

Submission to Yoorrook Justice Commission

From: Megan Evans

Dated: 30 August 2024

Submission:

I would like to make a submission on behalf of my late husband George Victor Lesley Griggs (Known as Les). I met Les in 1984 and assisted in getting him out of Pentridge in an early release program to work on the Northcote Koorie Mural which I was working on. We became involved in a relationship in 1986 and married in 1987. Les passed away in 1993 [REDACTED] in the International year of the Worlds Indigenous people.

From when we first met he shared with me his life and what had happened to him. He spoke regularly about being [REDACTED] and died long before the term Stolen Generation came into being. He always asked me to tell his story and I never felt I could, coming from such a different cultural background and life experience. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I have permission from his brother to do this, who is the only surviving member of his immediate family. Les was a friend and contemporary of both Uncle Archie Roach and Uncle Jack Charles and when they both passed I have felt compelled to have his story told.

I am an artist not an archivist so the way I am doing this is through my artwork using an artist mind and metaphor. I have just begun on this journey and don't know how it will unfold but will keep close to his family and other close respected Aboriginal friends and family before I formally present anything. However I would like to present his story to the Yoorrook Commission. I wrote this piece in 1996 when Sorry Day was formally announced and it was read many times in the early days of Sorry Day events. But now I would like his story to be formally recognised.

In Response to National Sorry Day I haven't signed the sorry book. It seemed to me to be too small a thing to do to express a very big feeling. My husband was [REDACTED]. He was a year younger than me. I'm sorry. I'm sorry that when I was a child of seven wearing party dresses and carrying my suitcase to school, he was regularly being beaten with a strop strap [REDACTED] and running away by hanging underneath a train all the way from sale in Gippsland to Richmond station. I'm sorry that his mother died in 1988, the year of the bicentennial, at the age of 46 and I am lucky enough to still have the company of my mother at the age of 75.

I'm sorry that I am about to embark on my 8th year of tertiary education and he had to study for his HSC from books he begged for in jail. I'm sorry that he was nine years old when his mother was eligible to vote, having some small say in a future on his behalf, yet my parents took that right for granted for all of their life and mine. Most of all I am sorry that I couldn't ever know his pain or do anything that would take it away. He used to say that he wished someone from the government would apologise for the mess they had made of his life. I am sorry he died [REDACTED] [REDACTED] in 1993, the International Year of the Worlds Indigenous Peoples

Megan Evans 1996 (This was read out in the Senate by Senator Nick Bolkus at the closing of the Wik debate in July 1998) Les was amazing and despite his trauma filled life he studied for and received his HSC certificate in jail in Aboriginal history. He was an early Victorian artist who made artwork about his incarceration when political artwork wasn't accepted in Victoria.

He participated in radio shows in SBS and 3RRR and spoke about Makarrarta when nobody knew what that meant. Les's Artwork can be seen here as he died before the internet became accessible. <https://www.lesgriggartist.com>

Over the past 15 years I have also been investigating my own colonial invader family history through my artwork as can be seen here. <https://www.meganevansartist.com>

END OF SUBMISSION