

Yoorrook Justice Commission
Statement of Matthew Delaney and Robyn Skeats

Mathew Delaney

My name is Mathew Delaney. At the age of about five, and I was actually at Delaney or a Cain, and I come from Coonabarabran in the Kamillaroi region. And I was born on Wiradjuri Country in the Blue Mountains in northern New South Wales, and I've travelled up and down the East coast all my life, and I've studied in university for Aboriginal studies and health and science.

My background is extensive in mechanics and a lot of other things including psychology. And my dad, he was the right hand man of the county court judge . He's done a lot of stuff in the justice system. And therefore, I've learnt a lot about bits and pieces in the Aboriginal culture and heritage and stuff like that.

I'm here to tell my true story. Thank you for listening and having me. It's a bit emotional for me, this whole story.

I remember, I just remember watching the sun come up and being hungry and then being burnt in the sun. And I was sitting in the back of dad's car. Black two door Falcon, and we're driving up and down from Sydney to Melbourne, travelling around trying to get to know family and stuff. Always out there visiting people, and the amount of family we met and know it's just incredible. And they know me, I don't know them anymore.

There's so many people out there to see them around, an aunty or uncle, and I respect everyone as best I can. So, like I say, they show it back, but even my mum says I'm an empath, I give a lot, and I see things normal, as normal people do. I'm a street artist now, I've been doing straight art for the last 15 years or so. I've been in and out of jail, because erratically but I can't say I haven't stolen. I've been a thief as well, I'm a sinner.

You know, we're all, we all messed up. I've got such an extensive history and long story of being abused and raped. I was sexually abused when I was a child, and I wanted to die, so I learnt how to make a noose, and I hung myself out of the tree for four hours. My brother and sister laughed at me, and I had to get myself out of the tree. I hung myself out of the tree by my foot. I was going to do it on my neck at the start. I'm so glad I didn't because I would have had to and my brother and sister would have saw that for the rest of their lives, you know? And that's the sort of thing I've been going through all my life.

It's been like one hell of a rollercoaster ride where I'm always trying to fight for survival, to stay alive. And now I just want to be a little bit happier in my life and be not - be known about so that people can have understanding of my story and not be worried about it. I go to places, and they say, we don't want your sort here, you know? And I'm like, well, what? What's the go there? Maybe because of what I'm wearing or whatever,

I don't know. It's just, the psychology of the world changes so quickly and everyone's attitudes in it, you know?

Yeah. So, I try to do the best I can. Yeah, I've been suicidal for a long time. The loss of my family and not being able to know who's who in the zoo. And you know, we'll have a community. And it's all around me now, people that are good, they're not blood, you know? I do know my blood, which is my direct family from my pop, but we had a few family meetings and stuff like that, and it was always standoffish with the other side of the family and stuff, and they don't know how to expect to be around each other, and different cultures and different areas, you know?

And they see you as a yuppie black or a Johnny come lately, or all these problems in life, and so it hurts. It hurts my heart, you know? So, try and back off, and my brother and sister don't want to know me anymore. Well, I've been aggressive towards them when they've snapped at me.

We've all got our own issues, and I'm learning to deal with other people's issues as well as mine. And growing up, not knowing, not having a real family because of my dad and mum split up when I was young.

I went to Eastern Creek School in Sydney. Got picked on a lot. My brother ended up becoming really bad fighters. Just like warrior pretty much - battle, battle, battle, battle, battle, battle all my life. Yeah, wild story, it's a wild life. But best thing you can do is keep your chin up and try and stay solid and be grateful for what you've got and be grateful for things you're not necessarily being - you can't - you can't be ungrateful. So, I'm just trying to do that the best I can these days. Stay solid on the right line.

I got a broken heart. I got a broken heart over this. I've got friends that are all white fellas, and they all call me Abo, you know? And they treat me like I'm an outsider. I feel like an outsider. They do care and love me, but they just, they don't understand. They're not in the same shoes. Yeah, just really, I know it's not in my culture, but suicidal you know. Yeah. Yeah, it's horrible.

And a lot of the time I just want to bury my head in the sand with drugs and alcohol and all this other stuff, but I can't do that anymore, it just doesn't affect me the same as what it used to, because I've done it for so long. And then it affects everyone around you the wrong way, and you just don't want to put that right on other people, you're trying to be a better person for other people. You know? Yeah, stop burying my head in the sand - I can't even drive a car anymore because they won't give me my license back, and they want me to go to court and they want me to jump through hoops and loops and this and that.

I can't afford it; I don't have the money in my life. I'm lucky if I can sell a painting every couple of weeks to get an extra couple of bucks for a couple of things for my dog and struggle street to get him to a vet. It started for me on a pension. I've been on a pension for the last however many years. I mean, I get help with people. People help me all the time, then I help them, you know? It goes tit for tat. It's how it is. And I'm just soldiering on.

My dad made out I was crazy when I was younger, and they put me in mental health treatment orders, and then they give me all this medication, and now it's - now I've become addicted to it. And it's wrecked my brain. I've not been able to stand on my own two feet because I've always had someone above me telling me how to live or push me around with the medications and stuff. I was on an injection for 15 years, but I wasn't supposed to be. I could have - I should have just been able to get off it, but it ended up being - so mums just turned up to help me. It ended up being that I was overdosed with the depo. Yeah, so they overdosed me at the depo, not realising, and Mum, they figured it out in Maryborough. It nearly killed me.

And they force it through tribunals, and there's no crossover between mental health and physical health. I needed to go to hospital because I was physically sick, but I felt mentally like I wanted to kill myself. So, they put me in there, because it's a treatment order, they took me in, but they only treat me under - they only had to treat me under the mental health, not the other stuff. So, I start throwing up while I'm in there. They check my electrolytes. My electrolytes are right down. I had low potassium, low - high calcium, low potassium and all these other problems, my whole body was out of whack.

And then two days later, I got another mate on the deathbed with cancer, terminal to the brain and liver and kidneys and everything. So, I got to get out and see him, and then I got to try and find another friend of mine who's just - who was really close to him as well, and that sort of, you know? So it's all just been a rollercoaster ride. So, I don't like to get off. It's like getting on a demon ride when you're at wonderland in Sydney. You get on the demon and you just want to get back on and on, and you just keep going on the roller coaster ride that sends you running loops and loops and loops up and down, up and down. And that's what it's life's like, I suppose. But it's how far you want to go up and down.

I don't understand why there's 3.8% Aboriginal people in Australia, and 90% to 100% of that are living in poverty. I just don't understand why. And, well, I try my best, the best I can. I've got a registered ABN number and business name already. I've had that for years. But they just say, they say it's a hobby. So, we're trying to turn it into a business so that it actually raises some money.

I miss mum and dad, and I wish I could be in touch with my brother and sister a bit more often, but it just hasn't happened yet. Maybe later in the future, might be able to get somewhere to live and have people come and stay, you know I always wanted to have a little community farm, yeah. We're all doing things, and everyone comes and lives and talks and communicates. Yeah, I don't know, see how it goes. See how life turns out. It would be nice to have more community areas to be able to go and actually stay in and sleep and have time out with people, you know? Like away from everything where you don't have to bury your head in the sand. Where you can be free to scream around and yell and make - if you want to go and talk to the trees or whatever you want to do spiritually, you know, and have that connection to land and real beautiful places.

You know, people are just wrecking everything. It needs to be brought back. We need that land back. We need "no More" Fracking. We don't need all this extra shit, gold

digging out of the country and all this stuff, and mining and you know? We just need something better for the people, for the next generation. Something good for them to be able to look forward to every day getting up, going out and playing.

Mum's got a nice place here, but we have to always rent out rooms and work to clean it up for the next person, and it's just no one looks after anything for themselves anymore. I mean, they have a cigarette instead of putting it in their pocket, their cigarette butts in their pocket, they put it straight on the ground and say oh, we're making something for someone else to do, you know what I mean?

It gets so hard when you get older and you smoked all that time, or buried your head in the sand all that time, to keep it real, you know? Into some sort of connection to the land, understanding that it's about just being able to live in the moment, in the peace and the moment that you've got, and respect everyone for what they do. Everyone does different things, you know? I just want to feel like a connection again to my family.

When we all used to go, I used to love going Christmas and meeting all the family and you know, talking and telling everyone each other's stories and getting motorbikes, and you know, whatever. My uncle Ross used to take me around and do things together, you know? And I miss all that sort of stuff. I want to be able to do that with my nieces and nephews, and I feel lost, I feel disconnected from that because of what's happened. It's hard enough. I wouldn't know what exactly I want from it. I just know that it's going to be prouder for the next generation.

And it is getting there. Like, they're able to -we're able to stand up and be recognised and places and stuff. And the less of the racism, you know. This and that, we've all got one God, it's all got - it's the same creator. He creates everyone, you know. Even if it is Muslim or Christian or Indigenous or whatever. It's all the same creator. It's the same thing there. I've got a little painting that I can send to you that sort of tells a bit of the story.

You know, you have got to be grateful. Be grateful. Because whatever it is you've got, because we have it so good in this country compared to what people are copying overseas. And I was just speaking to a guy the other day, and he was a taxi driver. He spent his whole life savings to get over here. And now he has to go back in two years' time because he's not married. And the guy, he has to worry about drones dropping bombs on his buildings and stuff all over the place in where he's from in Pakistan. You know, and like, we've got it so good here. So, I'm just thankful for that. Thankful that there's no drones dropping bombs here yet. And I pray that it doesn't happen any time soon.

Robyn Skeats

Just a quick background on Matt's history. He's first born, of first born, of first-born stolen generation. I don't know if he's told you his tribe and his history. That's from my side of the family. Matthew was taken at a young age, after several traumatic experiences in school. And raised indigenously by the male members of his family.

As a mother I was told I had no rights because I was not Indigenous. Since then I found out I'm also from Arnhem Land about two generations ago. But, you know, back in the day as a child, these things were kept in the cupboard. They weren't discussed because there was a lot of discrimination. It was all shoved backwards. And my children were grown up and they all relate indigenously - they feel they are indigenous inside spiritually, and it's been a massive quest right through their journey through their lives, especially Matthew's, who's an indigenous artist. He gets a lot of his messages out in the street with chalk drawings and through his artworks where he puts a lot of himself - he's sold quite a lot of things. He's had a few exhibitions. He's quite renowned.

Mathew puts himself out there and sort of a lot of empathy, and Matthew has a support dog called blue, which we faced a lot of challenges with as a support dog because he's not like a seeing eye dog, he's a different kind of dog.

Matthew's been raised with a little bit of domestic violence in his life. It goes good for a little while, it's a nasty cycle and they fight, and that ends up on the street. I've spent many years cut off from Matthew, not knowing where he is, and when things get a bit horrible for him he has a tendency of disappearing when the wind blows a certain way.

He's trying to come back to me about two months ago, he was mismanaged through NDIS, and the only thing I'm going to say about that is massive fail. Isolated, without supports, rorted and left for dead, left without food, left in bad situations. And the last time he was put in a place where he was exposed and vulnerable to ice addicts and woke up being injected in the foot. Matthew went manic and lost his cool. And of course, he got picked up by the police and put into Monash Medical Acute Mental Health Ward.

Matthew does have health issues, and during that time they initiated a new drug on him. One of the side effects was suicide. This drug, new drug would have made Matthew into a vegetable, would have lobotomised him chemically. And they tried to enforce it through a tribunal. And because Matthew was on his own with no appropriate supports in place, he was in quite a bad place.

My story with Matt in the last few months is that I went and got him from this hospital when they released him. He could not walk or talk properly. He was being put on the street, doped to the max by the drugs that they had initiated. Some of them were good, some of them were not good. I bought him and his dog home with me. And then, because of the tribunal - I requested a forensic reanalysis. I wanted him forensically assessed to make sure, or to contest them trying to enforce this through a medical tribunal on him when he has already had a lifetime of mental illness, and has already been assessed for the correct medications, and more than once - and he knows what is good and what's not good. So, we had to fight through Bendigo Health recently with the chief indigenous medical officer, with the treating psychologist, with a team of people typing up everything so legally it was covered. And with the treating staff as well. In addition, we had Matthew's two uncles. One of them is an Indigenous support worker, the other one's an Indigenous mental health worker, on the phone. And Matthew's father, who performed the smoking ceremony at the start when the Pre-hearing conference started. You get the rule of thumb, acknowledgement of elders

past, present and future. And it's just sort of to me, it's spat out like a chant with no meaning, it's only a protocol. And through the duration of this pre-hearing meeting at Bendigo Health for assessment, it became quite clear to the medical staff that yes, there is a difference between being normal Caucasian in a European in our society to an Indigenous person in our society.

I've got a local person, Indigenous person that was going to take Matthew to Coober Pedy, Opal hunting and noodling. They then were going to move out back too, for a couple of weeks, living off the land with Indigenous peoples that could not speak English. And they were going to get spiritually back in tune, sacred places, secret men's business and all the other things. But as a consequence of the medications Matt was prescribed, he's suffering severe illness. It's very hard to juggle medically and mentally with him because one triggers the other, and they won't cross the lines. So Matthew could not go on his sojourn to heal Indigenously like he wanted to do, he felt the calling. But that's just been postponed till another time.

So, over the last few weeks, Matthew's had a shocking time, to a point where suddenly last week, he'd had enough. He's tired of being sick, he does not feel like he has a future, he cannot - doesn't feel any hope for the future at all, and he strung up a noose. And when Matthew realised what he was doing, he rang for medical help. And he got put back into Bendigo Health for support. And that tells me that Matthew doesn't want to kill himself. He's just had enough. He's at his wits end. The whole system, the way everything is.

What I would like to see is stability for all Indigenous people. A change in acknowledgement. More acknowledgement from the people, a better attitude from the people towards our traditional owners and - and the fact that they still own our country. I don't like the way the world is going and we're all just cattle in a production line getting slaughtered even whether we're Indigenous or not. It's a really bad place. There's so much unhappiness amongst peoples and it shouldn't be that way.

I would like to see more natural traditional foods. Natural traditional ways of life. The right of the people to live how they wish instead of being told you must do what we say, you must obey and conform. Then taking the liberties and freedom from all peoples, Indigenous and otherwise. Australia is no longer a lucky country, I'm afraid. It's just - the way it's evolving is just terrible.

Most people, Indigenous or otherwise, need spiritual healing and people are acknowledging it more and more because they're getting more and more depressed about the way they have to live in society. And yeah, there's medical healing. There's - there's Western pharmaceutical style mental health healing, but there's not enough spiritual healing around anymore. And there's got to be mental, spiritual and physical. It's got to be the three or there's no balance. And this is where I'm working with Matt trying to get some kind of balance going for him, especially, he needs it.

He needs to be back in touch with his spiritual - spiritual heritage and his culture to heal. Otherwise, he won't. He won't heal with just the medical support and

pharmaceutical support, he won't heal. So that was part of why trying to get him out. Out with the boys, the secret men's business. Out in the outback Australia. Back in touch with his spiritual things and back in touch tracing his family. His family cultures. I have three Indigenous children. I've just started this business, I've called it Three Tribes because each of my children was born in a separate area of Australia, and each of my children are Indigenous from a father who was an older son. Of older son. Stolen gen. And it's absolutely terrible. It's just inhumane what's happened and what happens, and what still continues to happen.

I have prayed to Jesus, and I have asked for forgiveness, I believe in Jesus and he is real. It is powerful when someone comes to a place of conviction in their beliefs, as you have. Jesus offers forgiveness and hope, and it's clear you have a strong trust in His presence and truth. The idea that "whatever you are looking for is out there" reflects a sense of curiosity and purpose in life, which is an essential part of the journey of faith and discovery. Whether it's understanding God more deeply, finding peace, or seeking knowledge about the world, that search can bring growth and fulfillment.

END OF STATEMENT