when they twisted my arm, held me down like an animal.

I then had my belt ripped out of my pants. Not taken out, ripped out, taking all the belt loops with it. I was picked up, thrown into a concrete cell three metres by three metres,

with a two-inch mattress, no blanket, nothing in a pair of shorts and a T-shirt for two and a half days. They knocked me out for two and a half days. They let me out into the main part of the cell. It was five days later they let me out, into the main part of the hospital, like, the wing and I got to speak to the Aboriginal liaison officer.

They never made any attempt to find out about my Aboriginality. They never attempted to find out anything. They treated me like an animal. They treated me like I was a crook, like I was a criminal. I had done nothing. I had done nothing to even given any indication that I was going to be violent. I wasn't violent. At no stage was I violent. So, at no stage did they mentioned I was being sectioned. I went voluntarily, because it was suggested that I get a few days in hospital to give my head a rest and the police came in the ambulance.

As I said, I was held for five and a half weeks I think it was. I was fed Valium; I was fed whatever other drugs. I wasn't given a choice and I have like, a right to choose what medication I decide to take. They didn't give me any of those choices. They didn't give me anything. They never even bothered to ask about my background. They never even bothered to ask my wife about my background. My wife could have told them about my Aboriginality. The police never even bothered to check. They didn't notify anyone that they took me in custody, like they're supposed to. They notified nobody.

And the hospital never recognised it. The hospital never asked the question until, like I said, four or five days later when I spoke to that girl, the liaison officer at the hospital. They never even apologised for it. They never apologised for any of it, and I don't want to see another person get admitted into Upton House and get treated like a dog, like I was treated, whether I was white or black, or yellow or pink, or orange.

I don't want to see another person ever get treated like that again, you know, regardless of the Indigenous side of things. They never gave me any opportunity. They only had to ask. Every day I live with it and I'll continue to live with it for the rest of my life. They treated me like I was a criminal, and I wasn't a criminal. I was a human being. Yes. I'm Indigenous and I'm proud I'm Indigenous.

I want them to ask a basic question, a basic question like they have to do when they interview a person. "Are you Indigenous?" I want them to have the responsibility that they have to make the necessary reports. I want the hospital to ask the question. It's a basic question. It should be one of the first questions they ask and they didn't ask it so, therefore,

there's a breakdown in their own procedure. There's a breakdown in the police procedure. I want that changed.

I don't want people to feel like second class citizens, because they mention the word "Indigenous". You know, it doesn't make us dirty. So I just hope it never happens again to anyone and I hope that this Royal Commission changes things, and I hope it mends some fences.

END OF STATEMENT