

**Yoorrook Justice Commission**  
**Statement of Christina Secombe**

My name's Christina Secombe and I'm a Wotjobaluk woman.

I'm one of six kids.

My mother's Aboriginal obviously. My father's non-Aboriginal. He was a plant operator, so most times he was away working.

Growing up, we were living in a chaotic house. My mother would argue with my grandmother. But my grandmother, she was my safe go to person. I found myself at six years old, seven years old putting my baby brother into a pram and leaving home to go to my grandmother's home just to get away from it all, you know, and I'd stay with her. She was my safe zone.

As a kid and as a teenager you don't have any understanding of why this is going on, why are you growing up like this, you know? Thinking why is your father the total opposite of what your mother is. Your father is there. Your father is constant. But mum would drop us off at school and she'd say, "I'll come back and pick you up, you know, you're away here". So, we'd get out from school, waiting, waiting, waiting, no mum, you know?

Dads at work and we don't know where mum is. So, we would have to leave. We'd go to our grandmother's, and we'd wait, wait for her to come. Six months' later we don't know where mum is. Mums still gone. We have no clue where she is. She would take off.

That then led into my sister stepping in and having to step up and take care of us younger kids. So, she became a mother at 14, taking care of us. So, she went to work at 15, tried to make an extra bit of money, you know, while our father was away, working. Then when she was at work I had to then step up and take care of my siblings. So that affected my education. It affected her education. We couldn't attend school, you know?

We had to make sure the kids were fed, they were clothed, they were at school. So, we were left then in adulthood uneducated. Because mum would come home and then to us kids there would be no explanation of where mums been. Mums gone. She's home now, but for how long? And that's how our lives were. We grew up. Mum was there, mum was gone. Mum was there, mum was gone. Had no clue why.

She had been gone. And then jump to her having the youngest kid, she would then take me away with her and she would go away and meet up with a family of my youngest brother who is my half-brother. She had another partner. So, she would drag me along and I would take care of my younger brother as my own child at seven. So, I became the mother, taking care of him and I couldn't understand, "Why are you doing this? Taking me away from my father, from my siblings, from my cousins, from my grandmother. Why are you doing this?" but there's no explanation of anything.

The one memory that stood out to me was there was an argument between my mum and her partner then and we walked out. Then we had to walk from where we were, 100ks to Hamilton. She was carrying the bags and I'm carrying the baby. We got to the police station, and they said, "Oh, jump in the back of the divvy wagon and we'll take you home".

I remember getting in the back of the divvy wagon, being taken home, but then I felt isolated. I felt isolated from my siblings, from my father, from my cousins, because I was the one that she chose to drag along with her when it got too much for her. The reality of being a wife, a mother, it was too much for her. So, she would leave, but then I felt isolated.

I have no connection to my sister; I have no connection to my brother, and I have no connection to my cousins. So that was lost along the way.

I had no social life as a child, because you can't bring friends home. So, the only friends that you have are your cousins and, you know, other Kooris in the community. You can't have other friends, school friends come home, because you don't know what environment you're going to come home to.

So, I had no social life. And I still don't now you know? My social life is my husband and my kids, and my grandkids. That's my social life. I don't know how to socialise. I know how to go to work and interact with people at work, but I can't socialise with people. I don't know how to unless it's my family and friends of my husband you know?

I can't handle it. I mean, even with my work where I am, constantly dealing with people and everything. But I sit there, and I feel closed in. I hear it and I'm like, "It's okay". You know, I'm telling myself, "It's okay. It's okay" even today. Everyone's talking, everyone's doing their thing. They've got stuff to do, and it overloads me.

It's like I can't deal with this, but I love the job that I'm doing. I just have to push myself through it. But it comes back from being disconnected. But, one day, when I sat and talked with mum, it was like, "Well, okay, I understand. I understand why you feel the way you do. You couldn't trust anybody, because there was nobody to trust".

I was abused as a child. To cope, I started to drink. I drank to cope with all the abuse I suffered. I got angry, you know? It was party mode, you know, and everything was fine. But when I started to drink and become angry, then the anger turned into violence, and then I would take it out on my husband and our home. I would smash my house up, you know, because it was trying to cope with all these emotions that mum had placed on me. But it was not out of any fault of her own – I understand that now as an adult.

But then I had to stop drinking. But dealing with counselling brought all these issues up. I started to have to deal with, you know, the abuse, the bashings. And then once you remove yourself from a community and you don't do what everybody else is doing; you're not drinking, you're not getting into drugs, you stay at home, you put your children to school, you know, you work here and there, and do whatever then you become classed as a 'coconut'. You become alienated from your community and disconnected.

So, I broke away from that. So, then there's disconnection from your mother. Your disconnection from your siblings as a child, dealing with abuse. But then you stand

up and say, "Enough is enough. I'm doing this for my children" then you get the stigma of, "Yeah. Yeah. You're a coconut. You're this. You're that".

But I don't care what anybody thinks of me. This isn't about the community. This is about my children. I want them to feel safe. I want them to have a better life and now they do.

And my children when I was going through the alcoholism and I was violent, and I was all that my children stopped having anything to do with me.

So, I moved away from Geelong. I moved from Horsham to Geelong, moved from Geelong to Echuca. I was still drinking then and then it came to a breaking point where my husband and I, we split up and I was left alone.

I had no kids around me. I had no husband. I was on my own and that's when I had to have a good look at myself and when I had a good look at myself all I saw was a reflection of my mother looking back at me, you know.

Then it's like I had my cry and I got up and I said, "I'm going back home and I'm going to turn my life around. I'm going to stop with the alcohol. I'm going to educate myself" because I only had a year 3 to year 8 education.

But my husband and I we are close. When I met my husband, that's when I started to deal with the abuse. Then I had counselling.

Between my husband and I, we have five grandkids. We have a good relationship me and my husband. But at the same time both he and I, we don't hold back if we've got something to say to each other and we've always been like that to the point where we'll say something to each other if one of us gets pissed off or we get annoyed, or whatever. But then other people will perceive that as being, "Oh, you're going to have a fight. You're fighting". No, it's not that. What it is is that we are saying what we're thinking. We're not fighting. We are just saying, "You know, you need to stop. You're pissing me off". We have open communication.

We have had lots of conversations, my husband and I, about our feelings towards our mothers. So, I'm trying to have a better understanding of him and I'm trying to

understand how he's feeling. And I'm looking at it through my eyes at him and I have said to him "You're grieving". To me it sounds like when you lose anything, you know, when you lose family, when you lose, you know, a family member or you use something that's treasure, that's treasure to you or it's close to you, you grieve for it.

**END OF STATEMENT**