

Interview with Christie Jacobs by Tanya Riches

Darwin, NT

Abstract

Christie Jacobs is a Yidinji woman, the granddaughter of well-known Aboriginal musical evangelists Peter and Eva Morgan, and the daughter of Australia's best known Aboriginal worship leader, Robyn Green. She regularly leads worship at Hillsong Darwin and with her husband is a service pastor at the Palmerston campus. Her passion for the local church is matched by her desire to see the local Aboriginal children that she pastors grow in forgiveness and grace, as well as being proud about their heritage and past, after the atrocities of the Stolen Generation.

Interview

Tanya: What's your name for the transcript?

Christie: My name is Christie Jacobs.

Tanya: Where is your country?

Christie: My country is in Far North Queensland, I'm Yidinji and I'm part of the Mullunburra tribe.

Tanya: Could you tell me a little bit about your how you became a Christian?

Christie: Well I was privileged enough to grow up in the church. I had very strong Christian beliefs. My grandfather, he started a few of the churches up here in Darwin. He actually moved the whole family over in, I think it was 1968, just before Cyclone Tracy. He got the word from God and came over here to Darwin from mountains and rain forest and rivers, to desert ... and they started churches.

So I grew up in a church because his daughters were serving the Lord... it was something that I always did. But I made the decision to make Jesus my personal saviour when I was eight. That was when I really truly felt the presence of God.

It was at a camp meeting that mum and [the family] were running and I felt the presence of God. From there, I've never looked back... [I've] served and sung ... and done youth in the church - I just love it.

Tanya: You're now attending Hillsong Darwin - what is your role here?

Christie: We're service pastors. I also oversee all regulars on the Hillsong Darwin Creative roster. I also do [some] other things like decorate on Father's Day, Mother's Day and Kid's Fest and all that kind of good stuff. I love it! It's a passion of mine.

Tanya: And you worship lead!

Christie: Yeah! I worship lead and run Connect Group.

Tanya: I'd love to hear a bit more about the churches your grandfather helped build in Darwin and just a little bit of the history because as I understand it, he was very involved in how the church came to be. I'd love to hear a little bit about [that].

Christie: Yeah what is now the Hillsong Malak campus, my grandfather started as a church with the family.

Tanya: Oh I should have asked - what were their names for the transcript?

Christie: Peter and Eva Morgan.

He also helped to set up Potter's House as well - and then handed that one on and then went to what is now Hillsong Malak. So he always had a huge heart for the Indigenous people, going out to communities. So that's what we grew up with, on the road and preaching on street corners.

Wherever he had the opportunity or the platform to do it, he was telling people about Jesus. He was one of those guys that made you want to give your heart to the Lord [even] during the tithes and offerings messages. He was so convincing, and so convicting.

I remember being at one of the camp meetings out at Maningrida - and when you go out to the communities they sit in the dark, so you can't see [when] you're preaching or singing. You know that [the people are] there but you just can't see them ... and he was just giving one of the best altar calls I'd ever heard, and we were all listening... and then he said, 'if you want to give your heart to the Lord come down right now,' and these two dogs came out from the darkness and walked right down the aisle and sat just right in front of him.

He did one of those sneaky little peeks that a preacher does to see if anyone has come down the front, and when he [saw] the two dogs, he was just killing himself - he just started giggling. The dogs were convicted enough to come down the aisle and give their heart to the Lord.

Tanya: He had a lot of itinerant ministries through the Top End...

Christie: Yes!

Tanya: And was your grandma also a vocalist?

Christie: Yes, so - my nana actually played nine instruments. Her main choice was accordion. Everyone in my family plays an instrument and sings, and either preaches or does something like that.

We were just so fortunate to grow up and see God really move ... before our eyes ... miracles and that absolute [sense] that God is so real. This has really cemented me. Even through the hardest times - like even in losing my dad, where I couldn't make sense of it. I didn't want to be friends with God after that happened. But then came back to [remembering that] God is still God I've still seen him moving. Yes, we don't understand why he didn't heal my dad - like this will always be in the 'too hard basket,' but God is always still God.

I've still seen him. He still created the heavens and the earth. I've still felt him move, I've still seen him move with my own eyes and that's really kept me in the faith ... actually really experiencing him for myself.

Tanya: So your mum and dad - they did a lot of ministering as well, did they?

Christie: Yeah. My mum still ministers to this day. The whole family actually travel. We used to travel around Australia on a bus called Jezariah...well that was what our van name was...so the Jezariah bus... and we actually travelled around Australia. The whole family would be on this bush.

Tanya: And you'd all perform?

Christie: We'd all perform! ... so my Aunties and the kids would do the worship and my dad played the bass and the guitar ...and then my granddad would preach, and my nana would do the tithes and offerings. So it was just a whole family affair! We didn't know anything different but telling people about Jesus. That's how we grew up. Even through all the breakdowns and ... all the things that happened.

From a very [young] age we were taught to pray for people. I can remember when I think I was seven years old ... because they used to call us over and say "Alright, we're going to pray for this person."

They'd actually model how to pray. There was a little boy with a club foot and it actually grew before our eyes...like it just came back to normal shape - and I just remember being so excited! I was just bouncing around because I was so excited. I could feel the presence of God myself [as] this young boy was being healed.

I always tell the guys here in the worship team, I say ... "I don't envy you guys at all because I got to grow up in a time when we were just out there praying." My mum [Robyn Green], she's on the prayer lines even to this day for three hours ...on a prayer line, praying for everybody. She still sees miracles.

So every time we go back to be with them, they are always still ministering together. It's just what we love to do, just to serve people and serve the church. Everyone [in community] is doing it tough and [it's a good thing] to be able to share the message of Jesus with them and [tell them] that he does heal.

Tanya: You do a lot of travelling, you've been around the country a couple of times, like you would have gone almost everywhere right?

Christie: Yeah pretty much.

Tanya: To lots of communities.

Christie: Yes, lots of communities.

I don't know why they have so many healings take place in the communities. I don't know ... I think it's that childlike faith...None of the business of life is in the way, they're so receptive ... whereas in today's society our mind gets in the way. Then actually, we become faithless. Whereas they just believe what they believe - that Jesus is going to heal them. They can be coming up drunk to the prayer line but they'll get instantly healed - it's something that just blows my mind. They're just so open to what Jesus and God can do in their lives.

Tanya: And maybe God is really close to the hurting or broken as well. I'm really interested in the role of the Holy Spirit in your Christian life. You talked a little bit about that but - just as a leader, what role does the Holy Spirit play for you?

Christie: Oh wow. A huge role, especially in terms of leading worship. I'll be a nervous wreck before I get up. I just cannot handle it. I'm like sweating and it doesn't matter [how long] I've been singing for ... years ... I've sung on big stages and what have you, [but] I'm still as nervous to get up on a platform at church!

It's not until the Holy Spirit actually comes over me that I just become [released] of fears and [realise] that he's got the control of what happens. All I am is a vessel. So I just lead to where he wants to go. When I was younger it was prophesied over [me] that when I sing, the Holy Spirit actually carries every single note, and ministers to the people that are needing it, and directly to what they need - whether it's sickness or depression. So that single note actually ministers to them in the way that they need to feel the presence of God.

So I've always held onto that, and I always pray that every time before I worship lead or before I sing. Even when you're leading people you just have that, like the word for them ...like the Holy Spirit gives you a feeling or a word for that particular person that can be so in season and actually pull them through. If you're not sensitive to Holy Spirit then you're going to miss speaking into that person's life.

I think also running a connect group you've got to be open and able to speak into people's lives. But I just love it, I love to worship in the house, I love to have the presence of God, the Holy Spirit in the house wherever I'm singing and worshipping all day long pretty much.

Tanya: OK! To change topic a little... Culture means a lot of things to different people in Australia. What does culture mean for you? And I guess where I'm going with this is, what does Dreaming mean for you - and are those two things the same or are they different?

Christie: For me, Dreaming has a different meaning [than culture] ... only because with my family ... my grandfather and all his siblings were taken away when my grandfather was two. There was a massive massacre [and] a lot of the Elders were killed off. [So] language and culture, a lot of it was lost.

My grandfather was only two and he couldn't remember much. So it was like a loss and [we've] slowly been trying to regain some of that [culture] through other channels. Lately we've been really connecting with Country.

For us, Dreaming goes hand in hand in with Country (where you come from) and your ties to the land. For us it's [questions] like ...why are these sites important? What are the stories they tell about our family and our culture? Even down to the bush tucker - what do we eat? What did they eat back in those days? Just learning those stories, just the significance to your tribe, and how they actually tell the story - [for example] about how those people were born. My

grandfather, and all the siblings were born in caves. [Also] the stories of, you know, how the white people came to be...

So for me, Dreaming - it's a story of what's important about your family. People have memories, but for us we've actually got a name to it, "The Dreaming" - you're telling the story about how you came to be, how your family came be and what's important.

Tanya: And so is 'culture' broader than 'Dreaming?' Or do you see the two as the same?

Christie: Hmm. I don't really know ... I would put them in the same bucket!

Tanya: Culture is Dreaming?

Christie: Yeah. Even when [we] say "Country" like white people don't understand. They think we mean a country overseas, but there are so many countries within Australia. I think The Dreaming actually shapes your culture because your Dreaming might tell you the different foods you might eat and that actually become part of your culture - the fish you eat or the dances you do, the songs you sing - are all shaped through that Dreaming, which is actually just passed down from generation to generation. That's basically where it comes from.

Tanya: That's beautiful, such a good way of saying it! So in terms of ceremony, what do you as a Christian decide to participate in, and what do you decide *not* to participate in, in regards to culture? Do you feel there's areas where your Christianity and culture are in conflict or more complementary?

Christie: I haven't really found anything that's conflicted...like we're just starting to really dig deep into things and the kids are learning the stories at the moment. The only thing I guess could conflict sometimes is the forgiveness for what's happened in the past. It's only since I've gotten the age that I am that I really appreciate what my grandfather actually went through, and how he could be a man of so much forgiveness and grace. That was only because he found God. Whereas, there are a lot of families that haven't found God and they still have that hurt, that generational pain and suffering that's passed on.

Whereas with my grandfather, the moment he became Christian it was ...severed. He said "we've got to keep moving forward, we can't do anything to change the past" ...he was always preaching that to us. So I grew up kind of naïve I guess ... I didn't really appreciate [the depth of] what had happened in the Stolen Generation.

My grandfather he found God and he was just so sold out for Jesus. He was all about forgiveness. It wasn't until I was older that we've really gotten into the story of our family, and gone back

to Country. And now that I'm working in the schools and I'm in Indigenous education, I've got to actually do stuff on the Stolen Generation.

My grandfather was actually an amazing man. I don't know how he had so much just grace and forgiveness. He was taken and never saw his mother, all that kind of stuff. I just ... that's only what God can do.

He became a better man because of the religion, because of finding Jesus, it actually made him a better Aboriginal man, where he was actually a role model and somebody that actually inspired us to be better, just in the way he walked in forgiveness.

Tanya: Before I forget, you said that you're an Indigenous educator... I didn't ask you what you do for work but I'd love to hear that as well.

Christie: I actually work at a Catholic school called Sacred Heart Primary School. I've been there for 15 years so I'm part of the furniture. I love the job. I could be a teacher but I choose to, [take] a role that includes a lot of pastoral care. I deal with mainly the Indigenous kids.

I deal with their attendance and their pastoral care needs, such as hygiene. I'm the link between home and school, so I deal a lot with the parents. On top of that, I do a lot of things in the school because I've been there for so long.

I love being the bridge between home and school which is such a big thing in Indigenous families. They have a lot of shame that holds them back ... [but] I have not grown up with shame at all, just because of how my grandfather brought the family up. I'm able to just encourage them. They've seen me on big stages [and] I encourage them because I have no shame.

I can talk to white people, I can talk lingo as well, yeah ... just communicate on those levels and then seeing the kids actually go through the stages and see them achieve every year and go into high school. I like seeing the growth in them.

Tanya: Do you have people from out of area at school or is it mainly local people from Darwin?

Christie: There's a couple of communities around Palmerston that they come from ... they'll come and they'll stay. So they're classed as community kids.

Tanya: And they've kind of got links back to a community?

Christie: Yeah so often they'll go back and board. It's a huge job, I love it.

Now I've got the rapport it's usually pretty good. Most of the kids are either in the care of their grandparents. So they're from that generation where I can go "Who you mob?" and they say back "Who you mob?" ... And I say "my grandfather is Peter Morgan," and they're like "Oh! Peter Morgan" ... because they remember my mum and my grandfather. So already they know that rapport and that I'm coming from this family. We believe in Jesus and we encourage them [and their kids and] lift them up - they can trust us. Straight away, that's usually how I start the conversation with new families because they all know. I've never met somebody that doesn't know Robyn Green or Peter Morgan.

Tanya: That's so beautiful! What do you think is really important for people like yourself to pass on to the younger generation of Christian Aboriginal leaders, what do you think you'd like to say to them?

Christie: I think for me it's finding the balance between being proud and being just over the top... like learning to be proud - but still being able to walk in forgiveness and grace and to love our people. I get around a lot of people my age and they just have so much negativity regarding all the white people. Whereas we've got the opportunity to wipe the slate clean and be able to move forward and make life better for everybody and to not hold people in that condemnation.

[It] is hard because some people have never been able to move on and you've got to realise that as well. But for me... whenever I get together with people that [have] the same position as myself, I'm always trying to get them to see forward rather than labelling white teachers. I say "you know they're all doing a hard job!" So I'm trying to get them to see the bigger picture - that it's about us helping to move forward.

Not forgetting about what's happened and where we've come from! ... But hey let's move forward because that's the best thing we can do, show people that we're getting on with life and surviving or thriving despite where we've come from.

My Indigenous kids that I work with, a lot of them don't have an understanding of the world. They only see their community and their family and that's it. They don't have big dreams and aspirations. Some of them want to play footy - but they don't know what that actually entails. [They have to] leave the family to go and play down south - but that's where a lot of them get stuck and they can't handle it. Whereas every time I go away ... I'm always showing the kids the world. Like what's out there, and what they have to do to get to that point. There's so much more to see than just your community.

A lot of them come in for boarding school and ... the pull of family is so strong. It's the generational cycle - it just goes through the kids and the families. So one of the things I want

to pass on is to shift the generational... I don't know... it's like a curse. It's just [trauma] from the Stolen Generation, it just keeps cycling through, unless there's that shift. With a lot of people you can't say it's Jesus that [causes the] shift because they don't understand ... but something's got to break and that's why I just want to be a part of that shift.

Tanya: I think you answered my last question then because I was going to ask what your future hope for the church is ... but you've said - breaking that generational trauma.

Christie: Yeah. That's always been my goal working with kids. I just want to break that generational cycle. I want them to be the first person in their family [to be] a sports captain leader. Just those little things that they wouldn't have aspirations for - but they can actually do it. I've always just wanted to be part of making a difference in their lives.

Tanya: Thank you so much for talking with us!