

UNCLE NOEL

29th October, 2015

So if you could tell your name and a little bit of your background, just to introduce yourself...

Ok. My name's Noel Summers. I'm a community Elder in Logan City. I joined the Navy when I was about 17 - when I actually turned 17, I joined the Navy. And I stayed there, I enjoyed it, it was a good life. After that I come out and drove trucks for about two years. Then I did a working holiday, I worked around Mount Isa, Weipa, Mornington Island, Cairns, and I'd have still stayed up there only I had to come back home because my dad had had a bad heart attack. I come back for him and I haven't gone back since. Since I've shifted to Logan down here, I've been here - oh - it's nearly thirty years now. I've been doing community work for about 25 years, I started being an elder, and I found the importance of community work and harmony celebrations up the park - and all that. I'm all for peace.

How old are you now?

74.

So, you would have served in Vietnam?

No - 58 to 64.

I see the importance of community work here and I've actually gone to the South Bank TAFE and got a diploma in Community Services. Then I saw a little bit of further need so I did an Indigenous Community Management and Development Course, I got my Associate Degree over at Curtin University in Western Australia. So I've been all about working in community and doing peace work, when you think about it.

Can you describe to me what peace means to you?

It means everything to me. Going through the history of my people, we've been at war, we've had a hard time ever since settlers landed and to me, working with people in my community, I've been working towards that peace all the time.

I'm still trying today, and I find it sad that there's so much war and conflict going on in the world. It's just very sad. That's why I love going to those harmony

sessions in Logan, since we get all the cultures together. They all have stalls and everyone celebrates and entertains. We could have harmony all over the world.

That's right. It seems so simple doesn't it because it seems like it's what we really want.

Yeah, it does.

Do you link peace with other values and conditions? Obviously with community for you...

I do, yes, because what makes me more aware of it here is that Logan has got so multicultural lately - we've got Chinese, Burmese, Africans, every nation you could mention, they're here in Logan. And they all have their own little group and that's why we have these harmony days because we've got to all learn to work together, otherwise we'd be having conflicts like they do overseas. We have MultiLink [Community Services] here that has most nationalities in it and we work closely so we can all get on together.

Do you think that peace is an active thing, that you actively live a peaceful life? You choose it?

Yes, I do.

Is there a difference for you between your inner peace and social peace?

Yes. Well, inner peace I like to have it all the time, but sometimes I don't have the inner peace because I see so much going on around me. You know even here in the community, we have young people on drugs and this kind of stuff and conflict. I work a lot with youth and the schools to try and stop all this and I suppose that mucks up my inner peace a little bit. But mostly I do have a good inner peace, yeah.

Do you think there has to be a balance or there is a relationship between the two?

Oh yeah, there is. If you get social peace out there, which I'm working towards, that helps you get inner peace too really. Maybe I'd have inner peace if I wasn't active - you know what I mean? But being out in the community I see what's going on so I'm always trying to work towards that peace for everyone here in Logan.

Do you think peace is best found by yourself or is it best found with others?

Everyone's got to participate to get that. When you say is it with others or with yourself, well that's what I'm talking about. We've got a try and get on with the multicultural population here. Because you can't just find peace by yourself. You've got to do it together, you know what I mean, as part of a team and everyone's got to work towards it together and unite.

Do you remember choosing peace? Was that a decision that you made in your life? Or has the significance of peace changed over time in your life?

I've chosen to work towards peace. Well, not so much when I was very young and going to school, but after I left school. I learnt a lot more about my grandmother, my grandmother was part of the stolen generation and I sort of went towards Aboriginal history and researching and reading books and all that. I could see how that inner conflict really affects people. With our people it affected the whole nation, you know. And now there's all this working towards reconciliation now and so, I not only think about peace

for my people I think about peace for everyone in my community. Even though I'm an Aboriginal Elder, I think I can work towards everyone working in peace.

Do you have any experiences of intense peacefulness that you can recall that stand out in your memory?

Well, the only time I had it was when I was up in Mornington Island. When I was in Mornington Island I was asked to run a fishing village on the other side of the island.

What year was this?

About 1968/69. I was up there and I found a great inner peace because I love fishing itself and I love the sea, as you know because I joined the Navy. I love the salt water and I love the activities around it - fishing, crabbing and all that. We used to get the people coming up from Mount Isa for the weekends and all that. I found inner peace there because I think it was Utopia - everything I loved was there and I loved doing the work and so that was the greatest inner peace I ever felt.

And maybe there's a relationship between our natural environment, the sea and those open space beautiful spaces...

Oh yeah, the city is more of a rat race - everyone racing around. Up there everything was so peaceful and quiet. You know there's no hassles, no troubles.

Did you work with the community there too? Because there's a big Aboriginal community on Mornington Island isn't there? So you would have been involved with them?

Yeah. Actually another job I had out there was to put a pipeline for the water back to where the community was coming from... and I was the foreman, training them and showing them how to put the pipes in.

Remote communities play an important role don't they, in Aboriginal society?

They do.

With Aboriginal people to really get them to open up and talk to you, you gotta earn their trust and respect. I've found that out with Aboriginal people too, even though I'm an elder, and I meet someone strange. If you don't have their trust and respect they don't want to talk to you, they don't want to know you. But

even saying that, I think it applies to everyone really, you know... no one really opens up to you until you gain their trust and respect and friendship.

Yes, that's right, it has to be real doesn't it? The relationship.

Yeah, that's right, it doesn't want to be put on, it wants to be real openness and friendliness.

And are there particular things in your life that you do to find peace? Do you make art?

No, nothing like that. In community life, my satisfaction and what helps my inner peace is that sometimes I make a difference in a person's life. Sometimes you might try with 10 people. Even if you only have success with 2 or 3 that is a satisfaction, you feel that you've done something, you've made that person's life better.

Ok. That's all unless you want to say something more. That was all the questions I had about peace. The idea was that we wanted to talk to people who have experienced war, conflict and so on, because we felt they will know what peace really means. Do you think Australia is peaceful? Really honestly?

I'm trying to think to answer that. Yes and No. I like Logan community because there's so many wonderful people here. But in the headlines, you'll hear about [bad things] - oh, that's Logan City!

I work with the schools, I work with the ICPCG, I work with the police, I work with everyone here in Logan. As you can imagine after being here for 30 years, I'm everywhere - Salvation Army, youth, everyone. And I've found out some of the projects we're running here are fantastic. They are, they're really good. And you don't hear about them.

No, we only hear about the bad stuff.

That's right. There's some good stuff. Even the Salvation Army they're doing some good stuff here, some really good stuff, but you don't hear about it. And myself, I've got into a lot of groups of people

that are running projects. I'm on their committees and all that, and you don't hear about them either. Oh, very good projects.

So Australia - well, your community is a caring community and there are people that are really working even though there's a lot of need. I would imagine there's a lot of need.

There is a lot of need here. And I get satisfaction when there's need and there are people who want to do something about it. You know I've joined committees, I've gone to meetings and they think right we should do this, do that, whatever, you know, and this will be our goal. But you come back three meetings later and nothing's happened. So I get out of them meetings. I go to meetings where action happens. Like I started what they call a Logan Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Network. I started that because some agents were losing funding. This lot wasn't talking to that lot, you know how they go on. And I thought: no, the only way you're going to get some things happening in this community, in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community I'm talking about, is if they work together. So I took this to the Department of Communities, Wally Tallis

was in charge then, and I said, 'Wally we got to do something about this. We've got to make some changes'. He said, 'Uncle Noel, you do the footwork and I'll do the catering, meeting place and the admin for you'. And I thought, OK. We actually got some funding and got it started up. I heard some people talking outside so I gave them the message at the first meeting that I don't care if you don't get on with each other, if you don't talk to her or she doesn't talk to you, when you come to these meetings all that - and I said S-H-I-T - it all stays outside, it's not coming in here. This whole thing's been set up, it's going to benefit not only you, it's going to benefit your community and your family. So they understood that, it was a common goal. So even though they didn't talk to each other at the meeting, they still come to that meeting and they gave input and feedback. It's still going now.

It's just fantastic that you've stepped up into that role as Elder and you've taken that on and your whole community respects that.

Well, that's what I mean -what I was telling you about. It's no good going to meetings; you gotta take actions from meetings. And that's why, with the

committees I'm on, I know something happens. I'm on that committee because I know that if you and I talk about it and say this has got to happen and we gotta do this and that, I know when I come to the next meeting you're gonna say to me, 'That's right, Noel -we've done this and we've done that'. And I'll say 'Yeah, I've done this and I've done that', and action happens. That's what you want. Meetings are no good unless you have actions from them, I reckon. I've been to thousands of meetings but the only ones I like are the ones you get results from. You know what I mean?

Yes, definitely!