

## PODCAST



## Season 1 — Episode 2

## Identity and Culture

## JAX COMPTON

*Hello, and welcome to a special podcast series from The Healing Foundation, Healing Our Way. In this series, Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people share their thoughts about intergenerational trauma, healing, and the concept of truth telling. We also speak with Stolen Generations survivors and descendants about their journeys and thoughts on how we can continue to heal our communities.*

*To begin, we would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Lands and Waters across this beautiful Country. We acknowledge Elders past, present, and emerging.*

*Before listening, please take note that this podcast may touch on sensitive topics related to trauma. I'm Jax Compton, your host for the Healing Our Way podcast.*

*In this episode, we speak with four amazing guests, Uncle Matt Doyle; a renowned cultural practitioner, Ryan Donohue Pitt; a descendant of the Stolen Generations, Karlie Stewart; a proud Yuin Nation descendant, and a member of The Healing Foundation Interim Youth Advisory Group, and Libby Brown; a counsellor at Aboriginal Counselling in Western Sydney. In this episode we will explore the relationship between identity, culture, and healing.*

*Hello out there and welcome back to The Healing Foundations podcast. We are so very grateful and excited to have some wonderful people in the room for this episode about identity and culture. We wanna learn more about our identity. We want to learn more about culture, and what it means to our well-being, and how we heal and learn from all of our experiences growing up as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.*

*In this room right now, we have some amazing, amazing people and I can't wait for you to hear their stories and hear it from them about their lives and about their identities and their cultures. I'm going to start by talking to the amazing Karlie Stewart. Karlie you are a phenomenal young woman, but I want you to tell everybody listening across this entire world, who you are, and where you come from.*

## KARLIE STEWART

*Hi, my name is Karlie. I'm a Wandj Wandj woman from Yuin Country on the South Coast of New South Wales. I'm a Stewart, that's on my mother's mother's side of the family, but I'm a Williams on my mother's father's side of the family. I grew up in Nowra on the South Coast, and I have a lot of family in and around Nowra, along the South Coast, around Wreck Bay. Yeah, so that's home. Yeah, really special part of who I am. I moved to Sydney when I was about 9 or 10, so I've lived in Sydney since then, mostly connected to the La Perouse Community.*

## JAX COMPTON

*Another wonderful young person we have sitting in this room is Ryan Donohue Pitt. I just want to say that better, so Ryan Donohue Pitt. Yeah. How are you?*

## RYAN DONOHUE PITT

*I'm good thank you, how are you?*

## JAX COMPTON

*Very good! Ryan is a... I need a list of adjectives to- no, but you're a really strong man in in this community and you're doing amazing things. And again, you're young and the things that you've achieved to date you should be very proud of. And I know your family's very proud of, but what's interesting about you - and I really want you to share more of your stories about...is your nanna. So your nanna was a member of the Stolen Generations and she was a wonderful person as well. And your dad in particular talks about her all the time, can you tell us all about you and a little bit about your family?*

## RYAN DONOHUE PITT

*Alright, so my name is Ryan. I'm from Kempsey on the Mid North Coast. I'm a Dunghutti man and on my dad's side, I'm TI [Thursday Island] links and Northern Territory links. So my mother, she was born and bred, so was I, on Dunghutti Country, and then my dad is first generation from Stolen Gen. So my nan was taken from Alice Springs by the Second Heart Sisters, well not taken, stolen, to Garden Point. And then having lived there throughout her life and then taken to Sydney to work for free. Moving to Sydney, then Dad growing up in Woolloomooloo and then facing all those hardships as well. Yeah, but that's where I'm from.*

## JAX COMPTON

*So do you both - and I'm gonna put this to you both is - What does it mean to you to feel strong in, who you are in your identity? You know, you talked about your... where you come from and... Where your family members come from, but Karlie, to you, like what, what makes you feel strong in who you are?*

## KARLIE STEWART

*Yeah, it is a bit difficult. I was actually thinking about it this morning and thinking about... because I do feel really strong in who I am. I was thinking about identity and what... that as a concept means to me and for me I feel like, identity is, I think of myself as like a blanket, right? And all of who I am is that blanket. All the little woven parts of different fabrics, you know, and you make that- I think of my nan like sitting and making a blanket, knitting a blanket and just, you know, she'll pick it up at different times, she'll have a shit day, she'll come and - can I say that?*

*She'll have a bad day and she'll come home and you know, do a little bit of knitting and then she'll put it away for another couple of months and I, I feel like that's what your identity is, right? It's like this... this combination of all the parts of who you are and all of these different experiences. And you know, relationships and all of that, that contributes to your identity. And I suppose for me thinking about my identity is, well a lot of it is like thinking who I am and how did I get here? And how did I get to be this person?*

*Obviously, a massive part of that for me is being culturally connected to my family, and to Country, and to my community, but also to myself and knowing those parts of me, my roles and responsibilities to my family and Country and community and... you know, the community that I live and work in now and also my community back home.*

## JAX COMPTON

*And for you, Ryan, like - you talked about your nan, so you've had to do a lot of moving and shaking in your family to form that strong identity, because it was taken away from your nanna at such a young age. So, has there been this conscious effort to really connect to each other and build something for your family, even though you've come from that really traumatic experience for your nanna?*

## RYAN DONOHUE PITT

*Yeah, it's been hard because on my mother's side it's so strong. And because they're from the place that they are like, started from.*

*But on my nan's side it was hard at first and it was hard to like, comprehend as well, but gratefully, my nan found all of her brothers and sisters. So, we've been able to connect with our Northern Territory family and it's hard. I get kind of jealous as well because I can speak language and, I assume they're saying what are you saying? Like and me especially because I'm like I sound like I'm from Sydney as well. Yeah so I think identity as well is that like... I get to be part of that and I feel so strong with that. But then again, on like my mother's side, like I'm just... they were just so, she was such a strong woman in herself, and like... representing herself. Like I get the best of both worlds? Cause I'm so proud of like, my grandmother and her heritage. And hearing about stories and like all my other nannas up in Northern Territory, like being able to like, even if I call them now and feeling like I've known them for my entire life, which I have, but like, it's that deep rooted connection that I get as well... yeah.*

## JAX COMPTON

*That's amazing, coming from that resilience is... is amazing. And it's one of the- it makes me understand who... why you are who you are today. So thank you for sharing that story. So I wanted to introduce now, Libby Brown, who is just a wonderful woman, and strong, and she's got her own business with her husband. They met in university. It's an amazing story, they had four children together in that time you were studying, I just cannot right now with that, that's just an achievement and a half. So, I'm so happy you're here, being in this room with us. You make us feel safe and warm. Can you please tell us about you and your story and what you think about the correlation between having a strong identity and having strong mental health means to us as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.*

## LIBBY BROWN

*Thank you, Jax. They're kind words. So, I guess identity, that's our everything and I think that for us, as Aboriginal people, that's where our resilience comes from, is that identity and our ability to connect strong with each other, and with community, and with family, and with Country. That spiritual sense of knowing who we are and being grounded. I think you're right when Karlie talked about home and Country and you know, I think of that's the strength for me. I know when I'm homesick. I know when I need to go home and get my feet in the sand of, you know, the North Coast. Smell the salt in the air and really connect and I come back a hundred times stronger. I think that, I work with lots of people where it's that developing their identity and the sense of who we are, that is the real transition in life and when we transition, we're vulnerable and it's hard work.*

*So if we think about... we often when we're talking with clients and counselling, talk about that like the serpent and the shedding of skin and coming into new life. And it's sometimes a struggle. Or, you know, children relate very much to the cocoon and the butterfly. And you have to go through that to come out as a butterfly. And I think that for young people particularly, no matter what your background is, that young people, finding your feet of your identity, and then it's often two or threefold, or multilayered for our young people, we're an oral people. And so we built that identity and who people are through those yarns. When I try to explain to white fellas about transgenerational trauma, that's what I say, we're oral people and we brought that past to life in the now and handed that to a next generation. Yes, they need to know it.*

*But I'll also challenge people who want to carry that luggage that's not theirs to carry, you know? Is that your burden? I've had the discussion with young people that talk about the struggle, and I know they're not struggling and we have that yarn. You're not struggling, you're doing alright, you know, let the generation before you hold that. That's not yours to take from them. So I think... that connection is probably our real strength and our resilience. You know, part of genocide is not just that physical genocide, but the culture of, you know, stripping our language, stripping our culture and our identity.*

## JAX COMPTON

*Thank you for sharing that, Libby. Wonderful words. You've covered so many amazing things that we'll talk through today in this podcast. But I wanted to also introduce - you talked about culture, and the importance of culture - and I wanted to introduce somebody that's very responsible for a lot of us I feel like. Uncle Matt Doyle is in the room right now. Uncle Matt, I don't know if you know, but so many people that don't even come from Sydney feel like you're their family and you've created this... something in Sydney. Where who you are and the way you practise your culture is just something that they cling to in need. I want you to tell everybody that's not from Sydney, how amazing you are, your story, your family, and talk to us a little bit about what culture means to you?*

## UNCLE MATT DOYLE

*Ohh where do I start? I was born and raised in Sydney. My mum's family from Brewarrina, Goodooga. And so we're up in the northwest. We're Murrawari, our mob. My father's family, also from Sydney originally, but my dad's mum, that's from the Riverina and she's Wiradjuri, but never identified my father's family. So, my mum, she grew up in the bush, my grandmother, her mother, passed away when she was a baby. So she was raised by another person in the community and my grandmother's father went off and had another woman. So my grandmother really grew up, you know, as like an adopted child in Goodooga. And then pretty much lived there most of her life until she met my grandfather, who was a Stockman drover, jack of all trades.*

*And they just moved around all over New South Wales and Southern Queensland, wherever the work was. So my grandmother grew up without any of her family, any of her mob. She only knew names of, you know, relatives and whatever, and that passed on to my mum and her sisters, because they didn't grow up in that community either, because they grew up on the road, wherever the work was going from town to town, different school every couple of months, you know, helping Grandfather out with cattle and horses and sheep and all the rest of it. Until my mum was about fifteen then they moved to Sydney to go to work basically. So my mum was fifteen when she started working in a chocolate factory here in Sydney.*

*And the sisters were still in school. The younger ones and the older ones were out working as well. But what that really meant, for her and her sisters, was they grew up without family around them. Because they went from town to town and that sort of then came on when my mum had us, that sort of, we had that disconnect as well. It was a matter of I guess few years later, I started to question, you know who our mob was and where we're from and that sort of thing. Why can't I... why don't I know any language, and you know, all of these sorts of things. So I guess basically it was finding out my mum's history and story where she was born and where she came from. She was born in the bush, but grew up in Sydney more or less. And as a kid, you know you have questions.*

So I started asking questions to my mom and she could tell me a little bit. And my grandmother really didn't identify as an Aboriginal person. She didn't grow up with that identity, that cultural identity.

And also at the time, it was frowned upon for an Aboriginal person to be married to a white, a white man, and he had to get permission to do that. Particularly if you grew up in a mission. So she never really identified you know, as an Aboriginal person, which, you know, then it passed down to our generation as well.

Until I started to ask questions and wanted to know all these things, who we were, where we're from, what our language is, blah, blah, blah. So that was really the start of my journey in, in finding my identity, really. And I'm the youngest of three. But I was, I was the one who wanted to know. Know who we were and where we came from. So that started that journey, and I was the first out of my generation, out of all my cousins to go back, to community... where my mum was born, where my grandmother was born and reconnect with family. I just went up there and said my grandmother's name, that's my great grandfather. And they said, oh, yeah, you're my cousin, that's your cousin, and that's your cousin. Here's how you're related to all of these people. So more or less got a family tree. So then I brought that back, you know, to my family and that had a flow on effect. All my cousins, my brother and sister, all became interested and then saying, well, who are we and who's our mob? What's our language group? So on and so on. And from that they were able to start identifying with the community and with Country. Now they were happy to say and proud to say, oh, yeah, I'm Marrawarre. And my grandmother's from here and my great grandfather's from there, etcetera, etcetera.

So that's what really gave me my sort of personal identity and it wasn't til I studied at NAISDA, that I then started to, you know, take on all the cultural learnings from many different teachers, from many different communities. So, I was very lucky to have that as a teenager when I started at NAISDA, and that's when I really decided that's the part that was chosen for me. Find out who you are. Learn who you are. Learn about, learn your culture, and take that on board and that becomes your identity.

Once you have that, then you're able to then share it and teach it and pass it on to kids in your own community or whatever. And that's pretty much what I've been doing for the last, you know, 30 years or so, is now sharing that culture, and connecting kids who may have had the same, you know, identity issues or problems that I did. Particularly here in Sydney, so that's what I've been able to do is, go to schools, early childhood, grade schools, high schools, whatever, and connect. Start sharing culture and hopefully connecting kids with their own culture as well.

## **JAX COMPTON**

That's why I feel like the way you hold yourself, even though for a long time like you say, your identity wasn't there and you were quite young as well, realising that.

So, I guess what I want to learn from Karlie and Ryan is - you guys are quite young but you're so strong in who you are already. So listening to Uncle Matt's story, and knowing that there are people probably listening that can 100% relate to your Uncle Matt - and I'm probably going through it right now - what you would say to young people about trying to build themselves up and get that confidence in their identity, and what connections they can start doing or making to feel strong in who they are.

## **KARLIE STEWART**

Young people that are really lost and unsure of who they are especially in the Redfern Waterloo - just in the city area in general - I feel like you know, they know that their lineage is that way or this way. Or you know, they're from the North Coast or inland somewhere or South Coast. But they were born in Sydney and they've lived in Sydney their whole lives, so they know who they are. But they're a little bit disconnected.

And so... I think about my experiences growing up and how it helped me feel connected to who I am and who I've always known that I am. Because like I said, we talked about it all the time, when we were kids, and I'll talk to the young people I work with about that and how important it is too. Even though they can't be back home on Country because they live here in Sydney and this is where their families are. It's about, you know, having those little cultural experiences and letting themselves be exposed and open to what that looks like in the community that they're in to be able to start forming that stronger, you know, foundations of their cultural identity.

Because there are things I think that are cultural, that are like, universal. You know, the things like the boys getting in their like lap-laps and the girls painting up in particular ways. You know, the fact that women are the backbones of our communities and that's, you know, as long as we can ever remember and we can ever talk about that's who we are, and that's who we've always been. And that's nationwide. So there's those things that are universal and, you know, important across all of our communities and all of who we are, as you know, a collective group of people.

*So I try and talk to them sometimes about, it's not necessarily about going back to Country, even though that's important, sometimes it's just doing the little things that you can do until you build up to those bigger, bigger parts of who you are.*

**JAX COMPTON**

*Ryan, I want to bring you in here because you live here, right now, in Sydney. But like you said, you're from Kempsey, but also your mob from NT [Northern Territory] and so...*

**RYAN DONOHUE PITT**

*And TI [Thursday Island], don't forget.*

**JAX COMPTON**

*Ohh! I never forget, you know me. That's home. How you create your own like family and your own like sense of identity and home here, is very hard, I know for me it's been quite hard, but for you, how have you done that? What have you done? Like, you or your peers or cousins and stuff around Sydney, what have you guys done to try and help have that connection still even though you're so far from home?*

**RYAN DONOHUE PITT**

*Well, thankfully I do like, some of my mums do have sisters here in Sydney, so, you know it's always like, I do have that support of having the family around me. And def like we always get together, constantly. But I think when especially when I moved down on my own, like, in the big world, not like living with family. I dunno I just found myself like, that gravitational pull to like Blackfullas. I think yeah, a few years back I was feeling like a bit disconnected from my nan. So, my grandmother, she worked at Tranby, which is in Glebe, it's the oldest, Indigenous educational, adult education provider in Australia. Anyway, so my nan was the cook there for years and years and years, and everyone that had probably went there, probably would have had like her food or scones. So she was, yeah it's named like Nan Pat's Kitchen.*

*So anyway, I'd come down on school holidays and spend maybe a week there just sitting in the kitchen, like on my stool and then just having that connection with her, and then, just our personal connection. But then for some reason like, later in life, Tranby was that for me? If that makes sense? So I worked there. I ended up like, I was looking for work and this came up, it was so random, and I just decided to go for it. And then I think that was like, my connection to that place that drew me there. So I worked there for two years and that's where I kind of like, just struggling with my own things, I found like, that healing because I had like my nan there. You know what I mean? Like it was so weird. And then hearing, like, when I'd be working there like hearing the kitchen clink around like, I wouldn't be scared because I'd like, you know she's just like rustling around in there.*

*Yeah. So I think, what I would say to young people is that, I don't know. It's like, there's this, you have this, if you have that feeling and you know it. And it's there, you just have to like, go for it. Have that like yarn or have that conversation with someone that maybe even looks like you. I would say do it. There's no holding back. Like, what do you got to lose?*

**JAX COMPTON**

*That's right. But yeah, I want to say thank you, Karlie, Uncle Matt, Ryan, Libby. Thank you so much for being here on this podcast. And I'm definitely sure someone out there listening knows and relates to each and every one of us, on this podcast today. So, thank you so much.*

*Thank you for listening. For more information, head to The Healing Foundation website at [www.healingfoundation.org.au](http://www.healingfoundation.org.au). This podcast is a 33 Creative Production recorded on Gadigal Land.*



To access the links to resources and videos, or to check you have the most up to date version, visit [www.healingfoundation.org.au/schools](http://www.healingfoundation.org.au/schools) or scan the QR code.