

# What matters in Australia today

## *Four perspectives*

Monday 1 June, 6.00pm  
Adelaide Town Hall, 128 King William Street, Adelaide

*Jointly presented by the Australia Day Council of South Australia and The Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Centre at UniSA*

### **Presentation by Lillian Holt, Aboriginal educator and public speaker on Reconciliation**

I'll begin by acknowledging that we meet on the traditional land of the Kaurna people.

In speaking, tonight, let me say that whilst I am informed by Aboriginality I am not confined to it or by it.

Hence, I come not in any role as an Aboriginal representative nor do I come as an expert on the theme nor with watertight formulas nor answers

And let me illustrate the idea of an "expert" with a joke.

I am essentially an explorer rather than an expert – a seeker rather than a supplier – and, as such, I am interested in the never ending and ever evolving journey of the human condition and, within it all, our relationships with one another.

Furthermore, as an optimist, I am looking for others to join me in a journey which involves both contemplation and action in order to build a new dreaming track for this country.

In other words, I seek fellow contemplatives in action.

For I want a wise country and not just a clever one!

A wise country based on the warts and all of History, Honesty, Humour, Humanity and Hope. Which, I believe, matter.

For me, all of those 5 H's matter so let's start with **History**:

History matters because as the old Russian proverb states: " *dwell in the past and you lose one eye. Forget the past and the you lose both*".

Additionally, the late Aboriginal leader, Charles Perkins said: "*whilst we don't live in the past, the past lives in us*".

Both of those statements inform my view of history. Thus, I see the past as an elder to the present which can truly inform the future if it is looked at through the lens of learning rather than fear and pride. (FEAR and Pride).

**Thus Honesty** matters because it is required in delving into the depth where truth resides.

Without honesty, we can never recognise how we are all implicated, let alone how we have been diminished. For there are no innocent bystanders, but neither should there be any terrified ones. Visionaries such as Mahatma Gandhi understood diminishment only too well, for he said: "*when one is diminished. We are all diminished*".

So I say to you that what has diminished me as an Aborigine has also diminished you as a non-Aborigine.

Now Race Relations is often a dangerous and difficult topic, at times. But the beauty of the Reconciliation process, for me, is that it spawns the fruits of the spirit inherent in the issues of implication and diminishment.

Thus it is not about dwelling on "the problem" – which is invariably outside of ourselves. But rather, how one is implicated in it all and how one has been diminished

If we come from the dimensions of implication and diminishment, it takes away from the dogmatism of racism and who holds the power of definition and the debilitating debate of who is a racist and who is not. Thus it can divert us from the blame game *without letting anyone of us off the hook.*

Thus, a Pandora's Box of promises and possibilities arise when questions of implication and diminishment vis a vis history and the Reconciliation process are addressed.

**Humour matters so much as every blackfella in Australia would agree.**

Edward De Bono (and, if you don't know who he is, he's the guy who gets paid hundreds and thousands of dollars for thinking and speaking like me!) says that humour is the most under-utilised faculty in western academic education. I agree with him, totally.

Actually, I was formerly enrolled in a PhD on Aboriginal humour, when I worked in a remote community, namely Melbourne University but gave it up as, in my own view, Humour is something that essentially one shares, rather than analyses.

I found the academic approach all a bit too anal for me, so I think I will write a book and call it "On my way to my PhD, I nearly lost my sense of Humour").

All of the above H's I've mentioned, that is, History, Honesty and Humour inform what I call the conversational corroborees" I want to have on country and community and creating better connections.

As I can't have those conversations with myself I seek other contemplatives in action who have:

- **(a)** the ability to laugh at themselves and come with the concomitants of humour and humility and
- **(b)** who come armed not only with a glimmer of hope but also an ounce of courage and a pinch of indignation.

Why Indignation one may well ask? Well, George Sand, the writer, once said: "*that indignation at the world's woes is the most passionate form of love*".

Why courage? Well, as the saying goes: "*courage is fear that has said its prayers!*"

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So I seek those who are prepared to embrace the unpalatable as well as the palatable questions of Reconciliation including racism which, for me, is the gangrene of the soul of this nation.

People who are prepared to learn from the lessons of history and not resile from nor deny them.

People prepared to understand profoundly that what has diminished me as an Aboriginal Australian has also diminished them as a non-Aboriginal Australian.

For therein lies the connectedness of the commonality of our human condition. And therein lie solutions for all.

Money (and I am not saying it is not needed for resources) does not address or alter attitudes and actions. That is the province of the personal. Thus, it has to "*Begin with me*" as Mahatma Gandhi advocated.

Finally, in the courageous call of Gandhi's other words of wisdom to "*be the change you want to see*", we cannot be without Hope!

For **Hope** Matters. Especially the kind of Hope contained in the words of St. Augustine:

**"Hope has two daughters. Anger and Courage. Anger at what is wrong. And courage to change it."**

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