

# ANDREW ALLEN'S ORAL HISTORY WITH JOHN DELANEY AT THE H J DALEY LIBRARY ON 26 SEPTEMBER 2023

**AA** Good morning John!

**JD** Good morning Andrew.

**AA** Let me start with your full name and where you were born John?

**JD** My full name is Anselm John Delaney. I quite often get asked how I got that name Anselm. I found out I was born on Burra Bee Dee Mission. When my mother got over the childbirth they had to take us to Coonabarabran Hospital. So the doctor who registered me, his son was killed in an aeroplane crash in Germany about the same time as I was born and his name was Anselm. So I got into researching that name and there is a Saint called Saint Anselm one of the Archbishops of Canterbury. It's a Roman name and German as well so I got lumbered with that and been quite proud of that fact, it's funny, only my family call me Anselm, everyone called me John or JD, it's a bit easier to say. I was born on Burra Bee Dee Mission which is six miles outside of Coonabarabran in the central North West. I grew up there in my early days and it was like utopia compared to where I finished up as I transitioned through life. We had our own cattle and our own milk and all the dairy products and all the bush tucker, so we had a different feed every day a good healthy lifestyle. I started school there on Burra Bee Dee Mission, I only went to second class. The white mission manager's wife was the school teacher. That's as far as we could go. My elder sisters three of them, the eldest one, Pat was educated up to second class and that's as far as she got. She was farmed out to different properties in the area like my mother was, and all the women and men on the mission before me.

There's a story I think Burra Bee Dee was probably the first land rights successful claim in Australia. My great grandmother Mary Jane Cain, and you can google her, Cain - Mary Jane she asked the Australian authorities, the governors to give us our land back, 600 acres on Burra Bee Dee Mission under the Forked Mountain which is the Warrumbungle Ranges. They refused so she wrote to Queen Victoria. In 1892 Victoria granted the unconditional grant of 600 acres of Burra Bee Dee. She was very political and very feisty, she died five years before I was born, in 1929 she died.

**AA** I think it's coming back to me John, who Mary is now. Mary is connected to Jeff McGill's story?

**JD** Yes

**AA** OK I just realised who she is.

**JD** Absolutely, one of my great uncles used to tell me what a tyrant she was. She was a one tracker if she wanted to do something did it and I think that rubbed off

on my mother. Strangely enough I saw the letter, my old great aunt Minnie McLaren, she was a Cain too, took me to Coonabarabran Times office where the deeds and titles were held and I saw Mary Jane's letter, and her hand writing was exactly the same as Mum's. I was always fascinated by that and showed mum and she said where did you get that from? I had a copy of it and I said Aunt Minnie give it to me. She said it looks like my hand, I said that's your grandmother's, Mary Jane Cain's hand writing. I gave it back to Aunt Minnie and she passed it on to, she was my great aunt, so she passed it on to her eldest son. It was fascinating the story about Mary Jane and also our grandfather, great grandfather who had connections here in Gadigal land. Eora countries.

## 5 mins

Way back. I didn't know too much about him. In those days women had many husbands which changed with the times. I didn't know much about George. It's a fascinating story and I was so pleased to read about it.

**AA** Yeah you must be so proud of her and proud of where you have come from.

**JD** They named the bridge across the river at Coona, Coonabarabran, the Mary Jane Cain Bridge. John Anderson opened it up years ago we went up there for the grand opening so she is recorded in the history of Coonabarabran as well which was an awfully racist town when I grew up as a little fella.

**AA** Was it? Okay.

**JD** I think it has changed now, I only go back there for funerals and family celebrations. So that's a bit of history about that. The next step, I started school on Barra Bee Dee Mission. At four years of age it was compulsory for us to learn about Jesus Christ and we had to go to Sunday School, it was compulsory. If we didn't go the white manager would tear strips off our parents, but we always went. When I was five it was compulsory to learn about Captain Cook and as I have come through life I've understood that both of them, the Christians and Captain Cook destroyed all our lives in the early days. Thankfully as the generations turn over we have got a bit stronger. We've always been fighting. When I was seven years of age in the middle of the night my Great Uncle Ted McGrath came on a horse and sulky, we all jumped on there me and my three sisters and my mum and dad and he took us to Coonabarabran Railway Station and we got on an old goods train. There was one compartment at the back the guard's compartment and we sat in there for the journey to Sydney. Because it stopped at all sidings, it took us about three weeks to get there to the promised land Redfern. I found out later on that the next day the welfare was coming to get us, my three sisters and me, to take us away, so we escaped being part of the stolen generations because of the courage of my parents leaving absolute utopia, Burra Bee Dee was, we had everything there.

**AA** Did other families find out that someone was coming for them? Is that how it worked?

**JD** Oh yeah. Our uncle was the handyman on the mission so he was the right hand man in connection with the blokes on the mission, to the white mission manager. He said George you had better get the kids out of here or they're gone. So we left and came to Redfern to the Promised Land. It was raining and when we got out in the rain it wasn't Redfern Station where we got off but the one between Central and Redfern Station there is a little station there but I don't know what it's called but it's half way between Redfern and Central. I think it was something to do with funerals.

**AA** Yes, I know what you mean, it was the mortuary.

**JD** So as we got off there when we walked out the rain was washing all the soot down out of our hair and down our face and through our clothes and we slept in factory doorways and when the coppers weren't around, in bandstands in the park down there, Prince Alfred I think it's called and we lasted, we must have been there for, memory tells me about three or four weeks. I remember daddy saying to Mumma, Eliza, if I can't get a job, that was on Sunday because I went and watched the Redfern All Blacks play football, if I can't get a job by Thursday we will have to go back to Burra and to the mission and face the music. He got a job and started on the Tuesday and on Thursday he got his first pay and we paid seventeen bob a week and there was no flash bonds or anything like that, seventeen bob a week and we moved into a place in Wells Street, Redfern. If daddy hadn't got that, that's why I have always been passionate about employment.

### **10 mins**

If daddy hadn't got that job we would have been down in Bomaderry or up in Kinchela where a lot of my black brothers and sisters went. So him getting that job saved our lives. It was tough in Sydney. There was only two black kids, the first school I went to was St Vincent's which is in Redfern Street next to the Post Office. It was pretty tough for black kids back then in the early 40s. We used to get the shit kicked out of us, most people didn't like blacks and that lasted until, the hatred against us lasted until after the migrants started coming over after the war in 45. I had two good friends my brothers, they were like brothers. One was a white Russian and the other was a German kid. Everyone hated "Abo's and wogs" so we had something in common. By the time we were 14 they were about six foot tall so I didn't get any more bashings. It was great fun growing up in Redfern it finished up being a very good place to live.

**AA** You were happy at that time in your life? I know you said you encountered racism and all that but overall were you happy or?

**JD** Well no, I wasn't happy until all the bashings I used to get started to finish. I went to five different schools. I went to George Street, Cleveland Street, St Benedict's in Chippendale, Darlington Primary and Newtown Junior Tech. Because of the divisions and the trouble, I had always been a little fella I used to bear the brunt of racists. I've got to say that some of those kids that I grew up with in those days finished up good mates of mine later on in life, we got over that racist sort of shit.

And I was always fairly good at sports, I was pretty good in football and at (Newtown) Junior Tech our teacher, our sports master was Jack Moroney who was an opening batsman for Australia. Mr Moroney finished up being a manager of Burra Bee Dee Mission.

**AA** I've heard of the name

**JD** I used to go back to visit relatives and I would always recognise him when I went back. I probably hadn't seen him for ten years when I first went back and he was the mission manager at Burra Bee Dee. I was surprised, he was one of the greatest openers we ever had.

**AA** Did you learn to fight?

**JD** Oh yes, I learnt to fight. If some of them were my own size I could get hold of them, but the big blokes punched the shit out of me, excuse the expression. It was good fun when I look back. When I look back at life I don't think I would change a thing really because it was a great learning experience. I only lasted, I only went to first year it was then and I had to leave because Mumma was doing three jobs. She was a domestic in the hospital, she worked at Rachel Forster and the dental hospital and then any spare time she had she would work as a laundry maid in doctors and nurses homes. So I left when I was 13. I didn't tell her. I came home one Friday with a pay packet. They used to have little brown envelopes with your pay in those days and I got fifty two and sixpence. I gave mum the fifty bob and she cried. I said mum I don't want you killing yourself for me and I had two and sixpence, and I tell you the two and sixpence what it did, it got me and four of my mates into the Lawson picture theatre for the Saturday matinee. It was tuppence in, tuppence for a bag of chips and tuppence for a bottle of cola. So sixpence each for the four of us. I was the richest most popular little black fella in Redfern. My two mates Gerald and Scotty, I told you about them, the White Russian and the German kid, I took them. A couple of my black brothers and my two white brothers. We used to go every Saturday and watch "Search for the Green Hornet" and all those movies, those serials they used to have in those days. So that was a fun part of growing up.

**15 mins**

**AA** Was there segregation in the cinema?

**JD** No, no not in the Lawson. We could only afford front row tickets anyway. I never got that...I went to Gulargambone to stay with my aunty. Getting off the track a little bit but I took my cousin Valerie to the Greek milk bar and I put I think it was only a penny in the jukebox. He was Greek and he came up and turned it off and gave me my penny back. He said aboriginals aren't allowed to play the jukebox.

**AA** And he was Greek.

**JD** Yes. So I picked up my empty glass and I smashed the big mirror. He called the coppers and my Aunty Vera was one of the most respected black ladies in Gulargambone. So the coppers they got me, Aunty Vera went and got Aunty Vera and she raced down to talk to the coppers and I don't know what she said.

Then we went across to the movie theatre and I said two back stall tickets thanks. So we got back stall tickets and walked in and were sitting up the back and the usher came and said sorry you will have to move down the front. All the blacks had to sit in like sun deck chairs, canvas ones. Because I was brought up in Redfern, I got a bit brave and a bit political about it. I said I'm not moving mate, I've got back stall tickets here, so he called the coppers, the same coppers came. Oh it's you again you little black bastard. He said he won't go down and sit where the aboriginal people sit. So the coppers gave me the third degree and I said look I paid for two back stall tickets. So the copper said well if you sold him the tickets you can't do anything about that. Thank goodness they didn't. When they finished the discussion I said we'll go down and sit with the black brothers and sisters anyway. So that was Gulargambone. It was like later on when I heard about Little Rock, Arkansas I thought that's the same as Gulargambone was absolutely. Coming from the city to, if I went from Burra Bee Dee to Gulargambone I would have understood but coming from cosmopolitan Redfern to this place Gulargambone I guess I might have inherited that off my great grandmother the cheekiness and the boldness. That's just a small part of the growing up. The rest of it we played all sports, Redfern All Blacks, played with them for years. Had my first game with them when I was 17.

**AA** This is league you're talking about, rugby league?

**20 mins**

**JD** Yes I had my last game in 1968 when I was 34. I played, I went to the bush a couple of times, I played in Young, in the Maher Cup country, and I played in Kempsey, Central Kempsey. We won the comp in 1956. The coach was a bloke by the name of Lloyd Hudson who played with North Sydney and Bob Gorman who also played with North Sydney. I'm getting off the track a bit but it's been a fairly rugged ride. I had the good fortune of growing up with legends of our lifetime. I based my principles on the oration by Jack Patten on 26 January 1938, the day of mourning. Mumma could recite Jack Patten she was very political like her grandmother. She could recite his oration. The thing that stuck out in my mind you know they say we've got representatives in Canberra in parliament. One of Jack Patten's main points was dedicated seats in parliament like they've got in New Zealand now. Until we do that we don't have true representatives. I mean Linda Burney is a good mate of mine we have worked together she has constituents out Bankstown way and represents all of them as well as being a spokesperson for aboriginal people. But until we get something like dedicated seats we're not going to have true representatives people we pick ourselves. Like the Voice we can talk about that later. If I can get back to life, I left school at 13. I had about 2,000 jobs before I got married when I was 22. I used to be a shearer, I liked all the bush work. You could get a job anywhere in Sydney in those days, in factories. There was a mob called Grascos who allocated jobs to shearers and roustabouts, wool classers, and I started off being a roustabout and I got a learner's pen and I got up to 75 a day. I earnt more in a day than my father earnt – he worked for **Kippa** Engineering Company that was the first job that he got and he had that until he retired. I used to take a roll of money like this home to

Mumma because they all paid you by cash in those days ,direct cash. The jobs were easy to get, bush work was the best, burning off or clearing the land or wheat season. You would go back to Sydney and the same old thing again. We moved around I lived in, talk about wealth in the country. I should have got a piece of paper I'm too much off the track because everything is so vivid in my memory and one thing leads to another. We were always very political, when I was a little fella living in Redfern Mumma and Daddy were card carrying members of the Labor Party. So when election time came we would put the stickers on telegraph poles. Our family doctor was Doctor H J Foley and he was Labor in the upper house, the Legislative Council. So did all that. That was something we learnt from them and all the old Labor fellas were good mates with the family back in those days. Harry Burland was the Mayor of South Sydney and Doctor H J Foley was sitting in parliament. I grew up there and it is a strange thing I'm trying to keep on track. I just get lost a bit.

**AA** It's interesting, it's not a problem if you go off track.

**JD** When I left school when I was 13 and someone from the welfare came to the house one day and my sister Gloria was at home because she was just after school. We are looking for Anselm John Delaney and my sister Gloria said he's not home from work yet. This fella said he's at work is he? We never saw him again, he never came near me. They used to pick kids up who would finish up at Mount Penang or somewhere. They never came back those blokes, thankfully. Those were things that happened. You talk about today and people would be locked up for what they did to me, to us, but thankfully the country has changed.

**25 mins**

**AA** You mentioned January 26 a little while ago. How do you feel about Australia Day? Should we change the date or are you happy with...?

**JD** No I seriously think we should change the date. Without being trying to sound racist I think the history of this country is based on that. It is OK to celebrate that but to call it Australia Day that's the founding fathers or what they call the founding fathers, but my people were here. You see all the aboriginal people were here when they landed, we were supposed to be Terra Nullius, until Mabo that wasn't even recognised. It's still not truly recognised. I think there's got to be some better way to celebrate something as monumental as calling it Australia Day. I mean we can have a public holiday for the first landing if that's what they want that's fine but it just brings back a lot of memories of our ancestors who were being slaughtered. I mean this place, Appin Massacre, you would probably know more about that than I do because I don't come from this place. It just sticks in the mind of people. As the generations get more and more aware and we've got some well educated people now. We've got academics, the professionals. If we've got enough time to talk about that later on. Having said about my work history I finished up being a truck driver, cab driver you name it. Then the Communist Party ran the waterfront and they made openings for, they had different groups like migrants, a lot of migrants started on the wharves. There was a legend Chicka Dickson he was a wharfie, Jack Hassen the boxer he was

a wharfie, Trevor Christian one of my brothers I played football with and grew up with him, they have all passed now. We got entry through the Communist Party to the wharves and I worked on there for years. We had a committee, Aboriginal Wharfies Committee. Every now and again when you're a wharfie would have to pay a levy for some reason or other. They put a ten bob levy on all waterfront, waterside workers across Australia. My number on the Sydney wharves was 6,784, so there's got to be at least 7,000 wharfies in Sydney. That money helped to support the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs. It also supported the Tent Embassy. I didn't go to the Embassy. We as a committee sent the fox Chicka Dickson and Kevin another brother from La Perouse, who has also passed now, as our representatives to the Tent Embassy back in '72. It's been a terrific journey.

I said I was working as a truck driver. My old brother from Burnt Bridge Mission, Tiger Ray Kelly, he was the first fella that I worked with in National Parks and Wild Life actually, he came to me and said Delaney, what you are doing, he calls me JD, he said you can get paid for that. I said I don't want to get paid for it. When I moved to Mount Druitt in 1968, I had some mates out there who had already moved from there and they were members of the Dunheved Golf Club. They said why don't you join the club. But joining the club was \$31 back then and that was a week and a half's pay. I said I can't afford that. We were at the Rooty Hill RSL Club one Saturday night and got a daily double up, so I went and joined. That was about February 1970 and I've been a member there ever since and I'm a life member now at Dunheved. All the captains of industry used to be in Dunheved Circuit, before they changed it, I could get jobs for people who had just moved into the area. I would see the general manager of 3M and having a game of golf with him on Saturday.

### **30 mins**

I would say Keith I've got a mate, who works at the paper mills at Botany he moved out from La Perouse. What does he do? Keith said. He's a fork life driver/storeman. He said I've got a vacancy, tell him he can start on Monday. So that's what I used to do getting employment. The president of the club at the time was a copper, a Crown Sergeant and he used to lock up a couple of our mates who liked to go down to Mt Druitt and get on the piss. Pick them up and put them in gaol, drunk and disorderly. So I said to him, mate, why do you keep picking up Popeye, a nickname for one of my brothers? Every Saturday, I said, he gets picked up and he is the only fella from the pub in Mt Druitt what was known as, it wasn't The Western it was a pub down further. Every Saturday they picked him up and put him in gaol. And charge him. The Crown Sergeant said, Macdonald his name was, if you get any Aboriginal people here for drunk and disorderly here's Delaney's phone number. Bloody, two o'clock Sunday morning I would get a phone call, Popeye's drunk. He's sobered up can you come and pick him up. So I had this sort of arrangement just from being a member of the golf club. Then my cousin Tiger Ray Kelly from Burnt Bridge Mission where I lived and my first wife comes from he said they're paying people in the public service. I thought I've got no education and I think you had to be in the public service at least Higher

School Certificate in those days. He said I've booked you an interview, go and have a talk with them. So I went and had an interview and they called me back for a second one. The second time they said how do you feel, and I said I feel a bit more comfortable because you have a black fella on the panel, there was three white fellas the first time. The black fella was Tommy Calman. He was the Vocational Officer for the department up in Darwin. So I got the job. When I applied for the job at the Aboriginal Legal Service they said to me you are the only black fella we have seen with a reference from a copper. That was Jim McDonald. So I told them what I did with the community there, and I told them the story about that and I got the job in 1972 Aboriginal Employment Department, I think it was Employment and Industrial Relations in those days I just can't remember. It was in Chifley Square, it was a big office. I worked as Vocation Officer for Mt Druitt and I got paid for getting people jobs, and I went through the ranks and I finished up being Executive Officer. I worked in that until 1990. I got elected to the first Sydney Regional Council of ATSIC and I was on that for 12 years. In '96 I was elected to Zone Commissioner on the Board of Commissioners for ATSIC. They talk about ATSIC being a dismal failure. The cheekiness has come with me all my life, I spoke to three different politicians, I spoke to John Howard and I spoke to Senator John Herron who was the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and I spoke to Brendan Nelson at different parliamentary committee sittings. I said you fellas sound like you want to get rid of ATSIC and it's only just started. The Sydney Regional Council started in 1989 elected and met for the first time in 1990 and here it is '96 when Howard got into power. (I just thought of something when we talk about the Voice).

When we first got on the council we had 23 community controlled organisations and in '96 when Howard got into power we had 85 community controlled organisations including Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation, Medical Service – I'll tell you a story about that in a minute too. We had 85 and in the first full budget, when he got elected,

### **35 mins**

I think it would have been October or something in '96 and his first budget they put out in '97 we had to close down 52 organisations of those, and they were services like employment services, sports services, they were women's refuges, women counselling, they were youth, sport, art, now we had the black theatre, we had Bangarra was only starting out then, with Robbie Bryant, but they survived and are still going. They are almost a stand-alone entity now that's what happened with the legislation, and obviously in 2004 sure enough it was gone with the support of Mark Latham the leader of the Labor Party. That was disappointing because when I was the Portfolio Commissioner for three years from '96 to '99 I was the Health Portfolio commissioner, I visited every main city in Australia. I was also a member of the Central Australian Health Forum and that's when, with renal disease so rampant in the Territory they had to take them all the way to Darwin to get dialysis and by the time they got there they'd be... so I'm told now there's dialysis set up in Alice Springs so things like that happened that Jacinta (Price), that everyone talks about, are not recorded. I

knew her mother real well, Bess, because of my action there with the Aboriginal Health Medical Service in Alice Springs is on a par with Tharawal and is called Congress. They have all the services there for health for people and it is just amazing the people and I've got to say that the only thing that Alice Springs Council asked for to take care of was for more coppers to control blacks and it hasn't changed. Sadly Jacinta talks about what hasn't been done, you probably know she spent six years on the council and Bess was a parliamentarian in the Northern Territory, and they did nothing. All they asked for and it's the same with that Mayor now, Campbell, they just asked for more coppers because we can't control the blacks. But what ATSIC did was sensational compared to any other entity. We had NACC, National Aboriginal Consultative Committee and we had the NAC, National Aboriginal Congress they called themselves, Bob Hawke closed that down and then later on in the year with 1980 came along ATSIC. When they closed NAC down, they were a radical mob I knew most of them, well I knew all of them. Fellas on that were my mentors early about this political stuff. It's just unreal to think how far we've come which is great but it depends where you live. I don't know if you saw, talking about Medical Services, if you saw that expose on a place called Doomadgee in Western Queensland. It was on one of the ABC shows on months ago. When I say medical services saved my life, when I say we've got medical services all over Australia, but Doomadgee didn't, and they weren't serviced properly and there were all sorts of problems with Doomadgee. You can Google it and look at it if you get time. Just on medical services when they came into being in '71, all the radicals they called them, Coe and Belleair and Munro, and I knew them. Munro is related to me and his father was one of my mentors. When I joined the public service there was no computer we had to do a lot of reading and writing and I was getting these headaches. I lived in Mt Druitt

#### **40 mins**

and going into the city was a fair way and I went to, with these headaches I went to ten different GPs out in the Western Sydney area, Mt Druitt, between Blacktown and Penrith. They all said the same thing, go home and have a Bex powder and a cup of tea and a nice rest and you'll be alright because they couldn't find anything wrong with me. Pay \$6 to the girl in the waiting room and she'll give you a sick note. I didn't want a sick note I just wanted to do something as it was gradually getting worse. Anyway, one of the old white brothers that I worked with in Chifley Square one day said why don't you go to the AMS. I said they have enough people to look after and I have to come all the way from Mt Druitt. Anyway he talked me into going in there. I sat down with Dr Trish Fagan, she was up in Darwin, her and her husband, and she was back in Sydney now. I told her about this and she said tell me about your family history. I thought that's the strangest question a doctor has ever put to me. I said well, I went through Mumma with diabetes and breast cancer in the family and sugar and dropsy, and I lost about four aunties, my sister, breast cancer and my daughter has had breasts removed. So she said what about your Dad. I said Dad he and two of his brothers out of five had debilitating strokes. Her eyes lit up. Dad never missed a

day's work in his life until he had a stroke and then he was a passenger and we had to look after him between family my sister and I. And I told her about Dad and she said well, try this aspirin, Cardiprin it is called. Take one of those every day and about six months after that my daughter said Dad, how's your headaches going? I thought gee, I hadn't had a headache for a couple of months now. So I'm not a medical practitioner but I also spent six years on the National Health and Medical Research Council later on so I've got a bit more au fait about all of these things. So I think that's the first time they saved my life. Next time I went to the Mt Druitt Dharruk Aboriginal Medical service and they discovered I've got lung cancer, that was about 2013/14. Since surviving that and Tharawal now looks after me and me old mates. So if it wouldn't have been for medical service I'd have been long gone.

**AA** Yeah, because you were a smoker weren't you?

**JD** I was a chain smoker yes. You know, when I was driving the truck, as soon as you pull up at the lights you would light a cigarette up. And when I was a public servant as soon as the phone rang you would light up a cigarette. I used to smoke 90 a day, three packets of Escort 30s. When I used to go to Canberra as a public servant to meetings I used to buy them by the carton. I put it down to it hasn't killed me yet, I'm still here. I had a CT scan yesterday actually. I've got one of the best professors in the land Dr Alvandi his name is, and he works out of three hospitals Gosford, Westmead and Nepean. I've been lucky in that sense. I've been on Facebook many times and talking about The Voice. I said you know, black voices got us where we are. Those fellas and I know most of them, younger than me say, oh who's going to represent us? Where do they come from, I'm Kamilaroi, this fella's Wiradjuri. We want our mob. But I said Aboriginal Medical Services and Legal Services started off in Redfern and they spread the word and now Aboriginal Medical Services and Legal Services are all over Australia. At least in the main centres and they look after everyone.

**45 mins**

It was all about solidarity then and passing on. Just on that, that lady from the Northern Territory, her name's Secretary and she said well we don't want the Voice we've got everything, we've got this and we've got that but you don't think about the Voice that got it there. That's the same with what little luxuries we do have come from black voices and I've got to say a lot of white people are on side, my second wife was a registered nurse here and Gordon Fetterplace who was the Mayor here did everything. That's how Tharawal got the bowling club up there. When I was a public servant I was acting Assistant Director of the Aboriginal Programs Branch. They had a little place down in Langdon Avenue just behind the Shell garage, and they were all working on a shoe string budget, but I was acting, so I had the power to commit money, funds for employment training. I think it's got its 40<sup>th</sup> this year so 40 years ago, must have been '83. I signed a cheque for \$250,000 when they moved up to the bowling club. So they're paid and it was up to them then to use their political prowess to get funded ongoing. I've been a chairperson of Tharawal, I was on the Aboriginal Medical

Service, and I was a founding member of Dharruk Medical Service over in Mt Druitt and a great supporter of this one here. My wife was the first chairperson and did all the submissions through Gordon, he was a great bloke.

**AA** So I've heard. So the Voice, you are supportive of it then.

**JD** Because of the life experience I've just spoken about. The first black voices I heard were Jack Patten, William Cooper and William Ferguson and Aunty Pearl Gibbs, they were the first black voices I heard. Of course I was too little to understand what they were talking about but Mumma was an avid supporter and Aunty Pearl Gibbs was a good neighbour. She lived at Larper, La Perouse, when we lived in Redfern and we used to see her quite often. So I'm putting in for those black voices the same as that one up in The Territory called, Miss Secretary's the one she works for, that community's voices they would certainly vote yes now but she's going to vote no anyway because they get everything they need. I saw a young fellow, well he's younger than me, I worked with him and sort of mentored him. He was a good operator, and he got upset, and behind him was this great big aboriginal picture, artwork which probably would have cost a couple of grand and he said I don't need it because he came from the same background as me from the old mission station to where he is. He said I'm okay, we don't need a voice, I got where I am from hard work but he didn't think about the people that helped us along the way. I wouldn't have got where I was without help from a lot of people. I suppose when you are dedicated enough it must show. In my lifetime my heroes are Patten, Ferguson, William Cooper and Aunty Pearl Gibbs and this fellow here was saying I'm not representative, but I'm Kamilaroi, but they weren't, Ferguson was Wiradjuri and Cooper and Patten are Yorta Yorta. Aunty Pearl was living at Larper, I don't think she came from there but, I wasn't too sure of her background but they weren't isolated geographically they were all over Australia. So those voices got us on the springboard in my lifetime. I know that Mr Maynard and his son Professor John Maynard he's up at Newcastle Uni now, Mr Maynard started back in the Progress Association back in 1926.

**50 mins**

That was before my time obviously so I didn't get to, but I saw these other fellas, powerful. When I was about four years of age these black fellas came to the mission fence and management wouldn't allow them on the mission because they were rabble rousers. There was this man with his foot on the strainer post talking to us all. I found out later on it was Jack Patten, Bill Ferguson and Bill's son Duncan, I found that out later on. I had the privilege of growing up with Jack Patten's family in Redfern and Johnny Patten, he fought under the name of Johnny Jarrett, they called him JJ. He's a bit younger than me but I grew up with him and his family, I grew up with his family. It was quite an honour to be part of Patten's family. Jack Patten was run over by a car in Fitzroy in 1956. I think they were keeping him quiet. It's certainly been a wonderful journey, I wouldn't change my life. I go back and think of my little achievements that I've put in, I think if we all committed ourselves to the community rather than self it would be a better place for us. Some of our worst enemies are our own people. Like you see with

Mundine and Price, it just makes it difficult for us, not just them, Michael Mansell, one of the icons in Tasmania has turned on them now. So it's difficult for people to understand where we came from. We wouldn't have been here if it wasn't for black voices assisted by white fellas like Albo's as passionate and dedicated as you can get. We had Professor Fred Hollows was one of the founders of the Aboriginal Medical Service Redfern and Dr Andrew Refshauge who was the Deputy Premier in New South Wales, was the first GP that worked there. There was no money, Medicare wasn't as brilliant as it is now. Besides our black brothers and sisters there was a lot of white fellas that were committed like Gordon Fetterplace. What he did for this community is not written in the history books, so these young kickers.... I said to Melinda, you should have a history day up there and they put on a day for me up there, the reason because I've got lung cancer and I don't know how much longer I have got to live but they said we are always having testimonials for people after they are dead so a couple of months or so ago they put one on for me out at Tharawal. It was a matter of appreciation for the people that I have worked with came from all over the place they did. It was surprising. I said I'm not dead yet.

**AA** People like Gordon Fetterplace don't get recognised as much as they should.

**JD** It was sensational. With the medical service the Laylands also, Professor Layland also contributed greatly to Aboriginal Medical Service in Redfern and Fred Hollows, he was the most sternest bloke you'd ever seen. One day there was a young fella, he was telling him there to do something, do this and do that, and the young fella was a bit slower and Fred said give us the bloody thing here and piss off I'll do it myself. That was the type of bloke he was, a great man.

**AA** What about the future John, are you optimistic about the future as far as our First Nations people are concerned?

**JD** I think if the No gets up the struggle is going to be much more difficult. Because the population of this place is changing and the cultures are changing. So I think like Albo says if not now, when, and I think that the struggle is going to be more and more. See the argument that Jacinta and Mundine have got, when the Libs got in 1996 besides ATSIC, they disbanded all of the public service and they put in consultants. So the old Aboriginal employment and training branches are long gone.

## **55 mins**

We used to recruit local people. There was a young fella here from Kempsey called Wayne Simons. We got him in to represent this community then Karen Beetson who is still heavily involved. I started her off. So we got local people to deal with the local community. That's the only way to break into the aboriginal communities is get them involved. So I am sure that with the Voice getting closer to the community and Alice Springs is a typical example, those black fellas there. I was interested to see what Karen Finch, Google her, I was interested to see what she said about Jacinta, that Jacinta was elected by white sectors, According to the Liberal Commission in the Territory and she named the different places.

That's where Jacinta got all her votes from. So it just goes to show you, that for goodness sake if we got local people being involved in serviceability you get a bit more closer to the community and when they say they can't understand it, if you don't know, vote no. But as I see it I knew Albo fairly well when I was back in the game, I'm sure that what we see while Labor is in, and I put something on Facebook about this, what we'll see is, if it was to get up, say a miracle happens, and we got Yes, then I think Albo would get straight into it listening to the advice of the referendum working group they're all superstars, and they've got Patrick Dodson and Marion Scrymgour and Linda Bennett to take him through the paces. It would be set up where we decide, we're trying to talk Melinda into getting into politics on the council. She would be an ideal rep for this area.

**AA** Who is that?

**JD** Melinda Bell at Tharawal. That's how I see it. Then the Voice goes to Canberra. While ever Labor is there if yes gets up it will go gangbusters and they will prove that this is the way to do it. But if Dutton gets in next time we're back to square one because whilst the Voice is there in the Constitution, it's still got to be legislated, the activities and the makeup of it. It will be like ATSIC, the first two chairpersons were Lois (O'Donoghue) appointed by the government, bless her she did a good job and my old mate Gatjil Djerrkura from Nhulunbuy when I was a commissioner. He is a top man too and they were appointed. As soon as we got where the Commission elects the chairperson, that gave them a reason then for sliding in Clarky, Geoff Clark was elected as a chairperson, he was full on about treaty like Lidia Thorpe is. And we're never going to stop trying for treaty, and we're never going to give up our sovereignty, so people who say that's gone, are like pissing in the wind. These are not the first people. Lidia thinks she is the first one that stands up and says we want treaty. Well all my life, and according to Mary Jane it has been on since the 1800s. While ever we get the bugbears like Mundine and Jacinta and Lidia has probably done us more harm than good the way she is going on unfortunately. I worked with her grandmother Alma back in the old days, she was on the first National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation, NAHO it's now NACCHO. Old Alma was on that and she was a cheeky old bugger too. I think now the chances of getting reality and recognition and proper representation is down the gurgler. I don't think it will come back now. I haven't got long to live but my grandchildren might have the opportunity. Maybe their grandchildren. If it's still around. The flame fizzles out that's the trouble as we go through the thing,

**60 mins**

and I've been trying in all my activities all my children, I've tried to encourage them and I think I have been successful to a certain degree. They're all involved in aboriginal movements in one way or another.

**AA** Last question I wanted to ask you John is there a place that you feel like a connection to? You were saying before that you don't go back to Coonabarabran, I guess the memories aren't great when you go back there. Is there any other place that you ..

**JD** The place that's most magnetic to me is Burra Bee Dee Mission under the big mountain. I go back there and took my sons up there at different times to show them where I was born. And I look at that big mountain and think we used to climb up there when we were kids. How in the bloody hell did we do that? That's the first place but I have lived on Burnt Bridge Mission at Kempsey, I've lived on Mehi Mission at Moree, Walhallow Mission at Carroona. It's all Kamilaroi country. So I'm attached to that. I guess that my attachment will always remain in Burra Bee Dee, the land, the place, I just get a buzz. When I drive up that Red Hill they call it and you see the big mountain there I just get a buzz in my body.

**AA** Yeah, so that's the place, yeah, yeah.

**JD** Yeah, that's it, and it's my birth place and it's the place that was the first land grant, it's now under the auspices of the Local Aboriginal Land Council because of the 1983 NSW Land Rights Act. That's the place like I said we had berries growing all over the place and they are disappearing. I guess if you don't cultivate them they die off. All the old fellows got off the mission manager was flour, sugar and tea and tobacco. That was the dole, you had to live on that, the rest of it was all bush tucker. We never ever lived so well and everyone was healthy. They talk about life expectancy but I remember my Grandfather, I only had two memories of him he smacked my arse when I was a little fellow. I was with my old man's Uncle Ted McGrath and I was like this firing marbles up against the wall. I remember vividly I must have been – I didn't have, not even have any nappies on, just that bare arse. I was doing this and Grandfather came and said Morg, that was my Uncle Ted McGrath, if you don't tell that boy to stop that or I'll smack his arse. And I looked like that and I went again, Grandfather came, and he said I'll smack his arse, so I went like that again, and he picked me up, probably wasn't very hard he went smack, and the next thing he and Uncle Ted are into it, they were having a big fight outside, and the last thing I remember about him was lying in state in the mission chapel there. So I guess those things, how can you remember that when you're a piss arse little kid. The same as Jack Patten I was about four, three or four then and Jack Patten and William Ferguson first came to Burra Bee Dee. How the hell things like that stick in your memory I'm buggered if I know.

**AA** Yeah some things like that do.

**JD** I was so pleased when I first met Jack Patten and his family.

**AA** And I should say that you're nearly ninety aren't you.

**JD** 89. 24th May 1934 I was born.

**AA** Okay well, I have thoroughly enjoyed having our chat John and I appreciate your time. It was really enjoyable to talk to you.

**JD** Any time mate, I'm honoured to be asked to divulge some of our little family history. There's only one way to go with the Voice and that's yes. If we can't get it now we are down the gurgler. It's sad but true.

**AA** Yep, OK fantastic thank you.