

## Statement

Mention is made of persons who are deceased.

From August 1977 until April 1980, I was a voluntary audio-visual operator, cleaner, cook, security, in-house artist and resident of an entertainment centre at 40 St Kilda Road, St Kilda, across the St Kilda junction from what was called a “Corroboree Tree” (Ngargee) on Boonwurrung country, where I was born in 1952.

My first task was to use the centre’s equipment to record proceedings at an Australian Constitutional Convention held at the Exhibition Buildings in Carlton during September 1977, with a view to promoting constitutional reform in support of the Blak community.

Thereafter, the premises became a safe place, attracting such luminaries as Lionel Rose, Bruce McGuinness, Lawrence Booth, Jock and Locky Austin, Betty King, Graeme Rose, Jimmy and Kelvin Onus, a young Murri, Marlene Cummins and many others.

On several occasions Police raided the premises without making an arrest, purportedly searching for cannabis since alcohol was largely prohibited in favour cannabis use, then in the early hours of the morning of 8 March 1980, a squad of around a dozen plain clothed detectives descended on a raid for which I was the principal target, although I was at the time neither a cannabis (or alcohol) user or supplier.

When the squad arrived, I was asleep in a small room at the rear of a partially demolished shopfront next door to the entertainment centre, a few metres from a hole that had been knocked in the site’s wall into the entertainment centre to accommodate an industrial hot air blower during the winter.

At around 2.30am, I woke to detectives dragging me out onto a concrete walkway and throwing me against a brick wall.

I was punched and kicked on the ground then dragged outside into a car park and surrounded by detectives, before being transported to Prahran Police Station, the only arrest made during the operation.

Over the next three hours I was interviewed by two detectives who sought information about who was present at the entertainment centre, while I was being repeatedly punched in soft tissue areas of my body.

With arms around my legs and knees tucked into my chest, I assumed a ball position on a chair to fend off the constant beating.

When I refused to sign a document stating that I had no complaint about the torture to which I was being subjected, one of the detectives, the shorter one with dark hair, placed his arms around me in the ball position, and proceeded to pick me up and motion to drop my back directly onto the edge of the chair with the implied threat that I would be crippled with paraplegia should I continue to refused to sign the verballed document.

Upon this threat, I acceded to the detective's request and signed the document, crossing the end of my signature to denote duress.

I was charged with assaulting police and resisting arrest, although I had been entirely passive from the moment I was woken until my release, and possession of a small amount of cannabis in a coloured pencil case that had been thrown into the yard of the construction site where I slept from the upstairs residence of the entertainment centre next door.

I was released at around 9.30am and transported by the centre's supporters directly to the original 'shopfront' Aboriginal Health Centre on Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, where [REDACTED] received and registered me, and a doctor examined and catalogued the scrapes, cuts and bruises all over my body that I'd received.

After the examination, I returned to the room next to the entertainment centre and remained bedridden for three days with a bottle of water and fresh garlic as an antiseptic, in recovery from the beating I'd received, as pus weeping sores broke out all over my legs.

On the fourth day I managed an hour's work in the entertainment centre and gradually recovered over several weeks.

A month later I left the entertainment centre and relocated to a premises on the site of the first Government House in Phillip Street, Sydney (Warrane), to consider my circumstances and citizenship of a colonial enterprise that was demonstrably a danger to my health and well-being.

In May, I flew to Aotearoa and spent the next year travelling from north to south selling my artwork, before leaving for Stockholm, Sweden in April, 1981.

After a week in Stockholm preparing a written application for political asylum against Australia on grounds of Police violence in custody, I held up a sign on a busy street saying in Swedish, "I need a home".

An hour or so later, I was approached by two plain clothed Police officers.

When I explained that I was seeking political asylum, I was taken into custody and detained in solitary confinement on the third floor of an immigration prison in central Stockholm.

After three weeks, I was introduced to an officer who claimed to have worked in Sydney as a security guard, and was puzzled as to why I was seeking asylum from what he perceived to be a humanitarian country.

I explained that the circumstances of prior occupants starkly contradicted his perception, to which he appeared to agree once reminded.

A week later I was offered the opportunity to put my case for asylum before a parliamentary committee in possibly a year's time, during which I would remain in solitary confinement, or if I consented, I would be returned to my country of origin.

I considered that on my own without external support, I would have difficulty enduring a long period in isolation and consented to being returned having at least registered my protest, requesting that I be returned to Sydney rather than the city and State from which my complaint had originated.

Soon after, I was transported in the custody of two Swedish police officers, overseen by Interpol, in business class via Scandinavian Airways to Heathrow, where I was detained in custody for several hours, then again in escort, via British Airways to Sydney.

On arrival in Sydney, I was released to Australian Federal Police, who confirmed that I had an address to reside, and I was released.

After six months I returned to Victoria and took up residence in the Dandenongs at Tecoma to prepare for my return to the Blak community with which I'd been previously engaged.

My greatest fear was that I might once again find myself in a closed interview room in the bowels of a police station with two rogue detectives capable of delivering lethal abuse, while facing retribution for lodging a complaint of violence in custody in an international forum against their own service, after a threat of paraplegia had been insufficient to silence me.

With utmost caution over a year and a half, I prepared and exhibited a series of paintings entitled "Year One", at the Universal Theatre in Fitzroy during February 1984.

None of the paintings sold and I received only one inquiry from a male purporting to be from a local newspaper, who inquired about my political past.

Over the next year, I took the exhibition to Cologne, West Germany, then returned to Central Victoria where the paintings were destroyed when a gallery at Hepburn Springs was damaged by fire.

A few months later, I returned to Naarm (Melbourne) and spent a week in an Aboriginal hostel in Northcote, then took up an invitation from a colleague at the entertainment centre, [REDACTED], to occupy a room on the first floor of the Builder's Alms Hotel in Gertrude Street, Fitzroy.

I was promptly inducted into the Eagle clan of what was called the "Kerrup jmara" nation, my prior occupant heritage unknown but possibly from lutruwina with an apical ancestor, Emma Young b1844, buried in Melbourne Cemetery.

Six weeks later, after I'd expressed considerable concern on several occasions to [REDACTED] about my status with police after lodging an international complaint over violence in custody, and a few days after uniformed Police interviewed me at the hotel, [REDACTED] urgently informed at around 2pm one afternoon in January 1985, that I had two hours to pack and make myself scarce to secure my safety, effectively exiling me from the community.

Within an hour and a half, I was on a tram back to Boonwurrung country, after which I spent the next seven years isolated at Rye, my mother's birthplace.

Meanwhile, on 16 October 1987, a Deaths in Custody Royal Commission commenced an inquiry into violence in custody, examining incidents from two months prior to what I had reported in an international context.

I surmised that I would not be bothered by Police retaliation if I stayed well away from the prior occupant community, but that I would face a lethal response from the coloniser's gang of rogue Police, immune from prosecution over the most serious of crimes as the Deaths in Custody Inquiry revealed, should I return the community that had sheltered and taken me in, a conclusion I carry with me in the present until Sovereign treaties are transacted neutralising the coloniser's allegiance to a palpably dishonest and treacherous foreign entity.

I made contact with [REDACTED] in Redfern, who helped me relocate to Gadigal country, where I taught Aboriginal Studies for a semester at UNSW

prior to taking up positions as a Child Protection Officer with DOCS NSW for six months and assisting the federal transition from Social Security to Centrelink over four years, before working in transport at Sydney Airport for a decade.

I've since remained in exile on Gadigal country, with a few years spent healing on Widjabul-Waibel country in what colonisers call northern NSW.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this submission.

With respect,

Philip McKeon

Born on Boonwurrung country, 1952

“Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, First Nations or First People” are coloniser assimilation assignments with which the author does not identify.

Currently on Gadigal country

22 November, 2024

