



ABSTRACT FROM GENERATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

Paul Newman



I was born in Condobolin, in central west NSW, which is my Dad's traditional country, the Wiradjuri nation. My mother's traditional country goes back to Darug nation here in Sydney. I've also got connections to Kamilaroi and Murrawarri nations as well. I've got a very big family structure and story.

My early growing up was on Aboriginal Missions in country NSW. Back in the early sixties some of the missions where we lived were virtually tin shacks with dirt floors. We had no essential services, no water, electricity or sewerage. Even though we grew up pretty poor it was a rich life in terms of family and culture.

In Aboriginal culture you grow up with an extended family of parents, siblings, uncles and aunties, so I wasn't just being brought up by my parents. I cherish that because it was a very rich learning about our culture. If you were sick you didn't go to the chemist, you accessed bush medicine. I got an introduction to a lot of our traditional culture and practices, understanding bush tucker, bush medicine and getting the whole perspective about the importance and obligations under Aboriginal customary law; your obligations are to family and community – strong values that put me in good stead for the future.

I've been married for over thirty years now, and I've got three daughters whose upbringing is urban, and totally different to mine. I try and instil in them to value what they have, not take things for granted, to understand and appreciate the struggles that not only Aboriginal people have, but others too, and hopefully embed some of those values so that they lead good, healthy lives.

My whole upbringing was varied. A lot of people grow up in one or two places, but because my father was a shearer we used to move around. So I experienced many different things, along with some challenges and difficulties. In the mid 1960s, while living in Quambone in north west NSW, we had the unfortunate experience of being removed from the mission by Welfare. So me and my siblings are typical of the Stolen Generation. I've still got memories of us being taken away from our parents and being brought to Sydney and put into homes. My brothers and I ended up in Mittagong Boys Home, down in the Southern Highlands, which was a very daunting place. I was then put into foster care with one of my older siblings. So basically I was a ward of the state until I was 18. Being taken away also broke up my parent's marriage.

What we went through had a really big impact on all of my siblings in many ways, but my father got us out of the homes and out of foster care. That's how I ended growing up in Wellington, NSW.

My dad had remarried so I was able to settle down and finish high school there.

I used to absolutely love school, because I was very good at sport and I was recognised within the broader school. It was the sports and a combination of some good teachers that kept me focused on schooling. My dad also died when I was fourteen so I've been looking after myself since. I've had to make a lot of decisions as a young person, but I was lucky in many ways that the people around me, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, were positive, saying to me 'you need to focus, you need to concentrate on sport, on school' and those things kept me grounded, so I didn't have to deal with a lot of the trauma of being taken away, and things like that.

I remember my grandmother saying to me, 'Son, one thing you need to do in life, you need to get an education, because the white man is educated and you need to be able to operate on that same level, as the white man'. That stuck into me because in Aboriginal culture one of the things I learnt was that education is a lifelong process. Those words of wisdom, focusing on getting an education, grabbing the opportunities and having a job, have probably been the biggest things that have helped me through life.

I finished my school certificate in Year 10 at Wellington High School in the mid seventies and I wanted to be a vocational officer, but back in those days you needed an HSC and because I'd left at Year 10 I didn't have my HSC. The vocational officer at my school found me a job with the Soil Conservation Service of NSW as a trainee laboratory assistant, so I've got real good memories of having the little white lab coat on, working in the lab. We used to test soils and crops for the farmers, and in fact, the Western Plains Zoo at Dubbo in its' early planning stages. From there I went to work with Wellington Shire Council as a trainee surveyor.

In 1980 I was studying at the Mitchell College of Advanced Education, which is now Charles Sturt University, when I got a call from my old vocational officer and he asked me if I was still interested in a vocational officer role because a traineeship had come up in Sydney. So I resigned from my job at the Wellington Shire Council and grabbed the opportunity to become a vocational officer. In that role I was going into the schools doing all the career guidance and counselling. Through that I went on to senior management in the public service, filling a whole range of different roles.

In the mid eighties I was progressing into middle management in the Commonwealth public service and I asked my supervisor what I needed to do to get the Assistant Director's job, the big boss' job. He said, 'You know all those people they have in those big senior management roles? They all have a university degree and that's what you really need to get there'. Not long after that the federal government began offering scholarships to Aboriginal staff members

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in the public service, to go to university. In 1986 I applied to do a Bachelor of Business at the Nepean CAE and I got a three-year scholarship. In my last year of study the Nepean CAE was changing its name to this new entity, the University of Western Sydney, so when we were about to graduate we were offered the choice of graduating under the Nepean CAE or under this new university, and I chose the University of Western Sydney. So I'm the first Aboriginal Bachelor of Business graduate from the University of Western Sydney, and most likely the first Aboriginal graduate from this new entity. That was just a really good experience.

After I graduated in 1990 I went back to the public service but there was a major restructuring and the job I once had was gone. That made me re-assess my whole career. Having a tertiary qualification and being very aware of the political process I started my own business. I set up a management consulting company in 1992 and I've been in business ever since, advising on Indigenous economic development policy making, along with adult education and training.

About six years ago I received a call from the University of Western Sydney to come in and help put together their new Indigenous Australian Studies Major program. I came on as a casual contractor and worked with a team of Indigenous academics and we wrote the major. I was then invited to stay on and do some contract lecturing. I've been teaching some of the units we wrote over the last six years. That's how I reconnected with the University of Western Sydney. I did my postgraduate in Master of Arts and Communications here as well. I've actually been here for a long time so I know their story, I've been part of that journey. It's been a very good experience and beneficial for me in my development and learning.

Historically the University has been very strong in programs like the Indigenous Australian Studies Major, and things like UWSCollege providing an alternative entry point for people. There

has been a good positive cultural aspect put in, around cultural competence, making Aboriginal affairs and issues part of the core business of the University.

When you think about what has historically happened in universities nationally, Aboriginal education has often been seen as a welfare type of service, an add-on. It's often been focused around students' support, getting more people in to undergraduate studies, and UWS have done that really well. I think the next level is about embedding Aboriginal knowledge into the whole curriculum base within the University, so it doesn't matter whether you're doing law or business, engineering or medicine, all those units should have elements of Aboriginal culture embedded in them.

For example, I do a lot of work with engineers who went to university twenty years ago, when the engineering course would have been very technically based. Now what they're finding is they're often doing their business, as an engineer, on Aboriginal land and they need to know how to communicate with Aboriginal land owners. So I spend a lot of my time teaching those engineers about culture. The focus shouldn't just be on Aboriginal students getting it, but also about educating non-Aboriginal students and staff. And it shouldn't just be about Aboriginal culture but cultural diversity more broadly. The next level is postgraduate, and then research needs to be part of it. I think universities like UWS have started to make that leap.

I was recently appointed to the Board of Trustees for the University of Western Sydney. I never would've dreamed, back in my undergraduate days, that I would end up back here on the board of trustees, being part of the broader strategic planning that's happening within the University of Western Sydney, seeing how the Aboriginal affairs business is now being embedded into the University, where years ago it wouldn't have been. It's starting to change.

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