

Words of Wisdom from an Aboriginal Elder of the Yuin People – Uncle Max Dulumunmun Harrison

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To try and encapsulate the essence of Uncle Max I have presented below a number of his key teachings. All quotes are taken from conversations with Uncle Max and are also in his book, *My People's Dreaming*, 2009.

Each of these can be used in isolation or in their entirety as conversation starters and reflection points, for individuals or groups alike. It is an opportunity perhaps for us to consider the way in which we connect with the earth – reflect on our relationship with the earth.

Uncle Max has been sharing his cultural knowledge for over 40 years and with us here at the College for over 20 years. The students and staff here are blessed to hear and witness firsthand the connection that Aboriginal people have with the land. Each year when we have a new group of students who go into country for their 'community engagement', we always say that, *"we are standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before us"*.

Uncle Max, in passing on his traditional knowledge focuses on three truths:

- See the land – the beauty;
- Hear the land – the story;
- Feel the land – the spirit.

Quotes:

- "I've got to give it away to keep it"
- "Mother Earth births everything for us. Father Sky carries the water and oxygen for us to breathe. Grandfather Sun warms the planet, warms our body, gives us light so we can see, raises the food that the mother births and raises most of our relations, all our plants and trees. Grandmother Moon moves the water and gives us the woman-time and our birthing."
- "The songlines are such an important part of our mental and spiritual structure. They are lines of energy that run between places, animals and people. We can keep in touch with animal and bird life. We follow the songlines of the animals to know where they are and to see if they have moved on. If they have moved on then we can start a burn off to create more life without hurting the animals."
- "It is the energy of Grandfather Sun that helps to create the stories. We tell these when we have a campfire as then Grandfather Sun is much closer to us. When we finish with the fire, we cover the coals over with dirt, not water, because it is not right to leave the coals exposed – it can cause damage to the atmosphere. Our mob have been looking after the environment for tens of thousands of years".

- “Each mob has a collection of totems that represent special areas or animals to their community. It’s a way of preserving the ecology. Mobs can’t or won’t eat those particular totems because if they ate everything they found, there would be nothing left for other mobs to eat.”
- “Initiation is when a boy becomes a man. You become aware of the messages the land is sending you and you feel a responsibility towards the land.”
- “Trees can be named by their healing properties and like us trees like to live in communities.”
- “Trees live in tribes, just like people. When a tree is born and then it is moved to another area, that’s like taking a person out of their country and putting them into a different country. They become like a refugee.”

The image below, to me, represents such a powerful link between what we talk about today - contemporary mindfulness. To not be thinking about the past or worrying about the future but to live in the present. These three rocks remind me of this. In Uncle Max’s words:

These three rocksare one of the most valuable things to me – they show me where I come from; where I am now and where I am going to in the spirit world.



In conclusion, perhaps underpinning the focus of Segment One “Global Heart – Global Heartbeat” is the element of forgiveness. It is looking at what we have done to the earth and the way that we have treated the Aboriginal people that we may feel the need for forgiveness for our actions or inactionsin Uncle Max’s words:

“It’s a pretty big call to forgive...Forgiveness is for your healing. It’s your self-healing, it’s got nothing to do with the person that has probably done wrong” – what wonderful words of hope for the future!