

Hidden Promise of Garma

by Michelle Kerrin

The howling of the wind welcomed us; it spoke through the midst of the trees and beneath our feet. The land around us was sanctioned to its people, the owners to which we pay respect, to all generations great and small, the Aboriginal people. The acceptance of all people in itself was one of the greatest moments. As they danced around the Bungal they paid respect to their own, to their culture and their ancestors. The sand flicked beneath their feet as they danced to the beat of the sticks. One movement together, one movement apart, not a footstep was out of time, not a single move distanced the beat of their voices. The feeling that was aroused was like no other; you could feel it, the reason why they danced and although the differences in language parted us, it did not matter, because I understood their reasons to celebrate. We were accepted onto this land and it was another movement the cultures within Australia moved forward with.

You could see the slow change of mindsets; politicians and people with great power in the Country could see why we fight to accept and well-acknowledge Aboriginal people. The stories of the Aboriginal people empowered us; their battle, their anger and sadness filled the air as they spoke of their ongoing troubles. You could not only hear the sadness in their cries but also see it in their eyes. You could see their scars from the battles they have faced. Not only did the physical scars show but you could see how they were beaten with words, the discrimination they faced and still face is written all over them. They feel imprisoned in their own Country, feeling unaccepted and foolish, being treated like unforgotten slaves of this land. It was the perfect place to listen, to understand and focus on the what the real problem is. As they expressed their emotions through song and dance you could see the battles they have won and the ones they have lost. The heartbreaking reality of this festival was the question of change, the question of which has surrounded this Country for years and has slowly progressed to what is happening today.

The festival was a revolutionary campaign, illustrating the culture of Indigenous people. The day began with the sun reaching out and kissing the tops of the tent. One by one they came alive, zips were drawn down and heads slowly emerged. As you looked out across the land you were reminded of the beauty and cause you were there for. You felt a fresh sensation as the wind blew around you, raising the dirt around your legs, feeling a part of nature. This place was a new place, a place to understand others journey and to find your own. Garma had this power to bring people from near and far, from politicians to mothers, from business owners to children, from Indigenous elders, young ones and the spirits of the land. It welcomed the world in one little place and somehow created a commanding engagement for all people. The smiles among others faces were so friendly and kind. They reached from ear to ear along with laughter and enjoyment. It was stunning; the sunrays scattered across the land and created life upon everything it touched. Garma was able to connect individuals without a word spoken, a magical foundation the people of the land created.

As the festival came to an end, although saddened, people were enlightened with the progress they as both individuals and as groups had made. Change was coming and it was up to those who had experienced the festival to inform others of the issue, of the stigma that still surrounds Indigenous culture and the stories of continual fighting Indigenous people face. Although the fixation has occurred for years, for many it was a new beginning of change and recognition. While those journeyed their way home, it was only obvious to question whether it really affected them or if this was only a discussion of the land? Was it just a hidden promise to Aboriginal people?