

Good Afternoon, everyone,

They gave me a set time to talk today... which is risky. My Pop had yarns that went for three hours and still ended with ‘...but that’s another story.’ So, I’ll try keep it short!

NAIDOC Week is always a time for celebration — but it’s also a time for truth-telling, for remembering, and for giving thanks to those whose fire lit the path we walk today. My name is Levi Briggs, and I stand here today not only as the Aboriginal Education Worker at St Mary’s Catholic College Gateshead, but as a proud representative of my family and my culture.

It’s an honour to speak during this NAIDOC Prayer Service — in a place where faith, identity, and community come together.

Today, I speak on behalf of my family and in honour of my great-grandfather, **Bill Smith** — a man whose legacy continues to guide and inspire me every single day.

Pop was more than a community leader — he was a cultural warrior. He dedicated his life to strengthening our people and empowering our youth. Through his cultural business, **Mimiga Wajaar** — which means “Mother Earth” — he took our stories, language, and identity across the globe. That business wasn’t just work to him. It was a mission. A way of showing the world who we are as Aboriginal people. He travelled the world, proudly sharing our culture in places many of us could only imagine — even meeting **Queen Elizabeth II**, the **King and Queen of Samoa**, and many other world leaders, for him this wasn’t for fame, nor attention, but to ensure our culture was respected and heard on the world stage. But Pop didn’t just shine on the world stage — he shone right here at home. In communities, in schools, in the bush, on the beach. He could hold a crowd of hundreds with his voice — not because he was loud, but because he was real. What made him special wasn’t just his cultural knowledge, but how he shared it — always with humour, with heart, and with a deep respect for every person he spoke to.

Since his passing in 2021, I’ve done my best to follow in his footsteps. And one of the greatest honours of my life so far is being trusted to carry that mission forward — stepping in and continuing the spirit journey that Pop began, through Mimiga Wajaar.

I carry that with respect, humility, and a lot of pride. It’s not something I take lightly — it’s part of my promise to him, to our family, and to culture.

Another one of Pop’s most powerful legacies was **co-founding Awabakal Ltd**, now one of the leading Aboriginal medical and health service providers in the country. What started as a community-led vision has grown into something that continues to care for and empower our people to this day. He saw the gaps, the struggles, and instead of waiting for change, he *became* the change. He built things that would last — for his people, for the next generation.

He gave everything to his people. His voice, his vision, and his strength continue to live on — through our family, through our work, and through the stories we carry.

I also want to honour two very special people who are here with us today — my great-grandmother, **Gloria Smith**, Pop’s wife, and **Aunty Louise Campbell**.

Nan has been the rock of our family. The quiet strength behind everything Pop did. She has shaped who I am — not just in culture, but in character. She’s passed down values that ground me, guide me, and remind me of where I come from, and aunty Louise who has been a powerful influence in my life — not only through the work she’s done in education and this Diocese, but through the way she carries culture, strength, and dignity.

And because of them, I know who I am.

And now, it’s my turn.

My turn to dive deeper into culture. My turn to keep our fire burning. My turn to teach the younger generations with the same love and strength that my Nan and Pop instilled in me.

This year's NAIDOC theme — *The Next Generation: Strength, Vision & Legacy*— is more than words. It's a responsibility.

I may not be travelling the world like Pop just yet — but between studying at The Australian Catholic University and helping our mob at school, I reckon I'm doing my part!

I'm proud to stand here today. Proud of my Pop, and proud to carry his legacy forward with love, truth, and culture at the heart of it all.

And before I sit down, I just want to say — if Pop were here today, he'd probably be standing in the back somewhere, arms folded, nodding like, "Not bad, Levi... but you missed a few things."

That was his way — tough love, deadly yarns, and always reminding us there's still more to learn.

So, in his honour, I'll finish the way he often did —

Follow your dreams, follow your vision, find that mountain and follow that eagle to the top, don't let anyone pull you back or stop you.

Thank you.