

Yoorrook Justice Commission

Statement of Lindsay Hammond

My name is Lindsay Hammond. My second name is Charles. I was probably named that after my great grandfather, Charles Hammond, although it was never told to me that I was, but it's quite likely that that's where it came from. I was born in Orbost at the Orbost hospital. I was raised in Orbost.

My father is Alan Hammond, and my mother was Jean Griffiths. My mum has no connection with Aboriginal culture or heritage in her family. Dad's mob was Gunaikurnai, and the clan name for Hammond is Krauatungalung.

Dad was a quiet, hardworking man and never spoke a lot. He was a good footballer and loved music, playing several instruments. At times he would sit in his shed in the dark, and when asked why he would say the dark, gave him peace of mind and that he could think about things. I never knew what things he was thinking about. He was good to family, but also a loner. Dad grew up in Lindenow, his mother was a Polish woman, and his father was John or Jack Hammond. He had eight brothers and one sister. I also have one older brother, and we have a good relationship.

In general, I had a very happy childhood. I loved being in the bush and in the river, and I just loved Orbost and the area around. Although I knew nothing of my Aboriginal culture or heritage when I was young, I always felt very comfortable and very happy to be around Aboriginal people. I would prefer to have my lunch with the Aboriginal kids at school, and I felt at ease and happy to be with them. I also noticed that my father had a lot of Aboriginal friends, which I was to find out later, several of those would have been relatives of his.

I first learned that I had Aboriginal heritage from an Aboriginal woman when I was about 28 years old, but it was never spoken about. It wasn't until I moved to Bairnsdale when I was 39 years of age and met a cousin of mine for the first time, and she was into the family history. That's when I found out about the strong connection to many Aboriginal people who I have met, who are my relations. And these meetings have opened up a whole new connection with family for me.

I feel the biggest role that this connection has given me is the feeling of belonging and feeling strongly connected to my Aboriginal family and ancestors. It has answered so many questions that I had as a younger person before I knew all about this. Questions like - *Why did I enjoy being with the Aboriginal kids at school? Why did I feel so good in their company? Why did I get angry when other kids criticised me for hanging around with the black fellas?* So many questions have been answered.

I wasn't born when the Brodribb River Massacre took place. But I think back to what it would have been like for a small Aboriginal child who later became my great grandfather, that was stolen at this massacre, taken from his family and people by a white man, and given the white man's name of Charles Hammond, which was the white man's name. All on that day of the massacre, that innocent Aboriginal boy lost his parents, he lost his culture, and he would have been severely traumatised. I feel sadness and anger at what happened. In later life, he married a half caste Aboriginal woman, and they had seven children, one becoming my grandfather.

And they were living near Omeo and my great grandmother became sick. A doctor from Omeo refused to help her because she was Aboriginal and claimed that they wouldn't have the money

to pay him, and she died. My great grandfather had seven children and a couple of his grandchildren, one of them just a baby with them at the time of his wife's death and his health was failing, so he sought help from the Lake Tyers Mission. He died at the mission, and his children couldn't be with him because of the Half-Caste Act at the time. He died a lonely, sad man, and I feel a lot of sorrow and at times anger about this.

There's probably more than I can sort of say and I have probably been affected in different ways that I may not even realise, you know? My family lost a lot from this, and we don't know what our proper name is. And the mere fact, even though I was brought up in a happy household and things were good still, for that first 30 years or so of my life. But I didn't know that I had Aboriginal blood in me. And you know, when I think back, I think that's an injustice. What I knew about on my mother's side, I knew about her Scottish and Irish ancestry, and yet I had no knowledge of my Aboriginal ancestry. And to me that's an injustice.

I would hope that any issues that need seeing to in Aboriginal communities would be addressed by community leaders. And perhaps government reps in a fair and open and honest way that gets the issues sorted out as soon as possible. I think these issues, when they arise, need to be totally understood by the government reps. Understood how the Aboriginal people feel about these issues and for the government representatives to listen to the Aboriginal people, not assume that they know. The government reps think they know the problem and know how to fix it. But they should ask the Aboriginal people what they think is the best way to fix it.

One of the biggest things that comes to mind for me is that never, ever should families be pulled apart, except in extreme cases where there's a possibility of harm coming to either children or some other members of the family. But we need to try as much as possible to keep families together. And that all parties involved treat each other as equals and respect. And that decision makers listen carefully to both sides concerned. Well intended kindness can be a killer, I believe. If those making decisions for the Aboriginal families don't understand or know the cultural ways of Aboriginal people and families.

I feel that white Australia needs to learn more about Aboriginal culture and ways of life prior to the white settlement. Education programs could possibly be set up for white people to learn and understand more about the disruption that was forced on Aboriginal people, and how their lives were suddenly changed after thousands of years living their way. I believe if white people had a better understanding of the trauma caused to Aboriginal people by the invasion, most people would be more sympathetic and understanding as to the way it affected Aboriginal people.

The Aboriginal people had never seen a herd of guns before. They had never seen men on horseback before. Many believing that horse and rider was the one monster, you can imagine that you know how people would feel. People need to know how traumatic things like that would have been for the Aboriginal people. So, I believe money could be well spent educating other people about the real fears that were inflicted on Aboriginal people fears which also including having their children taken from them. The list goes on. We need to educate people about that.

I also feel that laws and that should be the same laws for us all. We should be all treated with the same laws. Many Aboriginal laws, and I believe some Aboriginal laws should be in force for all Australians. If we are separated by different laws, it creates a gap that needs to be closed. You know, as the song goes – 'we are one but we are many'. But we've got to be all treated as one on equal terms.

END OF STATEMENT