

'This country leans in on you. Like family. To my way of thinking, it is family.'

Country, what does country mean to you? How does it represent you, and your culture? Does it enforce the feelings of family...of its landscape? Race? War? Past, present or future? The history of my country has many beginnings and feelings; some cheerful, and some bleak.

My country is built upon a deep rich culture. Of what we know as the Dreamtime. Fond memories learning about this culture take me back to a time in primary school. Where the story of how the birds got their colours was presented, showing how they worked together in order to move forward in harmony, opposed to selfishness. As a young child, this story seemed to resonate with me as the world was new and this story allowed me to look at life from another perspective. Through the eyes of a culture that had been around for over sixty thousand years. A culture, built by strong pillars of storytelling, dance, law...a people of lore, art and music.

Beneath our radiant southern cross we sing, ADVANCE AUSTRALIA FAIR.

As I look back into our history's past, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples have looked after, and nurtured both the land, and water as well as all living things that share this great nation. This country has a dark start to its beginning, a nation built upon the tragic invasion known as Invasion Day or Australia Day. Memories from my childhood consisted of having family over sharing in the joy of 'Australia Day' and its founding. Looking back, as a country we were blinded by the truth of what this day truly meant. A day of suffering, death, and remembrance for those who were slaughtered. As a result, both Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander people lost their connection to the past through a time known as the 'Lost Generation' where both Indigenous and Torres Strait peoples connection to the land and past were taken.

In having a connection to this time it allowed me to gain an understanding of our country's past, and the importance of not forgetting its rich culture, allowing ourselves to move forward, and to not repeat the devastating events of the past. This connection was built by an elder, Uncle Bob Randle. A man who taught the local teaching of 'Living Kanyini', a man who showcased an unconditional love to all living things, fostering an interconnection with nature. This is where I believe I received my love of the bush. As a regular hiker, it was the teachings of 'Living Kanyini' that enforced my respect for the bush. I learnt the importance of leaving the bush as you found it, of not taking more than you need. A respect I learnt to implement into my everyday life.

Soon World War I rolled on to history's page. A moment in Australia's history that has personally left a lasting impression on me. At this point in time Australia had over 415,000 Australians enlist during the war, an army built from a nation of just over four million people, remarkable looking back. These men and women were known as ANZACS. It was inevitable that my family was to entangle itself with country and war in some way shape or form, just like the other families of the time. My great grandfather was a man of good looks. He was a man of family. He was a man who took pride in his appearance. He was a gunner, the man on the machine, laying down hell fire in order to grab just an inch of dirt. He was the man who came back as another person. A man troubled by the past and deafened by his return to normality. To me however, he was Uncle Bob. Nan would tell me tales of his adventures. As a young boy, I was given various trinkets, the passing down of Uncle Bob's heirlooms. A rucksack. Medals. Backpacks that had seen the horrors of the battlefield, heavy from the blood sweat and tears of battle. An old, battered diary. Pages still intact, yet withered age and turmoil. I find myself gaining a closer relationship with Uncle Bob, his story propelling me in my everyday life to push myself, to live life with the same spirit and charismatic look on life's most challenging tasks.

Australians all let us rejoice, For we are one and free, ADVANCE AUSTRALIA FAIR.

Remembrance Day. The 11th day of the 11th month. A day my family holds dear. A day where we honour those who fought for our freedom, and acknowledge the sacrifices made in order to save the lives of the oppressed. We do this in my family by waking before dawn, we do this to show respect at the dawn service, acknowledging the lives lost and the sacrifices made. The entire country does this, building a beacon of hope for the future. Love for the lost. Remembrance for the unforgotten.

In history's page, let every stage ADVANCE AUSTRALIA FAIR.

Australia has one of the most diverse landscapes to show the world. Built around the vast waters of the Pacific, Indian and Southern oceans. Landscapes of deserts. wetlands. rainforests. woodlands. grasslands as well as the largest reef to be seen by the world. Treasured memories of being amongst the bush allows me to relieve myself of all the troubling things life has to throw at me. To envelop myself in a space which feels like home, like family. I do this by going hiking by myself to block out all the noise and to just be one with myself. To allow space for true perfection in the colours of the rainbow. Of the birds chirping. Of the waterfalls glistening. Of the leaves rustling... And of the eucalyptus rich air being one with every breath. Through embedding myself in these experiences, it allows me to be one with myself. Building a place of happiness. Purposes. Survival.

Our land abounds in nature's gifts, ADVANCE AUSTRALIA FAIR

Upon reflecting back on my sixteen years on this earth. Family has been the bond of love, heart break, and the honour held in the holding of that love. Family is in the blood of one another, as well as the past entanglement of relationships with another. Family is the brother, the sister or the idol within your life, the one you can always count on, the one who will stay till the end. The one who stays on your hip in the darkness of the night, and is there in the wakening of the sun. I have immersed myself amongst the many cultures that share this great nation, as well as the many family relationships that border each other, across this green and blue ridden world.