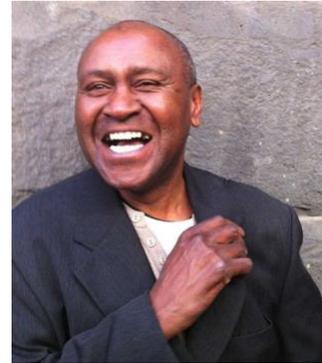




Bitter Harvest Mach 3
(A footnote in my history)

John Nain Harding
Meriam, Gu-Gu Yimidir
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(Dedicated to Tara Newen my Champa Princess x)

I am zooming my therapist, Dr Nutley, from my garage shed, using the money I've saved on petrol.

I need to vent to someone that has no intrinsic concern over what I am spouting.

"Can you see me Doc?"

He nods, in as yet cashless anticipation.

"Alrighty then! If I hear one more person compare this to the gubs poisoning us with strychnine, sticking it in bread and warmly giving us loaves to take home and share with our brethren, or lacing waterholes, I am going to be sick!"

See, I already know this shit. Tell me something I don't know. There was no such thing as iso then, for smallpox I mean. Or was there?

Yesterday marked the 250th anniversary of Cookie landing on my grandfather's country. They tried to burn him out for taking turtles. Then they brought out convicts for stealing bread.

One good thing about this virus, it has slowed everyone down ... right down.

I reckon we used to live slow, us Blakfellas, just plodded along with quiet determination. I mean, what was the rush? No rush, no need. Plenty of time to think, really **think** about the cultural consequences of a thoughtless selfish action. Maybe that's why they were kept to a minimum and we didn't need jails.

A lot of my blak mates are trying new things in this virus time. I joined a group on Facebook called Mob Feeds, and in April watched it grow from 2000 to 10 000 members. Everyone's cooking! Well, we all used to cook didn't we?

I obtained a dijeridoo, my *yidaki*, two blank canvasses, a guitar and a box of bottles of paints. They all stare at me in my loungeroom. I am tempted to



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paint my yidaki and my guitar, and give the canvasses to someone who knows what to do with a brush.

For some reason I am thinking of my Stolen Gens friends more than ever, hoping like hell they are alright; loneliness has a long memory, and plenty of pals. Some of these old friends, whom I haven't heard from for a while, ring me, telling me they're ok. I am glad they are not in front of me and can't see my tears of happiness, cutting my iso.

We laugh about how we, the toughest Blaks of the tough, are being told we are the most susceptible to a virus named after a light beer. Without blinkin, we'd have street fights with racist coppers, and now we are told to stay indoors at all costs. Funny how our warriors are turning into worriers.

Yesterday, I saw, for the first time, a skink in my backyard sitting on my baby lemon tree, my attempt at self-sufficiency.

Birds are coming back too. My windshield is covered with shit from rosellas that have suddenly decided to perch in the large ghost gum tree I call *Namatjira*, which hangs out above my Ford Capri

I saw a homeless guy who has sat outside the market since I first moved over this way in 2015. I'm glad every time I see him; it means I know he is alive. I can't stop thinking about the homeless, Doc. I feel so guilty when I cook myself a feed. Growing up in Port Melbourne, we used to have white swaggies knocking on our door every week, and Mum would dish them out tea and sugar, sometimes make them scones. She would carefully place everything into their hessian sacks, crack a joke with them, and wave them off. Never saw a Blakfella swaggie, maybe coz we just took them in.

I'm reflecting on the old ways a lot ... of the old times. Kindness was a given, ya know?

Trust was a given too, and you soon found out if your trust was betrayed, or should I say the betrayer would get a quick lesson on redemption. Loremen not lawmen!

I can't stop thinking about all our brothers and sisters stuck in detention, young and old.

Can you just imagine how quick that old boy will spread once it catches light in the lands of no social distancing, soap or sanitiser?

My people in the remote areas like TSI are a tinder pile, simultaneously saved by iso, while sitting in a crowded house waiting for Armageddon, which more than likely will come from a Grey Nomad. Now there's some irony.



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Pray it doesn't happen because when we start to see our old people getting wiped out, there go the libraries. And all the people that spoke for years about sitting down and documenting their stories will be watching their funeral announcements on Facebook. They will be wishing they had picked up that iPhone they're married to and turned it on their Elders for a morning or an afternoon. That's all they had to do!

But we'll get thru it, we always will be.

John is a Meriam / Gu-Gu Yimidir man, born and bred in Melbourne. John has been writing in the mediums of theatre, television series, documentary and drama, film and poetry for over 35 years. He has produced thirteen staged theatrical productions, won several State and National awards (including the Human Rights Award) and has twice been published as a playwright by Currency Press. He specializes in creative writing, and has sat on Indigenous Advisory committees for Melbourne Arts Festival, Australian Arts Law Centre and the First Nations of Australia Writers Network. John is a founding member of Ilbijerri Aboriginal /TSI Theatre Company. Since Ilbijerri's inception, John has worked tirelessly in the pursuit of Indigenous artistic expression in the arts and particularly theatre.