



Aunty Ali Golding turning 80

"I got the shock of my life! I don't know who I am anymore. All the lovely compliments lifted my spirit. The kindness, the warm thoughts of me. I never thought that people felt that way of me in their spirit," Aunty Ali Golding exclaimed!

Aunty Ali received many tributes at a zoom meeting called by the Women's Reconciliation Network (WRN) on November 26 and at a public gathering on November 28 held at 'The Settlement', Darlington in Sydney's inner West.

WRN organised these two events to pay homage to Aunty Ali's lifetime achievements on the occasion of her 80th birthday.

In both events, a biographical sketch of Aunty Ali's life was presented on slides beginning with Aunty Ali's birthday on December 3, 1940 in Taree, Biripai Country. Her mum, Anna Morcombe was taken away to Cootamundra Girls Training Home as a child and her father, James Morris served in Gallipoli as a soldier. Aunty Ali grew up on Purfleet Mission and left school early to work as a pea and bean picker in country farms. She married Peter Golding, an English sailor, and had seven children. They eventually moved to Sydney where Aunty Ali worked as a cleaner to help support the family.

Her public life began after her voluntary work, listening to her children and their schoolmates read after her cleaning job at Darlington Public School, was noticed. Linda Burney then working for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs facilitated her taking up a 12-month paid position in that school as an Aboriginal Education Assistant (AEA).

As the saying goes, the rest was history. Aunty Ali was sought after as a storyteller at schools, raising awareness and pride in Aboriginal cultural belonging and history. Her own artistic inclination in song, dance and art combined with her natural storytelling prowess led to more and more requests for her services which included holding smoking ceremonies, opening events with Welcome to Country, or conducting an Aboriginal style marriage ceremony.

She became actively involved in the work of WRN and the Redfern Residents for Reconciliation (RRR) during former Prime Minister Keating's establishment of the decade of Reconciliation (1991-2001). This was the decade of awareness raising community work inspired and spearheaded by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR). CAR was formed after the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody's final report was presented to Parliament. Aunty Ali was amongst the storytellers in the story sharing video/DVD produced by WRN that involved Aboriginal and other Australians.

Aunty Ali's services were employed by Darlington Public School, Cleveland High School, Santa Sabina College, and the University of New South Wales among others. Aunty Ali received initial training at Sydney University to help her in her role as AEA. In 2004, she completed formal studies at Nungalinga College in Darwin with a Diploma in Theology.

In 2001 at Eora College with Deborah Wall and in 2005 at Alpha House Glint Gallery with Wall and her daughter, Victoria, she collaborated in art exhibitions that showcased her culture. In 2006-7, she exchanged stories with Filipino women in 'Around the Dining Table' along with Aboriginal elders, Aunty Joyce Ingram, Aunty Betty Little, and Aunty Sylvia Scott. This Sydney City Council funded project was launched at Customs House Library. In the same year, Malcolm Turnbull, then a leading Republican and Lucy Turnbull, former Deputy Lord Mayor of Sydney donated \$93,000 to Aunty Ali's brainchild, the Redfern Community Foundation. The donation was earmarked to buy two vans for outreach work such as taking mothers to medical appointments and the shops.

In 2001, RRR was successful in obtaining a grant from the Australia Council for the Arts in undertaking an oral history of residents on 'the Block' in Redfern. This project included Aunty Ali's own story. On the Day of Action associated with Oxfam 'Close the Gap' campaign in 2007, Aunty Ali's improvised dreamtime storytelling of Tidalik the Frog with playgroup children captivated the audience. In 2010, she received the NAIDOC elder of the Year award in honour of her achievements.

Aunty Ali, with daughter, Victoria mentored students as artists in Residence at Santa Sabina College in 2008 and in 2011, Aunty Ali was appointed the inaugural Elder in Residence in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of New South Wales. In 2019, Aunty Ali regularly shared dreamtime stories at Redfern Jarjum College to give students the opportunity to grow their cultural knowledge and enrich their understanding of the world around them.

In 2019, Aunty Ali and Aunty Beryl Van Oploo's life stories became an educational tool launched at the Redfern Community Centre on NAIDOC Week as a special WRN project. That film available on YouTube was produced by WRN with the videographer, Dr Francisco Proenza.

On the occasion of her 80th birthday in 2020, the broad community of women associated with the Women's Reconciliation Network paid tribute to her lifetime achievements through a zoom gathering followed by a community presentation held at 'The Settlement'.

The tributes paid to her were personal, joyous, moving, and too numerous to mention. The impact on Aunty Ali was likewise overpowering. A few days afterwards, I rang to ask her how she felt after these two momentous events, and she replied:

"For me, they were the best gathering I had in my whole life. It was a hot day that day. I felt the warmth but more than that, I smelt *fragrance*, the sweetness in my spirit. It was a spiritual happening for me that will last for the rest of my life. The following five days after that, the strangest feeling went through all my senses — the ears, the nose, the eyes...I even felt all the teardrops. Never experienced that ever in my life! It kept open my whole being, a personal depth. I'm sincerely grateful to you, wonderful people, for giving me a shower of your blessings!"

Deb Wall article