

## Sidney Saltner interviewed by Daniel Browning, Sydney, February 2023

**Daniel Browning:** [00:00:03] You've pretty, you know, you've done this before, Sidney. We've done it before. So, I'll just begin by saying it's Friday. The 3rd of February, and I'm in inner Sydney with Sidney Saltner and this is the Muru-ba Indigenous Oral History Project in collaboration with Sydney WorldPride and ABC Radio. My name is Daniel Browning and Sidney I'm going to ask you to introduce yourself, as you like to be introduced, saying all those things that are important about you.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:00:42] Cool. My name is Sidney Saltner, a Wulli Wulli and Waka Waka man from Central Queensland. I was born in Theodore on Wulli Wulli Country in 1968.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:00:55] Now, Theodore, a little, little country town. How big is Theodore?

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:00:58] Theodore is a little country town, and it's probably about 6 to 700 people within the town. So it's really quite small.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:01:06] And a lot of family there is is an assault and is just one one mob among many mobs. There's a big Aboriginal population in Theodore.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:01:16] Yeah, there's a few families there and people come and go throughout the years and stuff like that. We certainly didn't. I was born there, but we moved around quite a lot and then suddenly we ended up back there again. So yeah, but you know, there's a few family members there. Yeah.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:01:32] And can I ask how many your family and your brothers and sisters?

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:01:37] I suppose when Mum and Dad were married, there were six of us. When they separated, Mum had five more and then Dad had four more. So there's 15 of us altogether.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:01:47] Gee whiz, we know how to. We know how to reproduce this. What I'll say. Everyone I've been talking to has generally always coming from very big families. So 90% of people coming from families bigger than five or six. Maybe it's that generation. No television. So can you tell me a little bit about your Bob and the Salt nickname? I know from from from Cherbourg, but that's your grandfather's brother's family. Yeah. So we have something has always been on that on that country.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:02:24] Yes, definitely. They recently we went back to delivering one of our programs up in theater. And Dad took all the kids in us and the participants out onto country, and they all grew up on Awkward Station. So they were living on the riverbank along there, working on a station, being station hands and stuff like that. So that was really amazing to go back there. And from there I think they were all shifted off to different places, different missions like Cherbourg and places like that. And a couple of years ago we recently discovered the papers of my grandfather, who was allowed to leave the station and work outside. So I forget what they call that, but certain papers are allowed off permission exemptions.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:03:07] They used to call it the dog. The dog.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:03:09] Tag. The exemption certificates. Yeah.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:03:13] And was that in? Just you were just interested in finding finding out more or someone in the family found out, found out these details.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:03:19] I suppose when we were growing up, we known you were Aboriginal was enough. But you know, young kids, you don't understand what that means until you grow up and then suddenly face racism and stuff like that for the first time. Sorry, Where was I going with that question?

**Daniel Browning:** [00:03:35] Yeah, just trying to find those records.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:03:38] Yeah. And I suppose once I left a theatre and came into the Aboriginal Dance Company and then eventually NAISDA and discovering that stuff, I suppose, and then that sort of fed back into my family. So then we all started finding out different histories and stuff. So all these paperwork start and then I think with Grandad

passing and Grandma and passing, all the paperwork came out because they used to hide stuff and put them away. So going through all the personal effects and stuff like that, we find stuff like this.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:04:09] And were your grandparents around when you were growing up in Theodore? Not just Theodore, but were they around when you're growing up?

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:04:16] For sure. So when Mum and Dad separated, our six kids, went with Dad and we went and lived with my grandparents on my dad's side. So we were there for I think when I was I was probably three turning four at that stage. And then when I was in grade eight, Dad met his new partner and we all moved in with him and their children.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:04:42] And so you mentioned that you moved around a little. So it wasn't just Theodore, but Theodore. Theodore is home. What are some of the other places that you kind of grew you grow up?

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:04:52] Um, because Dad used to work on properties and stations and stuff. So there's a lot of properties around the Theodore area that we went and lived on. Lived in places like Gander down in Hervey Bay. Mara We lived in Biloela, we lived in Abbott, Rolleston and places like that.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:05:11] In western Queensland and southern Queensland.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:05:13] Sort of like central Queensland really. Yeah. So all around on those areas, yeah.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:05:18] Now if we drew a line from Gladstone to Theodore, it's always a direct line, but we're talking central, not a direct line, but close enough Mara and Theodore kind of in the same area we call that Central Queensland.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:05:31] Yeah, that's correct. So directly. So I sort of go, if you put your finger on glass then a Rockhampton go like that, you'll come to Theodore for

about. It's about. 3 hours south of Rocky and about two and a half hours west of Gladstone.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:05:48] Now, when you were growing up, was it? How did you find yourself in in Sydney later? Was there was there any sense when you were growing up that you had a, you know, a sense of movement and that you had that natural grace that, you know, you later exhibited when you were on stage? What how did you know you were you had a talent or didn't? Did you know at all?

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:06:16] I don't know whether I had a talent back then, I suppose. But I think when we were living with my grandparents and my dad and his brothers used to work out on a property during the week and they'd come home in on the weekends. And sometimes our uncle Johnny, who used to put bottle caps under his toes and tap dance for us when he was, they'd come home drunk because they'd be at the bar or club or night party and come back and entertain us kids. And he'd put the caps under his toes and tap dance on grandma's wooden floors. And we were so excited about. So that really interested me going, Oh, okay. And so I was from a very young age. I was interested in dance and then watching the ABC and watching the Australian Ballet on the ABC and stuff like that really sparked that interest in me. But my family's a very sporting family, so anything cricket which I can't stand, I never took up but football I did because of my brothers and stuff like that. So I was very successful in football and then. Um, took on swimming was great at swimming also in athletics, I suppose. So we did all of that. There was no opportunities, a lot of opportunities anyway, in central Queensland and places we were for the arts at all. It wasn't until we moved to Billy Wheeler in the early seventies, I think it was, yes. And during the primary school years there there was opportunities to do school shows and stuff. So I threw myself into that and dragged my older sister along. So we did that and we couldn't afford costumes and stuff. So grandmom dragged out these shoes to iron clothes and put them under the bed. And that was your good clothes. You weren't allowed to wear them and tell her you going somewhere. So she dragged that out and pull all the Christmas decorations and sewed them on our costumes. So that became our costumes.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:08:16] Yeah. Necessity is a mother of invention. You know, we it's amazing what you can do with some Christmas decorations and some good clothes. So you're very close to your paternal grandmother. Grandparents? Yeah. And so

Theodore's traditional country. And what do you feel when you go back there now? I mean, you were talking about going back there and working with with the mob there.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:08:42] I suppose when you're young and you can't wait to get out of the place and stuff like that. And as you get older, you understand what country means to you and going back there. And every time I go back, I'd take my shoes off, I go down, walk on the grass, jump in the Dawson River, and just immerse myself in that and just let country heal you, I suppose. And it is that for me, when I go home, it's like, I don't know whether I'll go back there and live there again. But one you never know. But that's what it means to me. Just going back and and just recharging yourself and connecting to that place and just listening.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:09:22] It's almost as if country is waiting for you and knows you. I experienced something, something very similar where where I come from and always feel like I'm. It doesn't matter what happens, I'll be okay because I'm on country.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:09:37] Yeah. And I suppose now that the elders and stuff like, you know for many years they weren't allowed to speak or their language or show us things or anything like that. But going back now, every time I go back, Dad goes, Oh, we should go here. So we go for a drive. And he takes us to certain places where he grew up and and now I didn't even know there was cave paintings around there. And all this stuff is happening now and they're opening up and taking the kids back and doing all that kind of stuff and teaching them things how to make clap sticks and do all that kind of stuff. So all the stuff is now being brought back because now they have permission to do that. But also the kids are wanting to do that. And you know, it's sort of like it sort of baffles me for a minute and go, Well, why didn't you do this with us? Because I was still stuck in that system of going well. But also one of the best for us in terms of going, oh, you're going to have to learn this way so that you can survive in this world. And I think now where we are now, where I am now and what I've learnt culturally and stuff like that, they've been able to allow themselves to do that also.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:10:46] It's beautiful when that moment happens and they finally feel safe enough to tell the story because I haven't felt safe. They're trying to keep us safe and don't speak language, don't talk about stuff, because, you know, you might get taken away.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:11:01] You know, especially language and stuff. Like I was tasked to teach language and I'm, you know, going, oh, I don't really know the language. And so they hand me these language books and stuff like that. And I've been around many years to different Aboriginal communities and listening to language and the way they pronounce certain words and, and looking at the phonetics and stuff like that. So I was able to piece together some language stuff, but also looking at those language books and going, okay, we use these words in every single day. They were actually teaching language to us like certain things, and which made it easy for the kids to learn because, well, you already know this word. So see the energy, this new word here, how do you pronounce that? So we sort of building blocks that way.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:11:49] Yeah. We always had a word for in my ear. We had a bad word for fart and bum and all the words he didn't want to say in front of a white person.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:11:57] Exactly. Exactly. We do all of that. Yes. And especially if you're deaf, you vinegary. So we all know that one and stuff like that. So. Yeah.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:12:06] Vinegary. That means like no ear, doesn't it know ear.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:12:08] So you have dead ear.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:12:10] You don't listen. So. When you. I guess when you finish school. When. When did you finish school? Were you in Theodore at that time?

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:12:21] No. I finished school in theatre in 84 because theatre only goes up to grade ten. And then I got the opportunity to go to boarding school down in Warwick, in Queensland. And that was a co-ed school full of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids and other kids from International Place. And that was the first time I was immersed in an all black school and having so many black people around me. Because growing up in Theodore, Marah and Biloela, it was predominantly all a white school, unless they were your cousins and stuff like that. So you know. It was. Interesting. And then I graduated from Slade School in the end of.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:13:05] 86 Slade School in Warwick. What was it like going from central Queensland and coming to Warwick, which is a more kind of south southern Queensland? We're talking to Woomera in that kind of part of the world.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:13:21] I think because I was turning 1516 at the time, so every kid wants their independence at that age. So I don't know, sort of jumped out of the fire, into the frying pan, into the fire really, because it was getting out of that constraint of that family structure and then into the school structure where it's even more strict because you weren't allowed. But for me, because I was on my own, it was a bit daunting at first because I didn't have family around me. But it was something that I wanted. And I think if I was forced to do it, it'd be a different story. But because I wanted to do it, I made it work for me and I really enjoyed being at boarding school.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:13:59] And did you get homesick?

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:14:01] Um, I think in the first couple of months. But after that. No, no. It's like there was so much activities at the school that I was involved in a lot of sports and stuff like that. Got into public speaking because I. I never spoke like, my how I speak now was like cutting in the ends of words and all that kind of stuff. So the speech therapy helped and stuff like that. And I remember my speech therapist, Ms.. Haydel, it's having not heaven, so all that kind of stuff, and we used to do it just a teaser anyway and stuff like that. And then. But yeah, they had school camps every weekend where you went stuck at school. We'd go down to Guruji National Park or down to the Gold Coast fishing and do all that kind of stuff. So they really kept us engaged and entertained really through school.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:14:55] And because there were other mob there, did you feel like it was maybe not, maybe not family? Exactly. But did you feel supported and there were other blackfellas there that you could relate to?

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:15:07] Yeah, I think at the beginning I was a little bit black out. Yeah, It's like, Oh my God, I've never seen so many black people. And like the only sort of black people that we saw my family and the only other ones that we saw was like. They were all fighting and doing all this kind of stuff which we were kept away from as kids and protected against it. And so I thought, okay, this is going to be very interesting

coming here. How am I going to fit in here? Because, you know, we've brought up quite a sheltered life. But they were great. Like, you know, where are you from? Are you a salt? So then we found those connections and stuff like that and found friends and family quite quickly.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:15:52] It's good how that happens. But sometimes it's like, you know, as soon as you say, Oh yeah, we're related. Grandmother Great grandmothers were sisters or something. It's like, Hey, you got 20. You got 20 bucks. Yeah. But I love making those connections. But what we have to do.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:16:06] Yeah, no, exactly. I think one other thing I need to point out also. Sultana is our last name now, but it was changed. We're actually salt me salt from our great great grandfather who came out from England. And somehow in the police records, it got changed over to Salt. So that's where the salt came in.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:16:34] Salt mirror is very new. I've never heard that. It's a very unusual name.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:16:39] So, yeah, and we found another person who that Bangarra now. And we're related through the white side of our families.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:16:46] So the salt me is. Yeah.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:16:48] Definitely.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:16:49] Do you know what part of England they came from?

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:16:52] From what I see it's from the West Coast, up somewhere near just below Scotland, I think. Yeah.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:17:01] What is there. And you've travelled over there before. Did you know this? Where that. That white side of the family came from there?

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:17:08] No, not really. Like I think I've finished travelling at this stage with the company and stuff like that. So had I known I would have while I was over now



I would have been sorting things out. But you know, who knows what happens in the future.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:17:22] So I guess we should probably go to the most. I guess what we're trying to tease out is people's stories, get a sense of their background, but also what happened when they came to Sydney, which of course is a focus of, well, pride and I guess is what I'm interested to talk to you about. So from from Warwick, you graduated with the Slade School and what happened then?

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:17:50] I met a friend of mine at Slade School and he had come from the Aboriginal Dance Theatre. He'd spent a year there but then came back to school. Because you want to come back to school because he's missing his school friends. And he told me about the dance college and stuff and I thought, Oh, okay. So we used to put dancers together at Slade and stuff like that. And then he convinced me to go down, come down to Sydney and audition for the college. So I did. My father was against it at first and I said, Well, I'm 18 now and I can do what I choose to do. So I came down, got accepted into it, and never looked back.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:18:29] Now, of course, at the time we're talking about the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre, ADT. So can you tell me I mean, it's obviously morphed and changed into, into, into other things, but what was the what was can you kind of characterize. Adt, I mean, we talk about it, it's like, oh, great things happened there and great dancers were trained there. But what, what, what do you reckon was, was the was the magic or the power of ADT? Was the leadership really good or was it just the dances?

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:19:02] For me, I suppose stepping is another coming from all black school, going into another all black school. But these black school, there's so many personalities and they were huge personalities, but also very loving and nurturing. And a lot of that was from the senior artists, I suppose, and some of them who had been through the college and graduated, but also came back and taught in the school and stuff like that. And it wasn't just dance, there was theatre, it was like we were out on protests every weekend and stuff like that. So getting immersed in that coming from the small country town where we were sheltered from all of that to this was a real eye opener. And I think given us that sense of identity, I suppose like I always knew who I

was and where I came from, but understanding that in a black context, I suppose for me was challenging at first, I suppose. And then it wasn't until I was probably in my third or fourth year. Something clicked and I went, Oh, now I get what this is. And you know, and. That was an amazing part of me because in that gave. An even deeper strength of pride, of not just myself, but where I come from in my people and my family.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:20:25] So what year are we talking that you came to Sydney?

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:20:28] I came to Sydney at the end of.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:20:31] 1996. So 96.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:20:35] Really? No, no. 1986. Not 96. 86. Yes. Otherwise, I'd still probably be an old person when I started and I said no. 1986. And I auditioned then and then did my first year at the Aboriginal dance there.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:20:51] And 87 when you you know, when blackfellas come from other parts of the country and they come to Sydney, you know, Redfern obviously is a big focus and people go, go there, used to go there to find mob and still do. Were you given that you were protected and sheltered? Did you, was, was the idea of Sydney kind of frightening or did it, did it was it all exciting, the fact that you were starting out on this career, you didn't know where it was going to go, but what was the Sydney like in 1986?

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:21:27] I suppose for me getting off that plane, like I'd flown before, but getting off the plane in Sydney by myself. I think one of my saving graces that I had my friend with me who came from school, I suppose, and him and I were like thick as thieves and he'd been here before, so I had somebody to guide me through. But I found it really exciting. I wanted to go everywhere and see everything and do everything and just loved it, I suppose. And I relished in that. And that's homesickness. No, no, I was probably I've always been independent and I think this was something that I wanted, I suppose.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:22:09] And in this, Do you remember your first rehearsal for ADT? I remember, like, maybe not the tryouts, but like, when you. Because I tried out

for dance once and I realized I had absolutely no talent, but it was like a three. It was like a three hour audition, and it was musicality and all that. I was just like, I've got to get off this train. I'm no good here. I'm flailing. Did you did you have any experiences like that when you you always knew that this was something you wanted to do and that you were going to apply yourself regardless?

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:22:39] Yeah, I suppose I wasn't. It's the best, I suppose. And that never deterred me in dance, I suppose, or anything that I did. I always tried my best and I suppose I was there to learn. So that's something I instilled in myself straight away, like you're not going to be the best, so don't even put yourself in that category because you're here to learn and train. And and that's what I did. I applied myself for five years to develop those skills. I couldn't even touch my toes, really. And sitting in second position, I was like looking at some of the others. I was like, I'm never going to get there. But I was determined. And it happened.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:23:21] Because I guess dancers have to fine tune their bodies. They have to tune their bodies like cars or or an instrument. You have to train it and you have to get it so that it remembers how to do things. Did you did was your body always respond to you? Were you always in? Sometimes, you know, we don't communicate very well with our body. It's part of why movement, there's movement studies and all these kind of techniques to help people be in their bodies more. We always kind of in your body, aware of it.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:23:52] I suppose. So being been an athlete and stuff like that, I was always aware of my body. But being a blackfella, you think you can just go to bed and do it and win a gold medal? And as you get older and especially going through college and I think the discipline growing up with my grandparents, there was a routine. So that was instilled in me also said, you get up, you make your bed, you shower, you make your lunch, you go to school, you come home, you take your clothes off. So it was this and so that was going into into. College when I went to college, high school, boarding school and then coming to NAITO. So so as a across that kind of stuff. And this one, no one was there to push it to check you, so you had to do it yourself. And I suppose the first two years I was like, I'm in Sydney. I was out partying every weekend from Tuesday to Sunday or something rather. Da da da da da. But still turning up to

work every day and going through the processes and stuff like that. And then I think the third year you sort of settled down.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:24:59] And when I came here now and then you start to really hone in on your technique and skills like that and where you really want to go with dance. And that was the turning point, I suppose. And when you saw all your hard work start to pay off and but yeah, it was a struggle for the first few years to get your body because there's a different way of moving your body and stuff like that. And you use a lot more muscles and you use a lot more brain power to do that because it's like I say to my kids when I'm teaching, I said, Dancing is like when you're trying to learn the typewriter, you have to do it. A million times before you before it's muscle memory. So dance is the same. And that's how you remember the steps on stage, because you do it over and over and over. So same with learning to dance. You have to do that so your body understands where you want it to go and and you build up the strength for it and it's there ready for you to do it.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:25:57] Did you have a strong sense of? I mean, obviously has spent your career with Bangarra, but did you have a sense back in those early days with ADT of a of a dance language that that we as blackfellas have a dance language and that these are the things that you see in traditional dance and how we can maybe make it contemporary. We always kind of thinking about, you know, some people look at our culture and think it's limited or it's not visual enough or it's not florid enough, and the dances aren't complicated enough. But yeah, Did you have a sense when you were growing up of what traditional dance looked like and whether you were going to keep to that or do something else? I mean, you you mentioned classical, classically like ballet being something that you aspired to, looked at when you when you were young.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:26:51] It's strange you asked that question because it sort of had this as we were growing up and we were going to school learning about Aboriginal people and stuff like that and being one and going, okay, well, I'm not one, but you are. And reading these books and we were taught we were savages. So sort of like and then going to nice to Aboriginal and down there and used learning traditional dance, I was freaked out and going there's no way, this is not my style. We've never been taught this, we've never been shown this. I was like, It was foreign to me. And that's what I said earlier, like, and then suddenly something clicked three years later that like a spirit, it

hits you and came inside you or came out of you or was released. Something was released and yeah, and then it just sort of sat and then. Then infusing that with the contemporary style that I was so adamant. That's what I wanted to be on the Australian Ballet dance floor. I'm going to be a ballerina. And then to this. And then those two worlds collided.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:27:55] For me, it was a magical place and I think at that point in time Bangarra was birthed out of it in 1989. Adt the company was also birthed out of that and then phased out. The college became nester. So and then out of all those different styles and stuff like that that we learnt from, we took from here and there and just melded those together and we created our own language because. Looking at. When you look at traditional dance, it's mimicking a lot of mimicking and take and not just mimicking, but evoking that spirit in you so that you become that. And when you look at Western styles of dancing, it's all about shapes and movement and stuff like that. Silhouettes and silhouettes and stuff. And, and yes, ballet does have character stuff, but it's but they don't evoke that spirit that we do. We. The earth, the feeling, the spirit, all that kind of stuff. When you see Bangarra Dance, when you see it. We evoke that, and that's the stuff that people are drawn to us and see.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:29:03] It's a real it's a real distinction, I think, in Bangarra has been key in really exposing how when we do traditional dance, we are it's almost as if we are in a in a ritual, we are in a ritual, but we become that thing. We don't pretend to be it. We are the blogger, we are the emu. We are those things that we they become our totems, the other creatures that we share the planet with. Yeah.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:29:31] Exactly. And that's always, as I say, when I did that turning point, and that's what I brought to my performances every single time that you and we were lucky enough to go out on traditional trips every year and watch them elders perform. And that was amazing. And that's the thing that really captured me is not just the way they were moving. It's about what they did with their eyes that they you could see that they were in this trance and that they became that that spirit just took over them of the animal or whatever they are and possession. Yeah, Yeah, exactly. And also learning that a lot of these traditional dances that they were doing was always done in ceremony time. It was never done out of, you know. Four audience members come along and sit down and drink a cup of tea or drink wine, watching it and stuff like that.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:30:22] So ADT kind of transmogrified into what we know as Neda, the dance college and Bangarra is an offshoot. Do you remember the first time you met? You met the page boys? Russell, Stephen and David. I mean, they're very much key to the key to the nucleus of Bangarra. Do you have a first memory of the page, boys?

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:30:50] Yeah, I do. I met Russell first because Russell was.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:30:54] In.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:30:55] In my first year. Russell was in his third year. So we went through college together. And then. I think it wasn't. Till a few years later. David eventually came into. Nice day when we changed over to Asda and Stephen came in and directed one of the shows and that's how I met them. Probably 88, 89, I think I met them. Stephen And. David, then.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:31:29] And what do you remember of Russell's dancing? I've heard people I never saw him perform. Well, not that I remember. Not that I remember. But people used to say he was had some kind of lyricism, like his body was like a just a particular kind of dance.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:31:45] For me, I loved the way Russell danced because he's it's like he had no fear, I suppose. And he's like, when you look at the court jester, you know how they jump around. They joke and they're doing all those. Yes. So that to me was the essence of him. And he could do anything and be anything. And he you know, he was just magical to watch.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:32:11] Who was your greatest teacher in those early days? Is there someone that you really remember? It doesn't really have to be in dance. It was just someone who you really looked to. Who or who, maybe who supported you, who you felt mentored by or just held. Sometimes we need a teacher or just someone else outside of us to kind of keep encouraging us to do what we know we have to do. Um.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:32:37] I think I was inspired by a lot of the teachers that I. Um, I went through Nader and I hit with, but I think the most support and that really got us through was the friends we made along the way. And, and because they became family to you, because your family here in Sydney and it wasn't just and you know, and it was the elder students, people like Percy and Monica. Cheryl Stone. Oh, what's her name. Sylvia Blanco. Malcolm Cole. So they became like our parents and stuff like that. So they were all there encouraging you and pushing you along, going, Well, you know, we're not going to be here forever. So, you know, we're here to pass on our knowledge to you guys like you're going to be here for the next generation. So so it's about that process. And, you know, if we had a bad day and stuff like that, they were always there for us to go and talk to. So having those mentors that had been through this and been through before it became the Aboriginal dance, it was Black Theatre back then, so they'd all been through all that process also and having that support, I suppose. And we were all living together really at Tony Mundine Hostel Hostel too. So was that this whole family of dancers that.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:33:57] Living together, what Tony must have at the hostel must have been in Redfern.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:34:01] Yeah, it was Tony Mundine hostel out in Lockhart and I think in my when I auditioned we were further out at Chicken Chicken Dixon Hostel and number 90 something or other at, at Liverpool there.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:34:15] Would you have to come in on the train to go, to go to class from Liverpool.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:34:21] Liverpool. Yes. We got bus passes so when we got our AB study money we to make sure we get our bus pass that lasts us two weeks. And then at Lockhart we used to do the same thing but we could walk from like at took us about half an hour or something from there to Glebe.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:34:38] And the headquarters of Art were in Glebe at that stage because weren't they down at the rocks at one point or night? I sometimes I get confused with Origin story but so you were, you were training in Glebe.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:34:52] Yeah. So St John's Church on Glebe Point Road. We were that's where I started in that old church and then I graduated and I think after I left. When did I leave? We were in the company. I was in the company when I the original density of that company from 91 to 96. So I think they moved out of St John's in Glebe at the. Beginning of 96, and I moved down to the rocks down at Windmill Street there. And then they were there for a few years and then moved under the bridge under one of the pylons there. And then now they're up in Gosford.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:35:38] So you're living and living at the hostel in Lockhart and walking to Glebe to, to go to class.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:35:47] Yeah, we walk in walking there like, like we haven't had enough dancing all day, so we had to walk home. But then again, you know, it's just easy for us to walk home and catch buses because sometimes you get on the bus and everyone was there. And half the time when we lived in Liverpool, I had to get on the bus and fall asleep and missed my stop.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:36:07] When you came to Sydney, was there an experience of of a kind of racism you hadn't experienced at home or in Queensland? Was there anything I mean, it's a different spirit. 1996 Like there's a lot of possibility. We're two years out from the bicentennial, but yeah, no. Did you did you have any hard times in a big city, you know, because you're a blackfella.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:36:35] I can't say I did. I suppose I'm glad and like I'm pretty sure there was, but I think I'm one of those people, unless it was in my.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:36:42] Face.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:36:43] There. But if people are doing stuff, I don't really take any notice that I'm never one to pick a fight or do anything like that unless it's really in my face and I can't get away from it or I can't do anything. But, um. But. Yeah, but not really. No.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:37:03] So you talked about partying and having a good time. Obviously, first and second year at a time when people just like go crazy coming to



Sydney. What was not what was what were the clubs like? You know, this is people often think, oh, you know, young people, they don't know what clubs are like because there's clubs going on every street corner and a lot of little clubs and all of them had their own vibe. What was it what was it like going out to the clubs on on Oxford Street as a young fella?

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:37:34] Yes, going out on Oxford Street. We used to go up there quite a lot and discovering, you know. But also not discovering. Well, yes, discovering oneself, I suppose, in their sexuality, going out and allowing you that freedom without the eyes of family looking at you and stuff like that. And you know, some of the clubs I used to hang out at the midnight shift all the time, go upstairs. And I think one time somebody gave me a joint. I came up the first time I've ever had a joint in my life and went downstairs and spewed my guts up. Never touched a joint ever again. So that was a lesson learned. And then places like the Aubree where they had drag show, so. I was like. Captured by drag queens by then. So it was down down there every Friday night, Saturday night to watch the drag shows and places like that. And the Oxford Hotel was a bit scary because I think it was almost it was an ex bikie bar and it still had those remnants of that still around there. And then throughout the years it turned into a gay bar and then a cocktail bar and something juicy. So you watched all of that happen and then other places sort of happened along the way, like Stonewall, DCMS, the exchange many years ago. Also we're staying there in DCMS, we're staying out there. Patches used to be called patches before DXM. So yeah, we used to hang out there quite a lot.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:39:02] And so people have said to me like, Oh, you'd go out on Saturday at 6:00 and sometimes you'd be, you'd finish up at 6:00 on Monday. Were you like was it that kind of, that kind of intensity of, of partying.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:39:19] Um, not for me, I don't think. Not for me, I don't think because I never did drugs or anything back then. Years and years ago, I was a good boy. It was just alcohol and having a good time. So by 3:00 I was pissed. I wanted to go home and go to sleep. And not that you can afford much alcohol, an AB study anyway, and stuff like that. So. Yeah. No, no.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:39:47] No. Yeah. I'm just I because I came, I came to Sydney and I think the mid nineties it was a long time after you arrived so I'm always kind of like,

oh man, everyone talks about it. It's like this golden, golden time where the clubs were really good and the music was brilliant, you know, and, and there was a sense of community and even though there was, there are big challenges with the, with the pandemic. How did, how did what was your relationship with HIV AIDS? We can't deny that it was there. It was such a big part of coming out for me. Um. Was it? But still, it didn't. It was just something we had to deal with. We had to confront. And and we tried to do it as best as we could.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:40:34] Yeah, I suppose coming from there or to here, coming. I think it was probably the middle of that pandemic and stuff like that and coming here. And it was scary. And I think going going up and down the street, what they call the golden mile, I suppose it was like a village. And and once we sort of stepped into that world, it was like we felt, oh, we suddenly belong somewhere with the people who are like me. There's people like us and who are here. So and it was that freedom, but also that underlying power and of this age thing. And so. Scary, but wasn't limiting us because we sort of went, you know, and a lot of the friends that I saw pass away from AIDS, I suppose, but also knowing myself and looking at that. But you couldn't protect yourself, I suppose, from that, because as much as you try for yourself, you're not in control of somebody else who you're having relationships with and stuff like that, to be honest and truthful to you. So, you know, there's a few scary moments going through that where, you know, suddenly had sex with somebody and then find out later they got HIV and they weren't disclosing that to you. So that was scary for for quite a while. And then. I think. But, you know, Oxford Street was that safe place. We could just go out and just be ourselves. And many nights when I was going through college, going up there, you go out there and you see all them older one like Yella and Percy and all them up all on Oxford Street, all having a great time and then watching them walk down marching. And the Mardi Gras parade also was a sense of pride and going, okay, these fellas know who they are, where they come from, and they're up there shown who they are.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:42:31] You mentioned that in third year there was a you know. Dance and theater were part of a political movement, a political consciousness. And back then, those leaders said that you couldn't have a political movement without art. And this is the way we theater was. Black Theater was so huge in Redfern. And dance was just dance was like that. Maybe not as political, overtly political, but you mentioned that around third year you had it dawned on you what you were doing and that you were

part of something much bigger, and that to be a political blackfella was what you were going to be anyway. Even you didn't matter which dance company you were going to be in. It was something that was that was just intrinsic in as part of what you had signed up for.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:43:23] Yeah. And I think that is, is once you understand, yes, I am black, but fully understanding what that means in terms of in the wider community and and looking at probably not racism towards me because. Let's face it, I can pass for a white fella or Spanish or something like that. And people would look at me that way. And it wasn't until I said I was Aboriginal. Then you would get the looks of going, Oh, but I suppose hanging around with all my friends who who were darker skinned and me and watching that, that sort of racism sort of bought that out. And then as I said, turning into my third year and understanding that click over stage for me. Then looking at where we are being on this stage is a political statement no matter what we do. And because we tell our stories the way we want to tell them and how we want to educate the rest of Australia, but also show our mob. How not to to be angry or. Be that political person marching down the street, which is which is great and it's needed. But you can do it this way also. You can do it through song, you can do it through poetry, you can do it through all these other avenues to to voice your opinion. Because not all of us are activists that run down the street and hold flags and stuff like that. That's, you know, there's other ways of doing that. And one of those ways is the stage.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:45:06] And was there was there a time I mean, obviously from from ADT, you eventually joined this fledgling company. How old was Bangarra when when you joined, or was there anything in between when you graduated and when you became a part of the company? Sure.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:45:24] I think in my final year, 1991, with the Aboriginal master, at that stage I went and did as a comment down at AM, ADT Australian Dance Theatre. Leigh Warren then and then I came back and then.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:45:38] Was.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:45:40] Adelaide and then I came back and I did also a little bit of the comet with the Harold Project, with Kim Walker, Harold Blair, the Opera Blackfella

Black Aboriginal Aboriginal Opera singer. Yes, so him. And so I was asked to do that. So I played the spirit in that and we did that and we toured that around in 92.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:46:07] It was a dance production. Yeah, yeah.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:46:10] Yeah. So there's people like myself, Louis Lampton, Christine ANU was part of that, Frances Springs was part of that. So production for Harold. Yeah. And so we took that around Queensland I think, and New South Wales and that was a great production. And then after that I joined the company. And then I was there for six years.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:46:39] So you were. Did you have you just dance a part of the company? I mean, you don't get a title or anything like that. You just. Just part of it. Part of it. Part of the.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:46:46] Dance. Part of that is until two years in at ADT. And then Raymond made me write. Raymond Blanco made me the assistant director. So after two years, I became the assistant director and I was like, Oh, are you sure you want me? You got people like Marilyn and Gary and and John who are older than me and should have that role. They said, No, we don't want it. You have it. So yeah. So I took that role on at a young age and I was the baby of the company. Really.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:47:16] So from. You mentioned, Harold. Any other big productions that you worked on in those years at ADT as assistant director that you really remember or you're proud of? Because dance productions, like they're a bit like radio shows, people, they have a very short life. People forget them.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:47:35] I suppose when I first joined ADT, we did what they call spirit. So there's a spirit show that we did and it was a collaboration of choreographers. I think Garry choreographed. Dusun choreographed. Garry Lang. And then a lot of the nicer ones like Paul Saliba. He was one of the teachers there, encouraged caregivers. Denis Leary, Sean Newey, I should say. Sean Newey.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:48:02] Does.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:48:04] For him. Raymond Sawyer Oh, who else? Aka Doga and Christie Coulter. So they all put in different sections to make this one show, and we toured that around all over Australia. Back then, ADT was the most toured company, indigenous company in Australia, not only in Australia but overseas. We travelled nationally quite a lot. We spent probably three months in South America and all over Europe and places like that. So it's quite busy. And then somewhere along the line, funding to companies wasn't part of government plan. So one of the companies folds in 96 and that was ADT the company. And then I left dance altogether and just went, okay, what do I do? I want to become a steward. I'm going to become a trolley dolly. So but I didn't have any skills for that, so I didn't have any training. So what I needed to do was get some bar service experience, all that kind of stuff. So I did.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:49:13] Cpr.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:49:14] Yeah. So I went and did a hospitality management course and I was in that for about probably six months and I was just about to graduate. I think I was probably a month out of graduating. And Steven sort of went, We need a dancer for, for this show that I'm doing. Are you? Yeah. I said, Are you interested? And I said, No, I don't know. It could be persuaded. He says, I was paying \$1,000 a week, and back then that was quite a lot coming. You know, I'm persuaded. So I was like. And then I left that and didn't graduate. Didn't get the cut. Glad you do that. You didn't. Didn't become a steward and joined and then joined Bangarra and. So I'll go back and one step into ADT. One of the turning points for us, I suppose. We did a production called Colors, and that was a triple double bill really. And we did Colors where Gary. Marilyn and Diane and Raymond choreographed. Um. On the color spectrum and what that meant to each of those choreographies. And so that's where I think I became the workhorse. Everyone flogged me in that piece.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:50:41] But I really enjoyed it because it allowed me to develop as a as a dancer, I suppose. And then after that we did Gillum, which is Gillum, which is Torres Strait Island Story. It was Dennis's first full length work, I suppose, which was great, and I think that was probably my last work with them. Because we were traveling so much that we took those pieces with us wherever we went. And we did have a little section where we just pieced together of different shows and put that together and then joined Bangarra. But 97 I joined in 1997. And I think the first thing of the thing that really

attracted me to come to Bangarra was he was working with the Australian Ballet and that was my dream. So, okay, you're doing this same, but I want to be a part of that. So I got to do that. So I feel ticked off. One of my boxes got on the stage. I wasn't part of the Australian Ballet, but at least I got on the stage with them and was able to do that.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:51:47] That was the fulfilment of a dream to be around those those dancers. I mean, when you think about it now, do you still consider them to be your heroes, that kind of style of dance, or do you or you fully own the extraordinary language that you know, Bangarra has developed over the years?

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:52:08] I still have that passion for ballet. I love ballet, and I think it's great. And in its purest form, I. But, you know, as I said, learning about who I am in that and the way we perform, we tell our stories so much better. We have the theatrics behind it. We might not have the cash behind us, but we certainly have all that stuff, the spirit. And we've developed our own style and our own sense of presenting works. And I think they look at us and I think one of the collaborative works where we did some workshops together where they tried to move like us, and the next day they were all in the physios getting treated and stuff because we use a lot of our thighs and stuff because we're really grounded and have to drop out pelvis down a lot and stay in that position for quite a long time. So that kind of stuff. So you really have to build up strength for that. It's a bit like boogie or Kabuki or something in Japan where they sit in positions quite a long time and they'd take about half an hour to go from one side of the stage to the other. So it's a bit like that. And. For us also. But I sort of. Was a little bit easier slipping into ballet. So when we go and doing ballet classes with them, I was like in my element. I said, I love this. But I still didn't look like them. But at least I knew what the moves were.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:53:31] And I guess we didn't really need a black ballerina, you know, because we were devising our Bangarra was devising its own form of dance. And you were right there at the kind of really at the very early stages of the company. So when when. You've told us how you know Stephen got you on and you were kind of becoming more of a principal dancer relied upon by the choreographers because of your technical skill. And you're always a solid dancer. Everyone says it's just a solid dance. It's like every company needs a solid dancer and someone who is like the. I

don't know. A bit like just the the most reliable member of the troop can do everything and is very good at it. That's that. That was.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:54:24] You. That was me. I became that person because I honed in on my skills and learnt the technique. So I think the basis for any kind of dance, learning the technique first, building your strength and then. If you have that core, you can move your core anywhere and do anything in that sensibility where a lot of people can do lots of tricks and stuff like that. But that's masking something unless you have that core strength.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:54:53] I remember first meeting you and you actually it was a collaboration that you were doing with the Australian Ballet and you were all at the ballet headquarters in Melbourne at Southbank. And I was, I was invited into the rehearsal and there were two distinct camps of the ballet on one side and a Bangarra on the other. But I think what's called gathering ground, I would say gathering. Yeah, yeah. Maybe the second collaboration.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:55:19] So was it the stage that the stadium, half the stadium that was like, yeah, that was the second one. Right.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:55:29] So did you. Let me ask a question about the people that you the people that you performed with in Bangarra. Who who to this day did you kind of look at as being, you know, the people that you love to work with and the people who were just solid like you. And because, you know, the company has seen a lot of movement over the years, I mean, by which I mean bodies, different different people, different dancers.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:55:59] No, definitely. Like, even though I was with ADT and I was at the birth of both of ADT, the Company and Bangarra, so I knew all the dancers in Bangarra and all the dancers in ADT. So we still we all came from nine, so we were all still family. So no matter whether we're in this company or that company, we all loved each other and support each other along the way. So and stepping back into Bangarra, there was, you know, coming back to family, coming home again. So, you know, I still have that connection to Steve and I still have that connection with Russell and who else was there at that stage. And I knew Albert. Albert was a few years younger than me. He

was coming through Albert. David. Marilyn was there. Dujon was there. So they all came from 82 across, so and stuff like that. Gary was also there.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:56:54] There was a lot of love. Was there any kind of like, I really liked that guy. Like, just was there any? I don't know. Sometimes I think there are just some there's some blackfellas who just hate me. And I don't know. I don't particularly know why. But were there any kind of like, was it all love? I mean, was there any here?

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:57:12] It's just like a big family. You fight doesn't matter whether you love each other, but we're family and we support each other. That's who we have on the road. We're, you know, we travel together. We need each other. And, you know, and I think that's the thing. And Steven chose people on that, I suppose, and that connection to us and somebody who he can rely on and be there for him and be there for the company and be there for each other. And he was you know, he was quite smart in that way. And like, no, we didn't all have to get along outside of here. But once you're here, we're all going to get along. We all going to have to live in the same pockets with each other and stuff like that. And, you know, we did and we all laughed and we all joked and, you know, some days we didn't get along. And that's just nature, you know, even in our own families when I go home. But we're breaking up fights. But, you know, it's just over. Silly stuff. Yeah, but, you know, there's other people who came in and out of the company now hate the company and all this stuff, but it's sort of like, well, do you hate the company or something that happened to you from somebody in the company? So you just. Now you just. It's the Haider of everything. And that's happened a lot with the company. And in my private conversations with people, I suppose I go, Well, that's unfair to everybody in the company who's gone through that and our friendship.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:58:41] You are not the company.

**Sidney Saltner:** [00:58:42] Because I'm not the company. And the company didn't do this to you. It's just the person if it is, you know. And I think people coming into the company, they understand that each one of us who come in there, Yes, we're in there to fulfill a need and ourselves and why we're being there. But you need to look forward to why was the black theater started? Why wasn't it ADT started? Why was I here's a company, why is Bangarra started? Somebody had a vision for to be there for some for the future. So when you come in here now and that's what I say to the new dancers



now, what is your vision for the future? Where do you want to see this be for the future? Because right now you're enjoying it, but you've got to make sure you put more building blocks on this for the next generation. Yeah.

**Daniel Browning:** [00:59:35] What was your I mean, I remember seeing you dance in in Bangarra and you being that principal without being called principal dancer, senior artist. We didn't have principal dancers. But you were you had that. You enjoyed that status. What was your favorite production? The one that really suited you, your athleticism that you really spoke to, you kind of as a, you know, at a real deep level or just maybe work with your body?

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:00:10] Good question, because I think everything I did for Bangarra, I suppose was quite challenging for me, and I think they gave it to me because they knew I would a bit like Russell Fearless because, you know, suddenly I learnt all the technique and I'll push myself further to learn something new. And I think one of those came, I really I think the one of the highlights was right working with Steven on, right. And that was purely because of work, the ballet. But I think in terms of physical work. For me, it would have been. Bush. And because of that, because Francis rings to thousands.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:00:55] Hey, Bush.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:00:56] Yes, Bush was that. Let's have the Olympics. No, no. It was 2002. No, that's Corroboree 2002 might have been 2004. Can't remember such a. Glaze.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:01:17] The ambush was the production that suited you. Just the moos And.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:01:23] Fran has this knack of looking at people instead of Steven, I suppose, and working with you. And she just went, I want you on point. And I just went. I've never trained on point, but I'll give it a go. Yeah. With, like, a ballerina. So, yeah. So I did that. Shane Carol was really great and. What you call it, tutoring me and that kind of stuff. And they made special pointe shoes for me. So with a higher vamp. So a vamp normally comes to hear on a belly dancer, but they made my vamp come here. Yeah,

which was more support, but it also restricted a little bit because it didn't give any flexibility for that to happen. It sort of became like a platypus bill. So yeah, so that was great and that was challenging. But also Bush. And the characters in Bush made you think about where your movement was coming from and. Made you challenge, I suppose. Yeah. Like, especially with stick. All these different kind of shapes. It was. It was interesting.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:02:36] And, you know, Bangarra has done so many productions over the years, it's hard to kind of even. Every production is different. And, you know, towards the I think towards the in more recent times, you know, Stephen's been working with, you know, icons from our history and working with working with community has always been very important. And now a lot of your role at Bangarra because you're still there. But now in a professional context, you maybe just describe what your role is now with Bangarra.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:03:12] My role now is Youth Programs director. So when I first started with Bangarra, we only had one program rekindling and we developed that with Stephen and Francis. And when they presented to me, it was just like a bunch of workshops at school. So just come in to school, do a workshop, go to the next school. And I sort of sat there and I went, I can do this, but I'll be bored within a year. And so And what's what substance are we leaving? What? What footprints are we leaving behind for the next generation? It's like. Um, or what sort of building blocks are we giving them to be able to support themselves or sustain themselves in their own communities? And I sort of said, then we sat there and nodded it out, and I said, Wouldn't it be great to do a longer. Program like a residency within the community in terms of that and do a little mini Bangarra, how we engage community, get them to put on a performance and get the kids to perform. So we developed that program, the building program, where it's a three year program within the community, and the first year we do a consultant consultation with all the community members there and get them to understand what the program is, what their responsibilities are and how.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:04:31] Do you choose a community. I mean, just just explain that for me how. How the community aspect aspect works.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:04:38] When we first when we first started out, we chose communities and stuff like that. And and because we want to make sure that we could get the pilot done and make sure that it works within the community. And then eventually we open it up online so people can apply for it. And when they apply for it, they don't get it immediately because then they had to send a lot of support letters from elders in the community. Their medical services, the mayors and lots of people who they think can support the program because it costs a phenomenal amount of money to run one program over three years in one community. So we want to make sure that it's going to be supported and won't fall through because, you know, let's face it, we've all been through that. We go. De la la la. But if you're not there and no one does anything, so in that kind of stuff. So we need to make sure that when we're not there, that there's still the cogs are still churning, that they're making it happen. And so, yeah, so now they apply for it online to us and then we go out and do a consultation and go, okay, well. And then measure going, okay, well you got this in place, you got that in place. And then just gauge what their interaction with us is and how safe they feel with us. So it's about building trust also, because we're we're not taking stories from them when we're there. We're just trying to bring out. Nurturing, nurturing, and then also connect the two together, the youth and the elders and that sharing process and leaving those skills behind.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:06:19] Have have you identified dancers for the company through rekindling? I mean, you obviously seeing dancers in a very in a very raw states in community. Have you identified dancers who went went on to work in the company?

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:06:35] Sure. I think when we first started these programs, it wasn't something very professional development.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:06:43] You ain't going to looking for the next, you know, Sydney Salt.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:06:46] Now, we went looking for that and it was just about us supporting community and passing on our knowledge and our skills. And then probably I took on another project, also program from Frances Springs. She did in 2011 when I was still at Bangarra and when I took on this role that came across and the Department of Education, the Arts unit here in New South Wales as the school spectacular. So and

then we took that program. So we've grown that over the past 12 years, also from just school spectacular to regional workshops at the beginning of the year to selecting a group of kids who are. Um, became probably about 20 or 30 kids, became the New South Wales Public Schools Aboriginal Dance Company. So we formed that group. So they've been going for the past 12 years and then school spectacular. So they've got three touch points throughout the year that we go all over New South Wales regional places and run workshops, select these kids and then. State dance is just the Aboriginal dance company kids. And then when we get to school spectacular, we use these guys, the Aboriginal dance company kids and probably close to 300 regional kids who've come to the workshop at the beginning of the year and put them all on stage in front of a big audience.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:08:16] It's really about professional, you know, you're not meant to identify or it's not professional development, you're just fostering dance culture in community.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:08:25] Exactly. And giving kids the opportunity because, you know, they see all these non-Indigenous kids out there turning up to ballet class and doing all that kind of stuff. And then they see Bangarra, but they don't know how do I get there? So developing programs like this and being visible and I'm huge on Sunday and I are a huge on this as us being visible to make sure that our kids know that they can do this and the avenues to take. And one of those is being visible in schools and having blackfellas teach black kids at school in the way that we teach. And there's a certain things we get away with it non-Indigenous teaching stuff because kids know us and we we just have to use one tone and then kids know. So yeah. And so over the past 12 years, the byproduct of what we do, I suppose, and it's probably the worst term to use, is that these kids are now going to Nadezhda and Akpa. And now we have close to 70% of the kids at Bangarra who have come through our programs.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:09:36] So that was our intended. Wow. That's a that's an incredible legacy. We're talking about legacies. Um. Now, I guess, in telling the story of your life, I mean, it's impossible to do in an hour, in 2 hours, in 5 hours is just too much. But I guess it's the things that we haven't talked about that we haven't touched on that. I guess. I guess I always think if my if my great nephew was listening to this, what would I want him to know about me? Or I don't know. Sometimes I always think there aren't

there isn't a question I could ask that would encourage someone to speak their mind about something. But if there was something that that we haven't talked about in that whole life trajectory of yours, is there anyone we haven't mentioned, you know, really a big influence or something? That's a big, big something I haven't haven't touched on.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:10:34] I think the people who influenced me the most was my grandparents, because they were always there. They're the rock and they instilled lots of values in us as human beings, but also how to treat each other, how to share, how to be patient. And my father, I suppose, because he was always the workhorse.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:10:57] He was a drover horseman.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:11:00] He was head stopping those things like Jack or Jack of all trades. So so he did that and he also worked on it. Orange, Old Orchard. He's done lots of work. Yeah. And then I think my final year in Theodore in grade ten, he got a job in town at the Water Resource Commission. So, yes.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:11:23] He liked the desk job.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:11:24] No, no, he he still had to use paper work and had to learn to how to use a computer, which was strange to him getting off a horse into that. But, you know, he was out there and in Theodore, there's there's cattle, but there's also cotton. So he was in charge of all the canals and making sure the water farmers were doing the right thing and making sure the canals are filled. So, yeah, so those values, in terms of watching my grandmother get up in the morning, doing the washing, doing all that kind of stuff, all that structure and granddad the same and dad always in a job was never out of work. Instill those values in us, I suppose.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:12:10] Now. Sydney's changed a lot. You've been here the whole time, and I don't know that you've ever moved back that way. So how do you feel about Sydney today? I mean, how has you stood? You still love this place. Does it still have what it had in 86? That was so exciting.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:12:31] I love Sydney. It's. It's home for me as the way I bought my property here now, So not that I can't sell it, but anyhow, you feel like you belong. I

belong here, I suppose. And it's changed a lot. You know, gay. The gay world, I suppose, is opened up a lot more than whether it's for the good at the.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:12:50] Moment.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:12:51] Because then you lose that sense of family and belonging, I suppose, in a. Exactly. And I think back then we were fighting to be recognised and being da da da. And I think by kicking all those doors open, invited a lot of people in that is just sort of. What's the word? Gentrified it in.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:13:15] Order to become very respectable.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:13:17] Yeah, very respectable. And I think it's easy.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:13:20] We can even get married.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:13:21] Well, exactly. And that kind of stuff. So it's become normal now, but it still feels. I don't know whether I'm getting older or not. Going out to a nightclub and you get. Hm. Known people who are not gay or stuff in there and coming in there. And it's still it sets a different vibe, I suppose, and. Yes, it's a little free and lovely and stuff, but it's still this underlying current where it's not quite safe, I suppose, for me. And who knows, Maybe that's just me getting older.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:13:56] I know. I know what you mean.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:13:58] I shouldn't be out there.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:14:01] If you're frightened of everything when you get. When we get old. Yeah. So now, I mean, that's. I think that's the very thing that I wanted to ask you. And I'm sure there's many things that I've missed out, but so I've asked everyone to think about the idea of pride. And you mentioned pride a few times in the conversation that we had. What does that what does pride mean to you?

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:14:26] I think pride for me is knowing who I am and where I come from is probably the biggest thing and everything falls underneath that. Whether I'm

black, whether I'm gay, whether I'm a dancer or anything like that. But knowing who you are as a person. And being strong enough and. That just being you and being comfortable with being you, whether you know, and I think one of those and growing up that was quite challenging, I suppose knowing that you gay from a young age or. Now, you know you were gay, but you didn't know you were gay. When you're that age, you know what it was. And I think I had a really. Great upbringing with my family. No one gave me any grief or didn't tell me to do anything differently. They just allowed me to be me and find who I was, I suppose. And I was. I think I was a more afraid for that in myself. And I had those things in my head. But it didn't stop me from being who I was when I was growing up. And not that I was running around in a dress or not in the house anyway. But there's a great story that I'm going to share with you now. When we lived in Wheeler Wheeler with my grandparents and we used to live on the outskirts of town, it wasn't in the housing commission house and we call it the back track. So it was just Bush behind us. And we used to run down there and play there and they wouldn't see us. They said, Grandma and I just sat at the back of the yard and scream out to us. We could hear them and come up for lunch. But we used to go down the back tracks and then wander to the dump.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:16:15] And we used to get all our toys, everything because we couldn't afford toys. And then our clothes and our shoes and I'll make up and stuff like that. And we'd go down the. Exactly. And we'd go down, create our cubby house and stuff like that and. We play dress ups and they get, Oh, so you're going to be the father. I know. If I can't be the father, if I can't be the mother, I'm going to be the auntie. So we played dress ups down there and stuff like that. So and so. It was never a thing in my family about my sexuality. I don't think. I think that was all in my own head going, okay, well, if I come out, my father's going to hate me. And Dad and I had a conversation quite recently about didn't tell him about dressing up, though. I did tell him about It wasn't a struggle for me, I don't think. And I think it probably was when I was younger about why was my older brother always going with my dad places and why was he the favorite? And I think that's probably middle child syndrome and stuff like that. And I probably also I was more drawn to my grandmother, so I was always following her around, which is probably why I can cook now. So yeah. And I spoke to him about it recently, about why I didn't like football, but I was good at it and I thought, okay, well, if I play good and I'm good at this, maybe Dad would pay attention to me. And that wasn't the case. And I

suppose and. And I sort of was okay with that once I realized, okay, it's just their relationship.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:17:54] Eldest son, eldest.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:17:55] He's the eldest son. That's her relationship. And also we had cousins who lived with us also because their mother had passed away. So grandma was bringing up probably her last two kids. Her own are six plus another five.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:18:12] So your auntie and two of her own. And you, my six cousins.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:18:17] Five? Yes. So we're all lived in this one house.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:18:20] How many people in one house?

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:18:22] Oh, my God, it's six. Five. That's 11, 12, 13 grand. Mum and granddad. And then Uncle Mervyn and Dad.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:18:32] 16.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:18:33] 17 people.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:18:34] Yeah. And Big was his.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:18:35] House was we lived on in Mara on the railway line because granddad and uncle may have used to work on the railway. And it was just a little old house that had a. Had a flushing toilet, thank God, not a thunder box. And it had. Uh, kitchen, a downstairs laundry with a bath flushing toilet up. And then you had the just long narrow, like a verandah that had a kit. Not a kitchen. Kitchen table. The bathroom at the end of it. Then you had two bedrooms and then a lounge room. And then one big. Verandah at the front, but enclosed. So all the boys slept out on the verandah with. And then Dad would sleep out there with the boys when he'd come home from work and Uncle Mercer room, then Grandmoms Room and then all the girls room and then.



**Daniel Browning:** [01:19:30] Yeah, I love those memories of like just camping out on the floor and not necessarily having a bed or sharing a bed with my sisters until I was in my teens.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:19:41] Exactly. And that was. That was us. Like, me and my brother shared a bed. We were topped and tiled the whole time until we moved to below. And then me and my cousin, we had a thing called the van where they used to fold out. So we had one of those. So we were all the girls in one room. My older brother and Gran and uncle move in one room and.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:20:08] And then three generations altogether.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:20:12] So, yeah.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:20:13] Do you ever remember your great, great, great, great grandparents? Were they ever alive when you were alive? I thought a.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:20:23] I don't think so. I remember. Now, if you asked me a question about my earliest memory, I'll tell you. A little bit. Um, I remember years ago when we were young, probably living in MA at that stage, probably around four or five of Dad taking us out to. It's property, but you go out along the road and there's a dirt road you take. And then there was a one of a better word, an old humpy made out of tin with a dirt floor where. Um, these people lived, our mob lived, and that's where they lived. Uh, so, um, okay, this is interesting. And I was like, Why are these people living like that? But they that's. Way they wanted to live and stuff like that. So yeah. And then also in Theodore, this is much many years later, there was an Aboriginal family that lived on the riverbank also, but they live there because the people in town or non-Indigenous people didn't want them in town. And then my stepmother's brother and family and stuff like that created the Aboriginal housing co op in Theodore and fought to buy houses in town to house them and Aboriginal people there. So that we I think they ended up buying 17 houses in town eventually and then taking them from there and putting it in town in the house. So yeah.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:21:57] So was the Humvee the first memory?

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:21:58] No, it wasn't really. I think growing up, my first memories and I had conversations with Dad again and certain things when we were driving, when as I got older, I got triggers and then I said, Dad, did we live here? I said, I remember that train and I remember that house where? House and oranges, he goes. How could you remember that? You're only, like, two years old. I'm going. I don't ask me, but I remember that when I was playing with old Karan on that train. And I remember here we lived in this house and you were picking oranges. And then he goes, Oh, I said, There's another time. I think I was about one and a bit because Sharon wasn't born yet. Yeah, I don't think I was even walking. And that lived at at Rolleston, and he was plowing the field. And I think I was crying to get on the truck with him. So he took me on the truck and he took me for one ride up and one road. And I fell asleep. But I remember being on on the track.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:23:10] In the steering wheel.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:23:11] Yeah. So I'd been on that. Yeah. And then also the same same place at at Ralston, same age is we were on, you know, there's a big old Dodge truck that had the big, big fenders and mudguards on it. We were all sitting up there, and I was. My brother and me in the front, my sister Lynette and Wayne at the back. And somebody pushed me and I fell off. And I was.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:23:44] The car was moving at this.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:23:45] No, no, no. And I was. And I broke my arm. And I remember that. And I remember in the bathroom crying. When my mother was trying to console me then. So that's the earliest memories.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:24:00] Pushed off the Dodge Park Dodge truck and broke your arm around.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:24:06] It must have been one one and one half. And then lots of other little things along the way. Also, like I ended up being sick and married one time. I can't remember why I was sick. And I remember being in an ambulance and that. And stuff like that with an emergency. Yeah. So I was taking somewhere. And then I remember being in a hospital with, like, I was in a cage. And then suddenly my

grandparents come and pick me up and I couldn't get out of the hospital fast enough. You.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:24:39] Obviously got better. So just back on that question of pride. Um. I don't know. Is it something that you feel say? I mean, we may feel it when we watch a mardi Gras parade. We may feel it when there's events associated with Sidney. Well, pride. Is it something that you can feel every day or is it just does it being prideful can get in the way of being a good person? Sometimes you're too proud.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:25:08] Yeah, I think pride can hold people back in terms of if you need help and stuff like that. So there's a different kind of pride in that kind of thing. And you can take pride in the way you look, the way you present yourself, I suppose, and that to me, and then take pride in somebody else who does that has achieved something. And that's the pride that I'm sort of more in tune with, is taking pride in in what I've given to other people and what they've taken on from that and going, okay, you've created something beautiful or they've done it. And that pride to me is gold. And that's but the other pride where I'm probably guilty of it too, sometimes of that pride of not asking for help because I can do it on my own. And I've always done it on my own and stuff like that. And I, you know, and that can get in the way, especially in relationships that you develop, especially intimate relationships. Because I'm a person who's always doing that. I can do it while I'm here. And especially if you're going through hardships with families and stuff like that, you try to stay strong so that pride can get in the way. Also, you're not opening up enough and giving that to the other person that you're in relationship with. But yeah, but you know what I mean? Pride in oneself, I suppose, and understanding who you are and where you come from in that pride of somebody who has done something and going in a what? That's bloody awesome.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:26:46] On that note, what are you most proud of? It doesn't even have to be professionally. What are you most proud of in your life?

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:26:53] I think what I'm most proud of in my life is. Um, achieving not one goal, but two goals that I've set myself in life and. And achieving that and being successful at it, I suppose. But you know, it wasn't easy getting there. But that's something I'm telling my students now. You are not going to get out of bed and win a

gold medal if you don't do the work. And so, you know, and that. So I lost the train of thought.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:27:24] Yeah, Like, I mean, it actually takes a lot of work. Yeah. So you've got to, you've got to, you know, and to be proud and to be in the position that you're in now. Yeah. You've got to do stuff. You've got to actually do the work. You can't just coast through life.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:27:41] No, exactly. Exactly. And just, I mean, we're not all born.

**Daniel Browning:** [01:27:47] Well, there's very little. There's very little. We talk about blackfellas, talk about natural ability. And we there is. But I think when we say that, it also diminishes the hard work that people do.

**Sidney Saltner:** [01:27:56] Because then it gives you this false sense of security. Again, it's always going to be there and it's not always going to be there because one day you'll just jump out of bed and suddenly you might just crack a crack, a disk or something like that. And if you don't do the work to do it, and I always give that analogy that I'd see. Cathy Freeman She didn't get there by just getting out of bed and just jumping on that track. She trained for years. He isolated herself for years to to do that and she was focused and, you know, and you have to. One of the better would be that selfish to achieve that. And I suppose in my third year, that's what I did. I spent I have to be selfish now. I can't do this. I have to. This is what I wanted. If you're going to do it, you're going to have to do it the right way and do that. But also.