

ANDREW ALLEN'S ORAL INTERVIEW WITH UNCLE IVAN ON 7 MARCH 2016

AA May I have your full name please?

UI Ivan Robert Wellington.

AA When and where were you born?

UI I was born in a beautiful little town; I love the place and it is still great today called Kiama on 25 August 1946.

AA Kiama is a beautiful place, I was only there yesterday. It is a magical place.

UI It so happens that in the old days they had the big camps of the Aboriginal people all along the east coast and also the hinterland of the many tribes of the traditional people. One of them was around Minnamurra and Kiama somewhere and my people went right down to the Victorian border. My bloodline goes that way.

AA What was the name of the people in that area?

UI The mission where I grew up on after Kiama on the mouth of the Shoalhaven River was the Jerrinja mob. The place was known as the Jerrinjama. But the traditional people I'm told that were recognised by the settlers at the time was the Wombi Wombeyan people. They're one of the many sub-tribes of the Huon nation. That goes from Botany Bay to Two Fold Bay.

AA I'm from the far south coast, so I knew of Huon there.

UI That's your country Andrew; I won't take it away from you! That's beautiful country down there; we all own it and we all share it.

AA So you lived in Kiama for a while.

UI Yes, there was Mum and Dad and various farm hands and road workers and some timber cutters. That was all available in the early days. My grandfather worked on a farm until he was nearly 90. Old Billy Wellington lived on a farm at Gerroa towards Gerringong.

AA Your mother came from Coolangatta, is that right?

UI Yes. There was a gathering of the tribes and caring for them. It was in a way of clearing the land and farming the land and fencing the land. The Aboriginal people had their roots and their walkways and travelling from their traditional camping grounds, they used to track across the properties. What happened

was the farmers needed to fence the properties for their cattle and they gathered them up into a mob and they situated a big tribe of them at Collungutty the Aboriginal name for it then known now as Coolangatta the place of splendid view. There are markings there in the rocks where they held their ceremonies.

5 mins

AA Did your grandparents tell you stories about the early days?

UI Things weren't so good after the mob was rounded up. In time some nasty things went on, things changed. The traditional hunting and gathering of their traditional food had to be stopped. They took that away from them and gave them what was called Government rations. Still today I want my language before I go anywhere, I still want my language. Because this land without that knowledge of traditional people is no land.

AA Do you still know the old language?

UI No, I only know certain words. I forget the dates that we were gathered and put on separate missions and reserves and big camps. That all had to stop. They were dealt with and taken care of by white managers and the missionaries had their role to in the spiritual side of it.

This is a wonderful country. You spoke earlier of it was part of your land and it was my traditional land too from Botany Bay to Two Fold Bay. It is a wonderful country. The stories were told of the traditional way of living of hunting and gathering. It was a cycle, a wonderful way of life and living. It was all there.

AA What sort of things did you get up to as a boy?

UI I don't think I could tell you all the things that I got up to, the trouble that I got into! I honestly loved going out and camping under the stars from where I was living on the missions. I didn't want to come back home. We did things that were natural to us, gathering our food. We're salt water people, plenty of seafood.

AA So there are a lot of good memories.

UI There are a lot of wonderful memories.

AA Did your parents and grandparents teach you Aboriginal things?

UI I was the fourth youngest of Mum and Dad's mob. When I came in my life began when we were living on the missions and under the white law of the Aboriginal Protection Board at the time. Dad had to work for Government rations and he did farming work on the mission. He earned the Government rations doing that work.

10 mins

I didn't see the really old fellas, but I saw the sons and daughters that came behind them. A lot of them were on their last when I saw them. I valued and loved them. I didn't think it was too late for me. As I got older it became clear what I had missed out on. It would have been good for the people of today, because people like me of which there are many would have passed it down. The schools would have benefited from the teaching of it, the living on the land and the medicines and the tucker of the bush and the native plants. You lived and you saw the country when you were a boy. You would have seen how the people would have lived on it. After all these years you can picture and see it, the time they must have had.

AA They lived in harmony with the land for so long.

UI That's right, it was the mother it gave them everything. Going back to what you said about the old people, I saw the old elders when they sometimes met and the language they spoke to one another, they spoke quietly because they understood what they were talking about. They would have been close to God those people, they were wonderful people.

AA Were they angry towards the white people?

UI What the white people did to them Andrew, I won't say the weak ones but the ones that wanted to move forward, they employed them and gave them the rights of being a negotiator between the people. They said words to the old people that this is the way that we have to go for the future of our people and the children. They gave them titles and they didn't turn these people against their people but they did it in a general way. But the strength of the old people, they knew this, they knew what was going on but they knew that time had to change, they could see that what was going on.

AA I read where your mother believed that you had to start to assimilate with the white society. But of course you kept your identity and culture. Did you agree with your mother at the time?

15 mins

UI I struggled with mum. Dad would look at me, but Mum sort of didn't open the door or gate wide open but she left it open to see where she was going in life in another way with her children. That worried mum, because I had two sisters and she had to make sure that the changes were right. I wasn't uncontrollable, I was probably a larrikin and I didn't want to change, I sort of had that in me. My brothers were the same but we all had different ways of showing it. We knew who we were and we knew our culture and we knew our families and our mob. We loved the land and the rivers and the way of life that was provided for us.

We had the respect of the old fellas, I really loved them. They had a wonderful life and they were great people.

AA When you left the mission what did you do?

UI We had voting rights as a people in 1967. My old grandfather had been an old bullock driver in the old days and he worked on farms and he did a lot of things for white people. I can remember my grandfather rowing a boat across the river from the mission to Greenwell Point and walk to Torero to go to work in the morning. In the winter, winter was winter in those days, it was cold. All the seasons then were in place. He did that until well into his 80s close to 90 when we lost pop. After we lost Nan he came to live with my mum and dad. When I left home to go fishing to get the abalone and the crayfish, when I came back he was in a coma. I was very close to him, he knew what he was. He didn't single out anyone special but he knew that I had his way. I had a great respect for all people and I still carry that today. I do as much work as I can with people.

20 mins

AA What made you come to the Campbelltown area Uncle Ivan?

UI I came to Campbelltown because one of my daughters came here with her kids. She came from a rough area around Redfern, Newtown and Enmore. She got a house out here at Minto. There was her and her partner and they were drifting apart. I love my daughter and my grandkids and I was working at the time with Government people on excavation and haulage. They used to do a lot of contract work for the Department of Public Works. We used to do schools.

I used to lower a bucket down with drinks and chips and lollies over the side of the school wall. The only trouble was they used to give me away because they would fight over the goodies. I was pulled over it by the boss and told that I couldn't do it. They were only little boys in a boy's home along Parramatta Road. The brickies and labourers would give me a quid or ten bob and we would all chuck in. I'm not talking about one bucket there would be three or four. They weren't only indigenous kids. When they were fighting I would tell them that they wouldn't get any the next day if they kept on. I was calling one Jimmy instead of Johnny, Fred instead of James whatever. It was the life I lived and carried on from when I struggled as a kid. I still carry that on today amongst the people here.

AA What are some of your special places around Campbelltown?

UI I love the country, the Dharawal people's land. I could walk this place and never get tired of it. I love the way the Nepean and Georges Rivers run through the lands. One of my proudest moments is seeing the sharpening of the spears and axes in the river bed out at Thirlmere. They had the fight and the big war there.

25 mins

The opening of the Dharawal National Park back to the people was one of my proudest moments, I loved it. I value those things and hope the people value it the same as I did. The land that was handed back to them was there before the first people lived there, walked and roamed it and they left it untouched for the people of the day.

I have told Principals and teachers from many schools when they are on excursions it will take the little fellas a lifetime to go through the land and find what they are looking for. It is all there, special places, unbelievable.

AA Unfortunately there are also places like the bull cave which sadly has been destroyed.

UI They have destroyed it, that was another special place for me, a special place. When you see the drawings of the bull and cow, what a shock it would have been for them to see those.

AA You did a bit of writing too. We have one of your books in our collection. How did you feel about that?

UI I am very proud. I am not much of a scholar but I am very proud of the person that did that book and I still am proud today and the young girl that I did it with.

AA What advice would you give the young indigenous people today?

UI You and I both come from the same lands Andrew. Our lives were probably very similar. What we didn't eat from the land we would get from the sea. Today that is not there, it is not available because I don't know if people don't have the time or they have forgotten about that time and that way of life and that way of living. It is a whole new world. This place is one of the greatest places I have seen for multi-cultural living. One of my first awards was Inter-Generational Understanding of all cultural people. I got the award from the Premier in the Town Hall. That is what we have got here. I'm not saying that the mums and dads have forgotten their ways. Some of us haven't got Nan and pop any more. That has all gone. The new generation have got Nans and pops. We have moved on in time.

30 mins

I think the values and respect that you and I grew up with hasn't been handed down culturally strong. It is not given by mum and dad because of the way of life and living and the way of understanding. Some of our kids have really lost it. I found that out with my work with the Department of Juvenile Justice. I worked a long time with them. They have no connection with who they are, it is very sad. I put it down and I look at it. The handing down of respect and passing on

of knowledge of our Elders, we haven't got them today, our grandmothers and grandmothers. It is sad, I know it is not nice to say it, but the mums and dads, the parents of our children today have forgotten those values of life.

AA You do a bit of visiting to Reiby Detention Centre.

UI I still hold that connection. I still go into Reiby. Only recently there was a bit of spare land there, which was an old aviary between the units of the boy's homes. We put it into a gathering and learning circle. An acknowledgement and ceremonial ground and we made it into a special place so that when the boys go into that place they leave everything at the gate. They are walking on the land of their ancestors and that is how they will be spoken to and that is how they will speak with the respect from the people of the land.

AA We have the Appin Massacre bi-centennial coming up.

UI I knew you would come to it. I'm looking forward to it. I hope to see you there. The very same people that we spoke of, this is something that they have to recognise. If they don't recognise this there is no healing on the land. You are not going through healing of life. We only recently lost a great member of that reconciliation mob, the people that run this - Father Tony Daley. He was a great man. It was a sad loss to all people, indigenous and non-indigenous of this land. It is coming up for two hundred years. We are going to involve all schools on the traditional lands. We are going to give the people that respect and the kids will be part of the ceremonies. I am looking forward to it.

AA I think we have made some progress and continuing to make progress.

UI We have made a lot of progress. I am proud of the progress. Our children are really showing the way of this country. It shows in their learning. This is what we just spoke of; it is part of that learning. This is part of the history that they should know and pass on and kept. It belongs to the people and the land.

AA What are you most proud of?

UI I'm proud of many things Andrew. Only the other day I went down to the Police Station with the Superintendent. I'm proud of the young kids changing their lives becoming Policemen and going through college, TAFE and university and going through the Police Academy at Goulburn. The numbers are increasing, 6, 8, 12 and they are maintaining the numbers. This tells me that the kids are getting the right message and know the right way to go. The great elders of the land indigenous and non-indigenous are putting up there and maintaining it. That is the only way we are going to change. With the utmost respect of the people of the land that we live on and show that we acknowledge and respect them and we need to do that and maintain it. We need to keep that going with the kids. We can't say we will win Andrew but we can see the rewards of it. I have won a lot of rewards on the land here. What I have seen is most satisfying

for me and what I love and respect is the people coming together and acknowledging and respecting one another and working together and our kids showing and leading the way.

AA I really enjoyed talking to you today.