

ANDREW ALLEN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH PASTOR MICHAEL DUCKETT AND HIS DAUGHTER TORI DUCKETT ON WEDNESDAY 9 JUNE 2021 AT THEIR HOME IN WEDDERBURN

AA So Michael, Tory, I'll start with, I'll get when were you both born? I'll go right back to the start if you like. .

MD Yep, Michael's my name, I was born in 1970 in Sydney Women's Hospital.

TD My name is Tori Duckett and I was born on 19 August 2002.

AA Where were you born Tori?

TD Sydney

AA Michael what area did you grow up in?

MD Down the Illawarra, when I was a young feller up till I was 20. Something like that.

AA Tori have you lived here all your life have you?

TD Yes, we lived in Albion Park for my early years of my life and then we moved up to Campbelltown and that's when I went to Broughton Anglican College. So I've been a bit of everywhere but mainly in Campbelltown.

AA Do you know much about your ancestry? What can you tell me about that?

MD I have mixed ancestry. My mother is a Dhunghutti woman from the North Coast. Her homeland is a place called Bellbrook. She was reared in Bowraville, a little community just down from there on the river. My father is from Chile. I never met that fellow, he just happened to be my father, I was born he was gone. That's my heritage.

AA So you don't know anything about him at all?

MD No, no.

AA Can you go far back to the aboriginal side of things?

MD Yes, all my old people they're my grandparents and great grandparents are all from up the North Coast there. I can identify my bloodline at least three or four generations on my mother's side. I can identify my bloodline from Bowraville all the way down to Eden. My great grandparents come from Eden. My grandmother got married up in the north. So that's where I have blood from the North Coast right down to Eden on the South Coast with ties to all different families.

AA Did your ancestors pass many stories down the line from their lives?

MD A lot of stories from up on the North Coast because that was where my mother was raised and the old people just passed on yarns. I primarily got most of my yarns from some of the old uncles there.

AA And so they will be passed on too, the yarns.

MD Yes, so I had the opportunity to pick up bits of my language from my old uncle who was married to my grandmother so I passed that on to my daughter and she will pass it on to her little brother, just bits of our language and some songs.

AA So Tori what are you doing at University?

TD I am doing a Bachelor of Health and Physical Education so hopefully in four years time I will become a PE teacher. Once I finish the course I really have an aspiration to either go out rural, so rural or remote communities and help the schools out there. There are limited teachers out there, that's my dream at the end of my course. So probably travel out there and stay out there for a bit and do my job out there.

AA So you don't want to stick around and be a city girl then.

TD I did do work experience in year 10 for PE teaching and I went into the city to see what it is like. Yeah it was alright, I think I maybe just want to try something different and see if I like it. So yeah definitely.

AA Do you still dance with the Wiritjiribin group, you're still doing that?

TD Yes, I was part of that group for about six, five years and I was part of the group for that long and then one of the teachers went on maternity leave and she couldn't come back so I decided to step up and lead the dance group.

5 mins

TD So it was an amazing opportunity, and I love it.

AA And you enjoyed doing the, I saw the video that Jeff made, that was fantastic.

TD Yeah, I really enjoyed that it was a good experience.

AA Do you have much to do with Uncle Ivan?

TD I see Uncle Ivan quite a lot because with performances I'm performing around the Campbelltown area so whatever community event he's at, I'm at. So yeah, it's nice whenever we're there with our dance group he always makes sure he says hello and he does dances with us, it's very nice.

AA What does it mean by the way what does Wiritjiribin mean, I believe it's to do with the lyrebird?

TD Yes that's correct, Wiritjiribin - lyrebird. I think we came up with that name probably three years ago so it's pretty recent, but yeah, lyrebird.

AA It's to do with the seasons too I think isn't it, because the lyrebird comes out in a particular season or something like that.

TD Yeah? Is that right Dad?

MD I've only seen them down the coast I don't see them up here. I haven't seen any yet, and I've been here twelve and a half years. It's the place, the land, the totem of the people. They just attached it to the dance group.

AA I just thought I might get on to some issues that affect the indigenous community. Do you reckon we are on the right track with addressing the aboriginal inequality?

MD I think we're on a track, socially trying to bring equality in society but there is still inequality for Aboriginal people. So we are moving forward, it's on the table, people discuss it but we're still a long way from obtaining it. When our kids are in the shops, or they're doing different things they are treated differently. When they go into shops, parents are treated differently. We're still a long way from having equality which means, equality means everyone has the same standard, the same opportunities and we're far from that. Prison rates are still increasing, deaths in custody don't get mentioned so we're a long way from having equality but at least

it's on the table, we're talking about it. Government organisations are trying to figure out ways to address it, so we are on the track for improvement.

AA Just got a fair way to go.

MD Yeah.

AA Have either of you experienced much racism at all?

MD Oh yeah I've had it my whole life. I wasn't allowed to go swimming in the Moree pools as a kid. After the Freedom Riders went through and they changed policies in the pool, by the time I got there in the early 70s they had changed it back again. They stopped me at the gate and wouldn't let me go in the pools. So the Freedom Ride changed things but then they changed it back. Then they changed it again. So from that time on as a little fella I've always experienced racism going through school, and funnily enough I am still experiencing it in churches and I have been a preacher since I was 20 and I still come across racism. Society, systems, churches, that's the way it is but it's less. It's not as overt as it used to be when I was little now it's covert.

AA Tori, do you experience it?

10 mins

TD Well, growing up when I went to school at Broughton Anglican College it was highly populated by white people so I think I was growing up in a community where I guess, it's hard to explain. I think the more I was within this grade I was in, how do I explain it. I think I was just used to their way of, I guess, socialising with people, understanding one another and I think people just saw me as just another person but I personally did experience racism as much as others but I think it was just because of the community and experience of my grade.

AA Can I have your thoughts on reconciliation, what you think about?

MD Reconciliation, I love the word, I love the concept, our little church is driven by reconciliation between God and man. It's just harder between man and man. (chuckles) So I'm all for it, I'm 100% committed to it. It's just to many others it's an optional extra. It's only relevant if it's going to be beneficial of being a part of RAPS, Reconciliation Action Plans in different organisations. It looks great but the bottom line is unless the leaders and the managers implement it and actually practice it, it's just a bit of paper. I know organisations now are pumping out reconciliation action plans and they're doing all this and that and I'm rapt, I'm happy if they do that but if it doesn't get embodied in the organisation it's just a policy and most workers are too busy to worry about policies, it's just the reality. It's something they're working on, the government, it's a work in progress. But the key I think, if you see reconciliation as a must do, it's never going to happen. It's got to be a heart decision until people are willing to want to do it, not because it sounds nice and it fits different policies. It's not driven by the heart it's just information and we just go through the same old, same old. It's got to be a genuine desire.

AA They want to make it as though they look like they're doing something but it never sort of gets past that point.

MD Yeah, so you've got the Premier's Department pumping out directives to all their employees for Reconciliation, NAIDOC week and it's great I just don't know if it really hits the grass roots of peoples' lives. They will accommodate it at work, they will smile, they'll attend a luncheon that they put on but I'm just not convinced that people own it. They just accommodate it. And I see the same with politicians, they will get there and get their photo with you and all but I'm still not convinced it hits the grass roots in our own lives. The bottom line with me if it's real for a person they will talk about it in their homes with their children. I suggest that many don't even

get it in their house. It's a professional discussion, not a home discussion where for me reconciliation, if it doesn't hit the home it hasn't hit anywhere.

AA Ok, I know what you're saying. What about Australia Day, I'm just interested to know what you think about Australia Day. Should we change the day, or is it something that we can fix, if you like? Do you have any ideas or thoughts about that?

TD Personally I see a lot of people on social media post about it to change the date. Some people just don't say anything about it but personally I just see it as another day. I'm not a very debatable person but if someone was to debate with me I would be just like yep it's just another day that I get to live I guess. People have their views and nothing's wrong with that but that's just how I see it. Another day, yeah.

15 mins

MD I've asked a few of my old fellows that question. I did a little yarn on it one day about Australia Day and the variety of responses that I received was, some old uncles just said that they don't mind celebrating Australia Day because it's the day that identifies a significant thing in the history of Australia and it's there and it's the day that they acknowledge. They said we don't mind, we all live in the same country. They were very gracious and very, I think it's positive, you know like, others say we don't celebrate our beginning in this country so why should everybody else. So there's two different perspectives, and personally for me every day is a gift from God. So I am thankful for every day because it does identify a significant time in this country I lose no sleep over that. Celebrating it doesn't worry me either because it's only significant in history, I don't mind people, that's their business. The key is, I'm more about how we walk together in this country, not about just one day or another day. Changing the day wouldn't bother me either because it's not going to change my life. It's a significant time in history, it's been identified and recognised so be it. It doesn't faze me, I'll have a barbecue any day when they have their celebration. I respect the mind set behind it, the sentiment behind it but for me personally I know a lot of my mob would have it as invasion day and it's a very negative recognition of the time they began colonisation and the destruction of my people. I don't think that way. I have a big picture in my mind around how God in his goodness has always looked after my people.

AA That's an interesting and a really, it's a nice answer, it's good to hear that. Okay thank you, yeah, that's good.

MD So when my people are angry on that day fine, I'll sit with them. I won't be waving placards or anything, and those who rejoice, I'll sit with them too. I don't care who I sit with. I will just sit with them, regardless of pros or cons. Because all people should be respected, and their views and values whether you like it or not. That's the good thing about it, Aboriginal people should have the right to voice their resentment, their opposition. That's fair enough, that's their right. I would never talk down to anyone who does that. The atrocities upon my people and the violence, that cuts deep. I just choose, there's a time and place and I just choose not to be a part of those things. I can still feel the pain and I can still feel the scars, I just choose to respond in a different way.

AA Okay, thank you. Are we learning, do you think Tori, or you could probably both answer it, as far as schools go, aboriginal history in schools, are we doing more, or is it getting better?

20 mins

TD So with Broughton I was there since Kindy to Year 12, so there my whole life. I personally think we didn't do enough. So especially in high school there was really no recognition until I was in Year 10 until Year 12. I think to make it happen there was this one teacher, she was my Year

6 teacher and she messaged me and she said oh Tori I really want to implement something for Reconciliation Week. She knew I was the leader of the dance group and she said would you like to be a part of coming up with a plan for Reconciliation Week. I'm very certain that this was the first time that Broughton actually did something for Reconciliation Week so I think it was really encouraging for me to see my teacher I guess, make a change especially within Broughton. During my years at Broughton nothing was really recognised and I think in Year 10 and 11 and 12 we had a Reconciliation Week where we had external people from other companies come in and do workshops with the kids. Especially in Year 6 Dad and our Church did a painting on our wall in the school and it was just about creation so that was really nice. That was also something that I just remembered. With other schools I do know they do more than Broughton personally I think. I definitely know that Broughton is trying to make an effort so it is definitely improving.

MD Now they have that school where Tori went, a very white school, a good school, great teaching but very little Aboriginal content or recognition, to now they did a mural there on this massive big wall of the seven days of creation. They started flying the Aboriginal flag as of, I think last year. That's a big turnaround. It doesn't sound like much but for me looking from the outside in, it's massive, a big change. Some schools welcome Aboriginal input and Aboriginal recognition and some private schools and some Christian schools just don't want a bar of it. And so be it you know but in my education, there was a lot more overt racism.

AA When I think back to my school days there was virtually nothing taught in my day. It's good to hear that story.

MD Now schools are putting in yarning circles, so in Campbelltown there's just a massive increase in schools, high schools, primary schools, implementing yarning circles. Our local men's group do a lot of them so it's great. There is this big swing. You will see a lot of public schools now with flags flying, yarning circles, educational material in the schools, and artwork in the schools. So, mate, massive turnaround from when I was a young fella. It's good I'm happy to see that, it's positive. And even just the idea of truth telling is becoming more prominent in schools, in recognition of Aboriginal peoples and the atrocities, that's slowly filtering into schools I think. They try to keep it very pretty but it is getting more information about the black history of this country. It's good, you need to know what's gone down and to learn from it and become better from it by learning, the little kids. The massacre up here in Appin, many people in Macarthur don't even know about it. That was 1816 and people are still oblivious to it.

AA It's hard to believe, you think everyone knows about it but they don't.

MD No. It just shows we are a long way, and that was the first official massacre in this country. Many in the same community don't even know it even occurred.

AA And we don't know about Myall Creek, Myall Creek was another major, so we need to educate more. Okay, this one I struggled to know how to word it. With your Christianity and the role that you play as pastor and everything, how does it marry in, for want of a better word with your Aboriginal background? Because you know, you're Christian and you teach about God and everything but you are also Indigenous so, and that has its history as well. Do you understand what I'm getting at?

25 mins

TD The spirituality

MD To make it simple we relate well with the Bible because we are a tribal people and when you read through the Old Testament it's in a tribal setting. So we have that many similarities it is crazy. Funnily enough my people can relate better with the Bible than a Western person

because we have similarities in our culture in regards to the way that we do things, how we view things, our view of the world in regard to our stories of our past, how we interpret the world. When you read through Genesis right through we can relate to those stories because we have similar stories, there's stories in different parts of Australia of the flood, recording our heritage. It's not foreign to our people but we can relate better than most other groups in Australia because we have those ties. Those traditional ties through the Old Testament which then gives us a good foundation to move into the New Testament because the Old Testament moves into the New Testament. In one sense we have better pathways to understand the Bible in a deep way, in a rich way. How it's coming through the old. The one that is the most challenging bit is when you come through to not just creation but when you read that God's son came and God rose again and we have our different beliefs of our creational beings. Myamly on the south coast and every state has a different creational being, different ancestral beings. So for me I never challenge it even though I teach my old dreamtime stories to my children of our language of different things that come through our heritage. They still need to know that. I also teach how the teachings of God as revealed to us through his word, that He created all the heavens and the earth that He created, language. I always teach both and the reason why is this because I don't need to convince people. It's not my job, but it is my job to make people aware of both. Because our heritage is rich and it's beautiful and I would never deny any of it and I want my kids to understand that. But I also want to understand like God's revealed through his word it's not a competition, but God is real so than an individual can choose which path they want to travel on. Because I can't force anybody. So when it comes to core beliefs God is big enough to handle his own business. He don't need me to get someone in a headlock, so I live in God's hands. I just give everybody the information and say look this is what we have learnt, though our heritage, and it is so beautiful our culture, this is what God's revealed, and God created all things and is big enough to handle it. So I don't have a clash, I just choose to acknowledge what God has revealed in His word and I walk in a way that honours Him whilst I honour my people. It's not either or, and the challenge for all cultures is to allow God's word to transform all cultures. That's from the beginning hey, what he wanted to be done anyway. We've just lost a lot whereas in the culture I don't care what culture you come from every culture has got things that aren't as healthy. So our job as Aboriginal people is to work through the best of our culture and enhance it and the things that aren't as great and beneficial for our mob well then we transform it. So it's just a challenge for all cultures. So obviously a lot of western culture influence their churches and I suggest sometimes it's not a very healthy thing. I'm just saying stick to the basics, stick to how God wants us to live on this earth, on His creation, be good stewards of all we have, treat your neighbour as yourself, it's simple. It's just hard to do.

30 mins

AA You've certainly answered my question now, so that's interesting. The last question I wanted to ask you is who are some of the Aboriginal people you are both inspired by in our local community or nationally? Is there anyone who have been an inspiration to you or who you look up to?

TD That's a great question. I have met many people. Maybe in relation to dance I did a one on one dance mentoring with Jasmine Shepherd. She danced, I think she still dances for Bangarra, so Bangarra's a professional well known dance company. I did a mentorship with her and I think I look up to her because we're very similar in ways, she had a very kind and loving nature and her teaching me dance, it was something I really enjoyed, especially a female role model as well. I think I definitely look up to her.

AA Okay great. That name rings a bell.

TD Yeah, Jasmine Shepherd, she's a great woman.

MD She's an international dancer and very gifted. Well, the ones I look up to is a lot of old aunties here around me in Campbelltown, the ones who have been to hell and back and are still soldiering on and they still have a smile on their face. I value that. When I see my old drunken uncles walking around Campbelltown and they are still just trying to survive. Yeah, their way of dealing with it may not be the best in some people's eyes, but to me, I love them, they're my uncles here and I respect them. I value them you know. It's strange but you've got to look up to them and I have a high regard for them because they are just trying to get through another day.

Uncle Ivan Wellington, I have known him for about going on 13 years and we have done a lot of work together side by side and I respect him because he is a man who has demonstrated a commitment to our people. I know he is in the paper every week but if you know him personally you know he has a heart, not just for our people but for Campbelltown, he has a heart for reconciliation. I respect the man because he puts his boots on and he walks it. Yes, he talks a lot too, but he walks it. Nobody walks, a lot of people talk. He walks, and I respect the man, I respect all the efforts he does. People either love him or hate him but to me he is a man who has demonstrated his willingness and dedication to our people. Those things mean a lot to me. I don't want to listen to people who talk, talk and talk I want to know people that actually live by their convictions and walk it. I've seen many old preachers, and back in the day we weren't allowed in churches, our people. We had to sit outside. I've heard stories of old Aboriginal fellows coming to God by sitting outside tents back in the day when they didn't even have churches. They weren't allowed in but they still listened to the preacher and the word and they were changed.

It shows me grace and compassion of my people, I respect the stories, I respect the stories of the old fellows riding horses from town to town just to bring the word of God to my people, and they had nothing. I can tell you stories of people driving down the South Coast delivering bandages and band aids to our people with wounds because no hospitals wanted to treat our people. I can give you that many testimonies of the old people just faithfully giving and caring for our people that had nothing. The old preachers would travel from town to town with nothing in their wallets and people would just give them a feed and a few dollars for some petrol to the next town. They're the lives that impress me. They're not there to make money, they're not there to blow up their own pride, they're just there to serve, to love, and they're often unspoken, unrecognised, but they're the ones that I look up to. The ones that really fought the fight and demonstrated it when they had nothing, no-one pats them on the back. They're the ones I look up to. There's a lot of great ones, don't get me wrong, with big names and do all great things, I'm just telling the ones I know are just the people, the grass roots who are just nutting away, and...

AA Unsung heroes.

MD Yeah, they're amazing. My daughter who learns and listens from me and then she strives to practice it in her own little life, in her service to our community. Makes me proud you know to see my daughter just learn and not just learn but actually implement it and live it. That's all I can ask for.

AA Okay, well thank you both for your interview this afternoon, I've really enjoyed it, and found it really interesting, and I appreciate your time, so thank you.

MD No worries.

TD No worries.