



TIM GOODWIN is a member of the Yuin Nation, an Aboriginal nation that occupies the south east coast of NSW. He has just graduated with Bachelors Degrees in Arts and Law with Honours from the Australian National University in 2007. Tim is currently working as Associate to Justice Anthony North of the Federal Court of Australia in Melbourne. Tim was a member of the National Youth Roundtable in 2000; a member of the International Youth Parliament in 2000; and a member of the National Indigenous Youth Leadership Group from 2001–2002. Also in 2002, Tim was chosen as one of five young people to ask a question at the Inspire Foundation’s Audience with the

Dalai Lama, and he was one of two youth members of the Australian Delegation to the United Nations General Assembly’s Special Session on Children in New York. Tim was a facilitator for the Indigenous rights action area, for the International Youth Parliament in 2004. Tim is currently an Indigenous Education Ambassador for the Department of Education, Science and Training and a Dare to Lead Ambassador. In 2004 Tim was also an Ambassador for the Australian Republican Movement. Tim serves on the Board of the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). Tim is currently the Deputy Chair of the National Indigenous Youth Movement of Australia (NIYMA), and serves on the Movement’s Circle and Executive. NIYMA aims to create healthy, strong and free Indigenous communities by working with young Indigenous people and providing safe spaces for young people to share, learn and be proud of their identity.

Tim Goodwin *Sharing the Dream*

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I was born in Adelaide, South Australia, on 24 October 1983, UN Day. My dad is from Adelaide. He's only one of five siblings outside of Adelaide. My grandmother is still there and all of my family is still there; a very South Australian family. My great, great, great, great-grandfather on my grandmother's side came over on a ship with his new wife and two young children, and his sister-in-law which was probably part of the deal, so he could get her married in Australia. He owned a pub in Nairne, SA and died breaking up a fight and getting kicked in the mouth by a horse.

Then my grandfather came from Bridgewater; he had a long background in Bridgewater. Dad was born at Port Adelaide and Port Adelaide is in my blood, so I'm a big Port Adelaide Power fan, and grandma is still at Glenelg and a lot of my family is still at Glenelg where they all grew up.

Dad joined the army when he was 17 and he was based in Sydney for a little while and that's where he met my mum. She's an Aboriginal woman. She grew up at La Perouse, the Aboriginal community in Sydney. My grandfather is a Yuin man, Yuin Nation of the south east coast of New South Wales.

He grew up on a mission at Wallaga Lake and a lot of his parents' generation worked on the mill down there and once that closed down, a lot of them moved up to Sydney and back following work. They'd go back

down the coast for seasonal work, go back to country, and then they'd go up to Sydney for other work up there. That was where my grandfather met my grandmother.

She was a Wiradjuri woman from Narrandera in central New South Wales, where all of her family was from, and mum was born there at Narrandera when they were visiting, but she grew up in Sydney. So, yes, they met in Sydney and had a long-distance relationship while dad was posted back in Adelaide. Then mum joined him and had me in Adelaide, then my sister Cass was born in Victoria when they were stationed down there at Puckapunyal, two and a half years after I was born.

Then we moved back to Adelaide for a year when I was about four years old, and then we moved to the Gold Coast for two years, and that's where I started school. Then we moved to Canberra when I was around about six or seven, and I did the rest of my schooling there.

Dad got out of the army back in '93 because he and my mother didn't want to move my sister and me around. They didn't want us to be the typical army children that had to move every two years and they loved Canberra so they wanted to stay there. All my friends were staying there for university so I had no reason to move. I went to university and studied arts and law. I graduated last year with Honours in Law and a Bachelor of Arts, and now I'm in Melbourne.

I did have some hard times because of my Aboriginality, but I was very lucky for a long time. I think my mother and father cushioned us well against it. We were always in a really welcoming environment and I always appreciated my dad's family for being very supportive of my Aboriginality. You know, mum has said that they were never racist but their son was South Australian and, you know, a very Glenelg family, and the Aboriginal population of Adelaide is not based around Glenelg.

So, you know, one of the younger sons says that he's in love with an Aboriginal woman, it's something to deal with, and mum said that that took a little while for them to get used to. It was never an overt problem. So I was really lucky that I had two sides of the family who were very loving, very supportive, and very proud. My grandparents were proud of their Aboriginality, quite involved in the community, so it was never a problem being Aboriginal when I was growing up. So I don't have early memories of hardship.

I have memories of mum feeling uncomfortable at various times, or being upset but not to the point where I was really questioning things, and plus it was the time when I was growing up—I was nine when the Redfern Park speech was given, reconciliation was happening, the Native Title Act was passed. Mum worked. We had moved to Canberra by that time, so Canberra was a really great place to be. All this exciting stuff was happening in Aboriginal Affairs.

So I grew up thinking it was really an amazingly positive thing; it was a good time. I think the first time racism really hit me was in Year 4. I stuffed up on the soccer field and got picked on because I was black, and I was just devastated. I was really, really, really upset. But my school handled it amazingly well.

There was a particular teacher there called Mrs Maria Voutas who was on duty that day, and then my teacher Mrs Sherri handled it really well as well. What happened was that I talked to Mrs Voutas and she got the two boys with me and she had a bit of a conference with us about it and she said, "Well, what happened?" She asked me, "How did that make you feel?" and the other boys were really devastated about what they'd done and she explained why that was wrong.

She explained that racial discrimination was actually against the law,

and she really clearly explained to the boys why it was wrong and how it made me feel. I think that's better than just simply saying to a kid that it's wrong. You need to explain why or else they're never going to understand.

Racism is like that: you don't learn why it's wrong from the textbooks. You can't read how to not be racist. It's got to be something discussed, and the teacher did that and she was really supportive of me. And my actual classroom teacher did the same and talked to me about how I was feeling and whether I was okay, and she talked to the other two boys as well. And it was not about punishment of those two: they got a stern talking to about it and it was made very clear that it was wrong, but that was the end of the matter.

Once they were sorry about what they did, there was no further retribution against them, and I think that was also important. I ended up becoming very, very close friends with one of the boys in my last two years of primary school. I was lucky, very lucky, and I talk to friends that did not have it that good, and I think it helped because in Canberra it's quite multicultural. I went to a school in the diplomatic district so all of the non-Catholic diplomat kids came to that school. If you were Catholic you went to one of the Catholic ones; if you weren't, you went to Garran Primary.

So it was a really multicultural environment and the school facilitated, celebrated and gave life to that, and we had great supportive teachers. My mum was always involved in school matters and I never remember her not being there. So it was always a good environment.

High school was a bit of a challenge. I went to a Catholic all boys' school and it wasn't always a good experience for me.

It could be particularly homophobic, could be particularly racist, and

we had amazing teachers but they were the exception rather than the rule, unlike at Garran Primary. But I thank God that they were there. I had a really close group of friends that were really supportive, that were really great.

But it was a harder environment. People who were racist against me would do it in a joke sense. It wasn't personal; it was just because they thought it was acceptable. And I got along well with most people anyway; but I was always non-confrontational so I never challenged anyone about it and just took it on the chin.

Bullying wasn't too bad an impact on me but it was hard, and there just wasn't leadership. A principal's leadership isn't the only factor that's important, but it's really central, because we had great teachers and the teachers that did deal with it were fantastic.

I had one teacher who only had 20 year old history textbooks, with the last chapter being about Aborigines and only covering pre-1788 knowledge. They were just archaic and she got rid of them and bought new history books that covered each decade of Australia's history and in each decade what was happening to the Aboriginal population: what was happening in Aboriginal issues at that time.

It's really a hidden history of the country, and she was fantastic. But there just weren't enough of those people there and, you know, it showed. There were a dozen Indigenous students out of 1,200. I remember when I was graduating in Year 12, there was another Indigenous kid in my year and he was really smart, and his younger brother had IQ levels off the charts. He was always in gifted classes, but had behaviour problems.

Their mother was lovely, a wonderful woman but a single mother with boys growing quickly and it was kind of difficult at times. He could have gone to uni really easily, if he was given the space and time. The uni people

from the Jabal Centre at the ANU, the Indigenous support unit, came to school earlier in our final year and said, “Our records show two Indigenous students who might be interested in uni. Can we talk to them?”

The school said, “Oh, talk to Tim but don’t bother with the other student. There’s no point. You know, he’s not going to make it.”

It was those low expectations. You see it all the time and they think they’re doing a good thing, you know.

Regarding aspirations for the future, my job in Melbourne is at least a year, but that’s why I took it—because it was a year. I had a start date and an end date. It’s so hard to plan your career when you’re in uni. There’s so much pressure just to graduate. So I wanted a job that gave me the space to be able to do that and I wanted a job outside Canberra because while I love Canberra I wanted something new—a challenge. I really love research, and I really want to contribute to Indigenous policy, particularly Indigenous legal policy. I’ve really grown to see that the law can be used as a positive tool and I think I want to contribute in some way to that. But whether that’s academia or policy work or something like that, I don’t know yet, but all these areas would be great. I’m drawn to politics as the ultimate policy forum, whether that’s behind the scenes or in front—but that’s something that I’d like to at least try.

I think young people need to surround themselves with good advice. Why are we so willing to take negative advice rather than the positive? We find it so much harder to listen to people who are willing to support us and talk us up and we’re so much more willing to listen to people who are negative. I mean, it just doesn’t make sense, but it’s human nature.

So I’d really say to young people, “You know, there is always at least one teacher, even in a really bad school. There’s always one teacher, I found, that really cared and was committed to social justice and believes

in Aboriginal students and believes in Aboriginal issues, and might not have all the answers, but cares. You know, find that teacher, talk to them and get their advice, rather than bad advice, and understand the difference and surround yourself with good people—friends, family who believe in you—and it might not always be easy to find those people, but once you do, really hold onto that and keep hold of that and be open enough to talk to those people. Don't be afraid to share your dreams.”

I think you really need to believe in yourself. Anything is possible. I'm not going to say to students, “Look, it's easy or it's going to be fine,” or, “There's not going to be any barriers,” or, “It's only a simple matter of belief,” but belief is the first step and it's a bigger step than we give credit for.

You know, it really is half the journey: believing in your ability to do something; having high expectations of yourself before you expect other people to have high expectations of you. It's not about placing pressure on yourself; it's about believing in yourself and believing in your ability to do it. Indigenous people have amazing talents and one of those greatest talents is resilience and we've shown that in history; the fact that we may have problems but we've survived; we're here when so many people didn't want us to be. That in itself is a great and lasting victory and young Indigenous people are part of that legacy and it's something really important to take strength from.