

## Yoorrook Justice Commission Statement of Craig Secombe

I'm Craig Anthony Secombe and where I come from is a place called Horsham and we are part of the Wotjobaluk tribe, we are part of that five Aboriginal communities that are joined with the Grampians.

I was born in 1968 to Christine and John Secombe. My mother was a Harrison and that's where the Aboriginal side comes from. My dad was descended from Wales. He was a Welshman, so we were never brought up to be racist or have any sort of dealings with that sort of stuff. But I didn't find out anything of such could happen to anybody or anybody could put through those sort of feelings, until my father died. I was the age of 13. And that's when my father died that's when the police just started harassing.

And as a kid you really don't realise that until such things keep happening over and over and over to you. And some of the police were downright shameful. I was working one time and then my cousin, and he had an Aboriginal father, he used to supply vegetables to Safeway and I was taking all the pumpkins in the station wagon. And me and my cousin was there and then the coppers pulled us over and then this copper pulls me over and says, "What are you doing, you little black bastard" and that sort of stuff. You know, and you can't talk back to them and I say, "I'm just taking this into the Safeway". And he gets me out of the car and me cousin out of the car and puts us on the other side of the footpath and he goes through the car, and he starts getting the pumpkins and smashing them on the ground. And he goes, "Well there is no drugs in there", and then he smashes them again and smashes every single one in the car park. And from there you sort of you don't know where you stand.

So then as kids growing up, we were all experimenting in silly things that we shouldn't. I was exploring with amphetamines and doing silly things that I shouldn't have been doing but I was doing them. Anyway, the coppers pulled me over and arrested me, and they charged me, and this detective takes all the stuff and when he comes to charge me, he doesn't charge me with everything that I had on me. He didn't charge me with whatever. Then when they dropped me back home.

I knew I was a dickhead doing what I wasn't supposed to do. Then I went and said to the Sergeant that I do know, and I told him that this bloke, what he did, and he only charged me for such and such. And when I said, well, "where is the rest of it?" Well, unbeknownst to me, this cop had an addiction. And I didn't know at the time that he might have wanted me to deal with him. And from then on everything I did or tried to do they were harassing me and arresting me and I ended up going to jail a long time, and then meeting people I don't want to meet. But instead of being like some of my family, taken away as a kid and put in homes, well instead I ended up going to prison. And then and being treated in a way that I really didn't need to be treated.

So now I have been in prison half my life. And they only stopped harassing me last year when I went into hospital. I'm going on 56, I'm 56. So, from 13 years old to 56, it's a long time. And then you go through so many situations in your lifetime and then you spend all that time in prison, you know, and there's lots of things that's happened over the years that you want to forget but you can't. And some of the things that happened to me when I was in prison was unbelievable.

Then getting out of prison and then trying to start again is another thing, because then when the police find out where you are they start harassing you again. Do you know

what I mean? You get on with your life, you get a place, you try and start up a family again, go to work, doing what you are doing. It's just they don't just leave you alone. It just does your head in.

Then I ended up being charged for a crime - an aggravated burglary I didn't do, and I went to jail for, it was a six on top with a four on the bottom but I ended up doing like nine years. And I pleaded not guilty, and I wrote away to the Magistrates Court. I just kept writing letters. I couldn't read or write at that time. And I just kept writing and writing to the Magistrates Court, and I couldn't work out why or how I was found guilty of something I never did. And I went all the way went all the way to the Supreme Court and I still was found guilty. And I still couldn't work it out and I still can't work it out from this day why was I found guilty when I didn't do that. But I was found guilty.

So then when you go to do anything in life, and some people write a police report or whatever and then they start questioning you about these things, but because you have been found guilty you have to say you are guilty. But in hindsight you're not. But because of the paperwork it says you are guilty.

I had legal representation, but what do you do when you don't know the law yourself? You just know you are not guilty and you don't know the process. What do you do? Do you know what I mean? So, I've done all of them years. And then in amongst all them years you meet people, do you know what I mean. And you think these people are good but in reality, they are not in hindsight.

I got out of jail and and I was working and doing what I was doing and not only that I had a number of kids, because the biggest thing is when you do have children and you spend half your life in prison you don't get to know them. And being brought up the way I was brought up, we were a real family tight sort of family, do you know what I mean, until my dad died and then that's when the police just started harassing you. But I wanted to sort of rebuild my relationship with my kids.

But me being a gullible sort of a person, and this bloke that I knew from jail rang me and said he was in trouble, and he wanted somewhere to live. So, I said "yeah, no worries". But then unknown to me that he was doing horrific things that I didn't know that he was doing, you know. So, I kicked him out of the place. Anyway, well the police turned my life upside down. They broke into my house while I was at work, putting things in there and then ringing the police and getting the police to come and get me and all this sort of stuff.

And anyway, I ended up going back to jail. But I wasn't doing that, they were breaking into my house and planting all the things in there. And then when I went to jail, they stole everything of mine anyway. But then when you go and try and explain again to the police, they still don't believe you. Anyway, so then I get out of prison and then unbeknown to me these people had family in this town, you know. And I was nearly killed in that place four times.

The reason why I'm in ACES at the moment is because they poisoned me. And because they poisoned me I ended up with an epidural cyst on my central spine and when they operated on me it crippled me. I'm only just starting to get back to normal. But I just don't know what to do, do you know what I mean. I've what to do, or what not to do. And I can't help it if I have been to prison, do you know what I mean. And being an Aboriginal person and then when you go to the police and ask them to sort of help you, they don't want to know about it. They just you know, take a statement but they just do nothing about it at all, you know. And what do you do, you know? You just don't

know what to do. ACES is not too bad. It's still a bit strange. But, in a way it's good for my health.

I'm not on the pension, I'm only on Newstart or whatever you call it, JobSeeker, they take all my money because of the rent and the health problems I'm having. So, I don't get any money. I haven't had any money from Centrelink since I moved in there. I have had no money all year, I still haven't got no money. And being in the predicament that I'm in, in a sense afraid for my life and trying to get my life back on track, but at the same time I've got no money.

I would like to just walk out of here and then get on with my life. Do you know what I mean? Because I've been in prison for so long, I haven't got superannuation, do you know what I mean. I haven't got any money put away in the bank. You just can't get on and be a normal person in life because you want to but there is that hiccup because you have got that CRN and that criminal history.

I find it difficult, yeah, you know. In being in jail for so long you see a lot of things that happen to your people, like Aboriginal people, and in some respects certain things happened me in prison that, you know, happened and then I have moved on with it. And other people haven't, you know. I have seen other people in my situation in the same circumstances struggle and, you know, they end up going back into prison and then they die in prison, you know, and I don't want to be like that. I want to get on with life and build my relationship back with my kids and my grandchildren, do you know what I mean. But it's difficult.

It's difficult because you haven't got the foundations like everybody else. If I was a white person and I went through the same sort of circumstances as a white person, what they did to me, it would be completely different. They would listen to me. They would listen to the people. They would go and charge the people and pursue them from trying to kill me. And then you sort of tell the solicitors and stuff about what has been happened to me and then they are shocked to hear to a certain degree of the trauma that I have been through and that nothing has been done about it..

And then because you get to a stage in your life where you know that you want to tell people what's happened to you but then the people in charge, if you know what I mean and then there's no point telling them because they are not going to do nothing. You know. And so then you just keep pushing it under the carpet. Because nothing gets done.

In hindsight we know as Aboriginal people we need the law, we need the police there to protect us. But in hindsight they are not there to protect us they are there to protect the white people. Anything we do is written down, but nothing done about it. You know. And that's fucked. And then you try and build a relationship back with your children and because you have been in sort of predicament and all this sort of stuff, and your children are growing up and doing what they are doing, and in reality they are looking at you like you are a no-hoper anyway.

Then you are trying to build a relationship back with your children in the way that you know that in reality in your own head you haven't done anything wrong really, but in reality in their heads you have. So, then what do you do? It's just it's so downright hurtful, you know. It just makes you like you are a nothing and you are worthless. And that's how they ruin our families. That's how they disembark us from being what we want to be and where we want to go because we can't. It's just fucked.

For me, sin reality once my father left we sort of lived my mum's life but in a different way, if you know what I mean. It's just fucked. And what do you do? Nothing you say or do is going to be better to anybody. You can't do anything, you know. You have got a bit of paper saying that they have done the report, and nothing has happened. And then you end up living a life of being living out of jail because of who you are. Because of they made you like that. And you don't have to do anything wrong, it's just because who you are they put you in prison. And then that whatever they charge you with sticks like hell because you can't get out of it. Once you get that prison number and that name, they keep extra adding pages. And then what do you do?

I wasn't in that predicament when some people were, you know, taken away and then they were molested and traumatised in another way, I'm touch wood, thank God I was never like that. But in reality, they fucked me in another way, if you know what I mean. And people won't employ you with criminal histories, do you know what I mean? And then where do you want to go? I did my certificate IV in disability, a certificate IV in business, and I did uni and everything from prison. And then when you get out because you have got a criminal history, they won't give you they wouldn't give me a Working With Children's card. I have never been charged with any sex offences or charged with anything, but they made me wait five years for a Working With Children's Check.

So, then what do you do, you get out of jail and you have got all these certificates and you are thinking yeah you have done pretty good for yourself, but you can't go and do anything because they can't give you the next stage. So, they have got you again. And it's fucked. It's like someone is in the halo going, you know, this person can't do this, this person because he is this. And then he is what the fuck? What do you do? You know.

You know, when I first went to jail when I was 19 but I was I was a juvenile when they but they kept putting me in with these other people. And then because I had a family, I had just started a family and I was going through sort of psychosis and all that sort of stuff, and I didn't know what was going on with me anyway. But I went to prison, and I ended up hanging myself in the prison, do you know what I mean. If it wasn't for the prison officer coming I would have been dead. So, they put me in this psych ward and I was in there for ages.

But the point it could have been other inventions. But they put me in prison. But and then from then every year after I was in prison. So, it's just fucked. And then coming here today I don't know if my story meant anything or if you was going to get anything out of it, but the point being that, I suppose, they can hear my side and what I went through. And from 13 to 56 being harassed by police, that's pretty fucked.

The biggest thing is going to jail you're in a predicament where when you go to jail you are in a situation where you are either in a family or the family is there, or you are in some sort of situation that when you go to jail that situation from when they get you is always there with you.

So that's stuck into your head all the way through your prison system, do you know what I mean. You might have went through the last prison system and worked out all you want to do is get on with your family and build your relationship back with them and get on with your life. So, then you get to a certain extent in rebuilding that relationship with your children and then the police come and then charge you with these things that and then put you back in prison again. Well then you get so far and then you failed again. So really in hindsight you were never going to get anywhere. So then in reality the family give up on you, right, and then you do go to do it on your own.

Well, in hindsight that's the only thing you can do, really, is you have got to work on yourself, right, because no one else can change you, it's only you.

And when you get to that sort of stage it's like you have hit rock bottom and because you hit rock bottom there is no one around to say this or this or you are doing this wrong or whatever, then you do it on your own. And then because you are doing it on your own it's more rewarding because you tend to reflect with yourself, and then you come to reality that I've got to do this on my own because if I don't I'm going to die in there. And then that mindset gets stuck in and then you build yourself more stronger. Because in reality we present ourselves to people on the outside is the me, right, is the me that you want to present to the people. But in reality, who is really you is the eye inside you. And it's the eye inside you is the most strongest part and it knows you better than anybody else. And the eye does things and you do things that no one else knows. And it's that person inside which is the real you who you need to make stronger to get rid of the habits or get rid of the things that that are really not good for you.

So, you can get on with life and be you. And then because of the situations that you have been through in life you become more stronger and then you see other people in those sort of predicaments but whether they are there in that stage like you, are ready to move on or not, but you can plant seeds by explaining to them this is what you need to do. But it depends on the person whether they are at that stage and want to listen.

And because of that, you know, and working in the situation, like, I've been in prison but I have never sat on me arse and did nothing, I got up and worked. And then doing that you realise because you are dealing with so many individuals from all over the world in one little place, you see so many behaviours and so many things that goes on with an individual on an everyday basis in so many different ways, do you know what I mean. And that's how I've kicked on and made myself a little bit better and instead of dwelling on the things that's happened to me from the outside I have worked on myself from the inside. But the point still being is in reality that's what's made me.

But then it comes to an extent in your life where you have moulded yourself to where you want to be but the people in reality on the outside here in uniforms still don't see it that way. And then you can't do anything about them anyway because that's the way they are. But the point being is they still put you back in jail. So, then you don't know what the fuck is going on, you know. And so, you want to do your best and get on with your life but you still are coming up to that brick wall.

There is no reward in not only being dishonest but being honest. I was dishonest to begin with because I reported this police officer because he had done wrong by me, but I was still doing wrong. But in reality, I had been in turmoil because of that. I have lived a life in and out of prison because of that one incident. And over that I have learned the good and bad in the police, do you know what I mean? I have learnt the corruption of them. Who is corrupt and who is not corrupt. I can name every single one of them. And I have been because I've been in the system for so long you not only know the police you also know the prison people too and what goes on in the prison. The things that go on in the prison, it can be so horrendous, you know, shocking to a degree. Where people have done things in charge that they shouldn't have done. But they have done it, do you know what I mean, and have gotten away with it. And the same with the police. But because you are you and you are Aboriginal they don't fucking listen to you. You are a second class citizen, you know. And nothing that you say is going to be they might make out that they are going to listen and say that they are going to do this, but they don't in reality. They don't do anything.

I could turn around and say, well maybe things have changed. Or maybe I can now get on with my life. It's just unbelievable. And you can sit and you can explain and you can talk and say the things that you can remember at the time but then there is still heaps of stuff that one person, like me, has been through that I've dampened what's happened back then that I remembered just then. Because there is lots of things that happened and you really are coming in and saying what have you got to say but you haven't really covered everything. You are only covering the stuff that you can remember in the short term instead of the long term. And all you want to do in reality is change it for better. But whether we are going to or not, do you know what I mean, because I don't know.

And, you know, my story is enough to change anything, but mine is just my story. But then there is other people's stories. Do you know what I mean? But at least I come and told something. And hopefully it's going to change something.

**END OF STATEMENT**