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Dr Charles Perkins OA Memorial Oration & Memorial Prize 2019 University of Sydney

Title: Aminila bit tjan kin-ning wurrkama gu? Are we all working together with a united voice, treaty & truth?

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Acknowledgement

Yo Walakanda! Pilu! Tyilili! Kagaminy woewoe ninni Gadinura – Gadi nunngu. Marrany nginin pupwa. Yu nangy ga Payi Linda Ford, Rak Mak Mak Marranunggu, Kurrindju yangana, also daughter of the Warramirri clan at Gawa on Elcho Island in the Northern Territory. Wurrkama Dr Charles Perkins OA Memorial Oration ninni nangy ga woewoe Gadigal– Eora nunngu. Ma!

I honour your Elders that have come before you, those that are here tonight and wait in optimistic anticipation for those Elders who are yet to emerge on Gadinura – Gadi Country of the Gadigal of the Eora Nation. I began by acknowledging in my Mak Mak Marranunggu the sovereignty of Gadigal of the Eora Nation Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet this evening and all Indigenous peoples and guests tonight at the Dr Charles Perkins OA Memorial Oration 2019 and Memorial Prize event hosted by the University of Sydney.

I acknowledge and I can see:

The Perkins Family Members: Tyilili Eileen, Delyek Rachel, Kandu Tyson, Tjipal Thea, Tyipal Lillie

The University of Sydney's Vice Chancellor & Principal Dr Michael Spence AC

Deputy Vice Chancellor Indigenous Strategies and Services Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver AM

All my Family, countrymen from all walks of life and to those that are here in spirit

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Tonight, I honour Dr Charles Perrurle Perkins OA's Memorial.

Thank you all for your gracious attendance to listen and learn from the Dr Charles Perrurle Perkins OA's Memorial Oration. Charles is an Arrernte & Kalkadoon man whose journey impacted on so many of us. His footprints are engrained in the political Australian landscape of Native Affairs Policies, and I will present to you how his legacy is reflected in 'Celebrating the International Year of Indigenous Languages emphasising the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Day of Celebration 2019 theme: Voice Treaty Truth' in the Aminila bit tjan kin-ning wurrkama gu? Are we all working together with a united voice, treaty & truth?

This is Charlie Perkins story the way that I understand it from a Mak Mak Marranunggu woman's interpretation of the materials and documents that I have researched over the last couple of weeks. Charles Perrurle Perkins is the spirit of a desert man born in the heart of our Nation - in the Centre of Australia. The site is beautiful and the country full of deep spiritual moods and personalities that are celebrated through ancient ceremony. His strong Arrernte and Kalkadoon spirit fills the room tonight in remembering him and that we have survived.

I will outline key facts about Charles, his family and country, what influenced his life's journey my interpretation and activism, what he learnt and the lessons he shared with us. Then I will move onto the activism of today through 'Celebrating the Year of International Indigenous Languages, NAIDOC theme 2019 Voice Treaty Truth' and the 'Uluru Statement from the Heart'. Throughout this delivery I will make connections to my own story that is not dissimilar to many of my Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island extended families across our traditional countries. I will draw my conclusion, exchange gifts, sing a song to call on everyone's support and memorialize Charlie Perkins. I hope you're in for that.

Charlie was a man of many talents, a fitter & turner, sportsman, social critic, black activist for Aboriginal self-determination, a higher education student, administrator and above all as a Family Man loved by his Family. He was motivated by the atrocities that occurred to him, his mother and countrymen

across the nation. He recognized this and decided on an action plan. As a Bachelor of Arts undergraduate student at the University of Sydney he revealed in the social justice and equality for First Australians and graduated in 1967. Too good.

He was a courageous Arrernte and Kalkadoon higher education student. He created Australia's best-known activism event: the 'Freedom Rides' during 1965 and is regarded by many as one of the greatest Aboriginal activists of our contemporary era. His activism drew unprecedented hatred during his lifetime. Today the critics and scholars have recognised him as a champion of Indigenous peoples rights. His activism, sporting prowess and capability to influence governments and statesmen are widely remembered.

He was Born on June 16, 1936

He Passed Away on October 19, 2000

His Parents were Hetti Perkins & Martin Connelly

His widowed spouse is Eileen Perkins

They were Married on 23 September 1961

His Children are Hetti Perkins, Adam Perkins, & Rachel Perkins

His Grandchildren are Madeleine, Tyson, Thea and Lillie

All Charles and Eileen's children and grandchild are extremely deadly.

Charles had multiple brothers and sisters

Charles resting place is at the Bungalow at Mparntwe (Um-'barn'-two-a').

Purpunt tawa (Pur-pu-nt ta-wa) - Alice Springs, Northern Territory, Australia

As you can see I can't speak Arrernte.



Reputation & Notable Works

Charles identified what was really happening to his countrymen 'living in extreme disadvantage, they were treated as second class citizens, they were not included and therefore excluded from the Australian society, politics, economy and most of all they were not sharing in the happiness only the cruelty and hardship' doled out to them. He continued to plot, scheme, and plan on how to stop the cruelty and humiliation with a core support network of family, friends, colleagues, and experts. This was his strategic plan in action from the ground up – a transformative paradigm shift was shaped into a design framework that he could implement. Charles Perkins set about raising awareness to elevate Australians consciousness.

We now recognise and celebrate what happened 54 years ago when the Freedom Rides brought Charles's activism to rural New South Wales following that the 1967 Referendum. These events are benched marked National and Globally. They were BIG but not big enough as the injustices toward Indigenous Australians persisted and so did Charles stance on social justice - with a deep passion. Charles, Eileen and his mother Hetti had lived and breathed the injustices and unkindness towards Aboriginal people. He knew and understood what this felt like. Charles had witnessed them as a child and as a young adult he felt strong enough to act upon them through his work with the backup and support of his loving wife Eileen, Hetti, Adam, Rachel and the family. He did not forget who he was - an Aboriginal man. He was blessed by our ancestors that's for sure.

The Perkins Family continue to take care of their Family's legacy through their commitment for all Australians and the world. For this I say "Thank you to the Perkin's Family."

Rachel Perkins is Eileen and Charles's youngest daughter and she reflects on her father's activism in the following way:

"Understanding segregation – apartheid in Australia was what Charles wanted Australians to know about and he wanted to highlight discrimination against Aboriginal people. To experience the discrimination in Australia is profound and the legacy of the Freedom Ride was to draw Australian people's attention to what was happening in country New South Wales."

There are 3 film and documentary dedicated to Charlie:

- 1993: Freedom Ride
- 2009: Fire Talker - The Life and Times of Charlie Perkins
- 2009: Remembering Charlie Perkins

As the Perkins Family well know - Charles didn't mince his words. When he thought people were doing the wrong thing, he would tell them straight up: "That's not on!" or he would tell the oppressed countrymen the best action is "Speaking out!" "Get up and do it yourself!" "Keep the fire in your belly!" The one that gets me is "Keep your eye on the ball and on the main game!"

Charles position on reconciliation he claims is "evolutionary and a work in progress" and his lesson to us is to "work towards common goals – it's going to be hard – that's all!" I love that quote.

He had such hope for us as Australians – a fair country - full of milk and honey!

To understand the events and what influenced Charlie and other activists after the war we must to visit the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement.

In 1958, Mary Bennett, a Western Australian activist who was both attuned to the needs of her impoverished Kalgoorlie Aboriginal neighbours and aware of moves within the international community to safeguard the rights of colonised peoples, drew attention to 'International Labour Organization Convention 107' concerning "the protection of indigenous and other tribal and semi-tribal populations in independent countries". Whereas "the Declaration of Human Rights emphasised the universal rights of all people, the International Labour Organization Convention 107 looked specifically at the rights of Indigenous peoples who had been colonised. It sought to secure for Indigenous populations the same legal protections offered to the rest of the community.

While the basic focus of the International Labour Organization Convention 107 was on equal rights and integration, it went further, stating:

"The right of ownership, collective or individual, of the members of the populations concerned over the lands which these populations traditionally occupy shall be recognised. Australia, however, did not sign the convention." You could imagine how all the countrymen were feeling at that time.

"The agenda of the second annual conference of FCAA, which was held in Melbourne in 1959, was shaped according to the articles of Convention 107 as a way of alerting other activists of this International Convention and its

relevance to Australia. One conclusion they came to was that the Australian Constitution needed to be changed so that the Commonwealth government could take a more active role and responsibility. Another was to continue to publicise cases of injustice.”

“The Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement showed that it was prepared to challenge both law makers and law enforcers, such as mission superintendents and clerks of petty sessions. In remote parts of the country the police officer often had the additional titles of local Protector of Aborigines and the Clerk of Petty Sessions as well as being under sometimes intense pressure to support pastoralists in conflicts with local Aborigines.”

Activists at all levels rallied fast and hard with their national support networks to address the injustices faced by Aboriginal people.

“In 1967 a [referendum](#) was held on [constitutional amendments](#) to allow inclusion of Aboriginal people in censuses and giving the [Parliament of Australia](#) the right to introduce legislation specifically for Aboriginal people. In the lead up to the referendum Perkins was manager of the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs, an organization that took a key role in advocating a Yes vote. The constitutional amendment passed with a 90.77% majority.”

At this time, Charlie would have been feeling the wind blowing in his favour albeit for a fleeting moment.

Charles’s health was impacted by kidney failure and he underwent surgery and had a kidney transplant. This disease is common in our people. Unfortunately, kidney transplants for Indigenous Australians are not. The “ABS 2016 indicate life expectancy for Indigenous men is 72 years of age and for women 76 years of age.” This is 9 and 8 years less than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Atrocious isn’t it!

Nationally our cultural reinvigoration is valued by our mob. This is demonstrated through the maintenance of our Indigenous cosmology knowledges, cultures, languages and caring for our land and sea country. Our presences are paramount to our place in this country’s political, economic and social systems. That’s from my point of view.

Our mobility and communication across nations is stronger than it’s ever been, and we ought to be applying ways to grow the nation’s awareness of the issues we face as Indigenous people. This is what the Uluru Statement from the

Heart: Voice Treaty Truth proposed. We want this momentum to grow and develop from the ground up and to be transformative. We want all our mob to take responsibility for this movement and to take ownership of our future.

Ahla (mother) Nancy Ngulilkang Daiyi's lesson to me:

"If you don't stand up and speak out, no one will do this for you (or us)!"

As Australians when can we unite our nation to explore what our national identity will look like? When can we communicate with each other to bring Australians together to address Indigenous issues to examine the purpose that underpins the silencing and marginalisation of Indigenous people from the Australian Constitution?

Indigenous Engagement, Research, Learning and Teaching

There are examples of successful models within the nation-state educational institutions such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, most universities and many schools have supported and valued Indigenous engagement, research, learning and teaching into Indigenous languages, cultures, law, lore, songs, dance, performance and rituals respectfully.

Our Indigenous songs and ceremonies are our Indigenous archival repositories of our Australian history and they are also the living archives in our people, in our country.

The Indigenous research by ethnomusicology experts at the University of Sydney like Emeritus Professor Allan Marett and Professor Linda Barwick who have worked tirelessly with senior Wangga ceremonial leaders, my ceremony group to produce research outputs in refereed journals, books and multi-media such as the Wangga songs CD's that you heard if you came earlier this evening. These are available through the Sydney University Press for anyone to purchase. These ought to be available in every state and territory's educational institutions to develop Indigenous curriculum resources and materials for learning and teaching about our national heritage. I see a lot of my colleagues here from the Con (Sydney Conservatorium of Music).

The Charles Darwin University provides the Yolgnu Studies degree, the Living Languages Archive, Mak Mak and Warramirri seasonal calendars. They are available online through the Northern Institute based in the College of Indigenous Futures, Arts and Society. The Australian Universities are getting

better at addressing the Indigenist Research Reform Agenda in research, learning, teaching and community engagement.

Other pragmatic ways to support Indigenous young people is with their studies and career options. It is amazing to watch our younger generations of Indigenous undergraduate and postgraduate students excel with their higher education studies. There are more options for our students to apply for scholarships to obtain employment and improve their career prospects. For instances the Charlie Perkins Scholarship Trust will be announced by the VC (Vice Chancellor) later this evening. Congratulations!

Charles fought so hard to achieve – Freedom, Hope & Growth for all of us in a fair and equitable Australia.

To achieve this we need younger Australians to learn about the truth of our Australian history. They must be taught about this so they can make good decisions for the betterment and fairness of all Australians. We must work to embed Indigenous content into the core curriculum of the key learning areas of our nation-state schools, and ensure the content is delivered and assessed, that align with the accreditation requirements set by relevant authorities.

We have survived social Darwinism, fought in the resistance wars across our traditional countries, the 1901 Australian Constitution, WWI, WWII and other wars that Australians' have fought to date.

Our mob have been there.

However, the government continues relentlessly to manage us with numerous Ordinances that include the following “timeline of the:

Aboriginals Ordinance 1918	1918 - 1953
Welfare Ordinance 1953	1953 - 1964
Social Welfare Ordinance 1964	1964 – 1984

The Welfare Ordinance 1953 created the position of Director of Welfare and made the Director the legal guardian of all 'wards' - the term used to define Aboriginal people in this legislation. The Welfare Ordinance 1953 was passed on 15 July 1953 and became effective from 13 May 1957. Several amendments occurred until it was repealed by the Social Welfare Ordinance 1964.”

My story resonates with aspects of Charles’s story about “A bastard like me” 1975 in that we were both born ‘wards’ of the Northern Territory, Australia

and victims of being ‘forcibly’ removed from our Aboriginal mothers as babies to expunge our Aboriginality under these Ordinances’.”

More about my story later. I can’t read it now – I’ll be crying.

We have survived to lodge our voice to be heard through the Uluru Statement: “Anyone whose ancestors lived in Australia before 1788 and suffered the theft of their lands and its intergenerational consequences is eligible for a voice to Parliament.”

The International Year of Indigenous Languages 2019

“In 2016, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution proclaiming 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages, based on a recommendation by the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. At the time, the Forum said that 40 per cent of the estimated 6,700 languages spoken around the world were in danger of disappearing. The fact that most of these are indigenous languages puts the cultures and knowledge systems to which they belong at risk.”

Our very own AIATSIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) also celebrated our Australian Indigenous Languages and states:

“More than 250 Indigenous Australian languages **including 800 dialectal varieties** were spoken on the continent at the time of European settlement in 1788. **Only 13** traditional Indigenous languages are still acquired by children. Approximately **another 100** or so are spoken to various degrees by older generations, with many of these languages at risk as Elders pass away. Today Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia are speaking out about the need to maintain, preserve and strengthen Indigenous Australian languages. There is currently a wave of activity, with people in many communities working to learn more about their languages, and to ensure they are passed on to the next generation” and bloody hard work. I say that because there is a lot of competition with the phone and technology.

My language activism and learning work in higher education is included in my own language paradigm shift in the way that I have thought about language learning and teaching. I’ll divert a bit – 30 years ago I never thought we would lose our languages. Now guess what? There is only a handful of us that still speak Marranunggu and Marrithiyel. Marranunggu family members requested

to learn their languages and most of those families are from Stolen Generation and have been impacted by intergenerational trauma and find it hard to come back into the fold of *the family*. In 2019 – 2020 the First Language Australia grant was awarded and the Ford family can use the Miromaa program to build a Marranunggu Dictionary. Initially, I didn't have a lot of materials or resources but as I have been researching New Ways for Old Ceremonies, Aboriginal Cosmology and other small language projects and I have been compiling language materials and documents to release to my family.

I have learnt about the Australian Language family is the Pama-Ngunyan and non-Pama-Ngunyan languages and continue to learn about my two languages Mak Mak Marranunggu (my Grandfathers Language) and Marrithiyel (my Grandmothers Language) and where they are situated. I can hear many of the Marrawulgat languages. There are over 20 of them.

“The Pama–Nyungan languages are the most widespread group of Australian Aboriginal languages, consisting of some 300 languages, and covering most of the continent but for northern parts of the Northern Territory and Western Australia. The name "Pama–Nyungan" is derived from the names of the two most widely separated groups, the Pama languages in far north Queensland, in the northeast tip of Australia, and the Nyungan languages of southwest WA.

The Non-Pama-Nyungan languages are those indigenous Australian languages whose traditional territory was in the northern fifth of the continent, from around Broome on the Western Australia coast across to around Mornington Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria and encompassing the Kimberley, the Daly River region which is where my languages are, Arnhem Land where Ngahndi Gotha's languages are, the Barkly Tableland, and the offshore islands such as Groote Eylandt. These languages are not said to constitute a single family in and of themselves, but rather are divided into twenty or more families, which together with Pama-Nyungan form the overall Australian language family.” That's pretty amazing. I didn't have a clue about that 5 years ago. My Marranunggu and Marrithiyel languages are Non-Pama-Nyungan languages in the Top End.

Sign Language

“*The Australian sign language is known as 'Auslan' developed by, and for, Australians who are deaf or hearing impaired. It is a visual form of communication that uses hand, arm and body movements to convey*

meaning.” Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people use their own sign language system for those that are deaf and have a hearing impairment as well as for cultural reasons for everyone particularly for females.

“Sign language occurs informally and formally in multiple social contexts by many Indigenous people across Australia. Those Indigenous people living in remote and isolated regions continue these traditions of sign language in the Northern Territory, mid-northern Western Australia and far north Queensland” or so the research states.

“The Warlpiri Sign Language, also known as Rdaka-rdaka (hand signs), is a sign language used by the Warlpiri, an Aboriginal community in the central desert region of Australia. It is one of the most elaborate, and certainly the most studied, of all Australian Aboriginal sign languages. While many neighbouring language groups such as Arrernte and the Western Desert Language have auxiliary sign languages, Warlpiri Sign Language, along with Warumungu Sign Language from the Tennant Creek area, appears to be the most well developed and widely used — it is as complete a system of communication as spoken Warlpiri. This is possibly due to the tradition that widows should not speak during an extended mourning period which can last for months or even years; during this time, they communicate solely by sign language.

In Warlpiri communities, widows also tend to live away from their families, with other widows or young single women. As a result, it is typical for Warlpiri women to have a better command of the sign language than men, and among older women at Yuendumu, Warlpiri Sign Language is in constant use, whether they are under a speech ban or not. However, all members of the community understand it, and may sign in situations where speech is undesirable, such as while hunting, in private communication, across distances: Yo, yuwah, so I use words and signal (Linda points down the back of the hall) while ill, or for subjects that require a special reverence or respect. Many also use signs as an accompaniment to speech.”

Other sign language experts such as Lawurrpa Maypila and Dany ADone have researched the Yolngu Sign language. “The Yolngu Sign Language is as rich and diverse as the Walpiri Sign Language system. The Yolngu Sign Language is used across East Arnhem Land.”

My hunting story

When I was growing up on the cattle stations and in the stock camps my Ahla Daiyi, my mother would take us hunting. She would always indicate to us in Marranunggu sign language how to behave depending on the prey's proximity and distance. Linda raises her right hand to the front of her mouth and closes her fingers onto her thumb which means keep quiet. For instance if Ahla Daiyi was hunting for awa (animal) she would indicate to us with sign language either if she was hunting for a buffalo, or domestic or feral cow, or a feral pig. So she would say to us. (Pause and looked at Auslan interpreter and asks: Are you right for this?)

Act out using Marranunggu sign language.

What did she (Ahla Daiyi) say? You mob sit down and shut up I am gonna go and shoot that buffalo.

The limited research and documentation of the Indigenous sign language is important and requires resources to support Indigenous people that have no other cultural options to communicate their needs is a significant issue. The Indigenous women and deaf communities are the most disadvantaged of all Australian groups through sexism, racism and audism.

I encourage Indigenous people to engage with their heritage, language(s) and sign language(s).

The Uluru Statement (2017) is important as this has bought our attention to many issues in our journey. Thus, it states "When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. We speak for us. This is the crux of the Uluru Statement from the Heart - Voice Treaty Truth."

There was a call for the establishment of a First Nations voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Who is listening to the call?

Makarrata Commission

The creation of a "Makarrata Commission". I've got to say that right cause my Ngahndi's (adopted Warramirri Mother) right there. Ngahndi will growl at me. "... to supervise a process of agreement making between us and the government and truth telling about our history" was also highlighted as a framework to engage with ourselves and Australians.

“A performance of the statement was first delivered to a gathering of over 250 of our delegates at Uluru on May 26 2017.” I bet you that Charlie was there watching over them. What do you think Eileen? “It was a watershed moment in Australia’s history that came after a number of others. The 1967 referendum that counted our people in the census and gave the federal government power to create laws for us.”

The adoption of the Yolngu term ‘Makarrata’ imbues itself to “negotiating a reconciliation process with all Australians calling for fairness and equity to be addressed in the Australian Constitution.”

“The creation of a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement making between us and the government and truth telling about our history” is important to continue its formalisation and adoption in the narrative. This ‘Agreement making process’ will further our joint understanding of what a Makarrata Commission will be. Firstly, let me share what I understand of the word Makarrata. The word Makarrata is a Yolngu word from East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia. We have a boss over there who is an owner of that word (Makarrata).

How do I know this? Because my Yolngu senior Warramirri elders and Ngahndis (Mothers) Dr Kathy Guthadjaka OA and Dr Elaine Lawurrrpa Maypila from Elcho Island shared their story based on their oral living memory and their Aboriginal customary law traditions with me about Makarrata.

This is Ngahndi’s (mother’s) *Gotha & Lawurrrpa’s story*:

Their father went through multiple Makarrata’s. Their oral account is intense, and description of Makarrata can be dangerous in practice or it can be used to reconcile. However, deflection of the spears is likened to an apology and the surrendering of their anger and contestation to that of a neutral position on both sides.

I would tell you more stories about Makarrata’s but I don’t have time.

The Makarrata process can offer cultural insights to build respect and value each others’ opinions to resolve matters that require attention. Australians must resolve the ongoing dispute and lay it to rest.

It is claimed “The consultation process that lead to this statement was unprecedented. Former leaders Malcom Turnbull and Bill Shorten appointed a Referendum Council in 2015. And over a six-month period, it engaged over

1200 of our representatives in a dozen regional dialogues across the country. Those talks ended with a consensus position on Constitutional Recognition for the very first time. How amazing is that. Unlike documents of the past for example the 'Barunga Statement' which lobbied Federal government the Uluru Statement is directed at the Australian public."

The final paragraph reads: "In 1967 we were counted. In 2017 we seek to be heard. We invite you to walk with us in a moment of the Australian people for the better future. The Prime Minister Malcom Turnbull rejected the Uluru Statement of the Heart - Voice Treaty Truth."

Why do we need the Voice, Treaty, Truth? Why do we need specially dedicated seats? We need this to stop arbitrary Parliamentary Acts, like the Northern Territory National Emergency Act 2007, which had terrible effects on Indigenous people. This is why we need the Makarrata Commission.

It was a nightmare that carried devastating media messages about our men who were demonised, our women portrayed as hopeless mothers and grandmothers and as if we allowed our children to be sexually abused.

My daughters Chloe and Emily then 11 and 9 years old asked "Is the Australian Army coming to take us away?"

As Aboriginal learners we are taught at an early age through lessons about reality. My Ahla (mother) Daiyi's instructions were always gentle but stern. An important transmission of her teachings was to remind me to remain silent and always listen to what was going on around you: "Kipinja! Mori-nimba!" Leave it alone, that is their language, or business or work at hand when she believed we were being 'managed' by a Pa-dacoot, non-Aboriginal person, bureaucrats or government agencies.

Truth telling

Aaah! This is where it gets a bit hard, this is where I might need a bit more time. I might cry. Emily I might need a drink.

As a young Mak Mak Marranunggu teenager I was a curious young girl. An illuminating moment occurred to me in 1976 at the Batchelor Post Office, in the Northern Territory 0845. I went to collect the mail and saw a list of names on the bench. Of course, I read it. On that list I read my Mak Mak Marranunggu family members names. My name Linda was there with my siblings and mother; however, the surname was my father Maurice's (Max) and

stepmother Ada's surname of Sargent. I was shocked. I ran home to my stepmother Ada Sargent and asked why we were listed as Sargent and why was the document (apparently a petition against the pending Finnis River Land Rights Claim over the region) accessible at the post office. As I recall those events, I reflect on my poor Mum Number 2's reaction. Ada had been caught off guard and was equally shocked, but she calmed herself. Ada began to explain to me the best she could to a 14-year-old Aboriginal girl about why the government had identified myself, my 3 siblings and my Ahla (my birth mother) Nancy Ngulilkang Daiyi with the surname of Sargent and not Daiyi.

I sat and listened to the story about how Ada would sign my consent letters for the Batchelor Area School and how she cared for myself and my 3 siblings as our guardian and not as a parent. This was not news to me as I witnessed Ada Mum Number 2 signing my school notices as my legal guardian. Ada went onto inform me about the things that happened 14 years earlier at the Old Batchelor Health Clinic in March 1962.

After she had informed me of some of the legal guardianship details she stopped. You could imagine we were both sitting there bawling our eyes out. I told her it was okay. My Ahla (mother) Ngulilkang Nancy Daiyi often would share stories about my birth at the old Batchelor Health Clinic in 1962.

Tonight, I will share my story as taught to me by my Ahla (mother) Ngulilkang Nancy Daiyi.

My Ahla Daiyi, lived 3 miles outside of Batchelor at Meneling Cattle Station that was owned by my father Maurice (Max) and his first wife Ada Sargent. Ahla was experiencing complications with her prolonged labour and the contractions were not good. My A-tyang Nginyawal (Great Aunt) who was also my Ahla's mid-wife made a decision to take Ahla to the Batchelor clinic. I was born in Batchelor, Northern Territory 110 ks south west of Darwin in March 1962 at the heart of the Rum Jungle uranium mining town. My Ahla Daiyi had suffered birthing complications and was haemorrhaging in the small Batchelor regional health clinic. The sister in charge was overwhelmed delivering the first baby born at the old clinic and then experiencing the medical complication and to resolve them.

I was born a "half-caste" to a 'full-blood' Aboriginal woman. The sister freaked out my Ahla Daiyi told me and the sister called the Batchelor Policeman to attend to the Clinic and to assist in the transportation of my Ahla Daiyi and I to

the Darwin Hospital at Myilly Point where the old Kahlin Compound used to be. Ahla Daiyi was taken for surgery and the surgeon made sure that Ahla would not be able to give birth to any more children.

We remained together until Ahla Daiyi recovered and we were then transported by the Native Affairs officer to the Bagot Aboriginal Reserve on Bagot Road. A short time after arriving at Bagot Hospital my Ahla Daiyi overheard the Matron in Charge saying to another Pa-dacoot (white person) that she would start the paperwork to separate Nancy from her baby. You could only imagine what was racing through my Ahla Daiyi's mind to save her newborn infant Payi - me.

Ahla Daiyi returned to her bed and collected items necessary for her plan of action. She approached the Matron and requested if she could attend the Winnellie Shops to purchase safety pins, nappies and other items. The Matron agreed that Ahla and I could go to the shop. The Matron ordered a taxi to collect us from Bagot and to take us to Winnellie.

Another A-tyang (Great Aunt) was living opposite the big white-water tank along the Stuart highway with a Pa-dacoot (white) man. This is where Ahla Daiyi directed the taxi driver to drop us off and that Ahla Daiyi would arrange with the family to take us back to Winnellie to do the shopping and then head back to Bagot. We didn't! Instead my Ahla Daiyi planned to head back to country with the support of our family.

Remember - the end of March in the Top End is the monsoon season and the country is saturated and the rivers and creeks in full flood, full of threats with crocodiles, man eating crocodiles, and deadly poisonous snakes. We arrived at the old Bynoe turn off and headed west towards the Blackmore River – Tumbling Waters old crossing. The river was in full flood and the water flow roaring quickly by us.

My Ahla Daiyi was determined to get us across that river. Ahla Daiyi and A-tyang (great Aunt) gathered paperbark and wrapped me up into a bundle to sit across the back of my Ahla Daiyi's shoulders just behind her head, they tied the rope as tight as possible. In we went. My Ahla Daiyi said that if I had come undone and disconnected from her, I would have at least floated for a little while – perhaps enough time for her to have recovered me if necessary. Thankfully this wasn't the case. We made the crossing.

Ahla Daiyi left me wrapped in paperbark under the shade to return to A-tyang (Great Aunt) and collect all our belongs on the other side of the swollen flooded river which she transported across to where I lay in the shade. We crossed 5 more flooded rivers and creeks before we made it to the Roslyn Plains Cattle Station outstation and when I talk about floods in the NT we have @2.5m of rain per year. So, in the dry season the river beds might look like this (Linda points at the floor) but in the wet season there up above the painting – the water that is. My Tjabutj (Grandfather) Wigma was there with my Mangali (Grandmother) looking after the stock camp. They were horrified to see Ahla Daiyi walking into the stock camp with me.

My Uncle saw us first. He was onto the reason why we had shown up on foot. He quickly unhobbed three horses in the horse yard and saddled up two horses and put the pack saddle on another to carry our belongs to where my father Max Sargent and other family were building a stock yard by the Finniss River at a place known to Marranunggu as Kar-Kar. My father Max Sargent named the yard after me - Linda's yard and the paddock and outstation were named as Linda's paddock.

When we drive out to Dundee these days you can guess what the oral history lesson is about for my kids or any other family that will listen. "How my Ahla Ngulilkang Nancy Daiyi had saved me". In actual fact the country saves us.

So, I can stop that story because this story is epic apparently or I can continue. Three days later... Linda stops and asks the audience: "Do you want me to continue on?"

Note: The Audience's respond: "YES!"

Three days later the Batchelor Policeman arrived on horseback with his Central Australian Black Tracker. Everyone in the stock camp was on edge as a couple of stockman – my Uncle's had alerted the stock camp, my Ahla and Dad that they were on their way to the cattle yards. As the Policeman arrived on the edge of the construction site of the cattle yards Dad yelled out to him that he was trespassing on his land. The Policeman ignored him. Dad then instructed my brother who was 3 years old to bring his 303 rifle to his side. Dad issues a threat: "If you come any closer, I will use this!" The Policeman waves a piece of paper in the air and says: "Maxie, this is a summons for you to bring Nancy and her newborn baby to the Darwin Court House." The aim of the Policeman

coming on horseback was to remove me from my Ahla Daiyi's custody and care using court processes. My Dad fires a single shot into the air. The Policeman understood and returned to his post at the Batchelor Police Station.

Later Dad learnt from his first wife Ada Sargent that the Policeman had served the summons to Ada who was based at Meneling Cattle Station near Batchelor. Dad had three cattle stations. We all head off to Darwin Court House. Our legal counsel was Dick Ward. The judge ruled that Maurice (Max) Sargent and Ada Sargent would become the legal guardians of my Ahla Daiyi, my 3 siblings and myself. This act of rebellion was not unnoticed by the Native Affairs and the Northern Territory authorities. Want to have a guess what they did?

They came after us and my Dad. The health authorities identified him as having leprosy which he claims he never did. The government used health reasons to declare that Dad had leprosy and institutionalised Dad to the East Arm leprosarium in the Darwin Port. There was no way that Dad was allowing the Government agencies to separate us. He fought hard to keep my brother with him, and he gained the support of the Darwin Catholic Church Father Leary bless his heart to take my Ahla Daiyi and his 3 daughters. We were bestowed to Father Leary and taken to Garden Point Mission under his charge at Melville Island just north of Darwin. Ahla Daiyi informed me that by the time we left Garden Point I could walk.

We were reunited with my Dad, my brother, my Stepmother Ada and my half-sister at Meneling Cattle Station. The eight of us all lived together on the cattle stations (Meneling, Roslyn Plains, and Ban Ban), at Batchelor, the fish camp, in the catching camps, at the mouth of the Finniss in Fogg Bay and Ironstone – Ditjini on the Delissaville, Wagait, Larrakia Aboriginal Reserve. My parents fought hard to protect me from the authorities and were able to keep me safe where I learnt in both worlds – Tyikma (Aboriginal) and Pa-dacoot (European).

As a parent, I realised that Ahla Daiyi was releasing herself and the actions of those toward her. I finally understood my Ahla's courage and bravery to accept and hold her position – just as Hetti Perkins and hundreds of Indigenous mothers have and continue to do. Importantly, Ahla Daiyi was able to guide me to be the best person that I could be and how I would apply and use this version to act in good ways, to say good things, to be a good listener and to do the right thing to make life better for my children and humanity.

Ahla Daiyi expected that I would allow myself to have humility and gain from my standpoint position as a Mak Mak Marranunggu woman - compassion.

Ahla Daiyi, my Stepmother Ada Sargent and my father Max Sargent prepared me well to make plans to provide for my husband Mark, our 2 beautiful daughters Chloe and Emily, extended family and to create pathways for nanyga ninni (Us Mob), our wider Australian Family - to move together as we give warmth to our own places, remembering the past and joining right now TONIGHT to plan a better version of you and me - as one voice, one people, moving ahead together in unison.

I call on all my Australian countrymen as the saying goes, white fellas, blackfellas and everyone in between to stand together as we need to work out what our better Australian version of ourselves will look like for all Australians across all sectors of our lives to be fair and equitable and most of all to be really all Australians – Level and-it! That’s how our mob talk at home “Mebella lebal endit! Yo!”

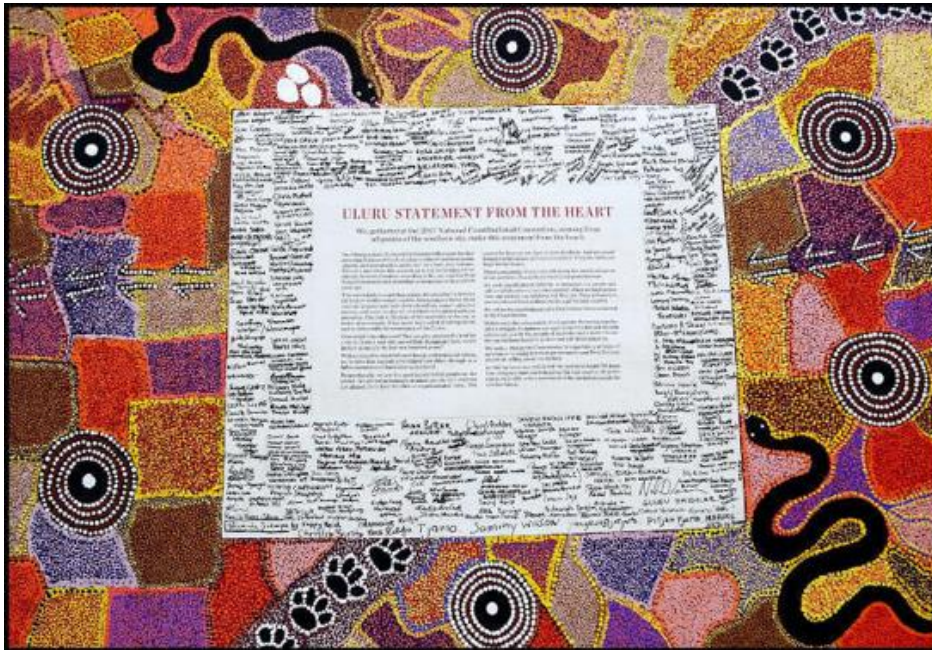
So, isn’t this what all fair minded and decent people want to do for their fellow Australians? Charlie wanted to address the inadequacies of past, present and future government policies towards our people and of society’s treatment. He witnessed unspeakable actions and poor policy implementation and evaluated the outcomes. He addressed what he could and did what he thought was best, using everything in he his arsenal to support his family and extended families.

Many treaty discussions emphasise that a referendum is needed for the treaty process. But this is not the case.

“The Elders who wrote the Uluru Statement From the Heart were asking Australian politicians to write, introduce, and pass a Treaty Act. A referendum is unnecessary because the parliament has the power to pass any act. The Elders at Uluru didn’t ask for, and in their discussions firmly rejected, a referendum. They feared that referendum-based changes to the Constitution would only perpetuate the UK Crown's domination of Aboriginal people and void Aboriginal sovereignty which they never ceded.” I should say that we never ceded. “That is why the Uluru Statement from the Heart never mentions a referendum.”

What a powerful statement. Those Indigenous nations that represented all of us took responsibility for this important dialogue and ensured the signatures

and painting from Uluru country were sung with ceremonial leaders blessing. This was an extraordinary event organised by our leaders.



What can we learn from history?

A famous activist Martin Luther King Junior stated:

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.”

Martin Luther King released himself from the people and governments that taunted and caused grief to himself and his people. It was in his character to demonstrate respect, dignity, honour, and forgiveness. This is what kept his hope and the goodness he sought to find in humanity alive and this is what Charlie taught us.

And yet, the Australian Bureau of Statistics ABS 2016 findings indicate that many key target areas in ‘Closing the Gap’, such as child mortality, early childhood education, school attendance and life expectancies are not being met.

“The target to close the gap in life expectancy by 2031 is not on track.

To halve the gap in child mortality rates by 2018 is not on track.

To close the gap in school attendance by 2018 is not on track.

The target to halve the gap in reading and numeracy by 2018 is not on track.

The target to halve the gap in employment by 2018 is not on track.

There is no new national data available for three targets and their status remains the same as for the 2018 Report.”

Ask yourself: How can Australians ‘Overcome Indigenous Disadvantage’ and ‘Close the Gap’ quickly? Because there are families, hundreds of families, hundreds of children, hundreds of elderly, hundreds of deaf people that are suffering.

You might not see that, but I see it, Ngahndi sees it, Chloe, Emily and Mark see it and Geoff sees it.

Whose Voice Treaty Truth?

The ABS indicate there are ‘798,400 Indigenous people’ on our census last count and these are the ones that ought to listen to and understand. The Governments systemic denials to First Australians continue to marginalise and silence our voices. The government bureaucrats are the privileged and it is their dominant voices and their words applied in the administration of successive governments that have led to the catastrophic position of Indigenous Affairs. Indigenous people need to develop our future for our people, policy and place in Indigenous Affairs in Partnership with key stake holders. We want to be included in the Australian Constitution.

Treaty

Charles' hope was to provide a better future for his children and countrymen across this nation. Charlie is an inspiration and a champion and he has metaphorically stirred the coals deep in the nation’s camp fire. There have been many discussions over the years about a treaty. The ultimate aim is to work together for a shared future – a vision.

Finally, Professor Mick Dodson has been appointed as the Northern Territory Treaty Commissioner in 2019 and other Treaty Commissioners have been appointed so far in South Australia, Victoria, and Queensland.

Mick did a presentation last week and he said that there’s been funds to do the consultation but from there, there are no implementation funding available.

What can you do as Australians help us get that back on track?

A government document from the Parliament library from 2009 addresses the matter to ‘dedicate seats in the Australian Parliament for Indigenous people’. It

states: “This approach implies that Australia is ‘not ready’ for dedicated seats but could become so given a change of public awareness and sentiment. Consistent with this, when the Enhancing Aboriginal Political Representation report describes points for and against dedicated seats, the arguments are equivocal. This issue is very complex with unclear legal ramifications. It should however be a matter for continued and thorough debate.

Encouraging younger people to resolve the issues of greater autonomy is the key. So, I look at my daughters and I look at Charlie’s grandchildren – Sorry girls and boy but that’s going to be on your agenda in the future and everyone else your age. But don’t worry – all us oldies are here to have your back and hopefully we will gain supporters along the way to help you.

Encouraging younger people to resolve the issues of greater autonomy is the key, however they require support and encouragement.

Historically we have been immersed in a long history of dependency with policies specifically designed to control Indigenous Australians. This includes:

- “Enforcement of the Welfare Act (which was enacted 1909 – 1969)
The Aborigines Protection Act 1909 (Section 25/1909) was the first piece of legislation that dealt specifically with Aboriginal people here in this State (New South Wales).”

The Indigenous people could not take any action to address these matters issued on us.

I have come to understand the following:

- Australia does not have a constitutional recognition of Indigenous peoples,
- Australia does not have a treaty with Indigenous peoples,
- Australia does not have a Bill of Rights that could potentially be used to protect Indigenous people’s rights

These many ways the Parliament can take away our rights. For instance, any Australian Parliament can write a sentence to abolish:

- the Native Title Act 1993

The Federal Parliament was able to:

- Enforce acts to cease the Anti-Discrimination Act for the Northern Territory National Emergency Response in 2007

The Northern Territory Government was able to:

- Cease the Bilingual Education Program in the Northern Territory 2008
- The Bilingual program was started in 1973 and ceased in 2008, delivered in 25 schools, provided learning for students in English and some 24 Indigenous languages.

That was a sad day that Dr Marika described as the government cutting out her tongue.

There weren't any legal avenues for Indigenous people or their community representatives to pursue these matters as the Australian Constitution safeguarded the Australian government(s) to implement their legislation to control Indigenous people's behaviour through coercion and punishment. This deepens and exacerbates the problems in Indigenous communities.

In conclusion, the statistics indicate that it will be another 50 years to 'Close the Gap' and to 'Overcome Indigenous Disadvantage'. Charlie Perkins highlighted the need to overcome injustices and we continue to shine the light on these. These are the matters that require urgent and immediate attention and must be addressed sooner rather than later. Indigenous people's lives and well-being are at risk.

Our younger generations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian children will inherit these complex social problems. It is our role to provide insights on how to address this meaningfully and with love and care.

As Martin Luther King Junior states:

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Metaphorically speaking Charlie Perkins withstood many Makarrata events to which he demonstrated his prowess and skill to outwit and deflected many spears as our forefathers before us. If we must we will continue to deflect the spears.

I call on my ancestral spirits and the people of Australia to support us to work hard to address the issues of tomorrow.

Yo Walakandha! Vinhthivinhthi! Guniguni! Ko, nganggi wedi, wurrkama luditj ma kuti nidin tjuwananiny wah!

So, when I did the welcome, I did that in my grandfather's language Marranunggu and I've just finished off in my grandmother's Marrithiyel language. I would like to now – that's the end of my speech.

Thank you.

Gift Exchange

I would like to now exchange cultural gifts which is part of our Mak Mak Marranunggu and Marrithiyel tradition and my adopted Warramirri clans in the Northern Territory.

I am initiating this action by calling on the:

Nginin pupwa nangga nangga.Wedi kanah Perkins Family.

If the Perkins family can please come out to the front and Emily (Ford), if you can come with the nangga nangga's please. Emily is my youngest daughter and she has our face mask on which represents the Mak Mak – white breasted sea eagle. We put this paint on.

Linda instructs Emily to hand over the set of nangga nangga's to the Perkins family - Rachel Perkins accepts these.

Meri vinhthivinhthi kanah Vice Chancellor Dr Michael Spence. Yo manim! Ma!

Linda calls Chloe (Ford). Chloe is my eldest daughter. Their proud father (Mark Ford) is sitting over there (in the front row).

Linda instructs Chloe to hand over the set of nangga nangga's to the Vice Chancellor Dr Michael Spence - he accepts these.

Muku guniguni kanah Deputy Vice Chancellor Indigenous Strategies and Services Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver AM.

Linda calls Anne (Wright). Anne is my best friend and adopted sister. Linda instructs Anne to hand over the set of nangga nangga's to the Deputy Vice Chancellor Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver - she accepts these.

Brief description of nangga nangga – clap sticks.

So, over the dry season we did workshops to make nangga nangga's so the kids were able to learn the songs from the CD's that Allan (Marett) and Linda (Barwick) produced to teach the about their ceremony - Wangga.

This is our ceremony. So, if you can now unwrap those (nangga nangga's) because now we are all going to join in a song. So, this is what we do: when our babies are born what we do is get them on our lap and of course we talk to them in our very ancient languages and we sing to them and we also make them dance.

Instructions: Please clap your nangga nanggass 3 times to start.

Sing: "Eh Eh Eh Oh! Eh Eh Eh Oh! Eh Eh Eh Oh! Eh Eh! Eh Eh! Eh Oh!"

Audiance clap:

Eh Eh Eh Oh! 1, 2, 3, 4;

Eh Eh Eh Oh! 1, 2, 3, 4;

Eh Eh Eh Oh! 1, 2, 3, 4;

Eh Eh 1, 2

Eh Eh 1, 2

Eh x 1

Oh x 1

Memorialisation

My family and I would like to dedicate the following Memorialising action to Dr Charles Perrurle Perkins OA our Clever Man and Militjin – Outstanding Leader, Hunter and Warrior by Memorialising Charlies ancestral spirit and also to those that walked before him in our Marrithiyel 'extinct' language from the Top End of the Northern Territory.

The Ode of Remembrance in Marrithiyel

They don't become old men & old women

Muku guniguni, ma-vinhthivinhthi, embipininj-wa ma-meri gagan

Though we become old, & die

Nganggi-nim-deven, ma-meri gan, nidin gan gambunj-nim, ngumbu-dinj-guniguni-nim-wa, ngumbu-dinj-vinhthivinhthi-nim-wa, ngumbun-wurr-nim-wa

They will always be strong; they will always be remembered as good

Ma-meri gagan lurritj parrginj-wa, marri ngimbim-nim ngumbun-nim-wa 'yu,
ma-meri ma-gati gawunj, ma-gati guninj'.

At sundown, & in the morning, we will not forget them.

Pandi-sjuwu-wa, e nitjin gani-wa, embi dim-ngimbimidi-sjengi-nim-wa

Lest we forget

Embi dim-gimbimidi-sjengi-nim-vang

Waki tjan marri yigin. Ma!

Thank you.

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