

I wish to acknowledge the People of This Land, their ancestors past and present, and to thank them for this opportunity to speak with you today.

What has worried me today, is that I have heard the speakers before me talk about knowledge, and with knowledge, but none have yet been able to tell me what knowledge is.

I can only speak about my peoples, the Bidigal Clans of the Dharawal peoples, who were known in times gone by as the Swamp Walkers, and the knowledge that has been passed down to me from my Mother, Elvie, my Grandpop, Albert, and my Great Grandmother, Mary, and their friends.

There is only one resource that can be traded, freely shared or given away, and still remain the responsibility, and in the possession of the owner.

That Resource is Knowledge. Knowledge is the Prime Resource.

In our traditional society, knowledge was treasured and protected, both physically and spiritually. There were laws and responsibilities governing the passing on of knowledge, and the punishment for misuse of that knowledge was indeed dire.

Without knowledge of resources and how to use them, natural resources are useless.

Without knowledge of our natural resources, the community would not survive.

However, the use, transmission and retention of knowledge is based upon a perception of truth, which is, in itself a most important law.

The first part of this precept was taught to children almost as soon as they could talk. As that person grew in knowledge, the other concepts of truth were revealed.

Although there are 13 truths altogether, only the first five were available to those not yet accepted into the ranks of knowledgeholders, and these truths can be applied to an object, an action, an idea, or a statement.

The First truth is what you see – how you perceive the truth

The Second Truth is what others see – how others perceive the same truth

The third truth is what is – inclusive of all perceptions.

The fourth truth that must be considered is that there was a time when that particular truth did not exist, but pathways were in place to allow that truth to come into being – its history.

The fifth truth is that there will be a time when that truth will no longer exist, but having existed, it will have set into place pathways for other truths to come into existence – consequences.

Thus, for anyone to be able to consider a truth, one must take into consideration, not only what one perceives to be the truth, but also how other perceive it.

However, its history, or how this idea, this object, or action came into being, and the possible consequences of it having existed, must also be taken into consideration.

Thus, the basis of all Knowledge is truth.

The laws regarding knowledge are provided in our stories, which also have laws governing them.

Every story must contain a law, so that a child listening to the story will learn a law of the land upon which it is living, and that law is usually discussed after the story has been told. But the story must also contain lessons, lessons on how to live within the environment in which the child is living.

Finally every story must contain a key to a secret – and if the child uncovers that key, and asks the storyteller about it, then it is raised to a higher level of knowledge – like passing an exam.

The stories were usually told early in the morning, a time when young children learned best, and also were on their best behaviour. This telling was again discussed later in the day, when the sun was at its hottest, and the old women sat down in the shade, and talked about the lessons that could be learned.

Sometimes, in evening the men would dance or sing the story. So that the laws and lessons were the last thing the child would be thinking about when it went to sleep.

But there were also very strict laws regarding the passage of knowledge.

In the story of Talara'tingi – how the flannel flower came to be, which, incidentally talks about a time when children learned to walk without having seen the sun. In this story, it was the refusal of the old knowledgeholders to accept knowledge from a young person. Thus the transmission of knowledge must be a two way action – the old can also learn from the young.

In the story of the Wattungoori, during a generations long drought we neglected to pass on knowledge about how to get food, to another peoples.

The law of that story was that knowledge must be shared to those in need.

There are stories about the misuse of knowledge where knowledge has been deliberately misused, and the punishment for that is inflicted upon the innocent as well as the guilty parties. That is the story of the Gagamari and Burrugin the Echidna.

There are two stories about the refusal of the old ones to teach the young ones, and the punishment inflicted on everyone, and that is the story of Boora Birra.

On the other side of the coin, in the story of the Kai Mia, it was the young ones who refused to learn from the older ones – something like today's young ones – where a whole generation was punished.

There is now a fear, or a reluctance to pass knowledge on. What if our knowledge is misused? The punishment is upon us – whether it be physical or spiritual.

But I would like to also mention our medicines.

Many years ago I had an incident when I took my Green Team into the Nattai Valley, where at that time we owned some land.

It is a steep climb down into the valley, and an even steeper climb out of the valley. On the third day, as we were about to begin our journey upward, I noticed that one of the men from another group whom we had been asked to take with us as a reward, was shaking.

I asked him what was wrong, and he replied that he had Parkinson's Disease and had lost his tablets. Because there was no radio reception in the valley, I sent two of the participants up to the top of the cliff to radio to our bosses about the trouble.

It was then that I remembered a certain plant that would ease the symptoms of the Shaking Hands Demon.

I found the plant, gave the relevant parts to him and he used it. He beat every one up to the top, and was jogging along the road when embarrassingly the helicopter winched the doctor down to us.

He virtually had to capture poor Mick, and confirmed that he was indeed suffering Parkinson's disease, but all life signs were okay, and would take him to hospital, just in case.

Meanwhile Mick's friend, who had been carrying the remains of the plant – without our knowledge took it home and decided to smoke it.

He apparently had imagined that he was superman, and tried to jump through a brick wall. When he was taken to the police station he was placed in a straight jacket to prevent him from injuring himself.

After that a well-known American chemical company bothered me consistently for months to tell them about our plants.

It was then that I decided never to tell anyone about the medicinal uses of our plants, until I could be sure that any financial benefit derived from the manufacture of those medicines would be returned to the Aboriginal community of origin.

I accepted this invitation today to tell you that if we are successful in protecting our intellectual property rights, then I will be one of the first to provide all the information I have.

But I do have a word of warning. Part of the information that was passed down to me was that most of those plants need other plants, insect, birds and or animals to be able to produce the treatments or cures.

I want to thank you so much for honouring me with this invitation. I hope that I have been of help in this debate.