

Of course, he was referring to Scotch College, where I had just finished giving a short presentation about my journey from a small village in Eastern Congo to the big city of Brisbane. I didn't want to tell him that I bought the scarf myself. I knew he had more to say, and I was ready to listen.

'That's the most prestigious school in Australia,' he said, 'and behind it is the famous Kooyong Stadium, the first stadium built in Melbourne for the Australian Open.'

My forty-minute conversation in the cab made me think about whether we'll always have to verify every shade of a person's skin before we can approve of their Australianness, or will we say, 'Australia is like a packet of M&M's – they come in different colours but they all belong to the same packet.'

Message from the Ngurra Palya

Ambelin Kwaymullina

To: Australia, 2020*

From: Australia, 2050*

** dates are based on the failed construct of linear time which forms a dominant point of reference for the iteration of reality to which this message is addressed*

Greetings from the crew of the *Ngurra Palya*

a ship that traverses all of spacetime

The first of many ships

designed by Indigenous scientific literacies
and built with Western technologies

Our crew

is mainly Indigenous

because Indigenous minds

are the most adept

at understanding how to move gently
through relationships

Without such knowledge

it is not possible

to travel spacetime

because spacetime *is* relationships

It is millions of beings
 all alive
 all conscious
 all constantly interacting
 A sea of connections
 shifting in multiple directions
 across multiple dimensions

We sail this sea
 led not by a captain
 but by an Elder
 an Aunty
 She guides us
 in this work we are doing
 to heal the fabric
 of our world
 of all worlds

There was much discussion
 amongst our crew
 about whether to send this message
 Many yarnning circles
 over many cups of tea
 This message
 is not a part

of the work the *Ngurra Palya* was built for
 or the work our crew trained for
 We are tasked
 with the winding and unwinding
 of all that was/is/will be
 To heal
 To balance relationships
 It is complex
 difficult
 our actions radiate out
 affecting all that is
 We must be wary
 of unintended consequences
 We do nothing
 without process
 without yarnning
 and cups of tea
 Aunty likes hers strong
 with a lot of sweetness

Some of us were worried
 that sending a message
 to the world before the change
 could skew possibilities
 derailing our reality

But we have consulted
 with the Council of Holistic Science
 They say the change in the world
 that led to us
 to the *Ngurna Palya*
 and to all the other ships
 being built in the shipyards
 that led
 to the on-Country learning places
 where Elders and other critical thinkers
 teach people how to transform patterns of thought
 so they can live in ways
 that sustain all life
 is coming and cannot be stopped
 It is a knot in spacetime
 that no one can undo
 Those of our crew
 born before the change
 said we had to reach out
 even in a small way
 even just through a message
 They said, you don't know
 what it was like before
 The hate

was everywhere
 spewed by trolls
 in online spaces
 The same hate
 in newspapers
 on television screens
 in parliaments
 Sometimes disguised
 in softer words
 longer words
 coded
 for use in polite company
 Sometimes denied
 by the very people espousing it
 Gaslighting abounded
 The hate was always there
 daily sapping the energy
 hope
 spirit
 of so many
 So we say to you:
 this hate
 these voices that glory

in privilege
 in exclusion
 in meanness of spirit
 this is not the future
 What you are hearing
 are the last gasps
 of a dying empire

When the change comes
 it will have many beginnings
 It will not be one big thing
 but a lot of little things
 Drops of water falling gently
 and running together
 into a trickle
 then a stream
 then an ocean
 that roars

We will tell you
 about one of the beginnings
 just a small thing
 A question and answer
 at a forum
 a panel

on Aboriginal policy
 Like every other forum
 in the world before
 Aboriginal people were talking
 about the keys to opening up a better future:
land justice
strengths-based
Aboriginal owned and led
trauma-informed
evidence-based
 And the government
 wasn't listening

A woman in the audience
 white
 earnest
 asks one of the panellists
 what she can do
 to support Aboriginal people
 The panellist who answered
 was my grandmother
 She told the woman
Stop asking WHAT
Start asking HOW

My grandma said
 that over the years
 she'd given that answer
 about as many times
 as she'd been asked that question
 which was a lot
 But this time
 her answer trended
 became a hashtag
 was listened to
 Not by government
 who would be the last to shift their position
 but by people
 at least some
 Grandma called them
 'good-hearted people'
 the ones who came from a place
 of respect
 humility
 genuineness

Stop asking WHAT start asking HOW
 made good-hearted people focus
 on all the processes
 large and small

individual and collective
 by which they could embody respect
 for Indigenous peoples
 including by yielding space
 instead of occupying it
 In those spaces
 out of those processes
 came conversations
 Different peoples
 coming together
 sharing knowledge
 sharing aspirations
 a thousand small beginnings
 towards dismantling
 settler-colonialism
 the context of violence
 the originating hate
 within which all other hate exists
 on stolen land

The distance between
 what is
 and what will be
 is less than you think

It is no distance at all

There is no linear past present and future

Only the now

with all possibilities

enfolded by

and unfolding from

what is

A just world

is not unreachable

It is what's next

You can breathe it

in your next breath

Feel it

in your next heartbeat

Think it

in your next thought

We know

the struggle is hard

the journey is long

but there are so many who feel

exactly as you do

You are all looking up at the same sky

as the world turns through day and night

And hope

like the stars

is there even when you can't see it