



Healing
Our
Nation

Through
Women's
Wisdom

This publication carries the energy of the Women's Reconciliation Celebration and was therefore accomplished by many. It was brought to this form by:

Elaine Telford	—	Project Concept
Shelley Reys	—	Cultural Advisor
Sally Gray	—	Project Coordinator
Bev Clarke	—	Desk-top publishing and photographic scanning
Jane Hinton	—	Editing and proofreading
Kiran Hutchinson	—	Tape transcribing
Velette Costa	—	Typing
Elaine Odger Norling	—	Photography
Gai Smith	—	Photography
Elaine Russell	—	Cover Artwork

Cover Artwork by Elaine Russell, a Gamilaroi woman now living in Marrickville, Sydney. Elaine participated in the Women's Reconciliation Celebration.

The snake represents strong power for healing. The Rainbow Serpent has always been part of the Aboriginal Culture. The background design is the skin of the snake. The four round circles symbolise the eggs; for the network this symbolises new reconciliation networks. On the back cover the snake sits, protecting the eggs. In nature the snake will go all out to protect its eggs. Women are natural healers and carers. At this time in our history we see that we must play a vital role in protecting spiritual and human values. The lower circle with the spiral design symbolises reaching out, which is the key aim of the Women's Reconciliation Network.

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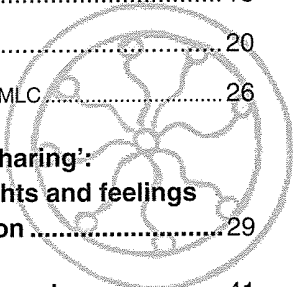
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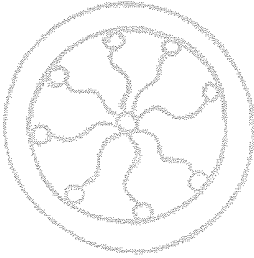
Vision Statement

**The Women's Reconciliation Network
is an informal network of indigenous and
non-indigenous women who aim to:**

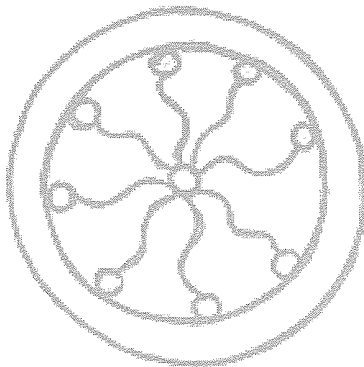
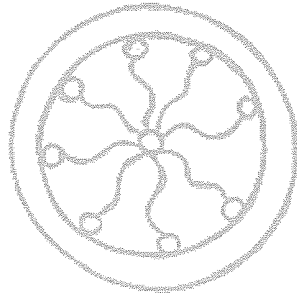
**'Open our hearts to the experience of others,
accept our traditional wisdoms,
acknowledge the past, heal ourselves
and teach others'**

**Healing Our Nation
Through
Women's Wisdom:**

Women Working For Reconciliation



Introduction



This book — “Healing our Nation through Women’s Wisdom: Women Working for Reconciliation” — has been put together to inspire and encourage women around Australia to build greater appreciation of and understanding between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

Women have a critical role to play in this process of reconciliation. After all, it is women who are the backbone of community life and, traditionally, it is women who hold families and communities together.

Our publication comes out of the remarkable reconciliation event that took place in the State Library of NSW on 29 May, 1996, organised by the Women’s Reconciliation Network (WRN).

The seed of our celebration was sown when Shelley Reys and Elaine Telford, two of the NSW Coordinators for ‘Australians for Reconciliation’, organised several meetings of indigenous and non-indigenous women to canvas their ideas on how the process of reconciliation could be enhanced by the powerful way women do things. A loose, informal network of women interested in the process of reconciliation, the Women’s Reconciliation Network was formed and has grown from there.

The focus for our celebration day came with the announcement by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation that the first National Reconciliation Week would be held between 27 May and 3 June, 1996 (see page 9 on *The significance of these dates*).

We chose Wednesday, 29 May!



Healing Our Nation Through Women’s Wisdom

Already, women all over the country had been working towards reconciliation in a variety of creative ways by:

- Supporting recognition of the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their regions' local histories
- Encouraging their children's schools to introduce Aboriginal Studies in their curriculum
- Inviting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to join Parents and Friends' groups and other activities
- Welcoming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women into community organisations
- Joining forces in community action campaigns for equality and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Establishing informal information exchange networks about Aboriginal reconciliation
- Promoting and/or supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, culture and heritage

The significance of these dates

The dates marking National Reconciliation Week, May 27 and June 3, are symbolic dates for reconciliation.

May 27 is the anniversary of the 1967 Referendum in which over 90% of Australians voted to support inclusion of indigenous Australians as Australian citizens. June 3 is the anniversary of the 1992 High Court 'Mabo' decision which recognised the existence of Native Title.

The dream of a women's reconciliation celebration

We wanted women from all walks of life to be able to attend a special women's celebration during National Reconciliation Week.

We wanted working women, mothers, professional women and those who have retired from the workforce, politicians, politically active women, women in the churches and all women of spirit.

We wanted to create a passionate spirit event which would draw on the strength of indigenous women and non-indigenous women of all ethnic backgrounds.

We wanted the event to touch and inspire women of all ages.

Most importantly, we wanted it to be a celebration of the reconciliation spirit of women and their capacity to feel, collaborate, acknowledge and share.

But how could this be done and, what's more, in such a short space of time, with little money and a group which, at that stage, was quite small? And what would this women's event be like?

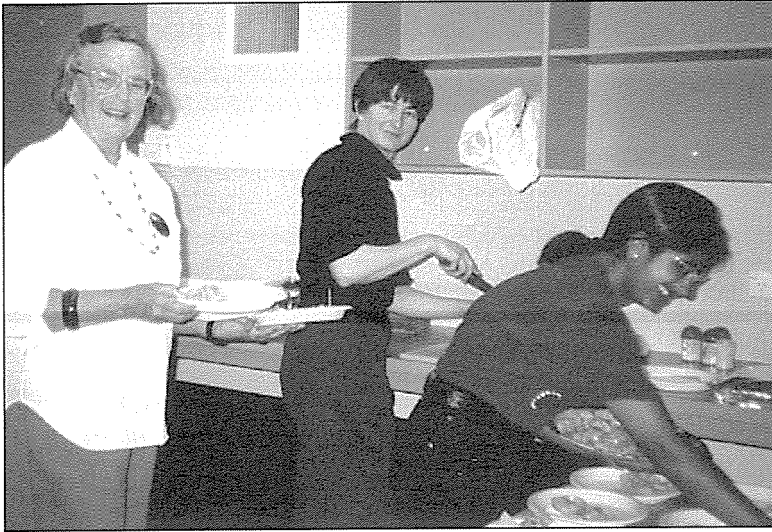
Realising the dream

From the moment of clarity about the kind of event we wanted it took on its own energy and everything just fell into place. Of course, there were plenty of things to do. And we only had six weeks to make it all happen.

Many people dedicated their time and energy to make this event the success it was. We haven't listed them by name — but by the things they did — so that other women could use it as a check-list of what might be needed to organise a similar event:

- phoning people on various mailing lists





Left to right: Trude Kallir, Kit Shephert and Kiran Hutchinson

- booking the venue
- writing press releases, making contact with the media and doing interviews before and during the event
- ordering food, hiring glasses, organising the speakers, organising parking
- printing and photocopying
- organising and mailing out invitations
- recording acceptances and apologies for the event
- keeping ahead of logistics — the numbers of acceptances rose from 45 to 200 in a matter of days
- shopping for food, tablecloths, paper plates, serviettes etc

- delivering boxes of food, juice and mineral water to the venue
- delivering reconciliation publicity material to the venue
- decorating the venue, arranging flowers, putting up posters, and hanging flags and banners
- organising entertainment
- chopping up and arranging food and refreshments for 300 people
- welcoming, ushering and managing the crowd
- photographing and making audio-recordings of the event
- and, of course, cleaning up afterwards.

The Event

The event started with acknowledgement of the Eora people, the traditional owners of the land on which we were meeting, and with hearty welcomes and inspiring guest speakers. We then invited anyone who wished to share what she thought and felt about the process of reconciliation.

We called this part of the program the 'Message Stick Sharing'. As the hand-held microphone passed from one person to another, the atmosphere in the room became charged with a powerful energy as the hearts of those present opened in response to the honest and courageous sharing of experiences, feelings and beliefs. There we all were, sitting side by side with each other, close together, 300 in a room which normally holds 100, and hearing each other's heartfelt sharing.



For many present, the most moving part of this sharing was when Tjanara Goreng-Goreng stood and electrified the room with the traditional Aboriginal women's wailing of mourning and loss. The threads of all these sharings were brought together by facilitators Janette Blainey and Julie Smith, who helped us to process the power of what we had just experienced.

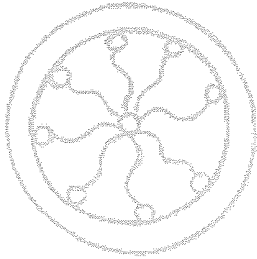
In this publication, you will find the the program for the day, selections from the welcoming speeches, the 'Message Stick Sharing', and the pulling together by the facilitators of the 'Common threads' of what people had said.

The event was so powerful that we wanted to give those who had been present the opportunity to express something of their experience of being there. Towards the end of this book we have included reflections written by participants after the event was over so you can get a sense of the energy present on the day.

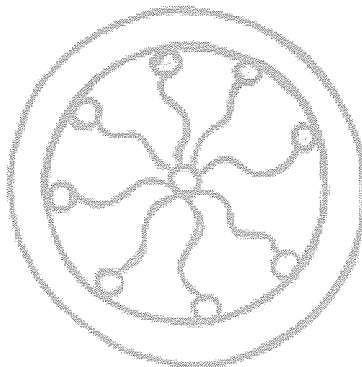
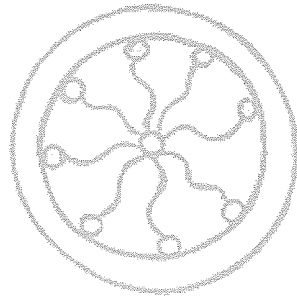
Keeping the energy

Since the Women's Reconciliation Celebration, the Network has grown and we are now at the stage of planning and imagining where we will go next in our desire to contribute further to the process of reconciliation. National Reconciliation Week will be held every year now, between the dates of 27 May and 3 June, and lots of key events are to be held across the nation.

The Women's Reconciliation Network wants to encourage women in every community to host a sharing event. Feel free to use the format of the day and the invitation as a sample for your own community



***Welcome to
the event***





Shelley Reys

**Event Host:
Shelley Reys,
'Australians For
Reconciliation'
joint Coordinator
for NSW and
Managing
Director of Arrilla
Aboriginal
Training and
Development**

First let me thank the Eora people for allowing us to hold the first national Women's Reconciliation Celebration on their land today and to thank the Library for allowing us this room and I'd also like to thank you for coming. This is an amazing show of support for reconciliation right in this room.

When we started working this year and decided to have a special reconciliation event for women during National Reconciliation Week, we knew it was the right thing to do, given the amount of reconciliation activities around the country instigated by

women. We thought that we might get 50 or 60 people. We've had 250 RSVP's and more still coming through the door and I think that is just fantastic. Thank you for showing support for the Aboriginal Reconciliation Council's Vision of "A united Australia which respects this land of ours, values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and provides justice and equity for all".

To me reconciliation is a number of things. It's about breaking stereotypes about what

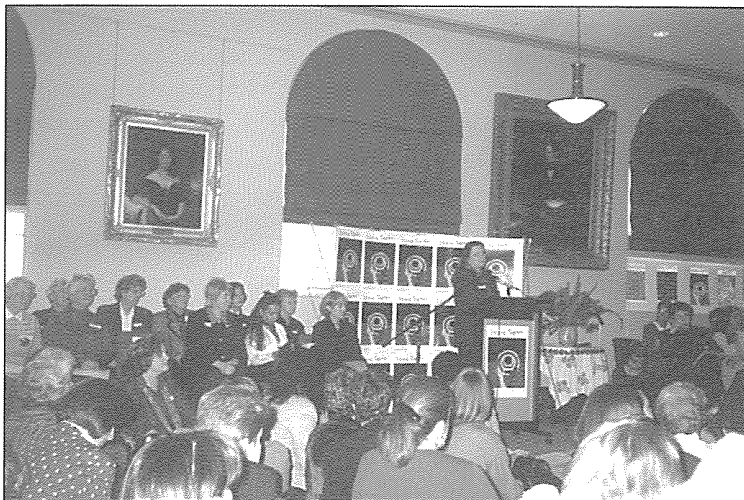


Healing Our Nation Through Women's Wisdom

Aboriginal people are and what they're capable of. It's about addressing the employment issues so that we're not just looking at numbers, but we're looking at the status of Aboriginal people in terms of employment and representation in our society at all levels. To me it is also about working with the media so that we have fair representation of Aboriginal people from that perspective as well.

Reconciliation to me is also about being able to be free, to be **me** as an indigenous person, to teach people about our people. I also would like to be free to be an indigenous **woman**. My mother might be Anglo-Australian; however I'm still a Jirribul woman. I might be a business woman working in a white world but I'm still an indigenous Jirribul woman and I might have bottled bleached blonde hair but my roots are still black!

I would like us all now to take a few moments of silence for all those people who fought for the 1967 Referendum and the Eddie Koiki Mabo decision and the true demonstration for Reconciliation that was shown at that time which enables us to sit here right now. I would also like to ask the Eora people and our ancestors to join us at this time.



Margy Burn

**Margy Burn,
Director
Australian
Research
Collections and
Collection
Services, State
Library of NSW**

You might find it surprising that our collections here at the State Library — apparently a great white monolithic institution — do include a great quantity of material documenting the lives and experiences of indigenous Australians. For example, there are more than 70 Aboriginal languages listed in our catalogues and materials in the collection. Of course much of the collection has been created by white Australians and visitors to these shores but the record is being redressed through our actions to collect the work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers, publishers, artists, authors, photographers and storytellers.



Healing Our Nation Through Women's Wisdom

In recent years we've been working to make this material more accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples — through exhibitions, educational and public programs at the Library, by working through the network of NSW public libraries and with the newly formed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resource Network (ATSILIRN) — for the support of indigenous library staff. And above all, by using Koori staff here to work with Aboriginal people who need to use material at the State Library. I'm very proud to say that more than 600 indigenous people from all over NSW and the rest of Australia visited last year to work with our two Koori librarians, Melissa Jackson and Ronald Briggs.

Melissa asked me to express her apologies that she can't be here today. She's studying and if she was here with us today, she would miss her third lecture in a row. Last week she was in Alice Springs representing ATSILIRN at the annual conference of the Australian Society of Archivists talking about protocols in relation to the holdings of Aboriginal material, and the previous week she was delivering Cross Cultural Awareness training to a group of NSW public librarians. Her academics at UTS are very patient with the demands of her job but at the moment we think there is only one other professionally qualified Aboriginal librarian in NSW, and only eight elsewhere in Australia which is an appalling record for the library industry, so I hope you will understand why we think it is important for Melissa and her colleague, Ronald Briggs, to successfully complete their studies.

I believe that through our collections and the work that we're doing with indigenous and non-indigenous people who use them, libraries are very important sites for reconciliation where our knowledge and understanding can be enhanced by the collections, the people and the interaction that occurs between them. Thank you very much for deciding to use this site for this special event.

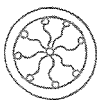


Linda Burney

**Linda Burney,
President of the
NSW Aboriginal
Education
Consultative
Group, member
of the Council
for Aboriginal
Reconciliation**

I think the organisers of this event are very overwhelmed at the amount of women who have come to share today with each other and to think about some good things, and probably about some bad things as well. So thank you very much. It's just incredible there's not even sitting space, let alone standing space.

As Shelley said, I'm a member of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and my colleague Helen Sham Ho, is also one of the women on the Council and will be speaking in a little while, but just a little bit about myself. I'm currently the president of



the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and come from the Wiiradjuri nation and have spent probably the last 20 years of my life working, primarily in the area of education, and now training.

I want to raise a few issues today and unfortunately I don't think it's going to be all warm and fuzzy because I think there are some very cold, hard realities that we are facing politically in this country right now in the area of Aboriginal affairs.

I want to also talk about why I agreed to become a member of the Council, because I can't say in all honesty standing here, that prior to becoming a member of the Council that I thought reconciliation would have any legs or that I believed that it was possible. Because I suppose I maintained, and to a large degree still maintain, but with a very very different perspective, from an Aboriginal world view, that reconciliation isn't possible if there is nothing to reconcile. I took that from the view that somehow or other there was an implication that indigenous people in this whole question of reconciliation, had something to give up, something to apologise for.

However I did accept the invitation to become a member of the Council and I can say to you all now, with all honesty, it's one of the most fulfilling, stimulating exercises that I've been involved with. Your participation here today is testament to what you believe in as well, and that is that reconciliation is just one of the most critical social issues that this country has to deal with and face over the next few years.

I truly believe in my heart that if it is not dealt with in the next five years then we are going to have a regurgitation next century, of this century, and I believe it is as serious as that. The incredible part about being a member of the Council is the diversity of people around the room: you've got people from the National Farmers

Federation, the mining industry, the union movement, you've got a whole lot of indigenous people from different areas, Liberal party politicians, Labor party politicians and Democrats, it is one of the most diverse groups that you could imagine. Yet somehow in that diversity we come to agree on things and that to me is the real essence of reconciliation.

Shelley said in her introduction that reconciliation can mean something different to everyone, but to me it is really a label and it's a 'mechanism' or it's a 'clothes peg', or however you want to think about it, to hang a whole lot of very important things on. And if we get caught up with thinking that reconciliation is this 10 year process and somehow it's all involved in politics, then we really may as well walk away from it because reconciliation is about, sure some really hard politics which I want to address in a moment, but it's also about what's in the hearts and minds of everyday Australians.

It's what is in the hearts and minds of a lot of extremely ignorant people, which if you let it happen can get you down, but it is also now in the hearts and minds of people like yourselves and it's in the hearts and minds increasingly of young people in this country. I think that's the one thing that really gives me a great deal of hope.

Reconciliation is not something that started 5 years ago. It's not something that is going to end in the year 2000. It's something that particularly people like yourselves can live and pass on to your nieces, nephews and your own children.

I want to read out to you something that some of you may have seen but it's this question of social justice and it's something that you'll hear every politician say at least once in every speech and you will hear bureaucrats refer to it increasingly in this present climate. But what does it really mean? What made social justice



real to me was a quote by Mick Dodson and I'd just like to read it to you and for you to think about it:

'Social justice' must always be considered from a perspective which is grounded in the daily lives of indigenous Australians. Social justice is what faces you in the morning. It is waking in a house with an adequate water supply, cooking facilities and sanitation. It is the ability to nourish your children and to send them to a school where their education not only equips them for employment but reinforces their knowledge and appreciation of their cultural inheritance. It is a prospect of genuine employment and good health. A life of choices and opportunity free from discrimination.

That to me is what we are really on about. It is about changing that situation.

The Council's work is at a crossroads. We are half-way through our legislative time-frame and the thing that I want to really stress today, and it's been said at the Council, is that I believe that the role of women is fundamental to the process of reconciliation — absolutely fundamental.

Whether you're a non-Aboriginal woman or an Aboriginal woman, we are the givers of life. We raise our children and impart to our nieces, nephews, the people that we care for, the values that are going to take them through the rest of their lives. At a local community level, I know within the Aboriginal community the people that are most active are women. I think that's probably the same for many other communities and many other community-based type of operations. We provide the anchor for so much and impart into young people, as I said, the values that will take them through the rest of their lives. I believe that we have a specific duty, in terms of reconciliation, as women — all of us in this room.

The Council recommends separate funding be allocated for indigenous women, particularly those subject to domestic violence to provide legal advice and representation. It's been said many times around our Council meetings that the role of women is so fundamental to this process. If nothing else turns this country on its head, then the inquiry into our stolen children that is being undertaken at the moment across this country, must.

I just want to say that this inquiry touches the lives of every Aboriginal person and should touch the lives of every Australian. It is a part of our history that so few of us know. So few people are even aware that there was a deliberate policy for many, many years in this country, **right** across this country to remove Aboriginal kids from their families, to somehow wipe out the Aboriginal race. Interestingly enough in NSW that 75 percent of the children removed, you guessed it, were young women — the lifegivers of our communities. That to me wasn't, and we know it wasn't, just coincidence but a deliberate policy of genocide. So those are the sobering things that we need to think about.

The really wonderful thing about reconciliation now, is that it's taken hold in Australia. It's like a lot of things. Once it has taken hold it really is outside the government's agenda to stop it. Someone said to me yesterday 'Why should I be involved in the process of reconciliation? What's so important about reconciliation?' I'll tell you what's so important about it. It's because it's the right thing. It is as simple and as basic as that. It is right. That's why it's so important and that's why it should mean something to everyone.

But what's got to be right about it is that the recognition and the role of indigenous people has to be first and foremost. As far as I'm concerned I don't have anything to apologise for. The emphasis, I think unfortunately, has often been on us giving and it has been



like that for a long time, us giving and saying it's OK. To me it's not about that. It is about not forgetting the past, it's not about forgiveness; it is about recognising that the past is a reality. It has shaped this country and it is not to be repeated.

That to me is the real thing about reconciliation and I am just so overwhelmed that you have all come to share with us today because I reckon if we could dispatch you mob out to most of the capital cities and the country towns with the sort of commitment that you obviously all have, and I know some of you come from such diverse backgrounds, then really I think the process is in very good hands. It's not in the hands of politicians, it's in the hands of Australian people and has to be recognised as something that we pursue and we hold in our hearts. Thank you very much.



Helen Sham Ho

**Helen Sham Ho
JP MLC, member
of the Council
for Aboriginal
Reconciliation**

I am honoured to be part of the Women's Reconciliation Network. This network was established and coordinated by a group of women dedicated to the Council's vision of 'A united Australia which respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage; and provides justice and equity for all.'

We are fortunate to have here today, women from a wide range of different interests and organisations.

There are women from different community groups, as well as professional women from both the government and non-government sector. Many women here today also come from different regions of the State, eg. Newcastle and Bathurst. Through key women's networks, organisations and departments, the Women's Reconciliation Network aims to further the reconciliation process.

Despite the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation's continuing effort to educate people in the community about indigenous issues, there remains an enormous amount

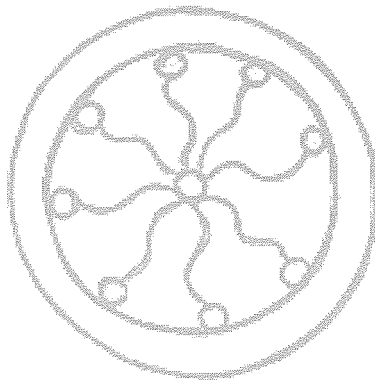
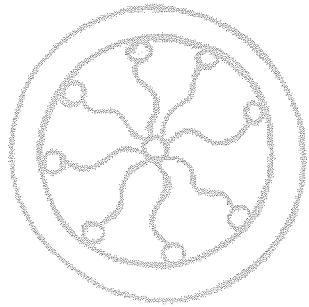


of misconceptions and confusion about indigenous Australians. As mothers, we have a duty to impart to our children the value of peaceful co-existence, compassionate disposition, and a harmonious society. This is essential in our reconciliation process. For the reconciliation process to be successful, all Australians must recognise and accept the wrongdoings of the past. But that is not enough in itself; we must also make a commitment not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

It is not enough to simply say we support the process. Social justice underpins the success of reconciliation. Given the great range of women here today, if each of us takes the message of reconciliation back to our homes, social circles and workplaces, we will be able to spread the reconciliation process more effectively.



***‘The Message Stick Sharing’:
sharing our thoughts and
feelings about reconciliation***

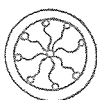




Berice Dudley and Dorothy McCrae McMahon

**Led by Dorothy
McCrae McMahon,
Director of Mission,
Uniting Church of
Australia**

This is the moment when we realise that, as women, we're terrific at giving great speeches, can give great strategies, but our greatest strength is when we share our own stories and our own moments and honour those. As we share our stories, let's respond authentically; sometimes with tears, sometimes with a bit of a cheer and sometimes we will honour it with silence — but what we will be doing is lifting up the energy that lies here. As I was sitting here I found tears coming to my eyes every couple of minutes simply because we are here together and that's really strong — special — hope — grieving and all those things. So if you have something to share which is hope or a heightened awareness or insight, then put up your hand.



Sharings:

■ “I’m a fourth generation teacher but I’d like to say that for the last 16 years I’ve had the privilege of the friendship with a Koori woman and I have learnt so much from her. I hope in the reconciliation process that those of us who are not Aboriginal will have more opportunities to learn from our sisters.”

■ “My name is Vivi, I’m from a Greek background and I’ve grown up in Redfern and among the Aboriginal people and I think that down at the grassroots level it doesn’t matter who we are, where we’ve come from, what colour we are, we are all working together. It’s the people up in the top and the decisionmakers who are dividing us and we as women have an influence on our sons, our fathers and all other people and we should be influencing them so that they can understand and talk to each other.”

■ “I’m a chicken farmer from Kellyville having a career change. When I grow up I’m going to be a writer and a storyteller. I hadn’t realised it before but I’ve been involved in reconciliation for a long time because I’m involved with kids in the Drugs and Rehabilitation Centre outside Kempsey. The kids loved it so much that I’ve ended up telling stories to all the adults as well and believe it or not in the evenings they had me teaching them line dancing. I’ve come to the realisation that reconciliation isn’t about big things — it’s about small things with love.”

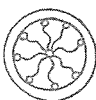
■ “Thank you to whoever invited me — I don’t know. I’m an artist. I have been a school teacher. What I want to say is the sacred sites are most important as far as the Land Rights and the farmers. Now the farmers need to be linked with Internet. Most of us here are city people. We need to spread the news to our sisters in the country,

particularly in the communities where there are farmers, about what reconciliation is all about, not only that the Aborigines give up hating us but that we make a point of loving them and not being ashamed of our past. Some of our ancestors have been good, helpful to this land but also some of us have done harm to the Aborigines. Now please can the country people get to know about this. Maybe we can get in touch through relatives, through friends or through organisations. That's all I need to say. I get wound up if I say any more!"

■ "I'm Marguerite Ramsden and I facilitate Spiritual Healing. Someone said this morning that the healing starts here. I'd like to draw everyone's attention to that because when we do start healing ourselves, that's when we start healing planet earth and that's the most important place to start."



Tjanara Goreng-Goreng



■ “I want to sing you a traditional wailing song so I would like you all to close your eyes please [she sings]. That song is for all the women who suffered by invasion and all the other laws. My name is Tjanara. I’m a Goreng-Goreng Waka Waka, and I’m a Murri woman, and I teach traditional women’s business and practice women’s business.”

■ “My voice is going to be a little bit shaky. On the storytelling side, I would like to say that I’m privileged to be involved in a very exciting project of reconciliation. I’m a member of the Jewish community and we’re working together with Tranby College in preserving the memories of Aboriginal people and the significant stories they have to tell. They are finding the people that they want to talk to and they’re learning how to record their oral histories which will be published for all of us to share. Because I think reconciliation is really an exchange. We have to learn more about Aboriginal people on a one-to-one basis and in a group and this is one mechanism by which we can come together and share.”

■ “I’m going to tell you a story which I will never forget as long as I live. It was a very salutary experience. It happened a few years ago when I was part of the organisation for the Assembly for the World Council of Churches in Canberra. There were about 4,000 people gathered and there was a parade for the vigil of peace on one night. Local people had decided that a group of children would lead that march through the streets of the city and the Aboriginal people thought that they were leading the march. I knew both groups and someone said to me to tell the Aboriginal people to stand aside and let the children through to lead this march because they have done all this work. I went to the Aboriginal people and I simply said ‘Will you stand back and let these people come through’. I don’t

know what sort of voice I used for that although I heard it ringing in my ears for many years and I still hear it. I **do** know what voice I used. A little bit later one of my Aboriginal friends said to me 'You didn't even wait to see what happened. You didn't even negotiate that with us. We thought you were our friend'.

They pulled me out of the Great Assembly where we were all sitting and they took me to their tent and I learnt what reconciliation is really about and it wasn't just about my weeping there with them and saying sorry; it was about me sitting with them for two hours while they told me one by one exactly how they had experienced my racism. They wept there and I wept there and I knew that it wasn't as simple as saying sorry. It wasn't even as simple as they made it for me because they gave me a gift which I didn't deserve. When I was so grieved and upset, they surrounded me and said 'Remember the earth is your Mother and you will be healed and we will touch you and you will be healed'. They also said to me 'That was a public act of racism Dorothy, and the apology must be public too and you know that'. I had to face that and to make my apology public to the 4,000 people who were there.

I learned a lot in that moment about reconciliation. The bit that I have put aside as a special gift was the fact that they did hold me and forgive me and give me grace at that moment. That was not something that I was due to expect. But I learnt that none of this is ever cheap and it's never without cost — a lot of cost."

■ "The singing brought something back to me and just made me realise just how much we have to learn. I'm a First Fleeter and at the time of the 1988 Celebrations, we were so excited about January 26th. Just before that, we had discovered our roots had gone back to the First Fleet and tried to imagine how our



grandmother would have turned in her grave if she had known about her convict ancestors which she was always denying. We were sitting there as members of the First Fleet at that early morning celebration in Sydney Cove for the re-enactment of the proclamation,



Trish Burns

and there were some very handsome Aborigines standing just behind in an enclave. After the proclamation was proclaimed the muskets were fired by people who were dressed for this occasion and after this there was the most extraordinary wail. And suddenly we just realised — there we were so proud of our 200 years history and you just realised who had suffered.

When we went to school we learnt Australian History. We learnt about Sturt and Leichhardt going out 'discovering' Australia. I think we have so much to learn. People my age, and maybe people 10 or 20 years younger than me, don't know anything about Aboriginal History. I've been to a wonderful course that Jack Beeton ran at Sydney University, 'Dreamtime and Dispossession'. We need to leave our ears at home and go with new ears and just listen to that story without any preconceived ideas. Without taking all the things that we have carried along with us. Let's go along and educate ourselves. I'd love to think that we have many more opportunities to meet

together as we are doing today. It's quite difficult to meet Aboriginal people. I've met Jack . We need to hear the story as the Aboriginal people would like to tell it. Thank you."

■ "I convene the anti-racism sub-committee of the Ethnic Communities Council. I know many of you here. I represent the Jewish Community on the Council and I came here as a refugee. I really don't want to cry but I really do understand the Aboriginal people's suffering. We are likely in Australia to have our newly acquired race-hatred law diminished and I would like to ask everybody here to make sure that the Federal Race-Hatred Law is going to be a strong one and, in order for it to be a strong one, everyone is going to have to lobby for it and be vigilant so that we can all live here freely as equal citizens and free of vilification and free of racial hatred. Thank you."

■ "I don't think that I have the right to say very much but I would just like to speak about the reality that I see at the moment. There is such a lack of services to Aboriginal communities across NSW, right now. There is such a lack of services for Aboriginal women who need health and refuge and assistance and it's very hard to get politicians to see these gaps and lacks and holes. I hope that from today, we have more people banging on doors and demanding what is in my view essential."

■ "In these days we find that many families don't have mothers and fathers. Don't have grandparents. Don't have aunts and uncles. A lot of people miss out on that. We bear the children and we are responsible for them. We should be trying to guide, not just the children but our brothers and sisters as well. We've got a lot of





Lola Forester

women who are very lonely out there, we have a lot of women who are very affluent. Women need to get together. It doesn't matter where we come from. Old people as well as young people. We don't have enough connections with our older women, whether they be traditional women from Aboriginal culture or whether they be older women from other cultures. We have lost so much because we lost so many more grandmothers. I lost my grandmother and she was the closest thing to me. Even now when I feel down

I still call to my grandmother and she comes to me and I smell her. I smell the three flowers that she always used to wear when I was a kid. I think about that today. The younger women today need to connect with the older women. This is how culture is. We learn from our elders. Without older women we are not going to learn anything. We come up with great ideas. But older women have gone through those so we should learn from their experience. If we put it together we can help make a better society."

**Dorothy McCrae McMahon summing up the
'Message Stick Sharing', and
Janette Blainey and Julie Smith weaving
the threads of the sharing together**

Dorothy:

"I would just like to say one thing. I want to say the last word which should have been the first word. Nothing will happen with reconciliation unless there is justice. It is justice that underpins the whole possibility or impossibility of reconciliation and I would say that, even though we have been talking about relationships — because women are very relational — it is our commitment to bring in justice as a basis for reconciliation which we must not forget."

Janette:

"I didn't think that this would be easy but it's even harder than I imagined. There seems to be so much to say. And people have been sharing a lot of what it feels like to be in Australia today, at this time of reconciliation. Some of the things that people were highlighting were love, and that's where we began in this last session. Healing, while not forgetting that there's a lot of grieving, and to acknowledge the grieving that needs to happen. We had a chance to do that as we experienced the wail. People talked about listening and sharing. It happens to be part of something that is very dear to me. That is, to really listen. I think that as women we decided to take up and shift the balance in our world in this century in the male dominated world and women's belief in how this world could be. Women found we weren't being heard and we had to speak in a way that we were heard and we had to learn to speak in a way that men could hear. This male way of speaking led us a long way from the place where we knew how to share from our hearts and ways of relating.



I think that what I'm hearing today is people are saying let's learn to listen and let's learn to listen as our Aboriginal sisters choose to tell us their stories. Learn to listen from the place we can hear with new ears or whatever it takes, but listen with our hearts, and that's not to forget that from that place we will also hear the ways of bringing justice to our world."



Julie Smith

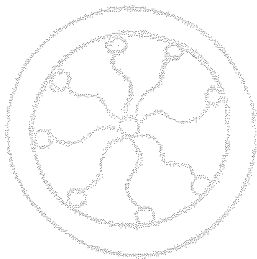
Julie:

"Like Linda, I reckon this has been the deadliest thing out to see every-body here — it's sure overwhelming. I heard so much about storytelling from people, even the chicken farmer, it's like, yeah sure, its here in the heart, because that's where it starts. Because I think most Aboriginal people would certainly recognise what scratching around for food, and scratching around for a living, must be like. At some time or other most of us have been there, if not all of us. It was very moving to hear the strength of what Linda was talking about. She certainly mentioned some tough stuff that many of us Aboriginal people are all concerned about and so the story is that yes, it's been tough. If we're all here, then we are obviously all aware that this toughness isn't going to stop. Many of you have acknowledged it, so I can assume that it's

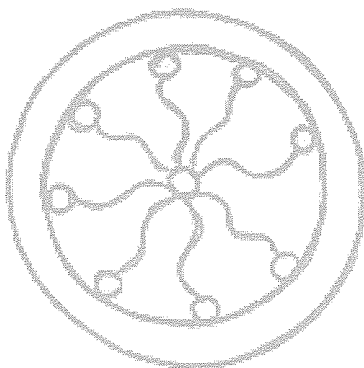
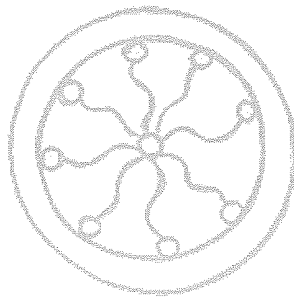
all of you — talk about gatherings, talk about relationships, talk about power over, and power with. And the story is, whether you're a first fleeter and have the joy of celebration, of knowing where you belong, and where you came from. What joy that must bring people who know where they belong.

For many Aboriginal people, for those of us who do know where we belong, our tribes, and those of us who have remnants of our language, to those who were taken away and are still trying to find this — when they find the earth their mother, when they find their dreaming, it's amazing how powerful they become. And for all of us, if we can have a sense of power of how we belong to the oldest living culture, how we have chosen in this lifetime to be here on the oldest living planet, then our ability to acknowledge and share what this earth has to offer us is immense. So we can look back on reconciliation. I think that it's in all of our abilities to recognise that this land is our mother, that we as women have a very special place in it but so do our men. It is interesting that I raise this because so much has been talked about the strength of our women, but recently a very old Aboriginal man said to me 'Why are we being pushed out all the time?' Some of my recognisable sisters around the place here have had some tough battles with our men, but they're still our men and we choose to raise those issues privately because they are about us healing ourselves as well. So the story for today for me is that in healing ourselves, as somebody has already mentioned, the story is also about healing each other in our own communities and extending out to beyond."

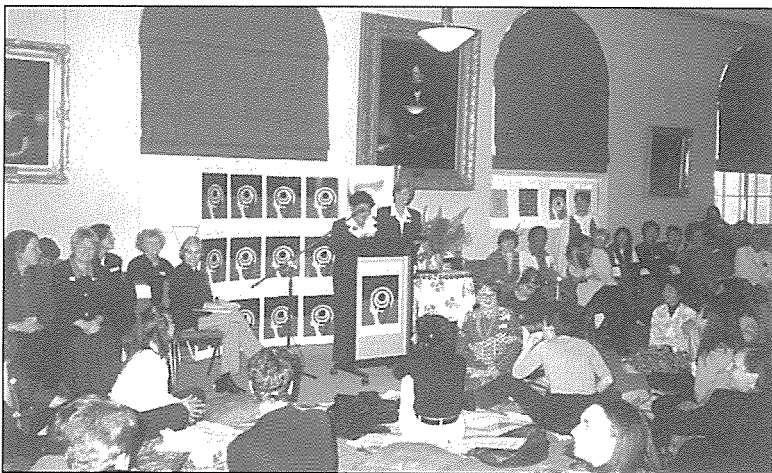




***Reflections after
the event***



We felt the experience of the Women's Reconciliation Celebration so moving we asked women who had attended to send us their impressions and reflections about the event. Here are some of these responses.



Julie Smith and Janette Blainey

Rasme Berolah
*Aboriginal and
Torres Strait
Islander
Commission*

My name is Rasme Berolah and I am proudly a Meriam woman. I am a Torres Strait Islander and my island is Mer also known as Murray Island. I come from a long line of very strong willed women and these women have and always will be my mentors and guides. In fact, it was one of these women that was the instigator of what is known as the Mabo case. One of the main strengths of island women is to always see the main picture so that no matter how hard the journey, your heart and eye remain on the objectives.



It was wonderful to experience the Women and Reconciliation Forum and as I looked around the room, I noted the different ages and cultures of the women. Along with all the others, I listened closely, laughed and cried at the stories so readily shared. I came to realise that the common denominator was that as women, we are all carers and nurturers, sisters in our ideals, wanting the same things for our families in a sharing, caring world. Therefore, keeping our eye on the objective and trying to right some of Life's injustices.

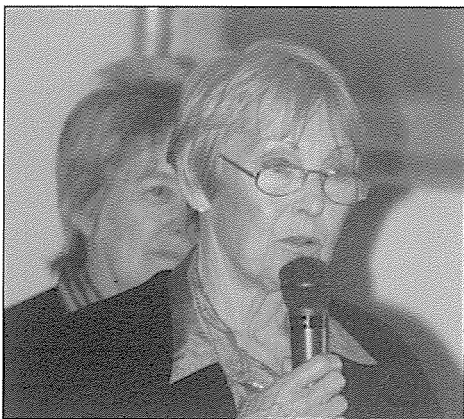
Some of us have always travelled this road and tried to change things in our own ways. Maybe through age or experience, some have only come to the realisation that there have to be changes. However, this Forum demonstrated clearly that all were prepared to open up their hearts and hold out their hands to help others to come to the understanding of the importance of reconciliation.

I hope in my heart that this Forum will be a yearly event as we all gained a wonderful strength of spirit and a unity of sisterhood.

On Wednesday 29th my friend Berice and I attended the Women's Reconciliation Celebration at the Dixon Room in the Mitchell Library. When we first received the invitation we had no idea of what this meant except that we realised it had great importance to the community. How right we were.

On arrival we were warmly greeted by friendly women who went out of their way to see to our comfort. The diversity of the

Helen McKay
*President,
Australian
Storytelling Guild
(NSW) Inc.*



Marguerite Ramsden

attendees that day was exceptional — people came as representatives of many different community groups. Very quickly we were all talking together and making new friends or contacts and, as the room filled up to capacity, a great buzz of conversation engulfed us.

The formal part of the program began and soon we were being made aware of the reason for our attendance. Speaker after speaker told of the outrages that had been perpetrated against our indigenous people in the name of civilisation and religion and the damage these attitudes inflicted on the Aboriginal self-esteem.

One speaker told how she had unthinkingly offended a group of Aboriginal people when arranging a welcome for a major event. She told how she had to make recompense to all those she'd offended and it certainly was not just with a simple 'sorry'. She had to listen to how deeply each person was hurt by the insensitive way in which she'd behaved, and afterwards, once she apologised to each individual, she was forgiven. That story certainly left a deep impression on all who heard it and I'm sure we'll all think carefully about how we react to others in the future.

The informal discussion of reconciliation started with a retired chook farmer from Kellyville talking of her involvement in helping the



Aboriginal community at a drug and alcohol program. Story after story from each person, showed us just how diversified the gathering was. There was a wonderful feeling of energy and togetherness in the Dixon room that day. I know I shan't forget the messages we received. Each journey begins with a simple step and I'd say we made great strides that day towards mending some fences along the way. Keep up the momentum!

I doubt if the Dixon Room in the State Library of NSW has ever seen the like. Chairs in great circles round the walls, cushions on the floor in the centre space where the baby contingent were so content with their mothers, beautiful hangings at the windows, imaginative food set out on individual servings and at least three hundred women in various degrees of emotion, heightened by the sweetness of the Women's Federation for World Peace choir and the drama of a solo lament by Tjanara Goreng-Goreng.

Priscilla Rowe
*Pitt Street Uniting
Church, Sydney*

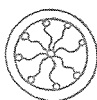
I found it an occasion of hope, in the presence of such a large and varied group, the accord was palpable. I am not someone who has ever been a big 'toucher', but at one point tears were on the cheeks of the young woman next to me and I found myself putting my hand on one of hers and she placing her other on mine. We had no need to speak. Many tears were evident.

**Dorothy
McRae-McMahon**
*Director of
Mission,
Uniting Church
of Australia*

There we were, pouring into the room. All sorts of women — Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, old and young, dressed in many styles, carrying many experiences, all with a sense of anticipation. Most of us didn't know what to expect of that meeting. All we knew was that we had to be there, to state by our presence that we believed in a new possibility.

I will remember the strong young Aboriginal women who led us that day who, with grace and confidence, firmly assumed their place as our leaders. I will remember contributions from people who sometimes did not even know the impact of their words as they came out of different generations and levels of awareness — and yet they were received in the spirit of our knowing that they were offering their best into the occasion.

I will never forget the 'wailing' — that sound of a woman, of all women in all times, grieving, lamenting for her people, her children, herself, with a voicing of pain which goes beyond crying. Most of all I will remember our strength together, the sense of power that arises from women who care deeply about something and who claim the mystery of the power which comes from determination, endurance, courage and love.



I lived and grew up in Redfern amongst Aboriginal people for 30 years. Through my work at South Sydney Community Aid, I participated in the Black Movement and witnessed and was inspired by the Aboriginal people's struggle for survival, for justice, revival of their culture, language, identity and recognition of their rights to the land of their ancestors. Some of the issues experienced by Aboriginal people affected people from Non English Speaking Backgrounds and many times we worked together to lobby for these issues. We walked together on the Multicultural trail and we have achieved some progress. We must fight together to preserve, to maintain and develop it. For my part I will always continue the struggle.

Vivi Germanos-Koutsounadis OAM
*Ethnic Child Care
 Development Unit*

An excellent idea to work the reconciliation process through membership of women's organisations. The location was good. MC, other speakers and program excellent. Organisation with easy eating and easy seating, workers in the city and others, very appropriate. An opportunity made for indigenous and non-indigenous women to be together. It has to happen more for reconciliation to progress. I agree it is really important to extend similar opportunities to country people.

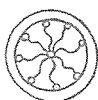
Judith Steanes
*Women's
 Electoral Lobby*

It was valuable to be given an opportunity to mark Reconciliation Week. We were clearly reminded there is still a lot to do before justice is achieved, and that everyone can do something even if it is just talking about issues with our friends and not letting uninformed comments pass. There was a good feeling of reality rather than accusation and while none of us will forget sharing a woman's wail, thoughts of a hopeful future for which we all have a responsibility, prevailed.

Ruth Layard

*Older Women's
Network Aboriginal
Study Circle*

The experience of such a large gathering of women from so many different countries and backgrounds — all united in grief about the past injustices to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but all determined to try to ensure that big changes in attitudes, education, transformation from words to deeds, can be wrought by women — was quite unique, and I hope that every single woman present on that momentous occasion will realise that each one of us has the opportunity and ability to influence those whom we come in contact with. We can correct misapprehensions, help to encourage advances in education, employment and health, but only after consultation with and advice from Indigenous people. We must listen, learn and understand.



Thank you for this unique opportunity to come together as women with hearts open, and I look forward to future gatherings.

It was a warm human gathering, a sharing and at times moving experience. What stood out in my mind afterwards was:

Clare Dunne
Writer

- Linda Burney's speech, delivered with humanity and authority, which connected at many levels — emotional, practical, institutional.
- Tjanara Goreng-Goreng's searing song of grief which vividly shook her as it did everyone else.
- Shelley Rey's appreciative opening, blessed with humour, her call for silently shared contemplation and her emotionally moved thanks at the end.
- The final dignified speech from the heart by Julie Smith who thankfully also included men as partners in reconciliation and life.

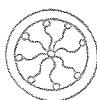
The women who shared their stories each gave in her own way, sometimes unknowingly, the sentiments of earlier decades. For me, reconciliation is about reaching wholeness as people and as a country, a major task of recognising that we

are in essence human beings together first and building that into community and institutional life. Other support programs at social, educational, economic and institutional levels need to be underpinned by programs aimed at engendering inner attitudes of respect, understanding and appreciation all round. The work of Reconciliation must necessarily be all inclusive and all embracing.

As a person born and reared in another country, Ireland, meeting Aboriginal people brought me into contact with the deep roots of the country, the foundation on which succeeding layers are built. It also brought recognition of parallels between Irish and Aboriginal cultures at human, social, historic and mythical levels that was entirely unexpected to me, leading to a sense of universal shared humanity. I'm enclosing my book 'People Under the Skin'; an Irish immigrant's experience of Aboriginal Australia. If it would be of any help at all in the reconciliation process, please let me know. I wish the work of reconciliation the wisdom, strength and support to succeed in its purpose.

Jennifer Barker
*Executive
Member,
Federation of
Parents & Citizen's
Association of
NSW*

It was an honour to be present at the Women's Reconciliation Celebration at the State Library in May. I was impressed by the number of participants, the diversity of their backgrounds and the range of age groups. All of the speakers were impressive, especially Linda Burney, who stated that she was initially sceptical, but has found that her participation on the National Reconciliation Council has been one of the most fulfilling exercises that she has undertaken.



Linda stressed that reconciliation was one of the most critical issues this country has to face in the next 5 years. She fears that if it is not dealt with successfully we will have a regurgitation of this century in the next century!

It is my hope, for the sake of all our population, but particularly for our children, that some of the goodwill, sincerity and respect apparent on this occasion can be dispersed across our country and that reconciliation will become a reality.



Tjanara Goreng-Goreng

I was humbled by the experience and touched by the honesty and openness of all women in sharing their stories. I found my emotions swinging wildly from tears to laughter. It caused me yet again to question why anyone would close themselves off from the richness that comes from exposure to all cultures. At the same time taking us on a lifelong tour of self discovery. I hope this wonderful event will be a first step that we can look back on as a catalyst for major change.

Robyn O'Connor

Pat Zinn

*Member of Older
Womens' Network*

I felt very privileged to be part of the Women's Reconciliation gathering on the 29th May, especially as it generated so much energy that was positive. I had a feeling of being part of history-in-the-making. Together, as women of all creeds, colours and ages, we can make a difference and have a positive influence on what is happening now and in the future.

One of the things we can do as women is to help empower Aboriginal women, as they are the backbones of their community. In South Africa, through working with black women in 'self-help' schemes, child-care and community schools, I experienced how effective this can be. Women who gained self-esteem and confidence became leaders. I look forward to further action.

Valwyn

Edwards-Wishart

*The 5th Women
& Labour
Conference,
Macquarie
University*

The Women's Reconciliation Celebration was memorable for a number of reasons. First of all, it was wonderful to see so many women attending and to feel part of such a focus of minds and hearts. Full marks to all who coped so magnificently with the tasteful catering for such a huge crowd, too.

Some things stand out for me: Shelley Reys' warmth and graciousness as host chair;





Sally Gray

Linda Burney's telling-it-how-it-is address about the problems currently facing Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders; and Dorothy McRae-McMahon's Message Stick Sharing session. This included the brave woman who announced her family connections with the First Fleeters but who poignantly described her awakened conscience in the face of the dignified cry of collective grief raised by Aboriginal bystanders at the Bicentennial commemorations at Circular Quay in 1988.

We experienced a similar kind of heart-piercing lament in the traditional offering from Tjanara Goreng-Goreng, an Aboriginal woman who is a singer, dancer, poet and healer. And finally, it was good to be reminded by another Koori, Julie Smith, that in our united strength and determination as women and life-givers, we should not overlook the dignity and value of men as well. All in all, a supremely successful and thought-provoking occasion.

Elisbeth Allen
*Tourism New
South Wales*

When I was asked by Elaine Telford for my reflections on the Women's Reconciliation Celebration, the first thought that came to my mind was privilege — the privilege I felt in being part of this first event to celebrate new relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous women.

Why was this forum so different from any other in which I have participated? The reason is simple: people spoke from the heart without any self-consciousness whatsoever, amongst a group whose very size could have intimidated them into silence.

These expressions of emotion ranged from the singing of a wailing song which moved the entire audience to tears, to the articulation of the meaning of reconciliation as the 'freedom to be "me" as an indigenous person'.

If the will of the group is anything to go by, the breaking down of stereotypes and the building of mutual respect and understanding is well underway. However, we still have a lot of work to do to convince others there is in fact much to reconcile.





Deaconess Mary Andrews and Sr. Michelle Farrugia

I was surprised to be invited to the Women's Reconciliation Celebration but felt excited about attending such an event. It is hard to describe the feeling I had on that day and have reflected on since. It was a mixture of many emotions. Sadness for the pain which has been endured for so long and joy at the feeling of connection and hope for the future. It was an emotionally charged meeting tempered by wisdom, life experiences and a realistic look at the present political climate. Thank you to whoever thought of inviting me. I feel privileged to have been included in such a positive, powerful experience.

Patricia Weir
Psychologist

Judy MacIntyre
*NSW Supply
Service*

There is nothing more uplifting than to see a group of people from a variety of backgrounds, cultures and socio-economic levels come together as one. It is even more so when the cause is as great as 'reconciliation'.

As a migrant woman of colour, from a non-English speaking background, I am more than aware of the inequalities and prejudices that exist around us. I was honoured to have been invited to the Women's Reconciliation Celebration and was delighted to see the determination and enthusiasm of the women and the progress they are making.

The event was informative and interesting and left me feeling rather more hopeful about tomorrow. My hope was tempered only by the concern that issues such as the rights of Aboriginal people, inequality and institutionalised racism are forgotten outside these forums in the hustle and bustle of daily life. But, it is precisely there, in our daily lives, that we should remember the issues and make a concerted effort to change what is wrong.

I strongly urge all people of ethnic origin, those of colour, those from non-English speaking backgrounds like myself, to pull together for this most vital cause. For we, more than most, should be aware of the



pain and anger that comes from the loss of our homes, discrimination, and sometimes plain hatred.

Attending the Women's Reconciliation Celebration was indeed wonderful. It marked a time when I could actually do something. I had wanted to be part of the reconciliation process with my sisters for so long but had no idea how to go about it. How to break down the barriers — how to be supportive without being seen as patronising. How to be in a loving partnership — learning from each other. The time I believe has finally come — the real understanding has finally begun!

Joan Carolan
*Catholic Women's
League, Sydney*

For one short period of time I experience 'peace' in knowing we seeded the future, our promise...

Christine Engel
Consultant

To be in a room filled with such a rich tapestry of humanity in all our shades, shapes, sizes and most important, graduation of ages...

The voices of ancestral wisdom resonating from within each, supporting our presence, stilling our minds to listen beyond the ear,

raising some voices to express personal history and others their integrated wisdom.

All the while the hum of the elders reminding us our personal story adds to and forms collective history. To reconcile, we first step back through our own barriers, address our own interior then re-emerge, acknowledging the issues we are to address.

Taking responsibility to resolve the personal empowers us to reconcile the collective.

We who rigidly and steadfastly refuse to acknowledge the internal, personal conflict, confusion, dysfunction and dispute, immobilise the possibility of reconciliation for the global community, harmony, unity, whole living... peace!

I believe if we all put our dreary self-saturated minds to rest for one minute... during those 60 big seconds, we would step directly into the new paradigm embracing balance, harmony and peace. Who would possibly want to re-enter the deafening cords of our own distortions, limited boundaries and self deceptions? We do bore ourselves to death... rather than tune to the silence of our own vast wisdom for direction and resolve.

I am an elder...

I have lived the business of initiation

I embrace the lore — I am the lore

I have voice — I am voice

and I say...

where are you? meetings, conference, committees, endless movement...?

Be still, be still and remember women of eternity



let my wisdom come
to you...
be still, be silent and
listen...
move back from
emotional dross
let go of attachment
allow the voices of the
elders to resonate
within and through
your beauty
be guided by the
wisdom of time...
oh... put the phone on
answer while you
walk the earth wisdom.



Elaine Telford

Thank you, thank you to the organisers of the Women's Reconciliation Celebration! We really needed that affirmation of hope and solidarity, as we struggle against the wave of narrow self interest, materialism and racism that seemed set to overwhelm the reconciliation process in the last few months.

Political leaders come and go, but real reconciliation is a slow, patient process that depends on the day-by-day commitment and actions of what I call 'ordinary people' —

Gai Smith
Library Technician

though I reckon there's a lot of the ordinary and extraordinary in each one of us.

To experience the calling into our midst of the spirits of indigenous women who suffered the violence, oppression and apathy of the last 208 years . To hear indigenous women, young and the not-so-young, willing to share their stories, their culture, and their hope for justice.

To be with 'ordinary people' like story-telling chicken farmers, anti-discrimination workers living with their own pain-filled Jewish history, descendants of First Fleeters who have realised the cost to indigenous people of their proud history. To be in that room packed full of loving, determined practical women. Wow! Take heart Australia. We will be reconciled.

**Elaine Odger
Norling**
Photographer

I saw the reconciliation gathering as a patchwork of nationalities woven together by the common ties of humanity. The phrases Walking Together and Sharing Our Future look very real and possible indeed.

Maria Maguire
*Consultant,
Unfolding Futures
Pty Ltd*

The few hours we spent together as women felt like days, we did what felt natural and necessary: we remembered, we recalled facts, we told stories, we observed silence, we listened to each other's concerns, to the call from the past, the depth of the past, and



Healing Our Nation Through Women's Wisdom

the future. There were speeches and songs, flowers, food and beautiful cloths, women of all ages and backgrounds sitting on chairs or on the floor and sharing. Everyone was a full participant: honoured, challenged, invited to share and essential to the whole. No one thing, no one person kept centre stage.

Everyone and everything became part of a larger whole. The many feelings such as reverence, sadness, joy, fear, hope, even outrage as well as gratitude

— all of them and many other sentiments — were accepted, expressions of a group of strangers becoming community. The atmosphere in the room was very rich, laden, tears of pain and joy at once.

I was particularly glad for the readiness with which people admitted the need to face up to our whole past as well as our own racism today. Only then can we find the desire to change and the courage to ask for forgiveness. In terms of pain or innocent suffering and/or guilt, we are unequal partners indeed. As human beings, however, there is so much more that connects us than anything that has divided us or could continue to separate us now. Women seem to know a lot about that. We can only move forward if we long for our liberation and create the new story together.



Margaret Gutman OAM

Healing ourselves, each other, the land and society at large belong together. We are on the journey indeed, we are even on track. No one can steal the journey from us any more. Reconciliation is not a matter of money and law, of parties or bureaucracies. It belongs to the hearts and minds of people, real people who love the past, present and future of their individual and collective lives, all of it, unashamedly yet humbly, gratefully and requesting forgiveness, for the sake of belonging, to time and place, together with original and many other inhabitants of this precious land.

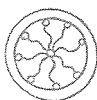
Much good went into the day, even more good might flow out of it. Everyone became a carrier of the message, of the reality of reconciliation, not in a room, not for a few hours but for all of life itself, nothing less. Yes, awesome. Yes, thank you, everyone. Thank you for being there. Thank you for being you, for the sake of all of us, world-wide.

Patricia Rovik
*University
of Sydney*

Guilt can hang like torn trousers and catch on our every step. Acknowledging hurts and harms however is very repairing and creates healing in the threads of social fabric.

Wendy Gillett
*Women's Sports
Unit, NSW
Department Sport
& Recreation*

I was tempted not to attend given the Federal Government's approach to Land Rights and to reconciliation in general; however I thought a women's meeting might be able to see past that and enable us to focus on



what needs to happen from here on in... and I think it did that. I was deeply moved by many of the stories that were told and the glaring reminders what atrocities against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have happened (and are happening) during my lifetime. The Women's Celebration provided me with an opportunity to remember the power and strength of women.

A sacred arena wherein the differences of all present cultural, social, spiritual blended to form a mosaic of mutuality and hope for a journey that is not for the fainthearted.

**Sisters Pat
Linnane and
Michelle Farrugia**
*Sisters of Mercy,
Bathurst*

I really appreciated the opportunity to share with other women just what reconciliation means. I had attended, the previous day, the launch of Reconciliation Week at the Powerhouse and enjoyed the speeches, but at a more intellectual level. Hearing personal stories from a variety of women really brought home to me at an emotional level the journey that all Australians must take. I think it was also important to hear the spirit

Peta Landman
*Programs Officer,
Museums
Australia, NSW*



Dr Faith Bandler D.Litt., A.M.

in which these stories were told. It was also enlightening to reflect on our role as women, mothers and nurturers in influencing the next generation to overcome prejudices and misconceptions. I think that the Women's Reconciliation Day will create a spreading circle of influence. Thanks once again for the opportunity to participate.

Cleo Lynch
*NSW Department
 of Corrective
 Services*

To see all the woman gathered together was to witness our tenacious commitment to justice and unity. To witness that was to feel the fierce rekindling of anger and hope. To feel this was to know the ultimate power of our collective strength and endurance.

On my way home I saw a woman, expressionless, tired, the shopping bag she carried an indication of the next shift on the homefront. Does she know her strength and plodding endurance contribute to that collective pool?



Healing Our Nation Through Women's Wisdom

The stories of women must continue to be proclaimed so that all peoples can unite for dignity and justice to all — RECONCILIATION.

I would like to congratulate the organisers for their initiative in creating a most meaningful and memorable occasion.

Beverley Clarke
*Community
Volunteer Worker*

I know that from those present and many many more, will come the foundation of love and understanding required to establish a strong and caring network of education and support. Aboriginal people have the ability to teach us their most outstanding powerful tools of human understanding and survival — through our taking the time to listen.

As a Grandmother who has reared an Aboriginal child taken from her parents, and her father before her was also taken from his family, I believe we can begin to help heal the mothers, fathers and families for the deep hurts they are carrying through caring, positive action and lots and lots of love.

Susan Wright
Artist

I have been meaning to write to you for some time to say how very special the Women's Reconciliation Celebration was, how I was moved and happy to be present and to congratulate those inspired enough to organise it.

I came away with hope for justice for Aboriginal people and the feeling that if it is possible to get somewhere with the powers of this place, the women will manage it. Thank you again for the opportunity to be present at the Celebration, it was one of the most moving events of my life.

**Jacinta Cubis
and Frances
Riordan**
CARITAS Australia

I think my giving [reconciliation] badges to almost everyone I know reflected my wish for the day to continue beyond the 29th May and the walls of the Mitchell Library.

We would like to thank you for organising the day and inviting us to be part of this special experience. The question is how are we going to transfer that 'specialness' to other Australians? Good luck with your roles in this effort, and when you are feeling it is all a little too difficult, cast your minds back to the 29th May for inspiration.



With a group of women on the 29th May, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to celebrate reconciliation with Aboriginal people, I felt the joy, the pain, the strength and most of all the love and healing that filled the room.

The presence of my daughter and her baby, only two weeks old, whose birth I attended, were very strong in the room. The gathering affirmed that as with my children, so my grandchildren will know the story of Aboriginal people and our invasion of their land, and the love and forgiveness that has been extended to me and many others. Since attending the gathering I have arranged to present an Aboriginal Reconciliation Study Circle through the University of the Third Age, Port Stephens.

Jane Purkiss
Health Worker

What moved me most of all at the Women's Reconciliation Celebration was:

- the generosity of the Aboriginal women — “this land of ours” Linda Burney called it, including us all; and we were welcomed and given permission to hold our meeting
- the pain and grief in the piercing, beautiful song presented to us

Sheila Walkerden
*Pitt Street Uniting
Church, Sydney*

- the atmosphere; so many of us, so intense, so willing to share with and learn from each other
- and the privilege of listening to those young women who are contributing so much, by their energy, good humour and courage to this country today.

Filomena Renzi
Artist

Hope. Without it there is only despair. Guess I haven't forgotten the Australia I was living in 20 years ago. To see a crowded room full of people who make the time to care gave me back some hope.

If we are given half the chance to act by our convictions and beliefs, we will. And policies only become a living experience when they're part of everyday life.

Foundations have been built and the spirit of each individual who cares is dependent on this strengthening.





Women's Federation for World Peace Choir

A most memorable event where I felt hundreds of people who did not know each other suddenly became united as one, to focus their energies on the immediate need for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

Janet Hall
*Marketing
Consultant*

These people were unified in spirit, purpose and energy and shared with each other some innermost emotions. For me, it was a most powerful learning experience through hearing personal thoughts of those who had suffered so much. Tears came to my eyes as the sufferers told us their reality. I felt ashamed being white, knowing that we had created this reality and never knowing or caring what it had done to others. It was like

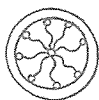
a knife had cut each of us to suffer more and bleed a bit because the suffering is not over. And there is a long way to go to correct the situation.

Tracy De Geer
*President,
Women's
Federation for
World Peace*

I felt that I had experienced a miracle, from the development of a simple idea to the coming together of so many women and their spirit of goodwill. We tapped into a longing within the hearts of Australian people to have one Nation. To respect all the people and environment of this land and to live together in harmony.

This was a diverse group of women. Aboriginal women came seeking justice and recognition for their mourned loved ones, themselves and the future, but also bringing forgiveness, love and faith. Non-Aboriginal women from the 8th generation to new Australians came seeking forgiveness and relationships and giving commitment to seek proper restitution.

I also want to speak on behalf of the choir of the Women's Federation for World Peace, which is a mixture of International and Australian Women. For each of us it was a deeply moving experience to see on the people's faces as well as feel in the

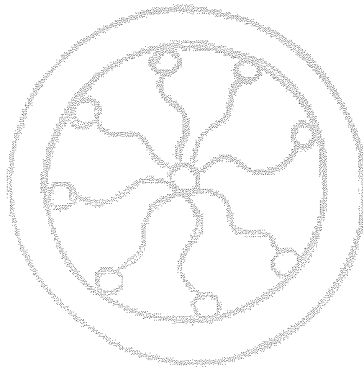
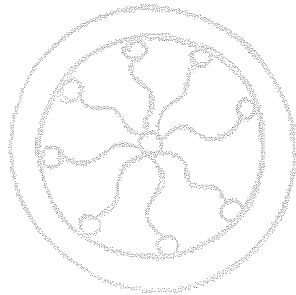


atmosphere that the women there truly did want 'to hold onto the dream of love and peace together'. It brought tears to our hearts as well as our eyes.

I thank God that I could be part of making this new history in our nation and working with such a wonderful gathering of women.



Program for the event



Vision Statement

**The Women's Reconciliation Network
is an informal network of indigenous and
non-indigenous women who aim to:**

**'Open our hearts to the experience of others,
accept our traditional wisdoms,
acknowledge the past, heal ourselves
and teach others'**



Healing Our Nation Through Women's Wisdom

Women's Reconciliation Celebration

The Dixson Room, State Library of NSW

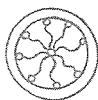
12.30 – 2.00pm

P R O G R A M

- 12.00 Registration and Refreshments
- 12.30 Opening — Host: Shelley Reys
- 12.40 Welcome: Melissa Jackson / Margy Burn
— State Library of NSW
- 12.45 Linda Burney: NSW Member, Council for
Aboriginal Reconciliation and President AECG
- 12.55 Song: Women's Federation for World Peace
- 1.00 Helen Sham Ho MLC: NSW Member,
Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation
- 1.10 "Message Stick Sharing" — Dorothy McRae
McMahon, Host: A time for sharing. A brief
statement from the heart. Please stand, using
the roving microphone, give your name and
organisation if relevant and a brief statement.
- 1.45 "Common threads" — Julie Smith, Janette
Blainey "Working Together" in cooperation with
the Conflict Resolution Network
- 1.55 Send out to the Future — Linda
- 2.00 Announcements and Close

**We would like to
thank:**

The State Library of NSW
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Commission
Local Government and Shires Association
The office of Anthony Albanese,
Federal Member for Grayndler
NSW Dept of Aboriginal Affairs
Koori Women's Network
Australian Museum
National Council for Women
NSW Department of School Education
Arrilla Aboriginal Training and Development
Ethnic Communities Council of NSW
NSW Jewish Board of Deputies
United Nations Association
NSW Women's Legal Issues Group
Jessie Street Trust
20-Something Women's Network
Chief Executive Women
Older Women's Network
Catholic Women's League
Uniting Church of Australia
Women's Federation for World Peace Choir
Women's Electoral Lobby
Gadigal Information Service
Institute of Cultural Affairs
Glencoe Consulting



‘Australians for Reconciliation’ is a major program of the Council for Reconciliation and there are Australians for Reconciliation Coordinators in each State and Territory. If you would like to be involved or to receive information, the Toll Free numbers are listed below.

NSW 1800 060 266

VIC 1800 060 265

ACT 1800 804 330

TAS 1800 659 363

SA 1800 060 270

WA 1800 060 269

NT 1800 060 268

QLD 1800 060 267

This publication is available from:

NSW ‘Australians for Reconciliation’ 1800 060 266

or

Bev Clarke

PO Box 397

Sylvania Southgate 2224 NSW

Donation: \$5.00

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**In recognition of voluntary efforts,
the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation
has agreed to sponsor this publication
to stimulate further action
across Australia.**



