

## Deline Briscoe transcript

Yurra Yalada Ngaygu Burri, Burrikari Milbirrba. Nagyu Kadyan Julaynwarra, Kubirriwarra, Burunku. Gugu Yalanji Jalbu. My name's Deline Briscoe, I come from the Gugu Yalanji people and I come from the Julaynwarra, Daintree, Kubirriwarra, Mossman and Burunku, China Camp, Wujal area.

I come from two generations of Stolen Generations. My nan grew up living culture. Later on she was found and taken. She was what they called 'half-caste'. My mother was also then a stolen generation. So when she was four, she was taken and she wasn't allowed to speak her language. She had us, seven of us. She taught us, the little ones, words that she knew.

As I got older, we started, we always connected with family, went up home, learnt how to survive in the bush, learnt about our medicines, food. Then when I was about 13, we had my nan come and stay with us for a little bit. She spoke fluent and I started hearing these phrases and thought 'oh, I really love the sound of them, the rhythm'. I was attracted to that mostly, the musicality of the language. Then I started thinking 'I want to remember these words'. I was already writing songs by that time.

I wrote this song, my first song, Wanjabu dungay which means 'where are you going'. It was a phrase that everyone would say to each other, Wanjabu dungay? So I put that into a song and my sisters and I we toured singing that song for many years. At the time I just wanted to remember the words. But now there's like three generations singing that song. So I feel like it was also part of preserving that and passing that forward to the next generation.

The role of music in sustaining our languages and cultural practices is so important. It gives us a sense of connection. Also I think it's that continuation of oral history that we've always done through dance, song, ceremony, lore.

What I've learnt is how music is stored in so many different parts of the brain. As we get older sometimes there's brain diseases like Alzheimer's, and even though one part of the brain might be affected by the disease or aging, the other part can still remember. I think about our mob and how they must have already known this science to pass on all of our stories, lores and custom through song. So continuing that, it also holds so much knowledge those songs, the knowledge to care for our Country.

Yeah, the challenges have been mostly not having speakers around, but also going back to the old way of speaking our languages. It's not the way that our grandma was before. I found that there's not just one form, even though there is kind of similar to English, I suppose, where you have these rules but then they can bend and shift, the same with our language.

I'm pretty blessed to have access to people to support me and help with that. But I have seen on many occasions where I've worked with communities that don't have that and they have to go back and find old recordings and it's must more difficult and challenging for those communities they don't have fluent speakers living anymore.

I think it's been a challenge for some of the older generation to speak language again and go back to that because they were so severely punished for speaking their language as children. Also when they see younger people learning the language and speaking it more fluently that's emotionally challenging for our elders and our communities, we have to be mindful of that.

There's a lot of places that I've worked bringing back languages through song where pronunciation is challenged between the generations. I've got to step out of it because it's not my, that's their thing to deal with, and then sometimes I just leave it with them and come back to it when people, when they've worked it out. But it is, it's a huge challenge where there's been complete breakdown of language speakers.

I think the risk and the challenge around social media and those online spaces is that there's not the right information or correct information going out. Our mob up in Kubirriwarra have set up a protocol or some way that if we see something online we can send it to our elders and say, "What do you think of this," or, "How should we deal with this," because there's wrong pronunciation and maybe we can work with those people. What I do see in that is just how humble and generous our elders are because they want everyone to have access and to learn and they see the importance of this language continuing.

There's not like punishment for doing the wrong thing, it's always like 'okay here, bub, this is how we should say it, maybe try this next time'. That's what I feel has been the challenges, making sure that things are pronounced correctly, the grammar is corrected, especially when it's such a public space, the digital space.

Yeah, the protocols around using language in song and just generally it changes for every single mob. I think it also sits on the spectrum of how colonisation has affected that language development and preservation. What I've seen is people develop protocols, there's new things coming up all the time.

Especially because there are non-Indigenous companies or people coming in and claiming that space and claiming our languages and wanting to teach our languages because they're a linguist or they've got, I suppose, academic authority to do this, but they don't have the cultural authority. So I think that there has to be more work to understand best practice when sharing and teaching our languages and going in and it's all very localised, there's no one size fits all.

For our mob, the protocol pretty much if you were speaking the language you would be able to write songs and share music and songs in that language, in our language. If you were uncertain or something, you should go back to your elders or to the Kubirriwarra corporation where our mob is from, go back to those mob and say, "Can you help me with this translation and is this correct." But not always. I think if you're pretty confident in your speaking ability then you should be fine. They'll let you know if it's wrong anyway.

This is the first song I wrote in Kuku Yalinji]. I was 16 when I wrote it, 13 when I started putting the phrases together, and it's just that phrase Wanjabu dungay, 'where are you

going', and when get up home everyone says that to each other, "Hey, Wanjabu dungay" So I just want to share that with you today. [singing the song].

I think the dictionaries are helpful. The one that we have is actually pretty awesome because it has all the words and meanings. We have it from Yalanji to English and English to Yalanji which a lot of mob don't have. Then they have phrases of words as well in the context, the different context that you can use the same word.

I love our language because of just the depth of each word, like words, for instance, wanju in that song it's kind of like a question mark at the start of the sentence, so if you say wanju you're about to ask a question. So there's things like that that aren't explained in those books that you just have to learn by speaking with your families. There's some good resources like that with the dictionaries.

There's another cousin of mine who will do an online course, you can do a one-on-one course with her to speak Kuku Yalanji. Tahlia Burchill, she's doing incredible work in that space and now they teach Kuku Yalanji at the primary and high school in Mossman which is awesome. They've always taught it in Wujal up at Bloomfield State School and for a long time now. So there's a lot of advancement in that resources to learn.

I think it would be, it's good that there's space, like my cousin's doing that work in online courses which is awesome, but it would be great to have more children's courses and things that we could access like that. There was an app that was made but it only went so far, like kind of surface level greetings and things like that.

Yeah, so I'd like to see more development in that tech space for the kids to access our language, learn more about the names of places. They learn it through the songs that I sing, but it would be great to have more of that, like a weekly interaction that they can do with other language speakers as well.