

FROM MY HEART

The Uluru Statement from the Heart is a “live political document” and will remain so until ALL Australian and Torres Strait Islanders are living equitably.

This unprecedented call to action was made on the 26th May 2017 to awaken and activate the people of Australia. The graceful and generous invitation given by the First and Original Custodians is for all Australians to ‘walk with’, on the land in which together we live, work, eat, sleep and raise our children.

This invitation has not yet been adequately responded to. Substantive, meaningful systemic change is critical. This will be enduring with a successful referendum for constitutional enshrinement of a Voice to Parliament, which enables the voice of ALL Indigenous Australians to be heard.

There has never been more awareness of the need for the people of Australia to listen and respond from our hearts to the Statement and through action, co-create a healthy, vibrant nation for us all to thrive within. The time for shared power and the enshrined wisdom of First Nations people is now.

Only through collaborative authorship and diverse voices can we address the issues that face our specific, environmental and collective wellbeing. The overwhelming successful majority witnessed in the 1967 Referendum symbolized a unified fight for equality. This is both a historical and contemporary reality and momentum is palpably building again. There is increasing collective awareness that the health of humanity and future generations undeniably rests here.

The majority of Australians are intent on improving relations. The gap in life quality, wellbeing and opportunity metrics make it clear there is an urgent need to act on the requests made in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Beyond the cold figures lives the warmth of voices embedded in the truth of stories being shared. It is apparent that these multiple contexts make tangible why the enshrinement of Voice, Treaty and Truth will be enriching for all Australians.

On return from living in New York for a few years, I made a trip from Sydney to Canberra in 2014 to witness the state of reconciliation in our capital. For me, it was only from this expanded perspective that I could clearly see and feel shame in the exploitive relationship we have with our Indigenous people and culture. I had no education prior, despite winning Awards and Honors degrees through multiple institutions.

On that day the Tent Embassy was desolate. The impact and haunted echoes of the blood-algae stained, parched pond was viscerally apt. The eerie landscape was barren. That evening, Fred Chaney’s Reconciliation retirement speech declared that we need to make the ‘space’ for reconciliation. He approached the lady whom I was casually talking

with after the speech and introduced himself. I affirmed that the 'space' was definitely needed and that as a trained architect my aspiration was to contribute to co-creating that 'space' and this was the topic of my University of Sydney Phd. Chaney replied with an endearing dismissal "You do know you're crazy, don't you" and I unhesitatingly replied "Yes, but in such a good way".

Since then, I have been researching; "Architecture as a catalyst for social change towards Awareness" focusing on Spaces of Hope for healing relationships between Indigenous Australians and the wider community. These extend well beyond the literal into the personal, spiritual, social, health, financial, educational and multiple trans-contextual realms across the entire fabric of our culture.

I now teach at University, in the Faculty of the Built Environment asking students to consider how we might respond to the Invitation given in the Uluru Statement from The Heart. I ask them to reflect and reconnect to their visceral knowing and listen and design from here – the world would be different if we were all doing this and it is required we do. Constructing regenerative, sustainable solutions in harmony with whole cycle thinking and sentience.

Questions around 'architecture' evolved into a deepening personal reflection of my structural self-awareness. What were my foundational assumptions? Why did I have them? How were my unconscious biases showing up? Was I even asking the right questions? This led me to relational training and hosting collective spaces. Specifically to allow for co-design, valuing community participation. Respecting the inherent wisdom of lived experience to inform, inspire and create systemic change. The answers already known, when we listen.

In 2015, I was fortunate enough to tour rural North Western NSW on the 'Freedom Ride Re-enactment' with 17 of the original Freedom Riders who had travelled with Charlie Perkins in 1965. On the final night, I stood up in front of our group, including Rachel Perkins, Troy Casser Daley and Paul Kelly. I suggested it should have been named the Freedom Ride 'Revival' as the need for change remains urgent and the implication of 'reenacting' is perpetuating the acts of deception that pervade the history of this country. Continuing to hide the gross inequality, which is clearly unsustainable for all.

As a mature age student and mother of three, I was sharing this sentiment with experts who had spent a lifetime engaged in activism. Simultaneously I was coming into belated awareness and building confidence in my own voice. Although I have Indigenous family who endorse my participation in advocating for equality, for the majority of my life my white privilege enabled complete blindness to the despairing contemporary reality of Australia's rightful custodians. I was ignorant that my privilege came at the high price of oppressing others. This is a confronting and shameful fact to face and for years rendered me quiet.

I now know I am not alone coming to realization. I continue to address my educated, conditioned bias and ignorance regarding the lived reality of thousands of Australians. It is so heart warming to hear that this has become a more collective experience and that many more Australians are keenly seeking the truth they have been denied. Although I certainly carry threads of intergenerational history of severance to ancestors, family, place and belonging through my parents experiences, I have never been consciously influenced by these facts. Possibly, a result of a strong heart centered relationship with my mother growing up. Both my parents have given me the gift of care. This is an undervalued yet invaluable quality that I deeply acknowledge.

We have been taught to separate, when actually everything is intrinsically connected. There is something to be said for a mother's innate knowing and the nurturing that sustains life. My daughter turned blue and stopped breathing the day she was born. I was told in the clinical hospital atmosphere "everything is fine, it was just a dusky episode". However I held my breath and said to the Dr in tears at the 6 week check up; "I don't know what's wrong, she's so thin, she's not eating, she's so sleepy, she's not thriving". There is nothing more heartbreaking as a mother. I still remember the gripping look when the Doctor turned to me and said;

"She has a hole in her heart, it's not one hole between her chambers, it's like gauze there are many holes."

I share this with you because it is my story but I believe much more than that, it is OUR story. As Australians we have many holes in our relationship with the Heart of the Nation, the people and land. I am certain that when we come to true collective care for the sacred and regenerative wisdom of the First People of this country we will heal together.

First Australians have always practiced this ancient knowledge of interconnectedness in ways other Australians are only beginning to learn. There are many holes as a result of the ongoing legacy of colonization, but if we listen from our hearts we can remember, and if we act from our hearts we can heal. In doing so we will thrive together.

There is clear need to continue the conversations and for Australia to respond to the Uluru Statement from the Heart's sacred invitation. As we learn the way forward together. Encouraging others to join in being active citizens in creating a vibrant future for all. In a country that has the values inherent to ancient regenerative wisdom at its core.

I ask that Voice is constitutionally enshrined and hope to share the potential walking together holds.