

VOICE. TREATY. TRUTH.



Speech by WRN Video Project Co-ordinator, Dr Deborah Ruiz Wall OAM (Women's Reconciliation Network) at the launch of the stories of Biripai woman, Aunty Ali Golding and Kamilaroi woman, Aunty Beryl Van Oploo on 10 July, NAIDOC Week 2019

VOICE. TREATY. TRUTH.

This is the theme for NAIDOC WEEK 2019. It is within this context that we will hear the voice of our aunts, hear truth-telling through their stories. Ali Morris was born in 1940. She grew up in Taree in the north coast. Beryl Walford was born in 1942. She grew up in Walgett in the north-west of NSW. Both were raised in the country. In their days, many Aboriginal children lived on reserves and missions. They hardly had educational opportunities. If they were trained for anything at all, it was to do with labouring or doing domestic work for the new settlers. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Aboriginal women were expected to work mainly as cooks, cleaners or, be employed in menial jobs. What was normal for young Ali Morris was life in Purfleet Mission ran by a government-appointed white mission manager and his wife. She was 12 when her Mum passed away. Aunty Beryl's family lived in the reserves, in Gingie Mission, about 30 km from Walgett. The mission was managed by the Aboriginal Protection Board (APB). She was 14 when her mother died.

To fully understand the early family life experience of Aunty Ali and Aunty Beryl set in the first half of the 20th century, we need to take account of how their lives were shaped by the impact of the governance of the British colonial system in Australia in the 19th century. In joining the dots between the footprints of laws and policies in the 19th century and their life experience, we can see more clearly the challenges that confronted them. At the time of invasion in 1788, the estimated number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders was more than 770,000. By 1900, their number was around 117,000 — a decrease by 84%, according to the Bureau of Statistics. Their population was decimated. Today the proportion of people identifying as Aboriginal is 3.3 % of Australia's population.

The plight of Indigenous survivors of frontier wars and introduced diseases was at the forefront of the colonial government's thinking. A Protector was appointed in 1881. The Aboriginal Protection Board was established in 1883. The Aborigines Protection Act 1909 gave the Aboriginal Protection Board power to exert extensive control over the movement of Indigenous people who were segregated to live on reserves and missions. The enforced separation of the two cultures, however, did not translate into 'protection'. Rather, many Indigenous people experienced blatant discrimination and racism.

In her story, Aunty Beryl recalls Charles Perkins' Freedom Ride movement, a protest against segregation in Walgett—segregated access to swimming pools, hotels and picture theatres. When Aunty Ali was about to leave

home as a teenager to look for work, Jim Morris, her dad gave her advice to survive life on her own. Jim Morris used the allegory of 'life in the black box' and 'life in the white box'. Black and white. Two very different life patterns and conditions. We know, of course, that Australian cultures are not strictly black and white. The imagery of black and white simply reinforces a colonial paradigm of thinking. Australia is a blended nation. Our Aboriginal mentor, Aunty Ali, has Chilean and Irish forebears, and furthermore, she married an Englishman. Our other Aboriginal mentor, Aunty Beryl has multicultural forebears —Austrian and Irish. She married a Dutch engineer. From the perspective of our narratives of Country, what binds our collective future together are the stories we share on this land. Aboriginal Nations come from diverse languages and cultures. And so do new settlers who come from diverse backgrounds.

Our starting point is diversity on a path seeking harmony rather than the slogan, 'Harmony in Diversity'. I tell you how we started 'our walk' in relation to the video production. I am a close friend of Aunty Ali and Aunty Beryl. All three of us have been involved with the reconciliation advocacy work of WRN for over twenty years now. I suggested to WRN that our Aboriginal mentors' stories should be shared with a wider audience. WRN thought that was a good idea, so we started working on the stories with the thought of a print and a podcast version. Sometime in November 2017 while on a lunch break from our podcast recording, my Cuban-American friend, Dr Francisco Proenza, came to hear about the work we were doing. He was impressed and inspired by Aunty Ali's story. He subsequently showed me his previous video work and suggested that video rather than podcast would be a better platform for the aunts' stories. He was persuasive so we let him join our WRN team. We told him that we did not have funding. All our work was free or pro bono. He was fine with that.

We finished the work. We think that these two completed videos of our elders' stories can serve as a training and learning resource for schools, universities and the workplace. We believe that when people reflect on our aunts' stories, it will help broaden and deepen our knowledge of Australian history. We will have a more inclusive telling of Australia's history.

Voice. Truth.

What do they really mean? Recognition of Australian Indigenous voice. Truth and inclusiveness in history telling. Voice and truth are essential prerequisites before we can even think of a **treaty or Makarrata**, the Yolgnu word from Arnhem Land for 'reaching agreement after a struggle'. Hearing their stories will give us an opportunity to move out of the shadows of misrepresentation, concealment, or deception, and help us acknowledge the injustices that marred our relationship with our Motherland and with our First Nations people. Our aunts' stories are positive. Our aunts have emerged as community role models against all odds. Their stories are an inspiration. From the **Uluru Statement from the Heart**, we realise that our First Nations people have generously offered us the invitation to move forward with them.

To access their stories, click on the YouTube web links

Aunty Ali's story: https://youtu.be/IP_qVW7PX3o

Aunty Beryl's story: <https://youtu.be/cO0sWM4t7II>

News Coverage of the event

Interview with Kamilaroi elder, Beryl Van Oplou

<https://www.sbs.com.au/yourlanguage/filipino/en/audiotrack/naidoc-weeks-message-respect-aunty-beryl>

Interview with Biripi Elder Aunty Ali Golding

<https://www.sbs.com.au/yourlanguage/filipino/en/audiotrack/aunty-ali-naidoc-week-and-aboriginals-right-be-heard>

Interview with Dr Deborah Ruiz-Wall OAM

https://www.sbs.com.au/yourlanguage/filipino/en/audiotrack/aunty-ali-naidoc-week-and-aboriginals-right-be-heard?language=en&fbclid=IwAR0aHxG4_AOAA9KPdqwk-TCuaFulkh3a0usRJ2w7tIgbkUg06VBvqRpEDiU

NITV online

<https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2019/07/11/womens-organisation-preserves-stories-well-known-elders>