



Kanyini...

[...translates as responsibility and unconditional love for all of creation]

By Lara-Jane Stewart

I have been reflecting a lot on the Peace Summit since attending online, and the many presentations shared throughout that moved and inspired me.

From listening to Fiona Wallis and Marshall Leaver speak about peace and justice working with young people in schools; to Corinne Unger sharing with us about the work of seeking justice for our earth and being a voice for the land; to stories from Zoe Naylor of promoting justice within our legal systems.

So many inspiring people, stories and ideas.

Amongst these, one presenter that shared in a way that was particularly moving for me was Father Rod Bower.

Rod spoke of many things that resonated for me, but it was his response to a question from Marshall

Leaver at the end of his presentation that really struck a chord.

I can't recall the exact wording, but in essence, Marshall was asking Rod to share his thoughts on the importance of our engagement with for Indigenous. Indigenous culture and wisdom as we move forward, particularly as a religious organisation, as well as individuals.

Father Rod had a long answer and a short answer. His short answer was: "I think it's absolutely essential". His long answer took us on a journey.

It was a journey of both remembering his own ancestral ties and his Celtic cultural heritage and how the spirit of those lands where his people originally came from many generations ago still calls to him; and

a journey of reflecting on the profound relationship and connection to country that is inherent in traditional Indigenous Australian culture.

He spoke of what might have been had white people first arriving to these shores sought with humility to be taught and guided by the wisdom of Australia's peoples. If we had sat and listened and cared to truly understand how to live here in this land, rather than just impose all our ways from other lands, just what might have been.

I was so moved, and perhaps all the more so because it reminded me of words I'd heard spoken before by an Indigenous Elder whose spirit and legacy I hold very dear: the late Uncle Bob Randall. (His name used with permission respecting his legacy).

Uncle Bob was a community leader, songwriter, elder of the Yankunytjatjara nation and custodian of Uluru. He was also part of the stolen generation, separated from his mother and family as a young child.

I first learnt about Uncle Bob when I studied counselling a few years ago and he was just an amazing man and a huge inspiration to me.

His legacy, amongst many other things, was bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, promoting peace and the teaching of *Kanyini*, which translates to 'responsibility and unconditional love for all of creation'.

I remembered him speaking of the land as his family. The trees, the rocks, the grass, the dirt, the kangaroos and the birds - all his "family". He spoke of BELONGING to the land and the sense of the earth truly being their mother, and so it is their responsibility to care for her, as she nurtures them and gives them life.

Rod sharing his response with Marshall at the Peace Summit that night reminded me of these things and stirred something in my heart. Something big and deep. Things, I believe, that my heart has been trying to speak to me of for a long time, but that I haven't been able to fully hear or comprehend. A yearning you could say, for a deeper connection or some kind of healing or restoration of wholeness as a human being living on this planet, in this land that I find myself... A growing awareness of my own displacement and disconnectedness in this modern world... And a deep desire to learn and be guided to become more deeply grounded on this earth, in this body and in this life, and a greater vessel for peace.

So, life went on as life always does after an event, and the days and weeks passed by in a joyful, tiring blur of feeding our newborn baby, changing nappies and the occasional bit of sleep. Until one day our new child health nurse who had taken over from our midwife team came to visit us. We connected immediately over many things, but of course we were mainly focused on the baby. On her next visit though she noticed the artworks around our lounge room and asked me about one in particular... it was a portrait painted by local indigenous artist Jandamarra Cadd... a portrait of Uncle Bob.

She recognised it to be one of Jandamarra's artworks and shared that her husband was a First Nations man. We talked more about the painting, and she looked through some of my own artwork and she noted the strong connection to Earth/nature throughout and that they seemed "spiritual" to her as well. She then asked me what MY cultural background was. At first, I didn't know what to say or how to answer and said, "um well I don't know, nothing special really..." and added "I do come from a Christian background...". To which she replied, "no, I mean, who are your people? Your ancestors."

I suddenly got a lump in my throat and felt a huge pang in my heart. I wanted to cry. Who are MY people? What a beautiful question. What a powerful, wonderful question. I was completely humbled. No one really ever asks me that. I felt such a mixture of joy at being invited to share about my heritage and acknowledge my ancestral homelands, and also the sadness of often feeling like I'm not eligible to truly claim any of that as part of "my" culture since those lands that I'm indigenous to are so far away on the other side of the world and from so long ago.

Nonetheless, we went on to chat about where my people were from, about ancient Celtic spirituality and culture, my faith community and more. And I told her about the Peace Summit as well and how I had come away from it inspired to learn and connect more with Indigenous Australian wisdom and to become more grounded in this land I am on, and more connected to and responsible for it, though I didn't know exactly where to start. She was excited to then be able to put me in touch with the precise Elder and custodian of sacred sites for our local area and explain to me that he is passionate about teaching and connecting Indigenous and non-Indigenous folk to learn and journey together. It was wonderful and we both felt delighted and enriched by our conversation that day and what it had led to.

I couldn't help feeling like Uncle Bob as part of spirit and of Nature and of all that is, has been somehow gently and ever so patiently helping me find my way. My way to greater wholeness and yet another path in life to creating more peace and deeper connection with nature, with my big, wide human family, with myself, and ultimately, to all of creation.

This part of the story ends here for now, but it is just the beginning I know of a wonderful new chapter, and I so look forward to seeing where it leads next.

I'm so grateful for the Peace Summit and for all who contributed to it. For those who attended in person and online as well to support it and to receive its blessings, and for spirits of those gone before us who are somehow still shining on us every moment of every day - guiding our way, as part of part of God, as the spirit and energy of Love, and as part of the invisible fabric of all that is.