



Are We Ready?

By Belinda Duarte, Wotjobaluk woman and CEO at [Culture is Life](#)

There are cherished moments in my life that fill me with faith, moments that inspire me, that come from witnessing the sincere and respectful interactions and friendships created between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

On reflection what I find most inspirational is when two people from different worlds find common ground founded in mutual respect, maintained by resilience and a commitment to understanding the path each have walked. I find hope in their shared aspirations and with that reassurance in the possibilities between the broader Aboriginal & Non-Aboriginal communities throughout Australia.

That said, in my mind, elements of Australia's past map out uncharted territory: it is a bumpy terrain that can be confronting, disruptive and challenging. It is a landscape that is imbued with deep emotion, pain, trauma and wounds that still need to be healed not only for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples but the broader community.

The relationships that I am surrounded by as a Wotjobaluk woman are vital to me and my humanity. I know, in a deep sense, about the power of friendships both personally and professionally in creating change.

My love of sport and work within the football industry has allowed me the opportunity to educate others about the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures to a national audience. I've been part of courageous conversations that have changed perspectives and deepened the connection between us.

I remember many moments where both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have shared how special the celebration of culture is for them. The moment, for instance, at the AFL's first 'Dreamtime at the G' ceremony on the grounds of the MCG witnessing Traditional Owners' radiant pride and emotion alongside a non-Aboriginal player making a personal choice to take the gift of a welcome gum leaf and slide it into his sock – an act he has repeated in every Dreamtime game since, in respect and acknowledgment of a cultural ceremony that he clearly values.

Of my own friendships with non-Aboriginal people, the strongest are founded on a mutual generosity of spirit and empathy that guides us both on a meaningful journey. Those friendships that are the strongest have required a willingness to be wrong and a commitment to be challenged. They have created a space in which we are both vulnerable and while these friendships straddle hurt and healing they are the true foundation for growth.



Something every person yearns for in life is to feel valued, to connect, to be understood, and to experience that deeper sense of another.

I know our history is littered with relationships that in no way can be classified as friendships, particularly those between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Our country is founded on horrific crimes and our relationships are infected with toxic memories and views that have not served Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, nor have they served non-Aboriginal people well.

The fact remains that every Australian has their own ancestral story. That story each and every one of us carries – as a part of who we are today – defined by our genetics, environmental experiences, the societies in which we live and in which we have been taught.

Knowing our collective ancestral story is the one thing as a nation we must be more informed about; and the ancestral lineage of this nation is filled with the riches of knowledge etched in the DNA of the oldest living culture in the world – Australia's First Peoples.

What does this truly mean? The oldest living culture in the world... How do we as a nation acknowledge, celebrate, authentically value this, and more importantly, allow for our First Peoples to thrive instead of attempting only to survive?

[Culture is Life](#) is a not-for-profit organisation whose current campaign poses the question, 'Are We Ready?'. In our own way, inspired by the strength of our friendships, we are asking both individuals and communities across our country to truly consider the opportunity we all have to benefit from knowing this land's cultural lineage and to understand more deeply our country's First Peoples.

I know in my heart that we will all be richer and stronger for it.

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