



TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH CO, A RELATIVE OF A FORMER CHILD IN CARE

- Interviewer** One of your grandchildren I think was taken from your community, can you tell us what happened when he was removed?
- CO** There's, uh, when he was removed I was just doing my business, wandering around doing, working around. And one of my daughters, she told me his cousin, sister had told to my daughter then she was talking to me and said he's been taken away from her and she was drinking too much there so they took him to Darwin there. So they took him away.
- Interviewer** How old was he when that happened?
- CO** Maybe I've seen him since I was going past when he was in school so he was 7 years old, 7 or 8 years old. Yeah, I remember that.
- Interviewer** And after he was taken, did you see him?
- CO** No. I only seen him when he was a kid. After that I just went up to the city and then I seen him going past every time. Like he's calling my name when he was a kid. Say '[grandfather in language]'. It means grandfather.
- Interviewer** Did you get to speak to him when you saw him?
- CO** No, I always go past when he go past, going to school. He always had to wave his hand and he pronounced me as a grandfather. In our language '[grandfather in language].'
- Interviewer** That would have been very hard for you.
- CO** Yes, I still remember. I used to come around every time to see he's still OK. So I keep on connecting with him, talking to him a little bit proud at times with him, in our languages, going past his school. Say hello, [grandfather in language]. To balanda he always say that's my [grandfather in language], that's my grandpa. Sometimes, you know, we don't have time to have a chat to him. Because the schooling days and we don't have a chance to talk to him.
- Interviewer** How old is your grandson now?
- CO** Maybe he's getting 18.
- Interviewer** Has he come back to the community?
- CO** Yes, he did.
- Interviewer** What happened when he came back to the community?
- CO** Scared first, he never came back to me yet. He was just go for his friends from school. So try to go next to him and [he] say hello [grandfather in language]. He remembered one language and that was [grandfather in language]. I say 'Hello. How are you?' in English. He good English. I just try to give him a talk by [language]. But I just have to talk to him in English.

- Interviewer** Why do you think he was scared?
- CO** Because he has lost his... I don't know, maybe, I don't know. Just say not coming back again.
- Interviewer** When he came back did he speak your language?
- CO** Not yet. Not yet. When he came back home he just speaking in English. So we had to speak in English anyway. So have to give it to my grandchildren, other little boys, maybe 18, 17. My grandsons was 10 and 8 and 7. They used to play around and talk him in language. So I have to give it to them kids so they can teach him to speak English and the boys to boys, kids to kids so you have to tell them 'You take him around, show him around. You know kids. Join games and things. So he didn't trust anybody yet. So he have to trust my grandchildren teach him. So the games they do in English and [language], English and [language]. They're talking like dogs might bite you in our languages. When we go to fishing, and oysters, whatchamacall oysters in English? That we call [name of oyster] in our languages. And the taste too. He had a problem with the taste too. And we have to give him a turtle. He didn't want to taste it. And so we have to give him a little meat. He has to taste it more, taste it more. And the other fish, other things that we eat so he have to taste it by a little bit. Going hunting for himself, sometimes he gets sick. Keep going, you know. Try out best to continue how to eat and taste and teach him how to eat all the animals we eat in our languages. It's very hard to understand. He's not really understanding.
- Interviewer** What other parts of your culture have you had to teach him since he came back?
- CO** Going to men's ceremony, he was too young, I told him not to go yet. I waited for him until 18. They took him out there. So we have to organise our families, elders, to be with him on the side all the time. The elders - man and woman elders. So they have to stay beside him all the time. Don't be scared I tell him. That's your place here.
- Interviewer** What cultural things had he missed out on in the years when he was away?
- CO** Cultures like dancing, painting, even things like making bamboo for dancing, clap sticks and the boomerangs too and also the spears so he can use those spears for hunting.
- Interviewer** Did he have any connection to culture while he was away?
- CO** What do you mean?
- Interviewer** Did he get to participate in ceremony or was somebody helping him to keep his language while he was in Darwin?
- CO** No. No, I don't think so. He came back with the English. When he came back it was very hard to... It was good English only but it wasn't our language. He just say 'hello' like this. It was very hard for him, for us too. For him and us too.
- Interviewer** How did you feel when he went away and you weren't able to teach him culture?

- CO** I said to myself, poor thing, how is he going to learn now? I tried other ways to get those things to him to visit him and we did make arrangement to make a call, you know, sometimes to do that.
- Interviewer** So what happened when you made an arrangement to make a call?
- CO** Just to talk to him, or maybe say visit to us. Maybe day trip there and come back in the afternoon.
- Interviewer** Were you allowed to visit with him when you did that?
- CO** No. I wasn't. In my days I didn't see him yet. No.
- Interviewer** Did Territory Families say why you couldn't visit him?
- CO** No, no one tell me why.
- CO** I think they let him then because he was old. I didn't realise they let him go. But in 2016 let him go, til he was tall. Maybe he was angry, I don't know, I didn't know. When I seen him he was tall. And I was surprised. He surprised me he was big and tall.
- Interviewer** When he came back, who did he live with?
- CO** Me. He stayed with me, until he got his language back. Teaching there, with kids play, go bush, go hunting. I maybe, say, couple of months, I told him that's your real family over there. Other families. So had to go drop him for 2 days or one week. He didn't stay for one week. He came 2 days there and came back again and I had to tell him to go with them bush so we have to go with him out bush so we can sit beside him with the families. Now those families are telling [him] this is your families here. This is your place, your country, come on let's go, have a walk around. I did run away from him when he was taking bush tucker around hunting. I was thinking I have to leave him so they could talk to him. I think about myself I have to move away from him, step away from him. So I was talking in [language], in languages. Sometimes the English there.
- Interviewer** Has he found it hard to learn his culture when he's almost a grown man?
- CO** Very hard, very hard. Once you get the language back and then he start getting going to the men's ceremony. He's trusted in that way, once he got his language back. And I seen him, and I said not yet, learn your language so you can learn the way they will speak you, speak to your elders so you can listen to them, listen to the elders. I told him that in a good way. So stop here until he get his language back and then go to the men's ceremony so he can hear what they are doing and thinking. How that its going to be good for him to listen really hard.
- Interviewer** Has he said anything to you about what it meant to him to lose his language and lose his culture?
- CO** No, he never tell me. Never tell me. Because his mind was thinking about coming home. Didn't ever think about losing. I'm thinking about this right now. He's comfortable. He's feeling to come through to me and through to our culture and

back to place where his belong. I guess maybe it opens his mind maybe coming back.

CO He don't trust people when he came back. I said come with me and we will go out. Don't be frightened all the time. And my son, his father and your father is next to me, let's go. So I told him your father will be looking after you. I brought him back and my son was really happy. He was going hugging him, staying inside, talk to him in [language] languages there. But he was really scared. He doesn't want to go sit next to them, so you know, we've all seen him so we have to speak English every time. So we tell him don't talk in English. Can you listen to the language you've got to learn. He said 'Nah, not yet, [Grandfather], not yet.' It took me 2 months, 3 months to go over and over and over and talk to him in the room, and say go and do something, go out and do something, go out with the children, go and play with them. There's one family. He's not allowed to go outside the door. If they see him he goes inside. And sometimes they recognise him. They go that's your grandfather, that's another sister in the window. He sit on the chairs outside watching people and then he wasn't scared. His parents came in there and sit beside him and said you're gonna watch the TV so he went inside with the tv and other friends and families waiting for him and chat with him.

Interviewer What do you think made him scared?

CO He wasn't used to there. It was scary for him to move.

Interviewer Did he remember his family?

CO I was showing him. He remembered his mum. He had the photo all the time. I tell him 'that's your mum,' when you show him, 'that's a photo of her' when his Mum came next to him, beside him.

Interviewer How are his relationships with his family now?

CO Pretty good but the last time I left - he stayed with me all the time - so I said you go to your other family first, stay with your grandma, I said I'm going to town for work and I'll be back again, so they get him there and they took him to bush, stay a week and then he come back again. So my son was there too and I said once he comes mind him there for me. Still scared but right now getting something back to himself. And sometimes he still talks in English.

Interviewer And what do you feel like you missed out on with your grandson who came to Darwin?

CO Angry. Not angry. Somehow got to figure out how to talk to those people to figure out how long he's going to stay there. How long he's going to stay there? Keep saying that and I ask his mother, 'how long you going to stay?' Maybe his mother tell him go and ask that balanda how long he's going to stay there. Don't be frightened, just ask how long he's going to be there.

Interviewer Were there people in your family who would have looked after your grandson if he couldn't live with his mother and father?

CO Yes. Plenty. We share the kids. Grandchildren and daughters. All share.

Interviewer Did Territory Families, did welfare ask anyone whether they would look after your grandson?

CO They should. They would. They would.

Interviewer Was anyone asked if they would look after him before he was sent to Darwin?

CO: No. No. I got a shock. They came after him and went and took him away. And from then when he was taken away maybe a couple of times, maybe month or maybe a year and maybe say 2 years, we almost forgot him. We just mind our own business when they take him. Kind of look out for him but he's gone.

Interviewer: It's hard not seeing him.

CO: And I'm thinking about maybe he's suffering there cause he's crying, crying, crying. I couldn't help him. I mean that was later.

Interviewer: When was that?

CO: When they took him away. They came to me. They came to me. Where is he? It's how I find he's in welfare now. I couldn't even talk to the welfares. Maybe they had full evidence from the kids and the mums about what they do. And I don't know about those things there.

Interviewer: Did welfare, are they giving him any help or any support to settle back in or about where he lives or anything like that now?

CO: No. Only the last ones when he's grown. When he's grown. All those chances they never asked him to come and visit us or something and they didn't. Even I wish for him to come back. I mean to get a phone call for welfare to come and talk to me.

Interviewer: If you were to change how welfare works, what sort of things would you change?

CO: I would change... how they look to how Aboriginal people how they live. Before, asks first, before they give those kids... I mean they want to come here and letting us peoples know how its going to be for them, for us, and the kid. They should give us more details in how long they are going to keep for or maybe say week or month or I don't know. But don't say straight away. Don't take him til he comes back 18 or 19. No.

Interviewer: Are there other things about what happened with your grandson that you would like people to know about?

CO: I think this is the time that people have got to understand now. Because right now, there is a lack of traditional ways, you can see your kids wandering and doing things, in the bad ways the good things, you know, we still do things we look after them and make them quite in Aboriginal ways and all that kind of stuff. But this, no. Nobody knows they coming there for them. Nobody knows it's coming there for them. They can hear what's welfare for, but I don't know when time or what day and who's looking at them. They be aware all the time but a bit tricky there for them to

understand how close we are with the balandas or something like this in a deeply ways, strongly ways about getting away. They say 'oh no, no – it's [language] comes', but no. That's why we're scared of them, we have to take them bush first and the come back when one day they go away.

CO: Sometimes you know they look , go to school. We tell them you go to school. So they go to school in [place] and come back and we talk in our language. So going to school and coming back. And then we know what the welfare what they do to us and we've got things to think about with kids gotta be educated and not with that mob. Especially when they get sick. That's the time our people and especially bush people there who doesn't understand English about this programs now, they just get them sick and maybe they stay bush for a while and just go around, putting the eyes around. Or maybe from the hospital, they get it from there, they get reports from there. I don't know. Maybe the nurse they ask 'they're very sick. I think we have to give it to balanda she can look after them'. I don't know where they are connected, I don't know.

CO: I think other countrymen of mine they stay out bush, and some of them they stay in communities. They say wouldn't care. I mean wouldn't care balanda comes in and we're still going to talk to them. We're still going to manage for our kids too and when they get sick we take them to hospital because sometimes we will tell them not to come near us. Don't talk about for our kids. The other ones don't because the other ones you know they just mumbling, mumbling, mumbling and balanda say 'ah, keep watching'. And the mum says, 'you're going to take it away from me.' And they come straight to me, which balanda, nurse or teacher, welfare. So I have to let them know you watch it.

Interviewer: And when welfare comes and they're talking to people, are people able to understand what they're saying. Do they have interpreters?

CO: No. No. Some welfare they think they know their English, no. Even the big papers there full of - no. Not without the interpreter.

Interviewer: Do they ask people to sign documents?

CO: They do. But I don't what hell they do. Yeah that's why we're really confused up there. They need the interpreter be there all the time for them to read the paper first before signing the paper.

Interviewer: Do they get to talk to a lawyer before they sign the paper?

CO: No. I only heard of the police coming around with the police and a lawyer. I mean welfare. I mean welfare talk to the police, police help the welfare to come over there. Grab it, grab it. And the police go there, ah you finished. And you know for protecting them, all the welfares.

Interviewer 2: So can you explain what it means now that he's back. So he left when he was 7 and he got back when he was 18.

CO: He made me strong.

- Interviewer 2:** You touched only a little bit but now that he's back and he doesn't understand skin groups and how he connects to in his moiety and his skin groups names too. Can you explain how that really helps him to fit into a community?
- CO:** He knows his skin groups and he knows his surname and also the skin names goes from the countries, the skin names of the countries names and a person, his grandfather's names too is going to be there too. His skin has gotta be - it's like an ID. His skin has got to be his ID. Once he has his skin name he knows straight away.
- Interviewer 2:** So he has to relearn all that?
- CO:** He's learning and he's getting by the skin names and also a skin name from the other side so two moieties there. And [skin group] and he's from [skin group] and I'm from [skin group]. So I'm in charge from there. So [skin group] has got to be like working for me and I will be working for him too. So we are both working together here.
- Interviewer 2:** So if you don't understand that, how difficult is it?
- CO:** Oh, you be sitting there in the shade. You won't be coming to the other shade. Maybe you go over there to the other shade sitting down people finish and then you say, 'come on ready we go home.' And then when the big ceremony comes he have to sit by himself. So I have to go and sit there until I make him comfortable to come through. It's very hard when the big ceremony comes and he has to stay away and really dancing things and all the things you have to learn. Until he learns the step. Little bit by little bit, come, come. He has to fully knows that properly.
- Interviewer 2:** That's very important?
- CO:** That's very important. That's important that you can stay stronger as like we teach him to behave and so he can learn how to behave himself and he knows where the skin groups are. Every skin group and the two moieties comes from this way there. He knows where it is yeah.
- Interviewer 2:** And it teaches him how to be good and how not to do bad things?
- CO:** That's it he behave himself all the way, get the message to the [skin group] and so we know he's doing the job and give the job to him so he will take the place that he will teach and then he teach the other mob. Before if we do that we have to teach him more and more until he get to understand and good behaviour and do things, no fighting.
- Interviewer 2:** So all that time he was away, he missed out?
- CO:** He missed out. He's missed out of all what you call them, between the balanda you can grow as you want but in the bush we like to be alone inside. It's like a bit separately from the balanda. To us it's very strong for us to, we say I'm a blackfella I'm shame here right now. I don't want to be talking to you. Want to one, you know, so I run away from you into the bush because I take my kids into the bush so we can get our, what we called a skill. A skill that he learn by speak, hunting and tradition he will take over when I'm gone. Pass away. So he will be taking over so

he can pass it to other mob.

Interviewer 2: So it's a responsibility.

CO: It's a responsibility to the other peoples and he's responsible for other countries too.

Interviewer 2: And he can't have that until he has that knowledge.

CO: Until he'll pass it. When I say to you ready, I can pass it over to you. But it's not yet. It's not yet.

CO: It's been taken away. It's been covered, it's been covered, it's been covered by this kind of stuff. Those things cities been covered from him, from them. And they should have been talking in the bush so they can see the birds and with the birds and dancing things like we dance when we eat those things, it's like a prayer, we need to be culture way. We have a praying dance. That's our culture way when you have emu dance, kangaroo dance, all the things you have to get it. That's why we get pray from them, it needs to give them to you. This way they grow up and they'll feed you. And we say we have fish here, in the bush tuckers.

Interviewer 2: And the stories for country and that?

CO: Everything that he miss. Country stories, sing stories, versing, there's many things to complete there. He missed out many things. You know right now he's struggling to go hunting and we give him a little bit more and more and we go out to hunt by yourself. So he's trying slowly but he's not fully covered here. Everything is not fully covered yet.

CO: Yeah I'd like to be letting people know too it's like my grandson is. To be like, say, warn them first before balanda comes. Not balanda comes first then after. Warn them first. Or balanda comes to me to warn them. Or, give me permission to talk to them. You know, and anything they thinks like documents and that you know, should be shown by like me an interpreter or somebody who will understand. So someone can explain to them the proper way of how it's going to be taken, how strong it will be taken, how anything going to be happening. We're talking about life here, the kid's life. I kept my children, my grandchildren and I brought them up, they looking after me now. They're not supposed to be. This is where we are. This is the way we are. Our strong culture to live how we live. So we've done both of them we live with the buffalos, kangaroos, we can teach him snakes, the next danger things, especially camping, going ceremony, many things. The thing that we can give you to them that comes stronger.

CO: Yes. Yes. This it will keep away from the problem. And so when they grow up we give them promise too. So don't you muck around. We tell them good way. Until you're good men, his there wife too, you both looking to each other. We can you to them, you know, in other away. Because once they have something else they can have their own children and they will teach their children. Look at culture way. Look at many things. Many things that we teach them, many things to teach them.

END OF INTERVIEW