

## FOREWORD

I am extremely proud to write the foreword for a book that reveals evidential material contained within the documents of a Parliamentary Inquiry in 1881 on the treatment of Aboriginal people resident at Coranderrk Aboriginal Station near Healesville, Victoria.

The establishment of Stations and Reserves was a policy of the Victorian Government's Aboriginal Protection Act to forcibly remove Aboriginal people from their traditional lands, divide families, stop cultural customs and assimilate them into white society. When the Board of Protection tried to move residents and close down Coranderrk Station, my great-great Uncle William Barak said: 'Me no leave it, Yarra, my father's country. There's no mountains for me on the Murray.' Barak also said: 'And we don't want any Board nor inspecting Capt. Page over us — only one man, that is Mr Green, and the station to be under the Chief Secretary, and then we will show to the country that we can work it and make it pay, and I know it will.'

'We will show the country' are powerful words which were upheld for many years. From the time of establishment of the Coranderrk Aboriginal Station in 1863 until its closure in 1924, the Coranderrk family became friends with a Scottish settler Mr John Green and his family. They trusted John Green and in turn, they successfully managed the 4850 acre property to become the most productive Aboriginal Station in Victoria. Coranderrk became a self-sufficient community, provided for families some distance away and won the first prize blue ribbon award for best hops at the 1881 Melbourne International Exhibition. Another staunch supporter of the Coranderrk family was the Scottish woman Mrs Anne Fraser Bon. Remarkably for the time, she played a big part in bringing about the 1881 Inquiry, which allowed representatives of the Coranderrk family to put their words on the official record. William Barak and Anne Bon shared their personal experiences, in particular, loss of their children. Barak invited Bon to witness a traditional ceremony but she chose to watch from nearby.

Dr Giordano Nanni, a historian at The University of Melbourne, approached me in 2009, during a pilgrimage to Coranderrk. He had recently discovered the minutes of evidence of the Coranderrk Inquiry and was very touched by the power of this story. He had an idea to re-enact the Coranderrk Inquiry using only the words from the minutes of evidence. He was very excited and felt that as a play, it would provide an opportunity not just to talk about the past, but to let the past speak for itself. More recently, Giordano told me that he had been nervous about approaching me because he wasn't sure how the idea would be received by descendants of the Community. I believed in this quietly spoken young man. The idea excited me and I hoped someday, something special might happen, and gave him my blessing.

Something special did happen. Giordano's dedication and commitment in sourcing the transcripts of the Coranderrk Inquiry which he edited together with Andrea James — an inspirational woman and successful Aboriginal playwright whose Yorta Yorta family were also Coranderrk residents — led to a draft script. And in collaboration with Rachael Maza of ILBIJERRI Theatre Company, La Mama Theatre and the University of Melbourne, the script was performed as a series of pilot readings in August 2010, which received a hugely positive response.

Further consultations with Community led to very special readings being held on Coranderrk country in May 2011. These historic performances brought back together descendants of the Wandin, Thomas Harris, Alice Grant, Peters and other Coranderrk Aboriginal families, on Coranderrk land. My youngest brother Norman aged 55 is seldom seen at these events. He sat in the back row and could not contain his excitement. He was hysterically loud and made it known how proud he was to be hearing the words of his family. Also John Parkinson aged 97, the grandson of the much admired, trusted and respected manager John Green, his children and grand-children attended the same evening. What a moment, the coming together of the descendants of John Green and Barak, 130 years later with still the same respect for each other and hearing the very words spoken during the Inquiry. Sadly, John Parkinson passed away in July 2013. His relatives said how immensely proud he was to have lived to experience the re-enactment of the Inquiry where John Green testified.

With the generous funding support of the Australian Research Council and the Minutes of Evidence project partners, thousands of people have seen the play and now it is being adapted for school audiences. Well done, to all involved. Here we are in 2013 with an amazing performance and a published script which allows audiences to take home a record of the powerful words which we hear in the play, and which explains the background history and helps give people further understanding of many things which are not contained in the minutes of the evidence, such as the events that led to the Inquiry and the relationships between Barak, Anne Bon and the Greens. You can now witness in the performance, and read in this book, how the Coranderrk family fought the battle alongside John Green and Anne Bon against the Board for the Protection of Aborigines with determination and integrity, 'in pursuit of shared sense of justice'; and the adversity of others who justified their treatment of the Coranderrk family, including children, as they pursued the closure of Coranderrk.

*Coranderrk* offers no less than the truth. It captures the strength and stamina of a people who stood tall and publicly fought together for the rights of all people. And they almost won! Hearing these words today, from this rare occasion, helps to heal the hurt within, knowing that the same caring for each other still lives on between our families. I believe that Barak and Bon were the forerunners of reconciliation and I see Giordano Nanni and Andrea James as a reverse reflection of the storyteller Barak and the strong-willed Scottish woman, Anne Bon. Giordano and Andrea, just like Barak and Bon, came together from two very different backgrounds, and in the spirit of a shared sense of justice return the story to today's society.

'Coranderrk' is a word from my Granny Jemima Dunnolly-Wandin, nee Burns *Pangerang ngulu*, language. It is a small stemmed and blooms in December with sprays of tiny cream and mauvish coloured bell-shaped flowers. It grows along the banks of the *Birrarung*-Yarra river as it does by the Goulburn river. Granny Jemima passed away the year I was born, 1944. My beautiful Mother, Olive Fogarty-Wandin-McCartney told me: your Dad James Henry Wandin was Granny's favourite. Granny came into Healesville to visit your Father wearing her colonial dress, hat and laced up boots. On return to Coranderrk with Uncle Frank driving the jinker cart, Granny would take off her boots and walk down to the *Birrarung*. This practice was believed to be her cleansing and healing ceremony for her separation from her baby boy.

Recalling these stories reminds me of the intensity and fortitude of our families in their struggle for basic human rights to retain their identity and maintain their cultures. I urge you to see the play and read this fascinating book. Perhaps you might then follow my Granny, take off your boots, walk barefoot on the land, put your feet into water, pay respect to this ancient land and feel the presence of the spirits of the ancestors of the *Coranderrk narkwarren* — family.

My heartfelt thanks and praise to the diligence and determination by Giordano Nanni who read a story and brought it to life, to the brilliant actors and to all those who have contributed and supported this story; *we* will always be eternally grateful and *we* hope you can feel the hearts of the *Coranderrk narkwarren* that you have given back to *us*.

**Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin**  
Senior Elder of the Wurundjeri people  
*Healesville, September 2013*