

National Reconciliation Week Breakfast (Hobart) Monday 27th May
Student Speaker Milly Crombie, The Friends' School
Don't Keep History a Mystery

Imagine me at the age of 8
sitting on slightly scratchy carpet
Fiddling with the fraying Velcro straps on my school shoes
caked with mud from overly competitive games of chasings at lunch
My teacher holding up a picture of men in red coats and large hats in front of a big sail clad ship
They looked proud, triumphant, victorious
But the bright red coats looked like they were shouting
Over the whispering greys and greens of the bush behind them

“these are the men that discovered Australia”
“they travelled here by boat from Europe, you know that big group of countries, a very long time ago”
“lots more people came to Australia when they heard how nice it was”
“they discovered an island, the convicts came, they found gold, the Chinese came, they built factories,
the Europeans came”

My school dress was chequered white and blue
I thought the way the lines of blue overlapped each other to form new shades was far more interesting
than these men with coats the colour of stop signs

“what do we call this when people start building towns on land they find”
She had wiry blonde hair that was going grey near her ears
She always wore big earrings and pink lipstick
I wasn't even listening to the question

The answer my teacher wanted to hear was colonisation
The answer she needed to hear
was invasion

I was taught Australian history every year in primary school since then
And every year I became more familiar with the loose threads on my uniform and scuffs on my shoes

I learnt dates...
Federation was the first of January 1901...
I learnt names...
Tasmania was originally named Van Diemen's land by the Dutch
I learnt stories...
The isthmus of Eaglehawk Neck was lined with dogs to alert the guards if a convict escaped...
I studied so many drawings and watercolour paintings of the men in red coats
Standing smugly in front of horses they rode, houses they built, hope they created
But what about the homes they destroyed

And when it came to the topic of aboriginal perspectives
We were simply fed the phrase “they didn't like the Europeans”

I was never told that the aboriginal community were introduced to alcohol by the Europeans
The poison that white men called liquid courage
Left communities cowering in corners
We blame them for the reputation of a drunk nation
Pin the brooch of shame on their breast pockets
Don't forget we were the ones that brought the bottle to their lips

We are taught about spears and boomerangs but ignore the guns and smallpox that trumped them
We are taught about dream time stories but neglect to credit the elders that spoke those beautiful
words
We are taught about the women weaving and creating jewellery out of seashells but forget to mention
these are the same women that had their children ripped away from them

We cannot continue to only teach half of history
We cannot continue to train our children to see white as pure
And brown as dirty
These people built this beautiful land we stand on
The earth beneath us is rich with stories of trials, tribulations, celebrations and community
And we drag our shoes over it with no care at all

We are responsible for creating generations that pride themselves on

Stupidity disguised as superiority

We are the only people we have to blame
Because we are the ones that have chosen to ignore our history
We have swept genocide, abduction and exploitation under the carpet
And left it to fester with the dust mites and delayed apologies

For so long we have simply skimmed over aboriginal culture
From the Muwinini people whose land we stand on today
To the Ngunnawal land on which our parliament house is built upon

The Gweagal land that the Europeans first harboured at and named Botany Bay
The Wurundjeri land that hosts the great city of Melbourne
Kunanyi, Uluru, Kakadu, Kata Tjuta
We have pushed a pillow called ignorance against their mouths
smothering any voice that tries to escape

Because not only do these people deserve our acknowledgement
more than that they deserve our remorse

For the past hundreds of years we have neglected to educate our children on a community that built
our earth
instead
We built curriculums on Sonnets instead of solidarity
Atoms instead of empathy
Calculus instead of compassion

And god forbid we let another 8 year old girl sit on scratchy carpet
and pay more attention to her school uniform than to the history of her home