

# The Road to Gamilaraay

## Transforming Service Conference

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By George Huitker

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered and pay respects to elders past and present and other descendants of First People also gathered here today. I would also like to express a will to go beyond mere acknowledgement in the hope that any ideas in this talk may inspire true action and some movement along the path to true reconciliation.

I lastly acknowledge my fellow speakers at this conference and thank them for giving us all a sense of solidarity, unity and hope as we seek to define and refine our service endeavour. I similarly thank the Transforming Service 2018 Committee for their often unseen work in preparation of the conference, as well as providing me with the privilege of keynote-speaking today. I do so with humility, recognizing Aunty Lenore's words yesterday morning that "No stories are more important than others".

The better version of this story would ultimately be from the Gamilaraay people with whom we walk alongside in northwestern New South Wales. No words or slideshows could matter half as much as their own assessment and version of this story about a relationship formed between myself, my students, my staff, my band, and my friends – with the communities centred around the beautiful schools of Minimbah Aboriginal, Moree East, Kiah Pre and Tingha Public.

I was encouraged by a mentor Phillip Heath<sup>1</sup> to explain at the outset *why* it is we all set out on "The Road to Gamilaraay". And the answer lies in the hearing and heeding of a call, a soft song, but often a cry from our own country to not place windows where we cannot see the powerless. It is a call to action that echoes down the corridors of retirement villages for the elderly - much like where my mother spent her final days; in the schools and residences and recreational activities for people with disabilities - where you often find my students and I; and for me, most markedly, it is in the places (as identified by that very mentor) where "the restless spirits of the

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<sup>1</sup> Phillip Heath is currently principal of Barker College and was principal of Radford College between 2009 and 2013.

dispossessed... call you to do something big to heal the land." It asks us, often pointedly, is the status quo a standard, a reality, a call that you can truly walk past?"

This story begins with an uncomfortable teacher approaching a rock, upon which sits an upset young primary school boy. The teacher doesn't know what to do with all that grief the boy was shedding. But he remembers contemplative theologian Sarah Bachelard once saying that "so often... we're unwilling to be with the discomfort of our anxiety, helplessness, or grief. So we rush around trying to cheer people and implement premature solutions, masking our sense of powerlessness with activity. But the truth is we cannot contribute to the healing of people, relationships or the deepest of our world's wounds unless we are willing first to be with things as they are."

It's sage advice. I don't know why I ignored it. More fool me, as I sat awkwardly next to that boy on the rock unpacking the school motto: "Totally Proud and Strong", and clumsily suggesting to him that adopting it would fix absolutely everything. Hmmm. *What* was compelling *me* to fix everything? Probably ego. Reputation. And possibly me being unwilling to be with the discomfort of anxiety, helplessness, or grief. Why was this becoming all about me?

We wordlessly kicked a footy for a spell. That did more than any of my yabbering.

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Who am I (for those that don't know me well)? I might work that into a story. Recently in Sydney, while waiting for a concert to start at The Enmore, I went and had an overpriced chilli burger at an establishment nearby. The fact it was overpriced is a moot point, because I forgot to pay as I walked out. A convoy of vitriol followed me: the young man behind the counter, the stocky owner who appeared out of nowhere, and even half dozen morally outraged co-chilli-burger eaters, and before I knew it I found myself up against a city wall with very little in defence except to quote from the bible: "He who is without sin cast the first stone". (John 8:7)

But what I wanted to say was: this is not who I am. Who I really am George Huitker, a flawed but essentially nice person who lived a lot of his adult life supporting a mother with vascular dementia; who has taught at a school called Radford College in Canberra for three decades, the last decade of which he's been Director of Service Learning and developed outreach programs

which have gathered some notice outside of the ACT; and who lives his life trying to get people, mostly teens (who generally think I'm OK for a dude who recently turned 51) to be openhearted and working *alongside* others who may be disempowered through programs acquainting them with the elderly, with people of all ages with disabilities, and with people in remote and not so remote rural communities. He also always pays his bills on time and regularly tips, and he tries to understand people at deeper than surface levels, including people struggling to run a small businesses, as well as run after possible thieves.

What I wanted to say was this: I would value *any* chance for you to get to know **who I am** before you judge, persecute or arrest me? An epiphany occurred right there in the middle of Enmore Road. This is exactly how some of my Indigenous brothers and sisters feel when backed up against a wall of soul-destroying statistics, history and prejudice (to label a few of the stones thrown). So, as a result of all this, before I enter any service endeavor - let alone form any opinion about associated people and things - I'll ask myself to ask those I walk alongside: "Who are you?" It's the essential and ultimate form of respect.

And also because I've found, after a long time in this game, some serious misunderstandings and outcomes can occur if you don't.

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"What is service learning?" is a follow-up question which frequently follows "What do you actually do for a living, George?" It's sometime accompanied with "What exactly is service?" For many, service is what sportstars do quite publicly after an equally public transgression. (So let's expect some Australian cricketers to undertake some service activity shortly.) I figure it best to commence this talk by sharing three fundamental ideas that inform *my* idea about what service and service learning actually might be.

My boys' leadership group were recently viewing Lieutenant General Morrison's now famous and possibly over-quoted announcement detailing Defence Investigations into allegations of some unacceptable online behaviour by Army members in which he stated: "the standard you walk past is the standard you accept." My lads and I explored and unpacked that idea in depth and later that evening driving home I came up with the notion that service learning is perhaps **our own ongoing exploration of what exactly it is in this life that we cannot walk past – to the point of actually doing something about it.** Is that accurate? Sarah Bachelard goes on to remind us

that the “practice of ‘being with’ doesn’t mean we never seek to change things” so I emit a philosophical sigh of relief over a pressing need to push service boulders.

Around this same time, at a PD session, a colleague shared with us the World Health Organisation definition of well-being as: a state “in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.” To me, this is imperative: that well-being is linked to *being able to contribute to society.*

This was echoed in Angela Duckworth’s recent Bestseller “Grit”, in which she attests that “what ripens passion is the conviction that your work matters. For most people, interest without purpose is nearly impossible to sustain for a lifetime. It is therefore imperative that you identify your work as both personally interesting and, at the same time, integrally connected to the well-being of others. Kathryn Boyle reminded us in her address<sup>2</sup> that spirituality “is not a private affair between oneself and God.... It has a social dimension.”

And then there’s my mum, J.A.Huitker, who often exclaimed to her exuberant, easily distracted and often unrepentant son, G.J.Huitker: “I want deeds. Not words.” (She certainly practised what she preached as far as brevity is concerned.) I’ll come back to her later. But in quoting Huitker (J), Huitker (G) is reminded of Bachelard once more, particularly her periodic warnings about developing a Messiah Complex under “the tacit assumption that service is about helping from the top down.” That some of us standing or sitting here perhaps have a Messiah Complex and think it is up to us to save the world, may well be a given. But humility means ridding oneself of that desire - and this can be hurtful and humiliating - but also a blessed relief as we realise that we’re no better or worse than anyone else for it.

She goes on to add, that in Australia, it is necessary to recognise that true reconciliation calls not just for good intentions, but for our willingness to be with what is. “Dare we respond to this cry from our indigenous brothers and sisters, to the invitation to be present to the full weight of our history, the continuing trauma of communities, and honestly, of our unknowing about where to go from here.” Dare we respond? Great question.

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<sup>2</sup> Transforming Service 2018, Keynote 2: *The faith call to action in the field, making connections between our scriptural roots and service to others.*

In December 2016, some ex-students and I were invited to a Colour Run in the tiny tin town of Tingha. It was one of the most poignant and powerful days of my life. The town had suffered a year of exceptional tragedy, as towns like it are prone to sometimes have. As Tim Winton recently observed: *In some Aboriginal communities, the funeral has become the dominant form of social gathering.* I won't go into the reasons for the Colour Run, or the funerals. But suffice to say the town was in need of a break from the colourless stats and gloomy reminders of mortality which contribute to the Closing the Gap Report's annual recognition that something needs to be done to stop Aboriginal people dying 10 years earlier than non-Indigenous Australians. And so, after 400 Radford students had returned to maintain a relationship begun in 2011, we were invited, maybe called by those restless spirits of the dispossessed, to live Bachelard's challenge "to be present to the full weight of our history, the continuing trauma of communities, and ...our unknowing about where to go from here."

As you will see from these slides, the day was incredible and beyond the capacity for words to do justice in describing what occurred. The whole town rocked up, formed a circle, acknowledged traditional owners, welcomed all present with a smoking ceremony, before the whole town lined up to do laps of the Tingha Tigers homeground – all while my students (alongside league legend Nathan Blacklock) threw every colour of the rainbow at the town's previously perfectly-white T-shirts, shorts, tutus, whatever was the go. For a blessed moment I didn't have Stan Grant's voice in my head reminding me that Aboriginal teens are statistically more likely to go to jail than finish school – or Chris Sarra reminding me that in this lucky country "the flow of access to opportunity" is "very restricted" for Aboriginal people: two comparative buckets, to use his analogy filled "at quite disparate levels".

I knew deep in my heart, that a standard existed here I could never walk past again – and thus, by my own definition, was presented by my life's "service station" (if you pardon the pun), situated there at a crossroads where I'd need to frequently retank if I was to truly call myself an Australian citizen. But for now, this sense of community in joyous colour, saying a collective 'no' to all that has gone before, was ***transformative service***, for both parties involved.

How did we get here, those kids and I? What led to a private school 1000 kilometres away in the sheltered hub of Canberra, being asked to stand in a circle of goodly defiance to then hurl rainbows of hope? As Director of Service Learning at Radford College I'd been given plenty of opportunities to experiment with finding a way of hurling hope, and have had modest success in

hurling (metaphorically) closed-off screen-dependent teens into outwardly-looking pushes of service boulders. But, quite frankly I lacked humility. In taking arms against poor service practice, I would often be unwise and unkind to well-intentioned people who didn't fit my gritty paradigm for effective service. And I apologise for that – no one likes their good intentions questioned...

I loved smugly quoting Charles Dickens: "*There were two classes of charitable people: one, the people who did a little and made a great deal of noise; the other, the people who did a great deal and made no noise at all*" (Bleak House) without recognising just how much I liked making noise about what I actually did. I became equally fond of quoting George Bernard Shaw too: "Do not do unto others as you would have them do unto you – they may have different tastes", mostly to service enthusiasts who regularly exclaim to me that they wish to make a difference. (I could deeply relate here to Lauren Hichaaba's likening of this desire 'to make a difference' to colonialism<sup>3</sup>.) I guess the only use of such smugness and smarminess when setting the bar high for others, is that by default you then set it high for yourself.

So when Richard Browning alerted me to the wonderful Gunawirra Organisation – who among many things work towards helping indigenous communities through early intervention programs – we both decided that merely fundraising for this organisation wasn't good enough. (We were going through an anti-fundraising stage that possibly hasn't entirely left us.) We needed to give more than money. We needed to give *people*. We needed to *form a relationship* based on mutual respect and as a result, preferably one that would *return*, in some way, to walk alongside the disempowered people of these targeted Gunawirran communities.

In order to operate from a better place, I began formulating a service learning palmcard for my students, designed to give them a philosophic grounding from which to springboard into their service endeavour more confidently and with clearer heads and hearts. It has changed shape over the years and many conferences, but in essence has been simplified down to 5 (possibly 7) Rs against which I'd like to use to shape and order the remainder of the presentation:

Respect. Relationship. Return. Reality. Resilience. (Research and respect underpin these 5.)

My favourite "R" became Relationship, because without it, we may as well just set up a direct debit of the soul that gives empathy (and funds) once a fortnight to some random charities we

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<sup>3</sup> Transforming Service 2018, Keynote 4: *What you do matters: Learning together with open minds and generous hearts.*

have no human contact with. But it is also my favourite "R" in that if things are going awry in our service learning, it's usually and quite simply because we are not working hard enough at the non-monetary, relational side of things. Or, worse still, we don't even have one. As discovered one night on Enmore Road when the shoe was on the other foot, if we do not know "Who" the other person is when engaged in a service relationship, we can never really hope for anything more than a transaction, or something transitory, or a great big burger of misunderstanding with a chilli on top, to occur.

Respect also implies another "R" word: research. Helder Teixeira asked us to complete it<sup>4</sup> prior to visiting his country, Timor Leste. I'm often flabbergasted by the number of servers who enter a situation without reading up or googling up on background info. So I'm big on presenting the kids with links (or references for the library-types) and this led me to the amazing Australian anthropologist WEH Stanner, who talks about our lack of understanding of Indigenous Australia as a "cult of forgetfulness practised on a nation scale" and how for most of us non-Indigenous people, it is almost as if a window has been strategically placed "to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape." If we take the word "quadrant" quite literally, do a quarter of our service programs actually address this "cult of forgetfulness"? Has this conference's programming? As Dr Meg Noack reminded us at the start of this conference, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives should sit centrally anchored within the National Curriculum<sup>5</sup>.

And so in further researching where that "quadrant" existed near us, it came as no surprise that it was exactly where organisations like Gunawirra were working in preschools. Reality TV was pushing us into some places within Stanner's "quadrant" and squarely into the face of 6 out of 10 Australians who had, if the press release was to be believed, "never met an Indigenous person" (at least not that they know of) or never had the chance to walk in their shoes for just a few steps."<sup>6</sup>

And then of course into our story comes Midnight Oil. I began to re-investigate my obsession with Midnight Oil, now finally understanding why in 1986 they packed up their amps and travelled into the dead centre to learn more about their country and its strained relationship with

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<sup>4</sup> Transforming Service 2018, Keynote 3: *What you do matters: Learning together with open minds and generous hearts.*

<sup>5</sup> Transforming Service 2018, Keynote 1: *Service Learning in Australia. Where are we up to? Setting the scene.*

<sup>6</sup> See SBS's reality TV series, *First Contact* (2016) and its second season (2017). I have personal reservations that reality television is the best way to address the issues concerned.

its First People. I'm now a little embarrassed about my initial indifference to "Diesel and Dust", the album which was a result of this journey. Yet the power of our developing relationships in Gamilaraay country found me emulating my musical heroes in service, spiritual and musical spheres, and shaving the head and taking my band for a tour up north playing Oz Rock for the communities we had relationship with, thanks to Radford, Gunawirra and huge twists of fate which I will reveal shortly.

With a receiver now open to messages, they suddenly came thick and fast from the most unlikely of sources. ACT Brumbies star David Pocock – who seems to be travelling on a similar trajectory of blending his work, play, passion and beliefs into an invigorating whole – reminded us to "Check the Approach" especially in the way we can promote helplessness through our helping. Similarly, Sarah Bachelard's stirring talks, including one at the last Transforming Service Conference and another at the last Dirrum Dirrum Conference, kept us honest about the self-referencing and self-congratulatory euphoria surrounding "good works". And my inspirational colleagues Fr Richard Browning and Dylan Mordike would always remain as central reality-checkers for me with their constant reminders to work *alongside* those we so-called "serve" rather than trying to make or enforce "a difference" onto other people we barely know.

As a result, Radford and myself became better listeners. And "from this place of deep and patient listening" we became able to more authentically serve, and to let a situation suggest the way ahead, rather than pushing and imposing (our) will and preconceived ideas on others. This fortuitously led us to the work of Australian educationist, Dr Chris Sarra, who simply reinforced the same message about authentic dialogue, patient listening and leaving the "'I' who wishes to make a difference' at the door.

Suddenly, at the Gunawirra Schools we chose to visit up near the QLD border, something miraculous occurred. In putting respect and relationships at the forefront – and *returning*, both as individuals and as an "organisation", our students could not only comfortably be themselves but be with those in their classrooms in ways which constantly surprised me. I dragged one lad kicking and screaming along every one of the 1000+ clicks on the road to Gamilaraay. And all of a sudden I found him, like his peers, modelling themselves on the very teachers they perhaps occasionally rebelled against. (I'm not talking about the highly-caffeinated model of us teachers at the end of Term 2 and 4 here. No, I'm talking about that better version that sees the classroom

as *everything* and the individual student we walk/work alongside as part of a mutual journey of learning, discovery and imagining.)

This brings us well and truly to the third “R” of “Returning”. You plainly do not have a respectful relationship if you do not return to it. To me there should be no such thing as crass as a service one-night stand. That’s self evident. Thus with the Gamilaraay trips, as with all service endeavor I choose to be involved with, if we cannot *return* to it, I’m not sure I can be enthused to be a part of it.

And so it was that Gunawirra guided us towards the outskirts of Armidale, where we found ourselves in Barnaby’s backyard (alongside some of Canberra’s public servants) walking and working alongside the 100% Indigenous students and staff of Minimbah Aboriginal School. It was at Minimbah that the student I previously referred to returned *twice* – no longer kicking and screaming - and in a moment of extreme courage and to the chagrin of some of his gangsta peers, fronted up in front of the whole of Radford College on Foundation Day and expressed just how much this service experience had transformed him. I wrote about his “Road To Gamilaraay” in *Big Life* if you’d like to read more of the surrounding story. I had a tear in my eye that day. You get that with this stuff. His speech went as follows:

*I’m no public speaker, but here goes... Last year I found myself in serious trouble at school, and as part of the consequences, I had to undertake a certain amount of community service. I thought that might all be a waste of time to be perfectly honest. But I started going to RAID Basketball<sup>7</sup> and the fun everyone was having there opened my eyes a little. Not really sure why it took me so long to get there. With the gentle encouragement of several teachers – and perhaps the not-so gentle encouragement by Mr H – I found myself heading out on Gamilaraay*

*I thought the entire experience was going to be terrible to be perfectly honest, but actually those nine days were the best of my life and completely changed me in so many ways... I have gone from being a kid who was going down the wrong track, to someone who has a new and different perspective on life. If you’re thinking of going on one of these, you should stop thinking about it and just go. It might change your perspective on stuff. Might change someone else’s life for the better. Thanks for listening.<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Recreational Activities for people with an Intellectual Disability. On any Wednesday of term you can see Radford College students playing social basketball with people with disabilities for a couple of hours.

<sup>8</sup> This speech was brave indeed, as after it he was mocked by a gaggle of his former peers for his ‘transformation’, to the point which had me questioning whether I had done the right thing in pushing him to make it.

Gunawirra also led us to the beautiful Kiah Aboriginal Preschool, also 100% Indigenous and situated on the edge of the Moree Plains. This in turn led us to Moree East Public, a primary school Kiah feeds, with a similarly high Indigenous population and a school which wonderfully embraces its culture with proud Indigenous teachers, administrators, elders and aides.

Tingha Public School, or TPS, with its “Totally Proud and Strong” motto, has seen us mutually straighten, strengthen and look convincingly into each other’s eyes since we first knocked on their handprinted front door, after Gunawirra again pointed us to the nearby pre-school. Some of the students at TPS are descendants of the survivors of the Myall Creek Massacre of 1838 and as our relationship grew, so did our awareness and understanding of the extent of the frontier conflict in this region. It became yet another standard we simply could not walk past.

Nucoorilma Elder and recent Order of Australia Medal recipient, Aunty Sue Blacklock, now welcomes Radford not only to her town and home, but also asks us to play an active part each year in the Myall Creek Commemoration (alongside other schoolkids of the region) – in a ceremony reaching its 180th anniversary this June. What has been especially transformative about this ‘service’, is that the relationship has become so respectful that students from *both* schools with Aboriginal heritage can now learn more about their people, culture and (often unwritten) history in a powerful way: in community. **As in all authentic service endeavor, you cannot tell who is serving whom when you ‘walk alongside’ each other this closely.** And something powerful, I believe, draws us closer together – especially in three Radford boys with Gamilaraay blood – who have literally and metaphorically come to embrace their own family history in a way no classroom or book can do.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with Myall Creek, this is what happened in a nutshell. (At this point I will show a slide which reads: “On 10 June 1838, a gang of stock-men led by a squatter rode into Myall Creek Station and brutally murdered about twenty-eight unarmed women, children and old men. The younger Wirrayaraay men were away cutting bark on a neighbouring station.”) And this is us walking alongside descendants of the slain, with some words by Pocock once more. (At this point I will show a slide which show G-trippers amongst descendants of those murdered at Myall Creek and an accompanying quote from David Pocock: “Surely the only way forward is the way of heroes like Desmond Tutu, who advocate reconciliation. Not a reconciliation that simply forgives and forgets, but a reconciliation that rights wrongs and allows

all parties to begin sharing a common ground, realising their common humanity and making reparations for past damages.”)

Proud of the developing relationships between my school and the region, I felt the need to share more than just my professional self and tentatively asked my band – who specialise in Midnight Oil covers – whether they would like to do a tour of Gamilaraay country and share songs and stories. Perhaps sing “Beds are Burning”. **It was then I realised, as the connections increase, so does coincidence.** My bass player and friend, Chris Brown, said to me “Tingha? Your programs are in Tingha? Georgie, I grew up there.” If that wasn’t enough: “My dad was principal of the primary school. Is it still there?” I told him it certainly was and that we’d be playing a concert for the school community. “Is there a tree near the cricket nets?” he continued. “I planted one there as a kid... And is my mate Paulie still in town? We used to play rugby together as kids. He face-planted me on the cricket pitch”. (At this point I will show slides of Chris’s tree, now fully grown, and his reunion with Paulie at the Junk Sculpture concert; Paulie was then an Indigenous Officer at TPS.) Chris’s son, Peter, was to sign up for a G-Trip just a little while later – and attended the school so intrinsically linked to his family.



What happened on that tour was incredibly life-affirming and too “big” to talk about or summarise here. (I have written about it in the before-mentioned book called *Big Life* if you are interested any.) But suffice to say, I’m glad I followed my rock-heroes lead and took to this ‘quadrant’ of the country I knew so very little about, to simply “be with” the people there. Like the Oils, I came back rejuvenated, inspired and full of songs.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Near Myall Creek: <https://vimeo.com/231041657> and Tiny Tin Town: <https://vimeo.com/259137287>.

Yet as relationships grew, so can the strain on them and a feeling of futility that anything can really be done to break vicious cycles that threaten our desire to do something big to heal the land. That fourth “R”: Reality. It rears its ugly head. Like an attacking snake. The darker reasons behind holding The Colour Run of 2016 reflect and echo so much of what you read in each year’s Closing The Gap Report. And one cannot help but wonder how we would react if those stats and figures – and the distinct lack of any improvement in any of them – were closer to our own homes and lives. As my friend Matt Pye (who ran a program for troubled teens which provided them with practical training for trade pathways) always reminded me and my students: “Do you think you would be any different if you were born here?”

As we embrace an often bitter reality together - and I return to Sarah Bachelard’s words here once more (slide appears again showing her “Dare we respond” quotation) - we come, full circle, to the last of my 5Rs: Resilience. As I watch vital programs close or become compromised (I cite my friend Matt Pye’s *Crossing The Divide* program here), beautifully inspired carers suffer burn-out, gaps significantly widen and the cult of indifference reach new heights of carelessness, I know that authentic service cannot be transformative without robust, trained and sustained resilience. It needs to be mutual: by definition, all of the 5 Rs on my palmcard need to be tackled together. Alongside.

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Now to turn the mirror. Physician/server/apparent-“expert”-in-service-learning, can you heal *yourself*? As a keynote speaker here today, have you gone the hard yards or do you simply present a good way *how*, accompanied by some carefully placed and chosen slides and quotations? What have you yourself learnt from all that you have read and/or heard after all these years? What have you discovered when you finally shut up and deeply *listen*?

My final story. The ultimate test perhaps? When my mother died I became overwhelmed with an uncomfortable grief that manifested itself physically and mentally. I took leave of work but found myself unequivocally compelled to return to the very heart of where perhaps my most powerful service relationship occurred. And so, almost hours after Father Richard concluded a beautiful funeral service for mum at the Radford Chapel, I looked around and saw many familiar faces,

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including many from previous Gamilaraay Trips, now in double-figures. I put “Diesel and Dust” on in the car, and hit the **Road to Gamilaraay** where I decided to sit through things and “be with” my grief.

Then one afternoon, I found myself on a rock at TPS – where I’d been volunteering as an aide - when a familiar Gamilaraay boy, the very one I’d been encouraging to stand totally, proud and strong and to look strangers or adversity confidently in the eye... did just that when he heard from his classroom teacher the real reason behind Uncle George volunteering around the school at a non-Radford time of the year to visit.

“I’m sorry about your mum,” he bravely said, his eyes displaying an understanding of the importance of family - and the gaping hole that opens up in their sudden, inexplicable absence. Once again, we sat for a second or two on a rock, not allowing for too much awkwardness or melodrama to creep in. A moment of understanding and just a bit of silence - somewhere away from the adult need for words, words, words. Maybe, just maybe, in all true service relationships, the good stuff comes full circle if you sit it out together. Lilla Watson has been repeatedly quoted throughout this conference: *If you've come here to help me, you're wasting your time. But if you've come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.*”

Let us work together indeed.

I resisted a tear and hoped, desperately, that somewhere, somehow, mum was watching me slack-off once again. It seemed as if everything that I have learnt from service learning, every person I’ve been fortunate to meet through exploring “deeds not words”, every song I’ve ever sung on the subject, all seemed to converge and be contained in this serendipitous moment of glistening and transformative service.

As I ruffled the hair of a child who most probably is a descendent of a survivor of unspeakable evil 180 years ago, I said with these eyes: *Enough of sorrow.*

And then with my mouth:

“Hey kid. Let’s go kick a footy.”

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