

RESETTLEMENT | Wiradjuri Gawaymbanha-gu Mamalanha

Transcript: Episode 3 | Gifts of Stone

Uncle James Ingram: Australia has a black history. And it needs to recognize the hurt that was done to First Nations people and they have to reconcile themselves with that. But the true history of this country has to be told. We just didn't sit here and wait for somebody to sail up on a boat and say, oh, come in, we're glad you got here. We lived in Paradise and it was destroyed. I mean, for us, it was. Our lives were destroyed.

LUKE VO: Hi, I'm Luke Wighton. I'm a Wiradjuri man originally from Condobolin now living in Wagga Wagga. I'm the host of this podcast series RESETTLEMENT - Wiradjuri Gawaymbanha-gu Mamalanha which means Wiradjuri Welcome to Visitors. It's all about Wagga Wagga's First Nations community.

Before white settlement, we'd been living peacefully and sustainably in this beautiful part of Country on the Marrambidya Bila - or Murrumbidgee River - for tens of thousands of years.

From the 1830's, colonisation of the Wagga Wagga area began, destroying our Mob through land theft, disease, murder and oppression. Our language and culture were denied, even made illegal. Our children were stolen from their families to be trained as slaves for the colonisers. We were banished to the fringes of society.

But in the early 1970's that changed. The children's homes were closed, the missions were shut down and the size of our population in Wagga Wagga began to grow again - under what was known as the Aboriginal Family Resettlement Scheme. The federal government scheme ran from 1974 until 1986. The aim was to move our mob from the missions and fringes of smaller remote towns to larger regional areas like Wagga Wagga, with the promise of better services and more opportunities.

This podcast series was a goal of the Wagga Wagga City Council's Reconciliation Action Plan. It has been developed by the Museum of the Riverina in collaboration with our First Nations community.

So, let's get to know some of our proud First Nations mob from Wagga Wagga.

Uncle James Ingram was born in Leeton and moved to Wagga Wagga in the early 1980's during the Aboriginal Family Resettlement Scheme.

By the late 1980's there was around 800 First Nations people living in Wagga Wagga... compared to just 20 or so families in the 60's.

They came from different mobs across western New South Wales - not just Wiradjuri Country - and Uncle James helped many of them find jobs.

Over the years he's worked with farming communities, councils, private companies and environmental agencies to prioritise the care and protection of Wiradjuri heritage and culture.

And he's part of the Aboriginal Men's group that worked on the Declaration of Aboriginal Places in and around Wagga Wagga.

[00:03:28] James: I'm from the Narrungdera Narinjeri clan of the great nation of Wiradjuri. Narrungdera's spelt N-A-R-R-U-N-G-D-E-R-A and Narinjeri's N-A-R-I-N-J-E-R-I. And it means the place of many lizards, but it's also, Narinjeri means spear as well. So we are Lizard people with spear.

Uncle James was born and raised in Leeton, a town located in the Riverina region of south west New South Wales.

As a young man, Uncle James moved from Leeton to Sydney.

[00:04:04] James: I was for four years at Sydney Teachers College. And I left there and I was doing some labouring jobs and I just got sick and tired of the smoke and the smog and the smell of Sydney. So I decided to come home and I walked into the local employment service in Leeton and they said we've got a job for you. And it was here in Wagga, because there'd been a large community of people moving here for resettlement.

Uncle James says that homecoming - being back on Wiradjuri Country - was such a relief after living in the big smoke.

His new job involved helping other resettled mob find jobs in Wagga Wagga - and he was good at it.

[00:04:47] James: And the main thing was that, there's an old saying that if you can't smell the Bidgee, you're not home. And of course, yeah, the Murrumbidgee runs straight through Wagga and bypasses Leeton as well.

[00:04:58] My dad moved here under resettlement. Uncle Roy Carroll from Narrandera was the resettlement officer. Him and a bloke by the name of Alan Lamb, and they resettled Dad here. So that was my first understanding of resettlement. But when I got here, my father introduced me to all these different people from all different communities, from Wiradjuri communities that is - that had moved here and were resettled here, so it was quite good, yes.

[00:05:26] I came here to Wagga as the vocational officer for the Aboriginal Employment and Training Branch which worked out of the Wagga Wagga CES. I

came at the end of '81, the beginning of '82 and yeah, been here on and off ever since.

[00:05:42] People were looking for employment opportunities, of course. And I was quite good at what I done and I had a high success rate. I think I only had one person who I couldn't get into a job. But that was because he'd trained in all these other jobs and it made it quite difficult to place that person. But I was quite pleased with the way we were able to place most people in the jobs that they wanted to do, especially apprenticeship programs.

[00:06:10] Well, we had a wonderful scheme called the National Employment Strategy for Aborigines. They called it NESA. And it was a great program. You could actually offer up to 100 per cent wage subsidy to employers if you wanted to get a job for a person. Especially if it was a job, a unique job like printing and stuff like that, we were able to place people in those type of occupations. And if the employer didn't have the scope to employ the person with their own wages, we could help that employer. And it was a very successful scheme and I don't know why the government got rid of it because it did help a lot of people here in Wagga.

[00:06:48] There's always government employers under the NESA scheme and it was targeted at that. A lot of the girls that were training as clerical assistants. When I first came here, I went around to all the government departments where the girls were employed and they were supposed to be typing 70 words per minute and none of them could type. And I said, well, what do they do? And basically they were out the back filing. And I wouldn't have that. So I started up a typing class and I told everybody if you didn't come on Monday, don't bother coming on Tuesday. And all the girls ended up typing 70 words, even 100 words per minute, so it was a great course.

[00:07:25] And of course they were networking while they were doing it 'cause they were doing it every Monday morning from nine to 12. And we had a great TAFE teacher, Eleanor Buckley and she'd done a wonderful job. And most of those girls out of that went on and got good careers out of it. That was the main thing.

[00:07:42] I see 'em all the time. Yeah. It's good to see, especially when they've gone on, gone on to bigger and better things as well. They've upskilled themselves and applied for the higher wage jobs and some more authority and the ability to help their people better by being in positions of, I guess power, yeah.

[00:08:04] Luke W: During your time here in Wagga, did you ever feel like an outsider?

[00:08:08] James: I never felt like an outsider here because I had a few mob here anyway who had been here, you know, a couple of years before me. And they'd integrated it into the community. And Kooris being Kooris, we always flocked to each other and, yeah, we all, we had a local hotel that we went to and socialised. We used to go to the Ashmont Hotel and a lot of people used to say that was the pub for the

blacks, but we didn't care. We just, as long as we got to see our family and friends in a social setting and have a few beers and have a few laughs and stuff like that.

[00:08:42] I think there was around about 64 families here when I got here and it's just grown. And if you know your community, you'll know that we don't like to fill out the Census every time they do a Census. And you can guarantee whatever number, like the 2,334 people in the Census, we're closer to 6,000 First Nations people here, given that we've got a huge catchment area from Moree and Bourke and Brewarrina and Wilcannia and Menindee and Murrin Bridge, all those places. So, yeah, you're talking a large population, yeah.

[00:09:25] Well, I lived in Ray Street, and if you know Tolland at all, you know that Ray Street was the main street. And there, once upon a time, yeah, you could leave your door open. People looked after each other. And we all socialised together. And of course, you know, that helping hand that First Nations families have towards each other. And if you needed something, you only had to ask. And that was what was good about it.

But Uncle James can still remember the signs put up by racists in Ashmont, that said Coon County or Vegemite Village.

[00:10:02] James: I heard all those racist stuff, but I'm one when someone's being racist to me, I tend to say something that goes over their head and they don't understand that I've just had a shot at them and they're not intelligent enough to, yeah, to understand what I just done to them. But, I've been in fights, fist fights in this town, don't worry about that, over racism. I've been assaulted a number of times because of the colour of my skin. But, yeah, those people have got a problem and the problem is with themselves and inside themselves and karma gets them in the end.

[00:10:38] Luke W: Racism just shows a low education to me.

[00:10:42] James: Same. Yep I feel exactly the same. So I'm more likely to torment them than, more than anything, because sometimes they are an easy mark because of their racism.

Uncle James says while there has been some positive change over the years, there are still haters in Wagga Wagga.

[00:11:00] James: There's been laws put in place and all that sort of stuff. Most people frown upon racism nowadays, even though, you know, you still get your boisterous, bigoted people who think it's fun to, to be racist and poke fun at people.

[00:11:14] But nine times out of 10, other people just get up and walk away and say, we don't want - that's not us. It's when, when it's happening in social settings, when we've got rid of that person who's racist, their friends who are with them have come over and apologised and said, that's not us. And I normally say, well, you know, I

didn't bash that kid up when he was a kid, or I didn't take his girlfriend, or something like that, that makes people hate Aboriginal people, whatever reason it is.

Stereotypes about us black fellas persist to this day, including the myth that we're not hard workers.

[00:11:49] James: Yeah, this thing that they get in their head, that we're lazy, fat blacks, and all this sort of stuff, couldn't be further from the truth. My family's worked all their life. And they've got quite a good name up and down the Murrumbidgee River and up the, up and down the Lachlan and the Murray, the whole place. And that fallacy there, about us, sitting around waiting for somebody to do something for us, it couldn't be... I've never heard so much bullshit in my life.

Uncle James has had a big part in the growth of Aboriginal run services in Wagga Wagga.

But he says there are still gaps in 2024 - including the need for a hostel for First Nations mob visiting family in hospital, and for students.

[00:12:28] James: You always had the Aboriginal Legal Service because we needed it. And then the Aboriginal Preschool was here, and then, the Aboriginal Lands Council started - of which I worked for the Regional Lands Council as well, before I ended up working for the local. But, yeah, it was... All those places were places where you could go and socialise with our people.

[00:12:50] Then the Aboriginal Advancement Corporation started. And then other groups came in like the Waagan Waagan Project men's group. And there's women's groups and Aunty Jean's and yeah, there's a lot of organisations now.

[00:13:05] We've always needed an Aboriginal hostel here. We have a very good TAFE and a very good university, but we have no Aboriginal hostel where people can come and study and stay. And we need facilities for our Elders. I've been talking to some people about, for years, particularly Aunty Patty Morris's mother, who wanted to build that type of facility for us and - though she's passed away unfortunately. But it's aged care like they have in Condo at Willow Bend. I think we need to be doing stuff like that given that Wagga is such a referral place for health and medical and education and all that sort of stuff. And if Elders have got a place to be, other people will come to Wagga as well.

Like in many regional areas, the drug ice is tragically running rampant ... and it's a disease that's really hurting our mob.

Uncle James says that while he agrees these drug problems need to be tackled, he questions whether police are targeting the right people.

[00:14:07] James: Once upon a time you could leave your door unlocked, but then you have these people who target our children and get our children on drugs, giving

them a taste. And then suddenly they're hooked and then that's when they've got to pay for it. And then the first people they'll knock over is mum and dad, then uncle and aunt or grandmother and you know this elder abuse that goes on. It's all about financial abuse too, where these people are taking this money for drugs and something's got to be done about it.

[00:14:35] I don't know. I tried to get something done about these drug dealers, but I didn't think the police were interested in arresting them. They're rather more interested in arresting our people for possession of minor drugs. You know it used to be marijuana, but now it's all ice and cocaine and the dragon as well. So, yeah, it's horrific what's going on with our kids.

Uncle James says all of these issues are a symptom of colonisation... and the splintering of families and culture... leading to a loss of respect.

[00:15:09] James: If you understand what's happened to my people, our people, over the last 250 years you'll understand that we're marginalised. We've got some of the worst stats that you'll ever have in any third world country. We're more incarcerated. Our education standards isn't the best. Mortality rates amongst our children. Poor housing. You only have to look at some of the ghettos we've got around this place. When you're in that situation, your mind isn't prepared to deal with all the heartache that goes with it.

[00:15:44] And you put Stolen Generation stuff on top of that, and then you've got a person who says, right, I've got a, I've got an in here. And then next thing they start targeting our people and next thing those people are hooked. And then they'll hook somebody else and it just goes on and on. It becomes this huge, vicious circle where nobody can get out of it.

[00:16:04] And the drug dealer is the local hero of the place. What a load of bullshit. He's the first person, or she should have been the first person arrested and put in jail for what they're doing.

[00:16:13] We haven't got the really significant Elders in every family around us anymore. Our life expectancy isn't the best. And, yeah, we haven't got those family connections that we need to make our family strong. And it's sad that the people mask their trauma with drugs and alcohol and domestic violence and everything else that goes with it.

[00:16:44] Most families when they came here, you know, the whole family came. But then you have that isolation period and then you integrate into the whole community and all that sort of stuff. And I had Elders in this community, not just Wiradjuri elders. They were Nyaampa elders and Barkandji elders and Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi elders. And I had the utmost respect for them. And yeah, we seem to have lost that because, I don't know, people think that they don't have to pay the due respect to Elders that they used to pay in the past.

[00:17:15] I'm always big on respect and having Yindyamarra about myself, to the point where it gets frustrating to me sometimes and I want to explode, but I try not to anymore.

One of the projects trying to undo this damage is a community facility in the city centre called Wollundry Dreaming.

There, Uncle James, other Elders and knowledge holders including people like myself, work with our youth, sharing culture and life skills to help get them on the right track.

[00:17:46] James: I've always been a firm believer that you've got to provide an outcome for, doesn't matter whether a child or an adult, they've got to want to come and do it and these kids have come and they've seen that the staff that are there at Wollundry Dreaming and the Elders that are there are fair dinkum and we care about them and we love them and that we want the best for them. And they can see that and then they react to that and then they, they tell their friends and next thing we've got a, a waiting list that we, you know, we wish we could fill but we can't because of the limited space.

[00:18:18] But with any help, we might end up with a facility that can help a lot of children. To see those kids go from the shy people they were to the, they just love being there at Wollundry Dreaming. They've always got to be respectful. No swearing, no fighting, those type of things. It's all about, you know, having your space, but also recognising you've got friends have their space as well, and then you can do things together.

[00:18:42] But we're teaching things like the Maliyen, which is the Eagle group for the boys. Because boys have got certain ways of thinking. And the girls have got their own way. And they do their business - they do Butterfly Dreaming. We do Eagle dreaming, Maliyen dreaming. So yeah, we just got to cater it for, for the different groups. But it's little things like teaching the kids how to fish, how to put a hook on a line. How to put a worm on a line and then throw it in there and catch a fish and all that sort of stuff. Some of the things that I grew up - that's second nature to me - fishing and hunting and that with my grandfather and my father and all my uncles and our aunts and all that sort of stuff, we used to do that. That was our spare time doing that stuff. Plus, it was putting food on the table. But kids don't get that anymore.

[00:19:32] I'm really big on, on connecting people back to Country. And Country's all about your culture and your language. And when you're doing good things for your, for yourself and your environment, you're more likely to get up and go to work, get a good education and make the right choices that you need to make. When you're sitting at home all the time and there's nothing to do except watch Netflix or whatever else you watch, that's when you tend to get involved with drugs and alcohol and all those evil things that destroy our communities.

[00:20:08] Luke W: I recall an afternoon, one afternoon Uncle James, when we were down the river and you was teaching us and the young ones about caring for Country. And then, one of the young fellows, Jack got up and then started, went and picking up rubbish without even having to be asked, so that's, yeah,

[00:20:23] James: That's exactly it. Yeah, that's the outcome you're looking for. You don't have to, say, pick that up. They'll go over and do it themselves because they get it in their head what we're trying to say to them. Well, I, you know, I thought I could save the world, but I can't. So, we take one step at a time and hopefully get something that will come along and help us expand and do what we need to do for our kids.

Wagga Wagga was traditionally a gathering, camping, swimming, ceremonial and burial place for Wiradjuri mob.

Still to this day there are significant places of Wiradjuri heritage. Songlines still exist. The markings of Wawee - the rainbow serpent - remain.

And many boundary trees mark out Country.

The squatters who colonised this area from the 1830s onward used Wiradjuri words to name their pastoral runs... and Wiradjuri names exist all over this district.

But the Aboriginal Protection Board banned us from using our language up until the late 1960's.

After a lot of hard work though, our language has been reclaimed and is increasingly being taught and used in schools.

[00:21:37] James: I've done the Graduate Grad Cert. Actually I, I was part of the group that put it to Charles Sturt University that they should do this. I was an advocate for it. Because I've always understood that without a language and without your culture, you're not really a Wiradjuri person. You're not really a First Nations person, you're just a pale imitation.

[00:21:58] You have no identity, and identity is a key thing to it. That you, I belong to the Wiradjuri mob. I come from Narrungdera Narinjeri right down to my totems. I've got different totems that define who I am. That type of knowledge is what we need to be imprinting back into our kids.

[00:22:16] And these Caring for Country initiatives, if anybody ever cared to read the last five reports, it's all, all about mental health and physical health and community health. And domestic violence goes down, crime goes down. All these wonderful outcomes you get, but they still want to lock our people up and, that's a cost of, what, a quarter of a million dollars for, per inmate. You times that by 10 or 20 and you've got enough money to run a Caring for Country initiative on, on, on the banks of the

Murrumbidgee River or any cultural area or any place that needs our help, needs cleaning up and rehabilitation.

[00:22:52] Luke W: Uncle James, can you tell us a bit more about the role that you've played in reviving our culture?

[00:22:58] James: Mate, people say I bang on about it too much, but I had some great teachers and, especially my grandfather and my dad. In particular my Uncle Oz, who was my mentor. Everybody knew him as Bumpa. And I was quite fortunate to be born when I was born with those fellas around me. Plus, I had a really hard headed grandmother who you know, I'd get a flogging if I mucked up. But it was always good for me in the end, when I realised back years later.

[00:23:33] But, yeah, I mean, I've always been around culture, I've always been around language and doing the right thing by our cultural sites. That's why I've been able to record and get nine Aboriginal Places declared because those icons need our protection. I've got a few more to do and I want some young people to step forward so I can show them how to do it. So that when I'm not here anymore that they'll be able to carry that baton on and look after these areas because they do need looking after.

[00:24:07] You've got places like Wollundry Lagoon, which is the most significant one. Wollundry Lagoon is named after The Rocks area, which is on the river. And millions of years ago, there was a volcano over in the mountains over there towards Tumut and there was a stream of volcano that came up on the riverbank there.

[00:24:27] And that's that place they called the Place of Stone on what most people would know, there's that buoy there that if you dive in, you're going to hit your head on rocks. So that is wallan. And wallan is our money. Because that stone that's there is the hardest known stone to us, besides diamonds. And we're not telling anybody where the diamonds are, but, so you have that,

[00:24:53] Luke W: It's a form of currency.

[00:24:55] James: Yeah, it was a form of currency. So people would come here to Wagga not only for many dances and many celebrations, which is the true meaning of Wagga, but they'd also come to trade that stone that was there. And that, that place of stone was on the headwaters of Wollundry Lagoon.

[00:25:12] Wollundry Lagoon is a large fish trap. So in times of flood, we would, after all the small water creatures would go into the lagoon for safety, we would block it off with the trees that had fallen into the river during the flood and they couldn't escape. And therefore, the little fingerlings would grow into larger fish and populate and then we'd have a ready food source, like a big supermarket.

[00:25:39] And you, you think about Wollundry being significant, you've got to talk about Parken Pregar. You got to talk about Kurrajong Lagoon. And then Bomen

Lagoon and again and of course Flowerdale Lagoon, which is a women's area and children's area.

[00:25:56] So all those lagoons - and if you looked at a topographical map, you'll see how all those lagoons are here in Wagga and all the food sources, like the big supermarkets they were in times when we had people coming here to Wagga, following the the Bogong moth into the Alps, for us to meet up with the black duck people from the Yuin nation and the Thurrawal people and the Lyrebird people and the Gundungurra people from Katoomba which are eagle people, and then the Gadigal people and the Eora people, and the Monaro Ngarigo people from from down south. Well we'd all meet in Canberra for the exchange of family.

[00:26:42] So we had to feed huge numbers of people when they came here to Wagga first, it's a staging place before they would move on to a place called Borambola. Well Bora means ceremonial ground. And if you go out to Borambola there are two significant areas. One's women and one's men. The men's area is right up on top of the hill and unfortunately they built a house over it, of course. But anyway, then you've got another place that they call Bora Binga too, but that's another story.

[00:27:12] You've got Tony Ireland Park. It's a declared Aboriginal Place. You've got Flowerdale Lagoon. You've got Bomen Lagoon. The Bomen axe quarry. Bomen Lagoon. The Kengal - The Rock. And Doodle Comur Swamp out at Henty as well. So yeah. And we've been able to record nine boundary trees in and around Wagga as well.

[00:27:32] Boundary trees denote the, the boundary between Wagga Wagga and Book Book and Uranquinty, which is all about plenty of rain and birds. And then if you go towards, if you go west you run into Collingullie. And then you run into Grong Grong of course. And then over the river, you run into Gilling Gilling country before you get into Junee and there's a couple of boundary trees out there as well, which we're protecting.

[00:28:02] So those boundary trees, there's one out on Alfredtown TSR, which is a square in a tree, which is a women's area and a kids area, because the branch comes out so the kids and women can sit on it. And then out the back of the Boat Club, you've got a diamond. There's one diamond in a tree. And then there's one at Lake Albert, which is on private property, and there's another one on, on the RAAF Base we understand.

[00:28:32] And there's a ring with a circle on Holbrook Road. And then you've got another one out at Yarragundry which has been destroyed unfortunately. But the ring remains. But there was a rather large canoe in it and inside the canoe were the markings of the Wawee, which is the marking of the Rainbow Serpent.

[00:28:53] And it's all about the songline behind the Riverina redgum, which is the yarra yarra tree. And it talks to us about our connection to that tree and what it means to us and what it gives us. It gives us everything, like tools, it gives us shade,

the canoe that came out of it, it also gives us food sources, everything. So our connection to that tree. So we have a songline story about that.

Uncle James says there's rich Wiradjuri heritage and knowledge to be shared... but it's an ongoing battle for recognition.

[00:29:25] James: Well, you know, government's always slow to change. And you know I work for the Local Land Services and I'm not critical of the organisation. What I say to you is that it still had its roots back in the Department of Ag and sometimes Aboriginal Culture and Heritage hasn't been on the forefront of how they do things.

[00:29:47] But my job was to show them that, how you can walk together and do things together without Aboriginal Culture and Heritage being the boogeyman that the shock jocks on radios and TV make us out to be the devils. And we're coming to claim your backyard and we're gonna evict you and get rid of you and, and you've got no rights.

[00:30:08] It couldn't be any further from the truth because those shock jocks are paid large volumes of money to divide us all. And that's what it's all always been about. And unfortunately that type of thinking gets stuck in people's head, especially older Australians. I have great hope for the younger generation.

[00:30:26] I think they can, they're starting to see through the falsism of what happens on TV and radio. And, to the point where I think, maybe in another 20 years, we might have a voice. But we were waylaid with the Voice and culture and heritage stuff by people who were stuck in the fifties.

[00:30:47] Luke W: I was going to say, do you think that was - that showed as a result of the referendum? Those mindsets?

[00:30:54] James: Well, they wouldn't let me on TV or radio to say that if they voted yes, we were going to get rid of the AUKUS funding arrangements and we're going to spend all that money on, on, on housing and give everybody a free house. Give everybody a free education. And some of the things that some of the people were saying that we were going to stop trade and we were going to plunge the community, the country into massive debt and all this sort of stuff.

[00:31:24] Couldn't be any further from the truth because what they don't know is that there's about a billion dollars each year spent on Aboriginal Affairs, but it's mainly spent on white administration. I mean I've got all these non Indigenous people telling me what's good for me. And in the end, I end up with about one dollar out of that billion dollars and I guess you would end up with another dollar.

[00:31:46] But they're not looking at the high number of non Indigenous people who are employed to look after us. And it's not right and it should be changed. That's why local Aboriginal organisations should get the funding that they need to divert kids from, away from drugs and alcohol.

[00:32:04] We don't want people putting band aids on us anymore. We need real solutions by getting real funding to grass roots organisations that can make the changes that we need to make.

Uncle James has done a lot of work with farmers over the years... and says our mob is respected in the farming community.

After all, black fellas helped to ensure they made money off the land that was stolen from us.

His own family's connections gave him an advantage.

[00:32:38] James: My father is James Ingram Senior, Jimmy. And he was a gun shearer, and a horse breaker and drover. And he'd been up and down the Murrumbidgee River, and the Lachlan River, and the Murray River all his life.

[00:32:53] And there's not too many communities that don't know who he is. I've been out on properties and a lot of people say - would say to me, you're not going to get anything out of that, that racist old redneck farmer. And um, you're not going to get anything. And I'd walk in the door and they'd just look at me and they'd say, Oh, you're Jimmy's son, aren't you? Or you're Ike's grandson. I said, that's right. I said, how do you know that? And they'll actually bring me up their records of where my dad worked and my grandfather. And they'd show me that there. Because when you're a gun shearer like my father was, you get to write your name on the board and it stays there for 200 sheep a day.

[00:33:32] And to see that. And then my Uncle George, I mean he - he could outshear my dad any day. And, and my Uncle Frank on my mum's side as well. It was just... They didn't want to talk about anything else except what was going on with my family. And they wanted to know who was who and what was happening with so and so.

[00:33:48] And the person I came with, they'd be sitting out in the car for an hour or so. The farmer, he'd say, oh, what did you come here for son? I'd say I've come here to find out where all the artefacts are. And he'd say Oh, they're down in the back paddock there.

[00:34:02] And that was all it was all about because he knew my father and grandfather and grandmother to be good people and honest, fair dinkum. And, if we gave our word, we gave our word. I wasn't there to claim their backyard and destroy their property and all this sort of stuff. In actual fact, some of the farmers said, can you give me a certificate to say that there you can't claim this place back. I said, yes, absolutely I can. And when I'd finish doing the survey work, they'd say, where's me certificate? And I said, I used to say to them, you go in there and get your Torrens Title and that's your certificate. And they said, really? I said, yes, that's how it works. Don't believe what those shock jocks tell you. It was quite funny sometimes.

[00:34:43] Sometimes they'd see the funny side of things. But I tell you, sometimes it was really hard to get away from people because they really wanted to know what was happening with my family. And that was the good thing about it, yeah.

Many people don't realise that First Nations mob and the colonists often got along well – it wasn't all bad relations.

A lot of the wealth of this country was built on Aboriginal people working the land and being patient with the invaders, while often only being paid in rations.

[00:35:10] James: When we did the Gift of Stones with the Australian National University, they run a day out at the Henty Field Days and they invited Farmers to bring their artefacts in and have a talk.

[00:35:23] And a lot of old farmers have this huge connection to artefacts, right? And some of the artefacts are very significant artefacts. Some of the best examples, some of the work that you'll see on the stone, on stone tools. And they would tell us stories about their best mate, about a blackfella. But they couldn't be mates with them outside the farm gate because it wasn't seen as, or the proper thing to do to be best mates with a, with an Aboriginal person, because of how we were demonised back in the day.

[00:35:58] But a lot of them now that they're older understand that - what my people had to go through and how difficult it was for those men and women to, to, maintain their dignity. Because they have a real soft spot in their heart for that person. But they weren't able to show it at the time because of society what it dictated at the time.

[00:36:21] So that's why a lot of people, when I talk to them, they're always interested in what, where me dad was and me Grandfather was. And I had a bloke come to Leeeton and I was sitting on the steps of the Roxy Theatre, tormenting people and all that sort of stuff. And this bloke pulled up and said, you'd be an Ingram wouldn't you? And I said yeah that's right. And he said where could I find Ike Ingram. And Grandfather had passed. And this man, he pulled up in his real flash car and he had all bullhorns on the car. He had all these rings. He was well to do and had a cowboy hat and long white hair and a beard and a goatee and all that sort of stuff.

[00:37:02] And the man broke down and started crying. I couldn't believe it. And I didn't know what to do. And, he said, Is your father around? I said, yes. He's at home, he's just down the road here. And he asked me to take him there. And I was umming and ahing about whether I'd get in the car but I, I did. And I'm glad I did. And we pulled up at Dad's place and got out of the, when we got out of the car, Dad come out and spotted him, spotted this bloke and they just embraced and had a big cuddle. And next thing they were laughing and the bloke ended up spending a couple of weeks there with Dad talking about old times and having a few beers and all that sort of stuff.

[00:37:39] But, yeah. That's the type of real Australia that I see.

Uncle James has real concerns about the growing pressure on the land... and the environmental damage that's been increasing since the first days of colonisation.

He's especially worried about the over-extraction of water from our rivers.

[00:38:02] James: I think Indian Hemp would be a better natural product to grow than cotton, but until people stop wearing clothes. It's like rice. I come from Leeton. It's Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area. A tonne of water to grow a grain of rice. And I know these departments and farmers are trying to get the best use out of their water, but you can't drive down the Sturt Highway without running into a huge dam that's there for irrigation of the cotton. And I just don't know what we can do to reverse that trend.

[00:38:36] You have places like Menindee, okay? To get their water, Menindee has to suffer at the hands of Cubby Station. Why? It's foreign owned. You can imagine if they got water to Menindee, to the Menindee Lakes there and all those areas where there's less population and they started growing industrial Indian Hemp to make all these fibres for us, that would be a possibility and we could get rid of the cotton. But I think cotton is one of these industries that's just gonna power on. And they're a very powerful group.

[00:39:18] If you, if you're involved in natural resource management, you have to be mindful of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation mob, and you have to be the rice - Sunrice - and the cotton growers and the orchardists. I have, I have been in rooms, in meetings with the orchardists and the rice growers and the cotton growers are on different sides. And if you think that there's a blue between black fellas and white fellas, you haven't seen a blue until you see them bluing. Because water is such an important commodity. And Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary said the great wars won't be fought over oil, they'll be fought over water. And he's right. Water's such a commodity that, that gets traded all the time now. There's wars overseas over water. We have to do something here.

In order to save the Murray Darling river system, Uncle James says First Nations mob needs to be given more of a say, more representation... and more water.

[00:40:21] James: This buyback debate that's going on with the government at the moment and the Farmers Federation. I mean, something's got to give. I don't know how we get more water into the system. Because enough water's been diverted out of the Murrumbidgee River already. And they've got a dam everywhere and they've got, weirs are everywhere and all that sort of stuff so the natural flows don't happen anymore.

[00:40:46] There has to be a real complete rethink. And I think our representatives on the Murray Darling Basin, the MILDREN mob and our environmental health people, they have to be strong and we have to support them. Because we just can't ask them to go and fight.

[00:41:02] When you're sitting in a room and there's 20 people and there's only one Aborigine, it's, it can be very, very difficult. And they think, oh, you've got representation. And in real fact we're competing against all these different forces. And we've got one lone voice sitting in the room and sometimes they're targeted. Sometimes they're ostracised and to the point where sometimes they've got to eat a meal by themselves. It's horrific what goes on.

[00:41:27] So, there has to be more representation about it. I'm mindful of how we do that because I helped start a thing called the National Indigenous Science Engagement Program. It's NISEP. It's all about science. Science is all about environmental science as well. Water science, yeah. Native, native vegetation, the whole lot.

[00:41:51] And I'm hopeful that our kids that are coming through that system will go on to get their degrees in land management, conservation, water, health and all that sort of stuff and then they'll be able to sit in that room and debate with the rest of them and the best of them about First Nations right to water. Our rights to land and our right to fix our country up, the environment up, by doing our Caring for Country initiatives. Instead of jailing us, put us out in the land and let us work, let us rehabilitate the place.

[00:42:27] That balance is, I don't think it's been struck yet. When I was on the Murrumbidgee Catchment Committee, I was in a meeting and they had a graph for everything. And we were talking to these young guns and they were pretty smart boys. But what they didn't quite understand is how do you put environmental water into the river, and an environmental flow, and then you put irrigation water and then you put cultural water.

[00:42:57] And they said, why would we want to do that? I said, so the water can get into the billabongs and the creeks and the streams, I said, where my people fish and hunt. I said, hey, why can't you do that? Oh, well, we haven't got a graph for it. Well, anyway. Yeah, so, it's that type of thinking outside the square that we've got to do.

[00:43:18] And our dams have been down to two and three per cent sometimes. You know, thank God we've got some beautiful weather now. Because what people don't understand that the name of the Murrumbidgee basically means big boss, big mate. In flood, he's your boss. In drought, he's your boss. And when there's water in the system just like there is now, just enough for everybody, everybody's happy. That's why he's our mate. That's why it's called the Murrumbidgee.

Another big part of life in Wagga Wagga is sport - it's been a great uniter of our community.

Uncle James even helped secure sponsorship for the first Wagga Wagga All Blacks rugby league side.

[00:44:09] James: I was fortunate enough to run into a bloke by the name of Carl Bamblett, they call him Banna and Uncle Tony Murray. And they came to me one

day and they said Ingram, we want to start the Wagga Wagga All Blacks. We want you to help us get some sponsorships. So we did.

[00:44:26] We went around and seen all the different businesses. Some just threw us out the door. Others said, because Carl and Banna had a real good name around the place. And we were able to get the sponsorship that we needed to get the guernseys and the shorts and socks and sponsorship on the back of the thing.

[00:44:43] And we started up the Wagga Wagga All Blacks. And we played in the Kennedy Shield. And you know, we had a... At the end of the season we had a trophy night and best and fairest and all that sort of stuff. And it was really good how we all got together and we had a lot of good supporters on the sideline as well.

[00:45:00] We used to play the different communities in softball and in basketball and in rugby league and touch football. We'd invite Narrandera over and Griffith'd come over or Tumut'd come over and, we, we'd have a day with just playing round robin with the different communities. And it was just a great day. You know, it was fantastic

He's really proud of the way our mob has celebrated and connected over the years.

[00:45:31] James: We used to run a really great NAIDOC ball back in the day too. We'd always have Miss Aborigine. It was quite fun. Great nights, yeah. We had good people running them at the time and they always put on a good show. And it was always interesting to find out who was going to be, you know, Miss Aboriginal of the Year, yeah - because we all had daughters.

[00:45:55] You know, I think back 12 months ago when we run the NAIDOC ball for the Elders and we got Roger Knox to come down. And Roger Knox is the premier Aboriginal performer in, in Australia as far as I'm concerned. And he'd never ever come here before and it costs a few dollars to get him down here but. And we gave all the Elders in most of the community free tickets to the event.

[00:46:21] But the thing about it was, when he was performing all these hits, they all knew him and they all knew the songs, they'd all sing along. And to see the smiling faces on all those Elders, mate that was worth a million dollars. We were so glad that we'd done it. And hopefully next year we'll run something similar. Yeah.

When the country voted no in the Voice Referendum... Uncle James was hurt... but not surprised.

He says he felt more support for our mob back in the 1988 protests over 200 years of colonial rule.

[00:47:08] James: You know, when I was at the Voice referendum and I was sitting up the back and I could hear these old non Indigenous fellas going on about, ah, you get so much and what else do youse want and all this sort of stuff. It just... That really disheartened me.

[00:47:24] And I knew that we weren't going to get a, a Voice. Yeah. And it's sad that 7 out of 10 people in the Riverina voted against us. Because I've grown up with some good people. I picked potatoes, peas, pumpkins, onions, watermelons, oranges and everything. Grapes. I grew up with the farmers' kids. And those kids know me. And I have a good relationship with those people.

[00:47:47] And when I was at the march in 1998, out of all the thousands of people that were there at the march, I'm standing in Hyde Park at the fountain there, and I could hear this, hear my name being called. And I looked around and here are these, all these non Indigenous people from Leeton that had come to march with me. And they came to find me and to march with me. It was incredible. Yeah. So that made me think about what real reconciliation's all about. And that we do need our friends to help us.

[00:48:20] I know there was money given to the Stolen Generation, I think it was around \$75,000 some people got. When they asked me what I thought about it, I said you can't buy a house with that. You can't buy any land that, with a decent house on it for \$75,000. \$75,000 people might think that's a lot of money, but it's a drop in the ocean when you think about the cost of living. It'll go pretty quickly. So, but if you were able to have a house, call it your own, I think a lot of people would say, OK. I've got my land rights. I'm right.

[00:48:58] Luke W: With the referendum and that, what do you think needs to happen next for our people, locally and nationally?

[00:49:04] James: Nationally, we need to beat the Australian government in the international courts. Because there's, unless we've got to wait another 20, 50, 100 years before they'll give us a voice. The only way that they'll ever give us a voice if we force them through the international courts to do that. And, I don't want to bankrupt this country, but I think that there's enough wealth in this country to ensure that my, our people are looked after.

[00:49:31] I mean, if Treaty's the way forward, well, fantastic. Truth Telling, yeah, I think a lot of people need to understand that this, Australia, has a black history and it needs to recognise the hurt that was done to First Nations people and they have to reconcile themselves with that.

[00:49:49] But the true history of this country has to be told. We just didn't sit here and wait for somebody to sail up on a boat and say, Oh, come in, we're glad you got here. someone needs to look after this country, tell us what to do with it. Couldn't be further from the truth. We lived in paradise. And it was destroyed. I mean, for us it was. Our lives were destroyed.

[00:50:13] Luke W: Uncle how do you feel about the future for your children or grandchildren or even great grandchildren?

[00:50:19] James: If this greed doesn't stop in this country, I don't feel that we're going to be able to reverse what's happening with the climate at the moment.

[00:50:32] I'm really mindful, hopeful that electric vehicles will take off for instance. And that places like China and India will embrace it and then their pollution that they put into the environment will be reduced. I was talking to my son who's in the mining industry and I said, 'One day you're going to be driving trucks that have got huge batteries in them'. And he said, 'Oh, it's never going to take off Dad'. I said, Yes it will. And I'm hopeful that will happen.

[00:50:57] I think if we can reverse what's going on with the climate and get some wins in the international court and Treaty and we do a bit of Truth Telling, I think, I'm hopeful about what'll happen to us in the future.

[00:51:15] Luke W: Just before I go, I just want to thank you uncle, for sharing your stories, your knowledge. I've learned so much from you and I continue to learn from you and I just want to say Mandaang Guwu. Thank you.

[00:51:26] James: You too.