



## WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT

*To feel happy about yourself you must feel happy about the place you live in.*

In 1982 I lost my brother. His name was Kenneth. We called him Nick. He was a beautiful, strong, young man. Although he was really skinny, he could go, he could fight with the best of them. When he hit, they stayed hit. He tried his best to fit into the white society but found it hard to relate to a city way of living. Whenever we went bush he was a different person. He was at home in the bush. He used to go down the beach all the time. That was his special place. The Bohle. At the mouth of the Bohle River, outside Townsville, in North Queensland.

Like most Aboriginal people, the pressures on Nick to conform were huge. To get away from this pressure he had to find space somewhere. Nick could never really find that space and so he hanged himself. There, where he used to go down the beach all the time. The Bohle. He was twenty-eight.

Although I didn't see it right away, there was beauty in his death, too, because he hanged himself on land down the beach by the mouth of the river where we had all the good times.

That land was owned by two white people. We called them our Uncle Arthur and Auntie Joyce. The fact that they were white never entered our minds. We loved and cared for each other and that's what counted. They gave us free run of the place. We ran for miles up and down that beach. And there was beautiful rainforest there and bushland and mangroves. The smell was so sweet.

Uncle Arthur and Auntie Joyce leased this land; I think it was the meatworks that owned it. This land had been in their family for years. Uncle Arthur's father had leased it before him. They had a gate with a padlock on it to stop people coming through their land, but Uncle Arthur always let us know where the key was. It felt like we belonged there. They had fish traps that stretched from the mangroves out to the sea and whenever we arrived to set up camp, they made sure they'd left us a big barramundi or turtle or dugong.

When Uncle Arthur died, the developers, 'the unseen people' as Mum calls them, took over all that area. The leases were stopped and it was sold off.

Nicky couldn't handle that happening to our special place. He put that in his suicide note. He hated all our land being sold off to the Japanese. It's not their fault that they buy it. It's the fault of the Australian government wanting to sell our land off overseas in the first place.

Then in 1988, the Bicentennial year, my brother Paul, who fought really hard to make things right, hanged himself.

He was also twenty-eight. Budda Paul, we used to call him. Budda is our way of saying 'brother'. Budda did everything that the white society asked of him. And they still never left him alone. He was one of the best actors, black or white, a great dancer and didjeridoo player and a brilliant storyteller. He had so many strings to his bow. He had the ability to cross all boundaries in expressing Aboriginal culture. But the pressure became too much for him.

In the back of his mind, somehow, he always knew that he too would have to endure the atrocities that happened to our people in the past. A long time ago, those atrocities were more out in the open. Now, and in Paul's time, mind-games are used to trick and subdue Aboriginal people. A lot of the white people he worked with in the film industry never knew of the harassment he had to face, being black. It became too much for him. And he hanged himself.

My sister Kim was thirty-eight when she suicided in 1994. We called her Mimby. She was a brilliant artist and her spirit was so giving that her beauty shone beyond her laughter. With her art she was trying to create a business, which was hard being a woman. Being an Aboriginal woman, it was even harder. Kimmy had lots of plans and ideas for the future for her and her son, Nicky Bidju. It's hard to pinpoint one thing that caused her to hurt herself, because so many dark shadows were cast over her. As time went on, the shadows became heavier. She had no space to breathe any fresh air into her body. Kimmy hanged herself under our parents' house.

Then came the loss of my nephew Liam in 1996. He was only thirteen. The police were chasing the stolen car he and

two other boys were in. The boys' car crashed into a tree. Liam was the oldest of three brothers. The other two, Kurtis and Sean, were only nine and ten. Chicky, their mum, used to call the three of them Huey, Louie and Dewey because they were inseparable and in times of trouble they stuck together like glue. Chicky was on her own with the boys and so Liam, being the oldest, was like the protector of the family.

When I speak about the deaths of these four special people who died in four very bad ways before their time, it's not to make people say, 'Oh, poor little blackfulla' or to make us look like victims. What I want people to do is to really sit down and ask, 'Why did these people die?' Because it is an important part and structure of this country. I'm not just speaking about my family. Most Aboriginal families I know have lost one or two people in the same way. As an Aboriginal family you expect that. You really do expect that.

Source: Fryer, B +  
McDonald, M.  
(2010) "Maybe  
Tomorrow" Sydney  
A + U  
p 9 → 12.

and from my beautiful godson, Ciaran. And from the kids