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Conclusion

Should I have been surprised on the morning of Uncle Roy's funeral to see a police car at Eildon cemetery? Perhaps this was a funeral escort, I thought, a fitting gesture for a respected local Elder. But the hearse was already at the graveside, and the funeral director seemed surprised to see the marked police car. This was no escort. Parked conspicuously in the only entrance, the officers appeared to be issuing defect notices to mourners.

This was an Aboriginal funeral, and the 'old enemy' was on the offensive. As relatives ran the blue gauntlet, Uncle Roy's daughter sighed: 'I hope it's not going to be one of "those" days', she said, with a shrug of resignation. I can understand why Aboriginal people might become bitter in such circumstances. Uncle Roy would have laughed and said, 'would ya blame me?'

Yet, in his final years, Uncle Roy was committed to collaboration and made efforts to overcome past failings. He wanted solutions for Aboriginal people and healing for Taungurung land. Uncle Roy took his role as an Indigenous educator seriously; even his burial was instructive. He chose a natural burial, with a shroud instead of a casket so that his body would soon be held by Mother Earth. There was no fake green grass to soften the grave side, no polished brass, no piped music, no canopy to shade the mourners, and no white plastic seats in a neat line. We stood in messy huddles around the naked hole. The eucalyptus smoke and the stark, haunting sound of the didgeridoo swirled around us as birds called. A grandson laughed out loud as he read surprising details in the eulogy. People shared anecdotes about an old joker, a teacher, a friend. Uncle Roy's body was lowered all the way to the bottom of the grave. His little

great-granddaughter wailed inconsolably, clinging to her grandmother's trouser leg. Mourners threw gum leaves and ochre onto Uncle Roy's old Akubra, placed over his heart. I had never seen him without that old hat. I would never see either again.

Uncle Roy once said, 'here is a story for ya':

In our Dreaming, the start of Aboriginal people is from Mother Earth. No one owns Mother Earth, not the state or federal government, not the mining companies and not the Aboriginals. When Mother Earth made people, she made us custodians of the land, not the owner. You don't own your mother, you are part of her; you belong to her. That's our law and a bit of our culture and spirit world. How do you like that?¹

1 Roy Patterson, in conversation with Jennifer Jones, 3 March 2016, DS3001138.

This text is taken from *On Taungurung Land: Sharing History and Culture*,
by Uncle Roy Henry Patterson and Jennifer Jones, published 2020 by
ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/OTL.2020.08