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TRANSCRIPT OF SUBMISSION



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**<THE RECORDING HAS COMMENCED**

**COLLEEN:** Hi, this is Colleen. Today I'm with [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] I'd like to ask you some questions. Were you named after anybody?

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[REDACTED] No, not that I'm aware of.

**COLLEEN:** Okay. Where were you born?

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[REDACTED] I was born in [REDACTED].

**COLLEEN:** Where was you raised?

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[REDACTED] I was raised in [REDACTED].

**COLLEEN:** What are your memories of your childhood?

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[REDACTED]: Pretty awful actually. I was sexually abused, and Yeah, most of my childhood memories aren't that great. I was haunted by someone in our house. Like an actual spirit. And I don't know whether that was because that I was sexually abused and I just had not nightmares all the time. And there was someone in the house that was always trying to get me.

**COLLEEN:** Okay. What are your memories of your childhood?

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[REDACTED] I just said that one.

**COLLEEN:** Okay. Sorry.

30

[REDACTED]: Yeah.

**COLLEEN:** What was your connection with Aboriginal culture growing up?

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[REDACTED]: We were we knew we were Aboriginal. We'd go and visit my aunty and almost all the time, and my dad's sister, [REDACTED]. And I think that's probably where I found most of my connection. Dad worked in mainstream, and we really, you know, growing up, a fair Aboriginal person was very hard at school. Got a lot of racist racism against us and from both sides, from non-aboriginals and from our own community. Because I was so fair. Even my own cousins would bash me up at school because of my fair skin [REDACTED], because [REDACTED]. So it wasn't something that I, you know, I tried to learn a bit about when I was younger, but we weren't really told a lot until I got into my later years.

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**COLLEEN:** Okay. Thank you. What is your connection with Aboriginal culture now, and what role does it play in how you live your life?

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[REDACTED]: Well, since growing up with without, you know, a strong connection, I always felt a connection, a strong connection to country back then and didn't realise what that actually meant. But you know, as I grew up, I was learning more about my cultural background. And I'd listen to my aunts and uncles, their stories, and they helped guide me through that journey of finding about who I was. And so my culture is everything to me. My connection to country is everything to me now. And it's a huge part of my life. I do a lot of cultural heritage awareness through [REDACTED] for government departments, and that's taught me an awful lot about myself. And just I suppose that self-journey in the last couple of years has been really amazing about finding out about myself and how strong my connection really is. And so, yeah, it's a huge part of my life now. And we every day is something I, you know, I make clapsticks and I sew and I make coolamons and I, you know, the aunties and uncles would give me blessing to do smoking ceremonies and welcome to countries and I do those for [REDACTED] nearly, you know, 3 or 4 times. Well, actually it's about six times a year. They specifically asked for me to do a Welcome to country and a smoking ceremony for their [REDACTED] and for their graduations for their families. So I find that it's my happy place to be now. And yeah, I'm growing all the time and just trying to learn as much as I can.

20 **COLLEEN:** Now, who are your parents?

[REDACTED]: So my mum is [REDACTED]. She's rest in peace. Mum passed. She was [REDACTED]. And she- they came from [REDACTED] oh, down towards [REDACTED]. And one of those [REDACTED]. I'm not actually quite sure. My dad's [REDACTED]. And that's where I get my connection from where there is there's Blackfellas on [REDACTED] side, which they denied for many years and said [REDACTED] so we thought they were [REDACTED]. But there is a connection there through the [REDACTED] on [REDACTED] side as well.

30 **COLLEEN:** Okay. Now who is your [REDACTED] mob and what is their background and what do you know about your [REDACTED] upbringing?

[REDACTED] Like I said, [REDACTED] was from [REDACTED] not [REDACTED], but [REDACTED]. I can't remember. It's just con for me. [REDACTED] was very sick growing up. [REDACTED] had two sisters and two brothers. And [REDACTED] was very sick growing up. That's why they had to leave where they were, where they were living, and come to the country because [REDACTED] had really bad [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] was in [REDACTED] a lot. [REDACTED] didn't do a lot of schooling. And then grew up down I think they lived at [REDACTED] out of [REDACTED] and met [REDACTED] in, I'm not sure what year, maybe [REDACTED]. And I was conceived in [REDACTED].

40 **COLLEEN:** Okay, great. Now, who is your [REDACTED] mob. And what is their background?

[REDACTED]: So [REDACTED] mob, [REDACTED] a descendant of George Thomas, which is one of our apical ancestors for Gunai Kurnai. And [REDACTED] mum was [REDACTED]. And [REDACTED] married [REDACTED], and [REDACTED] from [REDACTED]. My pop's from [REDACTED]. So [REDACTED] a Yuin [REDACTED]. And the nans Gunai woman. So her parents

were George and Agnes Patterson, George and Agnes Thomas and George's wife, Agnes was Patterson. She was a Monaro woman.

**COLLEEN:** Okay, now, what do you know about your [REDACTED] upbringing?

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[REDACTED] I think, [REDACTED] talks about [REDACTED] upbringing as being pretty good. [REDACTED] didn't- [REDACTED] had a good life growing up. [REDACTED] they were in [REDACTED] and so around they lived in a in the area just before you go into [REDACTED], it's [REDACTED]. And [REDACTED] said [REDACTED] had a wonderful upbringing there, and there was a lot of Koori families around them and grew up you know, with Nan and Pop in the bean paddock and, and aunties and uncles coming down from the new South to pick in the bean paddock and work on the farms. And [REDACTED] grew up in [REDACTED] was a pretty good footballer and also a boxer as well. [REDACTED] was a pretty good footballer. [REDACTED] got an invitation to the [REDACTED] [REDACTED], but I think it's the only time [REDACTED] ever got sick in [REDACTED] life. [REDACTED] got the flu or something and [REDACTED] said [REDACTED] couldn't go. And I, you know, I assumed that [REDACTED] did work in a sawmill. Pop actually drove [REDACTED] up and down [REDACTED], that goonji place. And used to pick up gold on the way. And that's how they used to pay for their food and everything. Nan was a beautiful woman. I don't really remember them. They passed when I was only- pop passed when I was, Nan passed when I was about 20 three, and pop passed when I was about four. I remember pop, but everybody used to speak about them, how their house would always be open to the whole of the community and anybody was welcome. Black or white didn't matter. They were all welcome and and Pop's house. And [REDACTED] told me about how they lived on the riverbank on the snowy River between two mahogany trees in a bark hut. And that's 25 where [REDACTED] sort of grew up, until they were moved into a house. And then all the blackfellas were moved out of their place and moved into a place called [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]. And the house and the main road went right through a Nan and Pop's house was it's the [REDACTED] now.

30 **COLLEEN:** Okay. Now do you have any brothers or sisters and what is your relationship with them?

[REDACTED] I have one full sister, [REDACTED]. We don't speak at all, haven't done for years. Our upbringing, when we were young, I used to get left at my nan and pop's 35 all the time. And that's where I was sexually assaulted. And I don't know why I wasn't taken with them, but [REDACTED] always went with mum and dad, and we never really got close growing up. We're only 11 months apart. And [REDACTED] sort of went into a [REDACTED] when we were young babies because she couldn't cope with it. And so we don't get on at all. We still don't to this day. She blames mum and dad for 40 everything that happened when we were young, but she was never a sexually assaulted like I was, so I'm not sure why she complained, but anyway And I have a half-sister, [REDACTED] who lives up in [REDACTED]. Oh, we did have a good relationship for a while, but the drugs and alcohol I gave her lots and lots and it just seemed to be become a habit for her to continually use [REDACTED] for money. And we gave 45 her cars and in the end. She sort of I think the drugs might have got to her. And she was very paranoid and she was really weird. And so I just stopped talking to her growing. Growing up we had lots of foster sisters and brothers. [REDACTED] fostered quite a

few kids. I still call one of them. I had a sister or I called my sister. She passed a couple of years ago. And a brother who I still call brother. He's not my biological blood brother, but I still call him brother. They're not Aboriginal people. We did foster a couple of Aboriginal kids. But we were told we weren't basically black  
5 enough to foster these little fellas. His name was [REDACTED] beautiful little baby. But he was taken away from us.

**COLLEEN:** Okay, I think you. What areas or topics would you like to focus on in your submission? Example, racism, forced removal from home, cultural loss,  
10 intergenerational trauma?

[REDACTED] Well, that's all very relevant today. I believe there's still racism. And I do believe there's still forced removal from homes from for from children that aren't placed with family. Cultural loss is huge. How do you even how do you even  
15 quantify that? Because the cultural loss that, you know right across Australia is significant. Intergenerational trauma is a big one down here. I listen to my aunties and uncles and it's like it happened yesterday. All these things being taken away from their families. I suppose we didn't- we did- I didn't see that growing up because dad never spoke about that sort of stuff. And he wasn't- he reckons he didn't see  
20 people getting removed, but I know they were from [REDACTED]. Even in dad's day, I know they were, because I've had people you know, other relatives that were taken from their parents when they were growing up in [REDACTED] and separated. I think the intergenerational trauma that's just- that will never go away. That will never go away. And when I do my cultural awareness training, I talk a lot about the  
25 intergenerational trauma because there's people in our community that don't well, there's a lot of people in the community that don't understand what that means. And for our mob and especially the elders it can happen at those bad memories can come back at any time because we have trigger words and or trigger. There's things that trigger these memories and this trauma. And it could be there's a lot of different  
30 things that can do that. And it occurs all the time. And then you get mainstream organisations like health care clinics and things like that have never I suppose they've never taken the time to understand what that means. And therefore I reckon they make it worse a lot of the times, because I know they're not trying to do it deliberately. They don't mean to be racist and they don't mean to cause grief, but  
35 because of the lack of understanding, that's what happens.

**COLLEEN:** Okay. Thank you. Now, thinking about your answer to the questions above, what injustices have you personally experienced?

40 [REDACTED] I've experienced racism exclusion, bullying, harassment. Because I'm Aboriginal. And because I am Aboriginal to my own community, I've faced the trauma from my own mob because of my fair skin. And when I- my first main job I went I applied for was in a [REDACTED]. And I got told that no one wanted to work with the black fella, and no one had even met me yet. I ended up working there for  
45 nine and a half years and got on with everyone. But it was the stigma around being a black fella. You know, you're going to turn up to work late, you're going to turn up to work drunk. And that's all those things that were said to me personally that that's

what they thought was going to happen when I first started there. I suppose for me being sexually abused, I see and I hear and I, you know, my family's that face alcohol, alcoholism, and drug abuse that their young children are dealing with that as well, because when there's drugs and alcohol involved and the children are there by themselves, they're so open to being sexually assaulted. And, you know, I've had family tell me about their children that have gone through that because they've been in exposed to those situations. And I just I know that still occurs. And, you know, I've heard of our children being taken and then placed in foster care, and it's occurred there as well non-aboriginal people. I find that the most they lose all their cultural identity when they're placed with people that don't understand our culture. And, you know, some people, it's, you know, they try to do the right thing and bring them up and teach them about the culture. And that is so, you know, that's fantastic. But the ones that miss out totally and don't realise that their what their heritage is and who their families are, miss out on all of that growing up and miss out on the support and the love and the nurturing of their families.

**COLLEEN:** Okay. Thank you. Now, thinking about your answer to the question above, what injustices have your family experienced?

20 [REDACTED] The same sort of thing racism. I know when [REDACTED] first got married, it wasn't popular for a black fella to marry a non-black fella. From both sides. My nan, god love her. Rest in peace. She was a racist right up until she died. And she used to say it to my face, and I'd have to pull her up all the time. I mean, I know she loved me, but she was a terrible racist. And it's just it comes with the age. 25 Because it was the generation, her generation. They all were racists, basically. And also, we did not get a lot of support growing up from our local co-op. And I think other families had that as well. We didn't get the support from the local co-op because dad was working mainstream, and it wasn't very popular back in our [REDACTED] back in them days either. He did that to support us and put food on the table and everything like that. I don't know how much racism dad copped when he was at work. He was a bloody hard worker, and he was good at his job, so I think they respected him for that. But yeah, I think having fair skin has been the most things that I've copped because of my fair skin from both sides, my own mob and the mainstream because I'm a black fella. They just the stigma.

35 **COLLEEN:** Okay. Thank you. What are your hopes for the Aboriginal communities in this country?

40 [REDACTED]: Oh, gee, that's a big one. I think my hopes. Well, I'm in the health care system. I'm the [REDACTED] and I- one of my hopes is that we have you know, especially down our way that we have a better health care system for our mob. And it's very hard to get doctors down our way and to be able to entice doctors to come our way. And it's not that they don't want to work for our mob, it's just that there's nothing for them here to entice them to come. So better 45 health care for our mob down here and across the country. Okay. For those that that were forced to live off country many years ago, I hope they find some peace and are able to reconnect to country. I find that that's a huge thing. I don't know what I'd do if

I couldn't live on country if I was forced to leave country. And that's generational. And like those people that were brought up from different countries to live on our country in the mission days. You know, they've grown up through generations and they've married into local mob. But I just feel I feel sad because they don't have that  
5 connection to country. And because we have native title as Gunai Kurnai people. I feel sad because they don't- we, they don't get the same options, I suppose, as we do when we connect to country and work on country and care for country. My hopes is that they can reconnect to country and I try and make everybody feel the same. That's lived here. They're all aunties and uncles and cousins. That's just who I am- I think  
10 that's the main one, I think connecting to country and health. And, you know, the big word is self-determination that comes in many different forms, I believe. It can be as small as just connecting to country. But it can be as big as you know, the nation recognising people that are the true custodians of the land.

15 **COLLEEN:** Okay, good. Thank you. Now what do you think needs to happen to correct the injustices you and your family have experienced?

That's a hard one. A better justice system for our mob. Which is always improving all the time. I can see that happening with all the deadly workers  
20 out there and more places. We've got more places to go now to ask the questions. And because sometimes we don't know how we're going to fix it, and I really, I don't know how to answer that, but it's really good that we've got more people like to ask these questions of, because before we I didn't know where to go. If I had a question, how do we fix this or this mobs experience and that that I think just having  
25 more people on the ground to answer questions is going to help me one day. Maybe do that, I don't know.

30 **COLLEEN:** Okay. Great. Thank you, . Now, what would you do if you were the premier of Victoria to make change and progress.

: Change legislation? Okay. There's a lot of legislation that needs to be changed. When Australian government first came into power here a lot of the legislation, acts that were brought out were to control our people. And there's still  
35 some of those acts around and they need to be changed. Especially when people have native title, it makes it's a contradiction. They're basically saying, yeah, you are first custodians in your country or, you know, in Gippsland as it is for us, Gunai Kurnai people. But the legislation needs to change to truly reflect that.

40 **COLLEEN:** Okay, great. What laws need to change and where does money need to be invested?

: I think well, like I said, there's a lot of laws that need to be changed so that they're not contradictory to our people. I don't know, achieving the best they can in their life. The laws- there's a lot of Lands acts, the Land Act, for instance, you  
45 know, prohibits us from doing certain things on our things, on our country, which contradicts our native title rights. You know, there's the Water Act and there's so many acts that could be changed that could actually help us move forward. What

does money need to be invested in? Well, you can't put amount of money on people feeling connected to country. You just can't.

**COLLEEN:** Okay.

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██████████: That's my big thing.

**COLLEEN:** All right. Great. Thank you. █████. Now, what obstacles do we as a community face to make change?

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██████████: The government and sometimes it's our own mob and our own community. I have to be blatantly honest and blunt. It's a lot of the times it's our own mobs that, unfortunately, trying to bring each other down. And I don't know why that is. I think that's a pretty big obstacle. And government need to make changes. They need to recognise us and they need to help us get that self-determination for our mob and stop-I think they need to, to stop handing out so much. In certain areas, there's a lot of our mob that need a hand. I'm not denying that at all, because, you know, I the government supports me because of my disability. But there's just certain things that I think there's a big stigma around. Like when I was growing up, everybody at school reckoned we got paid to go to school, and we, our families got money for us to go to school. And they still think that today and that we get all the handouts, we get cheap. This we get that nothing. You know, we pay nothing for this, we pay nothing for that. It there needs to be a better way around changing that stigma of black fellows get everything because they don't. And I don't know how else to answer that.

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**COLLEEN:** Thank you. █████. Now, do you have any other documents, photographs, cultural artefacts you would like to include with your submission?

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██████████: I don't know what that- no.

**COLLEEN:** Okay.

██████████: No.

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**COLLEEN:** That's fine. Okay. Thank you so much, █████. Thanks, honey. Okay.

**<THE RECORDING HAS CONCLUDED**